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# The Salafism in Europe Between *Hijra* and *Jihad*

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Salafism represents a conservative interpretation of the Islamic doctrine and of the political history of the Muslim world, which emerged in the first years of Islam. In fact, its very name testifies to its origin: *Salaf al-Sahilin*, "the pious ancestors", that is the Prophet, the circle of his followers and the first four caliphs, regarded as authentic models for Muslim behaviour and religious practices. Along the centuries, some Sunni theologians have often interpreted the religious or political failures of the Muslim world as a consequence of the estrangement from this original archetype. For this reason, they will suggest successive reformations of the society and of Islamic conscience in order to restore them to their authentic, original state. The best known of these reformers are: Ibn Handbal, 9<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Taimiyya, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Muhammad Abd-ul Wahhab, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jamal al-Din al-Afgani (1838-1897) and, more recently, Abdelaziz Ben Baz (former great mufti of Saudi Arabia until 1999) and Nasir ud-Din al-Albani (1914-1999).

The Salafi movements, which islamologists such as Olivier Roy have also labelled "neo-fundamentalist", decline to integrate Europe in the area of *Dar al-Islam* and regard the European territory either as *Dar al-Solh* (land of the pact, in which Muslims take no violent action against the non-believers – this is the position of pietistic Salafism) or as a part of *Dar al-Harb* (land of the war). This option carries considerable weight because it motivates the attitude of rejecting the cultural and religious Western values, as well as legitimising radical actions taken in the name of a Jihad against the non-believers. However, like the Muslim Brotherhood, European Salafism should be understood in all its complexity, since it is nothing but a generic term that covers a diverse range of movements and tendencies in constant rivalry and disagreement with one another. Any attempt at classifying the Salafite movements, whether in the Muslim world or in Europe and other countries, first needs to differentiate between the pietistic and the radical Salafism, the latter also known as Jihadist.

## "Shaykhist" Salafism

The pietistic Salafi movements are also known as "shaykhist" because they strictly follow the teachings of various sheiks and ulemas in the Arabic Peninsula (apart from Ben Baz and al-Albani, the most important ones were or are Ibn Uthaymin (who died in 2001), Salih al-Fawzan, Rabi Ibn Hadi al-Madkhali, Al-Cheikh – the new great mufti of the Saudi Kingdom, and Muqbil ibn Hadi (who died in 2001)<sup>1</sup>. These pietistic movements generally promote a conservative vision of Islam in the manner of Wahhabism. They place emphasis on developing

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<sup>1</sup> François BURGAT, *L'Islamisme à l'heure d'Al-Qaida*, La Découverte, Paris, 2005, pp. 32-39.

a universal type of Muslim, with no specific cultural allegiances, whose identity is based on the strict observance of a clearly spelled out theological and behavioural catechism. Their founding principle is that social changes meant to increase observance of Islamic norms must be based, above all, on improving individual behaviour. In fact, the emergence of Salafi movements, especially in Europe and North America, comes as a consequence of the transformations brought about by globalisation: "Déstructuration des sociétés traditionnelles, refondation de communautés imaginaires à partir de l'individu"<sup>1</sup>. Their ideology is founded on observance of a rigid set of rites, obligations and interdictions which define the "abstract" Muslim, who is completely detached from any cultural or social influence (Islamic or not, such an influence is regarded as unacceptable). Therefore, such a person is no longer the representative of a culture and becomes a homogeneous code, ready to adjust to any society: "Le néo-fondamentalisme est très clairement un produit et un agent de la déculturation des sociétés musulmanes, ce qui explique et son succès et son transnationalisme"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the Salafites refuse to build a multicultural Muslim community; instead, they criticise local Islamic traditions, ethnic-based communities, modern legal definitions of identity (citizenship), as well as any form of assimilation to Western culture<sup>3</sup>. Such an understanding appeals to those in search for an identity: "Le nouveau communautarisme se construit sur l'individualisme, c'est-à-dire à partir de l'adhésion individuelle, par le retour personnel à la pratique religieuse stricte, celle du code"; the fact that Salafism has been successful mainly among Muslim communities living abroad is explained by its compensating for, as well as being a product of, a "crise de l'autorité"<sup>4</sup>.

Although there are various ideological approaches and a strong rivalry within the Salafi movement, all its directions focus on several main themes: the superiority of Islam over the Western world, the decay of Muslim societies because of their estrangement from the true faith, the need for a return to the original Islamic teachings, an apocalyptic vision of a global battle between good and evil, fought by two generic entities called the Islam and the West (similar to the *Weltanschauung* of the American neo-conservatives but in reversed axiological polarity). Unlike the Muslim Brothers, Salafi representatives oppose any political involvement and disregard national identity; most Salafi movements strongly reject contemporary political concepts (state, nation, citizenship) and regard their implementation in the Muslim world as an essential cause for the "separation" (*fitna*) which has fragmented the Islamic community. The only legitimate reference is made to 'Umma, the congregation of all Muslims, irrespective of their geographical location. Therefore, Salafism presents a very special geopolitical vision, which is focused on two main concepts: Muslim individuals defined as such and their unity of religion and identity as represented by 'Umma. Apart from these two elements, all other references to politics, culture or ethnicity are regarded as illegitimate and rejected. There are some Salafists, however, in particular those who have responded to the Jihadist message, who believe that the return to an authentic Islam is not possible without resurrecting the institution of the caliphate, a fundamental category in the Muslim political tradition, the only legitimate source of authority.

<sup>1</sup> Olivier ROY, *L'Islam mondialisé*, Seuil, Paris, 2002, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Abderahim LAMCHICHI, *Islam-Occident, Islam-Europe: choc des civilisations ou coexistence des cultures?*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Olivier ROY, *L'Islam mondialisé*, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

