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**RADICALIZATION AND DE-RADICALIZATION  
PROCESSES: THE CASES OF THE EGYPTIAN  
NATIONAL GAMĀ'ĀT AS OPPOSED TO THE PROJECT  
OF GLOBAL JIHADISM**

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# Introduction

## The research hypothesis

The current literature on Islamist movements attempts to explain two principal issues: their support of violence (radicalization), and their changing attitudes towards democracy and democratization (moderation), whereas the reasons behind the renunciation (behavioral de-radicalization) and de-legitimization (ideological de-radicalization) of violence have not been sufficiently evaluated to date.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, throughout the work, radicalization will be regarded as

the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, de-radicalization represents

the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change. It involves an ideological shift and not only a behavioral one.<sup>3</sup>

An in-depth analysis of other definitions of radicalization and de-radicalization will be the focus of dedicated sections of the thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Moving from these premises, the objective of this research project is twofold. First, it aims at illustrating the changes that have occurred in the conception of jihad between two distinct forms of jihadism in the MENA region, i.e. national and global jihadism.

Second, it aspires to verify the following research hypothesis:

Once jihad goes global, it is no longer possible for an organic process of collective and political de-radicalization to happen, because global jihad does not possess a set of prerequisites that allow the process to occur.

This research hypothesis will be illustrated shortly.

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<sup>1</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, Routledge, London, 2009, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rabasa - S. Pettyjohn - J. Ghez - C. Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*.

<sup>3</sup> Abandoning violence from a strictly behavioral perspective means disengaging, not de-radicalizing. The differences occurring between the two processes will be addressed in the fourth chapter.

<sup>4</sup> See pp. 11 – 13 and 121 – 125.

From a geographical perspective, Egypt will be chosen as the reference country. Indeed, the national conception of jihadism will be exemplified by al-Ġamā'ā al-Islāmiya (Islamic Group, IG) and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy (Islamic Jihad), the two major Egyptian jihadi groups of the twentieth century.

Symmetrically, the so-called global jihad and the parabola of Ayman al-Zawahiri (Ayman al-Ẓawāhiri) and his thought will represent the second approach to violent jihadism.

The two abovementioned groups, which were active during the last three decades of the twentieth century, constitute ideal case studies because they all performed a process of collective disengagement and de-radicalization that led them to abandon violence.

Moreover, the Egyptian cases represent the most telling instances of de-radicalization because they involved comprehensive de-radicalization, i.e. successful de-radicalization processes completed on three levels: organizational, behavioral, and ideological. This is the main reason why Egypt will be preferred to disengagement processes that taken places in other countries, such as Algeria, which seems to partly lack the ideological component.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the beginning of global jihad in general and the figure of al-Zawahiri in particular will be chosen as the second basis for comparison because they represent the fundamental turning point from national to global jihadism.

Indeed, until the late 1990s, when he joined Bin Laden's World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, Zawahiri faithfully adhered to the strategic principle of making jihad against the Near Enemy and kept his focus on overthrowing the Egyptian government.

He used to say that "*the road to Jerusalem went first through Cairo*"<sup>6</sup>, confirming the hypothesis that from the 1970s until the mid-1990s the jihadi movement, with few exceptions, did not pay much attention to the Far Enemy – the West and its allies - and focused on the national horizon.

In this respect, we said that the second objective of the present research is to demonstrate that, after the emergence of al-Qa'ida as a regional and international player, a similar process of de-radicalization could no longer occur.

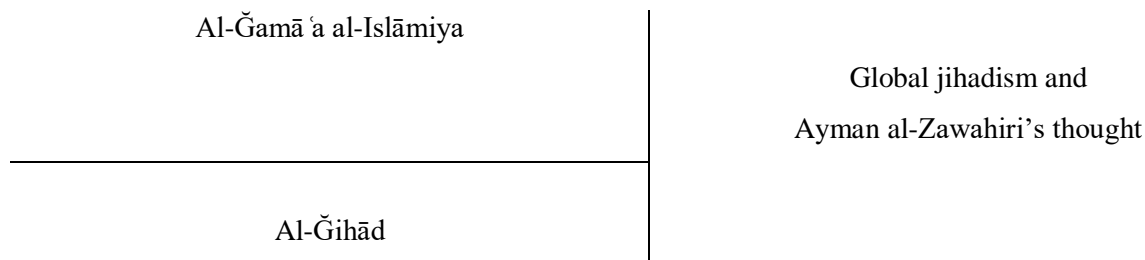
Indeed, the global project of al-Qa'ida excludes every chance of undertaking a de-radicalization process in which a group effectively negotiates with a nation-state. Unless its national and political dimensions are restored, this process can no longer be performed.

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<sup>5</sup> O. Ashour, *Islamist De-Radicalization in Algeria: Successes and Failures*, Middle East Institute, Washington D.C., November 1, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 11.

In compliance with both the synchronic and diachronic perspectives, the analysis will be structured as a square divided into three sections:



Interestingly, one of the resources of this structure is the possibility of reading it bi-directionally. Synchronically, the processes of radicalization and de-radicalization of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya will be compared to that of al-Ġihād. Diachronically, the Egyptian groups will be put into comparison with the path of one of the main ideologues of the group founded by Osama Bin Laden at the end of the 1980s.

Osama Bin Laden was aiming for an impossible objective. Since he sought to expel Russia from Chechnya, India from Kashmir, and to attack Algeria, Tunisia, France, and Libya, as well as evict America from the Gulf. All this is impossible. Even if Bin Laden possessed a superpower. Never in his life did the Prophet fight on two fronts or go to war against two enemies at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

This statement belongs to the large corpus of recantations written by the major Islamic Group's ideologues during and after the process of de-radicalization and clearly highlights one of the many differences occurring between the *gamā'āt* and al-Qa'ida.

Indeed, the leaders of al-Qa'ida entangled the Umma in a conflict that was beyond its power to wage and this has been possible because the national dimension of the confrontation between jihadism and power had been completely overcome, the Far Enemy had become more important than the Near one, and domestic interests had lost significance in favor of a transnational, unprecedented utopia.

The hypothesis underlying the idea that a true process of collective de-radicalization is impossible in the context of al-Qa'ida implies that the de-radicalization initiatives of the Egyptian Islamic Group (1997-1999), and al-Ġihād (2007-2010) were carried out in a national and collective context and not in a transnational one. More precisely, a number of related conjunctures fostered these initiatives, and the whole set of conjunctures is ascribable to the national setting in which the confrontation took place.

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<sup>7</sup> M. Muhamad Ahmad, "Correction: Islamic Group Leaders Tour Prisons with Non-Violence Message, Wholesale Release—adding editorial notation," in Arabic in: *al-Musawwar*, June 28, 2002.

First of all, the terrorist groups and their leaderships had a national perspective<sup>8</sup>. This is not to say that the first *ḡamā'āt* did not use to prioritize *dīn*, “religion”, over *dawla*, “state”. On the contrary, their greatest ideal was the restoration of the Caliphate.

Nevertheless, their primary and immediate targets were their own rulers, the beneficiaries of their *dā'wa* activities were their Egyptian compatriots and, above all, they were aware that the militant cause was part of a historically and geographically *situated* process<sup>9</sup> and not a global let alone a-national one.

The Egyptian groups did not focus on global jihad: they were primarily concerned with the overthrow of the apostate regimes, first of Anwar al-Sadāt (1970-1981) and later of Hosni Mubarak (Ḥosni Mubārak) (1981-2011).

On the contrary, in both al-Zawahiri's actions and narratives the national dimension had been completely overcome, the multi-ethnicity of fighters and constituency had become a value, the concept of territoriality had been revisited in unprecedented ways and the Umma utopia had gained new significance. Moreover, charisma had come to be most concretely located in words and in the ability to speak for the Umma, and not for one's own compatriots.

Another difference between the last century's *ḡamā'āt* and the rhetoric of al-Qa'ida lies in the concept of *hiḡra*, “migration”, which since the emergence of al-Qa'ida has started to be used as the notion of removing oneself, literally or metaphorically, from the present corrupt *ḡāhily* society, which is “ignorant of the Revelation”.

On the other side, according to the ideology of the twentieth century jihadi national groups, the decision to bring jihad abroad responded to the pragmatic need to *protect those youths by sending them to Afghanistan*:<sup>10</sup> another national goal.

The *ḡamā'āt* and al-Zawahiri's visions of the historical role of al-Qa'ida also differ in terms of their attitudes towards international powers. Obviously, this difference became clear particularly during and after the de-radicalization processes, when, in absolute contrast to al-Qa'ida's *Crusader-Zionist* conspiracy theory, which was produced to explain present-Muslim weaknesses, al-Ḥamā'a and al-Ḥihād self-consciously assumed ownership for their own destructive actions.

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<sup>8</sup> In some respects, the focus has been even narrower. For instance, an extraordinary connection between the Islamic Group's militancy and the territory of Upper Egypt has always been a characteristic of the organization. For the *Sa'idi dominance* in the group see M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Autumn, 1994, pp. 607-625.

<sup>9</sup> H. Ansari, The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Mar, 1984, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> H. Mubarak - S. Shadoud - S. Tamari, What Does the Ḥamā'a Islāmiyya Want? An Interview with Talat Fouad Qasim, *Middle East Report*, No. 198, Jan – Mar 1996, p. 42.



According to the groups' revisions, it is true that various enemies conspire against each other, but conspiracy does not represent the only factor that turns the course of events and influences history.

By contrast, in line with the conspiracy ideology, al-Qa'ida makes an extensive use of a particular mechanism of radicalization, which represents a distinctive feature of qaedist jihadism: the blaming of the victims. In order to reduce the unavoidable emotional impact of violence against civilians, jihadism has largely exploited this mechanism, which is based on the principle of "it's their fault", or "they asked for it".

The recantations of the Islamic Group, al-Ġihād, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which was inspired by the first two, harshly criticise the exploitation of this mechanism, thus adopting unprecedented forms of self-criticism that require further research.

The case of al-Zawahiri is particularly telling since the ideologue embodied the shift from national to global jihad.

Ayman al-Zawahiri, during his membership within the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, acted in compliance with the traditional features of what has been defined as national jihadism. By contrast, in his memoirs, released immediately after September 11, Zawahiri superimposes the present on the past to rationalize and justify his dramatically radical shift away from targeting the Near Enemy to targeting the Far Enemy.

The jihad was a training course of the utmost importance to prepare Muslim mujahedeen to wage their awaited battle against the superpower that now has sole dominance over the globe, namely, the United States.<sup>11</sup>

In this respect, it is worth restating that, for decades, global jihadists have been a minority. The Egyptian and Libyan jihadi landscapes have been continuously evolving, with most groups and individuals largely disinterested in transnationalism and instead focused on the local issues of retribution against the military regime. A review of their documents, manifestos, and actions indicates a preoccupation with the internal conditions of Muslims in disparate countries compared to those of the Umma as a whole.

Beside the national perspectives and goals of the terrorist groups and their leaderships, a further crucial conjuncture that fostered the processes of collective de-radicalization can be found on the governments' side.

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<sup>11</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*: [<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/6759609-knights-under-the-prophet-banner.pdf>].

Indeed, the national horizon of the twentieth century jihadi wave found a correspondence in the reactions of the Egyptian and Libyan governments which, during the process of de-radicalization and disengagement, activated a balance of repression, dialogue and selective inducements that will be the subject of an in-depth analysis throughout the five chapters of the dissertation.

Another fundamental feature of these de-radicalization processes is that they occurred at the organizational and collective level, and not at the individual one, and this point should not be overlooked. What the present dissertation aims at demonstrating is only the impossibility of collective de-radicalization, and this is no way to deny that individual disengagement and de-radicalization can still happen in a context of global jihadism.

In the case of al-Qa'ida, what is likely to occur at the individual level is only individual disengagement and –more rarely – de-radicalization, mainly derived from disillusionment<sup>12</sup> - especially because the group leaders seemed to have abandoned the fundamental norm of *'amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*, “Command the good and forbid the evil”, whereas the national dimension is a prerequisite for a complete process of collective de-radicalization.

In 2009, after some major corpuses of recantations had been published, Abu Qatāda (Abu ‘Omar)<sup>13</sup> commented in an interview on the transformations determined by the groups’ revisions:

The impact of these retreats on us is worse than 100,000 American soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, several Islamist leaders have argued that without the IG's de-radicalization process, there would not have been an al-Ġihād one. Similarly, the project will include the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībīa (the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, LIFG) in the comparison, hypothesizing that it was largely influenced by the two former examples.

This suggests a *domino effect* hypothesis that can be a subject of future research, because the de-radicalization of one group could influence others operating in the same context under similar conditions.

In order to summarize the research hypothesis, it is worth restating a few insights. First, once jihad goes global, a comprehensive process of collective de-radicalization can no longer take place. This is due to the advent of the transnational dimension of jihad, in which there is no national super-structure and

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<sup>12</sup> A. Speckhard – A. S. Yayla, *Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit, Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, Dec. 2015, pp. 95-118.

<sup>13</sup> Abu Qatada al-Filastīni, born Omar Mahmud Othman (b. 1960), is a radical Jordanian national who was charged of terrorist activity in the United Kingdom but judged innocent in Jordan. Particularly notorious is his fatwa stating that it is justified to both kill Muslims who renounce their faith and kill their families (1995) and is sermon on September 14, 2001, which described the 9/11 attacks as part of a wider battle between Christendom and Islam.

<sup>14</sup> A. Majid, “Ĥiwwār Ma' al-Sheikh Abu Qatada min dākhil al-Suġūn al-Britānniya” [“An Interview with Sheikh Abu Qatada from within British Prisons”], *Minbar al-Tawhīd*, June 5, 2009.

leadership, national instances, and national government that can play the role of interlocutor both through repression and selective inducements.

Second, for a true process of de-radicalization to take place, a set of prerequisites is fundamental, and in his studies of collective de-radicalization of radical movements in Egypt, Algeria, Libya and Tajikistan, Ashour found that four main variables account for the initiation of a de-radicalization process at the group level:

1. State repression
2. Selective inducements
3. Strong leadership within the radical movement
4. Social interaction (both with ideologically similar and different groups)<sup>15</sup>

The present work will analyze the four variables extensively and major changes will be made to Ashour's classification:

1. State reactions (repression + selective inducements)
2. Strong leadership within the radical movement
3. Interaction
4. Coherent and consistent ideological reorientation

The first change is the inclusion of both state repression and selective inducements under the notion of state reactions.

This change stems from the idea that the regime's reactions to the group's initiatives have to be addressed as a whole, thus underlying the developments that they experienced.

The second change to Ashour's list implies adding coherent and consistent ideological reorientation as a prerequisite to de-radicalization.

It highlights that de-radicalization is a process, not an event, thus requiring an ongoing path of ideological and doctrinal separation from violence.

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<sup>15</sup> In C. McCauley, *Group Desistance from Terrorism: The Dynamics of Actors, Actions and Outcomes*, in R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp.187-203.

## Conceptual and terminological premises

Notoriously, the term radicalization is complex and often problematic. In the last fifteen years or so, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have provided interesting definitions of the term, although a universal consensus on its meaning has not been reached yet.

As mentioned before, throughout the present work radicalization will be regarded as the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change.<sup>16</sup>

However, further informative definitions have been formulated by the experts in the field, and many of them are worth mentioning.

In particular, when it comes to governmental definitions of the term, some of them are remarkably informative.

The Swedish Security Service (Säpo) stresses the importance of political goals and defines radicalization as both:

a process that leads to ideological or religious activism to introduce radical change to society' and a 'process that leads to an individual or group using, promoting or advocating violence for political aims.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) radicalization as a process that is intimately undemocratic and can lead to violence:

a process, by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective.<sup>18</sup>

Across the ocean, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) explains radicalization as

the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect social change.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Rabasa - S. Pettyjohn - J. Ghez - C. Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*.

<sup>17</sup> Swedish Security Service, *Radikalisering och avradikalisering*, 2009. See also, Magnus Ranstorp, *Preventing Violent Radicalisation and Terrorism. The Case of Indonesia*, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies, Stockholm, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> PET, Danish Intelligence Services, 2009.

The DHS embraces the definition that will also be used in the work.

If the notion of radicalization is complex, the same is true for the related concept of de-radicalization.

Similarly, there is no universal definition of de-radicalization and scholars can only count on a number of generally accepted formalizations.

One of the most informative definitions has been provided in 2012 by the U.S. psychologist and terrorism expert John Horgan, whose definition has also been adopted by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism:

(De-radicalization includes) Programs that are generally directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of reintegrating them into society or at least dissuading them from violence.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of its stunning clarity, however, this definition only explains what individual de-radicalization means and keeps a strong focus on the rehabilitation of the single subject, as in the case of state-run rehabilitation programs often shaped on the example of the Saudi program.<sup>20</sup>

Analyses and definitions of de-radicalization that focus exclusively on the individual level fail to give significant insights in the realm of collective and political de-radicalization processes, which represent the focal point of the present discussion.

As asserted before,<sup>21</sup> there is a lacuna in the literature, since the overwhelming majority of works in this field focuses on individual de-radicalization and, in addition, they do so by using exclusively a structural-psychological approach – which has proved to have more than one shortcoming - instead of a political-process one.

In this respect, Ashour provides a more suitable definition of de-radicalization, which represents:

The process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue, *Tackling Extremism: De-Radicalization and Disengagement*, Conference Report, Copenhagen, May 8 – 9, 2012, pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>20</sup> See C. Boucek, Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., September 2008; P. Neumann, *Prison and Terrorism. Radicalization and Deradicalization in 15 Countries*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), London, 2010. S. Brzuskiewicz, *Saudi Arabia: the de-radicalization program seen from within*, Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan, April 28, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See the section Methodology and Sources of the Introduction p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> O. Ashour, *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*, London, Routledge, 2009.

In this way, the definition of de-radicalization expands to involve a collective ideological shift and not merely a behavioral shift, as is the case of disengagement,<sup>23</sup> which can be defined as the behavioral distancing from the violent terrorism modus operandi.

Unfortunately, disengagement often occurs without authentic de-radicalization, i.e. without a credible cognitive rejection of violence as a means to affect societal and political change.

Tore Bjørge and John Horgan persuasively assert that there is no clear evidence to suggest that disengagement from terrorism may bring with it de-radicalization, nor is there clear evidence to support the argument that de-radicalization is a necessary accompaniment to disengagement.<sup>24</sup>

John Horgan, having conducted dozens of interviews with former terrorists since 2006, concluded that:

While almost all of the interviewees could be described as disengaged, not a single one of them could be said to be de-radicalized.<sup>25</sup>

According to the British scholar Gordon Clubb, who confirms the assumptions of Bjørge and Horgan, the most likely process usually excludes simultaneous de-radicalization and disengagement. They are stage processes, which often start with declarative disengagement; followed by behavioral disengagement; followed by organizational disengagement (leaving the group); followed at the very end by de-radicalization.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, if de-radicalization happens, it does only after disengagement, which is confirmed by the cases of the Egyptian *ḡamā'āt* and their influence on the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

A further conceptual and terminological note is required in order to fully understand the meaning and the implications of the notions involved.

Indeed, beside the difference between de-radicalization and disengagement, a crucial distinction has to be made between de-radicalization and counter-radicalization.

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<sup>23</sup> J. Horgan, Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2(4), 2008.

<sup>24</sup> T. Bjørge and J. Horgan (Eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, Routledge, Abington, 2009, p.28; J. Horgan, De-radicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> J. Horgan, De-radicalization or Disengagement?, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> G. Clubb, Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3(3), 2009.

The term de-radicalization refers to processes involving individuals who are already radicalized, whereas counter-radicalization, refers to preventive programs aimed at individuals or groups considered vulnerable to recruitment.<sup>27</sup>

### **The notion of national jihad**

Inevitably, dealing with our initial hypothesis, which entails the notions of national orientation and national jihadism,<sup>28</sup> requires a number of preliminary considerations about two fundamental terms of political science - namely *state* and *nation* – and the ways in which they will be used in the present work.

In addressing these two concepts, the contribution of Roger Owen will represent a pillar of the analysis.<sup>29</sup> First of all, the word “state” itself has two distinct meanings. The first use refers to sovereign political entities, i.e. geopolitical conglomerates with international recognition, their own boundaries, and their own flag, while the second use refers to that set of institutions and practices that combines administrative, judicial, rule-making, and coercive powers.

In the latter sense, the concept of the state is much more complex. Recognition of the existence of an entity called the “state” goes back into European political thought, and what probably remains the most influential and informative definition is provided by Max Weber, according to whom the state is

a human community that claims and holds the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory.

Since this and the other most exhaustive definitions of the state were developed within a Western framework, the question of how to apply them in the Middle East has been central in the last decades of research.

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<sup>27</sup> Some scholars, however, utilize the term counter-radicalization as the umbrella term both for de-radicalization and prevention, see for instance J. Stern, *A future challenges essay, Deradicalization or Disengagement of Terrorists: Is It Possible?*, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> The relation between the nation of nationalism and religion has been recently addressed from a number of interesting perspectives by M. Demichelis and P. Maggiolini (Eds.), *Rethinking Religious Nationalism in the Contemporary Islamic World*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, 2017. The collection of studies adopts an inter-disciplinary approach to ‘religious nationalism’ and the ‘nationalization’ of religion, through focusing on case studies of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and proposes to reconsider the relationship between religion, politics and identity in the perspective of ‘religious nationalism’ and the ‘nationalization’ of religion in the contemporary Islamic World.

<sup>29</sup> R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, p. 1.

In this respect Joel Migdal, modelling his analysis on non-European entities, suggests that a state is

an organization, composed of numerous agencies led and coordinated by the state's leadership (executive authority) that has the ability to make and implement the binding rules for all the people as well as the parameters of rule-making for other social organizations in a given territory, using force if necessary to have its way.<sup>30</sup>

However, it is not untenable to say that contemporary Middle Eastern states are *like* Western states in the sense that, from the nineteenth century onwards, organizations of this type have represented the political structure par excellence. At the same time, what should not be overlooked is that European and Middle Eastern states came into existence in different historical circumstances. Consequently, while it is appropriate to talk about states without necessarily adding "Middle Eastern", their further developments cannot be predicted simply in terms of European models alone.

In his vast analysis of the notion of state in the Middle East, the Egyptian political scientist Nazih Ayubi moves from a markedly different perspective and suggests that the state can be said to be

an abstract construct that connotes the ensemble of institutions and personnel that possess the exclusive right to public power within a certain territorial society.<sup>31</sup>

Ayubi also underlines that even the origins of the word *state* in the European languages and of the word *dawla* in Arabic actually imply opposite things: stability and continuity of position in the first; circulation and reversals of power and fortune in the second.

Both the perspectives – the operational perspective of Owen and the abstract perspective of Ayubi – will represent fundamental theoretical pillars of the present thesis.

Indeed, the Egyptian state will be considered both

an organization, composed of numerous agencies led and coordinated by the state's leadership (executive authority) and an abstract construct that connotes the ensemble of institutions and personnel within a given territory.

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<sup>30</sup> J. Migdal, *Strong States and Weak Societies: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, Tauris, London, 1995, p. 30.



Even more delicate, however, is the relation between the notions of state and nation, particularly given that these two concepts will be used throughout the whole analysis.

One of the most exhaustive definitions of nation has been provided by Antony Smith:

A nation is a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths, and historical memory, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.<sup>32</sup>

In this respect, the nation is both an imagined and an abstract community: It is an imagined community due to the fact that the conditions exist for shared connections among all its members,<sup>33</sup> and it is an abstract community in the sense that it is objectively impersonal: even if each individual conceives him or herself as subjectively part of the nation, for the most part the individuals will remain strangers to each other.<sup>34</sup>

As a result, a nation-state can be defined as

the model of state that joins the political entity of a state to the cultural entity of a nation, from which it aims to derive its political legitimacy to rule. The term *nation-state* implies that the two poles coincide.<sup>35</sup>

Moving from this analysis, the initial hypothesis of the dissertation – the first Egyptian *ḡamā'āt* were essentially *national* jihadi groups - becomes clearer, since it implies both the cornerstones of the debate, i.e. the state *and* the nation.

According to Fred Halliday, throughout history different groups, in power or out of it, in the region or in exile, have constantly redefined and reselected in order to serve contemporary purposes,<sup>36</sup> and in the case of the Egyptian *gamā'āt*, those purposes were eminently national.

On the one side, radicalization processes, resentment triggers, and anger were first and foremost oriented against the state, and their enemy was embodied by the Egyptian regime itself.

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<sup>32</sup> A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, University of Nevada Press, Reno – Las Vegas, 1991, p. 14

<sup>33</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso Publications, London, 1983.

<sup>34</sup> P. James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, Sage Publications, London, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> F. Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, Saqi Books, London, 2000, p. 7.

On the other side, by prioritizing the Near Enemy (the State) over the Far Enemy (Israel, the United States, and its allies in the West) and developing an *Islamization* utopia within the national borders, thus choosing to build their narratives around Cairo long before Jerusalem, Egyptian jihadists showed a willingness to create their own *national* model.

Based on these premises, the work will focus on the Egyptian national – and nationalistic jihad. Indeed, the main constitutive ideological research of every nationalistic movement is about how the formal status accords with reality<sup>37</sup>, and this is where the action of the *ḡamā'āt* took place.

### **State of the art: The academic focus on individual radicalization and de-radicalization**

The so-called *war on terror* has affected not only international relations, but also the scientific production of scholars in Middle Eastern studies and experts in international politics.

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, academics with different methodological approaches and disciplinary backgrounds have contributed to enhancing knowledge about terrorism and radicalization, mainly focusing their attention on three research fields.

First, they have addressed the analogies occurring between the world of de-radicalization and that of *de-ganging* and *de-programming*.<sup>38</sup>

As far as this sub-field within radicalization and de-radicalization studies is concerned, informative insights have been provided by Madeline Morris, Frances Eberhard, Jessica Rivera, and Michael Watsula,<sup>39</sup> who highlight that affiliative motivations are found to predominate in entry and exit decisions both in religious, utopian, and psychotherapeutic cults and in terrorist groups, whereas this is only partially true for gangs.<sup>40</sup>

Second, scholars have engaged in the assessment, often from largely descriptive perspectives, of the de-radicalization programs carried out in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Iraq and of the prevention programs created in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> The exit processes from criminal gangs and various kinds of cults.

<sup>39</sup> M. Morris – F. Eberhard – J. Rivera – M. Watsula, *Deradicalization: A Review of the Literature with Comparison to Findings in the Literatures on Deganging and Deprogramming*, Research Brief, Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, May 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> C. Boucek, *Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., September 2008; J. Horgan – M. Altier, *The Future of*

The academic production on individual de-radicalization and prevention programs is massive, and it is not possible to present all the relevant works, as they also fall outside the scope of the present thesis. Nevertheless, a number of contributions and references are listed in the endnotes.

The third strand of research within the realm of radicalization and de-radicalization studies is the most relevant for the present work.

It includes all the efforts of scholars and experts toward the creation of radicalization models aimed at representing fundamental references for different socio-cultural contexts.

One of the most distinguished examples was provided in 2003 by the psychologist and intelligence expert Randy Borum, who created a very incisive model that could be termed *radicalization based on increasingly intense messages*.

According to this model, the process of radicalization can be divided into three phases, which are represented by three distinct messages:

- 1) “It’s not fair”
- 2) “It’s your fault”
- 3) “You are evil”.<sup>42</sup>

In 2005, the expert in counter-radicalization Quintan Wiktorowicz created his own model, introducing the concept of cognitive opening, i.e. the moment when an individual who has been trying to make sense of his or her existence *sees the light*, exchanging an old view of the world for a new one or creating the new view in the first place.

The basis of the process is the exogenous conditions surrounding the individual who enters a guided or self-initiated process of religious seeking. If the criteria for the credibility of the message and the messenger are met, he or she will start a process of socialization within the new context, which is likely to lead the subject to the next phase, implying value internalization and joining the group.<sup>43</sup>

In 2010, the Danish researcher Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen proposed a model divided into six stages, which correspond to the six fundamental psychological nuclei of violence:

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Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Washington D.C., 2012; L. Vidino – J. Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, King’s College London, December 2012. T. Agerschou, Preventing radicalization and discrimination in Aarhus, *Journal for Deradicalization*, 1, 2014, pp. 5-22.

In addition, some of the most representative de-radicalization programs will be examined in Chapter V, pp. 159 – 177.

<sup>42</sup> R. Borum, Understanding the Terrorist Mindset, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 72(7), pp. 7-10.

<sup>43</sup> Q. Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Lowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2005.

- 1) Identification of a problem as an injustice
- 2) Construction of a moral (religious, ideological, political) justification for violence
- 3) Blaming of the victims
- 4) De-humanization of the victims
- 5) Substitution or distribution of responsibility (“God wanted it”, “We obeyed the leader”)
- 6) Minimization of the action’s negative effects.<sup>44</sup>

Undoubtedly, many other examples of theoretical models should be considered here,<sup>45</sup> but they tend to exclusively analyze the individual dimension of the process. Indeed, these models theoretically underline the importance of context, but do not fully explain *how* context influences the process.

Moreover, since the 1970s, the literature on jihadist movements has addressed the causes of radicalization but, by comparison, less attention has been focused on the processes of de-radicalization.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, it is not untenable to say that there is a lacuna in the literature, and the overwhelming majority of works in this field are ascribable to a structural-psychological approach – centered on the individual - instead of a political-process one, which in contrast might be more able to analyze the process and group dynamics more effectively.

Unquestionably, the study of radicalization at the individual level, which has always been carried out with the structural-psychological approach, has produced some valuable insights, in particular by enhancing the understanding of radicalization as a process, an *in fieri* concept, and not merely as a set of events.

Nevertheless, this perspective has proven to have more than one shortcoming. First, it tends not to take historical and geographical variations into adequate consideration, thus claiming to be valid in every context and historical horizon.

Second, by focussing on the individual, it fails to observe broader socio-political phenomena that affect individual and group choices.

Third, most significantly, the structural-psychological approach implies that, as radicalization is supposed to be determined by structural factors, structural changes are required for the opposite process of de-radicalization to occur.

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<sup>44</sup> Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, ‘Violent Radicalisation in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 33, 2010, p. 799.

<sup>45</sup> See for instance Q. Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Oxford, 2005; F.M. Moghadam, ‘De-radicalisation and the Staircase from Terrorism’, in David Center (Ed.), *The Faces of Terrorism: Multidisciplinary Perspective*, New York, John Wiley, 2009, pp. 278-79; C. McCauley, S. Moskaleiko, *Friction. How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 206-214.

<sup>46</sup> O. Ashour, Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Autumn 2007), p. 600.

In other words, the structural-psychological approach automatically implies a direct causal relation not only between structural factors and radicalization, but also – as a consequence - between changes in those structural factors and de-radicalization.

The cases of the Egyptian Islamic Group, al-Ġihād and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which will constitute a significant part of the present project, will be analyzed through the political process approach in order to refute this hypothesis. Indeed, no structural changes occurred in Egypt or Libya for de-radicalization to happen, and this has to be addressed.

### **Methodology and sources**

All the classical models ascribable to the structural-psychological approach presume a linear causality in which socio-structural issues produce psychological discomfort which, in turn, produces radicalization.<sup>47</sup> From this perspective, radicalization is always perceived as a direct consequence of socioeconomic conditions<sup>48</sup>, threats against Muslim identity(-ies)<sup>49</sup>, or authoritarian regimes.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, as radicalization is determined by structural factors such as poverty, deprivation, political grievances, or persecutions against fellow Muslims worldwide - structural changes are essential for de-radicalization to take place.

However, there are significant case studies that entirely refute this alleged dogma, and the parabola of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya<sup>51</sup> are striking examples. These are all contexts in which, for de-radicalization to take place, what was necessary was not a set of structural changes, but a complex synergy of: negotiations between the state and the radical group, selective inducements offered by the state to those groups, strong leadership within the movement, and constant interaction of the group with the government and with other groups.

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<sup>47</sup> Q. Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic Activism: Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> See S.E. Ibrahim, *Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12(14), 1980, pp. 423 – 453 and H. Ansari, *The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1), 1984, pp. 123 – 144.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Esposito, *Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* Lynne Rienner, London, 1997 and M. Kramer, *The Islamism Debate*, Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, 1997.

<sup>50</sup> See L. Anderson, *Fulfilling Prophecies: State Policy and Islamists Radicalism*, in J. Esposito (Ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997 and M. Hafez, *Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria*, *The Middle East Journal* 54(1), 2000 and *Why Muslims Rebel? Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 2003.

<sup>51</sup>In the case of *al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya*, the letter *gīm* is pronounced respecting the diction of the Standard Arabic as a *j*, contrary to what happens in the Cairene dialect, which pronounces it like the *g* in “girl”.

For these reasons, the de-radicalization and disengagement processes carried out by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Libya will be analyzed through the political process approach.

Despite its importance, de-radicalization at the organizational level has received relatively little attention in comparison to individual-level de-radicalization and there has been a considerable amount of work on the related but distinct topic of how terrorism ends, which overviews a litany of possible reasons that an individual may forgo violence. Nevertheless, this body of work does not explore what happens when a militant organization goes beyond disengagement from terrorism and renounces its extremist beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

Both de-radicalization and disengagement merit explanations that are not sufficiently provided in the literature on terrorism.<sup>53</sup>

Contrary to the structural-psychological approach, the political-process perspective asserts and supports the primacy of the process over the structure – be it the political, social, or economic structure – thus highlighting the ever-changing nature of strategies and relations occurring between the different actors and the dynamism that characterizes both the radicalization and de-radicalization processes.

According to Doug McAdam, politics – in this case Islamist politics – can be perceived as the intersection of political opportunities, mobilization strategies, and ideological frames and symbols that resonate well within Muslim cultures,<sup>54</sup> and this view has a lot in common with the political-process approach that will be adopted in the present dissertation.

Following the structural-psychological approach, which focuses only on the individual, a large portion of the literature on terrorism does not provide sufficient explanations of collective and political de-radicalization processes.<sup>55</sup>

One of the few extensive works on that topic is the research of Omar Ashour, who highlighted many peculiar features of collective de-radicalization in both the Egyptian and the Libyan cases.<sup>56</sup>

In particular, he argues that a combination of charismatic leadership, state repression, interactions with the "other" and selective inducements from the state are common causes of de-radicalization.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> A. Rabasa - S. Pettyjohn - J. Ghez - C. Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, RAND National Security Research Division, Santa Monica, 2010, p. 158.

<sup>53</sup> Ashour, 2007 p. 602.

<sup>54</sup> D. McAdam, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York, 2001.

<sup>55</sup> O. Ashour, *Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group*, p. 602.

<sup>56</sup> O. Ashour, *De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda* (2008); *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements* (2009); *Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements* (2011).

As far as a comparative approach between the historical parables of the Egyptian and Libyan *ḡamā'āt* is concerned, the lacuna is even deeper, and while the literature on al-ḡamā'ā al-Islāmiya and al-ḡihād is substantial<sup>58</sup>, the research on the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is much more limited,<sup>59</sup> and this depends mainly on the different historical scope, impact and legacy of the Egyptian and Libyan groups.

A decade after the groups' collective de-radicalization, this project aims at partially filling the abovementioned vacuums, not only by providing a comparison between the Egyptian movements with reference to their influence on the LIFG, but also by enabling this enquiry to resonate in the present.

The legacy of these groups in the current era of jihadism will be evaluated, and the diametrical differences between the two violent militancy periods will be underlined.

From a methodological perspective, the political process approach will be preferred to the structural-psychological one because, as mentioned before, the former emphasizes the dynamism of the political environment, asserts the primacy of the process over structure and argues for the importance of resource mobilization, whether the resource is material, organizational, ideational or institutional.

The political process approach does not overlook the significance of structural conditions for both radicalization and de-radicalization to happen. On the contrary, it takes into account the multiple factors and energies that make those conditions lively and assesses the impact of the structural elements over the analyzed phenomena without looking at them as immutable, omnipotent circumstances.

The project largely relies – in addition to the Western literature - on Arabic sources, both primary and secondary, analyses of the pre-existent body of research, and media interviews with movement leaders, mid-ranking commanders, members of the grassroots, former security and intelligence officers, and state officials. The documentation will also include the groups' literature before the de-radicalization process, the so-called *fiqh al-'unf*, “jurisprudence of violence”, and the following doctrinal and ideological revisions, *al-murāḡa'āt*.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> O. Ashour, De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Terrorism Research Initiative, 2008.

<sup>58</sup> See for instance S. Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s* (1988); S. Reed, *The Battle for Egypt* (1993); M. Azzam, *The Use of Discourse in Understanding Islamic-Oriented Protest Groups in Egypt 1971-1981* (1986); F. Gherghes, *The End of the Islamist Insurgency in Egypt? Costs and Prospects* (2000).

<sup>59</sup> See C.W. Dunne, Terrorist Rehabilitation and Succession Politics in Libya: Opportunities for the United States?, Middle East Institute, Washington D.C., March 31, 2010: [<http://www.mei.edu/content/terrorist-rehabilitation-and-succession-politics-libya-opportunities-united-states>].

<sup>60</sup> For the first phase see for instance: *Mithāq al-'Amal al-Islāmi* (Islamic Action Charter) (1984), or *Kalimāt Haqq* (A Righteous Word) (1984), authored by 'O. Abdel Rahman, the former emir of Upper Egypt for al-Gamā'ā al-Islāmiya. As far as the recantation literature is concerned, a large corpus of documentation is included in the collective volume *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad* (2010) by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

Similarly, first-hand interviews and discussions with former radicals and jihadists played a major role in framing the intellectual, epistemological, and doctrinal horizon of the thesis, which has been possible thanks to the constant decentralization of perspectives that emphasizes the narratives used by the actors who were *directly* involved in the ideological production.

Interviews, talks, and fieldwork have been carried out through extended research trips abroad, in particular within the framework of the Program on Extremism of George Washington University (Washington D.C.) and through the collaboration with Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Center of Dubai (United Arab Emirates), which also helped the author to visit the Hair Prison Center and the Bin Nayef Rehabilitation Center in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia).

The fieldwork and the research experiences abroad represented invaluable resources that fostered the development and the growth of the dissertation, and many major gains of these activities in terms of intellectual exchange, personal stories, and bibliographical references will be acknowledged throughout the present work.

The decision not to carry out fieldwork in Egypt was made jointly by the author of the present work and her supervisor, Prof. Riccardo Redaelli, and was based on the impossibility to conduct free, safe, and effective fieldwork in the country in the aftermath of Giulio Regeni case - the Italian PhD candidate who disappeared in Cairo on January 25, 2016 and was found dead on February 3 of the same year – and on the undeniable reticence of Egyptian authorities in collaborating with Italy in the investigation on the murder.

In addition to the analysis of concepts such as radicalism and radicalization, and de-radicalization and disengagement, the focus will be on the variations in the use of complex terms that have been discussed during the fieldwork with experts, scholars, and former radicals.

These notions include for instance those stemming from the root *ğ-h-d*: *ğihād*, *iğtihād*, *muğāhid*, and *sharaf* (honor), *fitna* (sedition), *dār al-islām* (house-land of Islam), *dār al-ḥarb* (house-land of war), *dār al-‘ahd* (house-land of truce), *uṣūliyun* (fundamentalists), and *islāmiyun* (Islamists).

In order to attract social allies, jihadists articulate their worldview in a language akin to Huntington “clash of civilization”, whereby mobilization is viewed as a response to insidious Western – or westernized - desires to undermine the culture of Muslim societies.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, they do it in different ways, and analyzing these variations could shed light on the evolution of multiple jihadi narratives.

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<sup>61</sup> H. Kandil, Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 40, No. 1, January 2011, p. 42.



Moreover, the recourse to sets of oppositions<sup>62</sup> like *mū'min* - *kāfir*, *taqwa* - *fasad*, *muslim* - *murtad*<sup>63</sup>, which has been a constant feature of the jihadi narrative since the 1970s<sup>64</sup>, will be analyzed to highlight the ways in which radical rhetoric evolves along with operational strategies.

The starting point of the project consists of the notion of de-radicalization and, in order to define it, one needs to define radicalization. As mentioned above, radicalization will be regarded as

the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change.<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, de-radicalization represents the process of

abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change. It involves an ideological shift and not only a behavioral one.<sup>66</sup>

### **The structure of the dissertation**

The **first chapter**, *The Rise of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy: The Historical Context*, will focus on the historical, social, and political conditions that contributed to forging the environment in which the two major Egyptian ḡamā'āt - al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy - developed.

The time span of interest will cover Anwar al-Sadat's presidency (1970-1981), but multiple references to the previous Nasser era will be necessary to properly analyze the Egyptian positions during those decades.

A crucial notion informing the chapter will be that of the return of religion on the public stage and its impact on the emergence of radical groups. This definition will be preferred to "Islamic resurgence" or "re-Islamization", which do not seem to fully explain the gradualness of the process and suggest a return to an alleged Islamic or more Islamic past that implies a simplistic interpretation of nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt.

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<sup>62</sup> M. Azzam, *The Use of Discourse in Understanding Islamic-Oriented Protest Groups in Egypt 1971-1981*, British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1986, p. 151.

<sup>63</sup> Respectively: believer/unbeliever, piety/corruption or decadence, Muslim/apostate.

<sup>64</sup> It is worth noting that each couple of antonyms has its origins in the classical Islamic doctrine, but the contemporary jihadi discourse seized them in unprecedented ways.

<sup>65</sup> A. Rabasa - S. Pettyjohn - J. Ghez - C. Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*.

<sup>66</sup> Abandoning violence from a strictly behavioral perspective means disengaging, not de-radicalizing. The differences occurring between the two processes will be addressed in the Chapter IV.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a variety of groups had to decide their stand about the role of Islam in their own lives and in Egyptian society. These sectors included veterans of the Muslim Brotherhood returning home from Nasser's prisons, students in Egypt's rapidly growing universities, lower middle-class artisans and merchants whose livelihoods were threatened by modernization, poor immigrants in the burgeoning cities, and clerics who were disturbed by both growing secularism and the threat of radical fundamentalism. For many of these people, Islam seemed a familiar creed that provided both a powerful link with the past and a promise for the future.<sup>67</sup>

In this opening chapter the so-called "radical milieu" will be described, which views radicalization as the result of political and social processes that involve a collectivity of people beyond the terrorist groups themselves, which in turn, however, radicalize also because of this radical milieu.

Indeed, although their violent campaigns necessitate clandestine forms of operation and the society at large is obviously unaware of them, most terrorist groups remain connected to a radical milieu to recruit new members. Further, they depend on shelter and assistance given by this supportive milieu, without which they are unable to evade persecution and carry out violent attacks. Sharing core elements of the terrorists' perspective and political experiences, the radical milieu provides direct and indirect political and moral support.<sup>68</sup>

The **second chapter**, *Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya*, will be entirely dedicated to the embryonic, the radicalizing, and the confrontational phases of the group's existence, occurring in the years between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, when the movement started to discuss the opportunity of ceasing violence. The birth and ascent of the Islamic Group will be investigated to highlight those features that make it an emblematic example of national jihadism, i.e. the form of jihadism that pre-existed al-Qa'ida and chose objectives, projects, and enemies within the national borders and not in the global arena.

This will be followed by an in-depth consideration of the group's doctrinal milestones and a detailed examination of a number of peculiar characteristics - such as the dominance of members coming from south Egypt – and their implications in the confrontation with the regime.

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<sup>67</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002.

<sup>68</sup> S. Malthaner, *The Radical Milieu*, Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung (IKG), Bielefeld, November 2010, p. 1; S. Malthaner – P. Waldmann (Eds.), *Radikale Milieus. Das soziale Umfeld terroristischer Gruppen*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2012.

Similarly, the **third chapter**, entitled *Al-Ġihād al-Islāmy*, will analyze the corresponding phases in the second main Egyptian jihadi group, with a particular focus on the ideological, strategic, and organizational similarities and differences occurring between al-Ġihād and al-Ġamā'a.

As far as the doctrinal foundations of the group are concerned, *al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, “The Absent Obligation”, written by al-Ġihād's main ideologue ‘Abdel Salām Faraġ, will be examined as the milestone of the group's thought and the most exhaustive theorization of the concepts of Near and Far Enemies.

The killing of President Anwar al-Sadat (October 6, 1981) and its consequences will be the focus of the next section, which will be followed – as in the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in the former chapter – by a final summary of all the characteristics that make al-Ġihād a national jihadist group.

The **fourth chapter**, *The De-Radicalization Processes of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy*, will analyze the processes of organizational disengagement and de-radicalization of the two militant groups, which were concluded by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in 1997 and al-Ġihād in 2010.

The chapter represents the core of the dissertation as it is dedicated to corroborating the thesis according to which the process of the collective de-radicalization of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy has been possible thanks to the national character of the two groups, the regime's response, and the national setting in which the process itself took place.

After an introduction to the concept of de-radicalization emphasizing the differences between disengagement and de-radicalization and between individual and collective de-radicalization, the chapter will move on to the historical account of the path walked first by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and later by al-Ġihād.

The importance of the group leadership will be the object of a specific analysis followed by an investigation of the reasons why these processes can be termed *national* and an explanation of how this condition allowed de-radicalization to happen.

In conclusion, the chapter will mention a Libyan case, the de-radicalization of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya, which was largely modeled on the Egyptian examples along the lines of a transnational imitation effect.

The **fifth chapter**, *The Shift from National to Global Jihad and its Implications for Collective De-radicalization*, will focus on the turning point from national to global jihad and the momentous

differences in the fate of the Egyptian main *ḡamā'āt* – al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy – on the one side, and what is termed global jihad, on the other side.

Compared to the de-radicalization processes analyzed in the previous chapter, this section will address the symmetrical trend, embodied by those jihadists who chose not to de-radicalize and broke the geographical and strategic borders of national jihad embracing the transnational and non-territorial ideology that informs al-Qa'ida.

The chapter will investigate how the global veer of jihadism stopped collective political de-radicalization from being possible.

In this respect, two caveats are necessary at this stage. First, the research hypothesis does not suggest that, once jihad goes global, de-radicalization cannot happen tout court.

In fact, *individual* de-radicalization does happen even in the context of global jihad. What ceases to be possible is an organic process of *collective* and organizational de-radicalization in which a group motivated by *national* grievances and objectives negotiates with a *national* power that implements *national* strategies to foster the process, which is what happened in the case of al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātala bi-Lībya.

Second, by no means asserting the Egyptian and Libyan governments' adoption of an effective posture towards the group's initiatives implies a justification of oppressive regimes. The purpose of the work is to give a historical interpretation of processes that involved authoritarian regimes and their reactions to the movements' de-radicalization initiatives and to illustrate that these reactions were largely based on an effective balance between coercive methods, negotiation, and selective inducements.

Hypothesizing that these reactions actually worked does not justify all the regimes' methods from an ethical perspective.

In order to demonstrate the relevance of the shift from national to global in determining the impossibility of collective de-radicalization, a telling case study is that of Ayman al-Zawahiri and his own doctrinal and strategic shift from the Egyptian jihadi landscape to al-Qa'ida. Indeed, the first stages of al-Zawahiri's jihadi activity were characterized by the undisputed primacy of national goals over global ones whereas, following the shift that he had initiated during his experiences outside Egypt, al-Zawahiri carried out a gradual alignment with the global vision of al-Qa'ida, thus abandoning the national project of al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy.

The rift between the radical factions that chose to cease violence and de-radicalize and the worldview of al-Qa‘ida is enormous. In its *Silsilāt Tashīḥ al-Mafāhim*,<sup>69</sup> the Egyptian Islamic Group carries out a sharp critique of al-Qa‘ida’s alleged violations of the norms governing jihad, *taḳfīr* and the relation with authorities:

There is a difference in views between two visions of jihad. The vision of the Islamic Group and the vision of Al-Qa‘ida. . . [They] . . . called for a jihad that puts the logic of challenge above the principle of calculations, the preservation of interests, the availability of capabilities, and the perception of the goals.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, according to Nagih Ibrahim (Nāḡiḥ Ibrāhīm), one of al-Ġamā‘a’s main ideologues:

Al-Qa‘ida’s aim is jihad, and our aim is Islam.<sup>71</sup>

It is therefore not a question of whether jihad is a binding religious prescription: it unquestionably is. It is a question of how jihad should be the goal or the tool and whether one is to conduct it by lawful and prudent means and it is precisely this question that profoundly and irremediably divided the de-radicalizing groups’ *Corrections* from the path followed by al-Qa‘ida.

Inevitably, as an internal Islamist critique that relies on a common radical substratum, the *ḡamā‘āt* refutation of al-Qa‘ida’s ideology deeply affected the Egyptian and Libyan jihadi panoramas and largely delegitimized AQ’s status as *jihadi vanguard*.

The Egyptian and Libyan *ḡamā‘āt* have shown momentous behavioral and ideological transformations in favor of nonviolence and their initiatives and ideological reviews have removed tens of thousands of militants from the ranks of al-Qa‘ida supporters and have acted as disincentives for would-be militants.

For these reasons, the metamorphoses of the formerly radical groups are worth researching further, thus shedding some light on the possibility of new transformations in the future.

Illustrating the analogies and differences occurring between the first two waves of jihad – the national and the global models - will undoubtedly provide useful insights about newer phenomena such as the so-

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<sup>69</sup> Corrective Concepts Series.

<sup>70</sup> I. Dirbalah, member of the Islamic Group’s Shura Council, in Abd al-Latif al-Manawi, *Egyptian Islamic Group Leaders React to Abu-Hamzah Al-Masri’s Criticism*, July 4, 2003: [[www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov)].

<sup>71</sup> N. Ibrahim – A. al-Sharif – H. Abd-al-Rahman, Casting a Light on the Errors Made in Jihad, in P. Kamolnick, *The Egyptian Islamic Group’s Critique of Al-Qaeda’s Interpretation of Jihad*, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7( 5), 2013.

called wave of jihad embodied by the Islamic State galaxy, which does not fall within the scope of the dissertation.

In this respect, the choice not to include the Islamic State in the analysis will be addressed from different perspectives throughout the entire work. As an introductory word of caution, suffice it to say that the choice was based on two major points.

The first and simpler reason is that the phenomenon is too recent and its fate is too uncertain to be able to provide a truly complete and scientific assessment on the similarities and differences between Daesh and the older jihadi models.

The second reason why the Islamic State has been excluded from the work is that the present research aims at providing *preliminary* tools that can *later* be used to address the Islamic State as well.

