



Department of Political Science

Chair in Political Sociology

Islamic Extremism as a Deviant Matrix
in Muslim Western communities

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Academic Year: 2015/16

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Introduction

Ever since 2001, Islam has become a staple of world news every day. Islamic extremism or questions of Islamic integration have existed far before that, but it was on 11th September that they gained enough critical mass to be discussed outside of academic circles and inside everyday society. For better or worse the question of Islam, and particularly its jihadi Salafist current, have come to dominate national debates today. The discussion is manifold and extended, and not just limited to discussions about extremism: everything about Islam is up for debate by authors, journalists, politicians and pundits alike. From terrorism to the hijab debate in France, from Afghanistan to the question of compatibility between Islam and western values. But a new phenomenon has also emerged in the meanwhile. It is said that Sayyid Qutb, the inspirer for almost every jihadi salafi movement existing today in the world, adopted many of his extremist ideas arguing for a totalitarian version of Islam following his one-year stay in 1949 in the United States. It was with the 2005 London attacks by Al-Qaeda that Islamic extremism added a new dimension to an already complex topic.

While Europe did have a series of small incidents involving Islamic terrorists before the age of Al-Qaeda, the attacks in the British capital were the first to be carried out by *homegrown* terrorists – that is, by people who were born and raised in the European country which they attacked. The problem did not come from the Maghreb, Pakistan or the Middle East anymore. It came from inside the country, and it came from children of Pakistani, Maghrebi or Middle Eastern parents. The most remarkable thing was that this new breed of terrorism almost completely disqualified what was known about Islamic extremism up to that point. These were not people who, like Al-Zawahiri or even Osama Bin Laden himself, belonged to the Islamic extremism typical of the 20th century: a prevalently religious extremism, aimed at secular governments in the Middle East (or Western countries accused of interfering in Middle Eastern politics). These were people born and raised in an European country who revolted against a country which, for the most part, considered them citizens. It was less theological or political and more emotional: a deep hatred of the country they lived in, for one reason or another. While still religious terrorism, the doctrine of “political Islam” was not the *raison d’etre* anymore for them, but a consequence. The question is: a consequence of what? This is the extremely difficult question that the thesis will attempt to answer.

A premise: there is no single, unified and absolute answer. The subject of homegrown terrorism (known as the study of radicalization) is in its very early stages, being an event that has so recently formed. There is not even a consensus on what the word “radicalization” in itself means, a subject which will be discussed further in the dissertation. But in any case, while it may be more

academically satisfying to find a single universal reason for why Muslim youths (second generations or converts) turn to radicalism it is impossible to do so. Not only are the reasons diverse, but individuals are as well. No world-view is exactly alike one another, and this extends to radicalised youths as well. But it is possible to observe trends, which is what will be done. While a youth of Muslim religion from well-integrated upper middle-class parents may subscribe to jihadi Salafism, the tendency, especially in very recent years, is for poorer, alienated youths to do so. It is mostly reserved to those “living in the middle”, if so to say: for example, children of Moroccan parents living in Belgium who are neither Moroccan, nor Belgian. Not close enough to the parents' society to belong to it, and not as integrated to be part of the society one was born in.

A big question relating to this is if multiculturalism has effectively “created” these youths, by not assimilating youths well enough into the social system they should belong to. Perhaps, but that's up to one's own discretion to decide. Multiculturalism against assimilation is an important political debate, but it is far more complicated to understand in academic terms, because, much like radicalization, nobody has a precise idea of what it is. For example, some would argue that the French system of integration argues for assimilation. Others would argue that, while theoretically it does enforce assimilation, it acts as *de-facto* multiculturalism. The lines are very blurred and the notion of multiculturalism on its own is not the centre of the dissertation.

In any case, the most important thing to keep in mind regarding the thesis is of the massive impact that globalization has had on the jihadi Salafī movement. Most violent Islamist groups before the 20th century were far more concerned with governments in the Middle East they saw as secular and corrupt, organizing terrorist activities in actions aimed at overthrowing them. Al Qaeda was the first, global movement to call to action against the West, seen as interfering in Middle Eastern affairs. Many activities of radicalization today are carried out through the Internet, and it is the revolution of globalization in systems of communication that now allows individual terrorist cells to keep in contact with the central organization thousands of kilometres away. This revolution is the main vector through which jihadi Islamist terrorism travels to the West, and its impact will be addressed.

The thesis is divided in four different chapters, each analysing a different sector or aspect that might have had an impact on the subject of Western Islamic extremism and its consequences for young Muslim youths of today. Chapter 1 is dedicated to charting the origins of Western Islamic extremism: from where did Al Qaeda, ISIS and other jihadi groups derive the ideologies that they use today? This is an important topic that needs to be analysed. The chapter also delves into the re-Islamization movement that completely changed the Middle East from the 1970s to the current times and in many ways shaped much of the Muslim world today, for example in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt. It also talks about the birth and rise of Al Qaeda.

Chapter 2 moves to modern times: it looks at external Islamist influences born in certain countries and aimed towards the entire Muslim world. This has become especially important considering the system of norms and values present in the Middle East: the obsession present in much of the Middle East for the *umma* (“community”, best interpreted today as the idea of the global community of Muslims in the entire world) and the consequences of the events of the Arab Spring have brought a number of countries to adopt “Islamist geopolitics”, aimed at advancing national interests in the region. The support given by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey for Syrian rebels in the country's civil war is just one of the possible examples. Since this movement of Islamism is aimed towards the *umma* it inevitably arrives in some way to Europe, which is what interests us. Funding for mosques, organisations and so on by these countries plays into the underlying characteristic of Islam as without a central authority after the end of the Caliphate, allowing several ideologies to be built on top of it, even opposed to one another.

Chapter 3 will delve into the deep, diverse and sociological causes for radicalization in Europe. It will look at many different theories surrounding the concept of radicalization, and interpret them to understand why many Muslim youths are in a mindset that allows to absorb Islamic extremism. It will also propose different roles that may have a major or minor influence in radicalization. Finally, it will close with an analysis of the possible Muslim grievances inside some Western societies. The chosen societies have been picked on a basis of how many youths have left the country to go fight for Islamist groups in the Syrian civil war, based on the total population of the country.

Chapter 4, finally, will take a deeper look at the phenomenon of ISIS. If Al Qaeda was the first jihadi organization to have a globalised agenda, ISIS has been the first with a deep understanding of social media and propaganda in it. It will look at the language of ISIS' communication, analysing on its own or together with other academic material the media and the message used to recruit new members, particularly Muslims in Europe.

Chapter I: The Islamic Crescent origins of Western Islamic Extremism: Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda, et al.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will attempt to historically chart the origins of Islamist extremist movements. It will seek to find the most important moments in the development of radical Islamist tendencies, and attempt to find its most important movements and ideologues. It will also analyze new religious movements and interpretations, such as Wahhabism and some of the other Salafi movements. It will not however concern itself with quietist Salafi modernists due to their fundamentally apolitical dimension. The concern here is to try and find the common thread between some Salafi movements and other movements concerned with political Islam. This serves the purpose of the thesis, attempting to prove that modern Islamic extremism in western countries emerges when alienation, a tendency towards using Islam as a political element and Salafi tendencies meet one another. The scope of the thesis is however limited to analyzing the prevalence and spread of homegrown terrorism in Western communities. An historical analysis of Islamist movements such as Jama'at-I-Islami in South East Asia and Shi'a Islamist groups would also be tempting, but unfortunately too vast a topic and not as relevant in Europe for the purpose of the essay.

The vast majority of the most well-known Sunni Islamist movements have emerged in the past three centuries. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, was born in 1703, although it might be argued that his religious doctrines truly started mattering when the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded, in 1932. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, arguably the most influential political Islam movement of all time and inspirer for countless other organizations was created in 1928 by Hasan al-Bannā. Modernist Salafism (which had initially emerged as an attempt to concile Islam and modernity) became a vehicle for a far more conservative interpretation of sacred texts under the leadership of Muhammad Rashid Rida, who died in 1935. Salafism is on a whole a relatively recent phenomenon and, outside of Wahhabism, can be seen as a reaction of Islam towards modernity.

1.1.2 Foreword: an explanation of the term “Salafi”

The term “salafi” comes from “*al-salaf al-salih*”, “the time of the pious forefathers”. It is an

umbrella term used for Muslims who believe in a “pure” and eternal Islam inspired by the seventh century Muslims in Mecca and Medina. It must be mentioned that this can be interpreted in vastly different worldviews: it may be seen as an extremely conservative and fundamentalist movement concerned with strict and literal interpretation of the Qur'an and the *hadith* (reports of the time of the Prophet, an important source of law in Islamic jurisprudence) - such a system is the basis of the religious ideology of Saudi Arabia, for example - but it may also be seen as an attempt to concile Islam with modernity by proposing a “simplicity of faith”, and acceptance of different school of thought among Muslims¹. This is the ideology of the early Modernist-Salafiya, which found their ideological center in the figures of Jamal al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Their movement would however later be taken over by Muhammad Rida, who would push the movement into social conservatism and become one of the main inspirations for the Muslim Brotherhood. Today the word salafi is overwhelmingly used in its conservative interpretation, so its puritanical interpretation shall be used throughout the text.

1.2 The Muslim Brotherhood

No modern organization has probably been as influential in the Muslim and Arab world as the Muslim Brotherhood. It is at the same time a political party (and inspirer for many more foreign Islamist political parties) and a religious organization, a political movement and a hub for civil society.

The creation of the organization in 1928 by Hasan al-Bannā was heavily inspired by the writings and teachings of the aforementioned Rida, who looked at the “times of the pious forefathers” (*al-salaf al-salih*) as a way to reawaken the *umma* from decay.² In Banna's vision, the Muslim Brotherhood would be a body which could “advise government authorities on how to govern in an “Islamic” way”. During the party's fifth congress in 1939, its ideology was more clearly defined. Al-Banna was quoted as saying: “When asked what it is you propagate, reply that it is Islam, the message of Muhammad, the religion that contains within it government [...] If you are told that you are political, answer that Islam admits no such distinction. [...] Islam is a faith and a ritual, a nation and a nationality, a religion and a state, spirit and deed, holy text and sword.”³ The presence of the

1 Saeed, A. (2013) Salafiya, Modernism, and Revival. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

2 Ortega, R. (2014) The Muslim Brotherhood: creation, evolution and goals for the future. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

3 Massoud, T. (2013) The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

ideology in schools and Al-Azhar University contributed to its spread and founding of new chapters in other Arab countries in the following years. The common denominator in all political Islam organizations seems to be the image and the framework of the *umma*, the community of Muslims, which pushes these organizations towards keeping a global worldview. This is no different for the Muslim Brotherhood, which has always kept a very strong internationalist character which survives today due to its pan-Islamist vision and its longing for the caliphate.

The objective of the Muslim Brotherhood in its early decades was the Islamisation of society at an individual and collective level, so that an Islamic state would flow naturally from a receptive population. During the chaotic 1940s Egypt the organization had been briefly outlawed, due to occasional bursts of violence stemming from some of its members. Hopes for a better relationship with the government once Nasser's Free Officers movement took over in a coup d'etat were however disappointed. Nasser, the socialist Egyptian general, declared the organization illegal in 1954: Al-Banna had been assassinated five years earlier. The Brothers' pan-Islamism seemed to be fundamentally incompatible with pan-Arabism. The Muslim Brotherhood would move into hiding soon after. Some of its leaders were exiled and many of the organization's members left the country, contributing even further to its ideology spreading into foreign countries. The Brotherhood would stay in hiding until the early 1970s, when Sadat, a far more accommodating figure for Islamists, came to power.

Those who stayed in Egypt were subject to a fierce repression: 4000 members of the group were incarcerated and six of its leaders sentenced to death. Among those members was Sayyid Qutb, one of the group's main theorists. Sayyid Qutb is essential to the doctrine of political Islam and is one of its most important ideologues. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1951 and quickly became one of its leading members. His loathing of capitalism and western society, and his embracing the use of an absolute *shari'ah* in every corner of society offered Egyptians an alternative to a declining clergy and religious tradition. Through an innovative Qur'anic interpretation he justified the use of violence against Muslim rulers governing through a secular authority. His influence would however grow exponentially in the years immediately following his execution by Nasser's government, in 1966.⁴ Israel's victory in the Six Days War in 1967 came as a shock to Egyptians, who found themselves in a state of soul-searching. Some Egyptians turned to religion to do that.⁵ Three years later, Nasser died. The new government of Anwar Sadat would have a very different relationship with Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood: the new president's narrow base of support forced him to adopt a far more lenient attitude.

4 Akhavi, S. (2013) Sayyid Qutb. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

5 Shama, N. (2013) Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiya and the Al-Jihad group in Egypt. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

It is interesting to note that after the crackdown in 1954 some Muslim Brothers from Egypt and from other middle-eastern countries where they faced persecution resettled in Saudi Arabia. King Faisal, its ruler from 1964 to 1975 and credited for greatly modernizing the country, saw in the Muslim Brotherhood an efficient tool to both feed his ideological anti-communist fight against Nasser and use its network of teachers to adequately educate the Saudi population, which lacked indigenous professors. It should be noted that Osama Bin Laden seems to have been initially brought inside the Muslim Brotherhood and educated in a fundamentalist version of Islam during his adolescent years by one of these teachers, a Syrian.⁶

The Muslim Brotherhood and its ideology had proven to have a strong appeal and influence among some Muslims. Such an appeal has shaped some of the modern debates inside the religion today, and in some ways might have laid the foundations for a partial push towards radicalism among Muslim communities in European countries. This will be explored further in Chapter 2 and 3.

1.2.2 Violence and the Muslim Brotherhood today

As a pan-Islamist group, much has been inquired on what relationship the Muslim Brotherhood has with violence. It might be surprising to know that, after the ascension of Sadat to power and the execution of Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood has always proposed itself as pro-democratic. Delving into the ideology, however, it is possible to understand where this link between democracy and Islamism originated, in the writings of its founder, Hassan al-Banna. The Muslim Brotherhood's vision is one of an Islamic state. The role of the organization was originally advising the government on how to achieve this goal. Al-Banna had grown up with the abolition of the last Caliphate in 1923 by Ataturk. Like many, he yearned for the return to Islamic unity and unification of the *umma*, the Islamic community of believers. This ideology might be the reason for the trans-national character of the organization. For Banna, Islam gave not just a religious form of worship but also a perfect social system: but while the Qur'an and the *sunnah* had to be the highest possible authorities and references, their interpretations required consensus. An Islamic government, in al-Banna's view, could not be authoritarian or despotic, because without *shura* (consultation) it is impossible to do the will of the people. That meant that democracy as Western constitutionalism was compatible with Islamic law, because they both agree on the same principles: freedom of the individual, a defined authority of the people on the government, responsibility and accountability of the government to the governed, and so on. Banna believed in the possibility of an "Islamised",

⁶ Coll, S. (2008) *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*. 2009 edition, pp. 143-148. United States: Penguin USA.

quasi-western democracy, albeit stripped of its secularism.⁷

Qutb, on the other hand, adopted a far more violent stance, believing in the violent overthrowing of secularist governments. These are the two competing influences for the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The question of radicalization must also be considered: people like Al-Zawahiri and others defected from the Brotherhood to more extremist factions as a successive step (that is, with the Muslim Brotherhood as a first step in a process of radicalization) or as disenfranchisement with the organization for not being extremist enough since the very beginning? No consensus by scholars on the answer has yet been reached. The history of the Brotherhood seems to suggest the organization in its Egyptian faction has alternated minor periods of political violence (some scholars justify it as commonplace in the Egyptian political landscape during those years, however) with periods of willingness to take part in political competition, although through an authoritarian political system that stopped them from taking part in the government until 2012. This is in Egypt, however. Many questions have been raised regarding movements such as Hamas (described by many Brotherhood leaders as their “military wing”), who have often resorted to violence against Israeli civilians and members of Fatah.⁸ The Brotherhood's record on ideological positions today seem at the very least to be mixed: the organization is politically stuck (at least, until the 2013 coup d'etat by Al-Sisi) in finding a cleavage between the lay population educated in the “secularreligious” character of Sadat and Mubarak⁹ and gathering the vote of ultra-orthodox Salafist Islamists before they turn to other parties. Gender politics by the party also still raise a lot of eyebrows among the more secular population¹⁰.