In Europe, this estrangement from the local cultural and political environment is further enhanced by the aversion felt by the Salafists (in contradiction with the ecumenical orientation of traditional Islam) against Christianity, Judaism and other religions. The concern for ritual purity, which is a central aspect of Salafi behaviour, becomes exacerbated in Europe and in any other non-Islamic regions, as Salafism is defined by favouring an interpretation of Islam with detailed focus on ethics and behaviour, based on strict observance of what is allowed (*halal*) and rejection of what is forbidden (*haram*)<sup>1</sup>. All these norms, set by Muslim Sunni ulemas with theological and legal authority, are carefully presented in textbooks, and more recently on television and the Internet. It is an important characteristic of Salafism that it gives central importance to the authority of ulemas, whose *fatwas* or decisions are meant to provide for their followers a canonical hermeneutics, both of the Islamic tradition and of the various innovations and challenges that confront the Muslim believer in the contemporary world. Whether they are integrated in the official state system of Muslim and non-Muslim countries or they are independent, ulemas play an essential part in the ideological mobilization and subsequent actions of their followers. Benefiting from the countless mosques and religious centres spread across the regions where Muslims live, Salafi ulemas act most efficiently at the level of micro-communities. The Muslim Brothers, *Tabligh*, the Saudi networks and the various Salafi movements are engaged in a competition over domination of the most important religious centres and mosques of a community, each of them attempting to win over the believers to its own position. The allegiance of the imam or the religious leader in a mosque can significantly influence the attitude of the congregation; he can efficiently direct the religious zeal of his followers towards pietism or, on the contrary, towards violent jihadist action. The best-known European example is provided by the London mosque of Finsbury Park, which, after falling under the influence of Abou Hamza al-Masri, has pushed towards jihadism many of the worshipers. One cannot overemphasize the importance of ulemas as agents of the ideological and behavioural mobilisation of the Muslim population, irrespective of its geographical location. The personality of the religious ruler, whether he is the average preacher of a neighbourhood mosque, or a high-profile leader of international reputation, is always decisive for the behaviour of a large part of the people who acknowledge his authority. Since Sunni Islam does not recognize any unique and universal religious authority that could provide a unified and uncontroversial perspective on religious dogmas, this situation has made room for a constant "liberalisation" of Muslim religious theories and attitudes. Thus, alternative interpretations become possible, as well as the differential attachment of the believers to various forms of understanding and practising Islamic tradition.

While maintaining its own identity, the Salafism of recent decades has largely been the result of Wahhabi ideology, and its global expansion has chiefly been fostered by Saudi policies of promoting a conservative vision of Islam, which began after Faysal became king in 1964, and increased with the availability of petrodollars in the 1970s<sup>2</sup>. Since then, Saudi Arabia has attempted to gain geopolitical influence

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<sup>1</sup> Mohamed-Ali ADRAOUI, "Purist Salafism in France", *ISIM Review*, no. 21, Spring 2008, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad MOUSSALLI, *Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who Is the Enemy?*, A Conflicts Forum Monograph, January 2009, <http://conflictsforum.org/briefings/Wahhabism-Salafism-and-Islamism.pdf> (accessed on 05.03.2009)

over the whole Sunni-Muslim world by redistributing oil wealth towards the implementation of Islamisation projects and the recruitment of an elite who, taught in Wahhabi schools, was to bring Saudi Islam to their own countries, very often to the detriment of local Islamic tradition. The main instruments for exporting this "soft" Islamism – in principle, non-violent and essentially directed towards adopting conservative Muslim attitudes – have been the many pan-Islamic Saudi institutions and organizations, Muslim charities and Islamic banks. All these will unavoidably end up targeting the Muslim communities in Europe, where Saudi programmes compete with those of *Tabligh* and the Muslim Brotherhood, each movement fighting for the symbolic capital of the Islamic tradition. To a certain extent, each of them also claims an exclusivist canonical superiority, which tends to cancel out the relative liberalisation of the Sunni landscape occasioned by the theological and legal pluralism of the four official rites. Thus, the most important non-governmental Saudi organization, the World Muslim League<sup>1</sup> (*al-Rabita al-islamiya al-'alamiya*), founded in 1962 and whose main function is to support Muslim minorities from non-Muslim countries, has a regional Islamic council for Europe (with headquarters in London) which aims at giving financial support to Islamic projects (mosque building, schools, Muslim institutes, cultural programmes etc.)<sup>2</sup>. In France in particular, but also in Spain and Italy, where most Muslims originate from Maghreb, *Rabita* also faces competition from the official institutions of Maghrebian states (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), which in their turn propose projects meant to win the loyalty of their former citizens. For instance, Algeria has long been able to secure some important control over a part of France's Muslims by establishing a special relationship, ever since the 1950s, with the imams of the Great Mosque in Paris (and with the rectors of the Muslim Institute it hosts). The Great Mosque is the most important theological institution of French Islam, whose recent imams have been Si Hamza Boubakeur and, after 1995, his son Dalil Boubakeur. Usually, however, the League's financial resources are much larger than those of such Arab states, which are also immersed in domestic economic and political difficulties; therefore, Saudi money often comes first. The League also coordinates the International Council of Mosques, whose role is both to finance places of worship and to coordinate and control them; its European headquarters are in Bruxelles.

*Rabita* is certainly not the only source of financing and promoting Salafi (or Islamic) projects in Europe and across the world. One must also mention the importance of other Muslim banking institutions: the Islamic Development Bank (founded in 1973 by the Organization of the Islamic Conference) but also *Dar al Mal al-Islami*, a private Islamic bank founded in 1981 with headquarters in Geneva, and *Dalla al-Baraka*, founded in 1982 by a group of Arabs led by the Saudi billionaire Salih Abdallah Kamil<sup>3</sup>. With an initial capital of one billion dollars, the bank has grown rapidly and even managed to enter the European markets by opening in 1984 the International Islamic Bank in Copenhagen, which has become the bank of choice for most European Muslims. Some of these financial institutions have played an important part in transferring private Saudi money towards various Islamic programmes in Pakistan, Europe or the United States. Finally, in

<sup>1</sup> [www.muslimworldleague.org/mwlwbsite\\_eng/index.htm](http://www.muslimworldleague.org/mwlwbsite_eng/index.htm) (accessed on 05.03.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Antoine BASBOURS, *L'Arabie Saoudite en question*, Perrin, Paris, 2002, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Stéphanie PARIGI, *Des banques islamiques. Argent et religion*, Editions Ramsay, Paris, 1989, pp. 15-42.

addition to these institutions, a series of non-governmental organizations have also emerged, the best known of which are the *Islamic Relief Organization* and the *Islamic Relief Agency*, both first functioning as links to support mujahedin<sup>1</sup> resistance in Afghanistan, later directing their attention towards Bosnia. In the 1990s an important role in steering private Saudi money to support "the Islamic fighters in Palestine, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Algeria" is played by the UK Islamic Mission. Another important British association, which promotes Wahhabi interests and strives to win the loyalty and financial support of European Saudis, is the *UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs*. The main problem of all these institutions and associations remains that often a certain amount of money is not used for its official purpose – to support Islamic programmes – but rather directed towards various radical movements. The complexity of the social milieu which absorbs financial resources from the Gulf states makes possible such practices, given the fact that the people involved can easily lean towards militant positions. This situation, in fact, only mirrors the classical ambiguity that has for decades characterized Saudi Arabia: a strategic ally of the United States, it has at the same time supported the Salafi current, whose ideology fuels many contemporary radical movements<sup>2</sup>.

