ISLAMIC STATE'S DISCURSIVE POWER IN THE MENA REGION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is on Islamic State's (IS) "discursive power" in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Guided by the general investigation of the role of language in relation to key contemporary issues shaping the modern MENA region, it investigates the effects of IS' use of language in shaping the perception of the MENA populations about the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. Jordan and Tunisia provide the two case studies for the analysis of IS' discursive power. Representing IS' communication campaign as a sender-message-receiver continuum, this doctoral research aims to give primary importance to the message and its audience. Doing so, it highlights three distinct but related dynamics: the "meaning-making process" in IS' discourse, the latter's promotion as a general "truth", and the "shaping process" that consists in using this "truth" to influence its audience's representation of its environment.

This thesis situates the research in the body of work relating to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that provides deep insights into the concept of discourse and offers several advantages to study IS as a social movement through a discourse-sensitive and linguistic approach. Frame Theory (FT) is used as the general framework for the understanding of the formation and reception of IS' discourse about the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. This work specifically builts upon the concept of resonance, that is, the degree to which a message succeeds in generating responsiveness in the targeted group or the audience at large. Finally, Corpus Linguistic Techniques are the preferred analytical tools to code the datasets, highlight linguistics patterns and specificities, and analyse conflict frames.

The analysis and comparison of the conflict frames present in IS' discourse on the one side, and in the discourse of the Tunisian and Jordanian populations surveyed in the other side reveal that, while IS' rhetoric on the *causes* of the perceived crisis and on its *solution* seem to resonate in MENA populations, the *social practices* this solution entails failed to convince. In that sense, if IS succeeded to echo the grievances and resentment of its audience, the group was unable to attract generalised support for its Caliphate and radical socio-political change for the MENA region. Nonetheless, this apparent rejection of IS' project must be nuanced at the regional and state levels. After years of war in Iraq and Syria, the conditions that initially gave rise to IS remain. So do the dynamics that nurtured the popular grievances against perceived illegitimate rulers.

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Maps

Note on Transliteration

For sources derived from Modern Standard Arabic, such as books, Islamic concepts and names of organisations, I used a simplified version of the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies. Whenever Arabic terms have become commonly used in English, I opted for the English form – without diacritical marks (ِ ُ ً) in an attempt to make this thesis more accessible to general readers. For example, I used "jihad" rather than "jihād". The same was applied to the Arab names of authors whose works are translated into English. In citations, I preserved the transliterations that were employed in the original documents.

In the chapter on Tunisia, I have used French-based transliteration for names and places in order to reflect the local variation and nuances in language. This means, for example, that the Arabic letter و was transliterated as 'ou' rather than 'u'. This choice also accounts for the importance of the French language in Tunisia, which was introduced during the French Protectorate over the country and was used by most of the political representatives and academics interviewed during fieldwork. Moreover, names of well-known movements and groups mirror general usage. For example, I used 'Ennahdha' rather than 'al-Nahda'. Where local transliterations are inconsistent, the most commonly used version was employed.

List of Acronyms

AST	Ansār al-Sharī'ah fi Tūnis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDS	Critical Discourse Studies
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve
CL	Critical Linguistics
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CSP	Code of Personal Status
DA	Discourse Analysis
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
FA	Frame Analysis
FSA	Free Syrian Army
FT	Frame Theory
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSPC	Group for Preaching and Combat
HLSCC	High Level Strategic Cooperation Council
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMCTC	Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ITM	Islamic Tendency Movement
JAF	Jordanian Armed Forces
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KUIN	Katibat Uqbah Ibn Nafi
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

MP	Member of Parliament
ONJ	National Youth Observatory
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
PMU	Popular Mobilisation Units
SFG	Systemic Functional Grammar
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UGTT	General Union of Tunisian Workers (Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens)
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
US	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
YPG	People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

Part I

BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 ~ Introduction

1.1 Conflict Dynamics in Iraq and Syria

War is said to be as old as humanity. At all times, human beings fought for their land, for their god(s), for their culture. The 21st century is no exception. It already witnessed ninety wars and conflicts, sixty being still ongoing around the world. Thus, one may wonder: Are the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts two cases among many?

