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Jerome Drevon

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**Theorising Militant Groups' Meso-Level Evolution**  
**A Comparative Study of the Egyptian Islamic and Jihad Groups**

Jerome Drevon

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Sciences

School of Government & International Affairs

Durham University

2015



## **Abstract**

This research theorises militant groups' meso-level evolution from their emergence to their potential non-violent transformation. The central argument of this thesis is that the timing of militant groups' adoption of violence in semi-authoritarian regimes is crucial in accounting for their subsequent ideational and organisational evolution, according to a path-dependent model. When a militant group predates its legitimisation of armed violence, the time period preceding the latter encourages low-risk activism mobilising patterns, which are defined as safer modes of mobilisation that are not directly opposed by the state and therefore do not entail high individual costs. These mobilising patterns facilitate the creation of strong horizontal ties between the group's leaders and the development of collective group identity shared by its leaders and members. These three factors collectively ease the internal legitimisation of shared horizontal and vertical organisational norms, which respectively refer to the norms uniting the leaders of the group and the norms uniting the leaders to their followers. These norms include the normalisation of the prerogatives of the group's leadership, an internal culture of consensus and shared decision making processes. These factors subsequently shape the group's evolution, whose possible non-violent transformation becomes contingent on the ability of its leadership to exploit external macro stimuli or internal learning processes, and to draw on the group's collective identity to internally legitimise a new strategic direction. Conversely, the second type of militant group is defined by its members' immediate engagement in high-risk activism forms of mobilisation, defined by their high individual cost caused by their intrinsically violent nature (e.g. staging a military coup). The combination of early ideational justifications of violence and its associated mobilising patterns fuel internal factionalism and hinder the legitimisation of internal norms of decision making and the consolidation of a controlled collective group identity. This mobilising pattern often sparks splits over any new tactical and strategic issues which may arise overtime, and eventually impedes the successful consensual transformation of this type of group in changing macro circumstances. This theorisation of militant groups' evolution is applied to the Egyptian Islamic and Jihad Groups. This thesis is based on a social movement theory framework. It is a qualitative small-n comparative case-study research using field research and interviews with numerous leaders and members of these two groups.



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## **Declaration**

No material for this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University.

The work is solely that of the author, Jerome Drevon.

## **Statement of Copyright**

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*À ma famille*



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## List of Abbreviations

AQ	Al-Qaeda
AS	<i>jam'iyya ansar al-sunna al-muhammadiyya</i> (association of the partisans of Muhammad's tradition)
BDP	Building and Development Party ( <i>hizb al-bina' wal-tanmiyya</i> )
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CP	Contentious Politics
DGI	Directory of General Intelligence
IG	Islamic Group (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya)
IP	Islamic Party ( <i>hizb al-islami</i> )
JG	Jihad Group ( <i>jama'a al-jihad</i> ) (also known as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad or as <i>tandhim al-jihad</i> , the Jihad Organisation)
JM	<i>jama'a al-muslimun</i> (the Group of the Muslims)
JS	<i>al-jam'iyya al-shar'iyya lil-ta'wun al-'amilin bil-kitab wal-sunna al-Muhammadiyya</i> (the <i>shari'a</i> association for those who behave according to the Book and Muhammad's tradition)
LIFG	Lybian Islamic Fighting Group ( <i>al-jama'a al-islamiyya al-muqatila fi libya</i> )
MB	Muslim Brotherhood ( <i>al-ikhwan al-muslimin</i> )
PPM	Political Process Model
RMT	Resource Mobilisation Theory
SMF	Social Movement Family
SMI	Social Movement Industry
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
SMT	Social Movement Theory
U.S.	United States of America



## Arabic Glossary

<i>‘aqida</i>	The Islamic creed
<i>ahl al-hadith</i>	The people of hadith (the Prophet's tradition)
<i>ahl al-sunna wal-jama‘a</i>	The people of the tradition and consensus (Sunni Muslims)
<i>amir</i>	Prince; leader
<i>al-ikhwan al-muslimun</i>	The Muslim Brotherhood
<i>amn al-dawla</i>	From <i>mabahith amn al-dawla</i> : State Security Investigations Service
<i>al-amir al-dharir</i>	The blind leader
<i>al-amr bil-ma‘ruf</i> <i>-wal-nahi ‘an al-munkar</i>	The promotion of virtue and repression of vice
<i>ash‘ari</i>	The mainstream ‘ <i>aqida</i> endorsed by most Muslims
<i>‘ashwa‘iyya</i>	Cairo's informal neighbourhoods
<i>athari</i>	A literalist ‘ <i>aqida</i>
<i>azhari</i>	An al-Azhar scholar
<i>baghi</i>	Rebel (negative connotation)
<i>bida‘</i>	Innovation in religion (negative connotation)
<i>da‘wa</i>	Preaching
<i>al-da‘wa al-salafiyya</i>	The <i>Salafi</i> Call (Alexandria-based movement)
<i>fard</i>	A religious duty
<i>fard ‘ayn</i>	An individual religious duty
<i>fard kifayya</i>	A communal religious duty
<i>fatwa</i>	Religious ruling
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>fitna</i>	Sedition
<i>futuwwa</i>	“Chivalry”
<i>ghulu</i>	Religious extremism in Islam (negative connotation)
<i>hadith</i>	A recorded Prophetic tradition
<i>hakimiyya</i>	Divine sovereignty
<i>hisba</i>	The promotion of virtue and repression of vice
<i>hizb al-‘asala</i>	The Authenticity Party

<i>hizb al-fadila</i>	The Virtue Party
<i>hizb al-nour</i>	The Light Party
<i>hizb al-wasat</i>	The Centre Party
<i>hudud</i>	The limits (literally); Islamic penal punishments
<i>ijma‘</i>	Consensus
<i>ijtihad</i>	Independent reasoning
<i>al-inqilab al-‘askari</i>	The military coup
<i>isti‘ana bil-kuffar</i>	Appeal to the non-Muslims / the non-believers
<i>istishhad</i>	Martyrdom
<i>jahiliyya</i>	Ignorance; pre-Islamic time (negative connotation)
<i>jama‘a al-muslimun</i>	The Group of the Muslims
<i>jam‘iyya al-‘umumiyya</i>	General Assembly
<i>jihad</i>	Effort; struggle; war in God's path
<i>jihadi</i>	A Muslim actively committed to the military dimension of jihad
<i>kafir</i> (pl. <i>kafirun</i> )	Non-believer / non-Muslim
<i>al-khalifa</i>	The Caliph
<i>khariji</i> (pl. <i>khawarij</i> )	Those who went out (literally); an heretical Islamic sect
<i>al-khilafa</i>	The Caliphate
<i>khuruj ‘ala al-hakim</i>	Rebellion against the (Muslim) ruler
<i>kufr</i>	Disbelief
<i>madhhab</i>	A school of jurisprudence, differentiated in <i>hanbali</i> , <i>hanafi</i> , <i>maliki</i> and <i>shafi‘i</i>
<i>madkhali</i>	A follower of Islamic scholar Rabee Al-Madkhali
<i>mafsada</i>	Corruption, negative public good
<i>maktab al-khadamat</i>	The Services Bureau
<i>majliss al-shura</i>	Consultative council
<i>maslaha</i>	Interest; public good
<i>mathlumin</i>	Oppressed
<i>maturidi</i>	A secondary ‘ <i>aqida</i>
<i>minhaj</i>	The religious method
<i>mu‘askar al-kufr</i>	The camp of infidelity

<i>mu'tazila</i>	An early Muslim rationalist sect widely considered heretical
<i>mubadara</i>	Initiative
<i>mufti</i>	Jurisconsult; highest religious authority in a state or a group
<i>mujahid</i> (pl. <i>mujahideen</i> )	A Muslim engaged in jihad
<i>mukhabarat</i>	The intelligence services
<i>murabitun</i>	The Muslim on the jihad front
<i>muraja'a</i> (pl. <i>muraja'at</i> )	Revision
<i>murji'</i>	Postponer of religious judgement
<i>najimun min al-nar</i>	Returnees from hell-fire
<i>al-qanun al-wad'i</i>	Positivist Law
<i>qiyyas</i>	Analogical deduction
<i>qutbi</i>	Partisan of Sayyid Qutb
<i>rafida</i> (pl. <i>rawafid</i> )	The rejectors (derogatory term to describe <i>shi'a</i> Muslims)
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic Law
<i>al-shawqiyyun</i>	The followers of Shawqi
<i>sheikh</i>	Religious scholar; notable
<i>sahwa</i>	Awakening
<i>al-salaf al-salih</i>	The pious predecessors (the first three generation of Muslims)
<i>salafi</i>	A Muslim who identifies with salafism
<i>al-salafiyya</i>	Salafism
<i>al-sama' wal-ta'</i>	Listen and obey
<i>shahada</i>	Testimony; martyrdom
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic Law
<i>shirk</i>	Associating something with God (negative connotation)
<i>shurut</i>	Conditions
<i>sufi</i>	A Muslim who follows Sufism
<i>sulta</i>	The authority
<i>sunna</i>	The Prophetic tradition
<i>taghut</i> (pl. <i>tawaghit</i> )	Despot; idol
<i>takfir</i>	Excommunication
<i>takfir wal-hijra</i>	Excommunication and Exile

<i>takfiri</i>	A Muslim inclined to excommunicate fellow Muslims (negative connotation)
<i>talai' al-fath</i>	The Vanguard of Conquest
<i>taraju'a</i> (pl. <i>taraju'at</i> )	Retreat
<i>tawheed</i>	Oneness or unicuity; divided in: <i>tawheed al-uluhiyya</i> (oneness of divinity), <i>al-rububiyya</i> (oneness of worship) and <i>al-asmāt wal-safāt</i> (oneness of names and attributes)
<i>al-'udhr bil-jahl</i>	The excuse of ignorance
<i>usul al-fiqh</i>	The principles of jurisprudence
<i>'unf</i>	Violence
<i>'ulama'</i>	Religious scholars
<i>al-wala wal-bara</i>	Associating with the believers and dissociating from the infidels
<i>wilayya al-asir</i>	The leadership of the prisoner

## **Arabic Transliteration**

The transliteration of Arabic words and titles follows a simplified pattern. Diacritics are not included; Arabic words are not capitalised; Ayn and Hamza are differentiated; Arabic words and names mentioned in the International Journal of Middle East Studies' Word List are included accordingly; accepted English spelling is used for prominent Arabic names and figures (e.g. Gamal Abdel Nasser not Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir).



# CHAPTER 1

## A MESO-LEVEL THEORISATION OF MILITANT GROUPS' EVOLUTION

The diversity of the [*jihadi*] groups is the outcome of many factors [...] pertaining to the different temporal and spatial conditions in which they emerged, their different understandings of reality, and the lack of confidence of some Muslim youths that older groups could confront secular governments from the 1940s to this day.

Ayman al-Zawahiri (1993)

### 1.1. TOWARDS A MESO-CENTRED APPROACH TO MILITANT GROUPS' EVOLUTION

A comparative theorisation of Islamist militant groups' evolution across cases has long been neglected in the scholarship on political violence. While the academic literature recognises the necessity to contextualise these groups in their multi-level environments, a comprehensive theoretical understanding stretching from their emergence to their potential non-violent transformation has never been fully developed. Rationalised by a laudable endeavour to dissect these groups' diversity and undermine frequent unhelpful amalgams, the academic corpus on political violence has often endorsed diverse typologies based on these groups' ideologies, theologies and rationales. Rationale-based differentiations have notably compartmentalised Islamist militant groups into four categories demarcating the internationalists, the irredentists, the socio-revolutionaries, and the vigilant.<sup>1</sup> These typologies have been designed to facilitate militant groups' theoretical understanding in delimited contexts, even though they have often obstructed a broader understanding of these groups' changing rationales over time<sup>2</sup> and hindered the study of cross-group mechanisms. A replicable cross-category theoretical framework reconciling militant groups' changing macro environments and organisational dynamics with internal learning processes and ideational legitimisation has yet to be formulated.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. Hegghammer, 2009, 2011: 4-8; see also: Wittes, 2008; Ashour, 2011; Dalacoura, 2011. Ideational differentiations based on these groups' ideological or theological outlooks refer to other categories, including the ubiquitous *takfiri* denomination which includes militant groups which are said to excommunicate fellow Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Interchanging rationales between internationalists and local agendas have spread substantially in the 2000s, with the development of local groups adopting al-Qaeda's agenda combined with the latter's increased focus on local regimes (e.g. Hoffman, 2004).

The comparative routes followed by the two main Egyptian militant groups, the Islamic Group (IG thereafter) and the Jihad Group (JG thereafter), illustrate the limits inherent with rationale and ideational-based typologies, and demonstrate the necessity to develop cross-category theorisations. The IG emerged in the mid-1970s as a university-based proselytising group which subsequently endorsed armed violence against the semi-authoritarian Egyptian regime. A failed armed campaign in the 1990s triggered the 1997 ceasefire initiative, later followed by theological renunciations of violence. After a temporary opening of political opportunity in 2011, the IG created a political party and joined the political process. A rationalist understanding of organisational survival could infer that this group has historically responded to external macro stimuli, and adapted its ideational framework accordingly. It would posit that the IG endorsed violence when the state obstructed any non-violent alternative, and created a political party when the political environment became favourable to political participation.<sup>3</sup> The IG's history would illustrate that ideational typological differentiations between violent and non-violent Islamist groups merely reflect the diverging macro-level environments in which they operate.

This explanation would nonetheless not explain why, in similar environmental conditions, a prominent JG-affiliated faction joined al-Qaeda in the late 1990s when violence failed to yield any result in Egypt, and why only a minority of its leaders joined the political process when the Egyptian political environment became conducive to political participation after 2011. The JG, in contrast with the IG, indeed adapted its rationale for violence when armed jihad failed in Egypt: rather than renouncing the legitimacy of violence, the JG embraced an internationalist agenda. If this discrepancy was solely explained by the personality of the JG leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and by this group's association with al-Qaeda networks outside of Egypt,<sup>4</sup> then why did the IG's external leadership not similarly join AQ, despite its inclusion in analogous networks and friendly relations with Osama bin Laden? On the ideological front, one could also question why a broadly similar *salafi* theologico-political outlook was amenable to political participation in the IG, despite decades of theological opposition to party politics and democracy, while the same does not collectively hold true in the JG. The comparison between these two groups demonstrates that they have reacted differently to external stimuli over time.

---

<sup>3</sup> This argument is aligned with Hafez's analysis (2003), which posits that violence was a response to political exclusion combined with reactive and indiscriminatory repression. This argument has sparked many controversies over the precise role of exclusion on Islamist movements. e.g. Dalacoura, 2011; Hamid, 2014. See also chapter 6.

<sup>4</sup> This view is favoured by Gerges (2009).

Applied to Islamist and non-Islamist cases, these paradoxical routes suggest that organisational dynamics have a preponderant role in mediating environmental changes, and in explaining militant groups' internal learning processes. This thesis therefore aims to theorise militant groups' meso-level evolution according to a path dependent model. This perspective considers that, although these groups' evolution is not pre-determined, their past choices regulate the range of possibilities available in the present and informs their future trajectories. This research endeavours to achieve this aim with the completion of three complementary objectives. The first objective is to provide an understanding of these groups' ideational constructions situated between essentialist and rationalist perspectives. This research sets out to analyse militant groups' ideational developments as complementarily flexible and circumscribed, whereby ideas are reinterpreted relationally, in continuity with previous interpretations and within the boundaries set by the organisational settings in which these groups operate. This research's second objective pertains to these groups' use of violence. This thesis undertakes a multi-level disaggregated analysis of these groups' resort to armed violence centred on their organisational dynamics. Finally, this research investigates militant groups' potential non-violent transformation, including ideological renunciations to violence and the creation of political parties.

A meso-level conceptualisation of militant groups' evolution represents an important step towards their cross-case analytical comparison. This theorisation is designed to investigate successive phases of evolution comprehensively, from these groups' emergence, to their involvement in armed contention, and potential non-violent transformation. These episodes are understood in continuity and change in order to discover and investigate specific points of rupture. This meso-level perspective is designed to explore internal dialogues and processes, reconciling evolving patterns of decision making with broader ideational developments, and to investigate their mediation with material (macro and organisational) changes. This focus is necessary to explain Islamist militant groups' evolutions beyond idiosyncratic analyses, towards a replicable and empirically rich theorisation.

The construction of a meso-level conceptualisation of militant groups has important ramifications on the study of Islamist movements. This theoretical endeavour is a significant contribution to the academic literature, which has often been plagued by a counterproductive division between materialist and ideational paradigms. Materialist leaning studies have generally granted pre-eminence to structural and organisational factors, including political exclusion and repression (e.g. Martinez, 1998; Burgat,

2002; Hafez, 2003), foreign occupation (Pape, 2006), the sociology of the radical communities which support militancy (Berman, 2009) and diverse micro and meso processes informed by the necessity to survive in competitive environments (e.g. Bloom, 2007; Kalyvas, 1999, 2006). Conversely, ideational-leaning studies have often emphasised the nature of radical millenarist religious cults (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Stern, 2003) and of these groups' Islamist ideologies (Tibi, 2014).<sup>5</sup> According to this perspective, ideational factors are central to the study of militant Islamist groups, while, for their materialist contenders, ideational developments are contingent on broader structural and organisational changes. These two paradigmatic visions should nonetheless not simplify the complex reality of Islamist armed groups, which reveal that material and ideational factors are, in congruence with constructivist views, mutually constituted rather than mutually exclusive.

## **1.2. THE MAIN ARGUMENTS OF THIS RESEARCH**

This research presents a general argument explaining militant groups' ideational and organisational evolution, and three subsidiary arguments covering specific themes. While this research focuses on two Islamist groups, it is of relevance to armed militancy broadly speaking, whether in Islamist or non-Islamist settings. The central argument of this thesis is that the timing of militant groups' adoption of violence in semi-authoritarian regimes is crucial in accounting for their subsequent ideational and organisational evolution, according to a path-dependent model. When a militant group predates its legitimisation of armed violence, the time period preceding the latter encourages low-risk activism mobilising patterns, which are defined as safer modes of mobilisation that are not directly opposed by the state and therefore do not entail high individual costs. These mobilizing patterns facilitate the creation of strong horizontal ties between the group's leaders and the development of collective group identity shared by its leaders and members. These three factors collectively ease the internal legitimisation of shared horizontal and vertical organisational norms, which respectively refer to the norms uniting the leaders of the group and the norms uniting the leaders to their followers. These norms include the normalisation of the prerogatives of the leadership of the group, an internal culture of consensus and shared decision making processes. These factors subsequently shape the group's evolution, whose possible non-violent transformation becomes contingent on the ability of its leadership to exploit external macro stimuli or internal learning processes, and draw on the group's

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<sup>5</sup> Several criticisms of the role allegedly played by religion in violent contention have been recently elaborated by a few scholars (e.g. Cavanaugh, 2009; Gunning & Jackson, 2011; Gunning, 2012; Armstrong, 2014).

collective identity to internally legitimise a new strategic direction. Conversely, the second type of militant group is defined by its members' immediate engagement in high-risk activism forms of mobilisation, defined by their high individual cost caused by their intrinsically violent nature (e.g. staging a military coup). The combination of early ideational justifications of violence and its associated mobilising patterns fuel internal factionalism and hinder the legitimisation of internal norms of decision making and the consolidation of a controlled collective group identity. This mobilising pattern often sparks splits over any new tactical and strategic issues which may arise overtime, and eventually impedes the successful consensual transformation of this type of group in changing macro circumstances.

This thesis develops three supplementary arguments. The first contention is that a militant group's ideational framework has to be understood relationally, within a group's organisational norms which both empower and constrain the emergence and development of new ideational frames. A group's ideational framework therefore cannot be reified, and only exists and evolves through the learning processes of its internally recognised sources of authorities, and within organisational constraints (for instance internal norms of decision making). Ideational outlooks can be reinterpreted to justify both violent and non-violent tactics and strategies, although ideas cannot be solely considered epiphenomena of broader material conditions. A group's ideational reinterpretations are specifically bounded by an ideational structure adopted in its early days (for *salafi* militants, this structure is formed by the *salafi* discursive tradition) which defines its core commitments and provides a set of legitimate tools and resources to reinterpret them over time. These ideational reinterpretations are facilitated by the possibility to redefine the ramifications of a group's collective identity in light of external stimuli and internal learning processes.

The second argument of this thesis is that violence and its practicalities have to be understood within a cycle of contention with numerous forces, including these groups' allies, contenders and the state. In addition to this widely accepted assertion in social movement studies, it is also crucial to differentiate the organisational mediations of evolving state policies by distinctive actors within a militant group, and their changing interpretations at the meso-level. A group's reaction to a cycle of contention cannot be solely understood through the analysis of diverging patterns of repression (possibly contextualised in a cycle of protest). A group's reaction to macro policies is primarily contingent on its internal

structure and organisational norms, which mediate internal differences of preferences for the use of violence. This perspective posits that a militant group does not necessarily react similarly to analogous macro-level policies, and asserts that a group might react differently overtime, in consideration of internal learning processes and their organisational assimilation.

Finally, the third argument presented in this thesis is that a militant group can successfully renounce the applicability of armed violence and embrace non-violent approaches to political action. This transformation is informed by internal learning processes and by changing external environments. These two factors are regulated by these groups' interactions with external groups and actors situated within or outside their social movement family. A group's transformation should therefore be understood organisationally, in consideration of a group's internal organisational norms and in light of the ability of its leadership to reframe its collective identity and diffuse new ideational frames within the boundaries set up by the group's ideational structure

### **1.3. THE CHOICE OF A SMALL-N COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR GENERALISATION**

Finding an adequate balance between empirical abundance and theoretical value is the main difficulty of meso-centred studies on armed militancy. The numerous obstacles facing the gathering of rich primary data on militant groups have often spurred a counter-productive division between broad comparisons of macro or meso-level characteristics across cases, and empirically rich single-case studies. The former emphasises its theoretical validity and generalisability, at the cost of a neglected consideration of internal perceptions and interpretations at the meso-level (e.g. Pape, 2006; Bloom, 2007; Moghadam, 2008; Dalacoura, 2011). Conversely, the latter relies on first-hand primary access to militant groups and rich analyses of their written and oral sources to explore their internal dynamics and debunk existing simplifications. Their idiosyncratic nature, however, often leaves doubts over their theoretical generalisability to broader understandings of armed militancy, although their empiricism sometimes alludes to subsidiary theoretical ramifications (e.g. Gunning, 2008; Hegghammer, 2010; Lefèvre, 2013).

An alternative approach situated between these two contrasting poles emphasises the necessity to

conceptualise the meso-level, and comparatively investigate militant groups' internal dynamics and organisational processes. This perspective is located beyond hardly replicable analyses of a single case study, towards more generalisable conceptualisations and meso-level theorising, reconciling these groups' internal dialogues and organisational processes with changing macro policies. This choice has increasingly been adopted in the literature on civil war (e.g. Wood, 2003; Weinstein, 2007; Metelits, 2009; Christia, 2012; Shapiro, 2013; Staniland, 2014), building on the case for the multi-level disaggregation of the use of violence in these settings (Chenoweth et al., 2010). Similar conceptualisations of the meso-level have also been replicated in studies of armed militancy in alternative settings not marked by fully-fledged civil wars (della Porta, 2013), although this field of inquiry has not hitherto been as widely pursued.<sup>6</sup> This research endorses this alternative choice between empirical and theoretical value, and adopts a small-n comparative case study research design. This choice is the most appropriate to substantiate the main arguments of this research, and analyse militant groups' internal dynamics comparatively in a limited number of cases.

A major historical contribution to comparative politics was introduced by Mill's comparative methods. In *A System of Logic* (Mill, 1865), Mill explores the “method of agreement” and the “method of difference”, which have often been subsequently referred to as the most different and most similar cases. Mill posits that, in the method of agreement, “if two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree, is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon” (Mill, 1865: 454), while, in the method of difference, he proposes that “if an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance save one in common, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon.” (Mill, 1865: 463). Mill's method of agreement therefore endeavours to identify a single causal variable, whereas his method of difference attempts to identify a distinctive variable explaining different outcomes, all other factors being similar.

Although the application of Mill's methods in the social sciences can be problematic, they provide an important comparative logic of case selection. George and Bennett contend that Mill's methods rely on three challenging prerequisites, namely that only one necessary or sufficient condition should be

<sup>6</sup> A growing number of PhD theses have been recently completed with similar conceptualisations, although they remain focused on civil war environments. e.g. Green, 2011; Krause, 2011; Woldemariam, 2011; Bateson, 2013.

involved in the causal relations, that all “causally relevant variables” are recognised and that all causal paths can be investigated (George & Bennett, 2005: 155). Despite additional risks associated with Mill's methods to assess a variable's necessity or sufficiency, its ideal types are beneficial to this research for their distinction of the two main logics of case selection. The first choice would be the selection of a determined number of militant groups sharing an organisational characteristic, followed by their systematic comparison in different settings. This choice could draw on Goodwin's state centric approach (2001: 35) by selecting a small-n number of cases of Islamist militant groups with a shared organisational characteristic, which would be analysed and systematically compared in several types of political regimes in order to make theoretical sense of its role and importance. The second choice would be the selection of a few militant groups which differ on one prominent organisational characteristic, followed by their systematic comparison in very similar contexts. The analysis of this comparison would then infer on this organisational factor.

The philosophy and objectives of this research are particularly appropriate to a case selection informed by Mill's method of difference. The social movement approach to armed militancy developed in the next chapters does not isolate militant groups from their broader environments, which notably include their violent and non-violent competitors and allies, as well as religious and secular groups and institutions. This research contextualises militant groups' political approaches in relation to changing state policies towards them and towards these additional actors. The complexity inherent with the inclusion of rich external factors hinders a cross case comparison between different countries, which could increase the presence of unconsidered and uncontrolled external variables. This shortcoming would negatively impact the validity of this research's findings and limit its theoretical relevance. Building on Mill's method of difference, it is therefore more appropriate to select a single country and a small-n number of militant groups which substantially differ on one prominent organisational characteristic. This analysis can then focus on the impact of this discrepancy on these groups' respective evolution. In this research, the main difference between the two groups selected concerns the time-frame separating their emergence and endorsement of armed violence.

The choice of country was guided by several additional considerations. This research design required a country that was both accessible to field research and widely studied in the literature. The selected Islamist militant groups had to differ organisationally, and somehow represent typical cases. The

existing breadth of research on Egypt and the importance of its two main militant groups, the Islamic Group (al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, IG thereafter) and the Jihad Group (*jama‘a al-jihad*, JG thereafter) made it particularly suitable for a comparative study.<sup>7</sup> Egypt has long been central for armed Islamist groups in Muslim countries, and both groups have proven very influential for decades. The former has historically defended a mass-movement approach which has affected other Islamist armed groups, such as its eponymous counterpart in Indonesia. The JG's elitist endeavour, on the other hand, has influenced other groups such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), and has provided the ideational and organisational backbone of al-Qaeda organisation. The similarity of these two Egyptian groups' theologico-political frameworks drawing on *salafi* Islam and their evolution in similar domestic and international environments based on distinctive organisational structures and modes of mobilisation is therefore appropriate to the research design of this comparative case study.

These groups' evolution in the same macro-level environment and their analogous theologico-political ideologies means that this comparative case study can focus primarily on the impact of diverging organisational dynamics on these groups' evolutions. This choice enhances the replicability of this research's findings to other militant groups evolving in semi-authoritarian contexts. As the second theoretical chapter of this research argues, this generalisability is additionally strengthened by the use of process tracing and by the constant reference to a broad literature on social movement, civil war and political violence to substantiate the arguments advanced throughout this research.

#### **1.4. THE ADOPTION OF A PLURALISTIC APPROACH**

The intricacies of this study and the focus on political violence necessitate the use of complementary sources to bolster its internal validity. This qualitative research design therefore adopts pluralistic research methods for data acquisition and analysis, triangulation which notably facilitates “sound explanation, enhanced theory-building capacity, and deeper understanding” (Ayoud, Wallace & Zepeda-Millán, 2014: 68). This choice is supported by past and current criticisms elaborated by scholars of political violence, who have long lamented the absence of research-based analyses informed by reflective methodologies, using direct access to militant groups rather than solely relying on the secondary sources published by a small epistemic community<sup>8</sup> (Schmid & Jongman, 1988; Silke, 2004;

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<sup>7</sup> This group is sometimes internally referred to as *tandhim al-jihad* (the Jihad Organisation) and, in the literature, as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

<sup>8</sup> On the epistemic community monopolising public discourse on terrorism, one can refer to Herman & O’Sullivan (1990)

Gunning, 2007; Jackson, Smyth & Gunning, 2009). As argued recently by Marc Sageman, current research on political violence is still often marked by an “explosion of speculations with little empirical grounding” and by the absence of “comprehensive and reliable data” (Sageman, 2014b: 6). While this field of study has certainly improved over the past decade (Boyle, 2012; Schmid, 2011: 470), “too many academics make unsubstantiated claims mimicking research and cite each other, generating an echo effect of erroneous information” (Sageman, 2014a: 5). A pluralistic approach to political violence is therefore necessary to the undertaking of this research.

This research followed two complementary deductive and inductive phases. First, a diverse literature on social movements and political violence, complemented by empirical studies of these groups' histories and published interviews of their leaders, was gathered and analysed. These sources presented rich data on these groups and highlighted a few important themes in their respective histories. This early analysis facilitated the formulation of preliminary hypotheses accounting for these groups' evolution over time, including their ideological constructions, their evolving approaches to armed violence and their gradual (partial or comprehensive) renunciations to violence in the 2000s. This deductive phase was followed by eighteen months' field research in Egypt between 2011 and 2014 designed to gather primary data, following an inductive approach. This field research was composed of two main methods of qualitative data acquisition: a political ethnography with members and leaders of these two groups and an extensive number of semi-structured interviews. The combination of these deductive and inductive phases facilitated the consideration of new hypotheses and ideas potentially ignored by previous research (Lieberman, 2004: 2).

The 2011 uprising presented an unprecedented opportunity to participate in many public and private activities organised by IG and JG members, and to intermingle with them. The opening of the public space after 2011, the liberation of political prisoners (including numerous IG and JG members) and these groups' eagerness to communicate to the public after decades of political closure was used, in this research, to open dialogue and to facilitate a field immersion. After a clarification of this researcher's objectives, senior leaders and members of these two groups facilitated the author's integration, and crucially organised many formal and informal meetings with fellow members and leaders. This participant observation included diverse private and public activities, such as group meetings, political

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and Stampnitzky (2014).

party internal negotiations, public gatherings and demonstrations. The IG, through the family of sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, notably organised an eighteen months sit-in in favour of the liberation of this scholar in the centre of Cairo, which was used as a public space where Egyptian former militants, among others, would gather and engage one another. The researcher spent a considerable amount of time throughout this period in these settings to become acquainted with these groups' members' and followers' self-understandings in their own terms and within their own traditions (Asad, 1993: 200), which helped this researcher to “develop a certain intimacy with [this] subject” (Loaeza, 2005: 9). This field research shed light on the interactions between these groups' members and leaders, on the evolution of their micro-level perceptions and generally dissociated this research from widespread ideationalisation (through ideology or theology) of these individual experiences. As a political ethnography, this endeavour sustained the development of a specific “approach that cares [...] to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality” (Schatz, 2013b: 5).

In addition, these groups' leaders and members facilitated the organisation of semi-structured interviews throughout this fieldwork. These interviews were organised relationally, through networks of trust developed in the field. Initially, the author was introduced by a senior member of the IG to the group's current leadership, which consented to being interviewed. Senior JG leaders later gave a similar approval. Other lower-ranking IG and JG members encountered during this field research additionally presented their views and internal insights, and invited the researcher to their houses and communities to introduce new contacts and provide additional information. These semi-structured interviews presented thematic probes and queries on pre-defined themes, following the theoretical approach developed in the preliminary research design. These dialogues gave ample leeway to digression to introduce potentially overlooked issues and themes raised by the interviewees.

The accuracy of these interviews were facilitated by various factors. Between the 2011 uprising and the July 2013 military coup, the Egyptian political environment was unprecedentedly open. The coercive measures imposed hitherto by the political police, the infamous State Security Investigations Service (*mabahith amn al-dawla*), ended after the 2011 uprising and former and current Islamist militants were able, for the first time, to express themselves. For instance, many senior IG and JG members and leaders were invited by Egyptian TV channels for long interviews to present their views to the public. Academic interviews were consequently not subjected to their pre-2011 security repercussions.

Moreover, these two groups had long declared a ceasefire in Egypt (in 1995 for the JG and 1997 for the IG) and had already served long sentences in jail for their past actions. They did not have to conceal their responsibilities for what happened in previous decades, and were generally quite reflective about the impact of their actions. During the researcher's early interactions with them, it became clear that they saw an opportunity to set the record straight. They were aware that most publications written on their histories do not include their perspectives, and realised that this was a necessary endeavour. Both groups were engaged in self-critical appraisal about what had happened in the past, and were generally eager to convey their retrospective insights. They wanted to use the 2011 uprising to assert that they had, too, long been victims of state oppression under Mubarak.

Academic interviews cannot be considered uncritically, however. A researcher must reflect on “the effects of weak or selective memory, lack or imprecision of concrete historical detail, ideologically-driven portrayal of past events, personal self-promotion, and adaptation or outright distortion of responses in accordance either with the perceived aims and prejudices of the interviewer or with the current political agenda of the interviewee” (Sayigh, 2004: xvi-xvii).<sup>9</sup> These biases are inherent with any biographical retrospection, although they can be mitigated.

Preliminary research and interviewee selection were particularly important to take fully advantage of field research. In order to preclude hollow discussions whereby interviewees would reproduce a stereotypical discourse to an external audience, this researcher had to demonstrate an acute understanding of these groups' histories, and sometimes rely on the authority conferred by previous interviews to nurture trust with these groups' members. Some interviewees were occasionally less inclined to dwell on internal differences of opinion, especially in the Islamic Group where a consensual culture prevails. It was often beneficial to quote other leaders internally perceived as more intransigent to demonstrate that this researcher was already trusted by important figures. In addition, these references also helped to establish meaningful dialogues with lower ranking members, who were not always confident to divulge internal dissensions to non-members.

Interviewee selection was based on a combination of targeted sampling and snowball effect. The temporarily liberal environment after 2011 meant that, in contrast with many studies of political

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<sup>9</sup> See also Kalyvas, 2006: 42

violence, interviewee selection was not merely based on “opportunity sampling” (Silke, 2004: 64) with whoever could be interviewed. This researcher had the opportunity to select individuals at the leadership and non-leadership levels, based on the variety of positions they held in the past. For instance, it was important to include individuals from these groups' imprisoned and external leaderships, who invariably had different understandings of and perspectives on their groups' histories, and would be less likely to be subject to collective group reinterpretation. Occasionally, some members would also discourage the author from interviewing specific actors, which was important for inferring internal tensions. A final significant issue concerned the fact that a few leaders were still on trial, having previously been sentenced to death *in absentia*. Rifa'i Taha and Mustafa Hamza were notably re-trialled for their alleged involvement in the IG military apparatus. In addition, Muhammad Sawqi al-Islambuli is still, to this day [19 February 2015], on the United Nations' “List established and maintained by the Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee with respect to individuals, groups, undertakings and other entities associated with Al-Qaida” (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

A tremendous amount of internal and external sources were additionally gathered and analysed. They include these groups' official literature (books, communiqués and magazines) as well as diverse primary documents published by their current and former members, including memories and online retrospective interviews. Many sources were provided by these groups' members, while the remaining were obtained online. This research also retrieved a variety of documents from Islamist and non-Islamist websites and forums, media interviews and documentaries, and international and national non-governmental reports. The latter notably includes Egyptian and American court reports, declassified sources and Wikileaks documents. Governmental and non-governmental reports were particularly important to study the severe policing of protest of the Egyptian security forces in the 1990s, that interviewees would not necessarily describe in details considering the social taboos associated with many practices utilised by the political police.

The nature of this research project highlights significant ethical issues. The University of Durham's ethical regulations were discussed with this research's supervisor, and this fieldwork was then approved by the university's ethics committee. A few academic publications and guidelines produced by European and American associations were consulted, including the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, the Code of Practice for the European Commission, MRS Guidelines for Qualitative Research and Code of Conduct, the SRA's Code of Practice for the safety of social

researchers and the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association. In the field, all participants were told the aims and purposes of this research. They explicitly gave their consent to the use of the data obtained and, in the majority of cases, to use their names. At the same time, the precarious security environment meant that their consent could not be simply granted, and ought to be considered as a continuous process of renegotiation in changing circumstances (Clark, 2006; Wood, 2006; Miller et al, 2012). It was particularly clear that the political environment in Egypt was volatile and that information disclosed in a relatively free environment could become a concern, even a liability, in the future. Unfortunately, these early fears materialised after the July 2013 military coup, when more than dozens of IG and JG leaders and members interviewed in this research were arrested by the new authoritarian regime. After the completion of this research, it was therefore decided that, when an interviewee gave similar information via the media (written or televised), his quote and name could be preserved. In addition, names could also be preserved if the information was not sensitive and threatening to the security of the interviewee. On the other hand, when IG or JG members revealed information which could be potentially used against them, their names were altered and all information which could help to identify them was carefully removed, including from this researcher's electronic copy.

This research does not intend to speak on these groups' behalf, nor does it seek to uncritically reproduce their narratives. This research rather endeavours, as Sara Roy aptly mentioned in her study of the Islamist social sector in the Gaza Strip, to speak “*from* them by incorporating into [...] analysis personal studies and accounts” and to “walk in their shoes” (Roy, 2011: 17). In light of current criticisms of political violence research, this is the least a researcher can aspire towards.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGICAL MESO-CENTRED SOCIAL MOVEMENT APPROACH**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter has introduced the objectives of this research and set out the case for a multi-level analysis of Islamist militancy in Egypt. This theoretical chapter additionally promotes dialogue between political violence, civil war and social movement studies to contextualise and de-exceptionalise the study of the use of violence by Islamist actors. This theoretical framework accordingly contends that violence and non-violence should be studied as repertoires of social protests constructed in interaction with evolving and interrelated macro, meso and ideational factors. The following discussion presents this research's social movement theory analytical framework, and draws on past and current debates on armed violence and contentious studies to develop this thesis' theoretical outlook.

This theoretical chapter explores the academic study of social movements. It is designed to present the construction of a diverse understanding of collective action in the literature, to evaluate its strength in the study of the use of violence by Islamist militant groups and to present the meso-centred theoretical approach adopted throughout this research.

The academic conceptualisation of social movements broadly emphasises similar variables, even though they diverge on their respective importance. In this research, social movements are defined as “a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action, are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; share a distinct collective identity” (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 20). The adoption of this definition is justified by its clear and all-encompassing conceptualisation of social movements. Other definitions posit that social movements operate “outside of institutional or organizational channels” (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004: 11) or that they “actively pursue change by employing protest” (Edwards, 2014: 5). These conceptualisations are not suited to this research given that the two militant groups under examination have adopted other repertoires rather than protests before 2011, and institutional channels thereafter.

The following theoretical discussion explores the two main analytical perspectives developed in the literature. The first perspective has historically focused on the meso-level, and was initially introduced by resource mobilisation theory (RMT) to analyse the rational mobilisation of diverse types of resources by social movement organisations (SMOs). The second approach, the political process model (PPM), has conversely investigated the macro-level environment which facilitates or hinders social movement mobilisation. After discussing these models' respective analytical strengths and internal revisions, this chapter contends that social movement approaches are particularly adapted to this research's study of Islamist armed militancy. The corpus on social movement studies is notably aligned with this research's objectives, and with its ontological and epistemological premises. Moreover, social movement approaches to political violence are particularly relevant for their multi-level, dynamic and relational understanding of militant groups' evolutions.

This chapter nonetheless argues that the social movement literature on Islamist militant groups is less adequate on two fronts. First, the current academic focus on the discovery of replicable mechanisms across cases has often overlooked militant groups' internal learning processes. The literature tends to assume that militant groups evolving in similar settings are subject to similar mechanisms, and therefore excludes the possibility that their actions might be additionally informed by their past experience or by the experience of other groups. Second, the academic corpus on Islamist groups is still overtly marked by rationalist ideational considerations, wherein ideas are merely a resource to be used and manipulated by Islamist groups, without giving consideration to their potentially constraining role as well.

Finally, this chapter concludes with the methodological undertaking of this research. As a small-n comparative case study research, this thesis draws on complementary SMT traditions. This research postulates that militant groups' meso-level modes of organisation should be analysed as network-based, rather than maintaining an artificial division between organisational and networking conceptualisations. This perspective adds that a specific analytical emphasis should be stressed on the study of these groups' internal regulations and norms. This section finally contends that the choice of a small-n comparative research design has a few implications on this research's approach to causation and potential for generalisation. It consequently justifies the adoption of process tracing within and across

case study comparison, which, this research argues, is particularly suited to this thesis' endeavour to theorise militant groups' evolutions in diverse settings.

## **2.2. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STUDIES TOWARDS THE POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL CONSENSUS**

Social movement studies investigate individual mobilisation in various forms of social protest. From early collective behaviour models to the current political process consensus, the development of this academic corpus has been marked by an array of questions reflecting broader sociological debates, including the ubiquitous structure versus agency debate. The following discussion explores the maturation of this field of study and reflects on its dialectical nature (Edwards, 2014: 2). This discussion notably investigates the “conceptual dualism” of this field, between agency and structure, rational and relational approaches, and emotion and rationality (Edwards, 2014: 3). This section contextualises the emergence of the political process consensus, which has dominated social movement studies for the past few decades.

Modern social movement studies were preceded by early twentieth century's collective behaviour studies. This approach historically drew on the study of crowds, mobs and fascist militias, conceptualised as the irrational outcome of shared grievances and allegedly characterised by their irrational behaviour (e.g. le Bon, 1897). This approach to collective action is relatively diverse, and can be differentiated into symbolic interactionism and structural functionalism (Edwards, 2014: 10-41). The root causes of social problems and “abnormal” collective behaviour are therein located in macro-level societal disruptions and structural strains. These factors include, for instance, industrialisation, modernisation, rural flight and fast economic and social changes. An influential theory, the relative deprivation theory, specifically traces individual frustration back to changing social, economic and political conditions (Gurr, 1970; Marx & Wood, 1975; Smelser, 2011). Collective behaviour studies contend that an array of macro factors generate two key individual grievances, deprivation and social marginalisation (Edwards, 2014: 41), which, in turn, fuel micro psychological grievances and irrational emotions, and eventually catalyse micro-mobilisation.

Collective behaviour studies are marked by their focus on the causal roots of supposedly irrational contention. This approach is rooted in social psychology, which explains its investigation of the

negative and destabilising role of anger, emotions and frustration on aggrieved individuals. This early academic corpus has nonetheless long been rebutted in the literature. While the role of emotion has been reasserted in subsequent studies, collective behaviour studies have been contested for their limited explanatory relevance which fails to account for the non-participation of other aggrieved individuals (Snyder & Tilly, 1972; McAdam, 1982). Moreover, they have been crucially invalidated by the ubiquitous finding that mobilised individuals are generally more socially connected than the broader populace (e.g. Tilly, 1978).

The prominence of irrationality in early contentious protest studies combined with the emergence of new social movements considered favourably by social movement scholars, including the African-American Civil Right Movement and streets protests against U.S. wars in the 1960s, has subsequently initiated a new emphasis on social movements' rationality. This consideration has sparked the development of two successive rationalist traditions, resource mobilisation theory and the political process model. These new frameworks have instituted a new conceptualisation of social movements, understood as rational, purposeful, and organised, which has persisted in the literature (Zald & Ash, 1966; Oberschall, 1973, 1980; McCarthy & Zald, 1977, 1987; Tilly, 1978).

The first rationalist approach to social movements, resource mobilisation theory (RMT thereafter), emphasises the meso-level and the understanding of “how”, rather than “why”, contention occurs. Its proponents postulate that most individuals do not act upon their shared grievances, and assert that grievances alone cannot explain diverging modes of contention. Resource mobilisation scholars advocate the need to investigate the mobilisation of resources in contention. They contend that resources can be material (including financial and organisational) and intangible (including audience and public support), and vary quantitatively across social movements. They add that diverging mobilising structures, from centralised (McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977; Gamson, 1975) to decentralised structures (Gerach & Hine, 1970), are characterised by various levels of efficiency. Diverging structures arguably impact micro mobilisation, as well as social movement organisations' ability to adapt and survive in changing circumstances. This approach to contention focuses on the rationality of mobilisation and on the strategic mobilisation of resources, based on a cost-benefit individual calculus.

The micro-rationality endorsed by RMT has raised the so-called collective action problem. This

conundrum, initially developed by Olsen (1965), pertains to the free riding problem affecting presumably rational actors. It contends that micro mobilisation is not necessarily congruent with individuals' self-interests, considering the risks involved. While everyone benefits from societal mobilisation, risks are only taken by the minority actively engaged in contention. Economists explain this contradiction with the collective good problem. Fighting for the collective good benefits everybody, but mostly entails costs for the mobilised minority. Resource mobilisation scholars have attempted to explain micro-mobilisation by its micro-rationalisation through coercion or incentives (material or immaterial, including rewards and solidarity incentives) (Zald & Ash, 1966). They have also emphasised the role of mobilising entrepreneurs, ideational commitments and professional organisations (McCarty & Zald, 1977) which can successfully rationalise micro-mobilisation for active individuals.

The second theoretical development based on a rationalist conceptualisation of social movements is the political process model (PPM). In contrast with RMT, the PPM has reintroduced a thorough consideration of the broader macro environment in which social movement organisations evolve. This model focuses on the environment in which social movements emerge and operate, and investigates its constraining and enabling role on their development. Political process scholars generally argue that, notwithstanding the existence of shared grievances and resources, social movements need favourable macro-level conditions for contention to be possible and successful.

The central concept introduced by the political process model concerns the political characteristics of SMO's external environment. This concept was originally named "political opportunity structures", and referred specifically to the opportunities inherent within different types of regimes. Political opportunity structures are based on several conceptualisations by Eisinger (1973) and Tilly (1978), and include these regimes' degree of openness in comparative perspective across cases (e.g. Kitschelt, 1986). A typical definition describes them as "features of regimes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit a political actor's collective action and [...] changes in those features" (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009: 440). The next section elaborates on internal debates and contentions over the nature of political opportunities. It is worth mentioning that they generally include (1) the level of formal and informal access to political institutions and to the decision-making process, (2) changing state repression capability and use, (3) the general configuration of the political system (especially with regards to its

structure and to elite alignment and division), and (4) the position of other social movements evolving in the same milieu (Tilly, 1978; Kitschelt, 1986; Tarrow, 1994; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; McAdam et al., 1996).

PPM scholars have long argued that political opportunities cannot be objectified, and should rather be considered as interpreted and constructed by SMOs. McAdam (1982) adopted, from a Marxist perspective, the concept of cognitive liberation to explain the interpretation of political opportunities by social movement actors and their mediation by social movements' mobilising structures. According to McAdam, cognitive liberation explains that “people must collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through group action” (1982: 51) to mobilise successfully.

The development of new types of conflicts in Western countries from the 1970s onwards sparked the parallel study of “new social movements” among European scholars. These movements illustrate the development of new types of contention in post-industrial societies (Melucci, 1980, 1995; Touraine, 1981; Cohen, 1985; Kriesi et al. 1995). Their mobilisation is arguably no longer based on socio-economic class-based grievances but on ideas, identities, values and beliefs such as gender, international solidarity and environmental protection. New social movements recruit across classes, often among the middle class, women and minorities, and are characterised by less hierarchical, and more egalitarian and decentralised networks which significantly contrasts with their predecessors. New social movement scholars have surfaced in dialogue with hitherto prevailing Marxist understandings of contention; they mostly diverge with the latter vis-à-vis their focus on cultural struggle rather than on class-based economic contention, although their focus on structural changes as determining this shift to culture is informed by a neo-Marxist outlook.

This “ideational turn” has later influenced the political process model as well, and motivated a renewed interest in meaning-making and interpretative processes. The main contribution to the PPM is the inclusion of framing, in combination with the (already included) political opportunity and mobilising structures. The concept of frame was initially introduced by Gamson, and later popularised in social movement studies by a few scholars, notably Benford and Snow (Gamson et al. 1982 ; Snow et al. 1986; Snow & Benford 1988; Snow & Benford 1992; Benford & Snow 2000; Williams & Benford 2000). Frames are defined as “an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out

there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Snow & Benford, 1992: 137). The inclusion of framing in social movement studies has reignited a focus on the interactive relations between social movement entrepreneurs and their audience, rather than on individual transformation processes triggering collective action, which was initially proposed by Gamson. Framing studies uncover ideational micro-mobilisation through the creation of collective action frames, and investigate the success or failure of different types of frames in achieving this objective. The inclusion of framing in social movement studies has attempted to revive the social psychology dimension of collective action.

Although framing is generally considered an outgrowth of the RMT, its inclusion in the political process model has provided an array of analytical tools and concepts to explore ideational processes, including frame alignment, resonance and master frames. Frames have the same functions as collective action frames, and mostly differ in their broader scope, inclusivity, flexibility and cultural resonance. They are characterised by their generic and structuring nature, and by their provision of a general narrative, guidance and orientation. Frames have three main objectives, defined as diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. These three objectives are designed to inspire micro-mobilisation by presenting social movement audiences with (1) what is wrong, (2) what should be done, and (3) why they should mobilise. Social movement entrepreneurs can manipulate existing frames to mobilise their followers through frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation (Snow et al. 1986). Their success can then be assessed with the study of their resonance, which is contingent on their constituency, empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, centrality, narrative fidelity and the credibility of their promoters (e.g. Wickham, 2002),

The combination of political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing has shaped the formation of the consensual political process model (McAdam et al., 1996). The PPM has dominated social movement studies, despite the revisions discussed in the next section. This approach to the study of contention defends the need to explore the interactions between three level variables, macro, meso and micro, to explain social movements' emergence and development. According to the political process model, changing political opportunities are interpreted by social movement entrepreneurs who forge diagnosis, prognosis and motivational frames to mobilise their followers in specific structures. This prevailing model has, however, been subject to growing criticisms since its postulation, including by its

most prominent architects.

The development of RMT and of the PPM lay out the parameters which serve as a guide for this study of Islamist armed militancy. In agreement with most of the current academic corpus on political violence, these two models expose the limits of early structural strains studies on allegedly irrational contentious mobilisation. These two theoretical frameworks demonstrate the analytical relevance of the study of social movement organisations are rational groups whose actions are informed, constrained and made possible by the internal and external conditions in which they operate.

### **2.3. REVISITING THE POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL**

The predominance of the political process model in contentious politics and social movement studies has instigated many debates over its main premises. These criticisms have been elaborated internally and externally, by this model's main founders as well as by new contributors. They suggest diverse degrees of revisions over the concept of political opportunity structures, and over the PPM's rationalist and strategic foundations. These revisions have notably triggered the emergence of new research agendas discussed at the end of this section.

The first criticism of the political process model concerns the formulation of “political opportunity structures”. The narrow political characteristics originally included in this concept have exponentially been enriched by the inclusion of new non-political opportunities of a cultural, discursive, socio-economic, organisational and transnational nature (Jasper, 2011b). The proliferation of new opportunities has raised a word of caution among social movements scholars demanding a conceptual clarification and a quantitative delimitation (e.g McAdam, 1996: 27; Tilly, 2008: 91). The growing number of potential opportunities has prompted the discontinued use of the word “structures”, replaced by these opportunities' contextual examination on a case-to-case basis (Tarrow, 1998; Kurzman, 2004).

A broad consideration of political opportunities arguably limits their individual explanatory strength. The inclusion of a considerable number of new opportunities signifies that any favourable factor can potentially be examined. Analytically, this broad inclusion limits the possibility to systematically compare their influence across cases and hinders the analysis of their scientific falsifiability (Jasper, 2011b). Social movements scholars have notably lamented that any variable retrospectively considered

favourable to contention has been considered an opportunity, even if its cross-case impact is in reality more ambiguous (such as state repression) (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). Political opportunities have therefore been criticised for the difficulty to measure their explanatory strength and their post-contention interpretations (Jasper, 2011b). Some scholars have specifically denounced the truism to name them “opportunities”, and questioned the appropriate denomination of an opportunity missed by social actors (Jasper, 2011b). These criticisms have stimulated a redeeming quest designed to delimit political opportunities more clearly (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004), an endeavour rejected by a few constructivist scholars (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999, 2004).

Another leading criticism informed by the cultural turn in social movement studies pertains to the PPM's objectification of political opportunities. These contributions argue that political opportunities should not be considered objectively. In agreement with constructivist perspectives, they posit that, while some of them might be described as objective and structural, others are subjective and prone to interpretation by social movement actors (Koopmans, 2004; McAdam, 2004). More radical perspectives further renounce any objectification of political opportunities, and assert that social movement actors are agents of change who can create their own opportunities through interpretative processes (Kurzman, 1996; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). Regardless of the degree of constructivism endorsed by these criticisms, they generally agree that culture should, at least, be considered embodied in political opportunities, in recognition that cultural dimensions shape prevailing norms and practices (Polletta, 2004).

The investigation of political opportunities' construction by social movement actors has motivated an additional critique on the PPM, namely its structural bias. The rationalist and macro-centred approach endorsed by this model indicates that, despite an advocacy of a dynamic understanding of contention, structural changes are presumably prevalent in the initial phase of collective action (McAdam et al., 1996: 17; Tarrow, 1998: 7). This perspective thus suggests that macro-level changes pave the way for contentious mobilisation. At the same time, if, in accordance with cultural criticisms, political opportunities do not exist objectively, then rationalist understandings of structural change are unsubstantiated. McAdam recognised this structural bias as early as 1994, and the inclusion of cultural perspectives and framing in the PPM is a response to these criticisms. Goodwin and Jasper nonetheless maintain that social movement actors construct their own opportunities (Jasper, 1999; Goodwin &

Jasper, 2004) and are not simply waiting for favourable macro changes. Social movement actors therefore actively construct and interpret their world to make action possible.

The last prominent criticism of the PPM concerns its rationalist understanding of contention, illustrated by its treatment of ideas and meaning making processes. The PPM adopts a rationalist understanding of meaning making whereby culture and ideas are used as a “tool kit” (as coined by Swidler (1986)) by social movement entrepreneurs. The latter are considered rational actors who rationalise their choices to their followers by drawing on a shared ideational corpus, through the creation of complementary frames. This perspective follows a top-down approach, which considers ideas as one resource among others. This understanding has nonetheless been increasingly questioned for its inadequate explanation of the interactions between culture, ideology and framing. A few scholars have notably called for a clarification of the relation between culture and social movements (Williams, 1995; Kane, 1997), as well as between frames and ideology (Zald, 1996; Fisher, 1997; Johnston & Oliver, 2000). Johnston and Oliver (2000) have recommended a more restricted use of the concept of framing, and the reintroduction of the concept of ideology in social movement studies. They argue that many social movement theorists have used frame and ideology in a synonymous fashion, while framing should be considered a cognitive process and ideology should be reintroduced as a general belief system. Critics of the PPM's' rationalist foundations have also argued that the production of meaning is relational, and not solely strategic and rational (Steinberg, 1999). This relational understanding endorses a greater inclusion of the social networks in which social actors are embedded. A final critique of the use of framing in contentious politics has been elaborated by one of its foremost theorist, Benford, who has critiqued the neglect of “systematic empirical studies, [its] descriptive bias, static tendencies, reification, reductionism, elite bias, and monolithic tendencies.” (Benford, 1997: 423).

In agreement with the reconsideration of social movements' rationality, the role of emotions has been re-emphasised in the study of social movements (Aminzade & McAdam, 2002; Goodwin & Jasper 2007; Gould 2009). Emotions had historically been ignored in reaction to the collective behaviour model presented earlier, and replaced by a cost-benefit rational calculus by social actors in RMT and the PPM. This new corpus nonetheless posits that, despite valid criticism of the collective behaviour model, emotions should be scrutinised and analysed as any other variable in social movement studies. Emotions are an essential part of social interactions, and often contribute to meaning making beyond

rational calculus.

The most creative development informed by these criticisms was introduced by PPM founders themselves, with the “contentious politics” (CP thereafter) agenda (Aminzade et al. 2001; McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly & Tarrow 2006; Tarrow & Tilly 2009). This development unfolded in parallel to the growing emphasis on processes and causal mechanisms in the social sciences (Mahoney 2001, 2008; Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010). Its founders argued, ten years after designing this agenda, that they initially launched this research programme in response to the narrow focus of social movement research, which was isolated from broader studies of revolutions and large-N case study comparisons, biased towards Western movements, and characterised by structuralist foundations rather than by a focus on processes and outcomes (McAdam & Tarrow, 2011: 2). CP scholars recognised the validity of many criticisms of the PPM, which has generally been described as too static, narrow and rationalist. This acknowledgement has encouraged a move towards relational, dynamic and interactive studies of processes and mechanisms. CP promotes the study of broader and replicable mechanisms to explain diverse phenomena beyond social movements per se, stretching from revolution, civil wars, protests and democratisation and generally investigates the relations between different players in broader episodes of contention. This agenda suggests that mechanisms of contention can be environmental, relational and cognitive, and include, for instance, brokerage, diffusion, polarisation, repression and radicalisation. CP emphasises the relational dimension of contention, which contrast with the structuralist and rational PPM foundations.

The CP agenda has, despite its emphasis on relational contention, processes and mechanisms across cases, often been criticised for a plurality of reasons. A prominent criticism has maintained that CP undermines its relevance and applicability by trying to explain too many phenomena simultaneously, a critique its founders recognise (McAdam & Tarrow, 2011: 5). The latter's attempts to broaden their scope beyond social movements has arguably led to the inclusion of too many forms of contention, and has weakened this agenda's theoretical strength. CP contenders also argue that this agenda still favours a state-centred understanding of contention, which might lose its relevance in cultural fights unrelated to state authorities, as well as in non-Western contexts where the distinction between state and civil societies is different. This agenda's founders additionally recognise that too many mechanisms initially studied were not well-scrutinised, and that important issues of measurements remained unclarified

(McAdam & Tarrow, 2011).

Finally, most recent studies have built on the investigation of the relational and contextualised interactions between social movement actors. This relational emphasis expands on Bourdieusian fields to analyse the relations and interactions between various social movement players, including their opponents, allies and the state. This approach argues that these relations are regulated by specific rules, which collectively form structured fields of contention. This perspective contributes to the prevailing structure and agency sociological debate to explore collective strategic action (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011) and analyse social changes within these fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). It posits that society is composed of a plurality of “strategic action fields” containing their own social orders, where incumbents and challengers compete for material and status reward. This corpus explores the micro-foundations of field dynamics, from their emergence to their subsequent evolutions.

These criticisms of the PPM are beneficial to the study of armed militancy. Their two main strengths are the reintroduction of the relational dimension of contention, and the emphasis on interpretative processes and social movements' agency. In contrast with the PPM, these criticisms emphasise that SMOs actively construct their opportunities, which are simultaneously informed by these groups' interactions with other players in multi-level environments. SMOs therefore cannot merely be considered passive actors waiting for change to become possible. In addition, these new perspectives on social movements raise a word of caution against exaggerated strategic and rationalist understandings, and instead revive the importance of ideational and emotional factors in contentious processes. These criticisms have informed an emphasis on militant groups' leaders' and lower-ranking members' perceptions of changing macro-level policies throughout the interviews, and promoted a relational understanding of contention.

#### **2.4. THE STUDY OF VIOLENT CONTENTIOUS POLITICS AND ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS**

The discussion on the development of social movement and contentious politics studies reveals a striking attribute. Most of the scholarship has focused on “good” social movements, understood as Western-based social movements fighting for economic, societal and political advancement. This academic corpus has historically only marginally contributed to the study of social movements in other cultural contexts, or in violent environments where armed violence prevails (with some exceptions, e.g.

della Porta, 1995). Social movement approaches have been increasingly adopted to study political violence<sup>10</sup> and Islamist groups,<sup>11</sup> with diverging theoretical contributions to social movement theory. This section examines their strength in political violence and Islamist movement studies, before identifying two remaining gaps pertaining to their weaker treatment of organisational learning and to their overtly rationalist ideational considerations.

The main contribution of a social movement theory approach to the study of political violence concerns this research's ontological and epistemological premises. A social movement understanding of political violence de-exceptionalises this phenomenon and investigates its emergence and development as it would with any other social occurrence (Gunning, 2009). This theoretical understanding facilitates a sophisticated analysis of political violence, which contextualises violent groups within the broader movements from which they emerge, stresses the importance of their interaction with competing groups, allies and state authorities, and uncovers the evolution of their repertoires of contention beyond ideological and strategic considerations. These theoretical foundations promote a multilevel understanding of political violence, which cannot be reduced to the sheer outcome of psychological, ideological or structural factors. In this theoretical framework, the role of ideational and structural factors is recognised and studied in interaction with militant groups' organisational dialogues and internal dynamics, as well as in changing time and space.

A social movement theoretical framework contextualises militant groups within the broader social movement from which they emerge, and where they potentially operate. Violent groups do not surface in a vacuum, and often stem from broader social movements characterised by specific ideological and organisational legacies (Gunning, 2009: 160).<sup>12</sup> These groups and their affiliated social movements are separated by fluid boundaries, and are often competing for legitimacy over a partially shared audience. For instance, the combination of shifting internal boundaries and internal contests over an overlapping constituency often explains the evolution of these actors' framing processes (Wiktorowicz, 2004). In addition, these contests illustrate the potential embeddedness of radical groups in shared networks with

<sup>10</sup> e.g. della Porta, 1992, 1995, 2013; Goodwin, 2001, 2009; Hafez, 2003; Tilly, 2003, 2005; Wood 2003; Alimi 2006, 2011; Gunning, 2008, 2009; Hegghammer, 2010; Malthaner, 2011; Bosi, Demetriou & Malthaner, 2014; Bosi, Ó Dochartaigh & PISOIU, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Munson, 2001; Wiktorowicz, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005; Wickham 2002; Hafez 2003, 2006, 2007; Clark, 2004; Bayat, 2005, 2007; Karagiannis, 2005, 2009; Meijer, 2005; Sutton & Vertigans, 2005, 2006; Snow & Bird, 2007; Azani, 2008; Gunning 2008; Wagemakers, 2008, 2010, 2012; Tuğal, 2009; Eligür, 2010; Hegghammer 2010; Lacroix, 2011; Beinin & Vairel, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See also della Porta (1995).

broader social movements, which can both empower and constrain them (Malthaner, 2014). Overlapping networks and ties can also explain recruitment and support patterns, notably in consideration of the radical milieu, which provides moral and logistical support to militant activists (Waldmann, 2010; Malthaner, 2014).

Militant groups additionally interact with other groups, which are not situated in their social movement family. These groups, which can pursue violent or non-violent goals and objectives, are set apart by varying levels of antagonism or sympathy towards armed militants. Competition and cooperation can influence and shape armed groups' ideational, organisational and behavioural developments. For instance, competition can explain militant groups' rationale for violence (Zirakzadeh, 2002; Pearlman, 2011; Prince & Warner, 2013), as well as the use of certain armed repertoires such as suicide bombings (Bloom, 2004, 2007; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). These patterns are relational in nature, and can explain these groups' radicalisation and moderation over time (Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou, 2012). Group cooperation can also have a moderating influence, and widen the articulation of these groups' ideational commitments (Jamal, 2013).

At a macro-level, militant groups are faced with evolving patterns of policing of protest which crucially affect their evolution (della Porta & Fillieule, 2004; Earl, 2011; Davenport & Inman, 2012). These policies change over time and place, and vary in degree, modes and selectivity.<sup>13</sup> State authorities can include or exclude an array of actors, including militant groups, their opponents, allies and supporters.<sup>14</sup> State repression can be designed to dismantle armed groups' infrastructures and isolate them from their constituencies. Its peculiarities, if perceived unjustly by the populace, can also backfire and reinforce popular sympathy and support for the opposition (Hess & Martin, 2006). These policies are differently mediated by militant groups' organisational dynamics and internal dialogues, affect the perceptions of their leaders and members, and potentially change these groups' internal make-up. Evolving policing of protests are shaped by the state's institutional making and culture, and can fuel or mitigate cycles of protests with the opposition (della Porta, 1995; della Porta & Fillieule, 2004).

The multilevel conceptualisation of violence means that the latter cannot be considered militant groups' essential characteristic. Violence is rather investigated by social movement theorists as an evolving

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<sup>13</sup> See also della Porta & Fillieule (2004: 218).

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 6 expands on this theme. In the meantime, one can refer to Hafez (2003) and Dalacoura (2011).

repertoire adopted among an array of other choices, and marked by its changing traits. The resort to violence is informed by changing state policies towards militant groups, and by the use of an array of repertoires by these groups' allies and opponents. Internally, violence and its modalities are continuously debated amongst militant groups' leaders and followers, and reconsidered over time and space. Evolving patterns of violence should therefore be studied through these groups' internal dynamics since militant groups' internal fabric can fuel or restrain internal competition over resources and authority, and influence their evolving resort to armed violence.

Social movement approaches to violent contention have grown at a fast pace recently.<sup>15</sup> New research agendas have built upon the social movement and contentious politics literature to contextualise violence within episodes of contention. They have explored processes and mechanisms of contention, including radicalisation, escalation, transformation and diffusion. Violence is accordingly located within various repertoires of actions and in relational fields with other actors (Bosi, Demetriou & Malthener, 2014: 2). Violence is contextualised in time, space and milieu (Bosi, Dochartaigh & PISOIU, 2015), which helps to illustrate the temporal, spatial and organisational contexts which precedes the use of violence and unfolds in parallel to its use.