However, contemporary Salafism has moved beyond the institutional structure promoted and supported by private or public Wahhabi agents. It has become, first of all, a "state of mind" whose visible shape is given by various local figures, less motivated by the coherent strategy of some centre of power and more by their adherence to the same message and cultivation of personal Internet-mediated contacts. Salafism is the perfect example of a trans-national movement, based on a horizontal inside-the-network form of interaction, with no pre-established hierarchy. In Europe, it is characterized by the strict observance of *Shari'a*, the deliberate refusal of any political involvement, a strong social control over its followers (especially over women) and the tendency to keep a distance from the surrounding non-Muslim environment. Salafism has followed a logic of the ghetto; more precisely, its followers attempt to reiterate, in a new geographical context, the famous "retreat" (*hijra*) of the Prophet from pagan Mecca to Medina, where he founded an authentic Islamic society which is taken as the mythical reference by all Islamist movements. Therefore, this breakaway with the values and social structures of the Western world is motivated by a principled rejection, on the grounds that such values are not in keeping with Islam. In some cases, Salafite leaders have gone so far as to advise their followers to leave Europe and return to their Muslim home countries, for fear they might be corrupted by Western lifestyles<sup>3</sup>. However, their aversion against the West does not prevent Salafite supporters from taking advantage of its technological innovations: one of the most important characteristics of those who have embraced Islamism is their use of the Internet, which becomes a kind of virtual *'Umma*, anticipating the hoped for *de facto* unity of all believers. There are numberless Salafi websites and blogs, either in Arabic, Urdu, various Oriental dialects,

<sup>1</sup> Abdel-Rahman GHANDOUR, *Jihad humanitaire: Enquête sur les ONG islamiques*, Flammarion, Paris, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> This is the reason why, after September 11, 2001, people like the French analyst of Rand Corporation, Laurent Murawiec, have officially denounced the fact that Saudi Arabia supports international terrorist networks, and have pleaded for a "de-saudisation" of the kingdom: *La Guerre d'après*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Samir AMGHAR, "Le salafisme en Europe: la mouvance polymorphe d'une radicalisation", *Politique Étrangère*, no. 1, 2006, p. 72.

or in the European languages. Above all, these are a major instrument through which Salafi sheyks and preachers disseminate their canonical advice among the believers and answer their queries concerning the observance of *Shari'a* in the contemporary world. However, such websites and blogs also represent the most readily available opportunity for promoting a neo-fundamentalist ideology and recruiting new followers<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the Internet becomes a space where people and groups can freely criticize one another, in terms of theological positions, politics or unavoidable personal arguments.

The European penetration of Salafi structures is a relatively recent phenomenon, originating mainly in the foundation of *Front Islamic du Salut* (FIS) in Algeria in the late 1980s. It quickly spread its influence over the large Algerian diaspora in France, the main European center of the Salafi movement. Although FIS had a principled orientation towards a political agenda, and even won the local elections in 1991, the ideology of one of the movement's important wings (the most prominent representative of which was the popular preacher Ali Benhadj) shared Salafism's rigorous approach, which it actually attempted to implement in the Algerian milieu it could influence, especially on the outskirts of the large cities. The fact that FIS was outlawed in 1992 as well as the subsequent repression against its leaders triggered an exodus of many of them towards European countries, France and Belgium in particular. Thus, the founder of the Salafi movement in France was Abdel-Hadi Dudi, the imam of the *al-Sunna al-Kebira* mosque in Marseille and leader of the Salafi wing which would generate FIS (Abdel-Hadi Dudi had been expelled from Algeria in 1987<sup>2</sup>). He would convert from the old political militancy of FIS to the pietistic orientation of Saudi Shaykist Salafism and become the only authorized representative in France of Rabi al-Madkhali, the foremost canonical authority for the French Salafism.

Indeed, since the second half of the 1990s the Saudi influence over French Salafism has become essential, especially after the new generation of Muslims, educated in the Arab Peninsula, return to France, and after Saudi missionaries and preachers open religious centers in highly populated Muslim neighbourhoods. Here they promote an increased activism, mainly targeting the youth; the most important means of disseminating Salafi principles are *durus*, the study groups linked to mosques or places of worship. Their imams, often self-proclaimed, attract and mobilize followers, who are frequently people that used to support, but were disappointed by, the classical Islamist movements, *Tabligh* and the Muslim Brotherhood. Embracing Salafism involves countless nuances, as it is ultimately the expressions of a particular private experience. From a sociological perspective, however, the movement's very focus on the individual believer as such makes Salafi Muslims join preferably small groups, often consisting of people who either are relatives or belong to the same social circles (friends or even band members) and who believe they belong to the "saved sect" (*firqa najiyya*). This decision to break away from the social milieu of the "non-believers" results in very little public involvement and visibility on the part of most European Salafites, in clear contrast with the integrationist policies of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>1</sup> <http://islam-links.eu/> (accessed on 08.06.2009).

<sup>2</sup> INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *La France face à ses musulmans: émeutes, jihadisme et dépolitisation*, Rapport Europe No.172, 9 mars 2006, p. 13, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4014&l=2> (accessed on 13.03.2009).

This is also one of the reasons why it remains difficult to acquire adequate knowledge of the Salafite networks and of their members, intentions and actions<sup>1</sup>.

### *Jihadist Salafism*

The transition from pietistic to radical Salafism is often easy, given the fact that followers of both share the same *Weltanschauung* and only differ in their methods and the limits of their actions. Obviously, this shift towards a militant or even violent position is accompanied by a complex rationale of justification, which includes ideological and religious motivations, socio-economic and political causes and, no less importantly, the followers' personal histories. In Europe, these people have various origins: first, they are the war veterans from Afghanistan who are members, more or less openly, of al-Qaida, GIA, Chechen networks, Islamic Jihad or *Gama'at al-Islamiyya* in Egypt, and who have taken refuge in Europe. Under their influence, and responding to their proselyte action, the Muslim immigration from various European countries has become radicalized, in particular the young Muslims born in the West who undergo crises of identity both in terms of religion and culture. There are certain favorite methods for their recruitment: in the large cities, the mosques that have fallen under Jihadi influence (Finsbury Park – Londra, al-Quds – Hamburg, Chatenay-Malabry – Paris, al-Tawfik – Bruxelles), but also the family connections or friends, and the Internet. Prisons, refugee centers and immigrant aid units are also places where Jihadi influence can be exerted and potential followers targeted. The Islamist conversion of some delinquents is one of the most widespread phenomena of recent years, mainly taking place in countries with a recent Muslim immigration such as Spain and Italy. These new immigrants, usually coming from Maghreb, face a much more difficult social integration than the older generations of immigrants, or those born in Europe to immigrant parents<sup>2</sup>.