It appears that the Syrian case is peculiar from the many conflicts that have been dividing the world since the end of the Cold War. In 2011, in the wave of the Arab Spring, Syria sunk in a violent conflict, which destabilised the whole Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In addition to the thousands of lives sacrificed on the altar of political and religious leadership, the conflict caused the worst refugee crisis since World War II (WWII). The Syrian case stirred up debates and controversy, led to the involvement of the most powerful states in and outside the MENA region, and to the creation of as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups commanding an estimated 100,000 fighters (Lister, 2013). As for Iraq, the long-time cradle of radical armed groups, it witnessed the unprecedented rise to power of a non-state actor, Islamic State (IS), which came to challenge the socio-political structures set after the demise of the country's historical ruler, Saddam Hussein. As in Syria, the Iraqi conflict revealed and was fed by starker sectarian tensions that remain today, although the Iraqi government officially declared its victory against IS in June 2017.

The complexity of the situation in Iraq and Syria has given birth to a multitude of interpretations of the conflicts' dynamics. Both wars have recurrently been depicted as sectarian struggles between Islam and other religions on the one side and between Sunni and Shī'ia Islam on the other side (Friedman and Rabi 2017; Malik, 2016; Phillips, 2015). Other sources predicted the return of the Cold War between the United States (US) and Russia on the Middle Eastern field (Barmin, 2018; Jauvert, 2018). Besides, some voices pointed to the confrontation between pro- and anti-regime forces (Eisenstadt, 2018). Finally, governments in the West and the MENA

claimed that both wars were nothing more than a fight against "terrorism" (The Jordan Times, 2014; Zimmerman, 2018). The nebulous understanding of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was further impeded by the multitude of state and non-state actors involved, each trying to portray the situation according to its interests and objectives. All protagonists have taken part in the fight for the representation of the situation in Iraq and Syria. Yet, among all the belligerents, one seems to have put unprecedented resources and hope in the construction of a discourse that might eventually offer a crucial strategic advantage in the conflicts: Islamic State.

1.2 Islamic State: The Discursive Offensive of a Non-State Actor

On June 29, 2014, in Mosul in northern Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself the Caliph of the newly established caliphate Islamic state. By self-declaring itself a new "state" actor, the group entered in direct competition for power and legitimacy over territories and populations with the existing Middle Eastern states and other political entities operating in the region. Although it was initiated by a rapid military conquest in Iraq and Syria, the birth of the Caliphate was made official through a public statement by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesperson of IS. Since then, the group has been fighting two interrelated but distinct wars: A military war on the ground to win territory and impose its rule over the embryo of a state, and an ideological war to win the hearts and minds of the populations living in those territories to gain legitimacy and popularity.

Even though IS struggled on the military frontline from 2015, it remained a fierce opponent on the ideological battlefield. The group has developed a highly effective use of language and discourse as a tool to portray, carry and circulate its ideology in societies of the MENA region and beyond, thereby waging an intensive and extensive communications campaign aimed at both friendly and hostile audiences. An important precision is due regarding the "audience" of IS' message as it is referred to in this thesis. In its attempt to convince the masses to join the ranks of the Caliphate in its war against its numerous enemies, IS did not discriminate among the recipients of its message. While the latter would sometimes directly address Muslims and urge them to defend their religion, IS' discourse was primarily aimed at attracting the support of the people living in the immediate and more distant neighbourhoods of the Islamic state, and to consolidate the trust and loyalty of the people living inside the Caliphate. As a result, IS' targeted

audience was wide and diverse, constituted by several religions, ethnicities, together with national and local identities. In fact, one of the main reasons IS consciously chose not to discriminate against pre-existing identities is that the group aimed to promote a new single identity under the banner of its Caliphate. Hence, anybody exposed to the group's discourse was a potential recruit and was given the choice to become a proponent of its socio-political project. Moreover, as it will be developed further in this thesis, the populations living in MENA states were in regular, if not daily contact with IS' message via traditional and social media making them a *de facto* audience of it. In other words, while IS' struggle materialised in a mostly Muslim and Arab context, Muslim Arab individuals were not the only recipients of the group's message and were even not its only recruits. Hence, considering the focus of this research on MENA populations, this thesis refers to the "audience" of IS' discourse as any individuals living in a MENA country and potentially exposed to IS' message, whether by choice or via discourses disseminated by close circles, media, religious or political figures. Doing so, this research acknowledges both the Islamic heritage of MENA populations and their religious and ethnic diversity.

