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The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism and the Birth of Hamas

AITANA RADU

"Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture, and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power"[1]

Samuel HUNTINGTON

Among the most important social and political changes that the Middle East has experienced in the last century, lays also the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. In the aftermath of 9/11 and 11 March 2004 radical Islam has become a focus of academic concern, not mainly as a religion but as a contender in world politics. As Daniel Philpott argued "radical Islamic revivalism challenges the authority structures of the international system"[2]. The rise of Islamism is perceived as an indicator of a wider phenomenon of politicization of religion. According to one important scholar in the field we are now speaking of a "return of the sacred" – a challenge issued to the secular worldview promoted by Western societies[3].

Unfortunately for the academic field, the literature on this topic is sparse and more than often strongly biased. Islamic fundamentalism has been judged and condemned by many without been given a proper trial. For example, a considerable number of American authors have adhered to the conviction that "Islamic fundamentalism is the greatest threat to American security since Communism"[4], a statement that leaves little room for theoretical argumentation. As is the case here, many have fallen into the trap of over simplification being tempted to identify in Islam a permanent enemy for the West. In addition to this, many authors engage in extensive argumentation over the character of Islamic fundamentalism without previously taking the time to properly define their methodological framework. In many cases this has led to a confusion in concepts, Islam being equated with political Islam which in turn is defined as Islamic fundamentalism.

The aim of this study is to build comprehensive definitions for the main concepts involved in this debate. Moreover, the article explores some of the most frequent misconceptions and prejudices associated to the study of political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. In this respect, I stress the importance of given Islamic concepts, the significance attributed to them by the Muslims, and as to counterbalance

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[1] Jost HALFMANN, "Fundamentalist Terrorism – the Assault on the Symbols of Secular Power", *Institute of European Studies. Occasional Papers*, Working Paper OP-2, April 2003, at http://repositories.cdlib.org/ies/op/2 (accessed on 23.03.2007).

[2] Daniel PHILPOTT, "The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations", *World Politics*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2002, pp. 66-95/p. 67.

[3] Bassam TIBI, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe. Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008, p. 15.

[4] Jonathan R. WHITE, *Terrorism*, 4th edition and introduction, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont, 2003, p. 153.

the tendency of many Western authors to translate Islamic terminology in universal terms and interpret Islamic writings from a Western perspectives, which often leads to misinterpretation. As Frederic Volpi noticed in his study on political Islam:

> "While it is undeniable that the issues Islamic fundamentalists deal with overlap the issues that are important for Western political understanding – and therefore they can be apprehended with similar conceptual tools – they are not articulated and strategically implemented to confront the same practical dilemmas. Specific texts and actions are only fully meaningful in their own context, and there is no guarantee that what is factually accurate in a particular historical or geographical context is relevant to another"[1].

Taking into consideration that for a comprehensive understanding of the political life and state structure of the Western world is needed first an understanding and knowledge of Western political philosophy, my aim in this paper is to offer a similar kind of theoretical insight into Islamic political thought. To better illustrate my theoretical assertions I have chosen to use as a study case the Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas. There are several reasons behind this decision. First, Hamas is active in the Palestinian territories, a region holding powerful symbolic significances for the Muslim population. As an Arab scholar stated "the issue of Palestine has become the Muslim grievance by excellence"[2]. Thus, Hamas' objective of liberating Palestine has a sacred character that conveys legitimacy to the organization among the majority of the Arab people.

Second, I have chosen Hamas as an example because of its transformation potential. From its foundation, Hamas has been characterized by a dual structure, being both a military and social organization. The in-built duality has encouraged it in the last years to evolve from a traditional resistance movement towards a political party. This evolution has been accompanied at the ideological level by a gradual renunciation of the values of Islamism in favor of a more secular approach, which makes Hamas a valuable case-study for this particular research.

It is also important to mention here that Islamic political thought, is not a clear corpus of ideas but is composed of the points of views of different authors, all concerned with the problem of the relation between Islam, state and society. This lack of cohesion is due to the fact that until recent years Islamic scholars were not concerned with the elaboration of a structured Islamic philosophy of the state similar to its Western counterpart. It is clear that the historical development of states in the Middle East was much different from that of the West, and because of that it took a longer time for Middle Eastern scholars to elaborate such a political philosophy applicable to the Muslim-inhabited regions.

This lagging behind was also caused by the fact that Islamic political thought is organically connected to the interpretation of the Koran and of the writings of the prophet Mohammed. In comparison with the secularization of the West, in the Muslim culture the concepts of church and state cannot be understood individually[3].

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[1] Frederic VOLPI, "Understanding the Rationale of the Islamic Fundamentalists' Political Strategies: A Pragmatic Reading of their Conceptual Schemes during the Modern Era", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 1, no. 3, Winter 2000, pp. 73-96/p. 74.

[2] Mohammed AYOOB, "Political Islam: Image and Reality", *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2004, pp. 1-14/p. 11.

[3] Manus I. MIDLARSKY, "Democracy and Islam: Implications for Civilizational Conflict and the Democratic Peace", *International Studies Quaterly*, vol. 42, no. 3, September 1998, pp. 485-511/p. 486.

The fact that for a long time, the interpretation of the Koran was the privilege of Islamic scholars, also made it harder for such a political philosophy to be created. However, the Islamic revival brought with it the affirmation of the right of every Muslim to interpret the Koran which led to the appearance of many trends of interpretation that united together started to form an Islamic political thought[1].