The underprivileged milieu on the outskirts of the large European cities represent important locations for disseminating the Salafi militantist ideology; however, not all the movement's followers originate in here. Social and economic reasons do not provide an exclusive motivation for embracing Jihadism and violent action: a significant number of radical members and followers are recruited from the wealthy and well-educated Muslim population. In addition to those born or permanently settled in Europe, many of them come from the Gulf states, and their adherence to militant Salafism is motivated by ideological commitment rather than psycho-social circumstances. Educated in Western universities and/or having lived in Europe for some time, familiar with the cultural codes of modernity, accomplished speakers of several international languages, these Islamists nevertheless utterly reject Western values and are most willing to apply their cosmopolitanism to the advantage of trans-national networks, which preach a global Jihad<sup>3</sup>. For many of these people, national identity has lost any relevance and the only valid reference remains the sense of belonging to *'Umma*, which transcends

<sup>1</sup> Piotr SMOLAR, "Mouvance éclatée, le salafisme s'est étendu aux villes moyennes", *Le Monde*, 22 février 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Farhad KHOSROKHAVAR, *L'Islam dans les prisons*, Balland, Paris, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> IDEM, *Les nouveaux martyrs d'Allah*, Flammarion, Paris, 2003, pp. 271-301.



such "pagan" categories as state, borders, ethnicity. Aversion against the axiological system of the West, together with a belief in the spiritual, cultural and political superiority of Islam, does not invite a social "retreat" (as Shaykhist Salafism claims) but, on the contrary, calls for confrontation, in keeping with the historical archetypes of the Prophet and the first caliphs. This sublimated imagery and vision of war, which belongs to the Islamic tradition, is expanded on a global scale. Therefore, the various *fatwas*, or religious decisions, issued by Jihadi leaders now offer religious legitimization to acts of aggression against Western countries, which are regarded as mere abstractions on the battlefield of an apocalyptic imaginary confrontation between Islam and the West. Unlike Islamist attackers motivated by nationalist causes, whose potential victims retain a precise identity that explains their very choice as targets (the Jews for Hamas or the Islamic Jihad, the Iraqi for Iranian suicide bombers, the Russians for Chechen terrorists), Jihadi Salafites regard their victims as only "un signe dans une sémiologie abstraite, sans visage spécifique. Leur seul caractère identifiable, c'est d'être des 'Occidentaux', pour la simple raison qu'ils vivent en Occident"<sup>1</sup>. The most compelling example of this prototype of the Jihadi militant is provided by the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and London (2005), many of whom were people with a successful professional and social integration. The alleged leader of the USA attacks, Mohammed Atta, belonged to a fairly wealthy Egyptian family, and was himself an architecture graduate from the University of Cairo. His conversion to Jihadi Salafism only took place in Europe, after Atta arrived in Hamburg for post-graduate studies. During the 1990s he would attend religious services at the al-Quds mosque and fall under the influence of Mohamed Haydar Zammar. An Arab-Afghan war veteran and prominent member of al-Qaida in Europe, he was to introduce Atta to the movement's leaders in Afghanistan, where the latter would enrol in several military training programmes before settling in the USA<sup>2</sup>.

One more recent category of supporters of the radical Islamist ideology consists of the new converts, whose relatively low numbers are compensated for by their intense activism and by the public impact triggered by media coverage both in the Muslim countries and in the West. Many of those who embrace militant Islam belong to the well-educated middle-class and are motivated not so much by spiritual as by ideological reasons since they regard Islamist ideology as the new form of anti-establishment opposition, which has replaced the old-fashioned and outdated leftist ideologies. More often than not, conversion is prompted by the influence of charismatic figures or, as in the case of the young people living on the outskirts of European cities (especially in France, where the official secular education has resulted in the disappearance of Christian religious and cultural landmarks), by long proximity with the Muslim population. Social interaction sometimes leads to support for, and identification with, the Islamic system of values or with the political agenda of the Muslim world. Conversions are not always towards radicalism, when they are mediated by movements such as *Tabligh* or by various imams and preachers that recommend pietistic Salafism; however, just like the Muslims by birth, the new converts always have the option to move towards militant activism<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Peter FINN, "Hamburg's Cauldron of Terror", *Washington Post*, September 11, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Juan José Escobar STEMMANN, "Middle East Salafism's Influence and Radicalization of Muslims Communities in Europe", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2006,

Some of them even take part in military training, and sometimes conflicts, in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya or, more recently, Iraq – the new jihadi El Dorado. Apart from the zeal that characterizes all the new followers of a religion, Islam converts bring the additional advantage that, due to their Western origin, they can be more easily used for actions taking place in Europe.

Jihadi Salafism is mainly focused on three major geopolitical projects: (a) the fight against the Muslim ruling powers, regarded as illegitimate because they have failed to uphold Islamic aspirations (the Jihadi movements in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Syria and more recently Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Iraq); (b) the fight to liberate former Muslim territories, now inhabited by non-believers or tolerating the presence of their military forces (Andalusia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Kashmir, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine etc.); (c) the pursuit of a global jihad in view of a complete islamisation of all humankind.

The ideological roots of Jihadism are mainly to be found in the works of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), a member of Muslim Brotherhood whom Nasser's regime murdered in prison. He believed that almost the entire contemporary world, including the countries which called themselves Muslim, were illegitimate with regard to the demands of the true Islam. Qutb described this state as *jāhiliyya* (the age of ignorance and barbarism), employing the word that, in the Islamic tradition, was used to refer to the period before the coming of the Prophet. In contrast, *hākimiyya*, "Allah's exclusive political sovereignty", was illustrated by the Islamic state that implemented and secured a strict observance of *Shari'a*<sup>1</sup>. *Jāhiliyya* described the condition of the modern world, including Muslim countries, in which laws and governments were no longer founded on the divine Law (*Shari'a*) and in which people had usurped the divine sovereignty. This had been replaced by a human secular sovereignty, by the arbitrariness of human laws and systems of government which had no grounding in the transcendent. *Hākimiyya* represented the return to humankind's true condition, as illustrated in the society built by the Prophet and his first followers. At that time, governing was done in the name of God and according to his commandments by a truly Muslim emir and not, as Qutb thought it was the case in contemporary times, by a despot – the "Pharaon" (an obvious reference to Nasser, but also to all the lawless Muslim rulers who had abandoned Tradition), ruling as he pleased<sup>2</sup>. The major consequence of Qutb's dichotomy between *hākimiyya* and *jāhiliyya* was that it seemed to legitimize the Holy War – as a rebellion or a revolution – not only against non-Muslim powers (the classical understanding of *Jihad*) but also against the Muslim governments that were deemed illegitimate (*kufir*). These governments could fall under an anathema (*takfir*), the supreme accusation in Islam, which triggered the consequence that the accused was excluded from the community, from 'Umma<sup>3</sup>. In its juridical sense, *takfir*, the excommunication of a Muslim, meant that "spilling his blood became lawful", i.e. it was allowed to kill that person. Thus, Qutb suggested that he legitimized rebellion against tyrant Muslim rulers (*tāghāt*), the main target being, of course, Nasser.

pp. 1-14, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2006/issue3/Escobar.pdf> (accessed on 20.02.2009).