1.3 Wahhabism

Wahhabism is the official sect of Saudi Arabian Islam. The doctrine is central to the existence itself of the Saudi state: the kingdom is centered around a symbiotic relationship between its rulers (the Al-Saud family) and its Wahhabi clergy. It is impossible to talk about the Saudi state without talking about Wahhabism, and viceversa. This bond originated in 1744, when Muhammad ibn Saud, leader of the Al Saud tribe and family, and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an 18th century desert preacher who founded the sect, established an alliance. This alliance would offer the ruling family religious

7 Moussalli, A. (2013) Hassan Al-Banna. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

8 Milton-Edwards, B. (2013) Hamas in Palestine. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, pp. 508-510. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

9 Fattah, M. (2013) Islam and Politics in the Middle east. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, pp. 293-294. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

10 Massoud, T. (2013) The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, pp. 482-493. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

legitimacy in exchange for adoption among the Saudi tribe of its ideology. Wahhabism is today one of the most important Salafi sects, and several Wahhabis self-style themselves as such.¹¹

1.3.1 A brief history of Wahhabism and the Saudi Arabian state

Throughout the 18th and 19th century, the Al Saud had ruled over parts of the Arabian peninsula twice, but had at both times been defeated and exiled by the Egyptians and the Al Rashid, respectively. In 1932, however, after a period of war the leader of the Saudi tribe at the time, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, finally formed the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has existed uninterrupted until today. The newly formed Kingdom had control over the two most important cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina. When Mohammad entered the Mecca and preached for the restoration of the Ka'ba to monotheism, he was exiled by the opposition to Medina, where he managed to find political support. After a series of battles, he returned to Mecca victorious. Medina is today visited by many pilgrims, and is a central city in Islamic doctrine.

Islam has a hugely diversified number of sects and no central authority exists (even the Ottoman Empire, the last main caliphate and symbol of unity in the Middle East, has ceased to exist in 1924). One of the rare things all Muslims have in common is the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the Mecca each Muslim has to take at least once in his life according to doctrine. Needless to say, this gave the newly formed Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a huge revenue and influence, especially in more recent times. Immediately after the foundation of the state King Abdulaziz, its founder, managed to play a very careful balancing act between Wahhabi radicals and the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Mecca and Medina: for example, when militia requested the destruction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, a place they saw as heretical but which was beloved by many pilgrims, the ruler found a compromise in allowing the destruction of the mosque's dome, and keeping the rest of the mosque intact¹². This kind of compromise would be the basis for the Al Saud's policy in Mecca and Medina, and for Saudi Arabia in general.

The state would soon become very rich thanks to pilgrim revenues and humongous amounts of oil reserves in the country. Saudi Arabia found in the United States both a customer in oil and a close ally to protect them from foreign aggression. This has caused many tensions with the country's religious establishment and part of the population (especially in more recent times), which see the Western country and the West in general as morally corrupt. But the most abundant oil reserves in

11 Steinberg, G. (2014) The Wahhabiya, Saudi Arabia and the Salafist movement. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

12 Coll, S. (2008) *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*. 2009 edition, p.83. United States: Penguin USA.

the world and control over the two holiest cities in Islam have given what used to be a nomadic desert tribe far-reaching and profound influence.

1.3.2 Wahhabism as a doctrine

The Wahhabist doctrine is an ultraconservative Salafi sect. Its founder, Al-Wahhab, rejected all art, music, technology and adornments as blasphemy. The central belief of Wahhabism is that the Qur'an and the *Sunna* require no adaptation to modern times and must be interpreted according to traditions in the seventh century, because that is the way to live like the pious forefathers, the *al-salaf as-salih*. Music and silk clothes are forbidden, as is tobacco. Women must not take part in public life, and all believers must pray five times a day.

Due to its synergy with the Saudi Arabian state, many tenets of the Wahhabi faith might have been, in the past three centuries, used to justify state expansion and state building. Doctrines of *hijra* (migration), *takfir* (excommunication) and *jihad* (religiously motivated warfare) might have served a purpose in the creation of a Saudi State, but are today not as considered inside the country. Wahhabi doctrine as a political ideology is in any case an extremely controversial subject among academicians. There are countless divisions in Western scholars in analyzing the elements of the sect, and it is impossible to mention them all in a limited space. It should always be kept in mind that, as a sect with no clear central authority, there is much pluralism in interpretations of the doctrine. However, it can't be denied that many of the prescriptions of Wahhabist ideology are used by extremist militant Islamic groups today in the world and in Europe as an ideological framework. Al Qaeda and ISIS are the most famous examples.

1.3.3 A consensus-based model and its crisis

The dangerous balance play between the monarchy and the religious establishment finally came to a symbolic crisis in 1979. On November 20th Juhaiman Al-Otaibi led a group of armed men into seizing and occupying the Mecca's Grand Mosque. Al-Otaibi was a descendant of the *ikhwan*, the "Brothers" (no relation to the Muslim Brotherhood), a violent jihadi militia which fought for Abdulaziz at the time of his conquests. Shortly before the end of unification in Saudi Arabia, the *ikhwan* revolted against the monarch, which they saw as blasphemous for embracing modernity. Abdulaziz replied with a carrot-and-stick approach: some *ikhwan* were killed in battle, while others were resettled in oasis settlements in the Arabian peninsula. The resulting cities quickly became a

hub for conservatism in the country, in contrast to the modernizing push that had taken over most of Saudi Arabia in those decades. While Al-Otaibi prophesied about Judgement Day and the incoming apocalypse (a religious image also vastly used by ISIS today¹³) he was also reflecting a growing unrest against the monarchy among the more religious population of the country¹⁴. 8 years before, in 1971, following the death of the Grand Mufti Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al al-Shayk, the Saudi monarchy created a Council of Senior *Ulama*, a body of collective experts occupied in decision-making regarding religious affairs. Some scholars argue that the body served the purpose to institutionalize Wahhabism even further, giving the state more control in religious affairs and reducing the independence of the clergy¹⁵.

The Grand Mosque siege and the Iranian revolution the same year proved that Saudi Arabia was not invulnerable to violent, revolutionary political movements. During the 1980s Saudi Arabia, under newly ascended King Fahd, attempted to appease Islamist forces inside the country. Political culture became far more conservative: public demonstrations of religiosity, restrictions on access for women to public spaces, strict interpretations of Islamic law, media censorship and an increased budget for the kingdom's Islamists were some of the policies implemented to keep conservative forces in the country under control. At the same time, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan began.

Saying that the Gulf monarchies intervened massively in Afghanistan would be an understatement. The eagerness of these governments to finance and arm the Afghan jihad came in part from a misinterpretation: the Carter administration and the Al Saud both thought that Moscow's invasion was just the beginning of an attempt to take over control of Gulf oil supplies. This turned out not to be true, but at the time no one could know this. Through a commonality of interests, the United States and Saudi Arabia became ever closer allies. Saudi Arabia offered to match the U.S. Congress' funding for the mujaheddin in Afghanistan dollar by dollar. In 1984 alone, the gulf kingdom contributed 200 million dollars to the Afghan cause. For civil society inside the country the idea of an Islamic resistance against invasion by an atheist communist superpower proved irresistible: it was, after all, a population going through an Islamic reawakening. Golden jewelry, bags of cash money, checks by minor Saudi princes and even telethons for the Afghan jihad were at the order of the day in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s.¹⁶ The mujaheddin had become a romantic model: many young Saudis would flock to Peshawar in the final days of Ramadan to do volunteer work. Boasting about having been in Afghanistan became common among Saudi youth, although almost none did any actual fighting.

13 Chulov, M. (2015) Why ISIS fights, *the Guardian*. [Online] Available: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/why-isis-fight-syria-iraq> [Access: 03.04.2016]

14 Ibid. note 12, pp. 223-25.

15 DeLong-Bas, N. (2013) Islam and Power in Saudi Arabia. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

16 Coll, S. (2004) *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Chapter 4. 2005 edition, United States: Penguin Press.

In a decade of Islamic reawakening the clergy had quickly gained back the power it had lost during the modernist reign of King Faisal. By the 1990s, there was plenty of evidence to understand how conservative Saudi Arabia had become. Controversy broke out in 1990, for example, when approval by Grand Mufti Bin Baz of American troops being deployed to defend Saudi Arabia's borders from Saddam Hussein's troops was met with outrage by many Saudis, who saw the official religious establishment as an organ so dependent from the monarchy it could only rubber-stamp its decrees. Subversiveness inside the country was growing, with many radical Islamist preachers circulating dissident sermons and ideas through the use of underground cassette tapes¹⁷. The majority of the Saudi Arabian population had always had anti-Western attitudes, but what became worrying for western states at the time was the inability of the Saudi Arabian monarchy to contain dissent. The unrest was proving that, while Wahhabism was symbiotic with the Saudi state, it was not submitted to the monarchy.

1.3.4 Wahhabism: is it the scapegoat of Islamic extremism?

While Wahhabism is one of the most conservative interpretations for Islam in the world, it is impossible for it to be the only element in fostering terrorism. While Osama Bin Laden was a Wahhabi and while ISIS' territories in Syria and Iraq are governed using some form of Wahhabi principles there can be little relationship between many radicalized youths in Europe attracted by ISIS today and Wahhabism on its own. However, it can be argued that several organizations such as the Muslim World League have received ideological inspiration from the sect. Having control over Mecca and Medina gives Saudi Arabia a massive amount of ideological influence on the nature of Islam. While not advocating fully for their own breed of religion these NGOs can still cause ideological influences in one's personal interpretation of the religion, such as the legitimization of Sunni sectarian violence in the Middle East. This is valid for Wahhabism as it might be valid for the Muslim Brotherhood's style of political Islam: in the case of the Muslim World League, these separate ideologies seem to have converged. This type of soft power will be analyzed more fully in Chapter II, which will deal with Islamist geopolitics and religious influences towards Europe.

1.4 Al Qaeda

17 Ibid., Chapter 12.

In its ideology, Al Qaeda was extremely innovative. While all Islamist movements before it had concerned themselves with overthrowing Middle-eastern and Asian states they saw as corrupt, Al Qaeda was the first terrorist organization that preached to take the fight to the West. In Bin Laden's own words: "The snake is America. We have to cut the head of the snake"¹⁸. The "snake's head" was not exclusively in the West, but in general the most powerful nations in the world, which at the time would also have included the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union by the time of Al Qaeda's foundation in 1988 was in its twilight years before collapsing. It can be argued that one of the elements playing a part in this was the Afghan jihad. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan had cost the Soviet Union thousands of men and tens of billions in military equipment. It had proven that a scarcely armed group of Islamic fighters could contribute to the fall of a global empire.

There is still today much debate on the organization of Al Qaeda: the group seems to be a hybrid, combining a central organization, several separate groups affiliated but not an integral part of Al Qaeda (examples include Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Nusra today in Syria), and an ideology for lone wolves and independent Islamic terrorist cells.

1.4.1 Development and ideological influences of Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda's history is still discussed about today. It is known that both Osama Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri were both heavily inspired by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (the latter, an ex member of the MB and later founder of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, was particularly interested in Sayyid Qutb's vision). In fact, the organization was founded in 1988 as an "organized military faction" with the objective of overthrowing corrupt "apostate" governments in the Islamic world¹⁹, an objective not unlike the one of the Muslim Brotherhood(s) in the 1950s and 1960s²⁰. As the scion of one of the most powerful Saudi clans (and one completely created by patronage of the Saudi monarchy) Bin Laden enjoyed a privileged relationship with the royal family. At the time of Al Qaeda's foundation, Osama Bin Laden still enjoyed a cordial relationship with Saudi government officials. Things would however change in 1991, when disapproval by Osama over government inaction in Yemen against Marxist guerrillas and the use of American soldiers to defend against Saddam led Bin Laden to be exiled to Khartoum, Sudan.

In 1996 Bin Laden was able to set up a central organization: he returned to Afghanistan, and managed to strategically ally himself with various Islamist fighters first and the Taliban later. This allowed him to recruit many Islamist fighters who had stayed in Afghanistan after the end of the

¹⁸ Fineman, M. and Braun, S. (2001) Life Inside Al Qaeda: A Destructive Devotion, *Los Angeles Times*. [Online] Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/24/news/mn-49201/3> [Access: 09.05.2016]

¹⁹ Burke, J. (2013) Al-Qaeda and its Affiliates. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, p. 632. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁰ Ibid. note 3.

Soviet invasion. They were trained at Al Qaeda camps in Peshawar and then sent around the world to become sleeper cells. The first attacks set up by Al Qaeda were the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. In 2000 another attack was carried out on the USS Cole, a U.S. Navy warship that was refueling in Aden, Yemen.

1.4.2 The virtual nature of Al Qaeda after 2001 and Al Qaeda today

In the invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks, Al Qaeda lost its physical base. However, its networking power in a quickly globalizing world could only grow. The group both connected and inspired Islamist fighters around the world. Various attacks on local governments and Western targets were carried out: in some cases by ex-Afghan mujaheddin in their home countries, in other cases attacks orchestrated by veterans but carried out by new, local recruits²¹. Some struck in Europe, such as in Spain (an attack carried out by Moroccans with no links to Al Qaeda leadership, but nevertheless influenced by its ideology) and London, where the perpetrators had allegedly traveled to Pakistan for training before striking²². In the case of the Maghreb, Al Qaeda became an umbrella group for militant groups, and became known as Al Qaeda in the Maghreb, and also adopted the ideology of establishing a “pure” Islamic state. After 2001 Al Qaeda grew more and more into a franchise, rather than a centralized terrorist group.

Al Qaeda's goals have always been framed by its leadership as explicitly political: the organization's self declared objective is to end “interference” by the world's superpowers in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. It might be argued that Al Qaeda in its prime was far more pan-Islamic than ISIS today, due to the latter's propaganda focusing especially on Arabic populations in the Islamic Crescent and Europe. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 4, which will analyze media communication used by ISIS. In any case, the organization has suffered in the last years: the failure of their jihad in Iraq, the death of Bin Laden and the emergence of ISIS (once affiliated with Al Qaeda and disavowed by Ayman Al-Zawahiri in February 2014²³) have led the organization to adopt an even more decentralized system in its place. Zawahiri has also struggled to offer radicalized Muslim youths an alternative to ISIS: the Egyptian's speeches about theology and interpretations of the Islamic faith do not capture the attention ISIS does²⁴. However local affiliated branches of Al

21 Ibid. note 16.

22 Ibid, note 19.

23 Sly, L. (2014) Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq, *Washington Post*. [Online] Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html [Access: 09/05/16]

Official Al Qaeda statement available at: <http://jihadology.net/2014/02/02/as-sa%E1%B8%A5ab-media-presents-a-new-statement-from-al-qaidah-on-the-relationship-of-qaidat-al-jihad-and-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham/>

24 Byman, D. and Williams, J. (2015) Al Qaeda is losing the battle for jihadi hearts and minds, *Foreign Policy*.

[Online] Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/19/al-qaeda-losing-battle-jihadi-hearts-minds-zawahiri-tape/>

Qaeda are still very powerful: Al Nusra is still one of the main rebel groups in the Syrian conflict; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been seeking to expand its notoriety through several terrorist attacks and raids in the Maghreb and more recently in Sub-Saharan Western Africa, such as the Grand Bassam beach resort attacks in the Ivory Coast in March 2016²⁵; and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), its Saudi-Yemeni branch, allegedly struck at Europe directly in its January 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris, while enjoying unprecedented success as an actor in the Yemeni civil war.²⁶

[Access: 09/05/16]

25 BBC News (2016) Ivory Coast: 16 dead in Grand Bassam beach resort attack. [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35798502> [Access: 09/05/16]

26 Bayoumy, Y., Browning, N., and Ghobari, M. (2016) How Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen has made al Qaeda stronger – and richer, *Reuters*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/yemen-aqap/> [Accessed: 09/05/16]

Chapter II: External Influences. Islamist Geopolitics and religious influences from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and others towards Europe

2.1 Introduction

This chapter talks about the possibility of Islamism being used as a political weapon at an international level. Through the use of proselytizing and soft power some states have attempted for one reason or another to increase their influence in the Muslim world by attempting to export their ideologies or back groups who do so. It will analyse the two most prevalent cases, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Before that however it will attempt to explain how it became possible to be able to assert such a degree of influence, referring to particular concepts in Islam and by the peculiar geopolitical situation created after the Arab Spring.

2.1.1 The concept of *umma* and *da'wa* in a globalized world

Muslims and especially Arabs have always been very fascinated by the idea of the *umma*, the “community”, and a central concept in understanding Muslim identity. The Qur'an states “This is your *umma*, one *umma*, and I am your God”.¹ The community is supposed to go beyond differences (political, religious or social) with one another and be able to enjoy unity between its members. Hassan al-Banna, mentioned in Chapter 1 was greatly influenced by this rhetoric, having lived through the end of the Caliphate with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and by the longing for a return to the *umma*.² It is a central topic in all forms of political Islam, from non-violent Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood to jihadi Salafis including Al-Qaeda. It is also the reason for which the notion of pan-Islamism exists.

