

SALAFISM IN LEBANON

LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL RESOURCES

Salafisme in Libanon

Lokale en transnationale netwerken
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Note on Transliteration

This thesis uses an Arabic transliteration adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. However, to facilitate the readability of the text I dispensed with all diacritical marks. This transcription does not differentiate between long and short vowels.

In most cases I used Arabic transliterations even if Anglicized forms were available. I made exception in case of such terms, which are parts of the common knowledge. For example during the pages of I thesis I use 'Hizbullah', instead of *Hizb Allah*. The alphabetic order of the glossary does not take account of the article 'al-'.

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AMAL	Lebanese Resistance Battalions (<i>Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya</i>)
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GIA	Groupe Islamique Armée
GUM	Grounded utopian movement
IG	Islamic Group al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya
IHE	Islamic Heritage Endowment Waqf al-Turath al-Islami
IUM	Islamic Unification Movement (<i>Harkat at-Tawhid al-Islami</i>)
JSM	al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba
LNM	Lebanese National Movement (<i>al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya</i>)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
POS	Political opportunity structure
RIHS	Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (<i>Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami</i>)
SACA	Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association (<i>Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya</i>)
SMT	Social movement theory
SSNP	Syrian Social Nationalist Party

Glossary

'aql	mind
'ibadat	religious practices
'ilm	knowledge
'ulama'	religious scholars
'ilm al-hadith	the science of <i>hadith</i>
ahl al- bida'	those who commit religious innovation
al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar	commanding good forbidding evil
aqida	creed
ash'ari	follower of the creed goes back to Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari
ashi'ra, pl. 'asha'ir	tribe
athari	reference to the literalist school of thought in Islam
banu Isra'il	the Jews in the Qur'an
bida'	religious innovation
da'i	those who practice <i>da'wa</i>
da'wa	call, or proselytization
dalil	proof
danas	pollution
dars (pl. durus)	religious lesson
diwaniyya	traditional gathering in Kuwait
diyya	blood money
fatwa	non-binding religious opinion
fiqh	jurisprudence
hadith (ahadith)	prophetic tradition
hakim	ruler
hakimiyya	God's sovereignty
halaqa	religious lesson
haraka	movement
hisba	see: <i>al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar</i>
hizbiyya	partisanship
hudud	Islamic punishments
iftar	fast breaking
ijaza	license
ijtihad	independent reasoning
isnad	the chain of the <i>hadith</i>
istighatha	transmitters seeking help from deceased persons
iyman	belief
jahiliyya	condition of ignorance
jama'iyya	association
kafir	unbeliever

<i>khariji (khawarij)</i>	reference to those who revolted against the fourth Caliph, 'Ali
<i>khatib</i>	the person who delivers the Friday sermon
<i>khilaf</i>	difference
<i>khuruj</i>	revolt against the ruler
<i>khutba</i>	Friday sermon
<i>lajna</i>	committee
<i>ma'ahad shara'i</i>	Islamic religious college
<i>madhab</i>	Islamic legal school
<i>Mahdi</i>	redeemer of Islam
<i>manhaj</i>	methodology
<i>maslaha</i>	interest
<i>matn</i>	the content of the hadith
<i>minbar</i>	pulpit
<i>mufti</i>	a person who produces legal opinion
<i>muqta'ji</i>	landlord
<i>mushrik</i>	the one who commits <i>shirk</i>
<i>qada'</i>	jury
<i>qadi</i>	judge
<i>qiyas</i>	analogy
<i>ra'y</i>	opinion
<i>rafidi (rafida)</i>	pejorative reference to the Shi'a
<i>rijal al-din</i>	men of religion
<i>sadaqa</i>	voluntary donations
<i>sahaba</i>	the companions of the prophet
<i>sahra</i>	evening gathering
<i>al-Salaf al-Salih</i>	the first three generations of Islam
<i>shirk</i>	association of other things with God
<i>shura</i>	council
<i>sulh</i>	settlement of a dispute
<i>taghut</i>	the realm of disbelief
<i>takfir</i>	excommunication
<i>taqlid</i>	imitation
<i>tariqa</i>	Sufi order
<i>tawassul</i>	mediation between God and a human
<i>tawhid</i>	oneness of God
<i>tawhid al-asma' wa-l-sifat</i>	oneness of God's attributes
<i>tawhid al-hukm</i>	oneness of the governance
<i>tawhid al-rububiyya</i>	oneness of Lordship
<i>tawhid al-uluhiyya</i>	oneness of Godship
<i>tazkiya</i>	purification
<i>tha'r</i>	vendetta

<i>Umma</i>	Islamic Nation
<i>al-wala' wa-l-bara'</i>	loyalty and disavowal
<i>wali al-amr</i>	the legitimate ruler
<i>waqf</i>	Islamic endowment
<i>za'im (zu'ama')</i>	political patron
<i>zahid</i>	ascetic
<i>zakat</i>	charitable giving based on accumulated wealth
<i>zuhd</i>	asceticism

Introduction

The series of revolutions in Arab countries in 2011 brought important changes to the sociopolitical make-up of the Middle East. Not only did it lead to the collapse or significant weakening of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria, which had previously been regarded as the most stable in the region, but it also resulted in a new renaissance of Islamic movements. Parties with an Islamist orientation won the elections in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia. They were also victorious in the polls in Morocco, where the demonstrations failed to bring down the monarchy. Moreover, due to their increasing weight in institutional politics, the presence of Islamic movements became much more visible in the public sphere in general.

Salafism in particular has gained ground on the sociopolitical map of the Middle East since the Arab Spring. While the authoritarian regimes in Cairo and Tunis had limited their options and often repressed them, after state control had been lifted, the activism of Salafis reached an unprecedented level. In Egypt, for example, besides increasing proselytization in the mosques, universities and in the media, Salafi parties formed the second largest parliamentary block. Even in countries where the ruling system did not collapse during the Arab Spring, many people started to see Salafis as a potential alternative to their Sunni Muslim leaders. This is an important factor and one reason, among others, why Lebanon is currently experiencing a Salafi upsurge.

Although the mass demonstrations¹ in this small country in the Levant did not bring down the sectarian-based regime, the wave of revolutions in the region has nevertheless had a severe impact. The Syrian uprising and civil war have particularly affected Lebanon. As its neighbor gradually sank into the abyss after the spring of 2011, the Lebanese economy suffered heavy losses, as it is largely dependent on Syrian imports and exports. Nowadays tourists and investors, mainly from the Gulf countries, also tend to avoid the country, deepening what is already a severe financial crisis. The presence of hundreds of

¹ In early 2011 there were some large-scale demonstrations against the country's sectarian-based political system.

² Michel 'Awn has been a long-time foe of Syria since the Lebanese Civil War. However, when he

thousands of Syrian refugees is also adding to the socioeconomic hardship suffered by ordinary Lebanese citizens.

The deepening political divisions and looming sectarianism resulting from the events in Syria, however, pose an even bigger threat to Lebanon than the worsening economic conditions. Syria's Assad regime, which occupied the country between 1976 and 2005 and dominated its political and economic life, has long-term allies among the country's fragmented political elite. Since the 1980s, Hizbullah, the Shi'ite Islamist militia and political party, has enjoyed the protection of the Syrian government, first that of President Hafiz al-Assad and then later his son, Bashshar. Other forces, such as the Shi'ite AMAL (*Lebanese Resistance Battalions – Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*) movement, Michel 'Awn's Christian Free Patriotic Movement² and the secular Syrian Social Nationalist Party, forged strong relationships with the Syrian regime. These groups are dependent on Syrian patronage in many respects, to maintain their local influence and ensure their long-term survival.

The hostility felt by opponents of the government in Damascus towards the Assad clan often goes back for decades. The leading force in this camp is the predominantly Sunni Muslim Future Movement (*Tayyar al-Mustaqbal*), which is dominated by the Hariri family. Walid Jumblat's mainly Druze Progressive Socialist Party and the two Maronite Christian parties, the Phalangists and Samir Ja'ja's Lebanese Forces, are also important elements of this coalition. Since the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon was lifted in 2005, the gap between the pro- and anti-Syrian camps has been gradually widening. In the last eight years, the tensions have often culminated in political deadlocks and crises. Today, the various Lebanese factions are providing political, material and even armed support to the Syrian government and the opposition.

The political conflict on the ground reflects the sectarian tensions. The majority of the Shi'a community (about 30-35% of the population) supports the Assad regime, while most Sunnis (25-30% of the Lebanese) are on the side of the

² Michel 'Awn has been a long-time foe of Syria since the Lebanese Civil War. However, when he abandoned the anti-Syrian block in 2005 and allied with Hizbullah in the following year, he gradually became closer to the Assad regime. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, 'Awn has openly supported the Assad regime many times. 'Aoun Defends Hezbollah's Involvement in Syria Civil War.' *Ya Libnan*, 19 May 2013. <http://www.yalibnan.com/2013/05/19/aoun-defends-hezbollahs-involvement-in-syria-civil-war/> (accessed: 28 June 2013).

opposition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Recently, Sunni-Shi'ite sectarianism has often culminated in violence and armed confrontations. While Shi'ite militants belonging to Hizbullah are crossing the border and joining the forces of the Alawite³-dominated Assad regime, Lebanese Sunnis are fighting alongside the predominantly Sunni opposition. In May and June 2013, hundreds of Hizbullah fighters aided the Syrian army in the siege of a rebel stronghold, the town of al-Qusayr. The opposition forces consisted of some Lebanese Sunnis, mostly from the north of the country.

In North Lebanon, where the majority of the Sunnis live and which has traditionally been the laboratory of Islamic movements in the country, Salafis seem to have thrived since the eruption of the Syrian conflict. The sermons of Salafi preachers, who disseminate harshly anti-Shi'a messages and associate Hizbullah and the Assad regime with a global Shi'ite conspiracy, have become the most popular among the locals. Salafi scholars are gradually becoming the most influential religious authorities in the northern Sunni community, especially in Tripoli, the region's capital. Salafis have become visible everywhere in the city. Increasing numbers of young men are choosing to give up their secular lifestyles and adopt a Salafi way of life. Many of those who had previously worn fashionable clothes, enjoyed Western and Arabic popular music and consumed alcohol, exchanged their jeans for proper Islamic dress and grew their beards. The number and popularity of Salafi religious lessons in the mosques has risen sharply since 2011. A rapidly growing number of ordinary believers are seeking advice and religious services from Salafi shaykhs rather than going to others, such as the '*ulama*' (religious scholars) of Dar al-Fatwa, the official religious institution of Sunni Islam in Lebanon.

Many recent analyses suggest that Salafis might not only significantly expand their influence on the Sunni religious scene, but could soon become one of the most important elements of the community's leadership.⁴ In the future, they could take the place of the traditional Lebanese political bosses, whose once almost total dominance over Sunni Muslims has waned since the Arab Spring.

³ Alawite: an offshoot of Shi'a Islam.

⁴ Nour Samaha, 'Lebanon's Sunnis Search for a Saviour', *Aljazeera Online*, 15 June 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/06/2013615115015272727.html> (accessed: 15 June 2013).

Sa'd al-Hariri – the son of the murdered ex-prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri – who was regarded as the leader of the community after the 2005 Syrian withdrawal, has lost much of his legitimacy. As prime minister, he was unable to hold together his governing coalition after the 2009 elections. In 2011 the al-Hariri government was brought down due to a series of internal disputes. In the eyes of Lebanese Sunnis, Hariri's inability to hold on to power was proof of his weak leadership skills. His lack of charisma and rhetorical skills increased the disappointment felt by his community. Al-Hariri's successor, the otherwise charismatic Najib Miqati, was unable to unite the Sunnis under his leadership because he agreed to form a political alliance with Hizbullah. Many Sunnis regarded him as a traitor and lost faith in traditional Lebanese Sunni community leaders.

In several areas in the north, the inhabitants saw an alternative in the Salafis, who had built strong foundations in Lebanese society during the past three decades. During my visits to Lebanon in 2011 and 2012, I observed that the movement's activists were increasingly participating in managing local communities' affairs. In Tripoli's al-Tabbana district, some leading Salafi figures established a consultative council (or *shura* in Arabic) to discuss local issues such as social welfare, the hosting of the Syrian refugees, and political action to free prisoners who are being held without trial and accused of "terrorism". Nowadays the inhabitants of the north often turn to Salafi shaykhs to solve their daily problems as well, and it seems that Salafis are the preferred mediators in social conflicts.

Both the international and the local media have paid significant attention to the Salafi ascendancy in North Lebanon. A number of Western journalists have ventured to spend time in Tripoli and report on the movement's activities. Salafi personalities are also frequent guests on the Beirut-based TV channels' political programs. The media have focused on whether the increasing Salafi presence might lead to the spread of militant groups or deepen the already high sectarian tensions. Lately, journalists have realized that Salafism has become one of the most important players in Lebanese politics. One observer warned that secular

Sunni political forces are currently failing in Lebanon, and that this is opening the way to the establishment of Salafi “emirates” in the North.⁵

While the media now acknowledges that Salafism is one of the most important players in Sunni politics, just a few years ago, the opposite was true. Over the past two decades, newspapers, news-sites and audiovisual media depicted the movement as small and socially insignificant. Salafis were seen as a group of radical individuals who would occasionally commit terrorist attacks or host foreign extremists. In 2007-2008, when, as a foreign correspondent of the Hungarian daily *Népszabadság*, I first became interested in Salafism in Tripoli and the northern region, the Lebanese political analysts and journalists whom I interviewed played down the significance of the movement’s presence in the country. One of the leading Lebanese experts on Islam once laughed, telling me that there were not even one thousand Salafis in the country. He described Salafism as a “violent distortion of Islam”, which had no place in the “generally moderate and tolerant” Sunni society.

After conducting several rounds of fieldwork in North Lebanon, beginning in 2009, as a researcher and doctoral candidate at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, I drew a radically different conclusion from that of the above-mentioned Lebanese experts.⁶ It became clear to me that the analysts in their air-conditioned offices in Beirut are not really aware of what is happening in the far-off north. Furthermore, they have failed to recognize Salafism as a puritan missionary movement, rather than a network of armed gangs promoting al-Qaeda style violence. In fact, I found that Salafism had already become deeply rooted among the Sunnis of Tripoli and the city’s surrounding area. Salafi ideas are having a significant impact on the religious discourse of ordinary Muslims.

While wandering the streets of Tripoli and the villages of the ‘Akkar and Dinniya regions, I discovered that many well-respected preachers and imams of mosques had adopted the Salafi creed and methodology. I met young men with long beards and trimmed moustaches, dressed in long Islamic robes, walking in

⁵ Kamal Dhabyan, ‘Al-Islamiyun yataqaddamun fi-l-Saha al-Sunniyya ma’ taraju’ al-Fikr al-Qawmi wa Inhisar al-Tayyar al-Madani’, al-Diyar, 23 June 2013.

⁶ I wrote a book on the results of this fieldwork: Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis between the Gulf and Europe: Development, Fractionalization and Transnational Networks of Salafism in Lebanon* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

the popular city quarters and advising ordinary inhabitants on matters of religion. Interestingly, the people who encountered these activists, visited their mosques and attended their informal religious lessons were not aware that they belonged to a specific movement. Once, I had a discussion with a few Salafi preachers and a handful of local men in a bakery in Tripoli's Mina district. After the preachers had gone, I referred to them as Salafis in front of the locals. The latter expressed astonishment; one of them told me: "*Wallahi hol shabab tayyibin-tayyibin, ma 'araft annon Salafiyya!* [I swear to God, those guys are very good people, I didn't know they were Salafis]."

Having plenty of such experiences made me realize that ordinary people often relate Salafism to extremism and militant actions. The preachers whom they asked for religious advice and often consulted on social matters had never persuaded these people to adhere to a particular movement. They only called on locals to return to what they believe are the pure foundations of Islam: the rulings that are derived from a literal reading of the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. The Salafis also tried to convince them to abandon Sufi beliefs and rituals, which they labeled as innovations (*bida'*), and which had been common in the area for centuries.

Probably one of the main reasons why Salafis rarely attracted the attention of journalists and political analysts is that they tend not to establish organizations. Their movement does not have an official membership, unlike other Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Hizb al-Tahrir. Salafis usually prefer informal networking. The centers of their activism are the mosques, religious endowments and religious colleges (*ma'ahid shara'iyya*) where they provide secondary or sometimes higher education. Instead of using formal institutional channels, they mostly (or almost solely) rely on informal, interpersonal contacts. Sometimes even the active followers of Salafism do not see themselves as belonging to a movement. They only consider themselves as individuals who are following the proper teachings of Islam. For them, it is natural to network with those who have similar religious views.

I observed that besides correcting the religious beliefs and practices of ordinary people, Salafis also provide them with material services. The Lebanese state has largely failed to provide welfare for those facing socioeconomic

hardship. Salafis have filled this vacuum by offering free medical treatment for the poor and distributing money. During Ramadan, they usually set up tents where everyone can break the fast (*iftar*) for free. Huge amounts of capital are needed to maintain the vast Salafi charitable networks, which extend almost everywhere in the north. By interviewing many Salafi religious scholars and preachers, I found out that charities and individual donors in the Arabian Gulf are the main sources of financial support for Salafi benevolence in Lebanon.

During the last four years, I made trips and conducted fieldwork in Kuwait and Qatar to trace the transnational networks of my Lebanese Salafi informants. I made inquiries about the two most important transnational charity institutions that are present in Lebanon. The first is the Kuwaiti *Jama'iyyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami* (Revival of Islamic Heritage Society), the second is the Qatari *Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya* (Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association). Both institutions are present in dozens of countries around the world and are connected to Lebanese Salafis through a dense network of informal relations. During my fieldwork in the Gulf I gained valuable information about how the local manifestations of Salafism are connected to each other, and how the transformation of the movement in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has reshaped the map of Salafism in Lebanon.

The transnational networks of the Salafis in North Lebanon not only extend to the Gulf, but they also have many nodes in Western Europe. While Lebanese Salafis travel to the Gulf chiefly to acquire sponsorship or study at one of the Islamic universities, in Europe they often become influential preachers and leaders of Muslim communities. I made field trips to The Hague in the Netherlands, to Berlin in Germany and to Orebro in Sweden to interview and observe the activities of Lebanese Salafis. During these travels, I gained a lot of information about how Salafism in Tripoli and its surrounding area has become part of a dense web of transnational relations that links Europe to the different localities in the Middle East.

The swift and powerful appearance of the Salafis in the Lebanese public sphere after the Arab revolutions of 2011 and the eruption of the Syrian civil war came as no surprise to me. The Salafis simply converted the social capital that they had acquired over more than two decades of missionary work among the

Sunni community. Today, an increasing number of ordinary Sunnis are aware of the meaning of the term “Salafi”, and do not equate it with terrorism. According to my observations, the word also has positive connotations. In the imagination of many, the “Salafi” embodies the image of the ideal Muslim, and is therefore entitled to lead the community.

The focus of this study

In this study, I focus on those Salafi groups that are mainly based in Sunni North Lebanon, and which are aiming to achieve change in the religious identity of the population, mostly by means of non-violent proselytization. Militant Salafi networks lie largely beyond the scope of my inquiry, although I mention them where it is necessary to understand the development of mainstream Salafism. My choice of focus is based on my observation that the Sunni community in North Lebanon has been undergoing a serious religious transformation. Older authorities, such as Sufism and the traditional Islam represented by the official religious body Dar al-Fatwa, have recently been losing influence. Sunni Muslims, especially the young generation, are increasingly adopting elements of Salafi teaching. This “Salafization” of ordinary religious discourse made me eager to understand the logic and dynamics of this movement.

Although there are diverse ideological trends within Salafism, active participants in the movement are united in their belief in the same creed, which is based on a literal reading of Scripture. Furthermore, they are convinced that the Lebanese Sunni community, as an integral part of the global *Umma* (Islamic Nation), is being targeted by various conspiracies launched by the Shi'ites and the West. Salafis consider themselves the vanguard of Sunnis in Lebanon. They believe that the community can only be saved if its members return to the original tenets of Islam, which are identical to Salafism, and leave behind erroneous innovations and foreign practices. The methods they use to spread their teachings among the people are often very diverse. Some Salafis rely solely on correcting the minute detail of people's religious practices, while others even engage in politics in order to spread the call (*da'wa*).

In this study, I examine the dynamics and anatomy of the Salafi *da'wa* in North Lebanon. I intend to explain *how* and *why* the movement emerged as a key player in the Lebanese Sunni sociopolitical context. My analysis focuses on the trajectory and structure of North Lebanese Salafism. Limiting my inquiry to the local context would not provide adequate answers to my questions, so I also examine the transformation of the transnational environment and the dynamics of Salafism on the transnational level. I pay special attention to the links between the movement in North Lebanon and the Arabian Gulf and European Muslim communities. Social movement theory provides useful tools for my analysis, facilitating our understanding of how the interplay between the external context and the specific features of Salafism has brought the movement to prominence. I shall develop this theoretical framework further in Chapter 1, and will discuss the various fundamentals of social movement theory in the later chapters.

In this study, I analyze the historical development of Salafism in North Lebanon. I pay particular attention to how certain changes in the sociopolitical context, such as the weakening of traditional religious authority and the emergence of sectarian tensions, have influenced the trajectory of the movement. An especially important part of my inquiry is the fragmentation of Salafism and its split into two clearly distinguishable main ideological streams, a purist one and a more activist one. I provide insight into the theological debates and historical developments that led to the global split in Salafism. Then I discuss how the internal transformation of the movement in Kuwait led to the fragmentation of the Salafi community in North Lebanon.

Another major focus of my inquiry is the structure of the Salafi *da'wa*. I examine the sociological aspects of Salafi religious authority in Northern Lebanese Sunni society, and how Salafis have constructed this authority. This analysis not only enhances our understanding of why Salafis are able to make many people accept their version of Islam as orthodoxy, but also explains certain peculiarities of the build-up of Salafi networks in North Lebanon, such as the significant role of the '*ulama*' compared to the manifestation of the movement elsewhere. In addition, I examine the shape and function of these networks at the local level and analyze their transnational extensions. I show how informal networks at both the local and transnational levels facilitate the mobilization and

recruitment of Salafis in the absence of a formal organizational structure. An important focus of my study is how Salafis provide acceptable explanations and offer attractive solutions to contemporary problems by presenting them through the prism of their own ideology.

Methodology

Ethnography provided the main method of acquiring data for my study. Since there is hardly any written documentation on Lebanese Salafism and media reports are largely unreliable, I had to rely overwhelmingly on the information I gained by talking to people and observing their activities. The main body of sources for my analysis was collected between 2009 and 2012 during a series of fieldwork trips to Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Altogether, I spent about one year in the field. In this period I conducted semi-structured interviews, engaged in informal conversations and participated in the daily activities of adherents of Salafism.

During a period of more than six months of fieldwork in Lebanon, I interviewed or had informal conversations with more than one hundred Salafi shaykhs and active participants. I also had many conversations with sympathizers of Salafism, who had not fully adopted the movement's rulings fully, but nevertheless prayed in Salafi mosques and tended to follow the guidance of Salafi religious scholars. Important data were collected from ordinary inhabitants of North Lebanon who could not be called followers of the movement, and from opponents of Salafism, in particular the officials of Dar al-Fatwa and the members of Hizbullah. Approaching the Salafis was not always an easy task. Since these individuals had often faced persecution in the past, and sometimes in the present as well, they were understandably cautious about talking to a Western researcher. Most of the time I needed to gain their trust before I was able to get valuable information from them.

Establishing friendships with Salafis of the same age as me (late twenties, early thirties) proved to be the best way of getting insight into the structure of the movement and gaining access to the right people who would share valuable

information with me. I also engaged in random conversation with ordinary people in public places such as cafés, restaurants or beaches near the port city of Tripoli. Asking these individuals about their views on and relations with Salafis greatly helped me to understand the nature of the movement's influence and its place in North Lebanese society. I participated in Salafi religious lessons in mosques and private homes on an almost daily basis, and these observations proved to be extremely valuable additions to my body of data.

Because of the dense transnational relations of Lebanese Salafism, it would not be possible to rely only on research conducted in a single locality for my analysis. Multi-sited ethnography, which follows the connections and movements of people and the flow of resources across space,⁷ provides a useful methodological tool to research the movement in its transnational context. Since donors in the Gulf are important sources of financial support for Lebanese Salafis, and the transnational networks connecting the Levant with the Arabian Peninsula cannot be neglected if we wish to understand the dynamics of Lebanese Salafism, I conducted three months of intensive fieldwork in Kuwait and made a two-week field trip to Qatar. In both Kuwait and Qatar, my main aim was to interview the Salafi leaders who control the financial capital destined to support Salafis abroad. At the same time, in Kuwait I managed to expand the scope of my inquiry and also talk to ordinary followers of Salafism and observe their activities. This helped me to map the informal social networks that connect the movement in this Gulf monarchy with that in North Lebanon.

My multi-sited fieldwork also extended to Europe, where I chiefly interviewed Lebanese Salafi preachers about their *da'wa* in Muslim minority communities. One of my most productive field trips was to Sweden, where a Lebanese Palestinian Salafi shaykh, whom I had interviewed several times before in Lebanon, had been appointed as the head of an Islamic center. He let me observe his activities and interview his followers during my short stay, which greatly helped me to understand how transnational networks facilitate the import of Salafi ideas from the Middle East to Europe.

⁷ Mark-Anthony Falzon, 'Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research', in Mark-Anthony Falzon (ed), *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

Besides the interviews, informal conversations and observations, I collected hundreds of recordings of sermons given by Lebanese Salafi shaykhs. I also acquired a lot of printed *da'wa* material, such as leaflets and booklets and *fatwas*, in mosques and Islamic bookshops. My training in Arabic philology facilitated the analysis of these recorded and written sources, which provided a more nuanced understanding of the Salafi discourse than that which would have come from interpersonal verbal encounters alone.

The structure of this book

This book contains eight chapters. Chapter 1 clarifies the most important notions and concepts that are used in this study. First, it defines what Salafism is and describes its basic tenets. This is followed by a critique of the literature, which deals with the classification of Salafism into different factions, such as purists, politicos and jihadis. I then present my own approach, which distinguishes two main and four sub-factions. The second half of the chapter places Salafism within the realm of “social movements” and discusses the application of the fundamentals of social movement theory as the main theoretical background of this study.

Chapter 2 discusses the development of Salafism in the Gulf, which is crucial to understanding the dynamics of Lebanese Salafism. The first section explains the roots of the fragmentation of Salafism in Saudi Arabia, after which the transformation of Salafism in Kuwait is discussed. Kuwaiti Salafism is densely interconnected with its equivalent in Lebanon; the Kuwait-based Salafi charity *Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami* (Revival of Islamic Heritage Society) is one of the main donors supporting Salafism in North Lebanon. The last section briefly discusses the development of the other main sponsor of Lebanese Salafism, the *Qatari Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya* (Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association).

Chapter 3 discusses how Salafism evolved into a prominent social movement in Tripoli and its surroundings during the 1990s. In the chapter, the concept of “political opportunity structures” is used to explain how specific

changes in the external sociopolitical context can provide a social movement with opportunities. In the case of Salafism in North Lebanon, these changes were the weakening the traditional Sunni religious elite, the de-legitimation of competitors, the emerging Sunni-Shi'i tensions and the appearance of sponsors from the Gulf.

Chapter 4 explains how Salafism in Lebanon split into a purist and a *haraki* (activist) faction. The chapter identifies the selective repression by the authorities and the material support provided by Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami to the purists as the main factors that led to the disintegration of the once relatively unified Salafi movement in the country. In the following sections, the dynamics of the purist and *haraki* factions are explained. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the impact of the Arab revolutions on Lebanese Salafism.

Chapter 5 explains the construction of the religious authority of the North Lebanese Salafi Shaykhs. Drawing on a Weberian definition of religious authority, it is argued that the Salafis' authority is grounded in their redefinition of orthodoxy. Salafis employ different "techniques of authority" to indicate that theirs is the right path. These techniques are the practicing of a "moderate asceticism", implementing *hisba* (commanding right, forbidding wrong) and providing for the social and material needs of the community. The latter can include mediation in social conflicts, thereby providing access to patronage networks. To explain this, I provide several case studies in the last sections of the chapter.

Chapter 6 analyzes the structure and functions of Salafi networks at the local level. Salafi networks are viewed within the context of civil society, which is discussed using the alternative approach to civil society developed by Christopher Hann. The chapter discusses the social composition of Salafi networks and the modality of the evolution of interpersonal network ties.

Chapter 7 discusses the dynamics of Salafi transnational networking, giving a detailed picture of the ties between North Lebanon and the Gulf. Both the role of informal, interpersonal ties and the role played by Salafi charities in the Gulf are analyzed. The last section explains how informal links with Europe and the Gulf facilitate the dissemination of the Salafi message.

Chapter 8 discusses the significance of “framing” and the process of conversion in the recruitment of passive and active adherents of Salafism. The first part of the chapter explains how successful framing activity provides ordinary people with an understanding of what is happening in the wider sociopolitical realm. The second half of the chapter examines the appeal of Salafi ideology to young people who feel alienated in North Lebanese society for socioeconomic and identity-related reasons. These youths become committed followers of Salafism who seek to adopt the movement’s rulings in full by undergoing conversion. I also discuss how conversion is facilitated by Salafi networking strategies.

Chapter 1

Defining Salafism

Despite the rapidly growing academic literature on Salafism, the term remains beset by a lack of clarity, even for those who are otherwise interested in Islam. I therefore consider it important to offer a short introduction to the movement at the outset. In this chapter I first sketch the development and belief system of the movement. After this I discuss the internal variety of Salafism, and review and critique the literature that attempts to classify the different Salafi streams. Then I propose my own classification of the movement's distinct factions. In the last section of the chapter, I define Salafism as a social movement and categorize it as a "grounded utopian movement". Finally, I summarize the fundamentals of social movement theory that I use during this thesis to explain the emergence, means of mobilization and recruitment of Salafism.

The genealogy of Salafism

Before beginning my analysis, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term "Salafism" and its importance in the Islamic context. The term is derived from the Arabic expression *al-Salaf al-Salih* (the righteous ancestors), which refers to the first three generations of Islam, namely the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*sahaba*) and the first two generations of their followers. Salafis intend to purify the religion, ridding it of foreign elements and returning to the original form of Islam, the understanding of the Prophet and the *sahaba*. The Salafis are not alone in emulating the pious predecessors; in fact, all Muslims regard them as their primary example, but there is no consensus as to how they understood and practiced the religion. In the sense that they look up to *al-Salaf al-Salih*, all Muslims are Salafis. However, those who are called by this name in

the contemporary period represent a stream of Islam that promotes a literal understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunna (the prophetic tradition: the collection of sayings, practices and habits of Muhammad, recorded and transmitted by men from generation to generation; one single saying or practice is a *hadith*, (pl. *ahadith*) in Arabic and leaves little place for human reasoning (*'aql*) and opinion (*ra'y*). Salafis try to imitate the Prophet and his companions not only in their beliefs, but also in their daily practices and habits, as in their dress or by using certain formulas when speaking (see also Chapter 5).

Salafism is often associated with Saudi Arabia and the official form of religion in the kingdom, often called Wahhabism. This approach suggests that Salafism was originally a local practice of the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, alien to other parts of the Islamic world, which only spread at the global level due to the financial means of the Saudi state.¹ This simplistic and near-exclusive focus on the role of Saudi Arabia neglects a long theological debate in the history of Islam that began in the second century after the Hijra, and is still continuing. In the early period of the Abbasid Caliphate, Sunnite religious scholars split into two factions.

The cause of the schism was thinking on the relation of reasoning (*'aql*) to the sacred text (*nass*). The first group called themselves Mu'tazila and held that reasoning should take priority when interpreting the Text. They frequently used metaphors when explaining the Qur'an and the Sunna. The second group, the Ahl al-Hadith (or traditionalists), was the absolute antithesis of the former. Led by the founder of one of the four Sunni *madhabs* (religious schools), they did not leave any place for *'aql* in the interpretation of the Text, and would only accept the strict, literal meaning. According to them, text could be proven only by text, and not by logic. Although the Mu'tazila have mostly disappeared, their place has been taken by the *Ash'aris* (derived from the name of their founder, Abu-l-Hasan al-Ash'ari), who try to find a balance between the *'aql* and the *nass*. In other words, they allow the use of *'aql* only in the framework of *shari'a*.²

¹ Vincenzo Oliveti, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and Its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus Books, 2000).

² Jeffrey R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 13-31.

Today, the Ash'ari school dominates Sunni Islam in most parts of the world. However, the proponents of the literalist interpretation never disappeared; followers of this stream (which is also called *Athari* school) of religious thinking have always been present in the history of Islam. Perhaps their most significant advocates have been the medieval scholar Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), whose works are the main source of inspiration for modern Salafis, his pupil Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350), and the 18th-century Yemeni scholar Muhammed al-Shawkani.³

The contemporary renaissance of the traditionalist trend is largely due to the movement inspired by Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab, an 18th-century scholar from Najdi (a region in Central Arabia). He revived the *Athari* school as a powerful movement which intended to cleanse the Arabian peninsula of all beliefs and practices that were perceived to be heretical or *bida'*. Sufi traditions and certain local customs, such as visiting the graves of holy persons to request their mediation with God or the visiting of holy sites, belonged to these categories. Commins suggests that Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab's travels to Iraq and his studies in Medina, where he was probably influenced by the contemporary Indian *hadith*-revivalist trend, might have shaped his religious outlook.⁴

In spreading his religious views, he found an ally in a local chieftain, Muhammad bin Sa'ud. Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab and his successors provided religious legitimacy for the expansionist ambitions of the Sa'ud clan.⁵ Later in the 20th century, this alliance became the base of the modern Saudi Arabian state and, with this, the traditionalist school became the dominant religious interpretation in the kingdom. After the oil boom, when the Gulf States became hugely wealthy, Riyadh's monarchs began using Islam and its traditional interpretation to further their own imperial ambitions. By dominating religion, their purpose was to become the dominant power in the Middle East and even in the whole Islamic world. To fulfill these ambitions, Saudi Arabia invested billions

³ Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006), pp. 11-12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-70.

of dollars in building mosques and Islamic centers worldwide and training religious scholars (*'ulama'*) to propagate the traditionalist interpretation.⁶ This proselytizing effort greatly facilitated the revival of the traditionalist school. Its contemporary followers widely call themselves Salafis and label their call *al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya* (Salafi preaching). This is also the term that is most commonly used in the academic literature that focuses on this movement.

It is important to note that besides the intellectual tradition of the *Athari* school, contemporary Salafism has another important source: the Islamic reformism of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida in Egypt. Although in propagating a rationalist approach to religious texts, their theology differed from that of contemporary Salafis, Salafis did adopt one of their methods. This was the *ijtihad*, or the making of legal decisions by means of the independent interpretation of legal sources instead of adherence to one of the four legal schools (*taqlid*), a method that had been neglected by Sunni religious scholars for centuries. *Ijtihad* in contemporary Salafism was renewed largely due to Shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani, a Syrian scholar of Albanian origins (1914-1999) whose reading of the Islamic reformists' writings had convinced him to revive the concept.⁷ Later in his life, one of the Islamic reformist figures, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), became closer to Salafi thinking by relying more on the *hadith* and less on reasoning. Many contemporary scholars adopted Salafism by reading the *al-Manar* journal published by Rashid Rida in Cairo.

This brief historical introduction may suffice to show that Salafism is not identical to Wahhabism, since the concept itself is much older than the preaching of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab, and Salafis have maintained a continuous presence beyond the Arabian Peninsula. The adoption of Salafi doctrines by the Saudi state and their subsequent worldwide propagation due to the country's financial abilities only revitalized a thousand-year-old concept. So, in my opinion, just as we cannot use the term "Leninism" to refer to the entire body of Communist ideology, "Wahhabism" is also an incorrect term to describe Salafism.

⁶ Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, pp. 42-43.

⁷ Lacroix, Stephane. 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism' in Roel Meijer (ed), *Global Salafism* (Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 65.

The core tenets of the Salafi belief system

Salafi *'aqida* (creed) revolves around *tawhid*, the unity of God. Of course, this is the core concept of Islam, but unlike the Ash'arites and the Shi'ites, Salafis reject any philosophical reasoning. Most modern Salafi writers divide *tawhid* into three basic components, a distinction that is based on the works of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab.⁸

The first part is that of *tawhid al-rububiyya* (oneness of Lordship). It means that God is the sole creator of the universe, he is omnipotent, and nothing is comparable to him. Safar al-Hawali, a prominent Salafi scholar, identifies this part of *tawhid* as identical to the unity of God's deeds (*tawhid al-af'al*). He states that everything is the result of God's will and omnipotent nature, and that his deeds are not determined by material factors. In one of his writings, al-Hawali gives the Qur'anic example of the Jews (*banu Isra'il*) who did not believe that their victory over the Pharaoh was only due to God's mercy. Therefore they had to wander for 40 years in the desert while God fed them with "Manna" and "Salwa". After that, they recognized that God provides human beings with everything and were finally allowed to enter the Holy Land.⁹

The second part of *tawhid* is *tawhid al-uluhiyya* (oneness of Godship) or *tawhid al-'ibada* (oneness of worship). It means that only God deserves any kind of worship, and that all religious practices must be directed toward God alone. Salafis strictly forbid the seeking of any kind of mediation (*tawassul*) and aid (*istighatha*) from saints, something that is common practice almost everywhere else in the Islamic world. This is one of the reasons for their hostility toward Sufism. As al-Hawali writes, "if you believe that God is the provider of victory then you should not ask for it from somebody else".¹⁰

⁸ Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawhid* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Haramayn, 2001).

⁹ Safar al-Hawali, *Aqşam al-Tawhid*, undated text, available online at: <http://www.alhawali.com/index.cfm?method=home.SubContent&contentID=872&keywords=%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF> (accessed: 2 September 2010).

¹⁰ Ibid.

The third part is *tawhid al-asma' wa-l-sifat* (oneness of the names and attributes). The Qur'an contains the 99 names of God (such as *al-Ghaffar* – the forgiving, *al-Razzaq* – the provider, and so forth). The Book also names the attributes of God, such as his hands, his face, and so forth. These provide the basis for metaphorical explanations and the use of reasoning. For example, while Ash'arites explain the mentioning of God's hands in the Qur'an as the expression of his power,¹¹ Salafis strictly reject this approach. Since these things are mentioned in the Text, they have to be accepted literally. However, Salafis also reject anthropomorphism; Muslims have to accept that the human mind is not able to understand the substance of God, therefore the names and attributes must not be explained (*bila kayf*).

Salafis consider the preservation and defense of *tawhid* to be a Muslim's most important task. The opposite of the Oneness of God is *shirk*, that is, associating other things with God (for instance *tawassul* and *istighatha* are considered to be *shirk*). Therefore Salafis fight any innovations (*bid'a*) that contradict the Qur'an and Sunna, because *bid'a* can lead to *shirk*. To give an example, praying more than five times a day is *bid'a*, because the Text mentions only five prayers. A Salafi scholar told me that wearing jeans is also *bid'a* according to his understanding, because by doing so, the Muslim associates himself with Western culture and customs that contradict Islam.¹²

To preserve *tawhid* and avoid *shirk*, Salafis cling to the absolute authority of the Text, which they interpret literally, and also put great emphasis on the *hadith*. While they do not accept the interpretation of the Qur'an by metaphorical means, they think that if a certain *aya* is unclear, then the explanation can be found in the *hadith*; this, however, calls for a skilled scholar. This is why Salafis put great emphasis on *'ilm al-hadith* (the science of *hadith*), which is basically the archaeology of the Text to find answers to specific questions. Hadith scholars examine the credibility of a *hadith* by analyzing the chains of transmission (*isnad*). Unlike Ash'aris, however, they believe that it is forbidden to criticize the content (*matn*) of the prophetic tradition. The former might classify a *hadith* as corrupted on the grounds that its substance does not agree with the spirit of the

¹¹ 'Ash'ariyya', in Clifford Edmund Bosworth (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

¹² Interview with a Palestinian Salafi sheikh, Tripoli, 17 October 2009.

Qur'an.¹³ In addition, while they are not allowed to use reasoning to decipher the meaning of the Text, they can explain the exact meaning using modern Arabic, since the wider public is not always able to understand the classical language.

As I mentioned above, Salafis adopted the concept of *ijtihad* to find a solution in those cases when they were unable to find an exact answer in the Text. However, while Islamic reformists and Shi'ites use reasoning when practicing *ijtihad*, Salafis restrict themselves to finding analogies (*qiyas*) in the Qur'an and Sunna. For instance, they forbid the use of cannabis on the basis of the prohibition of alcohol. Although there is no word in the Text about cannabis, like alcohol, it affects people's ability to make decisions.¹⁴

At the same time as relying heavily on *ijtihad*, Salafis staunchly oppose *taqlid*. In their discourse, this term tends to refer to the exclusive acceptance of the rulings of one of the four *madhahib* (sing. *madhab*, the legal schools of Islam). *Taqlid* can also have another meaning, which is the unquestioned following of the legal opinion of an individual.¹⁵ In Salafi arguments, this can eventually lead to the worship of humans. They often refer to the Qur'an verse "They take their rabbis and their monks as lords..."¹⁶ In their view, every Muslim has to have a direct relationship with Scripture. This, however, does not mean that each individual must be his or her own *mufti* (a person who produces legal opinion). Someone can accept a religious scholar's opinion on the condition that he or she has been presented with the *dalil* (proof) from the Text that led the scholar to a particular conclusion. Salafis call this alternative to the *taqlid ittiba'*.¹⁷

One of the most important features distinguishing Salafism from other sects is *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, which can be translated as "loyalty and disavowal". This concept entered the traditionalist school via Ibn Taymiyya and was

¹³ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya Bayn Ahl al-Fiqh wa-Ahl al-Hadith*, 15th edn. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2007), pp. 39-43.

¹⁴ Ibid. Alcohol was originally prohibited in Islam when one of the sahaba recited the Qur'an incorrectly after drinking. Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-Fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 242.

¹⁵ Traditional scholars, who are mostly proponents of the *madhahib*, often contest the rejection of the *taqlid*. According to them, adherence to one of the legal schools is necessary to prevent anarchy and to prevent personal mood from influencing the issuing of a legal opinion. Meir Hatina, *'Ulama', Politics, and the Public Sphere* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010), pp. 99-100.

¹⁶ Surat al-Tawba 31, Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, p. 119.

¹⁷ For a good and authoritative description of *ittiba'* by a Salafi author, see: Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *'Awda ila al-Sunna'*, <http://www.alalbany.net/misc016.php> (accessed: 20 June 2013).

elaborated by Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab and his successors.¹⁸ *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* divides the world into two separate spheres: one is the realm of Islam and the other is the realm of the *kuffar* (unbelievers), which is necessarily evil. Muslims should feel loyalty and a sense of brotherhood with those who belong to the first realm, while defending the purity of their religion from influences coming from the second. However, Salafis interpret the practice of this concept in different ways. Activist interpretations can even call upon Muslims to physically destroy that which is regarded as un-Islamic, while more quietist interpretations focus only on the avoidance of foreign elements that corrupt the purity of Islam.

Al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar (commanding right and forbidding wrong), or *hisba*, is another important feature of Salafism. The term refers to the imposition of the moral rules of Islam on Muslims and the forbidding of immoral acts such as deviations from correct religious beliefs and practices, drinking alcohol, committing adultery, and so forth. *Hisba* can be implemented using only a verbal warning, but it can also take the form of violent acts (see in Chapter 5).¹⁹

Salafi factions: the problem of classification

Despite having a common creed that sets very strict boundaries on theological thinking, Salafism is far from monolithic. Although Salafis share the concept of *tawhid*, they differ on the methods of purifying Islam. While some focus exclusively on proper religious practices, others follow a more activist path. The Saudi religious establishment, al-Qaeda and a significant number of Kuwait's political reformers are members of the same social movement.²⁰

¹⁸ Joas Wagemakers, 'The Transformation of a Radical Concept: *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, pp. 84-87.

¹⁹ On *hisba* see Roel Meijer, 'Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong as a Principle of Social Action: The Case of the Egyptian al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*.

²⁰ I deal with Salafism as a single social movement, the reason being that I do not regard a social movement as an organization, but rather as a set of networks bound together by a shared collective identity and shared aim (see later in this chapter). In this way it would be difficult to distinguish different Salafi social movements. Salafis, as I will show later in this book, have a

Quintan Wiktorowicz developed what has become a widely adopted classification of Salafis.²¹ He distinguishes between different factions according to their stance toward the socio-political reality of the contemporary Muslim world. However, the rigidity of Wiktorowicz's method and his simplistic approach have been criticized. In the following paragraphs, I will describe Wiktorowicz's classification, the critique of his approach, and an alternative solution that was formulated by Thomas Hegghammer. Finally, I offer my own suggestions regarding a more practical classification that can capture the theological substance and dynamism of Salafism.

Wiktorowicz distinguishes between three Salafi factions: purists, politics and jihadis. The purists believe

that the primary emphasis of the movement should be promoting the Salafi creed and combating deviant practices, just as the Prophet fought polytheism, human desire, and human reason. Until the religion is purified, any political action will likely lead to corruption and injustice because society does not yet understand the tenets of faith.²²

Purists commonly use an analogy from the Meccan period of the Prophet's life, during which, according to the purists, he focused only on *da'wa* and did not become involved in political affairs or wage jihad. At this time, Muslims formed a minority in Mecca and were not in a position to use force against the Quraysh elite.²³ Therefore, purists think that Muslims should return to the correct form of practicing their religion before engaging in any kind of activism.

As Wiktorowicz explains, "Although purists also believe that the West intends to destroy Islam, they refuse armed struggle. Instead the purists transform this suspicion into an active ideological program to prevent any usage

common collective identity and aim to purify Islam from innovations. When they meet, even if it is for the first time, Salafis identify each other as belonging to the same collectivity.

²¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'The Salafi Movement in Jordan', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2000, pp. 219-240.

²² Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006, p. 217.

²³ The Quraysh were the dominant tribe in Mecca in the pre-Islamic period.

of Western values, behaviors, or systems of logic to discuss religion”.²⁴ Here, the author also states that, “this obsession with maintaining and propagating a pure understanding of Islam has produced a strong tendency toward isolationism. Any interaction with nonbelievers is viewed as an opportunity for the nonbelievers to infect Muslims”.²⁵ According to Wiktorowicz, purists refuse to participate in political organizations because they consider these to be an innovation that has been “derived from the Western model of party politics and democracy”.²⁶ The participant’s loyalty would be towards the party, and not God.

In Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and 1990s, the authority of the senior purist ‘*ulama*’ was challenged by younger scholars, who “argued that they [had] a better understanding of contemporary issues and [were] therefore better situated to apply the Salafi creed to the modern context”.²⁷ Wiktorowicz refers to members of this faction as “*politicos*”, because they see the political realm as an organic part of Islam. As the author explains, for a long time, the Salafi movement was unified and purist in orientation. This began to change when large numbers of Egyptian Muslim Brothers found refuge in Saudi Arabia from persecution by the secular regime in their home country. These highly-educated Islamists quickly became influential on university campuses, and their books became very popular.

Since Muslim Brothers had a sophisticated understanding of politics due to their long history of political engagement, they had an impact on the thinking of many young Salafis. “They believed real protection [*of tawhid*] requires addressing political issues as well. Otherwise, the rulers could destroy *tawhid* and Islam”.²⁸ The Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia that had been influenced by the Muslim Brothers became known as *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Awakening), or simply *Sahwa*. A schism between purists and *politicos* occurred during the 1991 Gulf War, when the senior purist ‘*ulama*’ legitimized the decision to invite US troops into the country. As Wiktorowicz explains, this “led many younger scholars to question whether the senior purists really understood

²⁴ Wiktorowicz, ‘Anatomy of the Salafi Movement’, p. 217.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

the political world in which they lived”.²⁹ Politicos launched debates about current affairs and criticized purists for limiting their focus to the details of religious practice.

According to Wiktorowicz, the split between purists and politicians led to the formation of the jihadi faction. Confrontation between the Saudi regime and politicians resulted in the latter’s persecution. Leading figures in the politico movement either ended up in prison or in exile. Some of the young Salafis who were fighting in Afghanistan and elsewhere were affected by the politicians’ ideas. They were seeking the establishment of Islamic states by using violence. After Saudi Arabia’s crackdown on the politicians, this group denounced the regime as subservient to the enemies of Islam, along with the purist ‘*ulama*’ who legitimized it. As Wiktorowicz states, for the jihadis, the purists represent ‘*ulama*’ *al-sulta* (“the scholars of power”). The term is laden with negative connotations, implying an insidious relationship with regimes and authority structures that undermines the independence and legitimacy of Islamic interpretation. It is typically surrounded by a barrage of other disparaging terms, such as “palace lackeys,” “the corrupt ‘*ulama*’,” and “the ‘*ulama*’ who flatter [those in power]”.³⁰ In his analysis, Wiktorowicz refers to al-Qaeda as the main representative of the jihadi faction.

Thomas Hegghammer has criticized Wiktorowicz’s classification, calling it “inconsistent” and arguing that it mixes “means and objectives”.³¹ For example, Hegghammer calls Salafism a theological concept that “highlights a distinction that is secondary in informing political behavior”.³² He offers an alternative classification that includes all of the Islamic movements, and uses five rationales that “represent the most important reasons for which Islamists act”.³³ These rationales are “state-oriented”, “nation-oriented”, “*umma*-oriented”,³⁴ “morality-oriented” and “sectarian”. The two manifestations of these rationales are non-violent and violent in form. Hegghammer includes all Islamist movements in his

²⁹ Ibid., p. 223.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

³¹ Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism,’ in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, pp. 244-266.

³² Ibid., p. 256.

³³ Ibid., p. 258.

³⁴ *Umma* means the larger Islamic community or nation; in this context, the global *umma* is being referred to.

categorization, regardless of their theological background, arguing that, “the term Salafi ... says very little about the expected political behavior of actors labeled as such”.³⁵ For instance, he puts the Muslim Brothers and the Saudi *Sahwa* in one category as non-violent manifestations of “state-oriented” Islamism. Its violent manifestations include the Algerian Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

In my opinion, both classifications are incomplete. The first, elaborated by Wiktorowicz, is too rigid, sets overly sharp boundaries between the factions, and somewhat neglects the core theological discourses that do, in fact, motivate the actions of Salafis. First, Wiktorowicz describes jihadis as violent offshoots of the *politicos*, although it is very difficult to define a “jihadi” or “politico” following Wiktorowicz’s classification. Sometimes only the socio-political context can determine which strategy is chosen by a particular Salafi group. For example, during my fieldwork in Qatar, one of my informants, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nu’aymi, the leader of a transnational network of Islamists, the World Anti-Aggression Campaign, claimed that he had the same ideological views as Osama bin Laden, whom he regarded as a freedom fighter against Western imperialism. At the same time, he defines himself as part of the *Sahwa*, and intends to participate in the upcoming elections in Qatar. Most of those who identify with the *Sahwa* generally support the Afghan and Iraqi jihad while refusing to engage in violence at home, either because they do not see the regime as totally apostate, or because they think that the timing is inappropriate.

Second, Wiktorowicz suggests that the purists are not interested in politics, and that they denounce participation in political organizations and focus only on religious practice. This view is at odds with actual practice, however, as many Salafis who hold the same religious views as the Saudi purists also actively participate in political life and form organizations. At the same time, they denounce the *Sahwa* and often ask for legitimation from the Saudi *Hay’at Kibar al-‘Ulama* (Body of Senior Religious Scholars). A good example of such practice is the Kuwaiti *al-Tajammu’ al-Salafi al-Islami* (Salafi Islamic Gathering), the political arm of *Jama’iyyat Ihya’ al-Turath al-Islami* (the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society), which I will discuss at length in Chapter 3.

³⁵ Hegghammer, ‘Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries?’, p. 250.

Hegghammer's classification is no doubt very useful when analyzing violent Islamist movements. However, it reflects a realist, structuralist approach toward social movement research, and entirely overlooks the importance of theology in determining action. In my opinion, the theological background to a movement plays a crucial role in predicting its possible political behavior, since the label "Salafi" covers an entire worldview that does, in fact, have much to say about how a person perceives and reacts to certain political events. For example, Brynjar Lia, in one of his publications on the jihadi writer Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, highlights how adopting a strict Salafi creed can cause divisions in militant movements.³⁶ According to al-Suri, the emphasis of Salafi fighters on doctrinal purity impedes the creation of unity in the jihadi ranks.³⁷

A further indication of the importance of theology is that when a social movement adopts the Salafi creed, its structure is always different from that of other Islamist movements. Almost without exception, Salafi groups lack sophisticated organizational strategies. Members are connected to each other through informal networks, and there is no clear, formal hierarchy between them. This phenomenon can also be derived from theology. According to most Salafis, operating in established organizational frameworks can lead to *bid'a* and *taqlid*. Salafis think that a person who subordinates himself to an established party hierarchy will gradually become more loyal to the organization and its leader than to God (they call this *hizbiyya*, or partisanship).³⁸ I will discuss this in Chapter 5 in more detail.

To avoid these shortcomings, I suggest a mixed, two-level classification that is based on both theology and preferences. In my opinion, the issue that divides Salafis most sharply is theological in nature, and relates to the concept of *hukm* (ruling) in Islam. The main debate revolves around the relationship of the ruled to the ruler (*hakim*). The members of the first faction, whom I will call "purist", are proponents of unconditional obedience to the ruler as long as he is not openly an apostate. In addition, they do not allow open criticism of the ruler,

³⁶ Brynjar Lia, 'Destructive Doctrinarians: Abu Musab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, pp. 281-300.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ During my fieldwork, I asked almost all of my Salafi informants about their views on organization, and almost always received similar answers.

only secret advice (*nasihah sirriyah*). The purists refer to the Text to support their stance. They commonly quote one of the sayings of the Prophet: “Who sees disobedience of God from his *amir* [ruler] shall hate what this disobedience causes but shall not lift his hands against him”.³⁹ When the purists forbid open criticism of the ruler, they usually cite the example of the first civil war in Islam: “When *fitnah* [civil war] occurred in the time of Caliph ‘Uthman, some people asked Usama bin Zayd [one of the companions of the Prophet]: ‘Don’t you rebuke ‘Uthman?’ He answered: ‘Rebuke him in front of the people? I rebuke him only in private but I do not open the doors of Hell in front of the people’”.⁴⁰ Purists use this to explain that even if it is warranted, open criticism can cause the people to rise up against the ruler and undermine order.

We can also identify different currents within the purist camp. The differences between them are not theological in nature, but based on which strategy they regard as being more efficient to spread the *da‘wah*. I identify two main currents within the purist movement. The first group, which I call “purist-rejectionists”, rejects any political participation, putting forward that in the political arena, Muslims can be affected by those who do not practice religion properly, or even by non-Muslims. They should only focus on proper daily religious practice. The followers of the Saudi scholar Rabi‘ al-Madkhali are a good example. Those whom I classify as belonging to the second current see political participation – if it is allowed by the ruler – as a tool of *da‘wah*, an excellent opportunity to spread the proper way of Islam and an appropriate platform on which to defend it.

The above-mentioned Kuwaiti at-Tajammu‘ al-Salafi al-Islami is an example of this current. The members of this group strictly forbid any form of criticism of the Emir of Kuwait and are loyal to the government, but they otherwise actively participate in parliamentary debates. However, their political aims mainly concern social behavior and the promotion of their understanding of Islam within Kuwait. For instance, partly due to their efforts, in most departments of the University of Kuwait, male and female students have to

³⁹ See <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/mat/1944> (accessed: 19 September 2009).

⁴⁰ al ‘Abd al-Karim, *Mu‘amalat al-Hukkam*, p. 17.

attend the lectures in separate rooms. I call this current “purist-politically oriented”.

Those belonging to the second faction, whom I call *harakis* (activists),⁴¹ refuse to obey the ruler unconditionally. They approach religion from an all-encompassing (*shumuli*) viewpoint. They are influenced by Sayyid Qutb’s concept of *hakimiyya*, which considers any government that does not govern according to God’s law to be illegitimate.⁴² *Haraki* Salafis think that since Islam extends its rulings to every domain of life, politics and the political state of the *umma* (Islamic nation) should not be neglected. In their opinion, the stance of the purists serves the religion’s enemies and colonialists. As many of my *haraki* informants explained, the unconditional obedience of the purists furthers the interests of Arab rulers, who are the “proconsuls” of the Western powers due to their total economic and military dependence on the West. They think that a ruler can only be legitimate if the ruled freely perform an oath of allegiance (*bay’a*). Therefore, regimes that come to power via military coups or conquest are by definition illegitimate. They also defend their stance by referring to the case of the first four caliphs who followed the Prophet, all of whom were accepted by the majority of Muslims. Although there is no clear reference to this in the Text, this process is in accordance with the consensus (*ijma’*) of the *Sahaba*, the Companions of the Prophet.⁴³

They also believe that it is permissible to openly criticize the ruler, and they refer to many cases in which the first four caliphs accepted open criticism. Salman al-’Awda, a prominent Saudi *haraki* scholar, mentions many examples in his book, *Why are we afraid of criticism? (limadha nakhaf al-naqd)*. One is that of how a man told the second caliph, ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, that “If we found deviance in your behavior than we would straighten it with our swords”.⁴⁴ Al-’Awda explains that this does not mean that the people would literally use their swords, but that they would criticize the caliph.

⁴¹ I consider the term *haraki* to be appropriate here, since the members of this faction themselves use this term to explain their activist approach towards Islam.

⁴² Some of them even add *tawhid al-hakimiyya* (oneness of the governance) as the fourth component of *tawhid*. In the fifth chapter, I will discuss the debate surrounding *tawhid al-hakimiyya* in Kuwait.

⁴³ See, for example Hakim al-Mutayri, *al-Hurriyya aw al-Tawfan* (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-’Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 2008), pp. 21-25.

⁴⁴ Salman al-’Awda, *Limadha nakhaf min al-naqd* (Islam al-Yawm, 2004), pp. 43-44.

Harakis usually differ in the methods that they favor for achieving change, and for reforming a Muslim world that is dominated by tyrannical regimes and dependency on foreign, non-Muslim powers. One should note here that this group is more divided than that of the purists. To clarify these divisions, I identify two main directions. The members of the first one, whom I call *politicos*, prefer achieving change in the realm of politics via reform and by achieving wider political freedom in Muslim countries. They differ from *politico-purists* in the sense that while the latter use politics to achieve reforms that concern people's daily lives (such as banning alcohol in five-star hotels or enforcing sex segregation), the *politicos'* ambitions do not end here. They also focus on international relations and political freedom, which according to them is defined in the *shari'a* or the accountability of political leaders. The Saudi *Sahwa* and the Kuwaiti Salafi movement (*al-Haraka al-Salafiyya*) are good examples of this stream.

The second current consists of jihadis who want to change reality by force. However, it is difficult to determine who is really a jihadi. The press and many academic studies have a tendency to call every Salafi who takes up weapons for a cause a "jihadi". However, in reality it is not that easy to distinguish jihadis from non-jihadis. Many Salafis, for example, support the resistance in Muslim territories occupied by foreign powers, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but refuse to participate in military operations at home. Many of the Saudi *Sahwa* think this way, although nobody calls them jihadis.

Wagemakers classifies those Salafis as jihadis "who believe that jihad should not just be waged against invading or aggressive non-Muslim enemies but should also be used in a revolutionary way against the 'apostate' rulers in their own midst."⁴⁵ The problem with this definition is that many, if not most Salafis whom Wagemakers (following Wiktorowicz) would classify as "politicos" believe in this.⁴⁶ The majority of the latter believe that a ruler can be overthrown, even by military means, if he systematically blocks reforms. The Kuwaiti Salafi thinker Hakim al-Mutayri thinks that most Muslim countries face two choices: either their leadership opens the way to participation, free elections and political

⁴⁵ Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

accountability (which, according to him, is prescribed in the *shari'a*), or it is justifiable for the people to abolish the regimes in any way they can.⁴⁷ Most “politicos” (according to both Wiktorowicz’s and my classification) in the Gulf or Lebanon, who otherwise advocate participation in parliamentary systems, are calling for jihad in Syria against the “apostate ruler”, and did so during the Libyan revolution.

I classify as “jihadis” those *haraki* Salafis who rule out any peaceful engagement with existing regimes and regard armed struggle as the sole means to achieve change. For these Salafis, armed jihad is the only way to depose the corrupt rulers of Muslim countries or rid the *umma* of Western dominance. Here it should be noted that while jihadis often form their own distinct groups and organizations, there are cases when it is difficult to distinguish them from other *harakis* on the ground. During my fieldwork in Lebanon and Kuwait, I met Salafi youths in the networks of clearly politico shaykhs who expressed jihadi views and rejected political participation. Despite this, they networked with others who were inclined towards politico thinking. These young people were constantly debating and discussing each other’s views. On some occasions, I even observed jihadis changing their views regarding political participation.

Since this study focuses on Salafis who cannot be classified as jihadis, in the following chapters, unless indicated otherwise, I use the term *haraki* to refer to the politicians.

Salafism as a social movement

Social movement theory (SMT) has proven a very useful tool for understanding Islamic Activism. In recent years, a wide range of studies has employed it to analyze various Islamic movements, especially since the publication of a groundbreaking book edited by Wiktorowicz.⁴⁸ The concept of a social movement implies some kind of collectivity or collective identity and a shared

⁴⁷ al-Mutayri, *al-Hurriyya Aw al-Tawfan*, pp. 7-110.

⁴⁸ Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

aim. Salafism fulfills both of these criteria. The collective identity of the movement is based on practicing the only pure and correct form of Islam, and manifested by certain shared rituals and symbols (as I explain in detail in Chapter 6). The common aim of every Salafi is to purify their own and others' belief and practices from foreign elements.

Mainstream approaches in SMT were developed to study movements arising from the framework of Western nation states and market capitalism, with the aim of achieving change in political institutions or the economic system. These movements usually rely on clear leadership hierarchies and elaborate formal organizational structures. Salafism, however, does not fit into this category, as it targets individuals' identities and beliefs and aspires to the Islamization of the society (in line with what Salafis consider to be correct religious rulings). Salafis are concerned with the transformation of institutions so far as this facilitates their project. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, Salafism tends to lack formal organizations. Therefore, in order to analyze Salafism, we need a broader understanding of social movements.

Approaches to studying what are known as 'new social movements' offer more useful tools for understanding Salafism. These movements are not engaged in a struggle for material values. Rather, they aim to create and maintain certain forms of individual and collective identity, promote autonomy and self-determination and offer an alternative way of life, and not to maximize the influence of state institutions, and power. Their field of action has shifted from the realm of institutional politics to civil society (for a longer discussion of civil society, see Chapter 6). Ideas and symbols therefore play a central role in new social movements' activities. Theorists also stress that their structures and organizational strategies are reliant on informal and fluid social networks that are often temporary in nature, rather than on formal institutions.⁴⁹ As Kriesi describes them, "they are made up of people living, working, communicating, and making politics together in pursuit of countercultural design for an alternative way of life."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Steven M. Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1995, pp. 441-464.

⁵⁰ Hanspeter Kriesi, 'Local Mobilization for the People's Petition of the Dutch Peace Movement', in Bert Klanters, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds), *From Structure to Action*:

Although the “new social movements” approach offers useful tools for my inquiry, Salafism cannot be described and studied as a new social movement *per se*. Theoretical discourses on new social movements presuppose the existence of the post-industrial nation state. Such movements result from the needs and frustrations experienced by individuals – mostly from the middle classes – in post-materialist society. According to Habermas, in recent decades the object of contention has shifted from the domain of material reproduction to the domains of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization. The reason for this shift is that class conflict has been institutionalized in the modern welfare state and thereby pacified.⁵¹

In Habermasian thought, modern society is constituted by the “system” governed by the media of power, money and the “lifeworld”. This latter term refers to “the stock of skills, competences and knowledge that ordinary members of society use, in order to negotiate their way through everyday life, to interact with other people, and ultimately create and maintain social relationships.”⁵² In modern, post-materialist society the system continuously tries to intrude upon the lifeworld and regulate not only political and material transactions, but also those that concern identity construction and symbolic reproduction. In this context, social movements are defending the lifeworld from the colonizing intrusions of the system.

In Melucci’s view, in modern society, traditional points of reference have been weakened by the rapid changes have been experienced in the past few decades, creating a homelessness of personal identity. People are therefore increasingly keen to engage in collective action that aims to construct and maintain personal identity.⁵³ While such a framework would probably be applicable to Salafism in Europe, it is less relevant to the manifestation of Salafism in the countries of the Middle East, Africa or Southeast Asia, which cannot be called post-modern and post-industrial.

Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures, vol. 1, *International Social Movement Research* (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988), p. 43.

⁵¹ Beuchler, ‘New Social Movement Theories’, p. 446.

⁵² Andrew Edgar, *Habermas: The Key Concepts* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 89.

⁵³ Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

Price et al.'s discussion of "grounded utopian movements" (GUMs)⁵⁴ offers a particularly useful approach to classifying Salafism as a social movement. The category of grounded utopian movements contains those movements whose characteristics show the closest resemblance to Salafism. Unlike new social movements, these movements do not seek recognition from capitalist institutions or modern nation states, but are instead grounded in visions of alternative "ideal places" (utopias), and set out to establish alternative, fairer and more satisfying ways of living.

Although all movements have a utopian dimension, since they have to build a vision of an alternative future, GUMs are distinct in that their strong utopias have been created in order to counter different types of oppression and injustice (real and perceived). In other words, the followers of such a movement create a parallel reality to escape from the conditions present in the surrounding world. By "grounded", the authors mean "that the identities, values, and imaginative dimensions of utopia are culturally focused on real places, embodied by living people, informed by past lifeways, and constructed and maintained through quotidian interactions and valued practices that connect the members of a community..."⁵⁵

In many respects, Salafism fits the description of a grounded utopian movement. Salafis also want to live an alternative, autonomous lifestyle and imitate what they believe were the practices of the first three generations of Islam. By creating a utopian, imagined community of Muslims who strictly adhere to what is prescribed in Scripture, they intend to protect the "original form" of the religion from various kinds of "oppression". As I will explain in Chapter 8, Salafis imagine the universe to be a place of a continuous struggle between good, which is represented by Islam, and evil. The latter attempts to oppress and distort or destroy the former.

For Salafis, the realm of evil is manifested in the West, which promotes secular and "immoral" lifestyles, or in other currents of Islam, which have adopted innovations and heretic practices, thereby endangering the purity of religion. By promoting their own worldview and practices and creating an ideal

⁵⁴ Charles Price, Donald Nonini and Erich Fox Tree, 'Grounded Utopian Movements: Subjects or Neglect', *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2008.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 128.

community of believers, they are trying to prevent the realm of evil from leading Muslims astray from their religion. Salafis believe that good will eventually overcome evil and that Muslims will be victorious over the forces of unbelief. As I discuss in Chapter 7, Salafis often interpret current events as signs of upcoming apocalyptic episodes prior to the end of the world. One of these is the appearance of the *Mahdi*, or redeemer of Islam, who will establish just rule on earth and will spread the Salafi belief and lifestyle across the world.

As De Koning argues, Salafis are establishing, maintaining and defending their utopia by practicing the politics of lifestyle, the politics of distinction and the politics of resistance.⁵⁶ By the “politics of lifestyle”, De Koning means that Salafis are continuously shaping and nurturing correct Islamic identity by educating their adherents in how true Muslims should act, behave and practice their religion. They organize study groups, lectures and conferences, where they discuss issues concerning their lifestyle, such as dress, correct forms of prayer, marriage, how to interact with non-Muslims, and so forth.

Through the politics of lifestyle, Salafis intend to construct the image of the perfect Muslim who possesses all the attributes associated with the personality of the believer in Scripture. The “politics of distinction” means protecting what Salafis regard as true Islamic values from mainstream culture, Westernization and other “un-Islamic” or heretical practices, which belong to the realm of evil. The “politics of resistance” means that Salafis are involved in activities to resist the perceived oppression and injustice practiced by unbelievers or heretics against Islam. This could mean preaching sermons against Shi'ites, for example, or even destroying Sufi shrines under the pretext of practicing *hisba*.⁵⁷

Salafism differs from the majority of the GUMs that are discussed by Price et al. in one important way.⁵⁸ While the main aim of these GUMs is to protect and maintain an autonomous, alternative lifestyle for their participants, for Salafis it

⁵⁶ Martijn de Koning, ‘The “Other” Political Islam: Understanding Salafi Politics’ in Olivier Roy and Amel Boubekeur, *Whatever Happened to the Islamists: Salafis, Heavy Metal Muslims and the Lure of Consumerist Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-173.

⁵⁸ Price et al.’s analysis focuses on three movements: the North American Ghost Dance, the Rastafari movement and the Long-Durée Maya Activism. Price et al., ‘Grounded Utopian Movements.’

is equally important to convince others to adopt their worldviews and practices, by which they hope to achieve social change. In this respect, Salafism resembles what Haenfler et al. call “lifestyle movements”. Adherents of lifestyle movements are not satisfied with “creating a cultural space where they can freely express themselves”,⁵⁹ but aspire to transform society more broadly by reorienting their everyday habits in accordance with certain values.

In this thesis I will apply the fundamentals of SMT to explain the emergence and historical development, the structure and the recruitment strategy of Lebanese Salafism. The transformation of the sociopolitical context played a crucial role in the emergence of Salafism in Lebanon. Changes in the structure of the external environment in the 1980s and 1990s enabled the movement to gain prominence. To understand how these transformations played a crucial role in the evolution of the movement, I will use the concept of “political opportunity structures”. This concept was originally developed to study movements that target the institutions of the state, so I propose some modifications to apply it to Salafism. Since Salafism, as a GUM, does not directly target political institutions, I focus on how changes in the sociopolitical context affected the identity and consciousness of Lebanese Sunni Muslims. I shall explain the political opportunity structure approach further in Chapter 3.