<sup>1</sup> William SHEPARD, "Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of 'Jāhiliyya'", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2003, pp. 521-545.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles KEPPEL, *Le Prophète et le Pharaon. Aux sources des mouvements islamistes*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Abderahim LAMCHICHI, *Géopolitique de l'islamisme*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2001, p. 74.

Qutb's influence has been enormous in the whole Muslim world, especially after his works have been extensively published by his followers who took refuge in Saudi Arabia. Although not his entire thinking has been embraced by all contemporary Salafi movements, Qutb has provided the theoretical framework that justifies violence against the ruling powers, in obvious disagreement with the Sunni tradition which tends to legitimize any political authority on condition that it is not guilty of apostasy. Today Takfirism, which essentially originates in Qutb's vision, represents one of the major lines of Salafite thinking and action. It is represented by groups and individuals who believe that paramount importance should be given to the battle against moderate Muslim leaders (who are accused of breaking Islamic laws or of cooperating with illegitimate powers) and even against any Muslim whose commitment to religious values does not seem strong enough. In the 1990s Takfirism is mainly illustrated by the Egyptian organizations *Tanzim al-Jihad* and *Jama'at al-Islamiya* (which become involved in violent actions against Egyptian leaders, in particular president Mubarak)<sup>1</sup> and by the radical Algerian movements that emerge during the civil war and are generically known as Groupe Armé Islamique (GIA). However, at the beginning of the 1990s Takfiri principles are also embraced by Ben Laden and some radical Saudi ulemas opposed to the power in Riyadh, who later take refuge in London. Contemporary Takfirism, although displaying less organizational visibility, still remains present in many Muslim countries; it has been resurrected by al-Zarkawi, the herald of an Islamic society purified of illegitimate rulers and heretic doctrines. One of the best-known European supporters of Takfiri ideology has been Abu Qatada al-Filastini, a Palestinian ulema trained in al-Qaida camps in Pakistan, who sought refuge in London in 1993. He believes that Jihad should first be directed against the apostatical political regimes in the Muslim world, which are to be dethroned and replaced by Islamic states based on *Shari'a*; only later should the military zeal target the West<sup>2</sup>. Without joining any visible Islamist organization, Abu Qatada has been one of the most influential theorists of Jihadi Salafism, with a considerable authority over the radical Maghrebian movements, especially the international Salafi wing of GIA, which legitimizes its violence against civilians by invoking his *fatwas* published in the movement's European bulletin, *al-Ansar*. After September 11, 2001, Abu Qatada has repeatedly been arrested by the British authorities and is now in detention.

The most important event, which has influenced the whole development of the ideologies and actions of radical Islamic movements, has undoubtedly been the war in Afghanistan. Throughout the 1980s it has become the favorite "cause" of the militant and combative aspirations of the whole Muslim world, replacing even the traditional Palestinian issue. More than 35 000 volunteers join the Afghan mujahedins between 1982 and 1992; they belong to 43 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Central and South-Eastern Asia. These jihadi fighters, also known as "Arab-Afghans", have been exposed to Salafi ideological indoctrination and received military training either in the units of the Afghan Islamist parties or

<sup>1</sup> David ZEIDAN, "Radical Islam in Egypt: A Comparison of Two Groups", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1999, pp. 1-10, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue3/zeidan.pdf> (accessed on 12.02.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Dominique THOMAS, *Le Londonistan: Le djihad au coeur de l'Europe*, Editions Michalon, Paris, 2005, p. 103.

in the new centers opened at the Afghan-Pakistani border by the Islamic World League or other Saudi organizations, later to be brought together as the "Afghan Bureau" (*Makhtab al-Khīdmat*) led by Abdullah Azzam. He is also one of the main ideologists of Jihadism, believing that the jihad initiated by Muslim fighters should not only aim at liberating Afghanistan but also at freeing all the Muslim territories inhabited by "non-believers". This "global jihad" will later become the leitmotiv of a whole generation of Islamist militants originating in Afghanistan, who attempt to globalize the holy war by imposing a universal Muslim rule in the Muslim countries as well as the West, the latter becoming, after the USSR is defeated, the new enemy of the Muslim world<sup>1</sup>.

The retreat of the Soviet army from Afghanistan, the suspension of financial and military aid from Saudi Arabia, the preference of Pakistani leaders for certain Afghan Islamist groups and the rivalry within mujahedin resistance itself are the reasons that have led to a re-thinking of the strategy of al-Qaida and of the Arab-Afghan fighters based in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Later on, the Gulf war triggers a clear division within the Salafi movement: Ben Laden, as well as the Islamist leaders and organizations that support him, now completely disavow the Saudi monarchy because it has allowed foreign troops in the Arab Peninsula. Previous to this movement, Riyadh used to be at the forefront of the international actions of support for Sunni Islamist movements and the main financier of Afghan jihad. Ben Laden's distancing himself from Saudi leaders clearly indicates the different paths that the two Salafi currents are to follow. Saudi Arabia continues to promote a pietistic Salafism (anti-political and anti-violent, focused on predication and control of behaviour) while protecting its relationship with the West. On the contrary, al-Qaida and the other radical Salafi movements uphold primarily military action as the best method to implement an Islamic order or, at least, to disrupt the current Western one. During this ideological and strategic shift, an important role has been played by the Egyptian members of al-Qaida, especially Ayman al-Zawahiri<sup>2</sup>. In the second half of the 1990s, after al-Qaida's infrastructure is primarily located in Afghanistan, al-Zawahiri articulates the most important characteristics of the movement: (1) the development of the concepts of "near enemy" (local Muslim regimes) and "distant enemy" (first of all, Israel and the United States) and the necessity to replace Takfirism by active fighting against the non-Muslims (hence the support Ben Laden provides for GIA, which opposes the Takfiri movement); (2) the rejection of the traditional Islamic view that Jews and Christians are "people of the Book", religious difference being now used for political and xenophobic purposes; (3) the idea of a "global jihad" (violent actions are no longer restricted to specific geographic areas but expand globally to all places where Western interests can be harmed); (4) the shift from guerrilla fighting (as it was the case in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Somalia) to urban terrorism which targets symbolical objectives<sup>3</sup>. Ultimately, however, the terrorism embraced by the al-Qaida leaders seems a sign of their inability to act