It is only natural that with the arrival of globalization and the increase in long-distance communication through the Internet the narrative of the *umma* would only become more common. There is a presence of religious scholars, usually identified with the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), who may be defined as having an ecumenical Islamic agenda. They wish for the connection of the community and to find common ground between all Muslims (except for radical militant Islamists, which they define as terrorists), proposing themselves as mediators for the

1 Fattah, M. (2013) Islam and Politics in the Middle east. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

2 Moussalli, A. (2013) Hassan Al-Banna. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

differences that may arise in all religious groups. The central belief is that all Muslims must play a part in restoring the Islamic civilization.³

Another very important concept in Muslims is the *da'wa*, the *religious call*, or the action of proselytizing. It is an invite to call the people to religious worship. Saudi Arabia has extensively resorted to *da'wa*: its position in the Arabian peninsula has brought it to see itself as the leader of the *umma*. To attempt to obtain legitimacy in this, it has invested heavily in exporting Wahhabi ideology in Europe. It has built Islamic centres in Malaga, Madrid, Milan, Edinburgh, Brussels, Lisbon, Washington, Chicago and Toronto, among others. According to the official Saudi magazine *Ain al-Yaqin* the Saudi royal family has financed, wholly or partially, approximately 210 Islamic centres, 1500 mosques, 202 colleges and 2000 Islamic schools in Muslim-minority countries.⁴ The reason for focusing on non-Muslim countries might come from the fact that countries in which Muslims are the minority lack the infrastructure for the use of religion: unlike Muslim countries mosques in Europe are not funded by the state and would-be imams cannot access religious education, which is missing in most European universities. This makes the entire Muslim apparatus in Europe heavily under-funded, and in need of funds which the oil-rich Saudi state can provide. It is also a matter of influence: a country with a central religious establishment is far more difficult to influence than one that does not have it.

The paradox of the *umma* is all too evident: Islam is a religion with a natural longing for unity and yet no central authority to create it. This sparks a competition between different actors at an international level, who all aim to be the ones to idealistically unify all Muslims. This chapter will look at two of the countries which have tried the most to increase their international influence in an age of globalization: Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

2.1.2 A post-Arab Spring world

The wave of change brought upon by the Arab Spring has caused massive and fundamental changes in the geopolitical asset of the Middle East, which in a way might have influenced European Islam. Reactions in several governments seem to have polarized even further Islamist actors against their secular or secularreligious equivalents. For example, Egypt after Al-Sisi's anti-Islamist coup d'etat in 2013 is now in a position of enmity with Qatar, which has supported several Islamist factions (including Morsi's presidency) during and after the Arab Spring. Not only that, but scenarios of civil war in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen have given the occasion for radical militant Islamist groups

³ Ibid. note 1

⁴ Cesari, J. (2015) Introduction. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

such as ISIS to emerge. In the case of the latter three there has also been a re-emergence of sectarianism, which might contribute to radicalization of Muslims throughout Europe and might convince many youths to become foreign fighters for these jihadi groups. Tension between Sunni and Shi'a Arabs have always been present in the Middle East, but only now are they placed in a situation of conflict with one another. Saudi Arabia and Iran have also been leading a geopolitical conflict by proxies in these countries. We do not know the effects that this revival of sectarian conflict might have on alienated Arab youths worldwide yet, but there is a possibility that it may galvanize them as Afghanistan and Bosnia in the 1980s and in the 1990s.

2.1.3 The failure of the International Muslim Brotherhood

One of the first experiments with adapting local Islamist organizations in the Middle East to an international reality was the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, or IOMB. The IOMB was created in 1982: it was an experiment to unite local Muslim Brotherhood chapters in several Arabic countries and to reunite its members or sympathisers scattered all around Europe. Mustafa Mashur was its *de facto* creator. He was a hard-liner deeply embedded in the elite of the mother Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: while he only became head of the political party in 1996 the previous heads were far more concerned with local Egyptian affairs, leaving Mashur the space to develop the IOMB as a transnational coordination organ. The party's very strong internationalism ever since its inception already implied that eventually an attempt to unite all factions in a transnationalist pan-Islamic mode would have been made. However, the IOMB would not last long. Eventually it failed due to the strong persisting local-oriented mindset of the Arabic Muslim Brotherhood organisations, which led to much infighting between the different chapters from different countries. The first Gulf War was especially controversial: in 1991 the Kuwaiti chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood withdrew from the IOMB due to the Egyptian leadership opposing the presence of U.S. troops in Kuwait, to defend it from Saddam's forces. In the end the doctrine of political unity in the name of the *umma* could not defeat strong local interests of the several Muslim Brotherhood parties throughout the Middle East, and the diffidence of the chapters toward an organisation that was still predominantly Egyptian in its ideology and leadership did not help the cause of the IOMB.⁵

Today, the International Organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood lays dormant: it still exists but it does not coordinate local chapters anymore, much less agree on a common policy for all chapters

⁵ Tamam, H. (2014) International organization of the Muslim brotherhood. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

and organisations in the Islamic Crescent and Europe. Some in the new organisation have proposed a new format for the IOMB: not a coordinating organ anymore but a political forum for all its members, not unlike the Arab National Conference.

2.2 The Qatari sphere: Muslim movements in Europe inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood

The tiny emirate of Qatar, made up by 300.000 nationals, has been interested in using political Islam as leverage ever since 2011, when the Arab Spring broke out. As described by an analyst in Washington: “Qatar's foreign policy is a vanity project”⁶. Huge economic possibilities, mostly deriving from the state's hydrocarbon wealth (it ranks second in the world for exports in natural gas, behind Russia⁷) has allowed Qatar to invest billions in Europe and worldwide, acquiring the popular football team Paris St. Germain and hosting the upcoming 2022 Football World Cup. This effort has mostly been centred around attempting to carve out a bigger role on the international stage for the Gulf emirate. But the primary effort in which Qatar has attempted to do so is in acting as a patron to several groups part of or affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead of competing with Saudi Arabia in supporting Salafi groups Qatar decided to back the patron-less Muslim Brotherhood. This support seems to stem from a belief in the country's governing elite that political Islam will play a dominant role in the decades following the Arab Spring, and that by backing several of its representatives the emirate will be considered de-facto as an influential mediator. During the Morsi presidency, for example, Qatar spent over 5 billion dollars on foreign aid directed to Egypt⁸.

Qatar has also funded other Islamist movements in the Middle East: together with Saudi Arabia and Turkey it is the biggest backer of rebel forces in Syria against Bashir Al-Assad's regime. From 2011 to 2013 Qatar has spent 3 billion dollars in support of the opposition in the country.⁹ And Qatari policy in Libya has irritated many other countries, due to support for Islamist armed groups operating outside of the Transitional National Council. Several high profile visits to Gaza have also been in the country's agenda: since Hamas is considered by the Muslim Brotherhood to be its military wing, it is only natural for Qatari support to extend to the party in the Gaza Strip. Khaled

6 Cockburn, P. (2016) Syrian civil war: Could Turkey be gambling on an invasion? *The Independent*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syrian-civil-war-could-turkey-be-gambling-on-an-invasion-a6844171.html>

7 United States. Central Intelligence Agency (2016) *CIA World Factbook (Qatar)*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html>

8 Dickinson, E. (2014) The Case Against Qatar, *Foreign Policy* [Online] Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/30/the-case-against-qatar/> [Access: 01.04.2016]

9 Shapiro, J. (2013) The Qatar Problem, *Foreign Policy* [Online] Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/28/the-qatar-problem/> [Access: 01.04.2016]

Mashar, Hamas' leader in exile, resides in Doha. Political support for the Muslim Brotherhood has created problems between Qatar and some of its neighbours, notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (who currently oppose the MB). In 2014 pressure by these two states forced Qatar to expel seven senior Muslim Brotherhood figures. However, support by Qatar for the organisation continues to this date.

But Qatari soft power doesn't stop in the Middle East, it also extends to Europe: by absorbing several Islamist intellectuals and religious scholars into government think-tanks and its university system the emirate has obtained influence over several Muslim religious associations based in Europe, mostly organizations with some degree of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, either directly, historically or ideologically. The most notable example is the European Council for Fatwa and Research, headed by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a controversial but nonetheless influential Egyptian cleric.

2.2.1 Yusuf al-Qaradawi

Yusuf al-Qaradawi is one of the most influential contemporary religious scholars in Sunni Islam. Born in 1926 in Egypt, he became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood between 1942 and 1943, inspired by the speeches of its founder, Al-Banna. He was arrested twice in 1952 by the Nasser regime. He was released two years later, and in 1961 he moved to Qatar to direct an institute of religious studies in Doha. While officially only a member of the Muslim Brotherhood until 1956¹⁰, he has nonetheless been a major authority of the movement. He has been asked twice to become Supreme Leader of the Egyptian political party: Qaradawi has refused it both times. During his stay in Qatar (where he still resides today) he notably taught Shayk Khalifa Bin Hamad al-Thani, who would then become emir between 1972 and 1995. More generally, he was instrumental in shaping the religious education system in place in the small emirate.

Qaradawi has been very present at an international level: he has helped fund the popular website Islamonline.net, and he is an associate of the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF) and of the Fiqh Academy, a part of the Saudi-based Muslim World League. His innovations come from offering a religious interpretation of Islamic laws which takes classical Islamic traditions and applies it to the contemporary globalised and pluralist world. He describes himself as part of the Egyptian *Al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya*, the Islamic Awakening project which took hold in Egypt in the 1970s, a reaction to the disillusionment of Egyptians after their defeat against Israel in the Six Days

10 Caeiro, A. (2014) European Council for Fatwa and research and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

War.¹¹ But outside of Egypt, he is very influential in the European Muslim world as well: his *fatwas* on *fiqh al-aqalliyat*, or “Muslim jurisprudence of minorities” (an attempt to understand Islamic norms in countries where Islam is not the majority religion or involved in government). This is a concern especially for the ECFR, which he has co-founded and of which he is the chairman. It is however interesting to note that he does not speak any European languages and that the majority of his material is produced in Arabic. This might make him more influential in European Arabic communities, compared to other Muslim backgrounds.

Due to his nature as a religious scholar adapting Islam to a globalised world he has been an early adopter and extensive user of the Internet. In 1997 he became the very first Islamic scholar to have his own website, *qaradawi.net*. He has a weekly program on Al-Jazeera, *Shari'a and Life*, in which he explains Islamic normativity. Several Muslims in Europe watch his videos on Youtube.

Qaradawi has also been very controversial: aside from not being a “liberal” and opposing the notion of secularism during the second Intifada in 2001 he has endorsed the use of Palestinian suicide bombings. Since suicide is forbidden in the Qur'an he has used the term “martyrdom” to describe them, and he has justified the deaths of women and children (forbidden by Quranic rules) by arguing that there are no civilians in Israel, because everyone could be drafted for military service.¹² His support to Hamas has led him to be banned from entering the United States and Britain. He is also banned from France.

2.2.2 European Council for Fatwa and Research

The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) is a consultative organ founded in 1997 and based in Dublin. It usually meets once or twice a year to produce *fatwas* (religious opinions) on matters connected with Muslims in the West. While many members are Muslim scholars from Europe there is a strong presence of *ulama* (scholars) from the Middle East : its chairman and co-founder is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a controversial Egyptian cleric with links to the Muslim Brotherhood and based in Qatar.

The Council's *fatwas* invite its Muslim European public to legal integration in the countries they reside in, but they reject cultural assimilation. The organisation seems to promote a strong Muslim identity, and it is also interesting to note that the website of the ECFR is in Arabic. The organisation does however invite to respect laws and customs of the European country Muslims reside in. Practices allowed in Islamic law but forbidden in European laws usually would be considered as

11 Graf, B. (2013) Yusuf al-Qaradawi. In Esposito, J. And El-Din Shahin, E. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

12 Ibid.

prohibited (*haram*). They do however invite European leaders to consider implementing matters of Islamic family law into the European system outside of the pre-existing legal system, citing already existing exception for Jewish communities in Europe. Clashes may also occur when an European law prohibits a Muslim obligation, such as the clash on Islamic headscarves in France. In this case, the organisation invites its public to peacefully protest in legitimate ways.

The organisation is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood: it is, after all, dedicated to a globalised world and its discussions on Muslim identity in Europe fit well with the Brotherhood's pan-Islamism. However, as explained by the failure of the IOMB most of these related politicians operate at a local level in the Arab world. The organisation overwhelmingly rejects jihadi terrorism, although there is support for violence in the Palestinian territories.¹³

2.3 Saudi ideological influence in Europe

Control over the most important holy places in Islam forced the previously very isolationist Wahhabiya to open up to the international stage. The Islamist influx of Muslim Brotherhood members in the 1950s and 60s (mentioned in the previous chapter) became an occasion for cooperation between the Wahhabis and the MB's political Islamists: this collaboration eventually would flow into the creation of the Mecca-based Muslim World League in 1962. One of the most famous Islamic organisations, it can be seen as a collaboration between the Wahhabi sect, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi sects.¹⁴ It usually concerns itself with educational, cultural and charity projects and has over 30 offices outside of Saudi Arabia, including 5 major Islamic centres in Europe. But its influence has been ever bigger thanks to a very large number of affiliated organisations, individuals, and mosques. This may have contributed to the growth of Salafism in Europe: but how connected is global and modern Salafism with Wahhabism? Guido Steinberg (2014), quoting Stéphane Lacroix (2008) states that “Salafism might be defined as all the hybridisations that have taken place since the 1960s between the teachings of al-Wahhab and other Islamic schools of thought”¹⁵.

2.3.1 Salafi influences in Europe

13 Caeiro, A. (2014) European Council for Fatwa and research and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

14 Steinberg, G. (2014) The Wahhabiya, Saudi Arabia and the Salafist movement. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

15 Ibid.

A large part of the European Salafist movements today (excluding the quietist Salafi sects which are also present) are also affiliated or inspired by the *Sahwa* movement, led by the Awakening Sheiks. The Awakening Sheiks emerged in the previously mentioned 1990s dissident wave that swept Saudi Arabia after the beginning of the first Gulf War and argued for a further Islamisation of Saudi society.¹⁶ In the Netherlands, for example, the *Islamitisch Comité voor Ahl as-Sunna in Nederland* (Foundation Islamic Committee for Ahl as-Sunna) leadership has been connected with Muhammad Suroor, a teacher for many Salafi leaders inside *Sahwa*.¹⁷ But the same things have also happened in France: the country went through a great expansion of the politicised Salafi movement in the late 1990s, when several European students started taking religious studies in universities in Saudi Arabia. An example is Abdelkader Bouziane, who studied two years in Saudi Arabia studying Islam before becoming an imam for several mosques in France, where he carried on in his *da'wa*. Many Salafi religious scholars from Saudi Arabia have visited France and other European countries themselves.¹⁸

This expansion would come to a halt after the 9/11 attacks in New York, when the French government began a crackdown on these Salafi groups. In his study of the French salafi movements Samir Amghar (2014) has observed how the main difference between the Muslim Brotherhood strain of political Islam and the Salafi, Wahhabi-inspired strain comes from the group of people it is directed to. While the message of the Muslim Brotherhood is directed primarily towards a re-Islamised middle class Salafism is directed towards the young, the working class and the unemployed. He states: “Salafist Islam is an easy-to-understand Islam, much easier for a population with little education *a priori* to grasp and comprehend. It provides a mental framework for exclusion and social and economic domination, endowing them with religious meaning. This Islam appeals to people because it emphasises its ability to deal with the economic and social malaises linked to exclusion by proposing a simple solution: a return to Islam.” He also notes an interesting phenomena, a small rising presence of petite-bourgeoisie in Salafi circles. The Salam apparel line was created by a young suburban Salafist, a former Moroccan rapper. It is interesting to note the relationship between rap and Salafism: an identity part-Islamist, part-gangster is what ties figures such as Mohammed Emwazi (allegedly Jihadi John) and the Abdeslam brothers, among the perpetrators of the November 13 attacks in Paris. This will be investigated in Chapter 3. The

16 Coll, S. (2004) *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Chapter 12. 2005 edition, United States: Penguin Press.

17 de Koning, M. (2014) Salafi politics in the Netherlands. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

18 Amghar, S. (2014) Salafist groups in France: a plural and antagonistic movement. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

German panorama of Salafism seems to be more complex. There is much infighting between different groups, and Saudi Arabia seems to have a lesser political influence simply due to the fact that many groups seem to have problems with Muslims to describe themselves as Wahhabi. These are often excluded from the mechanisms of the mosque. However, it is important to note that some religious Wahhabi scholars such as al-Uthayunin and Ibn Baz are often used as theological references. Long distance Islamic instruction from the University of Medina is also offered in the *Islamschule* of Braunschweig. Like most Salafist movements German Salafi mosques also are marked by an overwhelming use of Arabic as main language.¹⁹

19 Thielmann, J. (2014) Salafism in Germany. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

Chapter III: Arab/Muslim multiculturalism and alienation in Western European countries at the dawn of the 21st century.