In other words, the comparison between national and global jihad is inextricably related to the comparison between the first jihadi groups and al-Qa'ida, whereas the Islamic State represents the third era in the history of jihad, since it has been able to merge local and global strategies, instances, and rhetoric. Its enemy is the Far Enemy - the United States and the West in general - *and* the Near Enemy - the Shia regional enemy embodied by Iran, the Shia Muslims in the region, and the other religious minorities.

The potential contributions given by this work to the study of the third era of jihad will be dealt with more extensively in the following chapters.

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Finally, thank you, Mamma, Papà, and Rami.

## Note on Arabic terms and spelling

The scientific transcription has been chosen to transcribe the Arabic names and terms in this thesis. At the same time, the elected system is also intelligible to those who do not know Arabic.

Therefore, for Arabic words that are also used in the English language, the simplified phonetical transcription will replace the scientific one (ex. jihad instead of *ǧihād*)<sup>72</sup>, and this will be true for names as well (ex. Qaddafi instead of *Qadhdhāfi*), without writing these names in italics.

Moreover, for Arabic names that have regional variations (ex. Muhammad – Mohammed), the variation of the relevant context will be preferred.

The names of the Arab authors will follow the most common transcription they choose when publishing their works.

The glossary at the end of the work will list all the Arabic terms used throughout the dissertation.

All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from the English translation by N.J. Dawood, *The Koran*, second revised edition, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1966.

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<sup>72</sup> With the exception of the name of the Egyptian group.



Letter	Letter name	Chosen Transliteration	Pronunciation
ا	Alif	a	Like a in apple
ب	Bā'	b	Like b in baby
ت	Tā'	t	Like t in tree
ث	Thā'	th*	Like th in theory
ج	Ġim	ġ	Like j in jar <sup>73</sup>
ح	Hā'	ħ	Like h in he yet heavy in pronunciation
خ	Khā'	kh*	Like ch in the name Bach
د	Dāl	d	Like d in dad
ذ	Ḍāl	dh*	Like th in the
ر	Rā'	r	Like r in ram
ز	Zāy	z	Like z in zoo
س	Sīn	s	Like s in see
ش	Šīn	sh*	Like sh in she
ص	Ṣād	ṣ	Like s in sad yet heavy in pronunciation
ض	Ḍād	ḍ	Like d in dead yet heavy in pronunciation
ط	Tā'	ṭ	Like t in table yet heavy in pronunciation
ظ	Zā'	ẓ	Like z in Zorro yet heavy in pronunciation
ع	'ain	'	Arabic sound that represents a voiced pharyngeal fricative
غ	Ġain	gh*	Like gh in Ghandi
ف	Fā'	f	Like f in fool
ق	Qāf	q	Like q in queen yet heavy velar sound in pronunciation
ك	Kāf	k	Like k in Kate
ل	Lām	l	Like l in love
م	Mim	m	Like m in moon
ن	Nun	n	Like n in noon
ه	Hā'	h	Like h in he
و	Wāw	w or u	Like w in wow
ي	Yā'	y	Like y in you
ء	Hamza	'	It may have multiple grammatical values. It mostly signals an interruption of the vocal emission

\*For these letters, the simplified transcription has been preferred to the scientific one, thus making the reading smoother (here is the equivalent scientific transcription: th =  $\text{t}$  ; kh =  $\text{ħ}$  ; dh =  $\text{d}$  ; sh =  $\text{š}$  ; gh =  $\text{ġ}$ ).

<sup>73</sup> In Egyptian Arabic, it is pronounced like the g in girl.

# **I. The Rise of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy: The Historical Context**

The present chapter provides a preliminary overview of the historical context in which the two main Egyptian jihadi groups, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya (the Islamic Group, IG) and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy (the Islamic Jihad, IJ), were born.

The interested time span covers Anwar al-Sadat's presidency (1970-1981), but multiple references to the previous Nasser's era (1952-1970) are made to properly analyze the Egyptian socio-political and religious contexts of that time.

In particular, the crucial notions informing the chapter are the return of religion on the public stage and its impact on the emergence of the two radical groups.

The concept of *radical milieu* is utilized to describe a social environment that is likely to foster radicalization. It is a context that involves a collectivity of people that goes way beyond the terrorist groups themselves, but those groups cannot be understood in isolation from that *milieu*.

## **I.1 The return of religion on the public stage and Nasser's legacy**

The Egyptian historical and social context of the 1970s was characterized by multiple tensions, both dormant and manifest. Many of those tensions, ranging from those concerning the assessment of the heritage of Nasserism to those caused by the economical gap between the north and the south of the country, contributed to what has been defined "the return of religion on the public stage".<sup>74</sup>

A vast body of literature has been produced since the 1980s on the emergence of Islamist movements in the Middle East and the relevance of religion in the public arena. This literature offers different rationales for the materialization of new kinds of foes to the political regimes in the region.

Filling the void left by the leftist opposition, the Islamist militants appeared during the 1970s as new political actors. Therefore, less than a decade later, Egyptian and foreign scholars started to investigate the multifaceted reasons for the emergence first of Islamist activists, and later of jihadists.

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<sup>74</sup> Throughout the dissertation, the phrase "return of religion on the public stage" will be preferred to "Islamic resurgence" or "re-Islamization". The reason for this choice is the belief that the terms "resurgence" and "re-Islamization" do not seem to fully explain the gradualness of the process. Moreover, the latter suggests a return to an alleged Islamic or *more Islamic* past, which implies a simplistic interpretation of nineteenth century Egypt.

In fact, they were not expected by the state elites, who had previously initiated modernizing political and social reforms, or by political scientists who based their research on modernization-theory hypotheses.<sup>75</sup>

Both these perspectives had a blind belief in the supposed relation of direct causality between poverty and ignorance on the one side, and radicalism on the other. This belief was based on the assumption that people rely on radical beliefs and behaviors exclusively when they experience absolute or relative<sup>76</sup> economic and social disadvantage.

The so-called Islamic resurgence, which was taking place in an era of modernization and progress, aroused bewilderment and confusion.

In other words, a substantial part of the policymakers and scholars seemed to believe that, since Egypt, Africa, and the entire world were triumphantly moving towards technological advancements and progress in every sector of life, seeking refuge in religion was simply preposterous.

Gradually however, various scholars started to reject the theories implying a direct link between deprivation and increased religiosity and suggested more nuanced and sophisticated models and perspectives.<sup>77</sup>

The return of Islam on the public stage and the increase in religiously-oriented activism can be defined as the marked increment of religious activities and narratives, involving the participation of greater numbers of individuals and groups than one would generally expect under the previous circumstances. Egypt's return of Islam in the public arena can be described as an even broader movement of action, participation, and generalized support for the presence of religion in private and public life.<sup>78</sup>

In spite of the consternation with which these new trends were initially watched, the return of religion on the public stage and the subsequent developments had been anticipated by clear signs and the growth in the political and social weight of religion has obviously been a gradual phenomenon.

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<sup>75</sup> M. Zeghal, Religion and Politics in Egypt: the Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952 – 94), *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31(3), Aug 1999, p. 371.

<sup>76</sup> Compared to other social groups.

<sup>77</sup> See M. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004 and *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008; S. Malthaner, *The Radical Milieu*, Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung (IKG), Bielefeld, November 2010; A. P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, Egypt's Islamic activism in the 1980s, *Third World Quarterly* 10(2), 1988, p. 632.

Long before the rise of the Islamist students' groups, for instance – which will be dealt with shortly - Islamist thought started its process of reconstruction, primarily in the concentration camps created by Nasser's regime for political opponents.<sup>79</sup>

After seizing power on July 23, 1952, Gamal 'Abdel Nasser started to ensure that no discordant voices were raised to challenge the regime, and the following year, in January 1953, all the political parties were dissolved by decree.

The Muslim Brotherhood (Ġamā'a al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn), however, the then only Islamic mass organization on the Egyptian landscape,<sup>80</sup> was initially exempted from this measure, mainly because it had the status of an association and not of a party.

Another crucial reason for this temporary dispensation was that, considering Brotherhood's size and appeal among the citizens, the regime was not ready to deal with a direct confrontation with the group and in 1953 such a step would have been too hazardous.

Tension escalated in 1954, the year in which Nasser officially assumed the presidency announcing that Mohammed Nagib (Moḥammed Naġīb) was relieved from the post. On October 26, Maḥmūd'Abd al-Laṭīf, a member of the Brotherhood, tried to assassinate the President while he was delivering a speech in Alexandria, thus giving the regime a good reason for the first crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood.

On their side, the Brothers were harbouring ill-concealed hostility towards the President, and in addition to viewing Nasser as a secularist, the Muslim Brothers had a more specific grievance.

Indeed, on October 1, 1954, the president had signed a new agreement with Great Britain extending the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 for five years.

The provisions stipulated that, if Turkey was attacked, Great Britain had the right to re-enter Egypt for defensive purposes, which led the Brotherhood to denounce Nasser for selling Egypt out to the West.

In the crackdown that followed the assassination attempt, Maḥmūd'Abd al-Laṭīf and five other leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were hanged on December 9, and within a couple of weeks five hundred Brothers were also in jail.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> G.Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt. The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993. p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906 – 1949), a primary school teacher in Ismailiya, near the Suez Canal. See: H. al-Banna, *Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna: A Selection from the "Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna"*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978, pp. 150-155 and A. Abu al-Futūḥ, *Shāhid 'ala Tārīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiya fi Miṣr 1917-1984* [Witness of the History of the Islamic Movement in Egypt 1970 - 1984], Dār al-Shurūq, 2010.

These events drastically worsened the relation between the group and the regime, which burned the Brotherhood's headquarters, arrested its leaders and confined many members in concentration camps.<sup>82</sup>

After few years of dormant tension, a new crackdown on the Brotherhood took place. In a speech on August 29, 1965, Nasser announced that the security apparatus had thwarted a Brotherhood plot to kill him and overthrow the government.

This time as many as 27,000 people were arrested, and on August 29, 1966, the ideologue Sayyid Qutb was hanged in Cairo.<sup>83</sup>

Most of the leaders of the Brotherhood were held in Tura prison, in Cairo's southern suburbs, living in terror of the final solution to the problem they posed for the regime.<sup>84</sup>

In one episode, according to Kepel, fearing that they would be killed if they reported for the normal daily work - rock-breaking - they refused to do the forced labour, locking themselves in their cells, but armed soldiers broke into the cells and massacred twenty-one of them, but after the incident the authorities said that they had put down a rebellion.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, sympathizers of the organization founded by Ḥassan al-Bannā outside the prison walls began to meet again, adopting a low profile and periodically facing new crackdowns by the regime.

Some of these small, informal cells, contributed in the creation of the breeding ground for the following wave of armed Islamism.

In addition to the role of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been unquestionably significant in shaping the socio-political landscape and the religiosity of the last decades in Egypt, the so-called *re-Islamization*

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<sup>81</sup> A. Nutting, *Nasser*, Dutton, New York, 1972, p. 73.

<sup>82</sup> Interrupting his prepared speech, Nasser shouted: <<Let them kill Nasser. What is Nasser but one among many? My fellow countrymen, stay where you are. I am not dead, I am alive, and even if I die all of you is Gamal `Abd al-Nasser>>.

Understandably, some regarded Nasser's reaction as a bit too cool and suspected him of staging the assassination attempt.

<sup>83</sup> The role of Sayyid Qutb in the Egyptian jihadi landscape will be dealt with extensively in the following sections of the dissertation.

<sup>84</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood see B. Zollner, Prison Talk: The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Struggle during Gamal Abdel Nasser's Persecution, 1954 to 1971, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39(3), Aug. 2007, pp. 411-433 and A. Ranko, *The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony in Egypt*, Springer, New York City, 2015.

<sup>85</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 28.

of society is also related to the contemporary weakening of the official Islam, embodied by al-Azhar, which has led an increasing number of individuals to search for a new, stronger Islamic alternative.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, what Saad Eddin Ibrahim terms *establishment Islam*<sup>87</sup> was undergoing significant changes, which were particularly evident in the case of al-Azhar, the Muslim world's oldest and foremost religious university.

Al-Azhar was the symbol of establishment Islam par excellence, but this strand of Egyptian Islam was also embodied by the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*Awqāf*). Since the time of Mohammed 'Ali (1805-1848) these two bodies have formed the religious arm of the State, allowing the central power to have a firm grip on the mosques and religious activities on the ground.

Before falling under the increasingly strong control of the state, al-Azhar had been an important institution for the powerless masses *vis a vis* the rulers and had been able to counterbalance the top-down power with bottom-up perspectives, whereas with their incorporation into the state, the sheikhs (*shuyūkh*) and scholars became in effect state employees, losing their independence and consequently much of their political role.

Nasser's reform of al-Azhar in 1961, aimed at modernizing the religious institution, in fact weakened it further. The reform suddenly deprived the '*ulamā'*' of their economic independence and dispossessed them of their judicial power, the role of the al-Azhar thinkers narrowed, and they started to resemble salaried workers, who were paid to confer religious legitimacy on the regime's political decisions and policies.

Other provisions included in the reform focused on broadening the scope of secular teachings and modern faculties were added to the religious ones, while the bureaucracy was expanding to an unprecedented extent.

In fact, Nasser's first steps to undermine the independence of al-Azhar had been taken even earlier, in 1952, through land reform laws, which put all the *waqf* lands - grown since the time of Muhammad `Ali to represent some 12% of all arable lands - under the control of the Ministry of Endowments. Consequently, this new organism gained control over mosques, a practice that has continued since Nasser's time up to the present.

Moreover, Law 462 of 1955 abolished the Sharia Courts, along with all Christian ecclesiastical and rabbinical communal courts, the *milliyah*.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Al-Azhar was founded between 970 and 972 by the Fatimids as a centre of Islamic learning.

<sup>87</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic activism in the 1980s*, p. 635.

At the same time, however, following a dichotomy that would characterize many other regimes in Muslim-majority countries, during his presidency Nasser was always aware of the need to stress the religious legitimization of his power. In 1956 for instance, he chose al-Azhar's pulpit to address the Egyptians during the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel, thus exploiting the undeniable unifying power of religion and masterfully superimposing it on the challenged national pride.

Not surprisingly, the reshaping of al-Azhar was one of the root causes of the following decade's clash between the official establishment Islam and Egyptian jihadi groups, which accused the former of being unable to give more than interpretations of Islam that answered the needs of those in power.

In the Islamist discourse, these religious token-men began to be derogatorily portrayed as *babbaghāwāt al-manābir*, "parrots of the pulpits".<sup>89</sup> According to those radicalized and radicalizing individuals, the 'ulamā' and the *shuyūkh*<sup>90</sup> of the establishment Islam were nothing more than state employees, bureaucrats, formalists, and opportunists who were perverting Islam and profiting from this betrayal, thus becoming religious mercenaries.<sup>91</sup>

At that point, what the powerful did not understand was that, by weakening the religious authorities, the rulers were diluting civil societies' defences against jihadism. Limiting the religious establishment meant creating the room for an alternative and potentially more appealing religious discourse committed to denouncing the uselessness of the clerics.

In this respect, a few years later, Ayman al-Zawahiri complained that:

Any writer – such as Faraḡ Foda<sup>92</sup> – can object to and ridicule the sharia rulings. Any journalist can lambaste the government and object to its rules, decisions, and laws. The only one who cannot do anything is the mosque preacher. This is because article 201 of the penal code says:  
"No one in a house of worship can say something that opposes an administrative decision or an existing law or regulation. Anyone who does this faces

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<sup>88</sup> The law moved matters of personal status to the civil courts and out of the religious courts. However, personal status law in the civil courts remained grounded in religion and there was no real secular personal status law in Egypt.

<sup>89</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s*, p. 637.

<sup>90</sup> Plural of sheikh.

<sup>91</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> The thinker and writer who was killed in 1992 by the Islamic Group. The event will be dealt with in the second chapter, which will be entirely focused on the Islamic Group itself.

imprisonment and is fined 500 pounds. If he resists, the fine and imprisonment are doubled.”

Further, the only people who are not allowed to form trade unions – a right that is guaranteed even to belly dancers in Egypt – are the religious preachers and scholars.<sup>93</sup>

Speaking about the attitude of the Egyptian regimes towards Islam, al-Zawahiri provided a lucid analysis of their exploitation of religion:

Military secularism always claimed that it respected Islam. But this respect had only one meaning for it, namely, employing religious scholars to pour praise on it and justify its acts.<sup>94</sup>

## **I.2 The role of the Islamic students’ unions**

After the secular era of Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat became President on October 15, 1970. During Sadat’s era, religiously oriented activism grew dramatically and it is not untenable to state that one of the first real successes of Islamic militants in Egypt occurred when they took over student politics.<sup>95</sup> According to a number of scholars, the student groups constituted the Islamist movement’s only genuine mass organizations.<sup>96</sup>

The first *gamā āt-like* group is said to have been founded at Qasr al-'Ayni hospital in 1970 by young doctors and interns who had been influenced by the Brotherhood prisoners they were treating,<sup>97</sup> but the group soon spread to the medical faculties of Cairo, Ayn Shams, al-Azhar universities and elsewhere.

They were able to drive the leftist movements underground and to begin to exploit opposition to the policy of peace with Israel, which would be denounced by the General Union of Egyptian Students, at that time under Islamist control.

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<sup>93</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet’s Banner*, in L. Mansfield, *In His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, United States, 2006, pp. 70 – 71.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>95</sup> S. Reed, *The Battle for Egypt*, *Foreign Affairs* 72(4), 1993, p. 94.

<sup>96</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 127.

<sup>97</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 63.



Initially, they were not organized in *ḡamā'āt*, collective movements, but in special clubs, *usār* (sing. *usra*), which in many cases would become recruiting ground for radicals. Soon, the *usār* found the key to success: discreet, tactical collaboration with the regime to further break the left's domination on the campuses.

Moreover, this particular form of activism gained strength from what has been effectively termed communalism,<sup>98</sup> a tendency that springs directly from the use of religion as a group marker to define one community against another.

Through their religious form of communalism in university campuses and in dormitories and mosques, these students succeeded in creating Islamized spaces, in which local groups enforced their version of religious values over people living within well-defined areas.<sup>99</sup>

Undoubtedly, the freedom of action they enjoyed was also possible thanks to the condition that the country's universities were experiencing.

Gilles Kepel provides a harsh critique of Egyptian high education, in which the number of students rose from less than two hundred thousand in 1970 to more than half a million in 1977, thus leaving the system largely unequipped.

In this context, the religious groups exploited the students' problems to propose their immediate and *catchy* solutions.

The infrastructure was deficient, and it was not unusual to share a seat or to sit on the floor while attending lessons, while the dormitories were overcrowded.

Courses used to discourage creativity by stressing the rote memorization of concepts. Salaries for the teachers were derisory, so they were scarcely motivated and sought higher incomes. Hundreds of them migrated to the Gulf countries, thus contributing to the lack of quality teaching in Egypt.

A further, huge problem was the existence of a rigid system of selection by discipline: every year the newspapers used to publish the high-school diploma scores below which each particular faculty would refuse to accept first-year students.

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<sup>98</sup> R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 157.

<sup>99</sup> O. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 80 – 81

The highest scores were required for medicine, pharmacology, engineering, and economics, while the other departments competed for the mediocre. Entire fields of knowledge were relegated to what Egyptian themselves still call “garbage faculties” and this was the status, for example, of the humanities.<sup>100</sup>

According to Kepel, in this systematically discriminatory system the indelible stamp of Nasserism, which preferred to train technicians instead of intellectuals, was apparent.

Within this demeaning situation, Islamist students started to speak a language that was easily understood by the mass of their fellows, organized summer camps, published magazines and pamphlets, and set up committees for religion and society.

Exceptional measures and precautions were taken in order to address the promiscuity that threatened the female students’ modesty in the classrooms and buses. The new movement encouraged the return of the veil, imposed segregation of the sexes in different rows, and set up bus services to carry the young women from their lodging to the university.

Since the demand for these services was high, the unions had to find a criterion to decide who was eligible. Not surprisingly, the choice was based on Islamic attire, which was first preferable, and later compulsory, in order to be able to enjoy the new services and protect one’s own *modesty*.

For underprivileged students, who represented the majority, the Islamic unions launched group revision sessions at the mosques and reproduced cheap editions of the manuals, which significantly helped them to contain costs.

A telling overview of the crystal-clear goals of the students’ unions was provided by Usāma Rushdī, leader of Asyut University’s union who stated that, among the main objectives, the union listed segregating the sexes, forbidding all the un-Islamic forms of entertainment, and encouraging prayer and piety.<sup>101</sup>

The ways to achieve these objectives were extremely diverse and it was not infrequent for Islamist students to use coercion, book burnings, attacks on different ideologies, westernized costumes, and the Coptic communities, represented either by other students or members of the faculty.

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<sup>100</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 137.

<sup>101</sup> *Al Musāwwar*, “Interview with the Leader of the Islamic Group in Asyut”, April 11, 1986.

According to Barry Rubin, a key to the campus groups' popularity was their ability to provide a rebellion that was a relatively "safe" rebellion, because they were affirming, rather than rejecting, their traditional cultural and religious roots.<sup>102</sup>

As a side note, this is a path that Islamist groups – whether they are radical or not - have always walked. Their revolutionary strength lies in the power of their narrative concerning the past. Since Islam gave Muslims all what they need to be pious and feel fulfilled, revolution does not imply innovation.

On the contrary, it is a return to a more Islamic, less secular and westernized past. This discourse culminates in the *Salāfiya*, the school of Sunni Islam that condemns theological innovation and advocates adherence to the social and legal structures existing in the earliest days of Islam, the days of the *Salāf*, "ancestors", or "predecessors", i.e. the prophet Muhammad and his companions.<sup>103</sup>

Moving along this pathway, the new religious groups were responding to problems created by modernity – such as promiscuity, overcrowding, and big city life – with a conservative ethos and an efficient praxis, and when a revolutionary ideology is able to arise as a return to the past rather than a gamble on the

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<sup>102</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Salafism emerged in the late nineteenth century through the elaboration of a number of thinkers. Salafists viewed the *Salāf* as an eternal model for all succeeding Muslim generations, and believed that the only way to fight the moral, social, and political decadence and Westernization of the Muslim countries was to go back to their example of Islamic purity.

The movement's primary representatives were the Persian thinker Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni (1838-1897) and the Egyptian Islamic jurist Mohammed 'Abdu (1849-1905), whose main objective was to rid the Umma of centuries of unquestioning imitation of precedent (*taqlid*) and improve the moral, cultural, and political conditions of Muslims by proving the compatibility of Islam with science and modernity.

Among the primary works by al-Afghāni see *Risālāt al-waridāt fi sirr al-tağalliyāt* [Treatise of Mystical Inspirations], Cairo, 1968, a work dictated by Afghani to his student Mohammed 'Abduh when he was in Egypt and *Tatimmāt al-Bayān fi Tārīkh al-Afghān* [Dissertation on the History of Afghanistan], Cairo, 1879, a political, social and cultural history of Afghanistan.

As far as the thought of Mohammed 'Abdu is concerned, see *Durūs min al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* [Studies from the holy Qur'an], (no date), and *The Theology of Unity*, trans. by Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg. London, 1966.

One generation later, the Syro-Egyptian thinker Rashid Ridā (1865-1935) was the main disciple of al-Afghāni and 'Abdu and his ideas would later influence the 20th-century's Islamic thought. Following his predecessors, Ridā would be the most influential Salafi scholar of his generation.

Rida's desire to reform religious practices of his time found expression when he joined the Naqshbandiyyah sufi order and decided to study with the pan-Islamist thinker Jamal al-Afghāni.

Upon al-Afghani's death, Rida went to Cairo to study with the al-Afghāni's most eminent student, Muhammad 'Abduh. Milestones of his thought are *The Muhammadan Revelation*. Translated by Y. DeLorenzo, Al-Saadawi Publications, Alexandria, 1996 and *Christian Criticism, Islamic Proof: Rashid Rida's Modernist Defence of Islam*. Translated by Simon A. Wood, Oneworld, Oxford, 2008. For 'Abdu's and Rida's life and thought see M H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966.

For a detailed study of the role of Salafism in the Islamic thought see E. Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, Humanities Press, New York, 1966 and A. B. Soage, Rashid Ridā's Legacy, *The Muslim World* 98(1), 2008, pp. 1 – 23.

future, it is likely to enjoy an immediate credibility that cannot be easily eradicated, obviously attracting and co-opting sympathizers in multiple social groups.

Predictably, in trying to compete with the services and the values provided by the groups, the state found itself in a predicament. Anwar al-Sadat's rhetoric was centered on the character of the President Believer, and annihilating students' Islamic activism would work against that. At the same time, those unions were gaining power and autonomy, spreading potentially subversive discourses and points of view that were not necessarily those of the regime.

Al-Sadat was at a crossroads. On the one side, suppressing them would mean undermining the President's own image and what thousands of students wanted and the state was not able to provide for them. On the other, giving complete freedom to the Islamic Unions would mean allowing them to grow both inside and outside the borders of the campuses.

Initially, the government was not able to move away from this impasse and exploited the Islamist students against the left, although it was highly skeptical of the potential consequences of this move.

By the mid-1970s, the scattered students' clubs had been transformed into a nationwide organization with branches on every campus and each university had its own *shūra*, "consultative council" and an emir who chaired it.

In light of these developments, Sadat eventually decided to gradually change the governmental approach towards religious activism and took a series of decisive initiatives.

The regime's new tactic relied on a sequence of different actions. Initially, in an attempt to weaken them financially, he refused to honor various payment orders issued by those Student Union committees that were under Islamist control. Later, in summer 1977, the Islamist camps were simply shut down, and this decision caused two major effects.

First, Islamist student activists now enjoyed an aura of martyrdom which historically comprises an important role in all the Islamist narratives. Indeed, the Islamist discourse tends to include a long-lasting culture of victimhood and self-pity, according to which pious Muslims are invariably oppressed and discriminated against.

Second, they were now forced to break out of the university ghetto - access to which had been made extremely difficult for them - thus expanding their area of influence.

As mentioned before, tension escalated after the March 1979 Camp David Accords, which were strongly opposed by the whole galaxy of Islamist activists in Egypt and elsewhere.<sup>104</sup>

In an attempt to contain their influence on society, Sadat started to blame the students' associations for violence and Christian-Muslim clashes, and hundreds of their members were arrested as the laws governing student activity and organizations became tougher.

The parabola of the Islamic students' unions first of the national radical groups later, exhibited multiple stages, progressions and setbacks, and the lines between the different phases are inevitably blurred.

Nevertheless, in the search for a clear landmark that preceded the birth of the jihadi groups that will be analyzed in this dissertation, one event must be mentioned.

This event is largely acknowledged as the official birth of the Tanzim, literally "organization", which represented the ancestor of both the two major Egyptian jihadi groups of the last century, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād.

The Tanzim had its origin after the Military College incident on April 18, 1974, when one hundred members of the Islamic Liberation Organization (ILO) attacked the Military Technical College in Cairo. Their project included the murder of President Sadat and top military and security officials who were attending an institutional event with him. The second goal was to seize radio and television buildings and announce the birth of the Islamic Republic of Egypt.

A plan was prepared pursuant to which the group members would silently overpower the policemen guarding the college gate, enter the college, and seize weapons and armored vehicles with the help of students acting as night supervisors. They would then march toward the Arab Socialist Union headquarters to attack Sadat and his government officials who were meeting there.

As a matter of common knowledge, the coup failed, ninety-five members of the Islamic Liberation Organization were arrested and tried, thirty-two were convicted, and two were executed.

Nevertheless, among the surviving followers of the ILO, which was dismantled after the attack, some gradually rebuilt themselves as a group, which would be the embryo of both al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād.

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<sup>104</sup> For the full English text of the Camp David Accords see Camp David Accord, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/camp%20david%20accords.aspx>].

Ayman al-Zawahiri himself would give a detailed account of the Military Technical College affair in his *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, explaining that the Military Technical College group began to be formed after the arrival of Sāliḥ Sirīāh in Egypt, where he started to make contacts with Muslim Brotherhood symbols, such as Zaynāb al-Ghazālī<sup>105</sup> and Ḥasan al-Ḥudāybi<sup>106</sup>, and to form a group of young people, urging them to confront the ruling regime.

According to the current leader of al-Qa'ida, Sāliḥ Sirīāh was a Palestinian-born highly intellectual thinker who lived in Jordan until the Jordanian army defeated the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1970 and then moved on to Iraq and Cairo,<sup>107</sup> where he received a doctorate in education from Ain Shams University.<sup>108</sup>

Al-Zawahiri met Sirīāh once before he was able to create the group, which later encompassed a number of Military Technical College Students.<sup>109</sup>

Ayman al-Zawahiri insists on claiming that, despite the failure of the coup attempt, the Islamic movement after 'Abd el Nasser was too big to be eradicated and too strong to be pushed into despair and frustration:<sup>110</sup> In the following decades, history would prove him right.

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<sup>105</sup> She was the founder of the Muslim Women's Association, which partly merged with the Brotherhood. After the assassination of Ḥasan al-Banna in 1949, Al-Ghazālī played a significant role in regrouping the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1960s. Imprisoned for her activities in 1965, she was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor but was released under Anwar al-Sadat in 1971.

Al-Ghazali was certainly the most prominent woman to distinguish herself in the Egyptian Islamist pantheon.

<sup>106</sup> He was the second "General Guide", *muršid*, of the Muslim Brotherhood, appointed in 1951 after founder Hassan al-Banna's assassination two years earlier. Al-Ḥudāybi held the position until his death in 1973. Once al-Ḥudāybi entered office, he condemned the violence that characterized the movement from 1946-1949 and ordered that the Brotherhood dissolve their secret military branch. This created deep tensions between him and other high-ranking members supportive of the Secret Apparatus.

He was victim of the crackdown that followed Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Laṭīf's attempt to assassinate President 'Abd al-Nasser in October of 1954, and al-Ḥudāybi's was sentenced to life in prison.

While in prison, al-Ḥudāybi wrote *Du'āt la Qudāt*, "Preachers, not Judges", which was published after his death in 1977.

Gilles Kepel argues that the text is a refutation of Sayyid Quṭb's *Ma'ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* and a promotion of moderation and non-violence against the takfirist tendencies of Qutbism.

See G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004.

<sup>107</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 56.

<sup>108</sup> A. Al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, in L. Mansfield, *In His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, United States, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>109</sup> More details about Sāliḥ Sirīāh will be provided in Chapter II, pp. 63 – 92.

<sup>110</sup> A. Al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, p. 55.

### **I.3 Sadat and inter-confessional clashes**

As mentioned before, the re-emergence of Islam on the public stage during the Seventies was not an exclusively bottom-up process, but was also a top-down set of decisions and strategies implemented by the state.

Between 1970 and 1985, the state-supported mosques more than doubled the number of religious educational institutions, their student intake more than tripled, the number of radio and television hours of religious programs quadrupled during the same period and publications issued by al-Azhar and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA), which affirmed the officially approved version of Islam, also increased fourfold.<sup>111</sup>

The government boosted Islamic courses in schools, built mosques and employed Islamic rhetoric in public statements. President Sadat also gave the Egyptian-Israeli War of 1973 an Islamic significance as it was waged during Ramadan. After the perceived victory for Egypt in 1973, Islamic euphoria led more people to adopt Islamic attire, and mosque attendance and religious literature consumption increased in number.<sup>112</sup>

Meantime, an interesting sociological top-down phenomenon also took place. Usually, the lower classes tend to imitate behaviors and customs of the upper classes. At the same time, however, the upper classes tend to imitate the behaviors and customs of those in the lower classes who are on the rise.

In other words, the most appealing condition is not being at the top, but experiencing an ascent and the upper classes tend to be fascinated by the most dynamic classes, even if they represent a lower social stratum.

This is exactly what happened in Egypt, and this phenomenon was observed in the choice to give newborns traditional names rather than Western or Turkish names, in the increasing popularity of traditional Arabic music, and in fashion, which retrieved what not long before had been associated with farmers and low-income classes.

The return to religion experienced and publicly displayed by the lower classes was internalized by part of the upper classes, thus ceasing to be a class-bound phenomenon.

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<sup>111</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s*, p. 637.

<sup>112</sup> J. L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1992, pp. 10 – 11.

At the same time, Sadat's state was adopting a markedly Islamic appearance that also led it to give quite inconsistent responses to the inter-confessional clashes that took place between the Seventies and the beginning of the Eighties.<sup>113</sup>

The worst of them occurred in al-Zawiyya al-Ḥamra – a poor and overcrowded neighborhood in Cairo - in June 1981. The origins of the events are not clear, and the various accounts are contradictory. Some say that it started with an altercation between a Muslim and a Christian, and others that militants from the Islamist groups had taken over a land lot owned by a Copt to build a mosque on it.

The situation quickly worsened, the clashes broadened to the whole neighborhood, men and women were slaughtered, babies were thrown from windows, and houses were burnt.

Speaking of the reaction of the state, according to most witnesses, the police intervened only after irreparable damage had already been done,<sup>114</sup> as if a decision had been made to give people, especially the Muslims, an accessible outlet.

By contrast, in September of the same year Sadat hardened his attitude towards radical Islam, the Islamic students' unions were dissolved, and their leaders arrested.

One month later Sadat was killed by Khaled al-Islambouli (Khāled al-Islāmbūli).<sup>115</sup>

In highlighting the link between the weaknesses of the educational system, the Islamic Unions of students, and the prospective jihadists, Gilles Kepel conclusively notes:

They were the children of the rural exodus, and they arrived in the suburbs with outdated customs. Contrary to their expectations, however, education (even higher education) failed to provide them with the keys to modernity. It is from these circles that the heavy battalions of the Islamist movement were drawn. They were the living symbols, and their numbers were massive, of the failure of the independent state's modernization projects.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the inter-confessional relation during Nasser's regime see A. Melcangi, *I copti nell'Egitto di Nasser. Tra politica e religione (1952-1970)* [Copts in Nasser's Egypt. Between Politics and Religion], Carocci Editore, Rome, 2017, while for the contemporary situation of Egyptian Copts see M. Maḡīb 'abd al-Mon'im Mus'ad, *Al-Aqbāṭ wa muṭālibuhum fi Miṣr bayna al-taḍmīn wa al-istib'ād* [Copts and their demands in Egypt between inclusion and exclusion], Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'arabiya, 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

<sup>115</sup> The killing of Anwar al-Sadat and its consequences will be assessed in the Chapter III, pp. 97 – 123.

<sup>116</sup> J. L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, p. 177.



In the 1980s, after the hardening of Sadat's attitude towards them, the religious groups' horizons broadened, and while maintaining de facto control of some campuses, they moved out into slum neighbourhoods such as Cairo's Imbaba and the rural backwaters of Upper Egypt.

Inevitably, the new offspring of assertive Islamist youth attracted the Muslim Brotherhood, which repeatedly tried to incorporate it into the older movement.

In 1977, the Muslim Brothers were able to recruit the emirs of Cairo, Alexandria, and al-Minya universities. However, they were not able to recruit the leaders of the religious group in Asyut University, Nāḡiḡ Ibrahīm and Karam Zuhdi, who would later emerge as co-founders of al-Ġamā'ā al-Islāmiya.

In this scenario, after what was essentially a failure of the incorporation attempts made by the movement founded by Ḥassan al-Banna, the rivalries between the Brotherhood and the newer representatives of the Egyptian Islamist landscape begun to be more intense and explicit and their relationship was particularly complicated due to a complex mixture of similarities and differences that were both ideological and behavioral.

Describing al-Ġamā'ā al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy either as breakaway groups from the Brotherhood or as two of its branches would be simplistic and misleading. However, it is undeniable that the Brotherhood and the developing jihadi groups shared a substantial portion of ideological and cultural substratum.

From a doctrinal perspective, before and after the Afghan experience, the ideological foundations of both the Brotherhood and the jihadi movements of the nineteenth century lie in the thoughts of Sayyid Quṭb (1906 – 1966), the Egyptian thinker who elaborated the most important modern theory of jihad.<sup>117</sup>

For almost two decades, Quṭb was a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (1950s and 1960s),<sup>118</sup>

He was disturbed by the social ills he witnessed in Egypt, and attributed them to an erosion of public piety among Egyptians.

In his *Ma'ālim fi al-Ṭarīq*<sup>119</sup>, *Milestones*, he highlights what he calls “the human bankruptcy in the domain of the values”, and clearly states that humanity needs a new direction.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> For a complete analysis of the thought of Sayyid Quṭb and his role in the making of the jihadist ideology see, beside his works: S. Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Quṭb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*, Routledge, London, 2006 and *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Quṭb*, Routledge, London, 2009; J. Calvert, *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

<sup>118</sup> Although he did not formally join the movement until 1953.

<sup>119</sup> Since 1981, some chapters of the book have been expunged from the most widely circulated edition, published by the Egyptian-Lebanese publishing house Dār al-Shurūq.

With reference to the monarchy first and Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser later, Quṭb explains that both the individualist and collectivist ideologies had failed. Therefore, it was now the turn of Islam.

However, humanity as a whole would not listen to an abstract belief that could not be corroborated by tangible facts and for this reason. For this reason, a vanguard would be necessary for the advent of a truly Muslim society.

The vanguard of the Umma had to decide when to withdraw from and when to seek contact with the *ḡāhiliya*<sup>121</sup> that surrounded it.

If the doctrinal and operational notion of vanguard largely informed those who remained in the Muslim Brotherhood without embracing violent jihadism, Quṭb’s concept of *ḡāhiliya* partly distances the mainstream Brotherhood from the radicalizing factions that were emerging.

According to Gilles Kepel, Quṭb’s trans-historical use of the concept of *ḡāhiliya* marks a notable departure from the Muslim Brotherhood dogma, since the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideologues before Quṭb never dreamed of accusing Egyptian society of being *ḡāhily*.<sup>122</sup>

Indeed, the status of *ḡāhily* implies being pre-Islamic and, consequently, non-Islamic. Any accusation of being pre-Islamic would automatically imply that someone is simply non-Muslim. The further step would be the *takfīr* over the rulers and the corrupt society:

Any society in which something other<sup>123</sup> than God alone is worshipped is *ḡāhiliya* (...) Thus, we must include in this category all the societies that now exist on earth.<sup>124</sup>

On August 29, 1966, Sayyid Quṭb was executed by the Nasserist regime, and the Muslim Brotherhood began to formally distance itself from the radical message of the late ideologue, despite the efforts of his brother, Muhammad Quṭb, who in 1975 published a letter in *al-Siḡāb*, the magazine of the Lebanese branch of the Brotherhood, speaking against those who accused him of having expressed ideas contrary to the doctrine of the movement.

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<sup>120</sup> S. Quṭb, *Ma’ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones], p. 9.

<sup>121</sup> “Ignorance”. This term has a fundamental relevance both for the Islamic and for the Islamist-jihadi thought. It refers to the ignorance that preceded the Quranic revelation to the prophet Muhammad. In the jihadi narrative, it is used to indicate the morally corrupt conditions of the contemporary Muslim countries in general and Egypt in particular.

<sup>122</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 46.

<sup>123</sup> Power, material goods, money, etc.

<sup>124</sup> S. Quṭb, *Ma’ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones], p. 98.

From an organizational perspective, it is impossible to compare the Muslim Brotherhood with the two first Egyptian jihadi groups, and this due to the multiple crucial differences in terms of numbers, size, scope, and outreach.

Nevertheless, a comparison is possible between the jihadi groups and the notorious *ġihāz al-sirry* (Secret Apparatus) of the Brotherhood.

After the creation of the movement (1928) al-Banna permitted the establishment of an internal paramilitary organisation known as the “secret apparatus,” which represented the organisation's commitment to jihad and participated in political violence such as the assassination of the Prime Minister Maḥmūd el-Nuqrāshi (December 28, 1948).<sup>125</sup>

As Alison Pargeter highlights, this decision challenges the common view of al-Banna as a “beacon of moderation.”<sup>126</sup>

Later, having apparently learned from its experience with Nasser, the Brotherhood had supported Sadat in his battle against the left but had split with him over the peace initiative towards Israel in 1977.

After the repeated waves of repression led by Nasser, the Muslim Brothers had started to adopt a remarkably lower profile.

In the meantime, the Islamic student groups considered the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn representatives of a soft – and weak – Islamism; the Brotherhood's pragmatism was *Islamically* unacceptable, let alone its greater tolerance of Sufis and Shi'ites.<sup>127</sup>

Most important, however, was the different conception of violence between the two groups, since the Muslim Brotherhood had formally renounced to violence as a means of achieving its goals after its members' gradual release from prison in the early 1970s. On the contrary at that time, the younger Islamists were going in the opposite direction, strengthening their willingness to use violence.

As mentioned before, the Muslim Brotherhood had been dissolved by Nasser in 1954, after one of its members allegedly attempted to assassinate the President while he was delivering a speech in Alexandria and, at the beginning of the Seventies, the Brotherhood was continuing to keep a low profile and was trying to reorganize its activity, which was a markedly different condition from that of the *ġamā'āt*.

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<sup>125</sup> A. Pargeter, *Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power*, Saqi Books, London, 2013.

<sup>126</sup> E. Trager, *The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power*, Policy Analysis, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Summer 2013.

<sup>127</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 46.

This discrepancy reflected the different phases of the two groups' existence. On the one side, the Muslim Brotherhood was given a chance after a decade-long backlash and was closely monitored, it had lost many members and the sense of defeat was incumbent. On the other side, the movements that would form the Islamic Group and al-Ġihād possessed a much stronger energy and were in the ascendant phase of their radicalization paths.

The Brothers were longing for a shade of Islamism which did not promote a major upheaval or the toppling of social hierarchies and they were making significant inroads into the professional corporations – by seizing control of the physicians', pharmacists', engineers', and lawyers' unions, a sign of their entrenchment in the educated middle classes.

At the same time, the newer wave of activism was gaining speed and in 1981, outside of Egyptian campuses, only six thousand out of the total forty-six thousand mosques were under the control of the Ministry of Religious Endowments,<sup>128</sup> which clearly demonstrates the ideological ferment in the Egyptian Islamist panorama of the time.

As stated before, the return of religion on the public stage was also a top-down strategy, and in trying to establish his own power base and to eliminate any opposition against him, President Sadat undertook to remove the Nasserite elements from the government.

In the process, he empowered the Islamists by providing the structures that facilitated their funding and administration, but the empowering of politically active Islamists would have disastrous consequences for the Sadat government and a few years later, when the President would assume the role of peacekeeper with Israel, especially through the Camp David Accords, many religious students as well as the Islamists would regard this as a betrayal.

During the honeymoon between the regime and the Islamic identity of the country, in exchange for conferring Islamic legitimation on the state, the religious dignitaries of the establishment Islam formulated demands for the Islamization of society, notably in the moral and cultural sphere.

Works deemed contrary to the ethics of Islam paid the price of this censure, from the original Arab text of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which was judged obscene, to the novels or essays of contemporary Egyptian writers.

With respect to people's reactions to these trends, it must be underlined that the heritage of Nasserism had left the popular classes exceptionally poorly equipped, both politically and organisationally. The mass

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<sup>128</sup> H. Ansari, *The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1), 1986.

organisations of Nasserism did not work to mobilize citizens behind the regime, but rather to liquidate all forms of collective autonomous organization towards co-optation and repression.

Thus, popular mobilization became a function of a direct relationship between the leader and his people, and that of Nasser was probably the most personalized government in the entirety of Egyptian history.<sup>129</sup>

Consequently, the exceptional success of Nasserism, unexplained by the mere fact of despotism, is revealed in the extreme isolation of the political intelligentsia from the popular classes, with the majority of the former being appropriated into the regime's political organizations.

Inevitably, this represented a breeding ground for the search for meaning and agency, which in the following decades would acquire markedly Islamic features. The new wave of activism was creating communities of voluntary, highly motivated and self-policing believers that yielded greater degrees of internal cohesion and compliance than could be achieved by the absolutist authority.

In assessing the constituency from which the different groups drew consent and support, Hani Shukrallah<sup>130</sup> explains that the leftists and the Islamists relied on nearly identical sections of the student population – essentially its poorer groups.

This is a pertinent perspective. However, a word of caution is in order since, even though both the Islamists and the leftists relied on the underprivileged class, the scope of the Islamists' appeal was broader.

Indeed, the lowest, less educated class had rarely been influenced by the leftist ideology, which managed to catch on only among the members of the poor strata who had a sufficient level of political consciousness and who possessed a political vocabulary that was able to overcome the boundaries of exclusively religious discourses.

Therefore, the Islamist movement became the strongest political and social pole available for the expression of popular discontent.

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<sup>129</sup> H. Shukrallah, *Political Crisis and Political Conflict in Post-1967 Egypt*, in C. Tripp – R. Owen (Eds.), *Egypt Under Mubarak*, SOAS, Routledge, London, 1989.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

#### **I.4 Further reasons for the return of Islam on the public stage**

The legacy of the Nasser regime, the weakness of establishment Islam, the intellectual and social ferment of the Islamic students' unions, and the policies adopted by Anwar al-Sadat do not complete the list of reasons for the increase in and intensification of the Islamic dimension in the Egyptian society and politics of the Seventies.

Obviously, further reasons originated in different spheres of the *res publica*, which shows significant overlaps between domestic politics, international relations, economics, and culture.

In the following section, the financial situation of the country, the Six-Day War (June 5 – June 10, 1967), and the influence of the Iranian Revolutions will be analysed as further reasons for the return of Islam on the public stage.

According to James Toth, the Egyptian wave of Islamism took place at a conjuncture of three different trends in the global economy and regional politics that critically shaped Egypt's growing underdevelopment and the outbreak of violence that emerged as a militant attempt to repair it.<sup>131</sup>

First, there was a twenty-year worldwide recession induced by higher energy costs from the 1974 and 1979 oil price-hikes and, within the Third World, it was exacerbated further by the decline in petro-dollar investments after the 1985 collapse of oil prices.

The results polarized the new economic order. While some countries benefited from the transfers of First World capital, other countries, such as Egypt, were further impoverished since, like many other countries, Egypt suffered a debt crisis in the 1970s because of energy costs, a worldwide inflation, over-valued currency, stagnant public-sector industrialization, and a deteriorating agricultural sector.

Moreover, projects related to import substitution industrialization (ISI) failed for lack of investment, especially in new and more efficient technology.

From an economic perspective, the Egyptian situation was remarkably weak. Unable to accumulate foreign currency from agricultural or industrial exports, Cairo increasingly turned to international finance, and the 1979 Camp David treaty worsened the situation, with a decline in cotton exports, canal fees, and tourism.

Therefore, Egypt started to depend more and more on U.S. assistance and foreign aid, international bank loans, and income from emigrant workers.

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<sup>131</sup> J. Toth, Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35(4), Nov. 2003, p. 548.

A third factor emerged from Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War (June 5 – June 10, 1967), which aroused a deep disenchantment with centralized, state-led development and a popular rejection of Gamal Abdel Nasser's secular Arab nationalism and radical modernization programs.<sup>132</sup>

There is a universal consensus among scholars on the influence exerted by the defeat of the Arab countries on the following internal developments within the Egyptian borders and, undoubtedly, the Six-Day War in 1967 was an event that played a significant role in the shaping of Islamists' worldview.

The Arab armies were defeated at the hands of Israel and Israel occupied or annexed Southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula, in what would always be remembered among Arabs as *Naksa*, “the Setback.”

The military defeat reinforced the Islamist arguments about the corruption of the Egyptian regime and the necessity to implement God's *ḥākimiya*, “sovereignty”, over society, it strengthened the Islamist preconceived assumptions and exposed the failures of Nasserism in Egypt and the Middle East at large. On a psychological level, the defeat undermined the enthusiasm accumulated by Nasser. While the older generations might have appreciated the changes provided by the Free Officers' Revolution, younger people tended to take them for granted or felt they were not enough.

This gave more legitimacy to the Islamist movements, which had been harping on the injustices of 'Abdel Nasser's regime since the mid-1950s and all the hopes following his rise to power were dashed with Egypt's defeat.

The main consequences of these trends and events were a deeper dependence on private investors on the one side, and a more assertive turn towards religion on the other.<sup>133</sup>

In the same historical phase, as far as other sources of income are concerned, such as the migrants' remittances, it is worth noting that the government was largely incapable of accessing these flows, which fuelled investment in commerce, small businesses and tourism instead of employment-generating industrial projects.

As a consequence, the government was forced to borrow from the International Monetary Fund with austere lending conditions.

Soon, many families became more vocal in demanding higher incomes and more employment, especially because of the rise in consumer costs, and the anger became more intense, thus fuelling alternative

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<sup>132</sup> The bibliography on the Six-Day War is immense. Extremely informative analyses are provided in M. 'awda – I. 'abdallah, *Al-Naksa – Man al-Mas'ul?* [The Naksa – Who is Responsible?], Ruz al-Yusuf, Cairo, 1985; L. al-Khūli, *Ḥarb Yūnyū 1967 ba'da 30 Sana* [The June 1967 War after 30 years], Markaz al-Ahram, Cairo, 1997; M.B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2002.

<sup>133</sup> J. Toth, *Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement*, p. 548.

discourses about rights, equality, social justice, and power. This was primarily the case of the Islamist one.

All the legitimizing ideologies that had been struggling to survive in the previous decades, especially those that were perceived as imported, like liberalism and socialism, started to alienate the people and were increasingly called into question as means of dressing up the rulers' negligence or despotism and were seen as mendacious discourses.<sup>134</sup>

In this scenario, it was the thirst for more radical action and the lack of national strategies of the student groups that encouraged some of them to take a step forward and join al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.

In addressing the causes of the return of Islam in the public sphere, a paramount strand of research relates also to the influence on the Egyptian society of another momentous set of events, i.e. the 1979 Iranian Revolution.<sup>135</sup>

In Iran, the shah, without the support of the clergy, was forcing his citizens to embrace Westernization and secularization processes that were far from pleasing the majority of the population. The economic crisis of the Seventies, which affected mostly the *bazaari* businessmen<sup>136</sup> and young intelligentsia through unemployment, inflation, and a lack of goods, increased the tension between the ruler and the people.<sup>137</sup> When guerrilla groups such as the People's Mojahedin (Moġāhedīn-e Khalq, MEK) and the Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian (Fedāyn-e Khalq) started to plan terrorist attacks in order to trigger a revolution, the government responded with violent repression.

Rūhollāh Khomeini, after his declarations against mandatory military service (1963) and the Iranian subordination to the United States (1964), had been sentenced to fourteen years in exile.

After the 1977 death of 'Ali Shariati<sup>138</sup>, an Islamic reformist thinker who greatly popularized the Islamic revival among educated young Iranians, Khomeini became the most influential leader of the opposition to

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<sup>134</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 11.