To examine the mobilization structures of Lebanese Salafis at the local and transnational levels, I employ a network approach. My starting point is Diani’s conceptualization of social movements as networks held together by a shared collective identity.⁶⁰ I describe Salafism as being mainly structured by interpersonal relationships, which evolve into extended networks. The main hubs of these networks are informal social events, such as religious lessons and meetings in mosques or youth gatherings. As I shall explain later, these networks provide individuals with the space to pursue a certain lifestyle and export it to the wider society. In other words, they facilitate individualized collective action.⁶¹ As their main aim is not to mobilize resources to achieve institutional

⁵⁹ Ross Haenfler, ‘Lifestyle Movements: Exploring the Intersection of Lifestyle and Social Movements’, *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2012, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Mario Dinai, ‘The Concept of a Social Movement’, in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, *Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

⁶¹ Haenfler et al., ‘Lifestyle Movements’, p. 5.

changes in the framework of the nation state, resource mobilization theory, which mostly focuses on how formal organizations accumulate money, manpower and information to alter state policies, is less useful for my inquiry.⁶²

In the literature, social movements are usually discussed in the context of civil society. I also follow this approach in my discussion of Salafi networks, but instead of adopting the conventional, Western concept of civil society, I employ an alternative concept, which was first elaborated by Hann.⁶³ Hann shifts the focus of the debate from formal organizations, which are regarded as the backbone of civil society in the West, to informal structures that facilitate trust and cooperation between the members of a community. Such an approach is more suited to examining Salafism, which is a movement that lacks an elaborate, formal institutional framework. I explain the mobilization structures of Salafism further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Salafism's base of followers in Lebanon has expanded significantly due to their stance on the Syrian revolution and civil war and the rapidly deepening Sunni-Shi'a sectarian tensions. Framing theory offers useful tools for understanding this development, as frames provide prisms through which current events can be understood.⁶⁴ Salafis interpret developments such as the Arab revolutions, the political and military dominance of Hizbullah and the Shi'ite community, or the perceived socioeconomic backwardness of the Lebanese Sunnis through the lens of their Manichean worldview; they construct credible explanations and attractive solutions for their constituency. I shall elaborate the framing strategy used by Salafis in Chapter 8.

With their activism, Salafis try to achieve a dominant position among those who claim to have religious knowledge and target the beliefs of Sunni Muslim individuals. To understand the continuous competition between these actors, Bourdieu's approach, which divides society into different microcosms called "fields", is especially useful. In Bourdieu's view, a field is a configuration of

⁶² John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 82, no. 6, 1977, pp. 1212–1241.

⁶³ Chris Hann, 'Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology', in Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (eds), *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁴ Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000.

hierarchically arranged positions. These positions are defined by the possession of capital, a symbolic resource that enables its possessor to exercise power in a specific field. Within a field, there is a struggle between agents to possess as much capital as possible and thereby achieve a more influential position.⁶⁵ There are as many kinds of fields as there are types of capital. For example, it is possible to distinguish economic, political, cultural and religious fields, each of which are governed by their own logic and rules.

In our case, Salafis are agents (but not exclusively so) of the Sunni religious field. This field is composed of persons and institutions that are struggling to dominate or monopolize the creation of religious knowledge and the administration and provision of religious services. The category of agents includes religious scholars, preachers, Sufi shaykhs, official religious bodies and religious endowments (*waqf*). They claim to possess superior knowledge of the wishes of the transcendent. Throughout the thesis, when I refer to the “Sunni religious field” or the “Sunni Islamic field”, I am referring to this microcosm of hierarchically arranged positions and competing actors.

⁶⁵ David Schwartz, ‘Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu’s Political Economy of Symbolic Power’, *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1996, pp. 78-81.

Chapter 2

The Transformation of Salafism in the Gulf

In this chapter I discuss the development of Salafism in the Arabian Gulf, which forms the essential backdrop to understanding the movement's evolution in Lebanon. In the first section I explain the historical background to the fragmentation of Salafism and the origins of the different Salafi factions, whose theological tenets were discussed in Chapter 1. Following this, I show how the transformation of Saudi Salafism affected the movement in Kuwait. I discuss how purist Salafis took over the leadership of one of the most important transnational Salafi charity associations, a development that had a significant transnational impact and contributed to the reconfiguration of the Salafi scene in North Lebanon. I also examine other elements of the Kuwaiti Salafi movement that are connected to Lebanon. In the concluding section, I briefly explain how Qatar has become one of the most significant transnational hubs of *haraki* Salafism. The small Gulf monarchy hosts another important charity, which is also a sponsor of Lebanese Salafis.

The fragmentation of Salafism in Saudi Arabia

During and after the liberation of Kuwait, two more or less clear ideological streams emerged within Salafism. Transnational social networks have evolved along these ideological lines, which have largely shaped Salafism in different localities. In the following, I outline the evolution of ideological debates in Saudi Arabia, and then explain how these debates led to the split in Kuwaiti Salafism and the appearance of the *harakis* in Qatar.

Following the establishment of the first Saudi state in Njad, Central Arabia, in 1744, the Salafi '*ulama*' played a very important role in society. They legitimized the rule of the Sa'ud clan, constituting the second pillar of the state after the ruling family. Despite this position, the discourse of these religious

scholars remained parochial even after the founding of the modern state in 1932. This was largely due to the geographical isolation of the Arabian Peninsula during most of the pre-modern period, and the *'ulama's* hostility toward other schools of thought. After the capital of the Islamic Caliphate shifted from Medina to Damascus at the beginning of the rule of Mu'awiya in 661, the Peninsula gradually became the periphery.¹ The Najdi *'ulama'* therefore most probably did not have access to the major part of the thousand-year-old intellectual tradition of Islam. At the same time these scholars regarded anything that was foreign to their literalist interpretation as heresy, and it is therefore unlikely that they would have taken the trouble to read the works of philosophers or Ash'ari scholars.²

Over the centuries, it was the task of this *'ulama'* class to solve problems.³ They provided answers to questions concerning the minute details of their constituency's daily life, but they almost never engaged in theoretical debates. Very few of them wrote theological treatises with a scope that went beyond the correct performance of the *'ibadat*. Unlike their counterparts in many other areas of the Muslim world, they completely lacked a sophisticated perspective and discourse on sociopolitical issues. As a result, they were unable to confirm and boost the legitimacy of the Saudi Kingdom when it was threatened by Arab Nationalists and Leftists during the Arab Cold War.⁴

The Arab Cold War between Egypt and Saudi Arabia lasted from the mid-1950s until 1970. In 1952, a military coup abolished the pro-Western monarchy in Egypt. The new regime, led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, adopted Arab nationalism as its main ideology and allied itself with the Soviet Union. Cairo also began to support secular Arab nationalist movements worldwide. In the two decades following the revolution in Egypt, Arab nationalist regimes came to power in a number of Arab countries. In 1958, a *coup d'état* abolished the pro-

¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, p. 7.

² Shaykh Muhammad 'Abdul Ghani, one of the most renowned Lebanese Palestinian Salafi *'ulama'*, complained to me that when he was studying in Medina, the education was extremely one-sided in a certain university department. For example, in matters of the *'aqida*, the students were never provided with *Ash'ari* readings to provide at least some comparison between the two major ways of thinking about the creed. The shaykh suspects that the mostly Najdi teachers had never read the views of their opponents. Interview, Tripoli, 14 April 2012.

³ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 62-63.

⁴ Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 41-42.

Western monarchy in Iraq, and in 1962 an Arab nationalist government came to power in post-independence Algeria. In the same year in North Yemen, the monarchy was brought down by 'Abdullah al-Sallal, who became an ally of Nasser. Equally important were the Syrian and the Libyan "revolutions" in 1963 and 1969. These countries allied within the framework of the "progressive" block, led by Egypt, maintained good terms with the Soviet Union and intended to transform the whole Arab world in accordance with the ideals of Arab Nationalism.

The spread of the new ideology endangered the very existence of the traditional, kinship-based Saudi monarchy. In response to the threat, Riyadh (along with seeking the protection of the US) created its own alliance structure based on other conservative monarchies, such as Jordan and Morocco, around the rhetoric of *al-tadamun al-Islami* (Islamic Solidarity).⁵ Although the symbolic importance of the kingdom's geographical location – that is, controlling the holy cities of Mecca and Medina – was initially a helpful means of boosting the Kingdom's legitimacy, Saudi Arabia did not possess the resources to compete with Egyptian propaganda.⁶ Since Riyadh could not count on its own religious elite, it had to rely on foreign Islamists to create a political discourse that matched Arab Nationalism. From the end of the 1950s, the Kingdom opened its doors to members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had escaped persecution in Egypt and Syria. The majority of these activists were skilled professionals who could be employed in education and the media. They became the core elements of the anti-Nasser propaganda apparatus whose leading organ was the *Sawt al-Islam* (Voice of Islam) radio station.

At the same time the Brothers permeated all levels of the education. Due to their dominance in schools and universities and in the media, the foreign Islamists strongly influenced the thinking of a young generation of Saudis. Although the Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers) were forbidden from establishing an official branch in Saudi Arabia, they used their resources to spread their *da'wa* as extensively as possible. Controlling the education system was especially useful

⁵ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd edn. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁶ Nasser was increasingly popular among the rural population and the educated class in Saudi Arabia.

for this purpose. In the view of the Brothers, the goal of education was not only learning but also shaping the worldview of young people in line with the Brotherhood's ideals.⁷ As Lacroix puts it, the "massive influx of an exogenous tradition ... was the source of a vast social movement that produced its own counterculture and its own organizations and, through the educational system, soon reached almost all fields of the social arena."⁸

This movement is widely called *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Awakening, *Sahwa* for short). Contrary to what is stated in the earlier academic literature, the *Sahwa* is not exclusively a product of *Ikhwani* ideas.⁹ According to Lacroix, the movement possesses a hybrid ideology. The *Sahwa* adopted the main elements of the Muslim Brothers' worldview, but retained the Salafi creed and jurisprudence. They were especially influenced by the thought of Sayyid Qutb through his brother, Muhammad Qutb, who took refuge in Saudi Arabia in 1972 and is regarded as one of the intellectual mentors of the *Sahwa*. Muhammad Qutb intended to mediate between the conceptual apparatus of his brother and that of traditional Salafi thought. According to his explanation, the opposition between *jahiliyya* and *hakimiyya* in Qutb's thinking is in parallel with the antagonism between *jahiliyya* and *tawhid*.¹⁰ The result is an ideology that only recognizes the right of the "true Islam" to exist, in the Salafi view, and intends to purify religion from *bida'*. At the same time it adopts the Muslim Brotherhood's activist attitude, commitment to the Islamization of all spheres of society, and active resistance to imperialism and Westernization. In al-Rasheed's words:

while the Sahwa may represent itself through increased commitment to ritualistic Islam, it is above all a state of mind that allows a Muslim to have Islam and only Islam as a reference point for all aspects of life, including

⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 42-51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁹ Gilles Kepel, for example, suggests that the ideology of the Sahwa is purely derived from the thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood. See: Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and The West* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2004), pp. 170-196.

¹⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, p. 54.

public political affairs. At the individual level, Sahwis have a commitment not only to the salvation of the self but also to society.¹¹

The *Sahwa* never established a formal organizational structure, centralized institutional system and clear-cut hierarchy. Rather, it was characterized by the predominance of loose, informal, interpersonal networks.¹² At the beginning of the movement in the 1970s, the *Sahwa* was on good terms with and even supported by the Saudi government.¹³ In the 1980s the *Sahwi* presence became so powerful among the educated class that the regime had to side with them in their battle with secular intellectuals, so as not to lose legitimacy in the eyes of a wide segment of the population. The first signs of the *Sahwa* insurgency against the government appeared in the 1980s. According to Lacroix, the reason for this can be found in the economic decline of Saudi Arabia due to decreasing oil prices and the frustration of the young generation, whose career prospects were not meeting their expectations.¹⁴

The monarchy came under *Sahwi* attack on the eve of the Gulf War in 1991, when the government allowed tens of thousands of American soldiers to land on Saudi soil to defend the country against a potential Iraqi invasion. In public sermons and lectures, *Sahwi* shaykhs openly questioned the ruling system's legitimacy. They depicted Saudi rulers as vassals of US imperialism who had opened the door to the colonization of the country. They also decried the official '*ulama*' that had issued a *fatwa* legitimizing the presence of the US soldiers. *Sahwis* called these scholars '*ulama*' *al-sultan* (scholars of the rulers), hypocritical and subservient. They were depicted as ready to sacrifice religion for the interests of the regime, so as to avoid falling out of favor with the Sa'ud clan.¹⁵ *Sahwis* also questioned the Great '*ulama*'s ability to issue *fatwas* on sociopolitical matters, given their lack of knowledge about the contemporary

¹¹ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 68.

¹² They dominated many institutions, but unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, they did not have their own organizational networks. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 63-73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-133.

¹⁵ *Sahwis* often refer to the former Mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim (1893-1969) who was always enough brave to oppose the king if he thought that the king's orders contradicted religion. *Ibid.* p. 149.

world. The movement also demanded more political freedom and free elections, while at the same time calling for more social conservatism.¹⁶

However, the *Sahwa* insurgency failed in around 1994, and the government once again gained the upper hand over the public sphere. There are several reasons for this failure. According to Lacroix, the movement ran out of steam because it had been unable to gain wide grassroots support beyond the educated class. In addition, some counter-movements weakened the *Sahwis*, the most important being the Madkhalis or Jamis, which I will discuss below. Government repression was an important factor as well. Some of the leading figures in the movement were imprisoned for years, and *Sahwis* were fired from their jobs in the media and education, posts which were then filled by secular intellectuals and Salafis loyal to the government.¹⁷

Despite the weakening of the *Sahwa* within Saudi Arabia, the movement had a great impact on Salafism at the transnational level and played a key role in shaping its contemporary character. The emergence of the movement led to the formation of the *haraki* faction. Foreign students in the Saudi Kingdom who had been inspired by the *Sahwa* and socialized in *Sahwi* circles went on to spread its discourse and worldview in other Muslim countries. Leading *Sahwi* shaykhs, such as Muhammad Surur, Salman al-'Awda, Safar al-Hawali and Nasir al-'Umar, became transnational authorities. The *Sahwa* also influenced Jihadi thinking. For example, Osama bin Laden himself socialized in *Sahwa* circles before he left for Afghanistan.¹⁸ As Lacroix shows, other influential jihadi shaykhs such as 'Ali al-Khudayr started their activism in *Sahwi* circles. After the government's crackdown on the movement, they concluded that political activism would not lead to success. They therefore opted to use violence to destroy the Saudi regime and drive its main ally, the US, from the region.¹⁹

The example of the Kuwaiti scholar Hamid al-'Ali (see further below) also indicates the influence of the *Sahwa*. At the beginning of the 1990s, Al-'Ali was counted as one of the *Sahwa*, at least in ideological terms. Later he became one of

¹⁶ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 59-101; Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York; Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 21-60.

¹⁷ As argued in Chapter 1, jihadis only differ from other *harakis* with respect to tactics.

¹⁸ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, p. 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

the leading *haraki* figures in Kuwait. Although he never sided explicitly with the jihadis, many jihadis consider his polemics against the Shi'a or writings on Western imperialism to be authoritative. Al-'Ali usually focuses on diagnostic framing and does not make specific recommendations as to how to solve certain problems, leaving both the political and the military solutions open. Therefore he has a large following among both jihadis and politicians.²⁰

It is important to note here that the adoption of the revolutionary approach towards *ijtihad* and the *hadith* by one of the greatest Salafi scholars, Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914-1999), played a crucial role in shaping *Sahwi*, and thereby *haraki*, discourse.²¹ This is despite the fact that the shaykh himself was clearly purist. In theory, traditional Saudi 'ulama' call for *ijtihad*, but in practice they largely follow Hanbali jurisprudence. In most cases they abandon a given ruling by the *madhab* only if they find proof that it contradicts the Text. Al-Albani criticized this approach and instead emphasized the need for extensive study of the Hadith. He rejected the *taqlid* of the *madhahib*, instead proposing a wider form of *ijtihad* that requires, in each case, there to be proof by means of an independent reading of the Prophetic tradition if the Qur'an does not give a clear answer.²²

This extensive usage of the *hadith* independently of the constraints of the Hanbali School inspired the *Sahwa* and deeply influenced its discourse. It is also essential to *haraki* Salafis to refer to verified quotations from the Prophet to support their statements and claims in their discourse. When they argue about the necessity of reforming Middle Eastern regimes or ridding the Muslim world of Western imperialism, they support their arguments with proof and references from the corpus. There are plenty of examples of this; one of the most obvious is the book by the Kuwaiti Salafi thinker Hakim al-Mutayri, *al-Hurriyya aw al-Tawfan* (Freedom or Storm).²³ He builds up a system of references to *ahadith*

²⁰ During my fieldwork in Kuwait between February and March 2012, I met several followers of Shaykh Hamid al-'Ali. According to my observations, ideologically, they are mixed. The thinking of many of them is close to that of the Jihadis, while others have more moderate views. Many of these latter followers are active in networks that are affiliated to the main politico organizations in Kuwait, such as al-Haraka al-Salafiyya or Dr. Hakim al-Mutayri's Hizb al-Umma.

²¹ Al-Albani was born in Albania, but his family moved to Syria in his early childhood. Salafis regard him one of the greatest ever *hadith* scholars.

²² Stephane Lacroix, 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism', p. 60.

²³ al-Mutayri, *al-Hurriyya Aw al-Tawfan*.

and Qur'an quotations to prove that with the revelation, God also created a political system for humans that is based on individual freedom and the free election of leaders.

Another movement played a crucial role in the fractionalization of Salafism: its adherents are commonly called Madkhalis, in reference to one their intellectual founders. Their origins go back to *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM), a group inspired by al-Albani's teachings. They were even more influenced by the shaykh's approach toward the *hadith* than the *Sahwa*, but, like al-Albani himself, they focused on the ritualistic aspects of Islam. They adopted his theory on Islamic activism, which he called *al-tasfiya wa-l-tarbiya* (purification and education). According to this theory, an Islamic society and state cannot be established until the religion has been purified of every foreign element and of those Muslims who do not apply the teachings of Islam in full. On that basis, the JSM was fiercely critical of Islamic movements that were directly involved in politics, such as the *Sahwa*. The group also distinguished itself by its extreme social conservatism, attacking symbols of "Westernization" under the pretext of practicing *hisba* and following such customs as wearing shoes while praying in the mosque (since there is no proof in the Text that this cannot be done).²⁴

The JSM later split into two factions. The first rejected the rule of the House of the Sa'ud on the grounds that they do not have *Qurayshi* origins.²⁵ This first group occupied the Grand Mosque under the leadership of Juhayman al-'Utaybi in 1979. The loyalists took the opposite stance, resulting in the movement whose leading figures are Rabi' al-Madkhali (1931-) and the Ethiopian shaykh Muhammad Aman al-Jami (1930-1995). They retained the social conservatism of the JSM and their focus on the *hadith*, but at the same time emphasize that the obligation of unconditional obedience to the Muslim ruler is one of the most important aspects of their discourse. They launch harsh attacks on those who violate this "premise". The Madkhalis' most frequent targets are the various Islamic movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. They also regard any kind of organization as forbidden. The jurists of the movement even

²⁴ Lacroix, 'Al-Albani's Revolutionary Approach to Hadith', *ISIM Review*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2008, p. 7.

²⁵ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, p. 97.

prohibit the establishment of charity organizations, which are otherwise regarded as legal by the Great *'ulama'* of Saudi Arabia.

It is worth noting that Madkhalis (in Muslim countries) are exceptionally keen to work for state institutions, and they often support those who enter the army or the security services. According to Ikhwani activists from the United Arab Emirates, whom I interviewed when they visited Kuwait, there are large numbers of Madkhalis working as agents and officers in their country's internal security agency.²⁶ During the *Sahwa* insurgency the state supported the Madkhalis to boost its own legitimacy. Madkhali scholars were appointed as university professors in place of *Sahwis* who had been sacked. While the authorities tried to silence *Sahwi* shaykhs by forbidding them from giving sermons, Madkhali shaykhs were encouraged to play public roles.²⁷

According to many of my informants, at that time, divisions emerged among Salafis about the nature of a Muslim's relationship to the ruler (see the Introduction). As one of my Kuwaiti informants, the *haraki* scholar Shaykh 'Abd al-Aziz al-Jarallah, recalled, this issue had not previously been at the center of Salafi discourse. By contrast, after the Gulf War, "this became the first question a Salafi [individual] was asked about. Anything else became secondary after that."²⁸ Many *haraki* Salafis claim that the Madkhalis elaborated the thesis of "unconditional obedience to the ruler". When their numbers increased in educational and religious institutions, they had a significant influence on Salafi discourse. Many Salafis accepted their views on obedience to the ruler even if they dismissed their harsh criticism of those who differ from them or their ultra-puritan lifestyle. As I explain in the following section, this became the main dividing line between Salafis at the transnational level. The Madkhali movement also spread around the globe, despite the numerous internal splits.²⁹

²⁶ Interview, Kuwait, 4 March 2012.

²⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 214-216.

²⁸ Interview, Kuwait, 9 March 2012.

²⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 218-220.

The fragmentation of Salafism in Kuwait

Kuwait is unique in the region in many ways. Its social and political system differs from that of other states in the Arabian Peninsula. Although Kuwait is a hereditary monarchy, the ruling family has never been able to gain absolute dominance in every field of politics and the emir has always shared his power with influential elements in society. The founding myth of the state reflects its participatory origins. According to the myth, Kuwait was founded in the 18th century by a group of nomads escaping a prolonged drought in the Arabian interior. After settling in an oasis near the sea, they had to decide how they would run their newly established community. The question of rule had to be settled by the three most powerful families. The heads of the two wealthiest among them refused to fulfill the position of ruler, since then the families would be unable to fully concentrate their efforts on trade. Therefore they elected the poorest clan, the current royal family al-Sabah, to handle the state's political affairs.³⁰

This story reflects a kind of social contract between the rulers and the ruled that binds the hands of the former. In fact, throughout Kuwait's history, powerful merchant families have had significant stake in ruling the country. From the beginning, a *shura* (council) functioned in which the heads of the merchant families sat with the emir to discuss political issues. From these foundations, in the 20th century, a constitutional monarchy emerged that was unique in the Arab world, with a functioning and freely-elected parliament and free press; the only state in the region that compares to Lebanon. Due to this arrangement, control over society has been limited, and unlike in other Gulf monarchies, the flow of ideas and ideologies has been relatively free. The Shi'ite community that makes up around one third of the population was never as

³⁰ Mary Ann Tétreault, *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 33.

severely discriminated against as in other Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq or Saudi Arabia.³¹

This made it possible for Islamic movements to emerge in a relatively early period, and to be peacefully accommodated in the social and political system. The first Islamist movements were the Muslim Brothers, Hizb al-Tahrir and the Tabligh. Of these, the Muslim Brothers were able to gain significant influence and representation in the political system. Tabligh was the first active puritan movement in Kuwait, and in the 1950s and 1960s had many followers among the locals. Even some of the older Salafi shaykhs became Islamic activists, with them the Tabligh.³² Hizb al-Tahrir, however, while able to attract some Palestinian intellectuals, never enjoyed a significant membership among the Kuwaitis.³³

Although according to some accounts, the Salafi message arrived in Kuwait at the beginning of the 20th century from Saudi Arabia via tribal contacts, and via the interaction of the Kuwaiti '*ulama*' with the Najdi scholars who constituted the religious elite of Al Sa'ud,³⁴ the movement was not able to gain a foothold until the 1960s. At this time, a handful of *Salafi da'is* (preachers) settled in the country to transmit what was, according to them, the "pure form of Islam". The three most famous among them were the Egyptian 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, the Palestinian 'Abdullah al-Sabt, and the Saudi 'Umar al-Ashqar. According to an account by one of the first students of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, the Salafi *da'wa* began in an informal way at the beginning of the 1960s:

In the beginning we, a few dozen Salafis, only made excursions every night to the beach where we sat around the shaykh and took courses on the Qur'an and Sunna. At this stage we never touched on political or even social issues that went beyond personal, religious behavior. When our

³¹ Rajab al-Damanhour, 'al-Tayyarat al-Shi'iyya al-Kuwaytiya ... al-Tashakkulat wa-l-Masarat', *Islamonline*, 3 November 2009, http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1235628915074&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa%2FDWALayout (accessed: 5 March 2010).

³² One of them is the president of Ihya' al-Turath's fatwa council, Nazim al-Misbah. Interview, al-Bayan district, 20 February 2012.

³³ Interview with one of the first Kuwaiti Salafis, Kuwait, 11 January 2010.

³⁴ Daghsh al-'Ajmi bin Shabib, *Umara' wa-'Ulama Min al-Kuwait 'ala 'Aqidat al-Salaf* (Kuwait, 2008), pp. 53-61.

numbers became larger, we were able to have our study groups in mosques, until three mosques were entirely Salafi. The continuous arrival of migrant workers definitely increased our numbers. Many Egyptians attended our study groups.³⁵

The movement's first center was the Dar al-Salafi (Salafi House), where the members were able to handle issues in a more official way. These, however, were restricted to collecting *zakat* and voluntary donations (*sadaqat*). As Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq remembers, in the first years of the *da'wa*, the number of Salafis was still limited:

At this time, Kuwait lived in the euphoria of the oil boom and the government provided people with every type of service for free or at a ridiculously cheap price. People were preoccupied with material goods and did not have many concerns about religion. Among the youth the nationalist, anti-religious way of thinking was popular. When I first arrived in Kuwait, I was surprised to see that only old people visited the mosques.³⁶

In fact, three important factors played a crucial role in the expansion of the Salafi movement in Kuwait. The first was the 1967 war, and the catastrophic military defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan by Israel. Since this event, everywhere, "the attraction of Arab nationalism and socialism, dominant in 1967, has declined dramatically, while revivalist Islamism has risen".³⁷ After this war, for the first time Arabs blamed themselves, not colonialism, for their defeat. Islamists were generally able to exploit this situation by arguing "that the war was punishment for misplaced trust in the promise of alien ideologies that had been fostered as a means of mobilizing for modernization and development. The defeat was devastating because the margin of deviance from the faith was great".³⁸

³⁵ Interview, Kuwait, 21 January 2010.

³⁶ Interview with 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, Kuwait, 13 February 2010.

³⁷ Yvonne Haddad, 'Islamists and the "Problem of Israel": The 1967 awakening', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1992, p. 266.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

The situation in Kuwait was no different. Until the end of the 1960s, the various Arab nationalist movements, mainly the Nasserists, enjoyed overwhelming popularity among the people. However, after the 1967 war, their reputation rapidly declined and the vacuum was filled by an increase in religiosity and, naturally, by the Islamists, at this time dominated by the Muslim Brothers. As people recalled when I was conducting my fieldwork in Kuwait, in the years following the war, mosques that used to be empty, even at the time of Friday prayers, filled up with young people who had previously attended Nasserist gatherings or Communist organizations. Many people suddenly changed their lifestyles. Those who had followed a Western lifestyle stopped shaving their beards.

The main beneficiaries of this upheaval were the Muslim Brothers, who had been present in the country for almost two decades and were able to build up their organizational infrastructure. The state also helped them by every possible means, since it saw Arab nationalism as a serious threat, especially because of the enmity between Nasser and the traditional pro-Western monarchies. The Egyptian president's hostility grew in particular after Algerian independence in 1962, when colonialism ceased to be the direct enemy. "Nasir had to find new targets, new 'others'. So Arab nationalist fury was turned against Arab countries that Nasir deemed to be 'reactionary'".³⁹

In a more limited way, the Salafis were also able to take advantage of the religious upheaval, due to the fact that they already controlled several mosques and had direct access to young people who had recently turned to religion. The other efficient means of transmitting the message was being present at *diwaniyyas*, the traditional Kuwaiti (mostly men's) gatherings. These events are usually held weekly in the houses of prominent families and are open to everyone. *Diwaniyyas* are tremendously important in the Kuwaiti public sphere, as they provide the main forums for both political and religious debates (I explain the *diwaniyya* in Chapter 7 more in detail).⁴⁰ When members of significant Kuwaiti families became sympathetic to Salafism, the *da'is* were able

³⁹ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 285.

⁴⁰ There are *diwaniyyas* for women as well. The number of the mixed *diwaniyyas* is also growing among the liberal-minded population.

to access these *diwaniyyas* and share their teaching with other attendants. They are usually invited weekly, or every other week, to give lectures and hold study groups for Qur'an or Hadith.⁴¹ Most Salafis acknowledge the role that *diwaniyahs* played in spreading the Salafi message in the country.

The real breakthrough – and this is the second factor – for Salafis relates to an internal and an external development. At the beginning of the 1970s, Salafis were able to recruit followers among the influential merchant class. Khalid Sultan, the former leader of the Salafi parliamentary faction, was among them.⁴² This also opened the way for them to become part of Kuwait's political map in the long term. In the pre-oil era, the rulers of Kuwait traditionally shared power with the merchant class. The emirs were financially largely dependent on the merchants, as the latter dominated large segments of the population whose livelihoods were based on trade and pearl-diving, and were able to extract revenues from them. However, after the discovery of oil, the power balance changed in favor of the rulers. They became independent from the merchants' revenues, and were therefore largely able to exclude the latter from decision-making.

Unlike the other Gulf States, however, in Kuwait, the ruler did not enjoy absolute dominance, and though the merchants lost most of their political power, they still constituted an influential segment of the population. They continuously sought new opportunities to regain their former influence, and therefore supported political and social movements. At the end of the 1970s, many scions of influential merchant families became followers of Salafism. This enabled the movement to gain a presence in the financial and trading sector, and receive more funding than before. Since the merchants were interested in social and political issues, the voices that became stronger in the Salafi movement were those that were keen to see religious rulings implemented in public life.

As one of my informants explained to me, at this time, Salafis began involving themselves in more worldly debates concerning politics and society.⁴³

⁴¹ Nowadays, every Kuwaiti Salafi sheikh tends to appear at *diwaniyyas* on a regular basis, and the dates can be found on their websites. See, for instance, the website of the Madkhali Salafi Sheikh Salim al-Tawil. <http://www.saltaweel.com/schedule>, accessed 18 April 2010.

⁴² I will discuss the issue of politics and Salafism in Kuwait below.

⁴³ Interview with Salim al-Nashi, the former director of the politburo of al-Tajammu' al-Islami al-Salafi (Salafi Islamic Gathering), 13 January 2010.

A few Salafis joined the Muslim Brotherhood or worked with them. The majority, however, remained independent and harshly critical of the Muslim Brothers. According to some accounts, in the 1970s, a “war of ideas” (*harb afkar*) took place between the Muslim Brothers and Salafis in the *diwaniyahs*, mosques, public gatherings, and in the media, which became accessible to Salafis after they had gained sympathizers within the merchant class.⁴⁴

The third factor is the geopolitical change in the region, which favored the Salafis. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 posed a severe threat to the very existence of the Kuwaiti state. Beside the military threat that came from Tehran, Khomeini’s Islamist regime intended to spread the revolution among the Shi’ite communities of the Gulf. Shi’ite militant cells in Kuwait committed several terrorist attacks during the 1980s. In addition, the fact that Islamists were able to come to power and establish a regime based on *shari’a* in Iran (despite the fact that they were Shi’ites) gave the Muslim Brotherhood new confidence in countries with Sunni majorities that their project could also be implemented. The Kuwaiti ruling family was truly frightened by the prospect of being overthrown by the Islamists. Therefore, to divide the Sunnis, the state began supporting the Salafi movement against the Muslim Brothers, as it had supported the latter at the end of the 1960s against the Nasserists. A further reason for helping the Salafis against the Muslim Brothers was the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. While financing Saddam Hussein’s expensive military adventure, the government needed a form of Islamic legitimacy.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the Salafi movement in Kuwait had achieved an unprecedented level of organizational development. While most aspects of the movement’s organizational strategy retained an informal character, Salafis gained a strong presence in labor organizations and student unions, where they competed with the Muslim Brothers. As the next stage in their organizational development, the Salafis of Kuwait established *Jama’iyyat Ihya’ al-Turath al-Islami* (the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, or RIHS). The society was founded in 1981 with the support of the Kuwaiti state and wealthy merchants who had adopted Salafi ideology. Although according to its founding

⁴⁴ Falah al-Mudayris, *Al-Jama’ā al-Salafiya fi-l-Kuwait: al-Nasha’t wa-l-Fikr wa-l-Tatawwur 1965-1999* (Kuwait: Dar Qurtas li-l-Nashr, 1999), pp. 7-8.

documents, *Ihya' al-Turath* was created for charitable purposes, from the beginning, it covered a wider range of tasks.

In the 1980s the RIHS served as an umbrella organization for Kuwait's Salafis, and provided the institutional framework for engaging in the political process. In 1981, for the first time anywhere in the world, Salafis were nominated for parliamentary elections. At this time, Salafis elsewhere did not support any kind of political participation in secular and parliamentary regimes, since they were heavily influenced by the Saudi religious line, which abstained from any serious political involvement aside from legitimizing the autocratic rule of the royal family. Most Kuwaiti Salafis, however, took a different stance, due to the revolutionary ideology propagated by their main religious authority, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq.

The thought of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq

It is necessary to briefly discuss the thought of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, since his ideas and the debates they inspired played a crucial role in the development of *Ihya' al-Turath*. Unlike those of purist Salafis, the majority of the writings of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman are related to politics. In the second half of the 1970s he began publishing weekly in *al-Watan*, one of the biggest Kuwaiti dailies, mainly on contemporary political affairs. In one of his articles he argues that politics and human development are more important than mere religious practice. According to him, Islam is a total system; politics forms a part of this system, and cannot be neglected.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman criticizes the argument that the Prophet did not practice politics in the first Meccan period. According to Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman, this claim is false, because politics is not only about governing a state. In his words,

the Prophet from the first day of his *da'wa* intended to apply a different dogma from the dominant worldview and wanted to gather people around this dogma ... The Prophet also created a secret society [when the

Muslims were oppressed in Mecca], a society that worked publicly to change the social system. He used every available media, like personal conversations, sermons ... the media war against the belief of the *Jahiliyya*, and all of this is politics.⁴⁵

'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq thinks that the purist stance on politics only serves the enemies of Islam who destroyed the Caliphate and then established weak rulers in Muslim countries in order to safeguard the interests of the West. As these rulers refuse to govern according to Islam, the purists who legitimize their rule are serving the enemies of their religion. Unlike the purists, he also justifies the establishment of political parties on the grounds that they can raise the flag of Islam, and there is no any evidence in the Text that prohibits such organizations. He thinks that parties are effective tools of *da'wa* in a democratic system, and that it is in the interest of Muslims to preserve this system, since the alternative is military dictatorship. Many purists regard other types of associations, such as charitable organizations, as *bid'a* (invention) and therefore prohibited. However, according to Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman, such associations existed at the time of the Prophet. He mentions the case of Muslims who fled to Ethiopia to escape the repression of the Meccans. Since the Muslims lived in a minority in a predominantly Christian country, they forged close ties with each other and established an association (*jama'iyya*) led by one of the Companions, Ja'far bin Abi Talib.

Ihya' al-Turath after the liberation of Kuwait

While the Salafi movement was quite united until 1990 under the umbrella of *Ihya' al-Turath*, after the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation, this was no longer the case. The schism occurred due to debates within the Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia, which I described in an earlier section in this chapter. During the Gulf War, most Kuwaiti Salafis escaped to Saudi Arabia, where they

⁴⁵ 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, *al-Muslimun wa-l-'Amal al-Siyasi*, undated book, accessible online at: <http://www.salafi.net>. (accessed 5 February 2010).

rapidly began to play active parts in these debates. They were able to integrate quickly into the different Salafi networks and groups in Saudi Arabia because they were often connected to the Saudi Salafis through kinship.⁴⁶ Many of them became active participants in the *Sahwa* movement. Upon their return to their home country after the war, these individuals became pioneers of the *haraki* wing of Kuwaiti Salafism, as was the case for Dr. Hakim al-Mutayri, Shaykh Hamid al-'Ali and Dr. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Shayiji.

During the occupation of Kuwait, others sided with the purist camp, which was represented by the official Saudi *'ulama*. Most probably their main reason for doing so was the fact that the purists did not oppose Kuwait's liberation, even though it was undertaken by Western forces. Many Kuwaitis became influenced by Rabi' al-Madkhali (see the beginning of this chapter) and propagated his ideas upon their return. After the liberation, when most Kuwaiti Salafis returned home, the debates were exported to Kuwait, and in the 1990s, the local Salafi community split along *haraki* and purist lines. This schism, in turn, had an impact on Ihya' al-Turath. Until that time, the organization had been under the unquestionable influence of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq.

In the first half of the 1990s, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq was suddenly ousted from Ihya' al-Turath and the organization's ideological direction changed radically. In around 1996-1997, a purist stream gradually gained control over Ihya' al-Turath, led by Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Sabt and Shaykh Hayy al-Hayy, both influenced by Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali. According to some of my informants, the purists were given intensive state support, since the ruling family no longer trusted 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq and his followers. There were two reasons for this. First, Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman had personally sympathized with Saddam Hussein prior to the invasion, due to the Iraqi president's anti-Shi'a stance. Although Shi'ites were not the only victims of Saddam's persecution, many Salafis sympathized with him because he harshly repressed Shi'ite Islamic movements such as the Islamic Da'wa Party (*Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Most Kuwaitis have numerous relatives in Saudi Arabia, especially those who have tribal origins. All of the tribes that are present in Kuwait have extensions in Saudi Arabia.

⁴⁷ The Islamic Da'wa Party is currently the leading force in the Iraqi government. In the 1970s and 1980s it was led by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), one of the most important Shi'ite Islamist thinkers, whose thought has had a deep impact on contemporary Shi'ite Islamism. Salafis regard al-Sadr as one of the arch-enemies of Islam, along with Khomeini and other leading

Second, the Kuwaiti state was threatened by *haraki* Salafis due to their ambiguous stance towards Arab rulers.

The direct result of the expulsion of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq and most of his followers from Ihyā’ al-Turath was an open feud between ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq and Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Sabt, his former pupil. Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Sabt attacked one of the books written by ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq, *al-Sirat*, in which the latter describes *tawhid al-hukm* (oneness of governance) as an integral part of the pillars of *tawhid*.⁴⁸ As ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq puts it, “Unifying the *hakimiyya* of God Almighty means that we believe that he is the only one who has the right to govern and he is the source of the law for who those love him and accept [his *shari’a*]. As God said [in the Qur’an] there is no governance except for God [*la hukum illa li-llah*]”.⁴⁹ Purist Salafis interpreted this as the application of Sayyid Qutb’s concept of *hakimiyya* in a Salafi context.⁵⁰ According to Qutb, the government should be based on the sovereignty of God, which means that the legal system must be entirely based on *shari’a*. The ruler must rule justly, and must be chosen by the ruled, who must then obey the ruler. However, this obedience is based on the ruler’s obedience to God.⁵¹

‘Abdullah al-Sabt therefore accused ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq of making a covert call for a revolt against the ruler (*khuruj*) and called him a Khariji, after a sectarian movement in early Islam. The Khawarij (plural of Khariji) had revolted against the fourth Caliph, ‘Ali bin Abi Talib, when the latter agreed to settle his dispute with the governor of Damascus, Mu‘awiya bin Abi Sufyan, by arbitration. Mu‘awiya accused ‘Ali of hiding the murderers of the third Caliph, ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan – who was Mu‘awiya’s relative – and claimed the Caliphate for himself. Some of ‘Ali’s soldiers did not accept the method of arbitration, since according to them, “God alone has the right to judge [*la Hukum*

figures of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the current regime in Tehran. See: Rodger Shanahan, ‘Shia Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Dawa Party’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2004, pp. 943-949.

⁴⁸ Salafis usually regard *tawhid al-uluhiyya*, *tawhid al-rububiyya* and *tawhid al-asma’ wa-l-sifat* as the three pillars of Tawhid.

⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq, *al-Sirat*, 2000, available online at: www.salafi.net (accessed: 7 February 2010).

⁵⁰ Interview with Nasser al-Khalidi, 26 January 2010.

⁵¹ William E. Shephard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 117.

illa li-llah]”, which can also be translated as “no governance except for God”. As ‘Abdullah al-Sabt wrote in an article that referred to ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq:

The first Khawarij were repeating the truth but their aim was unjust with it: *la hukum illa li-llah*. They wanted to revolt against the legitimate Caliph of the Muslims ... That happened throughout history [i.e. according to the purist Salafi concept, the Khawarij always existed in Islamic history] and today’s Khawarij [*Khawarij al-‘Asr*] use the same word: the *hakimiyya* to excommunicate their rulers and legitimize the revolt against them.⁵²

In a lecture, ‘Abdullah al-Sabt explained that:

This sentence of *la hukum illa li-llah* is old in the vocabulary of the *khawarij*. They used it to excommunicate the companions [of the Prophet] and to revolt against [the Caliph] ‘Ali. [These thoughts] were transmitted among them [to the new generations] and then Sayyid Qutb used them ... then the contemporary *khawarij* developed these and divided *tawhid* into four parts [*aqsam*]: *uluhiyya*, *rububiyya*, *al-asma wa-l-sifat* and *al-hakimiyya*.⁵³

After that, he took a clear purist stance, which reflects the desire for order under the leadership of Muslim ruler, even if he is unjust (see the Introduction). He argued that, “there is no intelligent Muslim who thinks that governance is not for God”. However, he asked why it is necessary to emphasize this, since it can be misleading and cause political difficulties. In his article, ‘Abdullah al-Sabt explained that the Salafis believe in the “application of God’s rule on the Earth”, but this does not mean the “narrow-minded Hakimiyya concept of today’s Khawarij”. According to him, God’s rule means following all of the practices and rulings of Islam, and having a government that assures this (*iqamat al-hudud*). He rejects “the narrow-minded *hakimiyya*” propagated by Islamist movements.

⁵² Undated audio recording of the debate between Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq and ‘Abdullah al-Sabt.

⁵³ Ibid.

'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq responded to 'Abdullah al-Sabt in a religious letter (*risalah diniyyah*). In this, he stated that:

the Khawarij, when they said this word [*la hukum illa li-llah*] to 'Ali bin Abi Talib, were not demanding the application of the *shari'a*, but were disagreeing with him because he accepted the arbitration between him and Mu'awiyah ... Therefore not everybody is a Khariji who uses the words *la hukum illa li-llah*.⁵⁴

He thinks that revolution against the ruler is obligatory only if the ruler is openly an apostate and thinks that man-made law is as good as *shar'ia*, or better. Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman explained the inclusion of *tawhid al-hukum* among the pillars of *tawhid* as a matter of choice, not a matter of sacred principle. There is no reason why a Salafi should strictly hold on to the idea of three aspects of *tawhid*. One may also speak of just one pillar of *tawhid*, or of ten, if one so wishes.

It should be noted that when I asked 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq whether it was permissible for the ruled to overthrow the ruler under certain conditions, he refused to give me a clear answer, while the purists who today control Ihya' al-Turath respond with an unequivocal "no". Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, however, when the Muslim Brothers openly criticized the legitimacy of contemporary Arab regimes, including Kuwait, he had always argued that it was not in the interests (*maslaha*) of the *umma* to touch on political issues such as these.

After the emergence of the activist current of Salafism, the Gulf regimes began to worry about potential criticism of hereditary monarchical systems and their alliances with the West. The Kuwaiti state had had enough problems with the Muslim Brothers in the 1980s, and it did not want to count the Salafis among its opponents. Therefore the government began to support the purist Salafi faction led by 'Abdullah al-Sabt against 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq. By supporting a loyal faction and gaining control over Ihya' al-Turath, the state expected to ensure the loyalty of the majority of Salafis, or at least to depoliticize them. As the result of the internal strife in the organization, the majority of the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

followers of ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq left the organization in 1997 and created their own group under the name of “The Salafi Movement” (al-Haraka al-Salafiyya). After that, the nature of Ihya’ al-Turath rapidly changed. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq’s books disappeared from the organization’s publishing houses, and it instead began printing the works of the Saudi religious establishment and works by Kuwaiti scholars with purist views. These publications focus on two main issues: the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the question of jihad.

Ihya’ al-Turath’s ideology after the expulsion of ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Khaliq

On the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, Ihya’ al-Turath has printed the work, *‘Abd al-Salam bin Barjas Al ‘Abd al-Karim: Dealing with the Ruler according to the Book and the Sunna*.⁵⁵ The author is a renowned purist cleric, known for his harsh criticism of activist Salafis. At the beginning of the treatise, he makes it clear that revolt against the ruler (*al-khuruj ‘ala al-hakim*) is a corruption of religion and the world (*fasad al-din wa-l-dunya*), and that obedience is in the universal interest (*maslahat al-din wa-l-dunya*). Here he gives the example of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the governor of Iraq between 695 and 714, known in the Islamic tradition for his unjust behavior toward his subjects and for his cruelty. Despite this, the Prophet’s companions did not revolt against him. According to the author, Hajjaj was no better than contemporary rulers, but contemporary Muslims are not equal to the Sahaba.⁵⁶ In addition, he forbids revolt against the Muslim ruler who does not follow correct religious practice. Ahmad bin Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali *madhab* and one of the scholars who is most respected by Salafis, stood against those who wanted to remove the Abbasid Caliph because he had adopted the Mu’tazila (speculative theology).⁵⁷

The author gives a typical purist explanation of *hisba*, or *al-amr bi-l-ma’ruf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (commanding right, forbidding wrong). Although

⁵⁵ ‘Abd al-Salam bin Barjas bin Naser al ‘Abd al-Karim, *Mu’amalat al-Hukkam fi Dhu’ al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna* (Kuwait: Jama’iyyat Ihya’ al-Turath al-Islami, 2009).

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 11-12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

he does not criticize the idea that that *hisba* can be implemented by hand (*yadd*), tongue (*lisan*) and *qalb* (heart), he thinks that it must not lead to greater evil (*munkar akbar*); in other words, that correcting one mistake must not lead to another, even greater, mistake. Purist Salafis often mention the example of cafés such as Costa or Starbucks, where men and women can freely mix. In their view, while it would be desirable to close these establishments, it should be considered whether such an action would trigger resistance among the population and take them even further away from Islam. If this were to be the case, then such regulations should not be implemented. Likewise, it can be harmful to Islam when vigilant groups composed of enthusiastic young Salafis arbitrarily and forcefully try to implement *hisba* without the state's permission.⁵⁸ Only the ruler can use his hand, or the '*ulama*'; but the latter can only intervene to separate fighting parties. In other cases, the use of the hand – or in other words, the use of force to implement *hisba* – has to be ordered by the state, or by the ruler himself.

In other cases, only implementation by tongue or heart is permitted, but conditions are attached to the former. It can be done by the '*ulama*' during the Friday sermon, but the ruler must not be publicly criticized, since this can lead to disorder and revolt. The author supports his opinion with a *hadith* about the third Caliph Othman: "When the civil war broke out in the time of Othman, some of the people asked Usama bin Zayd [one of the companions of the Prophet]: You do not criticize Othman? He answered: What? Shall I criticize him in front of the people? No, I only can do it in private and thus not open the door to Evil".⁵⁹ This citation also reflects the common purist view that open criticism of the ruler is forbidden, and that it should only be done in private by skilled religious scholars. Publicly, the '*ulama*' can condemn those things that violate religious rules, but without relating them to the ruler.

The second main topic of the new purist discourse of Ihya' al-Turath is jihad, in response to the increase in terrorist attacks in the last decade on the Arabian Peninsula and elsewhere in the world. Ihya' al-Turath – like other Islamic charities – has been accused of sponsoring jihadi organizations worldwide. The US Treasury Department has accused the organization of giving

⁵⁸ For example, see the conversation between Shaykh Salim al-Tawil and his pupils, Kuwait, 4 February 2012.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

financial support to two South Asian terrorist groups. The first is the Pakistani group Laskar e-Tayyiba, which was responsible *inter alia* for the 2001 December attacks on the Indian parliament. The second is the Bangladeshi organization Jama'at al-Mujahidin. Both groups are linked to al-Qaeda.⁶⁰ On the basis of these accusations, the American government, having frozen its accounts in the US, demanded that the Kuwaiti state close Ihya' al-Turath (as the Saudis had done with Mu'assasat al-Haramayn). However, the Kuwaiti government did not fulfill this request, claiming that there was no reliable evidence against Ihya' al-Turath. Most Islamists – even those who were otherwise ideologically opposed to the organization, including *haraki* Salafis – resisted the ban. Although Ihya' al-Turath avoided the fate of Mu'assasat al-Haramayn, it came under almost total state control, and the purists' dominance became even more overwhelming. To avoid further accusations, Ihya' al-Turath put considerable effort into producing anti-jihadi propaganda. The organization published several books on the topic of jihad, and most of these are freely available in Salafi mosques worldwide. All of these publications reflect a strict purist agenda.

One of the most important and detailed of these books was written by a renowned Yemeni purist, Shaykh Abi Hassan al-Sulaymani, a pupil of the famous Yemeni purist scholar Muqbil al-Wadi'i. The book, entitled *al-Taffirat wa-l-Ightiyalat (The Bombings and the Murders)*, claims to explain the reasons for jihadi activity and offers solutions to the problem. The author thinks that the main reason for the radicalization of Muslim youth is that some Salafi scholars have begun to openly criticize Muslim rulers, and accuse them of hating Islam in truth and only being Muslims on the surface. This is a clear reference to *haraki* Salafis, who, according to the author, care little about *da'wa* and only focus on the issue of *hakimiyya*. This way of thinking inspired some young people who were ignorant of religious matters to take up weapons against their legitimate ruler. Suleymani thinks that although contemporary ruling regimes are not truly Islamic, Muslims should not revolt against them. He refers to a *hadith* to support his stance: "Always when an element of Islam is destroyed the people will cling

⁶⁰ Roy Bhaskar, 'Terrorism in Bangladesh: Monster Child of BNP Jamaat', *South Asia Analysis Group*, 17 November 2009, available from <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers36%5Cpaper3509.html> (accessed: 17 March 2010); 'Kuwait charity denies Qaeda links,' *Kuwait Times*, 15 June 2008.

even more to that which remains".⁶¹ The author explains that by this, Muhammad meant that even when a government was not truly Islamic, other aspects of Islam would remain strong. He also offers the example of the Companion of the Prophet, who did not revolt against the Umayyad caliphs, although they were much worse, in many respects, than contemporary Arab and Muslim rulers.⁶²

After the split with the *harakis* Ihya' al-Turath also published a booklet in which the organization's ideological foundations are explained.⁶³ The authors dedicate a considerable part of the book to the question of jihad. They regard the presence of the Imam (the ruler) as the most important condition for waging jihad. In the absence of this, Muslims can launch a holy war only if an external enemy occupies their land (*jihad daf'*, or defensive jihad; note that this is why most of the Salafis support the Palestinian resistance). However, here one should note that jihadis share this opinion, but they regard their activities as defensive jihad against those who occupy Muslim lands, even if they are fighting in the land of the enemy.⁶⁴ However, the authors' counter-argument is that jihad can only be waged face-to-face with the enemy; suicide attacks and bombings can also harm Muslims, and this is forbidden in Islam. In their argument, they refer to an *aya* in the Qur'an:

If there had not been among them, unknown to you, believing men and women whom you would have trampled underfoot, inadvertently incurring guilt on their account – God brings whoever He will into His mercy – if the [believers] had been clearly separated, We would have inflicted a painful punishment on the disbelievers.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Abi Hasan al-Sulaymani, *al-Taffirat wa-l-Ightiyalat* (Kuwait: Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami, 2008), p. 31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶³ Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami *Manhaj al-Jama'iyya li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Tawjih* (Kuwait: Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami, 1997).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Surah 48, ayah 25, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (trans), *The Qur'an* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 336.

Salafism in Kuwait after the split in Ihya' al-Turath

The secession of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq's faction from Ihya' al-Turath led to the reorganization of the Salafi movement in Kuwait, which in turn had a serious impact on the transnational movement as well. Kuwait can be considered one of the main hubs of transnational Islamic activism. Due to its relatively free environment, it serves as an important meeting point for activists. At the same time it is one of the most important centers of Islamic financing and charity activity in the world. For these reasons, transnational Islamic networks intersect in the country. Salafis from around the globe frequently travel to Kuwait to mobilize material resources or meet fellow activists. It is thus no wonder that local transformations in the Kuwaiti Salafi movement tend to have a transnational impact. The split of Kuwaiti Salafism into two main streams, a purist one and a *haraki* one, defined the character of Salafism in other locations, including Lebanon. Local factions became influential parts, and often the main material sponsors, of larger transnational networks. Therefore it is necessary to briefly describe the main Salafi groupings that emerged after the 1997 split in Ihya' al-Turath, before I analyze how they contributed to the transformation of Salafism in Kuwait.

The purists of Kuwait

Most of the purists identify themselves as close to Ihya' al-Turath, which now serves as their umbrella organization. Although the charitable institution's discourse has changed radically, it is still active in politics and has retained a relatively developed organizational structure in comparison to those of other Salafi groupings.

The members of the largest Salafi parliamentary block, *al-Tajammu' al-Salafi al-Islami* (Salafi Gathering), are closely connected to Ihya' al-Turath. Despite being politically active, they pursue predominantly purist aims in their parliamentary work. They always emphasize the need to obey the Emir of Kuwait, and they are mostly concerned with the islamization of social practices,

such as the segregation of the sexes in public institutions and universities, and obliging Muslim women to wear the *hijab* when they appear in public. As one of the Salafi MPs explained to me, the *da'wa* is not currently at an advanced stage and is endangered by both Westernized liberals and “extremists”. Parliament offers an excellent opportunity to defend the *da'wa*, support legislation that ensures the Islamic character of society and to practice *hisba*. Regarding this latter aspect, he mentioned how Salafis had contributed to the creation of a law that forbade the selling of alcohol on Kuwait Airways flights.⁶⁶ The members of *al-Tajammu'* – as Kuwaitis commonly refer to it – are often severely critical of those who are perceived to have insulted the person of the emir, whom they consider to be *wali al-amr*.⁶⁷

At the same time, *Ihya' al-Turath* preserved the organizational structure that had been established when Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq had dominated the institute. Although the Salafis who belong to the circle of *Ihya' al-Turath* tend to rely on informal networks, they maintain a more elaborate formal institutional structure than Salafis elsewhere. At the core of this lies the charitable organization itself and its branches in Kuwait's different districts. Besides mobilizing funds to implement projects abroad, these branches also organize local Salafis. They establish local committees (*lajna*), which set up programs for the followers of *Ihya' al-Turath* (more on this in Chapter 7).

The other influential purist stream contains those who belong to the Madkhalis, which I categorize as purist-rejectionists (see Chapter 1). Although fewer in number than the followers of *Ihya' al-Turath*, they have extended transnational networks in the Middle East, Europe and South-East Asia. The Madkhali stream in Kuwait developed around individuals who seceded from the Salafi mainstream when Salafis entered the political process in 1981. During the Gulf war they became close to the circle of Rabi' al-Madkhali. At the beginning of the 1990s, many young Salafis who rejected *Ihya' al-Turath's* main ideological line became attracted to them. Central to this wing of the Salafi movement in Kuwait are the Shaykhs Hamad 'Uthman, Salim al-Tawil, Falah Mundakar, and, from the younger generation, Ahmad al-Siba'i and Muhammad al-'Anjari.

⁶⁶ Interview with 'Ali al-'Umayr, 15 January 2010.

⁶⁷ *Al-Tajammu' al-Salafi: Narfudu Ayya Massas Bi-l-amir* (Salafi Gathering: We Refuse Touching [the Person] of the Emir), *al-Qabas*, 12 October 2012.

The cornerstone of their discourse is showing unquestioning loyalty to the ruler and being harshly critical of those who – in their opinion – disobey him. Purist-rejectionists interpret the meaning of *khuruj 'ala al-hakim* (see the Introduction) in a much narrower way than other purists. Mainstream purists think that Muslims can disobey the ruler and side with the opposition if the ruler uses extreme and unjustified violence against his subjects. For example, most purist Salafis in Ihya' al-Turath opposed the Syrian and Libyan revolutions, but when the governments of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi and Bashshar al-Assad started to murder large numbers of demonstrators, they felt justified in supporting the revolutionaries.⁶⁸ By contrast, Madkhalis attacked Ihya' al-Turath for taking this stance. Shaykh Salim al-Tawil called Bashshar al-Assad *wali al-amr*, forbade fighting against his army in a *fatwa*,⁶⁹ and described those Salafis who sent material support to the revolutionaries as *khawarij*.⁷⁰

As he explained when I interviewed him, Salafi *da'wa* can go on when there is a strong ruler who can provide security and essential infrastructure (such as roads, health services and food). This makes possible for the *da'is* to reach people and enables Muslims to focus on studying the Qur'an and Sunna, instead of focusing on their very survival.⁷¹ When Muslims start to establish organizations to achieve certain aims or express demands, they indirectly contribute to undermining and bringing down this order. Therefore even Salafis who claim to believe in unconditional obedience to the *hakim* are in fact partisans (*hizbiyyun*) and influenced by the Muslim Brothers, and he includes Ihya' al-Turath among these. As he explained, by organizing their members, they turn their attention away from the *shari'a* and become loyal to the organization instead. By their political activism and by occasionally forming different opinions to those of the ruler, they challenge the order.⁷²

⁶⁸ Interview with Khalid Safran, a youth leader of Ihya' al-Turath, Kuwait, 5 March 2012.

⁶⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKblfbmb1E4>. Shaykh Salim's fatwa incited a huge campaign against him, led by the Muslim Brothers and the *harakis*. In early March 2012 he was severely criticized in public sermons, on Internet sites and in social media (Facebook and Twitter).

⁷⁰ Interview, Kuwait, 3 February 2013.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Discussion in one of Shaykh Salim's *durus*, Sa'd al-'Abdullah district, 6 February 2012.

Purist-rejectionists commonly categorize those who do not agree with their views as belonging to *ahl al-bida'*⁷³ and openly express hostility towards them. One of the young Kuwaiti Madkhalis told me that he could be friends with someone who drinks alcohol or even a murderer, because he might repent. It is not possible to be friends with someone who is a *mubtadi'* (commits *bida'*), however, because this might make this person believe that he is right, and such behavior might imply that diversity in *'aqida* is permissible in Islam. Moreover, a murderer usually only kills one person, whereas the *mubdtadi'* kill thousands by legitimizing demonstrations and overthrowing *wulat al-amr* (pl. of *wali al-amr*).⁷⁴

One of the main characteristics of purist-rejectionists is their extreme social conservatism. They try to maintain close contact and socialize only with those who hold similar views. Most of them are reluctant to enter those parts of Kuwait that are seen as “secular” and “Westernized”, such as certain areas of Salmiya. They rarely go to restaurants, as females are also present there. By contrast, purists from Ihya' al-Turath usually do not mind appearing in such places if they have reason to be there (such as an appointment or business meeting), although Salafis generally agree that spending leisure time in shopping malls or “Western-style” cafés should be avoided.

At the same time, the networks of Ihya' al-Turath and the Madkhalis overlap in several ways. Despite the enmity the latter feel to the organization, many Ihya' al-Turath followers attend the religious lessons of the purist-rejectionist shaykhs because they possess deep knowledge in *hadith*. Purist-rejectionists also visit shaykhs associated with Ihya' al-Turath. Scholars such as Hayy al-Hayy or 'Uthman al-Khamis are considered to be close to Madkhali thinking and spend most of their time giving lessons and pursuing scientific research, even though both of them belong to the charity (Hayy al-Hayy is a known *hadith* expert, while 'Uthman al-Khamis specializes in the refutation of Shi'ite beliefs).

⁷³ Only those persons who are knowledgeable in matters of religion are regarded as *ahl al-bida'*. Those with only an average religious knowledge do not face the same harsh criticism from Madkhalis.

⁷⁴ Interview, Kuwait, 1 March 2012.

Haraki Salafis

The core of the *haraki* faction in Kuwait is made up of followers of Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, who seceded from Ihya' al-Turath in 1997. Although before the Gulf War, the majority of Salafis in Kuwait could probably be considered *harakis*, *haraki* thinking within the movement developed further after the Iraqi invasion. The young generation of Salafis in particular was exposed to the ideas of the Saudi *Sahwa* and many of them adopted several elements of Saudi thinking. The most important figure of the young generation of Kuwaiti *harakis* is probably Hakim al-Mutayri. He became the de facto leader of the activist-minded youth wing within Ihya' al-Turath that remained loyal to 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq.

According to Dr. Sajid al-'Abdali, a veteran *haraki*, before the Gulf war, Hakim al-Mutayri's thinking was closer to that of the purists, and he was mostly interested in the issue of '*ibadat*. At the time of the invasion he just finished his Master's degree at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca. When the debates between the activist Salafis and the purists started to heat up, he became involved in a network centered around Muhammad Surur Zayn al-'Abidin,⁷⁵ a leading figure in the *Sahwa* movement, which radically changed his thinking. Dr. Sajid described Mutayri as an unusually charismatic person who was able to gain admirers and friends quickly. In a short time, many young Kuwaitis who had escaped to Saudi Arabia joined him in the al-Qasim region, where he was then residing.

This group, which was led by Hakim al-Mutayri, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Shayiji and Shaykh Hamid al-'Ali, established a strong platform within Ihya' al-Turath. When the debate erupted between 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq and 'Abdullah al-Sabt, they founded a political organization, *al-Haraka al-Salafiyya* (Salafi Movement), under the leadership of al-Mutayri.

According to Dr. Sajid, the aim was initially not to secede from Ihya' al-Turath, but to establish a new political wing for Kuwaiti Salafis. Al-Mutayri's idea

⁷⁵ Muhammad Surur is one of the leading ideologists of *haraki* Salafism. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, one of the two dominant *haraki* networks in Saudi Arabia closely associated itself with his teachings. See: Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, pp. 63-70; al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 73-77.

was to create a political platform that would include both the purist-minded Salafi politicians and the *harakis*. He intended to create it in accordance with the example of the pre-Islamic tribal alliance of *Hilf al-Fudul*, in which everyone could have their own autonomy.

The above-mentioned alliance was made between five tribes a few years before the Prophet Muhammad's mission. They intended to protect each other's interests against outsiders, other tribes that were not part of the alliance. At the same time, the participants retained their autonomy; none of them could or intended to dominate the others.⁷⁶ Al-Mutayri wanted to create a Salafi alliance that would respect the differences between the various Salafi groups and would not focus on the disagreements, but would instead unify their lines and promote their mutual interests. The idea did not prove to be viable, mostly because of the purists' firm refusal to cooperate with those whom they considered *khawarij*. Al-Haraka al-Salafiyya soon became a separate *haraki* umbrella organization, connecting – mostly by informal relationships – most activist-minded Kuwaitis.⁷⁷

However, this network of *haraki* Salafis did not remain united for long. Internal differences surfaced quite soon. The main cause of the rift was the distinct visions of Hakim al-Mutayri and Hamid al-'Ali. When the former went to do his PhD at Muhammad Surur's Centre for Islamic Studies in Birmingham at the beginning of the 2000s,⁷⁸ Hamid al-'Ali took over as leader of the "Haraka". While Mutayri had originally wanted it to be an exclusively political organization, Al-'Ali started *da'wa* and charity activities, and transformed al-Haraka al-Salafiyya to be a competitor to Ihya' al-Turath. Due to the disagreements, Hakim al-Mutayri established his own political party, *Hizb al-Umma* (the Umma Party), in 2005.

Haraki Salafis never have been able to become as influential in Kuwaiti society as the purists. Obviously, most of the committed Salafis in the country sympathize with Ihya' al-Turath. Activists usually have only one member in parliament, Walid al-Tabtab'ai, while al-Tajammu' al-Salafi has between eight

⁷⁶ 'Hilf al-Fudul', in Bosworth, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

⁷⁷ Interview with Dr. Sajid al-'Abdali, former spokesman of al-Haraka al-Salafiyya, 4 March 2012.

⁷⁸ The center was established by Muhammad Surur in the mid-1980s, right after he had arrived as an exile in Britain. It functioned as a *haraki* think-tank and a key educational destination for the second generation of *haraki* Salafis in the 1990s and 2000s. See: Lacroix 2011, p. 154.

and ten. Despite this, Kuwaiti *harakis* are important members of transnational Salafi networks. The country is a significant transnational meeting point for activist-minded Salafis. *Harakis* from all around the world frequently make informal visits to Kuwait in order to meet individuals such as 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq or Hakim al-Mutayri. Prior to the Arab Spring, Kuwait was considered to be the only country in the Middle East in which Salafis did not face pressure from the government and security forces and were able to freely exchange their views. When I interviewed him in Kuwait, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq claimed that the idea that Egyptian Salafis should participate in politics had emerged during the meetings and workshops that these Salafis had attended in his house and mosque.⁷⁹

The charitable activities of *harakis* are also significant. Their charitable organization, Mabarrat al-'Amal al-Khayriyya, has projects all over the Middle East and Africa. They cooperate with the Qatari Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya, and also raise funds in informal ways. During my fieldwork in Kuwait, I often observed that activists would collect money during *diwaniyyas* and other informal meetings for purposes such as helping the revolutionaries in Syria. It is worth noting that large amounts of money are arriving in North Lebanon, destined for Syria. However, according to some of my informants in Wadi Khalid, the main transit region for Salafis in Lebanon going to Syria, part of this funding is never handed to the revolutionaries, but is kept by some of the Salafi shaykhs. According to them, this partly explains the increasing material means of some Salafis in the North.⁸⁰

The fragmentation of Salafism in Kuwait is a good illustration of the dynamics of the movement since the Gulf War, and the significant intra-movement transformations that have reshaped the face of Salafism worldwide. Being one of the most important hubs of Salafi transnational networks, the split in Ihya' al-Turath not only influenced the movement locally, but also had a significant transnational impact. In Chapter 4 I show how North Lebanese Salafism was influenced by the transformations in Kuwait. The splitting and reconfiguration of the structure of Salafism in Tripoli and its surroundings

⁷⁹ Interview, al-Bayan district, 12 March 2012.

⁸⁰ In the summer of 2011 I conducted many conversations with smugglers in Wadi Khalid, who are currently helping to transfer goods and money to the Syrian revolutionaries.

cannot be considered entirely unique; there were similar developments in Indonesia, for example.⁸¹ Therefore my analysis here uncovers important aspects of the roots of significant developments at the transnational level of the movement, and at the same time provides an important comparative perspective.

Qatar as a main hub of Haraki Salafism

To understand the development of Lebanese Salafism, it is also necessary to briefly discuss Qatar's position as one of the main transnational hubs of *haraki* Salafism and as a crucial source of sponsorship for the movement. The trajectory of Salafism is distinct from Salafism in Kuwait, and the reasons for this can mostly be found in the development of the country's sociopolitical structure.

Between its establishment in the second half of the 19th century and the second half of the 20th century, unlike Kuwait, Qatar gained little significance in transnational trade and remained one of the poorest areas of the Peninsula. As in Kuwait, the small sheikhdom's main income was based on pearl fishing, and the ruler also had to rely on the merchants who controlled the pearling industry. However, in Qatar the merchants were less wealthy and politically much weaker than in Kuwait. They were unable to counterbalance the Al Thani ruling clan, which dominated the political leadership.⁸² An economic crisis in the 1920s almost destroyed the Qatari merchant class. When the introduction of the Japanese cultivated pearl devastated the traditional pearl market, most merchants migrated to other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.⁸³ The few merchant families that remained in Qatar were unable to demand any kind of power-sharing agreement with the Al Thanis.

⁸¹ According to my informants in Jakarta, after the split in Ihya' al-Turath, the charity stopped sponsoring many *harakis* and instead built up an entirely purist network. The agents of Ihya' al-Turath in Jakarta whom I interviewed emphasized the need to obey *wali al-amr* under any conditions, if he is a Muslim. Interview with Ustaz Zarkashi and Ustaz Setiawan, Jakarta, 11 December 2012.

⁸² Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 112-118.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

Because of the unchallenged dominance of the ruling family, no body emerged in Qatar that was comparable to the parliament in Kuwait. Despite the country's rapid economic and social modernization after oil production began in 1940, the structure of the regime remained intact. Apart from members of the ruling family, no one could participate in political decision-making, and there was also no place for political movements, unlike in Kuwait. In Qatar, no powerful Arab Nationalist, Leftist or Islamist movements appeared that would have offered an alternative to the existing form of rule. Salafis confined themselves to strictly religious matters and never really aspired to fulfilling any political role. Salafism has been present in Qatar since the country's founding in 1878. Because of the lack of indigenous religious scholars, '*ulama*' from Najd settled in the small monarchy and provided religious services. Until the second half of the 1990s, they remained the sole religious authorities. Even in the 20th century, a local class of religious scholars failed to develop in Qatar, meaning that *Sa'di* shaykhs regularly crossed the border or settled in the country to fulfill the religious needs of the population. These '*ulama*' could be classified as purist, and were close to the official religious establishment of Saudi Arabia.

The Qatari religious field was totally reshaped when, in June 1995, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani deposed his father, Shaykh Khalifa, in a palace revolution. Apart from a broad modernization program, the primary objective of the first period of his reign was to rid his country of Saudi patronage. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1971, Qatar's internal and foreign policy had been dominated by its powerful neighbor.⁸⁴ The new emir broke with Riyadh and intended to rule independently from the House of Sa'ud, and transforming the religious field was one means of minimizing Saudi influence in the country. Most of the '*ulama*' in Qatar were loyal to Riyadh, rather than to the new ruler. Shaykh Hamad also feared that these scholars might side with one of the pro-Saudi wings of the royal family to oust him. Therefore the post-1995 government sacked the Saudi preachers and replaced them with Egyptians, Syrians, Yemenis and Saudi *Sahwis*. The cooptation of the latter is important for

⁸⁴ Guido Steinberg, 'Qatar and the Arab Spring: Support for Islamists and the New Anti-Syrian Policy'. Report: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 7 February 2012, p. 2, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publications/swp-comments-en/swp-aktuelle-details/article/qatar_and_the_arab_spring.html (accessed: 6 June 2013).

understanding the establishment of one of the most powerful *haraki* Salafi charity organizations and a main patron of Lebanese Salafism, Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya (Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association – SACA).

As already mentioned in this chapter, the Saudi *Sahwa* insurgency was suppressed by the state in 1995. Many of the activists ended up in prison or had to leave the kingdom. Doha offered some of the less prominent *Sahwi* shaykhs the chance to settle in the country and work as *khatibs* and imams of mosques. The Qatari government expected these '*ulama*' to be loyal to the ruling family in Qatar due to their persecution in their native country, and because the emir at that time was about to implement similar political reforms to those that they had been demanding in Saudi Arabia.⁸⁵ The ruler had two main reasons for hosting and employing the *harakis*. First, they were a means of strengthening his legitimacy against the Saudis, who were likely to seize every opportunity to reinstall their tutelage over Qatar or even annex it.⁸⁶ Second, the *Sahwis* were able to cater to the religious needs of the Salafi-minded inhabitants of the country, thereby largely detaching them from the Saudi religious establishment.