These social movement approaches to violent contention promote a dynamic and multilevel conceptualisation of violence, understood as an emergent, constructed and relational process (della Porta, 2013) contextualised in a multilevel environment (della Porta, 2009; Gunning, 2009). These perspectives favour a reconsideration of the temporality of violence, of the dynamic and interactive relations between societal structures and militant groups' behaviours and ideologies, and generally eases the scrutinisation of the impact of state policies on these groups' internal dynamics (Gunning, 2009). These visions challenge ahistorical and uncontextualised research agendas, and de-exceptionalise the use of violence (Gunning, 2009). Violence is not merely considered an ideological imperative or a tactical choice, but rather “the product of intense debates within the wider movement and of factional power struggles fuelled by differential access to resources and competing interpretations of members' interests and identities” (Gunning, 2009: 162).

Social movement approaches are particularly relevant to this research on militant groups for their

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<sup>15</sup> e.g. della Porta, 2013; Bosi, Demetriou & Malthener, 2014; Bosi, Dochartaigh & PISOIU, 2015.

investigation of armed groups' internal dynamics. This specific perspective had long been neglected in studies of armed violence, which have too often investigated militant groups as strategic black boxes and failed to uncover internal dialogues and processes accounting for their ideational and behavioural developments. Social movement scholars have increasingly studied militant groups' internal dynamics. Building on her previous scholarship, della Porta has notably theorised differentiated organisational processes, including militant networks' activation, organisational compartmentalisation, action militarisation, ideological encapsulation and militant enclosure (della Porta, 2013).

In addition to this wide corpus on armed violence, social movement approaches have increasingly covered Islamist movements as well. While most studies do not engage critically with social movement studies' theoretical development, they have undeniably demonstrated its analytical relevance in non-Western contexts. Social movement scholars contend that this theoretical corpus helps to take “the Islamist movement seriously” (Meijer, 2005) and to resist widespread analyses investigating these groups through a simplistic religious angle. By focusing on the interconnections between “ideas, events and actions” (Snow & Byrd, 2007), SMT scholars have, for instance, explored these movements' constituencies (Clark, 2004), analysed al-Qaeda as a New Social Movement (Sutton & Vertigans, 2005, 2006) and reincorporated the study of ideas' embeddedness within social movement organisations (Munson, 2001). Social movement studies have explored middle-class networking modes of mobilisation (Clark, 2004), as well as Islamist opposition movements' organisational and networking developments in semi-authoritarian regimes (Wiktorowicz, 2001). In Turkey, a SMT analytical framework has, for instance, demonstrated that political Islam reached prominence thanks to the successful framing of new opportunities by social movement entrepreneurs (Eligur, 2010). Most recent studies have primarily utilised the concept of framing to interpret Islamist groups' internal competition, ideational legitimisation and mobilising processes (Wiktorowicz, 2004; Wagemakers, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012; Karagiannis, 2009). A notable contribution specifically argues that framing can reconcile the incorporation of material interests and ideas to explain Islamist mobilisation (Wickham, 2002, 2004). These contributions have, however, often been inclined to rationalist understandings of ideational developments, whereby ideas are merely considered a resource which can be used and manipulated by social movement activists. In addition to this overtly functionalist ideational understanding, Roel Meijer (2005) asserts that these analyses often overlook the independent role of ideology, do not attempt to explain “why” people revolt, and neglect the study of patronage systems

ubiquitous in the Middle East.

The literature on political violence and Islam consequently still suffers from two main shortcomings that this research strives to address. The first main omission is informed by its focus on replicable mechanisms across cases. Most of the recent scholarship explores specific episodes and time-framed mechanisms in differentiated settings, and overlooks militant groups' long-term learning processes. While militant groups can be subjected to similar mechanisms and processes when faced with analogous macro-level changes, they also arguably learn from experience and from the experience of other groups in similar settings. For instance, one could question whether a militant group would react similarly to two comparable patterns of repression in different temporalities. Current research mostly focuses on the timing of repression (possibly within an episode of contention) and on the development of different type of resources across different movements. It is additionally crucial to revive the importance of meanings, and to investigate whether past lessons have been assimilated by militant groups and how. An acute exploration of organisational learning processes is therefore required to answer this question.

Organisational learning is partially suggested by the notion that militant groups evolve in continuity with their past, and that the latter informs their present choices. Following a path-dependent model, Kathleen Blee notably argues that “activist groups quickly develop routine ways of operating that shape what they will do, and will consider doing far into the future” and that “sequencing shapes the possibilities of action and interpretation” (Blee, 2012: 29-30). This approach is congruent with historical institutionalism, which examines sequences of evolution and recognises the constraints and opportunities inherent in the past. Historical institutionalism specifically contends that “institutions continue to evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political manoeuvring but in ways that are constrained by past trajectories” (Thelen, 1999: 387). While these analyses do not specifically focus on organisational learning, their perspectives are beneficial to the investigation of militant groups' changing responses over time.

Finally, the academic treatment of militant groups' ideological outlooks is not entirely satisfactory in current social movement studies. The consensual acknowledgement that ideational factors should be carefully assessed and contextualised is usually followed by their predominantly rationalist

understanding based on strategic considerations. In this prevailing conceptualisation, militant groups draw on a flexible ideological corpus and theological texts to respond to structural - and essentially material - changes, and to sustain their strategic objectives. Ideas are considered rationally while their relational dimension, which is arguably more congruent with recent theoretical developments in social movement studies, is mostly investigated in relation to other actors (in terms of collaboration and competition) rather than internally as well. Ideational frameworks should nonetheless not be considered independently from their organisational context and internal interpretations (Gunning, 2012). Social network analysis insights would be a welcome contribution to this corpus, with the postulate that ideas are embedded and mediated by specific networking structures. The networking and organisational ideational contextualisation presented henceforth is specifically designed to facilitate their relational exploration within the organisational structures in which they operate. Finally, the study of ideational developments should not necessarily consider ideational commitments from a rationalist angle only, and should additionally investigate non-rational ideational commitments. The perspective promoted in the research therefore insists on the exploration of the opportunities and constraints posed by ideational factors.

## **2.5. BUILDING A RELATIONAL MESO-CENTRED APPROACH**

The discussion of the study of violent contentious politics with a social movement theoretical framework has underlined the importance of militant groups' organisational dynamics and internal processes. This section therefore explores the conceptualisation of the meso-level in social movement studies, and defends a unified approach drawing on organisational and networking studies (as increasingly suggested by social movement scholars).<sup>16</sup> While social movement studies have long investigated organisational and networking modes of mobilisation separately, this section contends that their dichotomisation misrepresents their common roots, and artificially divides them. Drawing on social network analysis theoretical premises, this research endorses a unified networking approach, which defines organisations as specific types of networks rather than differentiated entities.

Organisational conceptualisations of social movements have their roots in RMT. Zald and Ash argued that social movements rely on social movement organisations, which they characterised by their endeavour to change society and by the existence of internal incentive structures (Zald & Ash, 1966).

<sup>16</sup> e.g. Diani & McAdam, 2003; Clemens & Minkoff, 2004; Caniglia & Carmin, 2005; Davis, 2005; Minkoff & McCarthy, 2005; Soule, 2013; Krinsky & Crossley, 2014.

Early definitions of social movement organisations have later been enriched by additional contributions; an inclusive definition identifies their “goals with the preferences of a social movement or counter-movement and attempts to implement those goals” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977: 1218) and stresses the additional existence of internal structure and boundary (Armstrong & Bartley, 2013). Resource mobilisation theorists have investigated evolving organisational structures and analysed SMOs' changing goals and objectives. They contend that the evolution of SMOs' internal incentives and mobilisation of resources illustrate their bureaucratisation, professionalisation and formalisation, designed to assure organisational survival in changing environments (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). These organisational processes notably explain the evolution of these organisations' membership, hierarchies, decision making processes and resource management (Armstrong & Bartley, 2013). Other social movement traditions, including the PPM and cultural analyses, have also examined SMOs. PPM scholars have considered social movement organisations from a macro perspective, and investigated the structuring of the organisational field as well as the interactions between SMOs. This model has nonetheless not referred specifically to organisational studies despite their analytical prospects. Cultural analyses have, on the other hand, investigated ideational and meaning makings in SMOs.<sup>17</sup>

Organisational and social movement studies share overlapping concerns which reinforce bilateral dialogue (Davis, 2005: 1-2). In the past, social movement studies drew more extensively from organisational studies (McAdam & Scott, 2005: 8), although this pattern has seemingly been recently reversed (Soule, 2013). Organisational studies are particularly relevant in SMT for the investigation of informal and formal modes of organisation, and for the analysis of organisational decision making and diffusion processes. The inclusion of institutional practices, governance and organisational changes, while not as dynamic as SMT endeavours, is especially suited to current RMT studies.

Organisational studies contribute to this research on militant groups in three complementary areas: organisational change and decision making (Minkoff & McCarthy, 2005), organisations and identity (Diani, 2013), and organisational identity and learning processes (Soule, 2013). The choice of an organisational conceptualisation premises that a militant group is more than the sum of its components. Members of a single organisation share and legitimise a set of informal and formal norms which regulate their interactions, and inform the ideational and behavioural evolution of their collective entity.

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<sup>17</sup> For a brief review of these three schools, one can refer to Caniglia & Carmin (2005).

These norms are socially constructed by historical processes to be investigated. They are informed by the past, through the construction of a shared identity, and mediated by a group's internal decision making processes. Organisational evolution is contextualised within these sets of parameters to explain broader processes of changes and continuity.

The continuity with the past concerns two neglected factors in violent contentious studies previously mentioned, namely the treatment of militant groups' ideational construction and organisational learning. As with any other structured organisation, militant groups should be understood in continuity with their ideational and material past developments (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 154; Blee, 2012), even though an inflexible and uncontextualised path dependency, rightly criticised by early resource mobilisation theorists (Zald & Ash, 1966), should not be presumed. A social movement perspective drawing on organisational analysis is designed to investigate organisational norms' construction, and uncover possible points of rupture with the past to preclude deterministic analyses.

The second meso-level field of inquiry are networking studies. This corpus has been included in social movement research in diverging ways, starting with Tilly's (1978) exploration of network embeddedness in micro mobilisation.<sup>18</sup> Social networks studies have followed two main perspectives (Diani 2013). The first approach investigates social networks as assortments of nodes and ties which connect individuals and facilitate mobilisation by sharing material and non-material resources, while the second perspective focuses on the networks which connect a plurality of social movement organisations and facilitate their collaboration (Diani, 2013).

The first perspective on social networks is specifically relevant in this research for its relational and structural contribution to the study of armed militancy. Social network studies extend beyond official narratives of violence, towards a dynamic and relational inclusion of the impact of diverging networking properties on militant groups (Krinsky & Crossley, 2014). From a social network analysis perspective, individual actors and militants are embedded in social networks characterised by structural properties whose study explains diverse phenomena relevant to militant groups, such as diffusion,

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<sup>18</sup> See also: Snow, Jr, & Eklund-Olson, 1980; McAdam, 1986; Kitts, 2000; Passy & Giugni, 2001; McAdam, 2003.

brokerage and leadership. This networking conceptualisation explores the ties between militant groups' members and their repercussions on individual behaviour and ideas, through the inclusion of diverse notions such as group solidarity and group social conformity (Everton, 2013: 15). This networking conceptualisation illuminates the sharing of resources, the diffusion of influence (Diani, 2004) and decision making processes (Passy, 2003: 24). A social network analysis enhances current understanding of the creation of coalitions, meanings, identities, culture and shared perceptions (Passy, 2003: 22). Within the general theoretical framework of this research, networking studies re-integrate structural and rationalist understanding of militancy in perspective.

Networking studies of armed militancy have expanded at a fast pace in the literature. They have generally focused on militant group's internal networking topographies (Mishal & Rosenthal, 2005; Marsden, 2014) and on the networks in which violent groups and insurgents are embedded (Staniland, 2014). A prominent approach notably uncovers networking structures and their role in the use of violence (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Jones, 2008; Enders & Jindapon, 2009; Piazza, 2009; Heger et al. 2012).

This thesis draws on organisational and networking studies and postulates that, following a social network analysis conceptualisation, all meso-level structures can be considered network-based regardless of their degree of internal centralisation, formalisation and bureaucracy (Everton, 2013: 6). A strict dichotomy between militant organisations and networks obscures their meso-level reality, which usually combine some degree of formal organisation with looser networking structures. The heterogeneous organisational patterns considered in this research, referred to as “hybrid models” in social movement studies (della Porta & Diani 2006: 159), encompass all possible combinations of organisational formality, internal hierarchy and organisational discipline.

## **2.6. A METHODOLOGICAL MESO-LEVEL COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

The introductory chapter has defined this thesis' aims and objectives, and defended the need to theoretically conceptualise militant groups' evolution. This section concludes with the presentation of this research's methodological approach in light of the preceding theoretical discussion. The following discussion locates this research within the broader social movement scholarship, and presents the

small-n case study research design endorsed in this thesis.

This research's meso-centred approach is pluralistic and draws complementarily on several SMT traditions. At a general level, this thesis conceptualises militant groups as network-based entities characterised by diverse degrees of institutionalisation and formalisation. This research contends that militant groups' internal construction determines their ability to successfully mobilise ideational and material resources in changing circumstances, and utilises the RMT tradition to study resource mobilisation by rational actors. In contrast with the limited RMT's analytical focus, however, this analysis also explores why contention occurs rather than solely how contention takes place. This causal investigation situates militant groups in the broader environment in which they operate, with the inclusion of PPM analytical perspectives. Drawing on this model and on its subsequent revisions, this research emphasises militant groups' interpretations and constructions of changing political opportunities on their ideational and behavioural evolution. This analysis postulates that militant groups interpret the environment in which they operate, and adds that their interpretations are mediated by their internal organisational make-up as well as by internal organisational norms including, for instance, their decision making and learning processes which specifically influence these groups' responses to changing environments. While acknowledging the negative fallouts of broad considerations of macro-level opportunities on the study of their cross-cases causal impact, this research's focus on their meso-level interpretations and constructions alleviate this potential shortcoming. This analysis therefore adopts an encompassing macro-level consideration. Finally, this research's networking conceptualisation of the meso-level emphasises the importance of internal and external relational developments. The study contends that militant groups' ideational and behavioural construction cannot be isolated from the study of the internal interactions between their leaders and members, as well as from the analysis of their interactions with external violent, non-violent and governmental actors.

The small-n comparative case study research design presented in the previous chapter and this thesis' endeavour to theorise militant groups' evolution beyond Egypt have notable implications on this research's methodological approach. This choice is related to broader debates in social sciences between case-oriented versus variable-oriented research (della Porta, 2008), which have already been

extensively discussed in the literature.<sup>19</sup> Small-n case study research does not share the premise that qualitative and quantitative approaches entail the same logic of explanation based on a statistical logic of scientific inference between variables (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994: 4). This research rather endorses the promotion of the “specificity of diverse tools” in social sciences (della Porta, 2008: 203), formulated in response to King, Keohane and Verba.<sup>20</sup>

This research contends that qualitative and quantitative methodologies endorse distinctive research designs informing their approaches to explanation, causation, scope and causal generalisation (Mahoney, 2006; Creswell, 2008). They are two different cultures with their “own values, beliefs, and norms” (Goertz & Mahoney 2012: 1). Qualitative and quantitative methodologies notably differ in their case selection and logic of inference (George & Bennett, 2005: 6). Their respective assumptions influence their approaches to explanation and causation (Mahoney, 2006; Creswell 2008; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012), and explains the determinist (rather than probabilist) definition of causation endorsed by qualitative research designs (Mahoney et al. 2009; Beach & Pedersen 2013: 28). While variable-oriented studies attempt to generalise their findings based on a logic of inference between pre-determined variables, case study research provides rich investigations of specific phenomenon and intricate understanding of complex units (della Porta, 2008: 198). Qualitative and case-study research provide numerous tools to improve their generalisability and are therefore more suited to theory discovery and theory building (George & Bennett, 2005: 13).

This thesis adopts a case study research design, which is defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2007: 37). Case study research is particularly suited to examining causal mechanisms in complex cases (George & Bennett, 2005: 19), by helping “to go beyond descriptive statistical measures, towards an in-depth understanding of historical processes and individual motivations” (della Porta, 2008: 203). This approach is hindered in large sample selections, which are more suited to the systematic test of specific hypotheses (Gerring, 2007: 41). Case study comparison can achieve higher conceptual validity thanks to strong methodological procedures which ease the development and close examination of new hypotheses and

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<sup>19</sup> e.g. King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Collier & Brady, 2004; della Porta & Keating, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

complex causal mechanisms (George & Bennett, 2005: 19).

While acknowledging the strength of case-study research designs, this research is reflective about their “trade-offs, limitations and potential pitfalls” (George & Bennett, 2005: 22). George and Bennett notably mention that their recurrent trade-offs pertains to case selection, empirical breadth and the compromise between internal validity and generalisability. They add that inherent limitations concern the representativeness of the cases, while potential limitations refer to “indeterminacy and lack of independence of cases” (George & Bennett, 2005: 22).

This research's main concern refers to its potential selection bias (Geddes, 1990; King et al. 1994: 116; Collier & Mahoney, 1996; George & Bennett, 2005). This bias has been repeatedly mentioned by quantitative methodologists opposed to any selection on the dependent variable (e.g. King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), which arguably undermines the validity of causal inference. Qualitative scholars recognise these limits, and argue that selection on the dependent variable can help identify causal variables or causal mechanisms, even though it does not allow for the assessment of their validity across cases (Geddes, 1990). This warning is not particularly problematic in this case study of Egypt, however, considering that the choice of the two militant groups was based on their distinctive early organisational dynamics in a similar macro-level environment.

In addition, qualitative research designs offer two tools to strengthen their internal validity and generalisability, diachronic within case study and process tracing (George & Bennett, 2005). Diachronic within case study entails a cross-time comparison within a single unit in order to reduce the influence of unconsidered intervening variables and background noise (Van Evera, 1997: 52). In this research, the choice of two militant groups evolving in the same country and their simultaneous within and cross-case analysis contributes to the exclusion of external (unconsidered) variables. In addition, the validity of qualitative research designs can be improved with a thorough use of process tracing, defined as “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (Bennett & Checkel, 2015: 7). Process tracing “provides a way to learn and to evaluate empirically the preferences and perceptions of actors, their purposes, their goals, their values and their specification of the situations that face them” (Venesson, 2008: 233), by “describing

political and social phenomena and [...] evaluating causal claims” (Coller 2011: 1). This research's use of process tracing eases the study of these groups' evolution in a systematic and dynamic way, and enhances the discovery of causal mechanisms which can be generalised to other cases.

This research utilises process tracing cross cases and within group comparison of two Egyptian groups to theorise militant groups' evolutions. Following the guidelines of Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen (2013), this research uses process tracing for theory building purposes. It postulates the possible existence of causal mechanisms explaining these groups' diverging evolutions in similar environmental conditions. It goes on to offer a rich analysis of the empirical data acquired in the field and a thorough study of a diverse academic corpus on social movements and political violence contributes to the hypothesising of these groups' evolutions and to the discovery of causal mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 60).

The endorsement of a dynamic and contextualised approach to these groups' evolution and the focus on causal mechanisms based on a path-dependent model sustain a specific focus on points of ruptures marking these groups' histories.<sup>21</sup> Rather than presenting a fastidious narrative of these groups' decade-long evolution, the following chapters are internally structured around specific themes designed to discover and analyse important points of rupture, located at the macro, organisational and ideational levels. These chapters' objectives are to theorise change and continuity before and after these temporal junctions. An array of themes are therefore investigated, including these groups' mobilising patterns, internal interactions between their members and leaders, external interactions with other groups situated inside and outside their social movement family, their leaders and members' evolving perceptions and thinking processes, internal norms of decision making, the meanings attributed to their leaders and members' belonging to these groups and these groups' changing relations with state authorities.

The following chapters are structured around four themes informed by this thesis' objectives. Chapter three examines these groups' emergence in the 1970s. Chapter four investigates their ideological construction over time. Chapter five analyses these groups' use of violence in the 1990s. Chapter six explores the construction of their political approach, including their joining of the political process after

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<sup>21</sup> On the focus on specific points of rupture in path-dependent studies of social movements, see also Blee (2012: 37-38).

the 2011 Egyptian uprising.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **THE EMERGENCE AND EARLY DEVELOPMENTS OF ARMED MILITANCY**

The Islamic movement was preoccupied with the big ideas, such as the Caliphate and the restoration of the Islamic state. We did not answer the modalities and just focused on the general principles. We had a dream, a vision and endless hopes. We drew on Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Taymiyya because they represented exceptional sources in Islamic history. A unique era necessitated unique sources. We were drawing a new framework.

A leader of a *jihadi* cell in the late 1970s

At the beginning of our movement in the 1970s, there was no clearly defined idea. We were only committed to religion. The *salafi* creed and the *minhaj* (method) of the Muslim Brotherhood were adopted later on. Then, we legitimised armed jihad and decided to change the reality through the use of force, which resulted in the killing of Anwar Sadat in 1981.

A religious thinker of the Islamic Group

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter investigates the emergence and early developments of the Islamic Group (IG thereafter), and of the cells which later formed the Jihad Group (JG thereafter). This analysis sets up the foundations of the remaining chapters of this thesis, which notably argue that these groups' initial organisational dynamics crucially shaped their subsequent ideational and organisational constructions. This chapter therefore explores these groups' early mobilisation patterns, as well as the formal and informal organisational norms established in these groups' early days.

This chapter's comparative emphasis on these groups' organisational dynamics based on rich empirical contributions from their members differs from current studies of armed Islamist militancy in Egypt in the 1970s. Early sociological studies explored militants' backgrounds, ideational frames of reference and organisational structures (Ibrahim, 1980; Ansari, 1984), contextualised in their broader contexts (Fandy, 1994) and in consideration of the expansion of the Islamic sphere in Egypt (Ayubi, 1980; Kepel, 1993). As theoretical overviews, these sociological analyses of Islamist militancy do not cover their members' experiences and micro-mobilisation processes, which were only subsequently elaborated by additional contributions from these groups' members, close observers, and scholars

(Hammuda, 1985; Ahmad, 1988; Khalid, 1988; Muru, 1990; Mubarak, 1995; al-Siba‘i, 2002; al-Zayyat, 2002; Sageman, 2004; al-Ansari, 2006; Munib, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; al-Zawahiri, 2010). These two main corpuses provide exhaustive empirical insights and sociological analyses of the 1970s, even though they do not thoroughly compare these groups' early organisational dynamics and mobilising processes. A few comparative attempts have proved less convincing because of their reliance on scarce empirical material (Zeidan, 1999; Nedoroscik, 2002), while the current focus on these groups' ideological publications has regrettably neglected these groups' meso-level dynamics (Jansen & Faraj, 1986; Kenney, 2006; Orbach, 2012). A comparative analysis of these groups' early developments is therefore still required and very much needed.

This chapter endeavours to de-construct two prevailing paradigms which obscure a more rigorous understanding of these groups' early histories. The most frequent myth claims that the IG and jihad groups cells sprang from the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood (MB thereafter) in reaction to Nasserist state repression.<sup>22</sup> It is widely reported, for instance, that Ayman al-Zawahiri would have been a MB member before his endorsement of armed violence.<sup>23</sup> Field interviews nonetheless reveal that most jihad groups members followed the mainstream *salafi* institution *jam‘iyya ansar al-sunna al-muhammadiyya* (association of the partisans of Muhammad's tradition), rather than the Brotherhood. They were not organisationally connected to the MB and were only indirectly affected by the repression of its members and leaders. This claim is also inadequate with regards to the IG, which emerged independently from the MB and specifically adopted armed violence in opposition to the reformist path promoted by the latter in the 1970s.

The second paradigm of the literature focuses on the ideas endorsed by prominent individuals, rather on their reinterpretation by these groups' members and mediation by these groups' internal dynamics. Many studies investigate the thoughts of a few religious scholars and intellectuals. They include Sayyid Qutb, sheikh ‘Omar ‘Abd al-Rahman, sheikh ‘Abd al-Hamid Kishk and the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya, as well as *jihadi* leaders such as Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj and his opus on jihad (*al-farida al-gha'iba, The Neglected Duty*).<sup>24</sup> These analyses tend to reify these publications with the underlying assumption that they would explain the causes of violence, its evolving use and generally

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<sup>22</sup> e.g Vidino, 2010; Cesari, 2014: 169.

<sup>23</sup> e.g Esposito, 2002: 18; Springer et al. 2009: 271; Masoud, 2013: 482.

<sup>24</sup> e.g Jansen & Faraj, 1986; Kepel, 1993; Brooke, 2008.

epitomise the ideological views held by these groups.<sup>25</sup> While ideological sources should be investigated, their construction and evolving interpretation should be contextualised as well. For instance, Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj was, according to extensive interviews conducted in this research, not as pivotal as often claimed; his post-mortem fame was primarily informed by his role in Sadat's assassination in 1981 and by the existence of a written legacy. His pamphlet on jihad merely compiled familiar ideas of the 1970s, and his emphasis on the so-called close enemy should not be considered quintessential in the rationale of fellow jihadis at the time.<sup>26</sup> The ideological framework of the latter was broader than usually assumed, and generally constituted of general principles which prominently included the need to liberate Palestine and Jerusalem as well.<sup>27</sup> One should therefore exert caution in understanding militant groups through the analysis of an Islamic equivalent of Lenin's *What is to be done?* (Lenin, 1966) which could explain these groups' actions, as inadequately as an analysis of Lenin's text would explain the actions of the Bolsheviks.

This opening chapter on armed militancy in Egypt demonstrates the existence of two distinctive *jihadi* trends characterised by diverging mobilising patterns, organisational dynamics and approaches to violence. The first *jihadi* cells were predominantly constituted by religious minded youths dismayed by an array of domestic and international issues. They resented the 1967 Arab defeat, the loss of Jerusalem and the repression of the MB and of its chief ideologue Sayyid Qutb. They mobilised in covert networks of acquaintances and friends to topple the regime and replace it with their utopian vision of an Islamic state. Their early mobilisation patterns, however, reinforced internal competition and prevented the emergence of a cohesive group. In the South of Egypt, the second *jihadi* group answered a different dynamic. The Islamic Group emerged as a group of proselytising friends active on university campuses, who later adopted armed militancy in response to a closing of political opportunities at the macro-level. Eventually, they formed a loose coalition with other like-minded jihadis to topple their common enemy, the Egyptian regime and his president Anwar Sadat.

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<sup>25</sup> More intricate analyses of the adoption of Qutb's ideas in specific political contexts were elaborated by Burgat (2002, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> As argued by Gerges (2009: 10-12).

<sup>27</sup> This chapter illustrates the role played by many Palestinians in the jihad groups, including Saleh Sirriyya and Salim al-Rihal. Their role in early Egyptian jihadism and in *salafi* jihadism has been specifically studied by al-Amin (2010) and in a special issue of *Welt des Islams* (Hegghammer & Wagemakers, 2013).

### 3.2. THE SEEDS OF VIOLENCE UNDER NASSER

The contextualisation of the Muslim Brotherhood before and during the reign of Gamal Abdel Nasser is important to understand the development of armed militancy under Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat. The first *jihadi* cell emerged in the Nasserist regime in the late 1960s and, while members of diverse *jihadi* cells did not suffer directly from Nasser's policies, the repression of the MB had a profound impact on their micro-mobilisation in the 1970s. The 1960s also witnessed the pivotal role played by the prominent MB ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, and his articulation of the concepts of *hakimiyya* and *jahiliyya* in the Egyptian context.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Nasser's endeavour to monopolize Egyptian religious institutions through the reform of al-Azhar University's educational curriculum catalysed the religious revival and the legitimisation of Islamic Law in Egyptian societal debates in the 1970s.

The MB emerged three decades before the 1952 military coup, and rapidly became a prominent mass movement in Egypt. Created in 1928 by a schoolteacher, Hassan al-Bana, the MB exploited new political opportunities after the abrogation of the Caliphate to develop as a revivalist religious movement in the city of Ismaïlia. Al-Bana was influenced by Egyptian reformist intellectuals, notably Muhammad 'Abdo and Rashid Rida; he resented the diminishing role of Islam in Egyptian society, and was eager to restore the prominence of Islam as a way of life (Mitchell, 1993: 5). Under his leadership, the MB emerged as an influential organisation which gradually politicised its message and methods (Lia, 2006). Despite the MB's initial non-violent approach, the deterioration of the political atmosphere in Egypt in the 1940s became more conducive to the use of violence between Egyptian groups and against British forces (Mitchell, 1993: 59). In this violent regional and national environment, the MB created the "special apparatus" (*al-tandhim al-khas*), which was initially justified by the MB failure to militarily support the 1936 Palestinian uprising (Ashour, 2009: 38). This military infrastructure subsequently pursued complementary internal and external objectives. In Egypt, its members targeted public figures deemed opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood or allied to the British forces in Egypt. Outside Egypt, the MB participated in the 1948 Palestine war. Observers and scholars nonetheless doubt that the apparatus was under the full command and control of the MB leadership, and stress the importance of internal organisational divisions (Ashour, 2009: 40). By the beginning of the 1950s, the military wing was dismantled, and a new leadership led by Hassan al-Hudaybi was selected.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. note 29 page 70 on these concepts.

In the beginning of the 1950s, a clandestine group composed of young officers successfully planned to overthrow the Egyptian monarchy. They named themselves the Free Officers, and included Muhammad Naguib, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. The Free Officers were a direct response to the failure of the Egyptian regime to help the Palestinians in the 1948 war. Its members considered the prevailing political environment destructive to the country, and believed that internal divisions and the absence of a strong leadership precipitated the loss of Palestine (Cook, 2011: 39). Their ideas were initially rather unsophisticated, lacking a central guiding ideology and a political framework. Their programme was mainly focused on the necessity to end British rule in Egypt and improve socio-economic conditions (Cook, 2011: 40). Shortly after seizing power in a military coup, they gradually closed most political opportunities for their contenders. They confined their opponents, dissolved their political parties and created a new revolutionary command council to rule the country. The coup abolished the monarchy and created a republic on its ashes (Cook, 2011: 49-51).

The relations between the Free Officers and the MB were crucially affected by the 1952 military coup. Some of the Free Officers, such as 'Abd al-Mun'im 'Abd al-Ra'wf, were MB members who took part in the special apparatus (Ashour, 2009: 42). Al-Banna and Nasser even discussed the possibility that the Free Officers became a MB unit in the Egyptian army (Ashour, 2009: 42). This close proximity led to an expected, yet not unconditional nor uncontested, MB support for the 1952 military coup. This mutual entente was nonetheless short lived, and only lasted for a single year (Cook, 2011: 53), when the Free Officers retreated from their commitments. The Officers feared the MB influence and its large constituency. By the end of 1953, the military regime subjugated the political opposition, consolidated its rule and became increasingly suspicious of the perceived MB hostility. An assassination attempt on Nasser - which some considered staged (Cook, 2011: 60) - was a pretext to jail the MB leadership and thousands of the group's followers. The MB disappeared as a political force between 1954 and 1957 (Cook, 2011: 83).

This historical context explains partially the rise of the most prominent Islamist ideologue of this decade, Sayyid Qutb, whose influence has been unparalleled on Islamist movements worldwide. Sayyid Qutb was born in 1906 in the province of Asyut in Southern Egypt (Calvert, 2010: 25-52). From his childhood to his execution in 1965, he had been the incarnation of Egyptian vacillations between Islam, tradition and modernity. After the beginning of his career as a school teacher and a poet

influenced by nationalist liberal thoughts and Sufism, he evolved quickly into a prominent writer and literary critic (Musallam, 2005: 35-39; Calvert, 2010: 62-72). By the 1930s, the general malaise caused by cultural Westernisation and by a harsh economic crisis cultivated Qutb's renewed interest in Islam and in the Qur'an, initially informed by the holy book's aesthetic and philosophical dimensions (Musallam, 2005: 58; Calvert, 2010: 111). Qutb became more critical of Western countries, admonished for colonialism, support of the Zionist movement, materialism and lack of spirituality (Musallam, 2005: 73-90; Calvert, 2010: 116-121, 172). His return from a study trip in the U.S. was followed by the completion of his work on social justice in Islam.<sup>29</sup> By 1952, he became politically closer to the Free Officers, who admired him and considered him the father of the 1952 revolution (Musallam, 2005: 139; Calvert, 2010: 182). Eventually, Qutb joined the MB and led their political propaganda and cultural affairs (Calvert, 2010: 187). When the regime crushed the organisation in 1954, Sayyid Qutb was arrested and imprisoned until 1964. Prison was a pivotal moment in his life; the harsh conditions he experienced with his inmates motivated his repentance from his past as a non-Islamic intellectual (Calvert, 2010: 200) and his rejection of the inauthentic Islamic nature of the regime (Musallam, 2005: 151). Prison gave him ten years to complete his commentary of the Qur'an, from which he extracted *Milestones* (Qutb, 1987), which has been widely considered the most influential text for Islamist movements worldwide.

Sayyid Qutb has mostly been remembered for the extensive scholarship he authored in prison, especially between 1958 and 1964 (Calvert, 2010: 204). Prison granted him the time to develop the concepts of *hakimiyat-Allah* (God's sovereignty) and *jahiliyya*.<sup>30</sup> Influenced by Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi from Pakistan, Qutb framed the roots of Nasser's authoritarianism in its *jahili* foundations. He contended that all modern societies were un-Islamic, and that only God's sovereignty could establish a superior moral order and a just Islamic society (Musallam, 2005: 153; Calvert, 2010: 217-218).<sup>31</sup> In *Milestones*, he denounced man's sovereignty as oppressive, and framed the restoration of Islamic Law as the only possible remedy to free humanity from man's despotism (Qutb, 1987).

Qutb's ideas and the MB organisational limbo sparked the last contested attempt of this organisation to

<sup>29</sup> See *The America I have seen* (Qutb, 2000) and the different editions of *Social Justice in Islam* (Qutb, 1975)

<sup>30</sup> *Jahiliya* means ignorance in Arabic. In Islamic terminology, this concept refers to pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula societies. *Hakimiyat-Allah* refers to God's sovereignty on earth. Qutb's political use of these concepts has been studied by Khatab (2006a, 2006b).

<sup>31</sup> For studies on Qutb, refer to: Moussalli, 1992; Euben, 1999; Carré, 2000, 2004; Musallam, 2005; Khatab, 2006a, 2006b; Bergesen, 2008; Calvert, 2010; Toth, 2013.

use violence against the regime in the 1960s. At the initiatives of 'Abd al-Fatah Isma'il and Zainab al-Ghazali, a secret organisation loosely inspired by the 1940's covert apparatus was formed to revive the MB, though scholars disagree about the organisation's aims (Calvert, 2010: 230; Musallam, 2005: 168). Some analyses allude to a thirteen year plan to preach and advocate for the creation of an Islamic state, culminating in the establishment of this utopian state when 75% of the population agreed (Musallam, 2005: 168), while others contend the organisation had plans to use violence against the regime (Calvert, 2010: 230-234). It is generally agreed that Qutb became this organisation's advisor after his liberation in 1964, though he arguably warned this organisation against any hasty actions, and advocated for the preliminary Islamisation of society before the application of Islamic Law in the country (Calvert, 2010: 241). Qutb believed that this group needed years of spiritual preparation to develop a true understanding of Islam, and thought that violence could only be a last resort in self-defence (Calvert, 2010: 232, 242). The group discussed some possibilities to attack the regime, before they eventually caught its attention. Its members were subsequently rounded up, the organisation dismantled and Qutb executed in 1966 (Calvert, 2010: 243).

This influence of Qutb's ideological radicalism on the MB receded in the 1970s. Shortly after his execution, his revolutionary thoughts sparked heated discussions on his legacy, especially on the justification of violence against the state and on the excommunication of Muslims (Zollner, 2008: 45; Ashour, 2009: 81). The general MB guide, Hassan al-Hudaybi, imposed a theological clarification on members of the 1965 organisation on these two contentious issues (Zollner, 2008: 45). This initiative triggered a process of ideological revisions, based on the shared premise that violence devastated the MB. The central contention pertained to the group's strategy, rather than its objectives. It endeavoured to clarify whether an Islamic state should be created through revolutionary means or through preaching (*da'wa*) and education (Zollner, 2008: 46). These revisions materialised with the publication of a book, *Preachers not Judges (du'at la qudat)*, consensually agreed upon by the MB leadership (Zollner, 2008: 66). This book was not solely a response to Qutb's scholarship but generally represented an attempt to impose a reorientation on diverse subjects including belief, disbelief, sins and Islamic Law (Zollner, 2008: 149).

### 3.3. EARLY JIHADI MOBILISATION UNDER SADAT

Anwar Sadat's presidency and the decade leading to his assassination in 1981 witnessed a proliferation of small militant cells whose central *raison d'être* was to replace the regime with an Islamic state, the so-called "jihad groups".<sup>32</sup> This section contextualises their emergence in a political and societal context marked by a religious revival, and analyses the early micro-mobilisation of these cells' members. The following suggests that the jihad groups were an epiphenomenon of the mainstream *salafi* institutions which became influential in the 1970s and subsequently gave them a specific legacy. This section argues that young jihadis were influenced by a plurality of issues, including moral shock in response to stories of torture suffered by MB members, the execution of Sayyid Qutb, the loss of Jerusalem in 1967 and the desire to create a utopian Islamic state which would restore the golden age of the Muslim world. At the same time, it demonstrates that the early adoption of violence by the jihad groups hindered their efforts to unite and fuelled repeated internal divisions. Finally, this section concludes with the investigation of the role played by Saleh Sirriyya, who managed to unite a few groups despite his eventual failure to achieve his objectives.

Anwar Sadat reached Egypt's presidency after the death of Abdel Nasser in September 1970. Sadat's political débuts were characterised by his renunciations of Nasser's policies and by the so-called "corrective revolution" which distanced Egypt from the Soviet Union and from the socialist camp. Sadat opened up the Egyptian economy and changed his country's regional alliances (Thompson, 2008: 317; Kandil, 2013: 99). He envisioned a strategic partnership with the United States, and a resolution of the Israeli Egyptian conflict that would result in the recovery of the Sinai Peninsula from Israel. Sadat portrayed himself as the "believer president" (*al-ra'is al-mu'min*) and used the new popularity of Islam and the looming importance of the Gulf States against his nationalist and socialist political opponents (Esposito, 1998: 236-237; Zaman, 2010: 146). He eased pressure on Islamist opponents, mostly represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, ended their detention in prison and allowed their reappearance in the public sphere (Zollner, 2008: 48). This religious revival was similar to parallel developments witnessed in other Arab and non-Arab countries.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> These groups were called *jama'at al-jihad* in Arabic media, even though their members did not self-designate their groups. Similarly, Saleh Sirriyya's group has often been called the "military academy" group (*al-faniyya al-'askariyya*), although this name was never used by its members. Others also wrongly name this group *shabab Muhammad* (Muhammad's youths) or *hizb ul-tahrir* (the Liberation Party).

<sup>33</sup> On the religious revival in Arab and non-Arab countries, one can refer to an extensive older bibliography (Haddad & Esposito, 1991).

Sadat's presidency was accompanied by the reconstruction of the religious field and by flourishing demands for a greater role for Islam in society. The nationalisation of the most prominent religious institution in Egypt, al-Azhar University, and its monopolistic instrumentalisation by Nasser to justify his socialist leanings gave al-Azhar scholars “the instruments for their political emergence in the 1970s” (Zeghal, 1999: 272).<sup>34</sup> The educational reforms of al-Azhar University and the inclusion of non-religious subjects in its curriculum paved the way for its graduates' entry into new professional bodies, which expanded the influence of al-Azhar outside of the religious sphere. Moreover, the monopoly granted to al-Azhar and its scholars on religious discourses under Nasser gave them administrative resources and a strong political platform in society. The demise of previous political constraints under Sadat therefore gave Azhari ‘ulama’ free reins to expand their political influence and to call for a greater role for Islam. Al-Azhar scholars were calling for the application of Islamic Law in Egypt and several committees created to codify Islamic Law later demanded the elaboration of an Islamic constitution that would include the application of the *hudud*<sup>35</sup> (Esposito, 1998: 236-237; Zeghal, 1999). The diversification of the religious field was accompanied by the appearance of what have been termed “peripheral” ‘ulama’, who used this phase of political liberalisation to issue similar calls for the application of Islamic Law in Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

Political liberalisation and the growing importance of religion similarly facilitated the expansion of *salafi* leaning associations, which had emerged a few decades earlier in the reformist environment mentioned in the previous section. The first influential association, *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya lil-ta‘wun al-‘amilin bil-kitab wal-sunna al-Muhammadiyya* (the *shari‘a* association for those who behave according to the Book and Muhammad's tradition), was created by sheikh Mahmud Khattab al-Sobki in 1912. This association is not strictly *salafi* (Gauvain, 2012: 38), even though it has long favoured religious views congruent with modern salafism, notably its emphasis on purging religion from innovations (Munib, 2009).<sup>37</sup> This association has pursued social work in the fields of preaching, education and health since its inception (Faid, 2014: 52). The other influential association is *jam‘iyya ansar al-sunna al-muhammadiyya* (association of the partisans of Muhammad's tradition), which was created by sheikh Muhammad Hamed al-Fiqi as a *salafi* split from *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya* in 1926

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<sup>34</sup> See also Zeghal's extensive study on the evolution of al-Azhar and its scholars during this period (Zeghal, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> In Islamic Law, the *hudud* refer to the legal punishments ascribed to certain crimes.

<sup>36</sup> On these themes, see also Eickelman & Piscatori (1996).

<sup>37</sup> The next chapter expands on salafism.

(Faid, 2014: 54). In the 1970s, *ansar al-sunna* was led by sheikh Muhammad Khalil Hiras,<sup>38</sup> who graduated from al-Azhar University in 1940 and later studied in Saudi Arabia under sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Baz.<sup>39</sup> These associations developed important social networks in Egypt, even though their influence had remained relatively limited until the 1960s. They subsequently benefited from the new competitive religious environment and from Sadat's new accommodating policies.

This contextualisation indicates that discussing the application of Islamic Law was commonplace among substantial components of Egyptian society in the 1970s. It was a discursive opportunity, which defines those “ideas in the broader political culture believed to be “sensible,” “realistic,” and “legitimate”” (McCammon, 2013: 1). Militant groups demanding the application of Islamic Law in Egypt therefore cannot simply be dismissed as *khawarij* groups to denounce their alleged heterodoxy.<sup>40</sup> An ontological refusal to essentialise Islam cannot negate that the Islamic legal tradition has historically legitimised certain forms of political organisation (polity) and elaborated rich political prescriptions (Cook, 2014).<sup>41</sup> Despite a plurality of *de facto* forms of Islamic states, this unitary conception has never been out-rightly abandoned by Muslim scholars.<sup>42</sup> Demanding the application of Islamic Law enjoys a certain resonance in Muslim societies; this contextualisation generally means that, in the 1970s, the main distinction between the *jihadi* cells discussed thereafter and mainstream religious actors pertained to the legitimacy of violence to achieve a shared objective.

This fundamental feature - that *jihadi* cells shared much of their ideological framework with broader sections of society - is inherent with the study of violent groups in social movement studies discussed in the previous chapter. The latter asserted that violent groups often originate from broader social

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<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Khalil Hiras was an Egyptian religious scholar born in the city of Tanta in 1916. He graduated from al-Azhar University where he received a doctorate in Islamic sciences. He was initially a self-proclaimed opponent of Ibn Taymiyya and of the latter's rejection of philosophy and *kalam* (Islamic theology). Eventually, Hiras's attempts to scholarly refute Ibn Taymiyya's creed failed, and catalysed his adoption of this creed as his own.

<sup>39</sup> Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Baz was a leading Saudi scholar and the country's Grand Mufti from 1993 to 1999. He is widely considered as one of the most influential scholar of 20<sup>th</sup> century salafism.

<sup>40</sup> *Khawarij* (*khariji* in singular) refers to an early Islamic sect denounced by Islamic orthodoxy as heretic. This name means that this sect literally "left" religion because of its antagonist position on the succession of prophet Muhammad. The next chapter expands on this theme. In the meantime, it should be mentioned that it has historically been common to denounce one's opponent as a *khariji* to deny his Islamic legitimacy. One can refer to Kenney (2006) for the evolving use of this concept in Egypt.

<sup>41</sup> One of the earliest Islamic theological conceptualisation of the Caliphate was written by Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi in *Al-ahkam al-sultaniyya, The Ordinances of the Government* (al-Mawardi, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> This understanding of the role of the tradition should not preclude the consideration of its reinterpretation over time. The next chapter develops this argument, and investigates the reinterpretation of the *salafi* tradition by the IG and the JG.

movements which give them a certain organisational and ideational legacies, and added that the boundaries between them are often fluid and changing.<sup>43</sup> In this case, *salafi* associations such as *ansar al-sunna* provided the theological *salafi* backbone and legacy to the jihad groups which were established by some of its members and followers. The shared objectives between mainstream *salafi* associations and *jihadi* entrepreneurs also informed the framing used by the latter, which mostly had to convince a *salafi* minded audience that only violence could lead to the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt.

The emergence of the first noticeable armed Islamist group in the 1970s was not directly related to these developments, however. The first violent group was formed by former MB members who suffered from Nasser's repression and strived to apply their reading of Sayyid Qutb's revolutionary path. This group, *jama'at al-muslimun* (the group of the Muslims, JM thereafter),<sup>44</sup> was led by Shukri Mustafa, a member of the 1965 MB special apparatus who briefly recruited a few followers and pursued an isolationist approach after his discharge from prison. During its short-lived existence, the JM was characterised by peculiar sectarian and authoritarian internal dynamics which isolated it from society and hindered the development of a supportive environment. This group was mostly based on prison ties, and its rejection of other Muslims on theological grounds later obstructed its expansion. Micro mobilisation was therefore limited, and the JM remained a cult organised around an authoritarian leader throughout its short-lived existence.<sup>45</sup> Its members eventually confronted the state before the group's dissolution by 1978.

The Islamist cells which later morphed to create the Jihad Group were called the jihad groups. These groups were loosely structured in fuzzy networks, which agglomerated high school students and friends of religious background, often active in mainstream *salafi* institutions as well. Their members were often convinced by their acquaintances that violence was Islamically justified in Egypt. The legitimisation of violence was rationalised by many complementary issues whose sole remedy was believed to be the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt. It included, for instance, the liberation of Jerusalem and Palestine and the creation of an Islamic utopia in Egypt. These groups did not follow an intricate ideological corpus, and mostly referred to a set of general principles. One of their leaders in

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<sup>43</sup> Chapter 2 pages 51-52.

<sup>44</sup> This group has also widely been referred to as *takfir wal-hijra* (excommunication and exile), even though the group never used this name (Hegghammer, 2009: 246).

<sup>45</sup> A few studies have covered this group's early developments (Ibrahim, 1982, 1988; Ansari, 1984; Kepel, 1993).

the late 1970s, a JG leader argues that:

The Islamic movement was preoccupied with the big ideas, such as the Caliphate and the restoration of the Islamic state. We did not answer the modalities and just focused on the general principles. We had a dream, a vision and endless hopes. We drew on Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Taymiyya because they represented exceptional sources in Islamic history. A unique era necessitated unique sources. We were drawing a new framework.

The jihad groups were religiously influenced by the *salafi* teachings of *ansar al-sunna*, and by this institution's leader sheikh Khalil Hiras. This influence shaped these cells' focus on *tawhid* (unicity of God) and on the rejection of unlawful religious innovations denounced as *bida'* (Muru, 1990: 31). Many members politically argued that the Egyptian regime was un-Islamic,<sup>46</sup> and drew on diverse writings of Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Taymiyya<sup>47</sup> to justify that Muslim leaders who do not apply Islamic Law have to be violently opposed.

The successful relational framing undertaken by *jihadi* entrepreneurs was rendered possible by its strong resonance, as argued by social movement theorists, and by its pro-active nature. The successful recruitment of *jihadi* fellows was facilitated by the theological corpus shared with mainstream salafism, which eased the transition to violence, and by the construction of a utopian project in these frames' diagnosis, prognostic and motivational components. New jihad groups' members were not uniquely convinced on the basis of shared grievances, but were also integrated into an ambitious project, the creation of an Islamic state, which would restore the golden age of the Muslim world, revive the Islamic Caliphate and liberate the Muslim world from domestic oppressors and foreign occupation. This pro-active and positive endeavour is described by Elisabeth Wood as “pleasure in agency”, defined as “the pleasure in together changing unjust social structures through intentional action” (Wood, 2003: 235). The plurality of concerns addressed by the creation of the Islamic state meant that all new members could find something worth fighting for. It also indicates that the broader project defended by the jihad groups, in contrast with the IG investigated later, was not merely a reaction to repressive domestic policies, thus accounting for the use of violence prior to the closure of political opportunities.

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<sup>46</sup> This position drew as well from mainstream *salafi* scholars. Cf. chapter 4 pages 109-112.

<sup>47</sup> The next chapter develops these theological arguments. It notably asserts that these groups' reference to Ibn Taymiyya does not mean that the latter legitimised the use of violence in Islamic countries, which he actually opposed. Cf. chapter 4 pages 107-108.

Relational micro-mobilisation through acquaintances and pre-existing ties was not the only mobilising pattern. In addition, many leaders and members of these early cells mention that they adopted armed jihad independently. They argue that, while they had never been MB members, the repression of the latter and the execution of Sayyid Qutb triggered their micro-mobilisation. They describe their moral shock at the stories of torture and executions of Islamist prisoners in Egyptian prisons, and often add that their outrage was further reinforced by the loss of Palestine in the 1967 war against Israel. This moral shock is defined in the social movement literature as a cognitive and emotional process which encourages micro-mobilisation in the absence of pre-existing ties with active social networks (Jasper & Poulsen 1995; Jasper, 1999: 106). This emotional outrage can trigger an individual's self-recruitment into activism, such as this decision to join or create *jihadi* cells. Stories of torture and execution of Islamist prisoners played a similar role in the wars launched by the United States in the 2000s on the radicalisation of Muslims in Western countries (Wiktorowicz, 2005), sometimes described as “humiliation by proxy” (Khosrokhavar, 2005: 157).<sup>48</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri (2010: 11) argues in his memoirs that state repression sparked:

[A] growing anger and a desire to take revenge against those who persecuted Islam and Muslims [...]. These feeling made many Egyptians - and the majority of them were religious - sympathise with the MB, especially when they learnt the crimes committed by the regime against their wives and what was sacred in their houses.

A leading member of a *jihadi* cell in the 1970s, similarly explains that:

I never belonged to any organisation but when I heard about the Muslim Brotherhood being tortured in prison, I wanted to know more about them. Why did it happen? What were their ideas? Then, I sympathised with them and realised that the regime had to be changed with the use of force. The regime committed a fatal mistake. They repressed them and paved the way for our emergence, the emergence of a more radical generation.

Another prominent member of the Jihad Group who briefly joined *jama'at al-muslimun* before joining a JG cell, Osama Qassem (2012), adds that:

I joined this group [*jama'at al-muslimun*] to express my solidarity with them against state oppression. My solidarity was to its members and was not ideologically inspired. At the time, there was nobody else

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<sup>48</sup> On the role of Western states' foreign policies on the radicalisation of individuals in Western societies, see also Githens-Mazer (2008).

involved in militancy so I had no other alternative.

The moral shock expressed in these testimonies relates to the theoretical discussion of the second chapter on the role of grievances and networks in micro-mobilisation. It notably suggests that micro-mobilisation is not necessarily generated by a direct encounter with the security services, but can also be triggered by the suffering of others. Moreover, it confirms that, while pre-existing ties played an important role in the socialisation of many jihadis,<sup>49</sup> it was not always a pre-requisite to high-risk activism mobilisation.<sup>50</sup> Emotions, empathetic grievances and individual solidarity hence played a critical role in the mobilisation of a new *jihadi* generation in the 1970s. This cognitive trigger and these framing processes are nonetheless not sufficient to give a comprehensive picture of the mobilisation processes of the jihad groups in the 1970s, which still relied on organised networks which could aggregate material and non-material resources to confront the Egyptian state.

The first jihad group emerged between the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s in the authoritarian Nasserist regime. Its initial leadership was formed by Nabil Bari', Isma'il Tantawi, and 'Ulaywah Mustafa (Muru, 1990, 1998: 77; al-Siba'i, 2002; Munib, 2009; al-Zawahiri, 2010). This cell was then reinforced by the joining of some of their acquaintances from schools and local mosques, including Ayman al-Zawahiri and Sayyid Imam, who became prominent JG leaders subsequently (al-Siba'i, 2002; al-Zawahiri, 2010).<sup>51</sup> This group was led by Tantawi in Cairo, who was the group's ideologue and Hassan Halawi in the Giza area (Muru, 1990: 31). This small grouping of mostly high school students was primarily a group of friends and acquaintances who were preparing themselves for jihad, rather than a structured armed group.

This group's first significant development occurred much later, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The war with Israel challenged this group on the most suited tactical and strategic approach to confront and replace the Egyptian regime. The largest faction legitimised the joining of the Egyptian army to confront Israel, and asserted that it would be an opportunity to spread the groups' ideas and recruit army officers. 'Isam al-Qamari, an army colonel who subsequently reached prominence within the JG,

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<sup>49</sup> The role of pre-existing ties is well-documented by social movement scholars. See chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> High-risk activism is defined by the "anticipated dangers" entailed by this form of activism compared to safer forms of mobilisation by McAdam (1986), who further argues that high-risk activism is generally associated with higher integration in activist networks.

<sup>51</sup> Sayyid Imam became the leader of the Jihad Group from 1988 to 1993, before his succession by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

was henceforth recruited by ‘Ulaywa Muhammad (Muru, 1990: 34). Another faction opposed this idea, and further argued that group members who joined the army and died in the battlefield, such as ‘Ulaywa Mustafa's brother, could not be considered martyrs in Islam (Munib, 2009: 48). The last faction, led by Yahiya Hashim, believed that only guerilla warfare could lead to the creation of an Islamic state.

These ideational divisions epitomise the story of the jihad groups and of the JG which succeeded them. These cells and their successor repeatedly divided over tactical and strategic matters.<sup>52</sup> Interviews with their members and with IG members and leaders who enjoyed close links with them nonetheless question the ideational nature of these divisions. They maintain that, in most cases, ideological and tactical divisions were an alibi to cover personal conflicts between group members (e.g. Taha, 2013).

The origin of these repeated divisions lies in these groups' early micro-mobilisations. These cells' early legitimisation and adoption of violence signifies that being a member entailed personal pitfalls akin to high-risk activism.<sup>53</sup> These cells were marked from their inception by the secret and violent nature of their endeavour to replace the Egyptian regime. This characteristic hindered the organisation of low-risk activities (such as non-violent proselytisation and the provision of local social support), which could have helped to forge close ties between group members and leaders, strengthen internal trust, and shape formal and informal organisational norms, decision making processes and ideological production. While high-risk activities can, in insulated cells or in military organisations, trigger a similar result, these processes are usually preceded in these structures by low-risk activism facilitating the integration and socialisation of new activists, as argued by social movement theorists (McAdam, 1986: 69), or by paramilitary collective training activities. In this case, however, these *jihadi* cells leaders were rather defined by Staniland as “revolutionary plotters” whose “fragmented organisations” were shaped by these early organisational patterns, which prove paradoxically inadequate to violent collective action (Staniland, 2014). The absence of internally legitimised norms explains these groups' tendencies to split over any new rising issue.

The endeavour to infiltrate the army and topple the regime with a military coup remained unexploited until the arrival in Egypt of a Palestinian called Saleh Sirriyya. Sirriyya was a former PLO

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<sup>52</sup> The next chapter expands on the extent of these divisions over time.

<sup>53</sup> Cf note 49 page 78.

representative in Iraq, and an Islamist intellectual close to the ideas of *hizb ut-tahrir* (though it is unclear whether he ever belonged to this group).<sup>54</sup> According to a close associate, Sirriyya was primarily motivated in the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem. He believed that Palestine could only be freed after the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt, which he justified in a pamphlet entitled *risala al-iman (Message of Faith)* (Sirriyya, 1974). Sirriyya envisioned a military coup as the least bloody way to create an Islamic state in Egypt, and the only workable possibility considering the military structure of the Egyptian regime.

Sirriyya tried to associate the Islamic current to his military coup. He notably proposed his plan to the Muslim Brotherhood, who refused to lend him support, and to Isma' il Tantawi, the leader of the main remaining jihad group. The subsequent rivalry between Sirriyya and Tantawi is quite symptomatic of the disputes opposing diverse *jihadi* groups allegedly for ideological reasons. Muhammad Muru mentions that many prominent members of Tantawi's group, including Hassan Halawi from Giza, were disappointed by Tantawi's passive posture and joined Sirriyya because of their eagerness to take action against the regime (Muru, 1990). Many new members of Tantawi's group therefore answered Sirriyya's call for unity, including Karam al-Anaduli, Mustafa Yasiri and Talal al-Ansari (Munib, 2009: 49). A member of the group argues that:

Saleh [Sirriyya] proposed his plan to Tantawi, who refused. Tantawi was scared of Saleh, whom he saw as a competitor. He thought that Saleh would eventually take the group's leadership and impose his conditions. Tantawi therefore asked everybody to agree to follow the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. Saleh refused, and thought that this demand was a mere excuse. Later, many people left Tantawi and joined our group because they wanted to do something, not for ideological reasons. They wanted to launch jihad and were very zealous.

This episode confirms that ideological or theological arguments can often act as a cover for less noble rationales. The theological debate between a religious favouritism for Sayyid Qutb or Ibn Taymiyya was a pretext for deeper organisational conflicts. Defectors from Tantawi's jihad group did not join Saleh Sirriyya for religious reasons but for his ideational and human resources: Sirriyya had a plan and followers who were willing to take action. Following Sayyid Qutb or Ibn Taymiyya did not entail specific tactical differences over the most suitable approach to political action. This competition between two *jihadi* cells is rather generally congruent with broader debates in civil war studies, which

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<sup>54</sup> On Saleh Sirriyya, one can refer to al-Amin (2010).

emphasise material reasons as for why individuals join specific groups with stronger resources or military potentials,<sup>55</sup> and stress the importance of varying resources in the creation of alliances between armed groups (Christia 2012). Sirriyya was ready and had a military plan to topple the regime. This simple fact explains why new members joined in, not because of Sirriyya's theology.

Sirriyya created many cells in Egypt to execute his plan (Muru, 1990: 37). His recruitment tactics were primarily aimed at young Muslims already socialised in a religious environment, with a preference for those who frequented mainstream *salafi* associations. Members of Sirriyya's group would meet individuals in mainstream *salafi* mosques, with an emphasis on individuals who prayed the dawn prayer (*fajr*). They would give them appropriate books and literature drawing on shared religious scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas on the Mongols. In a later phase, new members would be encouraged to recruit their friends, neighbours and family members. On the eve of the military academy operation, Sirriyya's organisation was composed of three main groups, young members of the military academy under the leadership of Karam al-Anaduli, a cell in Alexandria under the leadership of Talal al-Ansari and a cell in Giza under the leadership of Hassan al-Halawi (Muru, 1990: 45). In addition to these three main units, smaller cells also existed in local neighbourhoods in Shubra and in the military aerial academy.

The evolving composition of Sirriyya's group and the joining of many motivated individuals dramatically changed this organisation's destiny. In sharp contrast with *jama'at al-muslimun*, Sirriyya's group was not a pyramidal authoritarian organisation but was rather “fairly democratic in its deliberations and decision-making” (Ibrahim, 1980: 436). As a result, new members stimulated by the group's human and material resources pressured Sirriyya to act quickly against the regime (Ibrahim, 1980: 437). A member of the group confirms that Sirriyya supported the principle of an armed operation against the military academy, but considered the chances of success quite low, which explains his initial reticence. Intense pressure from his new followers nonetheless forced him to approve this operation, which eventually failed. Members of the group were subsequently arrested and imprisoned, while Sirriyya was executed.<sup>56</sup>

This operation was the main armed activity of the jihad groups in the 1970s. Sirriyya's followers did

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<sup>55</sup> See chapter 5 page 156.

<sup>56</sup> On the military academy operation, one can also refer to the autobiography of Talal al-Ansari (Surur, 2006).

not recover from their failure to take over the military academy. They scattered, and no cell managed to reach operational capability in the next few years. Some of its members tried to reconstitute the group under the leadership of Amir al-Jaysh and another Palestinian, Salim al-Rihal. Amir al-Jaysh was a close Egyptian associate of Sirriyya, while al-Rihal was a Palestinian who followed Sirriyya's rationale that Palestine could only be liberated after the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt. They coordinated their efforts to reconstitute this group with Sirriyya's vision, aware of the risks posed by excessive enthusiasm and by the absence of preparation. They remained a small *jihadi* cell, however, and were marginalised after 1979 by the rising influence of Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj. Meanwhile, other followers of Sirriyya similarly tried to revive the organisation in Alexandria and got involved in small failed armed operations in 1977 and 1979.

### **3.4. SPREADING DA'WA IN THE SOUTH OF EGYPT**

The evolution of the Islamic Group (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya) in the South of Egypt diverges substantially from this analysis of the jihad groups. The following section therefore focuses on the emergence and early developments of the IG from the mid-1970s to 1979. It argues that the IG emerged as a proselytising group of students who socialised and learned religion collectively. Then, it demonstrates that the group's inclusive and non-violent activities eased its development as an integrated organisation characterised by internal cohesion and societal integration. Eventually, this section establishes that the combination of local clashes against IG opponents in Southern universities combined with a gradual closing of political opportunities in Egypt informed the group's subsequent adoption of an antagonistic stand on the Egyptian regime, and a distinctive *salafi jihadi* outlook.

The emergence of the Islamic Group should be contextualised in consideration of the expansion of higher education in Egypt. The growing importance of Egyptian universities and their role in the political opposition can be traced back to the Nasserist regime. The promotion of higher education was congruent with Nasser's redistributive policies, and with his socialist inclinations. After consolidating power in 1954, Nasser endorsed educational reforms designed to facilitate wider access to Egyptian universities. The budget of the Ministry of Education effectively doubled, tuition fees were lowered and the number of students consequently increased substantially (Wickham, 2002: 24-25). While Nasser initially policed university students and forbade student unions, the political frustrations stemming from the Egyptian defeat in 1967 combined with general economic stagnation sparked the

first political demonstration in 1968 (Wickham, 2002: 32). Nasser was forced to ease state control over university campuses, and to authorise the expression of previously banned political opinions (Wickham, 2002: 33). The student movement was still under the overwhelming influence of nationalist and leftist forces, however, and the Islamic trend was virtually absent.

The succession of Nasser by Anwar Sadat and the expanding role of Islam in the public sphere modified the university landscape. The previous contextualisation of the growing importance of Islam under Sadat illustrated the expansion and diversification of the religious sphere in Egypt, and revealed the rise of Islam as a credible alternative to older ideologies. Arab nationalism specifically suffered from the 1967 defeat against Israel, and from the short-lived pan-Arab union with Syria. The expansion of its Islamic alternative was logically reflected in university campuses. New state policies eased the development of Islamic groups, which gradually agglomerated an increasing number of students, and competed with leftist and nationalist force to form an Islamist alternative.

The first Islamic student groups appeared in the beginning of the 1970s in most Egyptian universities. The first of these groups, the “youths of Islam” (*shabab al-Islam*), rose as an Islamist vanguard in the student unions (al-Arian, 2014: 52), even though its influence rapidly waned in favour of its emerging Islamist competitors. The latter were initially named the “religious group” (*al-jama‘a al-diniyya*), before adopting the name “Islamic group” (*al-jama‘a al-islamiyya*) by 1972-1973 (al-‘Awwa, 2006: 68; Hashim, n.d.). A leading IG member in the Southern university of Asyut and one of its first members, Salah Hashim, recalls that he was already religiously committed before joining university, and familiar with the activities of *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya*, *ansar al-sunna*, and *tabligh al-da‘wa*.<sup>57</sup> He explains that his group adopted the name Islamic Group in 1975, following the acronym Pakistani group created by the influential Islamic thinker Abu al-‘Ala al-Mawdudi.<sup>58</sup> He adds that most current IG leaders joined the group at that time, including Karam Zuhdi, Osama Hafez, ‘Ali Sharif, Rifa‘i Taha, Muhammad al-Islambuli (Hashim, n.d.). Based on numerous testimonies quoted subsequently, two main patterns account for the adhesion of early members. Some were religiously committed, like Hashim, while others adopting religion in parallel to their engagement with the IG.

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<sup>57</sup> This movement is a revivalist religious movement which originated in the Indian subcontinent and later expanded worldwide.

<sup>58</sup> On al-Mawdudi see also: Hartung, 2014; Jackson, 2010.

In the following analysis, the name “Islamic groups” refers to Islamist student groups active in Egyptian universities in general, while “Islamic Group” (IG) applies to the student group created initially in the city of Asyut. While the IG was initially part of the Islamic groups, it subsequently evolved independently after its adoption of armed violence, and eventually monopolised the use of the terminology “Islamic group”.