<sup>135</sup> See W. Abdelnasser, Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: the Experience of the First Few Years, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19(2), Spring 1997, pp. 25-39 and A. Bayat, Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40(1), Jan. 1998, pp. 136-169.

<sup>136</sup> According to Nikki R. Keddie, the expression "bazaari" indicates a specific social class and the term has meaning in its involvement in petty trade, production, and banking of a largely traditional nature. N. R. Keddie, *Modern Iran. Roots and Results of Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2003.

<sup>137</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 161.

<sup>138</sup> Multiple studies have been written over Ali Shariati and his impact on the making of contemporary Islamism. See for example A. Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian. A political biography of Ali Shariati*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1998 and A. Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1998.



the Shah and started to be perceived by many Iranians as the spiritual as well as political guide of the revolt.<sup>139</sup>

Between January 5 and 13, 1979, millions of people went to the streets supporting his revolutionary stances. On January 16, Reza left the country and Khomeini returned on February 1.

In March, in an unprecedented referendum, 98% of the eligible voters chose the Islamic Republic against the monarchy.

The inspirational power of the Iranian Revolution for the other countries in the region is absolutely undeniable. Islam was finally seizing power, and this was seen as both a revenge for the oppressed and a retrospective utopia<sup>140</sup> of religion as the only resource to counterbalance Western cultural influence.

The Revolution has had a far-reaching impact, direct as well as indirect, throughout the Greater<sup>141</sup> Middle East,<sup>142</sup> helping thousands of citizens to discover the vigor and mobilizing power of the Islamic vocabulary<sup>143</sup> and undoubtedly, it had an immediate impact in the Arab countries and on many sections of the Sunni communities, particularly those living under dictatorial and western-allied regimes.

Coming at the end of a decade characterized by increasing religiosity and religious-political activism, the Revolution was taken as proof of the fact that an Islamic popular movement could overthrow a tyrannical regime.<sup>144</sup>

The Iranian Revolution brought about all-embracing changes in relationships among humans, between individuals and their religion, and between the individual and himself. From men's slavery to submission to God, from earthly beliefs to the justice of Islam, from materialist interests to piety.

Inevitably, the posture towards the events taking place in Iran can be listed among the many causes of friction between the Egyptian government and the Islamists.

For example, between 1979 and 1981, Sadat extended repeated invitations to the deposed Shah to reside in Egypt and, as a reaction, pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini appeared in Cairo and demonstrations were organized against the arrival of the deposed Shah in Egypt.

Some circles of the Islamist landscape tried strenuously to lead their fellows to ignore the differences between Shiites and Sunnis.<sup>145</sup> However, many of them soon started to remark the ideological and

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<sup>139</sup> For the biography of Khomeini and his thought see: E. Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford, 1993; M. Baqer, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, Thomas Dunne Books, 1999; D. Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001.

<sup>140</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 166.

<sup>141</sup> The definition of Greater Middle East was introduced in the early 2000s in the field of international politics. It denotes a set of contiguous countries extending from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east.

<sup>142</sup> W. M. Abdelnasser, Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of the First Few Years, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19(2), Spring 1997, p. 25.

<sup>143</sup> R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, p. 164.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

sectarian divisions and the Shiite soul of the Islamic Revolution, since a faction of the Egyptian Islamic associations was concerned that Iran might try to impose Shiite hegemony in other countries.

The divergence regarding the ways to exploit the Iranian example provided further obstacles to the constitution of a truly compact radical front, but this did not stop the Revolution from being a historical model upon which Egyptian Islamists could base their plans and expectations.

## **I.5 Conclusions**

As Barry Rubin persuasively states, the developments of radical Islamist groups in Egypt have not been a succession of triumphs, but rather a series of periods of growth cut short by strategic incompetence, limited public support, and government repression.

Even though radicalism has never gained a position of ideological or political hegemony,<sup>146</sup> however, the enhanced presence of religious elements in the public arena between the Seventies and the Eighties represented the most significant trait of that historical phase.

As illustrated throughout the chapter, multiple reasons contributed to the return of religion on the public stage.

The repeated crackdowns on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups carried out by Nasser's regime further fostered the ill-concealed hostility towards the President, particularly after October 26, 1954, when Maḥmūd `Abd al-Laṭīf, a member of the Brotherhood, tried to assassinate him while he was delivering a speech in Alexandria, causing five hundred Brothers to be jailed within a couple of weeks.

The defeat in the Six-Day War of June 1967 is undoubtedly another cause of the increased relevance of religion in the public space and in the social narratives, since all the secular values embodied by Nasserism failed to provide Egyptians and Arabs with a factual and ideological victory and led thousands of young citizens to search for other *identity suppliers*, among which the Islamic discourse played a major role.

As far as the Nasserist legacy is concerned, another triggering factor related to it was the collapse of the so-called establishment Islam, embodied by al-Azhar, the Ministry of Endowments (*Awqāf*), and the mosques under state control.

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<sup>145</sup> W. M. Abdelnasser, *Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of the First Few Years*, p. 30.

<sup>146</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 10.

In 1952, through land reform laws, Nasser had put all the *waqf* lands, which had grown since the time of Muhammad `Ali to represent some 12% of all arable lands, under the control of the Ministry of Endowments, and it was thanks to these laws that this new organism gained control over the mosques. Moreover, three years later, in 1955, the Sharia Courts were abolished.

In the following decades, the new wave of Islamism that was maturing in the country vehemently blamed the establishment Islam for being subjugated by the secular regime and for acting as *babbaghāwāt al-manābir*, “parrots of the pulpits”.<sup>147</sup>

The ‘*ulamā*’ and the *shuyūkh* of establishment Islam were nothing more than state employees, bureaucrats, formalists, and religious mercenaries.<sup>148</sup>

In addition to Nasser’s legacy and its consequences, a crucial factor for the return of Islam as the trait that most informed the Egyptian society of that time was the role of the Islamic Students’ Unions.

Anwar al-Sadat became President on October 15, 1970 and during his presidency Islamic militants in Egypt made their first big accomplishment by taking over student politics and becoming the only genuine mass organization.<sup>149</sup>

In order to reach this goal, they found the first key to success, which was a discreet, tactical collaboration with the regime to break the left’s domination on campuses, where they succeeded in creating unprecedented Islamized spaces to enforce their version of religious values<sup>150</sup> and to exploit the student’s daily problems to propose their immediate and appealing Islamic solutions.

The Egyptian higher education system of the Seventies and the Eighties was in a disastrous situation, the number of students rose from less than two hundred thousand in 1970 to more than half a million in 1977, infrastructure was deficient, and the dormitories were overcrowded. Programs used to stress rote memorization of concepts over creativity, and salaries for the teachers were derisory, prompting hundreds of them to migrate to the Gulf countries in search of better positions.

Islamist students started to speak a language easily understood by their fellows, organizing free summer camps, publishing magazines and pamphlets, and helping underprivileged students with group revision sessions at the mosques and cheap editions of expensive manuals.

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<sup>147</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic activism in the 1980s*, p. 637.

<sup>148</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p. 83.

<sup>149</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 127.

<sup>150</sup> O. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 80 – 81

In order to address the promiscuity threatening the female students' modesty in the classrooms and on buses, the new movement encouraged the return of the veil, imposed the segregation of the sexes in different rows, and set up bus services for female students. Not surprisingly, the criterion for deciding who was eligible was Islamic attire, which was first preferred and later compulsory in order to enjoy the new services.

The new religious groups were responding to problems created by modernity through their conservative ethos and their effective solutions, thus quickly becoming the most appealing landmark for many young Egyptians.

In addition to the immense role of these developments, the return of Islam on the public stage during the Seventies was not exclusively a bottom-up process, but also a top-down set of decisions and strategies.

Between 1970 and 1985, the number of state-supported religious educational institutions more than doubled and the student intake more than tripled. Radio and television hours of religious programs quadrupled and publications issued by al-Azhar and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) also increased fourfold.<sup>151</sup>

The government employed Islamic rhetoric in public statements and President Sadat soon became known as *al-Ra'īs al-Mū'min*, "The President Believer".

In addition to Nasser's legacy, the crisis of establishment Islam, the role of the Islamic Student Unions and the top-down driven religiosity, a further triggering factor for the renewed appeal of Islam a few years later was the influence of the 1979 Iranian Revolution on the Egyptian context.<sup>152</sup>

The inspirational power of the Revolution in the other countries in the region is undeniable: Islam was finally seizing power and taking back its role as the only force to counterbalance Western cultural influence.

Coming at the end of a decade characterized by increasing religiosity and religious-political activism, the Revolution was taken as a proof of the fact that an Islamic popular movement could overthrow a tyrannical regime, in Iran and elsewhere.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt's Islamic activism in the 1980s*, p. 637.

<sup>152</sup> See W. Abdelnasser, *Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: the Experience of the First Few Years*, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19(2), Spring 1997, pp. 25-39 and A. Bayat, *Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40(1), Jan. 1998, pp. 136-169.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

In Egypt, not only did Iran provide an example of a purely Islamic revolution, but it also created a further ground for the friction between the Islamists and Sadat. Between 1979 and 1981, the President repeatedly invited the deposed Shah to reside in Egypt, thus provoking the reaction of the Egyptian Islamists and many of their sympathizers who demonstrated in support of Ayatollah Khomeini, even though some fractions were highly skeptical about supporting an exquisitely Shia phenomenon, because they were concerned that Iran could try to impose Shia hegemony in other countries.

From the social and cultural perspectives, the abovementioned reasons represented the most important factors underlying the return of Islam on the public stage.

Other circumstances, however, indirectly fostered and stimulated the phenomenon, such as those highlighted by James Toth, whose theory implies that the Egyptian wave of Islamism took place at a conjuncture of three different trends in the global economy and regional politics, which critically shaped Egypt's growing underdevelopment and the outbreak of violence that emerged as a militant attempt to repair it,<sup>154</sup> namely the worldwide recession induced by the higher energy costs from the 1974 and 1979 oil price-hikes, the failure of most of the Egyptian projects related to import substitution industrialization (ISI), and the consequences of Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War which - as already mentioned - aroused a deep disenchantment with centralized, state-led development and secularization. The defeat reinforced the Islamist arguments about the corruption of the Egyptian regime and the necessity to implement God's *ḥākimiya*, "sovereignty", over society.

The main consequences of these trends and events were a deeper dependence on private investors and, ideologically, a more assertive turn towards religion.

All the legitimizing ideologies that had been struggling to survive in the previous decades were increasingly called into question as the means to conceal the rulers' ineptitude and despotism and all the political, social, and international trends seemed to plot against Muslim pride, identity and sense of justice.

Therefore, radical Islam seemed to offer some easy solutions while also calling on believers to take their lives into their own hands, in contrast to the official political culture, which was reducing the citizens to spectators.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> J. Toth, Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35(4), Nov. 2003, p. 548.

<sup>155</sup> F. Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 117.

The next chapters of the dissertation will look closely at two of the most relevant outcomes of this historical phase: al-Gamā'ah al-Islamiya (the Islamic Group) and al-Jihād al-Islāmy (the Islamic Jihad).

For each of the two main Egyptian jihadi movements, the work will analyze their genesis, message, constituency, strategies, goals, and targets.

The disquisition will demonstrate the eminently Egyptian nature of the groups' action, which was motivated by domestic grievances and adopted a strongly national narrative both in their radicalization and de-radicalization phases.

## II. Al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya

In the present chapter, the birth and ascent of the Egyptian al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya will be investigated to highlight those characteristics that make it one of the most emblematic examples of national jihadism, i.e. the form of jihadism that pre-existed al-Qa’ida and chose objectives, projects, and enemies within national borders and not in the global and transnational arena.

The historical analyses of the different phases of its parabola will be followed by in-depth considerations of the group’s doctrinal milestones and a detailed examination of a number of peculiar characteristics.

In this respect, special attention will be given to the in-group dominance of members coming from south Egypt and its consequences in the confrontation with the regime.

### II.1 Genesis

Al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya - the Islamic Group (IG) - has been the major Egyptian jihadi group and was active between 1974 and 2002.

Its three-decade long history has been extraordinarily dense, and Omar Ashour, the scholar who produced the most extensive studies about it, divides the historical parabola of al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya into five main phases:

Movement building<sup>156</sup> (1974 - 1981),

Consolidation phase (1981 – 1984),

Rebuilding phase (1984 - 1989),

Confrontational phase (1989 – 1997),

De-radicalization phase (1997 - 2002).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Also termed “decentralized phase”.

<sup>157</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, Routledge, London, 2009, pp. 45 – 51.

Focussing on the first four phases, which include what can be more simply termed radicalization and militant stages, this chapter will cover the period 1974 - 1997, whereas the de-radicalization and disengagement years (after 1997) will be dealt with in the dedicated chapter.<sup>158</sup>

The *Tanzim*, literally “organization”, represented the ancestor of both of the two major Egyptian jihadi groups of the last century, al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād.

As explained in Chapter I,<sup>159</sup> it had its origin in 1974, after the notorious Military College incident when, on April 18, a hundred members of the Islamic Liberation Organization (ILO) attacked the Military Technical College in Cairo.

The Islamic Liberation Organization, in turn, had its origin in the Palestinian context and the leadership of Sāliḥ Sirīāh.<sup>160</sup>

The project implied the murder of President Sadat and a number of top military and security officials who were attending an institutional event nearby in the Arab Socialist Building.<sup>161</sup> According to the accounts that some surviving members of the commando later gave to authorities, the second goal was seizing radio and television buildings and announcing the birth of the Islamic Republic of Egypt.

The coup failed, ninety-five members of the Islamic Liberation Organization were arrested and tried, thirty-two were convicted, and two were executed.

Al-Zawahiri gave a detailed account of the plot in his *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, explaining that the military technical college group began to be formed after the arrival of Sāliḥ Sirīāh in Egypt, where he started to make contacts with Muslim Brotherhood symbols, such as Zaynāb al-Ghazālī<sup>162</sup> and Hasan al-Ḥudāybi<sup>163</sup>, and to form a group of young people, urging them to confront the ruling regime.

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<sup>158</sup> Chapter IV: The De-Radicalization Processes of al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, pp. 124 – 160.

<sup>159</sup> See pp. 34 – 58.

<sup>160</sup> See below.

<sup>161</sup> M. ‘abduh, *Azma al-Tamkīn. Dirāsa fi al-Taġrība al-Islāmiya fi Miṣr* [Crisis of Empowerment. A Study on the Islamist Experimentation in Egypt], Maktaba Mū‘min Kuraīsh, 2013, p. 46.

<sup>162</sup> She was the founder of the Muslim Women's Association, which partly merged with the Brotherhood. After the assassination of Hasan al-Banna in 1949, al-Ghazālī played a significant role in regrouping the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1960s. Imprisoned for her activities in 1965, she was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor but was released under Anwar al-Sadat in 1971.

Al-Ghazali was certainly the most prominent woman to distinguish herself in the Egyptian Islamist pantheon.

<sup>163</sup> He was the second "General Guide", *murshid*, of the Muslim Brotherhood, appointed in 1951 after founder Hassan al-Banna's assassination two years earlier. Al-Ḥudāybi held the position until his death in 1973. Once al-Ḥudāybi entered office, he condemned the violence that characterized the movement from 1946-1949 and ordered that the Brotherhood dissolve their secret military branch. This created deep tensions between him and other high-ranking members supportive of the Secret Apparatus.

He was victim of the crackdown that followed Mahmud ‘Abd al-Latif's attempt to assassinate President ‘Abd al-Nasser in October of 1954, and al-Ḥudāybi's was sentenced to life in prison.

While in prison, al-Ḥudāybi wrote *Du‘āt la Qudāt*, “Preachers, not Judges”, which was published after his death in 1977.



According to the current leader of al-Qa'ida, Sāliḥ Sirīāh was a highly intellectual Palestinian thinker who had lived in Jordan until the Jordanian army defeated the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1970 and then went to Iraq and Cairo, where he received a doctorate in education from 'Ain Shams University.<sup>164</sup>

Al-Zawahiri met Sirīāh once before he managed to create the group, which later gathered a number of Military Technical College Students associating the Islamic Liberation Organization's project of taking power by force with Quṭb's ideas of *ḥākimiya* and *takfīr*.<sup>165</sup>

After the attempted coup, Sāliḥ Sirīāh was captured and then hanged in November 1976, along with Talal Anṣāri, head of the Alexandria University cell.<sup>166</sup>

In spite of the failure, among the surviving followers of the ILO that was dismantled after the attack on the Academy, some would gradually rebuild themselves as a group, believing that, if a few individuals at the top were removed, the masses would respond by rising up in revolt.<sup>167</sup>

From an organizational perspective, the new-born al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya would be divided into cells and have two distinct wings, i.e. military and *dā'wa* wings.

In this respect, it is worth specifying that *dā'wa* is one of the fundamental concepts of all Islamist ideologies, and translating it with the term "proselytizing" is highly simplistic and ineffective.

It literally means "issuing a summons" and "making an invitation" and refers to the broader duty of a true believer to call people to enter Islam and live according to its principles.<sup>168</sup>

Performing their *dā'wa* duty, the Islamic Group largely occupied the vacuum left by the repressed Muslim Brotherhood - which was in a laborious phase<sup>169</sup> - providing citizens with Qur'anic schools, Islamic-licit loans, health clinics and religious literature. The ideological principles were promulgated through a network of thousands of unofficial mosques and using cassettes, pamphlets, and booklets.

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Gilles Kepel argues that the text is a refutation of Sayyid Quṭb's *Ma'ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* and a promotion of moderation and non-violence against the takfirist tendencies of Qutbism.

See G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004.

<sup>164</sup> A. Al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, in L. Mansfield, *In His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, United States, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>165</sup> The following sections will include an extensive analysis of Quṭb's message and theories.

<sup>166</sup> A. al-Islām Yassīn, *Al-'adl. Al-Islāmyūn wa al-Ḥukm* [Justice. Islamists and Power], 2000.

<sup>167</sup> This position is different from that of *al-Takfīr wa al-Ḥiğra*, the group that argued that, since both the society and the government were corrupt, true Muslims had to withdraw from society itself.

<sup>168</sup> S. Brzuskiewicz, Political de-radicalization: why it is no longer possible in the *wilāyāt* system of the Islamic State, *Journal for Deradicalization* 19, Winter 2016/17, p. 187.

<sup>169</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 34 – 58.

Essentially, their action and influences on citizens' traditions and practices were strongly rooted in the Islamic principle of *ḥisba: amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*, "Commanding the good and forbidding the evil", mainly through coercion and sometimes violence.<sup>170</sup>

Some examples included preventing belly dancers and female singers from performing in weddings, beating nightclub owners, sabotaging truck drivers who shipped alcohol, and torching video stores.

As far as the military wing is concerned, it has been increasingly strengthened by the return of Egyptian volunteers from the war against Soviets in Afghanistan, who enlarged the so-called group of *Afghan Arabs*.<sup>171</sup>

Muslim antipathy toward the atheistic ideology of communism and images of suffering Afghans inspired several thousand Arabs to volunteer in the conflict zone. Many of them were aid and humanitarian workers, but some went a step further by joining the fighters in rolling back the Soviet invasion through combat and in the context of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the United States, Pakistan, and other Muslim governments allied with the United States, did not hesitate to give their blessings and material support to these volunteers.<sup>172</sup>

Estimates of Arabs in the Afghan conflict have ranged from 3,000–4,000 volunteers at any one time. Most of those served in Peshawar and other Pakistani cities bordering on Afghanistan as humanitarian aid workers, cooks, drivers, accountants, teachers, doctors, engineers, and religious preachers and they built camps, mosques, and make-shift hospitals and schools.<sup>173</sup>

The jihadi component, however, played a major role, and in the 1980s an estimate of 526 Egyptian fighters died in Afghanistan, one fifth of the total of the Arab "martyrs", an undoubtedly significant figure.<sup>174</sup>

The involvement of Egyptian mujahedeen in Afghanistan, which might seem to signal a shift toward the prioritization of the Far Enemy, was in fact not an exception to the relevance of the Near Enemy for the Egyptian jihadi landscape and what is called national jihadism.

Fawaz Gherghes masterfully explains that, although the Afghan jihad against Russian military occupation ultimately bred a new generation of *transnationalist* jihadists - who were emboldened by the Russian

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<sup>170</sup> *Ḥisba* means "accountability". For an exhaustive explanation of this concept see S. Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World*, I. B. Tauris, New York City, 2005.

<sup>171</sup> The term Afghan Arabs (or Arab Afghans) refers to Arab mujahedeen who went to Afghanistan during and following the Soviet-Afghan War to help fellow Muslims fight Soviets and pro-Soviet Afghans. Estimates of the foreign volunteers who took part in the conflict range between 20,000 and 35,000.

<sup>172</sup> M. Hafez, Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Arab Afghans, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32(2), 2009, p. 74.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, Preface to the 2003 Edition, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003.

defeat and who decided to fully internationalize jihad and export the Islamist revolution worldwide - it did not constitute a shift by jihadists away from localism to globalism.<sup>175</sup>

In that phase, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa‘ida and then in the top ranks of al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, repeatedly made statements that are true for the Islamic Group as well, declaring that he and his fellow jihadists went to Afghanistan to establish a safe haven for jihadi action from which to launch attacks against the Egyptian regime:

A jihadi movement needs an arena that would act like an incubator where its seed would grow and where it can acquire practical experience in combat, politics and organizational matters.<sup>176</sup>

And also:

The problem of finding a secure base for jihad activity in Egypt used to occupy me a lot (...) I could establish a secure base for jihad action in Egypt.<sup>177</sup>

These declarations represent supporting evidence for the hypothesis that Afghanistan was used by Egyptian jihadists as a training camp that gave them new skills and expertise useful for their national jihadi project. Localism, not globalism, informed the thinking and action of mujahedeen who had initially fought in Afghanistan.

Moreover, once the hundreds of Arabs met the Afghan fighting landscape, a sort of cultural clash took place between them and Afghans fighters, thus hindering the birth of any truly non-national project. This is a frequently overlooked issue: at the time of the contact, the Wahhabi-Salafi and Deobandi<sup>178</sup> schools

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<sup>175</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>176</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*: [<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/6759609-knights-under-the-prophet-banner.pdf>].

<sup>177</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, in L. Mansfield, *In His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, United States, 2006, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>178</sup> The name derives from the city of Deoband, India, where the Darul Uloom Deoband school is located. The movement was inspired by scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–1762), and was founded in 1867.

The Deobandi movement developed as a reaction to British colonialism which was seen to be corrupting Islam. Deoband's curriculum combined the study of Islamic scriptures (Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence) with different subjects such as logic, philosophy and science.

Darul Uloom Deoband has consistently supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, including their 2001 destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and the majority of the Taliban's leaders were influenced by Deobandi fundamentalism.

A major difference between these two sects of Islam is their opinion on guidance by an imam. Whereas revivalist Deobandis are Hanafis and follow imam Abu Ḥanīfa, Wahhabis are *ghair muqāllid*, which means that they do not follow any imam for jurisprudence.

were in conflict, in particular due to the different opinions on *sufism* and, to a lesser extent, different practices.

According to Muhammad Hafez, a number of Egyptian radicals were released from prison by the mid-1980s and knew that they would face harassment if they stayed at home. In addition to seeking a safe haven, they wanted to build up their clandestine military capabilities in order to topple their regimes at home in the near future. By 1987, core leaders of the Islamic Group established themselves in Peshawar and began publishing *Al-Murabitun*, a magazine focused on the situation in Egypt.

They also created their own guest house—also called Al-Murabitun—parallel to Azzam’s Maktab al-Khadmāt and Bayt al-Anṣār.<sup>179</sup>

Regarding the Afghan experience, another significant point has to be highlighted. Following a pattern that will always be recognizable throughout the present study, to the eminently national goals of the Egyptian jihadists, eminently national interests corresponded on the Government’s side.

Indeed, the Egyptian administration largely let them go to Afghanistan, hoping that those people would carry out their jihad outside the borders, thus reducing the risk in the country.

In Cairo, the regime was pleased to kill three birds with one stone: getting them out of Egypt, subcontracting them to the United States for the purpose of anti-Soviet warfare, and hoping they would get lost for good.<sup>180</sup>

On the contrary, not only did most survive, but they acquired unprecedented military skills in the training camps of the Afghan frontier – which they would later use against their own regime in Egypt.

Indeed, it is worth reaffirming that the Afghan experience did not represent a shift towards global jihad. In this respect, Sidney Tarrow effectively distinguishes between international and global jihad. If a shift began to happen in Afghanistan, it was only towards an international jihad and not a global one.

In other words, it is true that thousands of militants had the chance to travel outside their own countries, meet others like themselves, and advance the argument that jihad should take the form of transnational military struggle. They were getting ready to wage jihad in different countries, not in a super-national dimension.

Afghan jihad was never a global war between Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb<sup>181</sup>, but only the first step in the establishment of new international connections, personal relations, and expertise exchange.

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<sup>179</sup> The role of the jihadi ideologue Azzam and his relation with Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri will be analysed in Chapter IV, pp. 124 – 162.

<sup>180</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, Preface to the 2003 Edition.

<sup>181</sup> S. Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2005, p. 126.

## II.2 Doctrinal milestones

From a doctrinal perspective, before and after the Afghan experience, the ideological foundation of the jihadi movements of the nineteenth century lies in the thoughts of Sayyid Quṭb (1906 – 1966), the Egyptian thinker who elaborated the most important modern theory of jihad.<sup>182</sup>

This is true for the Islamic Group and largely also for the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Sayyid Quṭb attended a secular school and his father was a secular nationalist activist and Quṭb originally followed his ideas. He worked for sixteen years in the Ministry of Education while keeping up his uncertain literary career.

Partly to get him out after his harsh criticism of the monarchy, he was sent in 1949 to the United States on an “educational mission” of almost three years.

The US, its freedom, and the sexual promiscuity characterizing American society shocked and horrified Quṭb, who wrote extensively about the moral decay that he encountered.<sup>183</sup>

After his return to Egypt in 1951, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood and in 1954 he was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment and was jailed for a decade. Released in 1964, he was rearrested a few months later and condemned for treason.

In his *Ma‘ālim fi al-Ṭarīq*<sup>184</sup>, *Milestones*, he highlights what he calls “the human bankruptcy in the domain of the values”, and clearly states that humanity needs a new direction.<sup>185</sup>

With a reference to the two distinct rules of the king and Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser, Quṭb explains that, since both the individualist and collectivist ideologies had failed, it was now the turn of Islam.

However, humanity as a whole would not listen to an abstract belief that could not be corroborated by tangible facts and for this reason. For this reason, a vanguard would be necessary for the advent of a truly Muslim society.

The vanguard of the Umma had to decide when to withdraw from and when to seek contact with the *ḡāhiliya*<sup>186</sup> that surrounded it.

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<sup>182</sup> For a complete analysis of the thought of Sayyid Quṭb and his role in the making of the jihadist ideology see, beside his works: S. Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Quṭb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*, Routledge, London, 2006 and *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Quṭb*, Routledge, London, 2009; J. Calvert, *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

<sup>183</sup> A. Abu al-Futūḥ, *Shāhid ‘ala Tārīkh al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiya fi Miṣr 1970-1984* [Witness of the History of the Islamic Movement in Egypt 1970 - 1984], Dār al-Shurūq, 2010.

<sup>184</sup> Since 1981, some chapters of the book have been expunged from the most widely circulated edition, published by the Egyptian-Lebanese publishing house Dār al-Shurūq.

<sup>185</sup> S. Quṭb, *Ma‘ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones], p. 9.

If the doctrinal and operational notion of vanguard largely informed those who remained in the Muslim Brotherhood without embracing violent jihadism, Quṭb's concept of *ḡāhiliya* partly distances the mainstream Brotherhood from the radicalizing factions that were emerging.

According to Gilles Kepel, Quṭb's trans-historical use of the concept of *ḡāhiliya* marks a notable departure from the Muslim Brotherhood dogma, since the Muslim Brotherhood's ideologues before Quṭb never dreamed of accusing Egyptian society of being *ḡāhily*.<sup>187</sup>

Indeed, the status of *ḡāhily* implies being pre-Islamic and, consequently, non-Islamic. Any accusation of being pre-Islamic would automatically imply that someone is simply non-Muslim. The further step would be the *takfīr* over the rulers and the corrupt society:

Any society in which something other<sup>188</sup> than God alone is worshipped is *ḡāhiliya* (...) Thus, we must include in this category all the societies that now exist on earth.<sup>189</sup>

In this unprecedented step, Quṭb states that in order to contrast *ḡāhiliya* the regime should be able to exercise sovereignty only in God's name, by applying the prescriptions of the revelation: *al-ḥukm bima anzala Allah*, "The power according to what God transmitted".<sup>190</sup>

On August 29, 1966, Sayyid Quṭb was executed by the Nasserist regime, and the Muslim Brotherhood began to formally distance itself from the radical message of the late ideologue, despite the efforts of his brother, Muhammad Quṭb, who in 1975 published a letter in *al-Siḡāb*, the magazine of the Lebanese branch of the Brotherhood, speaking against those who accused him of having expressed ideas contrary to the doctrine of the movement.

In spite of the attempts to tone down the violence of Quṭb's message, however, according to the Egyptian jihadi panorama that will build on it, sharia would be the only legitimate law, which cannot be institutionalized,<sup>191</sup> but only imposed to the system.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> "Ignorance". This term has a fundamental relevance both for the Islamic and for the Islamist-jihadi thought. It refers to the ignorance that preceded the Quranic revelation to the prophet Muhammad. In the jihadi narrative, it is used to indicate the morally corrupt conditions of the contemporary Muslim countries in general and Egypt in particular.

<sup>187</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 46.

<sup>188</sup> Power, material goods, money, etc.

<sup>189</sup> S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones], p. 98.

<sup>190</sup> A. al-Islām Yassīn, *Al-'adl. Al-Islāmyūn wa al-Ḥukm* [Justice. Islamists and Power], 2000.

<sup>191</sup> A. McDermott, Mubarak's Egypt: The Challenge of the Militant Tendency, *The World Today* 42(10), Oct 1986, p. 173.

To achieve this goal, the means par excellence is jihad, and nowhere is jihadists' challenge more evident and explosive than in their effort to elevate the status of jihad, to make it equal to the five pillars of Islam, and experience it as a *fard 'ayn*, an individual obligation, as opposed to a *fard kifāya*, collective obligation.

In Islamic law, an individual obligation must be performed by each Muslim, whereas collective or communal obligations must be performed by the Muslim community as a whole. If a sufficient number of members in the community discharge the obligation, the remaining Muslims are freed from the responsibility before God.

The future leader of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān<sup>193</sup>, repeatedly opposed the quietist definition of jihad as an internal struggle to be a better Muslim, and focused on its meaning as a fight.

One of his sermons is particularly telling:

They say that he who leaves his job during the day in order to go to the mosque has performed jihad. And he who listens to a religious lecture has performed jihad. What is this? This is a distortion to the subject of jihad. Why don't we call things by their proper names?<sup>194</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, for 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān and his fellows the hardest point to justify was their decision to ignore the Qur'anic verse according to which whoever kills a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other wicked crimes, should be looked upon as though he had killed all humankind.<sup>195</sup>

At first, al-Ġihād tried to claim that the government initiated the violence. Later, however, the ideologues started to lean on the legal opinion of Ibn Taimiya that states that if the enemy hides behind Muslims and uses them as shields, it becomes the duty of Muslims to kill those who were so used.<sup>196</sup> In other words, if an impious government uses its own people as human shields – physically and metaphorically - the jihadi vanguard is allowed to use violence against the people who are so used.

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<sup>192</sup> Here lies one of the major differences between the ideology of the analyzed groups and the Brotherhood, which, however, falls out of the scope of this work.

<sup>193</sup> For an extensive description of the role of 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān in the making of al-Gamā'a's ideology see p. 17.

<sup>194</sup> 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān, *Doubts about jihad*, audiotope no. 40.

<sup>195</sup> Qur'an [5:32]: "Whoever kills a person [unjustly]...it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind."

<sup>196</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002, p. 47.

Further theoretical milestones can be found in much older times. This is the case of the inspirational power of the thirteenth century Islamic commentator Ibn Taymiyya (1263 - 1328) author of *Al-Siyāsa al-Sha'riya fi Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'y wa al-Ru'ya* (The Shariatic Politics on Reforming the Ruler and the Ruled).<sup>197</sup>

Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya was an extremely vocal medieval intellectual who opposed widely accepted traditions such as the veneration of saints and the visitation to their tomb-shrines.

His works came to represent undisputed pillars of modern and contemporary jihadism.

Ibn Taymiyya regarded the institution of government as indispensable, since a pious state cannot be established without government and the duty of commanding the good and forbidding evil cannot be discharged without power and authority.

However, he theorizes a specific way to choose the ruler: for appointment to a public office the most suitable person should be chosen on grounds of relevant competence (*quwwa*) and integrity (*amāna*).<sup>198</sup>

With these two virtues, the ruler can prepare his people spiritually for the life hereafter, guided by the demands of Qur'an and Sunna. Whenever the government does not know how to apply the teachings of Islam to the particular problem, he must seek the advice of the '*ulamā'*'.<sup>199</sup>

This is the first Sunni organic theorization of the priority of religious experts over the ruler, a crucial notion in many forms of jihadism.

Similarly, Sayyid Quṭb and the jihadi groups analyzed here took inspiration from the concepts of *takfir* and jihad as expressed by the thirteen-century's thinker.

Ibn Taymiyya applied these theories on the Mongols, who, although converted to Islam, still retained their tribal laws. Since the Mongols did not practice Islamic law, they were apostates and their killing was an obligation and duty until they accepted Islamic law.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyāsa al-Sha'riya fi Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'y wa al-Ru'ya* [The Shariatic Politics on Reforming the Ruler and the Ruled], Dār ul-Fiqh, 2006.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> See B. Johansen, A Perfect Law in an Imperfect Society. Ibn Taymiyya's Concept of "Governance in the name of the Sacred Law", in P. Bearman – B. G. Weiss – W. Heinrichs (Eds.), *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Shari'a*, I.B. Tauris, London – New York, 2008, pp. 259 – 294.

<sup>200</sup> M. Hashim Kamali, *Siyāsah Shar'iyah* or the Policies of Islamic Government, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6(1), 1989, pp. 59-80.



### II.3 Saʿīdy dominance

As mentioned in the previous chapter,<sup>201</sup> the twentieth century's Egyptian jihadi galaxy developed in a complex and evolving social and demographic environment, in which geographical disparities played a major role. There was increasing awareness of these discrepancies, which were particularly apparent in the contrast north/Cairo vs south/underdeveloped areas.

One of the most significant features of the new-born Ġamāʿa was its particular relationship with the south of Egypt, which has made it possible for a number of scholars to talk about geographical or regional dominance.<sup>202</sup>

Historically, the Saʿīdy region's relations with the central government have always been problematic, and state budgets and investments consistently neglected the Saʿīdis.

The Saʿīd is less developed than the rest of Egypt, even compared to the other vast rural area, that of the Delta, north of Cairo.<sup>203</sup>

In the Seventies, the division of labor was very simple and, while the Saʿīd was more urban than the Delta, it had fewer inhabitants actually engaged in industrial production. Also, the Delta benefitted from having the major cities of Cairo, Alexandria, and the Canal Zone all over its borders,<sup>204</sup> while the Saʿīd population was highly dependent on smaller towns and dispersed villages.

The religious and sectarian distribution was different from the rest of Egypt and in the Saʿīd the Coptic population was much larger and more rural than in the Delta.

Moreover, the Saʿīd has always remained more tribal and clannish. Along the tribal lines that structured society, Islam and its differing interpretations could easily be used to endorse or undermine the dominance of one group over the other.

In particular, the three major lines on which the social hierarchy was – and partly still is - based were: the *ashrāf*<sup>205</sup>, the Arabs, and the *fellaḥīn*.

The *ashrāf*, embodying the highest group, claim descent from the prophet Muhammad and they do not intermarry neither with the Arabs nor with the *fellaḥīn*.

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<sup>201</sup> See pp. 34 – 58.

<sup>202</sup> A. Bayat, *Post-Islamism. The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 186; Al-Gamaʿat Al-Islamiyya (IG), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), January 2015: [<http://www.start.umd.edu/baad/narratives/al-gamaat-al-islamiyya-ig>].

<sup>203</sup> For an extremely informative analysis of Cairo's cultural dominance over the South and a complete account of stereotypes targeting southerners see M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, *Middle East Journal* 48(4), Autumn 1994, pp. 607 – 625.

<sup>204</sup> J. Toth, Islamism in Southern Egypt, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35(4), Nov. 2003, p. 553.

<sup>205</sup> This term is closely linked to the word *sharaf*, "honor".

In this respect, it has to be mentioned that the term Arab in the south does not always correspond to the northern meaning of the word, according to which everybody who speaks Arabic as the native language and lives in an Arab country is considered Arab. In the south, often the term refers only to a cluster of tribes who can trace their ancestries to central Arabia.

Finally, in southern terminology *fellaḥīn* indicates non-Arab Egyptians. Southern *fellaḥīn* claim to be descendants of the ancient Egyptians, a claim also made by the Copts and the Nubians.<sup>206</sup>

Throughout history, the social and economic dominance of the first two groups over the third one has been embodied by dominant narratives, which used to describe the *fellaḥīn* as those who accepted Islam only under the threat of the sword.

This kind of discourse triggered in the group a thirst of redemption and a willingness to change the regnant narratives.

It is not by chance that the majority of IG's initial members belonged to the lowest group, and it is clear that the challenge the new Islamic Group brought about was both social and religious.

To the Qur'anic verse that the *ashrāf* and the Arabs used to justify their dominance:

We raised some of you above the others by different degrees.<sup>207</sup>

Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya opposed a hadith:

All are equal in Islam: no difference between Arab and non-Arab except  
*taqwa*.<sup>208</sup>

The first push factor for the engagement of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in violent activities was the desire of changing the dynamics and the relationships of power between the center and the periphery, both from a local perspective related to the interactions with the other groups, and from a national perspective, related to the relations with the central government.

In this scenario, Islamism used to have the strongest appeal among people that had often personally experienced the dislocation of rural-to-urban migration.

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<sup>206</sup> In the southern terminology, the group of the *fellaḥīn* also includes the Ġammaṣa, a darker-skinned people who is likely to have origins that are close to Ethiopians and Somalis.

<sup>207</sup> Quran [6:165].

<sup>208</sup> Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, *Middle East Journal* 48(4), Autumn 1994, p. 613.

Provincial capitals, such as Asyut and Minya, represented marks of the rural-urban discontinuities and were the first areas in a predominantly traditional region to come under the impact of rapid urbanization. Therefore, they were the most likely places to experience social instabilities and tensions manifesting themselves in sectarian and political violence.<sup>209</sup>

For this reason, it comes as no surprise that Asyut and Minya provided 21.4% of Tanzim members.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, the three provinces of Minya, Asyut, and Sohag had the country's highest proportion of Copts, which used to cause tensions and incidents that were much more frequent than elsewhere in the country.

Also, as has already been mentioned, their capitals were university towns, and the geographic sweep of these universities was extremely broad. Many of their students tended to live outside the family context, grouped into dormitories or student neighbourhoods such as al-Ḥamra in Asyut, which exacerbated the sense of displacement experienced in the shift from the rural to the urban context.

In particular, the groups that have been affected the most by the transition were embodied by two main social classes: middle-class professionals and working-class indigents.

As far as the middle-class is concerned, many of the Islamists belonging to this group were university students from the countryside who had first come from village farm families that have benefitted from the new education policies implemented by Abdel Nasser's administration in the 1960s.

After graduating, however, they found out that the road to gaining satisfactory employment and a better social status was essentially blocked by the wall of urban élite society,<sup>211</sup> often coming from Egypt's mainland.

Frustrated in their homeland, many of them inevitably started to look at a new approach to Islam as the solution, and at the same time a massive group emigrated to Libya, Iraq or the Gulf to acquire the better incomes unavailable at home.

The choice of migrating usually attracted minor Arab tribesmen or *fellaḥīn*, mainly because historically more prominent tribesmen considered wage-labor beneath them.

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<sup>209</sup> H. Ansari, The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1), Mar 1984, p. 131.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>211</sup> J. Toth, Islamism in Southern Egypt, p. 554.

On a manpower basis - including the total male and female population between 6 and 65 years of age, estimated by the 1976 national census at above 25 million - more than 2.5 million migrants were estimated to be living outside the country during most of that decade.<sup>212</sup>

During the following years, however, many professionals and manual workers have begun to go back to the Sa'ūd after regional oil revenues started to decline.

People who decided to stay abroad and in the Gulf in particular for a longer time, began to get in touch with Wahhabi ideas that they were largely unfamiliar with, and some of them have been deeply fascinated by this approach to Islam.

When the newly rich went back to southern Egypt, they were looking for another source of social legitimization beside their improved financial condition, and many of them found it in Islam. The educated sons of this newly rich group started to preach in new mosques financed by their families, and the messages were profoundly different from those of their traditional predecessors.

Moreover, people with previous experience in the Gulf started to help other perspective migrants with paperwork and sponsorship, thus creating new bonds of gratitude that increased the influence of the new Islamic local benefactors on their fellow citizens.

As a consequence, a large portion of the remittances of Egyptian migrants abroad were devolved to Islamic charities and religious organizations set up to carry out multiple social projects in which *dā'wa* used to play a major role.

The main areas of activity included health and education, with hospital beds for the poor, low-cost health treatments, after-school tutoring, complementary textbooks, clothing, and guidance through the state bureaucracy.

According to Antonio Gramsci, a true revolution is not just winning state power but winning the society by institutional, intellectual, and moral hegemony.<sup>213</sup>

In the case of the Islamic Group and its developments in southern Egypt, the principles exposed by the Italian thinker seem to be applicable.

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<sup>212</sup> H. Shukrallah, *Political Crisis and Political Conflict in Post-1967 Egypt*, in C. Tripp - R. Owen (Eds), *Egypt Under Mubarak*, Routledge, London, 1989.

<sup>213</sup> A. Bayat, Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40(1), Jan. 1998, p. 141.

Undoubtedly, winning the society was prioritized over winning the state, at least after the disastrous endeavour of the Military Technical College in Cairo. Acquiring credibility and trust among the citizens was one of the first goals of the Islamic associations first and violent radical groups later.

According to the concept of power that al-Ġamā‘a was adopting, because a ruling regime legitimises its domination through cultural hegemony, its overthrow must begin by countering this hegemony.

The goal of every counter-hegemonic strategy is to foster contradictions between the worldview of the rulers and that of the ruled, thus creating a vacuum that could easily be filled by those who were able to expose the supposed contradiction.<sup>214</sup>

In this respect, the influence of Gramsci’s theories on Arab and Islamic thinkers is worth expanding a little.

Although the relationship between culture and revolution has been explored in the works of dozens of philosophers and sociologists,<sup>215</sup> Gramsci’s exposition of the organic link between cultural and political change was the most appealing for many Middle Eastern thinkers, who believed it to be the clearest and most elaborate.<sup>216</sup>

Antonio Gramsci was one of the first thinkers to point out that, because a ruling regime legitimizes its domination through cultural hegemony, its overthrow must begin by countering this hegemony.<sup>217</sup>

The Egyptian sociologist Hazem Kandil highlights that around the same time when Antonio Gramsci was penning down his *Prison Notebooks* (late 1920s and early 1930s), Hassan al-Banna, founder of al-Ikhwān

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<sup>214</sup> As mentioned before, an in-depth comparison between the historical trajectories of the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood and the jihadi groups falls out of the scope of the dissertation.

However, it is crucial to underline that, from a theoretical perspective, these two strands of Islamism shared a similar approach in exposing the contradiction between the worldview of the rulers and that of the ruled.

In their extensive and undoubtedly efficient provision of social services and often emergency response to the population - for instance in the case of the earthquake in Cairo in 1992 - the Muslim Brothers were willing to fill the gap between the need of the population and the actual assistance provided by the State. Once the discrepancy had been highlighted, the following step was to induce citizens to internalize their basic motto and all its implications: *al-Islām howa al-ḥāl*, “Islam is the solution”.

<sup>215</sup> G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1972); T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1973); T. Adorno – M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002).

<sup>216</sup> H. Kandil, Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies, *Theory and Society* 40(1), January 2011, pp. 37 - 62.

<sup>217</sup> See A. Gramsci, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, in *Quaderni dal Carcere*, 1948 e *Gli intellettuali e l’organizzazione della cultura*, in *Quaderni dal Carcere*, 1949.

al-Muslimīn (the Muslim Brothers) expressed the need to change “The hegemonic public Spirit” in Muslim countries before Islamists could target power.<sup>218</sup>

From that time on, even though obvious and undeniable differences between Islamists and leftist have always existed, strategies of cultural transformation have become central to most Islamist movements in Egypt and around the world.

One of the Arab scholars who most extensively based his theorization on Antonio Gramsci’s thought was the Egyptian political scientist Nazih Ayubi.<sup>219</sup>

When exposing his thesis according to which the contemporary Arab state is weaker than it seems, Ayubi repeatedly resorts to the Gramscian notion of hegemony.

Gramsci’s insights about how power is constituted in the realm of ideas and knowledge – expressed through consent rather than force – have inspired the use of explicit strategies to contest hegemonic norms of legitimacy.

Building on these premises, Ayubi uses the term “hegemony” instead of “legitimacy” - the latter term in his view being too tied to Western liberalism – which reflects the influence of Gramsci.<sup>220</sup>

The idea is that, since in the Arab state there is no hegemonic ideology involving all classes and groups in such a state because *developmentalism* is too vague a concept and nationalistic fervour is evanescent, Islam as a counter-ideology easily fills this cultural gap.

In this respect, it is the reaction of the state that varies. Whereas the more conservative systems have internalised certain elements of an Islamic ideology into the ideological apparatus of the state, mainly by co-opting the clerics, the more “radical” modernizing systems have seen their marginalised groups adopting Islam as a counter-hegemonic ideology in recent years.

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<sup>218</sup> H. Kandil, *Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies*, p. 38.

<sup>219</sup> N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, Tauris, London, 1995.

<sup>220</sup> Another prominent scholar whose thought have been influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s work is Edward Said (1935-2003). Said’s masterpiece, *Orientalism* (1978) has been highly influential in postcolonial studies and other fields.

Said terms the whole set of false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the Middle East “Orientalism”.. This body of scholarship is marked by a “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture,” which has served as an implicit justification for European and the American colonial and imperial ambitions.

Here lies the similarity between Said notion of orientalism and the Gramscian principle of cultural hegemony, which is superimposed on and fosters political power.

What makes Egypt one of the most interesting and complex realities is that it experienced both the scenarios - internalization and counter-hegemony – often at the same time, as happened during regime of Anwar al-Sadat.<sup>221</sup>

At the same time, however, not only does the mainstream literature on Islamic social services in Egypt group together different kinds of Islamism and Islamic activism, even those who do not fully subscribe to the same ideological framework as the Islamic Group and the Muslim Brotherhood, but it also tends to utilize other simplifications. For instance, a widespread belief is that the criteria for Egyptians to access those services were only personal and particularistic.

Adherence to the *proper* Islamic conduct, patronage, and communal membership supposedly represented the prerequisites for the access.<sup>222</sup>

In fact, in many cases the services were not provided only to the citizens who met these criteria, but also to people who did not.

In a deliberate effort to penetrate the social groups that were most skeptical about the Islamist project, Islamists pretended to take multiple steps towards them and undoubtedly this was one of the main strengths of the Egyptian Islamist program.

Obviously, this is not to say that favouritism and coercive methods were not applied, especially in the local forms of social control implemented by the groups.

Indeed, due to their forceful and violent methods and their exasperated interpretation of *hisba*, both al-Gamā‘a and al-Ġihād soon alienated the majority of public opinion, thus preventing their utopia from becoming a true revolution.<sup>223</sup>

As a matter of fact, the importance of these provisions varies over time because the quality of state welfare varies as well.

One key poverty alleviation measure that exhibits a great deal of variation is the subsidized price of bread. Basic food subsidies impose a significant fiscal burden on the state, but their removal has always been politically sensitive.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 34 – 58.

<sup>222</sup> J. A. Clark, Islamic Social Welfare Organizations in Cairo: Islamization from Below?, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 17(4), Fall 1995, p 12.

<sup>223</sup> S. Mohammed Al‘wa, *Al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya al-Musallaha fi Miṣr 1974-2004* [The Islamic Fighting Group in Egypt 1974 - 2004], Maktaba al-Shurūq al-Dawliya, 2006, p. 100.

Following the pressure of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1977 for instance, the Egyptian government lowered a number of subsidies on basic goods, and this triggered multiple protests all over the country.

Subsidies have always been considered a fundamental part of the social contract between the State and the population, and the government was aware that a significant change in this sector was likely to cause an increase in the support for the different groups of the Islamist spectrum.

Unquestionably, all the services provided by various Islamic organizations filled a wide and long-lasting power vacuum in the welfare administered by the central state, and this is particularly true for Upper Egypt.

Beside the educated middle-class, the second group that was involved in the contemporary processes of enrichment and Islamization due to migration abroad was exemplified by the working class, which included service and construction workers, small informal businesses owners, and even people who had only occasional and intermittent employment.

Contrary to common stereotypes that radical groups generally attract a disproportionate number of *alienated, marginal, or otherwise abnormal* individuals, evidence shows Islamist militants to be almost model young Egyptians.<sup>225</sup>

Constrained by raising prices, high unemployment rates, and low wages, they began to rely largely on private benefactors and Islamic charities and meanwhile, the process of urbanization that had started in the previous decades sped up and the two groups found themselves in close contact with each other. According to James Toth, they both joined religious associations that tried to recreate the intimacy of a bygone rural community.<sup>226</sup>

In this contact, however, urban Islamist associations strongly opposed the quietist, sufi-influenced rural religiosity and characterized it as a set of superstitions: the goal of the urban-dominated Islamist associations was to create in the cities a strict form of Islamic modernity largely inspired by the Gulf influences.

In Cairo and the Delta region, militants were usually arrested with much greater force than in Upper Egypt, were authorities tended to be less concerned about the contemporary wave of radicalism that was

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<sup>224</sup> D. Fielding – A. Shortland, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”: Political violence and counter-insurgency in Egypt, *Journal of Peace Research* 47(4), July 2010, p. 435.

<sup>225</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *The Changing Face of Egypt’s Islamic Activism*, p. 652.