The ruler also tried to assure the loyalty of the *Sahwis* by using patronage to bind them to him. The ruling family generously funded the *haraki* Salafis' activism abroad by giving them part of the personal property and wealth of one of the deceased members of the Al Thani clan, Shaykh 'Aid bin Muhammad (1922-1994). Before he died, Shaykh 'Aid specified in his will that one third of his material possessions should be used to establish a charity organization. Most *haraki* Salafis in the country were tied in some way or another to the newly-founded charity. Since SACA was put in charge of money that came from the royal family, they became their clients. According to Mehran Kamrava, this is one of the ways in which the Qatari royal family has traditionally ensured the loyalty of different elements of society.⁸⁷

In recent years, SACA has established a worldwide presence: it has become key player in Salafism in several regions, including the Middle East and

⁸⁵ I acquired this information while talking to a group of *haraki* Salafis in the office of Dr. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nu'aymi in Doha in June 2010.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Mehran Kamrava, 'Royal Factionalism and Political Liberalization in Qatar,' *Middle East Journal*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2009, pp. 407-408.

Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia), and its influence in Europe is growing. It supports hundreds of local charities, Islamic centers and mosques and gives financial aid to countless relief projects, from well-digging to the building of schools and hospitals. Unlike Ihya' al-Turath, SACA does not have official branches abroad, but instead sponsors independent local charities or even individuals. However, those who receive financial support have to be well embedded in transnational *haraki* networks and have to have good personal contact with someone who is influential in the organization (see Chapter 7).

Patronizing an organization such as SACA fits the profile of Qatari foreign policy. The emirate has traditionally supported Islamic movements around the world to increase its international influence. The main recipients are the Muslim Brothers, such as the al-Nahda party in Tunisia or the Brotherhood's Egyptian branch.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Salafis also receive vast amounts of money. Islamic movements are rarely (or maybe never) paid directly by the state, but by one of the charities that are patronized by the ruling family. Doha expects its beneficiaries to remain loyal when they gain more influence in society, or even come to power, as happened in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.

As I show in Chapter 4, SACA has become a dominant player in Lebanese Salafism by sponsoring the *harakis*. The organization funds the charitable activities of local shaykhs in Tripoli and the North, pays the salaries of hundreds of preachers and finances the building and maintenance of mosques and religious colleges. With this, SACA is contributing to the Lebanese *harakis'* ability to continue to compete with the increasingly influential purists, and to retain their significance within the movement at the local level.

⁸⁸ Steinberg, 'Qatar and the Arab Spring', pp. 3-4.

Chapter 3

Salafi Expansion in the 1990s

In this chapter I investigate the roots of Salafism's emergence as what is probably the most prominent and powerful Islamic movement in North Lebanon's Sunni community. Salafis today constitute a religiously educated vanguard with a large base of passive followers. Unlike in some other regions, such as Indonesia, the Gulf or even Europe, while there is only a modest (but rapidly growing) number of fully committed Salafis, masses of ordinary individuals submit themselves to Salafi religious authority. Salafis control a large number of mosques, which enables them to spread their ideas while providing everyday religious services. According to data that I acquired from Dar al-Fatwa (the official religious establishment of the Sunni sect), the institution administers only 40 of the 110 mosques in Tripoli. Another 40 are under the control of Salafi shaykhs, and 30 mosques belong to different movements such as *al-Ahbash* (a Sufi-inspired movement), *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* and *al-Tabligh*.¹ In *Bab al-Tabbana*, one of the most politically sensitive and unstable quarters of the city, all seven mosques are under Salafi control, while Dar al-Fatwa has little influence. In another region in the North, Wadi Khalid, which has 23 villages and 40,000 inhabitants, 15 of the 30 mosques belong to the Salafis, while the rest are controlled by Dar al-Fatwa and Sufi shaykhs. While I do not have precise numbers (and I think that it would be impossible to acquire numerical data on this issue), one can readily guess that a very significant part of the Sunni population of the North attends Salafi mosques and seeks advice in relation to daily religious practices from Salafi shaykhs.

Until the 1990s, when the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) had just ended, Salafism did not have the kind of influence that I described above. For a

¹ The original Urdu name of this latter movement is Tablighi Jamaat, since the movement originated from India in the first half of the 20th century. See Mumtaz Ahmad, 'Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i Islami and Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia', in *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 457-530.

long time, Salafis constituted a marginal group with no significant influence on the religious field in North Lebanon. The sociopolitical environment of the 1990s made it possible for the movement to gain a foothold in North Lebanese society. In this chapter I employ the concept of “political opportunity structures” to investigate the factors that facilitated this Salafi expansion. I show how the movement exploited the weakening of the traditional religious establishment, the decreasing influence of the Salafis’ competitors, emerging sectarian tensions and the appearance of transnational sponsors, so as to increase its popular support.

A brief political history of Lebanon

Unlike other Arab countries, Lebanon lacks a strong state and a repressive political system that can control the religious realm. The reason for this is that the Lebanese state and society have been built on a fragile balance between the four main religious communities: the Maronite Catholics, Sunnis, Shi’ites and Druzes (an esoteric, monotheistic community, which developed from *Isma’ili* Shi’ism in the 11th century).

The roots of Lebanon’s current sociopolitical make-up go back to the 19th century, when the territory was under Ottoman rule. During that period, the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon was mostly inhabited by Maronite Christians and Druzes. In 1860, a short but bloody civil war erupted between the two communities. In the aftermath of the fighting, the foundations of the contemporary Lebanese sectarian system were laid. Mount Lebanon became an autonomous province within the empire (*mutasarrifiyya*). The political positions in this autonomous province were filled according to sectarian affiliation, preparing the ground for the modern Lebanese regime.² As Ussama Makdisi explains, the aftermath of the civil war and the establishment of the sectarian-based institutional system led to the emergence of a “culture of sectarianism”, which he defines as a “culture that singled out religious affiliation as the defining

² Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon 1861-1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 82-102.

public and political characteristic of a modern subject and citizen³." Since then, sectarianism has been the main defining feature of Lebanese politics.

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed after the First World War, Mount Lebanon came under French mandate. The French attached the coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, Tyre and Tripoli, and territories in the south, north and east of Mount Lebanon. The new entity had a different sectarian make-up from that of the autonomous province of Mount Lebanon, because the majority of the new territories were made up of Sunnis and Shi'ites. The sectarian character of the political system was preserved. After independence and the formation of the Lebanese Republic in 1946, the religious communities were given a proportional share in the parliament and the most senior political positions were distributed between them. The presidency fell to the Maronites, and that of speaker of the parliament to the Shi'ites. The Druzes filled key ministerial portfolios. The parliamentary seats were distributed between Christians and Muslims (Druze are officially regarded as a Muslim sect) in a 6:5 ratio. Jobs in the public sector and university positions were also distributed according to sectarian quotas.⁴

Sectarianism in Lebanon is significantly different from elsewhere, where sectarian communities wish to secede or achieve as much autonomy as possible. A good example is Northern Ireland, where Catholics want to secede from the United Kingdom. In Lebanon, however, the different communities accept the concept of Lebanon as a multi-sectarian society.⁵ According to Shaery-Eisenlohr,

sectarianism is not about the dislike of other religious communities or the unwillingness to coexist, as those practices of boundary making/boundary breaking can be found in many other places ... Rather, ethnic entrepreneurs are concerned with who will eventually define the

³ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 159.

⁴ William Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon: History's Revenge* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), pp. 136-137.

⁵ Indeed, the Lebanese are proud of their country and its multi-faceted character. In my experience, Lebanese abroad, regardless of sectarian belonging, always speak enthusiastically about their homeland and emphasize the coexistence of different religious groups and the atmosphere of freedom. However, it is not obvious how the Arab revolutions will affect the loyalty of the Sunni community in particular towards the concept of Lebanon. I will discuss this question later in this study.

terms of this citizenship and coexistence, and which side will be assigned a marginalized position in the newly constructed national narrative.⁶

Sectarianism is manifested in the structure of the political system and the state institutions.

The literature identifies sectarianism as Lebanon's central sociopolitical problem, and the main cause of instability and internal violence.⁷ The first major disruption of the fragile sectarian equilibrium occurred in 1975. The main cause of the conflict was the tension between the Maronite political right, led by the Phalangist Party (*Hizb al-Kata'ib*) and the Muslim-dominated Lebanese National Movement (*al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya* – LNM), which consisted of Leftist and Arab Nationalist forces. When civil war erupted between these two camps in April 1975, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had established itself in the country after its displacement from Jordan in 1970, was dragged into the conflict on the side of the LNM.⁸ The civil war lasted more than 15 years, until the end of 1990.

These 15 years of sectarian violence had two important consequences in the context of this study. The first was the reconfiguration of the sectarian power balance. During the civil war, the Maronites lost their dominant position, while the previously impoverished and politically weak Shi'ites emerged as what was probably the most powerful community in Lebanon. When Israel invaded the country in 1982 to drive out the PLO, it triggered widespread Shi'ite resistance. Some of the Shi'ite militants who fought the occupying forces were inspired by the Islamist ideology of post-revolutionary Iran. With Tehran's support, they created Hezbollah, an Islamist movement, which later became one of the main political wings of the Lebanese Shi'a. Hezbollah's activities were one of the main factors behind Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian tensions, which began emerging in the

⁶ Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 9.

⁷ Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon* (New York, Chichester and West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁸ Lebanese political scientist Farid El-Khazen gives a detailed account of the roots of the outbreak of the civil war. He points out that the moderation of the Phalangist Party on the eve of the outbreak of the conflict was not enough to avoid the bloodshed, due to the uncontrolled activities of the Palestinian fighters. See, Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 187-217 and pp. 237-240.

1990s. I explain the roots of these sectarian tensions in more in detail later in this chapter.

The second consequence was that in the period after the civil war, Lebanon became a de facto Syrian protectorate. Damascus' domination of Lebanon was grounded in the military presence that it had sustained in the country since 1976. At that time, Syria had interfered in the Lebanese Civil War in order to prevent the LNM from achieving a decisive victory over the Maronites. After that, Hafiz al-Assad's regime became a main player on the Lebanese battleground. The Ta'if Agreement to end the civil war – made between the warring Lebanese parties in 1989 in the Saudi Arabian city of the same name – was brokered by Damascus, due to its ability to shift the power balance in its favor. The agreement modified the proportion of Christian to Muslim parliamentarians from 6:5 to 5:5. Furthermore, executive power was ceded from the hands of the Maronite president of the republic to the Sunni prime minister. Syrian dominance over Lebanon was assured by a passage in the agreement that enabled Syrian intervention in the case of internal conflict, upon the Lebanese government's request. Furthermore, the Ta'if agreement extended the legal basis of the Syrian army's presence in the country for two years after the formation of the new government.⁹

The “Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination [*Mu'ahadat al-Ukhuwwa wa-l-Ta'awun wa-l-Tansiq*]” – or Brotherhood Treaty – consolidated Damascus' dominance and provided the legal basis for the so-called Security Regime (*al-Nizam al-Amni*). It was signed in 1991 and provided grounds for large-scale Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs. The treaty established cooperation between the two countries on matters of politics, economics and security. It prescribed the creation of bilateral committees to coordinate the affairs of the two countries. Due to the power disparity between Syria and Lebanon, the treaty ensured the overlordship of the former over the latter.¹⁰

Syrian control over Lebanese politics, security and economic affairs was built up by appointing loyal figures to head the country's security forces and

⁹ Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon*, p. 262.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 279-280.; Bassel Salloukh, 'Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed', *MERIP*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2005, <http://ns2.merip.org/mer/mer236/syria-lebanon-brotherhood-transformed> (accessed: 14 May 2013).

army. By doing so, Damascus was able to control Lebanese political groups, and by gerrymandering the elections, the Syrian regime was able to create governing coalitions that served its interests.¹¹ The other pillar of the Ba'th regime's dominance over Lebanon was its influence over Hizbullah. Damascus' main strategy was to use Hizbullah as a proxy to strengthen its regional influence and to retain constant pressure on Israel. By doing so, the Assad regime hoped to press Tel Aviv towards negotiations about withdrawal from the Golan.¹² In exchange for Syrian protection, Hizbullah also assisted with counter-balancing Damascus' opponents in the political field.¹³

In this political environment, Salafism emerged as an important Sunni social movement in the 1990s. Before I analyze the changes in the context that enabled the Salafis to expand their influence, I briefly explain the historical roots of the movement in North Lebanon.

The roots of Salafism in Lebanon

Salafis usually claim that their movement is one of the oldest Islamic movements in Lebanon, founded in the late 1940s by Salim al-Shahhal (1922-2008), a self-educated intellectual from the Dinniyeh region. His son, Abu Bakr al-Shahhal, told me that his father was originally influenced by the reformist Salafism of Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who was born in the village of Qalamun near Tripoli, but spent most of his life in Egypt. At the end of the 1940s, Al-Shahhal became an enthusiastic reader of the journal *al-Manar* that had been established by Rida.¹⁴

Here we should mention that Rida originally belonged to the so-called "reformist Salafi" stream, or Islamic reformism, that emerged in the late 19th century in Egypt and then became influential in most Middle Eastern countries

¹¹ Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon*, pp. 281-291.

¹² Gary C. Gambill and Ziad K. Abdelnour, 'Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus', *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0202_11.htm. (accessed: 11 February 2013).

¹³ Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004); pp. 46-48.

¹⁴ Interview with Abu Bakr al-Shahhal, Tripoli, 29 October 2009.

(as discussed in Chapter 1). Although this stream of Salafism stressed the need to return to the practice of the Pious Ancestors, condemned the rigidity of the four *madhahib* and refused *taqlid*, it approached the Text by using reason and logic rather than literal interpretation.¹⁵ In his later period, however, Rida adopted a more literalist approach and put more stress on the hadith than his ancestors, such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani or Muhammad 'Abduh.¹⁶

In the 1960s, Salim al-Shahhal became a member of the network of the famous Salafi scholar, Nasir ad-Din al-Albani. Through him, he was able to reach many Salafi scholars in Saudi Arabia and gain financial support for his *da'wa* activity. It should be added, however, that according to his relatives and contemporaries, Shaykh Salim did not adopt the contemporary meaning of the Salafi *manhaj* and he was not conscious of belonging to the Salafi *da'wa*. He even refused to use the word "Salafi", and rejected the Manichean worldview of contemporary Salafis, who see the world through the lens of conflict between the true religion and heresy and unbelief. Rather, he considered himself one of Tripoli's religious intellectuals, who was respected even by the political leaders of the city.

It is well known that he was often invited to advise the leaders of the Karami clan, the most powerful of Tripoli's *zu'ama'* until the civil war. Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghani, one of the Palestinian shaykhs in Nahr al-Barid camp in the outskirts of Tripoli, remembered that in the 1960s, al-Shahhal used to be the candidate for Hizb al-Tahrir, an Islamist movement that intends to reestablish the Caliphate, in the parliamentary elections. According to the shaykh, he preferred wearing traditional "Shami" (refers to Greater Syria) dresses to Salafi attire. "Salim al-Shahhal with another Shaykh, 'Utman al-Safi, used to stalk the streets of Tripoli wearing turbans, trousers and light shirts with two pistols in the belt. If they observed that somebody's behavior was un-Islamic they tried to convince him to change. They regarded this as part of *hisba*." Those with whom I spoke, however, stated that they had never heard him express the concept of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (explained in Chapter 1).

¹⁵ Muhammad Khalid Masud, 'Islamic Modernism', in Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (eds), *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 244-245.

¹⁶ Ana Belén Soage, 'Rashid Rida's Legacy', *The Muslim World*, vol. 98, no. 1, 2008.

In the early 1950s, Shaykh Salim gathered some pious youths from the city and named the group *Muslimun* (Muslims). This group became the nucleus of Islamic movements in the Sunni community. Among the disciples of al-Shahhal were, for example, Fathi Yakan, the founder and first leader of the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brothers, and Sa'id Sha'ban, the leader of *Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami* (the Islamic Unification Movement) that ruled Tripoli for two years at the beginning of the 1980s. Many of the main figures in the current Salafi *da'wa* were also socialized in the group that was run by Salim al-Shahhal.

However, despite the existence of some Salafis in Tripoli, prior to the Lebanese Civil War, the conditions were not favorable for the movement to gain many grassroots followers. There were three main reasons for this. First, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Sunni masses were attracted to Arab Nationalist and Leftist currents. Young people aged 18-40, who currently tend to constitute the main supporter base of Salafism in the Middle East, were at that time attracted by Nasserism and, to a lesser extent, Marxism. Levels of religiosity were falling among this group. The gradually narrowing religious field was under the firm control of Dar al-Fatwa. Shaykhs from the traditional religious establishment were fervent supporters of Arab Nationalism, which therefore gained the sympathy of those who still visited the mosques.¹⁷ In such a climate, Salafis could not find a wide constituency. Those individuals who were keen to follow pietistic trends tended to join one of the well-established and influential Sufi orders.

Second, prior to the civil war, al-Shahhal's group still lacked skilled activists who would be able to appeal to the masses. Even in their social habits, the members of 'Muslimun' were no different from the more traditional inhabitants of the North. They usually warned people not to follow Sufi practices and to perform religious rituals correctly, but they did not possess the elaborate, alternative worldview held by contemporary Salafis. In other words, they did not challenge Arab Nationalism. According to some accounts, al-Shahhal even sympathized with it. At that time, Salafis focused on a number of narrow issues that were limited to personal religious practices. Third, Salafis were lacked transnational support. At that time, the Saudi Kingdom was propagating a

¹⁷ Interview with Shaykh Khaldun 'Uraymit, a high-ranking Dar al-fatwa official from 'Akkar. Beirut, 3 August 2008.

general message of Islamic solidarity, but it was not yet exporting Salafism abroad. Although Salim al-Shahhal had good connections in the Saudi religious establishment, he was unable (or even did not intend) to gain significant financial support to spread the *da'wa*.

Political opportunity structures and the emergence of social movements

It is hard to deny that shifts and changes in the larger sociopolitical structure play a crucial role in the emergence and development of a social movement. To analyze these shifts, scholars of social movements have developed the concept of political opportunity structures (POS). The concept has become a major field in social movement research, although one of the most debated and contested. In my analysis of the emergence of Salafism in Lebanon, I employ POS to examine the interplay of external factors facilitating the growth of the movement. After briefly reviewing the academic debate on POS, I will propose some theoretical reconsiderations.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, social movement theorists have recognized that changes in political and social structures facilitate or hinder the emergence and development of social movements. In Tarrow's words, political opportunity structures are "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements."¹⁸ According to the dominant view, political opportunity structures may consist of institutional changes, social transformations, changing alliances, and conflicts; in short, those factors that can provide a movement with resources to mobilize and help it to oppose external constraints.¹⁹

However, there have been serious critiques of POS theory. As Gamson and Meyer write,

¹⁸ Sidney Tarrow, 'States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements', in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 54.

¹⁹ Herbert Kitschelt, 'Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986.

The concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment – political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts ... It threatens to become an all encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all.²⁰

In their article criticizing the political process model, Goodwin and Jasper write that “any statement that X leads to Y (in our case, expanding political opportunities give rise to social movement mobilization) is not very illuminating when X includes everything under the sun”.²¹

According to them, “defined this broadly, ‘political opportunities’ explain social movements with the same precision that ‘social structure’, say, explains criminal behavior.” Although if we restrict political opportunities to a list of narrowly defined political factors, as McAdam does,²² the result will be insufficient to explain the rise of a social movement.²³ Goodwin and Jasper also draw attention to the so-called “structural” bias that “structural factors (i.e. factors that are relatively stable over time and outside the control of movement actors) are seen emphasized more readily than others – and nonstructural factors are often analyzed as though they were structural factors”. They regard political opportunities as too determinative; theorists tend to disregard other factors, such as the cultural environment or people’s choices. Others have formulated similar critiques of POS theory. Munson, in his analysis of the emergence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, argues that existing political opportunities alone are unable to explain why the Brotherhood gained prominence in the first half of the 20th century, and not the Communists. He

²⁰ William A. Gamson and David S. Meyer, ‘Framing Political Opportunity’ in McAdam et al., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, p. 275.

²¹ Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, ‘Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory’, *Sociological Forum*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1999, p. 31.

²² Doug McAdam, ‘Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions’, in McAdam et al., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, p. 26.

²³ Goodwin and Jasper, ‘Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine’, p. 32.

suggests that we should examine other factors that emanate from the characteristics of the movement.²⁴

The other weakness of most POS approaches is that the majority of studies analyze how protest activities and strategies emerge, but not how opportunities enable a movement to broaden its presence in a society and extend its influence among a population.²⁵ Even scholars of 'new social movements' (see Chapter 1), when discussing POS, overemphasize the transformations in the institutional system and tend only to discuss those opportunities that facilitate protest.²⁶ Goodwin and Jasper rightfully observe that POS theorists ignore those movements that "challenge dominant beliefs and symbols, influence collective identities, and even penetrate more state oriented social movements," focusing instead on the organization of demonstrations and sit-ins. Salafis are also not or only indirectly interested in protest.²⁷ Their activities serve their aim of dominating religious symbols and discourses. For this purpose, they intend to alter the identity of other (mostly Sunni) Muslims and eliminate every element of their thinking and worldview that does not agree with the Salafi understanding of religion.²⁸ Therefore, at least in the Lebanese context, these shifts and changes in the sociopolitical structure mostly mean opportunities for Salafis that somehow relate to the identity and consciousness of Sunni Muslims. To understand this, we need to employ a different approach from that to be found in the mainstream POS literature. I would like to

²⁴ Ziad Munson, 'Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood', *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2001, pp. 500-507.

²⁵ Social movement theorists often equate the rise of protest with the rise of a social movement, ignoring different types of collective action to achieve social change. See, for example: Hanspeter Kriesi, 'Political Context and Opportunity', in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

²⁶ Hanspeter Kriesi, 'The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization', in J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (London: UCL Press, 2005); David S. Meyer, 'Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest', *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2003.

²⁷ Since the Arab Spring in particular, Salafis are participating in and organizing demonstrations more often, with varying degrees of success. However, this is not to suggest that Salafism is becoming a protest-oriented movement. Protest is never the chief strategy to achieve the Salafi movement's aims. Such activities are only part (and not the most important part) of Salafis' contest to dominate symbols. For example, at the universities in Tunisia, Salafis often organized demonstrations to allow female students to wear the *burqa* on campus, while they rarely joined protests making economic demands.

²⁸ It is relatively rare for Salafis to focus on the *da'wa* of non-Muslims.

emphasize that I do not intend to elaborate a general theory; I only suggest some theoretical modifications in order to apply POS to studying the Salafi groups that I examine here, and to facilitate the understanding of the emergence of Salafism and other puritan movements in general.

First, I propose a different understanding of the “political” from that which is implied in the majority of works using the POS approach. The latter, influenced by liberal political theory, deal with the concept of the “political” as something that exists within the framework of the state and its relevant institutions and which is legitimized by the state. Scholars of Islamic movements have criticized this approach as being limited and insufficient to understand the dynamics of Muslim societies. Eickelman and Piscatori use the concept of politics to mean not only “command of organized force” or “distribution of the command of force”, but also “bargaining among several forces or contending groups” and, referring to Wittgenstein’s and Oakeshott’s conceptualizations, “public negotiation over the rules and discourse that morally bind the community together.”²⁹ They stress the importance of contest for defining meanings and symbols and controlling the institutions that produce them, since these meanings and symbols constitute the value system that is necessary for the existence of a political community.³⁰

The definition of politics used by Peter Mandaville in his study of Muslim transnationalism is similar to that employed by Eickelman and Piscatori. He synthesizes two directions in the conceptualization of politics. According to the first, the “political” can be characterized by social antagonism over identity. Antagonism arises when the recognition of one’s particular identity is withheld, or when someone attempts to force a discrepant identity.³¹ The second direction is characterized by ethical claims. As Mandaville puts it, “politics is often about the assertion of a particular vision of what constitutes ‘the good’”.³² According to the author, there is a close relationship between these two approaches, since identity claims often overlap with ethical claims, especially when “particular

²⁹ David F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 9.

³¹ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 9-10.

³² *Ibid.* 10.

identities are seen to be closely related to certain ethical projects” (as is obvious in the case of Salafism).

Dealing with the political as negotiation and contest over symbols and meanings, identity and the ability to define “the common good” makes POS theory a more useful tool for analyzing Islamic movements that are not protest-oriented. A wider range of aspects is included in the field of politics, such as morality, sexuality, religion, mediation, and other social activities that are important in the context of these movements. In this way, political opportunities mean those shifts in the structure that first, enable social movements to assert their identities and encourage others to adopt them; and second, which contribute to increasing the acceptance of the movement’s concept of the common good in society.

Social movement theorists focusing on Western protest-oriented movements commonly consider *declining state repression, increasing political access, divisions among the elite* and *the emergence of influential allies* as political opportunities.³³ In the case of identity-oriented religious movements such as Salafism, different sorts of shifts can be opportunities. According to my analysis, these are *the decline of the traditional religious establishment, delegitimation of competitors, the emergence of transnational (or in other cases local) sponsors, and deepening sectarian (or in other cases ethnic) cleavages*. In addition, declining state repression and the presence of influential allies often play an important role. However, in the case of Lebanese Salafism, these are not important enough to be discussed as separate political opportunities. In the following section I will show how these opportunities emerged in Lebanon and how the Salafis responded to them.

Social movement theorists often restrict their inquiry to the national context, while ignoring the shifts in the international context that also affect the movement. To avoid such methodological nationalism, I examine how changes in the transnational field have affected the local and interplay with local changes in the POS.

³³ McAdam, ‘Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions’, pp. 54-56.

Specific political opportunities

In the following I distinguish four specific opportunities that facilitated the expansion of the Salafi *da'wa* in the 1990s: the decreasing influence of the traditional religious establishment, the delegitimation of the Salafis' competitors, the emerging Sunni-Shi'i tensions, and the appearance of transnational sponsors.

1. *The weakness or decline of the traditional religious establishment – the weakening of Dar al-Fatwa.* Prior to the civil war, Sunni religious life was quite organized in Lebanon. It was possible to draw the boundaries of the '*ulama*' class. The religious scholars belonged to the official Sunni religious administration organized under the auspices of *Dar al-Ifta'* (commonly known as *Dar al-Fatwa*).³⁴ At the top of this religious hierarchy were those scholars who had been educated in prestigious religious institutions such as al-Azhar in Cairo. The lower level was made up of informally educated shaykhs.

The distribution of the tasks of the high and lower-class religious specialists (*rijal al-din*) is well described by Fuad I. Khuri in his study on Lebanese Muslim religious scholars:

Not only do Sunni specialists differ in the scale of their training, but also in the details of the tasks they perform. The lower ranks perform less prestigious functions such as “washing and burying the dead”, “reciting and chanting Qur'anic verses during funerals”, “calling for daily prayer”, “signaling Ramadan fasting schedule”, and the like. These tasks assigned to local shaykhs, the lower ranks, could in Sunni Islam be performed likewise by the laity. By contrast, the higher ranks, the formally trained jurists, are responsible for the administration of Islamic law and share in the management of religious welfare including shari'a schools, colleges, orphanages, vocational training centers and homes for the aged. Along with the power elite, they supervise the *awqaf* revenues and

³⁴ Fuad I. Khuri, 'The Ulama: A Comparative Study of Sunni and Shi'a Religious Officials', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1987.

expenditures, allocate funds for building and maintaining mosques, opening or cleaning cemeteries.³⁵

This religious elite had a relationship of mutual dependency with Lebanese Sunni patrons, including political patrons (*zu'ama'*) and local notables (*wujaha'*). The lower-level religious officials did not receive any salary from Dar al-Fatwa, but were directly dependent on financial support from local communities such as villages or city quarters, and needed the backing of their leaders. The high-ranking '*ulama'*' filled political positions and depended on government appointments, and therefore needed good relations with the *zu'ama'*. The jurists who administered religious endowments (*awqaf*) also had a similar clientelistic relationship. These endowments were mostly financed by patrons, who also had a decisive voice in the committees that elected their administration.³⁶ At the same time, the '*ulama'*' served for the *zu'ama'* as an effective tool for controlling the population and recruiting voters.

In contemporary North Lebanon this setting changed and the authority of the official '*ulama'*' became contested. The main reason for this was the weakening of the role of Dar al-Fatwa and the disruption of traditional social structures and alliances. During the civil war, when Leftist and Arab Nationalist militias gained prominence at the expense of the traditional *zu'ama'*, the old alliance between the latter and the religious elite also largely disappeared. For a while, the '*ulama'*' seemed to have become not only the religious but also the political representative of the Sunni community, but this newly-gained influence went into reverse after the 1989 assassination of the charismatic state *mufti* Hassan Khalid.³⁷ His successor, Muhammad Rashid Qabbani, who lacks personal charisma and adequate leadership skills, is far from possessing his predecessor's

³⁵ Ibid., p. 296.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 299.

³⁷ Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, 'The Sunni Religious Scene in Beirut', *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1998, p. 71. Hasan Khalid was killed by a car bomb on 16 May 1989 while returning from a meeting with Prime Minister Michel 'Awn. It is widely believed that the assassination was carried out by Syrian intelligence, because the mufti was a staunch opponent of the Syrian presence in Lebanon and was seeking its elimination. To this aim he was keen to cooperate with 'Awn, who that time was aspiring to oust the Syrian army from the country. The murder of Hassan Khalid was probably a warning to those who had sided with 'Awn against Damascus. David Grafton, *The Christians of Lebanon: Political Rights in Islamic Law* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 130. For a detailed analysis of Michel 'Awn's premiership and his "Liberation War" against the Syrians in 1989-1990, see: Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon*, pp. 243-278.

level of authority, and he is thus unable to influence the political leaders of the Sunni community.³⁸

Dar a-Fatwa has also suffered from a serious lack of funding since the end of the 1980s. This is because the *zu'ama* no longer support the institution financially, while the state provides it with very limited resources. Therefore Dar al-Fatwa is unable to employ a sufficient number of religious scholars, and those who are employed receive very low salaries. An imam of a mosque, for example, often earns only between 100 and 200 USD, while a *khatib* (a preacher who delivers the Friday sermon) earns less than 100 USD. These wages are far from enough to survive in Lebanon, where the living costs are nearly as high as in Western Europe. This has led to a diminishing of its influence over the population and religious institutions.

At the same time, many of the Sunni religious institutions that had been destroyed in the civil war, such as mosques, schools and charity endowments, were restored by Islamic movements, which later retained their control over them.³⁹ Since then, the official Sunni establishment has been unable to gain absolute dominance over the network of mosques and other religious institutions in the country. The institutional weakness of Dar al-Fatwa has left space for the establishment of hundreds of independent Islamic charities that offer their services to members of the Sunni community. Since they do not depend in any way on the official Sunni religious body, they often pursue a very different agenda. Some of them are under the patronage of the *zu'ama*, while others belong to different Islamic movements.

According to one of my informants from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Community, the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood), in Lebanon there are almost 6,000 registered Islamic charity institutions. Many of them exist only on paper, but others are active organizations serving the aims of political bosses, Muslim Brothers, Salafis, Sufi brotherhoods or independent Islamists.⁴⁰ The majority of

³⁸ Qabbani, Hassan Khalid's deputy, was not even granted the title of grand mufti until 1996, when Rafiq al-Hariri helped him to be elected. This is one of the reasons why many regard him as the former prime minister's puppet.

³⁹ Skovgaard-Petersen, 'The Sunni Religious Scene in Beirut', p. 71.

⁴⁰ A vague category, this mainly refers to those who have left al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya or Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami and administer charity endowments, serving their own aims by using transnational contacts and relations with Lebanese politicians.

mosques also lie outside the control of the official religious establishment and belong to Islamic movements. At the same time, the shaykhs of Dar al-Fatwa have lost their ability to completely provide for the religious needs of their communities (see Chapter 4), which has opened up space for activists from various Islamic movements to influence Sunni believers. One of the main beneficiaries of this development has also been the Salafis, who are especially active in fulfilling the daily religious needs of ordinary Sunni believers, such as issuing *fatwas*, holding religious lessons and providing personal consultations. One of the core members of Tripoli's Salafi community even admitted to me that if Dar al-Fatwa were to fulfill its task and take care of the believers, he does not believe that the Salafis would be able to gain a permanent foothold in Lebanon.⁴¹

2. Delegitimation of competitors – the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood-type of Islamism. As I mentioned above, at the beginning of the civil war, the alliance between the official religious institutions and their political patrons collapsed. Although Dar al-Fatwa was for a time able to maintain and even increase its prominence as both the religious and the political representative of the Sunnis, the authority of the traditional establishment was subsequently largely diminished in Tripoli. The city had traditionally been a stronghold of the Left. Going with the dominant flow in the Middle East, local Sunnis were attracted to Arab Nationalism in large numbers after the ascendance of Nasser at the beginning of the 1950s. Due to the uneven distribution of wealth in the country, many of Tripoli's Sunni youth joined the Lebanese Communist Party or other radical Marxist groups, such as the Maoist People's Resistance Movement led by Khalil 'Akkawi. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), with its semi-socialist agenda, also had numerous followers. According to those who lived through this period, these movements dragged the younger generation away from religion. As Shaykh 'Ali Taha, the imam of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq mosque, recalled, "during the 1970s the Communists and the Qawmiyyun [reference to the SSNP] were able to

⁴¹ Interview with 'Ali Shahadi, Tripoli, 3 August 2011. 'Ali Shahadi is probably the most successful distributor of Islamic books in Tripoli. Due to his multiple contacts in Islamist circles, he is able to constantly observe the dynamics of the city's Sunni religious scene.

draw the youth away from Islam. Only the old used to pray and in some regions the mosques were absolutely empty.”⁴²

However, at the beginning of the 1980s, the dominance of the Left ended, a development that was partly due to the rise of Islamism in the region and partly due to its lack of success in providing a viable alternative for the inhabitants of Tripoli. The Israeli invasion in 1982 and the withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon was the final blow for the Leftist movement, which then fell into an inexorable decline. At the same time the success of the Iranian revolution gave credibility to those Islamists who had upheld the possibility of establishing an Islamic state in the region. Local Islamist movements in the city quarters of Tripoli successfully recruited the young people who had previously been drawn to Marxism or Arab Nationalism. Many radical Leftist and Maoist activists seceded from the Left due to its failures in fighting Israel and the Maronite establishment, and joined Islamism.⁴³ One of them was Khalil 'Akkawi, who converted his Communist group into an Islamist movement.

These Islamist factions then merged into one movement, the Islamic Unification Movement (*Harkat al-Tawhid al-Islami* – IUM), under the leadership of the charismatic Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban. In 1984 the movement was able to control the city with material support from Yasir Arafat's Fatah and the Iranian Islamic Republic. Sa'id Sha'ban announced the founding of an Islamic emirate in the North. The Islamist mini-state was short-lived, however, because the Syrian army managed to take Tripoli back from the IUM in 1985. After it was defeated militarily, the movement lost popular support. The main reasons for this were the internal schisms, the terror practiced by the IUM during its one-year reign, and the lack of a unified ideological direction.

After the collapse of the IUM's Islamic mini-state, there was intensive competition between the different players in the religious field. On one side, Dar al-Fatwa was unable to regain its previous role due to financial difficulties and a lack of legitimacy. On the other side, different Islamic movements were

⁴² Interview, Tripoli, 5 December 2009.

⁴³ See: Fida' 'Itani, *al-Jihadiyyun fi-Lubnan: min Quwwat al-Fajr ila Fath al-Islam*, Bayrut: al-Saqi, 2008), p. 74. The Left's loss of popularity was partly the result of the split in the PLO into a pro-Syrian and an anti-Syrian faction (the latter led by Yasir Arafat) after Damascus' intervention in the Lebanese Civil War in 1976. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 205-219.

struggling for the soul of the Sunni community. After the fall of the IUM, the Lebanese Muslim Brothers or *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group – IG) were able to recruit quite a large follower base. However, after the Ta'if Agreement, which brought the 15-year-long civil war in Lebanon to a close, the movement's influence on the Sunni population gradually declined. There are several reasons for this. First, in the long-term, the IG was unable to establish a clear and viable agenda in the Lebanese environment. Although it propagated a “moderate Islamic ideology” and engaged in legitimizing activism in a multi-sectarian system, the movement's intellectual discourse only attracted a limited segment of the educated Sunni middle class. Due to the hostile Syrian military presence and the continuous harassment by the Lebanese and Syrian security services, and despite the efforts of its activists, the IG was unable to establish and maintain a large charitable network, which would have secured broad-based grassroots support.⁴⁴ Second, after the end of the civil war, a number of secessions occurred within the ranks of the Lebanese Muslim Brothers, driven by the deepening differences between the pro- and anti-Syrian wings of the IG.⁴⁵

At the same time many activists who had initially benefited from the IG, both financially and in building their social networks, preferred to establish their own patronage and Islamic institutions independently from the Muslim Brothers. Many of my informants who were formerly IG activists recalled how the movement's cadres put personal material interests before ideology. Shaykh Sa'd al-Din Kibbi, one of the prominent Salafi figures, left the Lebanese Muslim Brothers for the same reason. As he told me when I interviewed him during my visit to his *ma'had shara'i* (*shari'a* school), “Islamist ideology legitimated the desire to capture political positions and fill the pockets of IG activists. They did not use material sources to make Islam victorious but used Islam to achieve material benefits.” Many former IG voters whom I interviewed had similar views on the movement. When I chatted with ordinary people about their political preferences, they often referred to the Lebanese Muslim Brothers as “*Jama'a*

⁴⁴ Interview with ex-IG activist Nasser Naji, 28 April 2012.

⁴⁵ The final schism in the IG occurred when the former leader Fathi Yakan left the movement in 2006 and established a new umbrella organization, which draws together Islamists who have allied themselves with Hizbullah, such as Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami, and other, smaller local groups.

baddon al-Kursi bass [a group interested only in achieving political positions]”. Third, the IG’s Palestinian members left the group to join Hamas when it opened its offices in Lebanon in 1998. This dealt a severe blow to the movement, because it lost hundreds of skilled activists. Together, these factors led to the gradual decline of the movement’s influence in state institutions and in the religious field.

Salafis were able to fill the space left by the IG. Many former IG supporters who did not want to abandon Islamic activism joined the ranks of Salafis. Some of them told me that the years they had spent in the IG had made it clear to them that building an Islamic state and society should begin with perfecting the beliefs and practices of the grassroots. Otherwise, people would hijack the idea of Islamism to acquire political positions and other personal benefits.⁴⁶ IG members no longer give religious lessons (*dars*, pl. *durus*), which are important tools of mobilization for Islamic movements; the Salafis took over this task from them as well. During my fieldwork in Tripoli, I observed that even in one of the main centers of the Muslim Brothers, the Rahma mosque in the Qubba region, Salafi shaykhs often organize *durus*.

3. *Deepening sectarian cleavages – Sunni-Shi’i Sectarian tensions.* Worsening tensions between Sunnis and Shi’ites meant that another significant opportunity opened up for the Salafis. This shift had transnational dimensions that influenced the local structure. According to Vali Nasr, “to Arabs and Iranians, Afghans and Pakistanis living in the region, it is an age old scourge that has flared up from time to time to mold Islamic history, theology, law and politics.”⁴⁷ Such a flaring up occurred in the years following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The new Islamic government in Tehran became an existential threat to the Gulf States and other Sunni governments, due to the Iranian regime’s intention to export the revolution. Several times, Khomeini expressed his views about the Saudi kingdom’s leadership being dictatorial and illegitimate. He believed that the time had come to abolish the autocratic regimes throughout the Islamic world and establish similar ones to that in Iran.

⁴⁶ Interview with Nasser Naji, 28 April 2012.

⁴⁷ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 23.

However, the Iranian leader overestimated the capabilities of the revolution and the loss of legitimacy of the Saudi regime. In fact, Sunni Islamists, although inspired by the Islamist takeover in Tehran, were reluctant to acknowledge the Iranian leadership due to its Shi'ite identity.⁴⁸ At the same time, in their eyes and the eyes of the wider Sunni public, Saudi Arabia enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy because of the Saudi role in the 1973 Yom Kippur war (see below) and the image of the late King Faysal.⁴⁹ Saudi-sponsored counter-propaganda was thus able to emphasize Khomeini's and his revolution's Shi'ite identity. Moreover, the increasing Shi'ite activism in the Gulf, Lebanon, Pakistan and India was framed as a threat to the Sunni majority in most of these regions.⁵⁰ After that, the existing socioeconomic cleavages began to take a sectarian shape. This development culminated after the occupation of Iraq by the US in 2003, when the Shi'ite majority became the dominant force in a previously Sunni-ruled country. Salafis have generally been able to exploit sectarian sentiments, since hostility toward the Shi'ites lies at the core of their ideology. Throughout the Islamic world they have published books about the *Rafida's* conspiracy against Islam, and spread sectarian hostility from the *minbar*. The Sunni-dominated governments often supported their activism, and their audience grew in the sectarian climate.

Sunni-Shi'ite tensions throughout the Islamic world also had an impact in Lebanon and provided Salafis with an opportunity to reach a larger Sunni audience. Before the civil war, Lebanon's Shi'ites constituted the most underdeveloped and impoverished community in the country. The majority of Shi'ites lived under the patronage of their powerful traditional *zu'ama'*, and most of the population worked in the agricultural sector or as unskilled workers in cities such as Beirut or Sidon. Their middle class was thin compared to the Christians or the Sunnis. This situation changed, however, after the outbreak of the civil war. After the collapse of the state institutions, the Shi'ite *zu'ama'* lost

⁴⁸The *minbar* (pulpit) is used by the preacher in the mosque at the Friday prayer.

⁴⁹ King Faysal (1964-1975) is often portrayed as the champion of the Islamic cause due to his support for the establishment of transnational Islamic organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and for imposing the oil embargo in 1973. His personal image as a pious monarch living a modest lifestyle was in contrast to the hedonistic behavior of his family members. Alexei Vassiliev, *King Faisal: Personality, Faith and Times* (London: SAQI, 2012), p. 287.

⁵⁰ May Yamani, 'The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia', *Survival*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2008, pp. 151-154.

almost all of their power. Shi'ites initially joined leftist movements like the Lebanese Communist Party or the various Palestinian factions. From the beginning of the 1980s, their own sectarian militia, the Battalions of the Lebanese Resistance (*afwaj al-muqawama al-islamiyya* - AMAL) became prominent.

After the 1982 Israeli invasion, partly due to AMAL's inefficiency in dealing with the occupiers and defending its own community from Israeli raids and arrests, the ideology of the 1979 Iranian Revolution became increasingly popular. Groups of enthusiastic Shi'ite youth who had adopted Khomeinism, initially independently of each other, began launching attacks on the Israeli army. Then these cells were organized in a single institutional framework by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which had gained a foothold in the Beqa' Valley in Eastern Lebanon. This organization announced itself in 1985 under the name Hizbullah (the Party of God). Due to the organization's military activity (employing suicide bombers in particular), in 1985 Israel withdrew its army from most of the territories it had occupied three years before. By the end of the civil war, Hizbullah had successfully established itself in the Shi'ite community by building charity institutions and fulfilling the tasks of the state, which in some parts of the country was non-existent that time.

After the civil war Hizbullah successfully established itself as a political party. From the 1992 elections onward it became a dominant force in the Shi'ite community, along with AMAL. While the majority of Sunnis initially supported Hizbullah in its resistance activity, subsequently fears arose that Hizbullah's aim was not only to defend the country against the Jewish state, but also to establish Shi'ite dominance in Lebanon. Some Sunnis asked why Hizbullah and AMAL had the right to control entire neighborhoods in Beirut without the interference of the state. They also felt that members of their community had been deprived of the rights that Shi'ites now possessed. In the North in particular, many believed that the slow progress of the post-civil war reconstruction in their region, compared to the much faster development in the Shi'ite South, was a sign of the latter community's control over state resources.

A segment of these Sunni Muslims, especially young people in the impoverished neighborhoods of Tripoli who had been deprived of the

opportunity to find jobs or pursue higher education, was receptive to the Salafis' anti-Shi'a rhetoric. Salafi preachers successfully presented themselves as defenders of *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a* against the "Shi'ite plot" and the "import of Khomeinism". Sunni youth in the North felt that these shaykhs were telling the truth when they described the weak position of the Sunnis and their vulnerability to external enemies as a direct result of the spread of heresy and the distortion of the pure religion.⁵¹

4. *The emergence of transnational sponsors.* The three opportunities described above were complemented with an additional opportunity shift: the oil boom and the dramatically increased financial capabilities of the Gulf countries, which enabled Saudi Arabia in particular to sponsor the Salafi *da'wa* worldwide. The kingdom intended to use its sudden wealth to boost its own status in the international political arena and become the dominant power in the Islamic world.⁵² One way to fulfill this ambition would be to reach out to the grassroots in Muslim countries. To this end, the kingdom started to export its own religious ideology, which is identical to Salafism, and financed massive transnational Salafi proselytization in order to dominate the religious discourses in Muslim communities worldwide and suppress hostile ideological currents.

As al-Rasheed put it, this political strategy "aimed to control the minds and hearts of Muslims from Detroit to Jakarta".⁵³ Saudi Arabia financed the building of mosques, charities and educational institutions on a global scale, propagating Salafi ideas. Riyadh invested vast sums in spreading religious literature among Muslims around the world to transform their identities in accordance with the Salafi ideal, and to suppress local beliefs and religious practices as Sufism.⁵⁴ An important part of this *da'wa* was establishing the kingdom's universities as centers of transnational Islamic education. Since the end of the 1970s, these institutions have educated tens of thousands of foreign students who have since returned to their countries to spread Salafism.

⁵¹ Most Salafis whom I interviewed, who had joined the movement in the 1990s, said that the perceived political dominance of the Shi'a played a role their becoming interested in Salafism.

⁵² Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 61-80.

⁵³ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-131.

At the same time, when the prestigious al-Azhar University of Egypt restricted its scholarships for students from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon because these countries opposed Sadat's change of policy and Egypt's peace agreement with Israel in 1979,⁵⁵ the Islamic University of Medina opened its doors. Therefore, among others, several Lebanese students went to Saudi Arabia to pursue religious studies. As one of the Palestinian shaykhs from Nahr al-Barid camp recalled, about 50 Lebanese students went to study in Medina at the beginning of the 1980s. Many of them (the shaykh himself among them) had graduated from a religious high school in Tripoli and were supposed to leave for Cairo. When they were refused scholarships to al-Azhar, the Saudi Embassy offered to finance their studies in Medina.

The shaykh remembered that unlike al-Azhar or other universities that left much space for pluralism in *'aqida* and *fiqh*, in Medina, Salafism was the only accepted path for a student to follow. He recalled that after the second year, some pupils whose commitment to Salafism was doubted were asked to leave the university. On their return, the Lebanese graduates of the Islamic University of Medina were to transform Salafism in their country from being a marginal group into one of the most important Sunni social movements. Among them were Shaykh Salim al-Shahhal's three sons, who, after returning to Tripoli, began building institutions and spreading the Salafi understanding of Islam.

In short, these four major shifts in political opportunities created favorable conditions for Salafis to grow from being a small, marginal group into a major social movement in the Sunni community. Shaykh Hilal Turkomani, a popular Salafi preacher in Miryata (a town 10 km from Tripoli), remembers how he joined Salafism at the beginning of the *da'wa* in Lebanon:

⁵⁵ Ali E Hillal Dessouki, 'Egyptian Foreign Policy Since Camp David', in William B. Quandt (ed), *The Middle East: Ten Years After Camp David* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1988), pp. 103-104. One of my informants, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani, recalled that when he finished high school in Tripoli in 1980 his scholarship to al-Azhar was withdrawn. The Saudi Embassy in Lebanon almost immediately offered him and his fellow students, who also aspired to careers as religious scholars, to study in Medina at Riyadh's expense. According to the shaykh, this is how he became Salafi. Interview, Tripoli, 11 April 2012.

After the fall of the IUM, some Salafi shaykhs began gathering young people around themselves. One of them was Usama Qasas. We were 40 young people and Shaykh Usama was our master until his murder by the Ahbash. Then around 1990 Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal [the son of Salim] returned to Tripoli from Saudi Arabia with a lot of money. He succeeded in surrounding himself with hundreds of young men who became Salafis.

According to Shaykh Hilal, the Syrians initially gave a free hand to the Islamic movements at the beginning of the 1990s, because their main concern was the Christian opposition to their presence. In the climate of identity crisis and relative political stability, Salafism grew rapidly. Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal successfully developed the group established by his father into a network of charities and educational institutions that operated not only in the North, but also in almost every Sunni region. The organization's name became *Jama'iyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan* and its main supporter was *Mu'assasat al-Haramayn* (the Haramayn Institution), one of the biggest Saudi Charities that mainly sponsors activist Salafis.

Among the notable figures who began the Salafi *da'wa* in Tripoli was Shaykh 'Abdullah Husayn, a former physicist who had previously lived in France. He gave up his career in Europe and turned to religion, allegedly after a car accident almost cost him his life.⁵⁶ Unlike most of the other Salafis in the city, he never had any relations with the Gulf, but adopted Salafi *'aqida* and *manhaj* through his reading. He is currently the owner of an Islamic bookshop in the ancient market of Tripoli and spends most of his time educating young people about the basic tenets of religion. At the end of the 1980s, many young Tripolitan men became Salafis after participating in his study circles and then joining other groups.

⁵⁶ He was not willing to share his biographical details with me, but I was able to gather some information about him from his former disciples.

The tensions with al-Ahbash and the emergence of Salafism on the Sunni religious scene

The four opportunities described above enabled the Salafi movement to gain a foothold in Lebanon as a social movement. However, the Salafis were far from dominating the Sunni religious field, which had been highly contested since the second half of the 1980s. In the final stage of the civil war, an intensive struggle erupted between different Islamic movements for the soul of the Lebanese Sunni community, and this also affected the Salafi movement. Four movements – al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya, the Salafis, al-Ahbash (a Sufi-oriented group) and some Sufi brotherhoods – tried to extend their influence. As explained above, the social situation and the mental state of the Sunnis at this time facilitated the proliferation of these movements. All of the Islamic groups (maybe with the exception of the Sufi brotherhoods) intended to gain as much influence as possible in Sunni religious institutions, especially mosques. From the 1980s until the mid-1990s, there was almost daily violence between al-Ahbash on one side and al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya and the Salafis on the other, as they tried to occupy each other's mosques. This period of tension with al-Ahbash played an important role in the development of the Salafi movement, as I explain briefly in the following.

Al-Ahbash appeared in Lebanon in the 1960s, when the Ethiopian-born Shaykh `Abdullah al-Harari⁵⁷ succeeded in gathering a considerable number of disciples around him. Al-Harari had left his home country in 1947, when Emperor Haile Selassie expelled him for unknown political reasons. He traveled through the Middle East and then stayed for a while in Damascus, where he was attached to the Qadiriyya Sufi order. In 1950 al-Harari settled in Beirut, where Dar al-Fatwa gave him an official appointment as a religious scholar. He started his activism more than a decade after his arrival in Lebanon. However, for two decades the movement limited its activities to organizing study groups for the instruction of Harari's disciples. Al-Ahbash gained prominence from 1983, when the disciples of al-Harari took over an old charity, *Jama'iyat al-Mashari' al-Khairiyya al-Islamiyya* (the Association of Islamic Philanthropic Projects), which

⁵⁷ `Abdullah al-Harari was born in the Ethiopian province of Harar and settled in Beirut in the 1940s. The name al-Ahbash refers to the Shaykh's Ethiopian origins (Habashi, pl. al-Ahbash).

became their organizational body. The members of the movement then gradually took over more and more neighborhoods in Beirut, filling the vacuum created by the rapidly waning influence of the leftist militias due to the Israeli invasion. They were able to gain a foothold in all of the areas inhabited by Sunnis.

Al-Ahbash can be considered a countermovement to Islamism in general, and to Salafism in particular. Its ideology mostly builds on Ash'arism (explained in Chapter 1) and the *Shafi'i madhab*. In his teaching, Al-Harari also includes the thought of three Sufi orders that he considers "acceptable". Al-Ahbash's main critique of Islamism is that it transforms religion into a political ideology that intends to capture the state. Al-Ahbash regards Salafis as innovators; al-Harari considers Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab to be *ahl al-bida'* (those knowledgeable persons who distort Islam), because of their literal understanding of the Text. The Salafi's literal understanding of God's attributes has led Al-Ahbash to accuse them of anthropomorphism. In general, according to *Ash'ari* thought, a metaphorical interpretation of the Text is needed in order to avoid anthropomorphism that leads to disbelief. Al-Harari even calls the two abovementioned scholars "unbelievers".⁵⁸ Kabha and Erlich point out that al-Ahbash's message to Muslims is much harsher than that toward non-Muslims.⁵⁹ While they take a reconciliatory approach toward the latter, they practice *takfir* (excommunication) toward those Muslims whom they consider extremists.

The struggle of al-Ahbash against Salafism has a transnational dimension and is rooted in the secessionist aspirations of Harar Province. Salafis gained influence in Harar in the 1940s, and attempted to regain independence from the Ethiopian state and revive the 900-year-old Islamic emirate. One of the chief rivals of this Salafi group was Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Harari, who was a firm believer in Muslim-Christian coexistence and a supporter of the integration of Muslims in Harar into the Ethiopian entity. The secessionist Salafi organization was defeated in 1948 and its leader, Shaykh Yusuf 'Abd al-Rahman, later emigrated to Saudi Arabia. After he had settled in Medina in 1976, he immediately launched a series of attacks on his old enemy, Shaykh 'Abdullah. He was able to convince the highest echelons of the Saudi Salafi establishment to

⁵⁸ Mustafa Kabha and Haggai Erlich, 'Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiyya: Interpretations of Islam', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2006, p. 528.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 526.

support him in his struggle. The chief *mufti* of the kingdom, 'Abdulaziz bin Baz, even issued a *fatwa* stating that al-Ahbash was not part of *Ahl as-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a* (the community of Sunnis). According to one of my Lebanese Salafi informants, some Salafi groups in Tripoli received extraordinary levels of funding from Saudi Arabia to finance the struggle against al-Ahbash. However, I want to stress that this claim is not verified by other sources.

This tension at the ideological level manifested itself in clashes in the streets of Beirut, Tripoli and other Sunni-inhabited places. Al-Ahbash started to occupy the mosques, even those under the supervision of Dar al-Fatwa, under the pretext that the institutions were too weak to protect places of worship from infiltration by extremists (i.e., the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis). As one Salafi in Tripoli remembers,

al-Ahbash usually came to the mosques at the Friday prayer. They waited for the appropriate moment, then started a discussion about a certain topic, like whether the angels are male or female or is it permitted for Muslims to use disinfectants containing alcohol. If the *khatib* [preacher] or the imam of the mosque did not agree with them, then they came back later with 20-30 men, sometimes badly beat up respectable scholars and took over the mosque. After several such occasions, we [the Salafis] became also violent in this way and began using the same methods.⁶⁰

The tension between al-Ahbash and Salafis culminated when a group of Salafi youth who belonged to *'Usbat al-Ansar*, a militant group in the 'Ain al-Hilwa Palestinian refugee camp in Sidon, murdered the head of the al-Ahbash organization, Shaykh Nizar al-Halabi, in 1995. This event proved to be a constraint for Salafism: the subsequent persecution of Salafis by the Lebanese and Syrian security forces resulted in the movement's current disintegrated, polycephalous nature (which I explain further in Chapter 4).

At the same time, the tensions with al-Ahbash also benefited the Salafis. Due to its violent methods and serious deviations from mainstream (Ash'ari) Sunni Islam, the Sufi-oriented group alienated large parts of the wider Sunni

⁶⁰ Interview, Tripoli, 7 November 2009.

population. Salafi preachers were able to play the role of the defenders of Sunnism in the face of a “deviant” group. They also posed as the representatives of authenticity in the face of dangerous innovations. This was the first time that Salafi preachers were able to attract larger crowds to their Friday sermons.⁶¹ Many followers of Salafism in the North started to engage in Islamic activism along the lines of al-Ahbash. They were attracted to the movement by its combination of personal piety with social work. These individuals, as they recalled, found the same in Salafism, but without the “distortions” and “innovations” of al-Ahbash.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the historical trajectory of Salafism in Lebanon between the early post-Second World War period and the end of the 1990s. After providing a brief overview of the political history of Lebanon, I explained that Salafism in North Lebanon evolved from the group of Salifm al-Shahhal, who had originally been inspired by the teachings of the Islamic Reformists of Egypt, especially Rashid Rida.

After criticizing the approach to political opportunity structures taken by SMT and suggesting some modifications, I examined the various external changes in the sociopolitical environment that enabled Salafism to become what is probably the most prominent Sunni Islamic movement in Lebanon.

Four major changes in the external context enabled Salafism to transform itself from being a marginal group into a strong social movement. The first factor was the weakening of the traditional Sunni religious establishment, mainly due to the effects of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The diminishing influence of Dar al-Fatwa opened up space for Salafis to take the place of the traditional *'ulama'* and spread their call among the ordinary Sunni population.

The second factor was the delegitimation of the Salafis' competitors, namely Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Islamism. Salafis were able to fill the

⁶¹ Interviews with Salafi individuals and witnesses to the events. See also Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 113-140.

vacuum that had been left by these movements. Many of the former activists of the Ikhwan, who did not want to abandon activism, even joined the ranks of Salafis.

The third factor was the deepening sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Many Sunnis believed the conspiracy theories about a Shi'ite plot against Sunnis. In this environment, Salafis posed as defenders of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a against the threat from the other major Muslim community and its militia, Hizbullah.

The fourth factor was the appearance of wealthy sponsors from the Arabian Gulf. Salafism in North Lebanon largely profited from Saudi Arabia's effort to spread Salafism worldwide. The movement's activists received massive amounts of funding, which enabled them to build mosques, charities and religious colleges to facilitate the *da'wa*.

In the final section of the chapter I discussed the tensions between Salafis and the Sufi-inspired al-Ahbash movement, which was connected to the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services. These tensions were not only manifest in ideological debates, but also sometimes led to bloody street clashes. Although the conflict with al-Ahbash led to a security crackdown on Salafis, the latter also benefited from it. Salafi preachers were able to pose as the defenders of Sunnis in face of the "deviant" teachings of al-Ahbash.

Chapter 4

The Fragmentation of Salafism in North Lebanon

Over the last decade, Salafism in Lebanon has undergone a significant transformation. While the movement used to be relatively integrated under the leadership of Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, in the 2000s, this situation changed. The main factions that I discussed in Chapter 1 emerged in North Lebanese Salafism. At the same time, new leading figures appeared, who were independent of al-Shahhal and built up their own follower base.

In this chapter I explain how and why the network of Da'i al-Islam al-Sahhal fragmented. I show how the political environment, which was dominated by the occupying Syrian army and security services, played a role in this process. Then I analyze the development of the local purist and *haraki* factions. At the end of the chapter I discuss how the Arab revolutions affected Lebanese Salafism and the power balance between purists and *harakis*.

The fragmentation of al-Shahhal's network

The Salafi community in Tripoli was relatively unified until the second half the 1990s. Although the Salafis in this city never developed formal organizational structures, they mainly gathered around Jama'iyyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan and its leader, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal. As many of my informants recalled, this was due to Shaykh Da'i's prestige, authority and financial power, since he was in contact with many charitable organizations and wealthy individuals in the Gulf, who generously financed the Lebanese Salafi movement. According to Shaykh 'Ali Taha, one of the prominent Salafi '*ulama*' in Tripoli's Tabbana district, "incredible amounts of money arrived from Saudi Arabia – mostly from the *Mu'assasat al-Haramayn* [the al-Haramayn Institution] – for building mosques, distributing

Salafi literature and charitable purposes”.¹ Riyadh’s generosity was in line with its policy of counterbalancing Iran’s effort to win the heart of the Sunni population in the Middle East.² In Lebanon, the Salafis seemed capable of counterbalancing Hizbullah, Tehran’s proxy, in its attempt to gain allies among the Islamic movements of the North.

In less than a decade, Da’i al-Islam al-Shahhal was able to establish a vast charitable and educational network, not only in Tripoli and its extended urban area, but also in all of the country’s Sunni regions. This emerging Salafi charitable empire was subsequently dismantled, however, when the Lebanese judiciary ordered the closing of Jama’iyyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan in 1996, accusing the organization of inciting sectarian hatred. This event can be understood as part of the aftermath of the general crackdown on Islamists after the murder of Nizar Halabi, the favorite of the Syrian-Lebanese security regime.³ Al-Halabi was a renowned Ash’ari ‘*ulama*’ and the leader of al-Ahbash after ‘Abdullah al-Harari had retired. On 31 August 1995 he was assassinated by a group of Jihadi Salafis from the ‘Ain al-Hilwa camp near Saida. The security regime used the events to justify a crackdown on the whole of the flourishing Salafi movement, not only on the militants. The Syrian regime and its agents in Lebanon argued that al-Shahhal’s network was spreading extremist ideas, which had eventually turned many of the young Salafis to violence.⁴

According to Shaykh Da’is younger brother, Abu Bakr al-Shahhal, some members of al-Ahbash reported to the internal security service that in Ma’had al-Hidaya (Hidaya School), one of the Salafi organization’s educational centers in Tripoli’s Abu Samra district, students were being taught from a book that contained violent anti-Shi’a statements. According to Abu Bakr al-Shahhal, a textbook published by Jama’iyyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan contained some pages from this ominous book. However, these did not refer to the Shi’a at all, but focused on a completely different issue.

¹ Interview with Shaykh ‘Ali Taha, Tripoli, 5 December 2009.

² al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, p. 105 and pp. 126-133.

³ According to some sources, the Syrians wanted Halabi to be elected as Mufti of the Republic to control the Sunni religious establishment. Interview with a shaykh in Dar al-Fatwa, Tripoli, 26 November 2009.

⁴ Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, Cambridge, pp. 119-123.

Shaykh Da'is charity network, however, was able to continue its activities until 2000, when the final crackdown occurred. Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal's name was mentioned in connection with a jihadi group composed of between 200 and 300 members, which had fought against the army for several days in late 1999 in the Dinniya region.⁵ According to accusations made by the Lebanese judiciary, some of the militants had connections to Jama'iyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan. After the battle, many members of the organization were arrested and tortured, and Shaykh Da'i fled to Saudi Arabia to escape possible prosecution.⁶ Jama'iyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan was re-established only after the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005.

After the battle of Dinniya, the policy of the Syrian-Lebanese security regime towards Salafis changed. Earlier in the 1990s it had considered the Maronite opposition and the remnants of the PLO to be its main enemies.⁷ The former were identical to the members and supporters of the Lebanese Forces militia, which fought the Syrian army during the civil war. Later, after the restoration of the peace, the Lebanese Forces became one of the strongest Christian political parties. Its leaders opposed the Syrian domination of Lebanese politics and demanded the departure of the occupying Syrian army. Since the Assad regime was unable reach an agreement with the party, it sought its elimination. In 1993 and 1994, many members of the Lebanese Forces were arrested and tortured. Its leader, Samir Ja'ja' was sentenced to life imprisonment and the party was banned by the Lebanese judiciary.⁸

The PLO under the leadership of Yasir 'Arafat was also among Damascus' arch-enemies. After Damascus' intervention in Lebanon in 1976 against the LNM (see Chapter 3), the Syrian army also confronted the PLO, which was the ally of the LNM. The enmity between the 'Arafat's organization and Syria continued until the PLO leadership had to relocate to Tunis as a consequence of the 1982

⁵ The battle took place in the mountainous Dinniyyeh region. A veteran jihadi who had fought in Afghanistan set up a training camp with his followers in the mountains near Tripoli, to train them and send them to Chechnya. The group was allegedly responsible for several attacks on churches in Tripoli. The fight with the army erupted when the group took over the building of Da' I al-Islam al-Shahhal's radio station in Sir al-Dinniyyeh and left 30 dead, including 11 soldiers, five civilians and 14 Salafi militants. Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, pp. 229-241.

⁶ Shaykh Da'i's decision proved to be the right one, as in the same year, the Lebanese military court sentenced him to death in his absence.

⁷ Salloukh, 'A Brotherhood Transformed'.

⁸ Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon*, p. 282.

Israeli invasion. After the Ta'if Agreement (see Chapter 3), the Syrian intelligence kept a close check on the remnants of the PLO in Lebanon, preventing it from regaining any of its former influence.⁹

In the face of the threat coming from the still strong Maronite opposition (despite banning the Lebanese Forces) and the PLO activists, the security regime saw the Salafis as a secondary challenge. Before the battle of Dinniya, the authorities believed that the movement could be contained without the need to take strict security measures. Bernard Rougier suggests that Syrian and Lebanese intelligence believed that any threat coming from the Salafi community could be countered due to the presence of many informants among the movement's adherents.¹⁰ After the battle, however, this view changed. Fears arose that the proselytization activity of al-Shahhal's network would lead to the uncontrolled radicalization of the youth in the North.

The drying up of Saudi financial sources following the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent "war on terror" also contributed to the split in the Salafi movement. The US accused various Islamic charity organizations of directly or indirectly financing terrorists. Washington put pressure on the governments of the Gulf States to control their citizens' charity activities more closely and shut down organizations that might have links to al-Qaeda and other militant groups. The most notable case was the closure of the biggest transnational charity, Mu'assasat al-Haramayn (see Chapter 3). Owing to American pressure after the 11 September attacks, the Saudi government restricted the rights of al-Haramayn to support Salafi groups in foreign countries and then shut down the institution in 2004. Salafis in Lebanon thus lost their source of funding, and had to look for alternative channels.

After Shaykh Da'i's escape to Saudi Arabia, serious changes occurred in Lebanese Salafism. Until then, al-Shahhal had been the almost unquestioned leader of Lebanese Salafis due to his personal authority, contacts in the Gulf countries and financial means. It appears that there were minor ideological differences between the activists in the movement. Salafism in Lebanon generally followed a *haraki* line. Although they projected the image of a purely

⁹ Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, p. 260.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

da'wa movement that was primarily concerned with religious beliefs and practices, under the surface Salafis tried to change public opinion regarding Syria and Hizbullah. At that time in the 1990s, the majority of the Sunni community supported the Syrian presence and the Shi'ite party was regarded as a resistance movement against Israel, not a sectarian militia.¹¹ Shaykh Da'is' group attempted to transform these views by holding anti-Shi'a *khutbas* in some mosques in Tripoli and 'Akkar.¹²

Although some Salafis were more inclined towards purist ideas, they did not oppose al-Shahhal's main *haraki* line. For instance, although Shaykh Da'i stood as a candidate in the 1996 elections, he was not openly criticized by Salafis, who in principle rejected any involvement in institutional politics. This is because at that time, Salafism in Lebanon was still in its infancy and was associated with his name. Most of the Salafi activists in the country were under his patronage and often received their main income from him. However, when he had to leave the country, the relative unity that Lebanese Salafis had formed around his person quickly disintegrated. As one of the veteran Salafis recalled, only al-Shahhal was in direct contact with the Gulf charities, which were the main sponsors of Salafi activities in the North. He distributed the money between the other shaykhs and activists; others did not have access to the sources. When he had to leave the country, many of those who used to work with him found themselves without an income.

Although Shaykh Da'i established many institutions, he never managed to establish a sophisticated organizational structure. When he left, his associates and followers did not show much willingness to cooperate with each other. Instead, as my informant remembered, "everyone withdrew to his own mosque or *waqf*"¹³ and started to look for alternative sources of patronage, either individually or with a few acquaintances. One of their strategies was to contact al-Shahhal's old supporters. During the 1990s Shaykh Da'i was considered a successful Salafi leader, and delegations from Saudi, Kuwaiti and Qatari charities

¹¹ Palmer Harik, *The Changing Face of Terrorism*, pp. 48-52.

¹² Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, pp. 254-259. A Palestinian shaykh from Nahr al-Barid also confirmed that Salafis connected to al-Shahhal were making an effort to change the mindset of the Sunni population regarding the Shi'a. Interview, Tripoli, 4 April 2012.

¹³ Interview, Tripoli, 11 April 2012.

and individual sponsors would therefore visit him, offering their support. Some of those who were around al-Shahhal socialized with these individuals in the Gulf and often received phone numbers that later proved to be useful.

When al-Shahhal was no longer the main distributor of financial resources, Salafis called these numbers and paid visits to potential donors in the Arabian Gulf. The other strategy was to contact their former classmates and friends from the Islamic University of Medina, who were well connected to charities, the religious establishment and businessmen. Many Lebanese Salafis started to visit Saudi Arabia and Kuwait more frequently, and participated in the religious lessons of some well-known '*ulama*' there. According to one of the Palestinian shaykhs from Nahr al-Barid, these were excellent occasions to meet people and build social networks. In Kuwait, for example, the Lebanese visitors who were present at some of these *durus* were often subsequently introduced in a *diwaniyya* (frequent traditional gatherings in a patron's home), which are the best places in the Gulf to increase one's social capital.

Through increased participation in the transnational movement, Lebanese Salafis became part of and socialized in networks that had evolved around different ideological streams. This led to the presence of the *haraki* and purist factions in Lebanon as ramifications of larger transnational networks. Purists became particularly influential, because their main focus on the '*aqida* and the '*ibadat* meant that they did not draw the attention of the authorities. It is likely that the security regime also thought that the purist *da'is* would be an antidote to the radicalization of Salafis, due to their refusal to discuss political issues.

The tight security control over Salafis was lifted only after the fall of the Syrian-Lebanese security regime in 2005. On 14 February 2005 a massive explosion in Beirut killed the former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Many believed that Damascus had planned the murder, which was followed by massive demonstrations. The protesters demanded the resignation of the government and the withdrawal of the Syrian army. Whereas anti-Syria rallies in the past had consisted mainly of Christians, now Sunnis and Druze joined as well. At the same time, international pressure on Damascus also grew to implement UN Resolution

1559, which called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. The Syrian army left the country on 10 April 2005, after 29 years of occupation.

After the tight security controls on Salafis had been lifted, the movement began to flourish in the North. The proselytizing activity of both purists and *harakis* reached unprecedented levels. The former received financial support from the Kuwaiti *Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami*, which by then had become exclusively purist. The latter was sponsored by the Qatari *Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya*. Due to their different agendas, in the following sections I discuss the local manifestations of these two factions separately.

The emergence and development of the purist networks in North Lebanon

The emergence of the politico-purist faction in Lebanon is connected with the transformation of the Salafi movement in Kuwait, which I discussed in Chapter 2. After purist Salafis had taken over the leadership of *Ihya' al-Turath* and Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq had had to leave the organization, the charity cut its ties with *harakis* in Lebanon. Since the end of the 1990s it has been exclusively sponsoring Lebanese purists.