The scholars of this domain can be divided in two main categories: the conservative-radicals and the moderates. An important representative of the conservative-radicals that I have mentioned repeatedly in many paper is Sayyd Qutb, an Islamic scholar that attempted to provide a practical political philosophy to the socio-cultural revival led by the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt. Qutb's main goal was that of devising a practical conceptual strategy that would allow the true believers (Muslims) to confront a non Islamic authoritarian state. Inspiring himself from the works of a pro-fascist European thinker, Alexis Carrel, Qutb elaborated his own critic of modern civilization which took the form of a book called *Milestones*[2].

What makes Qutb a conservative-radical is his critique of the political and economic failures of both Middle Eastern and Western regimes but also his moral indictment of the post-Enlightenment political theories that advocated the elimination of the religious authority from the political realm[3]. I have chosen Qutb to represent the position of conservative-radicals in my paper also due tot the fact that his works are filled with Western ideas and constructs[4], which makes it easier for the understanding of his body of ideas and for the comparison of his works with Western philosophical writings on the same topic.

As an important representative of the moderate position I have chosen Muhammad Abduh, a recognized Islamic scholar. Abduh was also concerned with the reasons behind the Western domination over the Islamic community and identified these reasons in the separation between the religious authority and government. However, in comparison with Qutb's rejection of Western rationalism, Abduh saw in the adoption of Western rationalist philosophy the most efficient way of reversing the decline of the Islamic civilization[5]. In his opinion, there was no direct conflict between the West and the Middle East as he believed that "the current Western Civilization was not merely indebted to the Islamic Civilization but was also one of its unacknowledged instances"[6].

This separation between the two types of theories within Islamic political thought is essential for my paper as it helps me explain the distinction that exists among the different Islamist organizations. Although both Abduh and Qutb influenced the character taken by the various Islamist organizations their opposing perspectives on Islamic political thought were reflected also in the ideological platforms of these organizations. While Abduh's point of view is best reflected by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Qutb's writings are better expressed by terrorist organizations such as the Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and to a certain degree, Hamas.

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[1] Frederic VOLPI, "Understanding the Rationale…cit.", p. 78.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 81.

[3] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism", *The Journal of Politics,* vol. 59, no. 1, February 1997, pp. 28-55/p. 31.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 32.

[5] Frederic VOLPI, "Understanding the Rationale…cit.", p. 77.

[6] *Ibidem*.

A Conceptual Dilemma

Both the term "fundamentalism" and "Islamist" have been the object of intense controversy. The disputes are mainly concerned with the meaning and origin of these phenomena. Scholars like Nikki Keddie believe that the term "fundamentalism" is too biased, and suggested its replacement with a more neutral term "new religious politics"[1].Although Keddie does not offer a clear definition for new religious politics, he mentions several features that certain ideologies must possess in order to be included in this category[2].

These features include first an appeal to a reinterpreted, homogenized religious tradition, seen as an answer to solving problems caused by a secular power. Secondly, the movements are populist, aimed at gaining political power in order to transform the government on the basis of their religiopolitical program. Thirdly, they generally have social conservative views[3].

The dispute concerning the term "fundamentalism" is connected with the fact that representatives of such movements often use special terms to define themselves as true believers that help them separate from the others. In the case of the Muslims, the term used in order to identify those supporting political Islam is Islamist[4].

Although there is no global definition for fundamentalism, there are however definitions for the particular forms taken by fundamentalism. In the case of the Muslim world, Islamism is defined by the political scientist Guilian Denoeux as

> "a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition"[5].

On the other hand, Islamist movements are defined as "social groups that seek to preserve, change or create norms in the name of an overall belief system"[6]. The members of these groups are usually educated young urban people whose sense of alienation from the state, led them to internalize Islam as a means of protest and struggle for change. Additionally, their self-education in matter of belief has led them to oppose clerical Islam which is perceived to sanctify a type of docile submission to the government. Moreover, their modern education can be a cause for their willingness to use Western technological advances in their struggle against Western culture and its influences in the Muslim world[7].

Nikki Keddie also identifies several global factors that have influenced the rise of religious fundamentalist movements in the countries affected by these changes.

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[1] In this paper I will use the term Islamism or political Islam instead of Islamic fundamentalism or new religious politics because this is the term generally used in the literature of this domain.

[2] Nikki R. KEDDIE, "The New Religious Politics: Where, When and Why do 'Fundamentalisms' Appear", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4, October 1998, pp. 696-723/p. 697.

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 698.

[5] Mohammed AYOOB, "Political Islam...cit.", p. 1.

[6] Meir HATINA, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*, The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2001, p. 13.

[7] *Ibidem*.

Firstly, the recent development of capitalism has led to dramatic inequalities in society. The income distribution gaps, the forced migration and job insecurities have led people to question their identities[1].

Secondly, the economic slowdowns, stagnation insecurity and increasing migration that characterize the Middle East have encouraged popular discontentment and the rise to power of right-wing populist movements[2].

Thirdly, the change towards liberalization in the status of women has increased the number of conservative moments that idealize the past structure of society. In addition to this global cultural homogenization is perceived as a negative process which attempts to force upon people universalist modern western values, while tradition is lost or destroyed[3].

Furthermore, the increase in power of secular governments combined with their inability of solving serious problems within society has encouraged religio-political movements. Education and urban growth help people articulate better their discontentment with the government[4].