<sup>226</sup> J. Toth, *Islamism in Southern Egypt*, p. 555.



spreading all over different social classes. There was probably a tacit understanding that local security forces would tolerate the Islamic Group as long as the group limited its activities to preaching in Upper Egypt.<sup>227</sup>

In 1978 in Assyut, Nāğih Ibrahīm, who was going to become a top leader of the group, was elected the emir of all Upper Egypt, reasserting the role of the South in the internal hierarchy of al-Ğamā'a al-Islāmiya.

Simultaneously, a number of strategists from different Islamist or jihadist groups in Egypt reaffirmed that the difference between al-Ğamā'a and the northern groups was one of the obstacles to the formation of an Egyptian Islamic alliance similar to Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front.<sup>228</sup>

From their perspective, al-Ğamā'a al-Islāmiya members seemed to be aware of their uniqueness and repeatedly emphasized the differences occurring between them and the northern groups, with a particular reference to al-Ğihād:

In the south, there is only one Islamic force: al-Ğamā'a al-Islāmiya. Unlike al-Ğihād group, composed of clusters of secret organizations with different names like al-Fatah, al-Tal'i, al-Khilafa, and al-Nasr that have no mosques or social relations, we are a social force that conducts our works in the open through our mosques and our relations with the larger society.<sup>229</sup>

The influence of the first Islamic student groups in shaping the following jihadi groups has been analyzed in the previous chapter.<sup>230</sup>

Nonetheless, it is worth noting another provision that increased the cultural clash between Upper Egypt and the rest of the country.

In the Seventies, regulations by the Ministry of Education required students to stay within their regions – divided along north-south lines – unless the program for which a student applied was only offered at a northern university.

This official segregation played an indirect but decisive role in the regional character of al-Ğamā'a al-Islāmiya, which was primarily formed by and in response to its regional context.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> M. K. al-Sayd, *The Other Face of the Islamist Movement*, Working Paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C. 2003, p. 14.

<sup>228</sup> R. Sid Ahmad, Al-Islamiyn, al-Sulṭa, wa al-Irhāb [The Islamist, the Regime, and Terrorism], *Middle East Affairs Journal* 2(1), Spring/Summer 1994, pp. 71-82.

<sup>229</sup> M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, p. 609.

<sup>230</sup> See pp. 34 – 58.

<sup>231</sup> M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, p. 611.

Even since the 1952 Revolution, the regime had not penetrated the south extensively, and the central government has always relied largely on the local notables to ensure order.

Therefore, it is not controversial to state that, during its formation and consolidation phases, one of the major successes of al-Ġamā'a was soldering part of the urban soul of the Upper Egypt's cities and Cairo with the rural component, as well as the educated young generations with the mass of unskilled workers. In so doing, the Islamic Group managed to expand its base of support to a point that it had sympathizers, followers, and members in every social group and in all governorates, cities, towns, and villages.

One of those factions was that of Muhammad 'Abd al-Salām Faraġ, which later came to be known as the main mastermind behind Anwar al-Sadat's assassination on October 6, 1981.<sup>232</sup>

Along with Faraġ, several top-ranking members of the Egyptian jihadi movement including Naġīh Ibrāhīm, Karam Zuhdi, 'Abbud al-Zumūr, and Khālid al-Islāmbūli participated in the assassination.

All these figures of the Egyptian jihadi landscape will be dealt with in the next chapter, dedicated to the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), the second most important Egyptian jihadi group after al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya.

#### **II.4 Open confrontation with the government**

During the government's clampdown that followed Sadat's death, more than three hundred Egyptian Islamist activists were imprisoned.

While the Islamic groups al-Ġamā'a arose from did not immediately condone the use of violence against the state, the closing of political opportunities in Egypt combined with the proliferation of micro-level dynamics of aggression legitimized the resort to violence to change the status quo in the eyes of the group's leaders.<sup>233</sup>

In this respect, according to the majority of scholars who studied al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, the prison phase was crucial in transforming the essence of the group.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> The ideological role of Muhammad 'Abd al-Salām Faraġ will be the focus of a dedicated section in the Chapter III.

<sup>233</sup> J. Drevon, Assessing Islamist Armed Groups' De-Radicalization in Egypt, *Peace Review* 27(3), 2015, p. 298.

<sup>234</sup> See O. Ashour, Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group, *Middle East Journal* 61(4), Autumn 2007, pp. 596 – 625 and L. Blaydes – L. Rubin, Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20(4), 2008, pp. 461 – 479.

Indeed, in this phase, for instance, the official split between the Islamic Group and al-Ġihād occurred, with al-Ġihād being then led by 'Abbud al-Zumūr and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa'ida.<sup>235</sup>

Another development stemmed from the prison phase was the production of a large literary corpus illustrating the group's ideology, included in the so-called *fiqh al-'unf*, "jurisprudence of violence".<sup>236</sup> This literature included books like *Mithāq al-'Amal al-Islāmi* [Islamic Action Charter] (1984); *Kalimat Ḥaqq* [A Righteous Word] (1984); *Ilahun ma' Allah? I'lān al-Ḥarb 'ala Maġlis al-Sha'ab* [Another God with Allah? Declaration of War on the People's Assembly] (1990); *Hattmiyat al-Muwāḡaha* [The Inevitability of Confrontation] (1990).

One of the most important monographs is *Mithāq al-'Amal al-Islāmi*, written in 1984 by Naġīh Ibrahīm and others, under the supervision of spiritual leader 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān and describing the IG's primary goal of establishing an Islamic government.

Denis Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob write that the group calls for jihad in order to achieve this goal and puts forth a two-step process to achieve an Islamic state. The first entails a gentle preaching of Islamist ideology, the second is the use of violence and physical force if non-violent tactics are not successful.<sup>237</sup>

Overall, these are the stages that Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya actually took, getting gradually closer to the violent confrontation with the state during the 1980s.

During that phase, less than a decade after the group's foundation, al-Ġamā'a activists and militants numbered around 10,000, with several times that many hard-core supporters.

Indeed, while the top-ranks were in prison, the second-in-line leaders outside the prison made multiple efforts to rebuild and strengthen the group after the decisive backlash by the State.

Among those leaders, who embodied the second generation of al-Ġamā'a activism, were Safwat 'Abdul Ghani, Mamdūh 'Ali Yusuf, and Mustafa Hamza.

Safwat 'Abdul Ghani was the leader of the *dā'wa* wing and in 1990 was tried for the assassination of Rif'at al-Mahġūb, a former speaker of the parliament. Mamdūh 'Ali Yusuf was the former commander of the military wing, while Mustafa Hamza was the former head of the *Shura* council abroad.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> The ideological and operational differences between the Islamic Group and al-Jihad will be analysed in the following chapter of the dissertation.

<sup>236</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, p. 146.

<sup>237</sup> D. Sullivan – S. Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society vs. the State*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1999, p. 84.

The second-in-line leaders based the rebuilding phase on two major objectives: broadening popular support for the Islamic Group in urban areas and enhancing the military wing by dividing it into two branches.

According to their project, the first branch would be trained for quick and small-scale operations, while the second branch was supposed to embody the nucleus of a hypothetical Islamic Group's Army,<sup>239</sup> which never materialized.

In this respect, according to Mamdūh 'Alī Yusuf's accounts, the division of tasks depended on the length of the prison sentence, which reveals that the group collectively established a specific order of priorities. The ones who were released first were to carry on *dā'wa* activities aimed at expanding popular support, while the second group would exploit new recruits to expand the geographical areas of influence, and the ones who were to be released later, at the end of the 1980s, were tasked with the organizing of the two distinct military branches.<sup>240</sup>

The leader of the group of Sadat's assassins was an electrical engineer without any particular theological education who had written a manifesto that began by discrediting the '*ulamā'* who had made themselves the turbaned valets of those in power. It then called for the execution of Sadat, "the apostate of Islam nourished at the tables of Zionism and imperialism."

The whole argument was reinforced by citations from the Qur'an, from the Sunna, and from a number of medieval Islamic authors who were especially intransigent, such as Ibn Taimiyya in primis.<sup>241</sup>

After a commando from al-Ġihād assassinated Sadat in 1981, hundreds of its members were arrested; five directly implicated in the assassination, including Faraġ, were executed and the bigger group, al-Ġamā'a, faced many incarcerations as well.<sup>242</sup>

In prison, over a period of three years, the union of the Cairo faction and the Upper Egypt faction came apart.

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<sup>238</sup> For an in-depth analysis of these figures, see for instance S. al-'Awwa, *Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Musallāha fi Miṣr* [The Armed Islamic Group in Egypt], Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 2006.

<sup>239</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, p. 48 and P. Kamolnick, *The Egyptian Islamic Group's Critique of Al-Qaeda's Interpretation of Jihad*, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7(5), 2013.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with Mamduh A. Yusuf, Former Leader of IG Armed Wing, in S. al-'Awwa, *Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Musallāha fi Miṣr* [The Armed Islamic Group in Egypt], Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 2006.

<sup>241</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 14.

<sup>242</sup> The assassination of the President will be the focus of a dedicated section in the next chapter.

Ideological, tactical, and sociological differences became more apparent; the Cairo faction was definitely more elitist and secretive, while al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya had always enjoyed a broader base of support and a deeper integration into society.

In the early 1980s, the ultimate scission was triggered by the dispute over the role of 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān, the blind sheikh who the IG suggested should be the supreme leader of jihad in Egypt.

The Cairo faction believed that the Qur'an forbade leaders with impaired senses, while the leaders of Islamic Group maintained their allegiance to Sheik 'Omar.

As far as the figure of 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān is concerned, Malika Zeghal tellingly defines him an *Azharite at the extreme periphery*<sup>243</sup>, highlighting that, despite his studies at al-Azhar, he progressively distanced himself from the institutional Islam of the Sunni university.

Born in 1938 in the northern governorate of Dakhiliya, 'Abdel Raḥmān lost his eyesight when he was 10 months old. Later, he studied a Braille version of the Qur'an, memorizing it by the age of 11.

As a teenager, he developed a deep interest in the thought of Ibn Taymiya and Sayyid Quṭb, which led him to study at Cairo University's School of Theology and at al-Azhar, where he earned a Doctorate in *tafsīr*.<sup>244</sup>

Soon after leaving university, 'Abdel-Raḥmān was appointed imam in a mosque in Fayyum and began preaching against the secular regime of Egyptian president Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, who he used to compare with a pharaoh.

The 1967 defeat by Israel had a strong impact on his views, and in 1970 he forbade the believers to pray on the grave of the deceased President Nasser. For this reason, he was arrested in October of the same year and released in June 1971.

After his release, he taught theology in Assyut, where he mixed with some future members of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and consolidated his appreciation for the thought of Sayyid Quṭb.<sup>245</sup>

After the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, he was arrested but soon released for lack of evidence.

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<sup>243</sup> M. Zeghal, Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94), *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31(3), Aug. 1999, p. 391.

<sup>244</sup> Qur'anic interpretation.

<sup>245</sup> See G. Kepel, *The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

In the mid-1980s he made his way to Afghanistan, where he met his former professor, Abdullah Azzam, co-founder of *Maktab al-Khadamāt* (MAK) along with Osama bin Laden. *Maktab Khadamāt al-Muğāhidīn al-'Arab*, “Service Offices for the Arab Mujahedeen” was founded in 1984 by Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri with the goal of raising funds and recruiting new foreign fighters from the Arab countries for the war against the Soviet Union.

After Azzam’s murder in 1989, ‘Omar ‘Abdel Raḥmān assumed control of the international jihadist arm of MAK and more precisely, in 1990 ‘Abdel-Raḥmān traveled to New York City to gain control of MAK’s financial and organizational infrastructure abroad.

One year later he obtained a green card from the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in Newark, New Jersey.

After a few months, however, U.S. officials recognized that he was on the lookout list, and in March 1992, the authorities revoked his green card, after which he requested political asylum, and it was later revealed that ‘Abdel Raḥmān was given most of his visa approvals by the CIA.

While preaching at three mosques in the New York City area, ‘Omar ‘Abdel Raḥmān established long-term friendships with some of the members of the group that would soon be responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Moreover, one of his followers, El-Sayyid Nosāir, was linked to the 1990 Manhattan assassination of Israeli nationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League.<sup>246</sup>

In spite of the quite well-founded evidence of the CIA protection of the preacher, ‘Abdel-Raḥmān was deeply anti-American, and he relentlessly attacked U.S. foreign policy and Western social customs.

He went a step further, issuing a fatwa that declared it lawful to rob banks and kill Jews in the US.

His sermons condemned Americans as the “descendants of apes and pigs who have been feeding from the dining tables of the Zionists, Communists, and colonialists”. He called on Muslims to assail the West:

Cutting the transportation of their countries, tearing it apart, destroying their economy, burning their companies, eliminating their interests, sinking their ships, shooting down their planes, killing them on the sea, air, or land.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> C. Hedges, “A Cry of Islamic Fury, Taped in Brooklyn for Cairo”, *The New York Times*, January 7, 1993: [<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/07/world/a-cry-of-islamic-fury-taped-in-brooklyn-for-cairo.html>].

<sup>247</sup> E. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida’s Jihad in Europe*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 2004, p. 26

After the first World Trade Center bombing in February 1993, an Egyptian informant recorded the blind sheikh saying he preferred attacks be concentrated on U.S. military targets, but also stating acts of violence against civilian targets were not illicit.

'Abdel Raḥmān was arrested on June 24, 1993, along with nine of his followers, and on October 1, 1995, he was convicted of seditious conspiracy, solicitation and conspiracy to murder Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, solicitation to attack a U.S. military installation, and conspiracy for the World Trade Center bombing.

In 1996 he was sentenced to life in solitary confinement and 21 years later, on February 18, 2017, 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān died in a federal prison in North Carolina.

Back to the overall relations between the two groups, after three years in prison the two factions emerged in 1984 more rivals than allies. The faction headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri in Cairo would go global, and it will be the subject of an in-depth analysis in the following chapters of the present study.

Among those who stayed in Egypt, al-Ġihād focused on Cairo, recruiting mainly élite university students and young professionals.

We saw that al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, on the contrary, was active primarily in impoverished villages in the south and among a more grass-roots base, mainly recruiting poorly educated individuals, although not exclusively.

Both groups were subdivided into mostly self-sufficient cells, rendering each less vulnerable to government infiltration. Each cell had an internal structure and usually operated independently of others and at its peak, IG possessed several thousand militants and a similar number of supporters.

The Islamic Jihad, on the other hand, probably never had more than a few hundred militants. Assisted by elements inside and outside Egypt, the Islamic Group and Islamic Jihad assailed anyone who stood in the way of their goals, and the targets spanned the socioeconomic spectrum – police, military, government officials, Coptic Christians, journalists, and scholars.

A further difference between the two Egyptian jihadi groups is that al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya tended to target tourists and lower-level government personnel, such as police or paramilitary units, while al-Ġihād preferred high-level targets, such as Egyptian government officials – even those in the Cabinet.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> J. Wheatley – C. McCauley, *Losing your audience: Desistance from terrorism in Egypt after Luxor*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20(4), 2008, p. 253.

As far as the Islamic Group is concerned, after this new prison phase its terrorist activities rose to new levels of carnage beginning in March 1992, as part of a renewed effort to topple the government of President Hosni Mubarak.

Between 1992 and 1997, 1,500 people perished as a result of the terror campaign, and IG's assaults ranged from night club owners to secular thinkers and Copts, especially in the Upper Egypt.

In June 1992, the militants shot and killed a prominent secular writer, Farağ Foda, for ridiculing their ideas<sup>249</sup>, and this episode signalled a new campaign against the country's writers and intellectuals, and in October 1994 the Nobel laureate Nağīb Maḥfūz was repeatedly stabbed in the neck but survived.<sup>250</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamic Group practiced *ḥisba* according to its absolutist discernment of right and wrong and attempted to violently punish those they considered in violation of Islam.

Their acts of violence included attacks on unveiled women, assaults on artists and artistic venues, demolition of television sets, destruction of shops selling or renting videotapes, vandalism and destruction of places of prostitution or drinking, and physical punishment of those who drank, prayed in a way unacceptable to jihadists, or otherwise violated their religious and moral code.<sup>251</sup>

According to Gilles Kepel, the virulence was unprecedented, in Upper Egypt especially, in the large villages from which the students of the crowded universities came. Murders of Copts, fires set to their churches, and extortion of funds in the name of the *ğiziya* - the poll tax to which non-Muslims were once subject in the land of Islam and which the modern state had abolished – are just few examples of the climate that the Islamic Group was able to create.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Farağ Foda was a prominent professor, writer, and human rights activist, assassinated by members of the Islamic Group after being accused of blasphemy by a committee of clerics at al-Azhar University. Foda was noted for his critical articles and trenchant satires about Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt. In many newspaper articles, he pointed out weak points in Islamist ideology and its demand for sharia law.

<sup>250</sup> Maḥfūz's allegorical *Children of Gebelawi*, a 1959 political novel depicting religious figures such as Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed, caused him troubles with Egypt's religious establishment. Radical Egyptian sheikh 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān said Maḥfūz, a Muslim, deserved to die for *Children of Gebelawi*. (Awlād Ḥaretnā, "Children of Our Alley"). Another cause of the extremists' anger was that Maḥfūz supported Egypt's peace with Israel.

<sup>251</sup> A. Hamzawi – S. Grebowski, *From Violence to Moderation: al-Jama'a al-Islamiya and al-Jihad*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Center, Beirut, April 2010.

<sup>252</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 19.



Over the course of the eleven most active years of the insurgency - from 1986 to 1997 - an estimated minimum of 1,300 Egyptians lost their lives as a result of terrorist activity and of those, approximately 391 were members of the security forces, 385 were civilians, and the rest were insurgents.<sup>253</sup>

On April 28, 1996, the Islamic Group opened fire on a bus carrying Greek tourists, killing 18 people, while total tourist deaths from terrorist attacks between 1992 and 1997 were 97; year by year these deaths were respectively 1, 6, 4, 0, 19, and 67 (62 in 1997 at Luxor).<sup>254</sup>

More precisely, in the eighteen months between April 1992 and October 1993 over 220 terrorists, security officers, and tourists were killed in clashes, while during the first 10 months of 1995, human rights organizations reported that over 300 people were killed during fighting in Upper Egypt, the IG's stronghold.<sup>255</sup>

Obviously, in IG's project hitting tourism would weaken Egypt's economy and therefore facilitate its replacement with an Islamic system. The Islamic Group hoped that the loss of the all-important tourism revenue (nearly \$2.03 billion in 1992, around 7% of GDP) would quickly lead to financial ruin and state collapse.<sup>256</sup>

'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān also played a key role in the tourist campaign. As mentioned before,<sup>257</sup> after his release, he travelled to the United States and in July of 1980, he settled in Brooklyn. He shipped tapes back to Egypt urging confrontation. One such tape justified the attacks by saying:

To those lamenting what has happened to tourism, I say it is sinful and the lands of Muslims will not become bordellos for sinners of every race and color. (...)  
The goal of these attacks is to put pressure on the Egyptian regime.

Notoriously, the bloodiest attack of that phase of Egyptian history occurred on November 17, 1997 in Luxor. Around 8.45 a.m., a squad of armed members of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya attacked tourists visiting the archaeological site: they shot and stabbed 62 tourists to death, killing 4 Egyptians as well.

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<sup>253</sup> M. Awad – M. Hashem, *Egypt's Escalating Islamist Insurgency*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Center, Beirut, October 2015.

<sup>254</sup> N. Tal, Islamic Terrorism in Egypt: The Challenge and the Response, *Strategic Assessment* 1(1), 1998: [<http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat%21&incat% &read%592>].

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> S. Wahab, *Tourism and Terrorism: Synthesis of the Problem with Emphasis on Egypt*, in A. Pizam - Y. Mansfeld, (Eds.), *Tourism, Crime, and Security Issues*, Wiley and Sons, London, 1996.

<sup>257</sup> See p. 86.

Leaflets stuffed inside the bodies claimed, in the name of the Islamic Group, that the attack was in revenge for the imprisonment of ‘Omar ‘Abdel Raḥmān in the United States.

Carried out in a quasi-ritualistic fashion with guns and knives, the killing was likely to send shock waves through Egypt and beyond.<sup>258</sup>

Terrorists left the site at about 9:30 a.m., and even then, police did not arrive to stop them. Indeed, after 45 minutes of bloodshed, the commando hijacked a tour bus but eventually met resistance from police at a checkpoint only around 9:45.

At approximately 10:00 a.m., the remaining five gunmen fled into the hills, pursued by the police and by 11:30 a.m. the police had shot and killed the terrorists, although rumors circulated about a mass suicide.

The Luxor massacre unleashed repercussions that would resonate well beyond the event itself.<sup>259</sup> Primarily, it triggered increasing moral revulsion among strata of the social pyramid that had supported or sympathized with the Islamic Groups and their fellow jihadists and signs posted in Luxor after the massacre reflected similar sentiments “In Egypt, you will never be a stranger” and “All Egyptians refuse murder action in Egypt”.<sup>260</sup>

A few months before, on July 5, 1997, a faction of the Islamic Group officially declared a ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities and terrorist attacks. This event would represent the starting point of the de-radicalization phase and will be dealt with in Chapter III.

What became obvious after the Luxor events was that not all of the group agreed with the ceasefire and in spite of the analyses that see in ‘Omar Abdel Raḥmān the sole mastermind of the Luxor attack, it is probable that the massacre was orchestrated by Rifai Ahmed Ṭāha and his followers, the most prominent dissident IG leader, who used the attack to sabotage the ceasefire.<sup>261</sup>

Between November 17, 1997 and December 2, 1997, roughly 82,000 passengers cancelled their reservations with EgyptAir; tourism grew only marginally in 1997, and in 1998 arrivals declined by 13 percent. One study found that, compared to projected values, the drop in the actual arrivals, nights, and receipts amounted to 37.2 percent, 35.8 percent, and 45.9 percent respectively.<sup>262</sup>

Therefore, although the argument that the Islamic Group was driven only by religious zeal and was hostile to Egypt’s pharaonic past gained relevance in both Egyptian and Western media, a deeper

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<sup>258</sup> J. Wheatley – C. McCauley, *Losing your audience: Desistance from terrorism in Egypt after Luxor*, p. 250.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* p. 256.

<sup>260</sup> M. Ghalwash, “True People of Egypt Outraged by Luxor Attack,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 28, 1997.

<sup>261</sup> S. Brooke, *Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31(3), March 2008.

<sup>262</sup> M. Sakr - N. Massoud, *International Tourism Volatility with Special Reference to Egypt*, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, May 2003, p. 19.

perspective suggests that the first motivation for this kind of attacks was that tourism was a vital sector for the Egyptian state, and consequently for the regime.

Concerned about the renewal that the Islamic Group was undergoing, security forces inaugurated a second clampdown on its members, with new arrests and open clashes between the group and the police. In an attempt to ease the grip of the state, however, since the beginning of 1989 a number of high-rank leaders of al-Gama'a had been issuing an appeal to the government containing the so-called "six-demands".

The requests appeared regularly on IG's declarations and communiqués, asking for:

- The release of all the detainees who were not charged.
- Ceasing torture in prison, detention centers, and state security buildings.
- Improving the prison conditions for IG activists.
- The release of women who were taken to force their male relatives to surrender to the state.
- Reopening the IG mosques that were shut down.
- Ceasing the policy of renewing detention indefinitely.<sup>263</sup>

In an interview by Hishām Mubārak, Talāt Fuād Qassem<sup>264</sup>, a top IG military wing leader, says that an important official from the state security forces visited him while under house arrest in October 1988:

He (the state security forces official) told me it was necessary to stop the violence undertaken by the Islamic Group in the countryside, at Ain Shams, and in other regions. I specified our conditions: first, releasing group prisoners, including those who had not yet been sentenced; second, lifting the ban on our propagandizing and rescinding the order to close our mosques; and third, ending state torture and the taking of hostages. Of course, these conditions were not

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<sup>263</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, p. 49.

<sup>264</sup> He was one of the founders of the Islamic Group and the spokesman for the organization. Talāt Fuād Qassem fled Egypt after Anwar al-Sadat's assassination in 1981 and found political asylum in Denmark. From his place in Denmark, Talāt Fuād Qassem, with two Algerian associates, Kamer Eddine Kherbane and Abdullah Anas, who operated from Milan, coordinated and recruited Muslim European volunteers to fight in Bosnia in the years 1990-95. They sent, eventually, about 2,000 volunteers to camps in Bosnia. USA Intelligence suspected that Talāt Fuād Qassem, who was a close associate of the blind Sheikh `Omar `Abdel Raḥmān, was also involved in the World Trade Center Bombing in New York on February 26, 1993. In 1995, he was arrested in Zagreb, Croatia. USA officials questioned him for two days on a ship in the Adriatic Sea, focusing on an alleged assassination plot against President Clinton. Then they sent him to Egypt, where he had been sentenced to death in absentia by a military tribunal in 1992. According to Islamic militant sources in Egypt, Egypt took Talaat Fouad Qassem to the intelligence headquarters in al-Mansoura, and then moved him to Cairo in October 1995.

met, and the security around my house intensified. After my escape and re-arrest in 1989, I was visited by the same man who demanded again that we end the violence, especially around Ain Shams, where there had been a notable escalation in group activities against the police. I repeated our conditions and he his refusal.<sup>265</sup>

## II.5 National jihadists

What has become clear throughout the analysis of the genesis and the main characteristics of the Islamic Group is its prominent and remarkable national character.

Fawaz Gherghes, the scholar who investigated most about the shift from national to global jihad occurred at the end of the last century, defines jihadists of the 1980s and 1990s as “religious nationalists”<sup>266</sup>, due to the importance of the national horizon in their discourse, strategies, and tactics.

According to the eminent historian of the Middle East Roger Owen, this becomes clear when we think about what the modern politico-religious movements in the Middle East had in common.

A basic shared ingredient, as Owen notes along with Sami Zubaida<sup>267</sup>, is that they operated within a common historical context in which they are almost all contestants for power and influence within specific national political arenas defined by particular state borders.

This is not to deny that many of those movements and groups had significant cross-border linkages, especially in their mature phases. What it means is that their primary aim was to influence policies and practices within one given system, i.e. the Egyptian nation-state.<sup>268</sup>

As extensively stated in the introduction,<sup>269</sup> the first goal of the present work is to show the national approach that the first Egyptian jihadist *ḡamā‘āt* adopted to experience jihad. In particular, the relevance of the national dimension was clear in their genesis, activities, grievances and interests, operational choices, and enemies.

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<sup>265</sup> This quotation appears in L. Blaydes – L. Rubin, *Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt*, pp. 461 – 479.

<sup>266</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

<sup>267</sup> S. Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, I.B. Taurus, London, 1995, pp. 152 – 155.

<sup>268</sup> R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 155.

<sup>269</sup> See pp. 5 – 25.

First, as previously discussed, the first Egyptian *ḡamā'āt* in general, and al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya in particular, stemmed from the Islamist student groups that were born within Egyptian universities and campuses to respond to national and local issues.

Within the framework of higher education, between 1970 and 1977 the number of students rose from less than 200,000 to more than 500,000, thus rapidly accentuating the inadequacy of the university system both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective.

Deficient infrastructure, paltry salaries for the teachers – who as a consequence were often poorly motivated - the promiscuity threatening the female students' modesty both within the campuses and on the buses, overcrowded dormitories, and massive emigration of teachers to the Gulf countries were just some of the major concerns affecting the country's higher education.

The new *ḡamā'āt al-dīnya*<sup>270</sup> exploited the multiple problems that students had to face daily and put forward immediate Islamic solutions.

Young Islamists managed to start using narratives that were easily understood by the mass of students; they were animated by an unprecedented religious zeal that was oriented to action, they organized summer camps, published magazines and pamphlets, fostered the return to the veil, established bus services to carry the female students from their lodging to the university, set up free group revision sessions at the mosques and reproduced cheap editions of the expensive manuals.

Inevitably, since the demand for those services was extremely high, they had to find a criterion to decide who could go first. Islamic attire for instance, seemed a perfect criterion, which started to be preferable and then became compulsory.<sup>271</sup>

Analyzing the further activities that the groups carried out, it becomes particularly clear how they were dedicated to building up a national base of support and to providing a meaningful alternative to a national government, which jihadists wanted to portray as corrupt, incapable, and unwilling to take care of its own citizens.

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<sup>270</sup> It is helpful to distinguish between the *ḡamā'āt*, "groups" (sing. *ḡamā'a*), and the *gam'iyyāt*, "associations" (sing. *ḡam'iya*). The latter operate openly to propagandize Islamic behavior and teachings. They may serve as recruiting pools for the *ḡamā'āt* and there are sometimes organic links between them. The *ḡamā'āt* can be seen as a vanguard of dedicated radicals with some characteristics of the *ḡamā'iyyat* in addition to a much stronger commitment to jihad and acceptance of violence.

<sup>271</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 143.

Ranging from the first services that the Islamist groups used to provide to the university students to the *dā'wa* activities throughout Egypt, the groups focused on the state's deficiencies, giving the new potential supporters tangible ways to improve their daily life instead of an abstract utopian message to believe in.

Second, according to the words of Sayyid Quṭb, humanity would not listen to an abstract belief that cannot be corroborated by tangible facts, and the duty of the jihadi groups was providing humanity with those necessary tangible facts.<sup>272</sup> The underlying interests and grievances that contributed to the radicalization of the Egyptian *ḡamā'āt* in this direction were eminently national.

With regards to operational choices and enemies, every terrorist group relies on a pyramid of support, in which different layers show a different level of commitment to the group's cause.

The base of the pyramid includes all those who sympathize with terrorist goals but not their violent means. Next higher is the stratum of terrorist supporters, who verbally justify the terrorists' violent tactics but do not act. At the apex of the pyramid are the radicals involved in violence – the terrorists.<sup>273</sup>

According to this model, the Islamic Group were competing with the government for the sympathy or at least the passive acquiescence of the base of the pyramid, thus confirming the marked national dimension of the group's profile.

Third, what in this chapter has been called Sa'īdi dominance within al-ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya, that is to say the particular relevance that the Sa'īd in Upper Egypt had in the birth and development of the group, effectively reveals that the genesis of the Islamic Group was in response to national issues.

As previously stated, the Sa'īdi region's relations with the Egyptian government have always been tense and State budgets and investments consistently neglected the Sa'īdis. This territory is less developed than the rest of Egypt, also compared to the other vast rural area, that of the Delta, north of Cairo.<sup>274</sup>

Moreover, southern provincial capitals such as Asyut and Minya demonstrate the rural-urban discontinuities and were the first areas in a predominantly traditional region to be impacted by rapid urbanization, and they were the most likely places to experience social instabilities manifesting

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<sup>272</sup> S. Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fi al-Ṭarīq* [Milestones].

<sup>273</sup> J. Wheatley – C. McCauley, Losing your audience: Desistance from terrorism in Egypt after Luxor, p. 251.

<sup>274</sup> See M. Fandy, Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?, *Middle East Journal* 48(4), Autumn 1994, pp. 607 – 625.

themselves in sectarian and political violence<sup>275</sup> and it was not by chance that Asyut and Minya provided 21.4% of Tanzim's members.<sup>276</sup>

A fourth piece of evidence supporting the thesis that sees the Islamic Group as a national jihadi movement is the commitment to the anti-Soviet cause in Afghanistan.

Indeed, we saw that this commitment did not represent a shift towards a global approach to jihad. The sources and statements that have been previously analysed demonstrate that Afghanistan was used by Egyptian jihadists as a training camp that would give them new skills and expertise useful for their national jihadi project.

Localism, not globalism, informed the thinking and action of *mujahedeen* who had fought in Afghanistan, and it seems undeniable that the ultimate enemy of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya was embodied by the corrupt Egyptian governments of Anwar al-Sadat first, and Hosni Mubarak later.

Essentially, collective resentment was fostered by exquisitely national frustration and grievances, caused by a state that was considered *kāfir*, "infidel", and enslaved to Western interests.

Similarly, the fifth national indicator was the choice of targeting the tourism sector. It responded to national goals much more than to the hate for the supposed Far Enemy embodied by the Westerners, let alone the pagan pharaonic heritage.

The first motivation for these attacks was that tourism was a vital sector for the Egyptian state, and consequently for the regime. As repeatedly stated by 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān, the objective of the so-called tourist campaign was to put pressure on the Egyptian regime.

All these remarks corroborate the initial hypothesis of the dissertation that the first Egyptian *gamā'āt* were national jihadi groups.

Indeed, radicalization processes, resentment triggers, and anger were essentially oriented against the state, the enemy was embodied by the Egyptian state itself.

Prioritizing the Near Enemy (the State) over the Far Enemy (the West) and developing an *Islamization* utopia *within* Egypt and *for* Egyptians were the pillars of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya's agency.

In the next chapter, the process of radicalization, the characteristics and the activities of al-Ġihād, the second main Egyptian jihadi group, will be analysed.

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<sup>275</sup> H. Ansari, *The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics*, p. 131.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

In Chapter IV, the dissertation will proceed to examine the following phases of the two groups' existence and the momentous set of changes that led both al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād to undertake their disengagement and de-radicalization processes, which have been possible thanks to the national *raison d'être* of their conceptions of jihadism that is analysed in this chapter and the next one.



### III. Al-Ġihād al-Islāmy

The chapter will focus on the second most important Egyptian jihadi group, Al-Ġihād al-Islāmy (the Islamic Jihad), which stemmed in the Seventies from the same embryonic organizations as al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya (the Islamic Group), which was the subject of the previous chapter.<sup>277</sup>

The historical reconstruction of the genesis and the development of the group will be followed by the analysis of the ideological, strategical, and organizational differences occurring between al-Ġihād and al-Ġamā'a.

As far as doctrinal pillars are concerned, *al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, “The Absent Obligation”, written by al-Ġihād's main ideologue ‘Abdel Salām Faraġ, will be examined as it is the milestone of the group's thought and the most exhaustive theorization of the concepts of Near and Far Enemies.

The killing of President Anwar al-Sadat (October 6, 1981) and its implications will be the focus of the next section, which will be followed – as in the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in the former chapter – by the final examination of all the characteristics that make al-Ġihād an exquisitely national jihadist group.

#### III.1 Genesis

Historically, as we have seen in the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, the rural-urban and north-south divides that characterized multiple political forces in the last decades of the Nineteenth century affected the Egyptian jihadi landscape as well.

Indeed, the notion of a jihadi - or even Islamist - super-structure does not withstand the test of history, even though in recent decades the intra-Islamist struggle has not received enough critical scrutiny and the multiple internal fractures have often been overlooked.

Like their secular nemesis, jihadists could not overcome these divides – in particular the Cairo versus Upper Egypt rifts, which cast divisive shadows over the conduct and actions of the different groups.

Therefore, from the original Tanzim al-Ġihād, encompassing the different souls of the Egyptian jihadi landscape of the Seventies, two main trends began to acquire their own appearance to later become al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> See pp. 63 – 96.

From a theoretical perspective, the division that took place gradually at the beginning of the eighties revolved around three major issues.

The first concerned the principle of ignorance as an excuse in religious duties and sins. According to the majority of al-Ġamā'a's members, ignorance represented a sufficient excuse when adopting a non-Islamic behaviour.

This principle stems from the idea that, morally corrupted as it was, Egyptian society and political environment did not provide the citizens with the right conditions to be ideal Muslims. Therefore, they could not be blamed for their ignorance in religious matters, a fault that should have been attributed to the decadent and Westernized regime.

This debate relates to the Islamic concept of *niyya*, "intention"<sup>279</sup>, which refers to the intention in one's heart to do an act for the sake of Allah and is extremely relevant, since according to some clerics insincere *niyya* causes the invalidation of deeds.

Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya embraced the view that deeds are a result only of the intentions of the actor, and an individual is rewarded or punished only according to that which he intends. Therefore, when missing religious duty without bad intentions, believers should neither be blamed nor held responsible.

Al-Ġihād, on the contrary, strictly supported the principle of individual responsibility. If someone who was born Muslim is deficient in completing his or her religious duties, then that individual should be blamed as part of a corrupt society that could no longer be regarded as Muslim.

Obviously, this second theory implies getting dangerously closer to the doctrine of *takfīr*, which means accusing a Muslim of being a *kāfir*, an infidel.

It is not by chance if the majority of al-Ġihād members, contrary to the mainstream position within al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, supported *takfīr*.

Nevertheless, the group has always been something clearly different from pure takfirist movements such as al-Takfīr wa al-Hiġra,<sup>280</sup> and the two movements cannot be equated.

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<sup>278</sup> The name of the movement will be transcribed as al-Jihad instead of al-Ġihād because the word jihad is used in English too and J is likely to look more familiar than Ġ to the readers.

<sup>279</sup> Throughout Islamic history, there has been some debate as to the necessity of an audible utterance of *niyya*. However, most scholars agree that as *niyya* is spoken from the heart, it does not have to be uttered publicly. For a technical analysis of the concept of *niyya* see P. R. Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law: Motive and Meaning in Medieval Sunni Fiqh*, Brill, The Netherlands, 2006.

<sup>280</sup> *Takfir* and migration.

Some supplementary information should be provided about al-Takfīr wa al-Hiğra - even though it falls out of the scope of the dissertation – since its history and doctrinal foundation represent a cornerstone in the modern jihadi parabola in Egypt and elsewhere.

Al-Takfīr wa al-Hiğra was funded in 1971 by the young agronomist Shukrī Muṣṭafa from Musha, Quṭb’s family hometown in Asyut governorate. After moving to Asyut with his repudiated mother, Mustafa came into contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, and in 1965 he was arrested by Nasser’s regime with the charge of being part of the conspiracy against the president.

He spent six years in concentration camps, where he studied the teachings of Sayyid Quṭb’s with a particular reference to the concepts of *‘uzla* and *mufāṣala*, “separation” and “withdrawal” from society.

A sub-group of his fellow inmates believed that the separation from the infidel society meant only spiritual detachment, and that a public enunciation of *takfīr* that targeted the whole society would have had dramatic consequences. This sub-group would form al-Ġamā’a al-‘Uzla al-Shu’uriya, the Spiritual Detachment Group.

On the contrary, Mustafa heralded the more radical perspective and the section he supported preached *mufāṣala kāmila*, the total separation from society instead of a purely spiritual detachment. Inevitably, the two factions would gradually drift away during the seventies.

According to Mustafa’s faction, Islam had been in decline ever since men have ceased to draw their lessons directly from the Qur’an and the Sunna, and have instead followed the tradition of imams<sup>281</sup> and therefore the four *madhahib*<sup>282</sup>, Islamic schools, were wholly unnecessary.

Al-Takfīr wa al-Hiğra, which is actually the name that the media attributed to the Society of Muslims,<sup>283</sup> physically separated itself from the *ğāhily* society to which it felt no allegiance, rejecting public employment and refusing to pray in state mosques. According to the takfirists and a good portion of al-Ġihād members, the Qur’an offers evidence supporting their position:

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<sup>281</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003, p. 79.

<sup>282</sup> The four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence are Hanafi (named after Abu Ḥanfa an-Nu’mān ibn Thābit, d. 767), Maliki (founded by Malik ibn Anas in the 8th century), Shafi’i (founded by al-Shafi’i in the early 9th century), and Hanbali (named after Ahmad ibn Ḥanbāl, d. 855).

<sup>283</sup> ‘. Abū al-Khaīr, *Dhikrāyāti ma’ Ġamā’a al-Muslimīn* [My Memories with the Society of Muslims], Dār al-Buḥūth al-‘ilmiya, 1980, Madīnat Kuwait, p. 116.

Whoever did not judge by what Allah revealed, those are they that are the unbelievers.<sup>284</sup>

Within al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, some cells used to live all together in the same building, following strict intermarriage rules<sup>285</sup> and adopting group structures closely resembling those of sects and cults.

The downfall of Ğamā'a al-Muslimīn started when they captured the former minister of *awqāf*, Muḥammad al-Dhahābi, on July 3, 1977, an action that the group used as an opportunity to gain exposure and seek concessions from the Egyptian government.<sup>286</sup>

However, this led to a crackdown on the members of the movement, and in response they murdered al-Dhahābi. Consequently, state forces rounded up the members within a few days, including Mustafa, who was then executed along with five other members of Ğamā'a al-Muslimīn.<sup>287</sup>

Moving back to the three most important causes of the split between the Islamic Group and al-Ğihād, beside the principle of ignorance as an excuse in religious duties, the second cause concerned whether or not the groups should be entirely clandestine.

Notoriously, al-Ğihād favoured almost total secrecy, while al-Ğamā'a al-Islāmiya leaned towards a more balanced combination due to its deeper involvement in *dā'wa* activities.

Along with ignorance and secrecy, the third major divide occurred when the two factions started to debate about the commander of the united group. The scission was triggered by the dispute over the role of 'Omar 'Abel Rahman, the blind sheikh who the Islamic Group suggested as supreme leader of jihad in Egypt.

The Cairo faction, which would form al-Ğihād, maintained that the Qur'an forbade leaders with impaired senses and wanted Abbud al-Zumūr and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa'ida, to be the leaders.

The disagreement was over whether sheikh `Omar `Abdel Raḥmān was eligible and qualified to serve as the spiritual guide of the group. What Al-Zawahiri and the Jihad contingent vehemently opposed was *wilāyat al-ḍarīr*, "the rule of the blind" both on operational and doctrinal grounds.

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<sup>284</sup> Qur'an [5:44].

<sup>285</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, p. 89.

<sup>286</sup> A. Zelin, al-Farīḍa al-Ghā'iba and al-Sadat's Assassination, a 30 Year Retrospective, *International Journal for Arab Studies* 3(2), July 2012, p. 6.

<sup>287</sup> J. B. Cozzens, Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32, 2009, p. 493.

While al-Zawahiri and ‘Abdel Raḥmān shared jail time at Mazra’ah Turrah prison, they argued intensely about the best way to advance the cause of al-Ġihād in Egypt, but there has never been any public indication that al-Zawahiri and Abdel Raḥmān have healed their rift, especially as ‘Abdel Raḥmān died on February 18, 2017.<sup>288</sup>

More broadly, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century there was no jihadi superstructure with a well-delineated program and leadership representative of the diverse shades.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, along with the hidden regional and social differentiations between the ranks and files of the two groups, all attempts to merge and unify the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group failed because of the unwillingness and inability of their senior leaders to put personal differences aside and transcend vested interests.

According to Gherghes, in the 1980s and 1990s the only thread unifying jihadists was the priority of fighting the Near Enemy and there was little else on which jihadists could agree, especially in terms of tactics and strategies needed to replace the *ġāhily* leadership with *ḥākimiya*, God’s sovereignty.<sup>289</sup>

On the contrary, regarding the relation of al-Ġihād with mainstream Islamism, the group led by al-Zawahiri and the Islamic Group adopted a very similar posture.

Jihadists looked with contempt and derision on mainstream Islamists like the Brotherhood who – at that moment in history - seemed to have accepted the rules of the game set by the apostate and corrupt regimes.

Consequently, although many individuals previously belonging to one of the two radical groups ended up joining the Muslim Brotherhood, the majority maintained their independence.

With the Brotherhood, notably the most important representative of the so-called mainstream Islamism, they competed over the control of mosques in poor neighbourhoods in Cairo, Upper Egypt, and elsewhere, although the constituency of the two Islamist hemispheres was diverse and heterogeneous.

During and after the Afghan war, both the Islamic Group and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy launched a vehement ideological campaign to discredit the Muslim Brothers, who were actively engaged in humanitarian and other activities both in Egypt and Afghanistan.

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<sup>288</sup> S. M. Gohel, Deciphering Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda’s Strategic and Ideological Imperatives, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11(1), 2017.

<sup>289</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy. Why Jihad Went Global*, p. 99.

In Peshawar, al-Ġihād distributed a booklet written by al-Zawahiri entitled *The Bitter Harvest, the Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years*, in which he railed against the movement founded by Ḥasan al-Banna in 1928 and accused the Brotherhood everywhere of blasphemy because:

They substituted the democracy of dark ages to God’s rule and gave up on jihad.<sup>290</sup>

Likewise, al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya circulated a manifesto criticising the Brotherhood for saying that sovereignty resides in and stems from the people.

This presumably democratic stance was unacceptable for the jihadists, who regarded it as a threat to the absolute *taḥwīd*, “uniqueness” of God and a step closer to *shirk*, “polytheism”, since in their view it was contradicting the fundamental dogma of the sovereignty of God and God only.

As far as the opinions of al-Zawahiri<sup>291</sup> regarding the Muslim Brotherhood are concerned, what disturbed him the most was that the Brotherhood did not listen to his warnings regarding *iġtihād*, the interpretation of the Islamic sources.<sup>292</sup>

Reopening the door of interpretation that Ibn Taimyya closed between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century was likely to cause a number of dangers for Islam, and Ayman al-Zawahiri was particularly shocked by some pronouncements of Brotherhood members in favour of equal citizenship rights to minorities.<sup>293</sup>

In his memoir, al-Zawahiri devotes an entire chapter to attacking the Muslim Brotherhood and refuting the notion that all citizens are equal before the law. The current al-Qa’ida leader goes a step further and calls on the Brotherhood youth to rebel against their traditional leadership, which abandoned jihad, and to join the mujahedeen everywhere.

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<sup>290</sup> *The Bitter Harvest, the Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years*, in F. Gherghes, *The Near Enemy. Why Jihad Went Global*.

<sup>291</sup> A section of this chapter is dedicated to his role in al-Jihad, whereas Chapter V will address his shift from the Egyptian to the global jihad.

<sup>292</sup> The term *iġtihād* has the same linguistic root as jihad. Therefore, it conveys the meaning of effort and struggle. In the case of *iġtihād*, the term is a key word in the Islamic jurisprudence and refers to the interpretative efforts that can be practiced through the independent reasoning, aimed at finding a solution to a legal question and fully understanding the Islamic sources.

Starting from the tenth century, closing the gate of *iġtihād* (*bab al- iġtihād*), meant dismissing all the relevance previously accorded to human intellect and independent reasoning, and starting to rely only on a literal and strict reading of the sources.

<sup>293</sup> In fact, some members of the Muslim Brotherhood agree on the right for Copts to serve in all official positions, but for all of them presidency represents an exception.

Unsurprisingly, in order to arouse revolutionary feelings in the younger members, al-Zawahiri leveraged a classical *topos* of jihadi discourse: *Sharaf*, “honour”. According to al-Zawahiri, the youth - unlike their passive and pliant elders - must redeem their honour and defend the faith, since participation in the existing order means prolonging the state of *kufur*, “impiety”, which makes the contemporary Brotherhood no longer worthy of Quṭb’s name.<sup>294</sup>

In citing Egyptian colonial history, al-Zawahiri also lays into al-Banna for showing support for King Fuād,<sup>295</sup> who was not only a corrupt ruler, but was also a subservient tool in the hands of the English, the occupiers of Egypt.<sup>296</sup>

### III.2 Peculiarities and differences between al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy

As mentioned before, the geographic range of al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād marked the beginning of two different evolutions in diverse circumstances.

According to Gilles Kepel, students represented the true nucleus of al-Ġihād in Southern Egypt, and in some areas of the country, 64% of Jihad’s membership was students. In Cairo, on the other hand, students were a minority.<sup>297</sup>

Speaking about the variations between the two groups, it is not hazardous to state that beside their background, strategies, *modus operandi*, constituency, and appeal were remarkably different.

As far as strategies and *modus operandi* are concerned, al-Ġamā’a relied on a mixture of public and clandestine activities spreading across Upper Egypt and finally extending to Greater Cairo.

By contrast, al-Ġihād has always maintained a strikingly clandestine physiognomy. The group’s idea of change involved sudden military action against the state leadership in Cairo and, ideally, the seizure of power in the capital.

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<sup>294</sup> Osama Bin Laden himself will use a more diplomatic tactic both towards the MB and the religious establishment, saying that they lost their voice because they had been silenced and tamed by apostates at home and their masters abroad. Obviously, Bin Laden’s aim was to propose himself as a leader fighting for all Muslims, therefore he was at times able to put the many differences aside.

<sup>295</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, “Brief Messages to a Victorious Ummah”, “And Be Not Divided Among Yourselves”, The Second Episode, SITE Intelligence Group, August 21, 2016: [<https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/zawahiri-calls-on-fighters-to-rally-around-afghan-taliban-reject-is.html>].

<sup>296</sup> Ironically, al-Zawahiri ignores the fact that his paternal grandfather, sheikh al-Aḥmad al-Zawahiri, an imam of al-Azhar, was very unpopular because he was seen as a close ally of King Fuād.

<sup>297</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 2003, p. 206.

According to Barry Rubin<sup>298</sup>, al-Ġihād recruited hundreds of members around the country, but it failed to break out of its cult status and become a mass organization.

Soon after its formation, however, al-Ġihād formed three subcommittees: indoctrination and training, “readiness” (military training and weapons), and economics.

Later, al-Ġihād began to be run by a Finance Committee, responsible for finding and developing sources of income, managing investments, paying EIJ members and their families, and providing fund transfers for EIJ operations.

The Civil Affairs Committee, which recruited and trained new members, was involved in the indoctrination process and determined how members communicate with each other and EIJ leaders.

The Military Operations Committee provided military training for select members and organized them into small guerilla cells.

The sharia Committee was in charge of releasing fatwas and sanctions for military operations and working closely in preparing reports to *Islamically* justify EIJ actions.

Finally, the Internal Security Committee was tasked with protecting EIJ leadership, conducting background investigations of members and carrying out executions of individuals deemed as collaborators.<sup>299</sup>

The norm was secrecy, the group could take recourse to limited public action only in some cases, particularly as concerns the *dā‘wa*, in order to mobilize human resources but the *dā‘wa* activities that al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya used to carry out were incommensurably stronger both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

Performing their *dā‘wa* duty, al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya occupied the vacuums left by both the weakened Muslim Brotherhood and the state itself, providing citizens with Qur’anic schools, Islamic-licit loans, health clinics and religious literature.

Indeed, the main areas of activity included health and education, with hospital beds for the poor, low-cost health treatments, after-school tutoring, complementary textbooks, clothing, and guidance through the immense bureaucracy that characterizes the country.

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<sup>298</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, p. 57.

<sup>299</sup> M. al-Zayyāt, *Ayman al-Ẓawāhiri kama ‘ariftuhu* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him], Dār Miṣr al-Maḥroussa, al-Qāhira, 2002, pp. 196 – 198.



Al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, on the contrary, used to perform some basic social services through its non-violent and overt cells, but the small *dā'wa* action mainly focused on the principle and practice of *hisba: Al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, “Command the good and forbid the evil”<sup>300</sup>, usually through the use of intimidating and coercive methods.