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how the Middle East has gone through a period of political crisis, with the emergence and re-emergence of several Islamist groups, plus several influences from state and non-state actors that might have pushed Islamism into Europe. But it is also necessary to understand the root causes of radicalization: how do youths decide to take up the banner of jihadi Salafism? This chapter is dedicated to that. It opens with a strong normative statement on why the term “Muslim” shouldn't be used for ethnic framing in policy and academy in Europe. It goes on to explain the already existing theories of radicalization and then moves to elements or characteristics that might play a positive or negative role in radicalization. Finally, it will look at the states in Europe most interested by the process of radicalization and comparatively analyse them.

3.1.1 The construction of Muslim identity in Europe

In analysing radicalization tendencies in Europe, one question comes almost naturally at a certain point: is there even any such thing as a Muslim in Europe? A distinction should be made regarding “Muslim” as a follower of a religion (that is, Islam) and “Muslim” as an ethnic minority and identity, classified by much of the media and even some academic literature as just “Muslim”. An “ethnic Muslim” is a slippery concept by default. The use of the term implies considering around 1,6 billion people as pertaining to the same cultural group. While Islam has had a strong influence on political systems and local culture in the centuries ever since the religion was founded the degree and manner of influence on each political system in governments and rulers varies hugely from region to region in the world. Even the Ottoman Empire gave a very large degree of local autonomy, acknowledging the huge differences that required a careful balance between centralism and localism in each region of the caliphate. But in Europe today, Muslim minorities are for the most part considered as an ethnic group. This generalization has been used as a way to broadly define many groups of people who have come from Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia (among other places) to Europe in migration phenomena. The use of the term “Muslim” allows to include people from Pakistan, from India, from Morocco, from Sudan, from Egypt, from Afghanistan, from

Bangladesh and Turkey inside the same group. Since they do not share an ethnicity (or anything else, for the matter) the term that has been used to define these populations has been “Muslim”. Although this is a very normative interpretation, it can be argued that this has done nothing but damage the process of integration of these populations inside Europe. Muslim in the correct interpretation, that is as the follower of a religion with a set of norm and values, is a largely individual interpretation. There are dozens of sects in Sunni Islam (including some that might be considered as a whole other branch of the religion, for example Sufism) and countless schools of law, each with a different interpretation of *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence. To add to that, there is no central authority (at least, recognised by all Sunni Muslims of the globe), and with that no central modern doctrine outside of the basic tenets of the faith. That leaves not just a huge normative space for the single imam in a mosque to interpret (see a study on prisoners of Muslim religion and their imams), but a huge space for the individual as well, especially today with the huge amount of information available on the Internet. Each individual might emphasize a different aspect of the religion or disagree with a certain scholar. But the way most states and perhaps the majority of the European population interact with immigrant diasporas of Muslim religion is to label them all generally as “Muslim”. Radicalization is framed in this thesis ultimately as a failure of the process of integration in European societies, especially in second generation immigrants. As a friend of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, one of the attackers in the Paris attacks, put it: “We are revolting against this state and this society that never accepted us as Belgian. We are revolting against our parents and also their countries of origin. I don’t feel Belgian. I don’t feel Moroccan. I think of myself as a Muslim, and that’s how Abdelhamid saw himself.”¹ This is why, in this chapter, the use of the word “Muslim” has two meanings: it is either used to define people of the Islamic faith, or it is used reluctantly in its “ethnic” aspect because the pertaining literature also used it in this interpretation. Framing in ethnic concepts such as the nationality of immigrants is used, for a simple reason: many Muslim communities live in geographically condensed areas (which will be analysed below in a comparative analysis of different European countries). While I have the personal belief that ethnic framing should not be used in policy it does play a role in analysing diasporas, and that is the reason for which its use will be present (but not exclusive) in this chapter.

3.1.2 Radicalization: how reliable as a concept?

1 Faiola, A. and Mekhennet, S. (2015) The Islamic State creates a new type of jihadist: part terrorist, part gangster. *The Washington Post*. [Online] Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/the-islamic-state-creates-a-new-type-of-jihadist-part-terrorist-part-gangster/2015/12/20/1a3d65da-9bae-11e5-aca6-1ae3be6f06d2_story.html [Accessed: 27/05/16]

Analysis of a process of radicalization in Muslim Western communities, on which the dissertation is focused, is complicated from the very beginning due to the natural difficulty in defining what radicalization is. The problem was already partially faced in the previous chapters, in which there was an inability in defining if “moderate” Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood act as a “safety valve” or as a successive step before radical jihadi Salafism. Mullins (2012) defines radicalization as “the process of coming to adopt militant Islamist ideology”; on the other hand Wilner and Dubouloz (2011) define it as “a personal (and at times, interpersonal) process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and in which the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence. Radicalization is both a mental and emotional process that can prepare and motivate an individual to pursue violent behaviour”.²

The former definition is, in some ways, problematic: it does not offer a clear line on where to define radicalization and it considers jihadi Salafism with its own unique nature as a relatively generic phenomenon, which may be applied just as easily to members of the Christian or Hindu religion. While technically true (there is a presence of extremists in all religions and ideologies) the explanation does not factor that homegrown Islamic extremists in Europe often adopt an ideology which is lacking in their diasporic community. In the vast majority of cases second-generation immigrants do not have extremist parents or an overwhelming majority of extremists in their social networks, as would probably be the case in other religions abroad or in some Middle Eastern radicals. Radicalization however is, by definition, a process of transformation. Perhaps Islamic radicalization may also be framed as a profound change from a set of norms and values obtained by a process of socialization in a community (in the case of European Islam the social networks typical of an immigrant diaspora, from one's family to imams) to a far more conservative view, prevalently absent in the community. The latter definition, with its emphasis on emotional process, might work better.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 The heterogeneity of radicalization and “grievance consensus”

Since there is no consensus in defining radicalization, it is not a surprise to find out that there is also no academic consensus on the root causes of radicalization. There are no overarching theories and there is no academic tradition in the field of study. The subject is actually considered by some to be

² Pisiu, D. (2015) Radicalization. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

its own field of study, and it absorbs theories from many other subjects, from criminology to psychology. It is a very recent topic of study, with an amplitude of theories regarding the “transformation” to radicalised. There are, however, some early, prominent theories which will be described below. It is interesting to note that all these theories share the concept of “grievance” - feelings of anger, insufficiency or frustration derived from the idea that the “system” or society one lives in possesses unjust feelings towards them because of their identity. There is also debate on what kind of grievance is adopted in processes of radicalization: some scholars focus on the idea of group grievance adopted as part of a collective identity, while others identify it as a correspondence between one's own grievance and the group's. In any case, the consensus on grievance playing an active role in radicalising remains. “Grievance” is a term often used in the study of social movements, and the first group of dominant theories in the study of radicalization treats western jihadi Islamism as exactly that.³ It should also be noted that the vast majority of the literature regarding radicalization was written in the past ten years – more often than not in the years in which attacks inspired and sanctioned by Al-Qaeda were prevalent in Europe. ISIS' difference in ideology and method has exposed some problems with these approaches, and the fact that the subject of study is extremely recent shows how most theories are still very experimental.

3.2.2 Jihadi Islamism as a neo-fundamentalist, prevalently endogenous social movement

This approach, closely identified with French scholar Oliver Roy, focuses on the idea of jihadism as a neo-fundamentalist and anti-imperialistic social movement (in a manner not unlike the European radical left), born with second-generation Muslims in the West. Roy's example of Al-Qaeda, with its ideology of a de-culturalised, de-territorialised virtual *umma*, is especially interesting, because this is something both Al-Qaeda and ISIS have in common: while ISIS does pride itself on having a “national base”, its aims and scope have been just as global as Al-Qaeda, with strong emphasis on the idea of the *umma*. A second approach within this framework is in jihadism as a broader social movement with political origins in the Middle East. A minority of second-generation Muslims may have been strongly influenced by grievances common in one's own country of origin: for example, strong anti-Western sentiments in Pakistan may have affected or initiated feelings of radicalization in some youths of Pakistani origin in Europe today (Pargeter 2008)⁴. Roy (2008), however, also mentions that ideological and structural differences in jihadi movements stop networks and groups from being a social movement in the classical sense, which is understandable, considering the differences in aims and methods of global jihadi movements.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

3.2.3 Theories centred around the individual

These theories analyse radicalization from an individual point of view. They can be divided in deterministic theories and in developmental theories, and seek to understand what are the steps or motives that may transform an individual into an Islamic extremist. Speckhard (2008), part of the former school of thought, saw in his analysis of the Chechen Black Widows a part played by the consequences of psychological trauma in a situation of conflict, connected to peculiar socio-cultural conditionalities. While far from an universal model (many Islamic extremists today do not come or have origins in war-torn countries) it can still be useful to explain why jihadi organisations such as ISIS have also focused their propaganda on populations such as Bosniak Muslims⁵, who have been deeply affected by war. Other factors that may contribute to radicalization are other grievance-related factors: marginalization, alienation, discrimination, and feeling generally worse-off than the majority of the population. The set of grievances is so extended that it has been defined as a “kaleidoscope” (Ranstorm, 2010)⁶. The problem however lies in the fact that eventually anything might lead to radicalization.

Added to this, attempts to build the profile of a typical jihadi have all resulted in failure. In 2006, Nesser noted that “uncovered jihadi cells in Europe have usually consisted of a diversified group of individuals, encompassing multiple different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, ages, professions, family backgrounds and personalities.” These attempts were however formulated in the era of Al Qaeda, which was structurally different in ethnicity from ISIS. It was also different politically: ISIS is far more emotionally-centred than Bin Laden's organisation, and its political aims are not as clear. As there is also a matter of “probability”: a 50 year old, law-abiding, middle class Muslim might be radicalised, but the probability of that happening would be far lower than a 20 year old blue-collar Muslim who has been in and out of prison.

It is also essential to talk about the perception of events. Beyler (2006:93) noted how external events might be manipulated by jihadi propaganda (through, for example, conspiracy theories, which abound in the Middle East) to fit a certain narrative and accentuate the grievance already felt by a second-generation youth prone to radicalization towards his Western society. An example is the war in Iraq, mentioned by Beyler.⁷ The invasion of Iraq by the US was framed by Islamist media as an attack on a Muslim country by the West. While true, Saddam was not an Islamist. His Baa'thist

5 Borger, J. (2015) Isis targets vulnerable Bosnia for recruitment and attack. *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/25/isis-targets-vulnerable-bosnia-for-recruitment-and-attack> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

6 Ibid, note 4.

7 Ibid.

government, inspired by Nasserian principles, played far more on nationalism than it did on religion, also considering Iraq's own deep religious divisions. Jihadist media framed the conflict in the logic of a clash of civilizations – even though it might be argued that the invasion only strengthened jihadi movements by making the country more unstable.

The second type of theories focused on an individual process of radicalization is the developmental approach, which looks more at “how” people become radicalised rather than “why”. A very interesting contribution is that of Sagemann (2004), who observed the role of social networks in joining an extremist group. Kaplan et al. (2014) stated that group mechanisms also intervene in individual radicalization, and that lone-wolf phenomena are extremely rare. But lone-wolf attacks in the recent years have strongly increased in the West as well, especially outside of Europe. The Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, the Ottawa Parliament Hill shootings in 2014 and the San Bernardino shootings in 2015 proved that lone-wolf phenomena are becoming more common.⁸ This does not automatically disqualify the assumption that social networks play an important role, however. Those social networks may have been online, or on social media, although it will probably never be known. It is fitting for the rise in lone wolf attacks to coincide with the rise of social media. On a whole, however, it should be considered that lone wolves outside of dedicated cells are today a strong possibility.

Another element that has been observed by the developmental approach is the concept of cognitive openings or cognitive triggers, first proposed by Wiktorowicz (2005). He observes that interest for a certain religious and radical movement may be caused by an event that “shakes certitude in previously accepted beliefs”. While interesting, it is an unmeasurable phenomenon. In the vast majority of cases nobody can know when someone will go through such a moment or how. Is it possible to know the exact moment in which someone begins a process of radicalization? Can a measure even be used? Is the cognitive opening the first element in a process of radicalization or the last? Regardless, there are some who might go through the process of an Islamic awakening.

Neumann (2008) focused on something similar to Beyler. He applies framing theory to the extremism and jihadi radicalization, particularly in the concept of frame alignment between beliefs of recruits and the movement's narrative. It is interesting to note that the idea of frame alignment is very relevant today with ISIS: the narrative of the organization and the beliefs of its target often converge on the narrative of world powers killing Muslims and destroying their identity. Others to use framing theory in the study of Islamic radicalization include also Wiktorowicz (2005), who theorised “the elements of credibility of the frame articulators: reputation, authenticity, sacred authority, knowledge, character, and personality.”⁹

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

3.2.4 Community-based theories

Some scholars have focused on a community-based approach: according to them it is the several Islamic diasporas themselves which have been radicalised: this has proven to be a very controversial subject. While it is true that these approaches do not explain why only a small part of European Muslims actually radicalise, it can nonetheless be useful in understanding at least some of the elements that play a part in radicalization of the individual which tend to be exclusive to a certain community. There are three interesting and interconnected approaches. One looks at the frictions that would arise between a different set of norms and values from an Arab or Arab-influenced community (for example) to a European community: things such as “the erosion of traditions, conflicts of culture and generations, disintegration and identity issues.” The other builds on this, but sees things from a more post-modern perspective: strong individualism and loss of meaning affects Muslims more than it affects Europeans due to the religion's strong communitarianism.¹⁰

Some scholars have heavily criticised the community-based approach because it would imply that there's something wrong with European Muslims. Another reason is because it would consider Islamic extremism as a *sui generis* phenomenon instead of giving a broader meaning to radicalization. While technically true, Islamic radicalization must in some ways be taken as *sui generis* and distinct from other types of terrorism, because some grievances are exclusive to Arab or other Muslim populations. Jihadists follow a minority interpretation of the Qur'an but they are still using an interpretation exclusive to that religion. “Radicalised” terrorist groups of other religions (or without any), while sharing some things in common with Islamic jihadis (such as justifying violence) are distinct also in the fact they do not share the same ideological framework or *modus operandi* as they do. Because of this, community and identity-based theories deserve relevance.

3.3 Elements which play any kind of role (positive and negative, directly and indirectly) in radicalization processes

3.3.1 The crucial role of the Internet in creating a radicalised social network

Today the internet plays a huge role in radicalising young, disenfranchised Muslims. Most of ISIS propaganda today circulates by the medium. Its potential was however already clear to many jihadi Salafis, who have long used the web to circulate various material. It is estimated that between 2000

¹⁰ Ibid.

and 2005 the number of jihadi websites grew from 14 to over five thousand.¹¹ The Iraq War and its successive jihad project by Al Qaeda might probably be seen as the moment in which Salafi terrorist groups began concerning themselves extensively with the use of the internet: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was the first to upload propaganda videos of himself to various websites. Jihadi use of the Internet has also taken advantage of its extreme power in augmenting social networks – social media has made the phenomena of lone wolf terrorist attacks possible, and many foreign fighters in the Syrian war have been radicalised and convinced to go fight in the war at least in part by jihadi media and connections on the Internet. Several Muslim women (ethnically connected to the religion or converts) have also left their home country to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. While al-Qaeda has used the Internet in organising attacks and radicalising, ISIS has fundamentally innovated internet radicalization through the use of the medium. On the one hand, the organisation headed by Bin Laden used websites and internet forums to further its cause. Neumann (2008) theorised the existence of “hyperradicalization” in jihadi forums and websites: unlike ISIS today jihadi websites in the middle-2000s were mostly constituted by group mechanisms of hyperintensification of opinions – these websites did not create new convictions in its members, but the members mutually enforced them between themselves.¹² But today ISIS extensively uses social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many peer-to-peer chat services such as Telegram to communicate. There is however one thing the two organisations share: branding. Both Al Qaeda and ISIS are deeply concerned with cultivating a brand which might be seen as “appealing” by several disenfranchised Muslim youths around the globe.