In sharp contrast with the jihad groups, the IG did not initially endorse a specific political programme. As in similar cases of grass-root activism (Blee, 2012: 16-17), the IG emerged as a group of friends who interacted locally before developing a shared political understanding. Its members were religious youths who endeavoured to preach Islam and spread religion through *da'wa*. The nature of this initial endeavour, peaceful proselytisation, was interrelated with the group's early activities. As noted by Kathleen Blee, grass-root movements indeed “do not first develop collective political understandings and then formulate actions that reflect these beliefs. Rather, they build shared beliefs as they consider what it is possible for them to do” (Blee, 2012: 85). IG members therefore organised diverse activities such as student camps, conferences and lectures, which helped its members to become acquainted with religious precepts and concepts, and to internalise the group's fundamental mission. One of its earliest founders, who subsequently headed the IG abroad in the 1990s, Rifa'i Taha (2013), explains that:

Our movement did not begin as an idea in 1975, but as a group of individuals. We were a group of youths committed to religion in Asyut University. We created the Islamic Group to find the proper understanding of Islam. We were calling for fasting during Ramadan, for prayer and for wearing *hijab*. We did not have a comprehensive political understanding. We only called people to Islam and to their religious commitments. The idea was only taking shape.

The IG's religious endeavour was initially very heterogeneous and inclusive. The group was at an early stage of its religious maturation and had not yet adopted the *salafi* approach (*minhaj*) to Islam. In comparison with the jihad groups influenced by the legacy of mainstream *salafi* associations, the IG did not inherit a specific religious tradition during its initial development since it did not emerge from established organisations or networks. Moreover, coming from the rural South, early IG members were not initially marked by the activist politicisation of jihad groups members in Cairo and in the Egyptian Delta. A religious preacher of the IG argues that:

We initially followed many religious sources. We did not have a defined ideology, contrary to the Muslim Brotherhood which followed a clear method from the beginning. We began as a group of

students who loved religion. We initially drew from many sources, such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathir, [Imam] al-Nawawi, [Abu al-‘Ala] al-Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb.<sup>59</sup> We also participated in many lectures, by [Mohammed] al-Ghazali, [‘Abd al-Hamid] Kishk, ‘Isa ‘Abdo, Muhammad Najib al-Muti and many others.<sup>60</sup>

And Taha (2013) adds that:

Our learning process was gradual. We did not learn everything at once but rather gradually learnt from many sheikh, ‘ulama’, preachers, from *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya*, *ansar al-sunna*, the Muslim Brotherhood, etc.

In the 1970s, the Islamic groups spread throughout Egypt and became the dominant force in Egyptian universities, including in the South. They benefited from a favourable political environment and from the resonance of their Islamic message in Egyptian society to participate in students elections and gain control of eight out of twelve unions in universities nationwide (Abdo, 2002: 124). Their activities were diverse and progressively included the provision of social services to the students (Kepel, 2005: 135). The Islamic groups responded to increased student needs for social support that neither the state nor universities were able to provide due to the fast development of higher education and the exponential growth of the student body. The Islamic groups provided efficient and easy solutions to daily student issues, which made them a credible alternative to their opponents. They provided buses to female students, organised book fairs with cheaper material, and offered direct student support (Abdo, 2002: 124-125). Furthermore, their influence was reinforced by the growing religiosity of Egyptian society and by the booming prominence of religious discourse. Both factors explain the joining of a growing number of students throughout the 1970s. A current IG local leader explains that:

I became religiously committed before joining university. I was initially close to *tabligh al-da‘wa*. I liked the way they dressed and their religious commitments. When I joined university, the Islamic Group looked like them so I enquired about this group and sat with its members. I did not initially know the group's ideology, and only discovered its positions when I spoke to its members. The group's central objective was the commitment to the Prophetic tradition. It was just a religious revival. There was nothing political.

The time-frame before the group's legitimisation of armed violence had a crucial organisational

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<sup>59</sup> The first three religious scholars are from the early Islamic period, while the last two are contemporary.

<sup>60</sup> Many of those included in the “peripheral ulama” mentioned previously.

importance on the subsequent IG evolution. The low-risk nature of early IG activities helped the group to benefit from an advantageous religious societal environment to recruit and mobilise new followers. The ostensibly non-political nature of these activities additionally distracted the regime and did not obstruct the group's expansion, which could therefore build strong organisational vertical norms between its leaders and members, including shared ideational goals, collective group identity,<sup>61</sup> and obedience to the group's centralised decision making processes. Even though the IG engaged, by the end of the 1970s, in local acts of violence, these actions were preceded by low-risk activism during the group's early history. This time-frame therefore witnessed the consolidation of the IG's leadership based on the group's nuclear foundations, and eased the development of an horizontal culture of consensus between IG leaders, whose importance is a recurring undercurrent in the following chapters. The strong horizontal and vertical ties rendered the group similar to an “integrated organisation” (Staniland, 2014: 26).

Despite a non-political early focus, the group's expansion in Southern university campuses incited repeated local confrontations with its leftist and nationalists opponents. While the IG initially focused on non-violent, low-risk activities, its members started to resent their opponents' position on Islam and hostility to the group's expansion; conversely, non-Islamic forces opposed the IG's gradual imposition of stricter religious regulations regarding gender separation, dress codes and moral values (Abdo, 2002: 125). These confrontations were local occurrences, unrelated to specific theological arguments. An IG leader argues that:

The clashes started with the leftists on university campuses. They criticised us, criticised Islam, and claimed that we were backwards. These arguments fuelled local fights between our respective supporters. We did not justify it religiously at the time, and only drew from religious sources later on. Eventually, we utilised the concept of *hisba* to justify the imposition of our ideas with the use of force.

Taha (2013) also substantiates that:

Our movement became stronger. We became aware of our strength and consequently wanted to apply Islam and prevent violations of *shari‘a* in our universities. We wanted to impose prayer for example. When it was time for *salah* [prayer], we would stop university lectures to allow the students to pray. We also wanted women to wear *hijab*, and wanted to separate men and women in university campuses in order to protect female students from harassment. The communists resisted, insulted us and insulted

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<sup>61</sup> The chapter 6 of this thesis expands on this theme.

religion. We opposed them religiously, not politically. It only became political later. We refused their control.

The use of violence was therefore driven by local dynamics of violence rather than by a premeditated political or religious rationale. The IG did not resort to violence based on its interpretation of the Islamic concept of *hisba*, but only developed this theological conception afterwards. This concept, usually translated in English as “commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong”, has often been used to Islamically describe the societal imposition of Islamic norms,<sup>62</sup> and has been repeatedly mentioned in the subsequent IG literature. According to the Islamic conception of *hisba*, the implementation of Islamic societal norms can be undertaken by hand (*yadd*), tongue (*lisan*) and heart (*qalb*). In this case, however, this Islamic concept subsequently legitimised local clashes between IG members and their opponents, and did not precede them.

These violent developments were not isolated in Egypt. By the end of the 1970s, the political atmosphere had seriously deteriorated, and the relatively politically liberal environment had come to an end. These political developments were partially caused by Sadat's rapprochement with the United States and Israel; Sadat's new international choices and his fear of a popular backlash prompted new coercive domestic policies. The end of the 1970s witnessed a gradual closing of political opportunities, notably illustrated by increased restrictions on students' political activities (Abdo, 2002: 127-132) and by the interdiction of student elections, hitherto dominated by the Islamic current. Eventually, the president's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 caused a strong outrage in many components of Egyptian society, as well as in the ranks and files of the Islamic groups active in Egyptian universities. According to Taha (2013), these new political choices merely confirmed the group's evolving position on the regime:

Our perception of the regime evolved progressively. We realised that the regime was corrupted by 1976-1977, even before the Camp David peace treaty. We knew that Sadat was preparing for this outcome since his victory in 1973. We opposed it from the beginning.

The MB simultaneously attempted to capitalise on the student Islamic groups and to integrate them into its organisational framework. The MB successfully managed to integrate most groups from the Delta

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<sup>62</sup> For example the Saudi religious police referred to as the “Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice” arguably uses this concept to justify its prerogatives.

and from Cairo, and to recruit prominent student leaders, including Essam al-Arian, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh and Abu al-‘Ala al-Mahdi.<sup>63</sup> According to many testimonies of Islamic groups' members integrated in the MB, joining this movement nuanced their religious views and helped them to develop a more complex political understanding of Islam (Al-Arian, 2014: 159).<sup>64</sup> This rapprochement was nonetheless opposed by the IG, which reinforced its *salafi* creed and refused MB reformism. By 1978:

The *salafi* creed and the *minhaj* (method) of the Muslim Brotherhood were adopted later on, by the end of the 1978. Then, we legitimised armed jihad and decided to change the reality through the use of force, which resulted in the killing of Anwar Sadat in 1981.

### 3.5. TOWARDS AN ARMED CONFRONTATION: THE KILLING OF PHARAOH

The journeys of the jihad and Islamic groups reached their climax in October 1981, when individuals associated with their leadership assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. This group was later labelled *tandhim al-jihad* (the Jihad Organisation), even though its members never used this name to describe themselves, claiming that they constituted a loose network of individuals rather than a well-defined organisation (Ibrahim, 2012; Hafez, 2013; Taha, 2013).<sup>65</sup> The following analysis explores the succession of events preceding Sadat's assassination, and focuses specifically on the interactions between jihad group members and the IG. It notably demonstrates that state pressure triggered their rapprochement and their agreement on the orchestration of a military coup combined with a popular revolution, although this plan never materialised. This section rather argues that the modalities and timing of Sadat's assassination in October 1981 were primarily informed by a wave of arrests launched by the Egyptian president a month before.

The jihad groups were in organisational disarray by 1979. *Jihadi* cells had not recovered from the failure of the military academy operation, and had not managed to create a unified organisational structure. The lack of trust between their members and leaders combined with the fear of an infiltration from the security services hindered the group's recovery. Its leaders still endorsed the same strategic vision, that the Egyptian state had to be replaced by an Islamic state, but remained extremely divided. A central leadership had not materialised and only small groups of individuals remained at large. These cells' leaders and members notably included Amir al-Jaysh, Salim al-Rihal and Kamal Habib. In the

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<sup>63</sup> Incidentally these three leaders played crucial role in the subsequent MB reformist trend's trajectories, especially since they arguably did not emerge from the MB but from a different background (Wikcham, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> See also the testimony of Aboul Fotouh (Abul Futuh, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> See also Rushdi, 2002.

Cairo upper class neighbourhood of Ma'adi, 'Isam al-Qamari, Sayyed Imam and Ayman al-Zawahiri were leading their own cell; they were contemplating the possibility of organising military training in Afghanistan as early as 1980, when al-Zawahiri travelled to the Afghan war front (al-Zawahiri, 2010: 61; Na'im, 2014). This plan subsequently inspired their post-Sadat's assassination exile to this region, as detailed in the following chapters.

Meanwhile, a member of an Alexandria-based *jihadi* cell, Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, arrived in Cairo to reorganise the jihad groups. Faraj endorsed the jihad groups' strategic vision, and defended the Islamic legitimacy of the fight against Muslim leaders who do not apply Islamic Law in a small opus. This book's title, *The Neglected Duty (al-farida al-gha'iba)*, refers to the obligation of jihad against Muslim leaders ('Imarah, 1983). Building on the Islamic tradition, notably on Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas on the Mongols,<sup>66</sup> Faraj justified the necessity to use violence to replace the regime with an Islamic state. Faraj was initially opposed by former members of Sirriyya's group, notably al-Rihal and Amir al-Jaysh, who refused his leadership and considered themselves Sirriyya's real heir. Sirriyya's former companions did not accept Faraj's attempt to lead them, and refused to join him. Faraj persisted and therefore contacted other groups, including the Southern based IG.

By 1979, the IG was a structured organisation which gradually began to antagonise the regime. While this group emerged as a conglomeration of individuals solely committed to religious preaching, the previous analysis demonstrated that the IG later endorsed a confrontational stance on Sadat for an array of domestic and international reasons. As a revolutionary group, IG leaders requested the religious guidance of a previously mentioned peripheral 'ulama', sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, who became the group's religious mentor and emblematic *amir*.<sup>67</sup> In addition, IG members became embroiled in local skirmishes with Coptic Christians, reminiscent of the logic of vendetta which prevailed throughout the 1990s.<sup>68</sup> By the end of the 1970s, the deteriorating political environment and the pressure exerted on IG members explain the context in which this group's leader, Karam Zuhdi, met

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<sup>66</sup> Faraj refers to several prominent scholars, not solely Ibn Taymiyya. It should also be noted that this reference to the Islamic tradition should not be understood as an endorsement of the latter to the violent removal of Muslim leaders. See also chapter 4 pages 107-108.

<sup>67</sup> Sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman was born in 1938. He studied in al-Azhar University where he obtained a doctorate on "the position of the Qur'an on its enemies as conceptualised in the Repentance Surat" (al-Rahman, 1985). He was arrested after the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, when he argued that Muslims should not pray over him. He later reached prominence under Sadat's regime. His publications and audio recordings are available on the following page: [www.tawhed.ws/a?a=t44x7zcc](http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=t44x7zcc).

<sup>68</sup> See also chapter 5.

Faraj. Zuhdi was pursued by the security services for on-going confrontations between IG members and Coptic Christians in the South, and was looking for a way out of the political impasse. The IG second-in-command at the time, Najih Ibrahim (2012), retrospectively laments this rapprochement with Faraj:

The Islamic Group initially wanted to preach the masses (*da'wa*) and did not believe in the use of violence against the state. Joining Faraj's group was one of our biggest mistakes. Faraj believed in a military coup and was not convinced of preaching alone. He was already involved in a jihad group before, and was acting in haste. His people were not ideologically united through. For instance, they did not believe in *al-'udhr bil-jahl*,<sup>69</sup> while it was crucial for us. We were initially hesitant, and only accepted this idea subsequently. A split occurred shortly after, nonetheless, before October 1981. Our practices were fundamentally different from theirs; we believed in educating the masses and in social work, while they focused on establishing a secret organisation.

Taha (2013) adds that:

We all wanted an Islamic state by the time we met Faraj. We were merely, like other movements, discussing the practicalities. What programme will help to create this state? Some thought it could materialise through preaching, while others believed that a military organisation was needed. The first faction opposed this idea and claimed that such a group would be caught. So when 'Abd al-Salam [Faraj] discussed his ideas with us, we were already thinking about the Islamic state

These discussions reveal that the IG was already considering the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt before meeting Faraj. The practicalities were still being discussed, however, and the Islamic state was admittedly not a central group tenet before this meeting. This ideational development was informed, according to IG leaders, by two complementary factors. First, the IG religious construction was becoming more coherent, and a distinctive *salafi* approach to Islam materialised by the end of the 1970s. Second, state pressure on IG members and leaders, combined with the hostility to the regime's new foreign policies, reinforced the group's hostility towards the state and fuelled the quest for an alternative.

The discussions between Faraj and the IG did not immediately generate an agreement in principle. After meeting with Faraj, Zuhdi returned to the South to propose an alliance to the IG's leadership. According to the latter, the IG initially refused to join Faraj for several reasons. A central contention

<sup>69</sup> See the following page.

was Faraj's refusal to adopt the Islamic concept of *al-'udhr bil-jahl* (the excuse of ignorance) as a central *'aqai'di* tenet rather than a mere *fiqhi* question (Ibrahim, 2012; Taha, 2013).<sup>70</sup> In Islamic Law, this concept refers to the limitations imposed on the practice of excommunication (*takfir*) if a Muslim is ignorant of his sin. The Islamic Group considered it *'aqai'di*, in the foundation of the Islamic creed, while members of Faraj's groups usually considered it *fiqhi*, jurisprudential only. This does not necessarily mean, however, that jihad group members used excommunication indiscriminately; JG commanders stress that most jihad group members practised *al-'udhr bil-jahl*, and refused indiscriminate *takfir*. This contention over a theological principle should be comprehended in line with the previous discussion, which asserted that theological issues were often a cover to justify group divisions.

In the meantime, Faraj recruited new members who soon reach prominence in his group, including a Lieutenant Colonel from the military intelligence, 'Abud al-Zumur, and his cousin Tariq who recruited him. In other cells, al-Rihal was in contact with Palestinian fellow countrymen, including Fathi al-Shiqaqi who later created the Movement of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine.<sup>71</sup> Al-Rihal was later expelled from Egypt and replaced by Habib. Other cells, such as the group of 'Isam al-Qamari, Sayyid Imam and Ayman al-Zawahiri, or Rifa'i Surur, were acting in isolation and did not coordinate with other jihad groups or with Faraj and the IG.<sup>72</sup>

Under pressure from the security services, Faraj and the IG finally compromised on a common plan to topple Anwar Sadat. This plan was a compromise between the IG's mass-movement approach and the elitist vision of Faraj's group. This agreement occurred through a relational diffusion of ideas<sup>73</sup> which triggered these groups' acceptance of the necessity to share their resources to fight a common enemy. The long-term strategy was the organisation of a military coup in combination with a popular

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<sup>70</sup> In Islamic Law, *'aqai'di* refers to *'aqida*, which is the central creed of Islam, while *fiqhi* refers to *fiqh* which is the interpretative process by which religious scholars interpret Islamic law. A concept which is embedded in the *'aqida* is considered a required belief in Islam, while a *fiqhi* concept can be interpreted at the discretion of religious scholars.

<sup>71</sup> Despite similar names, the movement of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine (*haraka al-jihad al-islami fi filastin*, PIJ thereafter) is not related to the Egyptian *jama'a al-jihad*. In the late 1970s, there were some interactions between early PIJ members and some Egyptian jihad groups members in the city of Zaqaqiyah. Ramadan Shallah, the current PIJ secretary general, recognised these early organisational interactions in an interview (Shallah & Sharbal, 2003). Additional interviews with JG members in Zaqaqiyah confirm this claim. They all assert, however, that these groups did not share the same ideological outlook. On the PIJ, see also Higazi, 2010: 226-260; Alhaj, Dot-Pouillard & Rebillard, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> According to court reports, al-Zawahiri's memories (2010) and interviews (Na'im, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> See also chapter 4 pages 134-135.

revolution. According to Taha (2013):

The main idea was to create an armed organisation to protect a popular revolution. Our idea was to call for a popular revolution, and to expect the state to react violently. If the state used violence, then we would need armed men to protect the revolution. These men would be drawn from inside the army. So when 'Abd al-Salam [Faraj] came with the idea of a coup, we introduced the idea of a popular revolution.

This plan never materialised. The assassination of Anwar Sadat on 6 October 1981 was not pre-organised, and was rather a spontaneous reaction to an unprecedented wave of arrests launched in September 1981 by Sadat, widely known as *tahafudh* (the restraining measures). This assassination was an opportunistic move facilitated by the incidental participation of Khalid al-Islambuli, the brother of a prominent IG member, to the military parade organised in commemoration of the 1973 war. IG leaders argue that they did plan to take over the regime in 1981, but generally thought that they needed another three years to prepare the military coup and the popular revolution. They thought that they were not yet prepared to face the state, and needed to recruit more followers inside the army to organise a popular revolution (Hafez, 2013; Taha, 2013). By 1981, jihad group cells and the IG were only loosely connected. According a member of al-Rihal's cell:

Between 1979 and 1981, there were just meetings between different groups. We were still thinking about a long term strategy but nothing was really prepared before September 1981.

The seeds of Sadat's assassination were sown on September 3, 1981, when he ordered a massive crackdown on his domestic opposition. The wave of arrests covered the entire Egyptian political and sectarian spectrum. Sadat ordered the arrest of more than one thousand five hundred political opponents from the leftists to the nationalists, including liberals, students, journalists, prominent Christians and Islamists.<sup>74</sup> Sadat subdued the political opposition in a mere few hours. Many of those who managed to escape the initial arrests were subsequently pursued by the security services. These arrests scared Islamist militants who had not been caught by the state. Paradoxically, only a few jihadis were arrested, including two IG members, Muhammad Shawqi al-Islambuli and Tal'at Fu'ad Qassem (Taha, 2013). Faraj's and individuals from the IG leadership managed to meet at different times in Cairo to prepare a response to Sadat's latest move. IG members felt pressured in the South, and thought that the organisation had been compromised. They wanted to take immediate action and react quickly.

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<sup>74</sup> See also Heikal (1983).

According to a member of Faraj's cell:

There was no consensus between us. Our side, with sheikh 'Abud [al-Zumur], sheikh Tariq [al-Zumur], sheikh Abu al-Hadid and others wanted to abstain until the organisation was ready. The brothers from the South, on the other hand, wanted to act quickly. They said that the organisation had been compromised.

Finally, Taha (2013) explains the events preceding Sadat's assassination in October:

After the arrests, we thought that a reaction was needed. Incidentally Khalid al-Islambuli, whose brother Muhammad was arrested at the beginning of September, happened to be in the army. He was not supposed to participate in the military parade on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, and we did not expect it. Surprisingly, he learned that he would participate. Then, everything happened really quickly. He told us that he would participate, and said that he could do something. Some of the brothers met and decided that we could try to kill Sadat, and then take over the radio and the national TV. We could move the people after killing the leader. Khalid took three other brothers with him. He did not think that the operation would succeed, but he wanted to give it a chance. We were about to be caught so we had to do something. We couldn't just be arrested and executed by the regime without reacting. The decision was only taken by a few people. There was no consensus.

Osama Hafez (2013), the current IG second-in-command adds that:

We were escaping from arrests and thought that if the regime caught us, we would not be able to do anything. It was a battle for survival. We nonetheless tried to stop the operation at the last minute. 'Isam Dirbala, sheikh 'Abud [al-Zumur] and I opposed the operation. I went to Cairo after we agreed we would stop the operation. There was no *fatwa* and only limited possibilities remained available. I went to Cairo but could not contact the brothers. You know, we had no mobile at that time to call them! It was too late.<sup>75</sup>

The eldest son of sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, Muhammad, confirmed that his father never issued a fatwa condoning Sadat's assassination. The president of the Court constituted after Sadat's assassination, 'Abd al-Ghafar Muhammad, confirmed that sheikh 'Omar was declared innocent because he had no knowledge of the assassination plans (al-Khatib, 2009). As his son Muhammad (2012) reveals:

At the time, some people were looking for my father to ask for a fatwa. But he disappeared that famous month to escape the security services. He was hiding with our family and nobody could meet him. He

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<sup>75</sup> One could legitimately wonder if Hafez is reinterpreting what happened under a favourable light. His version is nonetheless confirmed by court documents and by numerous testimonies.

supported the opposition to Sadat and the preparation for a revolution, but there was no plan to kill him.

Eventually, the operation led by Khalid al-Islambuli on the 6 October, 1981 succeeded and former president Sadat was killed. The next phase of the plan - the taking over of the Southern city of Asyut - nonetheless failed; most members of the jihad groups, including those who had virtually no connection to the assassination, along with the IG leaders and members, were arrested. The IG and the jihad groups entered the next phase of their history, in prison.

### **3.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented a new perspective on the development of armed militancy in the 1970s. This analysis has refuted the claim that Islamist armed groups emerged from the mainstream MB in reaction to state repression, and has contended that this view misrepresents their initial developments and their implications on these groups' futures.

In contrast with the current academic corpus on radicalisation and violence in social movement studies, this chapter has uncovered two differentiated patterns explaining the legitimisation of violence by Islamist groups. The first pattern has been widely covered in social movement studies and concerns the radicalisation of a group of individuals in reaction to changing state policies, usually a closing of political opportunities combined with repressive policing of protest. Changing macro policies can antagonise opposition groups and account for the gradual legitimisation of violence when non-violent alternatives to political change disappear, and when these groups are faced with external existential threats. This radicalising pattern specifically explains the IG's adoption of armed jihad by the end of the 1970s.

This pattern nonetheless fails to explain the early adoption of violence by the jihad groups, which illustrates an additional trend often ignored in social movement studies. In 1970s' Egypt, the jihad groups legitimised the use of violence when the macro environment was relatively inclusive, which apparently seems to negate the previous argument on the role of repressive policing of protest and exclusion. In this case, however, ideational factors, including emotions, empathic solidarity and a sense of pro-active agency to pursue radical political change prevailed over the consideration of macro-level closing of political opportunities. While jihad groups' members had not directly suffer from repression,

they were motivated by their sympathy with MB victims of torture, and by the possibility to create a utopian state in Egypt which would bring about justice and liberate the Muslim world. Their rationale for violence was broader than a mere reaction to changing state policies.

Most Islamist militant groups, aside from the sectarian JM, were not, contrary to common conceptions, isolated from their societies. These groups' emphasis on Islamic law cannot be isolated from the broader Egyptian society, where analogous demands similarly flourished. These groups' long-term objectives were not essentially antithetical with the positions endorsed by mainstream preachers and religious institutions. It would consequently be analytically counterproductive to study these groups as *khawarij* (Islamic heretics) to denounce their alleged heterodoxy. These groups merely differed from their competitors on the most suitable *modus operandi* to achieve shared objectives.

This chapter has further explored these groups' early organisational dynamics. The study of these groups' emergence has notably uncovered the existence of two main mobilising patterns. This chapter has argued that the early legitimisation of violence by the jihad groups hindered the development of shared norms of decision making and prevented the development of strong ties between their leaders. Throughout the 1970s, the jihad groups were characterised by internal competition over (ideational and material) resources, and never managed to create a common organisational structure. These organisational dynamics substantially contrast with the internal legitimisation of widely shared norms inside the IG, which developed a clear internal hierarchy and unified decision making processes since the group's emergence

Finally, this analysis suggests that, while ideational factors shaped these groups' tactical and strategic views, theological intricacies were often used in internal and external competition. These groups have referred to theological arguments to assert their Islamic orthodoxy and defend less laudable rationales. Even though these debates do not negate these groups' genuine belief in a certain ideational framework, as demonstrated in the next chapter, these ideational contests nonetheless indicate that ideological arguments should be carefully examined and not taken at face value.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MILITANT GROUPS' IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION**

The Jihad Group and the Islamic Group tried to unite twice, in Afghanistan, and then in the Sudan. The Jihad Group had two conditions however: they did not want to be headed by sheikh 'Omar, and they opposed the leadership of the brothers in prison. These were of central importance for the Islamic Group. We supported our leaders in prison and the unification never happened. The Jihad Group was not important nonetheless. They were just a few individuals.

Muhammad 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman (2012), son of sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman

There was no agreement between them and us [speaking about the unification attempts]. We refused to unite with them because we already had a project, the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt. We were better organised, had more members, and our ideas were more developed. There was only a small number of them and they had no real possibility to act. They wanted to carry out common work, but expected to discuss on the basis that they were as strong as we were. They claimed that their leaders and members were better than ours, and that we could convene a common *majliss al-shura*. We refused. They had no presence on the ground. So the differences were not merely in terms of ideas. All ideological differences could have been solved. It was about people.

Rifa'i Taha (2013), external IG leader in the 1990s

My experience with the Islamic Group was bitter. Our attempts to unite with them failed because of their insistence on their prison leadership and their excessive veneration of the so-called big brothers. [...] They gave them the right to take all the existential decisions. Those abroad could only apply the general guidelines sent by the big brothers. Even though many of their leaders abroad were convinced by our logic, they declared that only the group could decide, that the group was built on this basis, that they did not want to disturb it, and that we had to deal with it as a *fait accompli*.

Ayman al-Zawahiri (2010: 191-192, leader of al-Qaeda organisation)

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter on the emergence of armed militancy concluded with the assassination of former president Sadat in October 1981. It argued that two main *jihadi* groups proliferated in Egypt before the detention of most of their members and leaders between 1981 and 1982. The first cells were the loosely structured *jama'at al-jihad* (jihad groups), which were characterised by their fragmented nature and by

the absence of a centralised organisational structure. The other group, al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group, IG thereafter), emerged in the South of the country as a non-violent integrated organisation<sup>76</sup> which later adopted an antagonistic position towards Sadat's regime. The detention of hundreds of their members after October 1981 and their subsequent trial opened a new phase in their histories. This chapter explores these groups' ideological constructions after 1981, and draws upon a central question to investigate their respective evolution: considering that these groups started with the same socio-revolutionary rationale<sup>77</sup> based on a shared *salafi* theologico-political outlook, why did the IG eventually renounce violence consensually while an important Jihad Group (JG thereafter)<sup>78</sup> faction adopted a violent pan-Islamist rationale in alliance with al-Qaeda?

The literature on the comparative study of the renunciation of violence and the joining of AQ is relatively narrow. The two main studies acknowledge that these two groups were in decline by the mid-1990s, and had tremendously suffered from state repression. Then, the IG's theological renunciation of violence is explained by a rational cost-benefits calculus of the excessive cost of violence (Gerges, 2009, 2011), which was arguably eased by a cognitive process informed by internal dialogue, interactions with outsiders and selective state inducements (Ashour, 2009).<sup>79</sup> As for “why jihad went global”, the choice of JG leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to join Osama bin Laden is explained by this group's financial difficulties, the close ties developed with AQ networks and al-Zawahiri's personality (Gerges, 2009, 2011).<sup>80</sup> The globalisation of jihad by a JG faction would be better understood as a desperate effort to reinvigorate a lost battle against Arab regimes by targeting another enemy, in light of a changing regional and international environment. These two choices, renouncing violence or adopting a pan-Islamist agenda, would be the outcome of an internal civil war within the *jihadi* movement itself (Gerges, 2009).

This corpus only partially explains these two complementary issues, however. The first study suffers from a rationalist consideration of ideational developments similar to the tool box denounced in this thesis' theoretical chapter (Gerges, 2009), whereby ideas are an epiphenomenon wholly susceptible to

<sup>76</sup> The definitions of fragmented and integrated organisation are based on Staniland (2014).

<sup>77</sup> This socio-revolutionary rationale is defined as the fight against Muslim endogenous authorities to replace current regimes with Islamic states. A useful typology differentiates four main rationales between: socio-revolutionary, violent irredentist, violent pan-islamist, vigilantist, violent sectarian (with possible overlaps between them) (Hegghammer 2009, 2010: 5-8).

<sup>78</sup> The JG is the organisational structure which agglomerated the jihad groups after 1981.

<sup>79</sup> The last chapter expands on this theme.

<sup>80</sup> See also al-Zayyat (2004: 64-70).

material changes. In the other analysis, cognitive processes are acknowledged through the inclusion of internal dialogues and retrospections, while internal differences of opinions and the predominance of specific ideas are overlooked (Ashour, 2009). Finally, these studies do not consider the constraining impact of ideational developments on their holders, whereby the ideational framework chosen by a *jihadi* group constrains the possible range of ideational reinterpretations overtime.

These studies' second shortcoming concerns their failure to explain the position of IG leaders abroad, who eventually accepted the cessation of violence in Egypt. These leaders were isolated from the IG prison leadership, had friendly interactions with AQ leaders in Afghanistan (and sometimes ideological affinity) and suffered from a predicament akin to the JG's. These studies' analytical frameworks therefore cannot explain why none of them joined AQ networks.<sup>81</sup> This illustrative issue underlines these studies' inadequate consideration of organisational dynamics, which are only partially covered in one case (Ashour, 2009) and rejected all-together in Gerges' study (2009). The latter rather generalises that *jihadi* movements are wholly based on “founding charismatic emirs” and marked by their “inability or unwillingness to construct formal institutions and organizations” (Gerges, 2009: 41). This AQ characteristic should not be considered an essential characteristic of *jihadi* movements as a whole, however,<sup>82</sup> and should rather be studied as the outcome of certain organisational processes peculiar to this organisation and informed by the JG's organisational legacy.

This chapter investigates the construction and articulation of these groups' theologico-political frameworks from Sadat's assassination in 1981 to the present day. It provides a multi-level explanation of these groups' dynamic and interactive ideological constructions, rather than a mere review of their textual productions.<sup>83</sup> This chapter theoretically builds on a relational consideration of ideas, which considers them embedded in relational interactions between individuals (usually at a leadership level), and shaped by specific organisational norms. This chapter does not reify militant groups' ideological frameworks, which cannot be considered independently from the organisational context in which they

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<sup>81</sup> Only a negligible number of IG members reportedly joined AQ, including a minor figure named Muhammad al-Hakayma (2006) (see also chapter 6 page 194). It should also be stressed that, despite intermittent contacts between IG members and AQ, it would be inaccurate to consider them allies (Ashour, 2011: 90) or to assert that many IG members hold dual membership in AQ (Sageman, 2004: 63), as this chapter later demonstrates.

<sup>82</sup> The assertion that all *jihadi* movements have failed to construct formal institutions is inadequate with regards to the IG, as argued throughout this chapter, as well as in many other prominent cases such as Hamas or Hizbullah, whose institutions have survived their leaders. e.g Gunning, 2008; Daher, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Extensive discourse analyses of these groups' positions are available in Arabic (Munib 2010a, 2010b; al-Mesbar, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Abu 'Atiyya al-Sandbissi, 2012).

are embedded and operate, and from the ideas held by individuals internally recognised as sources of authority. In other words, militant groups' ideational frameworks are tied to organisational norms and decision making processes which, in turn, shape them. Ideas cannot be considered an exogenous and pre-existing factor determining militant groups' actions. In addition, they cannot be merely considered a tool kit for internal and external consumption, nor can they be essentialised and considered immutable over time.

This chapter is structured in four sections. It opens with a theoretical discussion on organisational studies of militant groups' ideational developments. Then, the two following sections demonstrate the existence of ideational and organisational constraints on militant groups' ideological constructions. The first part argues that the *salafi* discursive tradition adopted in these groups' early histories has set up the boundaries within which these groups have reinterpreted their theologico-political outlooks overtime. The following section demonstrates the additional existence of organisational constraints inherent with these groups' internal norms of decision making. In the concluding analysis, this chapter investigates the emergence of new interpretative frames and the conditions that determine their organisational diffusion. It demonstrates that the macro environment in which these groups' leaders evolve, notably defined by changing political opportunities and by the evolution of their social movement industry, can trigger the emergence of new interpretative frames and ideational debates. Then, this concluding section argues that their organisational diffusions are constrained by their compatibility with these groups' discursive tradition and by internal norms of decision making previously analysed.

#### **4.2. THE ORGANISATIONAL STUDY OF MILITANT GROUPS' IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION**

The following analysis contributes to militant groups' organisational studies. This academic corpus investigates these groups' internal dynamics contextualised in a multi-level environment. It emerged at an early stage in the literature on political violence, and has been recently revived in academic research. This section analyses its contribution to the understanding of militant groups' ideational construction; it specifically substantiates the necessity to contextualise armed groups' ideological evolution in consideration of their evolving organisational structures and internal dialogues.

The study of militant groups' organisational dynamics has materialised to uncover the rationale behind

their use of violence. This approach was initially introduced by Martha Crenshaw, who defended the existence of two alternative explanations to political violence (Crenshaw, 1987). Crenshaw suggests that instrumental explanations consider violence an intentional choice to achieve predetermined objectives, while organisational explanations deem violence an outcome of internal organisational processes and of the fight for organisational survival in a competitive environment. The latter, she argues, explains the development of various incentives for violence which often contradict armed groups' stated objectives. This claim has been upheld in subsequent studies asserting that militant groups' political objectives cannot explain comprehensively their rationale for violence (e.g. della Porta, 1995; Hafez, 2003; Bloom, 2007; Gunning, 2008). While acknowledging these groups' rationality,<sup>84</sup> these studies determine that it is crucial to analyse the ideational and material incentives developed during an armed campaign to assure these groups' organisational survival. They add that these incentives can paradoxically contradict and replace initial justifications for violence (Crenshaw, 1987: 13; della Porta, 1995: 83-135; McCormick, 2003: 486-490). As stated by Wendy Pearlman, "the factors responsible for an initial turn to violence differ from those that sustain it" (Pearlman, 2010: 202).

This organisational perspective posits that ideological incentives for violence evolve during a contentious conflict and cannot be considered entirely exogenous and anterior to contention. The main hypothesis postulates that militant groups are clandestine organisations subjected to a process of "ideological encapsulation" which takes place to assure their survival in the underground. Donatella della Porta defines this process as a "mechanism of adaptation of frames to changing contextual challenges" (della Porta, 2013: 232), usually associated with "organisational compartmentalisation and action militarisation" (della Porta, 2013: 25).<sup>85</sup> This process is substantiated by an ideational closure producing new frames for internal consumption, designed to prevent dissent and preserve a group's unity. This process can trigger the development of a Manichean vision of the world, where militants perceive themselves as soldiers in an existential war against external groups (della Porta, 1995: 133, 2013: 207; Crenshaw, 2011: 124-134). This vision is often organisationally reinforced by insular group thinking, and by the removal of dissident voices (Crenshaw, 1985; Shapiro, 2013: 47-49). Applied to militant Islamist groups, this model has been utilised to explain the increasing use of excommunication

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<sup>84</sup> Militant groups' rationality has been stressed in many recent studies which do not necessarily follow an organisational approach. e.g. Figueiredo & Weingast, 2000; Doran, 2002; Kydd & Walter, 2002, 2006; Pape, 2003, 2006; Abrahms, 2004; Mishal & Sela, 2006; Wiktorowicz & Kaltenthaler, 2006; Bloom, 2007; Sandler, 2013; Shapiro, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> See also Crenshaw (2011: 88-110).

(*takfir*) against opponents of some Islamist armed groups in Algeria and Egypt (Hafez, 2003: 155-198).

The study of ideational encapsulation has, despite its theoretical strength, often been monolithic. Most studies have overlooked the impact of distinctive organisational dynamics on its materialisation. Della Porta accurately maintains that ideational encapsulation is tied to various organisational processes, such as organisational fragmentation and internal competition over leadership and resources. She also suggests the need to study the tensions inherent with militant groups' internal dynamics, and unfold their sources in these groups' organisational structures and in their vertical and functional differentiations (della Porta, 2013: 146-147). In spite of these theoretical ramifications, case studies of ideational encapsulation have not differentiated distinct types of encapsulation caused by diverging group structures and evolution. Mohammed Hafez, for instance, amalgamates ideational encapsulations in several Algerian and Egyptian groups without considering cross-group differences (Hafez, 2003: 155-198).

It would therefore be beneficial to refer to the expanding literature on the origins and evolutions of militant groups' internal structures to investigate their influence on ideational encapsulation. Scholars of political violence notably suggest that militant groups follow diverging organisational patterns, ranging from any combination of pyramidal and networking structures (della Porta, 2013: 30). The impact of these organisational structures on spirals of encapsulation should be explored. In reference to two extreme cases, one could suggest that foot-soldiers of a structured and highly hierarchical militant groups are not be subjected to the same frame development as members of independent and secluded cells (Gunning, 2012: 227).

The study of militant groups' internal dynamics and organisational structures has mushroomed in the literature on insurgency, civil war and political violence. This corpus remains a minority concern, however, which often fails to re-integrate macro and micro factors in the study of ideological changes. The literature primarily focuses on the impact of external (Stedman, 1997; Figueiredo & Weingast, 2001; Kydd & Walter, 2002; Bloom, 2004, 2007; de Mesquita, 2005; Berrebi & Klor, 2006; Jaeger & Paserman, 2006; Gunning, 2008; Christia, 2012) and internal competition (Zirakzadeh, 2002; Bueno de Mesquita, 2008; Pearlman, 2010; Shapiro, 2013) on the use of violence. The investigation of internal competition specifically demonstrates that violence is often the subject of heated internal discussions. It

further suggests that the use of violence fluctuates in consideration of these groups' evolving memberships,<sup>86</sup> changing macro environments and individual cognitive processes.

Militant groups' internal structures consequently play a prominent role in these groups' ideological developments.<sup>87</sup> The study of the interlinkages between Islamist militant groups' structures and ideologies has hitherto been undertaken on two levels. The main debate has focused on al-Qaeda's transformation after 9/11 from an allegedly pyramidal organisation to a network-based group. The two central questions have dwelt on the influence of this transformation on this group's use of violence and efficiency (Mishal & Rosenthal, 2005; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Jones, 2008; Braniff, 2011; Mobley, 2012), as well as on AQ's ideological evolution. As for the latter, primary sources from AQ's central leadership<sup>88</sup> have notably revealed their dismay at their followers in several countries (Rassler et al., 2012; Lahoud, 2012). AQ leaders expose their opposition to the Pakistan Taliban's "ideology, methods and behaviour" (Rassler et al., 2012: 37), while the memoirs of an AQ commander, Fadil Harun,<sup>89</sup> expose his castigation of new AQ followers "who are inflexible in their interpretation of religion and rush to declare fellow Muslims to be unbelievers, [and are a] liability to al-Qa`ida and to jihadism" (Lahoud, 2012: 6). This configuration suggests a correlation between militant groups' organisational structure and ideational construction, positing that the transformation of a structured to a network-based group degrades the ability of its leadership to impose a clear ideological framework.

Finally, studies of militant groups' internal structures have covered these groups' decision-making processes. In Palestine, the study of Hamas' decision making process is explained through the investigation of its internal structure and of the role played by its informal and formal figures of authority (Gunning, 2008). As for the use of violence, a study of the Syrian MB demonstrates that the latter's decision to use violence in the 1970s resulted from a combination of leadership crisis, internal divisions and the parallel development of a *jihadi* faction which influenced MB members when the political environment was deteriorating (Lefèvre, 2013). Similar internal dynamics are also studied in non-violent movements, for instance in the Egyptian MB where the emergence of new generations

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<sup>86</sup> For instance with the adhesion of less-disciplined members, who are more prone to violence, and the departure of older moderating leaders. Cf. chapter 5.

<sup>87</sup> The next chapter will further covers the impact of militant groups' structures on their use of violence.

<sup>88</sup> Most of these sources were produced by the Harmony Program, launched by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. AQ's primary sources were released on the following website: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program>

<sup>89</sup> Also known as Fazul Abdullah Mohammed.

arguably explain the group's changing reactions to new political opportunities (Wickham, 2013). While these studies do not necessarily explore these groups' ideational construction, their understanding of their internal dynamics and figures of authority contextualised in a multi-level environment underline their importance in these groups' evolution.

In conclusion, this discussion establishes that militant groups' ideological constructions are the outcome of interactive dialogues informed by evolving organisational structures and changing macro factors. The following analysis is, accordingly, based on a relational conceptualisation of militant groups' ideational construction, which contextualises ideational developments in mediation with militant groups' organisational dynamics and decision making norms and processes.

### **4.3. TAKING IDEAS SERIOUSLY: A FIGHT FOR ORTHODOXY**

This section demonstrates the existence of a (paradoxically) constraining and flexible framework which has defined the evolving boundaries within which these two Islamist groups have reinterpreted their theologico-political outlook. This framework is the *salafi* discursive tradition adopted in these groups' early histories, and characterised by its internal rationality and environmental conditions of production. The following analysis dwells on this religious tradition and explores its foundations. It exposes these groups' framing contest with their opponents, and argues that this contest demonstrates these groups' commitment to the validation of their political prescriptions and rebuttal of their contenders'. Finally, this section asserts that the narrow internal religious diversity of the *salafi* discursive tradition combined with its broad political diversity have provided rich resources to reinterpret these groups' political prescriptions when environmental conditions changed. At the same time, this analysis demonstrates that these groups' reinterpretations have been confined within the boundaries internally generated within this tradition.

This approach is situated between rationalist and essentialist conceptualisations of Islamist militant groups' ideological constructions. This perspective recognises that ideological discourses can lead to violent and non-violent interpretations (Kalyvas, 1999), and rebuts monolithic ideological analyses of Islamist groups that disregard the flexibility of these groups' interpretations and discursive works.<sup>90</sup> This approach substantiates that, while armed Islamist groups can reinterpret their ideational

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<sup>90</sup> As denounced by Snow and Byrd (2007) and Gunning (2009).

commitments and beliefs quite substantially, there is a constraining framework which limits the range of new possible reinterpretations. As Jeroen Gunning posits, “political entrepreneurs can re-interpret [their political theory or ideology] [...] but once formulated, it constrains what [they] can do with it” (Gunning, 2008: 56). This research argues that this constraining framework is shaped by the religious tradition adopted by these groups at an early stage.

#### **4.3.1. A Salafi Discursive Tradition**

The consideration of Islam as a discursive tradition developed by Talal Asad (Asad, 1983, 1996) is particularly suited to comprehend the internal construction of the *salafi* tradition. This concept is Asad's answer to anthropological debates on the disputed existence of multiple forms of Islam between ‘Abdul Hamid el-Zein, Michael Gilsenan, Ernest Gellner and Clifford Geertz (Asad, 1983, 1996). Asad opposed el-Zein's argument that diverse and equal forms of Islam coexisted, Gilsenan's assertion that there is no true Islam, Gellner's reversed image of Islam and Christianity and Geertz's neglect of power. Asad rejects a typological separation of a rural and an urban Islam, and defends the reintroduction of a historicised social context. He posits that Islam is better studied as a tradition, defined as a “Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present” (Asad, 1996: 398). This discourse “seeks to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history” (Asad, 1996: 18). According to Asad and his followers, the articulation of Islamic discourses has to be studied within their traditions, using their internal instruments of reasoning and texts, and their embodiment in a set of practices and institutions (Anjum, 2007: 662). It is essential to recognise that the preservation of this discursive tradition requires its reinterpretation with its own criteria (Anjum, 2007: 662), since this religious tradition defines its engagement with sacred sources and the conditions for its reproduction (Mahmood, 2005: 115). According to this view, “orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship - a relationship of power' (Asad, 1986: 15). Anthropological studies of Islam can facilitate the exploration of the social, political and economic conditions which enable or restrain the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions. This environment includes forces of change and resistance, which are necessary to the comprehension of the regulation, maintenance and adaptation of correct practices and their legitimisation by Islamic discursive traditions.

This anthropological concept is useful to the on-going debate on the relation between Islam and Islamist armed groups. These studies have long opposed two antagonist positions, one claiming that these actors merely follow Islam,<sup>91</sup> and their contenders dismissing these claims and alleging that these groups are *khawarij* (Kenney, 2006; Lahoud, 2010), tribal movements (Ahmed, 2013) or extremists whose ideational commitments have nothing to do with Islam.<sup>92</sup> Asad's conception of Islamic orthodoxy rather justifies that debating the Islamic nature of these groups and rebuking them as *khawarij* is an anthropological question in itself. This research therefore abstains from judging these groups' Islamic legitimacy, and rather endeavours to analyse their ideological construction inside their discursive tradition.

This analysis defines the *salafi* religious tradition as a specific discursive tradition within Islam. This approach to Islam is based on internally legitimised practices and textual analyses of the religious text (the Qur'an) and of the religious tradition (the *Sunna*). This approach is congruent with current studies of Islamic Law which explore internal structures of authority and textual norms of interpretation. This corpus specifically contextualises Islamic Law in its historical conditions of production in order to provide a rich understanding of the evolution of an Islamically rationalised revealed Law (Zaman, 2002: 38; Hallaq, 2005).<sup>93</sup>

The previous chapter argued that the IG and the JG adopted the *salafi* approach (*al-minhaj al-salafi*) by the end of the 1970s. Salafism is defined as a modern revivalist movement originating in *ahl al-hadith*<sup>94</sup> in the Abbasid caliphate (Haykel, 2009). The *salafi* approach to Islam mostly diverges with non-*salafi* Islam on the method of interpretation of Islamic sources. *Salafi* Muslims reject what they consider a blind adherence (defined as imitation in Arabic, *taqlid*) to the four canonical Islamic schools of Law (*al-madhaha'ib al-arba'*) (Meijer, 2009c: 4), and insist on the need to return to the two fundamentals sources in Islam, the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (the practice of the Prophet) (Haykel, 2009: 38-39). Their name, *salafi*, refers to the first three generations of Muslims whom they intend to emulate in their daily practices and religious understanding. Salafis promote a specific creed (*'aqida*) which is not shared by the majority of Muslims, and are often described by their relatively literalistic approach to the religious

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<sup>91</sup> This position is paradoxically often shared by these groups and some of their non-Muslim contenders.

<sup>92</sup> These discussions have been elaborated by Hellmich (2005, 2008, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> On this topic, see also Walbridge, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. note 102 page 108.

text.<sup>95</sup> They insist on the necessity to purify Islam from any innovation deemed un-islamic (*bida'*) and from remnants of polytheist beliefs or practices (denounced as *shirk* in Arabic). This emphasis motivates their continued reference to the prominence of *tawheed* (oneness), differentiated in *tawheed al-uluhiyya* (oneness of divinity), *al-rububiyya* (oneness of worship) and *al-asmat wal-safat* (oneness of names and attributes). Prominent religious scholars of salafism include Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century and Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in 19<sup>th</sup> century Saudi Arabia.

These characteristics of the *salafi* discursive tradition have facilitated its development and expansion in the Middle East in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The critical *salafi* posture on the Islamic scholastic heritage has incidentally coincided with state-sponsored modernisation and monopolisation of formerly independent religious authorities, which marginalised their influence for colluding with authoritarian regimes. It was additionally accompanied by the growing importance of modern universities' graduates (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996) who were not immersed in traditional Islamic teachings. These young professionals could more easily contribute to salafism, considering that this approach to Islam follows a relatively horizontal structure (Heykel, 2009: 35-36). These characteristics have rendered salafism more attractive to a new generation striving to re-appropriate religious texts from discredited religious authorities, such as al-Azhar University after Nasserist reforms.

The role of the prominent scholar Ibn Taymiyya for modern salafis should be understood in this context. Ibn Taymiyya is often misrepresented as a backward and sectarian anti modernist figure, even though this representation is inaccurate and factually misleading. Ibn Taymiyya's positions are far more nuanced than prevailing perceptions,<sup>96</sup> considering his reconciling position between rationalism and revelation (Holtzman, 2010; Anjum, 2012: 196-227) and his factual opposition to the use of violence in Muslim countries, which he only sanctioned against foreign occupation (Michot, 2004a, 2012a).<sup>97</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's contemporary resonance should rather be understood for his intellectual independence

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<sup>95</sup> See note 96 page 108.

<sup>96</sup> An edited book has recently investigated Ibn Taymiyya's theology, hermeneutics and legacy (Rapoport & Ahmed 2010).

<sup>97</sup> Yahya Michot denounces current misunderstandings of Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas by Islamists proponents of violence. He argues that their political and ideological approaches contradict Ibn Taymiyya's central argument (Michot 2004a). According to the medieval scholar, a country populated by a Muslim population cannot be considered a domain of war (*dar al-harb*), even if its institutions or prevailing Law are un-Islamic. Michot denounces the "Mongolisation" of Muslim governments and the betrayal of Ibn Taymiyya's position to justify armed rebellion against Muslim leaders. He adds that Ibn Taymiyya only commanded patience and did not condone sedition. On Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to rebellion, see also Abou El Fadl (2001: 271-279).

against oppressive state authorities, and symbolic role in waging war against foreign forces occupying Muslim lands. In addition, his independent theology and mastering of his opponents' arguments provide abundant theological arguments to refute religious institutions allied to the modern state on religious ground, such as al-Azhar University.<sup>98</sup>

Salafism is a tradition which is religiously homogeneous and politically diverse. Modern *salafi* scholars and movements consensually endorse the *athari* Islamic creed ('*aqida*'), as described by Ibn Taymiyya,<sup>99</sup> and often (even if not necessarily) draw from the Hanbali<sup>100</sup> school of jurisprudence (*al-madhab al-hanbali*), which represent the most orthodox approach the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-salih*) would have agreed upon according to Ibn Tamiyya (Al-Matroudi, 2006). They share the same religious understanding of the creed ('*aqida*) and principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), which are historically rooted in the legacy of *ahl al-hadith*.<sup>101</sup> This religious harmony should not conceal, however, that *salafi* scholars and movements have adopted remarkably antagonistic political positions, ranging from political apathy to the support of the violent overthrow of most Muslim regimes. These discrepancies in political assessments of a shared creed have commonly informed the distinction of salafis between so-called purists, politicians and jihadis, based on their approach to political action (Wiktorowicz, 2006).<sup>102</sup> This distinction has nonetheless been considered too schematic by some

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<sup>98</sup> al-Azhar University endorses the *ash'ari/maturidi* Islamic creed, whose refutation by Ibn Taymiyya gives modern salafis strong arguments to oppose this institution for religious reasons. Al-Azhar has not remained idle to this line of argument, however, and *azhari* scholars have strived to refute *salafi* theology and precepts, for instance in a publication called *al-Radd* (the response) (see: <http://www.fixyourdeen.com>).

<sup>99</sup> Ibn Taymiyya dwells on the *athari* creed in his book entitled *al-'aqida al-wasatiyya* (Ibn Taymiyya & Harras, 1996). The *athari* creed is distinctive from the *ash'ari* and the *maturidi* creed, which were historical responses to the influence of Greek philosophy on Islamic theology. The *ash'ari* creed was defined by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari in response to the (widely considered) heretical *mu'tazila* rationalist theology. It is similar to the *maturidi* creed, and diverges from the *athari* creed over the definition of God's attributes. The *ash'ari* and *maturidi* creeds are the prevailing theology of the Muslim world. Ibn Taymiyya's defence of the *athari* creed justified his trial in Damascus for defending heretical positions (Jackson, 1994). Ibn Taymiyya's creed is an alternative between the denial of God's attributes (*al-asma' wal-sifat* in Arabic) as defined in the Qur'an, and anthropomorphism.

<sup>100</sup> The Hanbali *madhab* is one of the four orthodox schools of jurisprudence recognised in Islam, the three others being the Hanafi, Shafi'i and Maliki schools. It originated with Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and was later developed by his students. This school of jurisprudence is considered more restrictive on the interpretation of the Qur'an and of the prophetic tradition. One can refer to al-Matroudi (2006) for a discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's contributions to the Hanbali *madhab*. This emphasis on the Hanbali *madhab* is specifically noticeable in the *wahhabi* tradition, defined as a subcomponent of the broader *salafi* discursive tradition, shaped by Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and his followers in Saudi Arabia. All salafis do not necessarily follow the *hanbali* fiqh strictly, however. For instance, Nasiruddin al-Albani, arguably referred to the marginal *madhab zahiri*, and was critical of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab positions on *fiqh* (Lacroix, 2011: 84). Other leading scholars of salafism, such as Muhammad Ibn al-'Uthaymeen, referred widely to the four classical *madhab* without favouring one specific school.

<sup>101</sup> In the Iraqi city of Kufa, *ahl al-hadith* (the people of hadith) favoured continued references to the tradition while *ahl al-ray* (the people of opinion) promoted individual reasoning.

<sup>102</sup> According to this definition, the politicians endorse political participation, the purists (also called scientific salafis, *al-*

scholars who argue that it overlooks internal *salafi* divergences over creed, and add that prominent *salafi* scholars transcend these strict boundaries (Wagemakers, 2012: 9. See also Meijer, 2007: 427-428). Others have additionally argued that diverging political prescriptions can be traced back to creedal divergences and older theological debates over the nature of faith (Lav, 2012).

#### 4.3.2. Asserting Orthodoxy and Challenging their Opponents' Credibility

The sharp discrepancies between the political prescriptions endorsed by diverse *salafi* currents have catalysed a discursive confrontation between *jihadi* groups and their contenders. This research argues that the IG and the JG have focused on the defence of the political understandings derived from their approach to Islam, rather than on their religious creed (*'aqida*). Theological arguments over *'aqida*, which appeared subsequently in the *salafi jihadi* literature, were initially absent from these groups' written productions.<sup>103</sup> The defence of their legitimate political prescriptions has framed their discourses and their consistent rebuttal of their opponents' positions and credibility. IG and JG leaders have consistently strived to embed their arguments in the *salafi* discursive tradition to demonstrate that their political positions are derived from the correct understanding of Islam, and that they do not deviate from Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>104</sup>

The trial organised after Sadat's assassination in October 1981 substantiates this assertion and further provides an incomparable access to these groups' use of the Islamic tradition. The most emblematic debate involved sheikh Jad al-Haq, sheikh Saleh Abu Isma'il and sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, three al-Azhar graduates who endorsed diverging positions on Sadat's assassination. Sheikh Jad al-Haq was the Egyptian mufti, before becoming sheikh al-Azhar in 1982 (the country's highest religious authority). Sheikh Salah Abu Isma'il was a prominent MB member and a strong supporter of the application of Islamic Law in Egypt. Sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman represented the *jihadi* current in prison and was their main religious figure. This debate concerned three core issues for the *jihadi* current and its opponents: the application of Islamic Law by the state, the status of the Muslim ruler

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*salafiya al-'ilmiyya*) focus on the creed and the jihadis support the violent removal of regimes which fail to fully implement Islamic Law.

<sup>103</sup> Sayyid Imam only contributed to this debate in a later phase, as argued in the concluding section of this chapter. This chapter's argument, in contrast with Roel Meijer's contention that "[Salafi current] are always engaged in persuading others of the truth of their *'aqida*" (Meijer, 2007: 428), posits that *salafi* jihadis only subsequently focused on *'aqida*, after the creation of a competitive social movement industry abroad. Cf pages 137-142.

<sup>104</sup> On *salafi* proponents of violence developing "their conception of themselves as the true defenders of orthodox Sunni doctrine", see also Lav (2012: 120).

and obedience to the Muslim head of state.

The eagerness of the state and its *jihadi* opponents to debate theologically is characteristic of their fight for Islamic orthodoxy. The religious clergy instigated this debate through the voice of the Egyptian mufti, sheikh Jad al-Haq. Al-Haq issued a legal opinion (fatwa) to rebut Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj's Neglected Duty (al-Haq, 1993). He dwells on the book's most contentious issues, referring to the criteria to be considered a Muslim, the meaning of jihad, the status of Muslim rulers and the application of Islamic Law in Muslim countries. Al-Haq's reinterpretation of some *hadith* used by Faraj substantiated his denunciation of the jihadis as modern *khawarij*, and his claim that Egypt is a Muslim State where rebellion is not Islamically acceptable as long as the ruler prays. Al-Haq does not, however, oppose some fundamental arguments developed by Faraj, for instance on the obligation of jihad upon Muslims when a Muslim country is invaded and on the important status of Islamic Law in Muslim countries.<sup>105</sup>

Sheikh Salah Abu Isma'il had an antagonistic approach to al-Haq's line of argument. He was called by the *jihadi* defence to debate the Islamic nature of Sadat's regime. Abu Isma'il insisted on the necessity to fully implement Islamic Law and clarified the circumstances in which Muslims can rebel against their rulers. He asserted that it is Islamically lawful to oppose a leader who disbelieves, and related Sadat's assassination to the *ridda* (apostasy) wars launched by the first Caliph Abu Bakr.<sup>106</sup> Abu Isma'il argued that Sadat's domestic and international policies, from his failure to implement Islamic Law to the Camp David peace treaty with Israel, were religious sins which could justify his excommunication if he considered them Islamically lawful.<sup>107</sup>

These arguments were later discussed by sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, who used this opportunity to defend the concept of *hakimiyya* (God's sovereignty on earth) to rebut the accusations that the jihadis were *khawarij*, and to discuss the status of the Muslim leader and the Islamic injunction to obey him.<sup>108</sup> In contrast with common allegations that the *jihadi* trend merely follows Sayyid Qutb to legitimise their views, sheikh 'Omar does not mention the latter's scholarship in his defence of the jihadis. Sheikh

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<sup>105</sup> See also Scott (2003).

<sup>106</sup> These wars, also named the Wars of apostasy, refer to a few military battles led by the first Caliph after the death of prophet Muhammad against rebellious tribes which refused to obey the new Muslim authorities.

<sup>107</sup> His testimony has been published in Arabic (Isma'il, 1984).

<sup>108</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman's intervention in the court was published in a single opus called *The Word of Truth (Kalima al-Haq)* ('Abd al-Rahman, 1985).

‘Omar’s arguments were rather based on the four canonical School of Law<sup>109</sup> and on the positions of prominent Islamic judges. In his testimonies to the Court, sheikh ‘Omar argued that God’s sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*) is absolute, eternal, and derived from God’s unchanging laws. He insisted that the right to legislation belongs only to God, and that Muslims are solely required to respect the Muslim leader (*wali al-amr*) if he applies Islamic Law and does not sin. Sheikh ‘Omar opposed the *khawarij* label used against the *jihadi* trend and contended that Islamic sources justify jihad against Muslim rulers who do not rule with Islamic Law. He added that the IG has repeatedly attempted to correct the Islamic understanding of real *khawarij*, and could therefore not be associated with them.

The written corpus published by IG and JG leaders in the following decades is based on an analogous use of the Islamic tradition to ground their positions; their authors continuously strived to refer to the four classic schools of jurisprudence to substantiate their political arguments. This corpus covers written magazines, books and leaflets published by their individual leaders or by their leaderships.<sup>110</sup> In the IG, it includes the texts written in prison by its historical leadership, the communiqués and magazines published in Egypt and abroad, the texts written by sheikh ‘Omar ‘Abd al-Rahman, by the IG leader abroad Rifa‘i Taha, by Tal‘at Fu‘ad Qassem and by the IG mufti sheikh ‘Abd al-Akhr Hamad. In the JG, it primarily includes the texts written consensually by its external leadership, JG’s communiqués and magazines, and the books published by its main leaders in the 1990s, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif and Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Collectively, these texts demonstrate that these groups shared a common political and religious understanding, despite diverging mobilising patterns. As asserted by al-Zawahiri, “there here are no essential or creedal differences between *jihadi* groups. The differences are [...] operational, with regards to our understanding of reality” (al-Zawahiri, 1993). The IG believed in the mobilisation of a broad social movement, whereas the JG believed in the training of a small well-equipped elite. Despite this difference, however, these groups shared similar politico-religious views. They opposed the application of Positive Law in Muslim societies (*al-qanun al-wad‘i*) and demanded a comprehensive application of Islamic Law. They asserted that Muslim heads of state who do not rule by Islamic Law

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<sup>109</sup> Sheikh ‘Omar mentions many prominent medieval scholars who wrote important theological treatises, including ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Abbas, Imam Abu ‘Abdullah Al-Qurtubi, Imam Shafi‘i, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, Imam al-Nawawi, Ibn Abidin, Ibn Hazm, Muhammad al-Shanqiti and Ibn Kathir.

<sup>110</sup> Most of these texts and publications were retrieved online, notably on Abu Muhammad al-Maqdissi’s website [tawhed.ws](http://tawhed.ws). They are fully referenced in the bibliography.

are disbelievers who should be Islamically opposed, including by force.<sup>111</sup> They acknowledged that jihad includes both military and non-military components, and contended that it is legitimate in the defence of Muslim lands attacked by non-Muslim occupation forces. These texts nonetheless did not elaborate on secondary issues, which were only alluded to. For instance, although the IG used violence in Egypt against foreign tourists in the 1990s, its leaders did not develop an Islamic line of argument to justify these actions. These attacks were rather defended by lower-ranking members in independent communiqués, which argued that tourists were a religious threat to Egypt's Islamic identity and that attacking them indirectly weakened the state. The JG, conversely, did not condone these attacks (al-Zawahiri, 1993).

This written corpus demonstrates that conforming to the *salafi* discursive tradition is important to persuade a religious audience that these groups' religious understanding inferred on the right policy prescriptions. These groups never addressed a liberal or modernist Muslim audience, but rather focused on the fight for orthodoxy inside salafism, and vis-à-vis MB supporters and al-Azhar University. They premised that their audience shares the same discursive tradition, and that the main barrier between them was the acceptance of these groups' political prescriptions. Mainstream *salafi* scholars and *jihadi* groups indeed share important political assumptions. They consensually agree that Islamic Law should be applied comprehensively in Islamic societies, that Muslim leaders who fail to do so are infidels,<sup>112</sup> and that jihad also has a military component which is Islamically justified in many contexts, especially under non-Muslim occupation.<sup>113</sup> The main difference between these groups and mainstream salafis concerned the strategical political vision developed to reach these shared objectives, in other words the legitimacy of violence against Muslim leaders.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Some JG factions nonetheless claim that they oppose these regimes without excommunicating their leaders.

<sup>112</sup> This position is supported by prominent *salafi* scholars such as Salih bin Fawzan, Muhammad Ibn al-'Uthaymeen and former Saudi mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al Shaykh (Al-Rasheed, 2007: 31; Lav, 2012: 164; Wagemakers, 2012: 65). Others scholars, such as Ibn Baz and al-Albani, do not disagree but additionally request an impractical procedure to convey the same position (Wagemakers, 2012: 64-65; Rabil, 2014: 103).

<sup>113</sup> The theoretical legitimacy of jihad does not mean that its application cannot be conditioned. It should be noted that Muslim scholars have historically separated jihad in two types of obligation: *farḍ kifayya* and *farḍ 'ayn*. *Farḍ kifayya* refers to the duty of the community and is only performed by one subgroup of the Muslim community. Conversely, *farḍ 'ayn* is an individual duty. *Salafi* scholars consider jihad a *farḍ 'ayn* for Muslims under non-Muslim occupation of Muslim lands. Ibn Baz used this argument to endorse 'Abdullah 'Azzam's, *the Defence of Muslims lands*, during the war in Afghanistan in 1984 ('Azzam, 1990. On the position on jihad amongst non-*jihadi salafi* scholars, see also Wagemakers (2012: 56-58). On jihad in Islamic Law, see Abou el-Fadl (2001).

<sup>114</sup> Wagemakers (2012) similarly argues that the main difference between quietist salafis and the *jihadi* trend is their position on Muslim rulers. Others differences pertaining to their excommunication of other Muslims (non-head of state), which appear more thoroughly in the subsequent *salafi jihadi* literature, were not covered by these two groups.

This proximity between many non-*jihadi* and *jihadi* positions has long shaped their framing contest. Considering that these two currents primarily diverged vis-à-vis their political prescriptions rather than vis-à-vis their long-term objectives, the IG and the JG have not necessarily felt the need to bridge, amplify, extend or transform existing frames - as elaborated in framing studies - to assert their correct political understanding of Islamic orthodoxy. Instead of dwelling on intricate arguments over the Islamic creed (*'aqida*) with their non-*jihadi* competitors,<sup>115</sup> these groups have rather focused on the latter's figures of authority and targeted the “credibility of the frame articulators” (Benford & Snow, 2000: 619). A common theme charactering their framing is indeed the denunciation of their opponents' political credibility and complacency with oppressive regimes (see also Wiktorowicz 2004; Wagemakers, 2014), designed to weaken their frame resonance (Benford & Snow, 2000: 620) and discredit their political prescriptions. These actors are the most prominent Islamic figures and institutions, namely al-Azhar University and its leaders, influential *salafi* scholars and the MB.