Compared to the Islamic Group, al-Ġihād has always committed to the development and use of more professional, destructive military methods to achieve its goals, such as grenades, bombs, explosives, and occasionally suicide attacks.

Al-Ġihād's fighting tactics showed greater sophistication. Not only did al-Ġihād members demonstrate the skillful use of arms, explosives, and remote-controlled devices, but they also manufactured some of these themselves.

The jihadists displayed remarkable abilities even in their intelligence system and these upgraded skills were the result of experience accumulated over the previous two decades. Equally important is the combat experience many of them acquired as volunteers in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation forces during the 1980s.

As a result, jihadists' operations in the early 1990s became more protracted, from hours or days in the 1970s to weeks and months in the 1990s.<sup>301</sup>

While the former Islamic groups from which al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād stemmed did not immediately condone the use of violence against the state, it is known that both groups would include violence among the legitimate means to achieve their objectives.

In the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, however, the closing of political opportunities in Egypt combined with the proliferation of micro-level dynamics of aggression between the group and its contenders legitimized resorting to violence to change the status quo in the eyes of the leaders.<sup>302</sup>

On the other hand, the cells that will gradually flow into al-Ġihād officially endorsed the use of violence much earlier, from their inception, in reaction to an array of domestic and international issues, ranging from the Arab loss of Jerusalem in 1967 to the weakness of the so-called establishment Islam.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Qur'an [3:110-114].

<sup>301</sup> S. E. Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam, and Democracy*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, p. 83.

<sup>302</sup> J. Drevon, *Assessing Islamist Armed Groups' De-Radicalization in Egypt*, *Peace Review* 27(3), 2015, p. 298.

<sup>303</sup> Establishment Islam is a term that refers to the thinkers and the ideas rotating around al-Azhar, the symbol of establishment Islam par excellence, and the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*Awqāf*).

After the reform implemented by Nasser in 1961, these institutions lost much of their independence, and began to be considered inadequate by the new wave of Islamist thought and activism. The reform has been analyzed in the first Chapter of the dissertation.

In its strategy of targeted killings, al-Ġihād also would direct attacks on the regime's high leadership, with attempts to assassinate the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister in 1993.<sup>304</sup>

In contrast with the IG, al-Ġihād promoted the recruitment of a small, dedicated élite that would infiltrate the army and stage a military coup, further corroborating the idea of higher military and tactical skills compared to those of the bigger jihadi group.

As previously mentioned, while al-Gamā'a radicalized more and more over time, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad was radical from its inception and its leadership considered the gradual approach ineffective and time-consuming and thus aimed for a quick and violent overthrow of the regime.<sup>305</sup>

A further interesting factor revealing the differences within the Egyptian jihadi galaxy is the influence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran on the two major groups.

In the case of al-Ġihād, it was remarkably stronger and al-Ġihād firmly supported the Revolution and considered it an Islamic experience that should be seriously studied. The majority of al-Ġihād members refused to discuss doctrinal differences between Sunnis and Shiites and preferred to focus on the ways in which the Egyptian jihadi cause could be influenced by the Iranian experience.

Furthermore, according to Fawaz Gherghes, while Quṭb produced an ideological manifesto, 'Abdel Salam Faraġ, al-Ġihād's main thinker, was an activist who preached jihad in local mosques, recruited jihadists, and plotted underground to overthrow the regime along lines similar to those of the Islamic revolution in Iran.<sup>306</sup>

Despite a persistent amount of skepticism towards Shia influxes, many members of al-Ġihād believed that those sectarian differences were nothing more than the result of the *criminal* practices of the Umayyad dynasty, which discriminated against non-Arab Muslims.<sup>307</sup>

After Khomeini's victory, the Egyptian radicals organized demonstrations and rallies in solidarity with the ayatollah and against giving the Shah asylum in Egypt and during 1979 and 1980 a number of Islamic groups of different sizes began to stage demonstrations trying to imitate the Iranian precedents.

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<sup>304</sup> D. Rashwan, What Remains of the Egyptian Jihad?, in D. Rashwan (Ed.), *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements*, Vol. 1, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, 2006, p. 63.

<sup>305</sup> C. Goerzig, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2010, p. 30

<sup>306</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>307</sup> W. M. Abdelnasser, Islamic Organizations in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution of 1979: the Experience of the First Few Years, *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19(2), Spring 1997, p. 31.

Nevertheless, we saw the Iranian experience would not become the catalyst of an Islamist revolutionary bloc throughout the MENA region,<sup>308</sup> and the majority of the Egyptian radical ideologues were well aware of the fundamental difference between their country and Iran. In Egypt, the Sunni clergy – less powerful than the Shia clerics in Iran – served as a bulwark against them, while in Iran, it was the clergy itself who believed in the revolution and actually performed it.

As one Egyptian radical stated:

What is lacking are *ulamā'* free of the chains of office, function, and dependence, *ulamā'* who cannot be hired and fired at will, and are economically independent, hence impervious to pressures.<sup>309</sup>

Overall, it is not hazardous to say that al-Ġihād had a more aggressive and *no-concession* posture towards the Enemy compared to al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya. Since its very creation, al-Ġihād inveighed more vehemently against the godlessness of states, regimes, and institutions that governed by or appealed to laws other than the law revealed by God and against those who required people to comply with systems inconsistent with Islam, such as secularism, democracy, and socialism.

### **III.3 *Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* and national jihadism**

In the previous sections of this work, the concept of national jihadism has been extensively analyzed.<sup>310</sup> Fawaz Gherghes defines jihadists of the last three decades of the nineteenth century as “religious nationalists,”<sup>311</sup> due to the importance of the national horizon in their discourse, strategies, and tactics.

The relevance of the national dimension was clear in their genesis, activities, grievances, interests, operational choices, and choice of enemies.

This point is the fundamental ideological platform that al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād had in common and, in the case of al-Ġihād, it is particularly evident.

In this respect, the milestone of the national jihadism adopted by the group is *al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, “The Absent Obligation”, written by al-Ġihād's main ideologue ‘Abdel Salām Farāġ.

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<sup>308</sup> See pp. 56 - 58.

<sup>309</sup> Cited in E. Sivan, *Radical Islam*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985, p. 14.

<sup>310</sup> See pp. 5 – 12 and pp. 92 – 97.

<sup>311</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009.

The word “obligation” in the title refers to jihad, which, according to Faraĝ, was absent from and neglected by the contemporary Egyptian society.

Faraĝ was an electrical engineer who, after graduating, managed to gain an employment at Cairo University while entering the country’s jihadi *milieu*.

If the work of Sayyid Quṭb provided an overarching intellectual architecture for the contemporary jihadi movement, ‘Abd el-Salām Faraĝ translated the meanings of jihad into operational terms. Moreover, he was the ideologue of the Near Enemy par excellence, and his *The Absent Duty* sanctions all the pillars of the twentieth century’s Egyptian jihadism.

While Quṭb produced an ideological manifesto, Faraĝ was an activist who preached jihad on the ground, recruiting new individuals and plotting within the framework of a revolutionary utopia. As mentioned above, he carried out these activities along lines similar to those of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.<sup>312</sup>

What made the *The Absent Duty* the ultimate operational manual for jihadists in 1980s and 1990s was that it introduced some peculiar considerations about the role of jihad in society distancing the analysis from that of Sayyid Quṭb.

The uniqueness of Faraĝ’s contribution relies on his exhaustive enunciation of the importance of the Near Enemy, *al-‘Adū al-Qarīb*, i.e. the Egyptian regime.

From these premises, Faraĝ rejected the widely held belief among other Islamic theorists and ideologues that the goal of jihad was the liberation of Jerusalem. Indeed, while stressing the importance of the liberation of the Holy Land from Israeli control, he saw the need to resist the enemy within as definitely more urgent.

Faraĝ posited a new paradigm, assigning a much higher priority to jihad against the Near Enemy than against the Far Enemy, be it Israel and/or the West.

According to the ideologue of al-Ġihād, the struggle against the local infidels was the fundamental priority:

As for the Muslim lands, the enemy resides in their countries. In fact the enemy is controlling everything. The enemies are these rulers who have snatched the leadership of the Muslims, therefore, jihad against them is *farḍ al-‘ayn*. Besides, the Islamic jihad is now in need of the effort of every Muslim. When Jihad is

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

*farḍ al-‘ayn*, it is not required to seek permission from one’s parents to march forth, as scholars have said: it becomes like praying and fasting.<sup>313</sup>

Descanting about the individual character of jihad, Faraḡ restates:

It is everyone’s duty to fight their ungodly rulers and liquidate their laws.<sup>314</sup>

In stating the priority of the Near Enemy, Faraḡ provides a number of significant justifications for this choice.

Firstly, he believed that the Egyptian Muslims in his time were worse than the Muslims in the time of the radical Hanbali ideologue Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).

Indeed:

Despite the fact that the Tartars [Mongols] ruled by the *yassa*<sup>315</sup>, which was taken from various laws and many laws that the ruler made up from his own desires, there is no doubt that it was less criminal than the laws laid down by the West, which have nothing to do with Islam or any religious laws.<sup>316</sup>

In order to strengthen his argument, he equates the leaders of Egypt with the Kharijites<sup>317</sup> - the Muslim sect that stemmed from the struggle for leadership of the Muslim community following the murder of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān, in 656 AD - saying that the former might be even more rebellious against Islam than the latter.

Secondly, Faraḡ distanced himself from the classical notion that required the existence of an Islamic authority to create an Islamic government. For him this goal could be achieved through jihad.

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<sup>313</sup> M. Faraḡ, *Al-Farīḍa al-Ghā’iba* [The Absent Obligation], Maktaba al-Anṣār Publications, Birmingham, 2000.

<sup>314</sup> S. Eddin Ibrahim, *The Changing Face of Egypt’s Islamic Activism*, p. 652.

<sup>315</sup> The *Yassa* was the secret written code of law created by Genghis Khan. It was the de facto law of the Mongol Empire even though the "law" was kept secret and never made public. Since it was secret, it could be modified and used selectively. It is believed that the *Yassa* was supervised by Genghis Khan himself.

<sup>316</sup> M. Faraḡ, *Al-Farīḍa al-Ghā’iba* [The Absent Obligation].

<sup>317</sup> Their name comes from the word *khāriġ*, “out”, “outside”. During the struggle for the succession, the community leaders chose Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, as ‘Uthman’s successor. ‘Ali had broad support based upon his reputation for piety, wisdom, and courage.

Mu’awiya, the governor of Damascus, however, rebelled against ‘Ali’s leadership. In the battle of Siffin (in modern Syria) in 657, Mu’awiya’s suggested to settle the dispute through an arbitration. ‘Ali agreed, and for this reason some of his supporters turned against him. Believing Mu’awiya and his supporters had apostasized through their rebellion, some held that ‘Ali was duty-bound to fight them, and that his victory had been divinely ordained. The agreement to arbitrate was thus a violation of the divine will, rendering ‘Ali and his supporters apostates as well. This faction—the Kharijites—continued to fight against ‘Ali’s troops, and ‘Ali was assassinated by a Kharijite in 661.

Most importantly, national jihad had to be considered a priority because the project of liberating Jerusalem could not be conducted under an apostate regime, which would have benefitted from such a victory.

In other words, shedding Muslim blood for an “atheist” state, i.e. Egypt, would serve to strengthen the latter.<sup>318</sup>

This implies that ‘Abdel Salam Faraġ unequivocally preferred that Jerusalem remain occupied by Zionists than be liberated by apostate Arab states.

Faraġ maintained that fighting has to be done only under the banner of Islam and under Islamic leadership and that establishing this Islamic leadership required a confrontation first and above all else with the *ġāhily* state. Once the Near Enemy had fallen, the new state would become an entity that could face Israel on equal terms.<sup>319</sup>

Undoubtedly, Faraġ’s work is the most all-encompassing theorization of the Near Enemy’s priority in the whole jihadi landscape of the last century, and in explaining the reasons behind the choice of prioritising the internal jihad, Faraġ clearly states:

The blood of Muslims will certainly flow even if victory comes, but the question now is will this victory be beneficial for the established Islamic State? Or will it be beneficial for the *kāfir* system and a strengthening of the pillars of the state that has rebelled against the laws of God? These rulers are taking advantage of the nationalistic ideas amongst some of the Muslims to achieve their non-Islamic objectives, even though they appear Islamic. Thus fighting must be under an Islamic flag and leadership, and there is no disagreement about that.

Verily the main reason behind the existence of imperialism in the Muslim lands is these rulers. Therefore to begin with destroying the imperialists is not a useful action and is a waste of time.

We have to concentrate on our Islamic issue, which is to establish the laws of God in our land first and make the word of God the highest. This is because there is no doubt that the prime field of jihad is to remove these leaderships and replace them with the complete Islamic system, and from here we start.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> H. Ansari, The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1), Mar. 1984, p. 137.

<sup>319</sup> S. Brooke, 2008, Jihadist Strategic Debates before 9/11, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31(3), 2008, pp. 201-226.

<sup>320</sup> M. Faraġ, *Al-Farīda al-Ghā’iba* [The Absent Obligation].

Faraḡ distanced himself from Quṭb also because he argued, contrary to the latter, that ideological and spiritual training were not necessary prior to conducting jihad.<sup>321</sup>

Islam was spread by the sword, but only against the leaders of *kufir*, who veiled it from reaching the people (...) It is obligatory upon the Muslims to raise their swords against the rulers who are hiding the truth and manifesting falsehood, otherwise the truth will never reach the hearts of the people.<sup>322</sup>

As Aaron Zelin effectively highlights, to emphasize the importance of fighting Faraḡ commits to a personal exegesis of the Qur'an and, for instance, he criticises the hadith in which Muhammad states after a battle that they have just completed the lesser jihad and now were to focus on the greater jihad; and when one asked what the greater jihad was, Muhammad replied that it was the jihad of oneself to be a better Muslim.<sup>323</sup>

Faraḡ states:

It is a fabrication. The reason behind the fabrication [of this hadith] is to belittle the value of fighting by the sword so as to divert the Muslims from fighting the *kuffār* and *munāfiqūn*.<sup>324</sup>

In other words, jihad is not only legitimate, but also necessary to defeat the false gods, *tawaghīt*<sup>325</sup> and in order to validate the idea that the jihad of the sword was the only option, Faraḡ carries out an accurate and uncompromising confutation of a number of tendencies of the then Islamist landscape in Egypt.

Firstly, he demolishes the activities of what has been defined *establishment Islam*, highlighting the uselessness of its action and the weakness of the Muslim charities that were under close surveillance by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Secondly, he focuses on the Muslim organizations that actually wanted to engage in politics and subsequently emphasises the fragility of those who believe they can fulfil their obligations only through *dā'wa* activities.

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<sup>321</sup> A. Zelin, al-Farīḡa al-Ghā'iba and al-Sadat's Assassination, a 30 Year Retrospective, *International Journal for Arab Studies* 3(2), July 2012.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>324</sup> "Infidels" and "hypocrites".

<sup>325</sup> Ibn Taimiyya's master work is *al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya* [The Shariatic Politics].

In particular, Faraḡ blames the *'ulamā'* of al-Azhar and describes them as *those who are busy seeking knowledge*:

There are some who say that what we should do now is busy ourselves with seeking knowledge, for how can we struggle in the cause of God while we are lacking the knowledge, which is obligatory to seek? But we have not heard anyone who says that it is permitted to abandon an Islamic order or an obligation of the obligations of Islam because of knowledge, especially if this obligation is jihad.

So how can we abandon a *farḍ 'ayn* (individual obligation) because of *farḍ kifāya* (collective obligation)?

He who says that knowledge is jihad must realise that what is *farḍ* is fighting (...).

If a person wants to increase his knowledge he could do so, because there are no restrictions on knowledge, which is available for everybody. But to delay jihad because of seeking knowledge is an evidence of the one who has no evidence.

However, we do not underestimate knowledge and scholars, rather we call for that. But we do not use it as evidence to abandon the obligations that God ordained.<sup>326</sup>

Faraḡ and his followers were contemptuous of the moderation, gradualism, and introspection favored by the official clergy and, while learning does have a role in trying to uproot sin, Islamic faith cannot be limited to study, devotion, and piety.<sup>327</sup>

He finally channels his critiques against those who say that in order to establish the Muslim state one must practice *hijra* to some other country, construct the state there, and then return as conquerors.

Such an option does not exist in the *weltanschauung* of 'Abdel Salām Faraḡ: For him it is imperative to build the Islamic state in one's own countries.

This clearly shows the depth of the differences occurring between the national jihadi groups and what would become known as the international project of al-Qa`ida.

For the former jihadists, jihad must be carried out within the border of their own state and there is no room to export jihad or for the foundation of a true Islamic State in another place. The goal must be accomplished in the Egyptian *hic et nunc*.

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<sup>326</sup> M. Faraḡ, *Al-Farīḍa al-Ghā'iba* [The Absent Obligation].

<sup>327</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, p. 45.



Along similar doctrinal lines another relevant ideologue in al-Ġihād, even though his status is not comparable with that of Faraġ, was Sayyed Imam al-Sharif, better known as Dr. Faḍl.

He was born in 1950, in the central Egyptian province of Beni Suef, his father was a headmaster in the city and the family belonged to the local middle class.

By the time he finished sixth grade, he became *ḥāfiẓ*<sup>328</sup> and at fifteen, the Egyptian government enrolled him in a school in Cairo for exceptional students. At 18, he entered medical school and began preparing for a career as a plastic surgeon specializing in burn injuries.

He would be a leading member of the militant organization and its emir until 1993, his work had a big impact on the jihadi movement during the late 1980s and early 1990s and, most significantly, Dr. Faḍl was also the author of the so-called *constitution* of al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.

He is said to be one of Ayman Al-Zawahiri's oldest fellows, and his book *al-'Umda fi I'dād al-'Udda* [The Essential of Making Ready]<sup>329</sup> was reportedly used as a jihad manual in training camps in Afghanistan.

In his masterpiece, he repeatedly highlights the concept of jihad as individual duty against local blasphemous tyrants:

Jihad is the natural state of Islam. Muslims must always be in conflict with nonbelievers, resorting to peace only in moments of abject weakness. Because jihad is, above all, a religious exercise, there are divine rewards to be gained. He who gives money for jihad will be compensated in Heaven, but not as much as the person who acts.

The greatest prize goes to the martyr. Every able-bodied believer is obligated to engage in jihad, since most Muslim countries are ruled by infidels who must be forcibly removed, in order to bring about an Islamic state.

The way to bring an end to the rulers' unbelief is armed rebellion.<sup>330</sup>

In 1968, he graduated from high school with a score of 94 percent, which allowed him to join the Faculty of Medicine in Cairo and that same year, Dr. Faḍl and a few others, including al-Zawahiri, formed the embryo of the Jihad group.<sup>331</sup>

In 1982, he was accused of taking part in Sadat's assassination, but he was later found innocent and after that he fled to Pakistan, being among the first Arabs to settle in Peshawar and assist, as a medical doctor,

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<sup>328</sup> *Ḥafiz* is someone who memorized the whole Qur'an.

<sup>329</sup> For jihad.

<sup>330</sup> L. Wright, "The rebellion within. An Al Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism", *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008.

<sup>331</sup> A. Moghadam – B. Fishman, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. 139.

the Afghan mujahedeen. In 1993, he left Pakistan and went to Sudan with his family, from where he later moved to Yemen.<sup>332</sup>

In 1999, he was condemned in absentia for the case of the returnees from Albania, involving Islamists who spent the previous years in the Balkan country and were accused of planning attacks on American interests worldwide. In 2001, Dr. Faḍl was arrested in Yemen and extradited to Egypt in 2004, where he would serve a life sentence.

In fact, what would really make Dr. Faḍl famous would be his defection from al-Qa`ida few years later and his recantations, which would represent one of the most evident instances of the strategies that the two groups were using to de-radicalize and make their initiative known.<sup>333</sup>

Indeed, Dr. Faḍl would gradually dissociate himself from jihadism and herald the momentous change that would lead the majority of al-Ġihād members to the process of de-radicalization, which would follow that of the Islamic Group.

The ideological relevance of his recantations and the role of Dr. Faḍl during and after the de-radicalization phase will be illustrated in the next chapter.

#### **III.4 October 6, 1981**

The new jihadi doctrine largely impacted on the actions of the group, and represented the ideological base for Sadat's assassination in 1981.

According to Hamid al-Ansari, the fact that members of the Tanzim were able to accomplish the primary objective of assassinating Sadat must be attributed to non-rational and informal types of organizational skills. These included traditional means, especially personal contacts with the military officers, kinship ties, and availability of *ahli* mosques<sup>334</sup> as grounds to establish further contacts.<sup>335</sup>

For example, ‘Abbud and Ṭarīq al-Zumūr were first cousins and the former was married to the latter's sister, but many other instances of intermarriages between Tanzim members and other militant groups occurred during the seventies, eighties, and nineties.

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 124 – 162.

<sup>334</sup> M. Faraġ, *Al-Fariḍa al-Gha'iba* [The Absent Duty].

<sup>335</sup> H. Ansari, *The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics*, p. 127.

During the preparatory phase, however, other means and places of interaction played a significant role, and the *ahli* mosques – mosques that were not under the control of the state – proved to be havens for establishing, renewing, and fostering contacts and friendships.

Farağ himself, for instance, was approached by al-Islāmbūli after he concluded his regular sermon at the local mosque in Boulaq al-Dakrūr<sup>336</sup>, and this encounter took place roughly six months before the assassination of President Sadat.

Among the leaders of the plot some names stand out, like ‘Abbud al-Zumūr and Khālid al-Islāmbūli himself.

Al-Zumūr was the senior military officer in al-Ġihād and a major in the military intelligence unit. Later, he would hold several primary roles in the Egyptian jihadi landscape, including the leadership of al-Ġihād itself, while Khālid al-Islāmbūli was the leader of the cell that carried out the assassination.

On October 6, 1981, President Anwar al-Sadat was attending a military parade marking the eighth anniversary of the launching of the October war against Israel (1973).

In particular, this commemoration relates to the time when the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal and broke through Israel’s Bar-Lev Line in Sinai.

A military truck ground to a halt and discharged four men, who opened fire on the reviewing stand with automatic weapons.

Khālid al-Islāmbūli was a twenty-four year old son of notables in Mallawi, not far from Minya who attended the Military Academy dreaming of becoming a pilot, but he was assigned to the artillery corps with the rank of lieutenant.<sup>337</sup> He was the member of the commando in charge of driving the vehicle after managing to replace the three fellow soldiers with three accomplices.

According to Michael Youssef, they planned to assassinate President Anwar al-Sadat, his Vice President, various ministers (Policy, Foreign Affairs and Defence), the chief of the military staff, the speaker of Parliament, and the Head of the Central Security Agency.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Omar Bin ‘Abd el ‘Aziz mosque.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. p. 210.

<sup>338</sup> Sadat's assassination was recently revisited by his daughter, Roqāya al-Sadat, a month after Mubarak was toppled. She filed a case in March 2011 at the general prosecutor's office claiming new evidence had emerged implicating Mubarak, who was Sadat's vice president. She and other members of the family believe that new answers could be found in Hosni Mubarak, because he benefitted the most from the killing.

Before murdering the President, the other assassinations were to occur simultaneously at night so as not to be easily detected or to allow repressive measures to be taken against group members.

The second step was to take over the military apparatus by poisoning guards in the area of the Ministry of Defence, which stored a weapons cache.

However, this action did not go as planned because apparently the drugs the chemical apparatus used when they mixed it with candy diluted the effect of the poison.

After this initial phase, their ultimate plan was to initiate a popular revolution once the cell led by al-Islāmbūli assassinated President Sadat.<sup>339</sup>

Despite the fact that President Sadat had cultivated the image of *al-Ra'īs al-mū'min*, "The President Believer", he was in fact an unbeliever who deserved to die.

Talāt Sadat, a former Member of Parliament and the nephew of the President, recalls the details of that grim day:

The president thought the killers were part of the show when they approached the stands firing, so he stood saluting them.<sup>340</sup>

Sadat's bullet-riddled body was rushed to the Maadi Military Hospital, but he was proclaimed dead at 2:40 p.m. due to internal bleeding in the chest cavity.<sup>341</sup>

After the murder, however, the organization was completely incapable of paralysing the city's nerve centres in order to trigger the awaited revolution, since it lacked units, weapons, popular support, and logistics to accomplish such an ambitious goal.

Consequently, after the killing of the President, those suspected of membership in al-Ġihād were tried in two different trials. The first one dealt with the assassination of Sadat only and included 24 defendants. Khālid al-Islāmbūli and his three accomplices were put to death on April 15, 1982.

The second trial had 302 defendants, some of whom had fled and were being tried in absentia, while the prosecutor demanded the death penalty for all the accused.<sup>342</sup>

After the attack, Khālid al-Islāmbūli shouted a sentence that was doomed to become historic:

I have killed the Pharaoh, and I do not fear death.

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<sup>339</sup> M. Youssef, *Revolt Against Modernity: Muslim Zealots and the West*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1985, p. 100.

<sup>340</sup> M. Fadel Fahmy, "30 years later, questions remain over Sadat killing, peace with Israel", *CNN*, October 7, 2011.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> M. Youssef, *Revolt Against Modernity: Muslim Zealots and the West*, p. 214.

A couple of remarks should be made about this declaration. First, al-Sadat was portrayed as the symbol of paganism par excellence, the Pharaonic past that was eclipsing Islam in the country, the only true heritage to be protected.

Even in his very last words as a free man, Khālīd al-Islāmbūli, a member of al-Ġihād, made a significant reference to national jihadism. Indeed, mentioning the Pharaoh meant locating the struggle in an exquisitely Egyptian perspective, after the killing of an exquisitely Egyptian enemy.

Second, al-Islāmbūli used one of the main narratives of the whole history of jihadism, i.e. the absence of fear at the moment of death. Martyrs are not supposed to fear death since they are dying *fi sabīli Allah*, “On the Path of God”, and their afterlife will be much more rewarding than the *dunya*, the “world” or “worldly existence”.

Al-Zawahiri himself would provide further details about what should have been the next step after the killing of Sadat and the seizure of the radio building in Cairo, particularly regarding a second front embodied by the armed uprising in Asyut and the attempt to seize the city in an uprising that started two days after the assassination of the President in the capital city.

In Asyut, however, the government summoned the Special Forces, and the mujahedeen were forced to leave their posts after running out of ammunition.

Interestingly, al-Zawahiri declares that the armed rebellion in Asyut was doomed to fail, since it was an *emotional* uprising that was poorly planned.<sup>343</sup>

This statement reveals the skepticism of al-Zawahiri towards the Southern component, which is blamed for being emotional and lacking organizational skills and, in turn, this mistrust reflects the more general attitude towards the South, embodied essentially by al-Ġamā‘a, as opposed to the urban and northern soul of al-Ġihād.

At the same time, he underlines that the events showed the courage of the fundamentalists – as he calls the group – who attacked forces that were more experienced and larger in number and equipment.

This is another *topos* of the classical jihadi narrative aimed at giving jihadists an aura of heroism, which sounds like: “The enemy was too strong but we managed to defeat them thanks to God by our side and to our commitment to jihad”.

Undoubtedly, this brings the discourse close to the martyrdom realm and in an essay titled *Jihad, Martyrdom, and the Killing of Innocents*, al-Zawahiri argues that when jihadists have to face an overwhelming military superiority, it is impossible to confront it in open warfare. Therefore, the only

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<sup>343</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet’s Banner*, in L. Mansfield, *In His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, United States, 2006, p. 60.

practical means available are the asymmetrical ones, using tactics that are often crude and may even include recourse to human shields.<sup>344</sup>

Undoubtedly, the events also showed the offensive nature of the radical movement and proved that the phase of the unilateralism of the regime in attacking the Islamic movement had ended.

Tellingly, al-Zawahiri concludes his account of the plot to kill Sadat by stating that the commando carried arms in defense of their religion, creed, sanctities, *nation*, and *homeland*.<sup>345</sup>

This is one of the many statements made by pre-AQ Egyptian thinkers that confirm the national perspective of the jihadi project. When al-Zawahiri pulls together religion, nation, and homeland, he reveals that the jihadi cause was related first and foremost to a national struggle, and not to a global one.

In the next few paragraphs, the work will analyze the first part of Ayman al-Zawahiri's life, highlighting the national characteristics of his initial view of jihadism.

### **III.5 Al-Zawahiri before jihad went global**

Ayman Muhammad Rabi' ai al-Zawahiri was born on June 19, 1951, in Maadi, Egypt, from an upper-class family of doctors and scholars and his ancestry is of Arabian tribal stock who settled in Egypt around 1860.

His paternal grandfather, Sheikh al-Ahmadi al-Zawahiri, was a distinguished Islamic scholar and the imam of the Al-Azhar Mosque, while his father was a pharmacology professor at `Ain Shams University. His maternal grandfather, `Abdul-Wahāb Azzam, was a professor of Oriental literature, President of Cairo University and Egyptian Ambassador to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen: well known for his Islamic knowledge and piety, he was often nicknamed, "the Devout Ambassador", while al-Zawahiri's granduncle, `Abdul Razzāq Azzam, was the first Secretary General of the Arab League.

Although his parents were from prominent families, al-Zawahiri and his siblings were raised in a relatively humble environment where, since he was a pious youth, he soon started to be greatly influenced by the work of Sayyid Quṭb and the modern Sunni revivalism.

Even many years later, on August 29, 2016, al-Zawahiri released a message entitled *The Solid Structure*, published on the 50th anniversary of the execution of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Quṭb, al-Zawahiri's family had close connections to Quṭb and the leader of AQ would often cite Quṭb in al-Qaeda's propaganda statements, describing him as the most prominent theoretician of the jihadist movement.

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<sup>344</sup> S. Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: the History of an Idea*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 62.

<sup>345</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, p. 63.

Al-Zawahiri's maternal grand uncle, Mahfouz Azzam, had been one of the defence lawyers for Qutb, following his arrest in 1965 after the publication of his *Milestones*.<sup>346</sup>

Interestingly, al-Zawahiri would also shape his ideas from Nasserist diatribe giving them an Islamist interpretation. In Nasser's book *The Philosophy of the Revolution* for instance, Nasser justifies the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the encirclement of his unit in the Falluja Pocket<sup>347</sup> with the need for defeating *the enemy within* (the Egyptian monarchy) before defeating the Israelis.

Al-Zawahiri would obviously give this an Islamist spin, writing that one can only defeat the enemy who is far away by defeating the enemy who is nearby, which was the Egyptian Republic and this can only be accomplished by declaring these rulers apostates and declaring jihad upon them.<sup>348</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is the distinctive feature of the first half of al-Zawahiri parabola: before going global with al-Qa`ida, he was a purely national jihadist, able to exploit and revisit Nasser's narratives to use them for his jihadi project.

According to Yussef Aboul-Enein, it is significant to pause and reflect that Ayman al-Zawahiri graduated from high school in 1966 and was on his way to university when several events occurred – such as the severe crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood by Nasser and the 1967 Six-Day War, and these events reflected in the ideological zeal of youth combined with forming solid jihadist theories at an early age.<sup>349</sup>

Muntassir al-Zayāt, the famous Egyptian Islamist lawyer who was imprisoned with al-Zawahiri in the eighties and wrote a book about Usama bin Laden's ideologue entitled *Ayman Al-Zawahiri As I Knew Him*<sup>350</sup>, quotes a deposition given by al-Zawahiri in 1981, when he was accused of collaborating in the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat:

I first joined an Islamist organization in 1966 under the tutelage of Ismail Tantawi, who advocated the creation of cells within the Egyptian government.

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<sup>346</sup> S. Gohel, *Insurrection of the Ideologues: The Evolution of Egyptian Islamist Radical Thought from Hasan al-Banna to Ayman al-Zawahiri*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics & Political Science, 2009.

<sup>347</sup> The city of Falluja and the neighboring village of Iraq al-Manshiyya formed the Falluja Pocket, an area where 4,000 Egyptian troops, who had entered it as a result of the 1948 war, were besieged for four months by the newly established Israel Defense Forces. The 1949 Armistice Agreements allowed for a peaceful transfer of those areas outside Gaza to Israeli control, allowing Egyptian troops to remain in Gaza.

<sup>348</sup> Y. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman al-Zawahiri: the Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, The Counterproliferation Papers, No. 21, USAF Counterproliferation Center, Air University - Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, March 2004, p. 2.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>350</sup> M. al-Zayyat, *Ayman al-Zawahiri kama 'arifituhu* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him], Dār Miṣr al-Maḥroussa, Cairo, 2002.

He goes on to describe how these theories differed from the Muslim Brotherhood and that Tantawi's vision would come to fruition with the 1974 Military Technical College revolt.

This movement was patterned after Nasser's revolt when he organized the Free Officers Association within the Egyptian military and cooperated with the Muslim Brotherhood who also had cells into it: if that brought about the 1952 overthrow of the monarchy of King Farouk, this should have created a truly Islamic State in Egypt.

Therefore, his approach to Islamism and then jihadism occurred early in his youth, during his final year of high school (1965-1966) when Nasser's crushing arrests of 17,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the subsequent execution of many of them - including the eminent Sayd Quṭb - took place.

He looked into forming an Islamist group and this project solidified in al-Zawahiri's mind when Nasser made his announcement in Moscow to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood and stated that this was an ideological war against Islam.<sup>351</sup>

He and three other students established a cell within his high school and called it Tanzim in 1966-67. It continued gathering members until 1975 and its Emir (Head) was Ismail Tantawi, whose purpose was the violent overthrow of the Egyptian government and the establishment of an Islamic government in its place.

The name Tanzim would evolve into Tanzim al-Ġihād or simply al-Ġihād, which is also known by its acronym EIJ (Egyptian Islamic Jihad), the organization that al-Zawahiri would take control of in 1975 and that gradually split from al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya.

In this respect, another fundamental figure in the journey of Ayman al-Zawahiri should be mentioned, he is the late Islamic militant and former armored corps officer, Issam al-Qamari.

Al-Zawahiri devotes an entire chapter to him in his *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, describing how he met a heroic death at the hands of the Egyptian security forces.

Al-Zawahiri's relationship with al-Qamari may have gone back to their high school days, when they discussed revolutionary ideologies. Undoubtedly, they both agreed that a military takeover was the only means of fomenting a revolution, and this is what led al-Qamari to join the military academy and rise to the rank of major in the Egyptian Armored Corps.

When they were incarcerated together, al-Qamari organized and led Islamist cells within Egypt's Tura Prison, and it was during their incarceration in 1981-1982 that the idea occurred to them of splitting from the Islamic Group and forming the more clandestine al-Ġihād.

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<sup>351</sup> Y. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman al-Zawahiri: the Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, p. 3.



In April 1995, al-Zawahiri argued in an article on *al-Mujahidun* magazine - tellingly entitled *The Road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo* - that:

Jerusalem will not be opened until the battles in Egypt and Algeria have been won and until Cairo has been opened.<sup>352</sup>

He also repeatedly argued that the most dangerous threat to the Muslims was the apostate rulers who were ruling the Muslim lands.

Even later, in a letter dated July 9, 2005, al-Zawahiri stressed the importance of establishing a base in the Middle East:

It has always been my belief that the victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt, and the neighbouring states of the Peninsula and Iraq; however, the centre would be in the Levant and Egypt.<sup>353</sup>

These statements represent undeniable evidence of the national interests of the *first* al-Zawahiri. Furthermore, he used to provide a strong Qur'anic justification for prioritizing the Near Enemy:

Oh, you who believe! Fight those of the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you hardness.<sup>354</sup>

Al-Zawahiri explained that his organization was striving towards gradual stages of the revolution, first recruiting many members from the civilian sector while actively pursuing members within the military and security establishments, who were required to actually implement their plans.

He elaborated about revolution being a technically complex matter, requiring the planning of someone with a military background, and this is significant, for it shows his *modus operandi*, a mixture of long-range planning, patience, and a determination to accomplish his objective, which is visible both in the national and the global phases of his jihadist parabola.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Al-Mujahidun*, No. 11, 1995.

<sup>353</sup> A. Al-Zawahiri letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, dated July 9, 2005, available online at: [[http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm)].

<sup>354</sup> Qur'an [9:123].

<sup>355</sup> Y. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman al-Zawahiri: the Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, p. 4.

What is sure, however, is that for al-Zawahiri and the other ideologues of the twentieth century's national jihad, the goal is to create a truly Islamic State from *within*, since moral corruption (*fasad*), idolatry (*taghūt*), and impiety (*kufṛ*) were destroying Egypt and the other Muslim nations from within as well.

After graduation, al-Zawahiri served for three years as an army surgeon and he went to Afghanistan in 1980 as a volunteer to coordinate the wave of Afghani refugees displaced by the war with the Soviet Union who were arriving in massive numbers in the Pakistani border city of Peshawar.

Al-Zawahiri spent seven months in Afghanistan as early as 1980 and then returned for short trips in 1981, 1984, and 1986. During this time, he formulated his ideas on jihad, seeing the opportunity to gain military and political experience for jihadists in Egypt.

He envisioned training a competent armed vanguard in Afghanistan and then reinserting it into Egypt to train and carry out active combat within the country<sup>356</sup> and this brings us to a fundamental conclusion that has already been illustrated in the previous chapters: Even the Afghan experience, at the beginning, represented a chance to improve jihad *within* Egypt, not a way to internationalize it.

In other words, these travels marked only the beginning of the second phase in the parabola of Ayman al-Zawahiri. His vision of jihad would become global thanks to the interaction with ideologues such as Osama bin Laden and 'Abdullah Azzam.

This second phase will be the subject of the fifth chapter, which will focus on the shifts from national to global jihad and from the Near to the Far Enemy.

Chapter V will take the change occurred in al-Zawahiri's strategy and priorities as the emblematic examples of these shifts.

In the next chapter, on the contrary, the dissertation will move on within the Egyptian borders, analyzing the developments and the events that led the two most important *ḡamā'āt* to perform their process of disengagement and de-radicalization.

It is this very process that could not be performed by the group that would remain with al-Zawahiri and move the jihad into a global arena. In the following chapter, it will be showed how, once jihad goes global, it is impossible to undertake – in the case of the group – or to foster – in the case of the state - the de-radicalization option.

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<sup>356</sup> M. al-Zayat, *Ayman al-Zawahiri kama 'ariftuhu* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him], pp. 98-99.

## IV. The De-Radicalization Processes of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy

This chapter represents the core of the dissertation, since it is dedicated to corroborating the thesis that informs the work: al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy de-radicalization has been possible thanks to the national character of the two groups and the national setting in which the processes took place.

Chapter IV opens with the theoretical and terminological introduction on the concept of de-radicalization. The focus will be on the relevant differences between disengagement and de-radicalization and between individual and collective de-radicalization, thus including a new *status quaestionis* dedicated to the review of the relevant literature on the definitions of radicalization after the initial one on radicalization and radicalization models that can be found in the Introduction.<sup>357</sup>

Subsequently, the chapter will move on to the historical account of the path walked by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya first and al-Ġihād later, highlighting the different phases and the parallel evolution of regime's reaction between repression and selective inducements.

The importance of the group's leadership deserves a specific analysis, which will be followed by an investigation of the reasons why these processes can be considered national and the explanation of how this condition allowed collective de-radicalization to happen.

In conclusion, this chapter will include a mention of the Libyan case with the de-radicalization of *al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātīla bi-Lībya* (the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, LIFG) largely modeled on the Egyptian examples along the lines of a transnational imitation effect that deserves in-depth analysis.

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<sup>357</sup> See pp. 5 – 25.

#### IV.1 Introduction to the concept of de-radicalization

As far as the mechanism of de-radicalization is concerned, it should be mentioned that, since the 1970s, the literature on jihadist movements has addressed the causes of radicalization.<sup>358</sup>

By comparison, less attention has been focused on the processes of de-radicalization.<sup>359</sup>

If radicalization is a fuzzy concept, the same is by extension also true for de-radicalization and,<sup>360</sup> similarly, there is no universal definition of de-radicalization and scholars can only count on a number of generally accepted formalizations.

One of the most informative definitions has been provided in 2012 by the U.S. psychologist and terrorism expert John Horgan, whose definition has also been adopted by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism:

(De-radicalization includes) Programs that are generally directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of reintegrating them into society or at least dissuading them from violence.<sup>361</sup>

In spite of its stunning clarity, however, this definition only explains what individual de-radicalization means and keeps a strong focus on the rehabilitation of the single subject, as in the case of state-run rehabilitation programs often shaped on the example of the Saudi program.<sup>362</sup>

The notion of de-radicalization as a social engineering technique for the individual emerged mainly in prisoner rehabilitation programs and the Saudi one is no exception.

The Muhammad Bin Nayef Counselling and Care Center, in the outskirts of Riyadh, was created in 2007 by the Prince Bin Nayef with the aim of de-radicalizing and rehabilitating former terrorists and individuals charged with terrorism-related offences.

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<sup>358</sup> See pp. 18 – 21.

<sup>359</sup> O. Ashour, *Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group*, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4, Autumn 2007, p. 600.

<sup>360</sup> A. P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague, 2013.

<sup>361</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue, *Tackling Extremism: De-Radicalization and Disengagement*, Conference Report, Copenhagen, May 8 – 9, 2012, pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>362</sup> See C. Boucek, *Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., September 2008; P. Neumann, *Prison and Terrorism. Radicalization and Deradicalization in 15 Countries*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), London, 2010. S. Brzuskiewicz, *Saudi Arabia: the de-radicalization program seen from within*, Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan, April 28, 2017.

Besides the set of hard measures – which include police and legal actions and all the provisions aimed at fighting jihadism and punishing jihadists – the Kingdom of al-Saud fostered the implementation of soft counterterrorism strategies to counter the ideological and religious justifications for violence.

The strategy is based on prevention, rehabilitation, and aftercare – which is where the acronym PRAC comes from - with the rehabilitation phase playing the major role.

During his or her time in prison, the individual is surrounded by a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, Islamic jurisprudence experts, and imams. After serving their sentence, the detainees are moved to the rehabilitation center, where they are supposed to complete the process with the help of another team of experts with different qualifications who will later give their binding opinion on whether the inmate should be released or sent back to jail.

Between the collective de-radicalization and disengagement paths – which will be dealt with in this chapter – and individual de-radicalization programs like the Saudi one, there are also combinations of the two models, such as in the Indonesian approach.<sup>363</sup>

The Indonesian model involves mobilization of religious leaders (*ulamā'*), who can address radical backlash and religious scholars and teachers who can garner the theological support for a pluralistic interpretation of Islam.

Moreover, it envisions the involvement of pop idols who have massive support from young people and government leaders who are able to address social factors as underlying sources of extremism, while business leadership often offers financial support for the programs.

Moving back to the conceptual and terminological clarifications required, analyses and definitions of de-radicalization that focus exclusively on the individual level fail to give significant insights in the realm of collective and political de-radicalization processes, which represent the focal point of the present discussion.

As asserted before,<sup>364</sup> there is a lacuna in the literature, since the overwhelming majority of works in this field focuses on individual de-radicalization and, in addition, they do so by using exclusively a structural-

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<sup>363</sup> Arab Thought Forum, Countering violent extremism: Learning from de-radicalization programs in some Muslim-majority countries, Amman, Jordan, March 15 – 17, 2012). Notes of a conference participant, obtained by the author, in A. P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), The Hague, 2013.

For the Indonesian model, see M. Ranstorp, *Preventing Violent Radicalization and Terrorism: The Case of Indonesia*, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies, Stockholm, 2009.

<sup>364</sup> See the Introduction, pp. 5 – 25.

psychological approach – which has proved to have more than one shortcoming - instead of a political-process one.<sup>365</sup>

All the classical models of the structural psychological approach presume a linear causality in which socio-structural issues produce psychological discomfort which, in turn, produces collective radicalization.<sup>366</sup> In this perspective, radicalization is always perceived as a direct consequence of socioeconomic conditions<sup>367</sup>, threats against Muslim identity(-ies),<sup>368</sup> or authoritarian regimes.<sup>369</sup>

This approach, in its diverse variations, presents a number of issues that are worth mentioning. First, it often tends not to take into adequate consideration historical and geographical variations and tends to claim to be valid in every context. Second, by focussing on the individual, it fails to observe the broader socio-political phenomena that affect the processes of both radicalization and de-radicalization.

The major weakness of the structural-psychological approach, however, is that it automatically implies a direct causal relationship between not only structural factors and radicalization, but also, inevitably, between changes in those structural factors and de-radicalization.

In other words, as radicalization is determined by structural factors such as poverty, deprivation, political grievances, and persecutions against fellow Muslims worldwide - structural changes in these factors are essential for de-radicalization to take place.

There are significant case studies that entirely refute this alleged dogma, and the parabola of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātala bi-Lībya<sup>370</sup> (the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group) are striking examples.

These are all movements and contexts in which, for de-radicalization to take place, what was necessary was not a set of structural changes, but a complex synergy of negotiations between the state and the

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<sup>365</sup> For the differences between structural-psychological approaches and political-process approaches see pp. 21 – 25.

<sup>366</sup> Q. Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic Activism: Social Movement Theory Approach*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2004.

<sup>367</sup> See S.E. Ibrahim, *Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12(14), 1980, pp. 423 – 453 and H. Ansari, *The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16(1), 1984, pp. 123 – 144.

<sup>368</sup> See J. Esposito, *Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* Lynne Rienner, London, 1997 and M. Kramer, *The Islamism Debate*, Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, 1997.

<sup>369</sup> See L. Anderson, *Fulfilling Prophecies: State Policy and Islamists Radicalism*, in J. Esposito (Ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism or Reform?* Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997 and M. Hafez, *Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria*, *The Middle East Journal* 54(1), 2000 and *Why Muslims Rebel? Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 2003.

<sup>370</sup> In the case of *Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātala bi-Lībya*, the letter *ġim* is pronounced respecting the diction of the Standard Arabic as a *j*, contrary to what happens in the Cairene dialect, which says it like the *g* in “girl”.

radical groups, selective inducements offered by the former to the latter, strong leadership within the movements, and constant interaction of the groups with the government and with other organizations. Therefore, the de-radicalization and disengagement processes carried out by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātala bi-Libya will be analysed through the political-process approach.

The political-process perspective asserts and supports the primacy of the process over the structure – be it the political, social, or economic structure – thus highlighting the ever-changing nature of strategies and relations occurring between the different actors and the dynamism that characterizes both radicalization and de-radicalization processes.

According to Doug McAdam, politics – in this case Islamist politics – can be perceived as the intersection of political opportunities, mobilization strategies, and ideological frames and symbols that resonates well with Muslim cultures.<sup>371</sup>

Following the structural-psychological approach, which focuses only on the individual, a large portion of the literature on terrorism does not provide sufficient explanations of collective and political de-radicalization processes.<sup>372</sup>

The deepest and most extensive work, which not by chance adopts the political-process approach, is the research of Omar Ashour, who highlights many peculiar features of collective de-radicalization both in the Egyptian and in the Libyan case.<sup>373</sup>

In this respect, Ashour provides a more suitable definition of de-radicalization, which represents:

The process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change.<sup>374</sup>

In this way, the definition of de-radicalization expands to involve a collective ideological shift and not merely a behavioral shift, as is the case of disengagement,<sup>375</sup> which can be defined as the behavioral distancing from the violent terrorism modus operandi.

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<sup>371</sup> D. McAdam, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York, 2001.

<sup>372</sup> Ashour, *Lions Tamed? An Inquiry into the Causes of De-Radicalization of Armed Islamist Movements: The Case of the Egyptian Islamic Group*, p. 602.

<sup>373</sup> O. Ashour, *De-Radicalization of Jihad? The Impact of Egyptian Islamist Revisionists on Al-Qaeda* (2008), *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements* (2009), *Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements* (2011).

<sup>374</sup> O. Ashour, *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*, London, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>375</sup> J. Horgan, *Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation*, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2(4), 2008.

Unfortunately, disengagement often occurs without authentic de-radicalization, i.e. without a creditable cognitive rejection of violence as a means to affect societal and political change.

Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan persuasively assert that there is no clear evidence to suggest that disengagement from terrorism may bring with it de-radicalization, nor is there clear evidence to support the argument that de-radicalization is a necessary accompaniment to disengagement.<sup>376</sup>

It appears that most ex-terrorists have not so much changed their cognitive framework and their worldview than they have their actual behaviour.

Disengagement without de-radicalization might be the rule rather than the exception, which confirms the relevance of the chosen Egyptian and Libyan case studies as characterized by exceptional features that are worth researching further.

John Horgan, having conducted dozens of interviews with former terrorists since 2006, concluded that:

While almost all of the interviewees could be described as disengaged, not a single one of them could be said to be de-radicalized.<sup>377</sup>

According to the British scholar Gordon Clubb, who confirms the assumptions of Bjørgo and Horgan, the most likely process usually excludes simultaneous de-radicalization and disengagement. They are stage processes, which often start with declarative disengagement; followed by behavioral disengagement; followed by organizational disengagement (leaving the group); followed at the very end by de-radicalization.<sup>378</sup>

In other words, if de-radicalization happens, it does only after disengagement, which is confirmed by the cases of the Egyptian *ḡamā āt* and their influence on the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

Completing the conceptual and terminological foreword on de-radicalization, a further note is required. Indeed, beside the difference between de-radicalization and disengagement, a crucial distinction has to be made between de-radicalization, referring to processes involving individuals who are already radicalized, and counter-radicalization, which refers to preventive programs aimed at individuals or groups considered vulnerable to recruitment.

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<sup>376</sup> T. Bjørgo and J. Horgan (Eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, Routledge, Abington, 2009, p.28; J. Horgan, De-radicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation, p. 6.

<sup>377</sup> Horgan, De-radicalization or Disengagement?, p. 7.

<sup>378</sup> G, Clubb, Re-evaluating the Disengagement Process: the Case of Fatah, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3(3), 2009.



Some scholars, however, utilize the term counter-radicalization as the umbrella term both for de-radicalization and prevention.<sup>379</sup>

## IV.2 Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya paves the way

Any de-radicalization effort must be based primarily on a clear understanding of what motivates individuals to join terrorist movements and what motivates them to leave.<sup>380</sup>

The push factors that induced hundreds of Egyptians to embrace violent jihad and enter al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya range from the resentment towards the regime that they considered infidel to the effective discourse of the Islamic Students' Unions all over the country, and they have been listed and analyzed in this dissertation's second chapter.<sup>381</sup>

We saw that, in the nineties, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya was involved in an open confrontation with the state, and violence was escalating, in the period that coincides with the confrontation phase suggested by Omar Ashour.<sup>382</sup>

Between 1992 and 1997, 1,500 people perished as a result of the terror campaign, and IG's assaults ranged from night club owners to secular thinkers and Copts, especially in Upper Egypt.