Ihya' al-Turath has been present in Lebanon since 1990, but at that time it was still under *haraki* influence. The charity supported *Jama'iyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan* and *Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal*. Shaykh *Da'i* befriended many members of *Ihya' al-Turath* during his studies in Medina, and one of them was 'Abdullah al-Sabt. These individuals saw potential in Shaykh *Da'i* to be their agent in Lebanon. *Al-Shahhal* followed them to Kuwait, where he stayed for a couple of months. While there, he built up excellent contacts in Kuwait's *haraki* circles and later became a frequent guest at *diwaniyyas*, conferences and other Salafi meetings in the country. When he went back to Lebanon in 1990 to start his *da'wa*, *Ihya' al-Turath* gave him hundreds of thousands of dollars, and likely in excess of one

million dollars,¹⁴ to establish *shari'a* colleges in Tripoli and the southern port city of Saida.¹⁵

However, when the leadership of the charity changed in 1997, al-Shahhal fell from grace. The new Ihya' al-Turath administration initially tried to convince him to follow a purist *manhaj* and distribute purist literature among his followers. When he refused to do so, the organization cut the financial aid to *Jama'iyyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan* and started to look for other beneficiaries. As Shaykh Da'i sarcastically noted, the only thing that Ihya' al-Turath considers important is that those who receive their financial aid "must not have *fiqh*".¹⁶ By this, the shaykh meant that purists do not have a sophisticated discourse on politics and international affairs, which, according to him, should have an important place in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In his view, issuing legal opinions on ritual does not make somebody an expert in *fiqh*.

After Ihya' al-Turath broke with al-Shahhal, for several years the organization sent only small amounts of money for a few purist individuals to publish booklets or make *iftar* (fast-breaking) for the poor. Large-scale charity work in Tripoli was resumed in the mid-2000s. A member of Ihya' al-Turath's leadership spent some time in Lebanon as a tourist when he accidentally met a young Salafi in his early thirties, Safwan al-Za'bi. Al-Za'bi was invited to Kuwait, where he spent some time studying *halaqat* (informal religious lessons usually held in the mosque or private homes) and was introduced to leading figures from Ihya' al-Turath. Around 2004, a-Za'bi started to build an Islamic center and a clinic in Tripoli's Abu Samra district, using funds he received from Ihya' al-Turath. In 2005 he officially established the local branch of the Kuwaiti charity under the name *Waqf al-Turath al-Islami* (the Islamic Heritage Endowment – IHE).

The IHE became the backbone of the purist networks in North Lebanon. Safwan al-Za'bi was the main agent of Ihya' al-Turath in the country and distributed the funds that arrived from the Kuwait charity. This gave him considerable influence over the North Lebanese Salafi scene until he left the

¹⁴ Interview with a Palestinian Salafi shaykh, Tripoli, 11 October 2009, and interview with Shaykh Hilal Turkomani, Miryata, 18 October 2009.

¹⁵ Interview with Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, Tripoli, 9 August 2011.

¹⁶ Ibid.

organization in 2011. He launched several projects that drew the majority of the purists into his circle of patronage. The IHE has opened several medical clinics in Tripoli and in the villages of 'Akkar and Dinniya. At the same time, the charity sponsors mosques and local *waqfs* where the needy receive material aid. Al-Za'bi has also built an orphanage, which provides basic amenities and healthcare and finances the education of hundreds of orphans.¹⁷

Besides helping the poor, the IHE puts emphasis on Islamic education. It sponsors two *ma'ahid shara'iyya* (*shari'a* colleges); one of them is Ma'had al-Bukhari in 'Akkar, the other is Ma'had Tarabulus in Tripoli. According to al-Za'bi, some Salafi colleges in Tripoli are spreading "extremism and *khariji* ideology" among the youth. By supporting "moderate" teaching institutions, he intends to counterbalance those who endorse a "deviated [*munharif*] *manhaj*".¹⁸ The IHE also organizes *halaqat* in mosques and makes regular payments to purist shaykhs to teach in them. Those who participate in these lessons can receive an *ijaza* (authorization, license) issued by the IHE, which enables them to teach certain religious subjects.

Bankrolling many of Lebanon's purist Salafis enabled Safwan al-Za'bi to start implementing the agenda that been proposed by the Kuwaiti charity. Ihya al-Turath's main intention was to create a strong purist stream in the country to counterbalance the *harakis*, which would become a significant sociopolitical actor over time. At the beginning of 2009, many of the '*ulama*' who were counted as representatives of the purist stream and received support from the Ihya' al-Turath signed a document (*al-Manhaj al-Wadih wa-l-Mithaq al-Shadid* – The Clear Methodology and the Strong Agreement [upon it]) in which they agreed on a number of basic tenets of the method of the *da'wa* that they would follow. This event occurred after serious disagreements had arisen between purist Salafis regarding an agreement between Safwan al-Za'bi, the representative of Ihya' al-Turath in Tripoli, and Hizbullah. Most probably this document was suggested by Ihaya' al-Turath, as a means of creating a loose network among its beneficiaries in Lebanon (and probably elsewhere). The main points of the agreement mirror

¹⁷ Here the category of "orphan", according to the Islamic definition, includes those who have lost their father but whose mother is alive. See: 'Yatim', in Bosworth, *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

¹⁸ Interview with Shaykh Safwan al-Za'bi, Tripoli, 29 September 2009.

the basic features of purist Salafism and can be regarded as the conditions for Ihya' al-Turath's sponsorship.

The agreement stresses the need to remain loyal to the Saudi Great '*ulama*' and forbids "mocking them" (which is a reference to those *harakis* who call some of the Great '*ulama*' the "'*ulama*' of menstruation", because of their lack of attention to political issues when lost in the detail of daily religious practice). The second main point is the call to create an Islamic society by peaceful *da'wa* and to be patient regarding the injustices of the rulers. The document also forbids revolt against the rulers, even if they are not Muslim, and condemns the understanding of jihad propagated by militant groups. Instead, they call for peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims and respect for "the treaties and contracts made with Muslims and non-Muslims".¹⁹ These points closely resemble the preferences of Ihya' al-Turath, which I have discussed at length above.

The IHE also formed a *fatwa* council composed of some of the most renowned Salafi scholars. Its task was to issue legal opinions in local Lebanese cases where the *fatwas* of the Saudi Great '*ulama*' did not fully apply or are were not specific enough. The council, for example, legitimized al-Za'bi's attempt to participate in institutional politics and mobilize voters for his preferred candidates in a *fatwa*. The writers of the legal opinion state that, "we live in a multiconfessional society where different religious groups and intellectual streams live together. It is not possible for one of them to dominate the others, this is one of the characteristics of Lebanese society".²⁰ Therefore, "it does not harm the [Muslim] candidate if he uses the parliament as a tool for *al-'amr bil-ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar [hisba]* and also as a tool for the *da'wa* by offering his thoughts and principles, [especially] if he does that through the media".²¹

The writers of the *fatwa* argue that participating in the election of representatives to parliament is legitimate, since Lebanese law does not oblige them to make decisions that are un-Islamic. It is also possible to elect non-Muslim candidates if they serve Muslim interests. In their reasoning, the authors of the *fatwa* first refer to the Qur'anic exegesis of 'Abd al-Rahman bin Sa'di

¹⁹ See *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper, 20 August 2008.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

(1889-1956), a widely-quoted Saudi scholar who followed the example of the prophet Shu'ayb (mentioned in the Qur'an) when he urged Muslims to participate in political life if they lived in a society that had no Muslim majority.²²

God may defend the believers in many ways, some of which they may know and some they may not know at all. He may defend them by means of their tribe or their *kafir* compatriots, as God defended Shu'ayb from the stoning of his people by means of his clan. There is nothing wrong with striving to maintain these connections by means of which Islam and the Muslims may be defended, and in some cases that may be essential, because *da'wa* is required according to ability.

Based on this, if Muslims help those who are under the rule of the *kuffar*, and strive to make the state a republic in which the religious and worldly rights of individuals and peoples are protected, then this is better than their submitting to a state that denies their religious and worldly rights, and is keen to destroy them and make them its servants. Yes, if it is possible to make the state an Islamic one that is ruled by Muslims, then this should be done, but when this is not possible, the next priority is supporting a type of state where religious and worldly interests are protected. And God knows best.²³

Second, the *fatwa* refers to the example of the prophet Yusuf, when he accepted the Pharaoh's offer to be the supervisor of Egypt's warehouses. Although Yusuf had to act according to the law of the Pharaoh and not that of God, by this action, he was able to save his youngest brother. As the Qur'an relates, Yusuf's brothers wanted to return to their homeland, and Yusuf was concerned lest they might harm the youngest brother. He therefore had a precious goblet belonging to the Pharaoh hidden in the latter's baggage, and had his officials carry out an inspection in which they discovered this item. This allowed him to arrest his youngest brother and thereby save his life. According to the authors of the *fatwa*, this means that he "who trusts himself that he is able to be of benefit [to the Muslim community], turn away from corruption and serve the common interest

²² According to one of the members of the 'ulama council, although Shiites and Sunnis together make up more than 50% of the Lebanese population, it is questionable whether Shiites are Muslims or not. In such a case, the country cannot be regarded as Islamic.

²³ Ibid.

can be a representative in the parliament and [he] who trusts him must vote for him".²⁴

The *fatwa* even states that political participation in a non-Muslim country can be a religious duty for Muslims if, by doing so, they serve the interests of their community. Al-Za'bi claims that due to this *fatwa*, many purist Salafis who had never previously voted went to the ballot boxes during the 2009 elections. He believes that political participation in the secular state defends the *da'wa*. As he explained, since his network mobilizes voters to elect different political bosses in Tripoli, it is in their interest to support Salafis by granting them protection and financial aid, instead of oppressing them.²⁵

Safwan al-Za'bi tried to further boost his patronage over the purist Salafis by signing the so-called Memorandum of Understanding (*Wathiqat al-Tafahum*) between a coalition of purist '*ulama*' led by himself and Hizbullah on 15 August 2008.²⁶ The document itself contains a number of clichés, such as accepting the other with all their differences or solving problems through discussion instead of confrontation. The only interesting point is the plan to set up a body of '*ulama*' between the Salafis and the Shi'ites in order to research the differences between Sunnism and the Shi'a. This can be regarded as a unique initiative on the part of the Salafis, since they usually refuse any such proposition until the Shi'ites denounce their sect and "return" to Sunni Islam. The real significance of the memorandum lies in the Salafi faction's motives and reasons for approaching and signing an agreement with Hizbullah, despite the Salafis' inherent hostility towards the Shi'a.

The event happened three months after Hizbullah and its allies had launched a military operation and occupied most of Beirut on 8 May 2008. This confrontation had erupted as a result of a three-year-long political conflict between the governing 14 March and the opposition 8 March alliances. The Sunni-dominated government decided to shut down Hizbullah's telecommunications network and sack the pro-Hizbullah airport commander,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview, Tripoli, 13 October 2009.

²⁶ 'Wathiqat al-Tafahum Bayn Hizb Allah Wa Ba'd al-Jama'iyat al-Salafiya Bayn al-Tarhib wa-l-Tahaffuz' *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 20 August 2008.

Walid Shukayr.²⁷ Hizbullah interpreted these measures as the first step to disarm the movement. In response, the armed brigades of Hizbullah and its allies, among them the secular Shi'ite AMAL and the Syrian Social-Nationalist Party,²⁸ took over the Sunni districts of Beirut, the power base of the al-Mustaqbal led government. Fighting erupted between militants of the 8 March alliance and pro-government guerrillas in both the capital and in other regions of the country, among them Tripoli.²⁹ During the confrontation Hizbullah outgunned its opponents, which led to the weakening of the 14 March alliance. Therefore the Hariri-camp had to make concessions to Hizbullah. On 21 May 2008, in an agreement between 14 March and 8 March in Doha, the former granted veto power to the latter in a newly formed government.³⁰

As one of the participants in the Salafi delegation that signed the memorandum explained, after 8 May 2008, there were fears that Hizbullah would try to uproot Salafism in Lebanon.³¹ By approaching the party and establishing contacts with it, al-Za'bi's network hoped to protect itself and turn the militia's and its allies' attention, in terms of military security, towards the *harakis*.³² By doing so, they would secure their autonomy to practice their *da'wa*, which, being purist in nature, is not concerned with the power struggle between the elites of the 8 March and 14 March blocks. Safwan al-Za'bi and his circle also believed that they could sign the memorandum without losing their constituency, because they could not gain legitimacy by focusing on the "Shi'ite conspiracy" against the Sunnis, unlike the *harakis*. Their criticism of the Shi'a

²⁷ 'Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward', *International Crisis Group Policy Briefing* (15 May 2008). <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/lebanon/b023-lebanon-hizbollahs-weapons-turn-inward.aspx> (accessed: 15 November 2012).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 'Bab al-Tabbanah Wa Jabal Muhsin: Jarah al-Shamal al-Lubnani al-Maftuh', *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 June 2008.

³⁰ 'The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians' Central Role', *International Crisis Group Policy Briefing* (15 July 2008). <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/egypt-syria-lebanon/lebanon/078-the-new-lebanese-equation-the-christians-central-role.aspx> (accessed: 15 November 2012).

³¹ Interview, 3 December 2009.

³² It is an open secret on the Lebanese street that the leadership of the Lebanese military intelligence consists mostly of Shi'ites with a strong affiliation to Hizbullah.

focuses on the *'aqida* and other elements of the belief system,³³ and they tend not to connect the alleged “deviations” of the Shi'a to political events and processes.³⁴ Za'bi also believed that the crackdown on the *haraki* Salafis would come sooner or later, leading to the imprisonment or exile of most Salafi leaders in the country. If he were able to secure his position with Hizbullah, he would have a chance of becoming the most powerful Salafi patron in Lebanon.

The attempt to secure an agreement with Hizbullah, however, proved unsuccessful. Al-Za'bi and the other participants had to withdraw due to the harsh criticism they faced from the *harakis*. Their own purist constituency also reacted in an unexpected way, with many of them expressing open hostility towards al-Za'bi and the *'ulama'* who had supported his initiative. In the long term, the Memorandum of Understanding also led to breach with Ihya' al-Turath. The Kuwaiti charity initially supported the idea of trying to reach agreement with Hizbullah and protect the purist *da'wa*. According to one of the leading figures of the Kuwaiti politico-purist stream, the organization convinced al-Za'bi to make the step and approach Hizbullah.³⁵

The Lebanese Salafi leader had to break with Ihy'a al-Turath three years later due to internal divisions within the latter. At the time when the Lebanese group signed the memorandum, Ihya' al-Turath was dominated by a faction that endorsed reducing the Sunni-Shi'i gap, even inside Kuwait. However, this stream lost its influence on the eve of the Arab Spring in 2011, when a radically anti-Shi'a faction took over.³⁶ As Safwan al-Za'bi told me, the new leaders of Ihya' al-Turath started to curb his autonomy and wanted to forbid him from participating in politics or defending the interests of Salafis “at the level of civil society”. Therefore he decided to leave the Lebanese branch of the Kuwaiti

³³ This was my experience when I frequently participated in *durus* and lectures by purist Salafis and talked to them during my fieldwork in Lebanon in 2009, 2011 and 2012, and in Kuwait in 2010 and 2012.

³⁴ This might be changing in the wake of the Arab Spring, due to growing anti-Shi'a sentiment on the Sunni street in the Middle East and the increasing keenness of active participants to understand the context of the events that are now occurring, such as the revolutions and the Syrian civil war. When I spent a long period of time with a purist group with close contacts to Ihya' al-Turath in Kuwait in February 2012, during the *durus*, the Shi'a were not discussed beyond their “doctrinal deviations”. However, among themselves, the participants frequently touched the topic of the Shi'i conspiracy (See Chapter 8).

³⁵ Interview with Salim al-Nashi'.

³⁶ Interview Sami al-'Adwani, al-Zahra' district, 7 March 2012, and interview with Safwan al-Za'bi, Tripoli, 26 April 2012.

organization. A new administration took over the Al-Sunna mosque and Islamic center, along with the other charity projects launched by al-Za'bi. The latter started to develop his own local charitable network, *Jama'iyat al-Ukhuwwa* (the Brotherhood Association), and at the time of my fieldwork he was building up contacts with individual sponsors and getting financial aid from, as he expressed it, Saudi "state actors".³⁷

Purist-rejectionist networks

Salafis who belong to the purist-rejectionist faction (explained in Chapter 1) are also present in North Lebanon's Salafi scene. They are more scattered than the politico-purists discussed above, and there is no trace of even a rudimentary form of coordination similar to that which was set up by Safwan al-Za'bi. Purist-rejectionists usually gather around a shaykh who either studied in Saudi Arabia or is a self-educated individual who gives *halaqat* to young people in his local neighborhood. The faction tends to attract committed Salafis, and the shaykhs who belong to this stream rarely have passive followers. The reason for this lies in their stance towards society and their social habits, which are similar to the Kuwaiti Madkhali movement I described above. Unlike other Lebanese Salafis, many of them prefer to isolate themselves from the rest of the population. Their only concern is to follow what is prescribed in the Qur'an and the *hadith* in minute detail and create the perfect Muslim individual by perfecting everyday religious practice. Politics and social issues are beyond their concern, since, as one of them explained, "all hardships that we are facing now will be solved when the majority follow what is prescribed in the Scripture."³⁸

Besides rejecting participation in institutional politics, they often criticize local and transnational charities. As a purist-rejectionist shaykh, Shaykh Wisam told me that aside from leading to partisanship (*hizbiyya*), the activities of Ihya' al-Turath and other organized charitable work are contributing to keeping the population of Northern Lebanon in a condition of poverty:

³⁷ Interview, Tripoli, 26 April 2012.

³⁸ Interview with Ghassan, Tripoli, 24 April 2012.

People are accustomed to getting a pittance from the charities or the *zu'ama* to fill their stomachs and they do not have to do anything for it. Therefore they have no aspirations to improve their situation; to learn a profession or open a business. Islam, however, tells people to be hardworking. *Zakat* funds should also help people who want to start an enterprise, as was the case in the time of the Salaf.³⁹

Most of these purist-rejectionist individuals spend their free time studying the Qur'an and the *hadith*, reading the books by those '*ulama*' whom they recognize and participating in *durus*. Their interactions with the wider society outside of their workplace is limited to those activities which are considered useful for the *da'wa*.

In North Lebanon there are dozens of small purist-rejectionist networks. One of these networks is centered around a highly knowledgeable, Medina-educated individual, Shaykh Ihab. The group has 10-20 members, mostly university-educated, middle-class young men. Shaykh Ihab's life story mirrors the typical trajectory of a Lebanese Salafi '*alim*'. He was born in a secular middle-class family in the 1970s. He described how his mother never put on a *hijab* and his father often cursed God. Despite this, he has had an affinity with religion since his childhood. He paid special attention to religious subjects at high school.

He recalled that two events pushed him towards Salafism. First, one of his teachers, who had *Athari* '*aqida*' instead of the mainstream *Ash'ari* one, had a great impact on him. Second, he went to al-Azhar university in Egypt to take a summer course. As he recalled, he was not impressed by what he learned there. After finishing his daily lessons at al-Azhar, he usually went to visit the *halaqat* of a Salafi shaykh in Cairo. The arguments he heard in Egyptian Salafi circles made more sense to him than what he had learned in al-Azhar. After returning to Lebanon, he joined the local Salafis, participated in religious lessons on a daily basis and visited both *haraki* and purist groups. Despite the objection of his parents, he accepted a scholarship to Medina University. In Saudi Arabia he became a student of Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali.

³⁹ Interview with Shaykh Wisam, 8 October 2009.

During the *halaqat* of Shaykh Rabi', Shaykh Ihab met a couple of students from Kuwait who invited him to their country, where he worked for a couple of months. There he met Shaykh Salim al-Tawil and became close to the local Madkhali networks. Ironically, while he was sharing activities with the Kuwaiti purist-rejectionists in the *halaqat*, he also met some individuals who were close to Ihya' al-Turath. When he went back to Lebanon, due to this relationship, he got a job as a clerk at the Sunna Islamic Center that had originally been built by Safwan al-Za'bi. The income he earned there enabled him to settle in Tripoli and start his *da'wa* activity in his neighborhood, Abu Samra.⁴⁰ Middle-class young men from the same district and also from al-Qubba joined him and participated his weekly *halaqat* in the Sunna mosque. Shaykh Ihab's network rarely interacts with that of other Salafis in Lebanon. At the same time, they form part of the transnational circulation of Salafism. Shaykh Ihab's students often benefit from their master's contacts in Kuwait. Some of them have traveled to the Gulf emirate to participate in purist-rejectionist *durus*, find a job or pursue their studies. Kuwaiti shaykhs such as Salim al-Tawil, Ahmad al-Siba'i and Hamad 'Uthman are frequently followed by the members of the group on social media such as Twitter.

The Haraki network in North Lebanon

After the Syrian army left Lebanon, the pressure on *haraki* Salafis from the security services significantly eased. After five years of passivity following the crackdown that had occurred in the wake of the battle of Dinniya in 2000, they were able to re-launch their activities. Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal returned to Lebanon after he had been exonerated from terrorism charges, and the death sentence, which had been imposed in his absence, had been withdrawn. He re-opened *Jama'iyat al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan* and attracted many young Salafis to the group. Some of his former associates also went back to him.⁴¹ Due to his

⁴⁰ Interview, Tripoli, 28 April 2012.

⁴¹ Interview with Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, Tripoli, 9 August 2011.

excellent transnational contacts and access to financial aid from the Gulf, he was able to re-establish himself as a patron.

The conditions after the Syrian withdrawal were generally favorable for *haraki* Salafis. For the upcoming elections in May 2005, two big coalitions were formed from the opponents and the supporters of Syria. The former camp, called “March 14”, a composition of Sunni, Christian and Druze parties, was led by the son of Rafiq al-Hariri, Sa’d. For March 14 it was crucial to gain the majority of the votes in North Lebanon to win the elections. Therefore they made an alliance with *haraki* Salafis led by Da’i al-Islam al-Shahhal, who helped them to mobilize voters. In exchange, the Salafis received material support from the Hariri clan to re-launch their charity networks, which had been disrupted by the security regime.⁴²

The radically deepening Sunni-Shi’ite tensions after the Hariri-murder also proved to be favorable for *harakis* to gain more followers. As mentioned in Chapter 3, sectarianism between the two Muslim communities was already present after the end of the civil war, although it was rather limited in extent. However, the situation changed radically in 2005. Between 1992 and 2005 Hizbullah was satisfied with holding one of the largest parliamentary blocks in the country, and did not participate in the government. This was because it enjoyed enough political protection from the Syrians, who effectively controlled the extremely fragmented political mosaic of Lebanon. Therefore Hizbullah was able to maintain its image as a pan-Islamic and national resistance movement that transcended sectarian divisions. However, the situation changed after this protection was lifted and pro-Western, anti-Syrian forces gained a majority in the cabinet after the 2005 elections. These latter demanded the full implementation of UN resolution 1559, which included the disarming of Hizbullah in addition to the withdrawal of Syrian forces. The Shi’ite movement therefore sent its own representatives to the government to create political

⁴² Interview with Fida’ Itani, a leading journalist on the *al-Akhbar* newspaper and a frequent publisher on Salafism in Lebanon, Beirut, 6 October 2009. See also: Fida’ Itani, ‘Al-Sa’udiyya Fi Lubnan Tarabulus Wa al-Ma’raka al-Akhira li-Tawhid al-Sunna 3/3’, *al-Akhbar*, 4 September 2008.

cover for its armed wing. By doing so, however, it became part of the sectarian struggle.⁴³

Gradually the image of the Party changed from being a national resistance movement to being a sectarian militia that wants to enforce its dominance at the expense of other communities. Sectarian divisions increased more sharply after the disastrous economic and social consequences of the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah. The result of this chain of events was that anti-Shi'a sentiments spilled over from the circles of Islamists and intellectuals and took deep root among the wider Sunni population. Hizbullah has been framed by the media and even by the '*ulama*' of Dar al-Fatwa as a part of a sectarian struggle across the Middle East between the Sunnis and Shi'ites, and as the Lebanese agent of Iran, an imperial state that wants to rule the whole region and oppress, and then eradicate, Sunnism.

This environment helped the *harakis* to increase their weight in society. Their anti-Shi'a framing – which portrayed the Shi'ites as part of a global conspiracy against Islam that has been going on for centuries – proved to be credible in the eyes of many Sunnis in the North (see the discussion on anti-Shi'a framing in Chapter 8). Furthermore, some reports suggested that Hariri's al-Mustaqbal Movement, the leading political force of the Lebanese Sunnis, intended to form its own Salafi militia to counterbalance Hizbullah.⁴⁴ After winning the 2005 elections, the Hariri clan continued to finance the *haraki* Salafis. They allegedly received weapons in case conflict erupted with Hizbullah's local allies in Tripoli. These latter consisted of Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami (see Chapter 3), the militias of the Alawite minority, and Fathi Yakan's Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami (Islamic Action Front), which seceded from the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood in 2006.

⁴³ 'Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis', *International Crisis Group*, 10 October 2007. http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/69_hizbollah_and_the_lebanese_crisis.pdf (accessed: 3 October 2010), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁴ See, for example: Seymour M. Hersh, 'The Redirection: Is the Administration's New Policy Benefitting Our Enemies in the War on Terrorism?' *The New Yorker*, 5 March 2007. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/03/05/070305fa_fact_hersh?currentPage=all (accessed: 9 April 2009); Fida' 'Itani, 'Salafiyyun Wa Mustaqbaliyyun Ma'an Fi Hubb al-Hayat wa-l-'Unf, *al-Akhbar*, 30 July 2008. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/115215> (accessed: 25 May 2009).

The appearance of the Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association (SACA) (see Chapter 2) greatly increased the capabilities of the *harakis*. The leadership of the Qatari charity saw an opportunity to establish a strong presence in Lebanon after the Syrian withdrawal. They first established connections with Lebanese Salafis through one of the charity's high-ranking officials, a veteran Lebanese *haraki* called Shaykh Khalid Za'rur. In the 1990s, Shaykh Khalid was a close associate of Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal and spent a few months in prison after the battle of Dinniya. Upon his release he settled in the Gulf, where he became an activist in the local *haraki* networks. In the early 2000s he found employment at SACA, and was made responsible for the charity's foreign relations.⁴⁵

In 2005 Shaykh Khalid reconnected with the Lebanese *harakis* and offered them sponsorship. SACA, for example, helped Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal to re-open his radio station, Iza'at al-Qur'an (The Qur'an Broadcast), which had been banned by the authorities in 2000. Dozens of other Salafi shaykhs received hundreds of thousands of dollars for charitable and *da'wa* purposes. Almost all of the renowned *haraki 'ulama'* at the center of significant local sub-networks received support from SACA. Among them were Shaykh Zakariya al-Masri, an influential preacher from Tripoli's Qubba district, and Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, probably the most popular religious scholar in North Lebanon (see my discussion below). Several lesser-known shaykhs also received significant material support to build mosques and boost their *da'wa* in the northern villages and popular neighborhoods of Tripoli.

Besides contributing to the preaching activity of local Lebanese shaykhs, SACA directly employs a large number of *da'is* in the Sunni-inhabited areas of Lebanon. As Khalid Za'rur explained to me, the organization pays them a fixed monthly salary, which in 2009 was 400-600 USD, two-to-three times higher than what they would receive from Dar al-Fatwa. Furthermore, SACA covers the maintenance of their mosques, reimburses the cost of petrol and sponsors the printing and distribution of *da'wa* material such as leaflets and booklets. In turn, the *da'is* have to spread Salafism among their local communities. Usually they are in charge of a small mosque, where they deliver the Friday sermon and organize

⁴⁵ Interview with Shaykh Khalid Za'rur, Doha, 29 July 2010.

daily religious lessons. At the same time they provide advice to the inhabitants of their village or neighborhood on daily religious issues.⁴⁶

In a few years, SACA was able to establish a huge network of religious schools, mosques and Salafi missionaries in North Lebanon. As Shaykh Khalid Za'rur explained to me, the organization tried to establish some kind of coordination and cohesion between the members of this network. It never aspired, however, to create a sophisticated institutional structure similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. SACA appointed a mediator in Lebanon, an ex-Maronite convert, Rabi' Haddad. His task was to organize a regular forum, *al-Liqa' al-Salafi* (Salafi Meeting), where *harakis* would have the opportunity to discuss and establish cooperation in matters of charity or politics. The latter would mean endorsing certain candidates during general and municipal elections.

By the end of the 2000s, due to the favorable local conditions and the financial support from SACA, a large, polycephalous network of *haraki* Salafis had emerged. Although Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal likes to pose as the leader of the Lebanese Salafis in his media appearances, in reality, he does not even have authority over the majority of the *harakis*. A number of other shaykhs with considerable popular bases and access to sponsorship from charities and merchants in the Gulf, and to Lebanese political patrons, lie at the center of the extended sub-networks.

The network of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i

During my fieldwork I discovered an important *haraki* sub-network that competes with that of al-Shahhal in terms of influence and the number of followers. It is centered around Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, who is regarded by many as the most renowned and respected Salafi *'alim* in Lebanon. He became an Islamic activist in the IUM in the mid-1980s, when it had controlled Tripoli for nearly two years. When the Syrians conquered the city he was forced to flee and seek refuge in Germany. After studying in several universities in the Middle East

⁴⁶ Interview with Shaykh Khalid Za'rur, al-Waqra, 1 August 2010.

and South Asia, and graduating from the Islamic University of Medina, he established himself as the main religious leader of the Syrian-Lebanese-Palestinian community in the Kreuzberg district in Berlin. Being the imam of the al-Nur Islamic center and Mosque, as he put it, he fought against the “erosion of the traditional values of Muslims and their westernization”.⁴⁷

When he had to leave Germany and return to Lebanon in 2005, he had already built up a vast transnational network of Europe-based Salafis and financial donors in the Gulf. His rhetorical skills, modest lifestyle and access to material resources enabled him to establish himself as one of the main Salafi authorities in Tripoli. Upon his arrival he became the imam of the huge al-Taqwa mosque in the al-Tabbana district, where he quickly built up a vast follower base. Following the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the Syrian revolution in particular, he declared the events to be the beginning of a new Sunni ascendance, whereby the *Umma* would break the chains of “Western colonialism” and would curb the Shi’ites’ attempt to “dominate the region” and “destroy true Islam”.

His rhetoric, which was thick with conspiracy theories, proved to be attractive to the masses of Sunnis in Tripoli. The latter felt economically and politically marginalized, for which they blamed the West, Hizbullah, the Shi’ite community and the Assad regime in Syria, which they regarded as one of the closest allies of the Shi’ites (see Chapter 8). At the time of my last visit to Lebanon in the spring of 2012, around three to four thousand people turned up to listen to his Friday sermon at the al-Taqwa mosque. Reflecting to his ability to seize the opportunities created by the climate of the Arab revolutions, the Shaykh ‘Aid Charity Association, and (according to some rumors) the Qatari state provide him with material support in the form of hundreds of thousands of dollars every month.

Shaykh Salim was able to gather around himself many of the younger Salafi shaykhs in the al-Tabbana region and al-Mina, where he controls the more modest but nevertheless important ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan mosque. He uses his access to Gulf funds to help these young preachers to build up their *da’wa*. In exchange, he can rely on them in various matters. For example, these young shaykhs urge their own constituents to vote for Shaykh Salim’s candidates

⁴⁷ Interview, Tripoli, 2 August 2011.

during elections. Along with heads of local families, they also participate in the *shura* (council), which was established by Shaykh Salim in 2012. The council is destined to “make the Muslims take their own affairs into their own hands”. As I will show in Chapter 5, the participants discuss issues such as the Salafi detainees in Lebanese prisons or organizing the “Sunni resistance” against the Alawites in Jabal Muhsin.

Shaykh Salim and other shaykhs who belong to his network managed to attract large numbers of local youth in al-Tabbana to join their movement. Working-class and lower-middle-class young people in the district were traditionally recruited by militias that fought under the banners of Marxism, Arab Nationalism and then Islamism in the Lebanese Civil War against the Christians, and then against the invading Syrian army in 1985 and their Alawite allies who inhabit the neighboring Jabal Muhsin. In 2008 these armed factions regrouped when the conflict between the Sunnis of al-Tabbana and the Alawites re-erupted as part of the events surrounding 8 May 2008. Since then, there have been clashes between the two communities in the area every year. Recently, Salafis have been able to win the hearts of many militiamen (if not the majority of them). Since the beginning, the conflict has been sectarian. Salafis are able to frame it as a Muslim struggle against those who are trying to destroy Islam from within (since the Alawite sect is widely regarded as an offshoot of Shi'a Islam). Besides providing religious legitimacy for their fight against the Alawites, Salafis also provide these young men with material help and monthly salaries.⁴⁸

The haraki ascendance after the Arab Spring

In the post-Arab Spring environment, the *haraki* stream has started to flourish in North Lebanon, taking over much ground from the purists. This reflects the developments at the transnational level, where the revolutions in 2011 led to the rapid expansion of *haraki* Salafism and to a decrease in the popularity of the purists. The main reason for this is that the purist shaykhs supported and

⁴⁸ An average salary is about 400-600 USD. Some of the leaders can earn between 1000 and 2000 USD. Interview with a group of young Salafis from al-Tabbana, 25 April 2012.

legitimized the autocratic Arab regimes until the last moment, and issued *fatwas* against the demonstrations and their participants all over the Middle East. They were quick to label the protests against dictatorship as “*khuruj ‘ala al-hakim*” and *fitna* (civil strife), which implies the right of the ruler to oppress them.⁴⁹

Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Sulaymani, a renowned purist scholar, argued that “The Muslim ruler has the right to be obeyed [by the ruled] in what is accepted by the religion⁵⁰ and there cannot be any reason which allows the revolt against him ... because the Prophet has forbidden the dethronement of the ruler as long as he is Muslim.” He justifies his argument by referring to a *hadith*: “Ibada bin Samit⁵¹ told us: God’s Prophet called us [to accept him as leader] and we pledged allegiance to him. Among other things he obliged us to listen to him and obey him ... and not to contest the rulers only if we see that they commit such acts which makes them unbelievers.” According to this scholar, even if the rulers takes the property of the people unjustly, the ruler’s orders have to be implemented.⁵² Another purist *‘alim* argued on the eve of the Arab Spring that people should not demonstrate to achieve freedom, since “the human being and the Jinn have been created for worshipping God and not for freedom.”⁵³ This stance largely alienated their follower base in Middle East. After some hesitation, the *harakis*⁵⁴ supported the revolutions and subsequently their popular support multiplied.

After the demise of authoritarian governments in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, *haraki* Salafi activism throughout the Middle East reached unprecedented intensity. One of the main reasons for this is that the lifting of strict state control created opportunities to spread their message more openly than before. As many reports suggest, after the pressure from the authorities disappeared, the Salafi presence significantly increased in the Middle Eastern public sphere, especially

⁴⁹ Purist scholars across the Middle East issued hundreds of fatwas denouncing the revolutions and urging the people to stay at home instead of demonstrating.

⁵⁰ Here the meaning is that the ruler has no right to order people to neglect religious duties such as prayer.

⁵¹ One of the companions of the Prophet.

⁵² Fatwa of Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Sulaymani. See the discussion on [www.kulalsalafiyeen.com](http://www.kulalsalafiyeen.com/vb/showthread.php?t=48698): <http://www.kulalsalafiyeen.com/vb/showthread.php?t=48698> (accessed: 10 February 2013).

⁵³ Shaykh ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ramadani, a prominent Algerian Salafi scholar, posted this opinion on his Facebook page on 10 April 2011. <https://www.facebook.com/Abdulmalek.Ramdhani>.

⁵⁴ Some *haraki* shaykhs, such as Zakariyya al-Masri in Tripoli, expressed their fears at the very beginning of the Arab Spring that the demonstrations might be connected to a Western conspiracy. Khutba of Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri, Hamza mosque, Tripoli, 21 January 2011.

in Egypt and Tunisia.⁵⁵ During the decades of authoritarian rule in these countries, Salafis, while mostly avoiding direct political involvement, were able to develop deep roots in society. Their informal social networks provided material help and patronage for the young generation, which was struggling to find employment and make a decent living,⁵⁶ and fulfilled the spiritual needs of many through a discourse that emphasized purity and provided easy access to and an understanding of religious rulings⁵⁷ (see also Chapter 5). Before the fall of the Arab dictatorships, Salafis achieved considerable success in attracting people despite having to keep a relatively low profile, and occasionally (in Egypt) or continuously (in Tunisia) facing persecution from the authorities.⁵⁸

After the fall of the regimes, the movement was able to increase its *da'wa* activity and become a key player in politics (such as in Egypt, where the Salafi al-Nur party won 25% of the votes in the last elections). When the pressure from the authorities disappeared, the Salafi *da'is* intensified their proselytizing activities on the streets, neighborhoods and university campuses. By combining their demand for the introduction of Islamic rulings to regulate public morality with an emphasis on social justice as one of the core tenets of Islam, they appeal to significant segments of post-revolutionary societies. Many people regard Salafism as a potential alternative. Salafis are promising equality and social justice after decades of corruption and favoritism, and many people in the region appear to find them credible.

⁵⁵ Ghassan Ben Khalifa, 'The Secret of the Salafists' Appeal In Tunisia', *Al-Monitor*, 1 May 2013, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/05/disadvantaged-tunisian-youth-embrace-salafism.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=7110#ixzz2SBxLTKd9; Khalil al-Anani, and Maszlee Malik, 'Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt', *DOMES*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2013.

⁵⁶ Al-Anani and Malik, 'Pious Way to politics', pp. 60-62; Amel Boubekeur, 'Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria', *Carnegie Papers*, no. 11, September 2008. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/salafism_radical_politics_algeria.pdf (accessed: 10 September 2008), pp. 14-16.

⁵⁷ Samuli Schielke, 'Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 15, no. s1, 2009, pp. s29-34.

⁵⁸ A few months before the revolution, the Egyptian government was forced to close the Salafi Satellite channels and arrested and tortured many of the '*ulama*'. Dina Muqallid, 'al-Fida'iyyat al-Diniyya: al-Ighlaq Laysa Hallan', *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 21 October 2010; al-Anani and Malik, 'Pious Way to Politics', p. 59. In Tunisia Salafis were not visible before the revolution due to harsh oppression by the Ben Ali administration. However, their powerful appearance in the public sphere after the fall of the regime indicates that there was indeed successful *da'wa* activity before the 2010 uprisings.

The recent growth of *haraki* Salafism in Tripoli is connected to the abovementioned ascendance of the movement at the transnational level. In the North in the last few years, many lower-middle-class and working-class Lebanese Sunnis descended into apathy due to the lack of opportunities to improve their lives and the widespread corruption and favoritism. After the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, many felt that while there was change in the Arab world, in Lebanon everything was stagnating or even becoming worse. When Salafism became stronger in the aftermath of the revolutions throughout the Middle East, large numbers of Lebanese Sunnis thought that the movement could offer an alternative for them as well. This does not mean that they would endorse direct political participation by Lebanese Salafis, but they are attracted to the movement's call for social justice and the argument that Muslims' lives will improve if they perfect their religious practices (see Chapter 8).

The Syrian revolution played an especially important role in this process. The events in the neighboring country have had a deep sociopolitical impact on Lebanon. As Syria has always played a significant role in Lebanese politics, it is no wonder that the conflict that erupted in 2011 further fuelled antagonism between Lebanon's pro- and anti-Assad camps. The political cleavages quickly became sectarian in nature and added to the Sunni-Shi'i tensions. This is because the vast majority of Shi'ites stand behind Hizbullah and its allies and support the Syrian regime's suppression of the revolutionaries. If Assad were to fall, the community would lose one of its regional patrons and this would lead to a serious decline in the Shi'a's political and economic power.

By contrast, most of the Sunnis sympathize with the revolutionaries. Sunni Muslims have been alienated from the Syrian regime several times in the past. Most recently, the Assad regime was accused of being behind the murder of Rafiq al-Hariri, and the Sunni community has sided against it and its allies ever since. At the same time, many Sunnis have relatives in Syria who are fighting against or who have been harassed or killed by the regime. In this climate, the *haraki* Salafi framing of the events as being part of a Manichean struggle between good and evil, between Islam and those who have corrupted it (i.e. the Shi'a) has positive resonance, as I will explain further in Chapter 7. Salafis are also perceived as playing the most active role in helping Syrian refugees and aiding

the revolutionaries at home. Many of the inhabitants of the North think that they deal honestly with the money they receive to cater for the refugees or to send to Syria. This is in contrast to the behavior of many members of other Islamic movements or Dar al-Fatwa shaykhs, who often misuse the financial resources destined for the Syrians.

The opportunity that emerged for the *harakis* with the outbreak of the Arab revolutions has been widened by the leadership crises within the Lebanese Sunni community. In June 2011 the Sunni-led Lebanese governing coalition, with Sa'd al-Hariri as prime minister, was brought down by disputes over the special tribunal investigating the murder of Rafiq al-Hariri.⁵⁹ The new government led by Najib Miqati enjoyed the backing of Hizbullah and did not represent the vast majority of the Sunnis.⁶⁰ Losing control of the state institutions led to a significant decrease in the power of the Hariri clan.⁶¹ Many Sunnis started to question the ability of Sa'd al-Hariri to lead the community, as he lost power despite the fact that his coalition had won the 2009 elections.

Doubt has also arisen as to whether the *zu'ama* deserve to be the representatives of the community. Miqati, who was regarded as a capable person, significantly lost his popularity after his pact with the Shi'a, which allowed him to be prime minister. Many Sunnis started to look beyond their traditional community leaders. For a large number of them, Salafis seem to present an alternative. Many Northern Sunnis feel that just like in Egypt, it would be worth giving Salafis a chance to prove their leadership skills.⁶² Here I have to note that leadership of a community in patriarchal societies such as Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world is not confined to institutional politics. In exchange of their subordination and support, the leader is expected to look after his followers in socioeconomic matters and provide individuals with advice in their spiritual and material lives.

⁵⁹ Waard Vloeberghs, 'The Hariri Political Dynasty after the Arab Spring', vol. 17, no. 2, 2012.

⁶⁰ 'Sha'biyyat Miqati Fi Tarabulus Tadannat', news program on LBC, 19 November 2011.

⁶¹ Vloeberghs 2012 (page numbers are not available).

⁶² After the Arab Spring, ordinary Sunnis in Tripoli often told me that Salafis should be given a chance to show whether they are capable of being the leaders of the Sunni community.

As Suad Joseph explains, patriarchy in Arab societies is internalized and has become part of the self.⁶³ The average Lebanese individual can only imagine himself in a patriarchal social context. Therefore, even if the current structure of patriarchy is weakened, the system reproduces itself. Today this is happening in Lebanon's Sunni community. The legitimacy of the *zu'ama* has been somewhat weakened, but it appears that the Salafis are filling this vacuum. There is another reason why they are able to do so. According to some reports, the financial abilities of the Hariri clan were severely weakened after Sa'ad lost the premiership.⁶⁴ Charities belonging to the family were shut down in some northern areas. At the same time, due to their direct contact with the Syrian rebels, Lebanese Salafis are receiving increasing amounts of financial support from the Gulf. They might therefore gain additional followers by taking over the role of Hariri's social support networks.

The favorable conditions created by the Arab revolutions led to the *haraki* shaykhs being regarded by a large segment of the people as potential leaders. For many, they appear to be the ideal representatives of Sunnis, who claim authority by behaving and acting in accordance with the foundational texts of Islam. As I show in Chapter 5, they boost this image by successfully taking care of the spiritual and mundane needs of the community. As one of my informants explained:

The *zu'ama* care about filling their pockets and if their interests demand it, they even make a deal with Satan. Salafis are different. They act in accordance with what God and the Prophet said. Today they are the ones who are really standing up against the Shi'a and Hizbullah ... They also do not distribute money before the elections only, but always help the needy.⁶⁵

As in other Middle Eastern countries, purists in Lebanon distanced themselves from supporting the Arab Spring. Many of them openly sided against the

⁶³ Suad Joseph, 'Patriarchy and Development in the Arab World', *Gender and Development*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Vloeberghs, 'The Hariri Political Dynasty' (page numbers are not available).

⁶⁵ Interview, 3 May 2012.

protests. Safwan al-Za'bi frequently told the media that revolution is not the way to change sociopolitical reality. According to him, the current events in the Arab world are leading to the return of Western colonization.⁶⁶ He is critical of the *harakis*, especially Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, for employing populist rhetoric to serve their own interests instead of considering what would benefit the *Umma*. In his opinion, the *harakis*' activities will result in chaos and civil war. He thinks that Lebanese Salafis should not focus on appealing to the masses. Instead they should pursue the *da'wa* among those who are willing to change their lives fully in accordance with the "true principles of Islam", even if their numbers are very limited.⁶⁷ Some purists have even distributed leaflets containing the *fatwas* of Saudi shaykhs against the revolutions.

Many of the purist Salafis refuse to criticize or support the recent revolutions in Arab countries. Instead, they withdraw to teach the minute details of belief and religious practice, largely neglecting what is going on around them. One of my purist informants, the imam of a small mosque in the adjacent district to the Castle in Tripoli, thinks that the actions of al-Za'bi and other opponents of the revolutions are foolish: "Clearly, the majority of Ahl al-Sunna [in North Lebanon] are enthusiastic about the Arab Spring. Therefore, openly siding against [the protests] is unwise on the part of [purist] Salafis. Through their harsh rhetoric, they lose the respect of the people while not gaining anything." He thinks that purists should refrain from talking about the demonstrations, and should instead focus on the *da'wa*: "If the number of true Muslims becomes more than the *muqassirun* [sing. *muqassir* – those who do not accomplish fully their religious duties], they will recognize that *al-khuru'j 'ala al-hakim* will not lead to any good."⁶⁸

Conclusion

⁶⁶ <http://arabi-press.com/index.php?page=article&id=4591>.

⁶⁷ Interview, Tripoli, 26 April 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview, Tripoli, 3 May 2012.

In this chapter I discussed how the *haraki* and purist factions emerged and developed in North Lebanon. In the first section I explained that Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal's network disintegrated at the end of the 1990s due to the selective repression by the Syrian-Lebanese security regime. When al-Shahhal, who had been the main distributor of money from Gulf charities, was forced into exile, the Salafis who had stayed in Lebanon needed to look for alternative sources of sponsorship.

Those who were inclined towards purist thinking received massive support from the Kuwaiti Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami. Due to the charity's patronage, in the second half of the 2000s a strong purist stream emerged in North Lebanon. Ihya' al-Turath's local branch under the leadership of Safwan al-Za'bi established a vast welfare network in Tripoli and the surrounding regions. He gathered most of the purist scholars under his own patronage. To further extend his influence, al-Za'bi even mobilized voters during the 2009 elections.

Al-Za'bi's relationship with Ihya' al-Turath later ended in abrupt fashion. In 2008 he signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with Hizbullah. Due to this initiative, when a radically anti-Shi'a faction gained influence over Ihya' al-Turath's leadership three years later, the Kuwaiti charity cut its ties with al-Za'bi.

Although the majority of Lebanese purists can be classified as politico-purists, I showed that there are also purist-rejectionist networks present in North Lebanon. They are critical of political participation by other Salafis and the activities of charitable organizations, accusing them of partisanship (*hizbiyya*).

I explained that the *haraki* faction re-emerged after the Syrian army's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. The context following the political changes of 2005 was favorable for them. Due to the emerging Sunni-Shi'i tensions, the *harakis'* stridently anti-Shi'a rhetoric became attractive to many Sunnis. *Haraki* Salafis also received financial support from the Hariri clan because they mobilized voters for the latter.

The appearance of the Qatari Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association on the Lebanese scene greatly increased the influence of the *harakis*. The charity established a huge network of religious colleges, mosques and *da'is* across the

country. Partly due to the financial support from SACA, by the end of the 2000s a large, polycephalous *haraki* network had emerged in North Lebanon.

In the final section I analyzed how the Arab revolutions influenced Lebanese Salafism. The post-2011 context was favorable to *harakis* across the Arab world. In addition to this, in North Lebanon many people saw *haraki* Salafis as alternative candidates for leadership of the Sunni community, in view of the declining legitimacy of political patrons such as Sa'd al-Hariri or Najib Miqati.

Chapter 5

The Construction of Salafi Religious Authority

In the following chapter I will analyze how the Salafi shaykhs who constitute the backbone of the North Lebanese Salafi movement construct their religious authority. I will argue that their authority over ordinary believers is based on their intention to narrow orthodoxy by diminishing the accepted Islamic intellectual tradition. They boost their argument as to what constitutes right belief by behaving in ways that are perceived as exemplary by many members of the community. I will show how this process is unfolding in North Lebanon, where Salafis combine moderate ascetic behavior with *hisba* and fulfilling the everyday needs of the Sunni community. To explain this latter aspect, in the final section of the chapter, I will discuss how mediation in social conflicts and patronage are related to authority.

The meaning of authority in Islam

Authority in the Weberian sense (Weber also used the term “legitimate domination”) means the probability that one voluntarily subjects oneself to domination because one believes this domination to be legitimate.¹ In other words, an authority possesses the ability to make others to follow or obey his rules and rulings without recourse to threats and coercive power. Based on this concept, “religious authority can assume a number of forms and functions: the ability (chance, power, or right) to define correct belief and practice, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy, respectively; to shape and influence the views and

¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 212-215.

conduct of others accordingly; to identify, marginalize, punish or exclude deviance, heresy and apostasy and their agents and advocates.”²

It is useful to add Khaled Abou El Fadl’s concept of persuasive authority in order to understand how the Weberian notion of legitimate domination works in a more detailed way.³ As the author puts it, “being an authority or being authoritative necessarily involves the element of trust, and any behavior consistent with justifying this trust, including the offering of persuasive arguments, will preserve or bolster such an authority.”⁴ It follows that “persuasive authority influences people to believe, act, refrain from acting in a certain fashion by persuading them that this is what ought to be. It influences people to believe that acting according to a certain directive is consistent with their sense of responsibility.”⁵

Abou El Fadl connects this notion of authority with the concept of exclusionary reasons elaborated by Joseph Raz. According to the latter, when an individual decides to do something, he or she has to choose from different conflicting set of reasons. An exclusionary reason justifies picking one set of reasons and excluding all the others when making the decision. According to Abou El Fadl, an exclusionary reason is often the result of submitting oneself to a certain authority.

Based on the abovementioned discussion, a person (or institution such as the Church or al-Azhar) possesses religious authority based on the social

² Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke, ‘Introduction: Religious Authority and Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies. A Critical Overview’, in Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke (eds), *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), p.1. The authors rightfully note that religious authority is a fluid concept and difficult to distinguish from power. In fact, one can assert a religious ruling partly by claiming legitimacy and partly by threatening physical or other forms of coercion or punishment if the subject deviates from orthodoxy or orthopraxy (non-physical coercion can be the threat of exclusion from or being cast out of the community). Islamic and Christian history offers countless examples of this.

³ Abou El Fadl contests Friedman’s argument, which distinguishes between authority and persuasion. According to Friedman, when somebody submits to a certain authority, he completely surrenders his independent judgment to the latter. Persuasion, on the other hand, is another kind of dependence, “in which one man influences another to adopt some course of action by helping him to see the merits of that particular action...” Abou El Fadl, however, regards this kind of distinction as too restrictive. According to him, equating the notion of authority with blind obedience is unreasonable, since usually those who are authorities, such as doctors, experts on Islamic law or teachers, only have directive normative power and their subjects might refuse their instructions. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), pp. 18-23.

⁴Ibid. p. 21.

⁵Ibid. p. 22.

perception that the instructions coming from the individual (or institution) generally represent God's (or more generally, the transcendent's) will. This then enables him to define for his followers the boundaries of right belief, influence their understanding of how they should behave to please the transcendent, and exclude from the community those whom he regards as apostates or heretics. In the following I will discuss how the authority of the rather inclusive, broad category of "men of religion" is constructed in Islam.

Researchers commonly explain the evolution of religious authority in Islam by using Weber's concept of the "routinization of the charisma". This means that charismatic authority, the third type in Weber's typology of authority (after legal-rational and traditional),⁶ becomes depersonalized and institutionalized. Charismatic authority lies in the belief in a leader's extraordinary personal qualities.⁷ After the leader disappears or dies, the authority over the domains that were controlled by him is transferred to multiple offices and institutions.⁸ In the case of Islam, in the absence of Muhammad, his comprehensive authority, which was solely based on charisma, was diffused into different realms. The Prophet's political authority was vested in the Caliph, and his religious and (partly) legal authority in the '*ulama*' and the Sufis.⁹ To be sure, this pattern has been in continuous flux throughout Islamic history and the different offices and institutions overlap, but it would be beyond the scope of the present study to discuss this. Here I am only interested in the authority of individuals commonly known as *rijal al-din* in the local Lebanese context. This category is rather blurred and includes all those who are perceived by wider society to perform religious services. In this sense, it includes religious scholars, Sufi shaykhs and some of the Islamists.

⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 215-245.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 241-245.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 246-249.

⁹ Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 1989), pp. 71-94; Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 5-7. Takim distinguishes religious authority from spiritual authority, though I argue that spiritual authority in the Islamic context belongs to religious authority, since the claim of spiritual contact with the transcendent legitimates one's attempt to influence one's followers' religious beliefs and practices.

The authority of the *rijal al-din* chiefly relies on their claim to possess *'ilm* (knowledge).¹⁰ The possession of *'ilm* confers the ability to bring the divine order from the abstract to real life. The nature of *'ilm* can be vary, and can be both scholarly and esoteric. The privileged position of the possessor of the former “rests upon achievements in learning and specifically his supposed mastery of the revealed canon together with related juridical and perhaps other texts.”¹¹ Those whose authority is derived from the latter claim to have insight into the *batin* or inner, esoteric dimension (opposed to the *zahir* or exoteric, outward dimension) to reveal God’s concealed purposes. Knowledge of the *batin* is not learned but rather infused. It is “distinguished as *ma'rifa* [gnosis] which has its source in a vital inner power or compelling divine force known as *baraka*”.¹² Scholarly knowledge is usually associated with the *'ulama'* while the esoteric knowledge is associated with Sufis, although one should mention that these two categories often overlap, since Sufis can also be scholars.

Here, we are interested in how the *'ilm* possessed by men of religion is converted into authority. When ordinary people accept the knowledge of *rijal al-din*, they usually submit part of their judgment to them, assuming that the men of religion either understand the primary texts and the intellectual tradition based on them or are connected to the divine in an esoteric way that enables them to discern the religious rulings that Muslims have to apply. However, this submission of judgment is not unconditional. There are alternatives to following a specific individual: the laity can abandon a shaykh to accept someone else’s authority, or they can even turn to directly examining the Text themselves. Those who possess religious authority have to convince their followers that they represent the truth and possess the sufficient *'ilm* to ascertain the will of god. In other words, *rijal al-din* provide an exclusionary reason for ordinary people to reject other sets of reasons and forego the alternatives.¹³

However, in order to be able to provide an exclusionary reason, pure *'ilm* is not sufficient. Someone might be highly knowledgeable in religious matters yet

¹⁰ Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 34.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 39.

¹² Ibid, p. 37.

¹³ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, pp. 50-54.

have a limited number of followers. It is crucial to possess sufficient charisma and exploit the opportunities provided by a given social context. For example, those who claim authority should embody the religious ideals of the community in which they operate and successfully frame this community's needs and grievances. Below I will show that Salafis construct their religious authority on the basis of redefining orthodoxy and by posing as the vanguard of Sunni Islam. First, I shall discuss what orthodoxy means in Islam and how is it re-conceptualized by Salafis. Then I will show how Salafis utilize this redefined "right belief" in order to assert their authority over ordinary Sunni Muslims at the local level.

Conceptualizing orthodoxy in Islam

The concept of orthodoxy in Islam is difficult to define. Many authors even deny the necessity of discussing the concept in an Islamic context. Some of these scholars deal with orthodoxy as it is understood in Christianity; that is, it presupposes an institutional body which defines the right tenets of belief and attempts to eliminate those ideas and practices that it considers to be heretical. For this reason, Watt and Goldzicher deny its existence in Islam.¹⁴ Others argue that it is not possible to speak about Islam as one entity. El-Zein, for example, denies that it is possible to find something that links the different "local islams" together. From this viewpoint it is meaningless to talk about "right belief" in Islam, as Islam *per se* is not a category of analysis.

In my opinion, however, it is possible to identify important attempts and debates to define orthodoxy throughout the Islamic history. These debates refer to common foundational texts and elements of an intellectual tradition that is detached from the local level and commonly accepted in widely dispersed localities. In the following I will attempt to define orthodoxy in Sunni Islam.

My two starting points are Calder's concept of orthodoxy as manifested by a huge body of intellectual tradition accumulated over the centuries, and Talal

¹⁴ Wilson M. Brett, 'The Failure of Nomenclature: The Concept of "Orthodoxy" in the Study of Islam', *Comparative Islamic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2007, p. 174.

Asad's approach, which relates orthodoxy to the dynamics of power. At the beginning of his argument Calder rejects the claims made by some scholars that Islam is in fact orthopraxy. According to Calder, "in order to achieve salvation as a Muslim, one has to have right belief in some sense or another. If one has right belief, wrong actions are not a barrier to salvation. One may go to Hell for a short time, but all times are short by contrast with eternity."¹⁵ Though this indicates that there should indeed be some kind of orthodoxy, the author asks how this should be conceptualized, since there is no institutional body to define right belief and distinguish it from heresy. His answer is that orthodoxy "lies inside the discursive tradition of jurists who write creeds."¹⁶ It is caught up in an ongoing discursive process to continuously interpret and reinterpret it.

The other problem, however, is how to define the limits of orthodoxy. In order to answer this question, Calder applies a five-pillar typology with which, he claims, any kind of religious beliefs can be analyzed. The headings of this typology are scripture, community, gnosis, reason and charisma. Applying these to Islam, Calder finds that it is "a religion of community, scripture, gnosis, marginally of reason and hardly at all of charisma."¹⁷ These limits of orthodoxy are set in a body of intellectual tradition accumulated over the centuries, which chiefly builds upon the Qur'an and the Hadith. The parts of this literary tradition can be classified under the genres of *hadith*, *kalam*, *fiqh*, *tafsir* and *sharah*:

Anything that is brought under these headings and held inside the discursive tradition of Muslim literary experience belongs within the limits of Islamic orthodoxy. And these are discursive limits, for the question of what can be held inside these works is not fixed by reference to one work, or the works of one century, one school or one geographical region.¹⁸

¹⁵ Norman Calder, 'The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy', in Andrew Rippin (ed), *Defining Islam: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007), p. 222.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 224.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 234.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 229.

I argue that the abovementioned discursive limits are continuously changing over time and in different localities. The shifts of the boundaries of orthodoxy are chiefly the result of the relationship between Muslims and their intellectual tradition. To understand this process it is useful to complement Calder's concept of orthodoxy with that of Talal Asad. As mentioned above, Calder deals with Islam as an intellectual tradition. Asad's discussion of the issue helps us to understand in a more detail how the dynamics of a discursive tradition define orthodoxy.

Asad criticizes both essentialist approaches (Geertz)¹⁹ and those which deny the validity of "Islam" as a possible object of anthropological inquiry (El-Zein).²⁰ According to him, Islam is a constantly transforming discursive tradition. As he puts it,

a tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions).

An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.²¹

¹⁹ According to Geertz, religion is "a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Quoted in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 28.

²⁰ Abdul Hamid el-Zein, 'Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 6, 1977.

²¹ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Occasional Paper Series (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), p. 14.

In other words, this discursive tradition relates back to and revolves around the Qur'an and the Hadith. The rulings of the foundational texts are constantly reinterpreted, depending on the given material context. Put in this framework, all discourses intend to establish orthodoxy. Yet, which one is able to become dominant in a specific historical and social context depends on power. According to Asad, "Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy."²²

It is useful to combine Calder's and Asad's approaches, as each explains the other. Clearly, when Muslims debate orthodoxy, their arguments relate in a way to the intellectual tradition. An argument is based either on its continuous reinterpretation or its rejection, as I will show later in the case of Salafism. When an "orthodoxy" is established in a certain locality, it is the result of power relationships, but its intellectual framework is defined by the continuous reinterpretation of the works of jurists that constitute the Islamic intellectual tradition.

When authors discuss orthodoxy, they often interpret Asad's concept on a local level.²³ I agree with Anjum's observation that Asad does not examine how local orthodoxies relate to a global one.²⁴ In my view, several factors indicate that a transnational orthodoxy exists. First, as explained by Calder (see above), there is a more or less common intellectual tradition within Sunni Islam that is accepted by Muslims in different localities. Second, the dominant discourses in a certain locality, which define orthodoxy, are influenced by or are even part of transnational discourses.²⁵ In fact, Muslim transnational networks have always played a crucial role in shaping what is regarded as right belief on both the local

²² Ibid., p. 15.

²³ Salwa Ismail, for example, shows how orthodoxy was established in Egypt by the interaction of the Islamic movements and the coercive power of the state. Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 58-81. See also Charles Hirschkind, 'Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd', *SEHR*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/hirschkind.html> (accessed: 7 August 2012).

²⁴ Ovamir Anjum, 'Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2007, pp. 668-669.

²⁵ In Malaysia the official 'ulama' are continuously attempting to suppress local Sufi practices and increase their moral control over the local population. According to some observers, this is partly the result of the influence of Salafism on the discourse of high-ranking Malaysian religious scholars. Conversation with Professor Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, Penang, 6 August 2012.

and the transnational levels. Madrasa networks in the medieval period provide a good example of this.²⁶

Third, the '*ulama*', who until the 20th century were the primary agents defining right belief, were participants in a transnational discursive field.²⁷ Zaman shows that the Maghrebi scholar Ibn Battuta was able to find his way in such remote places as India or the Maldives due to the existence of a common scholarly language that was used by the religious elite of the Islamic world.²⁸ I would argue that those who employed Ibn Battuta as a *qadi* in India and the Maldives did so because they identified him as person who possessed the right knowledge. This presupposes the existence of a shared domain of orthodoxy linking themselves and the Maghrebi scholar.

Fourth, contemporary discourses that attempt to define what is right belief and what is heresy are increasingly occurring in transnational space, often via the Internet or satellite television channels. Today, if a Syrian Sunni student goes to Malaysia to study, he is likely to share at least 80% percent of his religious ideas with his local colleagues. There is a supposed 20% difference in case the Syrian student refuses to visit shrines, a common practice in Malaysia. However, he will still identify the practitioners of this custom as Sunnis, because on the one hand many Sunnis in Syria do the same, and on the other, visiting shrines is included in the intellectual tradition of Sunni Islam (even if the student personally disagrees with it). The reason for this is that when educated Syrian and Malaysian Muslims form their concepts of right belief, they often come across the same discourses.²⁹

These factors imply that there is a continuously renegotiated orthodoxy at the transnational level. Now my task is to locate the domain in which this

²⁶ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges, Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

²⁷ Vincent J. Cornell, 'Ibn Battuta's Opportunism: The Networks and Loyalties of a Medieval Muslim Scholar', in Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Muslim Networks: From Hajj to Hip Hop* (Chicago: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 31-50.

²⁸ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, 'The Scope and Limits of Islamic Cosmopolitanism and the Discursive Language of the 'Ulama'', in Cooke and Lawrence, *Muslim Networks*, pp. 84-104.

²⁹ I interviewed two Syrian students at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. Both of them confirmed my statement in this passage (Penang, 5 August 2012). One could ask whether this also applies to the rural population, who are semi-literate or illiterate. They are certainly more influenced by local traditional practices, but they also share the same domain of orthodoxy with literate Muslims. The reason for this is that religious discourses are also mediated by the latter (Imams of the Mosques, schoolteachers, etc.) to the former.

process of renegotiation occurs. For this, Voll's concept of "Islam as a world system" is very useful.³⁰ Drawing on Wallerstein's work,³¹ Voll defines the Islamic world system as a "vast network of interacting peoples and groups, with considerable diversity and yet some sufficiently common elements so that it is possible to speak of these diverse communities as being part of the 'Islamic world'".³² Unlike Wallerstein, Voll does not define these common elements as chiefly economic and material in nature, but rather identifies them with a shared pattern of communication that binds people together: "It is built on the shared sources of the Islamic experience, which provide the basis for mutually intelligible discourse among all who identify themselves as Muslims..."³³

In other words, this Islamic world system is a network of networks held together by a shared pattern of communication. Certain networks among these, such as Islamic social movements, institutions of learning such as al-Azhar and madrasa networks, are concerned with establishing the dominance of what they define as right belief. Those networks have more influence on orthodoxy, as they are better positioned in the structure of power relations in the Islamic world system.

In short, we can say that there is a transnationally negotiated but generally accepted Sunni orthodoxy that has wide and fluid boundaries. Those who are within these boundaries recognize the differences between themselves, yet as long as somebody does not step outside of these boundaries in a radical way, he will be regarded as being within the limits of orthodoxy. These limits are set by the Sunni intellectual tradition and are continuously renegotiated, depending on power relations in the transnational field.

Salafism and the redefinition of orthodoxy

³⁰ John Obert Voll, 'Islam as a Special World System', *Journal of World History*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1994.

³¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, 'World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase', *Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1990.

³² Voll, 'Islam as a Special World System', p. 217.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

The basic aim of Salafism as a social movement and the most important element of its construction of authority is that Salafis intend to redefine orthodoxy. After “centuries of aberration”, Salafis want to re-establish the “true Islam”. This means that they intend to abolish all traditions and approaches to interpreting the foundational texts of Islam that do not agree with their methodology and worldview.

Calder rightly observes that the Islamic intellectual tradition is becoming narrower, or less inclusive, in modern times, and Salafism is a major contributor to this trend. The Salafi concept of “right belief” is based on their understanding of *tawhid* (see Chapter 1). Their approach rejects the larger part of the Islamic intellectual tradition described above. Salafis leave out logic and gnosis of the limits of orthodoxy. Of the works of early scholars, they accept only those that coincide with their worldview or can be explained in such a way that agrees with the Salafi approach.³⁴ Salafi authors mostly refer only to limited parts of books by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the Najdi scholars who were the followers of Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab.

Salafis have also largely abandoned the centuries-long juristic tradition in the methodology of interpreting the Scripture. Prior to the 20th century, jurists never attempted to interpret the Qur’an and the Sunna independently, disregarding the views of earlier scholars. At the same time, they intended to understand the context in which a certain ruling was revealed and then reinterpret it in accordance with the contemporary circumstances. The jurists also made an effort to understand Divine Law, but never could be sure that their opinions were correct.³⁵

The Salafi concept of Islamic law is rather static by comparison. According to Salafis, Islam is clear: the rulings of the Text are self-explanatory and are not subject to re-interpretation. They believe that in the majority of cases, Muslims can be sure what is the will of God. God’s word is valid at all times and in all circumstances and has the same meaning regardless of the context. In this sense,

³⁴ This tends to mean a selective reading of the early jurists; accepting sections or passages which affirm the views of Salafism and ignoring the rest. See, for example: al-Ghazali, *al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya Bayn Ahl al-Fiqh wa-Ahl al-Hadith*, pp. 17-42.

³⁵ Rudolf Peters, ‘From Jurists’ Law to Statute Law or What Happens When the Shari’a is Codified’, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2002, pp. 84-85.

Islamic law is codified and functions in a similar way to modern positive law. According to Salafis, Muslims must focus on the exact implementation of the Shari'a and disregard any kind of moral considerations. They usually argue that humans should not search for any kind of logic in the Divine Law or link it to moral imperatives, which can alter the original meaning. This is because while a specific ruling might sound illogical or even immoral, later its rightfulness will undoubtedly be proven.³⁶ The *Shari'a* is a total, perfect and unchangeable system, not a subject of human analysis.

Salafis generally argue that the decline of the *Umma* in modern times is due to the fact that Muslims have disregarded this. Instead they have made space for pluralism in theology and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and different methods of interpreting the Text. They have also validated *taqlid* and the hegemony of the *madhahib* (as explained in Chapter 1). In order to reverse this decline, Salafis believe that Muslims must adopt their version of right belief and abandon all other practices, methodologies and interpretations. Salafi authors have been prolific in discussing their understanding of orthodoxy and why anything else should be rejected and eradicated. One of the most systematic and influential writers on this topic is Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman, as the pioneer of the Kuwaiti Salafi *da'wa*, made a great effort to define and explain what Salafis regard as right belief and to prove that this is the only right manifestation of Islam. In his highly popular writings on this topic he holds the *taqlid* of the *madhahib*, which he identifies as blind and uncritical following, responsible for the decline of the *Umma*. In his opinion, *taqlid* forbids the individual to independently turn to the scripture and check the *dalil* (proof) of a certain ruling. Not looking at the proof makes the founders of a *madhab* infallible, which is forbidden in Islam. He is also critical of the fact that the different instructions of the four *madhahib* on the same problem are regarded as valid. He thinks that this divides the *Umma*. The first step in the unification of Muslims is thus to abolish *taqlid* and install a single codified '*manhaj*' that every Muslim is obliged to follow, which is based on the "revealed truth" and not on the "inventions of *Ahl al-Ahwa'* [people of whim] and *Ahl al-*

³⁶ I have encountered this reasoning in many conversations with Salafis around the world. See, for example: Salih al-Fauzan, 'Al-'Aql wa-Mada Hurriyat al-Ra'y', <http://www.sahab.net/home/?p=843> (accessed: 5 June 2012).

Bida' [people of inventions]". This *manhaj* is supposed to clearly distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy.

At the outset, Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman clarifies that Muslims must not follow different interpretations of the *'aqida*, since this is the basis of belief. Without this, unity is not possible. Only a limited difference of opinion (*khilaf*) is accepted in jurisprudence. According to him, most cases of *khilaf* can be explained by the fact that the jurist issues a *fatwa* without knowing a certain *hadith* or an alternative narrative (*riwaya*) of that *hadith*. This lack of knowledge used to be caused by the difficulty of accessing the relevant religious literature. Today, though, modern technology enables scholars to reach all *hadith* collections, so these kinds of differences must be eliminated. To minimize *khilaf* in *fiqh* Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman suggests the codification of *manhaj*, a process that would consist of five main steps.

First, the sources of jurisprudence have to be defined. These are the Qur'an and the Sunna in the "correct", literal reading, the consensus of the Sahaba and the '*ulama'* and the analogy (*qiyas*). The second step would be the creation of a Qur'anic encyclopedia (*mawsu'a qur'aniyya*). This would contain the "correct meaning" of all words and terms to be found in the Qur'an, along with common misinterpretations (which have been "whispered [to the humans] by Satan",³⁷ according to the author). After this, it would be forbidden to interpret the Qur'an in any way other than that based on the correct meaning.³⁸ Similarly, as the third step, an encyclopedia of Hadith would be created, containing all correct (*sahih*) *ahadith*. The rest of the books, which contain corrupted narrations or chains of transmission (*isnad*), would be burned. Fourth, the *ijma'* would be codified as well. The collection would contain all matters agreed on by all of the Sahaba and the '*ulama'* and would be the only source of reference to the consensus.³⁹ Fifth, the rules of the *qiyas* would be established in similar fashion.⁴⁰ Unfortunately here Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman fails to give any further explanation.