Finally, improvements in health have led to significant demographic increases which have changed the population structure. The number of young people is continuously increasing and they are the category most vulnerable to joining fundamentalist movements[5].

From all the countries affected by fundamentalist movements, the Muslim world is perhaps the most representative and the most analyzed. There are three elements that make Islam particularly vulnerable to such movements. The first of these factors is the early ties between Islam and politics, which have been preserved despite the trend towards the secularization of Middle Eastern governments. These ties have been supported also by the fact that Islamic institutions have a long tradition of controlling law, education and social services[6].

The second factor refers to the fact that in the Muslim world the opposition to existing governments has usually based its program on religious ideologies[7].

The last factor that makes Islam very vulnerable to fundamentalism are the anti-Western attitudes that characterize the entire Muslim world. These hostile contacts have originated mainly in the support given by the West to Israel even from its origin and also in the long period of Western domination through colonialism[8].

Radical and Moderate Perspective on Political Islam

There are three main moments that are considered essential for political Islam: the foundation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, the 1967 war and the 1979 Iranian Revolution[9].

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[1] Nikki R. KEDDIE, "The New Religious Politics...cit.", p. 699.
[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 700.
[4] *Ibidem*.
[5] *Ibidem*.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 712.
[7] *Ibidem*.
[8] *Ibidem*.
[9] *Ibidem*, p. 713.

The rise of Islamism is a modern phenomenon, part of a wider resurgence of religion in the entire Muslim world. In addition to the political and socio-economic causes mentioned above, the Islamic revival has also been supported by the appearance of several charismatic leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini and Sheikh Yassin[1].

The revival of Islam as a political and cultural force has been a considerably rapid phenomenon, as even the secular political discourses in the Arab world made use constantly of Islamic symbols and ideas. Political Islam was also encouraged both by the tolerant policies of the Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat towards the Muslim Brotherhood and by Saudi financial aid for the institutionalization of communal Islamic activities[2].

There are certain assumptions about political Islam that must be deconstructed before starting the analysis on the ideological essence of Islamism and of the shapes it takes in the political arena. These three assumptions are: political Islam, like Islam itself is monolithic, political Islam is by its nature violent and the close connection between politics and religion is characteristic only to Islam[3].

In reality, Islamist movements are quite different because of the context in which they operate and the means used in order to achieve their goals. Although the Islamic vocabulary is common to all, each movement uses it differently in order to legitimize its actions[4]. This point of view is supported by the anthropologist Dale Eickelman and the political scientist James Piscatori who stated that

> "politics become 'Muslim' by the invocation of ideas and symbols, which Muslim in different contexts identify as 'Islamic' in support of… organized claims and counterclaims"[5].

However, most Islamist movements are united in their goals of Islamizing the social and political system of their respective societies and of establishing a revived authentic world-wide Islamic state based on *Shari'a*[6].

The second misconception about political Islam is that it is inherently violent. This misconception appeared as a result of the importance given to violent *jihadi* groups in many studies concerning Islamist movements[7].

However, there are many important Islamist movements that have not resorted necessarily to violent *jihad* in order to achieve their aims. An example for this situation is the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt who worked both within the Egyptian political system and around it. Although the Brotherhood has undergone long periods of being officially banned in Egypt it has promoted many candidates to the parliamentary elections either as independents or under the banner of other parties. The Brotherhood was many times criticized by its more radical elements for adopting a non-violent tactic in what concerned the issue of Palestine[8].

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[1] David ZEIDAN, "The Islamic Fundamentalism View of Life as a Perennial Battle", *Middle East Review of International Affairs,* vol. 5, no. 4, December 2001, pp. 26-53/p. 26.

[2] Shaul MISHAL, Avraham SELA, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 12.

[3] Mohammed AYOOB, "Political Islam...cit.", p. 1.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 2.

[6] David ZEIDAN, "The Islamic Fundamentalism View of Life…cit.", p. 26.

[7] Mohammed AYOOB, "Political Islam...cit.", p. 2.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

This led to the separation of certain radical groups from the Brotherhood like the Islamic Jihad and eventually Hamas.

In fact there are two main trends that can be identified in contemporary political Islam. One pole of political Islam is revolutionary, stating that society must be "Islamized" through the seizure of power, legally or violently, after which the state machinery is used to re-Islamize the society from above like in Iran. The other trend is the reformist one, according to which the birth of an Islamic state is the result of a continuous, incremental process of Islamization, achieved mainly through education and social action from the bottom up. This trend is represented, as mentioned above, by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt[1].

The last supposition generally made about political Islam is related to the fact that the intermingling of religion and politics is unique to Islam. This assumption has been supported by the fact that Muslim leaders maintained the fiction of the indivisibility between state and religion mainly in order to legitimize dynastic rule and absolutist powers for the sovereign[2].

In order to understand fully Islamism, one must address first the writing of several important Islamist ideologues like Mohammad Abduh and Sayyid Qutb.

Mohammad Abduh, a recognized Islamic scholar from the end of the 19th century, attempted to reconceptualize both the relationship between Islam and the West and that between religion and politics[3]. In doing this, Abduh was deeply influenced by the French historian, philosopher and politician Francois Guizot' book *The History of Civilization in Europe*[4].