In June 1992, the militants shot and killed a prominent secular writer, Faraġ Foda, for ridiculing their ideas.<sup>383</sup>

This episode signalled a new campaign against the country's writers and intellectuals, and in October 1994, the Nobel laureate Naġīb Maḥfūz was repeatedly stabbed in the neck, but survived.<sup>384</sup>

A few years earlier, in 1989, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya started its attempt to avoid another regime's crackdown by issuing the so-called "Six Demands" already listed in Chapter II:

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<sup>379</sup> J. Stern, *A future challenges essay, Deradicalization or Disengagement of Terrorists: Is It Possible?*, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 2010.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Chapter II: Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya.

<sup>382</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, p. 49.

<sup>383</sup> Faraġ Foda was a prominent professor, writer, and human rights activist, who was assassinated by members of the Islamic Group after being accused of blasphemy by a committee of clerics at al-Azhar University. Foda was noted for his critical articles and trenchant satires about Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt. In many newspaper articles, he pointed out weak points in Islamist ideology and its demand for sharia law.

<sup>384</sup> Maḥfūz's allegorical *Children of Gebelawi*, a 1959 political novel depicting religious figures such as Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed, caused him troubles with Egypt's religious establishment.

Radical Egyptian Sheik 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān said Maḥfūz, a Muslim, deserved to die for *Children of Gebelawi* [Awlād Ḥaretna, lit. "Children of Our Alley"]. Another cause of the extremists' anger was that Maḥfūz supported Egypt's peace with Israel.

The release of all the detainees who were not charged;  
Ceasing torture in prison, detention centers, and state security buildings;  
Improving the prison conditions for al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya's activists;  
The release of women who were taken to force their male relatives to surrender to the state;  
Reopening the IG mosques that were shut down;  
Ceasing the policy of renewing detention indefinitely.<sup>385</sup>

During the following years, the regime ignored the demands, and as a reaction the Islamic Group intensified its use of violence, shifting from partial militarization to total militarization. This also involved members of the *dā'wa* wing, who for instance executed Rif'āt Maḡḡūb, former speaker of the parliament, on October 12, 1990.

Imbaba, a poor Cairene neighborhood, was another scene of bloody confrontations between the militants and the regime, and one of the areas in the city hardest hit by the October 1992 earthquake. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, the Islamic Group – although to a lesser extent than the Muslim Brotherhood - was active on the ground dispensing medicines, food and clothes.

Between 1991 and 1992, the militants had virtually taken complete control of Imbaba, replacing the government as the only law enforcement agent.

In 1992, the security forces decided to intervene: more than twelve thousand troops in more than one hundred armed cars descended on the neighborhood and sealed it off; thousands were rounded up, including around one hundred-fifty leaders of different radical groups.<sup>386</sup>

According to a perspective introduced by Lisa Blaydes and Lawrence Rubin, beside the regime's choice of ignoring the demands coming from al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, a further reason why the situation worsened was that the group had increased its presence in Cairo, gradually moving away from its strongholds in Upper Egypt.<sup>387</sup> This trend represented a threat for the government and a scenario that had to be avoided at all costs, which led to the exacerbation of the regime's crackdown.

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<sup>385</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, p. 49.

<sup>386</sup> T. Osman, *Egypt on the Brink. From Nasser to the Muslim Brotherhood*, Yale University Press, 2013.

<sup>387</sup> L. Blaydes – L. Rubin, Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20(4), 2008, pp. 461 - 479.

As observed in Chapter II, however, the terror campaign on tourism that was part of the confrontational phase, alienated a lot of the support that the radical group was enjoying in the country, ultimately weakening al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya to an unprecedented extent.

Before the nineties, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya would largely contain its preaching within the South, in exchange for some freedom of activity, exactly in the same period when Mubarak was pursuing a policy of relative political liberalization, allowing religious critics to have public outlets for their opposition, including the possibility of participating in parliament.<sup>388</sup>

In 1981, right after his official assignment, Mubarak proclaimed:

The era of arrests of leaders of the opposition and of their alienation from political life is now behind us.<sup>389</sup>

But this would be an extremely fragile policy and the releases ordered by the new President were selective and did not target the Islamist activists.

Therefore, and this will become more and more significant throughout the discussion, the new fracture was determined by a lack of dialogue on an eminently national and political level before the ideological one.

The historical phase was extremely complex and in 1981, President Hosni Mubarak had inherited a hard legacy from the Nasser and Sadat eras.

On the one hand, it put at his disposal an array of laws, institutions and practices that tended to work in favor of the head of the Egyptian state.

On the other hand, it burdened him with responsibility for the outcome of state policies initiated before his term, first of all the bitter harvest of the peace treaty with Israel.<sup>390</sup>

Under Sadat, the presidency was given a delegation for issuing laws by decree in all economic matters and on arms purchases, and after President Sadat had declared a number of emergency decrees and called for a referendum to endorse them, this became a recurring practice that fostered the jihadi discourse portraying Mubarak as nothing other than a new tyrant enslaving his people.

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<sup>388</sup> This is not to say that the regime had a soft approach on jihadists. On the contrary, the partial openness was saved for non-(explicitly)-violent groups. In 1987 for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was enjoying a considerable political participation, won thirty-five legislative seats in the parliamentary elections.

<sup>389</sup> G. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt. The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993, p. 244.

<sup>390</sup> N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, Tauris, London, 1995, Preface.

In the mid-nineties, however, this narrative and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya itself were irremediably and irreparably weakened, with internal contrasts rising and the general, widespread feeling that prolonging the confrontation would just be not worth doing.

The trends described above clearly show the nexus between the political process and the historical and social context surrounding it.

Indeed, even though the processes of disengagement and de-radicalization did not need structural changes to begin, they do reflect – inevitably – the rational assessments carried out by the radicals on the context, the increased risks violence represented, and their declining propaganda.

In other words, if the debate within the group created *push* factors towards exiting violence, the external context provided complementary *pull* factors in the same direction.

On July 5, 1997, this feeling spoke with the voice of Mohammed al-Amīn 'Abd al-'Alīm, an imprisoned member of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya.

During one of the military tribunals for the group's activists, 'Abd al-'Alīm read a statement signed by six of al-Ġamā'a's historical leaders.

The communiqué declared a unilateral ceasefire and called on every Islamic Group's cell to stop all military operations, thus forerunning the beginning of the group's de-radicalization phase.<sup>391</sup>

The universal consensus in the group about the unilateral ceasefire however, was reached almost two years later, on March 28, 1999, when the leaders in Egypt and abroad declared their unconditional support for the initiative. From that moment on, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya as a group did not commit any further act of violence in Egypt or abroad.

The process that led the movement to cease violence, disengage, and de-radicalize, however, came after a set of different steps both internal and, perhaps even more importantly, related to its relation and dialogue with the Egyptian regime. These steps will be the focus of the following paragraphs.

The Islamic Group, during the debate that led it to de-radicalize, took a number of crucial initiatives that marked the progression of the process.

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<sup>391</sup> According to the majority of scholars and journalists, the bloodbath in Luxor on November 17, 1997, in which a commando affiliated with al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya left 62 people dead, was the consequence of an order that had already been released before the statement of July, and not all the leadership had agreed on perpetrating the attack. According to 'Osama Rushdy, group's members operating in Upper Egyptian areas did not hear about the declaration and carried on the attack with an older order. 'O. Rushdy, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya wa Khurūġiha min Mu'askar al-'unf [The Islamic Group and its Exit from the Camp of Violence], interview by Mālek al-Trieqy, Qadāya al-Sa'a, al-Jazeera, October 1, 2005.

First, there was the public declaration of intent and the search for consensus among the leadership. Second, there was the ideological and doctrinal legitimization of the transformations, obtained through the production of the revisionary literature.<sup>392</sup>

Third, the group started to convince the lower ranks and the grassroots to support the leadership's choice. Fourth, the decision of addressing the general public and the Muslim communities to believe in the purity of intents of the Group was made.

While describing the historical sequence of events that led al-Ġamā'a first – and al-Ġihād later – to de-radicalize, the next pages will present and analyze all the arguments in favor of the thesis of the present work: the process of de-radicalization has been possible because the groups were operating in an eminently national dimension and had a national interlocutor – embodied by the regime – during the gestation and delivery of their initiative for ceasing violence.

In his studies of collective de-radicalization of radical movements in Egypt, Algeria, Libya and Tajikistan, Ashour found that four main variables account for the initiation of a de-radicalization process at the group level:

- 1) State repression
- 2) Selective inducements
- 3) Strong leadership within the radical movement
- 4) Social interaction (both with ideologically similar and different groups)<sup>393</sup>

The chapter will analyze the four variables extensively. Nevertheless, major changes will be made to Ashour's classification:

- 1) State reactions (repression + selective inducements)
- 2) Strong leadership within the radical movement
- 3) Interaction
- 4) Coherent and consistent ideological reorientation

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<sup>392</sup> See IV.5.

<sup>393</sup> In C. McCauley, *Group Desistance from Terrorism: The Dynamics of Actors, Actions and Outcomes*, in R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp.187-203.

The first change is the inclusion of both state repression and selective inducements under the notion of state reactions.

This change stems from the idea that the regime's reactions to the group's initiatives have to be addressed as a whole, thus underlying the developments that they experienced.

The second change to Ashour's list implies adding coherent and consistent ideological reorientation as a prerequisite to de-radicalization.

It highlights that de-radicalization is a process, not an event, thus requiring an ongoing path of ideological and doctrinal separation from violence.

### **IV.3 The evolution of regime's reactions**

Between the statement read by Mohammed al-Amīn 'Abd al-'Alīm, on July 5, 1997 and signed by six of al-Ġamā'a's historical leaders and the universal consensus within the Islamic Group announced on March 28, 1999, when the leaders in Egypt and abroad declared their support for the disengagement and de-radicalization initiative, a crucial factor that had to be taken into account was the reaction of the Egyptian regime.

Initially, Mubarak's administration was highly skeptical about the statement, and maintained an approach based essentially on one of the major requirements for de-radicalization listed by Omar Ashour, i.e. state repression.<sup>394</sup> It includes a wide range of actions and tactics like incarcerations, restrictions on free speech, and violations of human rights such as torture and political imprisonment.<sup>395</sup>

In several interviews, historical leaders of the Islamic Group have explicitly referred to state repression as a reason for revising their behavior and ideology, mainly because repression was one of the factors forcing them to reassess the costs and benefits of violently confronting the regime.

The new assessments of cost and benefits, which led al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya to acknowledge that violence was just no longer worth it – before being religiously illicit – would strengthen the perspective according to which

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<sup>394</sup> O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, pp. 14 – 15.

<sup>395</sup> S. Carey, "Uncovering the Dynamics of Domestic Conflict: A Time-Series Analysis of Protest and Repression in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa", Paper prepared for the ECPR Joint Sessions, Workshop 9: *The Systematic Study of Human Rights Violations*, March, 2002.

Jihad is not an end in itself, it is just a means to attain other ends. If you cannot attain these ends through jihad, you should change the means.<sup>396</sup>

This represents a significant turning point that will be addressed in the section dedicated to the ideological recantations written and published by the radical groups, whose leaders were starting to claim that, since Islam was hurt by jihad, the latter should be banned.

Regime's repression and repeated crackdowns on the Islamic Group were weakening the leadership as well as the rank and file members especially in jail, where they were mentally and physically suffering difficult detention conditions.

Outside the prisons, the families of the detainees were suffering from economic deprivation due to the inability of the breadwinners to provide for the family, increasing social alienation, and systematic discrimination by the state.

In this situation, not only did al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya realize that, if Islam as a whole was overshadowed by jihad this should stop, but also – from a theological perspective – that if God had been “on their side” these things would not have happened to al-Ġamā'a members and their families.

In spite of its undeniable effectiveness, however, we observed that state repression represented only one face of the Egyptian regime's behaviour towards al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in the infancy of its disengagement and de-radicalization processes.

The second face was embodied by the theory and practice of selective inducements, which can be defined as the whole set of explicit or implicit socio-political and socio-economic incentives proffered by the regime to the movement in return for behavioral, organizational, and ideological changes.

Examples of selective inducements range from ceasing systematic torture in detention centers to providing some form of economic assistance to the family of the imprisoned radicals.

From a historic perspective, the selective inducements came after skepticism and repression, and their beginning can be traced back to 2001 – 2002, when the regime began releasing IG members and leaders, initially in groups of hundreds and then in thousands.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Quote of Nāġih 'Ibrahīm, top leader of the Islamic Group, in a conference in Wadi al-Natrun during the de-radicalization phase. In B. Korany (Ed.), *The Changing Middle East. A New Look at Regional Dynamics*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2011.

<sup>397</sup> M. Ṣalāh, “Al-Qāhira tuqīr bi-itlāq a'dā' al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya 'ala duf'āt” [Cairo Admits Releasing Islamic Group Members in Groups], *Al-Hayat*, April 13, 2006.

In April 2006, an anonymous security official told *al-Hayat* newspaper that there were only two thousand detainees belonging to al-Ġamā'a left in Egyptian prisons, and that number had come down from fifteen thousand, all detained under emergency laws.

By April 2007, only IG members who were sentenced by military tribunals or state security courts remained in prison.<sup>398</sup>

Besides the gradual releases, the regime allowed and helped al-Ġamā'a's leaders to tour prisons, detention centers, and schools in order to disseminate their renewed ideology, fostering the publication of the volumes of recantations.<sup>399</sup>

In conclusion, the regime's reaction towards the internal and external developments of Egypt's biggest radical group ranged from skepticism to selective inducements.

As mentioned earlier, the inducements came later, even though establishing clear-cut time phases would be certainly misleading, since the history of the relation between the regime and al-Ġamā'a is a history of blurred lines, escalations and détente, progress and setbacks.

#### **IV.4 The role of group's leadership**

Throughout our life, especially in the earlier stages, we look for role-models. Sometimes those people come in the form of charismatic leaderships and sometimes in the form of imaginary leadership.<sup>400</sup>

In a sociological sense, leadership is a "process of social influence" in which one person can enlist the aid, co-operation, and support of others in the accomplishment of a common matter.

It refers to a process of influencing and supporting others to work enthusiastically toward achieving objectives.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> See IV.5 The Ideological Recantations.

<sup>400</sup> Khaled al-Berry. S. Brzuszkiewicz, Interview with Khaled al-Berry, February 2018. Khaled al-Berry (born 1972) is a former member of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and a writer. He studied medicine at Cairo University and moved to London soon after graduation and has lived there ever since. He is best known for his *Life is More Beautiful than Paradise*, an autobiographical account of his life with al-Gamā'a and his de-radicalization.

He has also written several novels, and *An Oriental Dance* (2010) was nominated for the Arabic Booker Prize. In the United Kingdom, al-Berry has worked for the BBC as a journalist, correspondent and producer.

<sup>401</sup> K. Siddiqui, *Political Dimensions of the Sīra*, Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, London and Toronto, 1998.



Obviously, the leadership of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya played a major role in the processes of disengagement and de-radicalization of the Group, and some of the doctrinal and operational leaders of the movement-building and confrontational phases would later stand out for their agency within the initiative for ceasing violence.

Among these leaders there was Karam Zuġġi, released in September 2003. He was one of the founders of the Islamic Group, who had been in jail since 1981 after being arrested following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat and was always part of the IG Shura Council.

After making the decision to disengage and cease violence, the primary objective that the Islamic Group's leadership had to pursue was instilling this momentous change in the worldview of the lower ranks, both in order to appear as creditable interlocutors for the government and to avoid another Luxor massacre.

The main resource that allowed the Group's leadership to accomplish this goal was that, historically, the leaders had always been credible enough and beyond suspicions of co-optation.

In other words, they conveyed the idea that the spirit of the initiative was generated within al-Ġamā'a, which was leading the negotiations with the regime that, in turn, was only *re-acting* to something that was under the exclusive control of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya itself.

Rather than holding their leaders accountable for counter-productive and disastrous decisions, the members of the Group rallied around them.<sup>402</sup> Even during the series of meetings and conferences in prisons, followers used to address their leaders only with the opening *mawlāna* ("Our Master"), in spite of the many years they had spent in detention or in hiding, as well as being tortured, which were at least partially a consequence of their leadership's strategic choices.

In explaining the appeal of radical leaders on part of the Egyptian youth, Khaled al-Berry states:

In this famine of charisma, in such an under-saturated environment, it is logically expected for young people to absorb whatever comes across with a hint of charisma, extremists in the first place.

It is much more difficult the other way around, when de-radicalization is concerned. However, it does need charismatic leadership, which will help new generations to know alternative cultural discourses.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> O. Ashour, *Continuity and Change in Islamist Political Thought and Behavior: The Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements in Egypt and Algeria*, p. 145.

<sup>403</sup> Khaled al-Berry. S. Brzuszkiewicz, Interview with Khaled al-Berry, February 2018.

#### IV.4 Al-Ġihād al-Islāmy follows the path

As described in Chapter III,<sup>404</sup> from the original Tanzim al-Ġihād, the embryonic movement encompassing the different souls of the Egyptian jihadi landscape of the seventies, two main trends began to acquire their own appearance to later become al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.<sup>405</sup> Between the first and the second group there were multiple divides and differences, ranging from the modus operandi to the constituency, from the relevance of secrecy, much more important for al-Ġihād than for al-Ġamā'a, to the divides that occurred when the two factions started to debate about the commander of the united group.

Indeed, the fissure was triggered by the dispute over the role of 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān, the blind sheikh who al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya suggested as supreme leader of jihad in Egypt.

The Cairo faction, which would later form al-Ġihād, maintained that the Qur'an forbade leaders with impaired senses, and they favored Abbud al-Zumūr and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa'ida.

The disagreement was over whether sheikh 'Omar 'Abdel Raḥmān was eligible and qualified to serve as the spiritual guide of the group: What al-Zawahiri and the Jihad contingent vehemently opposed was *wilāyat al-ḍarīr*, "the rule of the blind" both on operational and doctrinal grounds.

In spite of the significant differences between the two groups, however, their disengagement and de-radicalization phases are extremely similar.

The occurrence of an imitation effect between al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād can be posited, with al-Ġihād following the bigger group in the decision to abandon violence.

In the case of al-Ġihād, however, there is a fundamental point to be made that will mark the meaning and the development of this chapter and the following.

Only the national branch de-radicalized. The second one, which would follow al-Zawahiri in his shift from the Near to the Far Enemy and join al-Qa'ida, would move its jihad to the global level, without disengaging or de-radicalizing.

In the following pages the analysis will focus on the first wing, while the dissertation will move to the role of al-Zawahiri and his doctrinal changes in the next chapter.

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<sup>404</sup> Chapter III, Al-Jihad al-Islāmy.

<sup>405</sup> The name of the movement will be transcribed as al-Jihad instead of al-Ġihād because the word jihad is used in English too and J is likely to look more familiar than Ġ to the readers.

Back to the history of al-Ġihād's de-radicalization, it has to be mentioned that, after 2000, most of the group's members and supporters were in prison, and their number ranged between 2,000 to 3,000 militants.<sup>406</sup> Similarly to al-Ġamā'a, al-Ġihād started to de-radicalize in prison.

The first milestone was laid by the former leader of al-Ġihād, 'Abbūd al-Zumūr, who supported al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya universal ceasefire in 1997.

The internal discord, however, was still deep, and the tension between the faction supporting the détente and the one against it would last a full decade longer.

In 2007, the regime brought about the major turning point, officially declaring that Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf, better known as Dr. Faḍl, was present in Egypt.<sup>407</sup>

In 2001, Dr. Faḍl was arrested in Yemen and extradited to Egypt in 2004, but he disappeared for three years before the Egyptian regime declared that he was still alive and held in the Scorpion prison south of Cairo.<sup>408</sup>

In all probability, the regime let the news about his presence leak for a precise reason: the state and the group were now ready to continue their negotiations publicly, and they had found in Dr. Faḍl the best mediator, both from a political and a doctrinal perspective.

He was the ideologue who, just a few decades before, had written *al-'Umda fi I'dād al-'Udda* [The Essential of Making Ready],<sup>409</sup> reportedly used as a jihad manual in the training camps in Afghanistan and elsewhere:

Muslims must always be in conflict with nonbelievers, resorting to peace only in moments of abject weakness (..) The greatest prize goes to the martyr (...) The way to bring an end to the rulers' unbelief is armed rebellion.<sup>410</sup>

The operational and ideological shift was momentous, and in 2007 al-Sharīf confirmed that the process of disengagement was already taking place.

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<sup>406</sup> A. al-Khātib, "Qiyādat min al-Jihād fi al-Khāriġ Tu'ayid Murāġ'āt al-Tanzīm Dākhil al-Suġūn" [Al-Jihad Leaders Abroad Support the Revisions Done Inside the Prisons], *al-Masry al-Youm*, April, 21, 2007.

<sup>407</sup> For Dr. Faḍl's biography and role within al-Jihad before the de-radicalization phase see III.3 Al-Farīḍa al-Ghā'iba and national jihadism, pp. 107 – 114.

<sup>408</sup> C. al-Tawīl, "Al-Qiyādiān Dr. Faḍl wa 'Abdul Aziz al-Gamāl Yaẓarā" [Commanders Dr. Faḍl and Abdul Aziz al-Gamal Show Up], *Al-Hayat*, March 22, 2007.

<sup>409</sup> For jihad.

<sup>410</sup> L. Wright, "The rebellion within. An Al Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism", *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008.

In November of the same year, Dr. Fadl would publish the most important of al-Ġihād's recantations, *Document for Guiding Jihadi Activism in Egypt and the Islamic World*.<sup>411</sup>

The doctrinal and ideological changes of the two major Egyptian *ġamā'āt* will be analyzed in the next sub-chapter.

#### IV.5 The ideological recantations

An element whose analysis combines the reaction of the regime and the doctrinal renewal of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy is the corpus of ideological recantations produced by the two groups during their de-radicalization phase.

From its side, the state helped the *ġamā'āt* to publish new books explaining the groups' perspectives comprehensively, criticizing al-Qa'ida, and calling for dialogue with the state and with society.

In fact, this was just the tip of the iceberg of the governmental support for the de-radicalizing groups. Indeed, since the overwhelming majority of the radicals were imprisoned for long periods, they would not have been able to get any income or funding without the help of the state. Therefore, the state either provided direct funding or permitted the activists to raise the funds.<sup>412</sup>

In the meantime, as mentioned before, the regime allowed the de-radicalized leadership to tour prisons and detention centers to spread their revisited messages, usually organizing question-and-answer sessions between the leaders and the imprisoned group's members.

Back to the *murāġa'āt*, "recantations", in January 2002 al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya issued four books under the general title of *Silsilāt Tashīh al-Mafāhim*, "The Correcting Conceptions Series."<sup>413</sup>

The series comprises approximately twenty independent publications produced by the IG's historic leaders: the five original members 'Abd al-Raḥmān, sheikh Salāḥ Ḥashīm, Karam Zuhdi, Nāġih Ibrāhīm, Issām Dirbala, and Muhammad Shawqī al-Islāmbūli.<sup>414</sup>

Each historic leader was a senior author, co-author, or consultative reviewer for these publications. At the time of their writing, all were serving extended prison sentences, and some of the most significant books

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<sup>411</sup> M. al-Shaf'i, "Munāzīr al-Qa'ida Yidin" [The Ideologue of al-Qa'ida Condemns], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 6, 2007.

<sup>412</sup> O. Ashour, *Continuity and Change in Islamist Political Thought and Behavior: The Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements in Egypt and Algeria*, in in B. Korany (Ed.), *The Changing Middle East: A New Look at Regional Dynamics*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2011, p. 157.

<sup>413</sup> K. Zuhdi et al. *Nahr al dhikrayāt: al-murāġa'āt al-fiqiya li- al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya* [River of Memories: The Jurisprudential Revisions of the Islamic Group], Maktaba al-Abaykāt, Riyadh, 2005.

<sup>414</sup> For 'Abd al-Raḥmān, Karam Zuhdi, Nāġih Ibrāhīm, and Issām Dirbala see Chapter II. al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya. and Muhammad Shawqī al-Islāmbūli was the brother of the murderer of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat Khāled al-Islāmbūli.

include *The Initiative to Cease Violence: A Realistic Vision and a View Based on the Sharia*<sup>415</sup>, *Shedding Light on the Errors That Were Committed During the Waging of Jihad*<sup>416</sup>, *Guidance of People Between Means and Ends*.<sup>417</sup>

Analyzing the content of these works, it becomes clear that the ideologues chose to focus on a number of crucial issues: illustrating the Initiative of Cessation of Violence, spreading their new conception of jihad and the limitations to jihad that every Muslim must respect, and reinforcing the ban on *takfīr*.

The new, peaceful conception of jihad in particular, reveals the scope of the doctrinal changes that were taking place first within al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and later within al-Ġihād.

Throughout thousands of pages, the groups focus on legal impediments to fight, striking the right balance between Islamic doctrine and pragmatic considerations.

One of the most interesting impediments forbids jihad when one thinks that jihad will not realize the interest for which it was proclaimed. Indeed, it is known that jihad has not been legislated for its own sake and is not pursued for what it entails in the way of letting blood, annihilating spirits, killing people, and amputating limbs. Rather, it has been legislated for the purpose of realizing a rightful interest—or interests—in the way of aiding religion and putting down civil and geopolitical strife and other such causes.<sup>418</sup>

A second crucial impediment of conducting violent jihad that is related to the cost-benefit analysis but even stronger than the first one, is based on the prohibition of self-destruction.

If jihad stands to realize nothing but the destruction, annihilation, and uprooting of the party that calls people to God and the wiping out of their call, there is no escaping the conclusion that it is thereby proscribed and prohibited.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> O. Ibrāhīm Ḥāfiẓ - A. 'Abd al-Māġid Muḥammād, *Mibādara waqf al-'unf: rū'ya wagi'iyya-wa-nazra shar'iya*, [The Initiative to Cease Violence: A Realistic Vision and a View Based on the Sharia], Maktaba al-Turāth al-Islāmy, al-Qāhira, 2002.

<sup>416</sup> N. Ibrāhīm - 'A. al-Sharīf, *Taslīt al-adwā 'alama waġa' fi al-jihad min akhtā'* [*Shedding Light on the Errors That Were Committed During the Waging of Jihad*], Maktaba al-Turāth al-Islāmy, al-Qāhira, 2002.

<sup>417</sup> N. Ibrāhīm et al., *Hidāya al-Khalā'iq bayna al-Ghayāt wa al-Waṣā'il* [Guidance of People Between Means and Ends], al-Abikān, al-Qāhira, 2005.

<sup>418</sup> P. Kamolnick, *The Egyptian Islamic Group's Critique of Al-Qaeda's Interpretation of Jihad*, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7(5), 2013.

<sup>419</sup> N. Ibrāhīm - 'A. al-Sharīf, *Taslīt al-adwā 'alama waġa' fi al-jihad min akhtā'* [*Shedding Light on the Errors That Were Committed During the Waging of Jihad*].

In al-Ġihād's field, the fundamental work within the recantations' realm was the aforementioned *Document for Guiding Jihadi Activism in Egypt and the World*,<sup>420</sup> authored by Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf, better known as Dr. Faḍl.<sup>421</sup>

Like the works produced by al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, the treatise focuses on a number of crucial points regarding jihad and the relationship with power:

When a Muslim person aims to achieve a moral goal without taking in consideration his incapacity to achieve it, as is the wont of many a jihadist, he is not only, almost inevitably, led to resorting to whatever means he can muster to get to his goal, but ultimately also to act in total disregard of the principles controlling the legitimacy of the course of action he is engaged in. But this oversight is grave: it is certainly tantamount to putting one's desires before those of God, however noble, moral, and legitimate that goal may be from the Islamic point of view. This way of operating and this sort of conduct is not part of our religion, it is the method of the secular revolutionaries who abide by the motto: "The aim justifies the means", which we reject no matter how noble or legitimate is the aim.<sup>422</sup>

In other words, the first impediment to jihad is the likely incapacity to achieve the chosen goal, and this argument is consistent with the new, pragmatic approach based on cost-benefit analysis.

A second issue that makes al-Sharīf's work of recantations extremely significant relates to the doctrinal knowledge of jihadists and the systematic application of Islamic rulings to contemporary history:

It is not permitted to those members of jihadi organizations who are not legally qualified, to derive from the books of the *Salāf* universal and absolute rulings and apply them to our contemporary context.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Wathīqa tarshīd al-Jihād fi Miṣr wa al-'ālam [Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World], *Al-Jarida*, November 8 – December 4, 2007.

<sup>421</sup> M. al-Shaf'i, "Munāzir al-Qa'ida Yidin" [The Ideologue of al-Qa'ida Condemns], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 6, 2007. On the biography of Dr. Faḍl see Chapter III, *Al-Jihād al-Islāmi*.

<sup>422</sup> Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf, *The Document for the Guidance of Jihadi Action in Egypt and the World*, The Revision Series, November 2007, p. 16.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

De-radicalizing ideologues stress the danger of taking particular concepts out of their historical context, investing them with religious symbolism, and applying them to the present.

They cite their own experience, an obsession with the so-called theory of the inevitability of confrontation, which led them into a costly armed clash with the state.<sup>424</sup>

In this respect, also Nāḡih Ibrāhīm, serving a life-sentence, would write that September 11 and its reverberations exposed the need for Muslims to face reality and catch up with the rest of humanity, since standing still would mean suicide.<sup>425</sup>

In the following section of the book, Dr. Faḡl goes back to the notion of capacity to perform jihad, and clearly states that individuals and groups have to be in full capacity to carry out their jihadi project:

The obligation of jihad, the main topic of our document and one of our most important religious duties, is definitely one which is conditioned on our capacity to perform it, so that whenever the condition of capacity is not fulfilled the ruling or the fatwa for jihad is seriously undermined. We should stress, however, that capacity, be it ‘physical’ or even ‘financial’ capacity, is not the only condition required, in that the proper conduct of jihad necessitates also knowledge of the environment and the circumstances surrounding such activity. For instance, in the Qur’an, God may He be exalted, has not only praised those who have actively engaged in Battle for His sake, He has also equally praised those who shunned their society and withdrew to the cave,<sup>426</sup> (...) If we now return to focus on the reality on the ground to examine the state and condition of the jihadi organisation and their venture to implement the Sharia and steer away the general public from committing vice and wickedness, we shall notice that these organisations oscillate between powerlessness and incapacity.<sup>427</sup>

According to the revised ideological corpus, not only physical and doctrinal, but also financial independence is a condition that must be met by all those who want to engage in jihadi activity, along

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<sup>424</sup> *The Inevitability of Confrontation* was also a book distributed in the late Eighties by al-Gamā’a al-Islāmiya, see Chapter II, Al-Gamā’a al-Islāmiya.

<sup>425</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p.234.

<sup>426</sup> Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf, *The Document for the Guidance of Jihadi Action in Egypt and the World*

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

with the approval of the parents, the issue of parity in military strength,<sup>428</sup> and the protection of the lives and wellbeing of Muslims.<sup>429</sup>

As a matter of fact, every single statement made in the *Document* and every condition to wage jihad serves the scope of further regulating the use of violence, scrutinizing the prerequisites for jihad in unprecedented ways. In one word: de-radicalizing.

The topic of armed rebellion against the ruler or the ruling authorities is certainly one of the most important of this document and in the words of Sayyid Imām al-Sharīf, armed action against the ruling authorities is now unlawful.

In this respect, the ideologue of al-Ġihād gives a technical explanation of the illegitimacy of violence against the regime, based on the exegesis and critical interpretation of hadiths:

All of these armed rebellions have erred because they have misapplied ‘elevated’ hadiths (traced back directly to the Prophet) which have an unconditional and universal import to guide their actions. Among such hadiths are: ‘Whoever among you is witness to a wrong or wickedness, let him take action to remove it’ (narrated by Abū Sayid). ‘Whoever fights them in the name of jihad, is counted among the believers.’ (narrated by Ibn Mas‘ūd).

They have misapplied the hadiths because whilst these statements of the Prophet (pbuh<sup>430</sup>) may give licence to enter into such confrontations between the subordinates of the sultan or the ruler, they in no way permit insubordination and armed rebellion against the ruler himself, in that there is a specific prohibition to that effect, and that specific prohibition takes precedence over the type of universal commands couched in the aforementioned hadiths. This specific prohibition is clearly contained in the following hadith in which the Prophet (pbuh) has said:

‘If any of you sees in the ruler an attribute which he cannot bear, let him be patient, because whoever foments the slightest rebellion against his ruler will die as if he had not come to Islam’ (Agreed upon hadith).<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid. p. 48.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>430</sup> Acronym of the formula *Peace Be Upon Him*, conventionally attached to the names of the prophets in Islam.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid. pp. 66 – 67.



The phrase “agreed upon”, (*muttafaq ‘aleihi*) when referring to a hadith means that the hadith in question is found both in the collections of hadith by Bukhārī and Muslim, even if there might be variation in the wording.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim are two of the six major hadith collections<sup>432</sup> of Sunni Islam. These prophetic traditions were collected by scholars after being transmitted orally for generations.<sup>433</sup>

In December 2009, *Foreign Policy* ranked Dr. Faḍl tenth among the “Top 100 Global Thinkers” for “striking a mortal ideological blow to al-Qa‘ida”.<sup>434</sup>

In spite of the fact that their revisions unquestionably responded also to realpolitik considerations and not just actual ideological changes, the groups, with their new works, succeeded in debunking the idea that a paramilitary organization is doctrinally qualified to declare and wage jihad.

#### **IV.6 De-radicalization as a national phenomenon and the Egyptian critique of al-Qa‘ida**

Throughout the first three chapters, the different components of what has been termed “national jihadism” have been continuously highlighted.

In the first chapter, dedicated to the historical framework, we saw the causes of the increased presence of religion in the public arena, which ranged from the crisis of the so-called establishment Islam to the strength of the Islamic Students’ Unions.

In the second and third chapters, ideology, message, constituency, resentments, grievances, and elected enemies of the two main Egyptian radical groups – al-Gamā’a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy - have been analyzed to demonstrate that they were all part of an intimately Egyptian context. The anger was caused by alleged national problems, the enemy was the Egyptian regime, leadership and ranks and files of the groups were all Egyptian.

The present chapter maintains that the de-radicalization processes described here have been possible thanks to the national character of the movements on the one side and the presence of a compact state in the role of interlocutor, on the other.

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<sup>432</sup> *Kutub al-Sitta*, “The Six Books”.

<sup>433</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī (810 – 870) was an Islamic scholar who was born in the Bukhara Region of Uzbekistan. The second collection is that of Muslim bin al-Ḥaġġāġ (after 815 – 875).

<sup>434</sup> A. Moghadam – B. Fishman, *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. 138.

A review of the groups' documents, manifestos, and actions indicates a preoccupation with the internal conditions of Muslims in Egypt or, possibly, in disparate single countries and not with those of the Umma as a whole.

Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya in particular – after showing the Egyptian nature of its organization during the movement building and the confrontational phases that largely prioritized the Near over the Far Enemy - went a step forward during the disengagement and de-radicalization phases.

Indeed, al-Gamā'a presented the most systematic and devastating critique of al-Qa'ida, even citing several cases in the 1990s when the United States helped to resolve international conflicts with results that benefited Muslims, as in the cases of the American military and financial assistance in the Afghan war and the American intervention in 1995 to put a stop to the persecution and massacre of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs.<sup>435</sup>

After the first volumes of comprehensive *murāğā'āt*, twelve more books followed, critiquing al-Qa'ida's ideology.<sup>436</sup>

At the same time in al-Ğihād, Dr. Faḍl publicly criticized Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, calling them “false prophets” and accusing them of being untrustworthy, treacherous, liars and tyrants.

All the members of al-Gamā'a and al-Ğihād who did not join al-Qa'ida de-radicalized, and this was thanks to the national dimension of the whole process.

Here lies the core of the suggested thesis. They de-radicalized *because* they did not join al-Qa'ida, they did not go global.

Once the jihadi movement became a global jihadi network with al-Qa'ida – and this was the turning point embodied by the strategical shift of al-Zawahiri and the Egyptians who decided to follow him - a real process of collective de-radicalization is no longer possible, because the national features that made it happen in the first place, such as grievances related to the country, prioritization of the Near Enemy, and a regime willing to facilitate the disengagement and de-radicalization phases, are no longer available.

As James Piscatori has argued, while Islam plays a contextual role in the formulation of foreign policy in Muslim states, Islamic ideals and solidarities are trumped by pragmatism and *raison d'etat*. This is the case for Muslim regimes, and arguably it is also the case for Islamist social movements that seek to thrive under the auspices of those regimes.<sup>437</sup>

This is incommensurably more plausible for national jihadists than for the global jihadi movement, whose rational strategies – if any – would be totally different from those of the first *ğamā'āt*.

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<sup>435</sup> Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya preferred not to mention the propulsive thrust given by both the initiatives to local and international jihad.

<sup>436</sup> A. al-Din Arafat, *The Rise of Islamism in Egypt*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2017.

<sup>437</sup> J. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

In the new worldview of the de-radicalizing Egyptian groups, al-Qa'ida is a reckless creature living in its own bubble and led by a man, Osama Bin Laden, who tended to lose touch with reality and confused myth with fact.

Throughout the seventies, the eighties, and the first half of the nineties, the dominant thinking among jihadists was to hit the fifth column that was destroying Muslim societies at the behest of foreign powers, i.e. the regimes and rulers seen as disbelievers and ungodly.<sup>438</sup>

In 2004 Hani al-Sibai<sup>439</sup>, a former high ranking-member of al-Ġihād, published his own diaries, serialized in *Al-Hayat*, which represent a telling cross section of the ongoing conflict between national and global jihadists:

The Front was disastrous to Islamic Jihad in particular and to Islamist movements in general (...) Al-Qa'ida and the globalization of jihad diverted the jihadi caravan from its correct historical path.<sup>440</sup>

During all those decades, the priority was implementing Islamization in the country, both from the top-down and the bottom-up.<sup>441</sup>

Further evidence of the thesis according to which the de-radicalization of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmi was a purely national process – which conclusively distinguishes them from the globally-driven al-Qa'ida - is the groups' willingness to take into account – in their new narrative – other political and social forces that historically have always played the antagonistic role for the Islamist groups *within* Egypt.

Indeed, at no point did the *ḡamā'āt* admit that they had been influenced by secular intellectuals, nevertheless, they have expressed their gratitude to those secular intellectuals and politicians who supported the Initiative for Ceasing Violence, as well as their basic human rights.<sup>442</sup>

Such a stance is by itself a new development, as secularists were, with no exceptions, the objects of the radical Islamists' criticism and they have never been considered counterparts worth talking to.

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<sup>438</sup> K. al-Said Habib, "Islamic Renewal", in R. S. Ahmed (Ed.), *The Militant Prophet: The Revolutionaries*, vol. II, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1991, pp. 204-205.

<sup>439</sup> Native of central Egypt, he fought in Afghanistan and stayed with al-Jihad for decades. He now lives in London and all the Egyptian efforts for his extradition have failed.

<sup>440</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, p.225. The front mentioned here is the World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders, the organization led by bin Laden that was born on February 23, 1998.

<sup>441</sup> Unlike mainstream Islamism however, of which the Muslim Brotherhood is the best example, the two radical *ḡamā'āt* never fully discovered the importance of trying to Islamize society from the bottom-up. See Chapter I pp. 34 - 62.

<sup>442</sup> O. Ibrāhīm Ḥāfiẓ - A. 'Abd al-Māḡīd Muḡammād, *Mibādara waqf al-'unf: rū'ya wagi'iyya-wa-naẓra shar'iya*, [The Initiative to Cease Violence: A Realistic Vision and a View Based on the Sharia], p. 46.

As far as this new narrative is concerned, it is worth noting that this represents the realm in which the ideological changes of the two de-radicalizing groups are most apparent, and one in which the national component plays a major role.

Through the recantations, the two groups committed to spreading a conception of jihad according to which it is a collective duty determined by qualified and representative *'ulamā'*, and a prerogative of the state. The shift is momentous: from jihad against the regime to jihad as appanage of the regime.

As a matter of fact, this shift would not have been possible without the recognition of the state as the primary authority and the acknowledgement of its power, and here lies the function of the national context as the necessary ground in which de-radicalization processes can take place.

As a consequence, the whole groups' rhetoric changes, the security forces killed by jihadists become the new *martyrs*, according to a narrative common to other de-radicalization and counter-radicalization schemes.

For instance, at the entrance of the complex of Hair prisons, few kilometres away from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, one of the writings painted on the walls commemorates police officers who died as *martyrs* of their duty.<sup>443</sup>

The choice of using the term *shuhadā'* (sing. *shahīd*), “martyrs”, for police officers and placing it side by side with the concept of duty in the national sense, represents a recurrent ideological challenge to the jihadi rhetoric.

Even Sadat, named “the Pharaoh” by his murderer Khālid al-Islāmbūli right after his assassination, becomes a *martyr* in the post-recantations narrative<sup>444</sup>.

All these communicative changes respond to the need of showing rulers and fellow Egyptians that the groups were developing an unprecedented form of national belonging, *al-intimā' al-waṭani*.

This would serve as a bulwark against violent jihadism.

On their side, illiberal regimes are notoriously excellent in fostering national belonging symbolism and rhetoric. Therefore, this trend was largely supported.

During extensive talks with Khaled al-Berry, a former member of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, the new rhetoric and the role of the Egyptian identity in shaping the *ḡamā'āt* was one of the primary topics of discussion:

S. B. “A critical hypothesis that this work aims at corroborating – or debunking – is that the extremism of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya was a “deeply Egyptian”

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<sup>443</sup> S. Brzuskiewicz, *Saudi Arabia: the de-radicalization program seen from within*, Institute for International Political Studies, Milan, April 28, 2017.

<sup>444</sup> “Asharq al-Awsat talks to the leader of Egyptian Islamic Group Inside a Prison”, *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 15 – 16, 2003.

extremism. In other words, it responded to Egyptian problems, for Egyptian people, and had as the first and fundamental enemy the impious state. What is your perspective about the intrinsically Egyptian nature of the group and of al-Ĝihād al-Islāmy?”

K. al-B. “I agree with that. We should not fall prey to the global jihad argument. Islamic groups in their essence are just Islamic version of Nazism and Fascism. Old ideas and interests that organize themselves politically to stop the society attempt to change and modernize.”<sup>445</sup>

With these premises, the impact of al-Qa‘ida on contemporary history, the spectacular nature of many of its attacks, and the longevity of its ideology should not be misinterpreted.

Until the end of the last century, transnationalist jihadists possessed no mass following within the jihadi galaxy, which was dominated by nationally-oriented groups. Al-Qaida’s birth was abnormal, a monstrous mutation.<sup>446</sup>

For this reason, examining a further example of national jihadists’ de-radicalization can help in proving how the national horizon is a fundamental prerequisite for de-radicalization to happen.

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<sup>445</sup> Khaled al-Berry. S. Brzuskiewicz, Interview with Khaled al-Berry, February 2018.

<sup>446</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, p. 278.

## IV.7 The Influence of the Egyptian De-radicalization Processes on al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya

As discussed throughout the chapter, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy has been deeply influenced by al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya in its decision to follow a consubstantial path of collective de-radicalization and disengagement.

Similarly, the impact of the de-radicalization and disengagement of the two Egyptian groups influenced the fate of another movement, this time in Libya: al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya (the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, LIFG).

This led a number of scholars to suggest the existence of a *domino effect*, implying that one group can influence others operating in the same context or under similar conditions.<sup>447</sup>

Comparable remarks have been made for other cases, as the Egyptian *ġamā'āt* are often analyzed along with similar groups in other countries.<sup>448</sup>

A comprehensive examination of each case of collective de-radicalization falls outside the scope of the present dissertation, but the parabola of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya is particularly worth mentioning for three substantial reasons.<sup>449</sup>

The first is the chronological proximity to the Egyptian cases, which makes it possible to observe the domino – or imitation - effect between de-radicalization in Egypt and Libya.

The second reason is the crucial role played by ideology in the process of moderation first and de-radicalization later: In both Egypt and Libya, the recantations, *murāġa'āt*, have been decisive towards the constituency - for the choice of moderation made by the leadership to be more appealing in the eyes of the ranks and files – and for the regime to open a dialogue with the de-radicalizing group and allow them to spread their amended positions.

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<sup>447</sup> O. Ashour, *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*, Routledge, London, 2009; O. Ashour, Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23(3), 2011, pp. 377 – 397; O. Ashour – C. Boucek, *De-Radicalization in Egypt, Algeria, and Libya*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 16, 2009; P. Neumann (Ed.), *Prison and Terrorism. Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College, London, 2010; D. Kohler, *Understanding De-Radicalization. Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid. An interesting case that has not been largely investigated is Tajikistan. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) (*Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston*), which declared jihad in 1992 and spearheaded the United Tajikistani Opposition (UTO) during the civil war of 1992–1997, led the UTO into a peace agreement with the Tajik regime.

<sup>449</sup> For accuracy and clarification, the Fighting Group does not refer to itself as “Libyan” in any of its publications. Given its wide usage among both Western and Arab scholars, however, the full English name and the acronym will be used throughout the dissertation.

The third - most significant - reason is the exquisitely national dimension of the group and the de-radicalization and disengagement process, which included national interests and goals, i.e. to overthrow the regime of Muammar Gaddafi (Mu'ammār al-Qaddāfi), and a state-led reaction that fostered the détente, which will represent the core of this section.

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was a Sunni opposition group that was established to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi's government in Libya (1969 – 2011).<sup>450</sup>

In its first communiqué in 1995, the LIFG accused Gaddafi's regime of apostasy and stated its goal of establishing sharia law in the country.

Similar to al-Ġihād al-Islāmy in Egypt, the Libyan Group stemmed from a secretive jihadist movement before being formally created in 1995 and before that year, the organization decided to remain underground in order to collect weapons and amass expertise to overthrow the regime.<sup>451</sup>

The LIFG was modeled along the lines of the Egyptian al-Ġihād and it has always been highly secretive, elitist, and exclusively paramilitary.<sup>452</sup>

Throughout the eighties, the secretive movement was led by emir Awatha al-Zuwāwi,<sup>453</sup> who travelled the length of Libya advocating jihad against the regime, taking advantage of his profile as a student of Islamic law, which helped him in attracting dozens of educated young men who would constitute the backbone of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group throughout the next phases of its existence.

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<sup>450</sup> The so-called *Jamahiriya*. The term had been coined by Muammar Gaddafi himself and can be translated as "the government of the masses". Qaddafi derived this word from the Arabic *ġumhuriya*, "republic", but used the plural *ġamāhir*, "masses" instead of the singular *ġumhūr*, "public."

For in-depth analyses of the concept and the system of the *Jamahiriya* see J. Davis, *Libyan politics. Tribe and revolution, an account of the Zuwaya and their government*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987; E. Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica. Studies in personal and corporate power*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; H. Beblawi - G. Luciani, *The Rentier State*, Croom Helm, London, 1987; H. Beblawi - G. Luciani, *The Rentier State in the Arab World*, in G. Luciani (Ed.), *The Arab State*, Routledge, London, 1990; A. Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices. Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya*, Routledge, London, 2005; A. Obeidi, *Political Culture in Libya*, Routledge, London, 2011; I. Cherstich, When Tribesmen do not act Tribal: Libyan Tribalism as Ideology (not as Schizophrenia), *Middle East Critique* 23(4), 2014, pp. 405 – 421; R.B. St. John, *Historical Dictionary of Libya*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2014.

<sup>451</sup> H. Solomon, Political Islam and the state in Africa: the case of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in E. Keller – R. Lyob (Eds.), *Religious ideas and Institutions: Transitions to Democracy in Africa*, Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2012, p. 135

<sup>452</sup> O. Ashour, Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya, *Foreign Policy*, August 29, 2011.

<sup>453</sup> G. Joffe (Ed.), *Islamist Radicalisation in North Africa: Politics and Process*, Routledge, London and New York, 2012.

In 1989 however, the regime discovered the existence of the clandestine group and inaugurated a strong crackdown on the Islamist opposition reminiscent of the cyclical clampdowns that took place in Egypt and Awatha al-Zuwāwi was arrested together with dozens of his supporters.

As was to be expected, the majority of LIFG members who had not been arrested managed to flee to Afghanistan to join the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union<sup>454</sup> and become part of the contingent of the Afghan Arabs.<sup>455</sup> The involvement of Libyan mujahedeen in Afghanistan, which might seem to indicate a shift toward the prioritization of the Far Enemy, was in fact not an exception to the relevance of the Near Enemy for the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and its national jihadism.

This is a crucial issue common to the Egyptian groups: The major consequence caused by the Afghan jihad against the Soviet military occupation was the growth of a new generation of transnational jihadists only in the sense that, emboldened by the Russian defeat, many of them decided to export their concept of Islamic revolution worldwide.<sup>456</sup>

Nevertheless, this absolutely did not constitute a shift from localism to globalism:<sup>457</sup> Exporting Islamic revolution worldwide still meant moving along national lines, in which goals had to be achieved *within* a national framework and against an elected Near Enemy, usually the national apostate ruler, while the Near Enemy had not been replaced yet with the Far Enemy embodied by the West tout court, which is a momentous shift that would take place only with the mature age of al-Qa'ida and only for a portion of the whole jihadi galaxy.

In 2001, despite the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's declining capacity in Libya, the United States Treasury Department would list it as a foreign terrorist organization as part of the global crackdown on terrorist groups linked to al-Qa'ida following the September 11 attacks,<sup>458</sup> and the LIFG's ties to al-Qa'ida came under closer scrutiny when a senior Group's commander and companion of Osama bin Laden, Abū

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<sup>454</sup> A. Pargeter. *Political Islam in Libya*, The Jamestown Foundation, March 24, 2005.

<sup>455</sup> The term Afghan Arabs (or Arab Afghans) refers to Arab mujahedeen who went to Afghanistan during and following the Soviet-Afghan War to help fellow Muslims fight Soviets and pro-Soviet Afghans. Estimates of the foreign volunteers who took part in the conflict range between 20,000 and 35,000.

<sup>456</sup> See Chapter II.2 The Genesis of Al Gama'a al-Islamiya and Chapter III.5 Al-Zawahiri before jihad went global.