IS' effort to coin a discourse targeted at delegitimising its foes in the context of the wars in Iraq and Syria are referred to in this thesis as a "discursive offensive" or a "discursive assault". Both phrasings denote the fact that the discourse and the military should be regarded as the two faces of a same coin aimed at winning the battle against the enemies of the Caliphate. They also account for IS' awareness that articulating and promoting its worldview in a distinct discourse was an integral component of its war for the establishment of a global Islamic state.

This thesis investigates IS' discourse, namely how the group depicted conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. Yet, it does not solely study IS' discourse from a rhetorical perspective but also the group's worldview which is rooted in a form of knowledge-practice, or the group's analysis. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria were and continue to be major preoccupations at a political, economic, and societal level in the MENA region. They arguably catalyse broader regional dynamics such as the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Sunni/Shī'ia divide and the effects of western military interventions. It is also in relation with the two conflicts that IS has developed an Islamic discourse that promoted powerful assumptions and explanations about its violent struggle through a careful choice of words – as the multiple changes of the organisation's name exemplify (Osborne, 2015).

Discourse is defined as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (Hall, 1992: 291). Using such a discourse, IS has, to a large extent, succeeded not only in justifying its "war for true Islam", but also to redistribute power by reshaping existing socio-political, cultural and historical regional features, reconfiguring the geographical borders, and disrupting the regional economy. Virtually all populations in the immediate proximity of the self-proclaimed Caliphate have been affected by IS' representation of the past, present, and future of the Middle East.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

It should be remembered that this thesis is guided by the broader investigation of the role of language in relation to key contemporary issues in the modern MENA region. In light of the case under study, the thesis attempts to answer the following main research question:
Did IS' discourse influence and shape MENA populations' perception of the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria?
In other words, this thesis examines whether and how IS, as a social movement, participated in the creation of the MENA populations' perceived reality on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria – and more globally on their region?

Several sub-questions stem directly from the above core inquiry:

1) *How did IS depict the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, in an attempt to convince its audience that its representation of the region is the only valid one and to legitimise its struggle for a new socio-political order?*
This question aims to uncover the production process of IS' discourse, that is, how IS conceptualised and interpreted the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.
- What are the frames IS used to structure its stories about the conflicts?
- Which events and objects were emphasised in IS' discourse? Which words were used to describe these events and objects and what meaning was assigned to these words?
- What social practices did the discourse entail?
- Has IS' discourse evolved between June 2016 and July 2017?

2) *Did IS' frames on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria resonate in the larger MENA socio-cultural context?*

This question aims to uncover the reception process of IS' discourse, that is, whether the recipients of the message displayed similar interpretation of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

- What are the frames the MENA populations hold about the conflicts in Iraq and Syria?
- To what extent are the frames used by IS in its media outlet present in the way the MENA audience express its understanding of conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria?

The aims of this thesis may be better explained by underlining what this work is not about. First, it is not about questioning the events and objects which are described in IS' discourse. Those events and objects arguably exist, regardless of whether or how they are talked about. The primary goal is to examine the meanings assigned to those events and objects, and to analyse how these meanings were created by IS and perceived by its audience.

Second, this thesis does not intend to assess the truth or adequacy of IS' description and analysis of the world. Truth is the result of social interactions (Foucault, 1978). Whether it is empirically valid or not, a discourse needs a significant number of people to believe in it so it can be held "true" and so that actual consequences can result from it. Even for those who opposed IS, notably by trying to set up a solid counter-discourse, they still acknowledged and interacted with it by resisting it and the actions or policies it justified. The second objective of this thesis is thus to understand the way the discourse is effectively brought into existence as a "truth".

Finally, this thesis seeks to gain insight into the way how "truth" shapes broader understandings of the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria and generates concrete local and regional consequences. In other words, this research tries to shed light on the processes through which IS' message gained significant traction in the larger MENA public's understanding of the world. In other words, if one were to represent IS' communication campaign as a sender-message-receiver continuum, this thesis gives primary importance to the role of the message and its receiver.