He began to study the decline of the Islamic civilization and identified certain causes for its current predicament. Abduh saw the decline of Islamic civilization as being caused by the lack of "enlightened" governance and by the separation between political leaders and religious thinkers[5]. According to him "the dissolution and the weakening of the bonds fastening the Islamic community began when the title of *alim* became distinct from the title of Caliph"[6].

In reference to the European civilization, Abduh believed that the West and Islam represent not antagonistic forms of social order but variations upon a common theme. Moreover, he believed that the Islamic world should adopt the kind of rationalist philosophy used by the Western civilizations in order to stop its decline[7].

In order to reform the Islamic society on a more rationalist basis, Abduh supported the project of a critical re-evaluation of a large number of Islamic traditions which were considered to be of doubtful origin or coherence, but were nonetheless widely practiced[8].

Although the path opened by Abduh introduced some revolutionary ideas in the field of Islamic studies, the real consequences of his reformulation of Islamic studies became clear only after his death, through the works of his disciple Rachid Rida[9]. In order to avoid a potential harming re-evaluation of the Islamic corpus by

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[1] Shaul MISHAL, Avraham SELA, *The Palestinian Hamas*…cit., p. 12.
[2] Mohammed AYOOB, "Political Islam...cit.", p. 9.
[3] Frederic VOLPI, "Understanding the Rationale…cit.", p. 74.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 76.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 77.
[6] *Ibidem*.
[7] *Ibidem*.
[8] *Ibidem*, p. 78.
[9] *Ibidem*.

each new generation of scholars, Rida emphasizes the importance and primacy of the texts and traditions dating back to the Prophet and the four "rightly guided" Caliphs. The traditions stated in these works would be the main standard by which to judge all subsequent Islamic practices and interpretations. This conservative ideological trend started by Rida took the name of the *Salafiyya* (the way of the ancestors). Although the *Salafiyya* was important as an ideological trend, it achieved its peak once it was applied in the political arena by the Muslim Brotherhood[1].

In addition to the reforms brought on by Mohammad Abduh and Rachid Rida, came the works of Sayyd Qutb, who also aimed at re-articulating the themes of the *Salafiyya*. Qutb's challenge was to try to provide a practical political philosophy to the socio-cultural revival led by the Muslim Brotherhood. Using Abduh's and Rida's method of interpretation the Koran, Qutb tried to develop a practical conceptual strategy that allowed the Faithful to confront a non-Islamic authoritarian state[2].

From the various works written by Qutb, the most influential remains *Ma'alim fi-l Tariq* (Milestones), which is considered to be a manifesto for the Sunni Islamic Movement. The book begins with a characterization of modernity as being a condition of *jahiliyya*. *Jahiliyya* is a concept taken from Koran which refers to a period of ignorance in Arabia prior to the Revelation. Qutb uses in his book the term *jahiliyya* to define a state of ignorance into which a society descends when it deviated from the Islamic way. Therefore, the *jahili* society is one that refuses to submit to Allah's sovereignty[3].

The only civilized community, from Qutb's point of view, is the moral one, the only real freedom is moral freedom and the only true justice is Islamic justice. From these ideas Qutb derives the conclusion that the hegemony of the Western world has ended, as the Enlightenment has proven incapable of promoting real progress, which is moral progress[4].

Because of this inability of promoting real values, societies are, according to Qutb, "standing on the brink of an abyss"[5]. This threat does not only refer to the West but also to the societies that claim to be Islamic. For him, when Muslim struggle to imitate alien models, they inevitably replicate the ills of the Western society in the Islamic world. Qutb considers all Islamic societies to be *jahili* for as long as the leaders continue to replicate Western models and fail to understand the importance of Islam in politics[6].

Qutb believes that there is only one version of Islam, which can be found in the actions of the prophet Muhammad. In addition he states that the original Islamic *umma* (community) is not an unattainable ideal, but it can be accomplished once all Muslims find the necessary knowledge and path. This just Islamic community should be grounded in the belief in the unity (*tawid*) and sole authority of God which is expressed in the proclamation: "La ilaha illa Alllah" (There is no God but Allah)[7]. Moreover, the existence of the *umma* is a prerequisite to the use of the Koran as a political model. According to one Islamist thinker:

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 79.
[2] *Ibidem*, p. 81.
[3] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory…cit.", p. 34.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 35.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 36.
[6] *Ibidem*.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 37.

> "the difficulty of creating a political system based on the *Quran* in the absence of a homogenous Muslim nation leads to a contradiction between the *Ummah* as a religious community and the state as a system of government that caters for Muslims and non-Muslims alike"[1].

The submission to the will of Allah is accomplished, according to Qutb through the establishment of the *Shari'a* (Islamic law) as the sole source of legislation for all aspects of human life. The way toward transforming modern societies into a real *umma* is composed of individual paths. Once the individual has overcome the alienation that characterizes the *jahiliyya*, the milestones are clearly marked, leading the individual to success[2]. Islamism, generally stresses the importance of individual responsibility and the importance of the inner battle within each believer against sin[3].

However, the most important part of Qutb's writings for the topic of this paper is the one that deals with the issue of *jihad*. In Qutb's opinion, it is not only necessary for Muslims to implement Islam within their own lives, but they also must strive to destroy *jahiliyya* whenever it appears in the world. The path towards this action is the *jihad*[4].