3.3.2 Prison and extremism

Several European Islamic radicals have drifted in and out of prison before their respective attacks in Europe, or before moving to foreign countries in jihadi projects. But connecting prison and radicalization in Europe is a very complex affair. Neumann (2008) put forward the idea that radicalization offers a solution to an existential crisis in prison. Boyler (2006), on the other hand, theorised that radicalization in prison offers a way to vent anger and anti-establishment attitudes.¹³ But while both ideas can be agreed on and while the idea of a prison turning someone into a radical on its own is very easy to comprehend, there is no evidence to point to a direct causal link between prison and radicalism. However, several prisons might serve as an exchange of ideas for Islamic

11 Awan, A. (2014) Virtual jihadist media. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

12 Pisoiu, D. (2015) Radicalization. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

13 Ibid, note 2

extremists. It may create social networks between radicalised individuals, which may or may not morph into a terrorist cell further down the line. Although the “chicken and egg” problem of prisons and Islamic extremism can't be solved, there is some interesting data on Muslims in general (including non-radicals and moderates) in prison. Between 1995 and 2005 the Muslim prison population in Britain grew by 150%. Today Muslims in prison represent 11% of the total. Back in 2001 the number was far lower: Muslim females were 3% of the prison population while Muslim males were 7%. But in the census the same year only 2,7% of the British population defined itself as Muslim. This makes Muslims in British prisons severely overrepresented.¹⁴ Muslims in prison might also be discriminated upon by guards or other convicts, and this may exacerbate tensions that could accentuate feelings of grievance towards a society.

A very interesting set of interviews was conducted in the Muslim prison population in Denmark. The study found that where there was a religious relationship between a devout convict and a prison imam the prisoner absorbed almost completely the world-view of the latter. This has both positive and negative connotations. If the imam of the convict did not believe in the possibility of integration for Muslims in Denmark the prisoner during interviews would be far more pessimistic regarding absorption into Danish society. If the opposite was true, even with a very conservative convict, interpretation of having a personal duty to follow local law even in case of conflict with Islamic law was prevalent.¹⁵ This study has massive implications. None of the imams were radicals: but it is interesting to note how much is absorbed from someone considered a religious authority by devout Muslims, even outside the purely religious sphere. The advice of imams in prisons seem to have a very positive effects: if they were absent it could be possible that other extremist convicts could rise to take their place, and turn to a radical world-view other Muslim convicts.

3.3.3 The relationship between gangster identity and Salafism

One of the most recent and interesting phenomena in Islamic extremism has been the rise of what many call “gangster Salafi”. These are groups that involve both Salafi religious beliefs and criminal attitudes, creating an unique identity in radicalised youths which combine the two. The earliest evidence of “gangster Salafi” identity I could find is a 2004 music video titled *Dirty Kuffar*, created by “Sheikh Terra and the Soul Salah Crew”, an UK jihadi rap group¹⁶. It is a western-style hip hop

14 Quraishi, M. (2014) Muslims in prison and processes of radicalization: the United Kingdom. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

15 Olsen, J. (2014) Muslims in prison and processes of radicalization: Denmark. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

16 Ibid. note 8

video set on the notes of the Jamaican “*Diwali*” *riddim*, protesting against the US and UK invasion of Iraq and calling for George W. Bush and Tony Blair to be “thrown in a fire”.

Those who know Salafi doctrine might be surprised at knowing that such a musical subculture is present in jihadi circles, considering most Salafi *fatwas* explicitly prohibit music. In truth today the doctrine does not prohibit music but musical instruments: genres such as the *nasheed* (an ancient genre of Arabic chants acapella) are permitted, and even supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood produced their own in the 1970s.¹⁷ The *nasheed* are the soundtrack to many ISIS videos today. Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary, the man with which Mohammed Emwazi allegedly fled to Syria, was also a rapper before discovering religion.¹⁸ The fact that some European Salafi use hip hop might be related to the rhythm itself: it's a very basic rhythm which often repeats itself, with just the bare necessary in musical instruments and with the rapping (something not forbidden by Salafi doctrine) taking the centre of the song and often the role of poetry, historically ingrained in Arabic culture. It's not a *nasheed*, but to a Salafi eye it might not be as blasphemous as pop music, either.

What is the relationship between hip hop and jihadism? West coast hip hop in the United States took a strong social critique against the American political system, while also creating a “gangsta” identity in those who took part with it. The struggles many African Americans faced and sometimes still face (racism, alienation from society and being confined to a de-facto ghetto) are after all very similar to the struggles many Arabs confined to suburban *banlieues* in France and Belgium suffer today: in the end, although the manner and personal identity between the two differ the central concept is the exact same, that of grievance. But another comparison is that with crime: many African American hip hop songs are centred around crime, around gaining social status by becoming a “gangsta”, rich and respected. In the previous chapter it was seen how Salafism appeals primarily to a young and poorer working class, exactly the social category more likely to end up in petty crimes. Most of the attackers in the Paris attacks in 2015 and the Brussels attacks in 2016 were also small criminals, having participated in robberies and theft.¹⁹ ²⁰ Perhaps however for a Salafi criminal the way to escape from a life with no opportunities is to live what they see as the romantic life of a *mujahed*, an opportunity granted to them by the existence of the war in Syria and the existence inside it of the Islamic State. The concept of *jihadi cool* and the appeal of ISIL's propaganda will be explained further in the next chapter.

17 Marshall, A. (2014) How Isis got its anthem. *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/09/nasheed-how-isis-got-its-anthem> [Accessed: 27/05/2016]

18 Cross, B. (2015) Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary: British jihadist 'deserts Isis in Syria and goes on the run in Turkey'. *The Independent*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/abdel-majed-abdel-bary-british-jihadist-deserted-isis-in-syria-and-is-on-the-run-in-turkey-10384099.html> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

19 The New York Times (2016) *Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui: from bank robbers to Brussels bombers*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/europe/expanding-portraits-of-brussels-bombers-ibrahim-and-khalid-el-bakraoui.html> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

20 CBC News (2015) *Paris attacks: suspected ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud's life included petty crime, brother's kidnapping*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/paris-attacks-abaaoud-timeline-1.3326787> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

ISIL has also been using “gangster salafism” as a logistical help to operations. The Paris and Brussels cells were only two examples of how small criminal groups affiliated with the Islamic State would reinvest the money from illicit gains in financing operations or the recruitment of prospective members, who would then be sent to Syria and Iraq to take part in the civil war on the side of ISIS. ISIL may be seen as the main but not only Islamist group to use petty criminals to finance operations, especially in Europe.²¹ This is a radical departure from Al Qaeda: although the evidence is far too scarce due to the limited number of attacks by the organisation and its affiliates in Europe it is possible to use the example of the Charlie Hebdo shootings on 7 January 2015. The Kouachi brothers, the perpetrators of the shootings in the offices of Charlie Hebdo in Paris, were affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, arguably the de-facto successor in leadership together with Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb to the central organisation. Although they had grown in a very difficult environment much like many ISIL militants their criminal record before the attack was only constituted by terrorism-related offences. There were no charges for other crimes.²² On the other hand Amedy Coulibaly, the man who took several hostages in a kosher supermarket some hours after the Charlie Hebdo shootings (the attacks were meant to be synchronized: Coulibaly and the Kouachi brothers were close friends), swore fealty to the Islamic State. His criminal record stands in stark contrast to the brothers': Coulibaly had five convictions for robbery and one for drugs.²³ There seems to be a pattern between organised crime and Islamist groups operating in Syria today, not just ISIS: the use of organised crime aimed to obtain funds used for operations. It is unknown why this has become a phenomenon only recently. Perhaps it might be due to a competition which was previously lacking: the kind of global terrorism proposed by the central organisation of Al Qaeda at the end of the 1990s had what may be defined as a monopoly on global Islamic terrorism. Other jihadi Salafi groups were far more concerned with local interests in the Middle East. Today the situation is completely different: there are several jihadi Islamist groups with a global world-view, and there is now far more competition for resources than there ever was before. While Al Qaeda could count on a consistent group of donors in the past similar donors today are split in several Islamist organizations.

3.3.4 Geographical concentration of immigrant diasporas and de-facto enclaves

21 Ibid. note 1

22 BBC News (2015) *Paris attacks: suspects' profiles*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30722038> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

23 Higgins, A. (2015) French police say suspect in attack evolved from petty criminal to terrorist. *New York Times*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/world/europe/neighbors-say-suspect-in-french-attacks-and-his-companion-lived-quiet-lives.html> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

Today in several European countries there is a strong and perhaps growing presence of prevalently immigrant neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are prevalently working class, and often suffer from lower than average state services and higher rates of criminality. These neighbourhoods are often known as *banlieue* in France and Belgium (*banlieue* means “suburb” in French: while it is a neutral term it has increasingly come to signify these poorer areas). Unemployment is very high (crucially high in youth, where it reaches over 40%) and there is a strong feeling of abandonment and hopelessness among the population.²⁴ The *banlieues* have often been the theatre of revolts against the State, especially in France: the revolts in the suburb of the entire country in 2005 led to 3 deaths, hundreds of injuries and hundreds of arrests.²⁵ How did they come to be? In the case of Belgium, the answer might be simple. In 1964 Belgium signed bilateral labour migration agreements with several Maghreb countries and Turkey: Belgium required low-pay, low-skill jobs in sectors such as the car and steel industry. Tens of thousands moved to Belgium, and were also encouraged to bring their families as well, to obviate to Belgium's demographic problems. This phase lasted for roughly ten years: in 1974 the labor agreements were scrapped and the Belgian borders for foreign manual labour forces closed.²⁶ The two main populations to move in Belgium at the time were Moroccans and Turks. Perhaps it might be possible to understand how ethnic neighbourhoods might have formed. The jobs offered to many of those who arrived to Belgium were low-skill and low-pay, and in specific sectors: that means that immigrants would look for inexpensive neighbourhoods and with easy access to their workplace in particular. The fact that immigration was mostly concentrated in the ten years between 1964 and 1974 might have also played another role: a vast number of people from a small group of countries moved into the country at the same time, and not as individuals but for the most part as families. The probability that these families might have aimed at living close to offer each other help and a safety net (“solidarity” in its simplest sociological meaning), necessary when an ethnic group is used for lower-income jobs, is high. All these elements taken together might have contributed to the creation of “ethnic” neighbourhoods. The problem however is that by not being immersed inside the host culture but segregated to enclaves many families did not come in contact with a process of cultural assimilation and integration. This may not have been a problem for the first generation of immigrants (who still had very strong links to their home countries²⁷) but it could have created a huge number of problems for their naturalized children, who did not have access to their parents'

24 The Economist (2013) *Forgotten in the banlieues*. [Online] Available at:

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21572248-young-diverse-and-unemployed-forgotten-banlieues> [Accessed: 27/05/16]

25 BBC News (2005) *Timeline: French riots*. [Online] Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4413964.stm> [Accessed: 26/05/16]

26 Fadil, N., El Asri, F. and Bracke, S. (2015) Belgium. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

27 Ibid.

links with their home countries but at the same time were not integrated during their childhood and adolescence into Belgian society due to discrimination from the inhabitants of the host countries or to living in a place which did not offer Belgian culture. These conditions are precisely what may have generated grievance, the crucial element necessary to radicalization. Needless to say that this is not speaking for all immigrant communities but for only a part of them, which is the part that will most likely be vulnerable at being radicalised.

Belgium was just an example: similar narratives may be found in France or Great Britain. But a vicious poverty trap, a lack of cultural assimilation (not assimilated enough to the parents' culture, not assimilated enough to the host country's culture) and a lack of meaning itself due to a recession of those very economic sectors many came to Belgium for might have created an explosive mix. It is possible that these profoundly alienated youths may have found meaning in an identity that both revolts against the parents' identity and offers a release for the built-up grievance in these individuals: that of a Muslim. Islam in these cases moves from being a part of one's identity (religion) to the centre of one's identity, pushing individuals towards extremist interpretations and their totalitarian character.

3.3.5 Imams: can they help in preventing radicalization?

We already saw previously how imams can have a particularly strong effect regarding the worldview of Muslim prisoners in Norway. Imams can be massively influential in their respective communities and have been used by several governments to attempt to “deradicalise” youths who have taken up an extremist form of Islam. However, the comparison often drawn by the media between an imam and a Christian priest is misleading: the term imam only designates the person leading the prayer inside the mosque. The imam is also not an absolute figure of authority inside the community: after all, he commands as much respect as he is given, due to the lack of central authority.

Another problem is that not every imam is professionalised, and some might take up the role only as a part-time activity for their community. In France, for example, only 60% of mosques have a full-time imam.²⁸ This percentage is very similar to that of Denmark, in which the number of full time imams is even lower, at roughly 50%.²⁹ Many imams in Europe today also face a hugely serious problem which prevents them from engaging with the society of the country and, in many cases, the

28 Peter, F. (2014) Imams in France. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

29 Liengaard, I. (2014) Imams and process of radicalisation in Denmark. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

youth most at risk of being radicalised: many imams are imported and do not master the language of the European countries they work in, or they do not understand European society and the problems youth may face in interacting with it. In the case of Britain, there is a strong lack of homegrown imams. Philip Lewis has observed how 92% of mosque imams in Britain are foreign-born and trained, and only 6% speak English as a first language. However 52% of British Muslims are under 25 years old. He states that this disconnect might play a major role in radicalisation, since mosque imams often have no experience with the problems a young British Muslim might face in his everyday life.³⁰ France also suffers from a similar problem: only 20% of imams hold French nationality. A convention between the Grand Mosque of Paris and the Catholic Institute has been formed to train local imams, although there has been criticism from some Muslims for this collaboration.³¹

Germany and Belgium have some peculiar characteristics: the strong presence of a Turkish minority in their country. A strong majority of imams and mosques aimed at the community in both countries are under the control of the *Diyanet*, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, an organ belonging to the Turk government tasked with training Turkish imams and sending them around the world to serve their respective communities. Returning to Germany, the problem of foreign imams persist, although statistically the percentage of foreign imams should be calculated differently, due to the peculiar nature of the *Diyanet* imams. Several chairs of study have also opened in German university, as a plan to educate in the future native German imams: faculties of Islam, Islamic Theology and Islamic Religious Pedagogy have already been established.³²

Mosques in Denmark are mostly divided among ethnic lines. While 46% of people originating from a Muslim country rarely or never visit the mosque, there has been some worry about the links between some Sunni Arab imams and the Muslim Brotherhood, together with its affiliated organizations³³. In Belgium, finally, the Moroccan mosques are mostly handled through ethnic or family lines. This means that many imams are village imams from Morocco, brought to Belgium but without a clear knowledge of Belgian society. Unfortunately, they suffer from the same cultural disconnect as many other imams in Europe.³⁴ A very similar situation is also present in the Netherlands.³⁵

30 Lewis, P. (2014) Imams in Britain: agents of de-radicalisation? In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

31 Ibid. note 25

32 Kamp, M. (2014) Agents of radicalisation or agents of moderation and integration? Some remarks on the German debate about imams. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

33 Ibid. note 26

34 El Battiui, M. (2014) Imams in Belgium: integration factor or radicalisation instrument? In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

35 Oueslati, F. (2014) Imams and radicalisation in the Netherlands. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements*

A comparative analysis of Muslim radicalization and grievances in different European countries

3.4.1 France

The image of France most easily associated with immigration is that of the *banlieues*. Many grievances related to the immigrant or second generation in France can be easily found in the previous section on de-facto enclaves. In any case France deserves some attention on its own. The most notorious element of its system regarding its relationship with Islam is its secular separation of religion and state. This has created some problems in analysing the country: the official census of the government is “religion-blind”, following this principle. It is impossible to accurately know the number of Muslims in the country, due to the question not being asked. There is however an historical context that can be used and several private, minor studies. Historically, France has always held strong links to ex colonies, like Algeria. Migration from Algeria to the country peaked in the period around the Algerian war. Most Algerians moved into shantytowns in the period: many of these were then replaced by social housing projects, built by the government around the 1970s. It is interesting to note that many of these projects would then grow on to become the *banlieues* mentioned earlier, and many became the stage to the 2005 riots which shocked the country. The decade of the 1980s was also eventful: a deep economic crisis and a spike in unemployment during the decade pushed the Front National, the biggest far right party in France and led at the time by Jean-Marie Le Pen (arguably a racist), to grow. In any case, outside of the phenomenon of the *beurgeoisie* (a part of the Arab diaspora who obtained social mobility and moved to the upper middle class) Muslims in France are even today more likely to be unemployed and many face a precarious economic situation, due to being confined in the aforementioned poverty traps. France has also had problems with Islamic terrorism before 9/11: the 1995 Paris Métro bombings by the Algerian Armed Islamic Group are still ingrained in the memory of the country's population.