³⁷ 'Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Khaliq, *Khutut Ra'isiyya li-Ba'th al-Umma al-Islamiyya*, 1987, www.salafi.net (accessed: 10 April 2010).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Afterwards every *fatwa* would have to be issued according to these rules, and the methodology of *fiqh* would thus be unified. This would mean the exclusion of the *ra'i* (opinion)⁴¹ and any kind of logical or metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wil*). According to Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman, the biggest obstacle to achieving this aim is the existence and availability of the "old books" of jurisprudence which "charm" and influence the reader to stray from the straight path. Therefore, of these huge Islamic collections, only those should be kept that agree on the abovementioned sources of *fiqh*.⁴²

The Muslim character would be built upon this sharp demarcation of the limits of orthodoxy. Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman's discourse mirrors the views of Salafis in general, who regard Islam as a complete system that regulates every aspects of life.⁴³ Therefore, in the Salafi view, local culture and traditions should not influence the worldview and behavior of the Muslim. Rather, he should act and think in accordance with what is codified in Scripture and disregard that which he has inherited from his family and social environment. According to Salafis, morality is also in the Text; the moral rulings of the *shari'a* cannot be interpreted by concepts and notions from elsewhere.⁴⁴ This is why Salafis reject the notion of finding equivalents to the Western concepts of human rights and freedom in Islam. That kind of approach leads Salafis to a polarized, Manichean worldview. At one end is Islam as a perfectly constructed Divine system that includes instructions for every issue in human life. At the other end is everything that is not rooted in Scripture; this is regarded as the realm of *kufr* and therefore rejected. This category includes local traditions, logic, philosophy, moral systems created by humans, and so forth.

In short, according to Salafis, orthodoxy is static and clearly defined; as Scripture is self-explanatory and has one meaning, the boundaries of right belief are clearly marked. Orthodoxy is represented by the literal reading of the Qur'an

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ I chose 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq's works to explain the Salafi views on orthodoxy because these booklets are widely circulated in the transnational Salafi milieu. This is because they are well-written and well-edited, unlike many other Salafi publications.

⁴⁴ Salafis generally agree on this. This view is explicitly present in the above-cited book by Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq. From another author, see: Muhammad bin Ibrahim, 'Al-Falsafa wa-l-Falasifa', <http://www.al-aqidah.com/?aid=show&uid=ejfqom4f> (accessed: 22 August 2013).

and the Sunna and by a limited intellectual tradition that agrees with the Salafi methodology. In other words, while other schools of thought believe that humans can never be sure whether they know the divine truth and therefore accept different opinions as equally valid, Salafis reject those views that are not based on their methodology.

Other Islamic social movements often allow much diversity in their lines in terms of *'aqida* and *fiqh*. For example, many members of the Muslim Brotherhood follow Ash'ari *'aqida*, while others believe the Salafi creed. In addition, many of them practice the *taqlid* of a *madhab*,⁴⁵ and some are involved in Sufism as well. The reason is that the aim of the movement is to implement sociopolitical agendas based on Islam, not to set the boundaries of right belief. Unlike Ikhwanis, the whole program of Salafism as a social movement revolves around the exact definition of orthodoxy. Salafis see Islam as a sociopolitical project based on *tawhid*. As Haj puts it, "*tawhid* presumes the existence of a (moral and historical) community, one in which Muslims are bound to each other through a set of authoritative texts and practices."⁴⁶ In the view of Salafism, these authoritative texts and practices are exactly defined. Tawhid can be maintained by a moral community whose worldview, thinking and actions are directed by their abstract concept of orthodoxy. Therefore the aim of Salafism is to reorder the orthodoxy that is accepted by the Umma and lead Muslims back to the true form of Islam by purifying their belief and practices (see also Chapter 1).

In conclusion, the Salafis' claim to religious authority is based on the redefinition of orthodoxy. Their "techniques of authority" serve to indicate that they – as opposed to any other Islamic movement or school – possess the right belief defined by God. These techniques include a moderate form of asceticism, *hisba* (if it is performed in such a way that it increases the legitimacy of the performer and does not alienate the majority), adopting a certain universe of

⁴⁵ In my experience, Ikhwani activists only follow those rulings of the *madhahib* that concern personal matters. In politics and public issues, they accept the legal reasoning of their respective local Muslim Brotherhood organization. Interview with a Lebanese Ikhwani activist, Beirut, 6 October 2009, and interview with the head of a local office of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, Kuwait, 4 February 2012.

⁴⁶ Samira Haj, 'Reordering Islamic Orthodoxy: Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab', *The Muslim World*, vol. 92, no. 3, 2002, p. 339.

discourse and, in many cases, addressing the problems and needs of the Muslim community. By using these techniques of authority, Salafis pose as ideal Muslims.

Martin and Barzegar argue that in Islamic history, popular heretical movements have frequently gained dominance and become centers of orthodoxy.⁴⁷ In my view, today the same is happening with Salafism. Until the second half of the 20th century, the literalist Athari school to which contemporary Salafis also belong (see Chapter 1) used to be on the margins of 'Dar al-Islam'. Today, however, Salafis seem to be successful in influencing Islamic orthodoxy globally. The message of Salafism offers easy answers to the problems and questions that are troubling many contemporary Muslims. It provides them with an alternative identity and empowers disenfranchised Muslim youth by granting a sense of belonging to a superior community. With this in mind, it is no wonder that the Salafi message is spreading fast via the Internet and satellite television channels. For the same reasons, Salafi shaykhs tend to be highly influential among local populations. Many ordinary believers thus equate Islam with Salafism and have adopted several of its elements in their belief and practices.

In the following section I will show how Salafis construct their religious authority in particular localities, based on their claim to represent the true Islamic orthodoxy, free from additions and deviations.

The authority of the Lebanese Salafis

The literature tends to depict Salafism as a largely uniform movement, and authors to date have paid relatively little attention to how Salafism adapts to local patterns. Indeed, while the Salafi notion of the ideal Muslim community is a uniform denial of the legitimacy of cultural differences and distinct local customs, the situation on the ground is different. The movement's activists recognize that domestic structures cannot easily be changed, so they adapt to a

⁴⁷ Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar, 'Formations of Orthodoxy: Authority, Power and Networks in Muslim Societies', in Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (eds), *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2010), p. 180, pp. 189-191.

given social context in order to pursue their *da'wa* more effectively. The methods they use to assert authority over believers at the local level reflect this accommodation, as I will demonstrate in the case of North Lebanon. Furthermore, I argue that contrary to the claims of many researchers, Salafism cannot be conceptualized as an entirely post-modern phenomenon.⁴⁸ Below I will show that in many respects, Salafis construct a form of religious authority that is similar to that of pre-modern *athari* movements.

Salafism in Lebanon has taken a unique form that differs in many aspects from that of Salafi groups in other Middle Eastern and European countries. Although it is expanding rapidly, Lebanese Salafism is not yet a mass movement with large numbers of grassroots followers. Rather, the core of Salafism in Lebanon is constituted by a vanguard of religiously-educated individuals, shaykhs, who control mosques, charity endowments and religious colleges. A limited number of committed activists and a wide passive follower base of ordinary believers surround these shaykhs and seek religious services from them. Examining the evolution of the authority of these shaykhs provides us with an answer to the question of how this rather vertical structure of authority in Lebanese Salafism developed.

According to my observations, Salafis in Tripoli and the surrounding area fulfill the many tasks that are normally associated with *rijal al-din*. These include preaching and teaching in and outside of the mosque, giving non-binding legal opinions (*fatwa*, pl. *fatawa*), and advising people in matters of religion and life. The shaykhs also visit families, console the sick and the dying and mediate in social conflicts. It is also important to mention that they provide material aid and access to patronage. Due to the weakening of the official religious establishment, Salafis are gradually taking over its role. As I explained in Chapter 3, until the Lebanese Civil War, the Sunni religious community was relatively well organized under the auspices of Dar al-Fatwa. The mostly Ash'ari *'ulama* shared the religious domain with various Sufi *tariqas* and, from the beginning of the 1960s, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was then still in its infancy. Dar al-Fatwa lost

⁴⁸ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 245; Melanie Reddig, 'Power Struggle in the Religious Field of Islam: Modernization, Globalization and the Rise of Salafism', in Tugrul Keskin (ed), *The Sociology of Islam* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2011), pp. 153–176.

much of its influence during the civil war and the popularity of the Sufis was also diminished. Salafis filled the vacuum left by the former, and were able to exploit the fact that the reputation of the *'ulama* associated with Dar al-Fatwa suffered a significant decline in the 21st century.

These scholars are traditionally educated in one of the major Islamic learning centers in Egypt, Syria or the Lebanese branch of al-Azhar. Today, due to their financial weakness, the official religious institutions are unable to provide Sunni religious scholars with a decent living. The salaries of the shaykhs are below the Lebanese average, and most of them are employed on a contractual basis. Somebody who delivers the Friday sermon (*khatib*) receives a monthly salary of 66 USD, and a teacher who teaches religious subject in public schools receives 3 USD per hour. The monthly income of scholars who are permanently employed is also closer to the Lebanese minimum wage,⁴⁹ that is, 700,000 Lebanese Lira (533 USD) per month.⁵⁰ For that reason, being a religious scholar at Dar al-Fatwa is one of the least respected jobs among those that require higher education. Parents tend not to encourage their children to study religious sciences, but instead persuade them to enroll in engineering programs or become medical doctors.⁵¹

Those who complete their studies at one of the Lebanese Sunni Islamic educational institutions, such as the Lebanese branch of the Egyptian al-Azhar University, the Da'wa Faculty (Kulliyat al-Da'wa) or al-Awza'i University, are therefore often pursuing religious studies because they do not have another choice. Many of them come from poor families that cannot afford to support them financially during their university years. For them, one of the above-mentioned institutions is an attractive option, since they offer students free accommodation, food and often a modest scholarship.⁵² Others are unable to

⁴⁹ Interview with Dar al-Fatwa official, Tripoli, 5 December 2009.

⁵⁰ See, for example: 'Lubnan Yazid Al-hadd Al-adna Li-l-ujur', *Aljazeera Online*, 12 October 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.net/ebusiness/pages/ef7e7e82-6dcc-42e9-88e5-d72cd6eb7c2b>.

⁵¹ Interview with Shaykh Muhammad al-Masri, Tripoli, 5 May 2012. The shaykh told me that his father agreed to his studying *shari'a* only after he had completed his BA in history at the University of Balamand and started his Master's courses in philosophy and political sciences.

⁵² Bernard Rougier explains that young Palestinians who want to acquire a degree often enter one of the Islamic universities, because admission to Lebanese universities became increasingly difficult and expensive in the 1990s. Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, 2007, pp. 213-215.

gain admission to most Lebanese universities due to their low high school grades. They regard Islamic institutions as an easy way to acquire a degree.⁵³

Many of the residents of Tripoli whom I interviewed expressed their disappointment in the religious elite. They felt that some shaykhs are exploiting Sunni Muslims' traditional respect for the '*ulama*'.⁵⁴ According to them, shaykhs who engage in charitable activities often steal part of the donations and use this to improve their own economic situation. People often contrast the hedonistic and selfish lifestyle of the Dar al-Fatwa shaykhs with the puritanism and helpful attitude of many of the Salafi shaykhs. Most of the Salafis indeed have a strong missionary mindset. They sacrifice much of their time to serve their communities; changing and purifying their religious practices and helping them solve socioeconomic problems.

This is not a novel phenomenon, though. We can find parallels in Islamic history for when a puritan movement partly replaces the dominant religious elite when the latter's legitimacy has been undermined. I would argue that there is a strong resemblance between the medieval Hanbali movements and contemporary Salafis in Lebanon. We can draw parallels between how Salafi men of religion and Hanbalis in the 8-13th centuries constructed their religious authority. Previous research shows that the Hanbalis who formed powerful social movements during the Abbasid period were close to the masses and that their agents took care of the affairs of their community,⁵⁵ while the members of other *madhahib* were often elitist, distanced themselves from ordinary believers and tended to focus on abstract problems in the religious sciences.⁵⁶

⁵³ One of the professors at al-Awza'i University in Beirut expressed his dissatisfaction with the commitment and performance of the students in his institution. Interview, Tripoli, 11 April 2012. See also interview with Shaykh Muhammad al-Masri, Tripoli, 5 May 2012.

⁵⁴ In certain cases some shaykhs even use their status to cover up their criminal activities. These stories are circulating among ordinary people, further corroding respect for the '*ulama*'. See: Radwan Murtada, 'Marmulak al-Lubnani: Mawlana al-Nassab, Man Yuhasibahu?', *al-Akhbar*, 27 September 2011.

⁵⁵ See, for example: Nimrod Hurvitz, 'From Scholarly Circles to Mass Movements: The Formation of Legal Communities in Islamic Societies' *American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 4, 2003; Daniella Talmon Heller, 'The Shaykh and the Community: Popular Hanbalite Islam in 12th-13th Century Jabal Nablus and Jabal Qasyūn', *Studia Islamica*, no. 79, 1994.

⁵⁶ Michael Winter, 'Ulama' Between the State and the Society in Pre-modern Sunni Islam', in Meir Hatina (ed), *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), p. 26.

Using medieval sources, Talmon Heller draws a detailed picture of the relationship between Hanbali shaykhs and the rural communities of Palestine in the 12th and 13th centuries. She describes these men of religion as multi-faceted individuals who served their community both in religious and everyday matters. Their authority lay in their knowledge and charisma, built upon their exceptional piety and asceticism. These attributes of the shaykhs “turned Islam into a living reality for the simple people”.⁵⁷ Just like modern Salafis, these Hanbali Shaykhs intended to purify the beliefs and practices of their followers. A main focus was to perform *hisba* by targeting illicit behavior such as playing music or drinking liquor. They were not only concerned with the religious life of their communities, but they were active in the socioeconomic sphere as well. In times of hardship they provided material help for the needy and mediated in conflicts, just as we can observe Salafis doing in contemporary Lebanon.

Like the medieval Hanbalis, Salafis persuade their constituency to accept their authority on the basis of the claim that they, unlike others, represent right belief. They boost this claim by using different techniques of authority to construct their image as ideal Muslims in the eyes of ordinary people. In the case of Lebanese Salafis, one of the most important techniques is to live one’s life exactly as prescribed in the *Shari’a*, by practicing a moderate form of asceticism (*zuhd*).

For puritan movements, moderate asceticism has been a source of activism and a means of attracting ordinary people throughout history. In his *Sociology of Religion*, Max Weber distinguishes two type of asceticism: an extreme or “world-rejecting” one, and an inner-worldly one. Proponents of the first type withdraw from society and the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. “One with such an attitude may regard any participation in these affairs as an acceptance of the world, leading to alienation from God.”⁵⁸ Those who follow moderate or mild asceticism intend to live a virtuous life while actively interacting with the wider society. According to them, “salvation may require participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the

⁵⁷ Talmon Heller, ‘The Shaykh and the Community’, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 542.

world but in opposition to them)⁵⁹. These individuals regard themselves as instruments of God, meaning that their practice of asceticism often turns to activism in order to purify the surrounding society. Throughout history, a wide range of movements has adopted such attitudes, including Cistercians, Calvinists and even Communists.⁶⁰

Hurvitz gives a detailed picture of how mild asceticism was practiced by Hanbalis in Abbasid Baghdad, leading to the emergence of a social movement.⁶¹ Early Hanbalis, like modern Salafis, adopted a literal interpretation of the Text. For them, Asceticism meant only the exact, detailed application of the rulings (*ahkam*) of the Qur'an and the Hadith. As Hurvitz claims, unlike some Sufis, who wanted to repress all worldly desires, Hanbalis intended only to control them. The latter "promulgated ideals that were within the reach of ordinary believers"⁶². As a result, they remained close to the society and their behavior constituted an ideal in contrast to the hedonistic lifestyle of the members of the Abbasid court.

In this social environment, the Hanbalis' mild asceticism was converted to activism by practicing *hisba* and purging un-Islamic elements from the public sphere. "Thus the two have a common goal, which they try to attain in different arenas: forbidding wrong operates in the public sphere (or in other people's homes), while mild asceticism deals with one's own body and personal habits in the privacy of one's own home."⁶³ While those who followed the rules of Hanbalism in full were few compared to wider society, their influence went well beyond their numbers. They "were placed on a pedestal and were revered by men and women who could not live up to their standards",⁶⁴ and were able to gain a sufficient social base from which to control the streets of Baghdad,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Walter E. A. van Beek (ed), *The Quest for Purity: Dynamics of Puritan Movements* (The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988).

⁶¹ See: Nimrod Hurvitz, 'Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination', *Studia Islamica*, vol. 85, 1997, and Hurvitz, 'From Scholarly Circles to Mass Movements'.

⁶² Hurvitz, 'From Scholarly Circles to Mass Movements', p. 991.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 1001.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 994.

exerting a strong influence on its social norms and occasionally inciting riots in the city.⁶⁵

The mild asceticism of Lebanese Salafis takes a similar form and awakens powerful sentiments among certain segments of the population in Tripoli and in the northern region of the country. According to the discourse of local Salafis, *zuhd* is a basic element of a Muslim's behavior and conduct that is interconnected to the concept of purity (*tahara*). The frequently quoted Saudi Salafi scholar Ibn 'Uthaymin distinguished between two types of *tahara*: sensory purity (*tahara hassiyya*) and abstract purity (*tahara ma'nawiyya*).⁶⁶ The latter refers to the purity of the soul, which is equal to *tawhid*. The moderate form of asceticism is the method for getting rid any kind of *shirk* and reaching this ideal state. In other words, it is a tool for purification of the self.

Salafis often refer to the works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya when discussing *tahara* and *zuhd*. According to him, *tahara* means the perfection of one's deeds (*'amal*) and manners (*akhlaq*) and purification of the heart from the sin and ignorance that would otherwise lead to *shirk*.⁶⁷ In Ibn Qayyim's thinking, adopting a moderate lifestyle helps to achieve this. He gives the example of clothing. Some of the *ahadith* (in his view) forbid dressing in the skin of the tiger and other predators, for the reason that the behavior of those who do so might become similar to that of the predators. Men are prohibited from wearing gold and silk for the same reason: this leads to a hedonistic lifestyle and increases greediness.⁶⁸ According to the explanation given by one of my informants, if these attributes are attached to someone, this leads to *shirk*, since the individual will prefer material goods and pleasures to the fear and love of God.

This does not mean, however, that one has to get rid of such pleasures altogether. Indeed, enjoying them in accordance with the rulings of the *shari'a* even pleases God. What is important here is that "you should not be happy when you acquire them and should not be sad if you lose them. Your trust, love and

⁶⁵ Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, and Nehemia Levtzion (eds), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 31-48.

⁶⁶ Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaymin, *Kitab al-Tahara*, http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/all/books/article_18041.shtml (accessed: 7 August 2012).

⁶⁷ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighathat al-Lahfan Min Masayid al-Shaytan*, <http://saaid.net/book/search.php?do=all&u=%C7%C8%E4+%DE%ED%E3> (accessed: 7 August 2012), pp. 52-53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

fear of God have to overshadow these”.⁶⁹ Instead, the individual should use them to please God. Ibn Qayyim cites a story about the third Caliph ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan. Once, at a time of starvation ‘Uthman possessed one thousand Camels. Some merchants wanted to buy them and initially offered twice the usual price. When the Caliph refused, saying that he had already sold them, they offered three times their original value. ‘Uthman told them that he already sold them to God by offering them to the starving, because the profit from this deal would last forever.⁷⁰

Many of the Salafi shaykhs have successfully built up an image of being knowledgeable and *zahid*. Some of them do indeed live very simple lives, with the same standards of living as those of the inhabitants of Tripoli’s popular quarters. Others are quite wealthy and possess successful private businesses, yet they are still able to maintain the image of the mild ascetic if they enjoy their wealth within the strict limits defined by the *shari’a*. The most important element of this mild asceticism is the detailed application of the rulings of the Qur’an and Sunna that cover a range of issues, from a strict code of dress to the ethics of behavior.

The question here is how is this mild asceticism transformed into authority? Why do ordinary people respect and follow these shaykhs? The answer lies in the Salafis’ vision of the relationship of Islam to the world and human society (*dunya*). The conduct of the Salafi shaykhs reflects many ordinary believers’ concept of a pious lifestyle. Many local Sunnis in Tripoli despise those religious scholars who expose their wealth and luxurious, sometimes even hedonistic, lifestyles. By contrast, the Salafis’ puritan conduct and lifestyle inspires their sympathy.

As I have already explained, according to Salafism Islam is a total system; its rulings extend to all aspects of human life and mirror the perfect divine order on earth. Therefore the *shari’a* is a complex system that represents purity; anything that lies outside its framework is polluted. As one of the Salafi shaykhs

⁶⁹ Interview with Shaykh Haytham al-Sa’id, Orebro, Sweden, 23 June 2012. Shaykh Haytham had been an imam of a mosque close to Tripoli before he was appointed as head of an Islamic center in Sweden.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

in Tripoli explained, the *shari'a* fulfills a similar role for humans as the “operating instructions” for an electronic device. As he said:

when you follow what is written in the instructions your device functions perfectly, when you do not do that then it might break. When people follow the rules of Islam exactly as God has revealed them they are always happy, their life goes well and they are pure in both their soul and their body. When someone disregards the *shari'a* things often go wrong for him and he feels anxiety because his soul is not clear.

According to the shaykh, purity can only be restored if the individual returns to the full implementation of the *Shari'a*.⁷¹

As Shakh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq said in a public lecture, “everything in Islam [has been created] for purity.” Perfect purity is represented by *tawhid*. All the rulings of the *shari'a* are created to establish *tawhid*, and by that their aim is purification (*tazkiya*). As the shaykh explained, *shirk* is equal to pollution (*danas*): “the *mushriks* are impure. Their body and their clothes can appear clear but as long as they stick to *shirk* and apostasy their soul and feelings are embedded in pollution.” Any addition to the divine system of the *Shari'a* is pollution as well. As he argued, the spread of Sufi practices in the Abbasid Caliphate led to the decline of Islam and the disintegration of the empire. The *'ibadat* serve to reach *tawhid* and by this, purity as well. When somebody neglects a part of them, his soul becomes polluted. Implementing the rules of Islam leads to a pure soul and later to Paradise. If a Muslim dies and his soul is still impure, he goes to Hell for a certain period of time, until he has been purified from breaking the system of the *shari'a*.⁷²

Reaching purity through mild asceticism means getting closer to the divine order, which is manifested by *tawhid*. Purification therefore means restoring order by eliminating that which leads to its disintegration. In the eyes of ordinary people, Salafis represent this divine order by their intention to live a

⁷¹ Interview with a Salafi shaykh, al-Qubbah, Tripoli, 13 October 2009.

⁷² Public lecture given by Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, Kuwait, al-Salam, Badriyya al-Hajiri Mosque, 10 March 2012. Similar arguments can be found in his book *al-Usul al-'Ilmiyya li-l-Da'wa al-Salafiyya*, 1982, www.salafi.net (accessed: 17 April 2010).

perfect Islamic life. People admire the fact that they never wear Western clothes, unlike the members of the official religious establishment, but always appear in “*libas shara’i* [religiously proper clothing]”, creating a truly Islamic appearance and avoiding imitation of unbelievers (*tashabbuh bi-l-kuffar*).

The image of the shaykhs is further boosted by the manner in which they deal and communicate with other people. Some of the ‘*ulama*’ of Dar al-Fatwa are surrounded by a climate of royalty, and they spend more time in the company of political leaders than of ordinary people. Salafis, by contrast, are more approachable. Their constituents often recall their avoidance of arrogant behavior and tendency to deal with everyone as equals, not as superiors. Salafis also have a distinctively Islamic vocabulary. They avoid using English and French words and frequently use religious quotations and references in their daily conversations. For example, they avoid greeting Muslims with “*marhaba*” (the common form in Lebanon); instead they use “*al-salamu ‘alaykum*”. To thank someone, they frequently say “*jazakum Allah khayran* [May God reward you]”. When they argue, they often quote a *hadith* to prove their opinion. Some of them use formulas that are common in the Gulf, such as “*hayyak Allah* [May God grant you long life]”.

Although a significant segment of the Sunni Muslim community in the North considers the shaykhs to constitute ideal Muslims, most ordinary believers never themselves become committed Salafis. Their ideals of Islamic morality, which are often represented by Salafism, coexist with other, often contradictory, ideals in other fields of life. As Schielke puts it in another context, “people always live complex lives; a person’s identity is in practice dialogical, made up of different voices and experiences”.⁷³ In his analysis of the morality of young Egyptian Muslims, he observes that “people can argue for very conservative and strict standards of gender relations at one time, but express rather liberal ideals of romantic love at other times”.⁷⁴ I made similar findings when interviewing the Salafi constituency in Tripoli. Young people often praise and respect the shaykhs *because* they do not share their lifestyles. As one of them, Ziad, told me about one of the Salafi scholars, “He is perfecting himself in religion while we are wasting

⁷³ Schielke, ‘Being Good in Ramadan’, p. 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

our time in the cafés with meaningless things”. Though he admired the shaykh for living a pure life, he explained that he would not be able to adopt a similar lifestyle. He argued that life in Lebanon is full of temptations; he cannot resist occasionally going out with girls, not to say spending nights with friends smoking and often discussing religiously unacceptable topics.

It should be mentioned that not all Salafis are held in such high respect in the community, though. People often talk negatively about those who suddenly dress Islamic clothes, grow beards, memorize a few *ahadith* and claim to be shaykhs. These individuals are ridiculed when they enthusiastically try to advise others on how to live a proper life. This signifies that reaching the level of purity claimed by Salafi shaykhs should be the result of a long process of learning and perfecting one’s religious practices, cleansing one’s soul. The image of the Salafi is the image of the ideal Muslim due to the effort he has made to reach a state of purity. As one of the shaykhs explained to me, purity is the result of long practice, learning and *zuhd*. The *zahid* should try to abstain from telling even small lies, should resist temptation for years and must devote large parts of his free time to religious activities.⁷⁵

Those Salafis who enjoy the respect of the community are able to transform their mild asceticism into activism, namely *hisba*. Although, as I showed in Chapter 1, *hisba* has three dimensions, in Lebanon it is mostly performed by “heart” and “tongue”, since neither the state nor the wider community would tolerate serious actions by “hand” (i.e. vigilante activism), such as forcing music stores to close, forbidding shops to sell alcohol, and so forth.⁷⁶ Rather, the Lebanese shaykhs constantly remind people about the need to believe in the correct way and abandon deviations like Sufi practices. They argue that the Sunnis in Lebanon can only be saved if believers stick to the right *'aqida*. In their view, the sect is threatened from two sides. First, by the Shi'a who want to dominate the country and turn Sunnis into second-class citizens. Second, by the West, which wants them to turn their back on Islam and follow secularism. In the current climate of sectarian tensions and socioeconomic

⁷⁵ Interview with Shaykh Haytham al-Sa'id, 23 June 2012.

⁷⁶ Salafis did successfully force the grocery stores in the al-Tabbanah region of Tripoli to stop selling alcohol, and in the 1990s they also bombed video stores in Sidon that were allegedly selling pornography. These events are exceptions, however.

frustration, this kind of *hisba* meets a positive response. Many ordinary Sunnis think that the Salafis are the only ones who truly care about the fate of the community and who dare to face up to Hizbullah. I will explain this in more detail in Chapter 8.

Another typical way of performing *hisba* is to look after young people and correct their behavior. Salafi shaykhs and their pupils often engage in conversations with young people who are seemingly on the “wrong path”. They try to persuade them to abandon womanizing, drinking or aimlessly hanging out with friends on the street and in cafés. Rather, Salafis try to convince them to pursue their studies or work, and they often help them to find a job. I observed that the shaykhs sometimes sacrifice quite a lot of their time to give extra religious lessons to young people, and these activities often mean that they are held in greater esteem by the parents and family members. As these two examples show, it is necessary to have authority in order to successfully perform *hisba*. At the same time, performing *hisba* boosts the authority of Salafi shaykhs in the Sunni community yet further.

Religious authority and material services

Another important technique that increases the authority of Salafi shaykhs is taking care of the social and material needs of the people. It is generally expected that *rijal al-din* in Lebanon will look after certain affairs in the community. This often requires the shaykhs to possess quite a high level of authority, previously gained from mild asceticism and *hisba*. For example, Salafi shaykhs are quite active in mediating in cases of social conflicts. Just as in other Middle Eastern countries, often the state does not interfere directly in disputes over property or even in cases of accidental killing. Instead, the community has the opportunity to solve these issues according to local traditions. Mediation is usually performed by highly-respected individuals, such as notables or religious leaders. The latter have even more potential to be effective in settling disputes, since they are supposed to be independent of clan affiliations and local power games. Today people perceive that Salafis fulfill most of these requirements. The shaykhs that

are invited to perform such tasks are usually those who possess the trust of the community and are influential religious authorities. At the same time, when a conflict is solved, the shaykh's authority increases and he gains more followers. During my fieldwork in Lebanon I collected substantial data on social mediation, and I will present a more detailed analysis on this issue in the first half of the next section.

Unlike the movement's activists in many other countries, Salafis in Lebanon are also quite active in providing people with material help. The inhabitants of Tripoli often accuse the shaykhs associated with the official religious establishment of being corrupt and stealing the charitable funds they receive from donors. Islamic charitable activity has recently increased in Tripoli due to the large numbers of Syrian refugees in the city. Residents of the Tabbanah district complained to me that many of the shaykhs who receive financial support to help the refugees are in fact stealing most of the money. By contrast, they stressed that if they do not get aid from other sources, Salafis will even help those who escaped from Syria out of their own pockets. One of the Salafi shaykhs used half of his monthly income to rent two flats for Syrian families, where they could stay until they were able go back to their country or find a way to support themselves. The Salafis believe that showing an altruistic attitude complements and reinforces their image as "ideal Muslims".

The religious authority of the Salafis, at the same time, enables them to become patrons or "middlemen" in patronage networks. As authoritative personalities, Salafi shaykhs are able to attract many followers. Political patrons often approach them, pay them or provide them with other services if they are willing to mobilize their constituency for the *zu'ama* (see below). Sometimes Salafis acquire money for a certain purpose from other sources. They are able to collect donations from the faithful simply because they are seen as "pure" and free of selfishness. People trust that their *sadaqa* will reach those who need it. Controlling a relatively large flow of donations elevates the social position of the shaykhs, and in the second half of the following section, I will discuss the connections of Salafis to patronage.

Mediation in social conflicts

Mediation in social disputes is one of the most important tasks that Salafi shaykhs perform when serving their local communities. Successfully fulfilling the role of the mediator and reconciling quarreling parties reinforces a shaykh's social position and greatly boosts his *da'wa*. In the following sections I will explain the place and importance of the process of mediation in Northern Lebanese society. I will look at how Salafis have been able to become prominent and frequent mediators in social disputes, how the process of mediation takes place and how Salafis are able to utilize their successes as mediators in enhancing the preaching of their message.

In the Middle East in general and in Northern Lebanese society in particular, mediation is a common method to solve social disputes and avoid state interference in the affairs of local communities. Mediation is an integral aspect of the part of the Islamic justice system that is concerned with dispute resolution. Its preferred outcome is *sulh* (amicable settlement), as distinguished from *tahkim* and *qada'*, which are reached after the parties subject themselves to a decision by a third party.⁷⁷ Despite the importance of the topic, there are relatively few academic works on mediation in modern Middle Eastern society,⁷⁸ and studies that focus on the mediatory role of religious scholars are even fewer.⁷⁹

The secular judiciary, which was first installed in Lebanon with the beginning of the French mandate in 1920,⁸⁰ has not been able to fully replace traditional dispute solution mechanisms for three main reasons. First, it is frequently the case that one or both of the quarrelling parties do not accept the

⁷⁷ In the case of *tahkim*, the disputants can withdraw from the arbitration process before the decision. By contrast, during *qida'* it is not possible to withdraw, and the disputants have to follow the process until the end and subject themselves to the judge's decision. See: Aida Othman, "And Amicable Settlement Is Best": Sulh and Dispute Resolution in Islamic Law', *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 21, 2007, p. 68.

⁷⁸ Among these: Lynn Welchman, 'The Bedouin Judge, the Mufti, and the Chief Islamic Justice: Competing Legal Regimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2008; Alean al-Krenawi and John R. Graham, 'Conflict Resolution through a Traditional Ritual Among the Bedouin Arabs of the Negev', *Ethnology*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1999; Victor F. Ayoub, 'Conflict Resolution and Social Reorganization in a Lebanese Village', *Human Organization*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1967.

⁷⁹ See: Welchman, 'The Bedouin Judge'.

⁸⁰ Elisabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 58.

secular judge's decision if no informal reconciliation has been made. After the Lebanese court's verdict has been enforced, they often seek justice themselves, which can have tragic consequences. A Salafi shaykh in one of the Northern Lebanese Palestinian refugee camps gave me an example. At the beginning of the 1990s, a secondary school student killed one of his classmates during a fight (accidentally, according to the shaykh). The religious leaders of the camp immediately started a process of mediation between the killer's and the victim's families. However, at the end the victim's father refused the reconciliation and instead demanded the death of his son's killer, who was 15 years old at the time. Since the shaykhs were unable to reach a solution, the case was delivered to the Lebanese court and the killer was handed over to the state authorities. The victim's father found the seven-year sentence handed to his son's killer insufficient and maintained his demand that he be killed. Today there are increasing fears in the camp that the tensions between the two families will erupt. For the past 20 years, the vendetta (*tha'r*) had been prevented because the killer's family had a good relationship with powerful individuals in the neighboring Syrian regime and controlled certain smuggling routes between Syria and Lebanon. Since the Syrian revolution, the family's former influence has been shaken and there are fears that the victim's family will attempt to take revenge.⁸¹ If mediation leads to *sulh* it restores stability, and tensions never flare up around the same issue again.

The second reason why the Lebanese judiciary system is unable to replace the traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution is its inefficiency. Most verdicts are only reached after a long period of time. There are also many complaints that judges are corrupt and that winning a case depends on having political contacts. Salafi shaykhs are usually regarded as unbiased and trustful. In disputes over money, in particular, one should not expect an efficient and quick decision from the Lebanese court. Therefore most people prefer to ask the shaykhs to solve these cases. According to one of my informants, a Salafi shaykh with long experience in mediation, it sometimes takes the Lebanese court ten years to come to a decision on a dispute involving a large amount of money

⁸¹ Interview with a religious leader of the camp, Tripoli, 14 April 2012.

(about 20,000 USD). Salafi shaykhs can solve such issues in a few months by proposing a solution that is acceptable for all of the parties involved.

The third reason is the suspicion felt by the Northern Lebanese Sunni population toward the state. In general, people feel that the government is neglecting the region because it is home to the Sunni community. These feelings of unease toward the state increased after 2011, when Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri resigned and Najb Miqati's new government included the Shi'ite Hizbullah. These particular events led many Sunnis to feel alienated from the Lebanese state and its institutions. Although Dar al-Fatwa also offers religious mediation, it is associated with the state and the institution is seen as weak and incompetent, therefore people often avoid turning to it. Due to the mistrust of their political leadership and feeling disenfranchised, Lebanese Sunnis are increasingly turning to what they perceive to be their true religious identity and their traditional social institutions. Therefore those shaykhs who are well integrated in their local communities are gaining prominence. It seems that at present, most of these shaykhs are Salafis.⁸²

Shaykhs are not the only authorities to which people can turn for conflict resolution. Tribal chiefs (*shuyukh al-'asha'ir*) can play the same role in those places where the tribe (*'ashi'ra*, pl. *'asha'ir*) is still the main social unit. This is the case in the Dinniya region and in some districts of 'Akkar. However, in most places in the North communities are not tribal. In these communities in the recent past the *zu'ama*, the local notables (*a'yan*) and Sufi shaykhs often played mediatory roles. During the civil war era (1975-1990) in particular, militias and political parties performed the same task. Today, political leaders and the *a'yan* have less control over society than they used to, and the influence of the Sufis is also decreasing, especially in the cities. Many Salafis have sufficient authority in their communities to fill this vacuum. Salafi shaykhs have recently become the most active parties in mediation in social disputes. During my fieldwork, I interviewed many Salafi shaykhs and their followers over the formers' role in conflict resolution. In the following I will describe the activities of three shaykhs – two Lebanese and one Palestinian – in mediation. I will highlight the factors

⁸² One prominent Dar al-Fatwa official admitted to me that most of the mediators in social conflict in Tripoli are Salafis. Interview with a Dar al-Fatwa official, Tripoli, 29 April 2012.

that make somebody a successful mediator and use ethnographic examples to explain why Salafis have been particularly successful in brokering *sulh*.

Shaykh Tawfiq of the Mina district

Shaykh Tawfiq, a middle-aged Tripolitan man, is one of the leading Salafi preachers in the Mina district (the port district). The district itself differs significantly from the other parts of Tripoli. Many of the inhabitants of the district have more secular lifestyles than elsewhere in the city. More women go on the streets without a headscarf than in the al-Qubbah or Abu Samra regions. The proportion of middle-class citizens among the population is also significantly higher than in most other districts. The only street where bars can be found in Tripoli is also in the Mina district. However, there has always been a devout Muslim part of the population, and the growing number of Salafis also signifies the increasing religiosity of the locals.⁸³

The center of Shaykh Tawfiq's religious activities is the 'Uthman bin 'Affan mosque, which is maintained by the network of Shakh Salim al-Rafi'i, one of the most prominent Salafi preachers in Tripoli. When I asked the people about individuals who could solve disputes, most of them immediately recommended Shaykh Tawfiq. When I interviewed him, the Shaykh told me that he regards mediation as part of *al-'amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa al-nahi 'an al-munkar* (or *hisba*). According to him, disputes erupt between individuals when they violate the *shari'a*. By intervening in their conflict, the religious scholar leads the believers back to the way of Islam and preserves the social order defined by God. In the opinion of the Shaykh, those who perform this part of *hisba* must be well embedded in society. Respect, authority and having a dense network of social contacts are prerequisites for being able to reconcile quarreling parties. Shaykh Tawfiq has served his community since his adolescence, when he turned to religion.⁸⁴ He describes himself as one of the most religiously committed young

⁸³ When I started researching Salafism in Lebanon in 2009, there were only a dozen or so committed Salafis in the Mina district. In 2012 I found hundreds in the same region.

⁸⁴ It coincided with the religious revival in Tripoli in the second half of the 1980s. Interview with Shaykh Tawfiq, Tripoli, 18 April 2012.

people (*'awwal al-iltizam*) in the district. He acquired deep knowledge of Islam at a very early age and offered religious advice to ordinary people. When necessary, he also helped to solve their more mundane problems, such as getting appropriate health care, jobs and financial aid. When at the end of the 1980s he received a scholarship to study *shari'a* at the Islamic University of Medina, the inhabitants of the Mina district expected him to come back as their shaykh after getting his degree. The trust and authority that he has earned as a pious man and religious scholar led him to become a famous mediator. It is worth mentioning that another shaykh, an Ash'ari shaykh who was appointed by Dar al-Fatwa, never succeeded in getting involved in reconciliation processes. As one of the local inhabitants described him: "He always behaved like he was superior to ordinary people. Only merchants, lawyers and doctors were able to approach him, while we only saw him during the Friday sermon."

Shaykh Tawfiq mostly solves conflicts within families, such as disagreements between married couples, parents and sons, and disputes over money and property. He mentioned a typical case that had recently arisen in the Mina district. A disagreement occurred between a father and his adult sons over *nafaqat 'ala al-walidayn* (financial support for the parents). In Islamic law, sons have to give part of their monthly income to their father if he does not have enough money to support himself and his wife(s).⁸⁵ The sons refused the payment, saying that their father had quite a decent income and they were therefore not obliged to support him. The father, however, argued the opposite and prepared to file a complaint in the secular court. To avoid the shame that a lawsuit between father and sons would bring on the whole family, other family members asked the shaykh to intervene. As shaykh Tawfiq explained, in this case his persuasive skills and contact with other kin members and family friends proved to be as essential as his knowledge of the *shari'a*. The shaykh's argument contained two points. First, by quoting from the Qur'an and the Sunna, he reminded the sons of the need to obey the parents. It might be legitimate but it is

⁸⁵ Plenty of *fatwas* have been issued on this topic by muftis with various intellectual backgrounds. See, for example: http://olamaa-yemen.net/main/articles.aspx?article_no=9458 (accessed: 5 August 2012); <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=56749> (accessed: 5 August 2012).

not ethical for a son to inquire whether his father is really in need of financial support or not. Providing as high a living standard as possible for one's parents is dear to God and will be rewarded. Second, he argued that if Muslims were unable to agree among themselves and had to go to the non-Muslim court,⁸⁶ it would signify the weakness and disintegration of the Sunni community. As he was able to gather family friends and kin to support his stance, the sons agreed to pay the *nafaqa* for the father. In private he interpreted this event as having intervened as one of the '*ulama*' of the Sunnis who guards the values and integrity of the community, especially in times of danger. When Sunni Muslims need a third, secular or non-Muslim party to solve their differences, it is a sign of fragmentation within the *Umma* and gives the green light to Hizbullah, in particular, to strengthen its domination over the country.

After such a successful reconciliation, the members of the family will become supporters of Salafism, most likely as passive participants. Solving a serious problem significantly increases the shaykh's reputation in the eyes of those who were involved. After this, they are likely to accept the opinion of the shaykh in other matters as well. There is a significant chance that many male family members will attend Shaykh Tawfiq's Friday sermon instead of sermons by those who belong to Dar al-Fatwa or other movements. As a result, they will encounter the Salafi framing of contemporary events, which might influence their universe of discourse and worldview.

Shaykh Abu Sa'd, the "social activist" of the Qubba

Unlike Shaykh Tawfiq, Shaykh Abu Sa'd educated himself in *shari'a*. Having originally acquired a BSc in engineering, he built up an impressive degree of religious knowledge over years of studying with Salafi '*ulama*' in study circles in the mosques. Shaykh Abu Sa'd is very active in helping ordinary people with their everyday affairs. As he has basically sacrificed his life to the *da'wa* and to his community, he is highly respected and possesses a very dense social network. He can usually be found between the '*asr*' and the *maghrib* prayers in his Islamic audio shop and Internet café, situated next to the Rahma mosque in the Qubba region. The city district itself differs significantly from the Mina district. The

⁸⁶ The judge in the Lebanese court can be also a Christian, Shi'ite or Druze.

socioeconomic conditions here are much less favorable, and the majority of the population is traditional; most of them belong either to the “urban poor” or the “devout middle class”, in Kepel’s terminology.⁸⁷

Shaykh Abu Sa’d is known as a very open-minded person, compared to the average Salafi. As one of his acquaintances described him, “when you talk to a[n average] Salafi you feel a climate of purity around him, so you refrain from sharing everything with him, especially anything about your sexual life. Shaykh Abu Sa’d is different, he has been always easy-going, he knows how to talk to the people as a man of religion but without making them feel embarrassed.”⁸⁸ The shaykh’s attitude helped him to become a skilled mediator, especially in social and family matters, although he also deals with a wide range of issues, even murders. In one case he was asked to reconcile a wife with her husband, who had “deviated from the true path.” The man was drinking and visiting prostitutes regularly, and this had become an open secret in the neighborhood. The wife was determined to ask for *khul’* (separation),⁸⁹ which would bring yet more shame on the man and his family, especially in the environment of the Qubba district. The shaykh held separate consultations with the wife and the husband. He convinced the wife to wait and give her husband a chance to abandon his bad habits. He gave the example of the Prophet’s companion, who took years to learn the rules and left un-Islamic customs gradually. She should only divorce her husband if he did not appear to be committed in a given time frame.⁹⁰

Shaykh Abu Sa’d criticizes those Salafis who keep a distance from the less committed part of the Sunni community in the name of preserving their own religious purity (although these are a minority among Lebanese Salafis). He thinks that in the absence of an Islamic state, *hisba* and Islamic punishments (*hudud*) can only be performed by fully living with the people and “sitting even

⁸⁷ Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 1-22.

⁸⁸ Casual conversation with Sulayman, a middle-aged Palestinian acquaintance of the shaykh, Tripoli, 3 May 2012.

⁸⁹ If the wife dislikes her husband and this can lead to transgression on her side, or the husband drinks, has extra-marital affairs or often beats his wife, she can ask the *qadi* to separate her from him. In this case she is not entitled to any material compensation from the husband, but on the contrary, she has to pay back the *mahr* (dowry). See: Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 95-100.

⁹⁰ Interview, Tripoli, 30 April 2012.

with those who drink, do not pray or belong to Ahl al-Bida’”, and trying to bring them back to Islam.⁹¹

Shaykh Hisham, the intercommunity peace-broker

Shaykh Hisham, a Palestinian scholar in his mid-thirties, is well known for his efforts to minimize communal tensions between the Lebanese and the Palestinians. He lives in one of the northern refugee camps near Tripoli and the rural areas of 'Akkar province. He is the head of a large Islamic center and also imam of one of the mosques. His activities are not limited to the camp and to areas inhabited by Palestinians, though; he often goes to give the Friday Sermon in the nearby Lebanese Sunni villages. He also engages in charitable activities among poor Lebanese, and maintains a good relationship with the leading personalities in the villages and the most significant families. His dense social networks in both communities enable him to mediate in disputes between Lebanese and Palestinians. Most of the time he is invited to mediate in cases of manslaughter and accidental killing. According to him, during such mediation one of the biggest challenges is maneuvering in the framework of three legal systems: Lebanese law, the *shari'a* and customary (*'urfi*) law. At the same time, his embeddedness in the Salafi networks of the North facilitates dispute resolution. In the following I will illustrate this by presenting a typical case that was mediated by Shaykh Hisham.

In 'Akkar, a Palestinian bus driver crushed two Lebanese schoolboys and one of them died from his injuries. The case was particularly sensitive because the driver was working illegally, using a bus with private number.⁹² If the victim's family were to refuse to solve the case via mediation, the driver would face a much harsher sentence than usual. Lebanese law leaves room for mediation and *sulh*. In a case of accidental killing, the suspect is held in one of the

⁹¹ This attitude stands in opposition to the *Madkhali* network's views in Abu Samra district that I also have researched. They warn their fellow Salafis from spending time with those “who strayed from the path (*munharifin*)”, unless they are seeking religious advice.

⁹² Palestinians in Lebanon cannot work in a range of professions, including being drivers in public transport. In addition, they cannot own a taxi or bus used for public transport.

police stations (and not in a jail) until the case is solved. When the judge is convinced that a real *sulh*⁹³ has occurred, he drops the charges between the two families. In the bus driver's case, the negotiations began immediately, three days after the deceased boy had been buried.⁹⁴

Their work was facilitated by the fact that the victim's family had a close relationship with Salafi shaykhs in 'Akkar. Along with other lower-ranking shaykhs from his Islamic center, Shaykh Hisham started to negotiate a solution with these Salafi shaykhs, who in this case represented the family. The scholars together proposed a solution and presented it to the two families. Traditionally, a certain amount of blood money (*diyya*) has to be paid, even in cases of accidental killing, and the Prophetical Tradition has historically stated how much should be paid as *diyya*.⁹⁵ However, in the modern application of Islamic criminal law different amounts of blood money can be set, especially in modern times.⁹⁶ In Lebanon, customary law sets the amount at 10,000 USD. In view of the poor economic situation of the suspect's family, the Salafi shaykhs asked the victim's family to forgo the *diyya* and make other demands that would be even dearer to God. After long talks, the father of the victim agreed to waive the *diyya*, and instead asked the killer to go on pilgrimage to Mecca in the same year for the sake of his son's salvation.

The case illustrates the effectiveness of Salafi informal networks in the North of Lebanon. It is unlikely that the victim's family would have forgone the blood money for a shaykh from Dar al-Fatwa who lacked a serious scholarly network. In this case, though, they considered it more important to please the Salafis whom they follow, and to strengthen the relationship with them (which

⁹³ The judge has to be assured that the two families have been truly reconciled and no *tha'r* (vendetta) will be committed afterwards. Interview with Shaykh Hisham, al-Minya, 2 May 2012.

⁹⁴ According to customary law, negotiations can begin three days after the death, when the deceased has been buried. Second and third-level relatives of the killer also have to be present at the ceremony. Ibid.

⁹⁵ "In early Islam the standard bloodprice was given a monetary value of 1,000 dinars or 12,000 (according to the Hanafites 10,000) dirhams. This equals 29.7 or 35.64 kg of silver or 4.25 kg of gold." Rudolph Peters, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 51.

⁹⁶ 'Diya', in Bosworth, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. The amount of *diyya* usually differs according to country or region. See: Tahir Wasti, *The Application of Islamic Criminal Law in Pakistan* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), p. 179, 228; Gunnar Jochen Weimann, *Islamic Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria: Politics, Religion, Judicial Practice* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 23, 27, 109.

was possibly also a patron-client relationship), rather than asking for a 10,000-USD *diyya*. At the same time, the deal was worth something to both parties: the Lebanese Salafis who represented the victim's family earned a favor from the Palestinian one, and the Palestinian bus driver became obliged to Shaykh Hisham.

Sulh and the acquisition of social capital

How are Salafis' efforts to achieve *sulh* serving the *da'wa*? How does this help the shaykhs to access resources, and what are these resources? In the following section I will try to answer these questions. Mediation in conflicts is a very effective tool of resource mobilization for the Salafi movement. Successfully achieving *sulh* reinforces the social position of the shaykhs. People respect and trust them more, their embeddedness in social networks increases and their network ties are extended. In other words, mediation leads to an increase in the shaykhs' social capital, which they can exchange, in turn, for other forms of capital in the Bourdieuan sense. To further understand this process, we need to briefly discuss the concepts of religious and social capital and the interrelations between them.

In Bourdieu's theory of fields, religious capital is the commodity that is exchanged by the actors in the religious field to achieve stronger positions (see Chapter 1). Religious capital, according to Bourdieu, is manifested in myths, ideologies, religious knowledge or the mastery of religious practices.⁹⁷ I also classify religious authority as a manifestation of religious capital, because authority itself can be used as a commodity and can be invested to achieve a higher place in the religious field.

The notion of "social capital" is derived from the assumption that social relationships can lead to the acquisition of certain profits or benefits. Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized

⁹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field', *Comparative Social Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1991, pp. 22-23.

relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition".⁹⁸ That is, group membership, networks of friends, followers or access to patronage networks increases someone's social capital. The importance of social capital is that it can be converted into other forms of capital, such as economic or religious capital.⁹⁹

In our case, by performing social mediation, the Salafi shaykhs invest their authority to gain social capital. This social capital can then be converted into economic capital or increased religious authority. Those people whose conflicts are successfully resolved usually intend to strengthen their relationship with the shaykh in order to ask him for other services in the future. Consequently, they are more willing to assist the shaykh in his activities and help him to access the necessary resources. All of the shaykhs whom I interviewed told me that individuals who have been reconciled are more ready to provide material support.

For example, Shaykh Abu Sa'd wanted to organize religious lessons (*halaqa*, pl. *halaqat*) in different mosques in the Qubba region. He needed money to hire some other Salafi shaykhs to do the work. Since he was at that time unable to contact charity organizations, he needed private individuals to sponsor his plan. Three families for whom he had previously provided mediating services in social conflicts in which they had been involved collected about 7,000 USD to pay the salaries of the teachers for six months. This case shows that the effort that Shaykh Abu Sa'd invested in mediating for these families created social ties, which then provided him with material revenues. Using these material revenues, that is, by financing shaykhs to give *halaqat*, boosted the spread of the Salafi message. At the same time, it is likely that Shaykh Abu Sa'd will be able to rely on these shaykhs as clients, since he provides at least a part of their monthly income. All six shaykhs are young men from Tripoli who started their religious studies with Shaykh Abu Sa'd. They were his pupils in his *halaqat* in the Qubbah region, and he later encouraged them to continue learning in one of the Salafi colleges (*ma'had shara'i*) in the Abu Samra region.

The shaykhs also reported that individuals whose cases have been successfully resolved often turn to them when they want to pay *sadaqa* (make

⁹⁸ Alejandro Portes, 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1998, p. 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

voluntary donations). The shaykhs either collect the alms themselves or direct the donor to some of the needy. Many of these poor people are already (at least passive) followers of Salafism, and receiving material revenues supposedly encourages them to retain close ties with the movement. The shaykhs can also ask these individuals for other favors to extend their clientele. Some of those whom the shaykhs help to achieve *sulh* are entrepreneurs who own various kinds of businesses. The scholars can request that they give jobs to their pupils or others whom they patronize. Shaykh Hisham has come into contact with many influential and wealthy persons during his mediation activities in 'Akkar, and uses these relations to help his fellow Palestinians, who seem to be receptive to the Salafi message in order to get employed.

Contacts established via mediation do not only help Salafi shaykhs to access material resources (or in other words, economic capital), but they also provide them with new avenues to disseminate their message. The shaykhs reported that they were usually invited to all the occasions and events of the families that they had helped to achieve *sulh*. Salafi shaykhs are therefore frequent guests at weddings, which provide an excellent opportunity for *da'wa*. At the weddings of conservative Sunni families, men and women celebrate in segregated places. At a certain point during the event, the Salafi scholar who is present is invited to give a small talk or lecture. The wedding also serves as an open forum for ordinary individuals to approach the shaykh and ask their questions about religion.

For Arab families, social conflicts can have serious consequences. Retreat means losing face in society, while ongoing, unresolved disputes can lead even to armed clashes and huge human and material losses. It is no wonder that ordinary people hold those who can help the parties to reach a settlement that is acceptable for all in high esteem. Therefore the Salafi shaykhs' mediation activities make a substantial contribution to increasing their religious authority and influence in the Sunni community. As a result, they gain significant social and material resources to extend their *da'wa*.

Salafis and the Lebanese patronage networks

Of all the Arab states, patronage is probably the most visible and prominent in Lebanon. There are at least two reasons for this. First, in certain regions the presence of the state is negligible and the provision of basic services for the population depends on political patrons (*za'im*, pl. *zu'ama'*). This is especially true in certain parts of the North, such as the Dinniya region or 'Akkar. The second factor lies in the unique characteristics of the Lebanese patronage system itself. Prior to the Arab Spring, in all of the other Middle Eastern countries, one group or family dominated the whole political system. This arrangement still exists in most of the Arab states. In such cases, the dominant group constitutes the top of the patronage system. Other patrons depend on them and are simultaneously the clients of the rulers.

The structure of patronage in Lebanon is different. There is no dominant group that has been able to take over the state. The *zu'ama'* compete with each other for influential positions in the state administration. They need to fill government offices regularly in order to get access to state resources and distribute them among their clients, thereby retaining their status as *zu'ama'*. In order to achieve this, patrons need to mobilize their clientele at the time of elections and collect enough votes to return to parliament.

The contemporary Lebanese patronage system is rooted in the Ottoman era. Between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the society of Mount Lebanon was dominated by *muqta'ji* families. The *muqta'jis* were formally appointed by the Ottoman administration in order to collect the taxes. In exchange they got a share of the revenues, and Istanbul did not interfere in the internal affairs of the territory controlled by the *muqta'jis*. The legitimacy of the *muqta'ji's* rule was not based on coercion, but on the personal allegiance of the peasants on his land. Sectarianism was not involved in this form of patronage; in most cases, the landlord was Druze while the peasants were Maronites.¹⁰⁰

As I have shown in Chapter 3, after the civil war in 1860, the sect became the main component of the identity of the population, and not belonging to a

¹⁰⁰ A. Nizar Hamzeh, 'Clientalism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2001), pp. 168-169.

certain patron. Therefore patronage itself was defined by the religious community. After this time, patrons and clients mainly belonged to the same sectarian group. Following the emergence of the modern Lebanese state, first during the French mandate from 1920 and then from independence in 1943, patronage became tied to the state institutions. In this system patrons mobilize their constituencies during elections. Between elections, they expect them stand by them in times of political turmoil. For example, the client might take the patron's side in demonstrations or even during internal fights.

Today, patronage in Lebanon can be regarded as modern because most of the clientele, unlike in the 18th and 19th centuries, do not have moral bonds to their patrons. They serve them only for material reasons. Furthermore, contemporary Lebanese patronage is not exclusive. Unlike earlier, a client can serve more than one patron at a time. Due to the special features of the Lebanese election system, patrons usually compete each other in the same sectarian group¹⁰¹ while making alliances with patrons of other confessions. The major cleavages between different political coalitions in Lebanon define the political map of Tripoli and the North. In the predominantly Sunni region, patrons ally themselves with the pro-Western and pro-Saudi March 14 movement and with the pro-Syrian March 8 grouping. Salafis are usually well integrated into one of these patronage networks. The highest number of them supports the pro-Western group led by Sa'd al-Hariri. Hariri, though originally from Sidon and residing in Beirut, has a vast patronage network in the North. He is also supported by local patrons, who are allied to his block and receive political backing from him. For example, most of the *harakis* have some kind of access to Hariri's patronage network. The most famous "Hariri clients" include Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, Salim al-Rafi'i, Zakariya al-Masri and Rai'd Hulayhil.

The current prime minister, Najib Miqati, is the most powerful local patron in Tripoli. After a political crisis in 2011, the self-made billionaire allied himself with the pro-Syrian side. In spite of the fact that that this camp contains the Shi'ite Hizbullah, Miqati has several clients from the Salafi movement.

¹⁰¹ In each electoral district there is a certain number of seats in each of the communities, so electoral competition cannot result in a decrease in the number of parliamentary seats held by one of the sects, Bassel F. Salloukh, 'The Limits of Electoral Engineering in Divided Societies: Elections in Postwar Lebanon', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2006, p. 640.

However, these belong either to the network of Muhammad Khodor or Safwan al-Za'bi. The former rejects the anti-Shi'a stance of the majority of the Salafis and argues that of all those in the region, only Hizbullah has a truly Islamic, purist project. The latter argues that only peaceful coexistence and cooperation with Shi'ite political forces will create the stability necessary for the *da'wa*.

In patronage networks there is always a hierarchy of "dominance relations". In modern Middle Eastern societies there are several figures that mediate between "the little man" and the "big man".¹⁰² Salafis typically play the role of the mediator or middle-man between ordinary people and the *zu'ama*. The shaykhs are in a good position to benefit from Lebanese patronage networks. They possess significant ability to mobilize followers for the patrons. For the patron himself, relying on Salafis and paying them to mobilize followers for elections and other occasions costs less than attempting to directly mobilize large numbers of people. Naturally, Lebanese patrons have their masses of supporters, but they are unable to reach out in this way to all the people whose vote or presence in demonstrations is needed. If they are using the Salafis as middle-men, they need to finance the shaykhs. The latter use their moral authority to persuade their constituencies to vote for the candidates supported by the patron. At the same time, most of the shaykhs receive funding from other sources as well, which is necessarily used for the sake of the patron when the Salafis have to take sides with one of the political camps.

Their relations with patrons enable Salafis to provide a wider range of services to their followers. Since they often receive large amounts of money from the *zu'ama*, they are able to give more material incentives to their constituencies. This might take the form of direct financial aid in the case of a death in the family, paying for medical treatment or for the tuition fees of students from poor families. During my fieldwork in North Lebanon, I had a chance to examine the mechanism of patronage and how Salafis utilize it. In the following I will present some of the cases that I was able to observe in detail. One of the best examples of a Salafi who actively serves one or more patrons is Shaykh Safwan al-Za'bi, already mentioned above. I interviewed him about this issue in the summer of

¹⁰² Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2007, p. 107.

2011. He always talked openly about his cooperation with the *zu'ama* and justified it by explaining that this is how Lebanese society works.

Shaykh Safwan mentioned two cases in which he had interceded for his clients with one of the *zu'ama*. In the first case Ahmad, the head of a lower middle-class family from the Dinniya district, added a new floor to his house without a permit from the municipality. When officials from the municipal council found out, they ordered the man to be fined for an extortionate amount. According to Shaykh Safwan the sum reached almost 50,000 USD. Ahmad turned to Shaykh Safwan for help. The shaykh has relatively strong ties with some of the patrons in Tripoli, most notably Najib Miqati, the current prime minister, and Mouhammad Safadi. Shaykh Safwan had only to make some phone calls to Miqati's close aids, and after a few days the issue had been settled. Ahmad was no longer obliged to pay a fine and he subsequently received the permit from the municipality. Shaykh Safwan acknowledged that Ahmad deserved to be helped because he is a devout Muslim and urges his family members to practice their religion properly. At the same time, he is also able to mobilize a number of voters during the elections.

The other case occurred in the Tabbaneh district, where Safwan has also succeeded in building up a network of clients. One of these, Ra'id, was arrested by the military intelligence service on charges of having incited sectarian tensions during the clashes between the Sunni and the Alawite communities in the summer of 2011.¹⁰³ Although he claimed that he had not been involved, Ra'id had attracted the attention of the authorities because he had previously been a member of an unspecified militant Palestinian cell. Long before he was arrested, he had been in contact with Safwan's network and had undoubtedly encouraged others to attend the mosques supported by Safwan. Immediately after the arrest, the shaykh turned to both Miqati and Safadi and paid personal visits to both patrons. He did not tell me which one finally helped, but after two weeks or so, Ra'id left prison.

Safwan explained that the logic of patronage is such that these people are afterwards expected to show their devotion and appear regularly in one of his mosques. Maximizing his number of followers increases his social status among

¹⁰³ Interview with Safwan al-Za'bi, Sir al-Dinniya, 17 July 2011.

the Salafis in Lebanon. According to him, undertaking *da'wa* in this manner has two aims. First, it shows the way of true Islam to many people, even if some of them initially started to follow it out of financial interest. Second, having a significant follower base attracts more funds from the Gulf States. Furthermore, it helps him to build stronger relationships with the *zu'ama'*. In times of political turmoil, Salafi shaykhs such as Safwan are expected to visit the patron with a delegation. Such visits form part of Lebanese political tradition and demonstrate that there are plenty of people who stand on the *za'im's* side. Safwan also mobilized his clientele during the elections. He made a list of four candidates: two belonging to the Hariri camp, and the other two to the March 8 grouping. According to Safwan, such moves further increase his financial options, since he receives payments from all the candidates he has supported.

Patron-client relationships in the Salafi movement are not always linked to the *zu'ama*. Salafis frequently provide services to individuals without indirectly recruiting them for the *za'im*. I observed such a case when I spent a few days in the Wadi Khalid region in the summer of 2011. One of my informants, shaykh 'Imad, who is a prominent Salafi shaykh in the region, played an active role in helping Syrian refugees who had fled from the repression of the ongoing demonstrations. An older Syrian woman's leg had been broken when the security forces had beaten her up, back in her hometown. When she arrived in Wadi Khalid she was already in a critical condition. Shaykh 'Imad gave her shelter in his own home and spared no time and effort in organizing her care in a good hospital and collecting the 30,000 USD needed for her operation. He was able to get one third of the money from families in Wadi Khalid who sympathized with the Salafis or the Syrian revolution. The network of Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Sahhal, to which Shaykh 'Imad is also connected, donated 10,000 USD. Surprisingly, the rest of the money came from the Red Cross. Shaykh 'Issa got in touch with the Lebanese representative of the organization, despite the fact that Salafis often blame the Red Cross for being one of the Western "colonizing powers."

Conclusion

In this chapter I explained how Lebanese Salafi shaykhs construct their religious authority, and how this provides them with influential positions in the Sunni society of North Lebanon.

Following Max Weber, I defined authority as “legitimate domination”. To explain religious authority I used Khaled Abou El Fadl’s concept of “persuasive authority”. According to him, someone possesses religious authority if he is perceived by the wider society as representing God’s way. People have to believe that a given person is able to define the boundaries of right belief and exclude heretics and unbelievers. To explain the construction of religious authority I applied Weber’s notion of “routinization of charisma”. Following the mainstream literature on religious authority, I argued that certain tasks and attributes of the Prophet have been transferred to offices and institutions. The Prophet’s legal authority has been vested in the “men of religion”, or *rijal al-din*.

The authority of the *rijal al-din* chiefly relies on their possession of knowledge, or *‘ilm*. Ordinary people submit part of their judgment to the men of religion, assuming that the latter can discern the right religious rulings for them. Salafis claim authority by redefining orthodoxy. Traditional Muslim scholars accept differences in opinion and regarding belief and practice, as long as these opinions do not clearly violate the continuously negotiated “discursive limits” of orthodoxy. The Salafi concept of right belief, however, is rather static. Salafis reject the use of different methods to read the Text and argue that in most cases the rulings of the *shari’a* are clear and do not constitute matters of interpretation. Therefore what falls within and beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy can be exactly defined.

Salafis argue that they are in exclusive possession of right belief. I argue that they use different “techniques of authority”, which are supposed to prove to their constituencies that they are following the true path. By practicing “moderate asceticism” Salafis demonstrate that they live exemplary, pure and balanced personal lives. This appeals to many ordinary people, who compare the Salafis’ virtuous lifestyles with those of the often selfish and hedonistic traditional Sunni religious elite. Salafis often transform their moderate

asceticism into activism in the form of *hisba*. In the Lebanese context this means constantly correcting people's religious practices and reminding them about adopting a right belief. A specific form of *hisba* is looking after young people and persuading them to abandon the "wrong path", such as drinking, womanizing, or being lazy and unproductive.

I argued that fulfilling the socioeconomic needs of the community is an important technique of authority. The Salafis perceive that having an altruistic attitude, manifested in providing material aid for the needy, often from their own pocket, reinforces their image as "ideal Muslims". Furthermore, the religious authority that Salafis have already gained legitimizes their role as mediators in social conflicts and middlemen in the patronage networks of the Lebanese *zu'ama*. I used three case studies to explain how Salafis engage in social mediation. I argued that if *sulh* is achieved, this greatly increases the "social capital" of the shaykhs. This social capital enables them to access material support from the community and broaden their own follower base.

Chapter 6

The Structure of Lebanese Salafi Networks at the Local Level

The mobilization structure of Salafism is largely different from that of other mainstream Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brothers or Hizb ut-Tahrir. The movement lacks elaborate institutional structures. Although there are formal organizations and institutions such as charities and religious colleges, informal networks dominate the resource mobilization of the movement. Unlike other movements, in Salafism there is no clear hierarchical structure of authority, and membership is even less clearly defined. The earlier literature on resource mobilization, which mainly focuses on formal institutions, is therefore of little use in this case. In the past two decades, describing social movements as networks has been increasingly popular among researchers. In the following discussion I will demonstrate that applying a social network approach helps us to understand and explain the structure of social movements in Middle Eastern countries, especially the structure of Salafism. Although it mentions the importance of informal networks, the literature on Salafism lacks analysis of the structure of these networks.

Theorists have observed that rather than being a monolithic entity, a social movement contains multiple and heterogeneous actors which engage in collective action together. A social movement cannot be equated with a single organization, as earlier resource mobilization theorists thought, or with strings of protest events. Researchers on “new social movements” have observed that social movements stay alive even when no protest events occur, or even when their institutional frameworks have been disrupted (or never established at all).¹ Taking a network approach towards social movements therefore provides a

¹ Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*; Nancy Whittier, *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, 'Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture: The Culture of the Women's Movement', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *Social Movements and Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

wider perspective for analyzing social movements. Diani defines social movements as “networks of informal interactions, between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity”.² If we approach the topic from a traditional network theory perspective, these individuals, groups and associations (social movement actors) are the nodes of social movement networks that are connected to each other by direct or indirect ties (“spokes”). These ties are direct if the nodes are directly linked to each other in “explicit interaction and interdependence”.³ They might demote personal relationships (either virtual or real), for instance, and inter-group or organizational contacts. Indirect ties exist when nodes are not linked directly but some kind of relationship is assumed between them, such as participating in the same activity or belonging to the same movement. In the case of Salafism, due to the predominance of informal, interpersonal relationships I will consider individuals as nodes in the networks.

A very important question is that of how to define whether a specific node is part of a social movement network or not, since social movement actors simultaneously belong to multiple social networks. It is already known that certain ties facilitate, while others impede, participation in a social movement. If the facilitating ties are predominant, the individual engages in collective action. Melucci, along with other new social movement theorists, emphasizes the importance of having a collective identity that draws people into and keeps them in interpersonal networks.⁴ Later in this chapter I will describe how collective identity is constructed in Salafism. After this brief definition of social movement networks, in the following I shall seek to examine the kinds of functions that networks fulfill in Salafism. How do networks link different nodes in the

² Diani, ‘The Concept of a Social Movement’, p. 13.

³ Diani, Mario. ‘Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks: From Metaphor to Substance?’, In Diani, Mario, and Doug McAdam ed., *Social Movements and Networks*. Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 7.

⁴ Alberto Melucci, ‘The Process of Collective Identity’, in Johnson and Klandermans, *Social Movements and Culture*; Carol M. Mueller, ‘Conflict Networks and the Origins of Women’s Liberation’, in Enrique Larana, Hank Johnston and Robert R. Gusfield (ed), *Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox and Vinci Daro, ‘Social Movements and Collective Identity: A Decentered, Dialogic View’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2008; Diani, ‘Introduction: Social Movements’, p. 10.

movement, and how does the movement's network structure facilitate collective action? Precisely how is the structure of Salafism different from that of other Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brothers, Hizb ul-Tahrir or Sufi orders?

Networks and civil society

Before answering these questions, we need to locate Salafism, along with other social movements, in the wider Middle Eastern society. Western literature locates social movements in the realm of civil society. Cohen and Arato, for example, call social movements "the self defense of the society against the state", either to block the latter's attempts to dominate civil institutions or to change and define the accepted social rules and norms.⁵ In Habermas' social theory social movements defend the "life world" that is governed by normative consensus against colonization attempts by the "system", which is governed by money and power.⁶

In order to analyze Salafism as a part of Middle Eastern civil society we have to re-conceptualize the notion of civil society itself, since the dominant approaches are grounded in a Western social context. The Western concept of civil society – which is derived from Enlightenment thought – is of a plurality of associations that mediate between the private realm or family and the state. Theorists usually understand civil society as composed of formal institutions such as trade unions, independent newspapers, civil associations, clubs, charities and NGOs. Traditional, primordial social institutions are usually regarded as anathema to civil society, as they block the freedom of exchange and association of independent individuals. Civil society is mostly regarded as a space that is separate from the state, with its main roles being defending against and regulating political power and the peaceful management of conflict. At the same time, civil society is the realm where collective identity and citizenship (related to specific nation states) emerge.

⁵ Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (New Baskerville: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), pp. 492-563.

⁶ Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', p. 445.