Jihad is a Koranic term that for many years has fallen into disuse before reappearing in the works of Islamic scholars like Qutb who gave it a more radical interpretation. The word *jihad* comes from the verb *jahada* and it means "a determined effort" directed at an aim that is in direct accordance with God's command and for the sake of Islam and the Muslim *umma*[5]. For Qutb, however, *jihad* is a liberating force that sets humans free by bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth. Qutb also gives *jihad* a new field of application for while in the past it was used only in connection to the relationships between Muslims and infidels, in Qutb's writings *jihad* is to be used also in the relations between true Muslims and so-called Muslims[6].

It is important to note that in the Islamic tradition, *jihad* is a complex concept that has two separate but related meanings. There is a greater *jihad* and a lesser *jihad*. The greater *jihad* is the moral struggle that takes place within the soul of every believer, a struggle designed to harmonize man with Allah's moral standards as they are revealed in the *Shari'a*. The lesser *jihad* is the violent one conducted by the sword[7].

Generally speaking, for Qutb *jihad* is the means to eradicate a *jahili* society in favour of an Islamic society that exercises sovereignty in the name of Allah by applying the prescriptions proclaimed in the Koran and Hadith. Qutb justifies the use of violence by claiming that coercion is legitimate when it is done in the pursuit of freedom from slavery[8]. Freedom, for Qutb has a special meaning, that of equality in submission. He distinguishes between servitude and slavery by stating

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[1] Niels KASTFELT (ed.), "Scriptural Politics – The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa", C. Hurst & Company Ltd., London, 2003, p. 117, in Dan STOENESCU, "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Road Towards the *Ummah*", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. VIII, no. 3, 2008, p. 678.

[2] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory…cit.", p. 42.

[3] David ZEIDAN, "The Islamic Fundamentalism View of Life…cit.", p. 30.

[4] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory…cit.", p. 43.

[5] Assaf MOGHADAM, "The Shi'i Perception of Jihad", *al Nakhlah – The Fletcher School Online Journal for issues related to Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilisation,* Fall 2003, at http://fletcher.tufts.edu/al_nakhlah/archives/fall2003/moghadam.pdf (accessed on 21.03.2007).

[6] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory…cit.", p. 43.

[7] Assaf MOGHADAM, "The Shi'i Perception…cit.".

[8] Roxanne L. EUBEN, "Comparative Political Theory…cit.", p. 43.

that servitude becomes slavery only when it is done in front of men and not in front of Allah[1].

While in traditional Islam, *jihad* could be declared only after long deliberations by the competent *ulama* (Islamic religious authorities), Islamists have transformed *jihad* into a popular and effective tool against all enemies of the Islamic state, thus giving all leaders the power to declare *jihad*[2].

The concept of *jihad* has been used by many Islamist theoreticians, each one bringing the concept one step closer to its most violent form as it is used nowadays. Such a theoretician was Hasan al-Banna, a founding leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt who believed that it is not spiritual *jihad* which is the highest form of battle but the active defensive *jihad*[3].

The next step in the re-conceptualization of the term *jihad* was taken by Qutb, who, as mentioned above, considered *jihad* both a defensive and offensive tool used in the fight against *jahiliyya*. Qutb's perception of *jihad* was taken one step further by Faraj of al-Jihad who viewed active *jihad* as God's solution to the problem of dealing with apostate rulers. Furthermore, Faraj believed that violent *jihad* against all unbelievers is, in fact, the suppressed sixth pillar of Islam[4].

Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian *jihad* fighter in Afghanistan, followed Faraj' theory claiming that when *kuffar* (heretical forces) occupy Muslim land, *jihad* becomes a compulsory individual obligation on every single Muslim and remains so until the liberation of the last occupied piece of Muslim land[5].

This evolution of the concept of *jihad* is vital for the understanding of the evolution of political Islam in general. The transition from the moderate meanings of *jihad* towards the more radical forms can be seen also in the transition from the moderate philosophy put forth in the early stages of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to the more violent philosophy adopted by the Brotherhood's Palestinian wing – Hamas.

The Importance of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Birth of Hamas

The Muslim Brotherhood is one of the most important Islamist organization. It was founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna and turned into a political organization in 1939. The Brotherhood has generally adopted a peaceful way of reforming the Islamic society, concentrating on social and moral aspects. In Hassan al-Banna's own words the Muslim Brotherhood is

> "a *salafiya* message, a *Sunni* way, a *Sufi* truth, a political organization, an athletic group, a scientific and cultural union, an economic enterprise and a social idea"[6].

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 39.
[2] David ZEIDAN, "The Islamic Fundamentalism View of Life…cit.", p. 41.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 42.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 43.
[5] *Ibidem*.
[6] http://lexicorient.com/e.o/mus_br_egypt.htm (accessed on 21.03.2007).

The Muslim Brotherhood rejects both the secularism of modern Islamic nations and Western influences, calling in the same time for a return to the teachings of the Koran. The organization's motto is:

> "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. *Jihad* is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope"[1].

Despite sanctioning the method of violent *jihad* and involving directly in most Middle Eastern conflicts, the Muslim Brotherhood is considered to be one of the most moderate Islamist organizations due to its constant participation in elections both in Egypt and in other Islamic countries. While the organization has branches in 70 countries, it plays different roles in each of these states. The branch analyzed in this paper is the Palestinian branch which gradually transformed into an autonomous organization under the name of Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya (Hamas)[2].

Palestinian political Islam appeared later than other Islamist movements in the Middle East, acquiring its final shape at the beginning of the First Intifada in 1987. However, its origins can be found in the rebirth of political Islam in the early 1970s and in the Iranian Revolution of 1979[3].