The dispute with al-Azhar resumes the debate between sheikh 'Omar and sheikh al-Haq mentioned earlier. Considering al-Azhar's historical prestige in the Muslim world and in Egypt, these groups could not easily defame this institution even though this position would be theoretically congruent with the *salafi* non-hierarchical approach to Islam. IG and JG leaders have rather denounced the collusion of al-Azhar leaders with the state, while simultaneously praising some of its virtuous scholars (e.g. Taha, 1998; al-Zawahiri, 2008). They describe al-Azhar as the strongest historical defender of Egypt's Muslim identity, and blame foreign countries and post-1950s political regimes for marginalising its role as the protector of Islamic Law; they assert that al-Azhar will only re-establish its prominence when its financial and political independence are restored (e.g. Taha, 1998; al-Zawahiri, 2008). The *ash'ari-maturidi* Islamic creed endorsed by al-Azhar, which contradict these groups' religious creed, is never questioned. Al-Zawahiri mentions, for instance, that he never debated the Taliban's endorsement of this creed,<sup>116</sup> hence stressing the political nature of his opposition to al-Azhar, informed by the latter's deference to illegitimate leaders (e.g. al-Zawahiri, 1989).

The IG and the JG have also targeted prominent *salafi* scholars who enjoy a leading influence among

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<sup>115</sup> The main reference by Ayman al-Zawahiri to issues of *'aqida* concerns the group's position on Iran and, indirectly, on *shi'a* Muslims, which he denounced from a theological and political perspective (al-Zawahiri, 1995).

<sup>116</sup> The Taliban movement traces its roots to sub-Indian continent deobandism, which is a revivalist Hanafi current distinct from salafism. This religious difference has caused many controversies in *jihadi* circles in Afghanistan in the 1990s, when some of its components denounced the Taliban for not endorsing a correct *'aqida* (Lav, 2012: 176).

salafis. Among these are sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Baz and sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani.<sup>117</sup> Ibn Baz was Saudi Arabia's grand mufti between 1993 to 1999, and al-Albani was a *salafi* scholar of *hadith* dwelling in Saudi Arabia. While their respective scholarship on theology and hadith has not been contested, these scholars' political positions were firmly opposed. Ibn Baz has mostly been blamed for his legitimisation of the presence of American troops on Saudi soil during and after the first Gulf war, as well as for his positions on the elections in Algeria in 1991 and on Israel during the peace process (e.g. al-Zawahiri, 1994; jama‘a al-jihad, n.d.d). Al-Albani has similarly been denounced for his accommodating position towards Gulf regimes (e.g. jama‘a al-jihad, 1991) and for his opposition to the implementation of jihad (e.g. Hamad, 1996)<sup>118</sup> (even for occupied Palestinians).<sup>119</sup> These charges substantiate that, as argued by Wiktorowicz on AQ's comparable denunciation of the same scholars (Wiktorowicz, 2004: 170), *jihadi* groups can hardly discredit the religious authority enjoyed by prominent *salafi* figures, and have to focus on their collusion with Arab regimes and allegedly naïve political prescriptions.

Finally, these groups' last important target is the MB. The MB has been repeatedly castigated for engaging in party politics and participating in democratic processes (e.g. al-Zawahiri, 1988; al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, n.d.d). In line with mainstream *salafi* arguments, the IG and the JG have denounced democracy as un-Islamic for contradicting God's ultimate sovereignty and the supremacy of Islamic Law. Then, they adopted an essentially political viewpoint, arguing that the MB's participation in the political process legitimises autocratic regimes, such as Mubarak's presidency, and has never led to the application of Islamic law in Egypt. In a similar vein to previous arguments on al-Azhar and *salafi* scholars, the MB's relatively inclusive religious approach and *ash‘ari* creeds has not been questioned, and a focus has rather been devoted to the political consequences of the group's positions.<sup>120</sup> Al-Zawahiri additionally substantiated this primordial political focus in 1995, when the MB was faced with repression and military trials, that time was appropriate for the group to review its political position on the regime, reconsider its reformist path and endorse armed jihad (al-Zawahiri, 1995).

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<sup>117</sup> Other scholars are also criticised, such as the Saudi *salafi* scholar Safar Al-Hawali, who gained prominence for his opposition to the Saudi regime after the first Gulf war, who was criticised for supporting democracy in Algeria.

<sup>118</sup> In a recorded tape between al-Albani and a *jihadi* proponent (al-Albani, n.d.), al-Albani does not negate that jihad is a duty, *farḍ ‘ayn*, upon Muslims. He rather argues that, according to his reading, jihad cannot be undertaken before the creation of a single Islamic state which would rule the Muslim world.

<sup>119</sup> Al-Albani, in a famous fatwa produced in 1994, advocated for the departure of the Palestinians following the example of Prophet Muhammad leaving Mecca when Muslims were oppressed.

<sup>120</sup> On al-Zawahiri's book on the MB, see also Lav (2012: 170).

### 4.3.3. A Constraining Ideational Framework

After demonstrating that the IG and the JG have thoroughly strived to substantiate their Islamic orthodoxy, this section examines whether these groups' endorsement of a *salafi* discursive tradition has constrained the reinterpretation of their theologico-political outlook over time. The ideological revisions undertaken by the IG and of some JG factions are an unprecedented opportunity to undertake this analysis. The processes which accompanied these revisions are analysed in the last section of this chapter and, for the purposes of this section, it must be noted that these revisions consisted of an extensive retrospection and review of these groups' ideologies

The following analysis draws on two theoretical contributions to the dissociation of ideational and material causal factors in decision making processes (Tannenwald 2005; Jacobs, 2014).<sup>121</sup> While these studies primarily explore the causal role of ideas and cognitive processes, this analysis refers to their guidelines to demonstrate the constraining role of militant groups' ideational commitments on their subsequent ideological reinterpretations. This investigation is designed to substantiate that, while ideational commitments can be reinterpreted, the latter are ideationally bounded by these groups' discursive tradition. This concluding section therefore demonstrates that ideational commitments are not solely shaped by objective material features and strategic imperatives (Jacobs, 2014: 43-49).

The first theoretical guideline contends that the separation between ideational and material causal factors requires (1) to determine whether ideational changes are correlated with changing material interest, (2) to compare the timing of material and ideational changes and (3) to corroborate whether material or ideational factors explain which ideas prevailed (Tannenwald, 2005: 26-28).

The comparison between the timing of material and ideational changes is relatively straightforward in the ideological revisions. These revisions were initiated by the imprisoned IG leadership in 2001. They started with internal discussions on the group's theological positions, and were followed by a similar process by some JG leaders in 2007. In both cases, the ideological revisions followed substantial objective material changes and did not precede them. By the beginning of the 2000s, the IG and the JG were in serious jeopardy. Most of their leaders were either imprisoned in Egypt or scattered in several

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<sup>121</sup> See also Bennett (2008).

countries. Thousands of their members remained behind bars, with bleak prospects for liberation. The armed conflict with the Egyptian State failed to yield any results, and Mubarak's regime appeared stable and resilient in the 2000s. Intuitively, it can be asserted that the only alternative to jail was to convince state authorities that it won the ideological battle and that no additional rationale justified the continuous imprisonment of these groups' leaders and members. Ideationally, this would find a translation into the renunciation of the use of violence in Egypt, and into the acceptance of the Islamic legitimacy of Mubarak's regime - which underpinned the rationale of these groups' armed jihad.

The correlation between ideational changes and material interests could signify that these ideological revisions were not genuine considering their timing and conceivable rationale. In the 2000s, these groups were faced with strong strategic incentives and an environment conducive to a pragmatic reconsideration of former ideational commitments (Jacobs, 2014). The last section explores the causal mechanisms explaining the emergence and diffusion of new ideas and, in the meantime, the main concern pertains to the content of the ideological revisions. Considering that objective material factors at the macro and meso levels encouraged a revision of these groups' main ideological tenets, two main hypotheses can be formulated based on the previous guidelines to assess whether these groups' "cognitive structure is [...] wholly endogenous to objective, material features of the choice situation" (Jacobs, 2014: 43). If these groups revised their entire ideological corpus, it can be inferred that these revisions were a deceiving tactical move or that these groups' ideological corpus was entirely contingent on external stimuli. Conversely, if only a few ideological tenets were revised while substantial tenets incompatible with their new material interests were preserved, then the former can be regarded as flexibly re-interpretable, while the latter can be analysed as uncorrelated to them.<sup>122</sup> In other words, the latter would be exogenous to changing environmental and material factors (Jacobs, 2014: 45-48) and, in this case, be embedded in the *salafi* discursive tradition endorsed by these two groups.

This analysis should therefore demonstrate the persistence of ideational tenets incompatible with these groups' objective material interests. This counterfactual analysis would prove that these groups' theologico-political outlook is not solely shaped by changing material factors. This approach is considered Bayesian in causal process analysis, with the postulate that some pieces of evidence are more discriminating than others (Bennett 2008; Beach & Pedersen 2013). The researcher should

<sup>122</sup> The accuracy of this analysis is reinforced by its timing. Interviews were undertaken between 2011 and 2013, when these groups were not under pressure from state authorities, and had no incentives to conceal their real positions.

therefore give “greater weight to evidence that is expected a priori to be less probably based on previous knowledge of the phenomenon” (Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 83). A greater weight should be given to the persistence of ideological tenets which contradict these groups' objective material interests.

The IG ideological revisions generated the authoring of four main books in consensus, in addition to a dozen supplementary books and articles reflecting the non-consensual views of individual leaders.<sup>123</sup> The four consensual IG publications cover central issues for *jihadi* groups, notably jihad, its practicalities and legitimacy in Islamic and non-Islamic countries, the excommunication of Muslims and the application of *hisba* (which refers to an Islamic doctrine usually translated as the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice). IG's arguments are grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, in congruence with their historical use of the Islamic discursive tradition. IG leaders use widely acknowledged Islamic tools and concepts to revise some of their positions. For instance, these new texts do not reject the military component of jihad, but rather argue that jihad is conditional on *maslaha* and *mafsada* (their positive and negative utility), and can only be considered a means rather than an end purpose. In addition, they add that military jihad is unlawful against civilians, tourists and non-combatants.

Some JG members also endorsed a book authored predominantly by a former JG leader, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 2007). Imam, in a similar manner, endorses new Islamic restrictions on jihad, *hisba* and *takfir*. He has primarily addressed jihad and attempted to regulate and eventually impede its application. He mentions that a Muslim cannot select his targets based on their nationalities, and adds that Islam forbids the killing of tourists and foreigners who hold a visa to visit Muslim countries, assimilating visas to a binding security covenant. At a personal level, he asserts that only religiously trained Muslims who are allowed by their parents can potentially participate in jihad. He nonetheless insists that jihad is subordinated to military strength and to the presence of a favourable environment, and reiterates that *mujahideen* (Muslim fighters) are constrained by *maslaha* and *mafsada* (their positive and negative utility). In all cases, he rebuts the possibility to wage military jihad in the contemporary era, and claims that the only current solutions are societal isolation or immigration to safer places where preaching is permitted.

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<sup>123</sup> The four main books are the following: *mubadara waqf al-‘unf ruya waqi‘iyya wa nathara shar‘iyya* [The Ceasefire Initiative, Realistic and Islamic Law Perspectives] (Hafez et al., 2002), *nahr al-dhikrayyat al-muraja‘at al-fiqhiyya al-jama‘a al-islamiyya* [The Rivers of Memories The Jurisprudential Revisions of the Islamic Group] (Zuhdi et al., 2003), *taslit al-adwa ‘ala ma waqa‘a fil-jihad min al-akhta* [Clarifications on the Wrongdoings which Occurred in Jihad] (‘Abd al-Rahman et al., 2002) and *al-nasah wa al-tabayyin fi tashih mafahim al-muhtasibin* [Advices and Clarifications in the Correction of Hisba Concepts] (al-Sharif et al., 2002)

These books demonstrate that the ideological revisions are mostly a new interpretation of formerly endorsed policy prescriptions. The IG and JG members which supported this process do not reject their normative commitment to Islamic Law, or their endorsement of the military dimension of jihad; rather, they justify that the translation of these beliefs into their political approaches needs to be Islamically correct and in accordance with the Islamic discursive tradition. This approach reinforces the cultural resonance and narrative fidelity (Benford & Snow, 2000: 622) of the revisions, in order to preempt expected accusations that they betrayed the cause. As asserted in an eponymous publication of ‘Abud and Tareq al-Zumur, these are “*Revisions, not Retreats*” (*muraja‘at la taraju‘at*) (al-Zumur & al-Zumur, 2005). These groups have altered their former policy prescriptions (Tannewald, 2005: 16) by conditioning their practical application. IG and JG members have thenceforth become closer to mainstream *salafi* preachers and groups that they previously opposed, and adopted the same Islamic tools and concepts to justify similar political views.<sup>124</sup> In the *salafi* discursive tradition, this discrepancy between the preservation of the purity of the Law and the endorsement of a pragmatic application in practice noticeably follows Ibn Taymiyya's religious pragmatism.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, as justified in the previously mentioned guidelines (Jacobs, 2014: 49-56), private communications with these groups' leaders and members reveal that these revisions voluntarily omitted a central theme from these groups' former literature. These revisions do not claim that a Muslim head of state who does not rule by Islamic Law can be considered Muslim,<sup>126</sup> an ideological tenet which has long been a central feature of these groups' literature. While these groups' leaders have proscribed military jihad in Muslim countries, they have not consensually recognised that their leaders should not be excommunicated. Interviews with IG leaders and members detailed at the end of this chapter reveal that the two main proponents of the revisions, Karam Zuhdi and Najih Ibrahim, revised the apostasy of the Muslim head of state who does not apply Islamic Law. These discussions indicate that these two prominent IG figures could nonetheless not reach a consensus with remaining IG leaders. Similarly, after the election of President Mohamed Morsi from the MB, Sayyid Imam affirmed in a televised

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<sup>124</sup> Chapter 6 expands on this theme. These groups have become particularly closer to activist (*haraki*) salafis.

<sup>125</sup> Michot expands on this issue in his study of the position of Ibn Taymiyya on the *rafida*. He notes that Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas generally “present the Islamic norm with more or less details and then conclude with an emphasis on the danger resulting from an inconsiderate application of the norm. Rather, [his fatwas] favour teaching over excommunication” (Michot, 2014: 2).

<sup>126</sup> This point is not included in the four books published consensually. Individual leaders expressed non-consensual views in additional publications and in interviews which did not necessarily reflect the group's consensus.

interview that he considered him a disbeliever, akin to his predecessors from Muhammad Ali to Hosni Mubarak, for not applying Islamic Law (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2013c).

This omission is crucial to the hypotheses elaborated previously. It means that this central ideological tenet persisted despite favourable objective material features and strategic incentives to a comprehensive ideological revision. It substantiates the argument that the discursive tradition adopted by the IG and the JG at an early stage has ideationally facilitated and constrained their subsequent ideological construction, by providing the tools, texts and concepts which only allow for a circumscribed rearticulation. It can also be argued that this reformulation is further facilitated by the existence of a large spectrum of policy prescriptions inside the *salafi* social movement family, despite a narrow religious understanding. A detailed analysis of the individual positions adopted inside these groups<sup>127</sup> finally reveals that some individuals can overcome the barriers shaped by this tradition, including at a leadership level. At the same time, their rupture with the *salafi* discursive tradition has prevented them from diffusing their ideas organisationally.

#### **4.4. DECISION MAKING AND ORGANISATIONAL EVOLUTION**

This chapter's theoretical discussion posited that the study of militant groups' ideological construction has to be contextualised within their organisational structures. This section therefore explores these groups' evolutions with a specific focus on their internal norms of decision making. The following analysis argues that these groups' initial organisational patterns triggered the development of constraining horizontal norms of decision making only in the IG. This analysis adds that this crucial difference explains the survival of a centralised IG leadership which contrast substantially with repeated JG factionalisation. This argument is tested on three occasions, when these groups' leaders reconsidered their future and discussed the possibility to unite their groups. These negotiations occurred in time of relative or absolute uncertainty; they are points of rupture which facilitate the consideration of alternative explanations to the argument advanced in this section.

This section is primarily concerned with these groups' internal cohesion and with the emergence of factionalism at a leadership level. This section demonstrates that militant groups' initial organisational patterns and the temporality of their adoption of violence are crucial to explain the subsequent

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<sup>127</sup> The last section expands on this issue.

evolution of their organisational structures and decision making processes. This argument thoroughly builds on the demonstration that pre-war networks and the social bases in which violent group leaders are embedded define the nature of the violent organisation subsequently created (Staniland, 2014).

When the adoption of violence does not immediately follow a group's formation, the time interval in between facilitates low-risk activism mobilising patterns and the strengthening of strong horizontal ties between this group's leaders. These strong ties facilitate the provision of “information, trust and shared political meanings” (Staniland, 2014: 9), and subsequently generate militant groups characterised by “central processes of decision making, command and control, strategic assessment and ideological production” (Staniland, 2014: 27). The joining of new members does not subsequently contest these pre-established hierarchies and organisational norms. Eventually, changing macro policies can spark internal disputes, which are nevertheless more amenable to consensual resolution.

Conversely, when a group adopts violence from the onset, initial security dilemmas and tensions inherent with its clandestine nature hinder the reinforcement of trust between its leaders, as well as the establishment of consensual horizontal norms of decision making. Security risks reinforce mutual suspicion against one another and against new comers, for fear of external infiltration. These groups are set apart by the absence of central organisational control, distrust, and fragile loyalty between their leaders (Staniland, 2014: 53). Worsening macro conditions often deepen organisational divides and splits over personal or ideological issues.

This analysis is also informed by the expanding institutional and organisational literature on the evolution of violent groups over time. The validity of this approach is confirmed by an additional study which argues that external factors such as state repression amplifies existing “trends in cooperation or conflict existent in a movement”, depending on “the level of satisfaction with preexisting institutional arrangements” (McLauchlin & Pearlman, 2012). It is also substantiated by a quantitative study which demonstrates that “organisations with a factional or competing leadership structure and those that use violence as a tactic are at a greater risk to split” (Asal et al., 2012). The combination of these complementary arguments is congruent with this analysis, and stresses that strong pre-existing ties between militant group leaders legitimise institutional arrangements which are less likely to be contested when the group is faced with an external crisis, in contrast with groups characterised by

weaker horizontal links which are more likely to split.

#### **4.4.1. Exploring Early Organisational Differentiations**

The timing of these groups' adoption of violence shaped their respective organisational construction. According to the previous chapter, the JG was neither a unified nor a centralised structure before 1981. The group merely agglomerated many individuals around the idea that the Egyptian state had to be replaced with an Islamic state. New members were usually recruited in larger *salafi* mainstream institutions and through networks of acquaintances. They had relatively vague political positions and mostly agreed that a military coup would be the most suitable option in Egypt. These cells were competing against each other and, by 1981, included the council headed in Cairo by Faraj in coordination with the IG, the cell headed by al-Rihal and Amir al-Jaysh, the cell headed by al-Zawahiri, Imam and al-Qamari and hundreds of loosely affiliated individuals. According to interviews, recruitment required some level of secrecy and security constraints which hindered the creation of strong organisational institutions and horizontal ties between these cells' early leaders. Moreover, security compartmentalisation obscured their members' understanding of these networks' overall topography, which they often discovered in jail. The jihad groups were characterised by a divided leadership competing for influence, the prevalence of security dilemmas and a fear of external infiltration and internal collaboration with the state. As a group, it conforms with Staniland's account of a fragmented group whose leaders are tied through weak ties (Staniland, 2014: 8).

In the South of Egypt, the IG emerged as a non-political group of university students. Its members socialised collectively and adopted the *salafi* approach to Islam by the late 1970s. Initially, the IG provided social services to the students and enjoyed a broad public presence on university campuses. This pre-contention socialisation eased the development and legitimisation of a clear internal structure and division of prerogatives between its leaders, and encouraged shared horizontal norms. It reinforced trust between early IG leaders, and nurtured a culture of consensual decision making. As elaborated by Blee on grass-root movements in the United States, the IG's early days helped to “produce a unified voice, standards of leadership and authority, rules and procedures, political agendas and strategies” (Blee, 2012: 53). The IG was therefore characterised, before the contentious conflict, by a centralised horizontal decision making process, and vertical norms uniting the group's leaders and members,

including respect of the group's internal hierarchy and discipline, collective group identity, and a shared political understanding of the group's short and long term objectives. The IG resembled Staniland's description of a group led by a cohesive leadership united with strong ties (Staniland, 2014: 6).

Sadat's assassination in October 1981 was quickly followed by massive arrests of Islamist militants. Their subsequent trials were unrivalled in Egyptian recent history and lasted until September 1984.<sup>128</sup> Eventually, 3002 Islamist militants were judged in three successive phases. These trials started with Sadat's executioners and co-conspirators. Then, it carried on with these groups' leaders and concluded with their followers. In prison, all the militants temporarily united behind the leadership of a religious scholar, sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, until 1984. These groups' leaders argue that they expected to be executed and could not initially envision a future for their groups. They assert that they merely intended to present their defence to the public while waiting for their executions (e.g. Ibrahim, 2012). By 1984, they realised that the authorities were relatively clement and had only executed five militants.<sup>129</sup> It was therefore an appropriate time to discuss these groups' future after forthcoming prisoners' release.

These groups held multilateral negotiations on a possible union under the same organisational umbrella. These negotiations, which eventually collapsed, constitute the first test of this section. In theory, several alternative hypotheses at the macro, ideational and organisational levels can explain their failure. Drawing on a social movement approach, macro-level explanations include the consideration of different types of political opportunities and state policies towards Islamist militants. For instance, differentiated (selective or collective) concessions to militant groups arguably impact their political choices (Goerzig, 2012),<sup>130</sup> notably when the state "divides and concedes" them (Cunningham, 2011).<sup>131</sup> In this case, however, the state did not differentiate between the Islamic and jihad groups and did not promote one group or approach with selected incentives or punishments. Moreover, most militants were imprisoned or living clandestinely, and were not presented with alternative choices at the macro-level. While macro factors and the general characteristics of Mubarak's new regime, such as its initially liberal position on Islamist movements, could have influenced

<sup>128</sup> An exhaustive publication of court reports, which include the testimonies of the militants, can be found in Sharqawi (1985).

<sup>129</sup> The five militants executed by the authorities were Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, Khaled al-Islambuli, 'Abd al-Hamid 'Abd al-Salam, Hussein 'Abbas, 'Atta Tail.

<sup>130</sup> On selective inducements and the renunciation to violence, see also Ashour (2009).

<sup>131</sup> See also de Mesquita (2005).

militants' perceptions and internal debates, they did not directly disrupt these negotiations.

The main alternative hypotheses are located at the organisational and ideational levels. Officially, the Islamic and jihad groups did not manage to unite for a few reasons mentioned by the IG second-in-command at that time, Najih Ibrahim (2012):

Jihad groups' members supported jihad for the sake of it, while for us jihad was a means and not an end. We understood the need to balance it with the concept of *maslaha* [positive utility]. In addition, the essence of our work was public preaching (*da'wa*) to change people's values, while the jihad groups only believed in the military coup (*al-inqilab al-'askari*). We asked them to join us for God, not for us. They preferred to stick to secrecy whereas we understood that military actions did not benefit us. We also differed on the group's leadership. They opposed sheikh 'Omar from the beginning and rebuked the possibility to be led by a blind preacher. They wanted a military leader. So we split. We already had our *majliss al-shura* and stayed united while their *majliss al-shura* quickly dissipated. Their *majliss al-shura* initially had eleven members and every month one of them would leave.

Ibrahim's reference to the designation of a common leadership underlies a crucial issue, namely that personal and organisational differences between these groups played a decisive role in these negotiations. This assertion is confirmed on the other side by Nabil Na'im (2014), who was a member of al-Zawahiri's cell. He explains that:

The IG accused us of being *takfiriyyin*<sup>132</sup> because of *al-'udhr bil-jahl*.<sup>133</sup> I am a doctor in *shari'a* and I know that they were wrong. This was solely an excuse to split, not the real reason. In the JG, we practice *al-'udhr bil-jahl* as well. We are salafis and follow proper Islamic rulings. The application of this concept was not a reason to split. We thought that we were a *jihadi* organisation which could not be led by a blind sheikh. Our leader must be in good physical conditions and, in this case, this leadership was inconsistent with our *jihadi* nature.

The militants' failure to unite in prison was primarily informed by diverging initial organisational patterns, which explain pre-1981 ideological and organisational developments. These testimonies, which are confirmed by many other interviews (e.g. Hafez, 2013) confirm that the IG and the jihad groups were crucially influenced by their initial strategic rationale, preaching versus the military coup,

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<sup>132</sup> This description refers to those who arguably excommunicate (*takfir* in Arabic) other Muslims outside of established Islamic boundaries.

<sup>133</sup> "The excuse of ignorance" refers to the possibility to "excuse", and not excommunicate, a Muslim who is ignorant of his sin. Cf pages 90-91.

and were vying to impose their pre-1981 leadership on any organisational structure created henceforth. Their distinctive emergences shaped their approach to political action, and were decisive in these debates. Moreover, other alternative hypotheses fail to explain this outcome. As prisoners, their resources were limited and they were not competing for any sort of alternative resources, including material, ideational or public support.<sup>134</sup> In addition, these factions' weak positions in prison did not position any group more favourably to attract other members through the bandwagoning concept mentioned later in this research. They were isolated, in jail, and their social ties with their followers were severed for security reasons. These groups primarily wanted to preserve their pre-existing nature and leadership. The IG wanted to maintain its cohesive unity and leadership, while jihad group's members were reluctant to be included as secondary actors in a bigger entity.

#### **4.4.2. Organisational Division of Labour in Egypt and Abroad**

Prison discussions triggered the emergence of two distinct groups. The first group was the IG, which proceeded on its pre-1981 foundations. It was a cohesive group of friends who socialised collectively and consensually agreed to be guided by sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman on theological issues. They had a few years to bond, establish and legitimise horizontal and vertical norms and hierarchy, contrary to the jihad groups, and refused to unite with them for that reason. Eventually, the group consolidated a consensual leadership in prison. The IG named four leaders to define the group's general orientation and lead its ideological construction, as expected in integrated groups (Staniland, 2014). Blee notably argues that “the most common way that new activist groups phase out collective learning is by designating, often implicitly, the task of learning and knowing to one or a few members” (Blee, 2012: 53). An IG leader explains that:

Four main leaders were designated to lead the group's ideological construction: Karam Zuhdi, Najih Ibrahim, 'Isam Dirbala and Osama Hafez. Others, including 'Asim 'Abd al-Majid and I, also contributed. When IG members started leaving prison after 1984, Muhammad al-Islambuli was the main IG leader outside of prison. He was supplemented by Khaled Fikri and I. Sheikh Salah Hashim joined them in 1985. The South was our main focus.

The second group aggregated jihad groups' members and leaders. It adopted the name Jihad Group (JG), and was initially led by its imprisoned *majliss al-shura*. This group included many differentiated

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<sup>134</sup> The corpus on the competition for resources between violent groups and its impact on these groups' mobilisation and use of violence is relatively broad. The next chapter reviews these contributions.

social networks whose members often barely knew one another because of pre-1981 security dilemmas. They mostly met in prison and were frequently embroiled in diverse disputes for personal or ideological reasons. These contentions confirm the previous claims that internal conflicts intensify in militant groups characterised by the absence of pre-existing institutional arrangements and by competing leaderships (Asal et al., 2012; McLauchlin & Pearlman 2012). For instance, the JG's *majliss al-shura* divided in 1985 when a personal conflict arose between the group's two main leaders, 'Abud al-Zumur and 'Isam al-Qamari. According to Nabil Na'im (2014), these conflicts were motivated by suspicions of collusion with prison authorities, hence confirming the lack of trust and the mutual suspicion characterising fragmented organisations (Staniland, 2014). This comparison between the IG and the JG does not necessarily imply that the IG was not affected by personal disputes; it rather indicates that the latter managed to solve them consensually thanks to pre-existing organisational norms and stronger trust between its leaders.

In 1984, the first wave of prisoners was freed from detention after three years of incarceration. These groups' organisational patterns then crucially impacted subsequent developments outside of prison. The IG preserved its unity and reorganised its ranks in the South of Egypt. The prison leadership decided that time was not ripe for a violent confrontation with the state, and instead decided to focus on the group's social institutions. Sawfat 'Abd al-Ghani (n.d.) confirms this plan, and reveals that the IG was gradually reorganised by Rifa'i Taha in 1986. The vertical authority of the group's prison leadership was legitimised and accepted by all IG members, despite these geographic divisions. These leaders became thenceforth referred to as the "historical leadership". The IG leader outside of prison, Rifa'i Taha (2013), affirms that:

Until 1986 the *amir* (leader) was sheikh 'Omar. He was with us outside of prison, along with Muhammad al-Islambuli, Saleh Hashim, 'Abd al-Akhr Hamad and Khaled Fikri. The local leaders were leading the IG in the group while those in prison, Karam Zuhdi, 'Isam Dirbala, 'Asim 'Abd al-Majid and Najih Ibrahim were giving their views. The real leadership was the historical leadership in prison.

This organisational division of labour and its associated legitimisation of internal hierarchy did not occur in the JG. In this case, post-1984 liberations of prisoners only worsened internal divides and marginalised the group's *majliss al-shura* in prison. The absence of consensual horizontal mechanisms of decision making facilitated the emancipation of newly freed members, who were let free to pursue their own endeavours. Liberated prisoners were mostly associated with the network led by al-Zawahiri,

Imam and al-Qamari, which was not directly involved in Sadat's assassination. According to Na'im (2014), only some of their original members were arrested in 1981, and many remained at large. Their strength outside of prison was reinforced by these liberations, which inexorably marginalised *jihadi* cells most closely associated with the killing of Sadat, around 'Abud al-Zumur. When they left prison, they resumed their pre-Sadat assassination project, which consisted in pursuing military training in Afghanistan. Two JG members, Mohammed 'Atef (also known as Abu Hafs al-Misri) and 'Ali Amin al-Rashidi (also known as Abu 'Obaida al-Banshiri), were already in Afghanistan. They were soon joined by Imam and al-Zawahiri after his liberation in 1985 (al-Zawahiri, 1993). Na'im (2014) explains that:

We needed a base and training camps. It was easy to do so in Afghanistan. So when Ayman left, he met 'Asim Musa, an Egyptian Colonel. He recreated the organisation [the JG] there, in 1986-87. I joined him shortly after, when I was released from jail.

The war in Afghanistan played a fundamental role in these groups' histories in the following decade. According to many interviews (e.g. Amr, 2012; Mohammad 'Omar, 2012; Qassem, 2012; Sa'id, 2012) three main rationales explain the unprecedented exile of these groups' leaders and members to the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>135</sup> The first wave of departure was unrelated to Egyptian domestic developments. From the mid-1980s onwards, Egyptians of all political affiliation individually accepted the legitimacy of armed jihad in Afghanistan and independently travelled there to fight or assist Afghan refugees.<sup>136</sup> This mobilisation of foreign fighters was very similar to what happened in many other countries, considering the broad legitimacy enjoyed by jihad in Afghanistan in Arab and Islamic nations. The second wave of departure, which unfolded by the end of the 1980s, differed from the first emigration pattern and was generally informed by the deterioration of the security situation in Egypt, and by the necessity to escape the Egyptian security services. Finally, some of these groups' leaders and members were eventually sent to Afghanistan by their group, arguably to assure their protection despite some allegations that they were sent to undertake military training to fight back in Egypt.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> On foreign fighters, see also Malet (2013).

<sup>136</sup> One can refer to the numerous testimonies of so-called Arab Afghans who travelled to Afghanistan in the 1980s (e.g. Anas, 2002; al-Misri, 2002, 2006; 'Abd al-Ghani, 2010).

<sup>137</sup> This issue has often been mentioned in the literature on the IG and the JG. For instance, an IG leader reportedly mentions that the IG leadership decided to send their members to Afghanistan to undertake military training in the late 1980s (al-'Awwa, 2006: 119). IG leaders in Afghanistan nonetheless contest this interpretation (Taha, 2013). The next chapter contends that only a small number of returnees played a role in Egypt.

The exile of many prominent leaders was a major challenge to these groups' leaderships, which was differently mediated by these groups' organisational norms. According to IG leaders who relocated to Afghanistan by the end of the 1980s, contacts with the prison leadership were maintained through intermediaries. They assert that the legitimacy of their group's prison leadership was generally accepted despite intermittent disputes. Some mentions that there was no competition between the external and the prison leadership, even though the subsequent IG leader abroad, Taha (2013), mentions some tensions:

We thought that the leaders should be those abroad, including sheikh Hamad, Mustafa [Hamza], sheikh Shawqi [Muhammad al-Islambuli] and those on the ground in Egypt, notably Osama Hafez and Saleh Hashim. The leaders could not be those remaining behind bars. How could people in jail lead us? They said that they were the leaders, even though they could not really lead in reality. We did not want to claim openly that they were not the leaders, however, even though we took our own decisions. We did not say anything, and generally told other IG members that the leaders were those in prison.

Taha's position substantiates that, despite internal differences of opinion, the group's external leadership did not oppose the legitimacy of the prison leadership, and still strived to preserve the group's unity. This setting contrasted significantly with the JG, whose new leaders in the Afghan-Pakistani border area, al-Zawahiri and Imam, did not feel compelled to maintain the JG's organisational unity and to coordinate with prison leaders. These two leaders rather decided to revive their group's activities under the name *tandhim al-jihad* (the Jihad Organisation), later renamed *jama' a al-jihad* (JG), and to create their own training camps in the Afghan-Pakistani border area. Their objectives were to mobilise and train Egyptian fighters under their organisational umbrella in order to prepare for an armed confrontation in Egypt.<sup>138</sup> According to a member of the JG prison leadership:

All the contacts were severed even before Afghanistan. We were in prison and could be tortured at any time to reveal what we knew. We could not maintain any contact with them. We were not even in touch with others imprisoned members of our group, contrary to the IG who controlled the prisons from Liman Tora [one Egyptian prison].

Another imprisoned JG leader, Osama Qassem (2012), also adds that:

We have not been in contact with the external leadership since 1981. We did not even manage to preserve the contacts between us, in prison. Everybody was on his own, following a daily programme.

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<sup>138</sup> Chapter 5 expands on this theme pages 189-192.

Some obtained a PhD in *shari‘a* and in Law for instance. We were isolated until 2005, and only some limited contacts were established thereafter.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, Imam became the *de jure* JG leader until his resignation in 1993-1994. He had the most advanced religious credentials and was chosen for his religious authority (Na‘im, 2014). According to his testimony (Imam, 2008), he was primarily a religious guide absorbed with his religious scholarship. He was isolated from fellow group members and gave al-Zawahiri free rein to manage the group's operational and organisational leadership.<sup>139</sup>

The new opportunities and resources (ideational as much as material) available to the JG in Afghanistan and the popularity enjoyed by the Afghan jihad helped al-Zawahiri to reunite a few factions formerly affiliated with his group. According to one of these factions' leaders, al-Zawahiri managed to unite them on the fight against the Soviet Union, despite previous ideological contentions. While JG-affiliated factions were not competing with one another in a civil war environment, their coalition is congruent with studies of alliance formation in civil wars which emphasise the role of power distribution in the incorporation or bandwagoning of weaker groups with stronger entities (Christia, 2012; Horowitz & Potter, 2013). The JG became stronger in its new external stronghold, and manages to attract new Egyptians who became henceforth affiliated to this group. Some of them later played a leading role in the emergence of the *salafi jihadi* trend in Egypt, such as Murjan Salem and Ahmad ‘Ashush.

#### **4.4.3. Discussing a Merger in Peshawar and the Sudan**

The environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan was unique in the history of *jihadi* groups worldwide, and Peshawar rapidly became their nerve centre. Militants from many Muslim countries settled in this region, exchanged ideas and participated in this unprecedented jihad. *Jihadi* groups from Egypt, Libya and Syria, non-profit Muslim organisations and individuals from diverse affiliations conglomerated in the same region for the first time.<sup>140</sup> When the Afghan war ended, the presence of many Egyptian

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<sup>139</sup> See also: al-Siba‘i, 2002; al-Zayyat, 2007; Abu Shama, 2008.

<sup>140</sup> For primary sources on this period, one can refer to the memories of ‘Abdullah ‘Azzam's son-in-law (Anas, 2002), to the lengthy memories of a high-ranking member of al-Qaeda, Fazul ‘Abdullah Mohammed (aka as Fadil Harun) (‘Abdullah, 2012), to the books authored by Mustafa Hamid (aka Abu al-Walid al-Misri), one of the first Arab to join the Afghan jihad (e.g. al-Misri, 2006; Hamid & Farral, 2014) and to numerous other works (e.g. Tawil, 2007; ‘Abd al-Ghani, 2010).

fighters therefore spurred a debate on a possible unification of their groups, which were officially pursuing the same objective. Their dissociation was no longer justified in the eyes of some of their leaders who favoured a bilateral rapprochement. These discussions in Afghanistan and in the Sudan constitute the second test of this analysis.

The IG and the JG faced similar challenges in the beginning of the 1990s. In Egypt, their members were under heavy pressure from the security services which imposed a tight grip on their activities. Thousands had been arrested since the cycle of contention started in 1987, and the armed confrontation with the state was not heading in a favourable direction. The cycle of violence became counter-productive to these groups' objectives, and the prospects of achieving substantial political gains in Egypt were marginal. Outside of Egypt, their members were increasingly scattered. Their departure from Afghanistan after the beginning of the civil war in 1992<sup>141</sup> hindered the maintenance of a strong coordination between these groups' new regional poles. Finally, the IG and the JG suffered from acute financial difficulties. They notably failed to gather substantial sources of revenues to finance their activities, and were dependent on meagre resources and, sometimes, external assistance. For instance, Na'im (2014) mentions that most of the funding he used to send JG members abroad came from bin Laden.

The literature on militant groups' alliances argues that the difficulty to guarantee the credibility of bilateral commitments results in relatively rare coalitions (Bapat & Bond, 2012; Bacon 2013, 2014). These studies stress that the sustainability of state sponsorship render the latter more likely, and that group alliances are more viable for militant groups less exposed to state repression (Bapat & Bond, 2012), or bandwagoning a stronger group (Horowitz & Potter, 2013). Regarding the IG and the JG, however, the failure to unite against their stronger opponent (the Egyptian state) did not result from the (lack of) credibility of their mutual commitments, but mostly pertained to their leaderships and to these groups' institutionalised organisational norms. According to Muhammad 'Omar (2012):

The Jihad Group and the Islamic Group tried to unite twice, in Afghanistan, and then in the Sudan. The Jihad Group had two conditions however: they did not want to be headed by sheikh 'Omar, and they opposed the leadership of the brothers in prison. These were of central importance for the Islamic Group.

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. chapter 5 pages 192-194.

We supported our leaders in prison and the unification never happened.

The IG leader abroad, Taha (2013), relays a similar position:

There was no agreement between them and us. We refused to unite with them because we already had a project, the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt. We were better organised, had more members, and our ideas were more developed. There was only a small number of them and they had no real possibility to act. They wanted to carry out common work, but expected to discuss on the basis that they were as strong as we were. They claimed that their leaders and members were better than ours, and that we could convene a common *majliss al-shura*. We refused. They had no presence on the ground. So the differences were not merely in terms of ideas. All ideological differences could have been solved. It was about people.

This point of view is also supported on the other side by al-Zawahiri (2010: 191), who mentions in his memories that:

My experience with the Islamic Group was bitter. Our attempts to unite with them failed because of their insistence on their prison leadership and their excessive veneration of the so-called big brothers. [...] They gave them the right to take all the existential decisions. Those abroad could only apply the general guidelines sent by the big brothers. Even though many of their leaders abroad were convinced by our logic, they declared that only the group could decide, that the group was built on this basis, that they did not want to disturb it, and that we had to deal with it as a *fait accompli*.

These evidences demonstrate that the failure to unite was directly informed by these groups' organisational construction and organisational norms. The deference of IG leaders to their imprisoned historical leadership is confirmed by many other witnesses, including by Abu Mus'ab al-Suri<sup>142</sup> in his memories (al-Suri, 2004: 747). This pattern contrasts sharply with the JG, whose leader al-Zawahiri did not feel compelled to consult his peers before taking an important decision. More than ideological tenets or tactical factors, the IG and the JG therefore failed to unite because IG leaders felt part of an institutionalised entity which constrained their possibility to take existential decisions on behalf of their group.

#### 4.4.4. Joining al-Qaeda?

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<sup>142</sup> Al-Suri, whose real name is Mustafa Setmariam Nasar is an AQ-related theoretician. See also: Lia, 2008.

In the following years, these groups' predicaments worsened. By the mid-1990s, most IG members in Egypt were incarcerated, while the group's presence in the Sudan did not survive president 'Omar al-Bashir's decision to expel formerly-welcomed Islamist groups. IG leaders and members only maintained a sporadic presence in different places in Europe, Middle Eastern countries and Central Asia.<sup>143</sup> The leaders of its external *majliss al-shura* were Taha, Mustafa Hamza, Hamad, Muhammad al-Islambuli and Osama Rushdi. The coordination was extremely difficult because of this geographic setting:

It was very difficult to communicate. Rifa'i was in Iran, Muhammad Shawqi [al-Islambuli] was in Albania, Mustafa was in Afghanistan, etc. It was extremely difficult to take any decision. We had no internet and no real contacts. We were also apprehensive to communicate on the phone, because of the possibility to be intercepted by the secret services.

The JG faced a similar quandary. By 1995, most of the group's followers in Egypt had been arrested in the case referred to as *talai' al-fath* (vanguards of conquest).<sup>144</sup> In prison, they were maintained in isolation and could not communicate. Outside of Egypt, the group's *majliss al-shura* was dispersed and many members were arrested in diverse places such as Albania, Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria. The JG barely survived successive splits between 1993 and 1994. Tactical and strategic differences of opinion between its leaders sparked internal conflicts and organisational divisions, as in other groups marked by factionalised leaderships (Asal et al., 2012; Staniland, 2014). The JG was marginalised and many of its members and leaders formally joined al-Qaeda when both groups were in the Sudan, according to Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (2004: 712) and Fadil Harun ('Abdullah, 2012: 147).<sup>145</sup> Muhammad 'Omar (2013) adds that Osama bin Laden imposed a choice on JG members in the Sudan, to stay with their group or to join AQ, rather than play on two fronts. Al-Zawahiri attempted to find new ventures in several central Asian countries, including Azerbaijan and Russia, where he was briefly arrested.<sup>146</sup> The JG suffered from intense organisational and financial difficulties, highlighted in the testimony of one of its member in a trial in Egypt.<sup>147</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, IG and JG members and leaders were disseminated in different places and

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<sup>143</sup> The next chapter expands on their role in these countries.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. chapter 5 pages 176-179.

<sup>145</sup> On JG members actively involved in al-Qaeda, see also: Salah (2001), Gerges (2009), Harun ('Abdullah, 2012). Chapter 5 expands on this theme pages 195-197.

<sup>146</sup> Al-Zawahiri expands on these travels and on these countries in his memories (al-Zawahiri, 2010: 118-172).

<sup>147</sup> See the court reports in: *al-qadiyya al-jana'iyya li-ahmad al-najjar* (1997).

looked like a lost cause. These groups' approaches to political action in Egypt undeniably failed, and they were left with very dim military and financial prospects. The literature on the end of armed militancy argues that militant groups cease to exist when their leaderships are apprehended or killed, transition towards a political process or achieve their objectives (Cronin, 2009).<sup>148</sup> In this case, none of these alternatives materialised and these groups were marginalised. The social ties between their leaderships and followers crumbled, and the failure of their armed campaigns imposed unilateral declarations of ceasefire by the JG in 1995, and by the IG in 1997. Eventually, prominent leaders and members gathered in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover of the country. While the proximity of JG leaders to al-Qaeda organisation has already been mentioned earlier, the IG also entertained cordial relations with Osama bin Laden and AQ. Muhammad 'Omar (2012) argues that:

We entertained strong relations with al-Qaeda, based on respectful exchanges and interests. We moved together from the Sudan to Afghanistan, in the same plane. We were only a small group. Muhammad 'Atef [AQ military commander] wanted us to be together in Afghanistan because we did not really know the place. Our interactions occurred at a personal, rather than organisational, level: we coordinated with them on administrative issues, on food, training, etc. We liked one another even though we disagreed with their political positions.

Militant groups failing to achieve their strategic objectives and to transition towards a political process often attempt to reorientate their strategic objectives to survive (Cronin, 2009: 146-166). The last test of this analysis therefore concerns the possibility offered to both the IG and the JG in the late 1990s to join bin Laden and AQ. Bin Laden formally declared war in 1996 against the "Americans occupying the land of the two holy places", and discussed with other groups the possibility of manifesting this declaration into action by consolidating a unified Islamic front against American forces in the world in 1998.<sup>149</sup> This new alliance was inspired by bin Laden, who saw an opportunity to unite militant groups in Afghanistan to support his ambitions to oppose the United States and its allies in the greater Middle East.<sup>150</sup>

The similarity of these groups' quandaries and their opposite responses to bin Laden's call for unity favour a cross-case comparison. Many scholars recount that the IG leader abroad, Taha, would have

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<sup>148</sup> See also Jones 2008; Cronin 2006.

<sup>149</sup> These two declarations are available on the following page: <http://www.heritage.org/research/projects/enemy-detention/al-qaeda-declarations>.

<sup>150</sup> On this alliance and on the consolidation of al-Qaeda, one can refer to: Bergen, 2001, 2006; Burke, 2004, 2012; Coll, 2004; Atwan, 2006, 2013; Wright, 2006; Scheuer, 2011; Soufan, 2011; Tawil, 2011.

joined the “World Islamic Front for Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders” on behalf of his group, before withdrawing under pressure of his peers (Ashour, 2007: 617; Gerges, 2009: 39, 155). Many witnesses who spoke to him subsequently and Muhammad ‘Omar (2012) who was in Afghanistan disclose a different version. They mention that Taha only agreed to sign a declaration against American policies on Iraq. Then, Taha argues that another IG member told Abu Hafs al-Misri (AQ second-in-command) that Taha would agree to join the Front, even though he was not consulted. While Taha confirmed in an interview and in a book published subsequently (Taha, 2000) that he supported the legitimacy of targeting American forces in the region, he stresses that it was an individual, rather than a collective, endorsement.<sup>151</sup> He also adds (Taha, 2013), about the Islamic Front, that:

I could not join this Front without referring to the brothers in the leadership. So I did not withdraw from the Front since I never joined it. We had brotherly relations with AQ and I loved sheikh Osama bin Laden. I see him as the symbol of the Islamic movement and a courageous man. But, he had his project and I had mine.

On the other hand, the financial and organisational predicaments suffered by the JG and the absence of alternatives arguably persuaded al-Zawahiri to join this Front despite previous ideological differences with bin Laden.<sup>152</sup> Testimonies from al-Zawahiri's associates (al-Zayyat et al., 2004; bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 2008), primary sources (al-Shafi‘i, 2002; Cullison, 2004) and academic analyses (Gerges, 2011) consensually assert that the group's strategic deadlock combined with the possibility to access bin Laden's financial resources informed al-Zawahiri's decision. Despite the relevance of the academic debate on the mutual influence of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, it is thenceforth considered more relevant to investigate this alliance from an organisational approach. In this case, the striking difference between the IG and the JG is not ideational, on the legitimacy of bin Laden's project, but organisational, pertaining to these groups' decision making processes and organisational norms. According to broad evidences, al-Zawahiri did not negotiate this decision with his *majliss al-shura*, and did not feel constrained by the opinions of his peers, who often learned that he joined bin Laden through the media (al-Siba‘i, 2002: 37-39; Gerges, 2009: 163; Amr, 2012). In Afghanistan, this controversial decision catalysed intense opposition to al-Zawahiri from his close associates, who temporarily replaced him with Salah Shahata, an opponent to this alliance (al-Siba‘i, 2002: 37-39; Muhammad ‘Omar, 2012). Other JG members additionally expressed their disagreements with al-Zawahiri, such as Murjan Salem

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<sup>151</sup> Other leaders confirm this version (e.g. al-Ghamari, n.d.).

<sup>152</sup> In 1995, al-Zawahiri still maintained that the liberation of Jerusalem “ran through Cairo” (al-Zawahiri, 1995). Sayyid Imam also adds that al-Zawahiri was very suspicious of bin Laden (bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 2008).

who arguably wanted him to include the JG under the Taliban's authority according to al-Siba'i (Tawil, 2003). Eventually, al-Zawahiri was reinstated as the JG leader and his JG faction allied formally with bin Laden in 2001. Al-Qaeda became *Qa'ida al-Jihad* (the base of jihad). Qassem, from the imprisoned JG leadership, affirms (2012) that:

Many people left Ayman even before his decision to join the Islamic Front. After joining bin Laden, Ayman obtained more resources and became stronger. Some members therefore came back to him. I think it's fair to say that Ayman joined bin Laden because he had what they needed.

The comparison between the IG and the JG reveals that strategic decisions were more susceptible to changing resources and personal conflicts in the latter. While the alliance between bin Laden and al-Zawahiri can legitimately be interpreted “a desperate effort to alter the [*jihadi*] movement's route” (Gerges 2009: 24) driven by “powerful personalities” (Gerges, 2009: 37), it is crucial to note that it was rendered possible precisely by the absence of shared organisational norms inside the JG,<sup>153</sup> which had characterised the group for decades. In contrast, IG leaders and members have continuously felt organisationally constrained to consult their peers and to abide by the consensual decision making process established in the group's early days. These norms were absent in the JG, where the unilateral decision to join bin Laden was reminiscent of past uncoordinated moves taken by al-Zawahiri as early as in the 1980s, when he re-organised his group in Afghanistan. The JG's strategic deadlock and financial difficulties contextualise al-Zawahiri's incentives, but only a consideration of the JG's organisational structure and norms can explain why al-Zawahiri was able to take this decision in the name of his group without consulting his peers.

#### **4.5. THE ORIGINS AND DIFFUSION OF NEW IDEAS**

This concluding section investigates the IG and JG's ideological evolution through the study of the emergence and diffusion of new ideational frames. This approach premises that the ideational commitments of these groups' leaders can evolve for an array of reasons, including individual learning, intra and inter-group interactions and these groups' failures and successes on the ground. This section then demonstrates that the organisational diffusion of new interpretative frames is both contingent on internal decision making norms and subordinated to their compatibility with these groups' discursive

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<sup>153</sup> This relates to a central point of this chapter's introduction. Gerges (2009) is right to state that the JG and al-Qaeda were driven by personalities and not by organisational norms. His claim that this characteristic is widely shared by Islamist movements is inaccurate, however, and this case study demonstrates that the IG had enjoyed strong organisational norms.

traditions. In other words, militant group leaders can revise their ideational positions for many reasons, including these groups' operational failures, religious retrospections, and the influence of these groups' social movement industries. At the same time, being in a leadership position does not suffice to organisationally diffuse these new ideational frames if one's leadership does not operate within legitimised decision making norms, or if these frames are incompatible with these groups' discursive traditions.

This analysis draws on the literature on frame diffusion. This corpus differentiates ideational and behavioural diffusion (Givan et al., 2010), and adds that diffusion can unfold horizontally or vertically (Roggeband, 2010: 20), in relational, non-relational or mediated patterns (Tarrow, 2005; Sageman, 2004, 2008; Bakke, 2010; Givan et al., 2010). Relational diffusion occurs through trusted networks, non-relational diffusion relies on the media and on the internet and mediated diffusion is established by social movement brokers. While this literature focuses on ideational and behavioural diffusion between social movement organisations, this section investigates the reception and diffusion of new ideational frames inside militant groups.

This analysis contributes to intra-movement ideational diffusion with a comparative focus on militant groups' organisational characteristics. This analysis investigates organisational recipients of ideational diffusion in consideration of these groups' internal characteristics, including their decision making processes and internally recognised figures of authority (referring respectively to a group's horizontal and vertical organisational norms). Ideational diffusion is indeed contingent on these groups' organisational norms, which situate and shape the prerogatives of their leaders and their ability to influence their groups' ideological construction. Diverging group structures, from highly hierarchical to loose network, inexorably impact diffusion processes; the consideration of a leader's credentials or social capital<sup>154</sup> are therefore not sufficient in accounting for his ability to shape his group's ideational framework alone, without contextualising them within a group's internal regulations.

#### **4.5.1. Early Ideational Developments in Prison**

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<sup>154</sup> Chapter 6 expands on this theme.

The IG's ideological construction began in prison, when a central leadership was designated. The IG had not authored any written literature beforehand, and prison presented an opportunity to convey the group's ideational frame of reference. According to the group's second-in-command in prison Najih Ibrahim (2012), the IG's first text, *mithaq al-'amal al-islami (The Charter for Islamic Action)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, 1984), was written during the post-1981 trial to defend the group's positions. Ibrahim insists that IG leaders feared they would be executed, and intended to defend their actions rather than to elaborate on what has since been considered the group's literature. This text was followed by a few studies in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) undertaken by the group's historical leadership (Hafez, 2013). These texts expand on the necessity of fighting leaders who do not apply Islamic Law in *al-ta'ifa al-muntani' 'an sharia' min sharia'i' al-Islam (The Sect Abstaining from the Law of Islam)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, n.d.b.) define the group's theological positions on the excommunication of other Muslims in *al-'udhr bil-jahl (The Excuse of Ignorance)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, n.d.e.) and in *al-rad 'ala fikr al-takfir (The Answer to Takfiri Thinking)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, n.d.a.), and expands on the group's core principles in *man nahnu wa madha nurid (Who are We and What we Want)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, n.d.c.) and *nahnu wal-ikhwan (The MB and Us)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, n.d.d.). The last important publication, *hatmiyya al-muwajaha (The Inevitability of Confrontation)* (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, 1987) was published at the end of the 1980s and openly called for a violent confrontation with state authorities. This text was published when state repression worsened and:

These texts all supported the idea that the state had to be confronted. The last text, *hatmiyya*, was different and more violent because of the centrality of the fight back then. This is because the Charter was written for the courts, to defend ourselves. We could not openly support these violent ideas even though, at the same time, we did not want to retreat from our [pre-prison] positions.

The JG similarly did not possess a noticeable written corpus before 1981. Despite frequent academic mentions of Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj's opus, *al-farida al-gha'iba (The Absent Duty)*, the previous chapter demonstrated that this book did not present a comprehensive ideational framework but rather compiled a limited set of shared ideas. The previous chapter also asserted that, in contrast with Faraj's argument, foreign policy played a significant role for many jihad groups' members. In prison, this group's failure to create a cohesive and legitimate leadership hindered the creation of consensual ideological foundations. Only a few texts were published by individual members, such as *minhaj jama'a al-jihad al-islami (The Method of the Islamic Jihad Group)* by 'Abud al-Zumur (1986), *Amrika*,

*Masr wal-haraka al-islamiyya (America, Egypt and the Islamic Movement)* by the faction affiliated to Salim al-Rihal (jama‘a al-jihad, n.d.a.). These opuses do not cover the theological intricacies of the IG collective corpus, and are rather vague. Organisationally, they represent individual views rather than a consensual vision shared by JG members. It should be mentioned that many JG members could not recall the existence of these texts, which contrast with the firm grasp of the IG corpus usually noticed among IG members. This discrepancy already suggests that organisational differences played a critical role in these groups' early internal diffusion.

#### **4.5.2. The Influence of a Competitive Ideational Market in Exile**

By the end of the 1980s, the IG and JG ideological developments were challenged by an unprecedented exile of their cadres in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the border region between these two countries, they settled alongside an array of militant groups from other Arab and Islamic nations, and collectively formed a competitive social movement industry. The latter is defined in social movement studies as an agglomeration of “social movement organisations [SMO] with relatively similar goals” (Zald, 1979: 2), marked by intense internal competition over resources, legitimacy and support (Zald, 1979). The broad coalition assembled in support of the Afghan resistance was, as in other cases, “particularly conducive to frame disputes because they are comprised of activists from a variety of SMOs, each having its own reality, agenda and views” (Benford, 1992: 680-681). Interviews and independent testimonies<sup>155</sup> mention ubiquitous theological and political framing contests between Islamist groups dwelling in this region. The nature of these contests were diagnostic and prognostic (Snow & Benford, 1988), and concerned the future of *jihadi* movements worldwide, their strategic objectives and priorities, the status of Muslim leaders and states, and the use of excommunication against other Muslims. The *salafi jihadi* trend and AQ trace their roots to this peculiar environment, and, according to many observers, to the influence of the Egyptian groups under investigation. It is therefore important to study the influence of this social movement industry on the development and diffusion of new interpretative frames inside the IG and the JG.

In exile, these groups' decision making processes and organisational norms differently mediated the influence of this competitive Islamist social movement industry on their ideological frameworks. The

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<sup>155</sup> One can refer to: Salah, 2001; al-Suri, 2004; al-Misri, 2006; ‘Abd al-Ghani, 2010; ‘Abdullah, 2012.

IG remained under the nominal control of its prison leadership, which had been previously granted the prerogative to define the group's ideological tenets. Prominent IG commanders confirm that the external leadership in Peshawar was only leading the media campaign, with the publication of a few magazines (notably *al-murabitun*) and communiqué pertaining to international and domestic issues. Strategic decisions and ideological developments were still in the hands of the group's historical leadership, as had been mutually agreed upon in prison. Internal dissensions between prison and exiled leaders concerned practical decisions rather than the group's general policies. The IG's internal division of labour and the associated monopoly of a legitimised leadership hindered the organisational absorption and diffusion of new ideas, though this analysis later argues that some exiled leaders were individually influenced by this new environment.

In sharp contrast with the IG, the JG truly developed its ideological corpus in Afghanistan and Pakistan under the guidance of al-Zawahiri and Imam. Impediments to group discussions in prison, the absence of a culture of consensus and the group's poorly developed ideological framework gave them considerable leeway to develop their own theologico-political perspectives. JG leaders benefited from the Afghan jihad to elaborate their ideas and develop a new textual corpus which reflected prevailing debates in Peshawar. On-going contentions notably opposed al-Zawahiri and sheikh 'Abdullah 'Azzam on several important issues, including their positions on Arab regimes, on the participation in jihad alongside Afghan factions and on the Muslim Brotherhood. 'Azzam hailed from the MB and only supported armed jihad against non-Muslims occupiers of Muslim lands.<sup>156</sup> He had an encompassing approach to other Islamist movements, and argued that Arab and Muslim fighters should only fight under the umbrella of the Afghan resistance, although they disagreed with some of their religious practices. Al-Zawahiri wrote a few publications to repudiate some of these claims. For instance, he denounced the MB political participation in the democratic process in *al-hasad al-murr (Bitter Harvests)* (al-Zawahiri, 1988) and chastised their accommodating positions on Arab states and governments. Then, he used the concepts of *al-wala' wal-bara'* (loyalty and dissociation) and *al-isti'ana bil-kuffar* (appeal to the non-Muslims) during the first Gulf war<sup>157</sup> to blame the Saudi regime for collaborating with a non-Muslim military power (the United States). Al-Zawahiri became ideologically closer to the theologians of the emerging *salafi jihadi* trend, including Abu Muhammad

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<sup>156</sup> On al-Zawahiri and 'Azzam, one can refer to various primary testimonies in Bergen (2006: 69-70, 94-97).

<sup>157</sup> On these concepts, one can refer to Wagemakers (2008; 2012: 147-164).

al-Maqdissi.<sup>158</sup> These developments reveal that internal JG divisions and the absence of legitimised organisational norms rendered the JG more susceptible to new ideational influences.

The JG *amir*, Sayyid Imam, also contributed to the group's ideological construction. Imam expressed his frustration at the deficient religious knowledge of many young fighters, which informed his intention to clarify *fiqhi* (jurisprudential) issues to remedy this situation (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2008). His first book, *al-'umda fi 'idad al-'ida* (the Pillar in the (Military) Preparation) (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1988), mostly focuses on the religious duties of a *jihadi* group's leaders and soldiers. The most controversial elements appear in the book's last sections, where Imam asserts that it is more important to fight apostate (nominally Muslims) rulers than the far enemy, represented by the Jews and the Crusaders (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1988: 295-6). He also insists that Muslim rulers who do not apply Islamic Law are not the only priority enemy. In contrast with former JG positions, Imam declares that "the one who supports the infidel with words or action is a disbeliever like him" and that "jihad against these apostate leaders and their supporters (*al-'awan*) is an individual duty for all Muslims" (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1988: 297-300). This inclusion of the regime's supporters, *al-'awan*, marks a theological rupture with the positions formerly endorsed by the JG, which only opposed Muslim head of states without excommunicating the army.<sup>159</sup> These positions became close to the positions defended by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdissi, and reflected Peshawar's ongoing debates.

Imam's next opus intensified the internal ideological and organisational upheaval caused by these new ideas. By 1994, he authored a book which further fractured the JG leadership and degraded its relations with other Islamist movements. In *al-jami' fi talab al-'ilm al-sharif* (the Collection in the Acquisition of Sacred Knowledge) (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1993), Imam dwells on Islamic theology on more than a thousand pages and attacked many Islamist groups, including IG leaders.<sup>160</sup> Eventually, al-Zawahiri purged this book from controversial elements and published it under a new name, *al-hadi ila sabil al-rihad fi ma'alim al-jihad wal-'itiqad* (*The Guide to the Path of Righteousness in the Milestones of Jihad and Belief*) (jama'a al-jihad, 1994). Al-Zawahiri was religiously more inclusive, and limited the

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<sup>158</sup> On al-Maqdissi, see Wagemakers (2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2012, 2013).

<sup>159</sup> For more than two decades the JG has precisely attempted to infiltrate the army to orchestrate a military coup.

<sup>160</sup> Imam specifically denounces an IG leader, Tal'at Fu'ad Qassem for not excommunicating the supporters of the regimes (*ansar al-hakim*) and sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman for claiming that Muslim leaders who do apply Islamic Law are not necessarily infidels. He claims that the IG is an extreme *murji'* (postponer of the application of Islamic Law) group.

use of *takfir* (excommunication).<sup>161</sup> In addition, he wanted to preserve friendly relations with other *jihadi* groups, including the IG. Imam branded al-Zawahiri a thief for altering his book, to which al-Zawahiri replied that the latter was designed as a collective publication which legitimately had to be reviewed. Imam published a communiqué to denounce the JG as an “astray group” (*al-jama‘a al-dala*) from which he resigned (bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, 1994).

The comparative ideational evolution of the IG and the JG in exile is important for many reasons. Organisationally, this analysis establishes the importance of diverging decision making norms on ideational diffusion. The legitimised authority of IG leaders in prison and the group's culture of consensus prevented the inclusion of external debates into the IG's ideological corpus. Even though prominent IG external leaders were influenced by the crystallisation of the *salafi jihadi* trend in exile,<sup>162</sup> organisational norms prevented the inclusion of these new ideational frames into the group's corpus. The IG's external leadership recognised their organisational position and did not contest the group's established norms of decision making. Conversely, the JG's ideological evolution and the inclusion of these external debates into the group's corpus were facilitated by the comparative absence of centralised decision making norms, which did not impede ideational diffusion.

In addition, this episode substantiates that the radicalisation of Imam's theological positions (and to some extent al-Zawahiri's) mirrored the controversies affecting Islamist militants dwelling in Peshawar. His new positions preceded the JG's use of violence in Egypt in the 1990s and the related waves of arrest; they cannot be directly considered the outcome of an ideological encapsulation designed to assure the group's organisational survival in the Egyptian underground. In social movement studies, the radicalisation of these positions is rather congruent with the concept of the “radical fringe”, which determines that social movement organisations competing for a shared audience “become further apart in their conception of the amount of change and the tactic required” (Zald, 1979: 11). In other words, intergroup rivalry in a competitive social movement industry radicalised many Islamist groups, out of necessity to differentiate themselves and establish their orthodoxy and non-compromising creeds. As mentioned by an IG leader Osama Rushdi, these radical positions “grew inside the isolated atmosphere

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<sup>161</sup> For instance, al-Zawahiri does not excommunicate *shi‘a* Muslims as a collective group (Haykel, 2010: 210).

<sup>162</sup> Taha adopts this label for himself (Taha, 2013) and legitimised the theological and political legitimacy of targeting US forces in the Middle East (Taha, 2000)

in Peshawar. In these conditions, if you have any moderate opinion you would be [marginalised]” (Bergen, 2006: 68). Intergroup competition resulted in “ideological and organisational chaos” (al-Walid, 2006: 37) whereby, according to Abu al-Walid al-Misri, “in this intellectual environment, salafism was the best creedal trench and sword of religious retaliation against everyone else, Muslim, non-Muslim, all of those who were outside of the group or organisation ... or of the religious creed (‘*aqida*)!” (al-Walid, 2006: 38).