This thesis attempts to fulfil these three main objectives by adopting a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of the frames used in IS' discourse at the micro-level (text), at the meso-level (discursive practises), and at the macro-level (social practices the discourse entails).

1.4 Structure

This thesis consists of ten chapters structured into four parts. Part I continues with Chapter 2 that offers a theoretical discussion where this thesis chosen ontology and epistemology are rationalised. After providing a critical literature review on Islamic State's strategic communication, it suggests a definition of discourse as a central notion of this research. It also outlines the rationale behind choosing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a constructionist approach to studying IS' discourse. Finally, Chapter 2 discusses the suitability of Frame Theory (FT) to investigate the creation and reception of IS' depiction of the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. Chapter 3 details the methodological and analytical frameworks adopted to collect data and examine and compare conflict frames in two sets of discourses: IS' message on the one side and the discourse of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations on the other side. In this endeavour, Chapter 3 makes a case for the incorporation of corpus linguistic techniques into frame analysis and the study of discourse. To conclude Part I, Chapter 4 accounts for the importance given to social constructionism in this study and offers a contextualisation of Islamism in historical, geographical and socio-political settings in the MENA region.

Part II presents the analysis of IS' framing of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Chapter 5 develops the group's views on the causes and expected future of the conflicts, thereby examining the problem frames and gain/loss frames coined in IS' discourse. Based on the exploration of identity frames and characterisation frames, Chapter 6 describes IS' interpretation of the antagonistic warring camps and the group's discursive construction of two competing identities. Part II concludes with a discussion on power and social control as articulated in IS' revisionist programme. Finally, it outlines avenues for further reflection on the group's potential "discursive power", but also on its rhetoric weaknesses.

Part III tests those latter assumptions by analysing the perceptions of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Both chapters have a similar structure, putting the resonance of IS' discourse under scrutiny after offering an overview of the rise of Islamism in Jordan and Tunisia.

Part IV concludes the analytical investigation of the case under study. Chapter 9 highlights and assesses the processes of reproduction and/or resistance to IS' conflict frames in Jordan and

Tunisia. Doing so, it evaluates the penetration of IS' discourse within the two populations under scrutiny. Chapter 9 puts those results into perspective by discussing IS' successes and failures in its struggle to impose a revisionist socio-political system in Iraq and Syria, and the prospective place of Islamism and the state in the MENA in a post-IS and post-Arab Spring order. Finally, Chapter 10 concludes this doctoral research with a general summary of the findings before highlighting the challenges and limitations of this academic undertaking. It also offers a review of the findings' implications for future research, suggesting some ways forwards and final reflections on the study of non-state actors' communication campaign in their struggle for power.

CHAPTER 2 ~ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 9/11, there has been a widespread realisation that strategic communication of jihadi groups was crucial to the analysis of terrorism as a means to foster radicalisation and to sustain violent extremism (Corman, 2011: 36; Cornish et al., 2011; Fink and Barclay, 2013). In the new campaign that targets the hearts and the minds of people, the war of words has outpaced the war of tanks and machine guns, and writing an efficient counter-messaging has been advocated as a s*ine qua non* condition of counter-terrorism responses (Casebeer and Russell, 2005; Cilluffo et al., 2007; HM Government, 2011; National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2010; Presidential Task Force, 2009; Qatar International Academy for Security Studies and the Soufran Group, 2013; Quiggin, 2009). Although this unprecedented focus on the importance of language offers a salutary evolution from the traditional security response to violent extremism, it has left policymakers and academics working from a reactive paradigm and from a perspective centred on the effect of IS' message on western populations and governments (for a criticism of this reactive stance, see Glazzard, 2017). In other words, the focus on IS' message has been justified by the necessity to counter the violent ideology it promotes in the West (Cutter, 2017; Ferguson, 2016; Fernandez, 2015; Kuznar, 2016; Pelletier et al., 2016; Russell and Rafiq, 2016; The Carter Center, 2016 and 2017). This thesis offers an alternative perspective, studying IS in the context of MENA politics and the group's message aimed at MENA populations at large.