The Palestinian territories experienced a radical ideological shift after the 1967 war, when the focus on the struggle from the external arena (against foreigners and the Israeli state) shifted to a focus on the internal arena (against the ruling elite). It was believed that the Palestinian struggle could only be successful if all the secular Arab regimes were eliminated[4].

Still, in the beginning this reorientation towards a more violent approach was confined only to a limited audience in the Palestinian territories. While Islamic radicals in the Arab states distanced themselves from the struggle against Israel postponing it to a distant future, the radical movement in Palestine believed that the *jihad* against Israeli is imminent. Among the earlier supporters of immediate *jihad* were Sheikh As' ad Bayyud al-Tamimi of Hebron, an imam of the al-Aqsa Mosque expelled to Jordan in 1967 and Sheikh Ya'qub Qarsh, also expelled to Jordan in 1979[5].

However, starting with the 1970's the Islamic radicals in the Palestinian territories lost grounds due to two very important factors. One of them was the emergence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), a secular movement, which took upon itself the responsibility of conducting armed struggle against Israel. Although, the PLO's discourse contained Islamic symbols, these were only used in order to attract mass support for the movement[6].

The second important factor was the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories starting with 1967. As mentioned above, the Muslim Brothers had a reformist approach to the idea of establishing an Islamic state, and they applied this ideology to the Palestinian territories. They were partially supported in their endeavour by the Israeli Civil Administration who

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[1] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/Terrorism/muslimbrotherhood.html (accessed on 21.03.2007).

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] Meir HATINA, *Islam and Salvation…*cit, p. 17.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 1.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 18.

perceived the Brothers as a possible means of undermining the influence of the PLO amidst the Palestinian population[1].

The Brotherhood was represented in the Palestinian territories through three main bodies that constituted the base for the later formation of Hamas. These bodies were: the Islamic Centre (al-Mujamma' al-Islami), the Islamic Association (al-Jam'iyya al-Islamiyya) and the Islamic University. The spiritual leader of the Islamic Centre was Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who later on became the spiritual leader of Hamas[2].

All three organizations were constructed around the reformist approach of the Brotherhood. They were designed to reform Palestinian society in order to prepare the new generations for the future *jihad* against the state of Israel. This is why the members of these organizations restrained from performing anti-Israeli activities and instead concentrated their effort toward delegitimizing the PLO[3].

However, starting with the 1970's a series of historical events paved the way for the rise of militant Islam and for the appearance of a considerable number of Islamist organizations in the Palestinian territories. The first of these events was the failure of multiple diverse initiative, both Palestinian and international, of ending the Israeli occupation. The second was the resurgence of religion in the Middle East, expressed in the intellectual field through the works of Qutb and other Islamic thinkers and in the political arena through the Iranian Revolution, the assassination of Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat and the guerrilla attacks by the Shi'i militias in Lebanon against the Israeli and US armies. In the societal field, this religious resurgence was expressed through the increasing number of mosques and charitable associations in the entire Middle Eastern region[4]. Thus, in the period between 1967 up to 1987, the number of mosques in the West Bank rose from 400 to 750 and in the Gaza Strip from 200 to 600[5].

The third event was related to the internal schism existent in the Arab world and within PLO in the wake of the Lebanese war. The moderation of PLO's policies through the avoidance of direct confrontation with Israel was deeply criticized by the Palestinian people[6].

The fourth factor which supported the rise of militant Islam was the expansion of secondary and higher education in the Palestinian territories, alongside with a worsening of economic conditions, especially in the Gaza Strip. The dire conditions in the refugee camps fuelled a climate of religious fervour among the educated youth. An analysis of the ages, education and social origin of the 415 Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders expelled to Lebanon in 1992 reveals that 86.5% were young (20 to 30 years old), 32% were students, school teachers and professionals and 53% were residents of refugee camps and villages[7].

The last event was the passive stance of the Muslim Brotherhood on the issue of armed struggle against Israel. Many of the younger members of the Brotherhood wanted a more direct involvement in armed struggle, especially in the

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 19.
[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] *Ibidem*.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 20.
[5] Ziad ABU-AMR, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXII, no. 4, Summer 1993, pp. 5-19/p. 8.
[6] Meir HATINA, *Islam and Salvation*…cit., p. 20.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 21.

case of the Palestinian territories. This discontentment led to the separation of the more radical factions like the Islamic Jihad from the main body of the Muslim Brotherhood[1].

Hamas was formed on December, 8th 1987, in the beginning of the *intifada*, as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In a way the outbreak of the *intifada* and the appearance of Hamas were the consequences of two different but parallel changes that were taking place in the Palestinian territories at the time. While the first event reflected the general Palestinian mood towards the failure of all struggle against Israel, the second event represented the increasing consciousness of resistance and confrontation among Palestinian Islamists[2].

The establishment of Hamas, which means zeal in Arabic, being an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Resistance Movement) was not a clear-cut decisions but it evolved over time as a response to the events that led to the outbreak of the *intifada*[3]. As mentioned above, there were a large number of young members of the Muslim Brotherhood who demanded a more active participation of the organization in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation[4]. The question of whether to participate directly or not in the *intifada* led the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood into an ideological dilemma. A direct participation in the armed struggle would have come against the long declared aims of the organization of reforming first the society before entering actual fighting. On the other hand, a passive stance would have made the organization lose even more supporters in the Palestinian territories, which would have further weakened an already shaky presence of the Brotherhood there[5].