<sup>457</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>458</sup> Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was also listed by the United Nations on October 6, 2001 pursuant to paragraph 8(c) of resolution 1333 (2000) as being associated with al-Qa'ida, Osama bin Laden or the Taliban for "participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf or in support of", "supplying, selling or transferring arms and related materiel to" or "otherwise supporting acts or activities of" al-Qa'ida, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.



Anas al-Līby (1964 – 2015), was detained by U.S. forces for his involvement in the 1998 bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>459</sup>

Despite these links, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group has never condoned al-Qa'ida strategy of primarily targeting the West. While a minority of the Group's fighters reportedly moved to fight in or lead other al-Qa'ida affiliated groups, the LIFG as a whole has always refused to join Osama bin Laden's attacks against the West in 1998, did not congratulate him for the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, or the attacks on September 11, 2001, and reportedly warned Osama bin Laden against a large-scale attack against the U.S. in a meeting in Kandahar in 2000.<sup>460</sup>

Indeed, even though the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group demonstrated solidarity with other jihadist groups around the world, its goals were primarily nationalist rather than global, and the Group never publicly supported a global jihad or al-Qa'ida's strategy.<sup>461</sup>

After their Afghan experience, at the beginning of the nineties many of the Libyan fighters returned to Libya following their primarily national objectives, and the birth of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was officially announced in 1995.<sup>462</sup>

From a geographical perspective, the group was most active in the eastern province of Cyrenaica, and its core cells were located in Benghazi,<sup>463</sup> where they had multiple clashes with the regime's security officers and law enforcement officials and carried out at least three attempts on Gaddafi's life.<sup>464</sup>

In June 1996, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group killed eight policemen in Derna, and the government responded with air and ground assaults on the Group's. Indeed, in the second half of the nineties, when tension was escalating, the government imposed martial law and repeatedly cut off water and electricity

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<sup>459</sup> Nāzih 'Abdulhamed Nabāh al-Ruqā'i, known as Abu Anas al-Līby, was born in Tripoli in 1964. There are no significant accounts on his personal life. During the Nineties, he allegedly established ties with al-Qa'ida in Sudan. In 1995, al-Līby was granted political asylum in the United Kingdom after a failed plot to assassinate Hosni Mubarak, whose request for extradition was declined on the grounds that al-Līby would not receive a fair trial in Egypt.

After years of uncertain whereabouts, al-Līby was captured in Tripoli on October 5, 2013 by the U.S. with the assistance of FBI agents and CIA officers and he died on January 2, 2015 at a hospital in New York while in the United States custody for the attacks to the U.S. embassies in 1998.

<sup>460</sup> A. Zelin – A. Lebovich, *Assessing Al-Qaida's Presence in the New Libya*, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, March 22, 2012.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Stanford University: [<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/675#note57>].

<sup>463</sup> D. Witter, *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). Understanding War*, The Institute for the Study of War, Washington D.C., April 8, 2011.

<sup>464</sup> Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), Global Security: [<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lifg.htm>].

supplies in regions where the Islamic Group had local support while arresting over one hundred fifty LIFG members in 1998.<sup>465</sup>

Gunaratna and Oreg highlight that, as a result of the regime's crackdown, many Group's members were forced into exile and a high number of them chose the United Kingdom<sup>466</sup>, but also Afghanistan, Iran, and China. LIFG members who fled to the United Kingdom in particular, became politically active and created an underground support network for the LIFG.<sup>467</sup>

From an organizational perspective, after the initial completely underground phase, the Group created a structure consisting of four main branches.

The first was the Political Bureau, which supervised the group's political and military activities. The second was the Consultative Committee (*Mağlis al-Shura*), whose size is unknown but it has been speculated as having 12 to 15 members. The third was the Judicial Committee, which educated LIFG members on religion and propaganda. The fourth was the Information Bureau, which was responsible for communicating with the Libyan public.<sup>468</sup>

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group has not left the same amount of documents and accounts as the Egyptian *ğamā'āt*, and as a consequence any remarks on its internal structure and leadership risks to be pure speculation. What we know with a high degree of certainty is the role played by two prominent figures in the movement: 'Abdelhakīm Belhāğ (born 1966) and Sāmi al-Sādi (born 1966).

Born near Tripoli, Belhāğ graduated as a civil engineer from al-Fateh University, the largest Libyan University, located in the capital.<sup>469</sup>

In the eighties, after his graduation, Belhāğ travelled extensively, spending time in Sudan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Syria, as well as in Europe, mainly in the United Kingdom.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> The members of the LIFG diaspora in the United Kingdom, however, will also be crucial actors in the de-radicalization phase of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and will be vocal against violent radicalism. The best example is embodied by Noman Benotman, former leader of the LIFG and now President and Executive Board Member of the Quilliam Foundation (London), committed to promoting interreligious dialogue and reforming former extremists. The role of the LIFG leaders both in Libya and abroad in the de-radicalization phase will be dealt with in-depth in the following pages.

<sup>467</sup> R. Gunaratna, Rohan – A. Oreg, *The Global Jihad Movement*, Maryland, Rowan and Littlefield, 2015, p. 217.

<sup>468</sup> H. Solomon, *Political Islam and the state in Africa: the case of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, 2012, p. 138.

<sup>469</sup> Profile: Libyan rebel commander Abdel Hakim Belhāğ, BBC News, July 4, 2012: [<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14786753>].

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

After going back to Libya at the end of the decade, he became part of the clandestine group that would soon be discovered by the regime and as a consequence, Belḥāğ travelled to Afghanistan in 1988.<sup>471</sup>

Back to his homeland in 1992, he was among the founders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, heading the operations in Eastern Libya.<sup>472</sup>

Between 1995 and 2010, ‘Abdelḥakīm Belḥāğ was the Emir of the Group, but was arrested in 2004 in Malaysia and transported to Abu Salim Prison in Libya. After being released in 2010 and following the dismantlement of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Belḥāğ served as a brigade leader for the National Transition Council in Tripoli to bring down Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. After Qaddafi’s fall, Belḥāğ became active in politics, and in 2012, ran as a candidate for The Nation Party, *Hizb al-Watan*.

Another essential figure in the group was Sāmi al-Sādi, spiritual leader and most senior sharia authority for the whole period of official activity, from 1995 to 2010. In fact, Sāmi al-Sādi was a member of the secret group led by al-Zuwāwi that served as a precursor to the LIFG.

At university in Tripoli, he had been involved in the secret group, however, because of his activities against the regime, he had been detained once in 1984 and after his release he fled to Afghanistan via Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

After an experience as a *muğahid* in Afghanistan in the late eighties, he lived between Libya and the United Kingdom from 1994 to 1997 and then returned to Afghanistan in 1997, where he met with Osama bin Laden in 2000 and 2001, and reportedly argued that the 9/11 attacks were against sharia.<sup>473</sup> In 2004, Sāmi al-Sādi was captured in Hong Kong and was then sent back to prison in Libya.

In 2009, al-Saadi was charged with 14 crimes including attempting to overthrow the government. He was tried in prison, convicted, and sentenced to death. As with Belḥāğ, he was released in March 2010 alongside several hundred other prisoners following negotiations with Gaddafi’s son, Saif Gaddafi, although they had to publicly renounce their efforts to overthrow the regime. Shortly after the uprisings against Gaddafi began in February 2011 he was again arrested and detained with his son until August 2011, when rebel forces finally captured Tripoli.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Mapping Militant Organizations: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Stanford University: [<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/675#note57>].

<sup>472</sup> ‘Abdelḥakīm Belhaj was also known during this period as Abu Abdullah al-Sadiq.

<sup>473</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Delivered into Enemy Hands: US-led Abuse and Rendition of Opponents to Gaddafi’s Libya”, Human Rights Watch Investigation, 2012.

<sup>474</sup> The Rendition Project, Sami al-Saadi: [<https://www.therenditionproject.org.uk/prisoners/saadi.html>].

In December 2012, having sued the UK government for MI6's involvement in his rendition, al-Sādi accepted £2.23 million from the British government in compensation in an out of court settlement.

Al-Sādi stated that he had accepted the compensation to avoid putting his family through further suffering, and because he lacked faith that the truth would come out through the courts.<sup>475</sup>

During the de-radicalization and disengagement phase of the movement, Sāmi al-Sādi worked with other Libyan Islamic Fighting Group leaders to write a major corpus of recantations, the *Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Verification, and Judgment of People*,<sup>476</sup> which will be addressed shortly.

As we have seen so far, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group presented multiple ideological and organizational similarities with al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.

Its main goal was the overthrow of the regime and the establishment of a truly Islamic government informed by sharia; like al-Ġihād al-Islāmy in Egypt, it largely preferred secrecy and guerrilla warfare against the government; both the leadership and the files of the Group have been deeply influenced by the Afghan experience in terms of ideology and acquired expertise.

At the same time, however, significant differences occur between the Egyptian groups and the LIFG and it is not hazardous to say that the latter's size, appeal, and strength in the confrontation with the state were certainly more limited.

Therefore, the sequence of crackdowns and imprisonments carried out by the Libyan regime against the Group, which never had more than a few hundred members, quickly weakened it and created the premises for its disengagement.

As seen before, state repression represents one of the essential conditions for the process of disengagement to take place, and Libya is no exception, particularly considering the examples set a few years before by the Egyptian *ġamā'āt*.

In the second half of the 2000s, Saīf al-Islām started to consider the opportunity of leading a process of collective disengagement, which would have given him a stunning fame in the neighboring countries as well as the West.

At the end of the decade, it became clear for the regime that it could have made a step forward, helping fighters in their path towards de-radicalization without settling for a mere disengagement.

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<sup>475</sup> R. Norton-Taylor, "Government pays Libyan dissident's family £2.2m over MI6-aided rendition", *The Guardian*, December 13, 2012: [<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/dec/13/libyan-dissident-mi6-aided-rendition>].

<sup>476</sup> D. Witter, "Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)." *Understanding War*. The Institute for the Study of War, April 8, 2011.

To do so, Saif al-Islam, elected leader of the negotiations, began to apply the Egyptian model of de-radicalization to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

On April 9, 2008, the Libyan regime released at least 90 members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group,<sup>477</sup> thus inaugurating two years of secret talks between the Group's leadership in jail and the Libyan regime.

In September 2009, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group released the new code for jihad, a 400-page doctrinal document of *Corrective Studies*.

As illustrated before, the role of the leadership is unconditionally crucial for de-radicalization to take place, and the case of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is no exception.

Like most of the Egyptian Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya leadership, a high number of commanders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group were in jail during the beginning of the détente, and during their detention six of them authored their document delegitimizing armed opposition to Qaddafi's regime and other rulers by theological and ideological argumentations, regardless of their standards of oppression.

The book, *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Enforcement of Morality, and Judgment of People*, was paraded by Saif al-Islām Gaddafi himself in front of Western diplomats and experts, an event that was also followed by "Reconciliation" conferences all over the region, in which the regime described the entire process of repentance.

A further two-hundred prisoners were released in March 2010, including 'Abdelḥakīm Belḥāġ. After the 2010 release, Saif al-Islām Gaddafi, the second son of the supreme leader of the Jamahiriya, heralded in an international conference a new era of "national reconciliation" in Libya:

The enemy of yesterday is the friend of today. It was a real war, but those brothers are free men now.<sup>478</sup>

In carrying out the gradual process of de-radicalization, Noman Benotman, supreme leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, played an extremely relevant role.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> I. Black, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – from al-Qaida to the Arab Spring", *The Guardian*, September 5, 2011.

<sup>478</sup> O. Ashour, Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23(3), 2011, p. 377.

<sup>479</sup> See also footnote n. 24.

Back in November 2007, an audio message was published in which Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group had officially joined al-Qa'ida: Noman Benotman fired back an open letter to al-Zawahiri questioning his credibility.

Indeed, in the same month Benotman published a letter which asked al-Qa'ida to give up all its operations in the Islamic world and in the West, adding that ordinary westerners were blameless and should not be attacked.<sup>480</sup>

Noman Benotman had already distanced himself from the Group after the September 11 attacks, and since then had started to influence the negotiations between the Libyan government and his de-radicalizing fellows, urging the former to free LIFG leaders, and inciting the latter to formally renounce radical views. In 2010, the same year of the fulfillment of the collective de-radicalization program in his home country, Benotman wrote an open letter to the leader of al-Qa'ida Osama bin Laden:

Osama, you were kind enough to invite me to breakfast at your simple mud house in Kandahar in summer of 2000. I still remember your children playing barefoot near us. In our meetings, I represented the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and in the presence of Ayman al-Zawahiri as well as other key figures, I argued for an immediate cessation of violence and an end to al-Qa'ida's attacks outside Afghanistan. You asked me to provide you with access to LIFG's global logistic network to bolster your "Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders", as you termed your ongoing war. I refused point-blank, without even seeing the need to consult my group on this decision. You saw many truths in my argument: that al-Qa'ida and its violent acts had been an abject failure.

Benotman continues:

Most Muslim communities wish to embrace and engage in democracy; they seek justice, peace, freedom, human rights and peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world. Instead, where there was harmony, you brought discord.<sup>481</sup>

Omar Ashour conducted interviews with some of the former LIFG leaders after the reconciliation process had been made official in 2010.

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<sup>480</sup> O. Ashour, Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya, August 29, 2011.

<sup>481</sup> N. Benotman, An open letter to Osama bin Laden, Foreign Policy, September 10, 2010: [<http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/10/an-open-letter-to-osama-bin-laden/>].

During the turmoil that began in 2011, members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in Ajdabiya – north-east Libya – declared that the group would support the revolt against Qaddafi's rule, and changed the group's name to Libyan Islamic Movement (*al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiya al-Lībiya*).<sup>482</sup>

‘Abdelḥakīm Belḥāğ, who in 2012 would run as a candidate for the Nation Party, *Ḥizb al-Waṭan*, made some interesting statements revealing the moderation path that the Group was determined to follow and protect.

According to Ashour, the experiences of the LIFG leaders in armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Libya have forced them to mature politically, recalculate strategically, moderate behaviorally, and modify their ideological beliefs, following a trend that is exceptionally similar to the process that had taken place in the neighboring Egypt.

#### **IV.8 Conclusions**

De-radicalization, seen as the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change, finds emblematic examples in the parabolas of al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmi in Egypt and, thanks to a process of transnational imitation, al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātīla bi-Lībiya.

In order for the processes of disengagement (behavioral moderation) to be performed first, and de-radicalization (ideological moderation) to be performed later, a number of components are necessary. They have been analyzed in this chapter and include strong group leadership, effective reactions from the regime, both in the form of repression and selective inducements, and social interaction within the group and between different movements.

To initiate a de-radicalization journey, strategic calculations, political learning, and *weltanschauung* revisions have to be involved.

The first element, strategic calculation, coincided with the cost-benefit analysis that all three groups carried out, the political learning was a by-product of experience, confrontation, and negotiation with the regimes, whereas the ideological revisions would merge into the corpus of recantations produced by the groups in Egypt and Libya during the first decade of the Twenty-first century.

Leading and systematizing these processes, the leadership initiates a de-radicalization process that is in turn bolstered by selective inducements from the state as well as by internal interactions in the form of

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<sup>482</sup> O. Ashour, *Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya*, 2011.

lectures, debates, and meetings between the leadership, mid-ranking commanders, and grassroots participants.

Regardless of what one thinks about the revisions and the authenticity of the ideological changes, it is undeniable that the Egyptian and Libyan *ḡamā'āt* refrained from armed struggle and deactivated their paramilitary cells, and have not carried out military operations since the late 1990s.<sup>483</sup>

They succeeded in using sharia to build up an interpretation of jihad that unequivocally forbids the killing of Muslims and non-Muslim civilians.

Here a word of caution is required. The overwhelming majority of disengaged and de-radicalized jihadists does *not* consist of improvised democrats and never will.

Abandoning violence does not imply leaving backwardness, patriarchy, and the sense of superiority derived from the perception of being the guardians of faith.

Nonetheless, a large segment of reformed jihadists has gradually become initiated into the culture of political realism, continuing to develop their new approach to the world.

Conservatism has generally replaced revolutionary jihadism, whose goal is to Islamize society by seizing power by force and autocratic fiat.

On the contrary, global jihadists, who in the nineties represented an unstable minority, did not de-radicalize.

Portions of both al-ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-ḡihād al-Islāmy would distance themselves from the domestic initiatives to cease violence and the recantations of their former fellows, and will instead go global, following one of the major shifts in the history of jihadism. The shift was made by Ayman al-Zawahiri, former leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who for years had employed 'Abd el-Salām Faraḡ's hierarchy of enemies and prioritized the near one – embodied by the infidel regime.<sup>484</sup>

From the second half of the nineties onwards, the Egyptian doctor would, along with Osama bin Laden, be the primary representative of global jihad and the necessity of attacking the Far Enemy, namely the West in general and the United States in particular.

The ways in which this momentous shift took place, the changes in the rhetoric from national to global jihad, and the impact of this shift on the likelihood of de-radicalization compared to the national *ḡamā'āt* will be the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>483</sup> The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group will cease to exist as an anti-regime jihadi group. Part of its offspring, however, would join the armed struggle that would begin in Libya in 2011.

<sup>484</sup> See Chapter III. Al-Jihad al-Islāmy.



## **V. The shift from national to global jihad and its implications for collective de-radicalization**

The present chapter focuses on the turning point from national to global jihad and the momentous differences in the fate of the Egyptian main *ḡamā'āt* – al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy – on one side, and what is termed global jihad on the other side.

Compared to the de-radicalization processes analyzed in Chapter IV, this section addresses the opposite and symmetrical process.

It deals with those who chose not to de-radicalize and broke the geographical and strategic borders and boundaries of national jihad, thus embracing the transnational and non-territorial ideology that would inform al-Qa'ida.

This is one of the core passages of the work, since it investigates how the global veer of jihadism stops collective political de-radicalization from being possible.

Obviously, we are not talking about individual de-radicalization, which is still possible and does happen even in a context of global jihad.

The hypothesis does not claim that individual processes of disengagement and de-radicalization cease to take place.

On the contrary, it clearly states that once jihadism goes global with the emergence of al-Qa'ida, what does not occur anymore is an organic process of collective de-radicalization, in which a group from the *same* country motivated by *national* grievances and objectives negotiates with a *national* power that implements *national* strategies to foster the process, which is what happened in the case of al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy.

In order to demonstrate the relevance of the shift from national to global jihad in determining the impossibility of collective de-radicalization, a crucial section of the chapter will focus on the role of Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Indeed, the first stages of his jihadi activity were characterized by the undisputed primacy of the national goals over the global ones. Following the shift that al-Zawahiri initiated during his experiences outside Egypt, the analysis will move forward to the rift that fostered al-Zawahiri's alignment with the global vision of al-Qa'ida and his corresponding departure from the national project of al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy.

The research highlights the hiatus between the Twentieth century's jihadism and the project of the new-born al-Qa'ida, and the *hows* and *whys* behind al-Zawahiri's decision to internationalize jihad and dramatically change tactics and strategy.

As a result of the work carried out in this and the former chapters, in the final section the differences between the Egyptian national *ḡamā'āt* and the global project endorsed by al-Zawahiri in the second part of his life will be purportedly recalled in order to verify the central hypothesis informing the dissertation, according to which the de-radicalization processes of al-ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-ḡihād al-Islāmy have been possible thanks to the national identity of the groups' constituency and goals and of the process itself. Later, after jihad went global, collective political de-radicalization seems to be impossible.

### **V.1 Conceptual polarities between national and global jihad**

In all the previous chapters, the discussion has addressed the multiple differences occurring between the national and the global/transnational approach to jihad.

In the first chapter, the analysis focused on the historical humus that fostered the birth of the Egyptian radical groups in the framework of a stronger religiosity in the public arena.

In the second and third chapters dealt with the radicalization and confrontational phases of al-ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-ḡihād al-Islāmy, characterized by purely national strategies, goals, and rhetoric.

The fourth chapter described the disengagement and de-radicalization processes carried out by the two groups and revealed that being *national* jihadi movements allowed them to perform those processes.

Since the focus of the present chapter is the shift from national to global jihad, however, it is now worth recalling the crucial polarities existing between the two approaches.

First, what distinguishes the two forms of jihadism is the prioritization of the Near Enemy, in the case of the national jihadists, and the Far Enemy, in the case of global jihadists.

The difference between *al-'adū al-qarīb* ("the Near Enemy") and *al-'adū al-ba'īd* ("the Far Enemy") has been theorized by al-ḡihād's main ideologue 'Abdel Salām Faraḡ (1954-1982) in his *al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, "The Absent Obligation"<sup>485</sup> and al-ḡihād, like its bigger sister al-ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya, prioritized the Near Enemy embodied by the corrupt Egyptian regimes, over the Far Enemy.

Later, with the rise of al-Qa'ida, the jihadi project would go global, and the Far Enemy, personified by the United States, the West in general, and Israel, would take priority over the Near one, both in the jihadi strategy and narrative.

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<sup>485</sup> See III.3 Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba and national jihadism, pp. 107 – 114.

Inevitably, this enormous doctrinal difference generates a strategical rift in terms of targets. For the national jihadists, the goal was overthrowing the corrupt and westernized regimes and implement an Islamic government in their own countries, whereas for the global jihadists, the objective was defeating the source of impiety par excellence, the West, thus gaining justice for Islam and the pious Muslims worldwide.

In this respect, a word of caution is required. The final goal of jihadi groups has always been the instauration of the Caliphate over Dār al-Islām, and there is no ultimate difference in this between national and global jihadists.

What does change dramatically from the former approach to the latter is the priority given to this goal and the ideal timeline that has to be implemented to achieve it.

For national jihadists, the Caliphate has always been a sort of utopian goal to aim at in an unspecified far future, while al-Qa'ida gave it a much greater attention.

Notoriously, the Islamic State would go a step further and would make the unprecedented move of actually proclaiming the Caliphate over the territories that it would control (June 29, 2014), thus completely distancing itself from the oldest, utopian approach embodied by the national jihadists of the last century.

Beside the doctrinal polarity Near Enemy – Far Enemy and the consequent strategical polarity Islamic government in the country – defeat of the Crusaders and the Jews, the third major difference concerns the identity of the members of the group.

Indeed, not only did the national focus of the two Egyptian groups determine that all the members were Egyptians, recruited and indoctrinated in Egypt, but also, at times, the focus was even narrower, as in the case of the Sa'idi dominance within al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya,<sup>486</sup> in which the members were moved by regional – before than national – grievances.

On the contrary, in its global project al-Qa'ida has always appealed to the entire Umma and urged Muslims worldwide to join the cause, promoting a sort of jihadi cosmopolitanism that made it possible for thousands of fighters of different origins to gather and fight side by side as some of them had experienced in Afghanistan against the Soviets.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> See II.3 Sa'īdy dominance, pp. 73 – 82.

<sup>487</sup> This trend and the jihadi cosmopolitanism would be even stronger with the so-called Islamic State, in which a central propaganda fil rouge would be the multiethnic nature not only of the fighters, but also of the entire families that fled to the Islamic State-controlled territories, where mixed marriages would be highly encouraged in the name the only identity marker, Islam.

An additional difference between the national and global trends is located within the framework of the relationship of the radical groups with authority, and it is one of the most crucial discrepancies occurring between the two poles.

It relates to the reaction of authorities towards jihadists and their potential de-radicalization. The Egyptian national jihadi movements – which would also inspire the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group as we saw in Chapter III – were active within the national borders against the Egyptian regimes and the national authority was able to act as their counterpart.

For its part, this national authority, which was represented in Egypt by the regimes of Anwar al-Sadat first and Hosni Mubarak later and in Libya by Saïf al-Islām Qaddafi,<sup>488</sup> found itself in a position in which it was able to choose – alone – the best strategy to tackle the plague of violent radicals.

Therefore, by no means asserting that the Egyptian and Libyan governmental strategies have been successful represents a justification for authoritarian regimes, neither it means claiming that undemocratic governments are necessary for disengagement and de-radicalization to happen.

What is necessary, on the contrary, is a clear and *tangible* enemy who can delimit, together with the radical groups, a common ground for conflict and contact, fight and negotiation, thus striking a balance between repression and selective inducements. This is exactly what the Egyptian and Libyan governments chose to do in reaction to the radical activity in their countries.

From the rise of al-Qa‘ida onwards, all of this would disappear. The Enemy would be located in another hemisphere, both geographically and culturally. The shared *res publica* within the same territory would no longer be the arena of the confrontation, and the Arab national regimes would be considered nothing more than puppets in the hands of the true rival, the West and its system(s) of values.

The jihadi project would shift to an intangible ground which would not have room for negotiation, since the ultimate enemy would coincide with an entire cultural system.

In this respect, Ayman al-Zawahiri and a faction of his group al-Ġihād al-Islāmy carried out the shift from national to global jihad at first-hand, and in the following sections of the chapter the personal parabola of the current al-Qa‘ida ideologue will be taken as the crucial example of the analyzed changes.

By observing the strategical and rhetorical revolutions that he embodies, it will be clear that national and global jihadists were destined to undergo diametrically opposed developments.

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<sup>488</sup> See IV.7 The influence of the Egyptian de-radicalization processes on al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātala bi-Lībya, pp. 151 – 160.

## V.2 Jihadi activity in Egypt, the supremacy of national jihad, and the *first* Ayman al-Zawahiri

Some Egyptian popular accounts suggest that al-Zawahiri's family may extend as far back as Omar ibn al-Khattab (584-644), the second Caliph.

Al-Zawahiri's family has its roots in *Zawāhir*, a small town in Saudi Arabia located in the Badr area, where a crucial battle between Prophet Muhammad and his opponents among the Quraish was fought and won by the Prophet (624),<sup>489</sup> whereas his ancestry allegedly settled in Egypt only around 1860.<sup>490</sup>

Ayman Muḥammad Rabī' al-Zawāhiri<sup>491</sup> was born in 1951 to a reputable family in Ma'adi, a suburban district south of Cairo. His paternal grandfather, sheikh al-Ahmadi al-Zawahiri, was a distinguished Islamic scholar and the imam of al-Azhar, while Ayman's father was a pharmacology professor at Ain Shams University, Cairo.

His maternal grandfather, a professor of oriental literature, was president of Cairo University and Egyptian ambassador to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Well-known for his Islamic knowledge and piety, he was often nicknamed "the devout ambassador",<sup>492</sup> while his granduncle 'Abdul-Razāq Azzām was the first Secretary General of the Arab League.

Like many members of his educated family, Ayman al-Zawahiri was a studious boy who excelled in school and was quite precocious in activism, since by the age of 14 he had joined the Muslim Brotherhood's galaxy, only one year before the execution of Sayyid Quṭb. Allegedly, al-Zawahiri and other secondary school students helped form an underground radical cell devoted to overthrow the apostate government by implementing the mission of "putting Quṭb's vision into action."<sup>493</sup>

Even many years later, after radically changing his perspective and starting to advocate for the prioritization of jihad against the Far Enemy, al-Zawahiri's thought would echo the words of Quṭb on the vanguards embodied by the mujahedeen and those of 'Abdel Salām Faraḡ about the Neglected Duty:<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> For a detailed account of the battle see T. Bunting, Battle of Badr – Islamic History, Encyclopaedia Britannica: [<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Badr>].

<sup>490490</sup> "Nubbadha 'an: Ayman al-Zawāhiri Qā'id Tanẓīm al-Qā'ida" [On Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of al-Qaida], *BBC Arabic*, June 16, 2011: [[http://www.bbc.com/arabic/worldnews/2011/06/110616\\_zawahri\\_profile](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/worldnews/2011/06/110616_zawahri_profile)].

<sup>491</sup> From now on, his name will not be spelled following the scientific transliteration, since it is well-known and commonly used by non-Arabic speakers.

<sup>492</sup> Y. H. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, The Counterproliferation Papers, Future Warfare Series n. 21, USAF Counterproliferation Center Maxwell Air Force Base, March 2004.

<sup>493</sup> L. Wright, *The Looming Tower, Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York City, 2006, p. 37.

<sup>494</sup> The author of *Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* [The Neglected Duty]. See III.3 *Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* and national jihadism.

The United States wanted the war to be a war by proxy against the Russians, but, with God's assistance, the Arab mujahedeen turned it into a call to revive the neglected religious duty, namely jihad for the cause of God.<sup>495</sup>

More precisely, the young al-Zawahiri joined the *Ġamā'at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiya* (The Association of the Followers of Muhammad's Path), a radical movement led by Mustafa al-Fiqqi and characterized by proximity to the hive of the Brotherhood, but soon left it to join the Jihad movement. By the age of 16, he was an active member of a cell headed by Sa'id Tantawi, who trained al-Zawahiri to assemble explosives and to use weapons.<sup>496</sup>

In 1974 however, the group would split after its *takfīr* against Tantawi's brother, who had fought under the infidel Egyptian army. In 1975, after the split, the leader Tantawi went to West Germany and al-Zawahiri took over the leadership of the cell.

He immediately organized a military wing under Issam al-Qamari. Issam al-Qamari was a fundamental figure in the ideological and strategical growth of Ayman al-Zawahiri, who would devote an entire chapter to him in his *Fursān Taḥta Rāya al-Nabī* (*Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*), describing how he met a heroic death at the hands of the Egyptian security forces.<sup>497</sup>

Al-Zawahiri's relationship with al-Qamari may have gone back to their high school days, and they both agreed that a military takeover was the only means to initiate a revolution, and this is what led al-Qamari to join the military academy and rise to the rank of major in the Egyptian Armored Corps, thus trying to infiltrate the corrupt governmental apparatus.

Muntasir al-Zayyat would claim that under torture of the Egyptian police, following his arrest in connection with the murder of President Sadat, al-Zawahiri revealed the hiding place of al-Qamari which led to his arrest and execution; in fact, al-Zawahiri's confession has never been ascertained.

In this respect, it is worth recalling that Muntaṣir al-Zayāt, the Egyptian lawyer of many members of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād, who was also imprisoned with al-Zawahiri, wrote *Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him* [*Ayman al-Zawāhiri kama 'arifuhu*]<sup>498</sup>, a book that soon became a milestone for the analysis of the role of Ayman al-Zawahiri within the Egyptian and global jihadi movements.

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<sup>495</sup> <sup>495</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, translated in L. Mansfield, *His Own Words. A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri*, TLG Publications, 2006, p. 44.

<sup>496</sup> A. 'ādel Kāmel, *al-Nuqaṭ Fawqa al-Ḥurūf, al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa al-Niẓām al-Khāṣṣ* [Dotting the I's, the Muslim Brothers and the Secret Apparatus], al-Zahrā' li-l-'ilām al-'arabī, al-Qāhira, 1989.

<sup>497</sup> A. al-Zawāhiri, *Fursān Taḥta Rāya al-Nabī* [Knights Under the Prophet's Banner], 2001.

<sup>498</sup> M. al-Zayyāt, *Ayman al-Zawāhiri kama 'arifuhu* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him], Dār Miṣr al-Maḥroussa, al-Qāhira, 2002.

Dealing with the early stages of al-Zawahiri's jihadi activity, al-Zayāt quotes a deposition given by the physician in 1981, when he stood accused of collaborating in the assassination of president Anwar al-Sadat (October 6, 1981).

In the deposition, al-Zawahiri confirmed that he first joined an Islamist organization in the Sixties, under the tutelage of Ismail Tantawi who, according to Alaa al-Din Arafat, was one of the very first founders of al-Ġihād al-Islāmy.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, with him the cell started to be called Tanzim<sup>500</sup> (Organization) and Tantawi was its emir.

Within the broader Egyptian socio-political context, it is worth noting that al-Zawahiri's education and intellectual development took place in a phase characterized by several crucial events, such as the inexorable crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood carried out by Nasser and the 1967 Six-Day War,<sup>501</sup> and this scenario contributed to the increasingly pervasive presence of Islam on the public stage as well as to the structuring of al-Zawahiri's mindset and conception of jihad.

After finishing secondary school, the young radical entered Cairo University, where he studied medicine and graduated in 1974.

Right after graduation, he served three years as a surgeon in the Egyptian army and then he established a clinic near his parents' house in Ma'adi but, while holding his temporary job in al-Sayyedna Zaynab clinic - run by the Muslim Brotherhood - Ayman was asked to go to Afghanistan to take part in a relief project. Four years later, in 1978, he completed his specialization in surgery. Meantime, the name Tanzim evolved into Tanzim al-Ġihād or simply al-Ġihād or al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, later known by its acronym EIJ (Egyptian Islamic Jihad)<sup>502</sup>, whereas al-Zawahiri officially had taken control of it in 1975.

In this respect, al-Zawahiri's advancement in al-Ġihād movement was remarkably rapid and can be considered a distinctive phenomenon. Indeed, his fast rise to the top and his ideological and doctrinal impact on the thoughts of the various Islamic movements in general, and on al-Ġihād in particular, was quite unique.

As a consequence, by the early 1970s, barely 20 years old, he had obtained the rank of emir when he was implicated in the murder of President Anwar al-Sadat.

After Sadat's assassination, although he was cleared of involvement in the plot, al-Zawahiri was convicted of the illegal possession of arms and served a three-year sentence.

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<sup>499</sup> A. al-Din Arafat, *The Rise of Islamism in Egypt*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2017, p. 114.

<sup>500</sup> The spelling "Tanzim" reflects the Egyptian accent. The standard Arabic pronunciation is rendered with *tanẓīm*.

<sup>501</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the historical context see Chapter I.

<sup>502</sup> Chapter II is fully dedicated to the creation, movement building, and ideology of al-Jihad al-Islāmy.

As far as his family life is concerned, Ayman al-Zawahiri married his first wife, Azza Aḥmad Nowāri, in 1978 and they had five daughters and one son.<sup>503</sup> No reliable pieces of information are available on al-Zawahiri's three other wives, one of whom was called Umāima Ḥassan.

Al-Zawahiri's brother, Mohammed, followed Ayman's steps within the jihadi galaxy and in 1993 he would be sent to the Balkans to monitor the Islamization of the area.

Mohammed allegedly worked on the ground under the cover of being an International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) official. In 2000, while hiding in the United Arab Emirates, he was arrested and extradited to Egypt, where he was sentenced to death. However, after the Egyptian popular uprising in the spring of 2011, he was released from prison only to be rearrested a few days later, on March 20, 2011 and after a second release, he was arrested again on August 17, 2013.<sup>504</sup>

Following his release, in 1985 Ayman al-Zawahiri moved to Saudi Arabia for one year and afterwards he left the country to go to Peshawar and later to neighboring Afghanistan, where he established a faction of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad while working as a doctor in the country during the Soviet occupation.

More precisely, al-Zawahiri spent seven months in Pakistan and Afghanistan as early as 1980 as a relief worker with the Red Crescent, where he treated refugees affected by the Afghan War. During that time, he made several cross-border trips into Afghanistan, where he witnessed the warfare firsthand. The Egyptian physician returned in Afghanistan for short trips in 1981, 1984 and 1986, and during these periods he enhanced his theories on jihad, seeing the opportunity to gain military and political experience for jihadists in Egypt.

In other words, he envisioned training a competent armed vanguard in Afghanistan and then reinserting it into Egypt to carry out active combat within the country.<sup>505</sup>

Obviously, besides being able to train an unprecedented number of undisturbed fighters, the second effect of the time spent in Afghanistan was what Mohammed Hafez terms "ideological socialization":<sup>506</sup> Fighters of different origins brought with them radical ideologies and a penchant for proselytizing.

In spite of this mechanism of socialization, however, at the beginning the Afghan experience represented a unique chance to get ready for jihad in Egypt, and not a way to internationalize it.

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<sup>503</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri's first wife Azza and two of their six children, Mohammad and Aisha, were killed in an air strike on Afghanistan by US forces in late December 2001.

<sup>504</sup> "Egypt arrests brother of Qaeda chief for 'backing Morsi'", *Middle East Online*, August 17, 2013: [<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=60771>].

<sup>505</sup> M. al-Zayat, *Ayman al-Zawahiri kama 'arifuhu* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I knew him], pp. 98-99.

<sup>506</sup> M. Hafez, Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Arab Afghans, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32(2), pp. 73 – 94.



This was a new embryonic form of transnational jihadism, not a global one: the presence of the Afghan Arabs among non-Arabs sowed the seeds of pan-Islamism in their minds, and ideological disputes should not be confused with nationalist chauvinism, although the two sometimes overlapped.

Indeed, the diversity of nationalities in Afghanistan imbued the foreign fighters with a modern cosmopolitanism in parallel to their anachronistic fundamentalism. If Arabs can come to the aid of fellow Afghans, why can they not fight for Tajikistan, Kashmir, Philippines, Bosnia, and Chechnya?<sup>507</sup>

For al-Zawahiri and his fellows the priority remained the single country(-ies). In 1995, al-Zawahiri argued in an article on *al-Mujahidun* magazine - titled *The Road to Jerusalem passes through Cairo* - that:

Jerusalem will not be opened until the battles in Egypt and Algeria have been won and until Cairo has been opened.<sup>508</sup>

Even later, in a letter dated July 9, 2005, al-Zawahiri stressed how important establishing a base in the Middle East was at that time:

It has always been my belief that the victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt, and the neighbouring states of the Peninsula and Iraq; however, the centre would be in the Levant and Egypt.<sup>509</sup>

These statements represent an undeniable evidence of the national interests of the *first* al-Zawahiri. Furthermore, he used to provide a strong Qur'anic justification to prioritize the Near Enemy:

Oh you who believe! Fight those of the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find in you hardness.<sup>510</sup>

For decades, Ayman al-Zawahiri employed 'Abdel Salām Faraġ's hierarchy of enemies, prioritizing the Near Enemy over the Far one.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>508</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Al-Mujahidun*, No. 11, 1995.

<sup>509</sup> Al-Zawahiri's letter to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, dated July 9, 2005, available online at: [[http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm)].

<sup>510</sup> Qur'an [9:123].

<sup>511</sup> See III.3 *Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* and national jihadism.

Until the mid-1990s, the modern jihadi movement had not developed a transnational paradigm or a corresponding operational network capable of initiating qualitative attacks abroad. It is true that in the early 1990s Egyptian jihadists attacked soft Western targets, mainly within the domestic tourist industry, but the majority of jihadist ideologues and grassroots saw this kind of attacks as counterproductive, since they would easily play into the hands of the regime justifying further crackdowns on the oppositions and alienating popular support.

Clearly, the jihadi mindset was saturated with national goals and assessments, and so was the operational side.

Al-Zawahiri himself was a key figure behind a series of attacks perpetrated by the group within the country and against the Egyptian regime. The Interior Minister Ḥassan al-Alfi for instance, survived an assassination attempt in Cairo on August 18, 1993, which claimed the lives of at least four people,<sup>512</sup> while a few months later al-Ġihād tried to murder Atif Sidqi, who has been Prime Minister between 1986 and 1996.

Until the second half of the Nineties, the priority was destroying Egypt's economic resources, primarily tourism, and the symbols of the Egyptian government, and further attacks included the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad (November 19, 1995), failed assaults on Israeli tourists in Cairo's main *sūq* Khan-el-Khalili, and the Cairo Museum bus attack, in which two men attacked a tour bus with automatic weapons and gasoline bombs killing 10 people, 9 of them German tourists (September 19, 1997).<sup>513</sup>

Among the first works that influenced al-Zawahiri's conception of national jihad and justified these attacks and the violent overthrow of the regimes is the work of the thirteenth century Islamic commentator Ibn Taymiyya (1263 - 1328) author of *Al-Siyāsa al-Sha'riya fī Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'y wa al-Ru'ya* (The Shariatic Politics on Reforming the Ruler and the Ruled).<sup>514</sup>

Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya was an extremely vocal and debated medieval intellectual who opposed widely accepted traditions such as the veneration of saints and the visitation to their tomb-shrines and, because of his iconoclastic posture, he was imprisoned several times. His works came to represent undisputed pillars of modern and contemporary jihadism.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> "Interior Minister quits after Egyptian massacre", *BBC News*, November 19, 1997: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/32477.stm].

<sup>513</sup> D. Jehl, "Attack on Cairo Tourist Bus Kills 9 Germans and Driver", *The New York Times*, September 19, 1997.

<sup>514</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Siyāsa al-Sha'riya fī Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'y wa al-Ru'ya* [The Shariatic Politics on Reforming the Ruler and the Ruled], Dār ul-Fiqh, 2006.

<sup>515</sup> See pp. 71 – 73.

Ibn Taymiyya regarded the institution of government as indispensable, since a pious state cannot be established without government and the duty of commanding the good and forbidding evil cannot be discharged without power and authority. However, he theorizes a specific way to choose the ruler: for appointment to a public office the most suitable person should be chosen on grounds of relevant competence (*quwwa*) and integrity (*amāna*).<sup>516</sup>

With these two virtues, the ruler can prepare his people spiritually for the life hereafter, guided by the demands of Qur'an and Sunna. Whenever the government does not know how to apply the teachings of Islam to the particular problem, he must seek the advice of the '*ulamā'*.<sup>517</sup>

Similarly, al-Zawahiri took inspiration from the crucial theory of the thirteen-century's thinker regarding jihad and *takfir*.

Ibn Taymiyya applied this theory on the Mongols, who, although converted to Islam, still retained their tribal laws: Since the Mongols did not practice Islamic law, they were apostates and their killing was an obligation and duty until they accepted Islamic law.<sup>518</sup>

According to Yussef Aboul-Enein, beside the intellectual sources and the ideological and operational characteristics revealing that jihad in Egypt was al-Zawahiri's priority for the first half of his radical activity, another point that proves the national dimension of the ideologue's project.

Indeed – surprising as it may sound – al-Ġihād largely borrowed from the Free Officers Revolt led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, which in 1952 overthrew the monarchy of King Farouk.<sup>519</sup>

As a matter of fact, al-Ġihād's long-term project implied carrying out a sort of jihadist adaptation of the events leading to the 1952 creation of the Egyptian Republic: as the Free Officers ousted the monarchy to establish an apostate secular regime, the Egyptian jihadists would have to oust the apostate secular regime to establish a pious state.<sup>520</sup>

Indeed, in his book *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, disserting on the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Nasser himself explains his vision in terms of needing to defeat the enemy within (the Egyptian monarchy) before defeating the Israelis.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> See B. Johansen, A Perfect Law in an Imperfect Society. Ibn Taymiyya's Concept of "Governance in the name of the Sacred Law", in P. Bearman – B. G. Weiss – W. Heinrichs (Eds.), *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic Shari'a*, I.B. Tauris, London – New York, 2008, pp. 259 – 294.

<sup>518</sup> M. Hashim Kamali, *Siyāsah Shar'iyah* or the Policies of Islamic Government, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 6(1), 1989, pp. 59-80.

<sup>519</sup> Y. H. Aboul-Enein, Ayman al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy, p. 3.

<sup>520</sup> M. Abū al-Naṣr, *Ḥaqīqa al-Khilāf Bayna al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn wa 'abd al-Nāṣir* [The Truth on the Dispute between the Muslim Brothers and Abdel Nasser], International Press, al-Qāhira, 1987.

<sup>521</sup> G. Abdel Nasser, *Falsafa Thawra* [The Philosophy of the Revolution], Dār al-Ma'rif, al-Qāhira, 1954.

Al-Zawahiri would give this an Islamist spin, writing that one can only defeat the enemy who is far by defeating the enemy who is near, i.e. the Egyptian Republic.

Obviously, the radical narratives replaced many of the secular key-words used by Nasser, but some passages are astonishingly similar.

For instance, the first part of the essay is dedicated to the so-called “seeds of revolution” and their origin: since previous attempts did not manage to fulfil the intended aspirations of the Egyptian people – self-determination, independence and a sovereign government free of imperialistic influence – these nationalistic ambitions remained under the surface waiting to erupt again. The similarities between this narrative and the radical *topos* of the jihadi vanguard are striking.

Furthermore, Nasser claims that there are always two revolutions: The first is a political revolution, i.e. top-down; the second revolution is social, in which those who succeed to seize the power face challenges stemming from disintegration of values, disruption of principles, and discord, and this differentiation will be fully adopted by the Nineteenth century’s *ḡamā’āt*, for instance through the creation of two separate military (top-down) and *dā’wa* (bottom-up/ground) wings.

On a side note, it is worth recalling that *dā’wa* is one of the fundamental concepts of all Islamist ideologies, and translating the word with the term “proselytizing” might be quite simplistic. It literally means “issuing a summons” and “making an invitation” and refers to the broader duty of a true believer to call people to enter Islam and experience it according to its purest principles, thus urging fellow Muslims to live in accordance to Islam every aspect of their life.

### **V.3 The rift among Egyptian jihadists, the shift to global jihad, and the *second* Ayman al-Zawahiri**

So far, the chapter has shown the purely national inspirations, interests, and goals of Ayman al-Zawahiri, who for many years exploited his experience in Afghanistan to improve the quality of jihadists and jihad in Egypt, maintaining a training camp from where to go back home and achieve the objectives of weakening and later overthrowing the Egyptian regime.

Inevitably, however, the increased contacts with foreign jihadi ideologues and thinkers abroad had an impact on al-Zawahiri’s role in the Egyptian jihad and his relations with al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy.

In the second half of the Eighties, in Peshawar, al-Zawahiri had met Osama bin Laden (1957 – 2011), who was already running a base for foreign fighters called Maktab al-Khadamat (MAK), founded by the Palestinian ‘Abdullah Azzam (1941 – 1989)<sup>522</sup>.

As the fighting in Afghanistan drew to a close, a dispute between al-Zawahiri and Azzam had arisen on the next strategical steps after the fight against the Soviets.

Azzam advocated a move into new arenas of jihad where Muslims were a minority among people who he considered non-Muslim invaders, while al-Zawahiri urged to leverage the military victory scored in Afghanistan to open a domestic campaign and focus on jihad against infidel regimes in Muslim countries, first and foremost Egypt.

In his works, Azzam incited Muslims to restore Muslim lands from foreign domination and to uphold the Muslim faith.<sup>523</sup> In his worldview, jihad would liberate Muslim lands where Muslim were ruled by unbelievers: the southern Soviet Republics of Central Asia, Bosnia, the Philippines, Kashmir, Somalia, Eritrea, and Spain.<sup>524</sup> To begin with, however, the natural place to continue spreading jihad was Azzam’s birthplace, Palestine:

I am Palestinian, and if I found a way to Palestine and to al-Aqṣā, I would fight there.<sup>525</sup>

The dispute between Azzam and al-Zawahiri confirms that, contrary to the former, the latter was not ready to internationalize jihad.

In the year of the official foundation of al-Qa‘ida, 1988 - and so would be during the first half of the Nineties - al-Zawahiri’s priority was the overthrow of the Egyptian regime and the strategic dispute, which was obviously also a struggle for the approval of the funder Osama Bin Laden, came to an end only

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<sup>522</sup> According to Thomas Hegghammer, The Western academic literature on ‘Azzām is small and includes primarily A. McGregor, Jihad and the Rifle Alone: ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam and the Islamist Revolution, *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23(2), 2003; T. Hegghammer, *Abdallah Azzam: L’imam du jihad*, in G. Kepel et al. (Eds.), *Al-Qaida dans le texte*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2005, pp. 115 -1 38; J. C. M. Calvert, The Striving Shaykh: Abdallah Azzam and the Revival of Jihad, *Journal of Religion and Society—Supplement Series*, 2007, pp. 83-102; and Y. Aboul Enein, *The Late Sheikh Abdullah Azzam’s Books* (3 Parts), Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, 2007.

<sup>523</sup> ‘a. ‘Azzām, *Ilhaq bil Qāfila*, [Join the Caravan], ca. 1987: [<http://tawhed.ws/r?i=6nxrvref>] (accessed April 15, 2018).

<sup>524</sup> T. Hegghammer, Abdallah Azzam, Imam of Jihad, in G. Kepel (Ed.), *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

in November 1989 with the murder of Abdullah Azzam, assassinated by a car bomb along with his two sons in Peshawar.<sup>526</sup>

Obviously, al-Zawahiri was concerned that if the Arab fighters remained in Afghanistan they would be swallowed into Afghan tribal warfare and sidetracked from their focus on Egypt, a further evidence of the national priorities that the current leader of al-Qa‘ida used to fight for.

By 1990, al-Zawahiri had spent over five years outside of Egypt, and inevitably, during this time, other contenders like the former colonel and intelligence officer ‘Abūd al-Zumur had taken over the leadership of al-Ġihād within the country.

The help to regain the control of the organization came from two Afghan Arabs<sup>527</sup>, Nabīl ‘Abdul Fataḥ and Tharwat Salāḥ<sup>528</sup>, who distributed al-Zawahiri’s communiqués and copious writings to the group’s members, who learned to distinguish them from other jihadist writings by the characteristic yellow cover.

In 1991, al-Zawahiri was the most recognizable name in the movement, and young members thought of him as a brave *muḡahid* who lived the jihadist ideals he preached.<sup>529</sup> Nevertheless, the whole jihadi landscape was gradually realizing the incompatibility between global jihad and national goals, and the two strands were rapidly moving to the ultimate fracture.

Al-Zawahiri himself was no longer inclined to abandon the increasingly stronger external relations in order to focus exclusively on Egypt and therefore, when Osama bin Laden departed for Sudan in 1992, Ayman al-Zawahiri ultimately joined him there.

In 1989 in Sudan, the Islamic Front led by Ḥassan al-Turābi had taken over power and instituted a new Islamist regime that favoured and supported Islamic fundamentalist movements all over Africa and the Middle East. Taking advantage of these conditions, in the following years Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and their operatives started to purchase farms throughout there and convert them into military training bases. Osama bin Laden in particular, invested easily and heavily in Sudan, a country that was undergoing a severe economic crisis.

Three years later, an unsuccessful attempt was made by al-Ġihād to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia (June 27, 1995), and under international pressure, the Sudanese government eventually expelled al-Zawahiri and bin Laden, along with their followers in the country, since its reputation for being a state sponsor of terrorism was becoming harder and harder to bear.

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<sup>526</sup> Many of Azzam’s supporters accused al-Zawahiri of having directly ordered the assassination, but this hypothesis has never been ultimately confirmed.

<sup>527</sup> The term Afghan Arabs (or Arab Afghans) refers to the Arab mujahedeen who went to Afghanistan during and following the Soviet-Afghan War to help fellow Muslims fight Soviets and pro-Soviet Afghans. Estimates of the foreign volunteers who took part in the conflict range between 20,000 and 35,000.

<sup>528</sup> The former would be arrested in 1991, the latter would manage to escape and flee to Afghanistan.