The development of an exiled radical fringe contextualises the crystallisation of the *salafi jihadi* trend, and its new emphasis on the religious creed (‘*aqida*) and on the reformulation of Qutbian theologico-political outlooks with classic Islamic jurisprudence (Lav, 2012: 169-171). As argued by Lav (2012: 171), this trend initiated a “more sober and classically rooted formulation of the principle of *hakimiyya*, namely jurisprudential *takfir* of the rulers”. This reformulation appears clearly in Imam's new books, which partially shaped the theological foundations of *salafi* jihadism thenceforth. It also contextualises al-Zawahiri's previously mentioned use of *salafi* concepts such as *al-wala' wal-bara'* (loyalty and dissociation) and *al-isti'ana bil-kuffar* (appeal to the non-Muslims). Lav is nonetheless too categorical in distinguishing “the *salafi jihadi* school (*qua* school) and the al-Qā'ida-led global jihadist movement” (Lav, 2012: 170). Even though Lav rightly points out that AQ, al-Zawahiri and bin Laden did not consistently refer to *salafi jihadi* theological arguments<sup>163</sup>, their diverging use of theological resources merely reflects this trend's internal diversity.

This theological development of the *salafi jihadi* trend (and the evolution of Imam and al-Zawahiri) was additionally facilitated, in its early days, by the dearth of established authorities in this competitive social movement industry. The house arrest of bin Laden in Saudi Arabia, the exile of sheikh ‘Omar in the U.S. and the assassination of ‘Azzam meant that, according to Abu Mus‘ab al-Souri, “the *jihadi* scene was lacking ‘*ulama*’ and students of knowledge” (al-Souri, 2004: 29). Al-Souri adds that new *salafi jihadi* scholars such as Abu Qatada gradually filled this vacuum at a time (al-Souri, 2004: 29), when a new *takfiri* generation appeared and prospered (Harun, 2002).

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<sup>163</sup> An often endeavoured to portray a more inclusive religious tradition, as continuously mentioned in AQ secretary's memories (Harun, 2006) (see also Lahoud, 2012).

While the competitive social movement industry of Peshawar provides the broader environmental context of Imam's radicalisation, this episode is also important organisationally. Imam had the most advanced religious credentials and was the nominal JG leader. At the same time, the absence of shared vertical or horizontal organisational norms inside the JG and Imam's poor organisational dexterity hindered the incorporation of these new frames inside the group's ideological corpus. It further divided the JG, which was already faced with internal contentions over the appropriate use of violence. Imam's writing had paradoxically a more prominent influence on *jihadi* movements which appeared subsequently, through a non-relational diffusion of his thoughts.<sup>164</sup> Imprisoned JG leaders claim that they did not read his writings before their liberation in the 2000s (Qassem, 2012). In addition, many factions which previously joined the JG during the war in Afghanistan henceforth distanced themselves from the JG external leadership for ideological and personal reasons.<sup>165</sup> One of their leader claims that:

Sayyid Imam is the one who destroyed the JG with his *takfiri* ideas. We were strong in Afghanistan but then, when he excommunicated the parliament and military officers in the army, he divided us. He issued the idea that both the Muslim leader who does not apply Islamic Law is an infidel and the one who helps him. You know, even when we define one camp as *mu'askar al-kufr* (the camp of disbelief), it does not mean that all of them are infidels who need to be fought. There are limits in the use of *takfir*. Sayyid Imam destroyed our group with this new idea. We were an extension of the thoughts of al-Halawi and Salim al-Rihal, who fought for the freedom of the *umma* (the Muslim community), based on the wrong political positions of the Muslim leader.

#### 4.5.3. Revising Jihad in Prison

These developments outside of Egypt were unrelated to the third phase of ideological construction which unfolded in Egyptian penitentiaries. In prison, several mediation attempts were organised between independent religious scholars and these groups' leaderships, later followed by additional negotiations with state representatives. These discussions started in the late 1980s, when prominent religious scholars tried to convince these groups' leaders that violence was Islamically wrong. These mediation attempts repeatedly failed over the years for diverse reasons, however, including the evolution of the security situation on the ground, the lack of trust between the parties, media leaks and

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<sup>164</sup> In Algeria for instance, the GIA resorted to Sayyid Imam's book to justify its use of violence (which is paradoxical considering Imam's opposition to the practical resort to violence in Egypt) (e.g. Rushdi, 2002).

<sup>165</sup> JG leaders interviewed in this research often denounce Imam's radicalism before dwelling on his personal shortcomings as well (e.g. Qassem, 2012).

popular pressure on the Egyptian regime not to negotiate (al-‘Awwa, 2006; Ashour, 2011).

In parallel to these short-lived negotiations, IG leaders independently reflected on the contentious conflict with the state in the early 1990s. The aggravation of the use of violence on the ground and the expansion of the range of acceptable targets by IG members motivated the quest for an alternative to the emerging strategic deadlock. Two main positions were internally debated. One side was prepared to present extensive and unilateral concessions to the state, whatever the costs, while their contenders demanded to be acknowledged as a political partner which would formulate its own demands to the authorities.<sup>166</sup> The most prominent role was played by the leading representatives of the first position, the head of the IG's *majliss al-shura* in prison Karam Zuhdi, later seconded by Najih Ibrahim, the IG's second-in-command. According to most testimonies,<sup>167</sup> Zuhdi played a critical role in convincing his peers that violence should cease at any cost. An IG leader argues that:

Our members in prison received many books from al-Azhar scholars which failed to convince them to renounce violence. The IG solved the conflict unilaterally, thanks to sheikh Karam [Zuhdi] and sheikh Najih [Ibrahim]. They used their personal conviction, nothing else, to convince all our followers to support their position. IG members in prison did not consensually accept this decision in the beginning. They thought: how can we stop fighting after what we've been through? So the two sheikhs visited the fifteen prisons to convince our members that violence should cease immediately and unconditionally in Egypt.

Eventually, internal IG discussions and changing environmental conditions at the macro-level facilitated the proclamation of a unilateral ceasefire in 1997, which was only accepted by the group's external leadership in 1999. The two years delay before the acceptance of the ceasefire by the IG's external *majliss al-shura* is particularly relevant to this chapter's general argument. An analysis of the written corpus published by two of its foremost leaders, Taha and Hamad, could infer that their initial reluctance was ideological. Taha and Hamad published extensively against the regime and uncompromisingly in theoretical support of armed jihad (e.g. Taha, 2000; Hamad, n.d.c., n.d.d., n.d.e.), which could infer that they were not willing to negotiate a ceasefire with the regime. It can reasonably be assessed that an ideological opposition to the ceasefire informed their initial reticence to the

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<sup>166</sup> This was notably the position defended by ‘Abud and Tareq al-Zumur.

<sup>167</sup> See also: Ibrahim, 2011a, 2011b; ‘Abd al-Ghani, n.d.

ceasefire initiative. Interviews with imprisoned IG leaders (e.g. Hafez, 2013) and with the group's external leadership nonetheless substantiate that organisational reasons caused this dissension. Some mentions that it took two years to reach an agreement “because of the opposition of sheikh Rifa‘i [Taha] and sheikh Shawqi [al-Islambuli] and because of the conflict with Osama Rusydi. We wanted to reach a consensus but it was difficult to communicate and to make a common decision”.<sup>168</sup> Najih Ibrahim confirms that Taha's practical exclusion from the ceasefire initiative, caused by the difficulty to reach the group's external leadership, explain his initial reluctance (Ibrahim, 2011a, 2011b). According to Taha (2013):

We refused the ceasefire announced from inside prison because we thought that the state imposed it. We only accepted the ceasefire initiative subsequently, since we could not know initially if the initiative was good for our group. I thought that our brothers in jail were weak and could not decide. I believed that the ceasefire would weaken the IG. If the state wanted to negotiate, it could negotiate with us, outside of Egypt. We were not subject to any pressure, and were consequently in better position to negotiate. In prison, they could only negotiate on small issues, such as allowing visitors. We wanted a real and comprehensive solution, not merely solving penitential issues.

This consensual end of violence significantly diverged from the end of violence declared in Egypt by the JG in 1995. By 1995, the JG had no meaningful organisational presence in Egypt, and most of its members were incarcerated. Outside of Egypt, the group was in jeopardy and suffered from a leadership crisis. Many prominent members and leaders left the group in the Sudan. and a few subsequently joined Osama bin Laden's network. Leadership breakdown combined with the group's failure to achieve any result in Egypt fuelled its development as a loose network of factions disseminated in many countries, with poor operational capabilities.<sup>169</sup> The absence of a consensual and legitimate authority hindered the possibility to consensually resolve the conflict with the state on the IG's model.

In prison, JG members and leaders were isolated and evolved independently. Most older prisoners were not acquainted with the new generation, and were detached from the group's external reality (e.g. Qassem, 2012). For instance, they did not immediately learn that al-Zawahiri declared a ceasefire in

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<sup>168</sup> The contention between Taha and Rusydi was caused by the Luxor attack in 1997. While the external leadership had no direct responsibility, as demonstrated in chapter 5 page 188, Taha claimed responsibility for this action. Other leaders, especially Rusydi, were strongly opposed to this claim and denounced Taha.

<sup>169</sup> The next chapter expands on the JG armed campaign in Egypt.

1995 or that he joined bin Laden in 1998. Their isolation combined with the group's organisational predicament obstructed internal dialogue, and hindered consensual negotiations. While many JG leaders reconsidered the strategic value of violence in Egypt during their imprisonment (e.g. Na'im, 2014), the absence of shared organisational decision making norms isolated them.

Eventually, the ceasefires declared by the IG and the JG triggered a process of ideological revisions. In 2001, collective discussions among IG leaders encouraged the authoring and publication of four main books in consensus, in addition to dozen additional articles reflecting individual views. Karam Zuhdi and Najih Ibrahim, the two most prominent IG leaders, had a leading role in these discussions. In the aftermath of 9/11, these discussions endeavoured to distance the IG from the group's formerly endorsed theology of violence. As previously mentioned, the theological revisions were nonetheless circumscribed by the IG's *salafi* discursive tradition. These texts specifically did not re-evaluate the group's position on Muslim leaders who do not apply Islamic law comprehensively. Although Zuhdi and Ibrahim revised their position on the excommunication of Muslim leaders, they did not manage to convince other IG leaders to follow suit. Zuhdi and Ibrahim's favourable organisational position in the IG and their strong individual credentials did not allow them to overcome this ideational barrier. The ideological revisions were a consensual retrospection sufficiently broad to encompass different views and interpretations, as illustrated by Taha (2013) who argues that:

The revisions did not say that fighting was wrong Islamically. In reality, we only defended ourselves against the regime. Then, we reflected on the positive and negative utility (*maslaha* and *mafsada*) of armed jihad, and decided that we could renounce its application when jihad yields more negative than positive outcomes. We stopped armed struggle against the regime, and I do not have a problem with that. What was essentially wrong was that we used violence when we did not have the strength to do so. That is what was agreed upon in the four books. In subsequent meetings and interviews with Egyptian newspapers, the two sheikhs [Zuhdi and Ibrahim] said that fighting was wrong without elaborating further. This is the real reason: the absence of military strength on our side.

Another IG religious figure who opposed the revisions on theological grounds further asserts that:

They [Zuhdi and Ibrahim] said that the leader is Muslim if he says the *shahada*. My personal position has not changed, however. We opposed the leader because he was not committed and did not apply Islamic Law. My position on Mubarak had therefore not changed after the revisions. When I returned

from exile, the Egyptian security services interrogated me. I told them that I opposed violence, which I, in reality, opposed from the beginning of the conflict with the regime. But I also told them that I still opposed Mubarak, and thought that he should be removed from power. I therefore disagreed with sheikh Karam and sheikh Najih on the regime. They did not oppose this regime, and claimed that its policies were reasonable, aside from a few mistakes.

As for the JG, interviews with various leaders reveal that the consensual IG approach was not reiterated. While many JG members independently revised the applicability of jihad in Egypt, they never managed to overcome organisational barriers which impeded collective discussions. The extradition of Sayyid Imam to Egypt in 2006 facilitated the publication of his official renunciations to the applicability of violence (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2007), process which was thoroughly guided by the security services as Imam admitted in an interview after his release from prison (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2013c).

#### **4.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has investigated the construction of the IG and JG' theologico-political frameworks from 1981 onwards. This research has analysed these groups' ideational developments from an organisational angle, and argued that this perspective is the most suited alternative between essentialist and rationalist considerations. This meso-centred approach considers militant groups' ideological construction relationally, in consideration of internal and external developments. Internal interactions refer mostly to militant groups' organisational norms, especially their potentially binding decision making processes. External interactions include these groups' engagements with other actors, as well as their framing contests with widely recognised sources of authority situated in their social movement family.

This chapter has demonstrated that militant groups' ideational construction is constrained by two main factors. The first factor is the *salafi* discursive tradition endorsed by the IG and the JG in their early days. The *salafi* discursive tradition is defined by internally legitimised practices and textual analyses of the Islamic corpus, and by specific analytical concepts enabling the reinterpretation of this tradition over time. These groups' engagement with this tradition has notably shaped their framing contests with their opponents, and informed their decision to target their opponents' political credibility rather than

their theological legitimacy. In addition, while these groups have (partially or comprehensively) revised some of their political positions over time, these reinterpretations have been constrained by the parameters defined internally by the *salafi* discursive tradition regarding, in particular, the excommunication of Muslim leaders who do not apply Islamic law comprehensively.

The second constraining factor is organisational. Militant groups' ideological developments are bounded by these groups' internal dynamics, and by the legitimisation (or absence of) of an internal hierarchy and organisational norms of decision making, which are included in these groups' vertical and horizontal norms. These groups' evolving positions therefore cannot be understood in isolation from the evolution of their internal sources of authority. This chapter contends that individual leaders can evolve for an array of reasons, including individual or group learning processes, changing macro policies towards Islamic groups and external interactions inside a competitive social movement family. At the same time this chapter has demonstrated that the organisational inclusion of these new frames is bounded by these groups' regulatory norms. For instance, a group's leader can individually radicalise his positions, and be simultaneously incapable of diffusing new ideational frames if he feels bounded by internal norms of decision making which do not grant him this prerogative.

In line with the general argument presented in this thesis and with the previous chapter, the organisational norms created in the IG's early days legitimised an horizontal culture of consensus and shared norms of decision making between its leaders, which have not been subsequently opposed in contrast with the organisational predicaments that have repeatedly affected the JG. As a result, the IG has maintained its organisational cohesion and preserved the centralisation of its ideological construction despite challenging geographic divisions. Conversely, the JG has suffered from repeated fragmentation over similar issues, and has frequently split over ideological arguments. From a comparative perspective, the IG and the JG have reacted very differently to similar external constraints.

In this chapter, ideological developments have been studied in isolation from violent and non-violent practices. The following two chapters therefore draw on this analysis, specifically on the study of these groups' organisational evolutions, to investigate these groups' use of violence in the 1990s as well as their non-violent transformation after the 2011 Egyptian uprising.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE ORGANISATIONAL MEDIATIONS OF ARMED VIOLENCE**

We were our own leaders because the security setting isolated us from our leadership. We were pressured by the state and did not want to be incarcerated. The state was carrying out mass arrests and was pressuring and torturing our families to get to us. We needed to act in secret and had two objectives. First, we wanted to survive and needed resources. Second, we wanted to weaken the state. This explains why some of us attacked the tourism industry and the banks. It was the only way. As for the Christians, I don't think we had any connections with that. Those were mostly local family conflicts.

Sa'id (2012), from the Islamic Group

People from our group [the JG] pressured doctor Ayman [al-Zawahiri] to do something for the prisoners. You know, thousands of us had been caught before we fired a single bullet. Ayman was under heavy pressure and that's when we began to use our weapons against targets that supported the state. It was contrary to our doctrine and to the strategy of the military coup which defined us from the beginning, however.

Amr (2012) from the Jihad Group

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

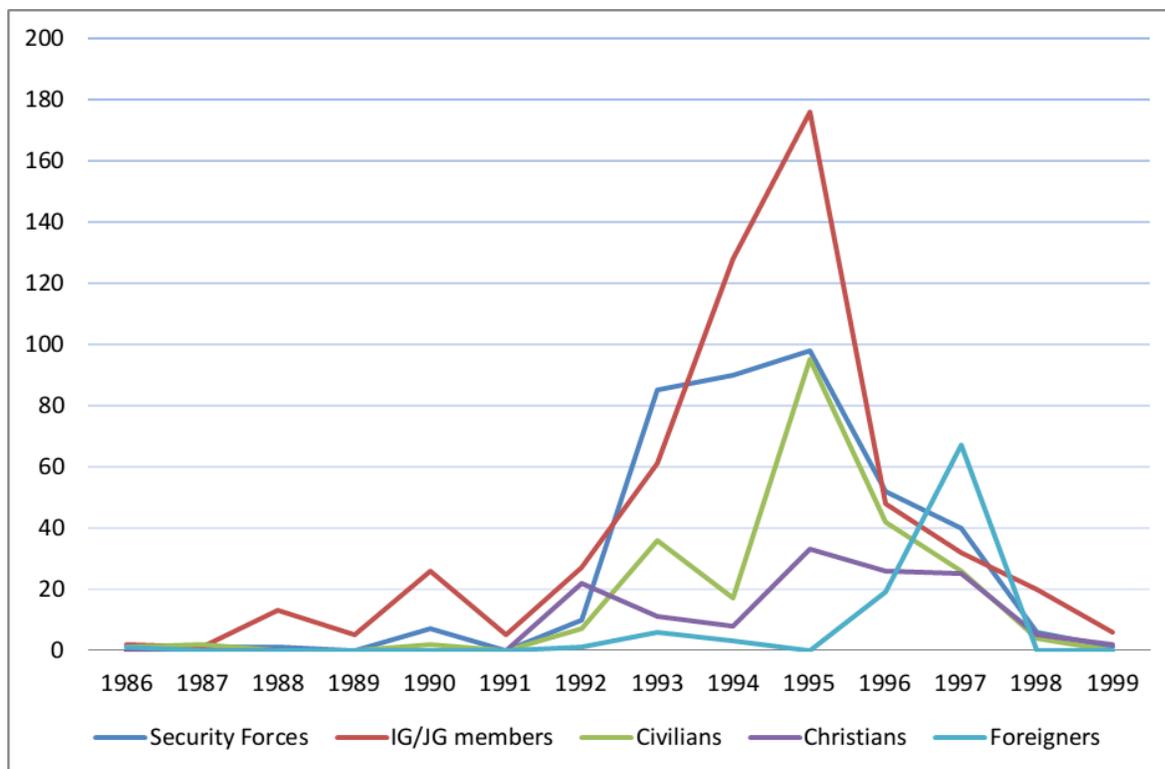
This research has hitherto investigated the Islamic and Jihad groups' differentiated trajectories, and has argued that their early mobilising patterns critically shaped their subsequent organisational evolution as well as the development of their ideological commitments. This chapter follows the same approach, and similarly adopts a contextualised multi-level focus on the meso-level to study the use of violence by the IG and the JG. Considering that the significant developments in the study of violence preclude a thorough treatment of its numerous intricacies in one chapter only, this chapter focuses on the organisational mediation of armed violence, through the investigation of internal dialogues and processes contextualised with evolving state security policies.

This chapter is based on an ontologically inclusive consideration of violent incidents. This analysis includes acts of violence perpetrated by Islamist militant groups, as well as violent acts which were more loosely related to this conflict, such as private skirmishes. This choice is informed by civil war and violent contention studies, which demonstrate that civil conflicts are marked by their ambiguity

and by the “interaction between political and private identities and actions” (Kalyvas, 2003: 475). This corpus notably substantiates that violence is often caused by private issues settled locally in the shadow of a broader master cleavage (Kalyvas, 2003, 2006). It is therefore crucial to question the artificial split between private and political violence and to adopt a broader definition of violent incidents. In Egypt, for instance, local vendettas between Muslim and Coptic families in the South typically epitomised this ambiguity between private and political rationales, as this chapter illustrates.

This research consequently does not utilise the shadowy and sketchy expression “military wing” to describe the perpetrators of violence. This term has rapidly gained prevalence in studies of Islamist armed groups, even though it has often impeded a rigorous understanding of violent contention. This expression presumes a political nature to violent incidents, and is often used by militant groups or by their opponents to exaggerate their strength and looming power. Moreover, this term obstructs the understanding of the organisational construction of these armed networks over time, and encompasses an array of armed organisations and networks that are often barely comparable, ranging from a negligible group of friends to a fully-fledged para-military organisation such as Hizbullah's armed networks in Lebanon.

The historical period included in this chapter ranges from 1981 to 2011. It begins with the incarceration of most of these groups' members and leaders after the assassination of former president Sadat, and ends with the post-2011 uprising. This period witnessed many acts of violence resulting in a number of casualties among security forces, IG and JG militants, civilians, Coptic Christians and foreigners, reported in the following graph:



5.1 Evolution

of the number of fatal casualties between 1986 and 1999<sup>170</sup>

Several analyses have investigated the use of violence by Islamist groups in Egypt with mitigated success. One influential explanation claims that these groups' hostility to the state and to the Coptic minority, magnified by the return of many militants from the Afghan military front, best account for armed contention in the 1990s (Kepel, 2003: 420-453). This study nonetheless examines the IG and the JG as monolithic entities whose actions can comprehensively be deduced from their political ideologies, and fails to recognise that violence in Egypt was primarily driven by local dynamics. A predominant ideational focus fails to explain the geographic peculiarity of violence and its evolution over time. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates that the allegation that returnees from Afghanistan played a crucial role is contested.<sup>171</sup>

A sophisticated rectification argues that violence in Egypt was primarily a reaction to indiscriminate

<sup>170</sup> This introduction presents the data used in this chapter page 153. The quantitative data utilised in this graph are notably drawn from Fahrer (2011: 108).

<sup>171</sup> This perspective is relatively common to explain the use violence in Egypt in the 1990s (e.g. Murphy, 2002), even though returnees were only marginally involved in violent contention in Egypt. This position additionally disregards the factual opposition of the external leadership to the practicalities of violence on the ground, which they believed was detrimental to their groups' objectives.

and reactive state repression combined with political exclusion (Hafez, 2003; Hafez & Wiktorowicz, 2004). These two factors would explain the existential threat experienced by Islamist militants, their rational decision to use violence and the development of anti-system ideational frames. Despite an accurate focus on organisational processes contextualised in a multi-level environment and a laudable endeavour to debunk superficial ideational and psychological interpretations, these studies suffer from several shortcomings. They gloss over diverging IG and JG organisational dynamics, including the evolution of their respective command and control over their followers, and therefore ignore their origins. They deem violence a “rational calculus about tactical efficacy” (Hafez & Wiktorowicz, 2004: 62), yet overlook the evolution of these groups' rationales for using violence in time and space, and the growing preponderance of local dynamics of violence. Moreover, these studies do not investigate internal revaluations of the costs of violence, and are relatively mechanical in their treatment of these groups' ideological constructions and organisational evolution in response to repressive state policies. Finally, they consider state repression wholly indiscriminate and reactive, therefore discounting the temporal and geographical reconsideration of state repression by the authorities from the end of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s.

A recent investigation of the micro sociology of violence in Egypt has explored the evolving interactions between militant groups and their local constituencies (Malthaner, 2011). This research considers the structure of this relationship and its influence on these groups' radicalisation and restraint, positing that militant groups cannot be considered outside of the milieu in which they are embedded. This analysis is particularly convincing in its reintegration of these groups into their social and local settings, and in its dynamic study of local dynamics of violence. Furthermore, this research adequately investigates the evolution of state repression at a local level and its impact on the support relationship between the population and militant groups. As with previous cases, however, this analysis is weaker in its consideration of organisational dynamics (including organisational control over the use of violence) and internal reconsiderations of violence.

Finally, a few quantitative analyses have attempted to explain the evolution of the use of violence in Egypt. Using quantitative methodologies, they have scrutinised the correlation between several socio-economic variables and violent incidents, investigating for instance their geographic location (Fahrer, 2001). This focus on the socio-economic characteristics of Egyptian society informs the elaboration of

generalisable assertions, such as the claim that “high rates of poverty, child mortality, cultural conservatism in terms of low contraceptive prevalence, and greater urban density are more likely to support insurgency” (Jenkins et al., 2014). In addition, quantitative studies examine the dynamic dimension of armed violence, arguing that “parliamentary exclusion, security sweeps, and executions affect the count of attacks along with spatial diffusion from neighbouring governorates” (Jenkins et al., 2014) and that the “combination of political repression and military counter-insurgency measures employed by the Egyptian government has the potential to exacerbate rather than reduce political violence” (Fielding & Shortland, 2010). Quantitative studies, regardless of their strength in analysing societies affected by violence, are much weaker in explaining mechanisms of armed contention and the organisational reinterpretation and mediation of violence over time, which form the central objectives of this chapter.

This literature has considerably enriched the study of violence in Egypt, even though some key themes have been left unexplored. While this scholarship has adequately demonstrated that violence in Egypt is better studied as a multilevel dynamic process, it has hitherto failed to explore the intricacies of militant groups' organisational dynamics. It is therefore crucial to investigate these groups' organisational evolution and uncover their decision making processes and internal dialogues overtime. This perspective can facilitate the study of the modalities, timing, location and discriminating nature of violence. It can also explain why most violent incidents occurred when these groups were paradoxically reconsidering the rationale behind their use of violence.

The following analysis triangulates complementary quantitative statistics on violence in Egypt. The first source is a Ph.D thesis, entitled “The Spatial Patterns of Egypt's Islamist Insurgency” (Fahrer, 2011), which contains an extensive listing of all violent incidents committed between 1986 and 1999 (Fahrer, 2001: 202-226). This source is complemented by the exhaustive chronologies of *The Middle East Journal* during the same period, and by two online database: the Global Terrorism Database of the University of Maryland<sup>172</sup> and the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents of the Rand Corporation.<sup>173</sup> Considering that the first source is more exhaustive and comprehensive than the *Middle East Journal* chronologies and the two databases, this chapter is primarily based on this thesis' data, possibly amended by these additional sources.

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<sup>172</sup> [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/)

<sup>173</sup> [http://smapp.rand.org/rwtid/search\\_form.php](http://smapp.rand.org/rwtid/search_form.php)

## 5.2. A MESO-CENTRED AND MULTI LEVEL STUDY OF THE DYNAMICS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

The academic study of violence encompasses pluralistic approaches characterised by different analytical focuses. They cover successive phases of violence<sup>174</sup> and range from large-N comparative studies based on quantitative methodologies to rich qualitative case study and ethnographic analyses. The following reviews the main perspectives adopted in the literature and advocates for a multi-level disaggregation of the use of violence centred on the IG and the JG's meso-level dynamics.

Early analyses of violence were rooted in psychological studies. Psycho-pathological contributions profiled violent militants to uncover abnormalities, such as mental illness, paranoia and authoritarian personalities.<sup>175</sup> These studies have since been repeatedly dismissed with regards to political violence (Corrado, 1981; Turco, 1987; Post, 1990; Ruby, 2002) and Islamic armed activism (Hafez, 2003; Sageman, 2004, 2008). Scholars generally agree that “the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality” (Crenshaw, 1981: 390).<sup>176</sup> A recent attempt to resuscitate psychological analysis and demonstrate that suicide bombers underwent psychological crises (Lankford, 2013) has been easily dismissed for its failure to tackle the recent literature and for its methodical shortcomings (Moskalenko, 2013; Qamar, 2013).

A prominent approach to the study of violence has investigated several macro factors explaining the development of violent groups. These societies' political, economic and social characteristics have been related to multiple grievances and strains which trigger the mobilisation of aggrieved individuals in violent contention. Political factors include the (il)legitimacy of the state, its relative weakness and the nature of political regimes (Lia & Skjolberg, 2004; Bjorgo, 2005). Relative deprivation theorists (Gurr, 1970) also study economic factors and consider, for instance, modernisation (Bendle, 2003), economic inequalities (Gurr, 2008), rapid economic growth and the presence of scarce (Lia & Skjolberg, 2004) or specific types of resources (Ross, 2003, 2004a, 2004b). The inclusion of societal variables underscore the role of threatened values (Juergensmeyer, 2003) and rapid demographic changes (Crenshaw, 1981; Huntington, 1998; Hudson & Den Boer, 2002), while international factors cover the influence of globalisation, armed conflict, foreign occupation, state sponsorship, interstate conflicts, resource wars

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<sup>174</sup> For general reviews, see also: Lia & Skjolberg, 2004; Bjorgo, 2005; Richardson, 2006.

<sup>175</sup> These analyses are listed by Lia & Skjolberg (2004) and Sageman (2004).

<sup>176</sup> See also: McCauley, C.R. & Segal, E., 1987; Sageman, 2004; Horgan, 2014.

and economic inequalities between states (Lia, 2004; Bjørge, 2005). Macro approaches contend that violent conflicts can be explained by any combination of domestic and international factors. A compelling argument notably suggests that the combination of horizontal inequality between groups aligned along ethno-linguistic differences can explain the inception of armed conflicts (Cederman et al., 2011, 2013; Buhaug et al., 2014).

This corpus nonetheless fails to demonstrate the existence of micro-level mobilising mechanisms and to explain the modalities of violence over time. Hafez (2003) and Wiktorowicz (Hafez & Wiktorowicz, 2005) argue, for instance, that societal cross-comparison does not explain varying levels of mobilisation. They further assert that, in agreement with resource mobilisation theory, the existence of grievances does not necessarily lead to militancy. The social movement approach adopted by these two scholars rather posits that violence is adopted by militant groups believing that they have “no other way out” (Goodwin, 2001).

The main alternative to macro-centred studies focuses on the organisations resorting to armed violence. It notably includes the greed school, whose proponents deny that the existence of grievances explain the development of violent contention, arguing that grievances should be considered a product rather than a cause of violence (Collier, 2004). The greed school uses quantitative methodologies to compare the societies affected by violence and to demonstrate a stronger correlation between greed and rebellion, than between grievances and rebellion. These scholars describe rebel forces as greedy groups driven by the material rewards to be made in civil wars (Collier, 2000, 2008), which allegedly occur when a rebellion is financially and militarily possible (Collier et al., 2008). This perspective has been reiterated by additional scholars who oppose, for instance, the assertion that ethnically diverse societies would be more prone to civil war (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Fearon 2006). The greed paradigm has, however, been contested for its shaky foundations, debatable variables and internal contradictions that lead to the adoption of politically convenient explanations (Keen, 2012; Buhaug et al., 2013). The greed school is also inadequate in explaining the practicalities and timing of violence. It further tends to overlook evolving interactions between rebel groups and their local settings, and between rebel groups and state authorities. Finally, an important contribution to the debate between greed and grievances has focused on militant groups' initial endowments. In contrast with the greed perspective, this study argues that only armed organisations with poor access to external resources can be studied under this

paradigm, which additionally explains their recruitment strategies and use of violence against the civilian population (Weinstein, 2007).

The second organisational approach to the study of militant groups focuses on their external environments, and specifically investigates their interactions with other groups. This perspective contends that the competitive environment in which militant groups evolve has a decisive influence on their practices. They demonstrate, for instance, that the fragmentation of the political opposition combined with internal competition worsens the militarisation of civil conflicts by raising incentives for violence (Zirakzadeh, 2002; Pearlman, 2011; Prince & Warner, 2013). Considering that militant and rebel groups are vying for popular support, they argue that group competition can inform certain patterns of violence and repertoires, such as the resort to suicide bombing to outbid other groups and networks (Bloom, 2004, 2007; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). Competition between armed groups is generally associated with higher level of violence between co-ethnic factions, and against civilians sharing their ethnicity (Cunningham et al., 2012). The evolving distribution of power between militant groups can explain intra-ethnic infighting (Nygard & Weintraub, 2011), as well as group formation and alliances (Christia, 2012) and civil war outcomes (Akcinaroglu, 2012). In addition, the use of violence by militant factions can arguably be explained by the timing and extent of government concessions (de Mesquita, 2005; Stedman, 1997; Goerzig, 2010; Cunningham, 2011). This perspective on violence demonstrates the strength of contextualised relational studies in explaining the timing and modalities of violence.

Recent militant groups' organisational studies have also uncovered their organisational make-up. Rebel groups' organisational features, for instance their level of centralisation, have notably been related to their use of violence and to its efficiency (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Jones, 2008; Enders & Jindapon, 2009; Piazza, 2009; Heger et al., 2012). Armed groups are arguably more lethal when they follow a pyramidal structure with clear command and control, accountability and organisational specialisation (Heger et al., 2012). Conversely, chaotic decision-making processes and operational divisions can facilitate the transformation of militant factions into criminal gangs (Eccarius-Kelly, 2012) and produce extensive variations in repertoires of violence when a group's leadership is unable to impose its preference for controlled violence (Green, 2011). It is therefore crucial to study the combination of internal and external factors regulating militant groups' fragmentation. External factors

include changing economic and political policies (de Mesquita, 2008), while internal factors include the factional nature of rebel groups led by a competing leadership (Asal et al., 2012).

This organisational focus has catalysed the examination of organisational dilemmas and trade-offs affecting militant groups. Shapiro argues that militant group leaders need to supervise the finances of their groups and the execution of military actions (Shapiro, 2013). He contends that this quandary represents a dilemma, considering that financial supervision negatively affects these groups' operational vulnerabilities, and a trade-off between operational security and financial efficiency (Shapiro, 2013). Militant groups' clandestine nature and need for secrecy generates an additional trade-off between operational security and tactical control, which inexorably affects the management of effective violence (Enders & Su, 2007; Enders & Jindapon, 2009; Shapiro, 2013). Decentralisation helps to secure the durability of their networks, and simultaneously affects the optimality of their decisions and the commitment of their followers (Cunningham, 2013). These two trade-offs arise from diverging preferences for violence between these groups' leaders and followers, notably explained by different commitments to the cause, diverging informational access and by the cognitive dynamics of underground organisations (Shapiro, 2013). These divergences are further informed by these groups' evolving membership, reflected for instance in the joining of new individuals prone to armed violence and by the possible survival of risk-averse leaders (Shapiro, 2013). These organisational perspectives demonstrate that militant groups face extreme difficulties balancing organisational security, operational efficiency and control.

Finally, organisational dynamics and macro parameters being considered, recent developments in the study of violence in civil wars have stressed the necessity to explore micro-dynamics of violence. This research agenda was significantly influenced by Stathis Kalyvas' seminal modelling of the micro-foundations of violence in civil wars (Kalyvas, 2006). Kalyvas has developed a sophisticated theoretical model to relate the changing nature of incumbents and insurgents' sovereignty over territories to their use of selective and indiscriminate violence against civilians. He specifically analyses the fragmentation and segmentation of these actors' sovereignty, and its influence on the collaboration and defection of civilians. Kalyvas' model explains why most violence is paradoxically not committed on the front lines, but in territories marked by the overlapping control of insurgents and incumbents. This emphasis on the micro-foundations of violence is particularly adequate to

demonstrate the importance of changing patterns of control over the populace, and to investigate the evolution of micro-level dynamics of violence. Kalyvas posits that many instances of allegedly indiscriminate violence cannot be considered truly indiscriminate. He demonstrates, for instance, that in Algeria many massacres were not as indiscriminate as sometimes assumed and followed a strategy designed to punish collaborators and deter civilians from defecting to the incumbent (Kalyvas, 1999).

This academic corpus demonstrates the necessity to study the use of violence by non-state armed actors as the outcome of multi-level dynamic processes. As emphasised by Kalyvas, recent theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of violence suggest that several dimensions of violence should be disaggregated: spatial (including subnational disaggregation), temporal, level of analysis (micro, meso and macro), the actors themselves and the recognition of the broad strategic options available (Kalyvas, 2010). This research therefore strives to uncover organisational processes in a multi-level environment in order to investigate the evolving use of violence by the IG and the JG, in Egypt and abroad.

### **5.3. ESCALATING POLICING OF PROTESTS AND THEIR ORGANISATIONAL MEDIATION**

The previous chapter demonstrated that IG and JG prisoners who were loosely associated with the assassination of Anwar Sadat were gradually released by the authorities by the end of their three year trial in 1984. It also established that the IG's ideological construction occurred mostly in prison under the direction of its newly constituted "historical leadership", while the JG only partially clarified some of its ideological tenets due to organisational obstacles. This chapter stressed that newly released prisoners still believed in the same strategic vision, the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt, even though their tactical approach varied substantially after their failure to unite under a central leadership. The IG believed in mass mobilisation and in the socialisation of a new generation, whereas JG leaders loosely associated with the network responsible for Sadat's assassination decided to revive their older tactical choice, and subsequently left Egypt for the Afghan war front to reorganise their group and undertake military training.

This section argues that the cycle of contention that started in 1986-1987 was paradoxically not triggered by these groups' commitment to overthrow the regime. The following analysis rather demonstrates that this cycle of violence was sparked by new practices in the Egyptian policing of

protest, and by the decision of the Minister of Interior Zaki Badr to face Islamist militants in the streets of the country. This section additionally establishes that changing macro policies do not suffice in explaining evolving patterns of violence, and argues that it is crucial to comprehend both their evolving organisational mediation and interpretation by these groups' members and leaders, and the latter's changing preferences for the use of violence against the state.

Despite these groups' hostile position on Hosni Mubarak's regime, interviews with their respective leaders reveal that they were not preparing for a short-term military deflagration by the end of the 1980s (Hafez, 2013; Taha, 2013; Na'im, 2014). Their organisational developments confirm that these groups were not actively training their members or planning any armed attack in the short-term, claims further substantiated by the absence of any violent incident between 1984 and 1986. The following analysis of the post-1986 cycle of contention demonstrates that these groups' leaderships merely reacted to the unfolding events, and gradually adapted their positions based on their changing perceptions of new state policies.

Before the beginning of the cycle of contention, the IG and the JG pursued different endeavours. The IG focused on its organisational expansion, which started in 1984 when its historical leadership delegated newly liberated members to reconstitute the group in the South of Egypt. IG leaders intended to reconstitute their group and to rebuild its foundations, which were shattered by post-1981 waves of arrests. The IG managed to quickly recover from post-1981 losses, and to expand its organisational presence in most of the South of Egypt. This rapid expansion was facilitated by the new political environment and by Mubarak's conciliating position, which initially favoured a non-confrontational posture.<sup>177</sup> An IG member who was not jailed in 1981, argues that:

We were very weak after the arrests in 1981. Those who were not caught shaved their beards and disappeared. It only became easier when our leaders were progressively freed from detention [after 1984]. We were not planning to confront the state, even though we believed that our final objective was the creation of an Islamic state. Personally, I wanted to free Jerusalem and thought that only a strong Islamic state would lead to this outcome. We did not have any presence in Cairo but we intended to expand there at some point.

This organisational expansion was not reiterated by the JG, which did not mobilise publicly through

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<sup>177</sup> Chapter 6 expands on this theme. See also Hafez (2003).

low-risk activism mobilising patterns. The JG stayed faithful to its secret and elitist endeavour, while internal divisions at the leadership level prevented the creation of sustainable social networks in Egypt. JG disorganised and loosely connected cells could not directly benefit from the relatively liberal political environment, and newly freed members and leaders preferred to leave the country instead. Many departed to the Afghan front, following pre-1981 suggestions that they should undertake military training to prepare for the future. The main cell, associated with Ayman al-Zawahiri, was temporarily coordinated by Nabil Na'im (2014) who testifies that:

The Afghan plan was just our project [this JG faction]. By 1985, Ayman was outside of prison and we all agreed that we should all go to Afghanistan. We thought that we needed to acquire military training so, when I was freed from prison, I only stayed a few months in Egypt. Then, I went to Afghanistan and prepared the travel of many Egyptian fighters there. I can recount that I helped at least 300 Egyptians get to the Afghan front.

The informal truce between these groups and the state was broken by the arrival of a new Minister of Interior, Zaki Badr, who reached this position in 1986 after unprecedented riots shook the regime (involving more than 25,000 disgruntled members of the low-paid security forces) (Sirrs, 2010: 162-163). The regime thenceforth enacted a two-track policy, consisting in the adoption of Islamic symbols while simultaneously repressing Islamist militants.<sup>178</sup> Badr harboured a strong animosity towards Islamist militants due to his background; he came from Upper Egypt and had already cracked down on the IG several years before, when IG leaders tried to take over the Southern city of Asyut after Sadat's assassination. Badr disagreed with his predecessors' accommodating policies and was determined to confront the Islamist opposition with a heavy hand (Abdalla, 1991). A diplomat commenting on Badr's policies asserted that "the instinctive response of the security people is not to do any investigative or police work, but just to pull the book out and round up the first 500 names and start roughing them up" (Kifner, 1987). Badr, speaking about the Islamist opposition (including the MB), was also widely quoted as saying that: "I want to kill only one percent of the population".<sup>179</sup>

Badr was adamant in his opposition to the IG's expansion and in his intention to face the group's members and sympathisers in the streets of the country. According to multiple reports authored by Human Rights centres, newspaper articles and the previously mentioned data, this new policy

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<sup>178</sup> *New York Times*, 4 April 1997.

<sup>179</sup> *New York Times*, 4 April 1997; Murphy, 2007: 78.

precipitated multiple clashes throughout Egypt, located primarily around IG affiliated mosques which were increasingly besieged by the security forces. Between 1986 and 1989, eighteen IG members died in these confrontations, in addition to three JG members killed in separate incidents. On the other hand, only two members of the security forces were killed by independent JG cells. The fifty-two violent occurrences were geographically located primarily in the South of Egypt and in Cairo and its Giza suburb, according to the following statistics:

Governorate	The Delta	Cairo and Giza	Upper Egypt	Total
1986	1	1	5	7
1987	4	6	3	13
1988	0	13	8	21
1989	0	3	8	11
Total	5	23	24	52

5.2 Geographic location of all recorded incidents between 1986 and 1989<sup>180</sup>

This new policing of protests focused initially on IG affiliated mosques, and targeted their members and sympathisers. These security measures should not, however, be solely analysed through their timing and intensity, as previously posited by Hafez (2003). Social movement theorists contend that political opportunities and policing of protests are not independent factors studied outside of their subjective construction and interpretation by social movement actors (e.g. Kurzman, 1996, 2004; Alimi, 2007). A closing of political opportunities combined with state repression is a dynamic process interpreted by militant groups' leaders, and mediated by these groups' internal organisational dynamics. The analysis of their impact should therefore simultaneously investigate IG leaders' perceptions, contextualised with their degree of command and control over their followers. IG leaders' changing positions on the ground are presented by Rifa'i Taha (2013), the IG leader outside of prison:

We became progressively threatening for the state. We had strong words in the mosques against the regime and many people followed us for this reason. The regime started to block our mosques and to set up police barricades around them. The security forces did not penetrate the mosques, however. They would just arrest a few brothers for short periods of time. Sometimes, some of our members would be killed by the regime, but these actions were unplanned. For example, a policeman killed Sha'ban Rashid while he was preaching. The interior minister did not plan it and a communiqué from the presidency denounced it and apologised. The policeman was judged and sentenced to seven years in jail. We wanted him to be executed but, still, we did not retaliate. Then we thought that because we did not retaliate, the state believed that we were scared and that the security forces could kill more IG members. Six months

<sup>180</sup> Data drawn from Fahrer (2001: 120).

later, they killed another preacher, Sayyid Taqi al-Din and they did not apologise. It became a normalised, acceptable policy for the regime. So the brothers wanted to do something. Then Muhammad Qutb was killed. Some of us said that we had to be patient and argued that we were not ready. The state increasingly assaulted us and our mosques. We had to deal with this new reality and do something. We did not want to face the state, but the regime was looking for a confrontation.

Taha illustrates the changing perceptions of the ground leadership, which enforced its opposition to the immediate use of violence against the state. Taha's assertion reveals that the continuation of a leadership on the ground muted internal calls for revenge, even though some IG militants already wanted to face the security forces. Conceivable differences of opinion over the most appropriate use of violence, which are common between militant group leaders and followers (Shapiro, 2013), did not initially alter the group's general restraint, in contrast with subsequent developments. IG leaders understood that premature use of violence would give the state free rein and threaten the group's achievements, as had been the case in 1981 after Sadat's assassination. IG leaders initially managed to enforce their early opposition to armed violence.

The IG leadership appreciated the need to protect the group's long-term objectives, and discerned the possibility to exploit an environment favourable to its expansion despite the growing pressure exerted by the security services. The initial repression indeed occurred in a favourable socio-economic environment since, by the end of the 1980s, the Egyptian government was pressured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to undertake structural economic reforms and adopt macro-economic adjustments. These measures weakened the foundations of the welfare state established for the past three decades (Gunning & Baron, 2012: 92), and worsened the economic situation of the population which relied most on the socio-economic assistance of the state. This gloomy socio-economic deterioration was particularly resented in the *'ashwa'i* neighbourhoods of Cairo (Gunning & Baron, 2012: 142), defined as the informal suburban communities such as Imbaba and 'Ain al-Shams where the IG established its organisational foundations to escape the security services in the South of the country.

The IG benefited from these new macro-economic policies and from the spatial, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of these informal neighbourhoods (Ismail, 2000) to embed itself in Cairo and to mobilise new supporters. The IG's expansion was notably facilitated by the congruence and resonance

of the group's practices with older social modes of organisation (Ismail, 2006b), exemplified for instance in the reminiscent model of the *futuwwa*<sup>181</sup> (Haenni, 2005), and by a milieu generally receptive to the group's Islamic message (Malthaner, 2011: 199).<sup>182</sup> The IG became a dominant social force which gradually provided the population with direct assistance that the state was unable to provide due to macro-economic reforms. In addition, the IG exploited these neighbourhoods' spacial structures, which were not easily accessible to the security forces (Ismail, 2006b: 92), to replace “traditional layers of control and mediation” and mediate local conflicts (Ismail, 2006b: 100). Its members gathered popular support by opposing local gangs that proliferated by the end of the 1980s (Haenni, 2005: 23). The IG took advantage of its antagonistic position against the regime (Ismail, 2006b; Malthaner, 2011: 121) and from the relative discrediting of the Muslim Brotherhood, which participated in parliamentary elections that the IG denounced as a façade and a legitimising tool for the regime. The rapid IG expansion was facilitated by a combination of a deteriorating socio-economic macro environment, local environmental conditions and organisational abilities and resources. The IG was able to create vertical ties to the population (Staniland, 2014), and to appear as a credible alternative to the regime.

In these conditions, state policies were relatively counter-productive during the first few years of contention. The embeddedness of the IG in the *'ashwa'iyyat* and its provision of various forms of assistance nourished the sympathy of the population, which considered that the IG was a victim of state oppression and therefore sided with the group when riots first erupted in 'Ain al-Shams in 1989 (Malthaner, 2011: 145-146). Moreover, detaining IG members similarly failed to achieve its intended objectives. As mentioned earlier by Taha, detention was not dissuasive and rarely exceeded three months in the first few years of the conflict. Prison was often used to reinforce the ties between the detainees and their leadership (Haenni, 2005: 95-96). A former IG member and current political analyst, Maher Farghali (2014), confirms that:

The IG benefited a lot from the pressure of the state initially. The population expressed their solidarity with them and their members when the security forces targeted them. IG sympathisers and members would also be jailed for only two or three months while the conditions in prison were still relatively good. IG members therefore benefited quite substantively from their incarceration and from this collaboration with their leaders in jail.

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<sup>181</sup> In Egypt, the *futuwwa* were local leaders which often mobilised popular forces against Egypt's central administration and regulations.

<sup>182</sup> See also Mubarak (1995) and Wickham (2002).

This episode demonstrates that, at the beginning of the cycle of contention with the state, the IG's organisational make-up and the group's relative centralisation around local leaders helped to take advantage of the deteriorating environment and of the closing of political opportunities in Egypt. The presence of relatively strong leaders on the ground prevented a reiteration of hasty actions against the state, which sharply contrasted with rebellious JG cells.

In contrast with the IG, the focus of the main JG cell on jihad in Afghanistan combined with acute internal divisions prevented this group from exploiting the new Egyptian setting in a similar way. In the JG, the cycle of contention rather stimulated the micro-level mobilisation of many individuals loosely affiliated with the group. These individuals had often been caught in the conflict between the IG and the state, and suffered from indiscriminate arrests of Islamist militants. These networks were not centralised around a central leadership and hierarchical structure, as in the IG, and mostly converged upon geographic areas. Their members revolved around the belief that they had to retaliate against the state and the security services. Mahmud (2012), a member of a cell which subsequently became affiliated with the JG, mentions that he mobilised through local connections and asserts that:

There were many small groups in different parts of Egypt at that time. We were mostly united by two issues, *al khuruj 'ala al-hukam* [toppling the leaders of Muslim countries who do not apply Islamic law comprehensively] and the defence of Muslim lands.

Another *jihadi*, Amr (2012), who was caught in the *talai 'al-fath* networks,<sup>183</sup> testifies that:

I became convinced by the legitimacy of jihad in 1986 and I had no relations with other groups. By the end of the 1980s, there were many different small *jihadi* organisations, sometimes with just a few members. At that time my activities were not military, however. I was mostly preaching.

The adoption of a confrontational position vis-à-vis the state occurred at an individual level and through personal connections (Amr, 2012; Mahmud, 2012; Sadiq, 2012). These groups were often isolated from one another, and motivated by their personal experiences in the on-going contentious conflict with the state. The absence of socialisation with a formalised and organised group, as in the IG, explains their tactical preferences for immediate actions, as opposed to the development of a long-term approach. It also contextualises their fragmentation and ambiguous organisational belonging, with many JG members being frustrated at the failure of its leadership to act against the state. In turn, many

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<sup>183</sup> Cf pages 176-179.

of these isolated cells decided to strike back and to selectively attack those they deemed responsible for their arrests and for gruesome acts of torture committed against them.

Some of these underground organisations distinguished themselves with sporadic and localised acts of violence, which the IG initially managed to prevent. Two groups, later referred to as *al-shawqiyyun* and *najimun min al-nar* (the returnees from hell-fire) by the media,<sup>184</sup> were specifically involved. These two armed networks were organised around limited geographical networks and were acting in isolation. The first group was led by Shawqi al-Sheikh, a man formerly affiliated with the JG who radicalised his religious views and took distance from the latter, according to JG leaders. Shawqi opposed the government and increasingly excommunicated outsiders as well (Munib, 2009: 95-99). The two main operations of the *shawqiyyun* targeted two Lieutenant Colonel Ahmad 'Ala and Muhammad 'Awda, who were both deemed responsible for targeting Islamist opponents and for acts of torture committed against detainees. Similarly, the group later denounced under the name *najimun min al-nar*, hailed from a limited geographic area and was led by a former JG associate, Majdi Safti, who similarly took his distance from the latter (Munib, 2009: 92). In 1987, Safti's group organised a few targeted operations against two former Ministers of Interior, Hassan Abu Basha and Al-Nabawi Isma'il, and a journalist considered close to the government, Mukarram Muhammad Ahmad. Other targeted attacks were also orchestrated by some individuals who suffered from the security services, such as the killing of Lieutenant Colonel 'Issam Shams by Muhammad Ahmad, after being tortured by the latter in prison, according to Ayman al-Zawahiri in his memories (al-Zawahiri, 2010: 90-91).

These attacks were marked by their selectivity, the desire for immediate action of their perpetrators and the absence of a broader strategic vision. These militants did not attack unaffiliated civilians, Coptic Christians or foreign tourists, who were only caught in the armed contention subsequently. Rather, they selectively targeted those they considered responsible for their direct suffering. These cells' religious ostracism, stressed by JG leaders themselves, did not prompt them to condone indiscriminate actions. These cells' preferences for armed violence were not dissimilar to early calls for retaliation among IG members. The main difference between these armed networks and the IG was the early maintenance of a stronger organisational structure in the latter, which initially prevented IG members from following a similar route.

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<sup>184</sup> Even though these groups never referred to themselves with these names.

Eventually, while the IG prison leadership did not condone the use of violence against the state until 1989,<sup>185</sup> its members decided to imitate these armed cells and to orchestrate the targeted assassination of the Minister of Interior Zaki Badr. This decision was informed by three developments. IG followers on the ground increasingly expected their group to retaliate against unanswered state provocations and not to give *carte blanche* to the security forces to kill IG members in impunity. In addition, imprisoned IG leaders resented the competition of small *jihadi* cells, which were retaliating against the state and its agents while the IG was idle. This competition is usually referred to as the outbidding thesis, which suggests that militant groups vying for recruitment, mobilisation and prestige might resort to similar repertoires to outbid one another (Bloom, 2004, 2007; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). Finally, the IG realised that they needed to establish some deterrence against the state. The first planned armed attack was decided in prison by the historical leadership of the group and not, contrary to what has sometimes been alleged, by its external leadership in the Afghan Pakistan border area, which in fact opposed it. According to the IG leader abroad, Rifa‘i Taha (2013):

After some time, the leaders in prison demanded the killing of the interior minister Zaki Badr from our members outside of prison. This operation was not consensual among us. Mustafa Hamza was outside of prison and opposed it for instance. The *majliss al-shura, qiyadat al-tarikhiya* (the historical leadership) of the group ordered this operation, which failed. It was against our views outside, including me, ‘Abd al-Akhr and Muhammad Shawqi [al-Islambuli].

Another IG leader adds that:

The leadership in prison accepted some limited operations but not all of them. From their point of view, they thought that they could launch one operation against one individual. They killed us so we kill one of them. Then we can establish some deterrence, which would then pave the way to bilateral negotiations and to the acknowledgement of our right to preach in public. You know, we always need something to negotiate. We need to change the balance of power.

Farghali (2014), who was in Egypt, similarly argues that:

A decision of this importance could only be taken at that time by the historical leadership in jail in coordination with the leadership outside of prison, notably Tal‘at Yassin Hamam. The leadership thought that they would benefit from this operation. They ordered a car bomb assassination but the operation failed.

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<sup>185</sup> See also al-‘Awwa (2006: 113).

This first staged armed retaliation against the state was therefore ordered by the prison leadership, which delegated its undertaking to second tier IG commanders. This decision marked “the activation of militant networks” (della Porta, 2013: 113-145) by the IG in specific macro and meso contexts.<sup>186</sup> Organisationally, it is important to note that local commanders still enjoyed strong ties to their prison leaders. They joined the IG many years before the contentious conflict and had long been socialised with this group's leadership. Mamduh ‘Ali Yusuf, who was a prominent member of these armed networks, reflects on the group's early military vision (al-‘Awwa, 2006: 125):

Our idea was not to kill for the sake of it, or to kill somebody merely because of his support for the regime. My idea was that we could only kill the one who is responsible for the killings. We only intended to kill Badr, and no one else. We were not targeting the Minister of Information or the Prime Minister. We only set out to kill the one who leads the battle against us.

Selective violence was not the only repertoire of contention used by members of the IG at the time. The deterioration of the socio-spatial environment of the *‘ashwa’iyyat* (the informal neighbourhoods) and the gradual fragmentation of the IG leadership, precipitated by the exile and imprisonment of many leaders, damaged the relationship between the IG and the local population (Malthaner, 2011). Increasingly, less disciplined IG members and sympathisers applied the group's religious doctrine, *al-hisba* (translated usually in the application of the good and the prevention of vices), in their neighbourhoods. These acts of violence appeared at the beginning of the contentious conflict, as early as 1986 in the South, and later spread to Cairo. They consisted of local attacks against mixed-sex celebration, storming of video clubs and attacks against alcohol selling (Haenni, 2005). These incidents proliferated as the group became increasingly fragmented, which reinforced the importance of marginal IG figures such as the much-publicised sheikh Jaber of Imbaba.<sup>187</sup> Unaffiliated youth inspired by this confrontational environment also contributed to these security infringements, and felt empowered to follow their lead. For instance, a declassified report of the American embassy in Cairo mentions an informal discussion between an American representative and a local IG leader, who recalls that he met a few teenagers in jail who bombed a video shop, arguing that they “wanted to do something for Islam”

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<sup>186</sup> Considering that this network only perpetrated one attack before the imprisonment of exile of most of its members, it would be exaggerated to assert that this decision marked the foundation of the IG's so-called “military wing”, as sometimes argued (e.g. ‘Awwa, 2006: 119)

<sup>187</sup> Jaber is often mentioned in the literature as an IG leader, or as the IG *amir* or even military leader. According to field research, he never actually reached prominence in IG ranks. The IG second-in-command, Osama Hafez (2013), describes him as a simple electrician who was never part of the group's leadership.

(Berger, 2007: 183). The IG prison leadership was informed of these violations early on and opposed it from the beginning. They released a tape to clarify the contradictions between the *hisba* doctrine and these violations, but the difficult coordination and maintenance of a tight control over their followers prevented them from ceasing these violations (al-‘Awwa, 2006: 116). According to several interviews, local followers had a different appreciation of the IG ideological corpus and wanted to impose their own religious understanding in their neighbourhoods. According to Farghali (2014):

The local leadership saw religion as comprehensive, including teaching, preaching, the application of good and jihad. This is what differentiated our group from the MB. We could not separate religion and our practice at a local level.

The IG second-in-command in prison, Najih Ibrahim (2012), adds that:

The contention over *hisba* started when it spread outside the universities. Inside the universities in the late 1970s, we were all students and there was still some *adab* (manners). No families and no weapons were involved, so that *hisba* could be controlled. When it spread outside, however, it faced multiple types of opposition, from the security forces and local families. Moreover, other people joined our forces. They were not always *mukhlisin* (sincere), and some of them were hypocrites. This setting generated small killings, controversies and clashes and the practice generally produced *mafasiid* (corruption).

Between 1989 and 1990, many incidents driven by local dynamics of violence similarly proliferated throughout the country, located primarily in Cairo and in the South of the country. Congruent reports mention the multiplication of local clashes between families and Islamist supporters for an array of reasons, ranging from local tensions based on sectarian rumours between Muslim and Coptic families to personal acts of revenge.<sup>188</sup> Whereas twenty-eight people were killed between 1986 and 1989, (including twenty-five Islamists), thirty-four individuals died in 1990 alone (including twenty-six Islamists). Half of these deaths occurred in April and May in al-Fayyum, when local rumours triggered local clashes and the subsequent intervention of the security forces. These deaths were caused by a tense sectarian environment and were not directly informed by specific decisions of the IG local or prison leadership. They were precisely rendered possible by the latter's loss of control over certain geographic areas.

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<sup>188</sup> Multiple newspaper reports a few rumours spreading between the Coptic and Muslim communities, such as rape, sexual harassment or simply friendly acquaintances between opposite sexes from different communities (e.g. Stokes, 1990; Jehl, 1997), Coptic Christians allegedly spreading a special product on Muslim girls' clothing to display a Christian cross (Sammakia, 1991) and the poisoning of vegetables by the other community (Hemady, Z., 1993).

Independently of the cycle of contention, internal and external frictions around the ministry of interior incidentally changed the course of the conflict with the Islamist opposition. The outspoken Minister of Interior Badr domestically antagonised all political forces (including government supporters) with politically hostile positions and his failure to end the conflict. His sharp criticisms against pro-government newspapers specifically marginalised him and justified his replacement by ‘Abd al-Halim Musa in January 1990. Musa appeared to be more reasonable with the political opposition and was praised for reversing his predecessors' policies (Podeh, 1996). He notably claimed that he would review political prisoners cases, and open dialogue with the Islamists. Despite these favourable signs, however, the turning point in the cycle of contention between the state and Islamist militants occurred only a few months later when, on October 12, the security services allegedly killed the IG spokesman, ‘Ala Muhi al-Din. To this day, the security services and the political authorities have not accepted their responsibility for this assassination. Even though one could speculate that Musa organised this operation while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability, his political choices and the lull preceding this operation indicate otherwise.<sup>189</sup> It is more likely that Musa's policies and the forced resignation of Badr did not satisfy hard-liners in the Ministry of Interior or in the security forces, who staged the targeted assassination of Muhi al-Din in response. The true responsibilities are analytically irrelevant in this case, considering that IG members held Musa responsible for Muhi al-Din's death. According to most IG leaders and members, this killing represented a turning point in their understanding of the conflict. An IG commander argues that:

We wanted to retaliate before the assassination of Muhi al-Din, but we were still patient. We felt oppressed but we did not react. The killing of Muhi al Din changed the game, however. By targeting our leaders, we thought that the state wanted to destroy us.

IG members viewed this assassination as a precipitating event, which Crenshaw defines as “specific events and external circumstances that provoke emotions of despair, rage, or vengeance” (Crenshaw, 2007: 19). The peculiarity of this assassination was reinforced by Muhi al-Din's moderation in the IG (‘Awwa, 2006: 121), and by his opposition to the military direction taken by the conflict (al-‘Awwa, 2006: 132). The significance of his assassination was not lost on IG followers, who did not accept to remain passive. Moreover, the IG organisational setting contrasted with the relative control previously

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<sup>189</sup> According to previously mentioned statistics, there were nearly no armed clashes during this time frame, apart from the sectarian skirmishes in April and May 1990.

enjoyed by the prison leadership. When Muhi al-Din was killed, in October 1990, many IG leaders were exiled or behind bars, and restrictions on prison visits impeded the containment of the military escalation. Moderating voices were silenced by the assassination of a moderate leader, and the secondary leadership took the lead. Remaining group members believed that their end was coming,<sup>190</sup> and an IG network planned the assassination of the Minister of Interior to retaliate against the killing of the group's spokesman. According to Farghali (2014):

The secondary leadership was leading at that time. They thought that the killing of Muhi al-Din meant that the state wanted to get rid of them. They decided to put an end to this and to retaliate by killing the Minister of Interior. Their objective was to reach a position where they would be able to negotiate with the security forces.

A network composed of second-tier IG members decided to assassinate the Minister of Interior 'Abd al-Halim Musa, even though this assassination attempt failed to achieve its intended objective. Musa was absent from the convoy in which he was supposed to travel, which unexpectedly carried the parliamentarian spokesman, Rifa'at al-Mahjub, who was killed the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1990. While the targeted operation against the previous Minister of Interior Zaki Badr was ordered by the prison leadership, the second tier leaders who executed al-Mahjub recognise that this new assassination was the product of their own understanding of the conflict, when they thought that the state had decided to eliminate them (al-'Awwa, 2006: 132-134). This assassination attempt marks the second stage of the contentious conflict with the state, towards increased militarisation accompanied by the decentralisation of the IG decision making process.

#### **5.4. ORGANISATIONAL DISINTEGRATION AND THE MILITARISATION OF THE CONFLICT**

Four years after the beginning of the contentious conflict, the IG organisational structure disintegrated outside of prison. The decision of the second tier IG leadership to start a tit-for-tat escalation with the security services prompted the imprisonment of this network's leaders, including Mamduh 'Ali Isma'il and Sawfat 'Abd al-Ghani, and the exile of others, such as Mustafa Hamza. These leaders were subsequently replaced by third and fourth generations IG members who had not been socialised with

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<sup>190</sup> If the previous assertion on Muhi al-Din's assassination is true, it would mean that state authorities had not necessarily decided to eliminate the IG in October 1990. This would further justify this thesis' argument that political opportunities and state repression cannot be understood solely by their objective content, but need to be understood through their subjective interpretation by social movement actors.

the group's leadership, had a different understanding of the group's ideological tenets (al-'Awwa, 2006: 133), and did not maintain the same level of organisational coordination. The strong vertical ties uniting the IG leadership to its followers were severed, and the group became increasingly divided on the ground.

This generational change had a tremendous influence on the militarisation of the conflict. The activation of militant networks and the legitimisation of selective violence by the central IG leadership paved the way for an expansion of the range of acceptable targets after the successive departures of prominent and second-tier IG leaders. Statistics on violence and IG's claims of responsibilities indicate that the use of violence and its targets significantly increased between 1991 and 1993. While violence initially targeted successive heads of the Ministry of Interior, denounced for their responsibilities in the conflict, the range of acceptable targets expanded subsequently. Lower-ranking individuals affiliated with the IG issued communiqués against tourism in Egypt in 1992, and attacked tourist convoys shortly thereafter even though initial attacks rarely resulted in fatal casualties. These actions were geographically centred in the South of Egypt and in Cairo, according to the following statistics:

	Security Forces	IG/JG members	Civilians	Christians	Foreigners	Other
1991	0	5	0	0	0	7
1992	10	27	7	22	1	11

### 5.3 Fatal casualties between 1991 and 1992<sup>191</sup>

Governorate	Delta	Cairo / Giza	Upper Egypt	Total
1991	1	2	4	7
1992	3	7	37 (incl. 26 Asyut)	47

### 5.4 Geographic location of all fatal casualties between 1991 and 1992<sup>192</sup>

The expanding range of acceptable targets and the discrepancies between the preferences of a militant group's leadership and its followers have been explained in the literature by divergent understandings of the political impact of their actions, the joining of a new generation more prone to resort to violence and by the cognitive dynamics of underground organisations (Shapiro, 2013: 45-47).<sup>193</sup> In this case, these discrepancies are mostly explained by diverging political understandings of the benefits of and rationale for violence, and by waning internal coordination and organisational control. The role of cognitive dynamics in the underground only appeared subsequently. The first armed attacks ordered by

<sup>191</sup> Data drawn from Fahrer (2001: 108).

<sup>192</sup> Data drawn from Fahrer (2001: 120).

<sup>193</sup> Similar dynamics have also been studied in ETA and the Shining Path, cf. Zirakzadeh (2002).

the prison leadership were mostly motivated by their desire to dissuade the state from repressing their group and to alter the balance of power. Then, the second IG generation retaliated for the assassination of their spokesman, and attempted to dissuade the state from eliminating them, fearing that a final decision to eradicate the IG had already been taken by the authorities. In both cases, the selective nature of these attacks signalled that IG leaders were not necessarily looking for an uncontrolled military escalation. The next generations had, however, a different understanding of reality. Subsequent assassinations encompassed broader targets considered enemies of the group and supporters of the regime, often accompanied with a stronger religious framing. While only a dozen Egyptians were considered Islamically lawful targets by the IG leadership, this new thinking justified the broadening range of legitimate targets by the new generations. This tactical change contextualises IG members' rationale for attacking two leading Egyptian intellectuals, Faraj Fawda in 1992, and Naguib Mahfouz in 1994. According to another IG commander (2013):

Faraj Fawda was killed because he incited violence against us, so we wanted to eliminate him. The decision was taken in prison. I asked a second generation leader who was involved in this decision why we killed Fawda. He said that it was better to kill him back then than to wait for him to become a minister. As for Naguib Mahfuz, the initial plan was to kill someone from the political police (*amn al-dawla*). But some of the youths revived an older plan and the network responsible for the killing of Fawda attacked Mahfuz later on. They were by themselves, though, and this operation was not decided by the central leadership. They thought that they could specialise in these killings. Personally I opposed it. Mahfuz was a voice of reason, unlike Fawda.