Muslims, Arabs and Berbers in France today also face a profound diffidence: an IFOP study from December 2010 found that 42% of the French population believed the Muslim population of the country was a threat to the identity of the country. It is however notable how many Muslims in France might be defined as nominal Muslims in the first place. A 2011 INED study found that only a third of Muslims in France practice the religion, and 43% identifies itself as just a believer. Perhaps this is a case of “believing but not belonging” being absorbed into the immigrant

of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

populations. This disconnection between perception and reality can also be seen in the hijab debate that swept the country in the 2000s: of the third that practices the religion only 26% of the female respondents wear an hijab regularly. A notable exception to this belief but not belonging rule is Ramadan: 80% of the Muslim population fasts partially or fully during the month.³⁶ A possible explanation may be that Ramadan has evolved into a cultural custom other than a religious custom: there are several lay meanings that may be given to the period, some of which may be adopted by the French population with Muslim origins.

3.4.2 The United Kingdom

Before tackling radicalization in the UK it is necessary to talk about the demography of British followers of Islam. According to the 2011 census, 27 million Muslims live in Britain. Of these, three fourths are South Asian.³⁷ The census did not register religious currents, but thankfully the number of mosques pertaining to each sect of Islam gives a clearer idea. Of all the British mosques, 600 are Deobandi, 550 are Barelwi, 60 are Islamist, 75 are Salafi and finally 65 are Shiite. There is also a number of ethnic-centred mosques.³⁸ The reason why it is necessary to talk about the demographics is because it can be argued that the South Asian British Muslims are very unlikely to be radicalised by ISIS or other main Islamist groups operating today. For the Barelwi, the explanation is simple: while the members of the sect may or may not be socially conservative the Barelwi are a Sufi order. Sufism is a macro-branch of Sunni Islam influenced by mysticism and overwhelmingly considered as heresy by most Salafi jihadi groups today. Not only that, but Sufism is a creed largely seen as non-violent, with a heavy disapproval towards jihad as religious warfare. While the Barelwi may suffer from the same grievances as “mainstream” Sunni Muslims it is extremely unlikely for them to be recruited by Islamist jihadi groups. This principle can also be applied to the Shi'ite British Muslims.

The Deobandi, on the other hand, are noteworthy for being from the same religious movement as the Taliban. The Taliban are a good example, because they are a result of a hybrid between Wahhabi and Deobandi doctrine. It can be argued that the Deobandi movement may also itself have become more conservative in recent years, especially after General Zia's push for re-Islamization in 1980s Pakistan, supported by the Deobandi and influenced by Wahhabism. The Deobandi are closer to mainstream Sunni Islam and could theoretically be a target for radicalization, but currently the

36 Selby, J. (2015) France. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

37 Gilliat-Ray, S. (2015) The United Kingdom. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

38 Ibid. note 27

jihadi groups with an interest in Europe seem to aim their propaganda more at Muslims from other ethnicities. This is understandable, considering the role jihadi groups are playing inside the Middle East, and less in other geographical areas (an exception made for Somalia). While the central organisation of al Qaeda did recruit from South Asian British Muslims (the perpetrators of the 2005 attacks in London had Pakistani origins) it is unlikely that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Nusra and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula will do the same. It might be argued that currently it is unlikely to witness radicalization “as we mean it” in South Asian Muslims. There is a group commonly known as “Islamist” in the South Asian British Muslim communities (Jamaat-I-Islami) but again, this seems to be a group largely unconcerned with current events in the Middle East and Europe. The reasons for this lack of radicalization are geopolitical, rather than theological or social. Other ethnic groups, however, especially from the Islamic Crescent, keep being at risk of radicalization.

3.4.3 Belgium

Belgium and possible grievances in its Muslim population have already been discussed earlier. It is however possible to add some more things to the subject. The landscape of Muslims in Belgium is similar to France, with many immigrants enjoying significantly lower levels of wealth. Confinement to poorer neighbourhoods is also present, probably because like France the majority of immigrants arrived in concentrated waves in limited periods of time. But Belgium also has something France does not: a strong regional and linguistic division between Wallonia (French-speaking) and Flanders (Dutch-speaking). Belgium also has no *laïcité* system like the one present in France.

As we saw before, the two main Muslim communities in Belgium are Moroccan and Turkish, prevalently. Levels of poverty in these immigrant communities and its second, naturalised generations are high: the level of poverty reaches 55% for Moroccans and an even higher 59% for Turks, around four times the national poverty level. Unemployment in the communities is between 29 and 38%. Presence in higher job categories is also particularly low: the percentage for the Turkish and Moroccan communities alternates between 3 and 17%. For native Belgians, it is between 25 and 31%.³⁹ But one thing in Belgium strikes as particularly odd.

It is well known how the Moroccan community in Belgium is at an extremely high risk of radicalization. The perpetrators of the Brussels bombings in 2016 were all of Moroccan descent. The same goes for Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mind behind the 2015 Paris attacks. But the remarkable thing is that, while both the Moroccan community and the Turkish community are

³⁹ Fadil, N., El Asri, F. and Bracke, S. (2015) Belgium. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

poorer than native Belgians, the latter has been completely untouched by the phenomenon of radicalization. For some reason Turkish Belgians, with many of the same grievances as Moroccan Belgians, do not radicalise. The reason why is a complete mystery. The Turkish community has not reported a single person who has left to go fight for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, compared to far more in the Moroccan community.⁴⁰ It has already been stated how the Islamic State's propaganda is very Arab-centric, but the difference in people who have left is far too wide to be explained only due to this reason (and Moroccans may not even be defined as Arabs, yet they do leave to fight in the Syrian civil war, although Arabic influence is far stronger in Moroccan culture than Turkish culture). There are two alternative explanations that may be used to give a solution to this peculiarity. The first is that the Turkish community has a far tighter cohesion. Mosques are not just seen as religious centres but as places to meet, centres (*merkez*). There is a sense of community that is perhaps stronger than in the Moroccan community.⁴¹ An alternative reason, simple and elegant, may be that in general, the Turkish community is less religious. In a report commissioned by the King Baudouin Foundation it was found that while 68% of Moroccan Belgians tried to follow religious prescriptions (and 18% actively followed them) the numbers for the Turkish community were far smaller. 39% of Turkish Belgians try to follow religious prescriptions but only 6% actually do. In addition, 45% of the community sees itself as believing, but not practising.

3.4.4 Germany

Germany also has a Turkish community – in fact, it's the most prevalent Muslim group. Other notable Muslim groups include a number of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon who came to Germany in the 1980s and Bosnian refugees in the 1990s. There is a vast number of diasporas of Muslim religion, which makes analysing the data difficult. The exact number of Muslims in Germany is unknown – it is estimated at 1,9%, but a high non-response rate in the relevant survey (around 17%) makes the data partially unreliable. Faith seems to have no effect on unemployment: the unemployment rate for male Muslims is approximately equal to the unemployment rate for male non-Muslims. It is implied that the survey asked German citizens, although in our discussion on radicalization it is usually the children of immigrants that radicalise, and not the first generation. There is however a degree of discrimination: a study on Muslims in Berlin found that 74% of Muslims felt discriminated last year on the basis of their own religion, compared to 25% in the

40 Temple-Raston, D. (2016) When It Comes To Radicalization In Belgium, Turks and Moroccans Are Different. *NPR*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/04/473004999/when-it-comes-to-radicalization-in-belgium-turks-and-moroccans-are-different> [Accessed: 25/05/2016]

41 *Ibid.* note 23

control group. Another survey found that 62% of the population in East Germany and 58% in Western Germany had a negative attitude towards Muslims: this number seems to be significantly higher than in the rest of Europe, in which it stays still at 37%.⁴²

The German security services keep under strict observation many Islamist organisations: in 2013 it investigated over thirty organizations with 43190 followers: among these was the Turkish Islamist movement Milli Görüş (with 50.000 followers in the country), the German Muslim Brotherhood and the German Muslim Youth. Some clarifications are in order, however. Milli Görüş has always had a Turkish national dimension: this movement is today fading inside Turkey, where its electorate has been almost completely absorbed by the AKP of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who used to be in the party and left it altogether in 2001. Milli Görüş in Europe has been undergoing a profound change, aiming to use Turkish-Muslim identity as a basis for integration in the West and abandoning its previous explicitly political agenda for Turkey.⁴³ On the other hand, the *Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland* (German Muslim Youth), generated under the umbrella of the *Haus der Islam* and placeable on an ideological spectrum at around the same provisions of the Muslim Brotherhood, has worried the German media. However the organisation only counts 650 members and has been seeking to engage more broadly German politics and society, suggesting that there might be a possibility of the movement becoming more moderate.⁴⁴

3.5 Conclusions

The root causes of radicalization are multiple, with several theories attempting to explain why young Muslims in Europe decide to take up the cause of jihadi Salafism. They all seem to agree on the concept of grievance, however – they all mention the angers and frustrations that afflict many second generation children of immigrants today, in theory naturalised but in practice not having been assimilated into the country they were born in. This is perhaps why radicalised youth may be defined as “deviant”: the correlation between petty criminals and current militant Islamist groups is absolutely no coincidence. There is a reason why the same neighbourhoods with high rates of crime are also responsible for the creation of Islamic extremists, particularly in Belgium, France and Scandinavia (although the case in particular of Sweden has not been discussed), among other countries. The Internet has also given an exponential push to the process of radicalization, by

42 Spielhaus, R. (2015) Germany. In Cesari, J. eds. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press

43 White, J. (2014) Milli Görüş. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

44 Syannöve, B. (2014) Being and becoming a German Muslim Youth. In Peter, F. and Ortega, R. eds. *Islamic Movements of Europe: Public Religion and Islamophobia in the Modern World*. Library of European Studies, vol. 21. London/New York: I.B. Tauris

allowing would-be extremists to forge social networks with like-minded youths. Governments struggle to respond – they fail to use the power given by imams, not because of unwillingness but in many cases because of the lack of a figure of a professionalised, homegrown clergy. These states all suffer from different problems with their respective immigrant communities, whose grievances may be amplified by the current geopolitical situation in the Middle East acting as a release valve. But, perhaps most importantly, these immigrant communities may not be universally defined as Muslim. Many governments have been having problems in engaging Muslim governance precisely because the authority of these organisations is not shared among all Muslim diasporas, who are deeply divided by ethnic and ideological lines. But it is in any case clear that radicalization is a social phenomenon and should be treated as such: religion is an element at play but it is minor. Perhaps for many countries the solution to radicalization may be the same as the solution to the immigrant riots that blew out in several countries: encouraging development and raising the standards of these impoverished neighbourhoods, which often suffer from low-level services and an absence itself of the state.

Chapter IV: Islamic extremism's modern political communication and recruitment. The ISIS revolution in communication?

4.1 The Revolution of Social Media

A report authored by J.M. Berger (2016) for Hate Speech International, titled “ISIS and the Big Three”, describes accurately the transformation of social media as a vector for jihadi propaganda. At the height of the sectarian conflict in Iraq a use of the Internet by jihadists already existed. There was a presence of several password-protected forums in Arabic and messageboards, where supporters of Al Qaeda met to exchange opinions regarding jihad.¹ In 2006 the Mujahedeen Shura Council, an umbrella group that contained all jihadi Iraqi groups, became the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Shortly before that Al-Zarqawi, a pioneer in distributing propaganda videos online, had been killed by US forces. Al-Zarqawi already had very strained relationships with the central organization of Al Qaeda, and the exact date or year in which the Islamic State became completely independent from Al Qaeda is unknown. However, two events took place in the meantime.

The first element was the Syrian Civil War, and the expansion of ISI operations inside of it. The organization's leaders might have been inspired by a 2004 book, *The Management of Savagery*: it was written by a jihadi theorist under the pseudonym of “Abu Bakr Naji”, and it argued that the objective for jihadi groups was to enter regions in disarray and anarchy, to then recreate a system of basic government and governance that would be welcomed by the majority of the population.² This appears to have become the basis of ISIS' political tactics today.

The second element was the abandonment by the pro-ISI faction of jihadi websites. Several of its members seem to have moved to Twitter, where they began their work of what they call *da'wa* (the Islamic concept of proselytizing, although it would be better framed as propaganda). In this the Islamic State was not alone: vast support for the Syrian rebels in the governments and populations of the Gulf created competition for fundraising. Several families and even governments would donate money to the cause of the rebels in fundraisers in Doha and Riyadh, almost in an exact repetition of what had happened in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan thirty years earlier. ISIS was far from the only rebel group to advertise itself on social media, but it did so differently from other rebel groups (some of which were also extremist, such as Al-Nusra), inserting in its propaganda the

1 Berger, J.M. (2016) *ISIS and the Big Three*, Hate Speech International [Online] Available at: <https://www.hate-speech.org/isis-and-the-big-three/> [Accessed: 29/05/16]

2 Koerner, B. (2016) Why ISIS is Winning the Social Media War, *Wired* [Online] Available at: <http://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/> [Accessed: 29/05/16]

brutality typical of Al-Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda in Iraq. To move the attention of the jihadi-friendly public away from other rebel groups it used a vast array of tools such as Twitter bots to manipulate hashtags and give the organization more visibility. Today, obviously, this social media push is under heavy pressure from the owners of the relevant social media.³

But in the meantime it also began adopting Telegram use on large scale: Telegram is a messaging app which combines elements of Facebook and Twitter. Messages on the platform are encrypted on a peer-to-peer basis, meaning that everyone “standing in the middle” between the sender and the receiver cannot obtain the message sent. Being a peer to peer platform however keeps the boundaries of the messages inside circles that are already close to the Islamic State, making it more similar to the “hyperradicalization” process seen in the previous chapter rather than a propaganda platform: to obtain new recruits ISIS often tries to push back on “universal” social media and platform, by constantly creating new accounts and circumventing the borders placed on it by Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.⁴ It might be hypothesised that Telegram may also act as a capillary system of distribution for ISIS' propaganda from its central organ of production, which may then be uploaded to mainstream “universalist” social media websites by the members who have received it – however this hypothesis cannot be validated yet due to a lack of information.

4.2 Inside the Islamic State's propaganda machine

4.2.1 Thematics of propaganda

In a report for the Quilliam foundation Charlie Winter (2014) has analysed the “quantity and quality” of the Islamic State's propaganda. On a research conducted on several ISIS social media hashtags on Twitter he registered and analysed 892 propaganda “events”. As he notes, propaganda is prone to change its message and the research was conducted at the height of ISIS' power in Syria and Iraq, so it is unknown how much of it is different today. In any case, it gives a clearer idea of ISIS' ideology and message. The study estimated an amount of 38,2 unique propaganda events per day (images, text, video, and so on) and an overarching use of six main thematics or narratives: mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war and utopia. The last three narratives are far more prevalent than the first three.

Brutality, surprisingly, is one of the minor elements. It took out just 19 events out of 892. Perhaps this might mark a shift in communication by the group. The notion of victimhood is more prevalent: all the events are dedicated to showing the dead and injured: most of the media shows injured or

3 Ibid. note 1

4 Ibid. note 1

dead children, youths and infirm by the regime. Victimhood also plays into the narrative of “Sunni Muslims being persecuted by a global conspiracy”⁵: as we have seen in the previous chapter, this mixes well with the grievances of some Western European Muslims. Winter hypothesises that this narrative may attempt to act as a justifier or a legitimiser for the actions of the Islamic State. He also observes a very strong presence of the narrative of war: ISIS is after all, primarily a military group. Propaganda media always show the troops of the organization victorious (obviously, setbacks and defeats are not shown, perhaps playing into the natural diffidence many Muslims have towards mainstream media outlets): it might be argued that this may not just serve the purpose of a demonstration of strength to sympathisers and enemies but also to attempt to show some kind of religious strength, to demonstrate that God is with them.

The main narrative of them all is the one pertaining to utopia, which included 469 propaganda events out of 892: almost 52% of the total. “Utopia” media show an image of ISIS as the perfect Islamic state: it may be divided into three sub-sectors – religion, economic activity and governance. First, Islam is clearly shown to be the centre of life: Salafi morality is enforced, cigarettes are burned and many are shown praying. Then comes the economic activity, creating the façade that shops are always full, “delivering evidence of the “flourishing” economic life under the Islamic State”⁶. Finally, governance – we have seen previously how the Islamic State of Iraq may have been influenced by *The Management of Savagery*: being able to show governance and government in a region beset by complete anarchy in the middle of a civil war is strong propaganda for the cause of the group. It also plays into a larger narrative: if political Islam is the place where religion and politics become one and indivisible, a jihadi Salafi group must show both commitment to religion as it must show commitment to politics.