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles KEPPEL, "Terrorisme islamiste: de l'anticommunisme au jihad anti-américain", *Ramses*, 2003, pp. 43-58, [http://www.ifri.org/files/RAMSES\\_2003/RAMSES\\_03\\_Kepel.pdf](http://www.ifri.org/files/RAMSES_2003/RAMSES_03_Kepel.pdf) (accessed on 18.02.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Jason BURKE, *Al-Qaida. La véritable histoire de l'Islam radical*, La Découverte, Paris, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin ORBACH, "Usama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida: Origins and Doctrines", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2001, pp. 54-68, <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue4/jv5n4a3.htm> (accessed on 18.02.2009).

politically in order to achieve their goals, as they rather unrealistically envisage the political unity of the Muslim world under the leadership of a caliph and the removal of Western hegemony over the Muslim countries. Al-Qaida terrorism is yet another example of what Oliver Roy has labelled "un fondamentalisme sunnite en panne de projet politique"<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to its own network, consisting of former Arab-Afghan fighters as well as subsequently recruited followers, al-Qaida has often attempted to enrol under its flag various other Islamist movements. It has either secured their voluntary adherence to its successful brand name or infiltrated al-Qaida members among the supporters of other Islamist movements, thereby steering them towards positions more in keeping with its interests and principles. This is mostly a project of action and ideology which al-Qaida leaders deliver to their followers around the world by means of mass media, and especially the Internet<sup>2</sup> (this project is adjusted to local specificities, like a franchise, by various groups or individuals who have been drawn to al-Qaida's message). Contemporary Jihadism, in the West as well as the Muslim world, consists of a large variety of currents, groups and strategies, only some of which are directly linked to al-Qaida<sup>3</sup>. A decisive role has been played here by Arab-Afghan veterans, the first generation of the new Jihadi Salafi current, people whose evolution, inter-personal relationships, loyalties to al-Qaida leaders or at least to their ideology and strategies represent the main sources of the emergence of the new Jihadi movements around the world. Some of these veterans remain close to al-Qaida leaders, following them to Saudi Arabia, Sudan and then Afghanistan again, after 1996. Others become "nomad" Jihadi fighters, making their presence felt in the new conflicts which take place on the fringes of the Muslim world and to which they attempt to lend a religious dimension: Chechnya, Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, Tadjikistan, Kashmir and, more recently, Iraq. Yet others choose to return to their home countries where, haloed by the glory of having taken part in the anti-soviet jihad and immersed in Salafi ideology, will make a decisive contribution to a radicalization of local Islamism, as it has been the case in Algeria and Egypt. Here they attempt to initiate local jihads directed against the political elites (regarded as illegitimate) and possibly to start an insurgency that will bring to power Islamic regimes. The failure of this violent Islamist strategy, the authorities' massive repression against Jihadi fighters as well as the difficulties encountered by most Arab-Afghan veterans in their efforts to integrate socially into their home countries will trigger a new *hijra*, a new "emigration" (hence the name they call themselves – *muhajiroun*, emigrants). Some of these people emigrate to the West (Europe or the United States), which could offer them not only personal safety but also many more opportunities to communicate, to recruit followers from within the Muslim communities, and especially to establish financial networks that could support further violent action.

<sup>1</sup> Olivier ROY, "Un fondamentalisme sunnite en panne de projet politique", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, octobre 1998, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Hanna ROGAN, *Jihadism Online – A Study of How al-Qaida and Radical Islamist Groups Use the Internet for Terrorist Purposes*, FFI Rapport 2006/00915, <http://rapporteur.ffi.no/rapporteur/2006/00915.pdf> (accessed on 11.02.2009).

<sup>3</sup> Petter NESSER, *Jihad in Europe. A Survey of the Motivations for Sunni Islamist Terrorism in Post-millennium Europe*, FFI Rapport 2004/01146, <http://rapporteur.ffi.no/rapporteur/2004/01146.pdf> (accessed on 11.02.2009).

### *The Jihadists Networks in Europe*

The emergence of radical Salafism in Europe in the 1990s has therefore been the result of two Islamist phenomena, which originated in the Muslim world but whose influence has reverberated in Europe as well. The first event is the exodus of a certain number of Afghan Jihadi fighters to Europe (either as refugees from their home countries or after they also spent some time involved in combat in Bosnia, Chechnya etc.)<sup>1</sup>. The second source of the expansion of Salafite networks in Europe is the Algerian civil war during the 1990s. Given the large Algerian diaspora in Western countries, particularly in France (more than three million), the political unrest, ideological currents and various changes that have affected Algeria along the decades have unavoidably impacted the Algerian population living abroad. As a result, the increase in the influence of Islamist movements during the 1980s (which culminates with the union of various groups and currents in *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS)) is equally visible among the Algerian population settled in Europe. The annulment by the political and military leaders of the election results of January 1992, which proclaimed FIS the winner of the general elections, the outlawing of the Front and the arrest of its leaders have led to the radicalization of a part of the members and supporters of the Algerian Islamist movement. They give up any political strategy to win power (which has become an impossibility) and choose instead violent action directed, in principle, against the authorities but which has often resulted along the years in the massacre of civilian population<sup>2</sup>.

Several radical movements emerged after 1992, which were led by various "emirs" (with one national "emir" recognized by all the regional ones) and which came to be known generically as *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA). They embraced Salafi principles, became involved in mutual contestation and bloody conflicts, and perpetrated paroxysmic violence which, although given a religious justification by ulemas such as al-Qatada, was actually motivated rather by pathological aggressiveness. Engaged in an open conflict with the Algerian authorities, GIA (although often infiltrated among the members of the security services) ended up expanding its actions outside the country. Networks of financial support, arm traffic and propaganda were implemented within the Algerian communities in various European countries, especially in France<sup>3</sup>. However, after 1994 the French authorities pursued an efficient policy of eradicating GIA members and supporters, more so in the wake of the attacks on the Paris metro (1995). Without being openly claimed by GIA, these attacks were, however, the result of a decision taken by the new national "emir", Djamel Zitouni, to expand jihad on French territory in the hope that his action would persuade France to withdraw support for the Algerian state, thereby weakening it<sup>4</sup>. The prompt repressive reaction of the French officials, as well as the public disavowal of the attacks by most Islamic organizations in France led to the dissolution of the French GIA networks. These were mainly located in Paris, Lyon and

<sup>1</sup> Evan F. KOHLMANN, "The Afghan-Bosnian Mujahideen Network in Europe", 2006, [http://counterterrorismblog.org/2006/06/cats\\_paper\\_the\\_afghanbosnian\\_m.php](http://counterterrorismblog.org/2006/06/cats_paper_the_afghanbosnian_m.php) (accessed on 08.03.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Séverine LABAT, *Les islamistes algériens. Entre les urnes et le maquis*, Seuil, Paris, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> CENTER FOR POLICING TERRORISM, *Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) Dossier*, <http://www.cpt-mi.org/pdf/GIADossier4.pdf> (accessed on 13.03.2009).