A senior IG leader, Osama Hafez (2013), nonetheless asserts that Fawda's assassination was carried out without direct orders from prison. Hafez's version is substantiated by a member of Fawda's assassination network, Abu al-'Ala 'Abd Rabbo, who additionally insists on his religious rationale for carrying out this assassination ('Abd Rabbo, 2012). 'Abd Rabbo argues that there is a consensus among the 'ulama' that apostates can be killed in Islam, pointing out to the blasphemies allegedly committed by Fawda.<sup>194</sup> Whether the assassination was ordered by senior IG members in prison or without direct instructions, the discrepancies between the arguments presented by the IG commander and 'Abd Rabbo validate this section's argument. These differences specifically demonstrate that IG members had diverging rationales for using violence. Senior members had a strategic and political understanding while, for lower members, religious justifications were more preponderant.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> The lawfulness of the assassination of an apostate in Islam was a central theme in its perpetrators' trial.

<sup>195</sup> While it could be argued that senior IG members are currently using a political rationale to legitimise this assassination,

Declining internal organisational control after the incarceration and exile of second tier leaders further exacerbated internal debates on violence and its legitimacy at a local level. Local IG members and leaders assert that they had diverging preferences over the most suited approach to the conflict, and add that organisational impediments prevented internal discussions and the elaboration of a consensual tactical and strategic vision. According to a local IG figure in Aysut, Saleh Muhammad Ahmad (2012):

We all had our own thinking on the ground. Some of us wanted to use violence, while others did not and strongly opposed the military direction taken by the conflict. We were not coordinated, however, because of the security situation and the difficulty to communicate.

Social movement scholars additionally argue that state repression can discourage moderate members from further involvement in contentious conflicts, or radicalise their views (della Porta, 2013: 67). In Egypt, these two phenomenon were reinforced by the resignation of local IG members and leaders who were not solely shocked by state repression, but also disapproved of the evolution of the violent practices of fellow IG members. The deterioration of the security environment and the absence of internal discussions inexorably reinforced the proponents of violence, and marginalised IG members opposed to the militarisation of the conflict. Several testimonies recount that many people opposed to the military direction taken by the conflict left the group (Haenni, 2005; al-‘Awwa, 2006: 133-134), disturbed by the discrepancies between their group's ideological tenets and its practices on the ground. Others simply took their distance without formally severing their ties to the IG. These departures excluded IG members who could have exercised internal control and convinced proponents of violence to revise their views. A former IG member who split from the group for this reason, mentioned in another interview (al-‘Awwa, 2006: 134) that:

I took my distance from them [the IG] when the ideas they preached differed from their local practices. Their literature needed religious scholars and educated individuals with a high level of understanding and awareness to apply it on the ground. But these individuals were not any more those we saw around us. At the beginning they were realistic [IG members] and under the control of their leaders. Then they became their own leaders and they decided who was a Muslim and who could be killed after the arrest of their true leaders and the exile of others

The militarisation of the conflict combined with the absence of internal organisational control and with

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another commander's version relates to an argument that was internally discussed by the IG in prison.

the departure of moderating figures exacerbated the use of violence at a local level as well. Many clashes were reported between local gangs and IG members, as well as inside the IG for the direction of the local leadership (Haenni, 2005: 39). Local dynamics of violence and the violent opposition of families, clans and gangs intensified local armed contention, altered the social environment<sup>196</sup> and exacerbated the use of weapons at a local level, especially in the South, even though “firearms and ammunition certainly flooded the *Sa‘id* [Upper Egypt]” before the conflict (Toth 2003: 562). The absence of organisational control over IG militants facilitated an escalation unrelated to the accomplishment of any tactical or strategic objectives.

In one specific instance, a local confrontation between two families was aggravated by this tense societal milieu. In spring 1992, a local quarrel over land between a Muslim and a Coptic family in the region of Dairut (South of Egypt) was exacerbated by the affiliation of one member of the Muslim family to the IG. The local vendetta between these two families, which was reminiscent of “this region’s “tribal” practice of seeking revenge for the dishonour of family members [...] as old tribal vendettas, long [antedated] the rise of Islamic militancy” (Toth 2003: 562; see also Malthener, 2011), degenerated into a violent confrontation. Dozens were killed, including an array of Coptic Christians killed by friends of the Muslim family, fellow IG members. In contrast with traditional clashes, the joining of local IG members violated the “traditional rules of vendetta”, and ushered previously unknown levels of violence (Malthener, 2011: 152-153). This incident illustrates the growing confusion between local identities and the master cleavage, already stressed in this chapter's introduction (see also Kalyvas, 2006). While many Muslim perpetrators were IG members, they did not target the Coptic Christians on behalf of their group, but as friends of the Muslim family. Interviews with IG members and leaders (e.g. Hafez, 2013) confirm that they were caught unprepared by the unfolding events, which resonated strongly in the Egyptian Coptic Christian population. These local skirmishes had henceforth been interpreted as evidence that the IG was targeting them. It reinforced their fears, even though Christian casualties hitherto resulted only from local unpredictable confrontations rather than from organised and premeditated targeting.

The collapse of security at the local level eroded the popular support previously enjoyed by the IG, especially in the *‘ashwa‘i* neighbourhoods of Cairo (Malthaner, 2011), and, at a macro level, this

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<sup>196</sup> On this issue, see also Wood (2008).

environmental evolution affected state policies towards the IG and bolstered the proponents of a decisive obliteration of the group.

The deterioration of the security situation was particularly grave in the informal neighbourhood of Imbaba in Cairo. By 1992, a combination of several factors deteriorated the relationship between the IG and the population mentioned previously. At a leadership level, most senior leaders had been imprisoned or exiled, and were subsequently replaced by a new generation. Former offenders arguably increasingly joined the group to alleviate the pressure on them and to benefit from a support group (Haenni, 2005: 36). These two factors aggravated the use of violence and intensified local extortions against the population. IG members became increasingly perceived as a source of violence, a feeling which was further fuelled by their repeated attempts to impose their norms and moral order in their neighbourhoods (Malthaner, 2011: 145-148). While the population initially sided with the IG when its members were perceived as victims of indiscriminate state repression (Malthaner, 2011: 145-146), the collapsing security environment raised the cost of supporting IG members in their fight against the state, and locally de-legitimised their group.

At the international level, the outset of the Algerian civil war likely raised the fears of the security leadership of a similar scenario in Egypt, and reinforced the views of the hard-liners.<sup>197</sup> Eventually, when a local IG leader declared that Imbaba was comparable to an Islamic republic, the authorities invaded the neighbourhood with 16,000 members of the security forces and arrested a thousand suspects on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1992 (Buccianti & Francis, 1992).

The IG prison leadership realised that they had lost control over their members, and that this new setting was threatening the group's survival. While they legitimised the use of violence against the Minister of Interior to restore the balance of power and dissuade the state from attacking their members, they subsequently appreciated that violence was becoming increasingly indiscriminate and counterproductive to the group's objectives. Their isolation in prison prevented them from contacting their members and, according to several prison leaders, the leadership took advantage of the liberation of a leading member, Osama Hafez, to convince their followers to refrain from violence.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> In the beginning of the 1990s, the Egyptian security services were collaborating with their Algerian counterparts, with a notable focus on the presence of Algerian and Egyptian Islamists in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Sirrs, 2010: 166).

<sup>198</sup> See also this chapter's next section.

The exacerbation of the tensions throughout the country nonetheless obstructed Hafez's mission. After 1992, the state radicalised its approach to Islamist militancy and resorted to military tribunals to chase and judge Islamist sympathisers. Human Rights reports document that the new hard-line approach included far-reaching preventive arrests and death sentences passed on detainees. They additionally report that the security services kidnapped many family members of alleged IG militants, including eight-year-old children (Human Rights Watch, 1994, 1995). Wives of IG militants were beaten in prison, sexually molested and threatened with rape in front of their husbands and other prisoners. This evolution is analysed more fully in the next section. Suffice it to say here that this security setting and the isolation of the militants underline the difficulties faced by Hafez in meeting and engaging in dialogue with IG militants.

This deteriorating environment and the evolution of the cycle of contention eventually affected other militants who were caught in the conflict between the state and the IG. The JG was particularly affected by these developments, which incidentally coincided, in 1992, with the dawn of the Afghan civil war. This setting contextualises the return of many JG militants from the Afghan front. Egyptian fighters had to escape the Afghan-Pakistan border region since they refused to participate in the Afghan civil war, and were additionally pursued by the Pakistani authorities on the other side of the border.<sup>199</sup>

Many separate networks affiliated with the JG leadership in the Afghan Pakistani border therefore appeared in Egypt. Ayman al-Zawahiri recognised this diversity in an interview, and asserted that the networks later referred to in the media as *talai' al-fath* (the vanguards of conquest) were affiliated with his leadership (al-Zawahiri, 1993).<sup>200</sup> Hani al-Siba'i mentions that the first network was based in Cairo and its suburbs, whereas the second main network was based in Alexandria under the leadership of Ahmad 'Ashush, and was called *al-tali' al-salafiya* (the *salafi* vanguard) (al-Siba'i, 2002: 22-24). Most of their members were isolated from one another for security reasons, and only had a loose understanding of the broader plan of the JG leadership (al-Siba'i, 2002: 22). A prominent leader of these networks in Egypt asserts that:

We might have appeared as distinct organisations for security reasons and because all our members did not know the full extent of the network. We were nevertheless united behind our leadership abroad. One

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<sup>199</sup> The last section of this chapter expands on this theme.

<sup>200</sup> In the same interview, al-Zawahiri denies that other factions, including a so-called *hizballah* (no connection to the Lebanese group), were affiliated with the JG.

thousand one hundred people were affiliated with *al-tali*. We can nevertheless say that only 50 or 60 possibly went to Afghanistan to fight.

While most acts of violence committed by the IG were the product of the gradual isolation of its central leadership and of its replacement by third and fourth generation leaders, the use of violence by the JG answered a different logic. These actions were initiated by the arrest of up to a thousand members of JG affiliated networks in successive waves of arrests organised by the security services in 1993. Prominent group members, including Majdi Salem, were arrested and accused of plotting against the state and coordinating with their leadership in Afghanistan to engage in violent contention in Egypt. These arrests occurred in the context of a broader conflict between the state and the IG, which explains the rationale of the security services to engage in preventive arrests. They were additionally facilitated by the retrieval of a JG member's computer, which contained an extensive listing of the group's infrastructure in Egypt.<sup>201</sup> The JG was caught off guard. Most of its members were arrested and its networks were dismantled before the JG perpetrated any act of violence.

This unprecedented setback galvanised young group members, and explains their desire to retaliate against the state. This issue divided the group outside of Egypt, and reinforced emerging divisions caused by the radicalisation of Sayyid Imam's theology.<sup>202</sup> According to al-Siba'i, a faction led by Ahmad 'Agizah in the Sudan and composed of the new JG generation opposed older cadres and denounced their reluctance to engage in violence in Egypt (al-Siba'i, 2002: 28). These youths were disturbed by the JG's absence of reaction and the group's failure to resolve this disagreement consensually triggered their departure.

This episode contributes to the previous discussion on internal divergences over the appropriate use of violence. JG leaders and their younger followers had a different understanding of the rationale for violence and of the consequences of hasty and unprepared attacks. Older members and leaders appreciated that an impulsive reaction contradicted the group's strategy and its long-term objectives to infiltrate the army and topple the regime from within. They learnt from the repercussions of Sadat's assassination in 1981, and were reluctant to repeat the same strategic mistake. Conversely, younger

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<sup>201</sup> The security services did not focus specifically on this group beforehand, considering the weakness of its networks in Egypt and its focus on Afghanistan.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. chapter 4 page 142.

members were infuriated and wanted to take revenge and express their solidarity for the prisoners. These contradictions substantiate that internal dynamics and different rationales for violence unresolved in a cohesive organisational structure prevailed, in this case, over the consideration of intergroup competition, which posits that militant groups competing to achieve similar objectives often attempt to outbid one another by resorting to specific repertoires of violence (Bloom 2004, 2007; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). The JG did not resort to violence for fear of losing popular support in favour of the IG, but for distinctive internal and external reasons.

Al-Zawahiri, the *de facto* JG leader in light of the leadership fragility of *de jure* leader Sayyid Imam, was faced with two main challenges. He was pressured by his followers to launch armed operations in Egypt (al-Siba'i, 2002: 31), and realised that his failure to do so could threaten their commitment to the group, his sway over the leadership and the JG's unity. According to a member of the *tali' al-fath* networks, Amr (2012):

People from our group pressured doctor Ayman [al-Zawahiri] to do something for the prisoners. You know, thousands of us had been caught before we fired a single bullet. Ayman was under heavy pressure and that's when we began to use our weapons against targets that supported the state. It was contrary to our doctrine and to the strategy of the military coup which defined us from the beginning, however.

Moreover, al-Zawahiri was also externally pressured by Osama bin Laden and needed to restore the JG's credibility. The arrests were indeed partially caused by the detention of a prominent JG member, Majdi Salem, and by the killing of the driver of a car stolen by JG members. Witnesses argue that bin Laden was perplexed about al-Zawahiri's abilities, and expressed his doubts about the JG's potential as a militant group. According to an associate of al-Zawahiri and a JG leader in Egypt, Na'im (2014):

We had more than one million Egyptian pounds so why would you steal a car? All of the organisation was uncovered and caught because of this failure. Dr Ayman wanted to improve the image of the organisational externally and internally. Osama bin Laden told Ayman, so you created an organisation to steal a car? Ayman decided to retaliate with a big operation, the assassination of the Minister of Interior, but the operation failed.

This time frame was critical to al-Zawahiri and to the JG. The group's leadership was divided and challenged internally and externally by these waves of arrests. It needed to respond, even though a response could be detrimental to the group's long term objectives. Al-Zawahiri orchestrated a few

limited operations and activated a militant network to assassinate the Egyptian Minister of Interior Hassan al-Alfi in August 1993 and the prime minister 'Atef Sidqi in November 1993. Both operations failed, and the two ministers survived the assassination attempts. Al-Zawahiri later strived to legitimise their validity and to demonstrate that these operations were congruent with the group's long term objectives, even though his justifications were relatively feeble (al-Zawahiri, 2010: 89-112). According to another JG leader:

The JG organised two armed operations against ['Atef] Sidqi and [Hassan] al-Alfi and Dr Ayman announced his responsibility very clearly. We wondered in jail who was responsible, and initially doubted our group's responsibility. Yet, when Ayman announced his responsibility, we accepted it. It was a logical reaction. We were oppressed and many were sentenced to death. It was a reaction to the situation.

These two operations did not accomplish their intended objectives. They marginalised the JG as a result of the killing of one teenager during one of the assassination attempts, and sparked a considerable backlash against the group in the public opinion. This embarrassment additionally triggered internal organisational turmoil. The *de jure* JG leader, Sayyid Imam, blamed al-Zawahiri and branded the group he hitherto led a deviant group (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1994). Imam later claimed that al-Zawahiri was operating on behalf of the Sudanese intelligence (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2008). Other prominent JG members, such as Nabil Na'im (2014), initiated internal revisions of their views and support for armed violence in Egypt in consideration of these aborted assassination attempts. Differences in tactical preferences over the use of violence worsened previous organisational fragmentation.

## **5.5. ORGANISATIONAL ENCAPSULATION AND THE LOGIC OF SURVIVAL**

The last time frame covers the armed confrontation between remnant IG networks and the Egyptian security services between 1993 and 1997. This phase was primarily located in the South of Egypt and featured most potent acts of violence according to the statistics previously mentioned. It resulted in the death of nearly 1300 individuals (90% of the total number of victims), and in the arrest of tens of thousands of IG militants and sympathisers. Despite the high number of casualties, these violent actions should not be conflated and different patterns of armed violence should be differentiated, based on their selectivity, location and timing, and in contextualisation with the IG's organisational configuration. The following graphs introduce the timing of these fatal casualties and the location of all violent incidents:

	Security Forces	IG/JG members	Civilians	Christians	Foreigners	Other	Total
1993	85	61	36	11	6	7	206
1994	90	128	17	8	3	1	247
1995	98	176	95	33	0	0	402
1996	52	48	42	26	19	1	188
1997	40	32	26	25	67	1	191
1998	6	20	4	5	0	0	35
1999	1	6	0	2	0	0	9
<b>Total</b>	372	471	220	110	95	10	1278

#### 5.5 Fatal casualties between 1993 and 1999<sup>203</sup>

	Delta	Cairo / Giza	al-Fayyum	Beni Suwayf	al-Minya	Asyut	Suhaj	Qena	Aswan	Total
1993	8	38	2	1	1	67	2	10	12	141
1994	4	18	0	1	43	56	10	18	4	154
1995	7	77	2	6	144	10	6	12	1	195
1996	2	6	1	2	55	15	7	1	0	89
1997	2	3	0	2	25	6	1	5	0	44
1998	0	0	0	0	12	1	1	0	0	14
1999	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	24	77	18	18	288	197	32	54	19	769

#### 5.6 Geographic location of all recorded violent incidents between 1993 and 1999

The main argument developed in this section is that the disintegration of the IG's organisational infrastructure after 1992 eliminated remaining internal organisational control (with one localised exception) and reinforced local dynamics of armed violence. Third and fourth IG generations increasingly perceived the conflict as an existential fight for survival, explained in political violence studies by the concept of encapsulation, which posits that “organisations become increasingly compartmentalised and closed to the outside” and can “escalate their forms of violence, moving toward the use of lethal and sometimes indiscriminate violence” (della Porta, 2013: 150). These organisational dynamics were sustained by the rural characteristics of the Southern regions, where the IG had historically built stronger social networks and ties with the population. This section suggests that the micro foundations of violence lays in the deterioration of the support relationship between these cells and the local population (Malthaner, 2011), and in these militants' fight for survival against local collaboration with the security services in the absence of centralised organisational IG control.

This section demonstrates the existence of two main patterns congruent with Kalyvas's study of the micro foundations of violence (Kalyvas, 2006). In the two successive epicentres of violence, in the

<sup>203</sup> Data drawn from Fahrer (2001: 108).

districts of Asyut and al-Minya,<sup>204</sup> the IG began with strong local grounding and support. IG members' initial embeddedness in these communities facilitated the selective targeting of the security forces and of their local collaborators. Then, the selective use of violence against these limited targets triggered uncontrolled cycles of familial vendetta which, combined with tighter state control and more selective patterns of repression, changed the tides against IG cells. These developments gradually isolated IG members from the population, who were increasingly considered the main reason for the growing use of violence at a local level and could no longer maintain order and security. The cost to be paid for supporting the IG increased and the population switched side against the group, which ultimately hindered the collection of accurate information on collaborators and on the security forces. This critical change subsequently accounts for the expanding use of indiscriminate violence against mostly Coptic Christians and the tourism industry, designed to punish the state by targeting the former for their alleged association with the regime and the latter for its prominent role in the Egyptian economy. This analysis illustrates the peculiar geographic setting of violence, and explains why most acts of violence occurred when the IG prison leadership was negotiating with the state and reconsidering the utility of violence. This explanation additionally dismisses possible alternatives, including the role of splitting factions and spoilers, as sometimes suggested in the literature on political violence (Stedman, 1997; Greenhill & Major, 2007).

IG militants used violence in the South of Egypt as early as 1986, even though its intensity only worsened after 1992. The shift from Cairo to the South of the country can be traced back, according to field interviews and primary data on violence,<sup>205</sup> to the previously mentioned clashes between local Muslim families and Coptic Christians in the district of Dayrut in 1992. These skirmishes, which started as a local quarrel between two families, rapidly triggered a logic of vendetta. Thousands of soldiers were deployed in May 1992 to prevent an aggravation of the security breakdown and to impose local curfews. The presence of the security forces was resisted by IG members, and the local quarrel escalated into armed clashes between IG members and the security services throughout the South of Egypt, while the sectarian nature of local confrontations between Muslims and Coptic Christians aggravated further. The proliferation of armed confrontations in the South was incidentally reinforced by the storming of the IG stronghold of Imbaba in 1992, which ended the group's significant local grounding in the country's capital and reinforced the transfer of its remaining forces to the South of the

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<sup>204</sup> Between 60 to 80% of all recorded incidents occurred in these two regions between 1993 and 1999, cf. graph 5.6.

<sup>205</sup> Hafez, 2013; Farghali, 2014. See also Fahrer (2001: 133).

country.

The relocation of violent contention to the South of Egypt was accompanied, by the end of 1992, by the decision of the Egyptian authorities to replace civilian tribunals with military trials. This decision epitomised the state's new Iron fist policy, which had been repeatedly denounced by international and Egyptian Human Right organisations and foreign governmental reports in the beginning of the 1990s (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995b, 1995c). These organisations increasingly blamed the Egyptian government for resorting to military courts and endorsing the death penalty against Islamist militants.<sup>206</sup> They vilified ubiquitous cases of torture in Egyptian prisons and castigated the security services for threatening family relatives of detainees with rape, including a seventy-year-old woman (Human Rights Watch, 1995). In one case, a boy as young as eight year old was kidnapped, according to Human Rights Watch, which argued that these practices were “undoubtedly [...] sanctioned, if not ordered, at a high level within Egypt's security apparatus” (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

The geographical transfer to the South of Egypt combined with reactive and indiscriminate state repression has to be organisationally contextualised as well. The previous section demonstrated that the IG prison leadership realised by 1991-1992 that violence was counterproductive, and that they were losing control over their followers. The latter were initially composed of second generation IG members and, after their incarceration, of third and fourth generations IG members. While the IG's early focus was limited to state figures associated with repression, the range of acceptable targets later included the tourism industry as well. After 1992, this organisational fragmentation was aggravated by the geographical relocation to the South, and was further catalysed by the regime's Iron fist policy. The member of an armed IG network, Sa'id (2012), affirms that:

We were our own leaders because the security setting isolated us from our leadership. We were pressured by the state and did not want to be incarcerated. The state was carrying out mass arrests and was pressuring and torturing our families to get to us. We needed to act in secret and had two objectives. First, we wanted to survive and needed resources. Second, we wanted to weaken the state. This explains why some of us attacked the tourism industry and the banks. It was the only way. As for the Christians, I don't think we had any connections with that. Those were mostly local family conflicts.

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<sup>206</sup> Human Rights Watch (1993) mentions that at least 10 people were legally executed between 1992 and 1993.

The IG prison leadership attempted to regain the initiative and reassert its control over their followers after 1992. The previous section mentioned that they benefited from the liberation of a prominent leader of the group, Osama Hafez, to disrupt the cycle of violence and convince IG members and sympathisers to refrain from undertaking further military actions. According to Hafez (2013):

In 1991, we attempted to contact people outside but the conditions in prison hindered our collective efforts. The main opportunity materialised when I was liberated shortly after. My mission was to visit local districts where violence was spreading and to stop it. I managed to reach a few places but the prevailing setting in other areas combined with the pressure of the security services prevented me from achieving the same outcome.

Statistics on violence confirm that Hafez managed to curb violence in areas under his control, and to stop the cycle of violence and vendetta. His organisational control was specifically noticeable in the region where he hails from, in al-Minya, where violence virtually ceased in 1993. This temporary lull is interestingly unexplained in a doctoral study of the geographical diffusion of violence in Egypt, unaware of these organisational dynamics, which asserts that it is “is remarkable [...] that al-Minya experienced so little violence” (Fahrer, 2001: 125) at the time. Hafez's organisational control lasted from 1992 to 1994, when he was re-imprisoned by the authorities.

This episode upholds the assertion that the IG prison leadership was eager to contain armed violence while negotiating with the state.<sup>207</sup> For the civil war literature, this episode additionally suggests that the micro foundations of armed violence should reconsider the inclusion of organisational dynamics as scope conditions. While Kalyvas's model of local dynamics of violence in civil wars (Kalyvas, 2006) elucidates the subsequent evolution of violence in the South of Egypt, the following analysis demonstrates that the temporary lull in al-Minya suggests that this model only applies, in this case, due to the inability of the IG leadership to reassert its organisational control over the group's members. It could therefore be suggested that this model would have been less relevant had the IG leadership managed to maintain a tight command and control on the ground. This episode further corroborates previous inferences that the IG leadership and its local members had diverging preferences over the appropriate use of violence, hailing from different understandings of the conflict.

According to Hafez, the security setting around Asyut prevented him from reaching IG members and

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<sup>207</sup> The previous chapter indeed mentioned that the IG was negotiating secretly with the authorities in 1993.

from imposing the same organisational control on the use of violence in this region. This area therefore witnessed most acts of violence in Egypt between 1992 and 1993, according to diverse statistics on violence. Human Rights Watch report that 164 people were killed between March 1992 and June 1993, including 65 IG militants and 39 policemen (Human Rights Watch, 1993). More than two-thirds of the victims hailed from the IG and from the security services.

In the region of Asyut, the IG initially enjoyed strong popular support. Asyut had long been an IG stronghold from the 1970s onwards, and its leaders historically managed to build strong vertical ties with the population over the years. As in Cairo's informal neighbourhoods, the IG provided significant local assistance to the population which was receptive to the group's opposition to the government. The development of the South had indeed long been neglected by state policies (Fandy, 1994), which inexorably reinforced the resonance of the IG's antagonistic message. The group's popularity and organisational strength were substantiated by its control over a large number of mosques, and by its substantial presence in some neighbourhoods.<sup>208</sup> The IG demonstrated its strength during massive annual collective prayers traditionally organised in public for the two 'aid festivals (the two 'aid being the two official Islamic celebrations).

Asyut was locally affected by the diffusion of violence after the Dayrut clashes between Muslim and Coptic families, that Hafez was not able to contain as he previously mentioned. The IG was thenceforth not locally centralised. Its members were acting on their own, and were both isolated from other regions and detached from their central leadership. According to a local IG leader in Asyut, Saleh Muhammad Ahmad (2012):

We had no relations with the historical leadership at that time. They were just people we saw sometimes on TV, but nothing more than that. They may have heard of me because of my health conditions, but nothing more.<sup>209</sup> People were acting at a very local level. We did not have a military wing. Sometimes this expression was used by some of us to appear as more threatening than they were, or by the media to attack us and gather public support against us. This nonetheless did not reflect reality. Some of our youths had weapons, but there never was the level of coordination and sophistication that we often read in the media. Most armed attacks were actions of vendetta and vengeance.

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<sup>208</sup> According to interviews and primary and secondary sources. e.g. Bari, 2003; Hafez, 2003; Malthaner, 2011: 150-151.

<sup>209</sup> Saleh was released in 1998 for his deteriorating health conditions. He remained on a wheeling chair thereafter. Saleh passed away in 2013.

The first phase of policing of protest and state repression in Asyut, during the first half of 1993, was violent and indiscriminate. The security services reiterated the approach they formerly endorsed in Cairo, which similarly reinforced the popularity of the IG on the ground (Malthener, 2011: 155). At the beginning of the cycle of contention, IG members were widely perceived as victims of state repression and alleged persecution of the security services. Their popularity and this general setting is confirmed by numerous testimonies from security officials who lamented the absence of collaboration, and claimed that strength of the IG at a local level prevented them from undertaking selective arrests. Malthener mentions numerous testimonies of police officers deploring the passivity of the population, and the reluctance of the locals to denounce IG members despite large sums of money promised to potential collaborators (Malthener, 2011: 155).

The use of violence by the IG began with selective actions committed against local security forces and their collaborators, in addition to ongoing vendetta opposing IG members and Coptic families. These developments substantiate that violence was mostly selective in this region. Selective violence was designed to punish collaborators and deter the civilian population from collaborating with the security services. This pattern is congruent with Kalyvas's theoretical model of collaboration and control in civil war settings, which posits that a substantial control exerted by militant groups in a certain geographical area is associated with lower levels of violence and with the use of selective use of violence against local collaborators (Kalyvas, 2006). In this case, the targeting of collaborators was facilitated by local support and by the provision of information on collaborators by the population. In addition to this selective and limited violence, local vendetta between IG followers and Coptic Christians and multiple attacks against foreign tourists followed a comparatively indiscriminate logic.

This setting was altered in the following months by two main developments. Selective acts of violence perpetrated by IG members reinforced local dynamics of vendetta, whereby families of suspected collaborators killed by IG members would retaliate against their alleged perpetrators. The IG's local grounding was additionally affected by the development of sectarian clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians, which were locally blamed on the IG. The combination of these two patterns of violence increased the cost of support for the IG. As in Cairo's neighbourhoods, while the IG was initially praised for its provision of local support to the population and for the security provided by its members against local gangs, the development of uncontrolled spirals of violence between the group

and local families changed the status quo that prevailed hitherto. The IG was no longer considered a source of stability and social support against an unjust state; the group gradually appeared as the main cause of the deteriorating security environment for its implication in local clashes and family vendettas. The cost of support for the group therefore increased, and the population started to side against the group when, incidentally, the state changed its approach to Islamist militancy.

This substantial evolution occurred in parallel with changing policing of protest, which became more selective and less indiscriminate. According to an array of observers and testimonies, the security forces changed their approach to armed militancy, and decided to target IG members more selectively in the second part of 1993 (Malthaner, 2011: 156-157). This new selective repression was facilitated by the declining local support for the IG, which eased the collection of accurate information about its members and facilitated individual arrests. This local evolution is, again, congruent with the predictions of Kalyvas' model on the micro foundations of violence. According to recorded statistics on the use of violence as well as multiple qualitative evidences, violence became more indiscriminate and increasingly targeted public places, despite its cost and counterproductive nature. Kalyvas explains this development by armed groups' failure to get accurate information, and by their endeavour to deter and punish the population for collaborating with the authorities (Kalyvas, 2006).

By mid-1994, a combination of state repression and switching population alliance contributed to the cessation of violence in the region of Asyut. The epicentre of violence was later transferred, for the next few years, to other regions in the North and South of Asyut, especially around al-Minya which became the main refuge of escaping IG members. The relocation of violence in al-Minya was organisationally rendered possible by the arrest of Osama Hafez, who maintained a strong organisational control hitherto. His departure eroded internal organisational control and unleashed local dynamics of violence previously witnessed in Asyut. For the next three years, this cycle of violence became increasingly brutal, with an estimated number of 881 people killed, especially in Abu Qirqas and Mallawi. This significant figure should not conceal, however, the existence of diverging patterns of violence.

Violence was triggered, according to most reports and testimonies, by the killing of a local preacher affiliated with the IG, Rajeb 'Abdul-Hakim, in June 1994. This assassination unleashed a cycle of violence between IG followers and the security services which followed two successive patterns. The

first types of killings followed a rational strategy of punishing collaborators and the security services while deterring civilian defection, as Kalyvas noted in Algeria (Kalyvas, 1999). This pattern is substantiated by a high number of casualties among suspected collaborators and the security forces. Curfews imposed on this geographic area combined with the dismantlement of IG networks and the cycle of vendetta sparked by selective assassinations precipitated the retrenchment of surviving networks, and in increasingly indiscriminate attacks against Coptic Christians and tourist convoys.

During the first phase of conflict, an expanding number of collaborators and security forces were locally killed. These assassinations were committed by IG members who benefited from local collaboration with the population, which initially sympathised with them (Malthener, 2011: 160-161). A policeman recalls the initial reluctance of the population to provide information about IG members, lamenting that “people here are very negative [...] we wish they would tell us about the hideouts of the militants” (Malthener, 2011: 161). These assassinations were widely covered by press reports which confirm these killings' selective nature. Policemen assert that they retrieved lists of alleged collaborators to be killed by IG militants, and many press reports mention that victims of assassinations were accused of collaborating with the police and killed for that reason (Agence France Presse, 1994). Local witnesses confirm the selective nature of the killings, affirming, for instance, that “the IG can assassinate or liquidate anyone who helps the police - the IG have liquidated no fewer than 40 people in Mallawi in the past four months” (Fisk, 1995b). IG's communiqués congruently emphasise the selective nature of their attacks against the security forces and their local collaborators. For instance, they claimed that “at the start of 1995 and with the backing of our people in Mallawi, our *mujahedeen* fighters carried out the 'law of talion' against 15 criminals of the security forces” (Agence France Presse, 1995).

The fight for organisational survival explains this selectivity. Targeted assassinations of alleged collaborators and security forces by IG members are not unique to al-Minya, and are consistent with the micro foundations of violence in civil wars model presented throughout this section. They notably support Kalyvas's study of violence in Algeria, which establishes that targeted assassinations are a rational answer to a specific setting consisting of a fragmented rule, civilian defection towards the state and a local escalation of violence (Kalyvas, 1999). Harsh state repression and systematic torture undoubtedly explains the fears of the militants to be arrested and their choices to frustrate repeated

attempts of the security services to capture them with the help of local collaborators, by deterring the latter.

In the second phase of conflict, the state successfully isolated these geographical enclaves and imposed a tighter security control. According to many reports, a combination of curfews and replacement of local paramilitary forces by thousands of soldiers enforced the local dominance of the security forces and confined remaining IG networks. The security forces benefited from the deterioration of the relationship between the IG and the population, substantially exacerbated, as in other areas in the past, by the logic of vendetta spurred by selective assassinations of alleged local collaborators (Malthener, 2011: 161-164). In congruence with previously analysed patterns in Cairo's neighbourhoods and in Asyut, IG members became embroiled in violent feuds with local families whose members were killed for collaborating with the state, and resorted to unprecedented levels of violence (including decapitations) to dissuade further defection to the state (Malthener, 2011: 162-163). These developments isolated the group and turned the population against its members, who were deemed responsible for local conflicts. By switching sides, the population started to provide more accurate information on IG members who, in turn, exacerbated their resort to armed violence against the locals, which ultimately reinforced their collaboration with the security services. Surviving IG militants subsequently had no choice but to escape and hide in remote and inaccessible areas, notably in the cane plantations which existed around these villages. Many newspaper articles report systematic campaigns to eradicate these plantations to uncover militant hideouts, which caused dozens of deaths among IG members (e.g. Fisk, 1995a; Abdel Lattif, 1997b).

This time-frame marked the expansion of indiscriminate attacks against Coptic Christian civilians and the tourism industry. While Coptic Christians were previously targeted in local and family vendettas, or during targeted killings of collaborators, subsequent patterns of violence became increasingly indiscriminate. The isolation of surviving IG networks and their inability to selectively target the security forces and local collaborators sparked a short-lived campaign of punishment against this population and against foreign tourists, for their indirect association with the regime. For instance, IG members reportedly attacked a Church and killed nine Coptic Christians on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1997 (Abdel Lattif, 1997a). One month later, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1997, they ambushed other Coptic civilians and killed nine of them, in addition to four Muslims (Jehl, 1997). A researcher asserted that

“the militants have been hit hard by the Government [...] but they have compensated by hiding out and then staging heavy strikes, either a high-profile ambush or now by targeting the Copts” (Jehl, 1997). By the end of 1997, these attacks reached an unprecedented level of indiscriminate violence.

The most infamous armed attack orchestrated by IG militants occurred in this context, and subsequently marked the group's history in public opinion although it occurred in a very specific setting which does not epitomise this group's use of violence. On November 17 1997, six IG affiliated militants organised an armed assault against Hatshepsut's Temple in Luxor. More than sixty individuals were assassinated in the next few hours, including fifty-eight foreigners, in addition to the perpetrators who died subsequently. This attack followed a ceasefire declaration by the IG prison leadership, in the summer of 1997. The discrepancy between an unprecedented armed assault against foreigners and the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire raised many speculations that this assault would have been ordered by the IG external leadership to disrupt the ceasefire initiative and thwart potential negotiations with the security services. This unsubstantiated allegation notably claims that the responsibility lies in al-Zawahiri, from the JG, who would have allied with Rifa'i Taha and Mustafa Hamza from the IG against the will of their prison leadership (Wright, 2006: 256-258). While the role of (internal and external) spoilers has been evidenced in many conflicts (Stedman, 1997; Greenhill & Major, 2007), an isolated focus on the political rationale of militant groups' leaders which neglects the broader dynamics of armed contention previously analysed obscures, in this case, an accurate understanding of this onslaught. This armed attack was actually consistent with the increasingly indiscriminate attacks targeting foreigners before the ceasefire initiative, which corroborates the repeated denials of responsibility by the external IG leadership and dismisses the external spoiler's theory.<sup>210</sup> The rationale of the perpetrators conforms with Kalyvas's explanation of indiscriminate attacks, and can be interpreted as their desire to punish the state and those considered its supportive forces in an environmental context where these cells were isolated, chased and lacking local support.

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<sup>210</sup> The IG's external leadership denounced this attack shortly after. The spoiler theory has been arguably substantiated by Rifa'i Taha's initial public support for the attackers. Taha, and other leaders who discussed this issue with him at the time nonetheless all consensually agree that this support merely reflected Taha's solidarity for IG members, and never implied that Taha orchestrated this operation. Taha's public support critically divided the external IG's leadership in the late 1990s.

## 5.6. TRANSFERRING JIHAD ABROAD?

The previous chapter mentioned that IG and JG members and leaders settled in the Afghan-Pakistani border area after 1985. While these groups have been subsequently associated with a few external conflicts and armed attacks against Egyptian targets in the next decade, this exile has often been exaggerated by their opponents. The IG and JG's external leaderships have been notably denounced for their responsibilities in the use of violence in Egypt, allegations mostly invalidated by this chapter's argument that armed contention was primordially driven by local dynamics.<sup>211</sup> In Egypt, at least nine external leaders were sentenced to death *in absentia* for conspiring against the state in the judicial cases referred to as “the returnees from Afghanistan” and “the returnees from Albania”.<sup>212</sup> Two individuals, Tala‘at Fu‘ad Qassem from the IG and Ahmad al-Najjar from the JG, were additionally subjected to pre-9/11 CIA rendition programmes in the 1990s, before their gruesome torture and execution without fair trial in Egypt (Human Rights Watch, 2005).<sup>213</sup>

This section investigates the evolving use of violence by these groups' members abroad. The following argument contends that the IG's centralised decision making process and the strong ties uniting its external leaders facilitated the preservation of the group's organisational cohesion, and explains the ability of IG leaders to impose their preferences over a limited use of violence outside of Egypt. The latter can be narrowed down to a few assassination attempts against former president Hosni Mubarak, and to various contributions to foreign conflicts. In addition, the preservation of the IG's organisational cohesion explains why none of its member joined al-Qaeda in Afghanistan,<sup>214</sup> despite close personal ties with their leaders and, sometimes, ideological affinity. The complementary side of this argument is that leadership divisions in the JG combined with the group's inability to legitimise internal norms of decision making explains the expansion of the range of acceptable targets in the 1990s. Moreover, these two factors additionally elucidate the opportunistic defection of many JG members to AQ, premise to the group's eventual absorption in 2001.

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<sup>211</sup> The two main exceptions being JG's armed attacks against Hassan al-Alfi and ‘Atef Sidqi in 1993.

<sup>212</sup> These cases were initiated in 1992 and only terminated with the revision of some prominent cases after the 2011 uprising, included the cases of Mustafa Hamza, Muhammad al-Islambuli, Rifa‘i Taha and Muhammad al-Zawahiri. They were all eventually acquitted by the Egyptian judiciary.

<sup>213</sup> See also: Grey, 2007; Mayer, 2009.

<sup>214</sup> With only one known exception in 2006. Cf. Page 194.

The previous chapter suggested that the IG's emigration to Afghanistan and Pakistan took place gradually, from the mid-1980s onwards. The first departures resulted from the willingness to fight the Soviet forces, while subsequent departures additionally included the necessity to escape the Egyptian security services and find a refuge.<sup>215</sup> Jihad in Afghanistan was widely perceived as legitimate in the Muslim and non-Muslim world, and enjoyed a strong support from Western and Arab nations alike.<sup>216</sup> The IG's highest religious authority, sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, travelled several times to Afghanistan and Pakistan to meet the fighters and incite them to armed jihad. According to his eldest son Muhammad (2012):

The Afghan jihad was a legitimate cause at the time. I travelled to Afghanistan when I was 16 years old with my brother Ahmad, who was 15. My father visited Afghanistan several times between 1987 and 1989 for short periods of one to two months at a time. He travelled to the training camps and to the fronts. He delivered lectures and incited to jihad. Sheikh 'Omar did not want the Arabs to benefit from the Afghans without contributing. Then he sent me and my brother as well.<sup>217</sup>

Prominent IG leaders similarly travelled to the Afghan Pakistan border, including its current mufti 'Abd al-Akhr Hamad, Muhammad al-Islambuli, Mustafa Hamza, Tala'at Fu'ad Qassem, Osama Rushdi and Rifa'i Taha. They formed the group's external *majlis al-shura* throughout the 1990s. According to another IG leader abroad:

Our work in Peshawar was to organise the group's media campaign and to publish its magazine, *al-murabitun* [those who are on the front]. Some of our youths also undertook military training for the Afghan jihad. We were not planning to come back to fight in Egypt, however, and only a few did so.

IG members contributed militarily to the last phase of the Afghan jihad. This choice should not be understood as a departure from the group's core ideological tenets but should rather be understood in consideration of the wide legitimacy enjoyed by armed jihad against foreign occupation in Islam. Muhammad 'Omar (2012) asserts that his father sheikh 'Omar did not want the Egyptians to benefit from the hospitality of the locals without participating in the war effort. An IG member who entertained good relations with most Afghan leaders, 'Adli Yusuf, therefore created a training camp to train IG fellows with the assistance of an Afghan war leader, 'Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.<sup>218</sup> In the following years,

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. chapter 4 page 126.

<sup>216</sup> One can refer to the literature in Arabic and English, e.g. Salah, 2001; Anas, 2002; al-Misri, 2002; Coll, 2004; 'Abd al-Ghani, 2010; Hegghammer, 2010.

<sup>217</sup> This interview has also been published online by the author (Drevon, 2014a).

<sup>218</sup> According to many interviews, including Muhammad 'Omar (2012). See also: 'Abdullah, 2012; Shमित, 2012; al-

many IG members died in important battles, including Yusuf. The IG generally enjoyed good relations with Afghan factions and Arab leaders. For instance, sheikh ‘Omar was very close to sheikh ‘Abdullah Azzam, the so-called godfather of *jihadi* fighters (Muhammad ‘Omar, 2012).

In the following years, the IG's emerging military infrastructure has been magnified by its opponents, as well as by IG members themselves.<sup>219</sup> It has often been referred to as the group's military wing, even though this perception is paradoxically not shared by its own leaders. Rifa‘i Taha (2013), the IG leader outside of Egypt before his replacement by Mustafa Hamza, argues that:

Some of our youths undertook military training but this was not a military wing in our view. Mustafa [Hamza] maybe saw it that way, you can ask him [pointing out at him, in the same room], but I didn't. Between 1992 and 1995, there was no clear mission and responsibilities; this appeared only later. I opposed the claim that I was leading a military wing in Afghanistan because it was not suited at the time, since we only had modest possibilities. We were in Afghanistan for jihad, not for anything else. While some of us thought that we could set up a military wing, I did not want it. We did not come for this. After some time, Mustafa led a military committee but this was not a military wing in our views. It was very small and we were not more than a dozen individuals. Those who acted in Egypt had no connection to us. The actions [in Egypt] were led from prison and from the ground, not from abroad.

Similarly, the Afghan jihad was also used by the JG to reorganise its ranks. As asserted in the previous chapter, JG members and leaders arrived in Afghanistan gradually from the mid-1980s onwards. Muhammad ‘Atef (aka Abu Hafs al-Misri) and ‘Ali Amin al-Rashidi (aka Abu ‘Obaida al-Banshiri) were the first prominent JG members in Afghanistan, preceding the arrival of Ayman al-Zawahiri and Sayyid Imam (Na‘im, 2014). According to most testimonies, interviews and primary sources, Abu Hafs al-Misri and Abu ‘Obaida al-Banshiri were actively participating in the Afghan jihad.<sup>220</sup> The participation of remaining JG members is, however, more controversial. Many witnesses, including Egyptians militants unaffiliated with the JG and written primary sources,<sup>221</sup> assert that the JG was very secretive and isolated from the battlefield. They argue that JG training camps were unknown to most people, and add that the group refused to participate in armed operations alongside Afghan factions for

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Ghamari, n.d.

<sup>219</sup> The next chapter expands on this theme. Many members of the IG and of the JG who did not go to Afghanistan still refers to this time as a glorious period for their groups and as the climax of their groups' histories.

<sup>220</sup> Na‘im, 2014.

<sup>221</sup> e.g. al-Siba‘i, 2002; ‘Abd al-Ghani, 2010; ‘Abdullah, 2012.

theological reasons.<sup>222</sup> In the group's five training camps, JG leaders strived to recruit and train fellow Egyptians, who often arrived in Afghanistan without organisational affiliation.<sup>223</sup> Strong security measures prevailed, and JG members were isolated from one another and usually unaware of one another's real identity.<sup>224</sup> The Afghan jihad was generally used by the JG to pursue its organisational and ideological development, rather than to support the Afghan war effort.

The early years of the IG and of the JG outside of Egypt were rather modest in scope. These two groups reorganised their organisational infrastructures in the border region separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, even though they were equipped with limited operational capabilities and training by the end of the Afghan war to sustain an hypothetical war against the Egyptian regime. The IG and the JG developed a capacity of nuisance but failed to materialise as an existential threat to Mubarak's regime. While some of their members undertook relatively advanced training in guerilla warfare,<sup>225</sup> the Afghan years did not substantially contribute to the development of an adequate strategic military doctrine accompanied with consistent military abilities to achieve success in Egypt. By the end of the war, the IG still believed in the mobilisation of the masses, while the JG remained convinced by the necessity to stage a military coup. Both groups were nonetheless not closer to the accomplishment of these objectives than they were in the early 1980s.

The Afghan journey ended unexpectedly with the dawn of the Afghan civil war in 1992. When the war started between the two main Afghan factions, led by Ahmad Shah Massoud and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar,<sup>226</sup> most Arab fighting groups refused to be involved and had to leave the country.<sup>227</sup> The regional and international environment had deteriorated and had become more hostile to former Arab *mujahideen*. The Pakistani security services were chasing Arab networks in Peshawar, and North African Arab states (Gulf state adopted different policies) became reluctant to reintegrate their Islamist opponents. Former Arab *mujahideen* lost their freedom fighters status and became a security threat to

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<sup>222</sup> The previous chapter elaborated on the contention between 'Abdullah 'Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri on the position to adopt on jihad alongside Afghan factions. This chapter notably mentioned that al-Zawahiri denounced Afghans' religious practices and refused to fight under their organisational umbrella, in sharp contradiction with 'Azzam's views.

<sup>223</sup> See for instance 'Abd al-Ghani (2010).

<sup>224</sup> e.g. al-Siba'i, 2002; 'Abd al-Ghani, 2010.

<sup>225</sup> Many sources mention the presence of military officers offering advanced training, such as a former officer from the Egyptian special forces, Muhammad Ibrahim Makkawi, and a former U.S. soldier, 'Ali Muhammad. e.g. Wright, 2006; Bergen, 2011; Soufan, 2011.

<sup>226</sup> One can refer to: Salah, 2001; Anas, 2002.

<sup>227</sup> Only a few joined Hekmatyar's forces according to Muhammad 'Omar (2012) and a few other sources (e.g. al-Misri, 2006).

their home countries, notably Egypt, where the cycle of violence worsened in 1992. According to Muhammad 'Omar (2012):<sup>228</sup>

Most Arabs, especially Tal'at Fu'ad Qassem from our group [the IG], did not want to be involved in the Afghan civil war. We sat in Peshawar with other Islamic groups to find an alternative. It was impossible to go back to our countries. They had turned against us, and we were now considered terrorists after initially being praised as *mujahideen*. We only had three possibilities. The first was to go to the Sudan where Omar al-Bashir had already welcomed many Islamist movements. The second was Yemen with its convenient tribal system. The last option was to go to Europe and claim political asylum. We could not go back to Egypt and face imprisonment.<sup>229</sup>

The departure from Afghanistan further divided these groups at an organisational level. IG and JG members and leaders chose different destinations according to their personal preferences and to the possibilities offered to them. Only a few returned to Egypt, where they were trailed as early as 1992 in the judicial case of the “returnees from Afghanistan”, hence dissuading others from coming back as well. It is therefore necessary to understand the organisational repercussions of this new development. The previous chapter demonstrated that the horizontal ties developed over time between the IG leaders facilitated the maintenance of the leaderships' cohesion throughout the 1990s, despite occasional differences of views. At the same time, this analysis asserted that the JG's organisational construction resulted in the formation of a divided leadership which repeatedly split over similar strategic and tactical divergences. These comparative developments signify that these groups' early organisational constructions and these diverging norms of decision making mediated the impact of this new geographic division. In the 1990s, these parameters additionally explain the evolution of these groups' use of violence outside of Egypt.

In the early 1990s, the main alternative to Afghanistan and the Balkans was the Sudan, where Omar al-Bashir promoted a friendly pan-Islamist policy towards Islamist groups (e.g. Burr & Collins, 2003). Senior IG and JG figures partially reconstituted their groups' infrastructures in this country, where they remained until their expulsion in 1996. The IG and JG's temporary exile to the Sudan marked the beginning of a new covert war against the Egyptian security services, especially against Omar Suleiman and the Directory of General Intelligence (DGI) he had led since 1993 (Sirrs, 2010: 169-178).

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<sup>228</sup> See also: Shamit, 2012, al-Ghamari, n.d.

<sup>229</sup> This interview has also been published online by the author (Drevon, 2014a).

The Egyptian intelligence repeatedly strived to thwart these groups' armed operations, disrupt their networks and, at times, kidnap or kill their leaders. The IG and the JG did not remain idle, even though their responses reveal diverging preferences for the acceptable level of violence.

The armed operations orchestrated by IG leaders and members dwelling outside of Egypt demonstrate that their only lawful target was Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Despite increased geographical divisions and obstacles to these members' coordination, IG leaders and members had internalised the group's collective decision making norms and felt constrained by the necessity to respect the group's consensus.<sup>230</sup> While new IG generations in Egypt increasingly resorted to indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the tourism industry, the presence of prominent group leaders abroad prevented a repetition of the same strategic mistake. Even though IG members entertained friendly relations with AQ leaders after returning to Afghanistan in 1996, they did not participate in this group's armed operations in the following years, in sharp contrast with the JG. Only a minor IG figure joined AQ in 2006, Muhammad al-Hakayma,<sup>231</sup> when most IG leaders had already left Afghanistan.<sup>232</sup> Moreover, al-Zawahiri's claims that prominent IG leaders, including Muhammad al-Islambuli, would have joined AQ were repeatedly denied (e.g. al-Ghamari, n.d.). The IG's limited military infrastructure focused exclusively on Mubarak, whose assassination was planned more than dozens of times, the most notable attempt being orchestrated in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in 1995 (Shamit, 2012). Despite the American hostility to the IG in the 1990s, epitomised in the life sentence passed on IG's religious leader sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman in 1995<sup>233</sup> and in the kidnapping of an IG cadre in Croatia subsequently summarily executed in Egypt, Tal'at Fu'ad Qassem,<sup>234</sup> the IG did not participate in any hostile anti-American operation in the 1990s, despite numerous opportunities.

In addition, IG and JG members participated in a few external conflicts in the 1990s. These groups'

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<sup>230</sup> This consensual decision making does not preclude personal disagreements over time. The main contention occurred after the 1997 Luxor attack. Rifa'i Taha, the head of the IG external *majliss al-shura*, initially acknowledged the group's responsibility while other members opposed his claim. Mustafa Hamza, for instance, said that he had no previous knowledge of these attacks and denied his involvement. The IG leadership believed that this operation would be additionally detrimental to the group and to its members abroad, notably in European countries where some of them resided.

<sup>231</sup> See his online interview in al-Hakayma (2006).

<sup>232</sup> Many IG leaders resided in Iran while others had been subject to extra-judiciary rendition and jailed by the Egyptian state, including Taha and Muhammad 'Omar.

<sup>233</sup> Sheikh 'Omar has been accused of conspiracy in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He has repeatedly denied playing a role in this attack.

<sup>234</sup> See also page 189.

participation was relatively limited and based on the limited geographic opportunities available after their forced departure from Afghanistan after the civil war. These groups' main foreign terrain was the Balkans during the early 1990s' Bosnian wars. Rather than a predetermined plan or a new strategic development, these groups' joining of a new battlefield merely represented an opportune alternative to Egypt. According to court reports from a captured JG member, Ahmad Najjar, the Balkans also presented an opportunity to raise money through shadow companies in times of financial hardships.<sup>235</sup> In the next few years, al-Zawahiri and some of his companions, notably Ahmad Salama Mabruk, additionally attempted to find ventures in other countries, notably in the Caucasus, which did not prove more successful.<sup>236</sup>

While the IG limited its armed operations to Mubarak, the JG's own war with the Egyptian military intelligence exacerbated its use of violence and widened the range of acceptable targets. The most noticeable turning point occurred in 1995, when the group attacked the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan. The JG was isolated and substantially weakened by the waves of arrests ordered by the Egyptian security services in 1993. The group was trying to re-establish its internal and external credibility when the Egyptian intelligence attempted to assassinate the JG leadership dwelling in the Sudan. According to various testimonies, the two sons of a prominent JG leader, Abu Faraj al-Misri, were kidnapped by Egyptian agents and sexually abused. The Egyptian *mukhabarat* taped the sexual abuses and blackmailed the two teenagers to pressure them to trigger an explosive device during the meeting of the JG leadership.<sup>237</sup> The JG eventually uncovered the plot and killed the two teenagers after a short trial. It was a new cataclysm for the group. The JG was expelled from the Sudan and many members opposed to this execution left the group, including the father of the two teenagers.

A weakened JG organised an unprecedented operation against Egyptian interests in Pakistan. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1995, a car bomb exploded next to the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan and killed seventeen individuals. The JG claimed responsibility in a publication released six months later (*jama'at al-jihad*, 1996). Considering that the JG had hitherto only targeted individuals associated with the Egyptian leadership, this publication was necessary to legitimise the use of a suicide bomber against a

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<sup>235</sup> e.g. *al-qadiyya al-jana'iyya li-ahmad al-najjar*, 1997.

<sup>236</sup> Al-Zawahiri presents his analysis of the Caucasus, and elaborates on his personal experience in his memories (2010: 117-172).

<sup>237</sup> See also: al-Shafi'i, 2002; al-Siba'i, 2002; Wright, 2006: 215-216.

larger target; this book further suggests the group's adoption of a new military doctrine, no longer defined by the infiltration of the army to stage a military coup. In a TV interview, a member of the JG's *majliss al-shura* at the time, Murjan Salem, claimed that this attack was a retaliation for the *mukhabarat's* (Egyptian intelligence) operation in the Sudan (Salem, 2013b). After 9/11, Ayman al-Zawahiri attempted to alter this narrative, claiming that the JG was primarily looking for a Western (preferably American) embassy, before choosing the Egyptian embassy in absence of a better choice (al-Zawahiri, 2010: 114-117). This new justification is nonetheless not congruent with the initial claim of responsibility and with the operation's timing.

This peculiar operation is important to understand the JG's military evolution abroad. It notably suggests that the JG modified its military doctrine after being substantially weakened in Egypt and abroad. At the same time, the comparison with the IG and the previous chapter's study of the group's evolving decision making process additionally indicate that the JG's strategic deadlock is not sufficient to understand the adoption of a new military approach. The latter was additionally facilitated by the divisions of the group's leadership, by the departure of many of its members, and by the absence of organisational constraints on al-Zawahiri, who did not need to abide by the IG's internally constraining organisational norms. In addition, this operation against an Egyptian embassy demonstrates that short-term calls for revenge prevailed, in this case, over the group's long term strategic objectives. By targeting an embassy, the JG changed the rules of the game and alienated its natural constituency in Egypt as well as potentially friendly countries. The JG's new strategic choice was short lived, however, and the JG declared a unilateral ceasefire shortly after this operation. This new *modus operandi* against external embassies was later adopted by AQ, when two American embassies were attacked in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998.

The JG's gradual organisational dislocation combined with its repeated operational failures additionally encouraged the departure of many of its members to AQ. Multiple testimonies from AQ members and witnesses suggest an individual bandwagon effect, whereby JG members decided to join AQ's operations in a few African countries in the 1990s.<sup>238</sup> The existence of stronger opportunities with Osama bin Laden, due to his stronger (ideational and material) resources and networks, sparked the association of many prominent JG members with AQ, including Abu 'Obaida al-Banshiri and Abu Hafs

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<sup>238</sup> See for instance the testimonies of Fadil Harun ('Abdullah 2012) and of a bodyguard of bin Laden (al-Misri, 2012), in addition to the English literature on al-Qaeda.

al-Misri, who were AQ's successive military leaders. The absence of constraining norms in the JG eased the joining of a stronger group, especially during the Sudanese exile. According to Muhammad 'Omar (2012), bin Laden ultimately instructed JG members to choose between their membership in the JG or in AQ.<sup>239</sup> In 2011, al-Zawahiri eventually joined AQ, as the previous chapter demonstrated. The JG virtually disappeared abroad, and became indistinguishable from AQ. In 2011, al-Zawahiri succeeded bin Laden as the leader of AQ.

After 9/11, IG members in Afghanistan had to leave the country in haste. Most of them went to Iran, with the assistance of Mustafa Hamza. Some were subsequently arrested and deported to Egypt, while others came back individually after the 2011 uprising. The sons of sheikh 'Omar followed another journey. His eldest son Muhammad was arrested in Pakistan in 2003 and subsequently subjected to the American rendition programme. He was jailed for six months in an American military base in Bagram in Afghanistan, and then detained in secrecy in Egypt (see also Drevon, 2014a). His younger brother Ahmad, who accompanied him in Afghanistan at the end of the 1980s, remained in the tribal areas of Pakistan until his assassination in November 2011 by an American drone. According to Muhammad (2012):

Ahmad stayed for three years with [Abdul Rasul] Sayyaf. Then he had the opportunity to leave so he went to Waziristan. He opened a few schools and helped the brothers and sisters from the IG return to Egypt. He personally did not want to come back. Eventually, he was killed by an American drone in November 2011. He was always by himself. He was a free spirit. He was fighting in Pakistan with the Taliban, not with al-Qaeda. You must remember that the people of jihad are the Afghan people, not the Arabs. The Arabs were the salt, while the Afghans were the meat. They were the majority. We were just a few thousand in comparison. Ahmad did not coordinate with al-Qaeda and refused their administrative system. Others were closer to al-Qaeda than he was. He was even independent from the Islamic Group. He was the word of truth. He stayed in Pakistan to fight oppression.<sup>240</sup>

## 5.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter is a meso-centred study of the use of violence by the IG and the JG in Egypt and abroad. In congruence with the general argument presented in this research and with the recent scholarship on political violence, this chapter has demonstrated that the study of violence in Egypt has to be

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<sup>239</sup> Fadil Harun, the secretary of AQ, similarly recalls in his memories that many members and leaders of the JG first act as trainers for AQ members, before formerly adhering to the group.

<sup>240</sup> This interview has also been published online by the author (Drevon, 2014a).

disaggregated, and investigated as a dynamic process contextualised in a multi-level environment. This research has specifically explored the evolving use of violence by the IG and the JG from an organisational perspective, and analysed the organisational mediation of changing macro and micro-level dynamics of violence.

This chapter has argued that violence should not be solely considered a rational choice adopted in reaction to external stimuli. While recognising militant groups' rationality, this research posits that violence is primarily the outcome of internal and external relational processes. The investigation of the evolving use of violence by the IG and the JG warns against exaggerated political and rationalist interpretations through rational choice paradigms. Exclusively rationalist considerations obscure, considerably more than they clarify, these groups' changing approaches to armed violence over time. Ontological definitions of violence as “terrorism” assume a political and strategic nature to violent incidents, disregard militant groups' internal dynamics and, sometimes, over-intellectualise their decision making processes. This research has notably revealed that an inclusive definition of “terrorism”, defined as an armed operation directed indiscriminately against civilians to achieve a political objective, is wrong at an ontological level. It would, in this case, fail to explain the rationale of the armed attack which is theoretically most congruent with this definition, when foreign tourists were killed in Luxor in 1997. By assuming a strategic or political rationale, the ontological premise attached to “terrorism” overlooks internal processes which sparked this indiscriminate attack, which was primarily a desperate act of vengeance carried out by militants fighting for survival.

Armed violence is the outcome of external and internal relational processes. This chapter has notably confirmed various claims from the academic corpus on political violence concerning militant groups' interactions with external actors, including the state and various violent and non-violent groups. Evolving policing of protests and external collaboration and competition with other groups have a crucial influence on militant groups' decision making processes. Exacerbated repression at a macro-level often contextualises militant groups' decision to use violence against the state, whose timing and modalities cannot be solely comprehended through the study of their ideational commitments. In addition, external competition with other groups can, at times, inform a group's decision to use violence in order to maintain its organisational cohesion and to demonstrate its internal and external credibility.

This chapter has additionally argued that external dynamics cannot be properly understood without simultaneously investigating these groups' internal make-up. This analysis contends that militant groups cannot be considered a strategic black box, and has stressed the necessity to study internal norms of decision making. This perspective suggests that, even though all militant groups' members might consensually agree over their long term objectives, internal tactical preferences often differ in time and place. A thorough study of these group's evolving decision making processes contextualised with their leaders' command and control over their followers notably explains why the former can order or consent to armed operations contradicting these groups' long-term objectives. Internal dynamics are crucial in explaining militant group's leaders and members' evolving construction of external political opportunities.

The construction of these groups' internal norms pertains to the general argument developed throughout this thesis. The two previous chapters specifically demonstrated that these groups' early mobilising patterns and the timing of their adoption of violence shaped their internal norms of decision making, and legitimised a structured hierarchy only within the IG. This chapter has additionally demonstrated the subsequent impact of these early organisational dynamics on these groups' use of violence.

The evolution of the IG and the JG in Egypt does not merely refer to their use of violence, however. The following chapter will explore the evolution of their non-violent practices as well, especially after the 2011 uprising.

## CHAPTER 6

### MILITANT GROUPS' NON-VIOLENT TRANSFORMATION

We did not renounce armed jihad but rationalised it. The weapon of jihad has changed. Jihad in Egypt cannot any more be undertaken with the rifle. The new weapon of jihad is the political party.

A senior member of the Jihad Group and a member of the Islamic Party

I said and reiterated that democracy is against Islam. My position has not changed. In the 1990s, democracy [in Egypt] meant that no political party could be created on a religious platform. This has changed, while we have not. We fought democracy because democracy was without God. The constitution now recognises it. It is based on *shari'a* and all the political parties agree with this feature. Democracy I denounced is consequently different from the current form of democracy.

A religious leader of the Islamic Group

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This research has challenged frequent assumptions that militant groups are intrinsically violent by contextualising the adoption of armed jihad by the IG and the JG. This ontological position suggests that the study of militant groups' evolution should also explore their examination of non-violent alternatives to armed violence overtime. This position additionally posits that non-violent alternatives should not be merely investigated as complementary means to sustain armed contention, as maintained in some studies,<sup>241</sup> without considering their transforming potential as well. As Sara Roy argued on Hamas, it is indeed important to note that militant groups can “reinterpret [themselves] over time through processes of radicalisation, deradicalisation, de-militarisation and re-radicalisation” (Roy, 2007: 165).

Armed violence and its alternatives are inherent with the study of the impact of political exclusion on

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<sup>241</sup> For instance, Hamas' non-violent activities have been analysed complementarily to the group's military operations (Levitt, 2007; Berman, 2009), rather than as possible substitutes as well. Levitt has notably simplified Hamas, an “increasingly complex and sophisticated organisation to an insular, one-dimensional entity dedicated solely to violence” (Roy, 2007: 165).

Islamist movements. The main hypothesis, adopted and elaborated by Mohamed Hafez (2003),<sup>242</sup> is that the combination of indiscriminatory repression and political exclusion accounts for the resort to armed violence by Islamist groups. In the words of Jeff Goodwin, Islamist movements excluded from political institutions have “no other way out” than violence (Goodwin, 2001). This persuasive claim has nonetheless been recently re-examined. Katarina Dalacoura (2011) has questioned this assumption and pointed out that Islamist militant groups often reject democratic political participation as unislamic, which means that political exclusion cannot explain these groups' decision to use violence in the first place.<sup>243</sup> Dalacoura asserts that, in Egypt, the IG rejected political participation when relatively free elections were organised in 1984, a few years before the contentious conflict with the state (Dalacoura, 2011: 117). Shadi Hamid adds that mainstream Islamist movements in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia endorsed pragmatic positions and did not resort to violence when the state excluded them from the political process (Hamid, 2014). These contradictory findings indicate that the correlation between political participation and violence is more contentious than usually assumed.

The study of Islamist groups' reactions to changing environmental conditions calls attention to these groups' transformation and organisational learning beyond short-term tactical postures. These two processes are arguably informed by a combination of (a) changing macro environments, (b) internal learning processes, (c) others groups' cognitive processes, and (d) these groups' achievements. Militant groups' transformation and organisational learning are additionally (e) mediated by their organisational dynamics, and are contingent on the (f) ability of their leaders to legitimise these new norms organisationally.<sup>244</sup> Most research on militant groups' organisational learning has hitherto focused on tactical and operational learning, as illustrated by two studies of the RAND corporation (Jackson et al., 2005a, 2005b). This chapter expands their scope by exploring militant groups' transformation overtime.<sup>245</sup>

This chapter investigates the consideration of non-violent alternatives to violence by the IG and the JG

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<sup>242</sup> Similar positions have been defended before Hafez, e.g. Burgat, 2002 (first published in 1995).