At that point, the spiritual leader of the Islamic centre, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin proposed a compromise solution, which was the creation of a separate organization out of the Muslim Brotherhood to take responsibility for its participation in the *intifada*. Thus, in the case the *intifada* failed, the Muslim Brotherhood could shed all the blame on Hamas, and thus escape possible Israeli repercussions[6].

However, through its active participation in the *intifada* and the growing awareness of its relationship with the Brotherhood, Hamas managed to put an end to the PLO's critics concerning the nonparticipation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the armed struggle. From that point on, Yassin and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders began to admit openly the connection between Hamas and the Brotherhood, forwarding the idea the Hamas is nothing but a reformed active wing of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brethren[7].

Hamas' ideological platform is best reflected in its Charter which was issued on August, 18th 1988. At the beginning of this charter Hamas defined itself as a "Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood" and the general content of the Covenant does not differ much from positions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood on the same issues. However, it is clear even from the beginning that unlike the

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[1] *Ibidem*.

[2] Khaled HROUB, *Hamas. Political Though and Pratice*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington DC, 2000, p. 36.

[3] Aitana RADU, "Hamas: Combinație explozivă între naționalismul palestinian și fundamentalismul islamic", *Revista Institutului Diplomatic Român*, no.1, 2006, pp. 63-65/p. 65.

[4] Ziad ABU-AMR, "Hamas…cit.", p. 11.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 11

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 12.

Brotherhood, Hamas' main aim is not the reformation of society but the liberation of Palestine through violent *jihad*[1].

In the charter, the religious discourse is dominant. In what concerns Palestine the document states that

> "the land of Palestine is an Islamic trust (*waaf*) upon all Muslim generations until the Day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up nor any par of it" (art 11)[2].

The solution to this problem is, according to Hamas, the resort to violent *jihad*. *Jihad*, as set forth in the charter is designed to prevent infidels from ruling over the land of Islam[3].

In what concerns peace negotiations and initiatives, the charter clearly states:

> "What are called 'peaceful solutions' and 'international conferences' to solve the Palestine question all conflict with the doctrine of the Islamic Resistance Movement, for giving up any part of the homeland is like giving up part of the religious faith itself" (art. 13)[4].

The Hamas Charter also mentions other organizations active in the Palestinian territories, like the PLO, which is portrayed as a "father, brother, relative or friend" as the two movements have a common goal. However, in another section of the document, Hamas' criticizes the PLO's secular orientation and its recognition of the State of Israel[5].

For the understanding of Hamas' radical religious stance I consider relevant a presentation of the organization's emblem which encompasses in a visual manner most of the organization's ideological principles. The emblem consists of a picture of the mosque the Dome of the Rock. At the top of the emblem is a small map of Palestine and surrounding it are two Palestinian flags in a semicircular shape which appear as if they are embracing the Dome. On the right flag it is written: "There is no god but Allah" and on the left one: "Mohammed is the prophet of Allah". Under the Dome there are two swords which cross one another at the dome's base and drift apart forming a lower frame for the Dome. Under the picture appears the word "Palestine" and under it a strip with the phrase "Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas"[6].

The picture of the mosque together with the two phrases expresses the Islamic character of the movement. The map indicated Hamas' goal of liberating the entire territory of Palestine, while the two swords are symbols of might and nobility, two qualities that are considered essential for all Arabs[7].

Although the Charter is important for the understanding of Hamas' ideological platform, in the recent years it appears that the organization's leaders have started to distance themselves from the principles stated in the document. Hamas' doctrinal discourse has started to diminish in intensity as early as the 1990's and references to the Charter are very rarely made in the discourses made by Hamas

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[1] *Ibidem*.
[2] Khaled HROUB, *Hamas*…cit., p. 273.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 269.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 274.
[5] Ziad ABU-AMR, "Hamas…cit.", p. 13.
[6] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Terrorism/Hamas1.html (accessed on 21.03.2007).
[7] *Ibidem*.

leaders. In time the idea of liberating Palestine has become more important than the Islamic dimension of the struggle, situation which led scholars like Khaled Hroub to conclude that the conflict with Israel is started to be perceived by Hamas as due to acts of aggression and not to differences in religious ideology[1]. The same idea appears to be expressed by Hamas when one of its leaders declared that:

> "In practice, it [Hamas] does not adopt belligerent positions against anyone on the basis of its creed or ideology. Hamas does adopt a belligerent position, however, once that creed or ideology is translated into aggressive or destructive actions against our *umma* and nation"[2].

Another proof of a more realistic political approach of Hamas is evident in one of Abu Marzook statements concerning the *intifada*:

> "Hamas never expected the *intifada* to lead to the liberation of Palestine. We are aware that fundamental historical conditions must be met for liberation to occur […] The role of the *intifada* was to bring us a few steps closer to the satisfaction of those conditions and to speed progress towards the realization of power and resurgence"[3].

Hamas' ideological platform also has important pan-Arab and pan-Islamic elements. This is reflected in the way Hamas portrayed the Palestinian cause as the foremost cause for Muslims throughout the world because of Palestine's unique sanctity and its special status within Islam[4].