The existence of a civil society is regarded as one of the main preconditions for democracy. A significant body of literature suggests that the key to democratization in Middle Eastern countries will be the emergence of a strong civil society composed of formal associations that are free from state supervision and patriarchal influences.⁷ Traditional institutions like the mosques or the *diwaniyya* in Kuwait are mentioned, but not explained. Saad Eddin Ibrahim recognizes the existence of a traditional public space in the Arab world over the centuries, where “various groups coexisted and interacted with a great deal of autonomy”, but he argues that this space disappeared after the emergence of the modern Arab states.⁸ According to him, as the state has withdrawn, primordial ties and Islamist associations have become stronger. The author argues that this will not mark the emergence of a kind of civil society unless they accept “the principle of pluralism and observe a modicum of civility in behavior toward the different other”.⁹

Others are also unable to go beyond the Western concept of civil society. They prescribe and predict a Western trajectory of development for Middle Eastern societies, in which a European type of civil society is supposed to emerge and push the Arab world into a more “civilized” phase of development. According to Norton, for example, civil society is supposed to emerge from voluntary associations of doctors and engineers.¹⁰ Most of the authors ignore the players in the abovementioned traditional public space, such as religious associations and movements, Sufi *tariqas*, the ‘*ulama*’, mosques or clans and tribes.

The Western concept of civil society offers an imperfect starting point for observing and analyzing a number of social phenomena in the Middle East. Civil society in the classical understanding (i.e. composed of voluntary associations) secures political and property rights. However, in Middle Eastern societies, the social and economic order is mostly maintained by primordial ties, such as the

⁷ See, for example, the contributions in Augustus Richard Norton (ed), *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vols. 1-2 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1996) and Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially pp. 163-185.

⁸ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, ‘Civil Society and Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World’, in Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt: Islam and Democracy: Critical Essays* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), p. 247.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, ‘The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East’, *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1993, pp. 209-211.

tribe, the family, the patron-client system or the sect. It is therefore misleading and neglectful to write about the region's social movements using the classical understanding of civil society. Instead of using an ethnocentric concept that is only applicable to certain societies, it is more fruitful to seek an alternative, more comprehensive notion of civil society.

Chris Hann offers a useful approach for this purpose. He states that

there is something inherently unsatisfactory about the international propagation by western scholars of an ideal of social organisation that seems to bear little relation to the current realities of their own countries; an ideal which, furthermore, developed in historical conditions that cannot be replicated in any other part of the world today. I shall suggest that the term is riddled with contradictions and the current vogue predicated on a fundamental ethnocentricity.¹¹

Hann argues that the two dominant strands of civil society literature, the Marxist and the liberal, do not leave room "for the exploration of alternative forms of social relationship to those assumed by liberal-individualism, of culturally specific patterns of generating trust in human communities that are growing ever more crowded and complex".¹² For this reason, traditional customs and practices cannot be neglected. "There is therefore a need to shift the debates about civil society away from formal structures and organisations and towards an investigation of beliefs, values and everyday practices."¹³

Hann offers a definition of civil society which is more applicable to Middle Eastern societies and also more useful for anthropologists. His thesis is that all societies develop "specific practices and normative codes through which people are made accountable and responsible to other members of society".¹⁴ Therefore instead of replicating Western models, it is better to "understand civil society to refer more loosely to the moral community, to the problems of accountability, trust and co-operation that all groups face. In this sense, all human communities

¹¹ Hann, 'Introduction', in Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society*, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

are concerned with establishing their own version of a civil society.”¹⁵ Using this understanding, specific traditional social formations like tribal and patron-client relations can also be included as parts of civil society.

Richard Antoun uses Hann’s concept to argue that tribal processes form an organic part of civil society in Jordan. He analyzes tribal conflict resolution processes to demonstrate that indigenous practices can fulfill the same role in Middle Eastern societies as that of formal institutions in Western societies.¹⁶ He also criticizes the separation of the domains of politics, the public sphere and the private sphere that is commonly to be found in Western civil society theories. He conceptualizes social relations as a seamless web, which influence each other and cut through different segments of society. Therefore, the abovementioned separation might not be applicable to Middle Eastern societies.¹⁷

Antoun further develops Hann’s definition of civil society by arguing that “civil society is constituted by universal processes of trust and cooperation that have separate inflections in different cultures.” He imagines civil society as being composed of wide-ranging social networks and “the process of civil society form a seamless web with state processes rather than a sharp dichotomy with them.”¹⁸ I argue that social movements should be understood in the context of this seamless web. Movements like Salafism utilize the networks of informal associations to fulfill people’s everyday social needs, such as the need for material help, discussion of public affairs and conflict resolution. Occasionally they also use the resources provided by formal institutions such as charities, or even political parties.

In short, social movements participate in a web of exchange of resources and information that constitutes civil society. Understanding Salafism in this context, in the following I will demonstrate how the movement’s mobilization structures are organically connected to the processes and institutions of Middle Eastern civil society. I will analyze the special features of the structure of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard T. Antoun, ‘Civil Society, Tribal Process, and Change in Jordan’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2000.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 460.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 441-442.

Salafism and show how it incorporates indigenous social institutions such as conflict resolution or patronage in its mobilizing structures.

Specific features of the structure of Salafism

In the following I will analyze the shape and function of the network structure of Salafism in Lebanon at the local level. However, before doing so, we need to understand why Salafis mobilize. The Salafis network does not mobilize resources for collective action against the state or the capitalist economic system. Normally, Salafis are not (or only indirectly) interested in such goals. The aim of the movement is to achieve social change through changing the individual. The social movement networks of Salafism transmit symbols and values and material resources to promote a certain lifestyle. In other words, resources are not mobilized to launch mass demonstrations, but rather to make the Salafi vision of life the accepted social norm. We can observe that collective action in Salafism resembles that of other “lifestyle movements”.¹⁹ As Haenfler et al. put it, “participation occurs primarily at the individual level with the subjective understanding that others are taking similar action, collectively adding up to social change”.²⁰ Networks serve to facilitate this “individualized collective” action. They provide space for individuals to express their identity and moral support to adopt or maintain the Salafi way of life, and by that export their value system to the wider society. As I will show later, even when Salafis mobilize material resources, they do this in order to encourage others to accept their norms and habits and to keep committed Salafis within the movement.

When Salafis engage in “conventional” collective action in the framework of contentious politics, they are often unsuccessful. In the spring of 2012, some Salafi shaykhs made several unsuccessful calls for demonstrations in order to demand that the government release or put on trial their arrested fellow Salafis and Islamists.²¹ Despite the huge effort they put into mobilizing people to

¹⁹ Haenfler, ‘Lifestyle Movements’.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹ After the battle in Nahr al-Barid camp in 2007, several young Salafis were arrested and accused of having been in contact with Fath al-Islam and other jihadi organizations. Many of them are still in jail five years later, and a trial date has not been set.

protest, the results were rather modest. The majority of committed Salafis ignored the call, on the grounds that these demonstrations do not serve the interest of the captives, but only degrade “God’s call” to a “political organization such as the Muslim Brotherhood”.²² Most of the participants in the demonstrations appeared to be young (aged 16-25), unemployed men who had little relationship with Salafism. As many of them explained to me, they did not have anything better to do, so they joined the protest in the hope of having some fun.

The mobilization structures of the Salafi movement consist almost exclusively of informal networks. As mentioned above, informal contacts are essential in all social movements and they cannot be equated with formal organizational structures. But in the case of some movements, informal ties are dominant and formal structures play a very limited role. Salafism is among these movements, and this is true for both *harakis* and purists. Although during the Arab Spring, the purists formed political parties such as *Hizb al-Nur* (the al-Nur Party) in Egypt, those lack the usual characteristics of mainstream Islamist parties. While the latter have a top-down institutional structure that resembles a Leninist organization, Salafi parties serve as umbrella organizations for the movement’s diverse networks.

The program of the al-Nur Party does not propose the establishment of an Islamic state and the abolishment of the existing secular one. Rather, it puts emphasis on social justice and issues that implicitly encourage Islamization on the social level. For example, the party promises to help small enterprises.²³ This can be beneficial for two reasons. First, in general in the Middle East establishing a small enterprise such as a restaurant or shop is the only way out of poverty for the majority of the population (since getting well-paid state employment or a good position in a private company is the privilege of the well-connected and well-educated). People are aware of this and they are keen to support a political force that endorses this.

Second, supporting the emergence of small-scale businesses is a way to establish a pious middle class, a large part of which would supposedly be Salafi

²² Interview, Tripoli, 9 May 2012.

²³ <http://www.alnourparty.org>.

sympathizers. This is probably the reason why many, if not the majority, of Egypt's influential Salafi '*ulama*', with their numerous constituencies, lined up behind *Hizb al-Nur*. This, however, does not mean formal membership; most Salafis have informal contacts to the party through the dense network structure of the movement. In short, the al-Nur party is only a political platform or official face for the largely informal Salafi movement. It is not unlike *al-Tajammu' al-Salafi* in Kuwait, which also lacks an elaborate institutional system (see also Chapter 3).

A number of academic publications have already shown how informal social networks are significant in Islamic movements.²⁴ However, most of these informal networks are organically connected to the movements' formal organizational bodies and are influenced by their decision-making mechanisms. We cannot imagine the Muslim Brotherhood or Hizb ul-Tahrir, for example, without their sophisticated institutional structures. Informal social networks are connected to these structures and facilitate the effective functioning of the formal organizations.²⁵ In other words, the formal organizational and the informal parts complement each other and are of equal importance in the dynamics of the movement.

The Muslim Brotherhood's organizational structure consists of two main parts that coordinate with each other: the political body and a large network of charitable institutions, which are densely interconnected. This kind of formal institutional structure is almost totally lacking in Salafism. While mainstream Islamist movements are more or less centralized, at least at the local level, the opposite is true for Salafism. Salafis frequently deny and usually do not even recognize that they are part of the movement. As many of my informants in Lebanon and Kuwait explained, they are simply following the pure Islam, free from any kind of innovation and heretical practices. Doing this cannot be identified with a kind of "*haraka*" (the Arabic term for "movement").

²⁴ Diane Singerman, 'The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements', in Wiktorowicz (ed), *Islamic Activism*; Janine A. Clark, 'Islamist Women in Yemen: Informal Nodes of Activism', in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*.

²⁵ One should mention that formal institutions in the Muslim Brotherhood are strong at the local level. At the transnational level, informal, interpersonal networks are predominant. See Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Burden of Tradition*, Kindle e-book edition (London: SAQI, 2010), location: 2091-2965.

There are at least two reasons for this exclusive reliance on informal ties. First, informal networks avoid repression more effectively. Researchers who have examined social movements in oppressive environments like the former Communist countries, or other autocratic regimes or patriarchal social structures, emphasize the importance of informal ties. Due to the overwhelming presence of the state's security service, movements in East Germany were only able to mobilize people via informal friendship networks.²⁶ The black civil rights movement utilized the informal contacts developed in the Church,²⁷ while the feminist movement survived in informal intellectual circles in the Reagan era.²⁸ Scholars of the Middle East also emphasize the informal network structure of the social movements in the region due to the presence of repressive political regimes.²⁹ Wiktorowicz has shown how Salafis effectively avoid the attention of the Jordanian security services by utilizing informal social contacts and study groups at home.³⁰

Wiktorowicz, however, neglected the other reason why Salafis avoid formal organization, which is that Salafi teachings themselves reject it. Formal institutions create divisions among Muslims, while Islam intends to unify Muslims in one body. Therefore formal institutions are often regarded as *bida'* and establishing them leads Muslims away from the true path. They commonly refer to this as *hizbiyya* (partisanship), which holds the danger that the individual will become loyal to the organization instead of God. One of my informants, Shaykh Sa'ad al-Din al-Kibbi, explained to me that, "the Ikhwan replaced God with the organization. What you, as a Muslim, have to sacrifice for God, they do it for the organization".³¹ As Muhammad bin al-'Uthaymin (1925-2001), one of the most prominent Salafi authorities, wrote:

²⁶ Karl-Dieter Opp and Christiane Gern, 'Dissident Groups, Personal Networks, and Spontaneous Cooperation: The East German Revolution of 1989', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1993.

²⁷ Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation. Indianapolis* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, INC, 1970).

²⁸ Whittier, *Feminist Generations*, pp. 191-224.

²⁹ Singerman, 'The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements'; Asef Bayat, 'Islamism and Social Movement Theory', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 6, 2005.

³⁰ Wiktorowicz, 'The Salafi Movement in Jordan'.

³¹ Interview with Shaykh Sa'ad al-Din al-Kibbi, 'Akkar, 12 October 2009.

I think that Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaa'ah should unite, even though they differ in the ways in which they understand those texts that may be interpreted in different ways. This is a matter in which there is room for difference, may God be praised. What matters is harmony and unity. No doubt the enemies of Islam want the Muslims to be divided, whether they are enemies who express their enmity openly or they are enemies who make an outward display of friendliness towards Muslims and Islam, but that is not real. We must be different [from other communities] by being united, because unity is the characteristic of the saved group.³²

According to Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali, the Text clearly forbids the establishment of any kind of organization. In one of his books, which is critical of Islamist movements and the activist Salafism represented by 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, he refers to some Qur'an verses to boost his stance: "Hold fast to God's rope all together; do not split into factions";³³ "As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them [Prophet]";³⁴ "This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it."³⁵ According to the author, when Muslims stopped paying attention to these verses, this led to the decline of the *Umma*. In his opinion, Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia would have been able to liberate their lands from the armies of the unbelievers at the time of decolonization, had the colonial powers not spread the idea of partisanship, which led to the formation of Islamist movements. These, along with their secularist counterparts, keep the Muslims scattered and allow the unbelievers to indirectly influence and govern Islamic countries.³⁶

³² Sermon of Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin, undated, available online at: www.ibnothaymeen.com/all/khotab/article_460.shtml (accessed: 12 October, 2010).

³³ Al-'Umran 103, translated by Abdel-Haleem.

³⁴ al-An'am 159, *ibid*.

³⁵ Al-Ana'm 153, *ibid*.

³⁶ Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali, *Jama'a Wahida La Jama'at Wa Sirat Wahid La 'Asharat: Hiwar Ma' 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq* (without date and publisher).
http://www.rabee.net/show_des.aspx?pid=1&id=17&gid= (accessed: 11 October 2011).

The structure of Salafi networks in North Lebanon

Wiktorowicz correctly notes that Salafis in the Middle East use indigenous patterns of mobilization when utilizing informal networks. A huge body of literature has shown that the people of the Middle East use informal social contacts almost exclusively to fulfill their daily needs and interests. Since formal institutions in the Arab countries are usually weak and unreliable, there has always been a high level of informality in everyday social exchanges. To give some examples, patron-client relationships are predominant in the distribution of goods, material aid and jobs.³⁷ White shows how working-class women in Istanbul maintain informal associations for mutual help that are based on traditional patterns.³⁸ Historically, the organization of the religious life and education has also mostly been informal. Until the 20th century, religious knowledge was predominantly transmitted informally in study circles held in the mosques and to this day, this type of education continues to fulfill a significant role besides *shari'a* faculties.³⁹ Movements in the Middle East have traditionally utilized these channels. These indigenous parts of Middle Eastern civil society constitute the main avenues of mobilization for Salafism.

The shape of Salafi networks in North Lebanon is influenced by the movement's structure of authority, as discussed in Chapter 4. The movement's sub-networks that constitute the basic elements of larger networks are more vertically shaped than those in other countries, such as Kuwait, for example.⁴⁰ This is due to the exceptionally significant role played by the shaykhs, as discussed in Chapter 4. These sub-networks are grouped around a religious leader and consist of his students and passive followers in the neighborhood where his activities are concentrated. The sub-networks connect to each other to

³⁷ Guilain Denoux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran and Lebanon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 16-20, pp. 29-44. Suad Joseph, 'Brother/Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1994.

³⁸ Jenny B. White, 'Civic Culture and Islam in Urban Turkey' (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁹ Almost all students at formal Islamic educational institutions, such as al-Azhar, told me that they participated in informal study circles on at least a weekly basis besides their official curricula.

⁴⁰ According to my observations, in many cases, Kuwaiti shaykhs have much less authority over committed Salafi activists than in Lebanon. Active participants often do not belong to one shaykh's network, but visit many. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that the average Kuwaiti Salafi is not dependent on a shaykhs' patronage, unlike the Lebanese.

constitute larger network structures at the local and transnational levels (see later in this chapter).

The men of religion

At the top of the sub-networks are those individuals who are associated with performing religious tasks or outstanding piety. They are considered part of the religious elite. Most of them perform religious tasks such as giving sermons, holding religious lessons, taking care of mosques, administering religious endowments, and so forth. They are generally given the title “shaykh”. This is a wide category, however, which includes individuals who possess different levels of religious knowledge. Some of them are recognized scholars or influential preachers with huge follower bases, others are less educated, are only influential in their neighborhoods and are counted as clients of other shaykhs. To draw a clearer picture of the category of the Salafi shaykhs and to facilitate the analysis, I classify them in two different subgroups. Here I should stress that the following classification is blurred and can be applied only to the situation in Lebanon.

The ‘*ulama*’ are the most knowledgeable and educated members of the Salafi community. The modern Western literature usually considers the ‘*ulama*’ class in Sunni Islam to consist of those who possess some kind of formal religious education. According to Meir Hatina, the ‘*ulama*’ are those “who acquired their formal religious training and credentials in established madrasas and religious colleges, and were identifiable by their attire of cloaks and turbans (*‘ama’im*).”⁴¹ The problem with this definition is that it does not cover fully those who the wider Sunni community consider to be ‘*ulama*’. Although most of the Salafis in Lebanon who belong to this class studied either at the Islamic University of Medina or in one of the Lebanese Salafi colleges, this is not always the case. To give an example, Shaykh Nur al-Din ‘Ammar, a leading scholar from the Dinniyeh region, east of Tripoli, has never studied at any kind of religious college or university. He does not even possess a formal *ijaza* (license) from a recognized scholar. Rather, he acquired his knowledge in a wholly autodidactic fashion.

⁴¹ Hatina, *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times*, p. 1.

Despite this, Shaykh Nur al-Din is regarded as one of the most knowledgeable Salafis in Lebanon. Thousands ask him to issue *fatwas*, and on Fridays around 600 people usually appear in his mosque to listen to his sermon. He has acquired wide recognition as a *hadith* scholar and arbitrator in the semi-tribal society of al-Dinniyeh.

In my opinion, Muhammad Qasim Zaman's definition is more appropriate. He argues that "it is a combination of their intellectual formation, their vocation, and crucially, their orientation viz., a certain sense of continuity with the Islamic tradition that defines the '*ulama*' as '*ulama*'..."⁴² According to Zaman, this is what distinguishes the '*ulama*' from modernists and Islamist intellectuals. The latter often share the belief "that one does not necessarily need that tradition [i.e. the Islamic intellectual and religious tradition] to understand the 'true' meaning of Islam, and that one certainly does not need the '*ulama*' to interpret Islam to the ordinary believers. That authority belongs to everyone and to no one in particular."⁴³ Although Salafis emphasize the need for everybody to be able to read and understand the Text, and will accept anyone's opinion after being assured by studying the sources, many of them still stress that the '*ulama*' are not dispensable. According to them, society is in need of experts on the Qur'an and the Sunna who can draw the boundaries of religious interpretation. Furthermore, they also believe that it is important not to dismiss the intellectual tradition of Islam; that is, to use those parts of this tradition which are acceptable according to the Salafi interpretation. In Salafi writings – at least in the purist ones – when discussing a certain issue, the renowned '*ulama*' of past centuries are usually quoted.

With this in mind, the description of '*ulama*' should be applied to those who match the following criteria. First, those who rely on the Islamic intellectual tradition in building their religious authority. Second, those who fulfill a role in society that is supposed to be fulfilled by the '*ulama*'. This means providing believers with the interpretations of the Text they need to live their daily lives as pious Muslims, and performing certain religious services such as giving sermons or holding religious lessons. The third condition is to be recognized as an '*alim*

⁴² Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

by a substantial part of the fellow '*ulama*' and the wider Sunni community. This last criteria is very important in view of the fact that many of those among the Salafis who are not considered to be '*ulama*' fulfill similar religious duties (see below). Universal recognition, however, is prevented by the fact that many critics regard Salafism as a heretical and superficial ideology. Many Ash'ari '*ulama*' with a Sufi orientation believe that a Salafi cannot be a scholar because what he represents is not '*ilm*'. A shaykh from Dar al-Fatwa told me that Salafis lack insight into the real meaning of the Scripture, and that their methods are instead confined to "*hadith* hustling", a term borrowed from Muhammad al-Ghazali.⁴⁴ Neither do Salafis recognize Sufis as '*ulama*'. I have encountered some activists who use the term '*alim*' only to refer to Salafi scholars, because those who follow other creeds and *manhaj* are "inventors" (*mubtadi'un*) and do not deserve to be regarded as scholars.⁴⁵

The '*ulama*' are the backbone of the Salafi movement in Lebanon. Some of them even have transnational influence: their publications are read in several Middle Eastern countries and Europe and they are in contact with other Salafi mosques, groups and charities abroad. Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, Ra'id Hulayhil and Zakariya al-Masri are among these. However, the majority of the Salafi '*ulama*' only have local influence, which does not extend beyond their city quarters or villages. The '*ulama*' are usually imams of mosques, or directors and senior teachers of religious colleges (*ma'ahid shara'iyya*). Usually they have a number of students who regularly attend their religious lessons, which they give in the mosques or in their homes. The '*ulama*' teach these religiously committed young individuals according to their specialization. Some shaykhs are experts in the *hadith*, others are distinguished in *fiqh*. For example, one of the most renowned Lebanese Salafi '*ulama*', Zakariyya al-Masri, is well known for his lessons on the modern interpretation of Ibn Hazm. Most of the '*ulama*' are full-time religious scholars and earn their income exclusively from their religious activities. They tend to receive a salary from the *waqf* they administer – the money in many cases comes from sponsors in the Gulf (see below) – or from the college or

⁴⁴ Interview, 25 April 2012.

⁴⁵ Some purists even refuse to refer to anyone who does not belong to their faction as '*alim*'.

university where they teach. Some of them also have private businesses, like Nur al-Din 'Ammar, who is a successful merchant as well.

To the category of the lesser-ranking shaykhs belong those individuals whose knowledge does not compare with that of the '*ulama*' but who are still counted among *rijal al-din* (see Chapter 4). In the North of Lebanon, people simply call these people "shaykhs" or sometimes *da'is* (preacher). Most of these individuals never had any kind of religious education aside from participation in informal study circles. Despite this, they still possess a much higher level of knowledge about religion than do ordinary people. Moreover, they are counted among those who have an outstanding level of religious commitment, since they tend to be established members of the Salafi *da'wa*. Therefore the authority of these shaykhs is not built on '*ilm* (knowledge) to the extent that this is true of the '*ulama*', but more on mild asceticism (see Chapter 4). This piety is translated into deeds that are usually interpreted as sacrifices for the well-being and good of the community. This is because the lesser-ranking shaykhs usually perform religious tasks without getting any kind of reward in return. Most of them earn their income from having a job or private business.

These shaykhs have similar duties to the '*ulama*'. Many of them give *khutbas* on Friday, hold religious lessons and issue *fatwas*, although not on the same level as the '*ulama*'. They usually preach in small, less frequented mosques or *musallas*,⁴⁶ often in suburbs or villages. Their sermons are much simpler than those of the '*ulama*', and their religious lessons are mostly attended by ordinary, less educated people. Those who intend to continue learning on a higher level usually go to the '*ulama*'. It is often the case that those who initially become involved in Salafism start taking lessons from these lesser-ranking shaykhs. If they want to deepen their knowledge, they start visiting the study circles of an '*alim*'. The *fatwas* issued by the latter are only verbal and deal with simple issues in which it is possible to reach a conclusion with a somewhat limited knowledge of the *shari'a*. For more difficult issues, they usually turn to the '*ulama*'. One should emphasize that there are no clear boundaries between the two categories described above. While certain individuals might refer to a shaykh as '*alim*,

⁴⁶ The term "musalla" in the Sham region means a building or space designated for prayer, but smaller than a mosque.

others might refuse to do so, saying that he still does not possess enough knowledge.

The active followers

Shaykhs are usually surrounded by a relatively small but nowadays growing number of active followers; in Tripoli, I would estimate this to consist of between three and four thousand individuals. These are mostly young people aged between 18 and 45, from all social classes. These individuals follow a Salafi lifestyle by trying to apply all of the rulings of the Salafi interpretation of Islam. Wearing a beard and (most of the time) Islamic clothing is therefore mandatory for them. They also try to perform all Islamic rituals in the correct manner, according to Salafism. It is no wonder that when asked which book had had the greatest impact on them, most of them answered, al-Albani's *Sifat Salat al-Nabi (Details of the Prophet's Prayer)*.

The majority of them have particularly close bonds with one specific shaykh whom they regard as their master. They attend his lessons and listen to his sermons more frequently, and often receive economic support from him in exchange for helping him in his activities. The shaykh can even pay a regular salary to those disciples who assist him, for example, in taking care of the mosque. Others regularly visit families who belong to the shaykh's constituency but whom he does not have the time to visit personally. Students also can fulfill a quasi-secretarial function by editing the shaykh's publications or arranging for the printing and distribution of books and leaflets for the wider follower base. According to my observations, the amount of money that these disciples receive is not particularly high, mostly 200-300 USD a month. This indicates that the relationship between students and shaykhs is not mainly based on economic considerations.

Having a special relationship with one mentor, however, does not prevent these committed Salafis from joining the study groups of other shaykhs and scholars, and some of them visit a different mosque each week to listen to the Friday sermon. Different shaykhs are strong in different disciplines; students

prefer taking lessons from the most renowned shaykh in every field of the Islamic sciences. Therefore it is not unusual to see these committed Salafis visiting the study group of a *haraki* shaykh about *fiqh* one day, while on another day they might be present at a *hadith* lecture by a purist scholar. When I asked why they did this, they tended to answer that Muslims should listen to the opinions of more than one person; otherwise this can lead to *bida'*, or in the worst case, *taqdis* (sanctification) of persons, which is regarded as a lesser *shirk*. The most candid of them also gave me another reason. Many young Salafis aspire to become *da'is* and highly respected '*ulama*' in the future. Finishing their studies at universities in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait greatly facilitates their careers. Many Salafi shaykhs have extensive transnational contacts and can help to further these young people's ambitions. Having more than one influential shaykh among their close contacts naturally increases their chances.

Ideologically, it is not always possible to classify these young people. They are frequently in contact with both *haraki* and purist '*ulama*', and read the literature of both factions. They can even vacillate between purist and jihadi teachings. In extreme cases they can be the pupils of an ordinary *haraki* or purist shaykh who does not support violence, but secretly visit militant cells and slowly adopt their way of thinking. That happened with four of the students of a prominent Palestinian *haraki* shaykh in Nahr al-Barid refugee camp. They regularly attended the lessons of their mentor, who is highly critical of jihadis, and aided him in performing his daily religious duties. However, when the battle broke out in 2007 between Fath al-Islam and the Lebanese army, they fought in the first lines on the side of the militant group. Two of them were killed, and two were captured and are still being held in Roumiyeh prison. The shaykh suspects that they had been influenced by radical shaykhs years before the incident.⁴⁷

One should note here that horizontal, interpersonal relationships are especially dense among these young committed Salafis, and sometimes even stronger than the vertical bonds to the shaykhs. Through these networks they exchange not only ideas, but also material resources. Being Salafi gives them a sense of belonging to a community other than their kinship group. During my fieldwork I observed the presence of informal associations between these

⁴⁷ Interview, Tripoli, 24 November 2009.

committed Salafis. They often help each other find jobs or just survive the harshness of the economic conditions in North Lebanon. Such voluntary, informal associations form important parts of Middle Eastern civil society, yet despite this, they are largely overlooked by the literature on civil society.

One of the few helpful analyses on the topic is provided by Jenny White, who examined the associations of working-class women in Istanbul. These associations are not forged on the basis of kinship; rather, religion and predicament (i.e. similar economic conditions) are the organizing factors. Associations of young committed Salafis are very similar, though it is clear that in their case, religion is even more important than for the women in Istanbul. Since they come from various economic backgrounds, the only factor that creates a kind of group identity is Salafism. As one of my informants explained, there are two reasons for helping each other. First, Salafis have the sense of belonging to the vanguard representing the true community of God⁴⁸ in a society that is composed of a mosaic of different sects and ethnic groups – most of whom are heretics and unbelievers. Believers and especially those who follow the pure Islam should help each other in order to defend Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a in this environment. Second, Salafis can rely on each other and expect that the other will return the favor, since honesty forms a major part of their religion. In other words, these networks are held together by ideology and reciprocity.

While doing my fieldwork in Lebanon, I was able to follow a case that showed how these informal associations work. One of my informants, Hasan, helped one of the members of the local Salafi network to get out of a hopeless economic situation. Hasan belongs to the network evolved around one of the famous Salafi educational institutions, Dar al-Hadith. By teaching there and participating in the religious lessons given by different shaykhs, he managed to get access to various patron-client networks. When one of his Salafi acquaintances, Ahmad (22), from Tripoli's Tabbaneh district, lost his father in a car accident, he was able to help him. The family's only income came from Ahmad's father's business. After his death, they had to find a way to survive, since they could not expect any long-term assistance from their relatives, who live in impoverished city quarters or in the villages of 'Akkar province (north of

⁴⁸ He purposefully called it *shi'at Allah* (*shi'a* means party or community in Arabic).

Tripoli). Hasan was able to ask one of the shaykhs teaching at Dar al-Hadith to donate some money to the family from the funds provided by the Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association. Following this emergency solution, Ahmad got a job in Qatar thanks to the contacts that the same shaykh had in the Gulf country.

The passive followers

At the third level, we find what might be called the shaykhs' passive followers; they are numerous, but their level of commitment is more moderate than that of the Salafis. These individuals are ordinary people who are attracted by the Salafis' religious knowledge, ascetic behavior and perceived altruistic social activities (see Chapter 4), meaning that the Salafis possess varying degrees of authority over them. Common to the group, though, is the fact that they do not fully apply the rulings of Salafism: they may shave their beards, they may smoke, and in some cases, their wives and daughters do not wear headscarves; but they do take part in Friday prayers and listen to sermons, and they may even attend the shaykh's religious lessons. Their children may go to summer schools organized by the mosque, where shaykhs and committed young men and women teach them the basics of (their understanding of) Islam.

Many of these passive followers have regular contact with the shaykh via mutual visits, and they may ask services of him, such as arbitration in disputes (see below). These networks are not only held together by religious sentiment; patronage also plays an important role, as it does throughout Lebanese society. Families living in harsh economic conditions often receive support from the *waqf* administered by the shaykh. In exchange, they visit the shaykh's Friday sermons and send their children to be taught religion by the shaykh. At the same time, Salafi shaykhs often receive economic support from their followers, who pay their *zakat* to the *waqf* or even give voluntary support. According to one of my informants, Shaykh Ra'id Hulayhil, the director of Ma'had al-Amin (Amin Religious School), a large part of the income of Salafi educational institutions and endowments comes from the merchant families of Tripoli.

The social composition of the passive followers is quite diverse and members of almost all segments of society are present among them, although according to my observations, the majority belong either to the pious middle class or to the urban poor (using Kepel's terms).⁴⁹ The former sympathize with the Salafi shaykhs for two main reasons. First, for the members of the pious middle class, belonging to Sunnism and the larger Islamic *Umma* has always been a main component of their identity. Historically, and in the 20th century at least, they have always sided with these political forces, which in one way or another gained legitimacy due to their program to unify a large part of the Islamic Nation against foreign oppressors.⁵⁰ Since both Arab Nationalists and mainstream Islamists failed to fulfill their promises to improve the political and social situation of Sunnis in the North (see Chapter 2), Salafi rhetoric is becoming increasingly attractive to this social class. As mentioned above, Salafis blame both secular nationalists and Islamists for the current miserable predicament of Muslims. They say that these movements adopted a way of thinking and action that is foreign to the religion. In their view, the movements have contributed to the loss of the tradition of Ahl al-Sunna, which is rooted in Islam, leading in particular to the socio-political decline of the Sunnis in Lebanon. Salafis often pose as those who will revive this tradition and thereby improve the situation of the Sunni community.⁵¹

Second, members of the pious middle class frequently interact with *rijal al-din* in socio-economic matters. Since many Salafis belong to the latter group, this presupposes strong ties with them. Beyond using the religious services provided by Salafis, merchants or professionals often support them financially and are connected to them via patron-client networks.

Salafis are also able to relieve the suffering of the Sunni urban poor. The members of this social group live in large numbers in the Tabbana and Qubba districts. Many of them are unemployed and find it extremely difficult to provide for their families. Salafis are able to utilize their frustration and recruit followers

⁴⁹ Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 1-22.

⁵⁰ Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, pp. 113-114; Sune Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 35.

⁵¹ Salafis tend to ignore the fact that the traditions of the Lebanese Sunni community are largely rooted in Sufism.

among them. Preachers argue that the dominant political forces have neglected the northern territories of Lebanon because they are mostly inhabited by Sunnis. In their discourse, they often draw comparisons between the dynamic economic development of the Shi'ite South and the poverty-stricken North. They argue that the Shi'ite community wants to dominate Lebanon and weaken the Sunnis as much as possible (I will discuss this in the chapter on recruitment). At the same time, Salafis are quite active in supporting poor Sunnis, which further increases the number of their followers.

Here one should note that the passive followers are also receptive to the messages of other currents in Islam, such as the Muslim Brothers, Tabligh, Sufis or the Dar al-Fatwa shaykhs. A contest for the soul of Sunni Muslims is taking place, and the Salafis have competitors. At the time of writing (October 2012), it seems that Salafis are gaining more ground among ordinary Sunnis than other Islamic movements.⁵²

The evolution of extended networks

In order to understand how these sub-networks evolve into larger network structures, I first have to show what makes social movement networks cohesive and distinguishable from other networks. Social movement theorists focusing on new social movements have discovered that shared values and symbols play an important role for activists who engage in collective action together. This system of values and symbols is commonly referred to as a movement's "collective identity". According to the definition used by Holland et al.,

the collective identity of a social movement as participants' shared sense of the movement as a collective actor – as a dynamic force for change – that they identify with and are inspired to support in their own actions. Elaborated more fully, a collective identity develops within an imagined world or, to use another term, a figured world which is a realm of

⁵² Since the Arab revolutions al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya is also gaining more sympathizers than before, although according to my observations, Salafism is spreading much faster.

interpretation and action generated by the participants of a movement through their shared activities and commitments that imagines the terrain of struggle, the powers of opponents, and the possibilities of a changed world.⁵³

This definition is particularly applicable to social movements operating in Western, post-capitalist societies. However, it is less useful for explaining movements such as Salafism, which do not engage in contentious politics (at least directly), but instead focus on people's lifestyles. The abovementioned concept of collective identity presupposes a clear entity with a declared aim of achieving a certain kind of social change. The collective identity of the members is based on the perceived existence of a clearly defined movement. The case of Salafism is different. Often, Salafis do not identify themselves with a movement; they do not even recognize that they belong to a social movement. Many of them say that Salafism is an idea (*fikr*), which is equal to the pure version of Islam followed by the Prophet and the first Muslims. They refuse to regard Salafism as one of the many Islamic movements, which they often regard as aberrant (*dall*). According to my observations, the average Salafi sees himself as an individual who intends to fulfill what God demands from him, whether it be performing rituals or correcting the belief and practices of other people. He does not regard himself as an activist, only as someone who has a special commitment to his religion.

In light of the above, we need a different way to approach the construction of collective identity in of the case Salafism. Here, the concept of "aesthetic formations" elaborated by Meyer is very useful. Meyer takes Anderson's theory of "imagined communities"⁵⁴ as the starting point in her discussion of what holds religious groups together. According to Anderson, communities develop around "imaginings" that are mediated by the printed media written in a standardized national language. Meyer argues that communities should form around something more than mere imaginings. As she puts it,

⁵³ Holland et al., 'Social Movements and Collective Identity', p. 97.

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 37-46.

in order to achieve this and be experienced as real, imaginations are required to become tangible outside the realm of the mind, by creating a social environment that materializes through the structuring of space, architecture, ritual performance, and by inducing bodily sensations. In brief, in order to become experienced as real, imagined communities need to materialize in the concrete lived environment and be felt in the bones.⁵⁵

In other words, a sense of belonging emerges between individuals when they share the same rituals, the same ideals of dress and behavior, and even the same notion of how to use language in everyday conversations.

Meyer calls groups that are held together by their “shared sensory experiences”⁵⁶ “aesthetic formations”.⁵⁷ According to my field observations, the concept of aesthetic formations applies to Salafism in North Lebanon (and Salafism everywhere, I suspect). The shared sensory experiences of Salafism are manifold. Here I summarize the most obvious and common experiences that play the most important roles in constructing the movement’s collective identity.

Dress codes are one of the main distinguishing features of Salafism. If somebody lets his beard grow long and shaves his moustache it strongly indicates that he sympathizes with Salafi ideas. This can be complemented with a *dishdasha*, an ankle-length robe. Salafis also use a distinct form of everyday discourse. Salafis prefer to attach religious references to almost every subject of conversation and frequently quote *ahadith* to prove their statements, even when discussing mundane matters. Salafis tend to frame even minor events in daily life in their Manichean worldview (see Chapter 1), while on religious matters, their universe of discourse is almost totally lacking in ambiguities.

Their everyday talk is infused with symbols from the Text. For example, a young Salafi shaykh in one of the old quarters of Tripoli once gave me the

⁵⁵ Birgit Meyer, ‘From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding’, in Birgit Meyer (ed), *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-11.

following explanation for why children are often impolite in his neighborhood: “In our quarter people do everything mindlessly and God is not in the center of their lives. When a husband and wife make love they neglect to perform two sets of prayers (*raka'tayn*) before the act. Therefore Satan penetrates the wife together with the husband and their child is affected by the Devil.”⁵⁸ Among the important shared sensory experiences are the performing of certain rituals such as prayer (see Chapter 1) and using symbols such as a black flag with *la ilaha illallah* (there is no God but God) written in white script.

Having shared sensory experiences implies having a similar worldview. Here we should note that these sensory experiences take on varying significance in the lives of different individuals. It is possible to observe that they play a more important role in the lives of committed Salafis than those of passive followers. The latter rarely follow the code of dress, but most probably do adopt certain elements of the Salafi universe of discourse, such as framing current sectarian tensions in terms of the Manichean conflict between *iyman* and *taghut*. The more important a role they play in someone's life, the more likely he is to be involved in a Salafi network. In other words, the more that the elements and symbolism of Salafism form part of someone's social identity, the more he will participate in the movement's activities and the more likely he will be to identify with those who adopt the same elements and symbolism of Salafism as “we”. Approached in this way, collective identity in Salafism is highly fluid and dynamic. It is often temporary in the case of many of the movement's followers.

This is particularly the case at times of sectarian tensions. Since the start of the Arab Spring and the Syrian revolution of 2011, which has been accompanied by increasing Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism, many Lebanese Sunnis have started to associate themselves with Salafism. During my stay in Tripoli in that period, I observed many ordinary Sunnis adopting the Salafi framing of the Syrian revolution as one of the signs of Judgment Day (*'alamat al-sa'a*). Some individuals whom I had known previously referred more frequently to Salafism in their everyday discourse. The displays of their mobile phones were decorated with symbols that are common among Salafis. The shaykhs are often referred to as the leaders of the community. When the political wind changes, it is likely that

⁵⁸ Interview, Tripoli, 4 May 2012.

their lives will be overshadowed by the struggle to provide their families with food and clothing. Then the “we” is more likely to become the family and the neighborhood again, or the Sunni community, rather than Salafism.

Salafi network hubs usually evolve around activities that are intended to create, strengthen and reinforce collective identity. These can be organized activities, such as the Friday sermon and religious lessons, or ad hoc ones, such as evening meetings between friends or discussions in the mosque. These gatherings constitute the backbone of the movement’s network structure, as they provide space to establish interpersonal contacts. At the local level, informal, interpersonal gatherings are dominant due to the small size of the geographical area, the underdeveloped state and the cost of the modern communications infrastructure. The patterns of network intersections I describe below not only play a role in creating and transmitting symbols and other non-material resources, but also fulfill important functions in the socialization of members. They provide them with space and opportunities to establish interpersonal contacts inside the movement and beyond, such as accessing patronage networks. In the following I will describe these activities based on my fieldwork data.

Religious lessons

Religious lessons (*durus*, sing. *dars* or *halaqat*, sing. *halaqa*) are one of the earliest forms of knowledge transmission in Islam.⁵⁹ They remained the main method of religious education in the Muslim world until the 20th century. Besides their function in learning, *durus* are an integral part of the public space, since they serve as a forum for the exchange of views and for community affairs and other kinds of information. Historically, Islamic movements utilized them as one of the chief avenues of mobilization.⁶⁰ Salafism in Lebanon has evolved from the

⁵⁹ Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 225.

⁶⁰ Clark, ‘Islamist Women in Yemen’, pp. 174-177.

durus and they remain one of the most important hubs in its network structure at the local level.

The lessons in Tripoli are held both in mosques and in private homes. They are usually given by an individual who is regarded as competent in discussing religious matters. Most *durus* are held by shaykhs. Other people can also give lessons, as long as they possess a certain level of religious education (the title of shaykh is not usually attached to their name). For example, professionals, doctors and engineers who are well read in religious sciences and are widely thought to be knowledgeable are frequently invited by mosques to give *durus*, mostly once a week or once every two weeks. During my fieldwork in Tripoli, I observed that the Salafi-oriented mosques I visited also promoted other *durus* given by Salafis in other places. The lessons are usually held after the *'asr* (mid-afternoon) or the *'isha* (evening) prayer, mostly on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Although a wide range of *durus* is available, taught by shaykhs with different affiliations (from Sufism to the Muslim Brotherhood), Salafis are especially active in giving religious lessons. This is because they regard them as being one the most effective means of *da'wa*, due to their informal character based on discussions between the shaykh and the attendants. According to my own estimations, about 60% of the *durus* are held by Salafi individuals in Tripoli. In the surrounding areas of the city, this percentage is even higher. According to my observations there are three types, or let us say three levels, of *durus* in the area. Most of the lessons are held for the *'amma* or ordinary people. In such cases, the attendants do not have any substantial religious education but they do have a certain interest in widening their religious knowledge. The second level is visited by *Talabat al-'Ilm* or "those who are seeking knowledge." These individuals intend to deepen their knowledge of the religious sciences and often aspire to be shaykhs in the future. The third level is for the preachers of the mosques who are themselves part of the vanguard of the Salafi movement.

The *durus* continue to be at the center of the public sphere in Tripoli. Many people visit them in order to deepen their religious knowledge and to seek answers to questions about daily life. Therefore these lessons provide an excellent opportunity to disseminate the message of Salafism. For most of the

people in Tripoli and North Lebanon, *durus* are one of the main ways to access a somewhat deeper level of religious knowledge and to synthesize and reaffirm what they have learnt from other sources. When a Salafi shaykh gives the lesson, he by definition gives answers from a Salafi viewpoint and shapes the religious imagination of the participants in a way that is identical to Salafism. Due to the Salafis' extended religious authority in the North, the *durus* are currently strongly influencing the religious behavior of the participants.

At the same time, religious lessons function as spaces where people can establish new interpersonal relationships and connect to networks. According to my observations, friendships often emerge, especially between the younger participants of the *durus*. Those who frequently participate also have the chance to get closer to the shaykhs and establish contacts that can facilitate their lives in mundane matters such as access to patronage or receiving charity. Often the *durus* are the occasions where committed Salafis can regularly meet each other. Therefore they serve as important spaces for exchanging information about intra-movement matters.

I frequently attended the lessons of Shaykh Kamal, one of the prominent young scholars in the impoverished Tabbanah district. The 32-year-old *'alim* gives most of his lessons to ordinary people three times a week in different mosques in the city quarter. These occasions are usually attended by a handful of men (between 10 and 20, although during Ramadan, when religious life is more intensive, the number of the participants can reach 50), although their number has been growing substantially since I first started conducting fieldwork in Tripoli in 2009. The lessons are attended by both ordinary Sunni Muslims who live secular lifestyles and committed Salafis. There is always a "core" who regularly participate in the same *dars*, but there is also a high degree of fluctuation.

Shaykh Kamal usually begins his lessons with a reading from one of the collections of the prophetic tradition. He usually chooses a *hadith* that can be interpreted to give an answer to a topical social problem or ethical question. Most of the *durus* touch on issues like how to solve disputes over property or money, how to treat women, divorce, or the importance of performing religious rituals regularly and in the correct way. Since the Arab revolutions, politics has

become a more frequent topic of religious lessons. After reading the original text, the shaykh explains the meaning in colloquial language. After this, the attendants are free to ask questions if they are unsure about the meaning of the citation. In the next phase, Shaykh Kamal interprets the content of the *hadith* in order to raise a current issue. After giving his opinion on the given problem or question, the attendants are free to give their remarks or ask further questions. During a *dars*, which usually lasts between 40 minutes and one hour, two or three *ahadith* are discussed.

These *durus* – unlike the *khutba* or *durus* that take the form of a lecture – feature a fair amount of give and take between the shaykh and his audience, and they also differ from the religious lessons that are described by Richard Antoun. In his case study on a Jordanian village, Antoun states that

the *dars* in Kufr al-Ma, then, does not take place in an atmosphere of give and take; rather, it is an opportunity for the preacher/teacher to expound the worship and interpersonal norms of Islam as well as its theology and its soteriology in a homely manner and in an atmosphere conducive to an appreciation of religious messages.⁶¹

According to Antoun's observations, the shaykh dominates the discussion and the audience does not challenge his arguments in any way. In Tripoli the situation is very different. On many occasions, I noticed the attendants express their own opinions and add their own arguments or interpretations of the texts. This is especially true if a large number of committed Salafis are present. In some cases, the purpose of their presence is to challenge the shaykh, whose opinions they disagree with. Fierce debates often arise between the participants themselves, which continue to rage even after the formal end of the *dars*.

I was also a frequent attendee of the *durus* of Shaykh Ihab. These lessons are quite different from those described above. They are not advertised and are open to the public, only to a small number of committed Salafi youth. If somebody wants to join, it is necessary to have the prior agreement of the shaykh and the

⁶¹ Richard Antoun, 'Themes and Symbols in the Religious Lesson: A Jordanian Case Study', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol 25, no. 4, 1993, p. 610.

other participants. Shaykh Ihab is a young man in his early thirties and belongs to the purist faction. He holds a Master's degree from the Islamic University of Medina and also studied at the *halaqat* of Rabi' al-Madkhali and other purist authorities. When he came back from Saudi Arabia, he started to teach some of the enthusiastic youth.

The structure of his *durus* is quite different from that of Shaykh Kamal. He does not focus on the basics, but instead reads and explains a book (at that time, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra* from Ibn Taymiyya⁶²) that requires a deeper level of religious knowledge. Consequently, the level of the discussion afterwards is more sophisticated than that at the "mainstream" lessons. At the time I was observing the *durus*, strong friendships had evolved between the participants in Shaykh Ihab's *halaqat*, who frequently engage in *da'wa* activities together. For example, from time to time they travel to the Dinniya region, where one of the young men has a house in one of the villages. They spend one or two nights there holding discussions on *'aqida* and *fiqh*. On these occasions some of the villagers also join them, and they answer their questions regarding religious matters. During the day, they often travel around the neighboring towns and villages and visit Salafis who are residing there.

Evening gatherings

Evening gatherings (*sahrat*, sing. *sahra*) provide a more spontaneous space for religious exchanges than *durus*. At the same time they are just as important in building and strengthening network ties and challenging society's dominant symbols. *Sahrat* are common in every Arab society. In some places they are even institutionalized, such as the *diwaniyyas* in Kuwait. In Tripoli *sahrat* are largely informal, but nevertheless play a significant role in the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants. *Sahrat* in Tripoli are largely spontaneous, and people usually participate in such events once or twice a week. The participants are friends and family members, and mostly belong to the younger generations. Unlike the

⁶² This collection of Ibn Taymiyya's *fatwas* is one of the main classical sources of contemporary Salafism. Most of the active participants learn some of the volumes (it consists of six volumes) with instruction from a more knowledgeable individual during informal religious lessons. The *fatwas* touch on various topics, such as matters of theology, creed or *hadith*.

diwaniyyahs where people discuss certain topic or engage in activities like playing music or reciting poems, in the *sahrat* they talk about various issues in daily life. When Salafis hold these gatherings, they are dominated by topics related to Islam.

I took part in some *sahrat* in 'Uthman's house. 'Uthman is 23 years old and a very committed, active Salafi. Although he left school after the seventh class, around the age of 13, he is quite well read, not only in religion, but also in politics and Arabic literature. He currently works as a shopkeeper in Sahat al-Tall (the center of the city), working for his elder brother and selling perfumes. After several years of hard work and saving money he has been able to establish himself financially, buy a flat in the Tabbanah district and get married. He is well connected to Tripoli's *haraki* Salafi networks and enjoys the respect of other merchants in Sahat al-Tall due his knowledge on religious matters. At least once a week he invites his friends for *sahrat*, mostly on Thursday or Friday evenings, when he can close his shop a little earlier than usual. Most of the participants are young men of the same age or a little older.

When I attended *sahrat* in 'Uthman's home, there were usually about six or seven people there. Most of them lived in the same street as 'Uthman and others knew him from the mosques that he usually attends. We used to start with coffee and some ordinary chat. After a while, religious topics came up spontaneously. Usually we would discuss some *ahadith* that came up in relation to our previous conversation, or questions such as whether the *khimar* (a piece of cloth covering the Muslim woman's face)⁶³ is obligatory for women or not. At that time (in 2011 and 2012), our discussions frequently touched on the Syrian revolution. The Salafis expressed their reading of the events in accordance with their Manichean worldview. They often give weight to their words by showing and exchanging videos, uploaded to their mobile phones, about martyrdom or how the regime's soldiers are abusing the symbols of Islam. Once they even

⁶³ There is a disagreement between Salafis regarding this matter. According to al-Albani there is no evidence in the Text that women have to cover their faces, while many *ahadith* point out that the face can be exposed. Others argue the opposite. See: <http://maktabasalafiya.blogspot.com/2011/06/shaykh-alabanis-position-of-niqab-of.html> (accessed: 7 October 2012).

discussed Yusuf al-Qaradawi's last statements on his website, vehemently opposing his interpretations of parts of the Text.⁶⁴

It is obvious that these *sahrat* are important spaces for reinforcing and strengthening collective identity. Since non-Salafis often participate alongside Salafis, they play a key role in exporting the movement's ideas and in recruitment as well. Just as in the *durus*, networks frequently intersect in the evening gatherings. Since there is a high degree of fluctuation in the participants, due to the highly informal character of these events, new contacts are often established. Younger shaykhs also show up from time to time to maintain and strengthen contact with their constituency and perform *da'wa* among the non-committed participants.

Discussions after prayer

Many of my Salafi informants told me that after performing prayers, they often sit down with other Salafis in the mosque for 10-20 minutes. During these occasions the conversation often evolves into a discussion about religion. This is the most spontaneous form of collective gathering in the movement, yet it provides an important space for the circulation of discourse and the strengthening of network ties. In Islam praying in the mosque is preferred to performing prayer at home. Therefore, when they are not hindered by urgent matters, Salafis usually pray in the mosque.

People usually spend a little more time in the mosque after the afternoon prayer (*salat al-'asr*), reading the Qur'an or chatting. My Salafi informants tended to use these occasions to discuss current religious topics. As one of them explained, these small after-prayer gatherings are excellent opportunities for widening one's religious knowledge. Since many Salafis do not always pray in the same mosque, these after-prayer discussions give them an opportunity to exchange their views with many different people. At most of these meetings the

⁶⁴ Purist Salafis often disagree with the prominent Egyptian scholar's views. They have been attacking him verbally especially since the 2011 Arab Spring. The reason is that Al-Qaradawi is a vocal supporter of the revolutions.

participants talk about different interpretations of parts of the Text, like Qur'an verses or *ahadith*. These discussions are often connected to actual political or social issues.

Like *durus*, these small meetings after prayer are primary spaces in which to establish and maintain network ties and circulate within the movement. One of my informants described their importance very eloquently:

Even though I do not have time to go frequently to participate in *halaqat* and spend much time with people who have the same views on Islam, meeting with other Salafi friends in the mosque after the 'asr prayer shows me that there is still a community of Muslims who give religion priority in their lives. Ten minutes of chat in the mosque gives me the sense of belonging to a true brotherhood and reinforces my commitment to the Book and what the Prophet taught us. Otherwise I would be too occupied with daily problems to pay enough attention to God, like most of the Muslims in Tripoli.⁶⁵

Durus, *shahrat* and discussions after prayers function as important "free spaces" for Salafism in times of political repression. When it is difficult to express one's views openly or act freely in the wider society, free spaces provide opportunities for members of social movements to discuss their beliefs and ideas and exchange information, skills and expertise without risk.⁶⁶

For Lebanese Salafis, both after the Dinniya affair (see Chapter 2), which was followed by a huge wave of arrests and the oppression of Islamic movements, and after the battle of Nahr al-Barid, it was not safe to communicate openly and engage in obvious *da'wa* activity. Many of them even shaved off their beards, started to wear ordinary clothes and avoided conveying the symbols of Salafism in wider society. For example, criticizing the Shi'ites or Hizbullah during the Friday sermon could lead to imprisonment. At this time, the movement's activities largely withdrew to the *halaqat*, *sahrat* and to other forms of informal, private discussions. Narratives and discourses, as well solidarity and network

⁶⁵ Interview with an active participant of Salafism, 1 August 2011.

⁶⁶ Francesca Polletta, 'Free Spaces in Collective Action', *Theory and Society*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1999.

ties, were preserved and have been utilized during the current period of upheaval in Lebanese Salafism.

Formal institutional structure

Salafism in Lebanon has a loose institutional structure consisting of religious colleges and charity institutions. However, there are no formal links connecting them, only informal ties based on interpersonal relations. These institutions nevertheless play an important role in the movement as network intersections both at the local and transnational levels. In Tripoli and its surroundings there are about seven or eight religious colleges (*ma'had shara'i*). Most of them provide their graduates with secondary school degrees, and some of them have been granted the right by the Islamic University of Medina to award Bachelor's and Master's degrees (as in the case of Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal's *Ma'had al-Hidaya wa-l-Ihsan*. The *ma'hads* are important hubs in interpersonal networks, since many of the Salafi shaykhs in Tripoli gain their main income by teaching in one or more of these institutions. Therefore the *ma'hads* function as spaces for networking and strong friendship networks usually emerge around the employees and the students.

The colleges also play an important role in conveying the Salafi message to society. People who do not know much about Salafism often join them for one or two courses in order to extend their religious knowledge. They also function as alternatives for those who are otherwise unable to get any kind of education, as is the case for many Palestinians.⁶⁷ The *ma'hads* also run summer courses for

⁶⁷ In the past many Lebanese Palestinians worked in the Gulf and earned high incomes, and were therefore able to finance their studies in prestigious Arab universities such as the American University of Beirut. After the Gulf War of 1991, masses of Palestinian workers were forced to return to Lebanon due to their support for Saddam Hussain. Those who did not have relatives in the Gulf were able to access scholarships in the Eastern Block. After the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, this door was also shut to Palestinians. Today, often the only way to get some sort of higher education is to join one of the religious colleges. See: Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, pp. 200-201. For many Palestinians even acquiring secondary education is difficult, because UNRWA's (the UN body responsible for helping the Palestinian refugees) budget was slashed in the 1990s. Salafi colleges offer them a solution, since they can attend for free to get a high school diploma.

primary and secondary school students, where they gain a basic knowledge of religion (according to the Salafi understanding).

The other types of formal institutions are the charity institutions in the form of *waqfs*. Sometimes they are connected to mosques and *ma'hads* and take part in financing their maintenance. More often, the *waqfs* provide financial and other types of support and alms to those who are living in poverty or unable to pay their medical costs. I will discuss these charities later in more detail.

The networks that intersect in the informal activities described above and the loose network of *ma'hads* and *waqfs* have resulted in a polycephalous movement structure that lacks significant formal organization or a clear, pyramidal leadership structure. Leadership in Salafism is largely based on personal charisma and access to financial resources. Some Salafis have attempted to unify the lines of the movement, at least in Tripoli, without any success. Most of these initiatives have met fierce resistance from the majority of Salafis. For example, Muhammad Khodor proposed setting out clear institutional structures for Salafis and trying to play a more significant role in civil society⁶⁸ (understood in conventional terms) and politics. He was accused of straying from the right path of Islam and had to leave Ma'had al-Amin, where he had been teaching. Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal made several similar attempts. He aspires to lead the Salafis in Lebanon unified under the banner of "al-Tayyar al-Salafi" (the Salafi Stream). His initiatives have always failed either due to repression by the government authorities or the refusal of other Salafi shaykhs with substantial charismatic bases to join him. Such attempts to create an institutional structure are usually labeled as *bid'a*. Most Salafis think that if they were to create a political organization they would be no different from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Initiatives to create a loose organizational framework, one that can draw Salafis and their supporters together regularly to adjust their activities and exchange information without creating a formal leadership structure and imposing obligations, have been more successful. In the first half of 2012, *haraki* shaykhs under the leadership of Salim al-Rafi'i and Zakariyya al-Masri created a

⁶⁸ Muhammad Khodor himself thinks that Salafis should embrace the institutional realm of Lebanese civil society, such as clubs, discussion forums and non-profit organizations. He also thinks that a Salafi political party should be established. Interview, Tripoli, 30 July 2011.

weekly *shura* (council).⁶⁹ It consists of two levels; one for the *'amma* (ordinary people) and one for the *khassa* (elite), in which prominent shaykhs participate. The former is held every Monday in the Taqwa mosque after *salat al-maghrib* (late afternoon prayers). Usually between five and ten shaykhs participate, along with leading figures from local families (mostly from the Tabbana and Qubba districts) and a number of young Salafis and sympathizers.

This event provides a forum to discuss the affairs of the communities in different city districts. It makes decisions on such matters as whether they should fight the Alawites in Jabal Muhsin and organize a militia against them, or whether they should instead rely on the Lebanese Army and the government's other security forces. The idea of organizing demonstrations in support of the Salafi detainees (mentioned above) also emerged from the *shura*. During the council Salafis also raise money for the Syrian refugees. Quite obviously, the aim is to utilize the temporarily heightened popularity of the Salafi shaykhs (as an effect of the Arab and the Syrian revolutions) and promote them as *de facto* leaders of the Sunni community in the North.

Many Salafis distance themselves from this *shura*, accusing Salim al-Rafi'i in particular of using it to promote his personal ambition of becoming the chief religious authority in Tripoli. One of the prominent purist shaykhs told me that it is incorrect to call such a gathering a *shura*. In his view, *shura* should be called together by *wali al-amr* and not an imam of a mosque, "even if he receives a lot of money from Qatar and Sa'd al-Hariri."⁷⁰

The second level of the *shura* is more exclusive and secretive. As a researcher, I was not allowed to participate. According to one of its members, this level decides which issues to discuss at the gathering that is open to the *'amma*.

Since at the time of writing, the *shura* is a recent development, it is hard to measure its impact on Salafism and the society in Tripoli. Nevertheless, if the

⁶⁹ The *shura* (consultation in Arabic) is rooted in Arab tribal traditions and refers to a consultation body. In early Islamic history it was an advisory body of the Rashidun Caliph. Later it was reinterpreted several times. In the Arab Gulf the advisory bodies of the rulers are also called *shura*, as are the different decision-making councils of Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Hizbullah. See: 'Shura', in Bosworth, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*; Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse and New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), pp. 45-48.

⁷⁰ Interview, 26 April 2012.

Salafi shaykhs who are organizing it are able to retain their increased authority, it has the potential to develop as an effective tool for gaining significant influence in the Sunni community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that Salafi networks in North Lebanon at the local level have a unique shape, due to the exceptional authority of the shaykhs. I also built up a picture of the social composition of these networks and analyzed the modality of the evolution of interpersonal network ties. Analyzing the network structure at the local level is crucial for understanding the evolution of transnational networks, and this will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Transnational Networks of Lebanese Salafis

In this chapter I shall answer the question, how is Salafism structured at the transnational level? I will do this by showing how interpersonal networks evolve and extend from Lebanon to other countries, and by discussing the function of transnational charity organizations. In the last section of the chapter I will discuss in detail the Salafi networks that connect Tripoli to Europe, using ethnographic data collected in Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany. I will show that like local networks, transnational Salafi networks are also largely informal. Institutional structures are not elaborate but are rather embedded in a dense web of informal links.

Local Salafi networks, as discussed in the previous chapter, are not isolated within the borders of Lebanon, but form organic parts of large, transnational webs. The civil society conceptualized by Hann and Antoun as a web of trust and cooperation¹ (see Chapter 6), where social movements are embedded, extends beyond the nation state. I consider transnational Salafi networks, whose structure and function will be discussed below, as part of this transnational civil society.²

Transnational networks in the Muslim world, past and present

¹ Antoun, 'Civil Society, Tribal Process, and Change in Jordan', pp. 441-442.

² In the mainstream civil society literature, the term 'transnational civil society' refers to networks of formal, voluntary organizations, which extend beyond borders. However, formal organizations make up a marginal part of the transnational web of trust and cooperation in the Middle East. For a definition of the Western concept of transnational civil society, see: Richard Price, 'Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics', *World Politics*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2003, p. 580.

There have been extensive and dense transnational exchanges in the Muslim world since the emergence of Islam. In the pre-modern period, social networks connected the Middle East with Africa and Central, South and Southeast Asia. The literature on this topic mentions several patterns in how these transnational links were historically structured.

Religion provided a key motive for travel and establishing transnational links with other Muslims. The doctrines of Islam explicitly encourage travel in the framework of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*), which was a major source of the establishment of long-distance contacts.³ People in the medieval Dar al-Islam frequently traveled thousands of miles to visit the shrines of holy persons (*wali*). These shrines often constituted nodes of extended Sufi networks. In the medieval Muslim world, Sufi *tariqas* connected regions such as Central Asia and Anatolia,⁴ India and Southeast Asia⁵ and Yemen and the Malay Archipelago.⁶ These orders provided assistance to their followers, even if they had to travel large distances.

Networks often connected center and periphery. Travel for the sake of learning (*rihla li-talab al-'ilm*) was of fundamental importance in facilitating exchange between Muslim societies.⁷ Seeking knowledge in highly respected centers of learning such as the sacred cities of Hijaz, or in intellectual centers such as Cairo and Nishapur, often increased the religious authority of scholars after they had returned home.⁸ For example, large numbers of Muslims from the Malay Archipelago stayed in Mecca and Medina for years after performing the Hajj, in order to obtain religious knowledge. Some of the most renowned scholars among them played a crucial role in spreading the Sufi intellectual tradition and establishing affiliation to Sufi orders in their home regions.⁹

³ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p. 5.

⁴ Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁵ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 'The Impact of Sufism on Muslims in Pre-colonial Malaysia: An Overview of Interpretations', *Islamic Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2002.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sam I. Gellens, 'The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach', in Dale F. Eickelman (ed), *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination Comparative Studies On Muslim Societies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, 'The Origins and Development of Sufi Orders (tarekat) in Southeast Asia', *Studia Islamika – Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, vol. 1, no.1, 1994, pp. 6-10.

Religious networks were often intertwined with trade in the pre-modern Islamic world. Through its religious and trade networks, the Hadrami (from Hadramaut) diaspora established a presence in several parts of the Islamic world. In Southeast Asia, East Africa and Malabar they married local women, created communities with a creole identity and extended civil society networks. According to Engseng Ho, “throughout this space, a Hadrami could travel and be put up by relatives, who might be Arab uncles married to foreign, local aunts.”¹⁰ ‘*Ulama*’ and merchants could rely on these contacts during their travels or when setting up their businesses or activities in a foreign place with a Hadrami community.

The dominant template of the political systems of the Islamic world enabled this mobility and universalism. Pre-colonial Muslim societies were ruled by sultanates “based on the concept of protection as business”.¹¹ The sultan protected the population in a given territory against local violence and external threats. In return, the ruled paid taxes that supported the ruler and his army.¹² This form of governance did not involve the concept of territorial sovereignty. Borders were not static and sacrosanct, and more importantly, rarely impeded the freedom of movement. The only boundary that set limits to the pre-modern Muslim transnational networks was the end of Dar al-Islam (“the whole territory in which the law of Islam prevails”¹³).

The imposition of colonial rule, and later the creation of nation states and national boundaries, were not able to significantly impede Muslim transnationalism. Due to the development of transportation and communication technologies in the 20th century, Muslim connectivity even increased. In Robertson’s formulation, organizational and technological advancements have led to the compression of the world and the emergence of a global field.¹⁴ In this, “individuals and societies become part of a larger system of societies and identify

¹⁰ Engseng Ho, ‘Empire Through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2004.

¹¹ Cornell, ‘Ibn Battuta’s Opportunism’, in Cook and Lawrence, *Muslim Networks*, p. 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 33-40.

¹³ ‘Dar al-Islam’, in Bosworth, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

¹⁴ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: SAGE Publications, 1992).

themselves in relation to global standards.”¹⁵ Today the different parts of the Middle East are connected to each other and to other parts of the world through charity networks, business enterprises and informal, interpersonal and computer-mediated networks. This has created a transnational Muslim civil society in which transnational social movements, among them Salafism, are embedded.

The high density and quick expansion of the Salafi transnational networks can only partly be explained by the development of transportation and communication technologies. At the same time, as Laurent Bonnefoy points out, Salafis have a special keenness for establishing transnational contacts and networking.¹⁶ Salafis, as I have already explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, attach little importance to local culture and traditions. Salafis feel at home where Islam can be practiced and where conditions are given to the living of a pure lifestyle (i.e. *halal* food and relative freedom of worship). Therefore they feel free to travel large distances for the sake of the *da'wa* or to acquire knowledge.

In addition to the Salafis' affinity for building transnational contacts, the Lebanese in general also have a tradition of transnational networking. Since the second half of the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have migrated and settled in West Africa, the Americas, Australia and Europe.¹⁷ In many cases, the Lebanese diaspora established dense trade links with their mother country,¹⁸ which nowadays serve as a main source of investment and income for the Lebanese economy.¹⁹ Family networks and social networks that transmit political and religious ideas are also significant.²⁰ For example, the

¹⁵ Chandrashekhar Bhat and K. Laxmi Narayan, 'Indian Diaspora, Globalization and Transnational Networks: The South African Context', *Journal of Social Science*, vol. 25, nos. 1-3, 2010, p. 14.

¹⁶ Laurent Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), p. 139.

¹⁷ Lebanese migrated from their country in a number of waves. Most of them were either skilled migrants looking for better opportunities abroad, or people fleeing from economic hardship and violence. See: Paul Tabar, *Lebanon: A Country of Emigration and Immigration*. Report, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University of Cairo, 2007, <http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cmrs/reports/documents/tabar080711.pdf> (accessed: 12 August 2013).

¹⁸ Mara A. Leichtman, 'The Legacy of Transnational Lives: Beyond the First Generation of Lebanese in Senegal', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2005.

¹⁹ Tabar, 'Lebanon: A Country of Emigration and Immigration', pp. 15-17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 672-675 and 677-680.

migrants are often involved in public debates and engage in sociopolitical activism in Lebanon.²¹

As I mentioned earlier, Lebanese Sunnis generally consider Lebanon to be an artificial entity and have not developed a Lebanese identity that would connect them to the members of other sectarian communities in the country. Since the establishment of “Greater Lebanon” in 1920, Lebanese Sunnis have continuously tried to reconnect with the larger Sunni world, often by being proponents of ideological streams that promise the abolishment of the fragmentation of the *Umma* (see Chapter 5). This mindset also enhances the establishment of transnational connections, especially with locations that are perceived as centers of Sunnism, such as the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula in our case.

The structure of Salafi transnational networks

According to my observations, transnational connections can be direct and interpersonal, maintained by visits and communication by phone or through the Internet. At the same time, indirect ties also play an important role.²² Someone can be connected to a transnational network by having ties to someone else in his local networks, who in turn possesses transnational contacts. For example, an active participant who does not have direct interpersonal ties outside of Lebanon can still be connected transnationally by being close to an *'alim* who is a frequent traveler and maintains a considerable social network in the Gulf countries. For example, many beneficiaries of Gulf charities are connected to these organizations indirectly via a Lebanese agent (see also Chapter 4).

Belonging to one of the major Salafi factions significantly shapes the structure of transnational links. Networks usually evolve along purist or *haraki* ideological lines. According to my observations, transnational links within the

²¹ Dalia Abdelhady, ‘Beyond Home/Host Networks: Forms of Solidarity among Lebanese Immigrants in a Global Era’, *Identities*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 441-445.

²² On the importance of indirect ties see: Yanjie Bian, ‘Bringing Strong Ties Back in: Indirect Ties, Network Bridges, and Job Searches in China’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, no. 3, 1997, pp. 368-372.

respective factions are much more dense than between purists and *harakis*. As I explained before, the participants of the two factions prefer what are often radically different methodologies for purifying people's belief and religious practices (See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). The different views about the ruler's role are a particular cause of mistrust between them, and they label each other "innovators" (*mubtadi*) or *murji'a* (one whose actions do not reflect his belief). Therefore transnational contacts that link *harakis* and purists are relatively rare.

Although, as I have shown in Chapter 6, the structures of the purist and *haraki* networks are similar on the local level, the situation is rather different on the transnational level. Transnational purist networks are generally more vertical than the *haraki* ones. At the top of the purist networks we find a few renowned scholars (mostly from the Gulf) whose *fatwas* are widely followed, from Europe to Southeast Asia. For example, as Noorhaidi explains, the founders of the Indonesian purist militia, Laskar Jihad, had to ask for *fatwas* from the highest purist Salafi authorities in Saudi Arabia and Yemen before they could legitimize their involvement in the sectarian conflict in Maluku.²³ The involvement of the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni authorities was necessary despite the fact that Muslim participation in the civil war in Maluku was considered by Salafis to be defensive jihad, which is *fard 'ayn* (a personal duty) for the believers in the given country.²⁴ The purist '*ulama*' in the Gulf also played a role in the disbandment of Laskar jihad. In 2002 the leader of the group, Ja'far Umar Thalib, referred to the *fatwa* of Rabi' al-Madkhali when he announced its dissolution.²⁵ The fact that the *fatwas* of the local Salafi shaykhs were not enough to justify the actions of the militia demonstrates the vertical nature of purist transnational networks.

The great scholars of the Gulf possess significant religious authority over the Lebanese purists as well. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Lebanese purists established a *fatwa* council consisting of local scholars. However, this council only issues independent legal opinions when the *fatwas* of the Saudi Great

²³ Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad: Islam, militancy and the Quest for Identity in post-New Order Indonesia* (Utrecht: PhD thesis submitted at Utrecht University, 2005), pp. 118-119.

²⁴ Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaymin, *Kitab al-Jihad*, http://www.ibnothaimeen.com/all/books/article_18093.shtml (accessed: 4 April 2013).