<sup>243</sup> See also a debate between Hafez and Dalacoura in: Dalacoura, 2013; Hafez, 2013.

<sup>244</sup> These factors are drawn from a broad literature mentioned throughout this chapter and discussed pages 203-210.

<sup>245</sup> This approach is relatively rare in the literature. Only a few recent studies have attempted to relate individual and organisational learning processes in changing macro circumstances (e.g. Wickham (2013) on the MB). This chapter broadens this scope by theorising the construction of militant groups' identities.

from their emergence to the post-2011 Egyptian uprising. This analysis locates these two groups inside the Egyptian Islamist social movement family, and argues that the development of non-violent approaches to political action has to be contextualised with these groups' interactions with their Islamist competitors, and in light of the latter's achievements. Internal interactions and political achievements notably determine the development of organisational and ideational resources which can motivate a reconsideration of militant groups' strategic choice to forgo non-violent alternatives to armed jihad. This chapter demonstrates that the structural context defining the Egyptian regime between 1981 and 2011 obstructed internal interactions between Islamist sub-trends, and prevented the materialisation of political participation as a credible alternative to achieve substantial political change. This analysis also investigates the development of the IG and JG's collective group identities from their early days, and argues that their identities' diverging theoretical positions on violence has shaped these groups' mobilising patterns and organisational developments. Finally, this research builds on the analysis of the construction of these groups' collective identities to analyse the impact of the 2011 uprising on their decisions to participate in the political process. This chapter demonstrates that the IG and JG's diverging responses to the post-2011 uprising was primarily contingent on the ability of their leaders to maintain their groups' organisational cohesion while drawing on their primordial identities to internally legitimise these new choices.

## **6.2. THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AND MILITANT GROUPS**

The transformation of Islamist movements and militants groups has been explored in the academic literature from complementary perspectives. This scholarship includes the investigation of Islamist movements' ideological and behavioural moderation, Islamist militant groups' participation in the political process, and Islamist armed groups' ideological and behavioural deradicalisation. These studies have often been undertaken in isolation, however, despite congruent contributions to the study of militant groups' transformation. The following discussion therefore explores this corpus in order to identify key analytical features beneficial to the study of the IG and of the JG from their emergence to the post-2011 uprising. This section concludes with an emphasis on two remaining gaps in the literature, namely its elite bias and the neglected consideration of the role potentially played by Islamist groups' interactions with other actors situated in their social movement families.

The scholarship on Islamist movements' political participation has mostly focused on mainstream Islamist groups whose roots are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. This corpus draws inspiration from democratic transition and modernisation theories to analyse the impact of the joining of the political process on Islamist groups, with frequent analogies to the political inclusion of Christian political parties in European countries and to the institutionalisation of left-wing revolutionary movements in Western contexts.<sup>246</sup> These studies are designed to analyse the rationale of Islamist groups' participation in political processes organised by discredited authoritarian regimes, as well as the potential repercussions of political participation on these groups' ideological and behavioural developments.<sup>247</sup>

The literature concerned with the rationalisation of political participation examines an intriguing paradox. Why would mainstream Islamist groups participate in political processes organised by authoritarian regimes, considering that their participation legitimises the very regimes they theoretically oppose? The most common cases are Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, where MB-affiliated movements have long participated in legislative elections. In these three cases, the literature is quite consensual vis-à-vis these groups' rationale. Most studies argue that these groups utilised a phase of relative political liberalisation to bolster their fundamentally proselytising (*da'wa*) mission (Wickham, 2013: 47; Hamid, 2014). They assert that joining the political process has helped to protect these groups' preaching and to sustain their Islamising mission by providing legal cover. A few scholars add that MB-affiliated movements have strived to present themselves as major non-threatening alternatives to current regimes in the short term, in order to replace them in the long term, when time is appropriate (e.g. Blaydes, 2010: 148).

The ideational and behavioural significance of political participation have also been widely debated. A prevailing viewpoint is the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which questions whether Islamist movements' ideologies and praxis moderate when they participate in political processes. This hypothesis notably examines if joining the political process entails the adoption of democratic values, or if participation is merely a tool designed to preserve these groups' organisational interests (Robinson,

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<sup>246</sup> e.g. Przeworski & Sprague, 1986; Kalyvas, 1996. For a more thorough comparison, see also Brown (2012: 32-58).

<sup>247</sup> An extensive review of this literature was undertaken in Schwedler (2011)

1997). Carry Wickham argues that, in Egypt, the limited political opening has produced incentives and cognitive opportunities which have facilitated the transformation of the core values and belief system of prominent MB members (Wickham, 2004). In a subsequent study, she nonetheless adds that this process has not necessarily moderated the MB's ideological outlook, and stresses the importance of generational differences and internal factionalism on the understanding of this group's behavioural and ideological evolution (Wickham, 2013). Wickham does not directly examine group competition, which has been mentioned as a source of moderation in other studies (Marshall, 2005). Cross group dialogue and cooperation combined with political participation have been further considered in Jordan, where Janine Clark argues that they account for the moderation of a few ideological positions formerly held by Islamist movements, although limited to those with no bearing on *shari'a* (Clark, 2006). Finally, Jilian Schwedler asserts that most mechanisms concerned with Islamist movements' moderation are still poorly detailed. Schwedler argues that the opening of a political system has to be associated with a consensual organisational structure and decision making processes, and accompanied with internal ideological justifications to stimulate a group's ideological moderation (Schwedler, 2006). Schwedler adds that the inclusion-moderation thesis is less likely to play a role in the post-Arab Spring, since the emergence of a competitive environment where new conservative Islamist groups prosper challenges the ideological moderation of MB-affiliated movements (Schwedler, 2013). Finally, a recent contribution to the study of Islamist groups' political participation has explored the organisational and ideological ramifications of political participation in semi-authoritarian regimes on Islamist groups' long term evolution (Brown, 2012). Nathan Brown has argued that these movements have invested, over time, more resources to political participation and have adapted their ideological and organisational frameworks accordingly. Brown stresses the primordial influence of the macro environment in which these groups' evolve, and substantiates its structuring role on these groups' developments.

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis has been increasingly disputed. New studies argue that the behavioural moderation and ideological pragmatism of MB-affiliated movements have not been precipitated by political liberalisation, but by political exclusion and repression. These studies contend that these movements have moderated their positions after a closing of political opportunities, rather than during phases of political liberalisation. In Tunisia for instance, repression and political marginalisation have been presented as the main source of al-Nahda's moderation (Cavatorta &

Merone, 2013). In a more extensive study, Shadi Hamid argues that the Egyptian MB has adopted political pragmatism and the language of democracy and human rights despite political repression and exclusion. Hamid notably explains this shift by the MB's need to seek legal protection, increase the cost of repression for the regime and find allies among non-Islamist political parties (Hamid, 2014).

The academic literature has also covered the political participation of Islamist armed groups. Rachel Rudolph and Anisseh Van Engeland contend that the decision to participate in the political process entails a previous commitment to governance, and needs to be compatible with these groups' political ideologies and programmes (Van Engeland & Rudolph, 2008). Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger add that, at a meso and macro-levels, a combination of four factors is required: the democratisation of a political system, an amnesty to these groups' members, some level of repression and an internal desire to reinforce these groups' social anchorage and compete with other movements (Weinberg et al., 2008). The most common cases refer to Hizbullah, since its first political participation in 1992, and Hamas after two electoral experiments in 1996 and 2006. In both cases, these groups' two main rationales were the competition over resources and their distribution (Malka, 2005; Brathwaite, 2013) and the need to legitimise these groups' existence domestically and internationally (Malka, 2005; Wiegand, 2009). Regarding Hamas, the decision to field candidates in 2006 also resulted from a combination of changing political opportunities, new political incentives and internal organisational changes (Gunning, 2004; Bhasin & Hallward 2013)

The study of the ideological ramifications of militant groups' political participation has pointed out to a moderating effect congruent with the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. Joseph Alagha argues that Hizbullah's decision to participate in the 1992 parliamentary elections epitomised a shift from the primacy of its religious and political ideologies, to the primacy of its political programme (Alagha, 2006). In Palestine, Jeroen Gunning argues that Hamas' political participation had a similar moderating effect. Political participation combined with Hamas' consensual decision making process has notably encouraged pragmatism and the support of a utilitarian logic (Gunning, 2004). These perspectives are not unanimously shared, however. Benedetta Berti challenges the existence of a linear transition between armed violence and political participation, whereby a militant group relinquishes violence to become more moderate, considering that political participation and armed violence are not mutually

exclusive (Berti, 2011).

Finally, the renunciation of violence has been studied under the concept of deradicalisation, defined as the ideological renunciations of violence combined with the dismantlement of militant groups' armed infrastructures. This theme has not been as extensively covered in the literature, and most of the current scholarship has hitherto relied on secondary sources and textual analyses (e.g. Blaydes & Rubin, 2008; Rashwan, 2008; Gunaratna & Ali, 2009; Rubin, 2011). Regarding Egypt, this corpus is characterised by a specific insistence on the state's non-kinetic approach, and by relatively flimsy analyses of the IG and JG's internal dynamics. Most studies stress the importance of internal group dialogue, but fail to uncover internal organisational processes and analyse divergences of opinions between these groups' leaders. This corpus does not investigate the acceptance of the revisions by these groups' members, and are generally quite unsuspecting in their contention that these groups' nature has fundamentally changed, despite the limited textual scope of the revisions.

The most comprehensive studies were authored by Omar Ashour on the deradicalisation of *jihadi* movements in three North African countries, including Egypt (Ashour, 2009, 2010, 2011). Ashour argues that these processes have been rendered possible by a combination of credible leadership, state repression, internal and external social interactions and selective inducements. The presence of these four factors is necessary to the renunciation of violence, according to Ashour. State repression sparks a re-evaluation of the costs of violence by these groups' leaderships. Interacting with non-Islamist groups influences militant groups' belief system and, eventually, internal dialogue led by a credible leadership and sustained by selective inducements of the state facilitates the internal promotion of deradicalisation.

Ashour's study of internal group dynamics is nonetheless less convincing. Ashour argues that internal dialogue led by a charismatic and credible leadership is sufficient to convince these groups' followers to renounce their ideas, without explaining if and why these groups' members have accepted the new strategic direction promoted by their leaders. This gap leaves a few questions unexplored. Have all these groups' members accepted the theological renunciations of violence? Were internal dialogue and

these leaders' credibility sufficient to internally legitimise these new ideas? These questions suggest that lower-ranking members may have only tacitly accepted this process and, in this case, the role played by additional factors (including some type of rational choice, group identity and group survival) could be examined. Finally, Ashour's study is relatively mechanistic and unidirectional. Ashour's analysis contends that the combination of the four previously mentioned factors is sufficient to explain why and how militant groups deradicalise, following a top down approach. This unilateralism is debatable, however, and the extent to which these groups' leaders were also constrained by ideational and organisational factors, including by the reception of their ideas at a meso-level, has to be investigated.

The corpus on the moderation, political participation and deradicalisation of non-violent and violent Islamist groups presents a general consensus on a few factors deemed important in the study of militant groups' transformation. These studies recognise that the decisions to participate in the political process and to renounce violence result from internal and external relational processes informed by a combination of changing macro and meso-level factors, including new political opportunities, internal cognitive processes and organisational dialogue. This corpus nonetheless remains relatively ambivalent vis-à-vis the role of macro-level change. While these analyses generally recognise that Islamist groups' interpretations of their external environments affect their decision making processes, political inclusion and repression are alternatively given predominance in these groups' decisions to renounce some of their ideological commitments and participate in their domestic political systems.

The academic literature on Islamist groups' moderation and deradicalisation is also incomplete on two accounts. The first deficiency is its elitist bias. Most analyses accurately investigate Islamist groups' decision making processes and cover the evolving positions adopted by their leaders overtime. These studies do not, however, meticulously explore internal interactions between these groups' leaders and members, and tend to assume that lower-ranking members unquestionably accept the new strategic choices of their leaders. In some cases, as in Ashour's study, a credible and legitimate leadership combined with internal dialogue are deemed sufficient to internally legitimise new directions, without expanding on their organisational internalisation. One could nonetheless infer that Islamist group leaders are simultaneously constrained by the acceptance of their new strategic choices by their

followers, and cannot simply impose their will on demand.

This corpus additionally disregards the influence of other groups and social movements on the evolution of violent and non-violent Islamist groups.<sup>248</sup> A few case studies explore the interactions with “the other” (i.e. non-Islamist groups and individuals),<sup>249</sup> without further consideration for militant groups' dialogues and interactions with Islamist movements and actors who potentially share common organisational and ideational resources. Although regular interactions with non-Islamist figures can influence Islamist groups' cognitive processes, one could speculate that militant groups' leaders and members are more likely to be influenced by external actors who share a common religious creed and worldview, albeit with a different political understanding. In this study of the transformation of Islamist militant groups, it can notably be posited that non-violent Islamist groups and scholars can provide cultural and organisational resources which could help to legitimise and rationalise militant groups' non-violent strategic choices.

This research investigates the emergence and construction of militant groups' collective identities to mitigate the elite bias of the literature. The notion of collective identity is a meso-level concept (Klandermans & de Weerd, 2000) which contrasts with the societal conceptualisation of identity utilised by new social movement scholars. This concept facilitates the study of the interactions between these groups' leaders and members, with the postulate that organisational belonging is associated with meaning-making processes of their members' engagement (Melucci, 1995), notably through the framing of their actions (Hunt et al., 1994). The consideration of a group's collective identity promotes the understanding of its transformation in continuity (Melucci, 1995), in light of the opportunities and constraints inherent with past developments (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). This concept additionally stimulates the study of the relationship between these groups' ideologies and organisational structures (e.g. Reger, 2002; Whittier, 2002). A reference to militant groups' collective group identities means that, rather than focusing on several concepts such as charisma and social capital which are difficult to

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<sup>248</sup> There are a few exceptions, such as the previously mentioned study of framing competition between Islamist non-violent groups (Marshall, 2005) See also Malthaner's (2014) on the Islamist radical milieu.

<sup>249</sup> For instance Ashour mentions the interactions between Human Rights activists and Islamist militants in prison (Ashour, 2009). In non-violent cases, Wickham emphasises the cooperation between MB members and non Islamist forces in professional organisations and syndicates (Wickham, 2013), while Schwedler and Clark uncover the interactions between MB-affiliated movements and leftist forces (Schwedler & Clark, 2006).

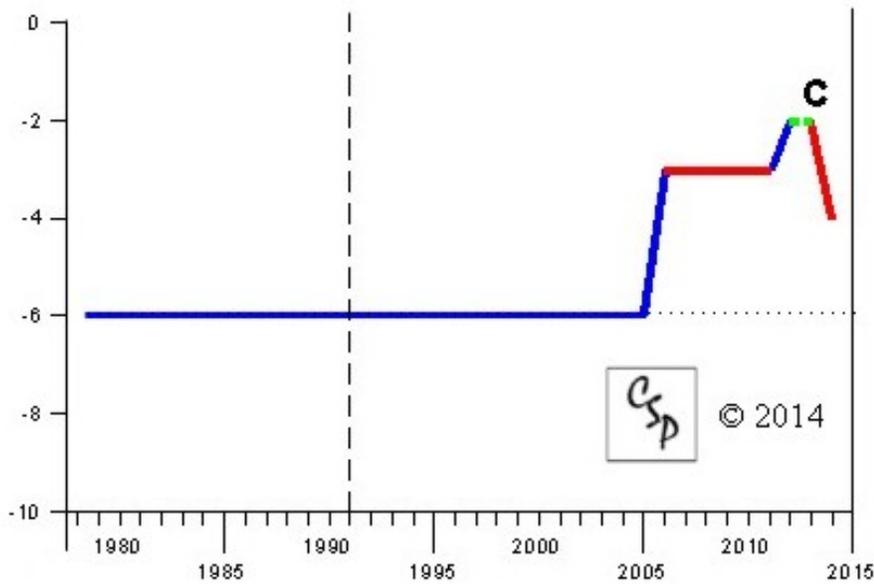
systematically compare across cases, this study focuses on militant groups' leaders organisational positions and reinterpretations of their groups' collective group identities to internally legitimise new strategic or ideological choices.

Finally, this research utilises the concept of social movement family to study the influence of non-violent Islamist movements on militant groups. This concept is defined by Donatella della Porta and Dieter Rucht “as a nationally based, historical configuration of movements that—though they have different specific goals, immediate fields of struggle, and strategic preferences—share a common worldview, have organisational overlaps, and occasionally ally for joint campaigns.” (della Porta & Rucht, 1995: 233). This study uses this conceptualisation to investigate the ideational and organisational developments of the sub-components of the Islamist social movement family in changing environmental conditions. This research posits that the ideational and organisational resources of the Islamist social movement family can inform militant groups' evolving choices and contribute to their legitimisation of new strategic directions.

### **6.3. WAS THERE ANOTHER WAY OUT? POLITICAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION OF THE EGYPTIAN ISLAMIST SOCIAL MOVEMENT FAMILY UNDER MUBARAK**

This section explores the development of the organisational and cultural resources of the Islamist social movement family in the structural context characterising the Egyptian regime between 1981 and the 2011 uprising. This structural context, defined by della Porta and Rucht's analytical model (1995: 115) as “the setting for both the social movement family and the alliance and conflict systems”, was relatively stable. The regime of former president Hosni Mubarak was authoritarian and provided stable (and limited) political opportunities to its Islamist opponents, illustrated in various degrees of political inclusion and exclusion over time (Statcher, 2012). The regime allowed some level of non-violent and non-threatening opposition, as well as diverse opportunities to participate through political parties, syndicates and grass-root movements; it was neither fully inclusive nor fully exclusive vis-à-vis the political opposition (Wickham, 2002: 63-66). This relative stability does not necessarily mean that noticeable internal variations overtime cannot be discerned. Brown argues that changing patterns of political inclusion and exclusion is symptomatic of semi-authoritarian regimes, which continuously strive to mold their interactions with the opposition through unstable and re-negotiated institutional

regulations (Brown, 2012: 15-31). The Polity IV Project of the Center for Systemic Peace substantiates this relative stability (until 2005), and defines Mubarak's regime as autocratic, based on several key characteristics including the nature of electoral competition and the existence of constraints on the executive.<sup>250</sup>



#### 6.1. Evolution of the level of authoritarianism of the Egyptian regime<sup>251</sup>

This section analyses the development of the ideational and organisational resources of the Islamist social movement family according to the following definitions. Organisational resources are defined as “the “material” basis for communication and action, networks, infrastructure, and organisations” (della Porta & Rucht, 1995: 115), while cultural resources refer to their “worldviews, values, frames, symbols, skills, experiences, and motivations” (della Porta & Rucht, 1995: 115). The Islamist social movement family includes, in addition to the IG and the JG, the *salafi* trend and MB-related organisations and institutions. The *salafi* trend is composed of all the groups and movements using the *salafi* etiquette, notably *salafi* networks in Cairo and Alexandria and the two mainstream *salafi* institutions, *ansar al-sunna al-muhammadiyya* and *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya*.<sup>252</sup> They are characterised

<sup>250</sup> The User's Manual describing these characteristics and their coding is available on the following address:

<http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2013.pdf>

<sup>251</sup> This graph is based on the Polity IV Egypt country report, available at the following address:

<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Egypt2010.pdf>

<sup>252</sup> Even though *al-jam‘iyya al-shar‘iyya* is not strictly *salafi*, as explained in chapter 3.

by multiple informal and formal networks and institutions centred around groups, sheikhs and neighbourhoods (Gauvain, 2010; al-Anani & Malik, 2013; Utvik, 2014). MB-affiliated groups includes the groups and movements which spring from the Muslim Brotherhood, including its charitable networks and the political party which successively split from this organisation, notably *hizb al-wasat*, the Centre Party, created in 1996. The following analysis is congruent with Brown's (2012) assertion that the semi-authoritarian environments in which Islamist movements evolve shape the mobilisation of their organisational and ideological resources.

This section specifically argues that the relatively stable structural context defining the Egyptian regime between 1981 and 2011 shaped the development of the Islamist social movement family, and explains the isolated routes taken by its three main subcomponents (the proponents of violence, mainstream salafis, and the MB). The post-1981 structural context obstructed internal interactions, dialogue and cooperation between these three sub-Islamist trends, and regulated their separate evolution despite organisational and ideational proximity in the 1970s.<sup>253</sup> This structural context additionally prevented the materialisation of Islamist participation as a credible alternative to the achievement of substantial political change. The combination of these two characteristics suggests that IG and JG leaders and members were unaffected by virtually inexistent interactions with other Islamist forces, and remained uninfluenced by their (negligible) political achievements. These two assertions indicate that these three trends did not share noticeable organisational resources during this period, and did not develop credible cultural resources in favour of political participation.

The succession of Anwar Sadat by Hosni Mubarak in 1981 had far-reaching ramifications on the Islamist social movement family. While Anwar Sadat ended his reign with massive arrests among his political opponents, Islamists and non-Islamists alike, his succession by Hosni Mubarak was followed by a phase of controlled political liberalisation (Wickham, 2002: 66) which informed the opportunities and constraints available to opposition movements thereafter. The new political context and the lessons of Sadat's assassination informed the strategic decision of the MB and mainstream *salafi* groups to devote their organisational and ideational resources into two isolated routes, which shaped their

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<sup>253</sup> On the interactions between Alexandria-based salafis and the MB in the 1970s, and more specifically on the eventual refusal of the salafis to pledge allegiance to the MB, see also Hassan (2012: 167-170).

subsequent evolution until the 2011 uprising. The MB maintained its rejection of armed violence in Egypt and recognised the necessity to engage in political and social activities. The internally diverse *salafi* trend broadly silenced previous discussions on the use of violence in Islamic countries and on the Islamic legitimacy of current Muslim leaders, replaced by a practical focus on non-violent preaching. These two trends voluntarily distanced themselves from the proponents of violence to assure their organisational survival in a new political environment.

The initial phase of political liberalisation was utilised by the MB to entrench its reformist nature and develop new organisational and ideational resources to sustain this objective. This process followed the MB's internal retrospection and ideological moderation initiated in the 1970s, when the second general guide of the Brotherhood Hassan al-Hudaybi published the opus *duat la qudat (Preachers not Judges)* to refute the ideas developed by Sayyid Qutb in prison (Zollner, 2008). The engagement with Mubarak's regime after 1981 and the concomitant participation in the political process were initially justified by the opportunity to protect the group's preaching activities and pursue the Islamisation of society through parliament (Wickham, 2013: 46; Hamid, 2014: 67). The MB's long-term strategy crystallised henceforth as the materialisation of the group as the main non-threatening opposition to the regime, with an implicit endeavour to potentially replace Mubarak's National Democratic Party in the long run (Blaydes, 2010).

The MB engaged with this new structural context in complementary arenas, including the parliament, professional syndicates and the informal Islamic sector. Immediately after 1981, the state's obstruction to the recognition of the MB as a political party and the list-based voting system required an alliance with an established political party. The MB therefore joined the new Wafd party as a junior partner in 1984, and collectively obtained 13 per cent of the seats in parliament in the legislative elections organised the same year. Four years later, in 1988, the MB changed partner and became the dominant actor of an alliance with the socialist Labour party, and gained 22 per cent of the seats in parliament (Hafez, 2003: 48). The MB additionally mobilised its organisational resources to join subsidiary domains. The group notably became a dominant actor in university associations and professional syndicates, thanks to the organisational absorption of skilled student leaders of the late 1970s (Wickham, 2013; Al-Arian, 2014). The MB finally took advantage of the expansion of the “parallel

Islamic sector” (Wickham, 2002: 94), which appeared in the 1980s as a “broad network of Islamic institutions [which] begun to coalesce in the interstices of Egypt's authoritarian state” (Wickham, 2002: 95). This sector included an array of entities, including mosques, associations, clinics and schools, developed by MB members to sustain the expansion of their group and the accomplishment of its objectives.

The MB's reformist endeavour and the group's engagement with the regime and non-Islamist opposition forces influenced internal debates on democracy and Islamic law (Wickham, 2013: 55-58), and strengthened the MB's commitments to political reform. The Brotherhood's collaboration with new political forces impacted the world-views and cognitive processes of new MB members, especially the generation who joined the group in the late 1970s from the universities students' unions (Wickham, 2013; Kandil, 2014). These interactions sustained new cooperative interactions with external actors and reinforced the internal role played by MB reformists (Wickham, 2013: 58-70). The structural context defining the Egyptian regime from 1981 onwards internally sustained the MB's strategic choice to engage with it.

The evolution of Egyptian salafism contrasts significantly with the MB on organisational and ideational grounds. Mainstream salafism developed distinctively from the IG and the JG, and adopted a separate trajectory. Organisationally, the epicentre of the *salafi* social movement family emerged in Alexandria, where mostly medicine university students politicised in the 1970s founded the *al-madrasa al-salafiyya* (the *Salafi* school), and then *al-da'wa al-salafiyya*, the *Salafi* Call, in the early 1980s (Hassan, 2012a: 167-170; Faid, 2014: 55). These students were members of the Islamic groups which proliferated in Egyptian universities in the 1970s, and who eventually refused to join the MB as their Cairo-based counterpart (Hassan, 2012a: 167). Young *salafi* leaders additionally refused to join the mainstream *ansar al-sunna*, whose institutional make-up was considered constraining on their activities (al-'Al, 2012: 30-31). They rather created a network of mosques and social services in the Nile Delta, which later spread throughout the country (Gauvain, 2010; Hassan, 2012a, 2012b; Lacroix, 2012; al-Anani & Malik, 2013; Utvik, 2014). In Cairo, local mosques and associations similarly developed independent *salafi* networks, often operating underground and characterised by lower levels of institutionalisation. These loose networks did not enjoy the relative unity of the *Salafi* Call and were marked by sharper

local divisions (Gauvain, 2010). At the national level, there were no *salafi* organisations or institutions which enjoyed a monopoly on the *salafi* trend akin to the MB's.

The ideational development of the *salafi* social movement family was profoundly influenced by the assassination of Sadat and its repercussions. The main ramification of the use of violence by *salafi* actors was the conscious decision of mainstream salafis to silence public discussions on jihad and on the legitimacy of current Muslim leaders. In Alexandria, the leaders of the most organised *salafi* movement deliberately chose to eschew political activities to protect their social activities and preclude political repression (Lacroix, 2012: 4). They preferred to focus on teaching, notably through the *furqan* institute created in the early 1980s (Hassan, 2012a: 169-170). In Cairo, diverse networks of *salafi* sympathisers and preachers were, in their theologico-political outlooks, divided on the legitimacy of the regime and its president Hosni Mubarak. Local divisions ranged from the supporters of the uncompromising positions of Sayyid Qutb to their opponents, mostly represented by the so-called *madkhali*,<sup>254</sup> who justified the Islamic legitimacy of Hosni Mubarak (Gauvain, 2010, 2011:175; Lacroix, 2012). These divisions were very common in Egyptian salafism and similarly thrived inside *ansar al-sunna* (Gauvain, 2010, 2012). Only some Cairo-based preachers such as sheikh Muhammad 'Abdul Maqsud and Fawzi Sa'id, often referred to as the *haraki* (activist) salafis, adopted an antagonistic position towards the regime and Muslim leaders who do not apply Islamic law comprehensively (Faid, 2014: 59-60). Their position represented a middle ground between mainstream and *jihadi* salafis: excommunication of the Muslim leader without resorting to violence. At the same time, Egyptian salafis acknowledged that this issue had no place in the public sphere, and *salafi* preachers generally respected the boundaries imposed by the regime (Brown, 2012).

These developments critically framed the subsequent mobilising patterns and ideological developments of Egyptian *salafi* networks. The nature of the political opportunities available to opposition movements in Egypt and the impossibility to challenge the regime from within sustained the development of an apolitical ideological construction. Most *salafi* groups and networks channelled

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<sup>254</sup> This denomination refers to Rabi' al-Madkhali, a prominent contemporary Saudi *salafi* scholar who has been used since the 1990s by the Saudi government to oppose the politicisation of the *salafi* opposition in the country, represented by the *sahwa* (revival) movement, and the influence of Sayyid Qutb on Islamist movements more generally. See also Lacroix (2011: 212-213).

their organisational resources into preaching and teaching in order to avert the repetition of pre-Mubarak's campaigns of arrests, and to stay under the radars of the regime. *Al-da'wa al-salafiyya* was specifically careful not to be associated with *jihadi* groups and suffer their fate. *Ansar al-sunna* was similarly unwilling to reiterate the active stance adopted between the 1960s and the 1970s, which sparked, back then, its dissolution into the mainstream *al-jam'iyya al-shar'iyya* and the confiscation of its resources (Gauvain, 2010: 815). Mainstream salafis chose to exploit the favourable political context to expand their networks, even though they occasionally suffered from limited setbacks (Lacroix, 2012). Mainstream public positions drew upon the cultural resources developed by the Saudi religious establishment, which specifically warns against political participation and its associated evils on Muslim societies, notably *fitna* (discord) and *fawda* (chaos) (Gauvain, 2010: 815).

The phase of relative political opening ceased by the end of the 1980s, when the contentious conflict with the IG and the JG inaugurated a wave of political de-liberalisation which extended throughout the 1990s. The conflict with militant Islamist groups and the perceived empowerment of the MB through political participation were resented by the regime, which decided to revoke the conciliatory position formerly endorsed towards the opposition (Hamid, 2014: 88). The legislative elections organised in 1990 were logically boycotted by an array of opposition movements, while the subsequent legislative elections held in 1995 were preceded by sweeping arrests among political opponents, and accompanied by the increasing use of military trials against the opposition (Rutherford, 2013: 88). The evolution of the Egyptian political context marked the beginning of a period of relative political exclusion.

Political de-liberalisation did not impede and reverse the MB's moderation, nor did it disrupt the group's reformist agenda. Political exclusion reinforced the group's commitment to internal and domestic democratisation (Wickham, 2013: 71-73; Hamid, 2014: 91-97) and reinvigorated the group's promotion of democracy and political reform in Egypt. Wickham argues that this evolution reflects the growing influence of the reformists inside the Brotherhood. She asserts that the reformist faction is formed by MB members who joined the Brotherhood in the late 1970s, and who have been influenced from the 1980s onwards by increased collaboration with non-Islamist political forces, especially in the syndicates and in the professional associations. She adds that, in contrast with the previous MB generation, the reformists were not socialised in prison and did not consequently have the same narrow

mindset (Wickham, 2013: 58-70). Hamid adopts a more cynical view, and asserts that this new pragmatism is better explained by the need of the MB to seek legal protection and allies against state repression (Hamid, 2014: 91-97). Despite diverging analyses, what matters for this section is that, when political exclusion worsened, the MB was all the more willing to carry on investing its cultural and organisational resources into the promotion of political reformism in Egypt.

The phase of political de-liberalisation witnessed throughout the 1990s similarly affected the Egyptian *salafi* trend. The post-1981 decision to avoid political activities and take distance from Islamist militants facilitated the survival of *salafi* networks and the continuation of their grass-root activities. State repression and the contentious conflict with militant *salafi* groups (the IG and the JG) confirmed the necessity to dissociate themselves from controversial public statements and from taking part to the opposition to Mubarak's regime. The *salafi* trend maintained the same organisational and networking structures and strategic vision, centred on teaching and preaching. They only suffered from some setbacks, such as the closure of the Alexandria-based *furqan* institute and of the group's publication in 1994 (al-'Al, 2012: 32). The evolution of the Egyptian structural context entrenched the route hitherto endorsed by *salafi* groups and networks.

Egyptian salafis had not been specifically affected by political and societal developments until the 2000s, when the religious field witnessed new developments. During the decade preceding the 2011 uprising, the proliferation of satellite TV channels and the growing access to the internet in Egyptian households combined with the marketisation of religion contributed to the promotion of a new individualistic approach to Islam in Egyptian society (Haenni, 2005; Roy, 2012).<sup>255</sup> The diversification of the religious field was reinforced by the growing inability of the religious establishment to fulfil individual religious expectations (Roy, 2012). The individualisation of religion has been corroborated by the marginalisation of traditional and institutionalised forms of religiosity, gradually replaced by an individually-driven selection among an array of religious sources (Roy, 2012).<sup>256</sup>

This setting was fertile ground for the diffusion of new forms of salafism. *Salafi* preachers increasingly

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<sup>255</sup> See also Hirschkind (2006) and Mahmood (2011).

<sup>256</sup> For a broader study, see also Roy (2010).

relied on new religious TV channels and on the internet, rather than on *salafi* associations, to diffuse the *salafi* approach to Islam (Field & Hamam, 2009; Gauvain, 2010: 816; Lacroix, 2012: 2). This new mode of socialisation with salafism shaped its new organisational and ideological making and rendered it more individualistic. Whereas *salafi* Muslims in Egypt used to be socialised in *salafi* institutions around specific religious scholars, this new socialisation through the internet and satellite TV individualised the religious approach of the new generation and shaped their eclectic choice among diversified sources, which has been conducive to the creation of their own understanding of salafism (Drevon, 2015, forthcoming). This period saw the proliferation of new *salafi* figures and movements, such as mainstream satellite-TV preachers Muhammad Hassan, Muhammad Hussein Ya'qub and Hazem Abu Isma'il, and new movements such as the *al-haraka al-salafiyya min ajl al-islam* (the *salafi* movement for reform) (Faid, 2014: 57). Salafism became more influential in Egyptian society while, paradoxically, traditional *salafi* networks and institutions lost their sway over its development.

These societal changes reinforced the competition between the MB and the *salafi* trend inside the Islamist social movement family. The first arena of contention was charity, where the expansion of charitable *salafi* networks increased rivalry with MB-affiliated networks. This antagonism was nonetheless abated by different focuses with, for instance, a middle class and urban constituency for the MB (Clark, 2004; Masoud, 2014).<sup>257</sup> Competition was more strident in the religious field, where the salafis were better positioned to capitalise on the evolution of the religious practices in Egypt. *Salafi* networks had devoted their organisational and cultural resources to education and preaching for the past three decades, and possessed a rich and coherent religious corpus to diffuse through new means of communication. The political focus of the MB and its neglected religious construction (Kandil, 2014) mean that, aside from a few exceptions,<sup>258</sup> the MB did not have the religious scholars and literature akin to the salafis', which became influential even among MB members.<sup>259</sup> The MB has indeed long been marked by a richer internal religious diversity between the sufis, the Qutbis, the salafis and the proponents of religious traditionalism (El-Houdaiby, 2012; Wickham 2013: 133-137), and defined by

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<sup>257</sup> On the Islamic charity sector in Egypt, see also Atia (2013).

<sup>258</sup> One of the most renown MB-affiliated scholar is Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He is the chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, and is widely considered influential among MB members. Al-Qaradawi was offered an official position in the group on two occasions (see also: Graf & Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009). Another influential Egyptian scholar for MB members is Sawfat Hegazi.

<sup>259</sup> The *salafi* influence among MB members is substantiated by an array of qualitative evidences. The most comprehensive historical analysis by Husam Tamam (2012) traces its origins back to the exile of MB members to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s (see also: Lacroix, 2011). Recent academic studies additionally highlight the changing demography of MB members in the 2000s (Kandil, 2014).

its neglected endeavour to diffuse a unified religious approach in society (Kandil, 2014). These developments indicate that Egyptian societal evolution reinforced internal competition in the Islamist social movement family, even though internal interactions remained underdeveloped. Islamist sub-groups remained faithful to their previous routes, *da'wa* for the salafis and political reform and participation for the MB.

The last political developments before the 2011 uprising occurred in the context of the two legislative elections organised in 2005 and 2010. The main noticeable change was the provisional and limited liberalisation of the political system in the aftermath of 9/11, when Mubarak's regime was pressured by the United States to undertake steps towards political liberalisation. George W. Bush notably insisted that the absence of democratic regimes in the Middle East partially contributed to the 9/11 attacks, and promoted a so-called "freedom agenda" to liberalise the region (Hassan, 2008; Dunne, 2009). The 2005 Egyptian elections were therefore the most competitive elections ever organised during Mubarak's three decades in power. These elections witnessed unprecedented gains for the MB, which loomed as the largest opposition group in the parliament with 20 per cent of the seats (Gunning & Baron, 2013; Osman, 2013). This perceptible political opening should not conceal, however, that the MB still suffered from repeated waves of arrest which substantiate that the regime had not fully liberalise and remained semi-authoritarian. The regime similarly continued to repress growing waves of popular protests which proliferated in the 2000s (Gunning & Baron, 2013). The next parliamentary elections, organised in 2010, marked a clear set-back. They were widely denounced as fraudulent, and rebuked by the opposition which broadly boycotted them, even though the MB participated and obtained a single seat (Gunning & Baron, 2013; Osman, 2013).

This relatively stable structural political context contextualises why the *salafi* trend did not revise its theological position on political participation in the 2000s, despite the significant political gains achieved by the MB in 2005. *Salafi* groups maintained their former positions, which stretched from silence to the denunciation of democracy as a form of *kufr* (disbelief) (al-'Al, 2012: 37-38, 44; Zahran et al., 2012a: 29-31). These apolitical or antagonistic positions to democracy raised the speculation among many observers, including U.S diplomats (Wikileaks, 2011) that salafis were used by the state as a religious alibi against the MB. After the uprising, the most organised component of pre-2011 *salafi* networks retrospectively argued that their refusal to participate was essentially political, and informed

by the absence of a competitive political system that would allow for substantive changes to occur through the ballot box (Lacroix, 2012). The pre-2011 setting also signifies that Egyptian salafis did not develop any organisational or ideational resources towards the shaping of a political vision for Egypt before the 2011 uprising, and carried on their post-1981 route during this decade.

The investigation of the evolution of the structural context under Mubarak confirms its relative stability for the three decades preceding the resignation of the Egyptian president. A stable structural context shaped the evolution of the Islamist social movement family, and informed its organisational and ideational development from 1981 to 2011. The MB channelled its organisational and ideational resources towards the sustainability of its reformist endeavour, despite numerous obstacles. The group's long-term approach to political change in Egypt relied on the mobilisation of a middle class constituency and on the development of internal norms of organisational survival. Conversely, the *salafi* trend remained divided until 2011, although its sub-components consensually agreed that they had to eschew political activities and focus on preaching and teaching to survive in this semi-authoritarian setting.

This analysis is critical to the understanding of the evolution of the IG and of the JG before 2011. This section notably reveals that these groups' non-violent competitors in the Islamist social movement family did not develop a credible alternative to political violence to change the fundamentals of Mubarak's regime. The MB's non-threatening opposition to Mubarak and the *salafi*'s apolitical preaching, both aiming in their own ways at the very long term, did not generate appealing cultural resources which could have challenged IG and JG members and leaders, and triggered a reconsideration of their positions on democracy. Moreover, the organisational isolation of the three sub-components of the Islamist social movement family obstructed internal interactions, dialogue and cooperation which could have stimulated a similar outcome. Dalacoura's claim that militant groups rejected democracy in the 1980s (Dalacoura, 2011: 117) is therefore inadequate considering that, despite occasional improvements (notably in 1987 and 2005), Mubarak's regime was never fully inclusive nor electorally competitive. At the same time, IG leaders' claims in personal interviews (e.g. Hafez, 2013) that they rejected democracy in the 1980s and in the 1990s solely because they considered democracy a legitimising tool for the regime, and the related argument that the IG's former theology did not aim at democratic participation per se, cannot be substantiated in this case. While the

IG and some JG factions legitimised political participation after 2011, the following analysis demonstrates that this structural change was not the only factor informing the evolution of these groups' political outlooks.

#### **6.4. COLLECTIVE GROUP IDENTITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN APPROACH TO POLITICAL ACTION**

This section investigates the development of the collective group identity and approach to political action of the IG and of the JG from their emergence to the 2011 uprising. In contrast with the fourth chapter of this thesis, this section does not explore the construction of these groups' theologico-political frameworks through the study of their leaderships, but rather endeavours to study the organisational elaboration of these groups' ideational commitments. The main argument developed thenceforth is that militant groups' organisational and ideational early developments are interdependent with the construction of their collective identities and approach to political action. These processes further account for the endurance of these groups' internal cohesion overtime and have assured, in the IG, the successful diffusion of new ideational frames when IG leaders' collectively renounced the use of violence in Egypt.

Collective group identity is an analytical concept designed to investigate meaning making at a meso-level. This concept is based on the premise that militant groups, like any other organised entity engaged in contentious politics, actively construct the sense of their actions through the development of a collective group identity (Melucci, 1995). New social movement theorists assert that this process unfolds in the course of social movement activities through internal dialogues, cognitive processes and negotiations, and in interaction with external actors (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). Collective group identity is thus described as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity” (Taylor & Whittier, 1992: 105). This definition nonetheless does not include the contextual field in which identity construction occurs, and which is incorporated in Melucci's conceptualisation of collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place”. Collective identity is therefore partially shaped by these groups' external context, as asserted by Melucci, who adds that “actors “produce” the collective action because they are able to define themselves and their relationship

with the environment” (1995: 43).

The following analysis contends that the IG and the JG produced, in their early days, an explicit primordial identity which has shaped the foundations of their collective “we”. This collective “we”, whose definition is “a fundamental accomplishment of activist groups” (Blee, 2012: 53), includes, in line with Melucci's framework, these groups' ends, means and possibilities (Melucci, 1995). This section argues that these groups internalised their collective “we” through diverging mobilising patterns consistent with their collective identities' fundamental nature and with the structural context in which these groups initially operated. This section establishes that the theoretical positions on violence embedded in the IG and in the JG's collective group identities enabled diverging mobilising patterns which have subsequently impacted their organisational internalisation. The IG's initially non-violent endeavour promoted low-risk activism mobilising patterns which have facilitated a thorough assimilation of the IG's collective group identity, strengthened its internal hierarchy and discipline, and legitimised its leaders' figures of authority. Even though the IG engaged, in the late 1970s, in clashes with its local competitors, widespread armed violence did not materialise in the group's early days and was not constitutive of the group's initial endeavour. Conversely, the violent endeavour pursued by the JG from its inception enforced high-risk activism mobilising patterns which have obstructed the replication of similar processes.

In the 1970s, the emergence of the IG as a group of friends who gathered to preach Islam in society has shaped the group's *da'wi* (proselytising) primordial identity. Multiple interviews and written testimonies of its early founders<sup>260</sup> suggest that IG leaders and members collectively framed their actions and the meanings of their engagement with the necessity to spread Islam in Egyptian society through *da'wa*. This engagement was harmonious with the post-Nasserist environment of the 1970s, when a religious zeal transpired across social classes and backgrounds, regardless of previous intellectual affiliations. Early IG members hailed from different socio-economic backgrounds and levels of religiosity. They mostly converged around a unifying Islamic revivalist endeavour. This point relates to Roel Meijer's contention that the IG has historically been guided by *hisba* (which is usually translated as the promotion of virtue and repression of vice in Islam) as a “principle of social action”

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<sup>260</sup> Chapter 3 pages 82-85.

(Meijer, 2009b), even though, according to field research and interviews, *da'wa* is ubiquitous while *hisba* is rarely ever mentioned.

The IG's ideational focus on *da'wa* shaped the means and possibilities available to the group before the contentious conflict with the state, as well as the conditions of their internalisation through low-risk activism mobilising patterns. As argued by Blee on grass-root activism, “activist groups quickly develop routing ways of operating that shape what they will do and will consider doing far into the future” (Blee, 2012: 29) and “to define who fits into the group by assessing questions of belonging, membership and recruiting” (Blee, 2012: 79). The liberalised environment of the 1970s was notably favourable to the use of the public space for religious mobilisation. This supportive environment was manifest on many levels, and can be generally corroborated by the increasing number of mosques through the country, by the growing influence of Islamist activism on university campuses and by the expansion of the Islamic parallel sector (e.g. Abdo, 2002; Wickham, 2002; Al-Arian, 2014). The IG benefited from this new setting to engage in various low-risk activities, including public preaching and the provision of diverse forms of social support which facilitated the recruitment of new members, strengthened the ties between IG members and leaders, and promoted the internal assimilation of the *da'wi* collective group identity. The IG's internal discipline was organisationally normalised by the adoption of the MB *minhaj* (method)<sup>261</sup> and by the endorsement of the Islamic concept of *al-sama' wal-ta'a* (listen and obey), which characterised Islamist student groups in the 1970s (Al-Arian, 2014: 120). This concept can be traced back to early Islamic history, and refers to the necessity for Muslims to obey God, his Prophet Muhammad and those in charge of authority. This concept facilitated the maintenance of an organisational discipline inside the IG and reinforced the group's patriarchal nature. The structural contextual of the 1970s combined with the *da'wi* (proselytising) nature of the IG's primordial identity therefore bolstered low-risk activism mobilising patterns which played a critical role in the socialisation of new members and in the creation of consensual organisational norms.

The inception of the first JG affiliated cells contrasts substantively with these developments. The violent nature of these cells' primordial identity, a *jihadi* avant-garde, prevented the institution of low-

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<sup>261</sup> Cf. chapter 3 page 88. This similarity between the MB *minhaj* and the IG is often mentioned by IG members, who define themselves as the *salafi* equivalent of the MB.

risk activism mobilising patterns. The translation of this primordial identity into organisational mobilisation was indeed associated, as in analogous cases, with several trade-offs between security, efficiency and control (e.g. Shapiro, 2013). The ideational nature of these cells' primary endeavour to use violence against the state prevented them from exploiting a relatively liberal environment on the IG model. JG members could not organise low-risk activism activities to mobilise and recruit new followers, and had to maintain a certain level of secrecy to avoid external infiltration by the political police (e.g. Muhammad, 2013). These obstacles to low-risk activism mobilisation internally hindered the development of shared organisational norms: JG cells were plagued with divisions and internal competition, and had to rely primarily on relational micro-mobilisation among trusted networks of acquaintances, family and friends (e.g. Muhammad, 2013). A member of one of the most prominent JG cell led by Saleh Sirriyya, argues that:

Saleh believed in a very specific mode of organisation. He believed that we should design a strategic plan and delegate its application to individual groups. We needed to compartmentalise our actions and to create different units throughout the country and inside the army. Our security needs made it impossible to create a centralised organisation which could have been destroyed at any time. Our three core principles were: secrecy, deception and decentralisation. We did not have a plan at the beginning, however, and were isolated from one another because we feared that insiders could collaborate with the state and betray the group.

Commenting on the emergence of early JG cells, a JG leader adds that:

The main difference between us and the IG concerned the level of secrecy needed by our group. We did not engage in mainstream *da'wa* in public places. Our *da'wa* always remained secret. Secrecy was the only means suited to the reality we lived in. We were like the Prophet during the first three years of preaching, when he preached in secret to his close friends and associates. You know, when you live in an oppressive environment, you look for a way out. The reality imposed itself on us, and Islam showed us the way.

JG members' early acceptance of jihad and these cells' relative isolation from one another nourished their fundamental self-perception as a *jihadi* avant-garde fighting for an idealist cause, in line with the

pro-active endeavour analysed previously.<sup>262</sup> Considering that JG cells could not, as the IG, create a comprehensive (*shumuli* in Arabic) movement which would form the basis of a new society, JG members had to be the avant-garde elite suggested by Sayyid Qutb's *taliya* (literally avant-garde in Arabic),<sup>263</sup> since, according to Blee, “how groups define a problem [...] shapes how they act and how they see themselves and the social world” (Blee, 2012: 82). Amr (2012) from the JG, expresses a self-perception shared by many JG members, who describes this *jihadi* elite:

We were all connected to the idea of jihad. Personally, what convinced me was the need to fight for the oppressed (*al-mathlumin*). I did not want to fight for them only because they were Muslims, but because they were oppressed. Had they been from other nationalities or religion, I would have fought for them as well. In the JG, we are like chameleons. We prepare ourselves and we are ready to act when an occasion arises. When new needs materialise, and when Egypt is not suited for jihad, we are ready to take action elsewhere. In the 1990s, the alternatives were Bosnia and Chechnya. Today it is Syria. Jihad is contingent on the circumstances.

The political context in which JG early cells emerged shaped their approach to political action as well, in accordance with Melucci's inclusion of the relational field in which collective identities are constructed (Melucci, 1995). While several strategies were initially debated among JG cells, with a preference for the military coup and guerrilla warfare, the death of Salih Hisham, a proponent of the latter, effectively paved the way for the general adoption of the military coup as a strategic objective to replace the Egyptian regime with an Islamic government. This strategic vision has subsequently shaped the conceptualisation of the military component of jihad by JG members, according to field research and interviews, even though the absence of organisational control meant that no individual or cell could claim a monopoly over the formation and evolution of the JG's collective group identity. A prominent JG leader in the 1990s and member the Islamic Party, contextualises the adoption of the strategic military coup:

In the 1970s we thought that change was only possible with the organisation of a military coup against this oppressive regime. We were not the only ones to think this way, however, and this vision was not peculiar to the Islamist trend. In Syria, Asia and South America, most political change occurred through military coup at the time. It was the prevailing idea. You had to change the regime through the army, and not through elections or public preaching. The jihad groups were not the only one to support this position.

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. chapter 3 page 76.

<sup>263</sup> Even though Qutb did not explicitly embrace the use of violence, cf. chapter 3.

Even [former president Anwar] Sadat, in the past, participated in military coups and political assassinations. He was proud of it!

Diverging levels of internal control and organisational discipline informed by low versus high-risk activism mobilising patterns exacerbated these differences in the next few years. In the IG, the post-1984 liberation of prisoners combined with the phase of relative political liberalisation during the first few years of Mubarak's presidency facilitated the reconstruction of the group's infrastructure in the South of the country, and reinvigorated the socialisation of its members with the group's collective identity. Local IG leaders reconstructed their networks under the nominal control of the IG's historical leadership in prison, and utilised favourable opportunities to preach in public and to spread the group's *da'wa*. While the IG's core literature was minimal before the 1981-1982 wave of arrests, the collective endeavour of the group's leadership to clarify core ideological tenets in prison contributed to the dissemination of these new texts among the group's (old and new) members. This process refined the framing of the group's collective identity, reinforced shared organisational norms and enriched the meanings associated with their members' involvement with the IG. An IG member argues that:

Our leaders authored the group's literature in prison. They clarified many core issues that we collectively learnt afterwards. For instance, they developed the theological concept of *al-'udhr bil-jahl* to differentiate us from the JG on the indiscriminate use of *takfir*, which we opposed and denounced. This concept became a central theological tenet for us, while it was not important for them. Our leaders also clarified our relationship with the MB in the text entitled "We and the MB". We were together on the ground and easily bounded in this relatively free environment. We could learn directly from our leaders, contrary to what occurred later, in the 1990s. These interactions reinforced our collective solidarity. The JG, on the other hand, were all their own sheikhs with their independent thinking.

The books published by the IG prison leadership were paradoxically not initially authored to form the group's core literature according to their authors. Najih Ibrahim notably insists that *mithaq al-'amal al-islami* (*The Charter for Islamic Action*) was conceived as their defence in the trials which followed Sadat's assassination, when they thought that they would be executed by the regime.<sup>264</sup> Field research with many IG members nonetheless reveals that they generally consider these books the IG's core literature and the epitomisation of its theologico-political tenets, frequently unaware of the initial

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<sup>264</sup> Cf. chapter 4 page 122.

intentions of their leaders.

The imprisonment of the early IG leadership after the assassination of Sadat was additionally used to legitimise its vertical authority over the group. Stories of steadfastness in prison and resistance to gruesome acts of torture bolstered the prison leadership's aura, religious credibility, and social capital. By staying faithful to their objectives and religious commitments in prison, IG leaders reinforced their portrayal as spokesmen for the truth (*kalima al-haq*). The IG leadership managed to portray itself as the rightful heirs of prominent religious scholars who were similarly jailed for their religious viewpoints, including Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya who faced a similar *mihna* (inquisition) in the classic period. IG leaders' opposition to a revision of their ideational commitments despite the use of torture demonstrated the virtue of their endeavour, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves in the path of God (*fi sabil illah*). Being in the front line against the regime, prison substantiated that IG leaders were not merely using fellow members for personal objectives, but were the first to pay a heavy price. The credibility and social capital of the prison leadership were nourished by their authorship of the group's newly published literature in detention, which were collectively assimilated outside of prison by IG members. The vertical authority of the IG prison leadership was reinforced symbolically, by virtue of imprisonment, and practically, with the collective assimilation of its written productions and recognition of its practical guidance. The development of the group's collective identity was therefore sustained by prison experience, which increased IG members' solidarity with their rightful leaders.

The IG's primordial *da'wa* identity retained its centrality in the next few years. This concept was pivotal in attracting and mobilising new followers before the beginning of the contentious conflict with the state. The relatively liberal environment that prevailed until 1986-1987 meant that joining the IG was, as in the 1970s, akin to engaging in low-risk activities for the group's newcomers. The framing of the group's primordial identity as *da'wa* resonated strongly among Egyptian youths who felt they needed to do something "for Islam". As argued by Wickham on the development of the Islamic sector in Egypt (2004), joining the Islamic movement gave them a "sense of purpose" (Wickham, 2004: 237) and an endeavour to change the prevailing order and create a just society (Wickham, 2004: 238). Joining an Islamist group was also aligned with their material interests, considering that the IG, as in the non-militant Islamist networks studied by Wickham, gave access to a new community with its own

communal support and resources (Wickham, 2002: 150-151). The IG was analogous to a new family which assisted its members,<sup>265</sup> as in other cases of socially embedded radical movements.<sup>266</sup> In addition, many IG members argue that they were attracted by the white Islamic garbs worn by IG members, which reminded them of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. This garment contrasted with the Western outfits common among MB members and leaders, and further diverged with the *jellabiya* traditionally worn in Upper Egypt.<sup>267</sup> Wearing this new type of dress reinforced the sense of shared identity among IG members. Joining the IG was a new *da'wi* way of life.

The ideational nature of the IG's primordial identity helped the group to take advantage of the favourable political environment and of the growing influence of the Islamist social movement family in society. This atmosphere was a fertile cement to the legitimisation of the public role of Islam (Abdo, 2002; Hamid, 2014), which eased the IG's mobilising process. *Salafi* networks and institutions legitimised the *salafi* religious approach promoted by the IG, while the support for the application of Islamic law by the Islamist social movement family strengthened popular demands for the application of *shar'ia*, which became ubiquitous even among non-religious political parties.

The strong public support for the application of Islamic law in Egypt and the growing influence of the Islamist social movement family determined the conditions under which IG's mobilisation could be successful. The group's expansion notably became contingent on its ability to differentiate its religious and political approach from mainstream salafis and from the MB. On the religious front, the IG exploited what were often perceived as internal *salafi* contradictions. Many IG members argue that they felt uncomfortable with the political ambiguities of the salafis on Mubarak's legitimacy, which they considered internally inconsistent with their religious approach. They believed that chastising the Egyptian president as an infidel was the only position congruent with the *salafi* approach to Islam, and mention multiple fatwas of mainstream *salafi* scholars to validate their claim.<sup>268</sup> The relative silence of mainstream *salafi* institutions on Mubarak, contextualised in the previous section, often motivated their quest for an alternative. In addition, the IG's opposition to party politics and the failure of the MB to

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<sup>265</sup> One can refer to the testimonies of former IG members (Bari, 2002; Farghali, 2012). See also Malthaner (2011).

<sup>266</sup> For a comparative study of the provision of social services by militant groups, one can refer to Berman (2009).

<sup>267</sup> The white dress worn by IG members is similar to the Gulf *thawb*. It contrast with the traditional *jellabiya* worn in Upper Egypt, which is a robe which is usually looser and more colourful.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. chapter 4 pages 111-112.

achieve substantial results through parliament similarly strengthened the group's political credibility. The structural context under Mubarak was therefore instrumental to the IG's success on the ground. IG members stress that they believed that their group had more credibility and consistence both politically and religiously. An IG member, Ahmad (2012), clarifies his feelings, widely shared among IG interviewees, concerning his decision to join the IG:

I joined the IG when I was fourteen. I was already religious at the time and so was my family. I was attracted by the IG because of their activities. They were assisting and helping people and I wanted to be part of that. You know, *da'wa* is fundamental in Islam and the IG was actively promoting it. When I joined university, there were different groups following different *modus operandi*. You could just choose and join who you preferred. The JG was secret and divided. We barely heard about them. They were their own sheikhs and leaders with their specific set of ideas. They did not enjoy the centralisation of the IG. *Al-da'wa al-salafiyya* was mostly based in Alexandria. There were no real contacts with the IG, which was localised mostly in the South and a bit in Cairo. In my opinion, I thought that *al-da'wa al-salafiyya* was acting like cowards. They shared our ideas but did not want to oppose the regime. The IG, even before the phase of confrontation, was stronger and more attractive to me. They were preaching *kalima al-haq* (the word of truth) and were not ashamed of doing so. I admired their strength and wanted to be part of it.

The relatively liberal structural context prevailing in the 1980s did not affect the JG equivalently. The primary focus on Afghanistan defended by its main faction<sup>269</sup> and the violent endeavour theoretically pursued by its various cells obstructed the group's use of a relatively free environment. As in the 1970s, membership in a secret group which endeavoured to infiltrate the army and stage a military coup prevented the organisation of public low-risk activities to attract and mobilise new members on the IG model. This group's nature, on organisational and ideational levels, was an important obstacle to public mobilisation. JG cells were still broadly characterised by the features developed in the 1970s. Their mobilising patterns were circumscribed to networks of acquaintances and friends, although JG members sometimes attempted to mobilise inside mainstream *salafi* institutions as well (Mahmud, 2012; Sadiq, 2012).

The secrecy required by JG cells combined with internal organisational divisions affected the

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<sup>269</sup> Which benefited most from the liberation of prisoners which occurred in 1984-1985. Cf. chapter 4 page 126.

continuation of a collective group identity widely shared among its members.<sup>270</sup> In contrast with the IG, the absence of low-risk activities impeded the strengthening of their members' collective bounds and emotional attachment at a meso-level, which have been critical to militant groups' survival in other contexts (e.g. della Porta, 1995: 177). The strength of JG members' attachment to their group's collective identity was contingent on the networks in which they were embedded, and on the positions of their leaders within the group. In social network analysis, the JG's overall topography can be analysed as a constellation of several cores constituted around its main leaders. The strength of JG members' identification with the group's collective identity was diluted in the cells situated farer from its core. This phenomenon is exemplified in the departure of some JG members, who took independent initiatives by the end of the 1980s, and retaliated against the security services without any specific identification with the JG. This is particularly true for the groups referred to as the *shawqiyun* and *najimun min al-nar*, studied in the previous chapter. Conversely, JG cells that were more closely associated with the group's core leaders still strongly identified with the JG and its collective identity, which influenced a similar identification by their new associates.

Eventually, the participation of IG and JG members in the Afghan jihad reinforced these dynamics and confirmed the importance of diverging organisational norms in the construction and continuation of these groups' collective group identities. IG members in Afghanistan and Pakistan remained under the supervision and organisational control of their leaders, which facilitated the survival of the group's organisational cohesion. The engagement in a foreign land did not contradict the importance of Egypt, as the previous chapter asserted, and the Afghan jihad merely enriched the self-perception of its members' and leaders. Multiple interviews reveal that IG members, including those who did not directly contribute to the war effort, pride themselves for their group's engagement in what they deem a legitimate jihad to protect oppressed Muslims. They identify with this war and consider it complementary to their duties in Egypt. Ahmad (2012) for instance argues that:

I did not have the chance to go to Afghanistan and I remained in Egypt. I nonetheless know that we were very strong in Afghanistan, and that our youths contributed to the jihad effort against the Soviet invasion. We had many camps and our group played an important role during the war. The IG influenced many other groups in other Muslim countries, who decided to follow our lead. For instance *al-jama'a al-*

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<sup>270</sup> The following suggestions were established on the basis of comparative interviews with members and leaders of these cells.

*islamiyya* [the Islamic group] in Indonesia was inspired by us. Our mission is to serve Islam, and serving Islam is both *da'wa* here in Egypt, and jihad in occupied Muslim lands.

Conversely, three organisational factors negatively affected the maintenance of a strong collective group identity and group loyalty among JG members in the Afghan-Pakistani training camps: (1) the group's historical division between its prison leadership and its exiled leaders, (2) the failure to cultivate a strong organisational culture before the Afghan conflict and, as illustrated in the fourth chapter of this thesis, and (3) the joining of new factions in a common fight against the Soviet Union.<sup>271</sup> Many new JG members were merely attracted by the concept of jihad in Egypt and by the liberation of occupied Muslim lands. They had a looser organisational loyalty to the JG, and a stronger self-identification with the concept of a *jihadi* avant-garde. Organisationally, JG members did not necessarily know who were their real leader (often confusing the leadership of al-Zawahiri and Sayyid Imam)<sup>272</sup> and had a tendency to take their own decisions. Sayyid Imam's first book on the responsibilities and duties of *jihadi* groups' leaders and members was a notable attempt to correct this situation and bolster internal discipline.<sup>273</sup> These factors collectively prevented the maintenance of an organisational discipline akin to the IG's. While IG members remained loyal to their group and to its cohesive leadership, JG members more easily switched organisational membership, especially in the following years when many JG members and leaders joined Osama bin Laden and AQ, considering that this alternative was more appealing. A JG member, Sadiq (2012), confirms the group's characteristics abroad and asserts that:

The JG in Afghanistan was characterised by secrecy and paranoia. In the training camps, people did not usually know one another and had to adopt aliases [*kunia* in Arabic] when interacting with one another. The least amount of personal information we knew about one another the better. If we were arrested in Egypt, we would be less likely to divulge threatening information about other members. We were kept in limbo and were training without understanding what our strategy was. We perceived ourselves as an elitist *jihadi* avant-garde and did not socialise collectively on the IG model.

In parallel to these developments, the cycle of violence initiated at the end of the 1980s in Egypt impacted IG pre-conflict low-risk activism mobilising patterns for two main reasons. As mentioned

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<sup>271</sup> Chapter 4 page 128.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. chapter 4. See also: al-Siba'i, 2002; al-Zayyat, 2007.

<sup>273</sup> Chapter 4 page 139.

previously, the IG's organisational structure gradually disintegrated on the ground and local leaders lost remaining organisational control through exile and imprisonment. Local dynamics of violence drove many youths towards the IG during the contentious conflicts for an array of reasons, stretching from group solidarity, the desire to confront the security forces and the necessity to get the protection of a protective group, as often pointed out in other cases (e.g. Bosi & della Porta, 2012). This new mobilising pattern contrasts significantly with earlier low-risk activism forms of mobilisation, and signifies that, by the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, new IG members joined this group wittingly, aware of the personal risks endured. These two factors contextualise their weakest socialisation with the group's collective identity and literature, and account for their loosest ties to the IG and its leadership. The fifth chapter has notably demonstrated that these developments explain the heterogeneous understanding of the group's ideological tenets and established repertoires of the new generation.<sup>274</sup>

While these developments could have sparked organisational divisions and splits, the ultimate imprisonment of virtually all IG members in Egypt had positive ramifications on the socialisation of the new generation. Prison presented an opportune time to familiarise themselves with the IG's collective group identity and to become acquainted with its organisational norms. This socialisation incidentally coincided with the IG historical leadership's acknowledgement that violence led to a strategic impasse, which helped to convince the state to allow senior IG leaders to tour the prisons to dialogue with their members. The IG's leadership evoked these tours in a collective memory, *nahr al-dhikrakyat (The River of Memories)* (Zuhdi et al., 2003), where they argue that these collective discussions were an unprecedented opportunity to promote internal dialogue, including with the generation which was not fully acclimatised with the group's identity before the contentious conflict with the state. According to an IG member:

There were contentious issues of understanding for the lower ranks, especially those who joined the IG in later phases. Most of them did not fully understand what we stood for. It was therefore extremely important for the leaders to take the time to sit and discuss with all of us, in order to clarify their new positions on the use of violence. As individuals we only accept God's words and the practices of the Prophet's tradition (*al-sunna*). At the beginning, it was very difficult. We thought that the political police was manipulating our leaders and felt saddened for that reason. Personally, I also thought that the state

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<sup>274</sup> Cf. chapter 5 pages 170-172. See also: al-Ghamari, n.d.

eventually freed some prisoners and not others in order to encourage *fitna* (division) in our ranks. I believed, unfortunately, that this process would mark the end of the IG as a group. Eventually I nonetheless saw that our leaders were good people, as I knew, and eventually the liberation of most of us clearly helped to facilitate this process and preserve the survival of our group.

In their collective discussions with their followers, IG leaders used the credibility and social capital acquired over time in prison to demonstrate that they were not presenting unacceptable concessions to the regime, but were merely pursuing a legitimate rethinking of the cost of violence. Stories of resistance of prominent IG leaders' against prison authorities were used to prove that they did not shirk from their ideological commitments, even, as earlier, when torture was widely used. Having faced similar predicaments, the IG leadership argued that, if they supported a ceasefire now, other IG members who also suffered at the hands of the security services should also support this initiative. Religious retrospection was more important than revenge. The vertical authority of the group's leadership and the presentation of the ceasefire initiative as a unilateral decision of the group articulated by credible leaders who did not retreat from their commitments in the past were crucial to convince IG members that this initiative did not imply that the group had been defeated.