This research adopts a broad understanding of the MENA as the geographic area stretching from Iran in the east – encapsulating Turkey, Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant – to North Africa in the west. This choice is justified by the fact that concerned populations – because they share a common history, identity and most of them speak the same language (Arabic) – are likely to be exposed to a similar discourse. The area under investigation will henceforth be referred to as the MENA region. Within this geographically defined context, IS is considered an Islamic military and political force whose use of language might have had a significant influence on the

dynamics characterising the region. This study is an attempt to understand the broader power struggle in the MENA where the scale and pace of change have increased in the last ten years.

Despite the centrality of IS' discourse in strategic communication approaches to counterterrorism (Weimann, 2014), there have been few efforts to establish an analytical framework that rigorously explains the role of the language in the development of violent extremism. The researcher has recorded that about 2,500 studies have so far been published on IS as of January 2019. This list includes sources in Arabic, English, French, German, and Spanish. While this database is not exhaustive, it offers a good illustration of the recent fad for the IS phenomenon. The great majority of those studies have been written from 2014 on, although previous research focusing on Islamic groups in Iraq offer useful insights to understand IS, and have thus been included in the record. It is worth mentioning that the latter focuses on academic work such as books and edited volumes, book chapters and journal articles, theses, as well as a few online resources such as blogs. On the contrary, newspaper articles have not been integrated unless they are the fruit of a thorough analysis of IS' discourse (published by Al Jazeera Centre for example).

The database emphasises that, while a plethora of studies seek to understand the rise and spread of IS, few have investigated the group's message and its "discursive power" (such studies are listed in Table 1). This thesis defines "discursive power" as: if and how the message effectively succeeds in shaping its audience's perceptions of its environment in line with the group's interests. Discourse is a rhetorical technique of persuasion in the traditional sense. In this traditional sense, it can be more or less powerful. However, this thesis suggests that discourse is not purely "technical" but includes the Foucauldian element, which is the power to influence actions, mobilise and generate beliefs (Foucault, 1978). Discourse is about the formation and shaping of one subject in the attempt to foster a certain understanding of one's environment. The notion of discourse is given a central place in this thesis, which focuses on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as a subject of IS' discourse.

The great majority of studies on IS' message (including studies on IS' discourse and IS' narrative) have tried to explain the group's global communicative strategy, pointing at its objective to mobilise support and recruit new members (Gambhir, 2014; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2016; Ingram, 2014, 2015 and 2016; Milton, 2016; Pellerin, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Whiteside, 2016). From a slightly different perspective, a number of studies have analysed how IS represented specific topics in its media outlets, such as youth (Christien, 2016; Kiefer et al., 2016-2017), the Qur'an

(Frissen, 2018), the *Ummah* (Georges, 2016), state-building (Hadra, 2015), statehood (Al-Dayel and Anfinson, 2017) and martyrdom (Bloom et al., 2016; Winter, 2017). As for the distribution process of IS' communications, Williams (2016) offered an interesting account on the group's use of western media to disseminate its message. In a similar attempt to explain IS' media "blitzkrieg", a series of investigations have examined IS' message through the language used by the group. Wignell et al. (2017), Kuznar (2017) and Vergani and Bliuc (2015) examined the evolution of IS' language over time, emphasising the consistent but dynamic nature of the message and showing the group's responsiveness to its changing fortune. Drischell (2017) explored how language was used by IS to spread fear and intimidation and Rawabet Center (2015) focused on the language of jihad in al-Baghdadi's investiture speech as a Caliph. Finally, O'Halloran et al. (2016), Walli (2015), Wassar (2017) and Winkler et al. (2016) noted the importance to view IS' language not only in its written form but also as a visual material, offering an analysis of IS' multimodal message.

A striking observation on the existing literature on IS' message is that a multitude of studies have focused their analysis on *Dābiq* – the group's official English-language magazine. Some have identified the varied array of characterising themes it displayed (Fernandez, 2015; Winter, 2015; Zelin; 2015; Ryan, 2014; Droogan and Peattie, 2017), while others have compared its content to al-Qaeda's message featured in its *Inspire* magazine (Huey, 2015; Ingram, 2017a and 2017b; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2017; Novenario, 2016; Reed and Ingram, 2017; Vallee, 2015; Vergani and Bliuc, 2018). Besides, *Dābiq* has been interpreted through the lens of political myth (Kirke 2015), behaviouralism (Lemieux et al. 2014) and hermeneutics (Colas 2016).