4.2.2 The language of Dabiq

Dabiq is an online magazine produced by the Islamic state, acting as a medium for propaganda and recruitment. Its cadence is irregular, but it seems to come out around every two months – sometimes less often. It is published in several languages, including European – unlike its newsletter al-Naba, which is only published in Arabic. The name Dabiq comes from an area in northern Syria, near Aleppo: it is a symbol for the Islamic Judgement Day, mentioned in an hadith regarding Armageddon. The ideology of ISIS is obsessed by *Yawm ad-Dīn*⁷: perhaps the underlying reason

5 Winter, C. (2015) *Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'*, The Quilliam Foundation [Online]. Available: <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf> [Access: 29/05/16]

6 Ibid.

7 Chulov, M. (2015) Why Isis fights. *The Guardian* [Online] Available at:

may be that it fosters unity in people from all over the world (radicalised European youths, sectarian Middle Eastern individuals, and so on). Perhaps a comparison may be drawn between ISIS' obsession with Armageddon and several Western cults such as the Peoples Temple of the Jonestown Massacre or the Manson Family: all of these groups held the strong belief of an impending apocalypse which would destroy the world. Sociological theories regarding religious cults may perhaps be useful to understanding more deeply the mechanisms of the Islamic State. A final detail should be noted: every issue of *Dabiq* ends with splash page and an *hadith* related to the Day of Judgement.

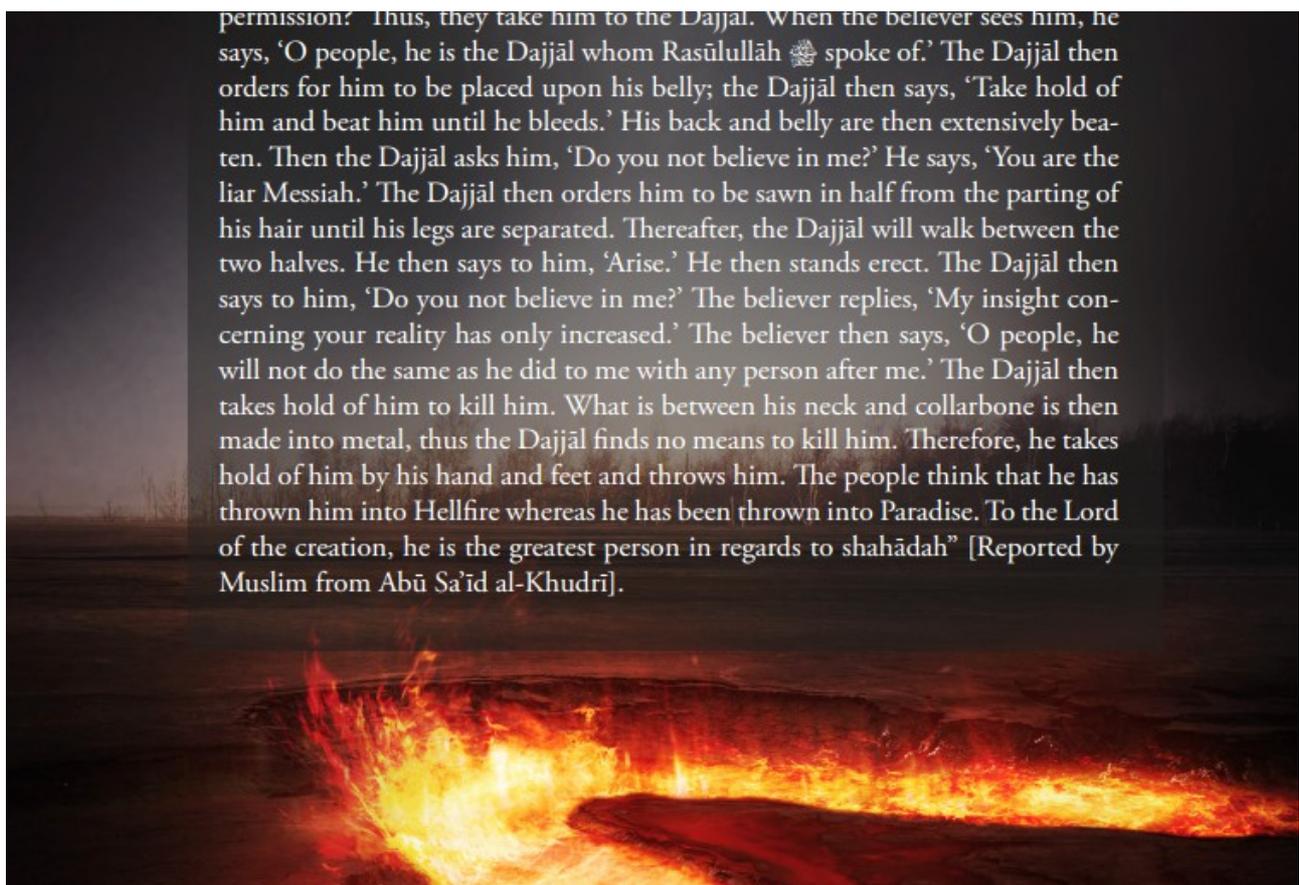


Fig. 1: An example of a final splash page in *Dabiq* (#14)

Every single number of the magazine opens with the same quote from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the well-known Jordanian who led Al-Qaeda's jihadi project in Iraq following the US invasion in 2004: "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq".⁸ It is now well-known that ISIL originated from within the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, led by Al-Zarqawi⁹: quoting him in this context makes political sense. ISIS in many ways is a continuation of the insurgency in Iraq: the conflict between Sunni jihadis

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/why-isis-fight-syria-iraq> [Accessed: 29/05/16]

⁸ (2014-16) *Dabiq* #1-#14. [Online] Available at: <http://jihadology.net/?s=dabiq> [Accessed: 29/05/16] [Safe links]

⁹ Chulov, M. (2014) Isis: the inside story. *The Guardian*. [Online] Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story> [Accessed: 29/05/16]

and the Shi'a government reflects ISIS objectives in Iraq, while in Syria the conflict is between Sunnis and Assad's Alawites, a Shi'a sect.

In any case, the professionalism and slickness of Dabiq's graphics are already well-known to much of the public: the index of each number cites features, articles and a "special". Another element of note is that the organization's rhetoric uses the notion of the Caliphate itself outside of slogans: the magazine consistently divides geographical areas in the Islamic Crescent as *wilayat*, which were administrative units typical of sultanates and caliphates. Inside the section dedicated to "Islamic State operations", victims are called apostates and the countries are almost entirely referred to as *wilayat*.

As is also well-known, the use of the term "crusaders" to refer to Western countries is common, although it is nothing new from the times of Al-Qaeda. The context in which it is used, however, is interesting: there is a heavy emphasis on the concept of the *ummah*, much like many political Islam movements we have seen up to this point. A quote from the magazine's foreword: "[the Crusaders]... their tyranny knows no limits when directed against the Muslim Ummah. It was only a matter of time before the brunt of the Ummah's wrath fell upon them".¹⁰ The article invokes the *ummah*, the narrative of an Arabic world enslaved by Western countries, and the revenge that will come from it. We have seen in the previous chapters how Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the first modern political Islam movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, was obsessed with the unity of the *ummah*. Ironically enough, the "cover story" of the most recent magazine lambasts the Muslim Brotherhood by calling it "the *Murtadd* (apostate) Brotherhood" for its tolerance towards Shi'a Muslims.

But perhaps the most surprising thing of all about the magazine is that, unlike its movie division, it puts a vast amount of effort in theological arguments that justify the organization's actions. The majority of articles inside the magazine extensively quote the Qur'an and hadiths, creating a supposed religious justification for the group. Comparing the most recent "issues" of the magazine with the previous makes the matter even more impressive: while religious argumentations are also present in earlier issues they seem to have recently become far more complex. What used to take up a few pages in the magazine now takes up dozens. The question is the reason why this change has taken place: perhaps it may be an attempt to counter anti-radicalization efforts by imams in Europe, although it can't be known for certain.

Another article in the magazine is an invocation to "*kill the imams of kufr*" (unbelieving). A hit list is also provided, with the names of Hamza Yusuf, Suhaib Webb, Bilal Philips and Yasir Qadhi. These are all Muslim intellectuals: Yusuf is a well-known Sufi imam, and reading the article it is possible to perceive how the Islamic State's ideology holds a deep-felt hatred for the Sufi order. It was also seen in the previous chapter how the Sufi order largely rejects violent jihad. The same is

¹⁰ (2016) *Dabiq* #14, p. 4 [Online] Safe PDF link available at: <http://jihadology.net/2016/04/13/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-magazine-dabiq-14/> [Accessed: 29/05/16]

also true for the other three names in the “hit list”, which are instead non-Sufi Sunni Muslims. It is interesting to note that while Suhaib Webb is a moderate who has often fought against extremism, Yasir Qadhi and Bilal Philips are instead conservative, with the latter being a full Salafi. Both are attacked for discouraging violence and proposing a non-violent view of jihad. The nine-page article is also largely theological rather than purely political, proposing alternative religious interpretations that attempt to argue why several Muslim intellectuals are apostates.

The magazine's feature, dedicated to the Muslim Brotherhood, criticises the organization for alleged links and tolerance for the *rafida* (“rejectionists”), a pejorative term used by Sunni Muslims to describe Shi'a Muslims. It also accuses the historical Ottomans and their modernism being brought into the Arabian peninsula. ISIS's resentment for Shi'a Muslims is obvious, considering its origins in Iraq's sectarian violence after the US invasion. Other articles of note include an obituary for a Bengali who moved to the Islamic State and an interview with jihadists affiliated to the Islamic State in Bangladesh, suggesting that while it is prevalently a Middle Eastern movement ISIS does have global objectives (again, in the name of the *ummah*).

4.2.3 Video production

The video production organ of ISIS is well-known, and the vast majority play out following the narratives described previously. Almost all videos are in Arabic, with a few exceptions: there are some “interviews” conducted in other languages (one video had two titles: “the way of the defiant” in Arabic and “on the traces of my father” in French). The series of topics being treated inside of these narratives is in any case extremely vast. Recent videos seem to show an up-tick in videos about Libya, which makes sense, considering the number of operations conducted by ISIS-affiliated groups in the country. But there are also videos about jihadists in India, in Khurasan, in Bangladesh and so on, to give the impression of ISIS as a global movement. The cinematography is complex and well-constructed - the production is prolific, with a new video coming out almost every day.

But it is important to note that the videos produced never feel disconnected one from another: ISIS' media seems less like the unfocused videos by Al-Zarqawi and more with an overarching scope. The Islamic State's video division almost seems like a media outlet in itself: the programming is not just propaganda, but “entertainment”. Some are meant to feel more like a documentary, while others are more action-focused, showing choreographed scenes of fighting in the areas where ISIS is involved. Perhaps this variety in “programming” may be connected to the tendency to use alternative news sites in many Arabs, stemming from a mistrust in traditional media.

Military videos also emphasize the concept of “jihadi cool”: instead of the theological monologues

inside Dabiq the language is more immediate, more emotional and more exciting for would-be radicalised youths. The life of a mujahedeen is shown to be filled with adrenaline, luxuries and piety. A comparison may be drawn between ISIS' military videos for its public and the vast amount of “war pornography” available on the Internet and directed to the general public: many of ISIS' military videos show similar situations of war to the ones in Youtube channels, filmed through aerial drones, cameramen or GoPro cameras on the helmet of the soldier. The crucial difference is the creator of the message (in the first case an Islamist jihadi group, in the second most often soldiers belonging to Western forces) and the people to which that medium is aimed. But in both cases these videos try to give the feeling of being inside the battle and very close to its fighters. One thing these videos do differ in, however, is brutality. Youtube channels such as FUNKER530¹¹ dedicated to war pornography rarely show scenes in which the death of an enemy is clearly witnessed, probably due to Youtube standards (a “Not Safe for Work” section is available on FUNKER's website, but the description of the section does not seem to glorify death like ISIS' videos often do. This comparison may give some further evidence that ISIS' use of brutality in media may be directed more towards their enemies as audience, rather than their supporters).



Fig. 2: on the left, a video from Youtube channel FUNKER530 titled “U.S. Soldier Sprints through Taliban Fire”, filmed from a GoPro. On the right, a video from ISIS titled “The Raid of Abū Şabāḥ al-Zawbi’ī”.

4.3 Conclusions

ISIS' propaganda organ reflects their ambitions as a global movement. From their magazine published in several languages to their Arabic videos focusing on affiliated jihadis all around the world, ISIS wish to become the vanguard of jihadi Islamist groups all around the world. Its propaganda also offers a lot of material to radicalise youths: notions of victimhood and utopia may touch easily those who don't feel like part of where they live in, such as in Europe. Offering an alternative to Muslims who see the West as “morally corrupt” may be the main element that pushes

11 *FUNKER530 – Veteran Community & Combat Footage* (2016) Youtube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6xBhF4QYIPPF2_-ExZzd2w

people towards joining the group in Syria. The brutality with which we've learned to associate ISIS with may instead be projected towards us (it is, after all, a terrorist group), and may not be intended for sympathisers in the first place. In any case what ISIS has done is to pick up the banner of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and to transform it into something fit for the age of social media, on which much of the proselytizing takes place. It has become a globalised movement, and efforts to stop it must take into account a deep ideology that has several different appeals for some Muslims in the world.

Conclusions

For better or worse, Islam is going to be one of the dominant discussions in the next years. The question of Islamic extremism will be as well. The Middle East is currently going through profound change (not necessarily positive), and many parts of this change reverberate all the way to Europe. These waves are not just theological or political, but historical as well. Globalization has made it so that a change in the Arab world affects all Arabs worldwide, even those residing outside their home countries. Arabs are, of course, just the possible mainstream example: the same goes for Pakistani, for Moroccans, for Somalians, and many others. Not necessarily just Muslim, but the existence of a fight for the mind and heart of the *umma* is what causes them to be affected the most. But this fight is what has exposed a deep rift in Europe: the almost complete failure to integrate immigrant populations into the European system. No matter if the political system advocates “pure” multiculturalism such as in Britain and Scandinavia or *laïcité* like in France, Islamic extremism wins hearts of alienated youths everywhere, with no distinctions. This tells us clearly that no matter the system there is something wrong with the process of socialization and integration for second generation immigrants in Europe. More so, it is not the first generation of immigrants that are affected by this but overwhelmingly the second. We can see what's wrong by noting that, by principle, second generations should not even be considered part of an immigrant community, but part of the system they were born and raised in. Yet this doesn't happen due to structural causes. Some of these youths end up in crime, other are absorbed by jihadi Islamist movements and become Islamic extremists, ready to revolt violently against the nation they were supposed to be part of.

We saw the reasons for this happening throughout the thesis. The doctrine of political Islam has become far more present after the entire Islamic Crescent (and Central Asia) went through a process of re-Islamization, shifting Islamic doctrine and even the countries themselves to a far more conservative stance. While the effects can't be clearly measured for Muslim communities in the West, they are nonetheless present. This process has also created shifts in today's Middle Eastern political system. Drawing on the changes brought by the Arab Spring, some countries have begun to carry out a work of *da'wa* towards the rest of the *umma*, seeking to increase their country's prestige. Unfortunately this work may also carry the seed of Islamism inside of it. And in such an anarchic competition for power and influence, eventually extremism may emerge. If the underlying structural and sociological reasons of radicalization are a circuit, Islamist ideological influences act as the electric shock that activates it. Islamism on its own is not enough to generate Islamic extremism, but together with other factors it may create a dangerous mix: paraphrased, not all Islamism is extremist but all Islamic extremism is Islamist.

But what are the underlying structures of radicalization? What is the system, the world-view required for the ideological seeds of Islamic extremism to take hold? There is no universal theory, but as we have seen almost every scholar agrees on the concept of “grievance”: feelings of anger, alienation and frustration felt by Muslims towards European states. These may sit at an individual level or at a collective and inter-subjective level. They have been defined as a “kaleidoscope” of reasons. And many may be found in neighbourhoods suffering from poverty, but perhaps above that a lack of opportunities and a feeling of abandonment by the State. This is what many *banlieues* represent today. They also represent the creation of de-facto enclaves, an element which may block any attempts to integrate second generations. Geographical concentration of immigrants (“ethnic” neighbourhoods, if so to say) places these youths “in the middle”, as we said before: in a neighbourhood inhabited prevalently by a diaspora, but of which they should not be part of. It prevents them from feeling the same as the native population of the country. Those who do not feel the same may feel discriminated, those who feel discriminated may elaborate grievances, and those suffering from these very same grievances may eventually be led into extremism. This may be why many alienated youths today in Europe define themselves as “Muslim” and why the discussion about identity politics is prevalent: being a Muslim is not part of one's identity anymore, it is all the identity many Muslims have left. While many do integrate and build a network of cleavages (including one's own religion) that may build their identity, there are too many who don't.