All the issues discussed above lead us to the conclusion that Hamas is a hybrid organization which manages to combine in a unique way Islamist elements with nationalist ones. Although, the higher goal of the organization, as expressed in many of Sheikh Yassin's discourses is the foundation of a true Islamic state within the borders of Palestine, there were many occasions when Hamas leaders seemed to demand more nationalistic goals, like the liberation of the Palestinian territories from under the Israeli occupation. The contradictions between the organization's Islamist and nationalist goals has long been an issue of debate for Hamas' ideologues.

Hamas' ideological dilemma is just a reflection of the ideological dilemma of the entire Muslim world which is characterized by a collective identity. Identity in the Arab world has several components, the most important of which being: Islam and Arab nationalism. The elements are not mutual exclusive, but quite the opposite they can be complementary. The importance given to one or another of these elements by different movements depends greatly on the historical context of the moment[5].

This type of adaptable behaviour is also applicable to Hamas. Although, Hamas was formed as a Islamist response to the secular PLO, in time, it started also to adopt elements of Palestinian nationalism in order to gain popularity amidst the Palestinian population[6].

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[1] Khaled HROUB, *Hamas*…cit., p. 45.
[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 48.
[4] *Ibidem*.
[5] Meir LITVAK, "The Islamization of Palestinian Identity: The Case of Hamas" at Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies http://www.dayan.org/d&a-hamas-litvak.htm (accessed on 21.03.2007).
[6] *Ibidem*.

Signs of this type of mixture between nationalistic and Islamist elements are also noticeable in the Hamas Covenant. Although, in the beginning of the Charter, Hamas is described as an Islamic movement which draws its "ideas, terminology and concepts" from Islam, there is also another part of the Charter where Hamas portrays itself as a "distinctive Palestinian movement", which strives to "hoist Allah's flag on every piece of land in Palestine"[1].

Hamas manages to reconcile the nationalistic orientation with the pan-Islamic one by making a clear difference between its short term goal, which is the complete liberation of Palestine and the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine and its long term goal of a universal Islamic state and the restoration of the Caliphate. Despite the Palestinian public opinion's increase in scepticism related to prospects of Islamic unity, Hamas has preserved this pan-Islamic approach, mainly because of strategic considerations. If the Palestinian struggle is not perceived as a local conflict but as a true *jihad* then every Muslim would be responsible for the liberation of Palestine, and thus Hamas could gain supporters worldwide[2].

Despite this increasing re-orientation towards a more nationalistic approach, there are some scholars like, Michael Levitt, who still believe that the main goal of Hamas is that of Islamizing and radicalizing the Palestinian society, which is perceived to be one of the most secular in the Arab world. The Palestinian society, due to the poor living standards and the frustrating presence of the Israeli occupation is vulnerable to such a Islamization campaign[3].

The means by which Hamas struggles to construct such an Islamic society were the ones used also by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: social services and education. In order to achieve its goal, Hamas uses a wide range of institutions ranging from Islamic charitable institutions and organizations, mosques, classes that teach students the Koran, *zakat* committees, medical clinics, relief societies to orphanages, schools, nurseries, cultural and sports clubs. Hamas managed to gain the trust of the Palestinians, by creating for its institutions a reputation of honesty and integrity unlike the PLO's institutions which were frequently accused of incompetence, nepotism and occasional managerial or financial corruption[4].

On the other hand, a number of scholars including the mentioned above Michael Levitt seem to think that Hamas sustains these institutions just in order to have a constant base of recruitment for its operatives and to encourage the radicalization of the Palestinian society. Therefore, Hamas- run schools, kindergartners and clubs are seen as places of indoctrination for young minds.

After Hamas won the 2006 elections and even before that moment, when it decided to participate in the electoral process, many scholars raised the issue of whether a Hamas government would transform this process of Islamization of the Palestinian society into a state policy. One such scholar argues, however, that it is not Hamas' participation in the election that fosters the Islamization of the Palestinian society, but the worsening social conditions that are the main factor for the intensification of this process. According to him:

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[1] *Ibidem*.

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] Matthew LEVITT, *Hamas. Political, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006, p. 107.

[4] Khaled HROUB, *Hamas*…cit., p. 235.

> "In a situation where ordinary life supports the collapse – when the government fails, employment evaporates, food becomes scarce, and hope is abandoned – Islamists offer a meaningful alternative"[1].

My aim here was to deconstruct two basic assumptions on Islam that can be often found in the literature concerning the topic of Islamist movements. The first was that Islam is an inherently violent religion and the second that Islam is the same with Islamism. By making references to the Koran and the Hadith I have proven that violence is not natural to Islam as it is not natural to Christianity. Although, the idea of *jihad* is present in Islamic political thought, it is not definitory to the Islamic religion.

In addition to this I have presented the evolution of Islamic fundamentalism, laying emphasis on the elements that differentiate it from Islamic doctrine. Moreover, in support of my thesis I have distinguished between the different schools of thought within political Islam that are also reflected at the level of Islamist organizations. By comparing the writings of the moderate Abduh with those of the radical Qutb I also made the difference between reformative social-educational movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and militant political movements like Hamas.

To conclude, it is my belief that the success of such large-scale projects as the "war on terrorism" or the promotion of democracy in the Muslim world are strongly dependent on a better understanding of the concepts and general philsophy entailed by political Islam.

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[1] Alastair CROOKE, Beverley MILTON-EDWARDS, "Elusive Ingredient: Hamas and the Peace Process", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no. 132, Summer 2004, pp. 1-11/p. 11.