The eventual acceptance of the rejection of armed violence by IG members, more than the theological revisions per se, was arguably contingent on two main factors. While these groups' members consistently argue that what mattered as Muslims was the congruence of any new ideological positions with the Qur'an and the Sunna (the Prophetic tradition), it can still be inferred that the interpretation of religious texts can be diverse within certain boundaries and frames of reference.<sup>275</sup> The first important parameter therefore pertained to the interpreting agents, these groups' leaders, and to their organisational positions within the formal and informal organisational arrangements presiding these groups' decision making processes. While the social capital and charisma of IG leaders mattered, these factors cannot be studied in isolation from the organisational positions and norms in which they operate.<sup>276</sup> The successful acceptance of this process required a legitimate leadership whose prerogatives were organisationally internalised and accepted, as had long been the case in the IG. An adequate contextualisation of militant groups' leaderships and organisational positions within

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<sup>275</sup> As demonstrated in chapter 4.

<sup>276</sup> This is recurrent shortcoming affecting academic studies using Bourdieusian concepts in isolation. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of diverse types of capital is not isolated, in his theoretical conceptualisation, from the fields and habitus regulating their use. See also: Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008

legitimised meso-level norms prevails over the sole consideration of a combination of leaders' charisma and internal dialogue, as previously argued by Ashour (2011).

Moreover, the acceptance of the necessity to cease violence was contingent on the ability of IG leaders to draw on the group's primordial group identity to legitimise a new strategic direction. In-group discussions and interviews with IG members reveal that, more than the theological intricacies of the revisions, what mattered was the reconsideration of violence as a reality which was imposed on them and that the IG did not want. Group members consensually reiterate the primacy of their group's *da'wa* mission and argue that the IG was pushed into armed confrontation: they typically maintain that violence was only used in self-defence to protect *da'wa*. This interpreting process is described in framing studies as frame amplification (Snow et al., 1986: 469), which “involves the idealisation, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs” (Benford & Snow, 2000: 624). In this case, IG leaders simultaneously amplified the group's primordial *da'wa* collective identity and curtailed the ideational importance of armed violence in the group's theoretical commitments. A local IG figure who rejected the theological renunciations of the group's old literature while supporting the end of violence, Saleh Muhammad Ahmad (2012), illustrates this view and argues that:

I don't believe in the legitimacy of the revisions and I still support our old literature, notably *mithaq al-'amal al-islami* (*The Charter for Islamic Action*). There is nothing wrong with it. This book is consistent with Islam and does not contradict any Islamic precept. I was nonetheless a supporter of the end of violence in Egypt. We did not launch armed struggle against the state in the first place, so if the security forces stop attacking us, then we can stop as well. We were just reacting against the state when it became necessary to do so. They killed our spokesman so we killed the head of their parliament. They killed our youths so we killed their policemen. We created dissuasion. End of the story. The foundation of our work is *da'wa*, not jihad.

This process could not be reiterated with imprisoned JG members and leaders. The absence of strong organisational control and the geographical divisions between several prisons notably isolated them from one another. The JG did not enjoy any substantial degree of centralisation, and had no legitimate leadership to initiate discussions with others members. The discussions widely reported in the media in 2007, when Sayyid Imam published the first renunciation to violence in Islamic countries were not,

according to most testimonies, as inclusive as allegedly asserted.<sup>277</sup> Many prominent JG members and leaders argue that they were never included in these discussions, even though some of them contend that they independently revised their position on jihad before Sayyid Imam's renunciations, as early as 1981, while others followed suit in 1994-1995 after the failure of the JG's armed operations in Egypt.<sup>278</sup> They add that they opposed the radicalism of the younger generation which joined the group in the 1990s, whose ideological excesses are epitomised by their excommunication of the Egyptian army. They nonetheless deny the existence of consensual discussions to renounce violence and boast that they never read Sayyid Imam's new writings (e.g. Qassem, 2012). They assert that these revisions were imposed by the security services and have no legitimacy.<sup>279</sup> One of the main JG leaders in the 1990s argues that:

There was no dialogue on the so-called revisions. This text resulted from the collaboration between the security services and Sayyid Imam. We refused it for objective reasons. We were under attack and were prisoners. We could not make concessions in these circumstances. Only a few accepted it, and many retreated afterwards. Others who allegedly accepted were not in the JG to begin with. Now, however, [speaking after 2011], may God be praised, we are out of prison. The political system is different after the uprising and we are not looking for revenge. We only want stability.

Finally, a parallel development directly related to the post 9-11 environment and to the evolution of the Egyptian religious field analysed in the previous section unfolded outside of prison in the 2000s: the so-called *salafi jihadi* trend appeared in Egypt in the fringe of some JG-affiliated factions. The emergence of this new trend is analytically important considering that its dominant mode of socialisation, non-relational diffusion, contrasts significantly with the low and high-risk mobilising patterns characterising IG and JG networks. Non-relational diffusion of *salafi jihadi* frames directly affected pre-2011 processes of identity construction of the new Islamist supporters of violence, and had notable repercussions on the post-2011 evolution of the Islamist social movement family analysed in the last section of this chapter.

According to a field ethnography with *salafi* jihadis undertaken after 2011 (Drevon, forthcoming), the

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<sup>277</sup> Sayyid Imam recognised this publicly, before the 2013 military coup (bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, 2013c).

<sup>278</sup> Cf. chapter 5 page 179.

<sup>279</sup> IG leaders who undertook their own theological revisions similarly point out to the role of the security services in the publication Sayyid Imam's new opus.

expansion of *salafi* jihadism in Egypt was mostly triggered by the wars launched by the United States on Afghanistan and on Iraq in 2001 and 2003, even though these wars do not suffice to explain the micro-level adoption of *salafi* jihadism. Field research with *salafi jihadi* youths reveals that the majority identified as *salafi* Muslims before accepting the religious justifications for violence framed by *jihadi* ideologues and theologians. This research adds that these wars nourished a personal quest and a desire to find indigenous answers to these external threats against the Muslim world, as in the cognitive opening analysed by Wiktorowicz on British *salafi jihadi* groups (Wiktorowicz, 2005). In contrast with Wiktorowicz's study, however, while militant networks managed to socialise these youths in London, the adoption of *salafi jihadi* positions in Egypt was precisely facilitated by the absence of militant groups and networks on the ground which could have mobilised and socialised them. The adoption of these new ideational frames was additionally fuelled by (1) the inability of mainstream *salafi* preachers to adequately oppose these attacks to the Muslim world, (2) the presence of a growing *jihadi* corpus on the internet<sup>280</sup> and (3) the shared *salafi* creed between *jihadi* with non-*jihadi* salafism.

In a comparative perspective, it is interesting to note that, while international solidarity played a role in older and newer mobilising patterns for a substantial number of IG and JG members (from the liberation of Palestine in the 1970s to the fight for Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s), *salafi jihadi* mobilisation was not directly mediated by existing organisational structures in Egypt. New *salafi* jihadis socialised individually and without intermediaries, which sustained the creation of an individualised understanding of *salafi* jihadism at a micro level. This peculiar socialisation with *salafi* jihadism means that the distinction between different trends of salafism based on their political approaches is more blurred than expected. While new *salafi jihadi* supporters acknowledged the illegitimacy of current Muslim rulers and the necessity to oppose foreign occupation of Muslim lands before 2011, they disagreed on wide subsidiary issues. For instance, they quarrelled on the legitimacy of mainstream Egyptian preachers such as Muhammad Hassan, Muhammad Hussein Yaqub and on prominent scholars affiliated with Saudi Arabia (e.g. Ibn Baz and al-Albani). These extensive divisions, which reflect wider divisions in *salafi* jihadism between realists and purists (Moghadam & Fishman, 2011) were relatively concealed before 2011. This new mode of socialisation therefore eroded militant groups' control over the ideational foundations of this new trend, and over the creation of a collective

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<sup>280</sup> Particularly on the website of prominent *salafif jihadi* ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdissi *minbar tawheed wal-jihad*. [www.tahwed.ws](http://www.tahwed.ws). See also: Wagemakers, 2011.

group identity.

Some of the young *salafi* jihadis were incarcerated for their political positions. Prison was a notable opportunity to become acquainted with a few JG-related networks, notably around Muhammad al-Zawahiri and Ahmad ‘Ashush. These youths’ independent socialisation and the renewed importance of AQ after 9/11 nonetheless meant that they did not identify with the JG any more, but rather associated themselves with al-Qaeda without being formally part of this organisation. One of these youths, Abu ‘Abdullah (2012), recounts that:

I became familiar with *salafi jihadi* idea after the 2003 Iraqi war and later spent 18 months in jail for my religious beliefs. In prison, we were incarcerated together, and become close to some JG-affiliated leaders like Ahmad ‘Ashush. I knew that they were in the JG in the past, although it did not really matter any more back then. Personally I thought of myself as an AQ member. I was attracted by their strength and power. The JG was irrelevant. AQ was the new central player.

## **6.5. MEDIATING THE IMPACT OF THE JANUARY 2011 EGYPTIAN UPRISING**

In 2011, massive non-violent protests against the Egyptian regime united millions of Egyptians in the streets of the country.<sup>281</sup> On February 11, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak resigned and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed responsibility to temporarily lead the country and facilitate the political transition. In the next few months, the SCAF suspended the constitution and dissolved the two houses of parliament. A constitutional referendum was organised, and a new temporary constitution was approved with 77.27 per cent of the vote. The (short-lived) opening of political opportunity witnessed after the resignation of former president Hosni Mubarak challenged the existing status quo and presented a reality that was previously unknown. The Egyptian military authorities initially liberalised political participation in the political process, and an array of new political parties appeared shortly after the uprising. Existing constraints on public activities were lifted, at least informally. Moreover, thousands of Egyptians affiliated to former militant groups, including IG and JG members and leaders, were gradually released by the new authorities. This opening of political opportunities presented many challenges and opportunities to the Islamist social movement family, reflected primarily in their ideational and organisational ramifications.

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<sup>281</sup> For recent analyses of these social protests, see Korany & el-Mahdi, 2012; Gunning & Baron, 2013.

This concluding section explores the repercussions of the 2011 uprising on the Islamist social movement family and on the Islamic and Jihad Groups. The following analysis specifically addresses the evolution of the IG and JG's political approaches in light of increased interactions inside the Islamist social movement family and of the broad legitimisation of political participation by its sub-components. This section argues that post-2011 networking and organisational overlaps with other Islamist actors combined with the development of new cultural resources in favour of party politics figure prominently in the IG and JG's evolving choices, even though they are not sufficient to explain these groups' differentiated responses to the 2011 uprising. This section contends that the successful creation of a political party by the IG was primarily contingent on the ability of its leaders to undertake internal reforms and to draw upon the group's primordial identity to substantiate its continuity with this new strategic direction. This analysis additionally demonstrates that pre-2011 JG divisions hindered the repetition of the same consensual process.

The 2011 popular uprising was unanticipated by most political forces, including by the IG and the JG which both initially failed to articulate a clear position (Drevon, 2014a).<sup>282</sup> The IG was divided between its exiled, detained and newly liberated leaders and members. The most critical division opposed a relatively accommodating position on Mubarak's regime and a hostile viewpoint. The two IG historical leaders, Karam Zuhdi and Najih Ibrahim, were initially reluctant to support the uprising, fearing a backlash had the uprising failed (Ibrahim, 2012). IG members nonetheless joined the demonstrations individually and, from prison, 'Abud and Tareq al-Zumur embraced the popular uprising. The JG was further divided at geographical, ideological and organisational levels. Its detained and newly liberated leaders were unable to articulate a united stance on the 2011 uprising. Some JG members and leaders participated individually, while others endorsed a passive stance.

The evolution of the Egyptian structural context critically affected the Islamist social movement family after the uprising. The first notable ideational challenge to the *salafi* trend pertained to the legitimacy of violence in Muslim countries. Before 2011, Egyptian salafis consistently agreed that Islamic law should be applied comprehensively, and primarily differed on the legitimacy of violence to reach this objective. The IG historically legitimised its use against nominally Muslim leaders, before renouncing its applicability in the theological revisions. Some JG members followed suit subsequently, while their

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<sup>282</sup> On *salafi* internal divisions on the 2011 uprising, see also Zahran et al. (2012a: 14-20).

fellows who opposed any concession on this issue did not articulate new positions on the legitimacy of violence before 2011. The emerging *salafi jihadi* trend, conversely, became essentially defined by its support of violence against Muslim leaders who do not comprehensively apply Islamic law in the Muslim world, even though their self-proclaimed spokesmen in Egypt<sup>283</sup> decided to focus primarily on public preaching after 2011.<sup>284</sup> A new shared understanding of the inapplicability of violence in Egypt consolidated in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, and blurred a central ideational division between different *salafi* groups and trends.

The de-legitimisation of violence as a means to implement Islamic law in a Muslim country did not comprehensively dissipate its legitimacy in the *salafi* public discourse, however. The aggravation of the Syrian civil war and the militarisation of a mostly non-violent uprising of the Syrian population unified a significant sector of Egyptian salafism behind the legitimisation of armed resistance to the regime of Bashar al-Asad. This support is illustrated in the favourable public stance adopted by non-*jihadi* preachers and politicians,<sup>285</sup> as well as in the growing public demonstrations organised in the streets of the country in 2012.<sup>286</sup> Paradoxically, while the renunciation of the use of violence in Egypt suggests that militant salafis became closer to mainstream salafis, the Syrian war signalled that this rapprochement was not unidirectional, and fuelled its legitimisation by mainstream salafis in other settings.

The second main ideological challenge posed by the post-2011 uprising concerned democracy and the legitimacy of political participation in the electoral process. The *salafi* trend was internally divided until 2011 vis-à-vis democracy. Internal divergences of opinion ranged from the outright rejection of democracy as a system of governance based on the sovereignty of the people to more circumstantially accommodating positions.<sup>287</sup> The absence of a clear consensus in Egypt was sustained by the absence of

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<sup>283</sup> Notably represented by Ahmad ‘Ashush, Murjan Salem and Muhammad al-Zawahiri.

<sup>284</sup> *Salafi jihadi* youths independently confirmed to this researcher that the spokesmen of the *salafi jihadi* trend told them in private that time was only suited to preaching at the time (between 2011 and 2012).

<sup>285</sup> For instance, the conference of the Muslim scholars organised in Cairo in June 2013 called for armed jihad in Syria. Later the same month, thousands of Egyptians congregated around prominent Islamist preachers and politicians (including Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi) in a stadium in Cairo to express a similar support. On the legitimisation of violence in Syria by mainstream scholars, see also Hegghammer & Zelin (2013).

<sup>286</sup> According to this researcher's field research in 2011 and 2012, public demonstrations in support of the Syrian jihad were initially organised by Syrian expatriates. Egyptian salafis initially contributed to these demonstrations, before taking a leading role.

<sup>287</sup> e.g. al-Anani, 2012; Lacroix, 2012; McCants, 2012; al-Anani & Malik, 2013; Utvik, 2014. Mainstream *salafi* preachers have, at times, endorsed electoral competition in specific contexts such as Algeria in 1991, when the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) was competing for victory before the military coup.

free and fair elections, and by the official ban on religious political parties. After 2011, the political transition following the removal of Hosni Mubarak encouraged many sectors of the *salafi* social movement family to re-evaluate their former positions. Mainstream preachers announced their public support to the political process and, through the *majliss al-shura* (consultative council) of *ansar al-sunna*, asserted that there was no barrier to political participation in Islamic Law, considering that electoral competition was an acceptable means to spread their *da'wa* in society (‘Ali, 2011). Similar positions were endorsed by a range of *salafi* groups and preachers from diverse pre-2011 leanings. Despite internal political divergences, most salafis eventually legitimised participation in the political process.

The new Egyptian structural context after the uprising therefore affected the Islamist social movement family at an organisational level as well. The following two years witnessed unprecedented demonstrations in the streets of the country successively organised by virtually all Egyptian political groups, including by the Islamists. This new environment was an opportunity for Islamist groups and, unprecedentedly, for the salafis, to defend their positions publicly.<sup>288</sup> The post-2011 era was characterised by intensive exchanges inside the Islamist social movement family, development which fostered internal interactions and discussions among Islamist supporters.<sup>289</sup> These exchanges fuelled the emergence of an array of new movements, from the middle-class *salafiyyu kosta* (the salafis of Costa Coffee) to the more activist *al-jabha al-salafiyya* (the *Salafi* Front), *ansar al-shari‘a* (supporters of Islamic Law), *al-haraka al-islamiyya li-tatbiq shar‘ Allah* (the Islamic movement for the application of God's Law), and the nebula around sheikh Hazem Abu Isma‘il.<sup>290</sup> The latter epitomise the blending boundaries characterising the Islamist social movement family after the uprising. Abu Isma‘il's father was a MB member of parliament<sup>291</sup> and, while a *salafi* preacher himself, Hazem participated in the 2005 legislative elections on a MB-affiliated list. After 2011, his outspoken support for the “revolution” combined with his Islamic project rendered him very popular in the Islamist social movement family,

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<sup>288</sup> The first public demonstrations of the *salafi* trend were organised the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 and the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2011. They were pejoratively dubbed “Kandahar's Fridays” by Islamist opponents, in reference to the Afghan city.

<sup>289</sup> According to this researcher's field participation in these demonstrations between 2011 and 2012.

<sup>290</sup> Sheikh Hazem is a public preacher who prospered in the 2000s thanks to the diffusion of salafism on satellite TV channels. He attempted to contest the 2012 presidential elections, but was dismissed because of the American nationality held by his mother (the Egyptian constitution does not allow for the candidature of somebody whose parents hold foreign passports). On the plurality of loosely defined groups which emerged around sheikh Hazem after 2012, see Zahran (2012) and Faid (2014)

<sup>291</sup> The fourth chapter of this thesis, pages 109-110, mentioned his testimony in the trial of the IG and JG after Sadat's assassination.

regardless of pre-2011 affiliations.<sup>292</sup>

Salafis from diverse leanings (including those formerly considered *haraki* – militant - salafis or ‘*ilmi* - pietist – salafis) additionally created cross pre-2011 boundaries institutions to foster their political influence. The most prominent institution was created by *ansar al-sunna* in alliance with the most prominent Egyptian *salafi* preachers, who collectively formed *majliss al-shura al-‘ulama* (the consultative council of the scholars)<sup>293</sup> to influence the political process and support the candidates and projects considered most closely aligned with Islam.<sup>294</sup> In addition, at an institutional level, the Alexandria-based *Salafi* Call founded *hizb al-nur* (the Light Party) and decided to contest the 2011 legislative elections. In Cairo, *salafi* preachers representing a middle ground between mainstream and *jihadi* salafism created *hizb al-‘asala* (the Authenticity party) and *hizb al-fadila* (the Virtue Party).<sup>295</sup> Influenced by the Kuwaiti precedent and by the emergence of numerous Egyptian Islamist parties, many *salafi* political parties mushroomed.

While the legitimisation of political participation in the new political process was facilitated among non-*jihadi* salafis by the existence of pre-2011 cultural resources,<sup>296</sup> *salafi jihadi* scholars did not develop similar resources in the past. Internal disagreements over the legitimacy of the political process were therefore particularly strident for their followers in Egypt before the 2013 military coup.<sup>297</sup> The study of their ramifications at a micro-level necessitates to consider pre-2011 modes of socialisation with *salafi* jihadism. The previous section argued that, before 2011, Egyptian salafis adopted *jihadi* positions individually, considering the absence of mobilising structures on the ground. This internal

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<sup>292</sup> This popularity is reflected at a national level by a poll of the al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies conducted in April 2012, before Abu Isma‘il’s disqualification, which gave him 28.8 per cent of the votes (only 2 per cent behind Amr Moussa).

<sup>293</sup> This council is formed by ‘Abdallah Shakir, Abu Ishaq al-Huwayni, Sa‘d ‘Abd al-‘Atheem, Jamal al-Murakabi, Abu Bakr al-Hanbali, Muhammad Hassan, Muhammad Hussein Ya‘qub, Mustafa al-‘Adwi, Wahid Bali and Jamal ‘Abd al-Rahman.

<sup>294</sup> For instance, the *majliss al-shura al-‘ulama* opposed any modification of the constitution which would reduce the role of Islam, initially supported the *salafi* candidate Hazem Abu Isma‘il in the presidential elections (until his disqualification), and later endorsed Morsi’s candidature (see also Faïd, 2014: 66-67).

<sup>295</sup> See also Faïd (2014).

<sup>296</sup> Regardless of their theoretical positions on democracy and on the sovereignty of the people, political participation had already been circumstantially legitimised by prominent *salafi* scholars (including Ibn Baz, al-Albani and al-‘Uthaymeen), in notable support for the 1991 Algerian elections. It should additionally be noted that the Alexandria-based *salafi* movement did not consider, as the *salafi* jihadis, that political participation was a matter of belief (*iman*) before 2011. In interviews conducted before 2011, prominent Alexandria-based salafis rather posited that political participation was an issue of jurisprudence and interpretation (Ghazi, 2012: 77). *Haraki* salafis differed with them on this point and refused political participation on the same ground as *jihadi* salafis.

<sup>297</sup> For additional *salafi jihadi* debates on the post-2011 Arab Spring, see also Lahoud (2013).

diversity meant that, after 2011, young Egyptians who identified with *salafi* jihadism continued to draw on eclectic sources despite new interactions with *salafi jihadi* preachers facilitated in a liberalised political setting. *Salafi jihadi* public spokesmen barely managed to disseminate their opposition to the political process among their potential supporters and to overcome its wide legitimisation in the *salafi* populace. According to field research, Hazem Abu Isma‘il was particularly successful in gathering strong support from *salafi jihadi* youths and to mobilise them in the presidential elections campaign.<sup>298</sup> In addition, democratic participation further divided the *salafi jihadi* trend after the election of Mohamed Morsi. One faction announced that Morsi was an apostate, and added that anyone who failed to excommunicate him was similarly leaving the fold of Islam. Most *salafi* jihadis nonetheless adopted a different position and refused to excommunicate Morsi, following Ayman al-Zawahiri's arguably more balanced views.<sup>299</sup>

These challenges were differently mediated by the IG and JG's organisational dynamics and resulted in two different outcomes. The IG created *hizb al-bina' wal-tanmiya* (Building and Development Party, BDP thereafter) as its official political party in June 2011. The religious outlook of its political programme initially hindered its official recognition but, after defending its case based on the interpretation of the second article of the constitution, the BDP was eventually granted legal recognition.<sup>300</sup> In the meantime, discussions among JG members sparked the creation of *hizb al-salama wal-tanmiya* (Safety and Development Party), later renamed *hizb al-islami* (the Islamic Party, IP thereafter). This party did not satisfy the new promulgated conditions for state recognition, however, and had not been recognized by the authorities before the 2013 July military coup (Faraj, 2012). In contrast with the BDP, the IP cannot be considered the official party of the JG considering broad differences of opinions over the legitimacy of the political process among JG members. This difference is reflected in the subordination of the BDP to the IG's *majliss al-shura* (the consultative leadership) and the independence of the IP from any external structure.

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<sup>298</sup> In-group meetings with the two parties later formed by the Islamic and Jihad groups reveal that their leaders realised the strength of Abu Isma‘il's constituency and attempted to find new avenues to gather similar support. Abu Isma‘il's popularity among *salafi* jihadis is also revealed by the fatwas demanded on the online library of *salafi* jihadism, *Minbar Tawheed wal-Jihad*, on the legitimacy of electoral participation in his support: e.g. [https://www.tawhed.ws/FAQ/display\\_question?qid=4873](https://www.tawhed.ws/FAQ/display_question?qid=4873).

<sup>299</sup> The existence of these two positions was widely communicated to this author by young *salafi* jihadis from both sides. It is worth noting that this division was later reflected in young *salafi* jihadis' diverging positions on the Syrian conflict between *jabha al-nusra* (the Front of Support) and the Islamic State (Drevon, 2014c): the *salafi* jihadis who excommunicated Morsi widely supported the Islamic State against *al-nusra*.

<sup>300</sup> More information on these discussions are available in a document published by this party which was given to this researcher (*hizb al-bina' wal-tanmiya*, 2012).

The rationale for the political participation of the IG and of the JG after 2011 is widely shared with mainstream and armed Islamist movements. The decision to participate in the political process was essentially based on these groups' interpretations of the new political opportunities available to them. This choice was not preceded by an ideological acceptance of the political process or by an expressed willingness to participate in the governance of Egypt. The ideological revisions detailed previously did not articulate a clear political vision for Egypt, and were virtually silent on these groups' potential political participation in the future (see also: Stein, 2011; Ashour, 2012). This issue was only briefly mentioned in 2005 when an IG leader, 'Abud al-Zumur, alluded to his potential candidature in the presidential elections (El-Nahhas, 2011) and in an opus he co-authored with his cousin Tareq al-Zumur on the promotion of political reforms in Islamic countries (2005). Before the 2011 uprising, however, there was no concerted effort to articulate a political programme beyond a support for the application of Islamic law in the country.

The IG and the JG were therefore, in 2011, in an ideational position analogous to the Egyptian MB before 1984. The joining of the political process in 1984 by the MB was also preceded by a process of ideological clarifications of its position on violence in Islamic countries and by the publication of a book, *duat la qudat (Preachers not Judges)*, which promoted, as in these groups' revisions, a non-violent approach in Muslim countries and an Islamic mode of governance. Despite the differences in terms of content between the MB's ideological clarifications and these groups' renunciations to violence, they similarly endorse non-violence and the application of Islamic law without articulating a clear political programme.

The main difference between the rationale for participation of the Islamic and Jihad Groups and mainstream and armed Islamist groups previously reviewed pertains to organisational protection and legitimacy. The political participation of the MB in Egypt did not solely result from its interpretation of the new political opportunities available to the group. While the MB was motivated by the possibility to expand its preaching through parliament, the group was also interested in the legal protection to its activities conferred by political participation. As for Islamist armed groups, political participation has been considered a complementary mean to achieve internal legitimacy and to protect the sanctity of their weapons, as the first section argued. In 2011, the IG and the JG were not affected by the same

requisites. These groups were in an organisational limbo, had no substantial constituency and no military wing to legitimise. Their members were scattered and isolated, and these groups' networks had virtually been decimated on the ground. Their decision to participate in the political process was therefore primordialily informed by their interpretations of the new opportunities available to them, rather than by the need to protect or legitimise nonexistent networks and institutions.

This decision leads to the second argument of this analysis: its internal legitimisation among group members and supporters. Before 2011, the IG and the JG had long opposed the MB on theological grounds for its political participation in the elections, and had generally denied the legitimacy of democracy in Islam. The theological nature of their former opposition to democracy was, according to a literal reading of their texts, not merely a political rebuttal of political participation under autocratic regimes but an absolute theological hostility. How did the IG and the JG justify to their members and followers the adoption of a position apparently inconsistent with their long-held religious positions on democracy?

The main argument is that IG and JG leaders reinterpreted their past commitments in light of post-2011 political opportunities in order to demonstrate the continuity between their groups' primordial identities and the willingness to form a political party. In framing studies, this process is defined as frame transformation, whereby a movement reinterprets its own self-understanding to generate new meanings (Snow et al. 1986; Benford & Snow, 2000). This process was necessary to convince these groups' members and followers that joining the political process did not contradict these groups' collective identities, but was rather a legitimate reinterpretation of what it means to be the IG or the JG.

Interviews of IG leaders and lower-ranking members reveal a clear emphasis on the primordial group *da'wi* identity to legitimise political participation. Two IG leaders, including its second in command Osama Hafez, affirm that their hostility to party politics in the 1980s and 1990s was informed by the absence of free and fair elections and by the need to de-legitimise the regime (Hafez, 2013). They argue that they opposed and blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for their participation since it made the regime more credible internationally. Their reinterpretation of the ramifications of the group's collective identity is an extension of the ideological revisions started a few years earlier, when they emphasised *da'wa* while simultaneously minimising the group's legitimisation of violence. An IG religious figure

maintains that:

I said and reiterated that democracy is against Islam. My position has not changed. In the 1990s, democracy [in Egypt] meant that no political party could be created on a religious platform. This has changed, while we have not. We fought democracy because democracy was without God. The constitution now recognises it. It is based on *shari'a* and all the political parties agree with this feature. Democracy I denounced is consequently different from the current form of democracy

While it is true that the IG was a preaching movement before its adoption of violence, this was undoubtedly not the case for the JG which adopted armed jihad in its early days. This fundamental difference could have obstructed a similar frame transformation of this group's primordial identity. In spite of this, prominent leaders of the Jihad Group similarly recognise that the 2011 uprising triggered their decision to join the political process and nourished the idea to create a political party (Qassem, 2012). In contrast with the IG, however, they do not claim that they adopted armed jihad in self-defence but rather contextualise its use. They assert that, while jihad is undertaken under an autocratic regime with weapons, the latter become irrelevant and illegitimate after a political opening. A JG commander affirms for instance that:

We did not renounce armed jihad but rationalised it. The weapon of jihad has changed. Jihad in Egypt cannot any more be undertaken with the rifle. The new weapon of jihad is the political party.

Other senior members of the JG and of its political party, including Osama Qassem, that the opening of political opportunities was crucial in their decision to create a political party in Egypt. They support Amir al-Jaysh's position, and explain that different state policies require different answers. They add that the 2011 uprising was a game changer which imposed the revision of their positions. They reject the legitimacy of violence, and consider electoral competition the new game in town. The JG therefore undertook a similar frame transformation from violence to political participation, by reinterpreting its past history in light of macro-level change to justify the continuity between the group's collective identity and this new choice.

The remaining question of this comparative analysis concerns internal group debates on the joining of the political process. As with any strategic decision of this importance, the decision to create a political party was not initially unanimously accepted in the IG and the JG. Interviews and discussions with IG

leaders and members reveal a plurality of position on this issue. Some prominent IG leaders, including Osama Hafez and 'Asim 'Abd al-Majid, preferred to focus on the group's reconstruction. Hafez (2013) notably stresses that many members and leaders had just left prison, and adds that the IG lacked a strong internal infrastructure and cadres. He asserts that he opposed the group's participation in the elections by fear of its potentially negative repercussions (Hafez, 2013). Contrastingly, other leaders advocated an isolation from the political game and a sole focus on preaching (*da'wa*) (e.g. Najih Ibrahim).

Internal JG divisions were more strident. According to field research and interviews, JG members and leaders broke up along three lines. The first faction accepted the legitimacy of the political process and created the IP. Its members are cross-generational and include militants active in the mid-1970s as well as new comers from the mid-1990s. The second faction, led by Ahmad 'Ashush, Murjan Salem and Muhammad al-Zawahiri established the so-called *salafi jihadi* trend after their liberation from prison, and thoroughly opposed the political process (e.g. 'Ashush, 2012; al-Zawahiri, 2012). They gathered around them many previously unaffiliated supporters of *salafi* jihadism socialised on-line, according to field research.<sup>301</sup> The remaining faction is not cohesive, and includes JG members and leaders who oppose the political process and who do not consider themselves *salafi* jihadis. Their post-2011 activities stretched from non-violent preaching to the mobilisation in support of the Syrian jihad (Amr, 2012).

Considering the wide range of opinions held by IG and JG members and leaders on the joining of the political process, why has the IG been successful in creating a political party based on a collective agreement while the JG simultaneously failed to reach a similar outcome? The previous comparative analysis of frame transformation can certainly dispel a solely ideational reason informed by these groups' essentially different nature. Being primordially a *jihadi* group is not sufficient to explain this failure, since prominent opponents of the theological revisions (e.g. Majdi Salem and Osama Qassem) legitimised the joining of the political process after 2011 based on their new understanding of the post-2011 structural context.

This comparative discrepancy is rather explained by these groups' organisational dynamics, and inheres

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<sup>301</sup> See also Drevon (forthcoming).

with their internal decision making processes. The consensual nature of the IG decision making process notably facilitated the democratisation of its internal structures after the 2011 uprising. This research previously noted that this group was divided along several lines in 2011, including between an accommodating and a hostile stance on the former regime. A IG religious figure argues that:<sup>302</sup>

Before the revolution, we could not do anything because of the difficulty to communicate. Then, internal disagreements between some of our leaders imposed a reconfiguration of the group's make-up.<sup>303</sup> We started from our followers, and organised internal elections at all levels. We managed to reconstitute our internal structures through elections. Then, we created *al-jam'iyya al-'umumiyya* (the General Assembly) as a legislative institution and the *majliss al-shura* as the executive. The *jam'iyya* represents all the governorates of Egypt. Regarding the elections, we organised a general discussion on current developments in order to present a unified position on the legislative and presidential elections. More than two-thirds of our members agreed to create a political party, and the new *majliss al-shura* took the responsibility to apply this decision.

In contrast with the democratisation of the MB under state repression in the 1990s, the IG managed to reorganise and democratise its internal decision making process after the post-2011 opening of political opportunity. In both cases, internal pressure played a significant role in convincing these groups' leaders of the necessity to undertake internal reforms to assure their group's survival and preclude internal ruptures and break ups.

The IG's internal democratisation did not materialise in the JG. JG leaders assert that, while some of them tried to reach out to one another (e.g. Qassem, 2012), they repeatedly failed to unite on a common programme. Instead of unifying their ranks, JG leaders debated one another and disputed the group's legitimate heir. In personal discussions and interviews, some IP leaders debated the sanity of Sayyid Imam (Qassem, 2012) and argued that they never read his theological revisions (Qassem, 2012). Others blamed the *salafi jihadi* trend for being from the JG young generation with no legitimacy to speak in its name. In turn, the latter argued that IP leaders were not in the JG in the first place, and were hijacking its legitimate heir (Badawi, 2013). The *salafi jihadi* trend merely recognised the former organisational belonging of a former JG leader Nabil Na'im, while denouncing him as a state collaborator (Badawi,

<sup>302</sup> See also: 'Abd al-Ghani, n.d.; al-Ghamari, n.d.

<sup>303</sup> IG members were particularly unhappy with the public positions adopted by Karam Zuhdi and Najih Ibrahim, which, they thought, did not represent the IG's consensus on the revisions considering their accommodating positions on Mubarak and their claims against the excommunication of Muslim leaders.

2013). The JG remained plagued by its historical development as a fragmented group.

The IG and the JG were not particularly successful in mobilising outside of their natural constituency. According to field research, most of their political supporters are drawn from their former members and families, in addition to the IG's traditional strongholds (where the BDP obtained decent results in the legislative elections). They particularly failed to reach out to the *salafi jihadi* trend, as they genuinely admit. According to an IG religious figure:

I spoke to the followers of the *salafi jihadi* trend and I tried to convince them to accept this new political setting. Some agreed, but many refused to listen to my arguments. I have realised that it is very difficult to reach out to them. You know, when I was asked by German intelligence if I was the sheikh of the young generation, we said, with my lawyer, that their real sheikh was sheikh Google!

Osama Qassem (2012) from the JG confirms that:

*Salafi jihadi* spokespersons and leaders have new means and channels to reach out to the new generation that we were not acquainted with. They use the media, the internet and new means of communication, while we failed to do so. We have been isolated for a long time and remain an old organisation.

The political participation of the BDP and of the IP in the post-2011 political process was abruptly discontinued in July 2013, when the Egyptian military staged a coup d'état against elected President Mohamed Morsi. These parties' short-lived political experience is therefore insufficient to draw meaningful lessons on its possible ideological or behavioural repercussions.<sup>304</sup> The main assertion is that both political parties showed some signs of political pragmatism. For instance, the BDP supported the candidature of Islamic-leaning moderate candidate Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh in the 2012 presidential elections, and refused to lend support to the *salafi* candidate Hazem Abu Ismail who claimed that he would apply Islamic law in Egypt. IG leaders argue that they favoured Aboul Fotouh's more consensual approach (Hafez, 2013). After the July 2013 military coup, both parties tried to mediate between the MB and the military, and publicly opposed the use of violence in Egypt by any side of the conflict. The post-coup setting is nonetheless more difficult to assess. Many members and

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<sup>304</sup> In the meantime, one can refer to their temporary political programmes in *hizb al-bina' wal-tanmiyya* (2012) and *al-hizb al-islami* (2013).

leaders of these groups were arrested or left Egypt. The BDP and the IP joined an alliance of political parties supporting the reinstatement of Morsi's presidency. Dissonant views appeared in the IG leadership on the appropriate position to adopt, but the group generally maintained its internal cohesion. The IP articulated a vague support for Morsi and, according to field research, its members and leaders preferred to stay under the radar for fear of arrest.

## **6.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued that an investigation of militant groups' evolution has to include their consideration of non-violent alternatives to armed jihad. Islamist militant groups indeed cannot merely be studied through their evolving use of violence without investigating their evolving positions on its alternatives in changing circumstances. This study is not limited to militant groups' potential renunciations of violence and of its legitimacy in Muslim countries, as investigated in the fourth chapter of this thesis. This consideration additionally includes the study of the internal and external factors which facilitate the emergence of credible alternatives, including the joining of the political process.

The first main argument presented in this chapter is that, at a societal level, militant groups' refusal to engage in party politics cannot be studied solely at a theological or ideological level without considering the macro-level environment in which these groups' operate. This research has notably insisted on the crucial contextualisation of militant groups' positions on democracy with the positions adopted by other groups and movements located in their social movement families. In Egypt, this research has demonstrated that the structural context defining Mubarak's regime during his three decades reign was semi-authoritarian and prevented the development of credible electoral alternatives to violence. This analysis has additionally contended that the structural context between 1981 and 2011 has shaped the evolution of the IG and JG's two main Islamist competitors, namely the MB and the *salafi* trend. This setting specifically accounts for the choice of the MB and mainstream salafis to distance themselves from the supporters of violence after 1981, and to mobilise their ideational and organisational resources into political participation for the MB, and non-violent and apolitical preaching for the salafis. This environment contextualises the absence of interactions inside the Islamist social movement family and the lack of credibility of political participation before 2011. This context additionally accounts for the IG and JG's unwillingness to legitimise party politics before the uprising.

This chapter has explored the construction of the IG and JG's collective group identities since their emergence. In line with the argument presented throughout this thesis, this chapter has argued that these groups' collective identities are informed by their early mobilising patterns. This analysis has demonstrated that these two groups produced an explicit primordial identity in their early days which has formed their collective identities and shaped the meanings associated with their members' collective belongings. The IG's non-violent theoretical endeavour promoted low-risk activism mobilising patterns which have subsequently facilitated the development of shared organisational norms, including the assimilation of the group's collective identity and the legitimisation of its internal hierarchy. In the JG, the violent endeavour pursued since the group's emergence has prevented the development of low-risk mobilising patterns and has obstructed the replication of similar processes.

This chapter has finally demonstrated that the construction of these groups' collective identities has informed their positions on the political process after 2011. While increased interactions with other Islamist trends and the latter's broad legitimisation of party politics after the uprising contextualises the IG and JG's evolving positions on political participation, only an analysis of their meso-level dynamics can explain the consensual creation of a political party by the IG and the JG failure to reach a similar outcome. In this case, the IG's successful organisational reconstruction and subsequent joining of the political process were facilitated by the existence of shared organisational norms and by the ability of its leaders to internally reform their group and to draw on its primordial identity to demonstrate the continuity with this new strategic direction. A few JG leaders similarly utilised their group's primordial identity to legitimise the same choice, although pre-2011 organisational divisions hindered a consensual legitimisation of party politics.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

### 7.1. THIS THESIS' GENERAL ARGUMENT APPLIED TO THE ISLAMIC AND JIHAD GROUPS

This thesis has theorised and systematically compared the evolution of the Egyptian Islamic and Jihad groups from their emergence to the post-2011 uprising. The comparative study of these groups' ideological construction, use of violence and non-violent transformation has demonstrated the existence of a path-dependent model accounting for their diverging ideational and organisational evolutions in similar environmental conditions.

The IG's emergence as a group of friends who socialised collectively before the endorsement of violence against the Egyptian regime substantially affected its subsequent evolution. The time-frame preceding the legitimisation of armed jihad against the Egyptian regime promoted low-risk activism mobilising patterns which helped to create strong ties between the group's early leaders and to shape the foundations of its collective identity as a proselytising (*da'wa*) movement. The combination of these complementary factors facilitated the internalisation and legitimisation of shared organisational norms, including collective decision making processes and deference to the group's internal hierarchy.

The IG's early organisational norms combined with the embrace of the *salafi* discursive tradition have informed the development of the group's theologico-political framework. The IG's adoption of the *salafi* discursive tradition has shaped its engagement with its competitors and galvanised the defence of the group's orthodoxy in diverse framing contests with its Islamic contenders. The *salafi* discursive tradition circumscribed the IG's reinterpretation of formerly held political prescriptions with regards, specifically, to the status of the Muslim leader who does not apply Islamic law comprehensively. Early organisational norms also facilitated the group's rearticulation of its theologico-political framework as a result of external stimuli and internal learning processes. These norms helped to preserve the continuity of the group's consensual decision making processes, and facilitated the sustainability of its ideological cohesion despite occasional differences of views between IG leaders.

The transformation of the IG's organisational structure throughout the 1990s had a profound impact on the group's interpretation of changing state policies and subsequent use of violence. The cycle of

contention triggered by the new Minister of Interior in the late 1980s diminished the IG's command and control over its followers, and altered the group's evolving preferences for the use of violence. While the IG's organisational cohesion initially muted internal calls for revenge and armed retaliation, IG leaders later orchestrated a few limited armed operations, which resulted in the imprisonment or exile of the group's ground leadership. Heavy handed policing of protests then disrupted remaining IG's internal organisational control and aggravated the use of violence by IG members at a local level, especially in the South of the country. Surviving IG members initially targeted the security services and their collaborators, while the IG's popular support helped to provide accurate information on IG opponents. Eventually, their societal isolation triggered a spiral of encapsulation which was fuelled by local and ideational grievances against Coptic Christians and foreign tourists, and accounts for their indiscriminate targeting to avenge themselves against perceived state allies.

The shared organisational norms established in the IG's early days facilitated the group's theological renunciations of violence as well as its non-violent transformation after the 2011 Egyptian uprising. While the IG did not explicitly endorse party politics before 2011, the transformation into a political party was facilitated by the broad legitimacy enjoyed by political participation in the Islamist social movement family after 2011, and by increased interactions with other Islamist groups. IG leaders' consensual decision to join the political process was internally legitimised by reference to their followers' self-understanding of the IG as a proselytising (*da'wa*) movement. The IG has thus re-framed the interpretation of the group's collective group identity in a new macro setting, with the contention that political participation is the most suitable means to promote religion and that violence was historically merely used in legitimate self-defence against the state.

The emergence of JG cells in the 1970s substantially contrasts with the IG, and reveals the development of a distinctive path dependent model. In this case, the early legitimisation of armed jihad against the Egyptian regime hindered the development of shared organisational norms. Early JG cells were characterised from their inception by multiple security dilemmas sparked by the high-risk nature of their endeavour, which essentially hindered low-risk activism mobilising patterns. The absence of shared organisational norms and strong ties between JG members and leaders exacerbated internal suspicion, and reinforced internal competition over (ideational and material) resources. These groups repeatedly split over tactical, strategic and personal issues, and failed to exploit an initially favourable

macro environment to establish a cohesive entity.

The JG's early days affected its subsequent ideational evolution. The emergence of JG cells in the fringe of the broader *salafi* movement provided a *salafi* theological legacy which, as in the IG, constrained the range of possible reinterpretations of the group's theologico-political framework. In contrast with the IG, however, the absence of shared organisational norms uniting JG members obstructed the development of a consensual ideological development. The JG failed to solve internal ideological disagreements consensually, and was frequently faced with organisational splits as a result. In addition, JG cells were more extensively influenced by external developments, especially by the emergence of a competitive *salafi jihadi* social movement industry in the Afghan-Pakistani border area in the early 1990s. A JG faction eventually joined AQ outside of Egypt, a decision facilitated by the absence of constraining norms of decision making on its leader at the time. Conversely, JG imprisoned members who, as in the IG, realised that armed violence yielded more damage than benefits did not manage to consensually renounce its theological legitimacy, due to the absence of internally legitimised organisational norms which could have set out the foundations of internal dialogue.

Early organisational impediments to the JG's internal cohesion were never surmounted, and affected the group's resort to armed violence by the end of the 1980s. In spite of the collective imprisonment of many jihad groups' leaders and members after 1981, pre-prison security dilemmas triggered by the lack of trust between them persisted, and attempts to unite and to create a cohesive entity quickly faded. The use of violence by JG-affiliated individuals during the post-1986 cycle of contention was affected by the absence of shared organisational norms. While the IG's initial organisational control muted internal calls for revenge against the security services, the absence of analogous norms inside JG cells stimulated, at a very early stage, the proliferation of local armed actions against security personnel. In addition, JG leaders dwelling outside of Egypt subsequently ordered a few armed attacks contradicting the group's long-term objectives to reassert the JG's internal and external credibility, which were deemed vital to the group's organisational survival. The absence of internalised organisational norms consequently rendered the JG more susceptible to internal and external challenges.

Internal discord obstructed the transformation of the JG into a political party after the 2011 uprising. While many JG members and leaders, including opponents of the theological renunciation of violence

before 2011, have been influenced by the nearly consensual legitimisation of party politics among Egyptian *salafi* movements, the absence of consensual norms of decision making thwarted initial attempts to join the political process as a group. Diverging organisational dynamics and the absence of a controlled collective group identity mediated macro-level change differently from the IG. Individuals affiliated with the JG created a political party, whereas others decided to focus on other endeavours such as peaceful proselytisation and the mobilisation for the Syrian jihad. Those who joined the political process internally legitimised this decision by re-framing the group's *jihadi* avant-garde collective group identity, arguing that the use of weapons in jihad is only legitimate against autocratic regimes.

## **7.2. GENERALISING THIS RESEARCH'S FINDINGS**

This research has endeavoured to theorise militant groups' evolution across cases with a small-n case-study research design. The analysis of the Islamic and Jihad groups contextualised them in their multi-level environments and in consideration of the positions of external actors, including the state and these groups' opponents and contenders. This thesis has argued that these groups' ideological and behavioural evolutions stem from internal processes and dialogues informed by changing environmental conditions. This research's investigation of rich empirical data with a process tracing methodology and its reference to the literature on political violence and social movements have bolstered the internal validity of this comparative case study,

The generalisability of this research is nonetheless faced with two possible caveats. The first issue is inherent within the development of a path dependent case study research design. It would be erroneous to assume that this conceptualisation implies that these groups' evolution was entirely predetermined and could not have materialised differently. A structuralist and determinist path is not endorsed in this thesis, which, by a meticulous focus on points of rupture, posits that these groups' paths could have been substantially altered in specific instances. This research recognises these groups' agencies, and only infers that the IG and the JG's early days shaped certain mobilising patterns, which informed these groups' subsequent developments.

An associated warning concerns this research's external validity, and the professed endeavour to be generally relevant to the study of militant groups evolving in semi-authoritarian regimes. Considering

this research's contextualised focus on Egypt, to what extent can this analysis of the Islamic and Jihad groups contribute to the study of Islamist and non-Islamist groups evolving in different settings? The following discussion focuses on four important themes in the study of political violence, which benefit substantially from this thesis' analytical insights: (1) the debate on the correlation between political violence and democracy, (2) militant groups' organisational legacies, (3) the study of militant groups' beliefs and (4) the investigation of the construction of their tactical and strategic approaches.

### **7.2.1. Debating Violence and Democracy**

This research's first contribution to the academic literature concerns the debate on the impact of political exclusion and repression on opposition movements. Political violence and social movements studies have hitherto broadly defended two antagonistic positions. The first contention posits that political exclusion combined with some patterns of repression explains opposition groups' resort to violence when non-violent alternatives to political change disappear. Violence is accordingly understood as a rational choice calculus to achieve political objectives. The contending position asserts that militant groups do not necessarily believe in political participation, which they often denounce. This perspective argues that violence is caused by an array of material or ideational factors, stretching from socio-economic environmental change and individual alienation to radical ideologies.

This thesis has addressed these apparently contradictory findings and proposed that political inclusion and repression should be disaggregated. While exclusion and repression are often combined in semi-authoritarian regimes, their impact on opposition movements (both violent and non-violent) should be differentiated.

Semi-authoritarian regimes' political configuration informs opposition groups' ideological and behavioural developments. Opposition groups evolve in a specific macro-level environment, which delineates available opportunities to achieve their objectives. While these groups believe in a set of principles, which defines their core commitments as this concluding chapter later argues, the endeavour to pursue their objectives combined with the necessity to survive in a precarious environment additionally contextualise the construction of their political choices. The macro-level environment in which opposition groups' evolve specifically informs their ideational and organisational developments, through the mobilisation of internal (cultural and organisational) resources. A closing of political

opportunity can, for instance, trigger a public retreat on some controversial positions to protect a movement's survival. In other cases, refusing to participate in a discredited political system can be a very political decision, whereas an unprecedented opportunity to achieve a group's objectives through political participation can motivate a reinterpretation of previous opposition to party politics. The organisational sustainability of these paradigmatic cases relies primarily on these groups' meso-level dynamics. For this research, what matters is that political inclusion and exclusion are not directly correlated to opposition group's decision to resort to violence, even though political exclusion can exacerbate armed contention.

This research has demonstrated that the use of violence is primarily correlated with evolving policing of protests mediated by militant groups' organisational dynamics. Although violent ideologies occasionally precede political repression, the modalities of violence (including its timing, selectivity and intensity) have to be understood in relational patterns located at the meso-level, in militant groups' interpretation and construction of a changing policing of protest. Opposition groups might pursue a violent endeavour irrespectively of repression; however, an ideational emphasis is not always sufficient to explain when and how violence is used. Only in some limited cases the importance of ideational commitments prevails over these groups' contentious conflict with the state in accounting for the use of violence. Violence is primarily the outcome of internal and external relational processes. The decision to use violence has to be contextualised with these groups' internal dynamics, including their evolving decision making processes and command and control over their followers, and in interactions with external actors, including the state and these groups' opponents and contenders.

Political exclusion and the absence of non-violent alternatives to political change can exacerbate the use of violence, even though they do not directly trigger violent contention. The exclusion of non-violent opposition movements can discredit semi-authoritarian regimes' legitimacy, bolster militant groups' credibility and frame salience, and stimulate public support on the ground. Although this macro setting does not necessarily mean that militant groups will be able to exploit this opportunity, the populace is generally more likely to side with them when non-violent alternatives are exhausted. Popular support potentially gathered locally by armed militants can generate the provision of crucial sources of information on the security forces and their collaborators, which are necessary to accurately target them and threaten the regime's control. In turn, this development can reinforce the fears of a

semi-authoritarian regime and aggravate the cycle of contention by strengthening internal support for these groups' eradication. Political exclusion can additionally influence militant groups' internal dynamics and reinforce the perception that violence is the only way forward, hence marginalising dissenting positions.

This thesis has finally revealed the existence of an additional instance whereby militant groups use violence irrespectively of political inclusion and exclusion. In this case, the use of violence cannot be merely explained by state repression against an opposition group, which later adopts an antagonistic position and legitimises armed violence. This case is relatively rare, and can occur in relatively inclusive political regimes, which do not actively repress their opponents. In such instances, the consideration of a proactive agency to pursue radical political change prevails over the study of these regimes' macro-level configuration. Militants can be affected by a combination of emotions, revenge, empathic solidarity for others and a desire to pursue a grand endeavour, which sparks radicalising processes and motivates their legitimisation of violence even in relatively liberal regimes. This pattern is relatively rare and, as with other forms of violence, has to be similarly contextualised at a meso-level to comprehend its peculiar modalities.

### **7.2.2. Militant Groups' Organisational Legacies**

The previous section has thoroughly emphasised the importance of militant groups' organisational dynamics. According to the argument developed throughout this thesis, their investigation should start from the premise that militant groups do not emerge in a vacuum, but originate in a specific context, which accounts for their early mobilising patterns. This perspective contends that diverging mobilising patterns can trigger specific path dependent models, which inform these groups' early developments, although initial impediments can be potentially surmounted.

The first insight of social movement studies is that militant groups often stem from a broader social movement family (SMF). Their SMF is defined by a specific world-view, modes of organisation and position in society. These factors contextualise whether these groups' SMF promotes societal status quo or more confrontational approaches. They equally account for militant groups and their SMF's engagement with society, as well as for the opportunities and impediments to their respective expansion. Militant groups and their SMF can, for instance, benefit from discursive opportunities if

they promote long term objectives aligned with societal developments, but merely differ on the means to achieve them. These discursive opportunities can constrain militant groups' ideational construction and curb their ability to cross certain red-lines, within society and within their SMF.

Militant groups' SMF give them a certain ideational (possibly theological for *salafi* groups) legacy, which informs their early mobilising patterns and framing processes. The contextualisation of militant groups' emergence within a broader SMF specifically determines the articulation of their internal legitimisation for violence. In many cases, these groups emerge in times of crisis when they are more susceptible to convincing new sympathisers that, while they still believe in their SMF's long term objectives, the latter's tactical approach has proven unsuccessful and should be dramatically changed. The consideration of militant groups' broader SMF can reinforce these groups' legitimisation of violence, or impede their expansion, depending on their SMF's perceived effectiveness. Militant groups' emergence in a broader SMF therefore determines their initial developments.

This research's central argument has demonstrated that the timing of these groups' legitimisation of violence is crucial to explain their initial modes of organisation. When a group does not immediately legitimise the use of violence, the time period preceding the latter facilitates low-risk activism mobilising patterns, which help to strengthen the ties between its leaders and members, and contributes to the creation of shared organisational norms. Conversely, an immediate legitimisation of violence triggers multiple security dilemmas, which prevent similar developments and reinforce mistrust and internal competition. In such instances, micro-mobilisation is more likely to be circumscribed to trusted networks of acquaintances and friends. Militant groups' organisational structures are therefore inherently related to their early developments.

The type of organisation initially created by militant groups eventually informs their subsequent evolution. Although these groups' future cannot be mechanically determined from their early days, the conditions in which they emerge present a set of impediments and opportunities affecting their future prospects. The legitimisation of consensual norms of decision making processes and the acceptance of a group's internal hierarchy are particularly important in accounting for the survival of a group's internal cohesion in changing external conditions. The absence of shared organisational norms combined with internal suspicion and competition between a group's members, on the other hand, often

sparks internal splits in similar environments. Even though a militant group can overcome these obstacles, their importance should not be underestimated.

Finally, militant groups' organisational legacies influence their behavioural and ideational developments. As posited in the previous section, organisational dynamics and norms mediate the impact of changing state policies towards militant groups and determine their interpretation of macro-level change. Organisational norms indicate the level of command and control exerted by a group's leadership, and helps to establish the latter's role in the use of violence. Moreover, the study of these groups' organisational dynamics illustrate whether they can (and have) assimilated past learning processes in response to a combination of internal retrospections and external stimuli, and adapted their views accordingly. The resilience of these norms can also mean that, while some individuals might object to some of their group's (past or current) policies, they still abide by collective decisions regardless of their personal positions.

### **7.2.3. Revisiting the Role of Ideas**

This research has defended an ideational perspective situated between the two paradigmatic positions widely defended in the literature. The first academic position has traditionally emphasised militant groups' rationality and their endeavour to survive in precarious environments, postulating that ideational developments are epiphenomena broadly susceptible to material changes. These rationalist considerations tend to analyse ideas as a mere tool kit, and to overlook their potentially constraining impacts on their holders. The second academic perspective has leaned towards essentialist considerations of militant group's ideational frameworks, including through the study of the influence of religious cults and radical ideologies. In sharp contrast with rationalist considerations, this perspective usually disregards militant groups' discursive work.

This thesis has endorsed a relational consideration of militant groups' ideational developments situated between rationalist and essentialist perspectives. This approach to the study of ideas is more closely aligned with recent developments in social movement studies and social network analysis, which posits that militant groups' ideational construction has to be studied relationally. This thesis adds that ideational considerations are broader than the usual study of militant groups' ideologies, and include internal and external relational dimensions as well.

The internal-relational dimension of militant groups' ideational developments refers to the meanings attached to one's belonging to a group. These meanings include these members' emotional ties to one another and to their leaders, their self-identification with the group's collective identity and their acceptance of the groups' organisational norms (including decision making processes and a group's internal hierarchy). These norms often stem from these groups' emergence, as the previous section argued, even though they can be infused subsequently. Their strength varies across cases and differently regulate the impact of external stimuli on militant groups overtime. These norms are constraining on these groups' followers as well as on their leaders, whose legitimacy often relies on their appropriate handling of these norms to legitimise new directions.

The second relational dimension is external. Militant groups interact with other actors (including allies, contenders, opponents, and the state) in relational patterns circumscribed by the macro environment in which they operate. This research has notably expounded on the role played by militant groups' interactions with their broader social movement family, and contended that they can generate very distinctive outcomes. When militant groups are pursued and repressed at national and (possibly) international levels (for instance in the early 1990s in Afghanistan and Pakistan), their interactions with a competitive social movement industry can radicalise them. The so-called radical fringe effect refers to a process of ideological radicalisation caused by the necessity felt by militant groups to differentiate themselves to survive in a precarious environment. Conversely, a liberalised political environment (for instance post-2011 Egypt) has proven more conducive to cooperation and ideological acclimatisation, through a legitimisation of party politics rendered possible by a combination of new political opportunities, interactions with other groups and the development of ideational resources legitimising this choice. These two cases are context-specific and are highly contingent on these groups' internal dynamics. They nonetheless clearly establish that militant groups cannot be isolated from their external interactions with other actors.

At a micro level, militant groups' members can additionally be affected by direct or indirect interactions with external actors. These interactions concern, for instance, their emotional identification with the suffering of others, such as Muslims under foreign occupation in Islamic cases. These precedents are particularly salient for Islamist groups, considering the broad legitimacy enjoyed by armed jihad for

Muslims living under foreign occupation. Emotional ties can trigger micro mobilisation in external terrain, regardless of militant groups' *raison d'être*. This external relational consideration revives individual agency beyond rational calculus, considering that fighting for external actors is less intelligible for strictly rationalist analyses.

Finally, militant groups' ideational study includes the investigation of their ideological commitments. This thesis has contended that militant groups' ideologies are better studied as a set of core principles embedded in a certain ideational framework (for *salafi* groups, the *salafi* discursive tradition) and mediated by these groups' organisational dynamics. These core principles form a group's primordial identity and the meanings attached to the membership of its followers. They shape the foundations of a group's ideological commitments and constrain a group's reinterpretation of the past and general ability to adapt to changing circumstances. These core commitments are usually enriched in later stages by various framing contests opposing these groups to their opponents and contenders. These processes result in the creation of a broad and coherent world view reflecting debates and themes deemed important in these groups' social movement families and societies.

In line with the debate on militant groups' deradicalisation and disengagement from armed violence, this research has posited that these groups' primordial identity does not substantially change over time, although their tactical and strategic objectives (also studied as these groups' political prescriptions) might be substantially altered. Militant organisations that have defined their *raison d'être* as proselytisation or jihad do not easily renounce the ideational commitments they theoretically embraced for decades. In changing macro circumstances and in subordination to these groups' ability to utilise internal regulations to legitimise new choices, militant groups might recant the relevance and applicability of their former commitments without disavowing their initial objectives. Even though individuals might fully revise these objectives as well, internal group regulations often hinder the diffusion of these ideas at an organisational level.

#### **7.2.4. Studying the Construction of Militant Groups' Tactical and Strategic Objectives**

This thesis has contended that the construction of militant groups' tactical and strategic approaches to political action and violence has to be contextualised in the multi-level environments in which they operate, and in consideration of internal and external relational patterns. Militant groups' rationalist

understandings are notably inadequate if they simultaneously overlook these groups' organisational dynamics and the constraints and opportunities associated with them. Militant groups' evolution is better studied in continuity and change, with a focus on specific points of rupture in their ideational and behavioural developments.

This research has argued that militant groups' early days are critical to the understanding of their subsequent evolution. The conditions in which these groups emerge inform the development of multiple norms, which regulate their short-term tactical choices and the construction of their long-term objectives. Militant groups' early days notably define their primordial collective identities, and determine their abilities to establish shared organisational norms, including the legitimisation of an internal hierarchy and of consensual decision making processes.

The study of militant groups' tactical and strategic choices consequently necessitates to move beyond the strategic black box which often characterise them in the literature. A legitimate rejection of flawed considerations of militant groups as irrational lunatics should not be substituted by exclusively rationalist perspectives. While acknowledging these groups' rationality, this research has demonstrated that rationalist paradigms have to be contextualised with these groups' organisational and ideational dynamics and in consideration of external interactions with other actors. The construction of new tactical and strategic objectives is notably contingent on these groups' ideational commitments contextualised with their decision making processes, organisational cohesion and level of internal command and control. In this case-study, an Islamist group which has long emphasised its solidarity with fellow Muslims under occupation or its endeavour to implement a constitutional order based on Islamic Law is likely to be constrained ideationally by these commitments. In addition, the analysis of militant groups' organisational dynamics include the study of internal framing processes designed to legitimise new objectives in the eye of these groups' members. It should indeed not be assumed that lower-ranking members blindly follow their leaders, even in militant groups characterised by hierarchical structures and internal discipline.

Militant groups' transformation is not a unidirectional process. In this thesis, the two groups under study have gradually (and to varying degrees) rejected the legitimacy of violence in Islamic countries under semi-authoritarian regimes and joined the political process. They internalised the lessons of their

failure to accomplish their objectives in Egypt and recognised that violence was tactically and strategically wrong. This analysis does not mean, however, that these processes cannot be revised and reversed. Changing macro conditions, such as an unprecedented wave of repression combined with militant groups' organisational weakening could trigger a re-legitimisation of violence if these groups' leaderships were not able to maintain internal control over their followers. A heavy-handed policing of protest could additionally alter previous learning processes and influence their tactical choices in the short term.

### **7.3. FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research's study of the evolution of two Egyptian militant groups has opened multiple academic avenues for future research. New academic studies can build upon this thesis in complementary ways, stretching from its methodological and philosophical premises to more detailed studies of its internal mechanisms in various settings.

Future research can apply this thesis' central findings to other militant groups evolving in Islamist and non-Islamist environments. This research's path-dependency model has not been designed to be applicable to Egypt only, and has strived to be relevant to other cases of armed militancy in semi-authoritarian regimes. The guidelines presented in this concluding chapter can therefore be potentially applied to idiosyncratic cases, or serve as a foundation to larger comparative case study research designs. New studies can notably enhance the generalisability of this research by refining its theoretical framework, or discover irregular cases which might apparently contradict some of its findings.

The generalisability of this research's argument can be improved in mixed-method case study research designs. Future research can notably utilise new mixed-method methodologies, including qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), to compare numerous groups (typically between 5 to 15 groups) evolving in different environmental conditions in order to test the sufficiency and necessity of the factors introduced in this thesis. A larger comparative case-study could additionally help to refine this thesis' argument by elaborating comparatively on some elements which can be deemed peculiar to *salafi* groups (such as the *salafi* discursive tradition which has constrained their ideational development).

New case studies can reveal the existence of “deviant” militant groups, whose evolution does not

follow the two routes defined in this thesis. Two main types of groups can be differentiated. One possibility would be the study of a group which emerged, as in the IG, as a mass movement, endorsed the use of violence against a semi-authoritarian regime subsequently, and eventually divided in the JG model. The other type of group would include an array of cells which legitimised armed violence at a very early stage and then managed to unite despite the numerous obstacles to unification presented in this thesis.<sup>305</sup> The existence of these deviant cases would not contradict this thesis' central argument, but would rather contribute to the improvement of its scope conditions and to the discovery of intermediate steps in militant groups' path-dependent evolution which can fundamentally affect their development.

Two interesting cases are Hizbullah and the Islamic State Organisation. Hizbullah's organisational origins can be traced back to a plurality of groups which did not interact before the group's gradual aggregation between 1982 and 1985. Despite these initial organisational divisions, Hizbullah managed, over time, to reinforce its internal structure, create shared organisational norms and establish a strong collective group identity. In this case, the group's evolution in a sectarian civil-war environment, the external support provided by Iran and the related provision of a strong unifying ideology have arguably helped to overcome organisational barriers to unification. This case would demonstrate that a group characterised by early organisational divisions can eventually develop shared norms necessary to its survival.

Another important case is the Islamic State Organisation. A priori, this group developed on the JG model and eventually managed to expand and develop a cohesive organisational structure despite similar obstacles. In this case, a thorough investigation would focus on Camp Bucca detention facility, where most current ISO leaders met and developed interpersonal ties and shared organisational norms, which proved crucial a few years later, after their liberation.<sup>306</sup> Their detention in the same prison and their fight against the same external enemy in a civil war environment arguably helped to unify organisational (provided by Baathist pre-2003 networks) and ideational resources (based on a *salafi jihadi* approach to Islam) between differentiated networks.

Finally, considering the fundamental role played by evolving social networks in this comparative case

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<sup>305</sup> Staniland (2014: 35-58) has already highlighted some important factors which can crucially affect these groups' evolution.

<sup>306</sup> The most comprehensive study of this group, which presents thoroughly this line of argument, has been undertaken by Weiss & Hassan (2015)

study, a new research agenda could investigate the arguments presented in this thesis with a social network analysis theoretical framework. Social network analysis has exponentially focused on the study of social networks' evolution and on meaning makings, which are central to this thesis' argument. New research could synthesise the evolution of militant groups' networking typologies in changing external conditions, and theorise the interactions between their leaderships and their followers with a social network theoretical approach. This theoretical conceptualisation would notably enhance the replicability and generalisability of this thesis.

This research on political violence has demonstrated that academic research on armed militancy can be empirically rich, theoretically and methodologically rigorous, and be faithful to these actors' self-understandings. This philosophical approach ought to be replicated in new studies of armed violence, which should be reflective about the shortcomings which have affected this field of inquiry for many decades.



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