<sup>4</sup> Hassane ZERROUKY, *La nébuleuse islamiste en France et en Algérie*, Edition 1, Paris, 2002.

Lille and consisted of militants that had purposefully come from Algeria as well as young Muslims recruited from the underprivileged neighbourhoods on the outskirts of French cities. Some of the French members of GIA would be arrested while others would seek refuge in other European countries, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland and especially Great Britain<sup>1</sup>.

In Algeria, GIA was to lose more and more of its supporters and members, and towards the late 1990s completely disappeared. A significant part of the Algerian Islamist movement accepted the peace agreement offered by the authorities and gradually ceased violent action. However, some GIA members would integrate into a new Salafi structure, which emerged particularly as a result of the efforts made by Ben Laden and al-Qaida leaders to steer Algerian violence away from a radical Takfirism that targeted civilians towards a battle against the Algerian government and Western interests. The new organization, known as the Salafite Group for Preaching and Combat (SGPC), would be led by Hasan Hattab, a former leader of GIA networks in Europe. Now an al-Qaida supporter, Hattab would persuade his European followers (especially in France, Belgium and England) to serve the organization; thus an European strategy, in addition to the Algerian one, became a part of the new movement. During the anti-terrorist campaign initiated by the European countries after September 11, 2001, dozens of SGPC members would be arrested and their cells dissolved. They had intended several attacks on European and American targets, such as the cathedral in Strasbourg<sup>2</sup>. However, the disagreements between Hattab and al-Qaida leaders, and Hattab's refusal entirely to submit SGPC to al-Qaida control and interests would result in his losing power at the hands of the Algerian militants who had returned from Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime. Hattab would be replaced by Nabil Sahraou, who on September 11, 2003 would officially pledge obedience to al-Qaida. The strategy of the new "emir", Abdelmalek Droukdel, seemed to be focused especially on violent actions perpetrated in Europe, particularly in France<sup>3</sup>.

SGPC paves the way for the emergence of a new generation of Salafite groups in Maghreb, consisting mainly of former al-Qaida members who take refuge from Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime: the Islamic Moroccan Combat Group, the Tunisian Combat Group, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group<sup>4</sup>. For all these organizations, national identity becomes almost non-existent, being replaced by a generic Islamic identity; they recruit their followers almost exclusively from underprivileged often delinquency-prone milieus, and direct potentially anti-social actions towards Islamist purposes. All these organizations receive military and financial support from al-Qaida, especially after its change of strategy in the wake of the September 11 USA attacks. Al-Qaida leaders now focus on an increased involvement in the local networks of Islamist movements, in particular those close to, or within, Europe, which are in return granted the privilege of being openly acknowledged as al-Qaida branches. The new strategy is known as the doctrine of a

<sup>1</sup> Lia BRYNJAR, Åshild KJØK, *Islamist Insurgencies, Diasporic Support Networks, and their Host States – the Case of the Algerian GIA in Europe 1993-2000*, FFI Rapport 2001/03789, Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut, <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2001/03789.pdf> (accessed on 13.03.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Jason BURKE, *Al-Qaida...cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> François GÈZE, Salima MELLAH, "Al-Qaida au Maghreb, ou la très étrange histoire du GSPC algérien", *Algeria-Watch*, 22 septembre 2007, [http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf\\_fr/gspc\\_etrange\\_histoire.pdf](http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_fr/gspc_etrange_histoire.pdf) (accessed on 16.03.2009).

<sup>4</sup> Mathieu GUIDÈRE, *Al-Qaida à la conquête du Maghreb*, Editions du Rocher, Paris, 2007.

"decentralized Jihad", ascribed to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, the latest leading al-Qaida ideologist who has emerged from "the third salafi-jihadist generation"<sup>1</sup>. All the new Maghrebian Salafi movements have important European cells, which are used as sanctuaries for their members (originating in Arab countries) who are threatened by state repression, as well as centers for promoting their ideology and actions across Europe<sup>2</sup>. The Moroccan Combat Group, which authored the suicidal attacks of May 16, 2003, in Casablanca, is suspected of also being behind the Madrid attacks of March 11, 2004<sup>3</sup>. In fact, al-Qaida and these new movements are very successful in their recruitment efforts in Spain and Italy, countries with a large clandestine Maghrebian immigration. The new generations settled or born here do not feel any particular loyalty towards the cultural and socio-political European values, but rather find a solution to their frustrations and existential confusion in the transnational Salafite ideology<sup>4</sup>.

France programmatically pursued a policy of restricting militant and radical activism for fear that it might involve the French Muslim population, in particular the youth in underprivileged neighbourhoods, in violent actions against the social order and public security. However, in other European states (such as Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries) Islamist members and organizations from the entire Muslim world would find, until the September 11 attacks, a great freedom of speech and action. Some of the radical Egyptian leaders fleeing the repression of Mubarak's regime, as well as GIA members, would settle in Sweden and Denmark, countries with a long tradition of granting asylum to political refugees and to all those suffering discrimination. GIA members would publish here the movement's bulletin, *al-Ansar*, mostly written by Islamist ideologists living in London<sup>5</sup>. In fact, throughout the 1990s the European center of Islamism would be the British capital – hence the name, already become a classic, of "Londonistan". Taking advantage of the unparalleled permissiveness of British legislation concerning the granting of the right of residence to political refugees, large numbers of leaders and members of the most diverse Islamist groups and currents would settle in Great Britain. More than 30 opposition movements originating in the Muslim world used London as a basis for communication and financial support. This was also due to the fact that, given its advantageous global financial position, London

<sup>1</sup> Murad AL-SHISHANI, "Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and the Third Generation of Salafi-Jihadists", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 3, no. 16, 2005, pp. 1-4; Lia BRYNJAR, "Al-Suri's Doctrines for Decentralized Jihadi Training", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 1-4; Paul CRUICKSHANK, Mohammad HAGE ALI, "Abu Musab Al Suri: Architect of the New Al Qaeda", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> Saïd HADDAD, "Le jihadisme au Maghreb: vers la fin des exceptions algérienne et marocaine?", in Jean-Luc MARRET (dir.), *Les fabriques du Jihad*, PUF, Paris, 2005, pp. 215-240.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc MARRET, *Les réseaux jihadistes marocains: entre devenir politique du Maroc et Europe*, Notes de la Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Octobre 2005, [http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/secuInterieureTerrorisme/reseaux\\_jihadistes\\_marocains.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/barreCompetences/secuInterieureTerrorisme/reseaux_jihadistes_marocains.pdf) (accessed on 20.03.2009).