²⁵ Noorhaidi, *Laskar Jihad*, p. 225.

'*Ulama*' are not specific enough. Most of the *fatwas* issued by this council simply interpret the opinion of the scholars in the Gulf and apply it to local circumstances. According to my observations, when an ordinary believer asks for a *fatwa* from a Lebanese purist '*alim*', the scholar tends to refer back to legal opinions given by the Great '*Ulama*'.

Haraki transnational networks are much more horizontal. They are rarely structured around a few renowned shaykhs. When networks in distinct localities establish links to each other, their relationship tends to be more equal than in case of the purists. Ideology plays a major role in this; when Salafism in Saudi Arabia fragmented during and after the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis, *harakis* complained about the overwhelming domination of the Great '*Ulama*' in the religious field and their monopoly in interpreting the Scripture. They regard this as a distortion of the teaching of Islam, which advocates the individual freedom of the learned (those who are capable of understanding the Qur'an and Sunna) to interpret the Text.²⁶

Lebanese *haraki* shaykhs, although usually well connected to the Gulf, act rather independently. Although shaykhs such as 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, Hamid al-'Ali, Safar al-Hawali and Nasir al-'Umar are widely respected, they cannot issue orders to *haraki* shaykhs in other localities, as Madkhali did with the leaders of Laskar Jihad. Lebanese activist scholars usually produce independent *fatwas*. Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i argued that idolizing shaykhs in the Gulf technically elevates them to the position of Christian priests. He referred to the following Qur'anic verse: "They take their rabbis and their monks as their lords (instead of God)."²⁷ According to Shaykh Salim, local Salafi shaykhs also can be highly knowledgeable and almost certainly have deeper insights into what is going on in their own country. They should turn to the word of God directly and should not unconditionally accept the opinion of the Great '*Ulama*'.

Links of Lebanese Salafis to the Gulf

²⁶ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 71-72, p. 213.

²⁷ Surat al-Tawba, *aya* 31 (my own translation).

Lebanese Salafis tend to extend their networks in the direction of the Arabian Gulf: mostly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. The Gulf is the main source of funding and center of learning for them. Networking with Salafi groups in the Gulf often provides valuable religious capital or social capital that can be converted into other forms of capital, such as religious and economic capital. In the following I explain how religious and social capital is acquired as a result of establishing contacts in the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.

Acquiring religious capital

Lebanese Salafis acquire two forms of religious capital in the Gulf. The first form exists in the “embodied state” in the Bourdieuan sense, which refers to knowledge and abilities.²⁸ If they can afford it or if they possess the right contacts, Salafis travel to the Gulf to pursue their religious studies. Ideally, they enroll on degree programs at the prestigious universities, such as the Islamic University of Medina, Umm al-Qura University in Mecca and Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa‘ud Islamic University in Riyadh. A less prestigious but still favored destination is the Shari‘a Faculty of Kuwait University, where many renowned Salafi scholars teach (such as Hakim al-Mutayri or Hamid al-‘Ali).

Traveling to the Hijaz to perform ‘*umra* (lesser pilgrimage)²⁹ can also be combined with religious learning. The ‘*umra* visa might grant the bearer a three or six-month stay in the Holy Places. After performing the rituals, Salafis often visit the *halaqat* of renowned shaykhs residing either in Mecca or Medina. Among the most prestigious religious lessons are those of Shaykh Abu ‘Abdullah al-Lahaydan, Rabi‘ al-Madkhali and Safar al-Hawali. Some of the Lebanese stay in Mecca or Medina for a few weeks or months to pay regular visits to some of these *halaqat*.

²⁸ Bradford Verter, ‘Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2003, p, 159.

²⁹ The direction of the ‘*umra* is also the *Ka‘ba*, but it is not compulsory, involves fewer rituals and can be performed at any time of the year.

Besides knowledge, studying in the Gulf provides students with what one might call the recognized or “institutionalized state” of religious capital.³⁰ In the case of Salafis, this mostly means religious authority. Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf in general, is regarded as the center of learning for Salafis. Those who belong to the Salafi community in North Lebanon, and those ordinary inhabitants who sympathize with Salafism, presuppose that an individual who has studied in the Gulf has acquired a superior level of knowledge.

Possessing a degree from one of the abovementioned universities in the Gulf elevates one’s credentials within the Lebanese Salafi community. A shaykh who has a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree from Medina or Umm al-Qura can potentially attract more active participants and passive followers than someone who is self-educated or has a degree from a Lebanese Islamic educational institution.³¹ Being a graduate of one of the learning centers of the Gulf also paves the way for the shaykhs to get a job at one of the Salafi colleges of Tripoli, or to access funding from the Gulf.

Participating in the *halaqat* of some of the famous Salafi scholars in Saudi Arabia might also increase the individual’s religious authority. He can claim that he is the student of some of the most renowned Salafi ‘*ulama*’, or can simply say that he studied in Mecca or Medina. In the eyes of the passive followers, this still elevates him above those who never studied in the Gulf. In purist-rejectionist circles it is often more respectable to have spent a period of time visiting the *halaqat* of Shaykh Rabi’ al-Madkhali in Medina, or Shaykh Salim al-Tawil in Kuwait, than to have graduated from one of the Islamic universities. This is because there is a significant *haraki* and non-Salafi presence in the *shari’a* faculties there, which might corrupt an individual’s beliefs.

Acquiring social capital

³⁰ Ibid, p. 160.

³¹ Although there are exceptions: Shaykh Nur al-Din ‘Ammar, whom I mentioned in Chapter 6, never had any formal education, yet he can be considered one of the most renowned Salafi scholars in Lebanon.

Establishing and maintaining various forms of contact with Salafis in the Gulf countries increases the social capital of Lebanese Salafis. During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to observe how Lebanese Salafis open and maintain channels with the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, and I will discuss this in the following.

To clarify the analysis, I classify transnational exchanges between Salafis as taking place on two main levels. On the first, links are developed and maintained between the shaykhs. The second level concerns the contacts between active followers and between active followers and shaykhs. Passive followers do not usually form an integral part of these transnational exchanges, with perhaps the only exception being when someone asks for a *fatwa* from a Gulf-based shaykh by telephone or online. However, according to my experiences, these practices are not yet widespread among ordinary Lebanese Salafi sympathizers.

1. The level of the shaykhs: On this level I discuss both links between the shaykhs themselves and between the shaykhs and the sponsors. Transnational contacts between the '*ulama*' are often established during their student years at one of the universities in the Gulf, mostly in Saudi Arabia. Shaykh Mahir, a young preacher from the Qubba region in Tripoli, spent four years at the Islamic University of Medina acquiring his degree. As he recalled, he used to spend most of his free time with three other students, who came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Mauritania. He described how their thinking and worldview was shaped when they participated in extracurricular activities, mostly in the *halaqat* of *haraki* shaykhs such as Safar al-Hawali.

After they graduated, they maintained regular contact, with the exception of the Mauritanian student. After returning to his home country, this latter student had limited ability to use the Internet and travel abroad. Shaykh Mahir, however, often communicates with the other two. They exchange messages almost daily via Facebook and follow each other on Twitter. Since his graduation he has visited them both in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia a couple of times. These

occasions provided him with the opportunity to further expand his network and even to acquire some material support to pursue his *da'wa* activities.³²

Network ties also often emerge during various formal and informal visits abroad, mostly to the Gulf countries. Such travel can be for a purely social purpose, or to look for financial aid (as I discuss below), or to participate in Islamic conferences. The latter are usually exceptionally good opportunities for transnational networking. Such events are often organized by one of the Salafi centers or charity organizations in the Gulf. *Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami*, for example, frequently calls for such events in Kuwait. On many occasions the organizers have invited renowned scholars from Saudi Arabia or Egypt to give lectures.

These conferences serve as important platforms for networking. They provide space for shaykhs who already know each other to maintain relationships, or to forge new ones. At the same time these events are excellent opportunities for contacting potential sponsors. According to my informants at a conference organized in the Gulf, participants are often invited to spend the night at the house of one of the local Salafis after the seminars. These meetings in the evening function as one of the most effective platforms for making contact with others. In the relaxed environment of the informal home gatherings, Lebanese Salafi shaykhs often make valuable contacts that provide them with access to charities or other kinds of patronage. Salafis from the Gulf frequently introduce like-minded movement members to businessmen, who are willing to sponsor certain *da'wa* activities.³³

I had an opportunity to observe informal transnational exchanges between Salafis during my fieldwork in Kuwait, when I often participated in *diwaniyyas*. According to Kuwaitis, these events have been organized since the founding years of the country, and can be traced back to old tribal traditions. The *diwaniyya* is usually hosted by the head of a prominent Kuwaiti family on a given day each week (usually a Tuesday or a Saturday). At around 9 pm, men (usually members of the extended family, friends, clients of the host, or those who wish to discuss something with him) gather in a specific place in a Kuwaiti house that

³² Interview, Tripoli, 11 April 2012.

³³ Series of interviews with Lebanese Salafi shaykhs in Tripoli during July-August 2011 and April-May 2012.

has been created for *diwaniyas*. The people sit back against the wall, to the right and left of the host. A Pakistani or Egyptian servant offers them drinks, usually tea or Arabic coffee.

The discussions in the *diwaniyyas* cover a range of issues. Sometimes people gather at a *diwaniyya* only to socialize and talk about everyday issues, or to watch an important football match. *Diwaniyyas* for poetry are also popular. More important are those *diwaniyyas* where people discuss economic or political issues. The fate of millions of dollars can be decided at such gatherings (rather than in the offices of Kuwait City's skyscrapers). At election time, *diwaniyas* can be extremely crowded, as key campaigning takes place there. Usually the time and place of a *diwaniyya* is advertised online, indicating the social importance of such events.³⁴

Salafis from other Middle Eastern countries or Europe often participate in *diwaniyas* when they visit Kuwait. My Lebanese Salafi informants who frequently visit the Gulf emirate also make use of the opportunities these gatherings provide. One of the most important functions of the *diwaniyya* is providing a "free space"³⁵ for transnational actors to exchange information. *Diwaniyyas* are protected by Kuwaiti social customs. According to Kuwaiti law, the state has no right to put them under surveillance or curb their freedom by any means.³⁶ Therefore the discussions can be held relatively freely. Salafis from abroad are often brought to different *diwaniyyas* by their local contacts. As Salafis from Tripoli who are frequently in Kuwait told me, most of the time during the *diwaniyyas* they only exchange ideas with others and establish new contacts. Kuwait Salafis often ask them to talk about the situation in Lebanon and how they perceive the threat coming from the Shi'ite community and Hizbullah.

Diwaniyyas provide space to establish contact with charity organizations. For example, to receive support from Ihya' al-Turath, it is usually necessary to have previously established contact with shaykhs who are associated with the charity. Funds also can be collected from individual donors who might not even be Salafis. Since Ihya' al-Turath often covers only part of the expenses, the extra funds collected during trips to the Gulf emirate can be very important. Salafis

³⁴ <http://www.dewan.ws/> (accessed 18 April 2010).

³⁵ Polletta, "Free Spaces" in *Collective Action*.

³⁶ Mary Ann Tétreault, *Stories of Democracy*, pp. 278-281.

usually ask for extra support for their *ma'had shara'i*, to be able to provide more alms for the poor or to publish books and leaflets. Kuwaiti donors usually offer their *zakat* or pay *sadaqa*.³⁷

2. *The level of the active followers*: The transnational networks of the committed Salafis are less dense than those of the shaykhs. This is because the young men tend not to have the financial means to travel frequently to the Gulf. Despite this, active participants can gain social capital, which they can convert into religious capital (mostly knowledge) and economic capital.

Committed Salafis often mix with young Salafis from Kuwait or Saudi Arabia who are visiting Lebanon, usually for a vacation. Activists from Western Europe and Australia are also a frequent presence in the Salafi religious colleges. Due to the Internet, long-lasting links and networks can emerge from these encounters. Series of studies have emphasized the importance of online communication in the evolution of transnational networks. Social networks are emerging that consist of individuals from various distant localities, who can be in daily contact with each other.³⁸ Twitter, Facebook and online Salafi forums enable the movement's followers to transcend locality and create communities that are established purely on the grounds of shared ideology. According to my data, these transnational networks can evolve either around certain websites, such as kulalsalafiyeen.com,³⁹ or on social media. In the first case, the members of the networks rarely know each other personally and are only familiar with each other's virtual profiles.

In the second case, networks on Facebook and Twitter often evolve after the network's members have previously established personal contact. These networks tend to have a stronger impact, at least in the case of the Salafi youth in North Lebanon, and last longer. I had conversations with Khalid, a 25-year-old Kuwaiti Salafi and student at the Islamic University of Medina. His family owns a

³⁷ Interview with a prominent Palestinian shaykh from Nahr al-Barid, 23 April 2012, and personal conversations and observations during my fieldwork in Kuwait, February-March 2012.

³⁸ Lyndsay MC. Hayhurst, 'Navigating Neoliberal Networks: Transnational Internet Platforms in Sport for Development and Peace', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2011.

³⁹ [Kulalsalafiyeen.com](http://kulalsalafiyeen.com) is one the most popular Arabic language purist Salafi Internet forums. It is supervised by the prominent Jordanian 'alim, 'Ali al-Halabi.

villa in the Dinniya region, close to Tripoli. He has spent most of his summers there since his childhood. When he is in Lebanon he often socializes with fellow Salafis from the villages in the Dinniya region or Tripoli. As he recalled, 4-5 years ago, after he had left Lebanon at the end of the summer, he had hardly kept in contact with these young people due to the lack of means of communication. In the past few years, however, Internet access has become more widespread and even people from poor economic backgrounds can have connections at home. As Khalid told me, he is now able to add many of his Lebanese acquaintances to Facebook and Twitter, and exchanges between them have become quite frequent.⁴⁰ They tend to share articles, e-books and religious materials or inform each other about what is happening in the Salafi communities in Kuwait, Lebanon and Medina (since Khalid is a student there).

In other cases, however, especially if personal visits are relatively frequent, Salafis in the Gulf can help their Lebanese acquaintances to find a job and establish themselves in the Gulf emirate. I briefly encountered two Lebanese Palestinians in Kuwait who were assisted by the 22-year-old Faisal, one of the pupils of Shaykh Salim al-Tawil (See Chapter 4). He told me that the Palestinian youths were connected to him through another student of Shaykh Salim, who had previously met them in Lebanon. At the time when I was in Kuwait, Faisal was helping them to secure new jobs after their previous contracts had ended. He mobilized his local contacts and access to patronage to find employment for his protégées. As he told me, he is doing all of this because he sees the young Palestinians as “right-thinking,” and after their return to Lebanon they will spread the right form of the *da'wa* and challenge the *mubtadi's*, who “unfortunately are the majority among those who call themselves Salafis” in the country.⁴¹

The role of transnational charity organizations

⁴⁰ Interview, Kuwait, 30 February 2012 and 5, 7 and 14 March 2012.

⁴¹ Interview and observation, Kuwait, 11 February 2012.

Gulf-based charity organizations are among the most important elements in transnational civil society in the Muslim world and Salafi transnational networks. They are the main sponsors of Salafi activism worldwide and form significant hubs in transnational networks. Charities are also the only significant institutional actors in transnational Salafi networks. Previously I mentioned that two large Gulf charity organizations play a crucial role in the Salafi field in North Lebanon. Since it split into two in 1997 (see Chapters 2 and 3), Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami has sponsored the purist Salafis, while Mu'assasat al-Shaykh 'Aid al-Khayriyya finances the North Lebanese *haraki* network. Having analyzed their role in the emergence of Salafism in North Lebanon, in this section, after a brief historical overview, I examine the importance of these charities in the transnational dynamics of the movement.

Islamic charity organizations emerged in the 1970s due to three main factors. The first was the six decades of ongoing wars, civil conflicts and humanitarian disasters in the Muslim world. The second factor was the 1973 oil boom (see Chapter 3), which enabled the Gulf States to finance charity activities. The third factor was the need on the part of the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the other monarchies in the Arabian Gulf for legitimacy, especially after the Iranian Revolution (see Chapter 3). Supporting transnational charities was an excellent way of serving this aim and improved the reputations of these countries in the eyes of Muslims worldwide.⁴² Charity work gave credibility to the conservative Sunni monarchies' counter-propaganda against Iran's revolutionary ideology.⁴³ The Afghan war (1979-1988), which caused millions to flee and seek refuge in neighboring Pakistan, triggered Islamic charity activity as both individual donors and the Gulf States poured money into charity organizations.⁴⁴ The peripheries of Islam in Africa likewise provided good opportunities for charity work intertwined with *da'wa*. In poverty-stricken countries such as Chad these

⁴² Marie Juul Petersen, 'Islamizing Aid: Transnational Muslim NGOs After 9.11.' *Voluntas*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2012, p. 133.

⁴³ See Kepel, *Jihad*.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed analysis, see my book: Pall, *Lebanese Salafis between the Gulf and Europe*, pp. 79-82.

institutions found fertile ground to spread their ideologies among local Muslims, and to convert others to Islam as well.⁴⁵

In the beginning, the profile of most Islamic charities represented the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is because most of the employees of the charities used to belong to the Ikhwan, as in the 1970s they were the ones who possessed the skills and education needed for relief work. Salafis also refrained from participating in the newly established charity organizations, due to their rejection of formal organizations that are not mentioned in the Scripture (as *waqf* for example), labeling them *bida'*. This attitude began to change from the 1980s onwards, when the Saudi government started to spread its Salafi ideology worldwide. The senior '*ulama*' affiliated to the state issued *fatwas* that legalized charity organizations. In addition, many of the new generation of Salafi scholars who were influenced by other Islamist currents no longer thought that all organizational forms were unacceptable. Since then, transnational charities have come to constitute one of the most important pillars of Salafism.⁴⁶

Transnational Salafi charities differ from other relief organizations on many points. Probably the most important distinctive feature, as Petersen also pointed out when examining the Saudi International Islamic Relief Organization, is that in the activities of these charities, "Islam and aid are intimately intertwined".⁴⁷ As I have often heard from members of these institutions, the aim of relief work should not only be poverty alleviation and the fulfillment of other, material needs; charity work has to be done for the sake of God. It means the recipients should benefit regarding the prospect of their hereafter. In other words, material aid should serve the aim of bringing the beneficiaries closer to the right '*aqida*, and by that salvation.⁴⁸

The institutional structure and operating forms of the two Salafi charities that I examined are largely similar. Unlike Ikhwan charities and the mainstream secular or Christian relief organizations, they generally lack an elaborate

⁴⁵ Mayke Kaag, 'Aid, UMMA, and Politics: Transnational Islamic NGOs in Chad', in Benjamin F. Soares and René Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁴⁶ Pall, *Lebanese Salafis*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Petersen, 'Islamizing Aid', p. 140.

⁴⁸ Series of interviews conducted with the officials and donors of Ihya' al-Turath and SACA between 2009 and 2012.

organizational framework, and their operations are dominated by informal exchanges. Ihya' al-Turath might constitute a slight exception, however. After the purist takeover (see Chapter 4) the charity started to cooperate more closely with the Kuwaiti state and the authorities of the host countries in which it has presence. An official from Ihya' al-Turath told me that before launching any major projects, they consult the royal family and ask for their approval. In Lebanon, for example, the local agents of Ihya' al-Turath are obliged to report to the Kuwaiti Embassy whenever they receive a large amount of money from the mother institution. The official whom I interviewed told me that "All of this is part of the obedience to the ruler".⁴⁹ When I visited Ihya' al-Turath's office in Jakarta, they told me that as a sign of "active obedience to the ruler" they closely cooperate with the Indonesian police by informing them regularly about their activities and reporting any tensions with other Islamic streams (such as Sufis).⁵⁰

Unlike Ihya' al-Turath, SACA does not have any official branches in foreign countries. On paper they only subsidize projects launched by independent local charities. However, in reality, dense informal, interpersonal networks connect these formally unattached institutions to the mother organizations in Qatar and Kuwait. These allow the leadership in the Gulf charities to control their beneficiaries effectively. During my fieldwork I had an opportunity to observe how aid is distributed in North Lebanon. The main agent of SACA in Tripoli, as mentioned in Chapter 4, is Shaykh Khalid Za'rur. Although he was the charity's international relations chief for several years, since his resignation, he has not had any official links with the charity. Today Shaykh Khalid earns his living as a real estate agent working with a Qatari company. However, he has kept his network ties to the leadership and advisory board of SACA and in reality he is the one who distributes the charity's money in Tripoli and the Dinniya region (but not in Nahr al-Barid and the surrounding region, where Shaykh Haitham al-Sa'id is the agent of SACA).

⁴⁹ Interview, Kuwait, 4 March 2012.

⁵⁰ Interview with Ustadz Zarkashi and Shaykh Setiawan, Jakarta, 11 December 2012.

I was a frequent visitor to Shaykh Khalid's office⁵¹ in *Sahat al-Nur* (Star Square) in the center of Tripoli during the summer of 2011 and spring of 2012. While he was mostly busy with his clients and business partners, sometimes local Salafi shaykhs also appeared. They usually came to discuss the possibility of receiving subsidies to build a mosque or pursue their *da'wa* activities. Most of the time, when the amount of money required is only a few thousand or tens of thousands of dollars, Shaykh Khalid has the authority to decide. If the given plan is approved, the beneficiary has to prepare a formal application and send it to SACA's headquarters in Qatar. Upon receiving it, they transfer the money to the recipient. If the amount of requested aid is more than the abovementioned sums, either the recipient has to visit Qatar or some members of SACA's leadership visit Lebanon to inspect the proposed project.

Embeddedness in the informal networks of Salafism is essential for someone to become a local representative of a transnational Gulf charity. None of the agents of SACA or *Ihya' al-Turath* in Lebanon whom I interviewed went through any formal recruitment process. Their way led through the transnational networks of friends and fellow Salafi '*ulama'*' whom they had encountered both in Lebanon and the Gulf countries. This was the case with Safwan al-Za'bi, as I explained in Chapter 4. Khalid Za'rur's network evolved through his business activity in the Gulf, while Haitham al-Sa'id, as I will show in the next section, was able to establish his contacts with SACA after years of tireless networking with Salafis from the Gulf and Europe.

As a chief official in *Ihya' al-Turath* explained to me, when the organization wants to establish a presence in a given country, they look for someone who is already in their network. As he explained, their local agents tended to be former fellow students of '*ulama'*' who are affiliated to the charity, or friends whom they meet on various occasions, at Islamic conferences for example. He told me that in this way it is easier to check whether someone's way of thinking meets the requirements of *Ihya' al-Turath*; that is, that the individual agrees with purist views and opposes jihadi activism (see also Chapter 4).⁵²

⁵¹ I would use the Internet in his office, where he had installed a much faster connection than was available elsewhere in the city. During the time I spent there, saving my fieldwork notes and checking my emails, I had plenty of opportunity for observation.

⁵² Interview, 'Isa al-Qaddumi, Kuwait, 6 January 2010.

The financial sources of transnational charity organizations

Examining the financial background of the charities in the Gulf would allow us to understand how these charities maintain links between transnational Salafi networks, the state apparatus of the Gulf monarchies and the Islamic financial sector. However, gathering information about this issue tends to be difficult. When I asked the agents and employees of charities about their financial sources, they tended to give general answers and usually tried to change the course of the conversation. Such inquiries always raise suspicions in the minds of Islamists, since Western security services are also paying more attention to this topic. Once, when I asked one of the officials from Ihya' al-Turath in Kuwait how they finance their activities, he asked me directly which security service needed this information. The responses were similar when I interviewed members of SACA in Qatar. Despite these experiences, I was able to collect meaningful data about Ihya' al-Turath during my fieldwork in Kuwait by means of informal conversations in *diwanis* and other private meetings. It is highly likely that the other charities have similar financial sources. Therefore this case study also serves to indicate how Salafi relief institutions in general gather their funding.

According to my observations, the two main sources of financial support for Ihya' al-Turath are the state and income from the Islamic financial sector. In Kuwait, all charitable organizations registered in the country receive government funding, which covers the salaries of the employees. However, all of my informants who were willing to speak about this issue admitted that Ihya' al-Turath receives further funding from the state budget, due to its loyalty to the royal family. The organization plays an important role in the pursuit of Kuwait's ambitions to extend its international influence. Since it promotes a purist form of Salafism that legitimizes contemporary Arab regimes, the Gulf States share a common interest in supporting it.

Financing purist groups helps to control them and ensures that they focus their activities on purifying religious practices and beliefs. In addition, the active

presence of its charitable organizations significantly enhances Kuwait's influence in the host states. It suffices to mention that during the Lebanese election of 2009, the local branch of Ihya' al-Turath in Tripoli helped to recruit voters for those candidates that the Kuwaiti government regarded as acceptable. It is possible that Ihya' al-Turath plays a similar role elsewhere, especially in Southeast Asian countries and in the Balkans.

Possibly the biggest supporter of Ihya' al-Turath is the Islamic financial sector. Islamic banks and financial institutions have sponsored charities worldwide since their emergence in the second half of the 20th century. Although Islam includes pronouncements on economic matters, modern *shari'a*-based financial institutions were only established in the early 1970s. Until this time, the Western financial system was the only financial system in the Islamic world. Islamic banking emerged for political, rather than economic, reasons. Its main trigger was the Arab defeat by Israel in the 1967 war. After this event, it became obvious that there would not be any political unity in the Middle East, either under the umbrella of Arab nationalism or pan-Islamism.

The (re)-discovery of the Islamic financial system was basically intended to palliate the failure of the abovementioned political project. As Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan argue, "In the face of the impossibility of political union, the transnational dimension of Islamic finance and practices of solidarity stepped in to maintain the utopia of the unity of the Muslim World".⁵³ Therefore it is unsurprising that the Gulf States pursued mutual interstate cooperation in the Islamic world on the economic and social levels, but strictly refused to give up any political sovereignty. The designers of the Islamic financial system wanted to create a "third way" between the capitalist and Marxist economic systems. The main idea behind it was the combination of free private ownership with social sensitivity and responsibility.⁵⁴ The Islamic banks' basic principle is the prohibition of interest (*riba'*). To avoid this, they offer alternative practices for their clients.

⁵³ Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

⁵⁴ Timur Kuran, 'Islamic Economics and the Islamic Subeconomy', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1995, pp. 159-160.

The Islamic financial sector of Kuwait is one of the strongest, and plays its role in sponsoring charities. Three of the biggest banks in the country, the Kuwait Financial House, the Boubyan Bank and the Kuwait International Bank, function according to *shari'a* rules. In 2009, there were 53 Islamic investment companies in Kuwait.⁵⁵ Since most of these institutions form part of global financial networks, they cannot avoid cooperating with banks that use interest rates. To convert the *haram* to *halal*, Islamic financial institutions give the money that they have earned with interest-rate-based transactions to charity. Islamic banks and investment companies also have to pay *zakat*, and a large part of this money also goes to support charitable organizations. Moreover, *shari'a*-based financial institutions usually voluntarily donate huge amounts for relief purposes. Salafis close to Ihya' al-Turath are active in these institutions, or even own parts of them. The most important of these is Khalid Sultan (see Chapter 2), a prominent member of the merchant class and the biggest shareholder in the Sultan Center investment company. Therefore, it is no wonder that charitable organizations gain the greatest part of their budgets from this sector.

The links of Lebanese Salafis to Europe

Besides the connections to the Gulf, the networks of Lebanese Salafis extend to various European countries. Often the central elements of these links are shaykhs who are connected to charity organizations and individual donors in the Arabian Gulf, and practice *da'wa* among the Muslim communities of Europe. Despite the still relatively small number of Salafis in North Lebanon, many of them have settled in Europe and become leading members of the movement there. In the following I will present a detailed account of the life story of a Lebanese Palestinian Shaykh who carries out *da'wa* in Sweden. The case illustrates important aspects of the nature of Salafi networking. It shows how a Lebanese shaykh becomes part of the transnational movement, how he establishes contacts with transnational charities through informal networking

⁵⁵ See: <http://www.gulfbase.com/Site/Interface/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?n=97832> (accessed: 3 March 2010).

and how his interpersonal links enable him to start a career as a preacher in Western Europe. After this ethnographic sketch I also present less detailed examples of two other *da'is* who are active in the Netherlands and Germany.

Shaykh Haitham al-Sa'id between Nahr al-Barid and Sweden

The life story and European activities of Shaykh Haitham al-Sa'id offer a good illustration of how Salafi transnational networking works. In the following I will explain how a young Palestinian from Nahr al-Barid camp became quite an influential transnational *da'i* and how the dynamics of the movement's networking led him to a leading position in Sweden's Salafi community. Shaykh Haitham's case demonstrates that Salafis are exceptionally mobile, even in comparison to the activists of other Islamic movements.

Shaykh Haitham was born in Berlin in the first half of the 1970s, as his father was a guest worker there. The family returned to Lebanon and settled in Nahr al-Barid camp when Haitham was about five or six years old. Like many other Lebanese Salafis, his parents were not practicing Muslims. However, Haitham had two uncles who were deeply religious and with whom he had a very good relationship. Due to their influence he became interested in Islam at quite an early age. As an adolescent he became involved in the vibrant religious life of Tripoli in the 1980s. He visited a different mosque almost every day, where he participated in the *halaqat* of shaykhs from various Islamic movements, such as the Ikhwan, al-Ahbash, Sufis and Salafis. At the age of fifteen Haitham joined the *Qadiriyya* Sufi order where he, as he emphasized, became an exceptionally active member. When the civil war in Lebanon ended and travel became safer, he often went to different parts of Syria to visit Qadiriyya groups and take part in their activities.

As he explained, the "Salafi turn" in his life occurred when he started to take lessons from a "*taqlidi* [traditional]" shaykh who followed an *athari 'aqida* (see Chapter 1). The scholar advised him to stick to the Qur'an and Sunna, since these two sources are not debated and challenged, unlike Sufi practices. After his studies with this shaykh he gradually distanced himself from the Sufis. At this

time Shaykh Ahmad al-Hajj, one of the prominent Salafi scholars of Nahr al-Barid today, returned from Saudi Arabia after finishing his studies and started his *da'wa* among the youth of the camp. Haitham joined the group of young people that evolved around him, left Sufism for good and adopted the Salafi *manhaj*. During his high-school years he studied in Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal's Ma'had al-Hidaya. According to him, his experiences at the college made him decide to dedicate his life to the *da'wa*. Later he graduated from Jinan University in Tripoli in *shari'a* and started to teach in Tripoli's Salafi colleges.

After receiving his university degree in the mid-1990s, he began working in the various *ma'hads*, which subsequently led him to get involved in the transnational Salafi movement. According to his account, the years he spent lecturing in Tripoli were crucial in building up his transnational interpersonal network, which led him to become one of the main authorities among Lebanese Palestinian Salafis and an important transnational *da'i*. In other words, this was the period when he collected social capital that he later converted into religious and economic capital.

As he told me, before the battle in Dinniya in 1999 (see Chapter 3) there was a lively Salafi community in Tripoli. There were many Australian Lebanese and European Muslim students of Arab, Albanian and Bosnian origins who were pursuing their studies in the Salafi religious colleges. According to Shaykh Haitham, he was a well-liked teacher and he forged close relationships with some of his students outside of the classroom as well. As he told me, some pupils from Germany "praised his qualities" in front of the leadership of a Salafi mosque in Berlin. As a result he received an invitation to undertake a *da'wa* tour in the German capital and some other major cities. During his trip, which lasted a couple of weeks, he delivered a series of lectures and issued many *fatwas*. He also had the opportunity to get closer to a number of leading European Salafi scholars, who later proved to be very beneficial to his career.

For Shaykh Haitham, the other source of connections with transnational networks was the milieu around Shaykh Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal. The young *da'i*, described by many as capable and tireless (*du'ub*), quickly became close to the shaykh, who was then the main Salafi leader in Lebanon. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, shaykhs and agents of charity organizations from the Gulf frequently

visited al-Shahhal. On these occasions Shaykh Haitham acquired many contacts in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which he employed to boost his *da'wa* activities. From the second half of the 1990s he frequently traveled to the Gulf to participate in conferences or learn from prominent scholars in their *halaqat*. Unlike many other Lebanese Salafis he could afford such trips even without external financial help, since he owned a number of successful businesses in Nahr al-Barid. During one of these visits he was introduced to the leaders of SACA in Doha and was granted subsidies for spreading Salafism among the inhabitants of the Palestinian refugee camps. As Shaykh Haitham explained, after this he became part of a “powerful” network, which opened doors to more effectively fulfill his mission to spread the “correct form of God’s religion”.

After several years of cooperation with the Qatari charity organization to implement local charity projects, mainly in Nahr al-Barid and the surrounding areas (which are mostly inhabited by Lebanese Sunnis), in 2011 Shaykh Haitham was appointed as one of the heads of a Swedish Islamic center sponsored by SACA. As he told me when I interviewed him in Sweden, he was recommended by the European Salafis whom he had met during his *da'wa* tour in Germany and travels to the Gulf. He thinks that the strongest aspect of his candidature was his educational background in administration and accounting. After graduation in *shari'a* he had acquired a degree in the latter subject as well, and is therefore able to contribute to the financial management of the center, besides providing religious services. By working as the imam and *khatib* of a mosque in the city of Orebro and directing the Islamic center that is attached to the mosque, Shaykh Haitham became the center of a transnational network connecting Scandinavia and Lebanon. Although he spends most of his time in Sweden, he goes back to Lebanon every year for a couple of months to take care of the affairs of his institution, Dar al-Arqam, in Nahr al-Barid.

In the summer of 2012 I spent several days at the Orebro Islamic center interviewing co-workers and ordinary believers, and observing the activities there. The institution is one of five similar establishments built by SACA in Sweden. It was completed in 2007 after buying and renovating a building that was previously used as a church for the Jehovah Witnesses. Today about 5,000 people visit the establishment regularly. Most of them have Somali origins, but

there are some Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Egyptians and Bosnians as well. As members of the mosque's leadership committee told me, the arrival of Shaykh Haitham "brought fresh blood to the Islamic center", which is attempting to "purify the erroneous religious customs" of the local Muslims, customs which "were brought from the Horn of Africa".⁵⁶ In fact, Shaykh Haitham started his new appointment with exceptional activity. As I witnessed, the programs that he launched attract young people in particular, many of them from the educated classes.

One of the first initiatives that Shaykh Haitham launched upon his arrival in Sweden was to start the *da'wa* among university students and young professionals aged 25-35. He gathers these individuals every two weeks. He gives them a religious lesson and then they continue with a small socializing event with some food in the community hall of the mosque. He entrusted a 32-year-old Afghan Tajik computer programmer, Ansare⁵⁷, to try to attract his Muslim friends and acquaintances to these events. As Ansare told me when I interviewed him,⁵⁸ he does not know too much about Islam and he is unable to recognize the different movements and schools of thought. He was only able to learn the very basics of religion from his parents, who belonged to the working class and were "not really practicing". Ansare thinks that many young Muslim professionals of the same age are in the same position; they have a working-class family background with parents who had little to pass to their children about Islam. At the same time they are not fully accepted as Swedish by the majority, despite the fact that they have received a Swedish education and speak the language with native proficiency. For most of them, the only identity they can adopt – as has been revealed by several academic studies on European Islam⁵⁹ – is being Muslim. According to Ansare, many who belong to this segment of the

⁵⁶ Interview with a shaykh from Syria, 26 June 2012.

⁵⁷ "Ansare" is the Swedish spelling; the original Arabic or Tajik transcription would be "Ansari".

⁵⁸ Interview, 25 June 2012.

⁵⁹ Studies on European Muslims which are based on ethnographic data often conclude that second and third-generation European Muslims can accept neither the identity of their parents and grandparents nor that of the host country, where they feel excluded or rejected. Islamic movements, which claim to represent the authentic Islam, usually appeal to them. Martijn De Koning, 'Changing Worldviews and Friendship: An Exploration of the Life Stories of Two Female Salafis in the Netherlands', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*; Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, 'Salafism in France: Ideology, Practices and Contradictions', in *Ibid.*; Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of "Authentic" Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth', in *Ibid.*

society respond positively to Shaykh Haitham's call, since at least "they get some answer [to the question of] who they are".

One of the most interesting aspects of Shaykh Haitham's activism in Orebro is how he works on expanding his *da'wa* to neighboring Scandinavian countries. After his arrival in Sweden he proposed that other members of SACA's network who are based in Norway and Finland should coordinate their activities. In 2011 they launched a yearly Qur'an-memorizing course at the Orebro center in the summer holidays. The four-week-long course was being held while I was there, meaning that I had an opportunity for observation. Most of the participants were aged between 12 and 16 and more than half of them came from Finland, Norway and other, distant parts of Sweden. SACA fully financed their travel expenses and stay in Orebro. During the period they spent in the Islamic center, the students learned a couple of *suras* from the Qur'an by heart. After the memorizing sessions, Shaykh Haitham, along with some other scholars who were affiliated with the institution, gave them Arabic lessons and an introduction to *fiqh*.

The shaykhs who belong to SACA's network frequently visit each other's mosques to give guest lectures and *halaqat*. The Qatari charity also gives financial aid to some of the originally non-Salafi mosques in localities where there is a considerable Muslim population. In exchange, these institutions let Salafi *da'is* visit them and deliver lectures. Shaykh Haitham himself frequently travels to smaller towns in Sweden and elsewhere in Scandinavia. Once he even made a trip to Kiruna, Sweden's northernmost town, well beyond the Arctic Circle, which has a few hundred Muslim inhabitants who are working in heavy industry. According to Shaykh Haitham, these trips are especially beneficial for the *da'wa*. As he told me, there are hardly any trained religious scholars in the smaller towns of Scandinavia. Local mosques even lack basic religious literature. The Salafis usually offer to send some additional copies of the Qur'an, hadith collections and books such as al-Albani's *Sifat Salat al-Nabi*, 'Aid al-Qarni's *La Tahzin* (Don't be Sad!) or 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq's *al-Usul al-'Ilmiyya li-l-Da'wa al-Salafiyya* (The Scientific Roots of the Salafi Da'wa). If they have the capacity, the Salafi centers send some scholars to these places on a fortnightly or monthly basis to give some lessons or lectures or deliver the Friday prayer.

Shaykh Haitham told me that he intends to establish a more intensive relationship between his Lebanese and Scandinavian networks. In his opinion, European Muslims should have a better understanding of the concerns and sufferings of their Middle Eastern brothers. Therefore he plans to bring some of his more enthusiastic students from Sweden to Tripoli, to stay for a while in Nahr al-Barid camp. He thinks that directly experiencing the difficulties of the Palestinians and Sunni Lebanese in the North, and the injustices that Muslims are facing (from the side of Hizbullah and the Lebanese government), would strengthen their feeling of belonging to the *Umma* as an identity that is superior to all other identities. Besides, these young European Muslims would have the chance to improve their Arabic and religious knowledge by learning in Dar al-Arqam, or even participating in one of the summer schools⁶⁰ organized by the institution. Shaykh Haitham plans to start sending his students to Lebanon as soon as the security situation in the country improves.⁶¹

This ethnographic case study on Shaykh Haitham's activism demonstrates the nature of Salafi transnational networking, which I have discussed above. He built his *da'wa* almost entirely on informal, interpersonal networking. Even his cooperation with SACA cannot be described as formal and institutional. Officially, he is not a SACA agent. He receives money from the institution because he belongs to a network of friends and fellow Salafis who maintain close personal links with the leadership of SACA. Salafis like Shaykh Haitham choose this type of networking not only because they feel uneasy about formal institutional structures; informal links, even at the transnational level, provide fewer chances for the various state authorities to crack down on them, because they are more difficult to monitor. A similar kind of transnational networking strategy can be observed in my two other European case studies. In the following, although in less detail, I examine a Dutch and a German *haraki* network, both of which are connected to Lebanon.

⁶⁰ Interview, Orebro, 23 June 2012.

⁶¹ At the time of the interview the country was significantly destabilized by the Syrian civil war. Clashes, kidnaps and murders were occurring regularly in North Lebanon, making it rather unsafe for foreigners.

Lebanese networks in the Netherlands and Germany

The leaders of the Dutch and German networks have followed somewhat different trajectories than Shaykh Haitham, yet they share some similarities as well. Both shaykhs established themselves as a result of having become part of the transnational Salafi movement. Their transnational networking also largely lacks institutional aspects, and rather relies on informal and interpersonal exchanges. Like Shaykh Haitham, both '*alims*, whom I discuss below, connect Europe to their country of origin. The head of the Dutch network spends the major part of his time in the Netherlands, although he also travels extensively within Europe and to the Gulf and Lebanon. The founder of the German network currently resides in Lebanon, where he has established himself as one of the most influential Salafi authorities in the country (see Chapter 4). Finally, both shaykhs have a similar aim in Europe: to urge Muslims to focus on their membership of the *Umma* and not to adopt a European identity, which might drive them away from their religion.

The head of the Dutch network, Abu Adham – who is now in his early fifties – began his life as an Islamic activist in al-Ahbash circles when he was a teenager, as did many other Lebanese Salafis.⁶² After a short period, he left this Sufi-oriented group and became a Salafi, as the pupil of Shaykh Salim al-Shahhal. As he recounted, he was almost the stepson of Shaykh Salim. He spent several years in his house and was treated like the other children there. When he finished his secondary education in Tripoli, Shaykh Salim helped him to gain a scholarship to the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia, where he completed a Master's degree. After graduation, he became the imam of a mosque in the United Arab Emirates. He had to leave the country after several years because, as he explained, he did not belong among the government shaykhs (*mashayikh al-sulta*); in other words, because he was *haraki*. He is convinced that those '*ulama*' who follow the prescriptions of the faith and refuse to bow in front of the rulers are not welcome in Gulf countries. He even accuses the government of the Emirates of supporting Sufis in order to weaken Salafi influence. When

⁶² Abu Adham is not the real name of the shaykh. He would prefer his name not to be mentioned in any publication.

staying in the Emirates, however, the shaykh come into contact with some Dutch Salafis, who invited him to their country to lead their group.

Currently he is one of the most influential Salafi leaders in the Netherlands, with hundreds of committed followers and thousands of sympathizers. Considered a skilled orator, his Friday sermons, which are delivered in his mosque in one of the major Dutch cities, attract a considerable number of believers. In the Netherlands, the shaykh regards preserving the identity of Muslims as his main task. He wants to prevent them from becoming westernized. He urges them not to see themselves as Europeans, but rather stresses their membership of the global Islamic community. At the same time, he urges Muslims in the Netherlands to vote in elections, preferably for Muslim candidates or those who do not contradict the interests of Muslims.

The shaykh is still in contact with Lebanese Salafis from the *haraki* network. He visits Tripoli from time to time, occasionally taking some of his students there to become acquainted with local Salafis. There is, however, no indication of any organized relationship between the Dutch Salafi group and the Lebanese network. The shaykh's visits may well reflect his wish to maintain contacts there as a precaution, just in case he has to leave Europe one day, as happened to Omar Bakri, Salim al-Rafi'i and Ra'id Hulayhil. When I asked him about his activities during his Lebanese visits, he told me that he mostly meets fellow Salafis and updates himself about the current situation in the country. He stressed that it is important for a preacher to have a comparative perspective on what is going on in distant territories of the *Umma*, so as to make his audience aware of the needs and problems of Muslims. According to him, he needs to tell the Dutch Salafis about the threat that Ahl al-Sunna face in Lebanon from the Shi'a and Hizbullah. Being aware of the nature of the Shi'ite conspiracy (see Chapter 8) enables Muslims in the Netherlands to understand why they need to be cautious with Iraqi Shi'ites who have taken refuge in the Netherlands and, in the opinion of the shaykh, are continuously attempting to harm the Sunnis.⁶³

My interviews with the shaykh shed light on how his Lebanese origins influence his thinking and style of activism. On one occasion, we talked

⁶³ At the time of my interview, a disagreement had occurred between the constituency of a Shi'a mosque and the followers of the shaykh.

extensively about how he perceives the importance of coming from the Sham (Greater Syria) and not, for example, from the Gulf. He explained that Lebanon gave him a kind of “global outlook” (*tafkir ‘alami*).⁶⁴ Historically, the region has always been a hub of trade routes and a meeting point between East and West. Migration and long voyages have formed part of the inhabitants’ lives for thousands of years. Nowadays, large migrant communities originating from Lebanon or Syria can be found throughout the world. Families even urge their members to seek their fortune in Western countries, unlike in the Gulf States.

In the Gulf region, according to my own observations, ordinary people influenced by Salafism usually refuse opportunities to spend a certain period of time in a Western country. They often express fears that they might not find an appropriate environment there in which to live life fully according to *shari‘a*. As the shaykh told me, “*‘asabiyya* [here meaning kinship bonds] and racism prevent Salafi *da‘is* from the Gulf from coming to Western Europe. They are nothing without their tribes, often they do not have an independent personality. Although God created us to individually worship Him, they are nothing without their tribe”.⁶⁵ This is why the shaykh thinks that *da‘is* from the Gulf issue thousands of *fatwas* for Western Muslims without ever leaving their home towns. He also regards this as the main reason why most of the Salafi *da‘is* in the West come from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, or have Palestinian origins. As he explained, due to his Lebanese origins, he is able to bridge cultural differences with his mostly Moroccan constituency. “Moroccans have their own *‘asabiyya*, which is different from that of the Middle East. You have to find a way to talk to them – this is what somebody from the Gulf is unable to understand”.⁶⁶

According to the shaykh, another distinguishing feature of Shami Salafis is their mostly different understanding of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*. He argued that for many Salafis in the Gulf, this doctrine not only means an obligation to hate that

⁶⁴ Interview with a Dutch Salafi Shaykh with Syrio-Lebanese origins, The Hague, 6 July 2011.

⁶⁵ Ibid. It would be interesting to make a comparison between the dynamics of kinship connectivity in Lebanon and the Gulf. Suad Joseph argues that Lebanese society is neither corporatist (like that of the Gulf Countries) nor individualistic, but rather the mix of the two. Since individual autonomy is as determining in the life of an individual as patriarchy or kinship, this might make it easier to live a life in a different location from that of the extended family. Suad Joseph, ‘Connectivity and Patriarchy among Urban Working-Class Arab Families in Lebanon’, *Ethos*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1993.

⁶⁶ Interview with the Dutch Salafi Shaykh, The Hague, 6 July 2011.

which is un-Islamic in religion, but also to avoid and hate all non-Muslims and heretics. Even one of the greatest Salafi authorities, 'Abd al-'Aziz bin Baz, warned in many of his lectures against friendship with or positive feelings towards unbelievers.⁶⁷ The Dutch-Lebanese shaykh, however, thinks that *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* means only the hatred of certain beliefs and actions of those who are not Muslims or who do not practice Islam properly, and this hatred should not be extended to their persons. "Muslim men are allowed to take Christian or Jewish wives. They marry them because they are affected by their beauty or thinking. So how could they hate them at the same time?"⁶⁸ The shaykh also thinks that Muslims can befriend non-Muslims, because in this way, they may be a positive influence on them.

I discovered similar relationships in Berlin between the al-Nur mosque in Kreuzberg and Lebanese *haraki* networks. The founder of the local *haraki* Salafi group, Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, had followed a similar trajectory to that of the aforementioned scholar in the Netherlands. Like him, Shaykh Salim also became a Salafi in Salim al-Shahhal's group, and then graduated from the Islamic University of Medina. As he had been part of the IUM in the early 1980s, which had ruled Tripoli in 1984-1985 and was then defeated by the Syrian army, he had to leave Lebanon. Due to his contacts in the Gulf, he was able to migrate to Germany and acquire refugee status there. Building on more than a decade of proselytization, he founded one of the most important Salafi communities in the country. Shaykh Salim, however, subsequently had to return to Lebanon, as the German authorities withdrew his residence permit.⁶⁹ One of his pupils, a Lebanese Palestinian, became his successor.

While the German authorities regard the mosque as a source of radicalism, during my visit there in March 2010, I found it to be a relatively open environment. The mosque serves as a forum for the local Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian communities. While the management is Salafi, they also allow other groups to practice *da'wa*. I met preachers from the Tabligh movement there, who were on *khuruj* (a proselytizing tour) and were staying in the mosque for a few days. Sometimes the Salafi management even invited a rabbi to participate in a

⁶⁷ See, for example: <http://www.ahlalhddeeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=88912>

⁶⁸ Interview with the Dutch shaykh, 6 July 2011.

⁶⁹ Al-Safir newspaper, 17 May 2005.

religious debate. The preachers of the mosque also urge their followers to be politically active. They usually support candidates (not only Muslims) based on the *maslaha* (what is beneficial for the community, the common good). The Palestinian shaykh told me that in the local elections, he had given assistance to the campaign of a candidate who had promised a separate graveyard for Muslims.

Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i's person was idolized after his departure, and his books are sold in the mosque's bookstore. If local Salafis have a religious problem, they still seek advice from Shaykh Salim. Ordinary believers can call him on his mobile phone if they are seeking an answer to a question related to *shari'a*. Active followers of the mosque have kept in regular contact with him. Although the shaykh is forbidden to enter Germany, many of the committed Salafis who are affiliated to al-Nur mosque frequently visit Lebanon. They usually spend one or two weeks in Tripoli, during which they visit Shaykh Salim's *durus* and socialize with his Lebanese followers.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the nature and structure of the transnational networks of Lebanese Salafis. I argued that transnational connections have deep roots in Islamic history, and that Salafi networks are integral parts of the dense webs that connect the different parts of Dar al-Islam.

I explained how transnational networks constitute channels for the flow of material resources, symbols and ideas. I analyzed the types and functions of the links to the Arabian Peninsula and how they facilitate the acquisition of religious and social capital.

I shed light on the role of the institutional dimension of the Salafi transnational networks, which are manifest in the charity organizations in the Gulf. I explained that despite the fact that Ihya' al-Turath and SACA are formal organizations, informal channels play a crucial role in gaining funds from them.

In the last section I used the example of the Lebanese networks in Europe to explain how informal social networks and contacts with the Gulf charities facilitate the transnational expansion of the *da'wa*.

Chapter 8

Recruitment

In this chapter I analyze the methods and strategies that are used by Salafis in North Lebanon to attract followers. First I should clarify what “recruitment” means regarding the movement. In the previous chapters, I showed that Salafism differs in many ways from the mainstream movements that social movement theorists usually examine. For the former, recruitment does not mean attracting registered members, since the concept of membership does not exist in Salafism (see Chapter 6). It is more about convincing people to adopt their worldview and lifestyle. Many people who adopt Salafi practices or elements of Salafi discourse do not claim to be Salafi, but in most cases the researcher should regard them as belonging to the movement due to their worldview and activities.¹ In the following I discuss how the minds of these people have been changed by encountering the Salafi *da'wa*.

Framing and the Salafi ideology's appeal to young people are the main factors that enable successful recruitment for the movement. The masses of ordinary believers are usually attracted by the Salafis' successful framing activities. Salafis provide highly plausible explanations of the nature of the problems faced by Lebanese Sunnis, and offer appealing and seemingly simple solutions. The success of Salafi framing is boosted by the articulators' (i.e. the Salafi shaykhs') high degree of religious authority and ability to provide social services and access to patronage (explained in Chapter 5). The frustration and insecurity experienced by young people in North Lebanon have prepared fertile ground for Salafis to convince these individuals to transform their lives in accordance with Salafi norms. In the second half of the chapter I explain how,

¹ I explained this in Chapter 5 when I analyzed collective identity in Salafism. My starting point is Birgit Meyer's concept of aesthetic formations. I argue that the more individuals share sensory experiences, the more they develop a sense of belonging to each other. See: Chapter 5 and Meyer, 'From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations', pp. 6-11.

due to the successful networking and *da'wa* strategies, the number of the active adherents is also growing rapidly.

Recruitment through framing

According to my interviews conducted in the field with individuals who are involved in Salafism at different levels, many people first became sympathizers with the movement because they accepted the Salafi interpretation of the world around them.² The discourse that they hear during the Friday sermon, and that is repeated during *halaqat* or informal conversations, resonates with their own experiences and helps them to construct an understanding of their external environment. One aspect of SMT, framing, is especially useful for studying and explaining this process. The term is derived from the “frames” that Goffman calls the “schemata of interpretation”, which “enable users to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms”.³ In other words, frames are prisms through which past and present events, and the logic of “the world out there”, can be interpreted.

Social movement theorists have pointed out that frames have more than a mere interpretative function, as discussed in Goffman’s essay. Often they not only provide answers to the question “what is going on here?”, but they are also “decidedly more agentic and contentious in the sense of calling for action that problematizes and challenges existing authoritative views and framings of reality”.⁴ These are commonly called “collective action frames” and intend to “mobilize potential adherents and constituents, garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists”.⁵ Successful attempts by movement actors to make others accept their frame are referred to as “frame resonance”, which is of crucial importance in the recruitment processes of social movements. In the

² Interviews and field observations between September 2009 and May 2012.

³ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974), p. 21.

⁴ David A. Snow, ‘Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields’, In Snow et al., *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, p. 385.

⁵ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, ‘Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization’, *International Social Movement Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1988, p. 198.

following, after analyzing the structure of the Salafi frames, I explain why are they successful in the current historical situation and why they resonate with large parts of the Sunni audience in North Lebanon.

The relations between ideology and framing can be different in the case of different social movements. While the framing strategy of a given social movement is not necessarily derived from ideology,⁶ in the case of Salafi activists, ideology plays a central role in elaborating their frames. The main reason is that the aim of Salafism as a movement is to make others accept their ideology as the only truth.

As I mentioned in Chapters 1 and 5, one of the main elements of Salafi ideology is conceptualizing the world as a place of struggle between good and evil, or truth and falsehood (*sira' bayn al-haqq wa-l-batil*). The good side is manifested in Islam. Those who follow the right '*aqida* and *manhaj* belong to this camp. Any deviation from this forms part of the realm of *batil* (or *kufr* or *taghut*). According to the Salafi concept, correct deeds (*sahhat al-a'mal*) can be derived only from the right '*aqida*. Deviant belief can only result in deviant acts.⁷ The Muslims' task in this world is to correct their own and others' belief, so as to erase wrongful acts and create an ideal life-world for the whole of humankind.⁸ In this Manichean struggle, there is no mid-way. Salafis often refer to the 32nd *ayah* in *Surat Yunus*: "That is God, your Lord, the Truth. Apart from the Truth, what is there except error?"⁹ On the good side there is *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a* and on the bad side is *Ahl al-Batil* (the community of wrongfulness), which consists of all those who deviate from right belief. In Salafi writings, both purist and *haraki*, it is often repeated that these camps are engaged in a continuous struggle against each other. As Salman al-'Awda puts it in one of his articles, in all historical eras, "the enemies of the prophets, the enemies of Islam help each other [in everything] that the enmity [towards Islam] requires. There might be disagreements and conflicts between them, but when they face Islam they

⁶ Snow, 'Framing processes', pp. 396-400.

⁷ <http://www.saa'id.net/Doat/almuwahid/003.htm> (accessed: 10 January 2013).

⁸ Most of the Salafis I interviewed gave this answer to the question, what is the aim of the *da'wa*? For example: interview with Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, Kuwait, 11 March 2012.

⁹ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, p. 131.

become united.”¹⁰ When Salafis try to give an explanation of what has been happening in this world, past and present, they use their Manichean concept to frame various events.

The Friday sermon is the most common way for Lebanese Salafis to transmit their message to the masses. Unquestionably, the most popular preachers in the city of Tripoli, but probably in the whole North are Salafis from the *haraki* faction. Purist preachers nowadays do not attract mass audiences, since they have refused to support the revolutions, labeling them illegitimate (*ghayr shara'i*). Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i in the Taqwa mosque on the border between the city center and the al-Tabbana district, and Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri in the Hamza mosque of al-Qubba, attract thousands of people every Friday. In addition, often hundreds gather to listen to the *khutba* of other, less renowned Salafi shaykhs all over the city. The most common topics of discussion in the past few years have been the role of Hizbullah, the social and economic deprivation of the Sunnis and the Arab revolutions. The Salafi worldview and universe of discourse provide the toolkit to frame these topics and the related events.

Diagnostic framing

Social movement theorists classify collective action frames according to “core framing tasks”. These are “diagnostic framing”, “prognostic framing” and “motivational framing”.¹¹ Diagnostic framing aims to identify the problem and its sources, and the culpable agents.¹² In prognostic framing, the frame articulators propose a solution to the problem detected in diagnostic framing.¹³ Motivational framing “provides a ‘call to arms’ or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action”.¹⁴ As theorists argue, for successful mobilization these three

¹⁰ Salman al-'Awda, 'al-Sira' Bayn al-Haqq wa-l-Batil', <http://www.saaaid.net/alsafinh/12.htm> (accessed: January 3, 2013).

¹¹ Benford and Snow, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements', p. 615.

¹² Ibid., pp. 615-616.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 616-617.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 617.

core tasks usually have to be contained in a movement's framing.¹⁵ In the following I will analyze the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing of Lebanese Salafis, based on my fieldwork observations and recorded sermons.

In the diagnostic framing of Salafis, every malaise that Lebanese Muslims are facing has been caused by the enemies of Islam, who are trying to weaken and crush the religion. Interestingly, during the four years I have been actively observing Lebanese Salafi discourse, the logic of their framing has not changed. Events in 2008-2009 were explained through a similar prism to that which was used to explain the events and developments in 2012.

1. Anti-Shi'a framing: Theorists of social movements have analyzed the relationship between framing and political opportunities.¹⁶ Changes in the external context affect the frame resonance and provide new grounds for movement actors to create collective action frames. As I explained in Chapter 3, the emerging Sunni-Shi'i tensions in Lebanon, especially after the Hariri murder in 2005 and the subsequent political transformations, provided Salafis with a significant political opportunity. The activists of the movement were able to use this change in the external context to their own advantage due to successful framing of the events.

Anti-Shi'ism is a cornerstone of Salafi ideology and appears in the vast majority of the *khutbas*. As discussed in Chapter 5, Salafis depict the "ideal Muslim" who follows every aspect of their understanding of Islam as the manifestation of purity. The Shi'a, who in the Salafi view corrupt the perfect belief system, represent "pollution [*najas*] in the body of the *umma*".¹⁷ The hostility towards the Shi'a has been present in the *Athari*¹⁸ school since its early days. Ibn Hanbal was the first to call the members of the sect *rafida* (sing. *rafidi*).¹⁹ The term means "rejectionists" and refers to the Shi'ite denial of the

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 615.

¹⁶ Snow, 'Framing processes', pp. 401-404.

¹⁷ This view was expressed to me during numerous interviews and conversations with Salafis in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East between 2009 and 2012.

¹⁸ See my discussion of the Athari school of thought in Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Guido Steinberg, 'Jihadi Salafism and the Shi'is: Remarks About the Intellectual Roots of anti-Shi'ism', in Meier, *Global Salafism*, p. 133.

kind of approach originates from the Syrian Muslim Brothers at the beginning of the 1980s, who saw the alliance between the Assad regime and Khomeini's Iran as part of the Shi'ites' continuous attempts throughout the Islamic history to dominate the Middle East and oppress Sunnis.²⁶ *Haraki* Salafis worldwide adopted this frame to explain the role of the other major Muslim sect in the contemporary Islamic world. It is also a chief element in Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri's and Salim al-Rafi's rhetoric. In one of his *khutbas*, the former argues that the Shi'ite sect is the direct result of the *taghut's* eternal attempt to destroy the *haqq*:

After the Prophet extended his rule over the whole of the Arabian Peninsula by conquering Mecca and starting the wars with the Byzantines with the raid of Tabuk [*Ghazwat Tabuk*],²⁷ and after Abu Bakr eliminated the *Ridda*,²⁸ the Muslims began with [the latter's] leadership to conquer Persia and the Byzantine Empire. This continued under the rule of 'Umar bin al-Khattab and 'Uthman bin al-'Affan until the Muslim armies arrived at the borders of China in the East and the [western] coasts of North Africa in the West. These [events] shook the world and woke the resentment of [those who hate Islam]. The leaders of the Persians and the Greeks gathered to find a way to face this great Islamic expansion. They formed a secret organization to hit Islam from inside ... by pretending [by a group of people] to convert and spread the division and internal strife among Muslims. 'Abdullah bin Saba', a Yemeni Jew, was given this dangerous diplomatic [sic!] task. He pretended to accept Islam with a group of fellow Jews to mobilize Muslims against their Caliph in the capital city of the Islamic Empire.²⁹

²⁶ Steinberg, 'Jihadi Salafism and the Shi'is', pp. 116-121.

²⁷ According to the Islamic tradition, in 630 Prophet Muhammad led a campaign against the Byzantines stationed in Tabuk, North Arabia. Although the Muslim army did not make contact with the enemy, some local chiefs submitted to them. See: 'Tabuk', in Bossworth, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

²⁸ Here the *Ridda* means a series of battles between the early Muslims and the tribes that terminated their allegiance to the Islamic state in Medina or refused to pay taxes during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (632-634). In Islamic historiography these tribes left Islam, and this is why they had to be fought. See: 'al-Ridda', in Bossworth, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

²⁹ Khutba of Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri, Hamza Mosque, Qubba district, Tripoli, 11 February 2011.

According to Shaykh Zakariyya, 'Abdullah bin Saba's activity led to several uprisings in different parts of the Caliphate, and he was subsequently behind the murder of the Caliph 'Uthman. Later, after the death of the Caliph 'Ali (who followed 'Uthman), bin Saba' and his followers started to mix the doctrines of Islam with old Zoroastrian beliefs and invented Shi'ism by associating divine attributes with 'Ali and his descendants, the twelve Imams. The mission of the "Shi'ite religion" – as many of the Salafi preachers refer to it, denying that the sect is part of Islam – is to undermine and destroy Islam. Zakariyya al-Masri and other preachers often present the example of the Fatimid Caliphate³⁰ and the Safavid Empire³¹ as the attempt of the "*Majus*" (reference to Zoroastrians) to destroy Sunnism. Similarly, they accuse the Shi'ites of allying with the Crusaders and cooperating with the Mongols to conquer Baghdad and abolish the Abbasid Caliphate.³²

The Salafi shaykhs warn that the series of Shi'ite conspiracies has been continuing in the 20th and 21st centuries. In their reading of the events, since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has been trying to dominate the Middle East. First the Iranians tried to achieve this by spreading their ideology by direct military means, but they failed to do so, because "Iraq with the leadership of Saddam Hussein made their aspirations fail and resisted them with the support of the Gulf countries".³³ After that, Iran began to mobilize the Shi'ite minorities throughout the Islamic world to spread the revolution. They incited the Shi'ite communities in Saudi Arabia and Iraq to revolt. Salafis believe that the Iranian leadership has a secret alliance with the US. Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri often claims that the regime in Tehran helped the Americans to conquer Afghanistan and Iraq by supporting local Shi'ite minorities against the Taliban, "that held the ideology of unifying Muslims under the banner of the Caliphate", and Saddam

³⁰ Zakariyya al-Masri, *Dawr al-Imbaraturiyya al-Shi'iyya al-Shuyu'iyya* (Tarabulus: Markaz Hamza, 2007), pp. 37-38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86.

³³ Salafis usually argue that the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war was provoked by the latter, and depict Saddam Hussein as a hero who stopped Iran with the help of the Gulf monarchies, which financed his military. See, for example: Al-Masri, *Dawr al-Imbaraturiyya*, p. 35.

Hussein, who “turned from nationalist to Islamist at the last period of his rule”.³⁴ According to Salafi preachers, the other ally of Iran is *al-‘Almaniyya al-Sharqiyya* (Eastern Secularism), namely China and Russia, which also intend to weaken Islam in order to subjugate their own minorities and achieve control over the Middle East’s resources. Salafis also think that the Shi’ites have been in a secret alliance with the Jews since the dawn of Islamic history, and that they nowadays cooperate with Israel. With all of this, their implication is that the Shi’ites are prepared to ally with non-Muslim powers, and even atheists and Communists, simply to destroy the Sunnis.

Salafi preachers commonly frame contemporary events in Lebanon as part of this global Shi’a conspiracy against Islam. Most of them have adopted Zakariyya al-Masri’s reading of the country’s history since the civil war.³⁵ According to the shaykh, Iran intends to convert the whole country to Shi’ism. In order to realize this, Tehran has allied with the *Nusayriyya*³⁶ (the Syrian regime dominated by the Alawites).³⁷ According to Shaykh Zakariyya, the Iranians began to execute their plan during the civil war, from the beginning of the 1980s onwards. They established Hizbullah, which Shaykh Zakariyya regards as the Lebanese branch of the Revolutionary Guard and which, since that time, has constantly been trying to rid the country of its Sunni population. They initially supported the Shi’ite AMAL militia in its military campaign against the Palestinians in the second half of the 1980s (the event known as *Harb al-Mukhayyamah* or “the war of the camps”).³⁸ Their plan was “to weaken *Ahl al-*

³⁴ Interview with Sheikh Zakariyya al-Masri, Tripoli, 10 November 2009.

³⁵ Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri, probably the most notorious anti-Shi’a cleric in Tripoli, is regarded as “the authority [*al-marja’iyya*]” in the “scientific inquiry” about the “truth about the Shi’ites”. Many local Salafi shaykhs have studied at his Islamic center and *halaqat* or read his books.

³⁶ Nusayriyya is a reference to the Alawite sect. The term is mostly used by Sunnis and has a pejorative meaning.

³⁷ The Alawites are part of Shi’ite Islam and constitute the majority of the population on the Syrian coast. They have dominated Syrian political life since the Assad clan, an Alawite family, came to power in 1970. See: Patrick Seal, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁸ The war in the camp lasted between 1985 and 1989. After Israel had withdrawn from most parts of Lebanon in 1985, the PLO started to gain a foothold again in South Lebanon. Hafiz al-Asad, in order to boost his own dominance in the country and avoid a possible second Israeli invasion, helped the secular Shi’ite AMAL militia to sweep the PLO factions out of Beirut, Sidon and the Southern regions. Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon*, pp. 195-197.

Sunna by ridding them of their military power”,³⁹ represented by the Palestinian factions.

In the common Salafi rhetoric, Tripoli is the stronghold of *Ahl al-Sunna* in Lebanon, and the Shi'ites realized that it should be broken before they would be able to take over the country. Iran therefore assisted Syria in wresting the city in 1985 from the IUM. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the IUM was formed by different local Islamic movements that were controlling different quarters of Tripoli. Their intention was to establish an Islamic emirate in North Lebanon. According to the Salafis, Tehran prevented the IUM from introducing Islamic rule by buying the leader of the movement, Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban, by promising him the presidency of an Islamic state in Lebanon that was to follow the template of Iran. However, when the Syrian army took over the city, none of the Ayatollahs' promises came true. Instead Islamists and Salafis had to face long persecution by the agents of the Ba'th regime and Hizbullah. The “sincere” members of Harakat al-Tawhid were either arrested or left the movement. The rest sided with the Syrians and the Shi'ite militia. Since then, the Alawites of *Jabal Muhsin* who, according to the Salafis, helped Assad's army to slaughter the Sunnis upon the takeover of the city, and the IUM have been the main agents of Shi'a influence in Tripoli.⁴⁰

When Salafi preachers discuss contemporary events in Lebanon that involve Hizbullah or are related to the Shi'a in other ways, they frame them using the conspiracy theory explained above. Hizbullah is regarded as the Trojan horse and main agent of the “Persian conquest”. In one of his sermons, Zakariyya al-Masri states that Israeli military exercises between 31 May and 4 June 2009 were organized by the Jewish state to support “their ally” Hizbullah in the parliamentary elections of 9 June. The aim was “to help the party in an indirect way to gain more votes” by inciting fear in Lebanon of the Israeli threat. Hizbullah has an interest in maintaining the tensions with the Jewish state in order to portray itself as a pioneer of the resistance, and thereby gain the legitimacy to keep its weapons and increase its political influence. The ultimate

³⁹ Interview with Sheikh Zakariyya al-Masri, 10 November 2009.

⁴⁰ Series of interviews with Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri and other preachers between 2009 and 2012.

aim of this “Zoroastrian-Zionist coalition” is to dominate Lebanon and eliminate the Sunni population by displacing them or converting them to Shi’ism.⁴¹

In one of his *khutbas* Shaykh ‘Imad Jasim, one of the leading preachers in the Wadi Khalid region in ‘Akkar, discussed some remarks made by the Druze politician Wi’am Wahhab, one of the allies of Hizbullah. Wahhab, while criticizing the social norms in Saudi Arabia, called the women in the kingdom “black garbage bags” (referring to their dress).⁴² Shaykh ‘Imad argues that the politician’s aim was to attack the honor of the pious Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. After that, he turns his attention toward those who are behind him with “their dirty media empire and money”. The preacher’s conclusion is that Hizbullah supports Wahhab and similar figures in order to create *fitna* in the country. By using the strategy of “divide and rule”, the party can integrate Lebanon into the future Shi’ite Empire.⁴³

2. *Sunnis as victims*: Depicting Lebanese Sunnis as a disenfranchised population because of their *‘aqida* is another topic that is frequently discussed by Salafi preachers. It is also related to the anti-Shi’a frame. In the rhetoric of the shaykhs, the oppression of *Ahl al-Sunna* fits into the framework of the cosmic fight between good and evil. The forces of the latter are today made up of the Shi’a, Zionism, the United States, China and Russia.⁴⁴ Their aim is to prevent the Sunnis from re-establishing the Islamic Empire “from Indonesia to Andalusia”⁴⁵ and to create a Shi’ite state that extends from Yemen through Iran to Lebanon. Together with Israel, this state would secure the control of the three great powers (the USA, China and Russia) over the resources of the Middle East. To realize this plan, Sunnis first have to be oppressed politically, economically and mentally. Salafi shaykhs frame the current miserable socioeconomic situation in terms of this conspiracy theory.

⁴¹ Sermon of Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri, Hamza Mosque, Tripoli, 5 June 2009.

⁴² <http://news.nawaret.com/?p=175920> (accessed: 7 January 2013).

⁴³ *Khutba* of Shaykh ‘Imad Jasim, Wadi Khalid, 18 March 2011.

⁴⁴ See, for example: *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi’i, Taqwa Mosque, Tripoli, 10 February 2012.

⁴⁵ See, for example: *Khutba* of Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri, Hamza Mosque, Tripoli, 21 October 2005.