<sup>529</sup> Y. H. Aboul-Enein, *Ayman al-Zawahiri: The Ideologue of Modern Islamic Militancy*, pp. 8 – 9.

Al-Zawahiri's next movements are quite unclear: he allegedly traveled to Switzerland, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands and in late 1996 he was arrested by Russian officials while illegally crossing the border to enter Chechnya. Although he was jailed for six months, Russian agents were apparently unaware of his identity until after his release, but it is a matter of public record that he spent almost six months in the mid-1990s in the custody of Russian intelligence.<sup>530</sup>

The theft of al-Zawahiri's computer after his escape from Kabul in the 2000s and its subsequent sale to a reporter of the *Wall Street Journal* have added enormously to our knowledge about al-Zawahiri's different phases of life and activity.<sup>531</sup>

Important elements retrieved from his computer were those concerning his attempt to smuggle himself into Chechnya, his arrest by the Russian security police, his trial and subsequent release: apparently, in the early morning of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996, Ayman al-Zawahiri, disguised as Mr. Amin with two operatives with fake Sudanese passports and a Chechen guide tried to cross the Chechen border with the plan of establishing a base in that territory. As mentioned before, however, the group was soon arrested at the border.

The Russian security forces that confiscated al-Zawahiri's computer at the time of his arrest had failed to read its Arabic content properly and - lacking other evidence - the Russian judicial system let the group go free. Nevertheless, the documents found on al-Zawahiri by the Russians were quite interesting and included a visa application for Taiwan; a bank card from Hong Kong; details of a bank account in Guangdong, China; a receipt for a computer modem bought in Dubai; a copy of a Malaysian company's registration certificate that listed Dr. Zawahiri under an alias, as a director; and details of an account in a bank in St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>532</sup>

According to Dilip Hiro, in December 1996 Ayman al-Zawahiri tried to enter the Dagestan province, and not Chechnya.<sup>533</sup> Given the proximity of the two regions, however, the most likely hypothesis is that the plan of the radical ideologue was trying to penetrate both territories in a quite short time.

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<sup>530</sup> The fact that al-Zawahiri's sojourn in Russia occurred at a pivotal point in the development of al-Qa'ida, i.e. the shift in strategy towards attacks on the Far Enemy, inevitably engendered conjectures and guesswork in the West. Following this train of thought, the strategy leading to 9/11 was developed during al-Zawahiri's imprisonment by the Russians. An assessment of the influence of the relations between Russia and the United States on the development of global jihadism falls outside the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, the topic is undeniably worth researching further.

<sup>531</sup> A. Cullison – A. Higgins, "Forgotten Computer Reveals Thinking Behind Four Years of al Qaeda Doings", *The Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2001: [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB100975171479902000>].

<sup>532</sup> N. Raphaeli, Ayman Muhammad Rabi' Al-Zawahiri: The Making of an Arch Terrorist, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Winter 2002.

<sup>533</sup> D. Hiro, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Middle East*, Olive Branch Press, Ithaca, NY, 2013.

Within the broader framework of al-Zawahiri international movements and network, in the late Nineties the external alliance with Osama bin Laden was extraordinarily strong, and the closeness with the internal Egyptian constituency of al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, which a few years before al-Zawahiri had tried to restore, had been severely – if not irremediably - weakened.

Following the distancing of al-Zawahiri from his original group, Muntaṣir al-Zayyāt, the abovementioned well-known attorney who defended jihadists and Islamists in a number of Egyptian trials, would portray al-Zawahiri as a reckless opportunist with no *moral* scruples. According to the lawyer, selfish and ambitious reasons, not ideology, propelled al-Zawahiri to jump on bin Laden's bandwagon and to reinvent himself after loss of influence among his countrymen.

In the words of the lawyer, he was an overambitious tactician who cared less about the future of al-Ġihād than about his own image and status and Al-Zayyāt would openly accuse him of sacrificing the interests of the Tanzim at the altar of the unholy alliance with bin Laden.<sup>534</sup>

Eventually, in 1998, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden forged a formal alliance, the World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, which marked the ultimate shift of the Egyptian doctor from local to global jihad, particularly after the *Declaration of Jihad against Jews and Crusaders*, the statement faxed to the pan-Arab newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi* on February 23, 1998 to become the manifesto of al-Qa'ida's concept of jihad.<sup>535</sup>

The document purports to be a fatwa, and its signatories were Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Rifa'i Aḥmad Ṭaha from al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, Mir Hamza, Secretary of Ġami'at 'Ulamā'-i-Pakistan, and Fazlur Rahman, founder of Bengali Ḥarakat al-Jihād.

By June 2001, the fracture between the faction of al-Ġihād led by al-Zawahiri and the other part of the group – the national jihadists - was complete, and the new global jihadist officially merged his fellows with al-Qa'ida.

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - civilians and military - is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah: "And fight the pagans all

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<sup>534</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p.220.

<sup>535</sup> M. al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaeda. The Story of Bin Laden's Right-Hand Man*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2004, p.89.



together as they fight you all together,” and “Fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.”<sup>536</sup>

If the Americans' aims behind these wars are religious and economic, the aim is also to serve the Jews' petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there. The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel's survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the Peninsula.<sup>537</sup>

The shift from the Near to the Far Enemy was completed. From that moment on, the focus of al-Qa'ida propaganda and Ayman al-Zawahiri's messages to the world would always be on the United States and its allies.

At the turn of the millennium, Ayman al-Zawahiri accomplished his personal ideological and strategical revolution, abandoning the national jihad of his first movement, the Egyptian al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, to enter the global jihad.

As explained before, the momentous shift had multiple reasons and one of the most important was the deepening of the relations between the Egyptian jihadist and the younger international network born in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, trends occurring in Egypt contributed as well, and one of the crucial factors was the increasingly negative view adopted by Egyptians on Islamists, which caused financing and other forms of support to dry up not only for al-Zawahiri's EIJ, but also for the other Islamist groups.

At times, single episodes like the death of the 15-year-old Shayma during the failed attempt to kill the former Prime Minister Sidqi in November 1993 so appalled Egyptian public opinion that al-Zawahiri was forced to issue a statement regretting her death in the cause of resistance against the government.

Also, the crackdown by the government led many violent members of al-Ġihād to escape to Sudan, Yemen, and to a lesser extent some Sub-Saharan countries, and al-Zawahiri became frustrated at the failure of operations within Egypt.

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<sup>537</sup> World Islamic Front Statement, Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, February 23, 1998: [<https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>].

According to Muntaṣir al-Zayyāt, another significant reason for al-Zawahiri’s doctrinal shift was the major setback caused by the conviction of more than 100 al-Ĝihād’s members in what is known as the “Returnees from Albania” Case.

It was the largest trial in Egypt since the 1981 trials on the assassination of President al-Sadat and started with the American-backed extraordinary rendition<sup>538</sup> of dozens of radical suspects kidnapped from foreign locations and secretly brought back to Egypt to face trial: 43 individuals were retrieved from Albania, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and an additional 64 were tried in absentia.<sup>539</sup>

The result of all these factors was that al-Zawahiri had to search for alternate means of funding, external safe havens, a new ideological direction for his jihad and found it both in Osama bin Laden and the globalization of the project.

When jihadists met their Waterloo on home-front battles, they turned their guns  
against the West in an effort to stop the revolutionary ship from sinking.<sup>540</sup>

According to Dinesh D’Souza, Fawaz Gherghes fails to explain *why* radicals like al-Zawahiri came to the conclusion that they could defeat the vastly more formidable United States even though they had not been able to defeat the Arab tyrants.

This is a strikingly appropriate insight, since al-Zawahiri himself simply switches his view and rhetoric from national to global and neither he justifies his move extensively, nor he explains how jihad was supposed to defeat a much stronger enemy.

It is from his subsequent writings and thoughts that the reason becomes clear: infidel dictators like Hosni Mubarak are now perceived like simple watchdogs who are faithfully serving the occupiers and enemies of the Muslim nation:

The internal enemy was a tool used by the external enemy and a screen behind  
which it hid to launch its war on Islam.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> An extraordinary rendition is the transfer - without trial - of a detainee to the custody of a foreign government for purposes of detention and interrogation.

<sup>539</sup> M. al-Zayyāt, *Ayman al-Zawahiri As I Knew Him*, p. 125.

<sup>540</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, p. 301.

<sup>541</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, p. 41.

And:

The struggle against the external enemy cannot be postponed: it is clear from the above that the Jewish-Crusade alliance will not give us time to defeat the domestic enemy then declare war against it thereafter. The Americans, the Jews, and their allies are present now with their forces, as we explained before.<sup>542</sup>

In short, Ayman al-Zawahiri came to the conclusion that the Near Enemy could not be defeated *because* of the Far Enemy, and this caused further momentous changes in the perspectives on radicalization and de-radicalization.

#### **V.4 The global nature of jihad prevents political de-radicalization from happening**

Throughout the dissertation, the various characteristics of what has been termed national jihadism have been systematically analyzed.

During the initial historical contextualization, the work focused on the causes of the increased presence of Islam in the public arena from the Seventies onwards, which range from the crisis of the so-called establishment Islam to the growth of the Islamic Students' Unions.

In the second and third chapters, ideology, message, constituency, strategies, and elected enemies of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy have been examined to demonstrate that they were all part of an intimately Egyptian context and the enemy was the Egyptian regime.

The fourth chapter maintains that the de-radicalization processes described have been possible thanks to the national character of the movements on the one side and the presence of a compact state in the role of interlocutor on the other.<sup>543</sup>

A review of the groups' actions, propaganda, and documents reveals a sort of obsession with the internal conditions of Muslims in Egypt or, possibly, in disparate single countries and not with those of the Umma as a whole.

Towards the emergence of the global project of al-Qa'ida, the most common reaction was not that of al-Zawahiri, who joined Osama bin Laden, and the majority of Egyptian radicals chose to keep their project within the Egyptian context and strongly criticized the newer transnational movement.

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid. pp. 220-221.

<sup>543</sup> See IV.6 De-radicalization as a national phenomenon and the Egyptian critique to al-Qa'ida, pp. 146 – 151.

They harshly criticized the new jihadi phase and, as explained in the previous chapter, al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya presented the most systematic and devastating critique of al-Qa'ida.

At the same time in al-Ġihād, Dr. Faḍl publicly criticized Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, calling them “false prophets” and accusing them of being untrustworthy, treacherous, liars and tyrants.

All the members of al-Gamā'a and al-Ġihād who did not join al-Qa'ida de-radicalized, and this thanks to the national dimension of the whole process; here lies the core of the suggested thesis: they de-radicalized *because* they did not join al-Qa'ida and did not go global.

Once part of the Egyptian radical groups joins the global jihadi network, for the individuals belonging to that faction a real process of collective and political de-radicalization is no longer possible, and this because the prerequisites that made it happen in the first place, such as grievances related to the country, prioritization of the Near Enemy, and a regime willing to facilitate disengagement and de-radicalization, are no longer available.

In the amended worldview of the de-radicalizing Egyptian groups, al-Qa'ida was a reckless creature living in its own bubble and led by a man, Osama bin Laden, who had no feasible plans whatsoever.

We saw in Chapter IV that in 2004, Hani al-Sibai<sup>544</sup>, a former high rank member of al-Ġihād, published his own diaries, serialized in *Al-Hayat*, which represent a telling cross section of the momentous conflict that was taking place between national and global jihadists:

The Front was disastrous to Islamic Jihad in particular and to Islamist movements in general (...) Al-Qa'ida and the globalization of jihad diverted the jihadi caravan from its correct historical path.<sup>545</sup>

In turn, al-Zawahiri did not hesitate to criticize – even though with open commendation - the choice made by the former Egyptian jihadists who de-radicalized, in particular the members of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya:

The Islamic Group was dragged into a stance where it halted armed jihadist action under the name of “The Initiative to halt military operations”. This initiative has had serious repercussions. I apologize to my brothers in the Islamic

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<sup>544</sup> Native of central Egypt, he fought in Afghanistan and stayed with al-Jihad for decades. He now lives in London and all the Egyptian efforts for his extradition have failed.

<sup>545</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, p.225. The front mentioned here is the World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders, the organization led by bin Laden that was born on February 23, 1998.

Group – whom I respect and love – for disagreeing with their view and criticizing their opinions. However, in my efforts to properly interpret sharia, I find that doing what is right is dearer to me than these brothers' love.<sup>546</sup>

The most crucial fracture between the two sides is the one concerning the prioritization of the Near or the Far Enemy, and this has been dealt with extensively throughout the dissertation.

A further pivotal difference, which marked the two distinct paths that national and global jihad walked, was the recognition of the state as the primary authority and the acknowledgement of its power, in the case of the Egyptian *ḡamā'āt*, and the lack thereof, in the case of al-Qa'ida and the second half of al-Zawahiri's jihadi parabola.

This is the function of the national context as the necessary framework for negotiation and dialogue in which disengagement and de-radicalization processes can take place.

Al-Qa'ida, which aims to be the transnational entity par excellence, does not see in national governments the elected counterpart for negotiations, neither does it acknowledge their role.

From a strategic perspective, attacking the United States and its allies directly was supposed to stimulate their withdrawal from the region to allow the violent revolution to succeed. The focus is on the Far Enemy who is blamed because first, it allows the corrupt local regimes to exist and second, it kills innocent Muslims all over the world.

As observed when analyzing the de-radicalization processes of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmi,<sup>547</sup> once the groups undertake their processes of behavioral disengagement and ideological de-radicalization negotiating with and receiving support by the Egyptian state, the whole groups' rhetoric changes as well and the security forces killed by jihadists become the new *shuhadā'* (sing. *shahīd*), "martyrs", according to a narrative common to all the de-radicalization and counter-radicalization initiatives in which national governments are involved.

Even Sadat, dubbed "the Pharaoh" by his murderer Khālīd al-Islāmbūli right after his assassination, becomes a *martyr* in the de-radicalized narrative<sup>548</sup>,

In the second case, that of al-Zawahiri and the fighters who chose global jihad, the rhetoric and the recurrent narratives did change too, although in the opposite direction.

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<sup>546</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>547</sup> See pp. 124 – 163.

<sup>548</sup> "Asharq al-Awsat talks to the leader of Egyptian Islamic Group Inside a Prison", *Asharq al-Awsat*, July 15 – 16, 2003.

The current leader of al-Qa‘ida, who used to prioritize the overthrow of the Egyptian regime at all costs, would start to preach that:

The battle today cannot be fought on a regional level without taking into account the global hostility towards us (Muslims).<sup>549</sup>

And also:

I hope to spend whatever is left of my life in serving the cause of Islam in its ferocious war against the tyrants of the new Crusade.<sup>550</sup>

The same is true for al-Zawahiri’s new perspectives on the Afghan experience. If in the past the radical ideologue used to see Afghanistan as an incubator where the seeds of jihad could grow and where fighters could acquire practical experience in combat and organizational matters, in the global phase al-Zawahiri focuses exclusively on the transnationalism of the experience and emphasizes the multiple origins of the mujahedeen:

The name Arab Afghans is a tendentious description because these mujahedeen have never been solely Arab, but mujahedeen from all parts of the Islamic world.<sup>551</sup>

Dealing with the past in Afghanistan, the current leader of al-Qa‘ida reveals a rare ability to read and interpret the trends in the public opinion worldwide and uses it in an attempt to confute the most widespread positions:

The Arab and Western media are responsible for distorting the image of the Arab Afghans, portraying them as half-mad people who have rebelled against the United States that once trained and financed them (...) The purpose is namely, to deprive the Muslim nation of the honor of heroism and to pretend to be saying: Those whom you consider heroes are actually my creation and my mercenaries who rebelled against me when I stopped backing them.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, p. 141.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 24-25.

Obviously, the goal of this attempt is trying to show that the United States is and has *always* been an enemy, and no form of cooperation between the Arab fighters and the superpower has *ever* taken place.

As a consequence, the narrative of global jihad, and Ayman al-Zawahiri in his *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, rarely provide specific time references and, in spite of the historic nature of his essay, the jihadi ideologue often avoids clear statements of dates and sequences of events.

The purpose is to implicitly convey the idea that not only is the message contained in the book timeless and universal, but also characterized by the very same perspective as it previously was, which in fact is just not true.

After his shift to global jihad, the ideologue will systematically revisit and change all his previous perspectives, overlooking them nonchalantly, and if before he consciously got inspiration from Nasser's coup ideology giving it an Islamist spin, now he advocates that mixing Islam with nationalism has caused confusion among young Muslim men and that jihadist ideology needs to be kept pure from the taint of nationalism, leftist and communist ideals.

Indeed, one of Ayman al-Zawahiri's insights that draw attention to his new conception of jihad – which unmistakably ceases to link the national perspective to the fight, focuses on the confusion that the overlap between the two dimensions – nation and jihad - caused to the radical youth:

The fact that these battles that were waged under non-Muslim banners or under mixed banners caused the dividing lines between friends and enemies to become blurred. The Muslim youths began to have doubts about who was the enemy. Was it the foreign enemy that occupied Muslim territory, or was it the domestic enemy that prohibited government by Islamic sharia, repressed the Muslims, and disseminated immorality under the slogans of progressiveness, liberty, nationalism, and liberation? This situation led the homeland to the brink of the abyss of domestic ruin and surrender to the foreign enemy, exactly like the current situation of the majority of our countries under the aegis of the new world order.<sup>553</sup>

If previously he used the case of Palestine to state the necessity of liberating Cairo before liberating Jerusalem, now he mentions Palestine as an example of how different ideologies mingled with Islam led to the failure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid. pp. 36-37.

Not only did the Enemy change, but also the communication strategies al-Zawahiri exploits to talk to his – now global – audience.

Killing them (Americans and Jews) with a single bullet, a stab, or device made up of a popular mix of explosives or hitting them with an iron rod is not impossible. Burn[ing] down their property with Molotov cocktails is not difficult. With the available means, small groups could prove to be a frightening horror for the Americans and the Jews.<sup>554</sup>

Al-Zawahiri continues:

Cause the greatest damage and inflict the maximum casualties on the opponent, no matter how much time and effort these operations take, because this is the language understood by the west.<sup>555</sup>

On a side note, in retrospect, al-Zawahiri's exhortation to kill Americans and Jews in whatever way possible represents a disturbing preview of the notorious appeal issued in September 2014 by the former Islamic State's spokesman Abū Muḥammad al-Adnāni (1977-2016):

If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way, however it may be.

Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him.<sup>556</sup>

Going global and choosing to prioritize the far Enemy, al-Zawahiri becomes more precise in identifying the elected targets, which are not only the Americans and Jews in general, but also the United Nations, multinational corporations, international communication and data exchange systems, international news

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<sup>554</sup> N. Raphaeli, Ayman Muhammad Rabi' Al-Zawahiri: The Making of an Arch Terrorist.

<sup>555</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, pp. 200 – 201.

<sup>556</sup> Y. Bayoumy, "Isis urges more attacks on Western 'disbelievers'", *The Independent*, September 22, 2014.



agencies and satellite media outlets, and international relief agencies that he feels are nothing but a cover for evangelism and espionage by non-Muslims.<sup>557</sup>

Given the complexity of the topic, in the next section of the dissertation the conclusions will summarize the findings of the work and a relevant part of them will be dedicated to a number of crucial clarifications and caveats on these findings.

Indeed, the central thesis of the work states that:

Authentic processes of collective disengagement and de-radicalization cannot take place unless they are carried out by groups with national grievances, narratives, and goals and only with the presence of a national counterpart that can work as their interlocutor adopting different means, including repression, negotiation and selective inducements.

Once jihad goes global, these processes can no longer happen because the national push, the common ground, and the interlocutor are missing.

In this respect, objections and criticism concerning the dissertation's thesis might arouse from the idea that it has somehow the potential to justify regimes and dictatorial states: Since a strong state is a prerequisite for de-radicalization to happen, it means we are justifying dictatorship.

This is not the case, and the next section will dig further into this complex issue demonstrating the reasons why supporting this thesis does not mean supporting dictatorial regimes.

Indeed, by no means asserting that the Egyptian and Libyan governments adopted an effective posture towards the group's initiatives implies a justification of oppressive regimes and hypothesizing that the regimes' reactions worked does not mean to justify the regimes' methods *tout court*, especially from an ethical perspective.

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<sup>557</sup> A. al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*.

## Conclusions

### Validating the research hypothesis

The objective of this dissertation was twofold. The first goal was to illustrate the ideological and strategic developments that occurred in the shift from national to global jihad, the two conceptions being exemplified respectively by the two main Egyptian jihadi groups, al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya (Islamic Group, IG) and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy (Islamic Jihad) on the one side, and the parabola of al-Qa'ida and Ayman al-Zawahiri before and after he entered al-Qa'ida itself, the emblem of global jihad, on the other side.

The second goal was to demonstrate that a true process of collective de-radicalization can happen only in the context of national jihadism. Once jihad goes global, this process is no longer possible.

The notion of national jihad refers to those jihadi movements that were characterized by remarkably national strategies, constituency, goals, and narratives.

In other words, the primary objective of the exclusively Egyptian groups was the overthrow of the Egyptian regimes and the establishment of an Islamic government within the country, their undisputed rival was the Near Enemy, the corrupt and westernized regimes ruling their own country, and *the road to Jerusalem had to go through Cairo*, i.e. they prioritized the Near Enemy (the State) over the Far Enemy (Israel, the United States, and their allies in the West).

With these premises, the national jihadists developed an Islamization strategy *within* the national borders, choosing to create their own *national* model.

The difference between *al-'adū al-qarīb* ("the Near Enemy") and *al-'adū al-ba'īd* ("the Far Enemy") was theorized by al-Ġihād's main ideologue 'Abdel Salām Faraġ (1954-1982) in his *al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, "The Absent Obligation."<sup>558</sup>

Later, with the rise of al-Qa'ida, the jihadi project became global, the Far Enemy - personified by the United States, the West in general, and Israel - took priority over the Near one, both in the jihadi strategy and narrative, and the objective was defeating the source of impiety par excellence, the West, thus gaining justice for Islam and pious Muslims worldwide along a-national lines.

Al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, which were active during the last three decades of the twentieth century, constitute ideal case studies because they performed a process of collective disengagement and de-radicalization that led them to abandon violence.

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<sup>558</sup> See Chapter III.3 Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba and national jihadism, pp. 107 – 114.

Moreover, it was comprehensive de-radicalization, i.e. a successful de-radicalization completed on three levels: Organizational, behavioral, and ideological.

At the same time, the dawn of al-Qa'ida and al-Zawahiri's path were chosen as the second basis for comparison because they represent the fundamental turning point from national to global jihadism.

As mentioned above, after highlighting the different conception of jihad between national and global jihadism, the second purpose of the present study was to answer the following research question:

Is a real process of collective de-radicalization, in which a jihadi group effectively negotiates with a government, still possible after the shift from national to global jihad?

The research hypothesis was that, following the emergence of al-Qa'ida as a regional and international player, a similar process of collective and organizational de-radicalization could no longer happen.

Throughout the five chapters that constitute the dissertation, each one aimed at verifying the initial hypothesis from a different angle, this hypothesis has been substantiated and has gradually acquired the status of a thesis, according to which:

Once jihadism goes global, organic processes of collective de-radicalization, in which radical groups from the *same* countries motivated by *national* grievances and objectives clash and/or negotiate with *national* powers that implement *national* strategies to foster the process, are no longer possible.

The validation of the hypothesis has been substantiated throughout the five chapters. Chapter I, *The Historical Context*, focused on the historical, social, and political setting that contributed to forging the environment in which the two major Egyptian *ḡamā'āt* developed, and covers Anwar al-Sadat's presidency (1970-1981), even though multiple references to the Nasser's era have been included.

A crucial notion informing the chapter is that of the increased religiosity on the public stage and its impact on the emergence of radical groups. The notion of increased religiosity has been preferred over those of "Islamic resurgence" or "re-Islamization", which do not seem to fully explain the gradualness of the process and suggest a return to a supposed Islamic or *more* Islamic past, which does not appear convincing.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a variety of groups had to determine their stand on the role of Islam and secularism in their own lives and in the Egyptian society: veterans of the Muslim Brotherhood returning

home from Nasser's prisons, students in Egypt's overcrowded universities, lower middle-class artisans and businessmen, and poor immigrants who moved to the cities from rural areas, and for many of them, Islam seemed to provide both a powerful link with the past and a promise for the future.<sup>559</sup>

This contributed to the creation of a radical milieu, a social environment involving a collectivity of people that goes way beyond the terrorist groups themselves but it is able to indirectly foster radicalization, which in turn cannot be understood in isolation from this milieu.

The chapter analyzes this milieu by highlighting its crucial features, which range from the powerful action of the Islamic Students' Unions to the crisis in establishment Islam, from the top-down Islamization pursued by Anwar al-Sadat, the "President Believer", to the failure of the Pan-Arab ideology of Gamal 'Abd el-Nasser, exemplified by the defeat in the Six-Day War of the Arab countries against Israel (June 5 – 10, 1967).

The following chapter, *Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya*, is dedicated to the embryonic, developmental, and confrontational phases of the group's life, which occurred between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, when the movement started to consider the opportunity to carry out an initiative to cease violence and to discuss it internally.

This section highlights the features that make the Islamic Group an emblematic example of national jihadism, which chose objectives, projects, and enemies within the national borders and not in the global arena.

Similarly, the third chapter, entitled *al-Ġihād al-Islāmy*, examines the corresponding phases of the life of the second main Egyptian jihadi group, with a particular focus on the ideological, strategic, and organizational similarities and differences between al-Ġihād and al-Ġamā'a.

*Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba*, "The Absent Obligation" by 'Abdel Salām Faraġ - the milestone of the group's thought and the most exhaustive theorization of the concepts of Near and Far Enemies - occupies a relevant place in the chapter, whereas the killing of President Anwar al-Sadat (October 6, 1981) and its implications are the focus of the following section, which introduces the characteristics that made al-Ġihād an exquisitely national jihadist group.

The fourth chapter, *The De-Radicalization Processes of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād al-Islāmy*, represents the nucleus of the dissertation, because it addresses the processes of organizational

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<sup>559</sup> B. Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2002.

disengagement and de-radicalization of the two militant groups, which were concluded by al-Ġamā'ā al-Islāmiya in 1997 and by al-Ġihād in 2010.

After an introduction of the concept of de-radicalization and disengagement tackling the differences between the two notions and between individual and collective de-radicalization, the chapter moves on to a historical account of the processes.

The importance of the group leadership is the object of a specific analysis, followed by an investigation of the reasons why these processes can be considered *national* and how this allowed de-radicalization to happen, leading the de-radicalizing members of the groups to think that “al-Qaida’s birth was abnormal, a monstrous mutation.”<sup>560</sup>

In conclusion, the fourth chapter includes a discussion of a Libyan case: the de-radicalization of al-Ġamā'ā al-Islāmiya al-Muqātila bi-Lībya (The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, LIFG), which was largely modeled on the Egyptian examples, thus suggesting a transnational imitation effect that is worth researching further.

By consistently adopting the political-process approach, the relationship between the de-radicalization initiatives and the context in which they took place have been highlighted and the multiple agents characterizing the political, social, and religious arena have been constantly taken into account.

In this respect, as explained before<sup>561</sup> an in-depth comparison between the historical trajectories of the jihadi groups and the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood fell out of the scope of the dissertation. The significance of the Brotherhood for the entire Egyptian and Middle Eastern history and its links to the radical milieus would require a dedicated dissertation.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the de-radicalization of the Islamic Group and the Egyptian Jihad, the Brothers chose to keep a low profile, avoiding making public statements and giving opinions on the initiative to cease violence.

Nevertheless, as far as the complex relationship between the two Islamist strands are concerned, a number of considerations presented within the work need can be summarized here.

First, from a theoretical perspective, the radicals and the Muslim Brothers shared a similar approach in exposing the contradiction between the worldview of the rulers and that of the ruled.

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<sup>560</sup> F. Gherghes, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, p. 278.

<sup>561</sup> See Introduction and p. 178.

In their provision of social services for the population, the Muslim Brothers were willing to fill the gap between the need of the people and the actual assistance provided by the State. Once the discrepancy had been highlighted, the following step was to induce citizens to internalize their basic motto and all its implications: *al-Islām howa al-ḥāl*, “Islam is the solution”.

Second, the group may have been non-violent since the 1970s, but it was never pacifist, and this proved to be key when the Brotherhood faced its first true adversity since the abrupt end of its decades-long *détente* with the Egyptian state in 2013.<sup>562</sup>

Third, on the other hand, after contesting the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood within the Islamist spectrum and discrediting its “weak” ideology for decades, jihadi revisionism clearly has been inspired by the Brotherhood.<sup>563</sup>

This is particularly true when it comes to delegitimizing violence,<sup>564</sup> the new limits on the ideology and practice of *takfīr* and *hisba*, and the open confrontation with the authorities.

On the confrontation, it is worth noticing that during the ideological revisions *al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya* and *al-Ġihād al-Islāmy* adopted a Brotherhood-like angle by stressing that the “failure” of regimes to govern in accordance with Islam is more often a sign of rulers’ negligence than disbelief, and their governance is not necessarily a reflection of their soul. In other words, the new vision still had power of political criticism, but the perspective behind it had changed.

Similarly, in a clear change from its previous denunciation of the politically active Muslim Brotherhood, the groups endorsed political participation as an acceptable way to achieve key objectives such as full implementation of sharia and Islamization of society through the gradual adoption of higher moral standards.

*Al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya* in particular, clearly states that the Brotherhood’s reformist ideology represents an important component of the Islamist spectrum.<sup>565</sup>

Continuing in the fifth chapter, *The Shift from National to Global Jihad and its Implications for Collective De-radicalization*, the research focuses on the turning point from national to global jihad and

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<sup>562</sup> M. Awad, *The Rise of the Violent Muslim Brotherhood*, Hudson Institute, Washington D.C., November 6, 2017.

<sup>563</sup> A. Hamzawy – S. Grebowksi, From Violence to Moderation *Al-Jama’a al-Islamiya* and *al-Jihad*, *Carnegie Papers*, N. 20, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2010, p. 4.

<sup>564</sup> See Chapter IV, *The De-Radicalization Processes of al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya* and *al-Ġihād al-Islāmy*, pp. 104 – 136.

<sup>565</sup> Ḥ. ‘Abd el-‘Azīz, *‘asharat a’wām ‘ala al-murāġa’āt mawāqif wa ru’a al-Ġamā’a qabl al-murāġa’āt wa ba’diha* [*Al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya. Ten Years Since the Revisions: Positions and Views of al-Ġamā’a Before and After the Revisions*], p.5.

the momentous differences in the fate of the Egyptian main *ḡamā'āt* – al-Ḡamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Ḡihād al-Islāmy – on the one side, and what is termed global jihad on the other side.

Compared to the de-radicalization processes analyzed in the previous chapter, this section addresses the symmetrical trend, embodied by global jihad and those jihadists who chose not to de-radicalize and broke the geographical and strategic borders and boundaries of national jihad, by embracing the transnational and non-territorial ideology that informs al-Qa'ida.

### **Final caveats**

Given the complexity of the subjects that have been analyzed in the present work, it is now necessary to restate a few caveats that have already been addressed in the previous chapters.

The first word of caution relates to the difference between individual and collective-organizational de-radicalization: de-radicalization is the process of abandoning an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect societal change.<sup>566</sup>

During individual de-radicalization, the process involves a subject who, autonomously or in the framework of a de-radicalization program,<sup>567</sup> first decides to start his or her disengagement<sup>568</sup> - which can be defined as a behavioral distancing from the violent terrorism *modus operandi* – and later abandons violence ideologically.

In the case of collective-organizational de-radicalization, the process involves a group, and there are clearly identifiable prerequisites that, when absent, are likely to jeopardize the entire process.

First, a leadership strong enough to start the debate over the opportunity to de-radicalize; second, a group cohesive enough for the leadership to spread the decision; third, an entity – primarily the State – able to play the role of a creditable counterpart for the group before, during, and after the processes of disengagement and de-radicalization. The counterpart must also be able to design and execute a set of diverse measures that range from repression to selective inducements, and from imprisonment to helping support the families of the inmates.

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<sup>566</sup> O. Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, London, Routledge, 2009.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> J. Horgan, Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2(4), 2008.

In this respect, as stated throughout the dissertation, the research hypothesis does not suggest that once jihad goes global, de-radicalization cannot happen tout court. In fact, individual de-radicalization does happen even in the context of global jihad.

What ceases to be possible – according to the research hypothesis - is an organic process of collective and organizational de-radicalization, in which a group motivated by national grievances and objectives negotiates with a national power that implements national strategies to foster the process.

This is what happened in the case of al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya, al-Ġihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā'a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātīla bi-Lībya.

Contrary to the collective processes, the realms of individual radicalization and de-radicalization have been the focus of a huge body of research, and a considerable number of scholars have provided informative insights on how they take place on an individual level.

As addressed in the Introduction and in the fourth and fifth chapters,<sup>569</sup> the research on the individual dimension of the two phenomena has significantly enriched the theoretical tools of terrorism studies and has made it possible to reach a universal consensus on the possibility for both radicalization and de-radicalization processes to happen on the individual level. Therefore the present work, focusing on collective and organizational de-radicalization, does not call into question the findings of the individual radicalization branch of research.

In addition to the crucial distinction between individual and organizational de-radicalization, it is imperative to reiterate a further caveat linked to the thesis that has been reached through the work. It relates to criticism that might arise from the idea that the thesis has somehow the potential to justify regimes and dictatorial states.

In other words, since the thesis claims that a state that is first able to confront, and later negotiate, with the radical group is a prerequisite for organizational de-radicalization to happen, this means that the thesis justifies dictatorship. This assumption could not be further from the truth.

Indeed, by no means does asserting that the Egyptian and Libyan governments adopted an effective posture towards the group's initiatives imply a justification of oppressive regimes, and obviously hypothesizing that the state reactions worked effectively is not equivalent to supporting the dictatorial nature of those regimes from an ethical perspective.

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<sup>569</sup> See pp. 18-24, 125-130, and 164-167.



Stated differently, the dissertation does not include any moral assessment of the states' responses to the Egyptian and Libyan initiatives to cease violence, and its aim is to analyze the historical evolution of the theory and practice of de-radicalization.

The regimes of Hosni Mubarak and Gheddafi – whose son Saif al-Islam Gheddafi led the negotiations with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group<sup>570</sup> – were able to address the issues that arose from that specific kind of de-radicalization, i.e. the collective and organizational de-radicalization that took place in a defined historical phase in two determined countries.

In particular, they struck an effective balance between repression and selective inducements, and they were capable of fostering an unprecedented form of national belonging, *al-intimā' al-waṭāny*, in the worldview of the jihadists involved in the initiatives.

In regimes' plans, this would serve as a bulwark against violent jihadism and, undeniably, illiberal governments are usually excellent at fostering the symbolism and rhetoric related to national belonging.

### **Implications for future research**

The implications of these remarks for future research are likely to be copious and substantial, as they cross multiple issues and sub-topics in the field of radicalization and generate further research questions.

In particular, the present findings could enrich the debates concerning three major research fields: the so-called third wave of jihadism; the relationship between individual and collective de-radicalization; the contemporary phenomena related to lone actors and home-grown terrorism.

First, what does the momentous metamorphosis of jihad from national to global tell us about the possibility of further transformations?

This research question is closely related to the birth and development of the so-called third wave of jihadism,<sup>571</sup> whose major representative is the Islamic State. Al-Dawla al-Islāmiya fil 'Iraq wa al-Shām (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) proclaimed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on June 29, 2014 in the major mosque of Mosul, is the emblem of the third wave of jihad because it was able to build both a local and a global identity and to persecute both the Near and the Far Enemy, embodied respectively by the religious minorities in the territories once under its control in Iraq and Syria, and the West.

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<sup>570</sup> See pp. 147-156.

<sup>571</sup> In the last decade, the definition of "Third wave of jihadism" has been widely used. See M. Sageman, *The Next Generation of Terror*, *Foreign Policy*, October 8, 2009; F. Gherghes, *ISIS and The Third Wave of Jihadism*, *Current history*, December 2014, pp. 339-343; G. Kepel, "The Limits of Third-Generation Jihad", *The New York Times*, February 16, 2015.

At its peak in late 2014, the Islamic State controlled more than 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, containing more than eleven million people, but by February 2018, ninety-eight per cent of the territory the Islamic State had once held in Syria and Iraq had been recaptured, including the Caliphate's most important cities, Raqqa and Mosul, and of the forty thousand men who once fought for the Islamic State, only three thousand are thought to be left.<sup>572</sup>

Yet there is no reason to think that the Islamic State will cease to exist: Actual territorial control and administration were essential for the group in building up its founding myth and exhorting recruits worldwide to move to its territories, whereas its narrative is now deeply ingrained, and will not simply disappear. It will more likely be rearranged, with the notion of territorial control perhaps shifting back to the utopian level, thus making the group more closely resemble al-Qa'ida.

Even though the parabola of the Islamic State fell outside the scope of the present dissertation, the current era of jihad is inevitably linked with the former developments that have occurred within the jihadi galaxy worldwide and overlooking the potential connections between the past and the present could jeopardize the future of counter-radicalization efforts.

A second set of implications for future research goes back to the crucial distinction between collective and individual de-radicalization. As seen in Chapter Four,<sup>573</sup> individual de-radicalization is usually fostered and overseen in the framework of de-radicalization programs<sup>574</sup> that can be run either by governments or by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are active in the field of prevention and reintegration.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> P. Neumann, *ISIS And Terrorism In Europe: What Next?*, *ICSR Insight*, February 16, 2018.

<sup>573</sup> See pp. 121-156.

<sup>574</sup> Not to be confused with counter-radicalization programs and activities, which involve preventive measures and initiatives that target individuals who might be vulnerable to radicalization but have not yet been radicalized.

<sup>575</sup> In the last fifteen years, an increasing number of countries have been creating and financing programs for individual de-radicalization, and a vast corpus of literature on them is available.

For the Saudi program, see C. Boucek, *Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare*, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Washington D.C., September 2008; P. Neumann, *Prison and Terrorism. Radicalization and Deradicalization in 15 Countries*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), London, 2010. S. Brzuskiewicz, *Saudi Arabia: The De-radicalization Program Seen from Within*, Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan, April 2017.

For the program ran in Singapore, see M. Haniff Bin Hassan - K.G. Pereire, *An Ideological Response to Combating Terrorism – The Singapore Perspective*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17(4), 2006, pp. 458 – 477 and K. Ramakrishna, *A Holistic Critique of Singapore's Counter-Ideological Program*, *CTS Sentinel*, January 2009.

For an in-depth analysis of some of the European de-radicalization programs, such as EXIT Deutschland in Germany and EXIT Fryshuset in Sweden - which were designed primarily to tackle extreme right-wing radicalization - see T. Bjorgo - J. van Donselaar - S. Grunenber, "Lessons from disengagement programmes in Norway, Sweden and Germany" in T. Bjorgo - J. Horgan (Eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009, pp. 135-151.

In this respect, scholars will have to answer the following the fundamental question: what can individual de-radicalization programs learn from collective de-radicalization experiences and initiatives and vice versa?

The answer to this question will require the research on radicalization and de-radicalization to become less compartmentalized and more synergic.

Historical, political, sociological and psychological expertise will need to be aggregated with the goal of enhancing our knowledge and understanding of contemporary jihadism through familiarity with older, crucial phenomena.

In the last two years, the ongoing debate on the measures that countries should adopt to deal with the so-called returnees (Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, RFTFs) and their families is becoming increasingly crucial.

The experiences of the jihadi groups analysed in this work and the governmental response to their willingness to disengage and de-radicalize might offer a number of interesting lessons to deal with contemporary challenges.

Needless to say, numbers, dynamics, and the scope of the phenomena are remarkably different from those of the Egyptian and Libyan cases of a few decades ago.

Nevertheless, *mutatis mutandis*, policymakers and CVE experts should not underestimate the experience accumulated through the de-radicalizing phases of the national jihadi groups.

Circulating former jihadists' personal stories, allowing some of them to tour prisons and more generally leading them to take an active role in preventing and countering violent radicalization are just a few examples of the actions that can be partly inspired by the initiatives for ceasing violence that took place in Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere.

Last but by no means least, in the last decade the counter-terrorism community worldwide has been requested to deal with and confront increasingly complex phenomena, such as the so-called lone wolves (or lone actors), the abovementioned returning foreign terrorist fighters,<sup>576</sup> and home-grown terrorism.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> The more widespread phrase "Returning foreign fighters (RFSs)" is not fully satisfactory. It describes nationals of one country who travel to participate in a conflict in another country. A more exhaustive definition implies that these individuals are driven mainly by ideology or religion, and the international community, in order to bypass some of the existing legal limits to address nonstate actors and terrorist groups, has developed the term *foreign terrorist fighters*, which seems to have strong explanatory power.

<sup>577</sup> The bibliography on these phenomena is immense, and only a few recent milestones will be recommended here. For the notion of lone wolves, see H. A. Hamoudi, *'Lone Wolf' Terrorism and the Classical Jihad: On the Contingencies of Violent Islamic Extremism*, University of Pittsburgh Legal Studies Research Paper 39, 2015; S. Mullins, *Lone-actor vs. Remote-Controlled Jihadi Terrorism: Rethinking the Threat to the West*, Commentary, *War on the Rocks*, April 20, 2017.

Faced with these trends, scholars and practitioners too often focus on radicalization and de-radicalization on the individual level, thus overlooking the relevance of networks, radicalization hubs,<sup>578</sup> peer pressure, and leadership.<sup>579</sup> Future studies on collective radicalization and de-radicalization will have to fill this gap.

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For the returning foreign terrorist fighters (or returning foreign fighters), see E. Bakker – J. de Roy van Zuidewijn, *Threat Barometer: Ten Years of Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands 2005 – 2015*, National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, The Netherlands, 2015; E. Bakker - E. Entenmann – C. Paulussen, Returning Jihadist Foreign Fighters: Challenges Pertaining to Threat Assessment and Governance of this Pan-European Problem, *Security and Human Rights* 25(1) 2014, pp. 11-32; D. Byman, The Homecomings: What Happens When Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return?, *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 38(8), 2015; Centre d'Analyse du Terrorisme, *Attentats, tentatives et projets d'attentats en relation avec le contexte syro-irakien dans les pays occidentaux*, Paris, 2017.

For the so-called homegrown terrorism, see P. Neumann, *Joining al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe*, The Adelphi Papers 48(399), Routledge, Abingdon, 2008; M. Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2010; B. Hoffman – F. Reinares (Eds.), *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama bin Laden's Death*, (Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare), Columbia University Press, New York, 2014.

<sup>578</sup> See L. Vidino – F. Marone – E. Entenmann, *Fear Thy Neighbour. Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West*, Ledizioni, Milan, 2017.

<sup>579</sup> See M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad. Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008.

## Glossary

The order of the Arabic terms in the glossary is based on their trilateral roots, according to the system used in Arabic dictionaries.

For example, words like *iğtihād*, *ğihād*, *muğāhīd* will be under the same entry because they all share the trilateral root *ğim – hā' – dāl*.

### *Umma* - أمة

The term has the same root as the words related to the concept of motherhood.

*Umma* is the worldwide community of Muslims.

### *Iğmā'* - إجماع

*Iğmā'* is an Islamic legal term meaning “consensus”, the universal and infallible agreement of Muslim scholars over a particular opinion.

### *Ğihād* - جهاد

The word is one of the most relevant terms in both Islamic and radical thought. Thousands of volumes have been written with the goal of giving an exhaustive description of its meanings.

For the sake of this glossary's brevity, it can be stated that jihad is both the spiritual struggle within the individual against sin and weakness, carried out to become a better Muslim, and the fight against the enemy of Islam.

For non-radicals, the jihad of the sword (*ğihād bil-sīf*) represents the lesser or “smaller jihad” (*ğihād al-ṣaghīr*), while the inner struggle (*ğihād al-naḥs*) is the priority (*ğihād al-kabīr*).

Obviously, this fundamental term has the same trilateral root *ğim – hā' – dāl* (ج ه د) as *muğāhīd*, “fighter of jihad”, but also – more interestingly – of many of the terms related to the concept of effort, including *iğtihād*, “interpretation”. This is an Islamic legal term referring to independent reasoning of the individuals in general and the jurist in particular in finding a solution to a legal question.

### *Ğāhiliya* - جاهلية

The term means “ignorance” but came to indicate the era before the advent of Islam and therefore it implies ignorance of the Revelation.

### ***Ḥisba* - حسبة**

It literally means “accountability” and it is an Islamic concept based on the Quranic injunction to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. (*amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*).

It has been enforced in different ways by a variety of actors, ranging between the Saudi religious police and the civil society initiatives in other countries.

For the Egyptian radical groups, some forms of implementation included preventing belly dancers and female singers from performing in weddings, beating nightclub owners, sabotaging truck drivers who shipped alcohol, and torching video stores.

### ***Ḥakimiya* - حاكمية**

Its root is related to the semantic area of power. In Islam, this term indicates the absolute sovereignty of God.

### ***Tawḥīd* - توحيد**

The term is built on the trilateral root wāw - ḥā' - dāl (وحد) and these are the letters of the unity. The term means unity and it refers to the absolute uniqueness of God, the most important dogma of Islam.

### ***Da'wa* - دعوة**

This word has the root dāl - 'ain - wāw (دعو) of all the terms included in the area of “inviting”. It means “issuing a summons” and “making an invitation” and refers to the broader duty of a true believer to call people to enter Islam and living it according to its principles.

### ***Dhimmi* - ذمّي**

A *dhimmi* was a non-Muslim living under an Islamic state. Dhimmi had to pay a tax for their protection (*ḡiziya*). In turn, they were granted some religious freedoms and were exempted from some duties imposed on Muslims by the state.

### ***Dār al-'ahd* - دار العهد**

“House of Truce”. This term refers to a territory that is not ruled by the laws of Islam but does have a peace treaty with Muslims.

### ***Dār al-Ḥarb* - دار الحرب**

It literally means “House of war”. It refers to territories that are not under the control of an Islamic state and also have no peace treaty with the state.

***Dār al-Islām* - دار الاسلام**

*Dār al-Islām* means “house” or “abode” of Islam. It refers to an area where Islam is dominant and Islamic law is enforced.

***Dār al-Kufr* - دار الكفر**

*Kufr* means disbelief and *Dār-al Kufr* refers to a territory not ruled by the laws of Islam. This can include Muslim majority countries ruled by secular law. In this respect, it has to be mentioned that *kāfir* (pl. *kuffār*) is the related term indicating disbeliever(s) and *takfīr* is the practice of accusing someone of being a disbeliever.

***Dawla* - دولة**

State.

***Dīn* - دين**

Religion.

***Murāḡa’at* – مراجعات**

They are the doctrinal and ideological revisions and recantations that Al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya, al-Jihād al-Islāmy, and al-Ġamā’a al-Islāmiya al-Muqātīla bi-Lībya wrote and published during and after their de-radicalization and disengagement phases.

***Sharia* - شريعة**

Islamic law.

***Mutaḡarrif* متطرف**

Radical, extremist.

***Al-’adū al-qarīb wa al-’adū al-ba’īd* - العدو القريب و العدو البعيد**

The Near and the Far Enemy. In his *al-Farīḡa al-Ghā’iba*, “The Absent Obligation”, al-Ġihād’s main ideologue ‘Abdel Salām Faraġ theorized the priority of the Near Enemy over the Far one. Later jihad would go global, and the Far Enemy – the United States, Israel and the West in general – will be prioritized over the Near Enemy – the Arab regimes and the religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries.

### **عنف - 'unf**

Violence.

### **فرض العين and فرض كفاية - 'ayn - Farḍ kifāya and farḍ**

Literally “sufficient duty and individual duty”. These are two attributes that jihad can have. According to the majority of Muslims, jihad of the sword, against an enemy, has to be performed only by a group of people belonging to the Muslim community in order to be valid. For most of the radicals, on the contrary, it is an individual duty, and each Muslim is asked to personally wage jihad against the enemy. The Islamic doctrine provides a number of further distinctions and scenarios in which the opinions discordant (such as the difference between defensive and offensive jihad, the kinds of jihad existing today, the impediments to wage jihad).

### **فتوى - Fatwa**

A fatwa is a nonbinding but authoritative legal opinion that a qualified Islamic jurist or mufti can give on issues pertaining to both the Islamic law and daily life of Muslims.

### **فتنة - Fitna**

The meanings of the term are very complex and diverse. They include those of temptation and sedition, but also rebellion and chaos. Historically, the term has been used in two major fields: first, when speaking about the civil wars within Islam that weakened the Umma; second, when dealing with interpersonal and gender relations, particularly to convey the meaning of “temptation”.

### **فقه - Fiqh**

Islamic jurisprudence. The pillars of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) are the Qur'an, the Sunna, the consensus (*iḡmā'*) about an issue not covered in the Quran or Sunna.

Most Sunni scholars consider consensus binding; others, including Shii scholars, believe that such consensus is impossible. The fourth pillar is analogy (*qiyās*), or rule by precedent.

### **استكبار - Istikbār**

It has the same root as all the words related to magnitude and greatness *kāf - bā' - rā'* (كبر). It means “arrogance”, and accusations of arrogance were frequently expressed by the radical groups against the apostate governments and the Copts.



### ***Iltizām* التزام**

By *iltizām* radicals and Islamist militants mean the accomplishment by Muslims of all the various duties prescribed by Islam. The Muslim who performs them becomes *multazim*, which means roughly practicing or pious, and his piety in turn makes him ready to receive the Islamist message. In the current language they simply mean interest and being interested in something.

### ***Tanzīm* تنظيم**

It means organization. Readers encountered this term in the sections dealing with the Tanzim (Egyptian accent), which represented the ancestor of the two major Egyptian jihadi groups of the last century, Al-Ġamā‘a al-Islāmiya and al-Ġihād.

It had its origin in 1974, after the notorious Military College incident when, on 18 April, 100 members of the Islamic Liberation Organization (ILO) attacked the Military Technical College in Cairo. Their project, which failed, implied the murder of President Sadat and a number of top military and security officials who were attending an institutional event nearby in the Arab Socialist Building, seizing radio and television buildings and announcing the birth of the Islamic Republic of Egypt.

### ***Ṭāghūt* - طاغوت**

In the Islamic terminology, it denotes worshipping entities other than Allah, such as idols. Consequently, in radical propaganda it came to indicate the enemies embodied by the West and the disbelievers, who have different faith and/or worship idols such as money, success, and mundane pleasures.

### ***Ṭā‘a* - طاعة**

Obedience to God.

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