The final chapter analysed ISIS' thematics and style of communication: we have seen how “utopia” is the strongest element in the propaganda of the Islamic state. This makes sense: perhaps the strongest things that ISIS may give radicalised youths is an identity, and most of all, a feeling of belonging. A belonging that many have never felt in Europe. Because, at the end of the day, the priority is and should be integration. Through a real assimilation or through a different multiculturalism? That's up to debate (although, since we are at the conclusions, I admit I gravitate towards the former solution). But the priority is to “immunise” Muslim youths from the troubles of the Middle East. The political problems in the region have brought our own problems with immigrant communities to emerge. We must act not just in the name of security but to prevent the lives of so many to take a tragic turn which will be hardly reversed. They are, after all, citizens of our own countries.

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Riassunto

Alcuni tra i grandi problemi politici del giorno d'oggi derivano dal concetto di estremismo islamico. Se prima dell'undici settembre 2001 la maggior parte dei discorsi sull'estremismo erano focalizzati sull'Iran e sulla sua teocrazia (e parzialmente dai Talebani in Afghanistan), nel nuovo millennio si è passati a discorsi sul jihadismo e sul salafitismo. Il “vecchio” terrorismo diretto ai paesi occidentali, composto da attentatori con una concezione secolare e prevalentemente di matrice marxista, è stato sostituito da un nuovo tipo di terrorismo, basato sull'interpretazione totalitaria dell'Islam e sulla sua giustificazione della violenza per ottenere i propri obiettivi. Oggi stiamo assistendo ad un altro profondo cambiamento. Se negli anni di Al Qaeda gli attentatori provenivano prevalentemente da paesi di religione musulmana (eccezione fatta per gli attentati a Londra nel 2005, che si possono considerare uno spartiacque), negli anni dell'ISIS è emersa una nuova categoria di estremisti: cresciuta in paesi occidentali come minoranza, e radicalizzatasi, abbandonando una visione moderata dell'Islam proveniente dai genitori per abbracciarne le interpretazioni più totalitarie. Questo è quello che si definisce homegrown terrorism, o “terrorismo cresciuto in casa”. Questa nuova specie di jihadisti, cresciuta per la maggior parte in quartieri poveri ed etnici all'interno dei paesi occidentali, è meno “pura” di quella che l'aveva preceduta. Molti hanno avuto un passato da piccoli criminali, e molti sono partiti a combattere per gruppi islamisti in Siria. Questo fenomeno è nuovo, e non è mai stato osservato in anni passati. L'obiettivo di questa tesi è stato di analizzarlo: cercare di capire le radici ideologiche del fenomeno, le condizioni sociali che hanno potuto innescare un processo di radicalizzazione in così tanti giovani, e il linguaggio utilizzato dai gruppi estremisti per convincerli ad unirsi alla loro causa.

Le radici ideologiche del fenomeno (capitolo 1 e 2)

Il primo capitolo tratta la storia dell'estremismo islamico moderno, e più in generale dell'Islam politico sunnita. I movimenti islamisti sunniti, generalmente, sono un'invenzione recente. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, il fondatore del Wahhabismo, nacque nel diciottesimo secolo. La sua alleanza con il clan degli Al Saud portò eventualmente la sua dottrina religiosa ad essere implementata in tutta l'Arabia Saudita, dopo la fondazione dello stato nel 1932. I Fratelli Musulmani in Egitto, il primo vero movimento dedito all'Islam politico (e ispiratore per tutti i rappresentanti dell'Islam politico che vennero dopo), furono creati dal maestro di scuola elementare Hassan al-Banna nel 1928. L'interpretazione conservatrice che diede Muhammad Rashid Rida al movimento del salafitismo modernista risale ai primi anni del ventesimo secolo, prima della sua morte nel 1935. Si è poi

andato ad analizzare i movimenti dell'Islam politico principali, e quelli rilevanti all'estremismo islamico in Occidente oggi (quindi escludendo movimenti come Milli Gorus, prevalentemente turco, e Jamaat-E-Islami, di matrice asiatica). La prima parte del capitolo è dedicata alla storia dei Fratelli Musulmani. Come già menzionato, il movimento nasce nel 1928. La sua visione era quella di un'organizzazione dedita a consigliare ai governi dell'Egitto come amministrare il paese in maniera islamica. Al-Banna era stato fortemente influenzato dall'abolizione dell'ultimo Califfato da parte di Atatürk nel 1923. Desiderava un ritorno all'unità islamica e l'unificazione della *umma*, la comunità di fedeli musulmani. Il concetto di *umma* ritornerà moltissime volte durante la tesi: è uno dei punti cardinali dell'Islam politico, estremista o meno. È questo l'elemento che dà all'Islam politico un carattere fortemente internazionalista e pan-islamista, che è stato poi assorbito dai salafiti jihadisti di oggi.

I rapporti tra i primi Fratelli Musulmani e il governo furono marcati da diversi conflitti. Una volta che Nasser prese il potere, peggiorarono ulteriormente. Nel 1954 Nasser dichiarò l'organizzazione illegale. Cominciò un'onda di repressione per i Fratelli Musulmani nel paese, molti si nascosero, altri scapparono in altri paesi. Negli anni precedenti peraltro il controllo ideologico dei Fratelli Musulmani sull'università al-Azhar portò il movimento a diffondersi in tutto il Medio Oriente, con la fondazione di diversi capitoli dell'organizzazione in vari stati. Nel frattempo Sayyid Qutb era diventato uno dei teorici più importanti dell'organizzazione. Qutb si può considerare come l'ideologo principale di tutti i movimenti jihadisti salafiti moderni. Nelle sue interpretazioni coraniche giustificava l'utilizzo della forza contro i governanti musulmani che utilizzavano il secolarismo. Fu giustiziato nel 1966, ma le sue idee sopravvivono ancora oggi ed ebbero un'influenza immensa in tutti i movimenti estremisti. L'Egitto successivamente si trovò in un processo di re-islamizzazione, creato dalla sconfitta dell'Egitto nella guerra dei sei giorni e l'ascesa al potere di Sadat, molto più tollerante verso fazioni islamiste.

La seconda parte del capitolo è dedicata al Wahhabismo, una corrente religiosa molto importante all'interno del panorama islamico. La religione di stato ufficiale dell'Arabia Saudita, è un'ideologia estremamente conservatrice che sfrutta un rapporto simbiotico tra la monarchia (della casata Al Saud) e la classe religiosa dell'Arabia Saudita. Il principio di questa alleanza oggi è lo stesso dell'antico accordo tra Muhammad ibn Saud e Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab – una base politica offerta in cambio di legittimità religiosa. Le conquiste di Abdulaziz ibn Saud nei primi decenni del secolo scorso diedero ai sauditi il controllo sulle due città più importanti nell'Islam – Mecca e Medina. Per questo, molto spesso la monarchia si trovò a dover bilanciare le ambizioni ultraconservatrici della sua popolazione più religiosa con il cosmopolitismo derivato dalla *hajj* di fedeli in tutto il mondo. È interessante notare che anche l'Arabia Saudita attraversò un processo di re-islamizzazione verso l'inizio degli anni '80. Due eventi principali causarono questo processo. Il

primo fu un aumento del malcontento nella popolazione più conservatrice creato dalla modernizzazione del paese, simbolizzato nell'assedio della Grande Moschea a Mecca. Il secondo, l'invasione sovietica dell'Afghanistan. L'Arabia Saudita fu il paese mediorientale a contribuire più soldi in assoluto alla causa dei *mujaheddin* in Afghanistan. La società civile fu emotivamente molto coinvolta in questo conflitto, appoggiando la rivolta anti-sovietica e partecipando a raccolte fondi per i combattenti nel paese.

La terza parte del capitolo parla di Al Qaeda, il primo movimento estremista islamico ad assumere una visione globale. Al Qaeda fu inizialmente fondata, come molti altri movimenti islamisti, con l'obiettivo di rovesciare governi secolari in Medio Oriente. Ma a partire dal 1991 adottò una nuova visione: rimuovere l'influenza occidentale dal Crescente Islamico. Dopo essersi stabilita in Afghanistan nel 1996 l'organizzazione pianificò diversi attentati contro prevalentemente gli Stati Uniti, come gli attacchi alle ambasciate americane in Kenya e Tanzania nel 1998 e l'attacco alla USS Cole in Yemen nel 2000. Dopo l'11 settembre e l'invasione dell'Afghanistan da parte degli Stati Uniti Al-Qaeda perse una base fisica forte. Divenne un'organizzazione prevalentemente di natura virtuale e liquida, sfruttando il potere offerto dalla globalizzazione nel comunicare a livello mondiale. Tuttavia, oggi è *de facto* diventata un'organizzazione frammentata. L'organizzazione centrale non è più rilevante come in passato: le sue tre organizzazioni principali (Al Qaeda nel Maghreb Islamico, Al Qaeda nella Penisola Arabica e Al Nusra) sono oggi quasi completamente indipendenti l'una dall'altra.

Il secondo capitolo della tesi parla di “geopolitiche islamiste”: influenze ideologiche da parte di paesi del medio oriente verso l'Europa che potrebbero contribuire ad un processo di radicalizzazione. Abbiamo già menzionato come la *umma* sia uno dei concetti più importanti per l'Islam politico. L'anarchia oggi in Medio Oriente contribuisce ad una competizione tra attori islamisti per avere più influenza sulla *umma*. L'opera di *da'wa*, nella visione di molti di questi paesi, serve appunto ad accrescere la propria influenza nella comunità di musulmani globale. La globalizzazione ha aumentato la facilità con cui è possibile farlo. Ma quali sono questi paesi? Si possono prevalentemente distinguere tre macrosfere d'influenza: la macrosfera qatariota, e la macrosfera saudita. La prima si basa principalmente sull'appoggio al network globale dei Fratelli Musulmani. Negli ultimi anni (specialmente dopo il 2011) il Qatar ha agito da patrono verso i Fratelli Musulmani: il suo governo ha scommesso molto sull'ascesa dell'Islam politico negli scorsi anni. I Fratelli Musulmani investono inoltre molte risorse in Europa. Un esempio è la European Council for Fatwa and Research, un'organizzazione satellite dedicata ad emettere *fatwa* (opinioni religiose) su problemi tipici dei musulmani europei. La seconda macrosfera è quella saudita: attraverso organizzazioni come la Muslim World League l'Arabia Saudita ha finanziato migliaia di progetti islamici in stati dove l'Islam è una religione di minoranza. Ha inoltre avuto un'influenza

diretta e indiretta sulla crescita del movimento salafita in Europa. Lo stato saudita ha educato molti studiosi religiosi nella sua ideologia ultraconservatrice, che sono poi diventati imam o ideologi in Europa. Ma molti movimenti salafiti in Europa, come ad esempio l'olandese *Islamitisch Comité voor Ahl as-Sunna in Nederland*, possono essere tracciati al *Sahwa*, un movimento saudita dissidente alla monarchia e formatosi verso l'inizio degli anni '90.

Le radici della radicalizzazione islamica in Europa (capitolo 3)

Il terzo capitolo analizza la tematica principale della tesi: il processo di radicalizzazione nei musulmani europei. La prima cosa da menzionare è che lo studio della radicalizzazione è una branca estremamente recente. Ancora oggi, non c'è ancora un consenso ben definito sul significato stesso della parola radicalizzazione. Le varie teorie sono ugualmente divise su cause ed effetti della radicalizzazione. Tuttavia, esiste un concetto condiviso da quasi tutti gli studiosi dell'argomento: la presenza in ogni teoria delle *grievances*, sentimenti di rabbia o frustrazione provati da una certa comunità, in questo caso quelle di religione musulmana. Va inoltre considerato che la maggior parte di queste teorie sono state elaborate quando l'ideologia jihadista dominante era quella di Al Qaeda: l'ascesa dell'ISIS su Al Qaeda in Occidente ha creato alcuni problemi in queste teorie.

Le teorie, come già menzionato, sono molto diverse tra di loro. Una prima fascia di teorie tratta il jihadismo come un movimento sociale. Mentre alcuni lo considerano un movimento neo-fondamentalista e anti-imperialista nato con le seconde generazioni di immigrati musulmani in Europa, altri lo considerano un movimento sociale con le sue origini politiche all'interno del Medio Oriente. Una seconda fascia di teorie si incentra a livello individuale, divisa in teorie deterministiche e teorie *developmental*, legate allo sviluppo. Mentre il gruppo di studiosi delle teorie deterministiche cerca di capire perché alcuni giovani si radicalizzino per unirsi ad organizzazioni legate all'estremismo islamico, gli studiosi delle teorie *developmental* guardano più alla maniera in cui le persone si uniscono a queste organizzazioni. La terza fascia di teorie, infine, analizza le *grievances* musulmane a livello dell'intera comunità, invece di focalizzarsi solamente sull'individuo: un conflitto tra norme in popolazioni di religione musulmana con norme europee, oppure come l'individualismo in Occidente colpisce molto di più le persone di fede musulmana, a causa del forte comunitarismo intrinseco alla religione islamica.

Il capitolo cerca inoltre di trovare diversi elementi che possano giocare un ruolo (maggiore o minore, diretto o indiretto) nel processo di radicalizzazione nei giovani musulmani europei. Il primo elemento è la crescita di Internet, il quale ha permesso alla propaganda jihadista di raggiungere molto più facilmente molti musulmani europei e di creare molto più facilmente un network di estremisti (capace poi di trasformarsi in un cellula terroristica). Le prigioni, sorprendentemente, non

sembrano influire particolarmente sui processi di radicalizzazione. Anche se molti giovani radicalizzati in prigione possono creare legami tra di loro, non sembra essere la prigione in sé uno dei fattori scatenanti. Piuttosto è possibile che i giovani ad alto rischio di radicalizzazione abbiano una probabilità più alta di finire in prigione. Infatti un fenomeno estremamente interessante all'interno del panorama jihadista è il fenomeno del *gangster Salafi*, un ibrido di identità tra il salafitismo e l'identità *gangsta* tipica dei *ghetto* americani. Questa identità viene analizzata meglio nel capitolo. Tra gli altri elementi che possono contribuire al processo di radicalizzazione si possono notare la concentrazione geografica delle diaspore di immigrati e la mancanza di risorse degli imam (e a volte degli stessi imam professionalizzati). Il capitolo, infine, analizza le possibili *grievances* all'interno dei paesi europei da cui sono partiti più *foreign fighters*: la Francia, il Belgio, il Regno Unito e la Germania. È interessante notare una quasi totale “immunità” ai processi di radicalizzazione delle comunità turche, nonostante un livello di povertà ed opportunità in molti casi uguale a quello di altre comunità. È possibile che la forte organizzazione delle comunità turche abbia giocato un ruolo in tutto questo, anche se è un fenomeno che andrebbe analizzato più a fondo.

Il linguaggio dello Stato Islamico (capitolo 4)

Il capitolo finale della tesi tratta il linguaggio mediatico utilizzato dal jihadismo moderno, in particolare da parte dell'ISIS: lo Stato Islamico ha sfruttato la rivoluzione offerta dai social media per entrare in contatto con potenziali reclute, ma non solo. Si sa oggi che l'ISIS nacque dal progetto jihadista di Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a sua volta un pioniere nell'uso dell'Internet come medium di diffusione per amici e nemici dei jihadisti iracheni. Oltre ad utilizzare Twitter, Facebook o Youtube (social media), l'ISIS ha anche utilizzato piattaforme a “network chiuso” (quindi che non si possono osservare senza esserne parte) come ad esempio Telegram, per facilitare la comunicazione tra diverse cellule estremiste e l'organizzazione centrale in Siria/Iraq. Molte di queste applicazioni usano un sistema di crittografia altamente complesso che permette ai membri dell'ISIS, prevalentemente in Occidente, di comunicare protetti tra di loro.

Analizzando il linguaggio propagandistico dell'organizzazione è possibile notare che la tematica prevalente all'interno del materiale di propaganda è quella di “utopia”. Le altre tematiche principali sono “guerra”, “vittimizzazione”, “brutalità”, “appartenenza”, e “perdono”. Gli organi più sviluppati all'interno della propaganda dello Stato Islamico sono due: “*Dabiq*”, la rivista ufficiale, e il settore dedicato alla produzione di video. È interessante notare le differenze tra le due cose: *Dabiq* spende molte pagine in complesse giustificazioni teologiche per i propri atti, citando il Corano e vari *hadith* ed interpretandoli in una corrente jihadista-salafita. Il concetto della *ummah* è citata più e più volte. I video dello Stato Islamico sono invece vari e cinematograficamente complessi. Lo stile quasi

documentaristico di alcuni video si unisce a video di combattimenti dell'ISIS in varie zone del mondo. È interessante notare che molti dei video militari dell'ISIS si potrebbero considerare *war porn*, pornografia di guerra: sono video che sfruttano il fascino esercitato da operazioni militari al giorno d'oggi.