<sup>4</sup> Javier JORDAN, Nicola HORSBURGH, "The Jihadist Subculture of Terrorism in Spain", in Jonathon E. LYNCH, Gary WHEELER (eds.), *Cultures of Violence*, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 181-194, [www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/horsburgh%20paper.pdf](http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ati/violence/v5/horsburgh%20paper.pdf) (accessed on 20.03.2009).

<sup>5</sup> Åke SANDER, "Muslims in Sweden", in Muhammad ANWAR, Jochen BLASCHKE, Åke SANDER, *State Policies Towards Muslim Minorities: Sweden, Great Britain and Germany*, Edition Parabolis, Berlin, 2004, pp. 218-223.



was the place where many petrodollars from the Gulf states were directed, and which attracted the great investors of the Arab world. The City of London hosted the European branches of Arab banks such as *Dar al-Mali al-Islami* and *al-Baraka*, as well as those of the Muslim World League and of many charities, all of which operated with enormous sums of money worldwide. Besides, London became the world capital of Arab press and publishing houses, surpassing even the traditional centers, Cairo and Beirut. Most of the Arab daily newspapers and periodicals that circulated internationally were published in the British capital; in addition to these, there were many other publications issued by various organizations and currents in the Muslim world, either legal or dissident.

London's cosmopolitan environment allowed the co-existence of nationalist Islamist leaders of the Egyptian radical movements, the various Iraq parties opposed to Saddam's regime, FIS and GIA members expelled or taking refuge from France and the most important ideologists and activists of European Jihadism. A prominent representative of the last category was Abu Hamza al-Masri, former mujahedin in Afghanistan and Bosnia, who since 1996 has controlled the second largest mosque in London (Finsbury Park) and made a decisive contribution to the radicalization of some of its congregation<sup>1</sup>. Omar Bakri Mohammed was another high-profile Western Islamists, sometimes regarded as al-Qaida's spokesman in Europe, who founded a transnational organization, *Harakat al-Muhajiroun* (the Emigrants' Movement), with branches in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa<sup>2</sup>. While officially aiming at protecting the interests of British Muslims, the organization actually pursued the ideology and goals of the older Islamist party *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (the Islamic Party of Liberation), a transnational movement which emerged in the Middle East in the 1960s and argued for the formation of a large caliphate that was to unite the whole Muslim world and dissolve national states<sup>3</sup>. Bringing together Arab-Afghan veterans as well as other followers in the entire Arab-Muslim region, *al-Muhajiroun* added to the classical *Hizb* ideology an essential jihadist dimension, illustrated through various actions of support for the Muslim cause in conflict zones and through involvement in international terrorist networks. Apart from Abu Qatada al-Filistini (mentioned above), another important figure of Londonistan was Yasser al-Sirri. In 1996 he founded the *Islamic Observatory Center*, which functioned primarily as a public platform for giving voice to the various Islamist currents in the Muslim world, in particular those in Egypt.

However, after September 11, 2001, the British policy towards Islamist leaders and movements in Great Britain has become much less accommodating. In fact, the new anti-terrorist strategy begins in May 2000 when the *Terrorist Act 2000* is passed (later to be rectified, in March 2001), which bans verbal, financial and military support for terrorist organizations. As yet the law has its limitations, since it mostly targets the large radical nationalist Islamist movements and focuses less on restricting transnational Salafi networks. It is passed in response to the pressure

<sup>1</sup> Yotam FELDNER, "Profiles islamiques radicaux (1) – Londres – Abou Hamza Al-Masri", *Enquêtes et analyses* – no. 72, Octobre 2001, <http://www.memri.org/bin/french/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA7201> (accessed on 24.03.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Maureen COFFLARD, *L'Emir*, Fayard, Paris, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Zeyno BARAN (ed.), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, Nixon Center, Washington, 2004, <http://www.nixoncenter.org/Program%20Briefs/PB%202004/confrephiztahrir.pdf> (accessed on 24.03.2009).

from countries directly affected by Islamist violence (the USA, Egypt, India, Israel). However, London continues to decline the expulsion of Islamist militants charged with terrorist acts, such as the Algerian Rashid Ramda, leader of the GIA networks from abroad, a suspect in the 1995 terrorist attacks in Paris. It is only after the September 11 attacks that the *Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001* is passed, which allows the arrest of any foreigner who is suspected of endangering national security<sup>1</sup>. This law has led to restricting the media, financial and militant activities of British Islamist movements, and some of their leaders have been arrested after 2002 (Abu Hamza, al-Qatada, Yasser al-Sirri, various Algerian Jihadists) or expelled (Omar Bakri Muhammad, 2005). However, the measures taken against the high-profile representatives of British Islamism have not brought to an end the influence of Jihadi ideology among the Muslim populations in Great Britain. Some members of the community have chosen secrecy and a social mimetism that could render them less conspicuous to the authorities; other have preferred relocating in the north of England, or even in Ireland, regions under less security surveillance than the large cities in the south<sup>2</sup>.

The London underground attacks of July 7 and 21, 2005 were perpetrated by the new generation of Islamists, recruited from among those persuaded by the radical teachings of such well-known Londonistan ideologists as Abu Hamza. Some of the attackers had a successful social and professional integration, which did not prevent their adherence to the conceptual and existential ideology of Salafism. It is a characteristic of many Salafi Jihadists involved in attacks (suicidal or not) perpetrated in Europe that they display forms of behaviour which make them blend perfectly into the surrounding social environment (in clear contrast to the dress code and assertive behaviour of classical Salafi and *Tabligh* members, who thus conspicuously proclaim their identity). The discretion manifested by the members of radical Salafism in Europe is motivated by a Shi'a principle, that of *takiyya*, of concealment (when necessary, even concealment of one's religious beliefs).

It is difficult to anticipate the European destiny of all these ideological currents and movements of Islamism. The process of re-islamisation, which has been affecting many Muslim societies for decades, has constantly reverberated across the Western Islamic community as well, prompting its members to a much stronger mobilization based on their asserting their Muslim identity and values. The fundamental problem for European states (and, in fact, for any country with a polemic Islamic activism) was, and has remained, that of identifying the most appropriate cultural, social, economic and security measures which could diminish the radicalism of some of these movements.

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<sup>1</sup> *Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001*, <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010024.htm> (accessed on 26.03.2009).

<sup>2</sup> Pascal RADOV, "Islamisme radical et jihadisme au Royaume-Uni et en Irlande", in Jean-Luc MARRET (dir.), *Les fabriques du Jihad*, cit., pp. 41-60.