In many of his *khutbas*, Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i emphasizes that "Ahl al-Sunna in Lebanon are banned from development."⁴⁶ According to him, the conspirators against Islam "determined the Sunnis in Tripoli would live in poverty". Despite the "vast resources" of the northern region, masses of young people are unemployed, the city lacks basic infrastructure and "drug abuse is omnipresent". In his sermon, Shaykh Salim mentions the case of the airport in Tripoli, which was closed in the 1990s. He stated that a foreign company wanted to renovate and reopen the airport at its own expense. This would provide 6,000 jobs for the inhabitants of Tripoli. The offer was refused, however, because "Hizbullah forbade its acceptance".⁴⁷

The shaykh's conclusion as to why the city is deprived, economically and socially, is that "it is inhabited by committed young men [*shabab multazimin*]. And they [the enemies of Islam] want to depict religious commitment [in the case of Sunnis] as a phenomenon coming together with poverty and chaos". According to him, the following case proves this:

Recently I was informed by someone about a security meeting between Lebanese state officials. They were inquiring about the alarming situation in the North. I thought they discussed the poverty, the spread of drugs or the lack of order. However [the person who informed him about the event] told me, No! No! But they were inquiring about the fact that – and now listen to me well – they were inquiring because the number of the young men who visit the mosques has dramatically increased and they want to devise a plan to strike them!

To prove their argument, Salafi shaykhs often highlight the fact that the situation in other countries is similar. They point out that Sunnis are oppressed and often murdered in Iraq and Iran; they lack even the basic right to practice their religion. According to a common Salafi claim, Sunnis are even forbidden to have a mosque in Iran.

⁴⁶ *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, Taqwa Mosque, Tripoli, 11 May 2012 or 21 December 2012.

⁴⁷ *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, Taqwa Mosque, Tripoli, 11 May 2012.

3. *The Arab Spring and the Syrian revolution*: As I have already explained, the Arab revolutions provided Salafis in Lebanon with another political opportunity to increase their influence among the Sunni community of the North. Successful framing, just as in the case of the anti-Shi'a topic, was crucial in this process.

Lebanese *haraki* Salafis see the revolutions in general through a similar lens to that of their counterparts in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Middle East. In their rhetoric they emphasize the “Islamic nature” of the uprisings and argue that it is a new phase in the battle between *iyman* and *kufr*. According to them, the Sunni masses want to get rid of their oppressors, who are the servants of the *taghut* and implement the orders of Western powers to spread secularism (*'almaniyya*), immoral behavior (*fahsh*) and adultery (*zina'*) among the populations of their countries. In their revolution, however, *Ahl al-Sunna* have to face the opposition of the *taghut* manifested by the secular powers, such as the West, Russia and China, and the Shi'a and its stronghold, Iran. As a result, the theories of Shi'ite conspiracy and the Sunnis as victims are inherent parts of the framing of the Arab Spring by Salafis.

In a series of *khutbas*, Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i frames the revolutions as part of one of the last battles between good and evil before the end of the world. He believes that the contemporary events in the Middle East foretell the coming of the age of justice and righteousness and mark the imminent appearance of the (Sunni) *Mahdi*.⁴⁸ In his sermons he refers to the three traditions that prove this. The first one concerns the types of leadership of the *Umma*:

The Prophetic period among you will be as God wants it to be, then He will end it when he wishes to. Then a Caliphate governing according to the method of the Prophethood [*khilafa 'ala manhaj al-Nubuwwa*] will follow, and it will be as God wants it to be, then He will end it when he wishes to. Then there will be a hereditary kingdom [*milk 'add*], and it will be as God wants it to be, then He will end it when he wishes to. Then there will be a tyrannical kingdom [*milk jabri*], and it will be as God wants it to be, then

⁴⁸ According to widespread Sunni belief, which is adopted by Salafis, the *Mahdi* will appear at the time when Jesus will return to the Earth. The former will help the latter to kill the Antichrist (*al-Dajjal*) and then they will rule the world together and re-establish justice. 'al-Mahdi'. Bossworth, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

He will end it when he wishes to. Then there will be a Caliphate governing according to the method of the Prophethood.

According to the interpretation of Shaykh Salim, the “hereditary kingdom” means the historical Caliphate that ruled from the Umayyad dynasty until the abolition of the Ottoman state. The “tyrannical kingdom” signifies the contemporary Arab regimes, which are falling one by one due to the uprisings.⁴⁹ This *hadith*, according to him, is supported by another one, which foretells the “siege of Iraq” and the “siege of Syria [*al-Sham*]” before the emergence of a caliph. According to the preacher, the first refers to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), because the *hadith* tells us that the siege will be carried out by the Persians (*'ajam*). The second is the ongoing Syrian conflict (at the time of writing in January 2013).

The third *hadith* concerns the appearance of the *Mahdi*. According to this *hadith*, there will be injustice (*zulm*) on Earth to an extent that has not been experienced before. After that, God will send someone from the family of the Prophet who will spread justice on Earth.⁵⁰ Shaykh Salim believes that these three *ahadith* indicate that after the Arab Spring, the Caliphate will re-emerge and the Caliph will be the *Mahdi* himself.⁵¹

In the shaykh’s rhetoric, the forces of *taghut* are trying to prevent the re-establishment of the “Righteous Caliphate [*khilafa rashida*].”⁵² His frame is similar to that used by Shaykh Zakariyya al-Masri. According to him, there are two sides in the battle. The first is the “Camp of Belief [*mu'askar al-iyman*]” where Muslims fight to return to their might (*istirja' al-'izza*). On the other side are all the forces of *kufir* allied to crush the believers and prevent them from establishing an Islamic empire. This camp consists of the West, China, Russia and the *batiniyyun* (a polemical reference to the Shi'ites).⁵³ The first two powers forbid military intervention in Syria and try to prolong Assad’s rule. Regarding Russia, Shaykh Salim asks why it is supporting the oppressors when Moscow always used to pose as a supporter of the Arabs against the oppressors. His

⁴⁹ *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, 13 April 2012.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* and *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, 20 April 2012.

⁵² See *khutba*.

⁵³ *Khutba* of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, 10 February 2012.

answer is that if Islam were to become strong in the Middle East, it would spread again in Central Asia and endanger Russia as a Christian empire. This is why all of these powers support the Shi'ite plan to dominate the region, and not the Caliphate.⁵⁴ In another *khutba* he mentions that the Syrian revolution is especially important for Lebanese Sunnis, because the Syrian Sunni community, which constitutes the majority of the country, is their “natural extension”. If the Assad regime were to fall, Lebanese Sunnis would cease to be only one of the communities in the country, but would reunite with the *Umma*.⁵⁵

Prognostic and motivational framing

Prognostic framing offers possible solutions for the problems identified in diagnostic framing, while motivational framing calls for action to realize what is suggested in prognostic framing.⁵⁶ Lebanese *haraki* Salafis generally urge their constituency to implement the rulings of Islam (according to their understanding) and emphasize the importance of solidarity with fellow Sunnis. This serves as the basis of their solution to the “Shi'a problem”, the perceived disenfranchisement of their community, or what to do to support the revolutions. As I show in the next section, in which I deal with frame resonance, this approach is attractive to Salafi constituency, since it does not require a high level of investment but does offer significant rewards.

In one of his sermons, Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i refers to a *hadith*: “When a servant of God [*abd*] commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents his heart will be cleansed.” The preacher explains that the more disobedient (*ma'siya*) the Muslim individual, the blacker his heart becomes. The darker someone's heart is, the more difficult it is for him to distinguish between good and bad, and eventually he falls into the trap of evil. According to his argument, the decadent morality of contemporary Muslims enabled the forces of *taghut* to overwhelm *Ahl al-Sunna*, because they were unable to make the right

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Khutba of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, 24 February 2012.

⁵⁶ See: Benford and Snow, 'Framing Processes', pp. 616-617.

decision. However, if they obey the *shari'a*, their hearts will be cleansed and God will show them the difference between right and wrong. Here he refers to the following *ayah*: “Believers, if you remain mindful of God, He will give you a criterion [*furqan*, to tell right from wrong] and wipe out your bad deeds, and forgive you: God’s favour is great indeed.”⁵⁷ This argument might be similar to that of the purists. However, according to the preacher, Sunnis with dark heart enable “Iran and its allies in Syria and Lebanon to commit massacres in Syria”. If those Muslims knew the truth they would not help the Shi'a to oppress the revolution.⁵⁸

In a different *khutba*, Shaykh Salim argues that success follows if people obey the rules of Islam “beyond prayer and fasting”. He gives the example of the *shura* or consultative council. First, he refers to the *aya*, which describes the believers as those who “respond to their Lord; keep up the prayer; conduct their affairs by mutual consultation [*shura*]”.⁵⁹ According to him, this, along with a range of other citations from the Qur'an and the Hadith, proves that *shura* is obligatory when Muslims take major decisions. He gave the example of the consultative council that he organizes every week in the Taqwa mosque (see Chapter 6), which, according to him, has been proven to be effective. In January 2012 the Lebanese authorities arrested one of the famous Salafi shaykhs in Tripoli, 'Abdullah Husayn, because of his *fatwa* that forbids Muslims to enter the Lebanese army.⁶⁰ The participants of the *shura* decided to call for demonstrations until the shaykh was freed. Since 'Abdullah Husayn is very popular even among the *harakis*, despite his purist views, thousands of people responded and paralyzed the city by blocking the major roads. After a few days the shaykh was released. According to Shaykh Salim’s reasoning, they were successful because they had followed the instructions of the *shari'a*.

Shaykh Mahir, a young but popular 'alim from the Qubba district, pointed out that “the oppression of *Ahl al-Sunna* by the Shi'a will end if they follow the

⁵⁷ Surat al-Anfal 29, Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, p. 112.

⁵⁸ Khutba of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, 13 April 2012.

⁵⁹ Surat al-Shura 38, Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, p. 314.

⁶⁰ Shaykh 'Abdullah Husayn is an interesting purist. He forbade entering the army because according to him, there is no *wali amr* in Lebanon who can lead a Muslim army, since the president is Christian. Furthermore, the majority of the officers are Maronites and Shi'ites. According to the *shari'a*, Muslim soldiers cannot obey the commands of non-Muslims.

right *'aqida*." During his *mau'iza* (lecture)⁶¹ after the afternoon prayer in one of the city quarter's mosques, he argued that Hizbullah was able to grow strong in Lebanon due to the support and assistance of Sunni Muslims:

These persons [the Sunnis] acted out of ignorance [*jahl*]. If they were firm in their *'aqida* they would know that [the members of Hizbullah] are heretics and *mushriks* and would not agree to cooperate with them under the banner of "Islamic unity" ... Islamic movements, the Muslim Brothers among them, when Khomeini abolished the rule of the shah they offered *bay'a*⁶² to him. If they knew their own *'aqida* they would never do this, helping the *rafida* to implement their conspiracy.⁶³

It is worth noting that Salafi framing sharply differs from that of other Islamic movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter is far from being a purely messianistic or utopian movement. Although its ideology contains such elements, overall the Ikhwan tends to be rather pragmatic. In its framing it also uses conspiracy theories, yet these are much more down-to-earth than those of the Salafis. For example, the members of *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood, also refer to conspiracies linked to Hizbullah and Iran, but they argue that they do not intend to destroy Islam, but simply want to achieve domination in the region.⁶⁴ Different proposed solutions also result from this logic. According to the Ikhwan, simply studying the Text and adhering to the rituals are not enough to elevate the Sunnis from their miserable state. Rather, they put emphasis on the importance of education, political consciousness and building civil society institutions (in the Western sense). In the Muslim Brotherhood's framing, participation in their activities is also crucial. They require their followers to sacrifice some of their time, energy and, if they can afford it, money for the sake of the movement.

⁶¹ These lectures are usually held after the *'asr* or the *maghrib* prayers. During the *mau'iza* the shaykh talks about a Qur'anic verse, a *hadith* or a socially and politically important topic. These lectures usually last about half an hour.

⁶² The Arabic term denotes "the act by which a certain number of persons, acting individually or collectively, recognise the authority of another person". 'Bay'a' in Bossworth, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

⁶³ Participation in Shaykh Mahir's lecture, Tripoli, 19 April 2012.

⁶⁴ Interview with Fadi Shamiya, a prominent Muslim Brother in Sidon, Sidon, 15 April 2012.

Frame resonance

In the social movement literature, “frame resonance” means the extent to which the target audience accepts the frames and acts in line with them.⁶⁵ According to my observations, Salafi frames have strong resonance, especially among the pious middle class and the urban poor (see also Chapter 6). Below I investigate the reasons for this. According to Benford and Snow, the credibility and salience of the frame accounts for the extent to which it resonates among the target population. In the case of Tripoli’s *haraki* Salafi preachers, the success of their framing has been mostly determined by their own credibility as frame articulators and the empirical credibility of the frames.⁶⁶

The credibility of Salafi shaykhs as frame articulators is interconnected with their religious authority, which I discussed in Chapter 5. As I have shown, considerable numbers of the population regard these shaykhs as the most authoritative source of religious interpretation. At the same time, many see them as the group that is most qualified to lead the Sunni community in Lebanon (at least at the level of city quarters and villages) due to the loss of legitimacy of political leaders such as the Hariri clan or Najib Miqati, and the chronic weakness of Dar al-Fatwa. Unlike these leaders, the actions of Salafis seem to be consistent with their rhetoric. For example, in his prognostic framing, Shaykh Tawfiq, a well known preacher from the Mina district, emphasizes the importance of returning to the rulings of the *Shari'a* to solve the problem of poverty in the North.

In one of his *halaqat* he argues that the Islamic system of *zakat* and *sadaqat* (alms) is in fact a powerful method to establish social justice and can be considered superior to Western social welfare systems. He thinks that poverty is the result of abandoning the rulings of Islam, and the only way to eradicate it is to return to the commandments of the *Shari'a*. The shaykh argues that if the *zakat* and *sadaqat* received from the richer members of the society were handled by faithful *'ulama*, there would be no poor among the Lebanese Sunni

⁶⁵ Benford and Snow, ‘Framing Processes’, p. 619.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 619-621.

community.⁶⁷ At the same time he spares no effort in making the “Islamic welfare system” work in reality, at least on the micro-level. He collects *zakat* and alms and distributes them among the needy in his neighborhood. He also has developed a system in which he and other shaykhs can issue vouchers that can be exchanged for medicine and other goods in certain shops. These goods are paid for later from the *zakat* and financial aid from Gulf charities.⁶⁸ These practices make the shaykh credible as a frame articulator and, because of that, people tend to accept his arguments about other issues more readily.

In the case of the experimental credibility of the frames, the most important aspect is not the actual validity of its content, but whether the target group perceives it to be credible.⁶⁹ Regarding the anti-Shi'a frame, the Sunni street has become increasingly sectarian due to the political developments since the Hariri murder. Many believe that the Shi'ites aspire to dominate Lebanon and sideline the Sunnis, and that their main tool to achieve this is Hizbullah. Hostile rhetoric towards the Shi'a is common, even in secular circles. Sectarianism is present in the discourse of the mainstream Sunni media that is related to the al-Mustaqbal movement and the Hariri clan.⁷⁰ The 2006 sit-ins in Riad Al-Sulh Square and the May 2008 occupation of Beirut by Hizbullah and its allies were perceived as acts launched by the Shi'a, targeting the Sunnis. In Tripoli, frequent clashes between the Sunni militias of al-Tabbana and the Alawite groups in Jabal Muhsin have greatly contributed to the increase in sectarian sentiments. In the eyes of many, these experiences give credibility to the claims of Salafis about the existence of a global Shi'ite conspiracy.

The success of Salafi framing is also a result of the fact that currently (January 2013) there is no viable counter-framing activity.⁷¹ Other Islamic movements or Dar al-Fatwa shaykhs have not come up with a viable approach regarding the Shi'a. The Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood refrains from sectarian

⁶⁷ Dars of Shaykh Tawfiq, 'Uthman bin 'Affan mosque, Tripoli, 25 April 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview with Shaykh Tawfiq, Tripoli, 25 April 2012.

⁶⁹ Benford and Snow 2000, p. 620.

⁷⁰ It is easy to discover implicit or explicit sectarian references to the Shi'a in al-Mustaqbal's media, such as the al-Mustaqbal newspaper and TV channel.

⁷¹ The literature shows that the absence of successful counter-framing greatly boosts the resonance of a given frame. See, for example, Ioana Emy Matesan, 'What Makes Negative Frames Resonant? Hamas and the Appeal of Opposition to the Peace Process', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 24, no. 5, 2012, p. 678.

rhetoric, and allow only political criticism of Hizbullah. There are two reasons for this. The first is that most ideologists of the Ikhwan⁷² reject Salafi-style anti-Shi'ism, which regards the Shi'ite belief system un-Islamic.⁷³ The second is that al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya has a long history of cooperation with Hizbullah. The group's armed wing, *Quwwat al-Fajr* (Dawn Force) has regularly participated in military actions against Israel in coordination with the Shi'ite militia.⁷⁴ Certainly, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's intellectual and political approach does not fit with the expectations of the many who resent the Shi'a as a community. The other major Islamic movement in Tripoli, *Harakat al-Tawhid*, is an open ally of Hizbullah. Its credibility has also been undermined because of its implicit alliance with the Assad regime, which crushed the movement in the 1980s.

The socioeconomic reality of the North as experienced by its ordinary inhabitants also boosts the credibility of the Salafis' "Sunnis as victims" frame, especially if there is no viable alternative. Inequality and a lack of balance are the main characteristics of Lebanon's development. Most economic activity is centered in Beirut and the surrounding area, while the other regions are severely lagging behind both in living standards and in human development.⁷⁵ The popular discourse in the North is that the region is neglected because it is inhabited by Sunnis. Ordinary people often compare the North with South Lebanon. According to them, the latter is swiftly improving because the Lebanese state is pressed by the Shi'a to inject capital into the region. As a middle-class city dweller explained to me: "There are technical schools everywhere in the South to give a profession to the [Shi'ites'] young generation, while here in the North our daughters are being sent to the Gulf to work as prostitutes and concubines."⁷⁶ In saying this, he was referring to some of the newly opened courses for women to train as beauticians, many of whom go on to apply for jobs in the Gulf countries.

⁷² Israel Altman, 'The Brotherhood and the Shiite Question', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, no. 9, 19 November 2009, <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-brotherhood-and-the-shiite-question> (accessed: 12 January 2013).

⁷³ As I also indicated above, it does not mean that all members of the Shi'ite community are regarded as non-Muslims. Salafis, however, consider the totality of the creed and beliefs of the Shi'a as a different religion. Those Shi'ites who do not possess the necessary knowledge to be aware of this still remain within Islam.

⁷⁴ 'Al-Fajr al-Sunniya Tuqatil fi-l-Janub Wa Tarfud Fatawa al-Firqa', *Islamonline.net*, 6 June 2006. <http://islamonline.net/ar/news/2006-07/28/06.shtml> (accessed: 5 April 2010).

⁷⁵ <http://www.undp.org.lb/communication/publications/linking/Session4.pdf> (accessed: 10 January 2013).

⁷⁶ Interview, Tripoli, 17 April, 2012.

According to some rumors spreading in the city, these women are in fact supposed to work as prostitutes in the Emirates and Kuwait. Salafi frames about the deliberate economic oppression of the “Muslims by the heretics and unbelievers” meet with widespread resonance.

The experiential credibility of the Salafis’ frame of the Arab revolutions is boosted by the Sunni community’s traditional sense of weakness and oppression. Considerable segments of the society in the North support the Salafi approach because belonging to a strong *Umma* which revolts against and brings down the *taghut* in a cosmic battle elevates them from belonging to what is perceived as the weakest sect in Lebanon. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, Lebanese Sunnis in the 20th century inclined towards the concept of Arab Unity rather than accepting multi-sectarian Lebanon as a final home (*watan niha’i*). Although in the period after the Hariri-murder, many observed the “Lebanonization of the Sunnis”,⁷⁷ this development seems to have reversed after the breakout of the Syrian revolution. After February 2005, Sunnis started to identify themselves with Lebanon due to their hostile feelings towards Syria, caused by the killing of the former prime minister. However, after the uprisings many members of the community felt that they related once again to their “fellow believers”. The reason for this was that by revolting against the Assad regime, the masses of Syrians detached themselves from the killers of Hariri and the oppressors of the Sunnis during the Syrian occupation of 1976-2005. This development removed the last barrier that had been preventing the Lebanese Sunnis feeling part of the global *Umma*. The Salafis’ frame about equating the revolutions with events predicted in Scripture fits well with this transformation of identity.

Conspiracy theories in general also tend to find a receptive audience in the Arab world. This is mainly because in the modern and contemporary history of the Middle East, conspiracies have been observable for the ordinary individual. One such example is that of the Iran-Contra affair of 1986, which resonated deeply in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East. In the mid-1980s, assisted by Israel, the Reagan Administration sold weapons to Iran in exchange for the freeing of American hostages held by Hizbullah in Lebanon. Part of the

⁷⁷ Rayyan al-Shawaf, ‘The Transformation of Lebanon’s Sunnis’, *The Daily Star*, 21 September 2007, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/Sep/21/The-transformation-of-Lebanons-Sunnis.ashx#axzz2SmtF3o37> (accessed: 5 April 2010).

revenue that came from the weapons deal was used to arm the anti-government Contra guerillas in Nicaragua.⁷⁸ When it became public, the case largely discredited the United States in Lebanese and Arab eyes. This and other similar affairs convinced people that conspiracies exist and led to the wide acceptance of conspiracy theories.

The nature of the prognostic and motivational framing of Salafis boosts the resonance of their frames. Salafis offer easy and rewarding solutions for ordinary believers. They do not ask them to make big sacrifices; Lebanese Salafis rarely tell their constituents to go to mass demonstrations to bring down the existing political system and risk their lives by facing the weapons of Hizbullah and their allies. They also do not require ordinary people to invest a lot of time and effort in facilitating the activities of the movement. The most they ask is to attend prayer regularly, listen to the Friday prayer, join religious lessons and generally perform religious rituals in the right way. In exchange they offer the strong probability that the individual's life will improve significantly in the near future, since God often rewards those who follow His regulations with mundane success. Furthermore, if more Muslims increase their attachment to their religion and correct the way they perform its rulings, this will necessarily lead to the *Umma's* political and economic success. In short, following the Salafi remedy for the problems identified in the diagnostic framing requires little investment, and at the same time it makes the individual feel morally superior and promises high psychological and material returns.

Conversion to Salafism

Framing plays the most important role in attracting passive followers to Salafism. However, to gain committed individuals who transform their entire lives in accordance with the movement's principles, these incentives on their own are insufficient. According to my data, collected by conducting dozens of field interviews, the overwhelming majority of active followers joined the

⁷⁸ Ann Wroe, *Lives, Lies and the Iran-Contra Affair* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 1992).

movement for additional reasons. In the following I will discuss why Salafism appeals to them and which kinds of methods of recruitment meet with a positive response.

Those whom I consider committed Salafis (see Chapter 6), unlike passive followers, have in most cases gone through a radical transformation in their worldview and identity, which can be identified as conversion. Here I have to note that a convert is not necessarily someone who left a certain religious tradition for another.⁷⁹ Rather, conversion involves “radical discontinuity in a person’s life”⁸⁰ and the “reorientation of the soul”.⁸¹ That which was previously peripheral in his or her consciousness now becomes central. In other words, as I implied in Chapter 6, the sensory experiences associated to Salafism move to the center of these individuals’ consciousness to the extent that this reshapes almost all aspects of their lives.

Frustration, feelings of insecurity and identity crisis are often described as the main factors that make someone a potential convert.⁸² Analyses of affiliation to Salafism in different national contexts suggest the same. De Koning’s study shows that young second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands who cannot fully identify with their parents’ identity, but who are also unable to adopt that of the host country, are receptive to the message of Salafism.⁸³ Another account points out that Salafism offers a stable alternative way to Muslim youth in France who fail to identify themselves with the French concept of citizenship based on the notion of *Laïcité*, and feel excluded and marginalized from the majority of French society.⁸⁴ In Indonesia Salafism is adopted by young people from rural backgrounds who have been forced by economic circumstances to migrate to the cities. Upward mobility is usually denied to them, while detachment from their traditional socio-cultural context causes feelings of insecurity. Salafism provides them with a space where they can build

⁷⁹ David Snow and Richard Machalek, ‘The Sociology of Conversion’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 10, 1984, p. 170.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Anton van Harskamp, ‘Existential Insecurity and New Religiosity: An Essay on Some Religion-Making Characteristics of Modernity’, *Social Compass*, vol. 55, no. 1; John Lofland and Rodney Stark, ‘Becoming a World-saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 30, no. 6, 1965.

⁸³ De Koning, ‘Changing Worldviews and Friendship’.

⁸⁴ Adraoui, ‘Salafism in France’.

up new bonds of solidarity and an alternative means of social advancement, by reaching a higher level of commitment and piety.⁸⁵

The abovementioned aspects can be discovered when we examine how someone becomes a committed Salafi in North Lebanon. The majority who go through the process of “conversion” are typically young, in their twenties or early thirties, have middle-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds and possess a certain level of education. They typically experience the usual frustrations and insecurities of the young generations in the North due to the lack of opportunities for upward mobility and self-improvement. The unemployment rate in the Sunni territories of the North is the highest in the country.⁸⁶ Job opportunities are meager, even for university graduates. Young people often complain about the prevalence of nepotism and patronage. It is considered impossible to get a high-level professional position without having links to one of the political bosses. One often hears comments such as, “if you don’t have contacts (preferably to a *za'im*) you won’t get a job, whatever diploma you have. If you are well-connected, five classes are enough to be director of a company.”⁸⁷

University students in the final years of their study do not see a secure future in front of them. Those who have already graduated are often unemployed and are reliant on support from their families, or have to do inferior jobs. At the same time the surrounding society expects them achieve material stability, establish a family and pursue a career that is fitting to their level of education, in order to grant the respect and social status to which these young people aspire. In reality, however, they can only dream of becoming a *rabb bayt* (lord of the house); that is, a financially independent married man. The disparity between expectations, ambitions and real opportunities generates a sense of insecurity and frustration. Young men often express that they feel like “nobodies” and “*bala qiyma* [worthless]” in front of elder family members and more successful individuals. They also describe life as boring, as there are no prospects of work, to make an effort and achieve something. Young men try to fill their aimless days

⁸⁵ Hasan Noorhaidi, ‘The Drama of Jihad: The Emergence of Salafi Youth in Indonesia’, in Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera (ed), *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁶ Rasha Aboudzaki, ‘Tripoli, North Lebanon: The Forgotten City’, *al-Akhbar*, 15 May 2012, English edition. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/7367> (accessed: 15 May 2012).

⁸⁷ Conversation with a group of youths, Tripoli, 4 August 2011.

by gathering in groups and spending time in cafés, sometimes consuming alcohol and soft drugs. Occasionally, when they acquire some money, they hire prostitutes or visit divorced women who provide sexual services in exchange for material compensation. Some young men mentioned feelings of guilt, distraction and emptiness after such deeds.

'Adnan, one of my committed Salafi informants had similar prospects and a similar lifestyle before his "*iltizam*". When trying to expel his feelings of boredom, he often started to think: "Where I am going, what is the purpose of my life? Why do I exist in the world if my life is not going anywhere?"⁸⁸ Many of these young men, like 'Adnan, find Salafism and become active followers of the movement. The movement is particularly attractive to them because it provides answers to these questions. As 'Adnan continued: "Now I know, I am in this world to worship God as He wants me to do it. All my acts have to be accomplished in the way God prescribed. If I follow this, everything I do is worship (*ibada*), i.e. I worship God 24 hours a day." It is often said that Salafism, unlike other approaches, is a complete system of life with clear instructions to carry out all actions in line with the creator's will (see also Chapter 5). As Nabil, one of my informants, told me:⁸⁹ "There is a text for everything, you just need the right *dalil* [proof]. [It is clearly stated] how to interact with others, how to talk with your parents, your fellow Muslims and also with non-Muslims. [There are instructions for] how to consummate your marriage, exactly how to dress and even how to enter the restroom." As many of the committed Salafis recounted their experiences before their "*iltizam*", they were praying either occasionally, sometimes only on Friday, or they were fulfilling religious obligations only because everyone was doing the same in their family. "I was praying and fasting because my father and elder brothers taught me to do so. I did not understand why I had to follow [these practices], but I did not even care too much about it. My mind was usually occupied with other things, meaningless things", said Rabi', a university student in Tripoli in his mid-twenties. "Today I understand.

⁸⁸ Interview, Tripoli, 28 April 2012.

⁸⁹ Interview, Tripoli, 29 July 2011.

Everything, fasting, prayer, any particular practice is part of a system, which is designed [by God] to make me an ideal Muslim.”⁹⁰

In many cases, the crisis of Sunni identity in Lebanon (see also Chapters 1 and 5) also contributes to the conversion of young people to Salafism. At a time of sectarian polarization, many young men are asking themselves what it means to belong to the Sunni community. How should they interpret it? Why are Sunnis weak in the face of the Shi'ites and Hizbullah? Many of them perceive that al-Mustaqbal's secular and pro-Western approach will not improve the situation, just as the Arab Nationalist and Leftist movements, to which their fathers used to belong, failed. Abu Bakr, a 30-year-old Salafi, told me his story:

After the 2006 [political] crisis and the 2008 occupation of Beirut by the Shi'a I started to think, what does it mean that I am Sunni? Before, “Sunniness” did not mean too much to me, but when the political climate changed and everybody started to speak about Sunna and Shi'a, it made me also inquire ... Salafis made me realize that being Sunni means belonging to God's religion and being part of the *Umma*. If we follow God's rulings in full, not as our parents did, Sunnis will change their current miserable situation. Our fathers maybe went to the mosque and prayed, but just as an inherited habit. Otherwise they did not look for God's will. This is why we are weak now.

According to him, countless parts of the Text prove this truth. He quoted the following Qur'an ayah: *In 'idtum 'idna* (If you return [to Me] I return [to you]).⁹¹ Though this part of the scripture has been interpreted in radically different ways, in the common Salafi interpretation, if Muslims return to the true path, God will return his favor to the *Umma*.⁹²

The widespread presence of Salafism in new media and its networking strategy are the two main reasons why these young individuals come across the movement and later adopt its ideas.⁹³ In the past decade, Salafism has achieved

⁹⁰ Interview, 13 April 2012.

⁹¹ al-Qur'an, Surat al-Isra' 8.

⁹² Interview with Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, Tripoli, 22 July 2011.

⁹³ De Koning 2009, p. 421.

dominance over the Islamic content of the Internet.⁹⁴ In North Lebanon, increasing numbers of people are regularly online and visit religious websites. They are most likely encounter Salafi pages and forums, often even without knowing that those transmit the message of a specific movement. The Egyptian Salafi and Saudi Wisal and Safa' satellite channels, which are popular across the Middle East, also play a very important role. Both the Internet and television present an appealing discourse for the youth. Many of my informants encountered Salafism first through new media, which then led them to look for local Salafis to learn more about the movement's ideas. Those who were approached by *da'is* often responded positively to the call due to their previous experiences with websites and TV channels. In other words, the flow of Salafi ideas through the media facilitates the already crucial role of social networks in the recruitment of new active members.

Numerous studies have concluded that in the recruitment of most social movement activists, informal interpersonal contacts play a substantial role.⁹⁵ A movement which habitually employs these in its recruitment process is more likely to attract participants than if it relies on the mass media or formal methods such as sending emails, making phone calls, and so forth.⁹⁶ The literature on new religious movements also pinpoints the crucial importance of social networks and interpersonal interactions in drawing members to their lines. People usually become followers when preliminary bonds have been established with members, while it is unlikely for an individual to fully adopt the ideas of a religious group without previously being in contact with their networks.⁹⁷ Conversion usually happens after spending a relatively long period of time in day-to-day interaction with activists in the given movement.⁹⁸ Analyses of Salafism also frequently emphasize the role of social networks in recruiting new followers to the movement. Wiktorowicz points to the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, 'Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects', *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 85, no. 6, 1980; James M. Jasper and Jane D. Poulsen, 'Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests', vol. 42, no. 4, 1995; Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema, 'Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1987.

⁹⁶ Stark and Bainbridge, 'Networks of Faith'.

⁹⁷ Ibid., especially pp. 1379-1381.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 1378.

significance of pre-existing friendship ties that drag someone to the movement, and the wide availability of Salafi activities, such as *halaqat*, which potential converts can join.⁹⁹

My findings in the field confirm the crucial role of informal ties. According to my data, in the case of committed Lebanese Salafi individuals, social networks play a significant role in their recruitment. Without exception, the active followers whom I interviewed between 2009 and 2012 had chosen to radically change their lifestyles and adopt Salafism after having relatively long interpersonal relationships with Salafi activists. At the same time, probably the majority of the potential converts encountered Salafism prior to contacting the networks of committed individuals, either through the Internet or satellite channels, or through the Friday sermon (if the *khatib* of the mosque where they prayed was Salafi). After becoming somewhat familiar with the movement's ideas, the young people usually became more responsive if Salafis approached them, or even took the initiative to learn more for themselves. In the latter case they usually started to visit *durus*, or occasionally participated in informal gatherings as the first step of their socialization in Salafism.

Active followers also look to contact those who can be convinced to refashion their lives in accordance with the movement's standards. Being available to answer questions and assist ordinary believers (*'ammat al-muslimin*) is part of the *hisba* and is therefore considered one of the most important parts of their activism. Active participants frequently approach others in the mosque and their neighborhood to talk about their religious belief. Often these activists provide assistance to young people, such as counseling them if they face mental stress, or are socially isolated and alienated. In some cases, Salafi youth try to stop others who "have mixed with bad company" from hanging out with those who regularly consume alcohol and drugs. Such activities earn them a high reputation and many young people are happy to spend time with them.

According to my observations, one of the most important and interesting methods used by Salafi activists to approach young people is their *da'wa* in popular places where Salafis would otherwise hardly appear, such as cafés and beaches. While other Islamic movements frequently employ these spaces for

⁹⁹ Wiktorowicz, 'The Salafi Movement in Jordan', pp. 233-236.

proselytization, Salafis mostly refuse to appear in cafés and beaches because people listen to music, smoke waterpipe (*argila* in Lebanese dialect) or play cards there. According to their views, these activities and the occasional presence of women can awaken temptations in them and turn them away from religion. Some Salafis, however, have abandoned this philosophy. They think that people can be approached where they like to be and where they are relaxed. Here they refer also to the practices of the Prophet, who did not avoid public places in Mecca or Medina where un-Islamic practices often occurred. The initiative of these Salafis has been proven to be very successful and has become one of the most significant methods of *da'wa* in Tripoli.

Cafés and beaches are important meeting points for the petty bourgeois youth in Tripoli and the North. Gathering with friends, drinking coffee and smoking *argila* creates a kind of “free space” for these young people, since these places are not under the surveillance of the family and nobody else can hear what they are talking about – unlike when friends gather at one of their homes. The cafés in the Mina district are especially popular, because here the environment is less traditional than, let us say, in the Tell district or the Qubba, so a group of young people can gain more privacy. As Firas, a young man in his twenties explained, “when we meet [with other youth] in one of the cafés in these areas [Tell or Qubba], you feel that you are under continuous observation. Often I hear from my family that some others have seen me in a certain café. The Mina is different. People do not know us there and privacy is respected.” Indeed, the residents of Tripoli frequently escape from the urban crowds to sit in one of the beach-side cafés or restaurants in the Mina district. Gatherings on the beaches close to Tripoli are also popular. In summertime, meetings on the beach consist of swimming, then gathering on the shore and eating dinner. During these occasions young people often express their concerns about their future and their frustration due to the difficulties of life in the northern part of Lebanon. Salafi *da'is* are able to penetrate these “free spaces” of the Tripolitan youth, and many of these young men are receptive to their ideas.

Ghassan is one of the young Salafi preachers (he is in his mid-twenties) who practice *da'wa* among young Tripolitan middle-class or petty bourgeois men. I met him during my fieldwork in Tripoli in 2011 and 2012. He is one of the

close aides of Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i, the imam of the Taqwa mosque in the Tabbaneh district. Ghassan was born in a typical Tripolitan middle-income family in one of the wealthier parts of the Tabbana (which is otherwise known for its deep poverty). He described his family as "non-religious". As he explained, they fast in Ramadan and sometimes read the Qur'an, but they never pray any of the five obligatory prayers and never taught their children anything about Islam. He told me that his religious turn came after his graduation from high school. Ghassan started working for an electronics company that sells refrigerators. As he recounted, "although I was quite successful in my work, I felt deep emptiness in my heart and felt my life to be worthless. Thanks to God it did not last long. I started to pray in the Taqwa mosque and my life quickly changed." Due to the environment in the Taqwa mosque, Ghassan became one of the prominent young Salafis in the Tabbana. Currently he works as the secretary of the mosque and at the same time practices *da'wa* among fellow youth.

Ghassan strongly opposes those (mostly purist) Salafis who, according to him, live between their mosque, work and family, basically secluded from the society. As he explained:

These guys limit their contact with people to avoid temptation and fully focus on religious practice, but they forget that isolation is not the only way of avoiding sin, self control is also important ... Implementing Islam fully is self-realization, but following only religious practice and ritual is only half of this self-realization. The other half is enlightening others and contributing to the creation of a more Islamic society.¹⁰⁰

This is why Ghassan thinks that "a wide social network composed of all kind of people is crucial for the *da'wa*. Personal isolation [i.e. meeting only Salafis] leads to the isolation of the *da'wa* as well."

Despite his pious lifestyle, Ghassan appears quite frequently in the cafés that are popular meeting points for young people from his generation. He prefers those places where there is no loud music and there are fewer women. Usually he meets there with young people whom he met before at work or other places

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ghassan Hadhuri, Tripoli, 27 July 2011.

in the city, rather than joining their gatherings. According to Gassan, he does not start by preaching and convincing these young men to live a more pious life: “This would lead nowhere; they would only escape from me. Rather, I listen to their daily problems and participate in ordinary, worldly conversations. Although in the time of *salat* I perform prayer. Most of them follow me at this time even if they would never pray otherwise.” Most of the Tripolitans are proud of their Sunni identity, even if they do not pray and do not fast in Ramadan. When somebody proposes that they perform the prayer together, they cannot refuse.¹⁰¹ According to Ghassan, occasionally praying together creates a sufficiently religious climate to be able to introduce his ideas from a more Islamic viewpoint, or propose an Islamic solution for the socio-economic problems suffered by these young men. “If I were to try to persuade them to live a more religious life while drinking coffee, that would backfire. They might listen to my arguments politely, but they would not take them seriously.” After they have prayed together a few times, Ghassan usually talks about what kind of solutions Islam offers for the social problems of the youth. He tries to convince them that regular prayer, refraining from drinking alcohol and using their time for something more productive than sitting in cafés all night would improve their life. This might be reading the Qur’an, visiting the mosque, or participating in religious study groups (*halaqat al-durus*). According to Ghassan’s account, although most of the youth are partially receptive to his call, some eventually become full “*yaltazim* [becomes *multazim*]”.

The 22-year-old Yahya is one of these latter Lebanese. Ghassan introduced him to me in the Taqwa mosque after the *maghrib* prayer. He is an undergraduate student at the Tripoli branch of the Lebanese University, living in a middle-class family in the Tabbana. He explained his life and worldview before he was converted to Salafism:

My parents did not teach me too much about our religion. I knew how to pray, but I did not practice it. Although I used to fast in Ramadan (sometimes not the whole month), I lived Islam only as a tradition and it

¹⁰¹ This is especially case if somebody cannot claim that they had performed the obligatory prayer before.

did not play an important role in my life. My father prays, but my mother and my siblings never ... I loved music, playing board games or cards. Occasionally I drank beer and almost every night I sat in a café or on the beach with my friends and colleagues at the university, smoking *argila* ... Ghassan sometimes joined us in these meetings. Once I complained to him that I could not really focus on my studies, since we live in a small apartment and therefore there is a lot of distraction. He said that I could go and study in the mosque, since the environment is rather quiet there ... Spending a long time in the mosque, the climate somehow catches you. At the time of the prayer I performed the *salat* with the others. Afterwards, I felt that my soul was becoming cleaner. In the mosque I also got in contact with others who had more knowledge about the religion, I joined the study circles as well. Gradually I found that I hated my former lifestyle and behavior. I threw away my CDs, stopped hanging out at night, and gave up smoking *argila*.

Today, Yahya is one of the most enthusiastic activists at the Taqwa mosque.

Another interesting and successful *da'wa* method I encountered in North Lebanon is using the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) for proselytization purposes. I discovered that some of my committed Salafi informants got involved in the movement's networks during and after they participated in the *Hajj*. Salafis play quite a large part in organizing trips by Lebanese pilgrims. They operate "*Hajj* travel offices" in Tripoli and Beirut, where people can arrange their documents and travel to Saudi Arabia. When the pilgrims arrive in Mecca they are divided into groups consisting of 15-20 members. The office appoints a *murshid* (here: spiritual guide) to each group, who is usually a Lebanese Salafi shaykh. The *murshid's* task is to advise the pilgrims on how to behave and perform the different rituals that are obligatory during the *Hajj*. They also provide a kind of religious training, mostly in the form of *halaqat* and personal consultations, while the people are staying in Mecca. Shaykh Haitham al-Sa'id from Nahr al-Barid camp often serves as a *murshid* for Lebanese and Palestinian pilgrims. When I interviewed him, he emphasized how the spiritual guide can play an important role in leading people to "*manhaj* of *Ahl*

al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a and cleansing them from the *shirkiyyat* [practices and beliefs that contradict *tawhid*].¹⁰² According to him, during the *Hajj* people find it “easier to accept the truth”. In Mecca “there is *baraka* [blessing]” and the “heart of the Muslims opens up to God’s message”.

Turner and Turner provide a useful analysis to understand the general significance of pilgrimage in a believers’ life.¹⁰³ In their analysis of Catholic pilgrimage, they argue that pilgrims detach themselves from their social context, with its different social positions, rights and distinctions, and enter into a “liminal” state where these distinctions disappear. During pilgrimage the individual enters a community of equals where ordinary social structures are temporarily abolished.¹⁰⁴ The authors call this state “*communitas*”, a term which describes “the individual pilgrim’s temporary transition away from the mundane structures and social interdependence into a looser commonality of feeling with fellow visitors.”¹⁰⁵ During *communitas* the individual is subject to serious internal changes or even distortions before re-entering his or her ordinary social structure. In case of the *Hajj*, *communitas* is symbolized with the *ihram*, the white robe that every pilgrim has to put on before beginning the pilgrimage. The *ihram* strongly resembles the *kafan* (death shroud) and implies that in death, social positions are meaningless.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, during the *Hajj*, the *ihram* is supposed to hide the social background of the believer, detach them from it, and thereby integrate them into the community of equals where only faith has any importance.

In the case of the Islamic pilgrimage, a person’s detachment from their local socioeconomic environment is often accompanied by a “re-orientation of the soul” from mundane matters towards God. The *Hajj* is supposed to be a turning point in the individual’s life, when he or she gets rid of the sins and mistakes of the past and becomes a better person. Some personal accounts suggest that being in Mecca and the activities and rituals that are performed

¹⁰² Interview, Orebro, Sweden, 23 June 2012.

¹⁰³ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Mage and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-40.

¹⁰⁵ Simon Coleman, ‘Do You Believe in Pilgrimage? *Communitas*, Contestation and Beyond’, *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2002, p. 356.

¹⁰⁶ F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 115.

when there leads to a feeling of continuous closeness to God.¹⁰⁷ In other words, just like everyday religious rituals in Humphrey and Laidlaw's analysis, the *Hajj* creates a space for religious experience, albeit a deeper and more persistent one.¹⁰⁸ Salafi *murhsids* find this "opening-up of the heart" a suitable moment to influence their group members. Besides giving lessons and providing personal consultations during the *Hajj*, Shaykh Haitham draws on his pre-established transnational contacts. He told me that he frequently travels to Saudi Arabia, where he studied under some renowned '*ulama*' and maintains cordial relations with others. When these scholars are present during the *Hajj*, he brings his group members to participate in their *halaqat* or just to interact with them on a personal level. Shaykh Haitham described these '*ulama*' as exceptionally charismatic people who can have a long-lasting impact on someone who spends time with them. As he told me, after the *Hajj*, most people return to their ordinary lives, but some, especially young people, get involved in Salafi networks and in many cases become active followers.

The latter was true for Shaykh 'Imad, now a young but very popular preacher in Wadi Khalid. As he told me, in his early adulthood he was a Syrian Ba'th party sympathizer (the ideological backbone of the regime in Damascus). Just like many of the residents in his home region, he was enthusiastic about Hizbullah and the "Axis of Resistance [*Mihwar al-Mumani'a*]" which consists of the "anti-Imperialist and anti-Zionist" forces such as Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas. He was "not really practicing" Islam and led a rather secular lifestyle. As he told me, he was busy with worthless things such as listening to music, smoking and loitering with other young men. He enjoyed writing obscene poems about girls he knew. He started studying IT in a college in Tripoli, but did not become a successful student in that period. According to his account, what changed his life was performing the *Hajj* in 2005. His father sent him to Mecca, hoping that it would precipitate some positive changes in his son's character. He made the journey with a Salafi *Hajj* office and during the pilgrimage he was deeply influenced by his *murhsid*. As he explained, the whole experience in Mecca made him realize how meaningless his life was and made him think about

¹⁰⁷ Conversations with Lebanese individuals who performed the *Hajj* between 2009 and 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 78-79.

finding an aim. After returning to Lebanon he established contacts with Salafi networks and participated in some courses at Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal's al-Hidaya college. After a couple of months he concluded that his main task in this life would be to spread the *da'wa*. A year after the pilgrimage, he adopted the Salafi *manhaj* and began his studies at Tripoli University in the *Shari'a* faculty. The political developments and the emerging sectarian tensions also played a role in his turn toward Salafism. When he started to teach and deliver Friday sermons in his home village, he became one of the flag-bearers of anti-Shi'ism in Wadi Khalid.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the importance of framing and conversion in recruiting passive and active adherents of Salafism. Successful framing activity appeals to the larger masses, who are seeking an plausible answer to what is going on around them in the sociopolitical realm. Salafi ideology also attracts those young people who feel alienated in contemporary North Lebanon due to the socioeconomic malaise and ongoing identity crisis. They become committed followers of Salafism who seek to adopt its rulings in full by going through conversion. Conversion is also facilitated by the networking strategies of Salafis, as I showed in the second part of the chapter.

Today, Salafi recruitment strategies in Lebanon appear to be effective. Large numbers of ordinary believers consider the words of Salafi preachers to be credible, adopt their opinions on current events and conceive of Islam in accordance with the Salafi concept. In the past two years, mostly due to the climate generated by the Arab Spring, there has been a sharp increase in the number of young people becoming active participants. These developments are partly due to the fact that Salafis are successfully exploiting the favorable political opportunities that are opening up (see Chapter 2). The interplay of the Sunni-Shi'i sectarian tensions with the Arab Spring gives wide ground for the shaykhs' framing activity.

At the point of writing it is still unclear whether the success of Salafis in recruiting new participants will be temporary or long-lasting. The ongoing Syrian civil war, the decreasing opportunities for the Sunni youth and the lack of credible alternatives are among the main factors that explain why Salafis are successfully attracting people. However, things might change if stability returns to the neighboring countries and if the economic situation improves in the North. Such developments could favor moderate Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood or wings of Lebanese Salafism that are currently marginalized, such as the network of Muhammad Khodor. In the case of socioeconomic developments, doors might open for education, and Sunni youth might then see a non-apocalyptic future that leads to becoming part of the middle class (also economically), rather than to the “Siege of Sham” and the arrival of the *Mahdi*. In this case, the successful movements will be those that can respond to these changes.

Conclusion

Since the end of the 2000s, Salafism has emerged as a key component of the Sunni sociopolitical landscape of Lebanon. The movement has become especially strong in the country's northern region, in the city of Tripoli and its surrounding areas, where I conducted my fieldwork. In this study I explained how Salafism has evolved and developed due to both local and transnational factors. I took a closer look at its emergence, fragmentation and internal dynamics, such as the construction of its religious authority, its network structure and recruitment of participants.

One of the novel aspects of this dissertation, I believe, lies in its discussion of Salafism as a single social movement, instead of limiting its focus to a specific group, such as the Jihadis in the Palestinian camps of Lebanon.¹⁰⁹ I analyzed the dynamics of the power structure of the movement, which was influenced by theological debates and the transformation of the external, sociopolitical context, both at the local and the global levels. To explain these dynamics I refined the earlier versions of the classification of factions of the Salafi movement, which appeared in the academic literature. At the beginning of this study I argued that the most frequently used classification, first proposed by Quintan Wiktorowicz, is incomplete. Wiktorowicz distinguishes three main Salafi factions, Purists, Politicos and Jihadis, based on their methods of activism. I found this approach to have serious shortcomings. I argued that it is too rigid, sets too sharp boundaries, and neglects the core theological debates that in fact divide Salafis.

I proposed an alternative classification of Salafi groups, which is based on my field observations and interviews. I distinguish two major factions in the movement. The main difference between them lies in their theological disagreement over the relationship between a Muslim and the ruler (*hakim*). The members of the first faction, whom I call purists, believe that the subject must unconditionally obey the ruler if he is Muslim and does not order them to contradict the fundamentals of Islam. According to purists, the *hakim* cannot be publicly criticized, and any form of public demonstration is strictly forbidden.

¹⁰⁹ See Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*.

The proponents of the second faction, whom I call *harakis* (activists), argue that the purists' stance is unfounded. *Harakis* refer to rulings in the *shari'a* which prove that the ruler has to be openly criticized and corrected if his acts are contrary to Islam. Furthermore, his rule is legitimate only if the ruled have performed an oath of allegiance (*baya'*) to him.

This classification also distinguishes two sub-factions among the purists and *harakis* respectively. I explain that there are purists who regard political participation as acceptable if it does not lead to disobedience to the ruler, and if it benefits the *da'wa*. I identify this group as "politico-purists". I call those who reject political activism altogether "purist-rejectionists". Those *harakis* whom I class as "politicos" believe in electoral participation and achieving positive change through political work. The other sub-faction of *harakis*, the "jihadis", believe that reality can be changed only by force.

The first half of this study provided insight into the evolution and development of the abovementioned Salafi factions in Lebanon. I outlined both the local circumstances and the transnational context which led to the fragmentation of Salafism in Lebanon. In Chapter 2 I discussed the fragmentation of Salafism in Gulf, which is necessary to understand the trajectory of the movement in Tripoli and its surrounding areas. I discussed the historical origins of the split between purists and *harakis* in Saudi Arabia, then analyzed the evolution and dynamics of the two most important Salafi charity organizations, the Kuwaiti Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami and the Qatari Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association (SACA).

A detailed discussion was provided on how the fragmentation of Saudi Salafism affected the power structure of the movement in Kuwait. I showed that in the first half of the 1990s, a strong purist faction emerged within the previously predominantly *haraki* Kuwaiti Salafi community. The purists managed to sideline the activist-minded Shaykh 'Abdul Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, the main religious authority of Kuwaiti Salafis, and took over the leadership of Ihya' al-Turath. Most *harakis* left the organization, which became one of the main bankrollers of purist Salafis worldwide.

At the same time, Qatar became a main hub of *haraki* Salafism. The chief objectives of the emirate's foreign policy in the second half of the 1990s were to

maintain their independence from Saudi dominance and increase the country's international influence. Patronizing *haraki* Salafis, who generally questioned the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy, fitted into this framework. The Qatari ruler also hoped that sponsoring *haraki* Salafis abroad through SACA would increase the number of allies for his country.

This overview of Salafism in the Gulf provided an understanding of the transnational context of the development of North Lebanese Salafism, which was then discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3 I explained the emergence of Salafism in Tripoli and its adjacent areas. By using the “political opportunity structure” approach, I argued that both local and transnational changes provided Salafism with opportunities to become one of the most prominent Sunni movements. The erosion of traditional religious authority, the delegitimation of the movement's competitors, the growing sectarian tensions and the emergence of transnational sponsors were the main factors that opened the way for the spread of the Salafi message.

The fragmentation of the movement that could be observed in the Gulf appeared in Lebanon as well from the beginning of the 2000s. In the 1990s, *harakis* dominated Lebanese Salafism. However, after the turn of the millennium they faced repression by the Lebanese authorities and Syrian intelligence. Most of their institutions were closed down and their main leader, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, had to leave the country in 2000. These developments opened the way for the purists, whose main financial benefactor was Ihya' al-Turath. Until the end of 2000s a strong politico-purist stream emerged in North Lebanon, which possessed a vast charity network and mobilized voters during elections. Purist-rejectionist networks are also present and active in Tripoli, though they are much less influential.

Although their network was severely disrupted by the authorities, *haraki* Salafis remained strong in North Lebanon. The collapse of the Syrian-Lebanese Security regime and the withdrawal of the Syrian forces enabled them to start spreading their message again. The appearance of the SACA on the Lebanese Salafi scene and its massive financial support greatly facilitated *haraki* activism. *Harakis* also benefited from the deepening Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian tensions that were fuelled by the Sunni community's fear of Hizbullah's growing influence. The

2011 Arab Spring sharply increased popular support for the *haraki* Salafis, who were staunch advocates of the revolutions. The decline of the *zu'ama* and the leadership crisis of the Lebanese Sunnis especially facilitated this trend. Religious leaders such as Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i and Zakariyya al-Masri became leading figures in the Sunni community – although not yet at the level of institutional politics.

From this expansion of Salafism both at the local and the transnational levels, a complex network structure has emerged that consists mostly of informal ties. In the second half of the thesis I provided a detailed analysis of the shape and function of the structure of the movement. My discussion in Chapter 5 provided an understanding of the religious authority of the Salafi shaykhs, who practice their *da'wa* through everyday interactions with the ordinary Sunni population. Salafis argue that only their definition of right belief is correct; therefore they narrow the limits of orthodoxy and draw rigid boundaries around it. Their claim to possess uncorrupted religious knowledge is boosted by different “techniques of authority”, such as practicing moderate asceticism, which creates the image of purity. Other techniques are implementing *hisba* and fulfilling the socioeconomic needs of the Muslim community. I argued that activities such as mediation in social conflicts and intercession with the *zu'ama* also serve to increase the social capital of the shaykhs, which can then be converted into authority.

Asserting authority in these ways shows how “men of religion” play a central role in Lebanese Salafism. This creates a network structure that is constituted by vertically shaped sub-networks with the shaykhs on the top, surrounded by active and passive participants. At the local level, I placed Salafi networks within the framework of civil society. I defined this latter concept – following Hann – as a web of trust and cooperation, which also consists of indigenous institutions, and is not exclusively based on formal voluntary associations.¹¹⁰ I argue that the cohesion of Salafi networks is provided by a sense of collective identity, which is based on what Birgit Meyer calls the “shared sensory experiences” of the participants. Then I showed that network ties evolve around activities that strengthen collective identity, such as religious lessons,

¹¹⁰ Hann, ‘Introduction: political society and civil anthropology’.

evening gatherings, or discussions after prayer. Formal organizations play a less significant role than informal networks. However, institutions such as the *shura*, set up by Salafis in Tripoli, constitute an important part of the local structure of the movement.

Local networks, which are discussed in Chapter 6, extend beyond the border and constitute parts of transnational networks. Another novel aspect of this study is that it exposes how Lebanese Salafism is densely interconnected with the Arabian Gulf and Europe, and I provided an in-depth analysis of the structure and function of these transnational ties. In Chapter 7 I showed that social capital is mobilized via the links to Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which can then be converted into economic and religious capital. In the last section of the chapter I discussed the expansion of the Salafi networks to Sweden, Holland and Germany, transnational networks between Lebanon and Europe that have not been previously examined by researchers. I discussed their structure and function in detail, using the ethnographic data I collected in the abovementioned countries.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, explored the recruitment strategy of Salafism. First I argued that the successful framing activity of the Salafi shaykhs attracts large number of passive followers. Preachers explain the actual concerns of the Lebanese Sunni community, such as the increasing influence of the Shi'a, the perceived socioeconomic deprivation of the Sunnis, and the Arab revolutions, by placing them in a framework of conspiracy theories, inspired by their Manichean worldview. Then they advise their audience to adopt the tenets of the true version of Islam, which is identical to Salafism, to solve these issues. This framing has positive resonance due to the sociopolitical circumstances of North Lebanon and the lack of viable counter-framing. The last section of the chapter explained how active participants are recruited through informal networks. These mostly young people usually go through a process of conversion, which is facilitated by their search for an alternative identity and the lack of alternative future prospects.

In this dissertation I have attempted to explain the current prominent position of Salafis in North Lebanon and create a basis for further research into the movement in the Levant. In the future, my findings could also be extended to

examine the emerging Salafi movement in Syria and its interconnectedness with the Lebanese Salafi field. Besides, the methodology that I have used to analyze the evolution of different Salafi factions, and my approach to researching the shape and operation of their transnational networks, provides a basis for understanding the logic of Salafism in other regions. My research could be extended to further examine the movement's expansion from the Middle East to Europe, or even to Asia.

Samenvatting

Salafisme in Libanon: Lokale en transnationale netwerken

In deze studie onderzoek ik de dynamiek en anatomie van de salafi-*da'wa* beweging in Noord Libanon. Ik beantwoord de vraag hoe en waarom de beweging opgekomen is als een cruciale speler in de Libanese soennitische sociale en politieke sfeer. In mijn analyse schenk ik specifiek aandacht aan de ontwikkeling en structuur van het salafisme van Noord Libanon. Om adequate antwoorden op mijn vragen te krijgen, is het onvoldoende om alleen de lokale context te onderzoeken. Daarom onderzoek ik ook de transformatie van de transnationale omgeving en de dynamiek van het salafisme op een transnationaal niveau. Ik schenk speciale aandacht aan hoe de beweging in Noord Libanon gerelateerd is aan de Arabische Golf en de Europese moslingemeenschappen. Social movement theory verschaft een bruikbaar instrument voor mijn analyse. Het helpt goed om te begrijpen hoe het samenspel tussen de externe context met de specifieke kenmerken van salafisme heeft geleid tot de bekendheid van de beweging. Dit theoretische raamwerk wordt samengevat in hoofdstuk 1. De verschillende fundamenteën van social movement theory worden verder uiteengezet in de volgende hoofdstukken.

Een nieuwigheid van deze dissertatie is naar mijn mening de bespreking van het salafisme als één sociale beweging, in plaats van het te beperken tot één specifieke groep, zoals de jahdi's in de Palestijnse kampen van Libanon.¹¹¹ Ik heb de dynamiek van de machtsstructuur van de beweging geanalyseerd, die beïnvloed is door theologische debatten en de transformatie van de externe sociale en politieke context, zowel op lokaal als op globaal niveau. Om deze dynamiek te verklaren, heb ik eerdere versies van de classificatie van facties van de salafi-beweging in academische literatuur verfijnd. In het begin van deze studie heb ik gesteld dat de meest gebruikte classificatie, geïntroduceerd door Quintan Wiktorowicz, onvolledig is. Wiktorowicz onderscheidt drie salafi-facties: puristen, politico's en jihadi's, gebaseerd op hun methodologie van activisme. Deze benadering schiet tekort op belangrijke punten. Ik heb gesteld dat het te

¹¹¹ Zie Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*.

rigide is, te scherpe grenzen trekt, en de fundamentele theologische debatten over het hoofd ziet die de salafi's werkelijk verdelen.

In hoofdstuk 1 heb ik, na de grondbeginselen van het salafistische geloofssysteem uitgelegd te hebben, een alternatieve classificatie voorgesteld, gebaseerd op mijn veldwerkobservaties en interviews. Ik onderscheid twee grote facties in de beweging. Het voornaamste verschil ligt in hun theologische meningsverschil over de verhouding van moslims tot de machthebber (*hakim*). The leden van de eerste factie, die ik puriteinen noem, geloven dat de onderdanen onvoorwaardelijk de machthebber dienen te gehoorzamen, zolang deze moslim is en hun niet beveelt tegen de fundamentele van de islam in te gaan. Volgens de puriteinen kan de *hakim* niet publiekelijk bekritiseerd worden, en zijn iedere vorm van publieke demonstraties strikt verboden. De voorstanders van de tweede factie, die ik *haraki's* (activisten) noem, stellen dat de houding van de puriteinen ongefundeerd is. *Haraki's* refereren naar regelgevingen in de *shari'a* die bewijzen dat de machthebber openlijk bekritiseerd dient te worden en gecorrigeerd dient te worden wanneer zijn daden tegen de islam ingaan. Bovendien is zijn regime alleen legitiem wanneer de onderdanen een eed van loyaliteit (*baya'*) aan hem gedaan hebben.

Deze classificatie onderscheidt ook twee sub-facties onder zowel puriteinen als *haraki's*. Ik leg uit dat er puriteinen zijn die politieke participatie acceptabel achten als het niet leidt tot ongehoorzaamheid aan de machthebber, en ten goede komt van de *da'wa*. Ik noem deze groep "politico-purists". Degenen die politiek activisme geheel afwijzen, noem ik "purist-rejectionists". De *haraki's* die geclassificeerd zijn als politico's geloven in participatie in verkiezingen en het brengen van positieve verandering door politieke activiteiten. De andere sub-factie van *haraki's*, de *jihadi's*, geloven dat de realiteit alleen door middel van geweld veranderd kan worden.

De eerste helft van deze studie verschaft inzicht in de evolutie en ontwikkeling van bovengenoemde salafi-facties in Libanon. Ik heb zowel de lokale omstandigheden als de transnationale context uitgelegd, die geleid hebben tot de fragmentatie van salafisme in Libanon. In hoofdstuk 2 heb ik de fragmentatie van salafisme in de Golf besproken, wat noodzakelijk is voor het begrijpen van de ontwikkeling van de beweging in Tripoli en omgeving. Ik heb de

historische origine van de splitsing tussen puriteinen en *haraki's* in Saudi-Arabië besproken, en vervolgens de evolutie en dynamiek geanalyseerd van de twee belangrijkste salafistische liefdadigheidsorganisaties: de Jama'iyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami uit Koeweit, en de Shaykh 'Aid Charity Association (SACA) uit Qatar.

Er wordt een gedetailleerde bespreking gegeven van hoe de fragmentatie van het Saoedische salafisme de machtsstructuur van de beweging in Koeweit beïnvloed heeft. Ik heb aangetoond dat in de eerste helft van de jaren '90 een sterke puriteinse factie opkwam in de salafi-gemeenschap van Koeweit, die daarvoor door *haraki's* gedomineerd werd. De puriteinen wisten de activistisch georiënteerde Shaykh 'Abdul Rahman 'Abd al-Khaliq, de belangrijkste religieuze autoriteit van de salafi's van Koeweit, naar de marge te drukken, en het leiderschap van Ihya' al-Turath over te nemen. De meeste *haraki's* verlieten daarop de organisatie, die vervolgens één van de belangrijkste financiers werd van de puriteinse salafi's wereldwijd.

Tegelijkertijd werd Qatar een belangrijk centrum van *haraki*-salafisme. De voornaamste doelen van het buitenlandse beleid van het emiraat in de tweede helft van de jaren '90 waren het behouden van hun onafhankelijkheid van Saoedische dominantie en het vergroten van de internationale invloed van het land.

Het steunen van *haraki*-salafi's, die in het algemeen de legitimiteit van de Saoedische monarchie in twijfel trokken, paste goed in dit raamwerk. De machthebber van Qatar hoopte ook dat het sponsoren van *haraki*-salafi's in het buitenland via SACA het aantal medestanders voor zijn land zou doen toenemen.

Dit overzicht van het salafisme in de Golf verschaft inzicht in het begrip van de transnationale context van de ontwikkeling van het salafisme in Noord Libanon, wat besproken wordt in hoofdstuk 3 en 4. In hoofdstuk 3 heb ik de opkomst van het salafisme in Tripoli en omgeving uiteengezet. Door 'political opportunity structure approach' toe te passen, heb ik beargumenteerd dat zowel de lokale als transnationale veranderingen het salafisme gelegenheden verschaft heeft om op te komen als één van de meest prominente soennitische bewegingen. De erosie van de traditionele religieuze autoriteit, de delegitimatie van de concurrenten van de beweging, de groeiende sektarische spanningen en

de opkomst van transnationale sponsors waren de voornaamste factoren die de weg geopend hebben voor de verspreiding van de salafi-boodschap.

De fragmentatie van de beweging die waargenomen kon worden in de Golf kwam ook op in Libanon vanaf het begin van de jaren '00. In de jaren '90 domineerden *haraki's* het Libanese salafisme. Echter, na de eeuwwisseling kregen ze te maken met repressie door de Libanese overheid en de Syrische inlichtingendienst. Het merendeel van hun instituties werd gesloten en hun voornaamste leider, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahha, moest het land in 2000 verlaten. Deze ontwikkelingen openden de weg voor de puriteinen wiens belangrijkste geldschietter Ihya' al-Turath was. Tot het eind van de jaren '00 kwam een sterke "politico-purist" stroming op in Noord Libanon, die de beschikking had over een groot liefdadigheidsnetwerk en kiezers mobiliseerde tijdens de verkiezingen. Netwerken van "purist-rejectionists" zijn ook aanwezig en actief in Tripoli, zij het met veel minder invloed.

Hoewel hun netwerk sterk verstoord was door de autoriteiten, bleven *haraki-salafi's* sterk in Noord Libanon. De ineenstorting van het Syrisch-Libanese veiligheidsregime en de terugtrekking van Syrische troepen openden de weg weer voor het verspreiden van hun boodschap. De opkomst van de SACA met haar grote financiële ondersteuning op de Libanese salafi-scene kwam het *haraki-activisme* sterk ten goede. *Haraki's* hebben ook geprofiteerd van de verdiepte spanning tussen soennieten en sji'ieten, aangewakkerd door de angst van de soennitische gemeenschap voor de groeiende invloed van Hizbullah. De Arabische Lente van 2011 heeft de populariteit van de *haraki-salafi's*, ferme pleitbezorgers voor de revoluties, onder de bevolking sterk doen toenemen. De neergang van de *zu'ama*, en de leiderschapscrisis van de Libanese soennieten hebben deze trend voornamelijk gefaciliteerd. Religieuze leiders als Shaykh Salim al-Rafi'i of Zakariyya al-Masri werden leidende figuren in de soennitische gemeenschap – hoewel nog niet op het niveau van institutionele politiek.

Uit deze expansie van het salafisme op zowel lokaal als transnational niveau ontsproot een complexe netwerkstructuur, welke voornamelijk bestaat uit informele banden. In de tweede helft van de dissertatie heb ik een gedetailleerde analyse verschaft van de vorm en functie van de structuur van de beweging. Mijn discussie in hoofdstuk 5 verschaft inzicht in de religieuze

autoriteit van de salafi-shaykh's, die hun da'wa uitvoeren middels dagelijkse interactie met de gewone soennitische bevolking. Salafi's zijn van mening dat alleen hun definitie van het juiste geloof correct is; daarom versmallen ze de grenzen van orthodoxie en trekken er rigide grenzen voor. Hun claim dat zij alleen niet-gecorrumpeerde religieuze kennis bezitten wordt ondersteund door verschillende 'techniques of authority', zoals het praktiseren van gematigd ascetisme, waarmee een imago van puurheid gecreëerd wordt. Andere technieken zijn het implementeren van *hisba* en het voorzien in de socio-economische behoeften van de moslimgemeenschap. Ik heb gesteld dat activiteiten als tussenkomst in sociale conflicten en bemiddeling met de *zu'ama* ook tot doel hebben het sociaal kapitaal van de shaykh's te vergroten, wat vervolgens omgezet kan worden in autoriteit.

Het op die wijze verzekeren van autoriteit suggereert een centrale rol voor de 'men of religion' in het Libanese salafisme. Dit creëert een netwerkstructuur, welke bestaat uit verticaal gevormde sub-netwerken met de shaykh's bovenaan, die omringd worden door actieve en passieve deelnemers. Op lokaal niveau heb ik de salafi-netwerken binnen het raamwerk van civil society geplaatst. Ik heb dit laatste –daarin Hann volgend- beschreven als een 'web of trust and cooperation', die ook bestaat uit inheemse instituties, en niet exclusief gebaseerd is op formele vrijwillige associaties.¹¹² Ik stel dat de cohesie van salafi-netwerken verschaft wordt door een collectieve identiteit, die gebaseerd is op wat Birgit Meyer 'shared sensory experiences' van de participanten noemt. Vervolgens heb ik aangetoond dat netwerkverbanden draaien rond activiteiten die de collectieve identiteit versterken, zoals religieuze lessen, avondbijeenkomsten, of discussies na het gebed. Formele organisaties spelen een minder significante rol dan informele netwerken. Echter, instituties zoals de *shura*, opgezet door salafi's in Tripoli, maken een belangrijk deel uit van de lokale structuur van de beweging.

Lokale netwerken, die besproken worden in hoofdstuk 6, strekken zich uit tot over de grenzen en maken deel uit van transnationale netwerken. Een ander nieuw aspect van deze studie is dat het aantoont hoe het Libanese salafisme sterk in verbinding staat met de Arabische Golf en Europa.

¹¹² Hann, 'Introduction: political society and civil anthropology'

Tegelijkertijd verschaf ik een diepgaande analyse van de structuur en functie van deze internationale banden. In hoofdstuk 7 heb ik aangetoond dat sociaal kapitaal gemobiliseerd wordt via de links naar Koeweit, Qatar en Saoedi-Arabië, wat vervolgens omgezet kan worden in economisch en religieus kapitaal. In het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk heb ik de expansie van de salafi-netwerken naar Zweden, Nederland en Duitsland besproken. Deze transnationale netwerken tussen Libanon en Europa zijn voorheen aan de aandacht van onderzoekers ontsnapt. Ik heb hun structuur en functie in detail besproken, gebruikmakend van etnografische data die ik verzameld heb in voorgenoemde landen.

Het laatste hoofdstuk, hoofdstuk 8, verkent de 'recruitment strategy' van het salafisme. Eerst heb ik gesteld dat de succesvolle 'framing activity' van de salafi-shaykh's een groot aantal passieve volgers aantrekt. Predikers verklaren de praktische problemen van de Libanese soennitische gemeenschap, zoals de opkomst van de invloed van de Shi'a, de waargenomen socio-economische achterstelling van de soennieten, en de Arabische revoluties, door ze in een raamwerk van complottheorieën te plaatsen, geïnspireerd door hun manicheïsche wereldbeeld. Vervolgens adviseren ze hun publiek om de grondbeginselen van de ware versie van de islam aan te nemen, welke overeenkomt met het salafisme, om deze problemen op te lossen. Deze 'framing' vindt positieve weerklank vanwege de sociale en politieke omstandigheden van Noord Libanon en het gebrek aan levensvatbare counter-framing. Het laatste deel van het hoofdstuk legt uit hoe actieve deelnemers gerecruteerd worden via informele netwerken. Deze meestal jonge mensen gaan meestal door een proces van bekering, dat gefaciliteerd wordt door hun zoektocht naar een alternatieve identiteit en het gebrek aan alternatieve toekomstperspectieven.

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Quaestiones Infinitae

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