Five sets of criticisms can be directed at existing research on IS' message. Since its emergence, the group has fascinated the media, public opinion, academics and policymakers. In less than five years, thousands of articles, books, newspapers articles and blogs have taken up the subject. In other words, IS was and remains highly "trendy". Yet, while many have written about IS, only a limited number of authors have proposed a theoretical (and methodological) framework to analyse the group's message. Hence, the first criticism of the existing literature is its wide-ranging, often poor, quality. Among the rare authors who conducted a thorough analysis of IS' message, Winter (2015) built upon Jacques Ellul's work on propaganda (1958) to argue that the group's communication "[was] not just a means of securing support, but is a way to activate an individual's participation in the transmission of ideas" (Winter, 2015: 15). To that end, IS' "propaganda" set up a problem, offered a solution and was eventually used as a tool of coercion that "corrupt[ed]

the intellectual process" (Ibid). Ultimately, Winter argued that the objective of IS' message was to detach its recipients from reality and to alienate them from their peers (Ibid). Ingram (2016) offered a different perspective from the existing literature on IS by developing a strong and innovative framework to uncover how the group's message sought to shape its reader's perceptions in an attempt to foster support for its cause. For this purpose, Ingram suggested an interpretive framework for radical narrative analysis to contend that IS' message was an interplay of narratives "designed to leverage powerful psychosocial forces and shape supporter decision-making processes" (2016: 3). More specifically, he argued that IS prioritised dichotomy-reinforcing messages to influence rational and identity choices. This strategy was reinforced by the emphasis on the Sunni superiority and the necessity of helping IS to implement its solution to the perceived crisis.

Analyses of IS' language are by far the most sophisticated in terms of theoretical and methodological frameworks. As such, they have provided a fruitful ground for inspiration and intellectual reflection for this thesis. Wignell et al. (2017) borrowed Halliday's Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine changes in emphasis and approach in *Dābiq* and *Rumīyyah* magazines over time. The same theoretical framework was adopted by O'Halloran et al. (2016) in their development of a multimodal discourse analysis of IS' message. Vergani and Bliuc (2015) used a computerised text analysis programme (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) to investigate IS' mobilising strategy in the light of the group's language. Drischell (2017) built upon an unusual framework based on Symbolic Convergence Theory to explore how IS used language to spread fear and intimidation. Finally, other semiotic studies have relied on Discourse Analysis (Kuznar, 2017; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2017), Critical Discourse Analysis (Can, 2017; Georges, 2015; Steindal, 2015; Walli, 2015) and Content Analysis (Larsson, 2017).

The second drawback of existing studies is that their investigators treat IS' communication as homogeneous, without taking into consideration the diversity of the message over different audiences, spaces, sources and over the languages the group used to disseminate information. For example, almost all of the existing studies focus on IS' English materials that are issued towards western audiences, especially the magazine *Dābiq* (al-Dayel and Anfinson, 2017; Azman, 2016; Colas, 2016; Kibble, 2016; Langemeijer, 2016; Novenario, 2016; Vergani and Bliuc, 2015; Ryan, 2014; Winkler et al., 2016). Barely 25% of the analyses recorded on IS' message investigated its Arabic content. The English material, though, accounted for only a small percentage (around 12%) of IS' media outputs compared to the vast majority of Arabic videos

and communiqués released daily (Milton, 2016: 49). Regrettably, there exists no thorough investigation of *al-Naba'*, the weekly Arabic-language newsletter issued by IS and distributed both online and directly to the populations living in the territories controlled by the group (Map 1). Thus, the existing literature failed to apprehend, for instance, the etymological value of notions borrowed from classical Arabic literature and poetry and present in IS' message (Kendall, 2016). Moreover, relevant studies underscored the diversity of the group's message, thereby offering a partial and reductionist analysis. IS did not only deliver its message through its central media commands but also through a total of seven media centres and 42 provincial media offices spread over more than 13 countries in more than 10 languages (Figure 1). For that reason, this research argues that a more comprehensive and representative message network is needed to efficiently and systematically assess IS' communication. This network should include not only IS' magazines but also the group's official statements, radio bulletin, newsletter, songs, and so on. It is also essential that Arabic-language media outlets are given prime importance.

The third flaw of the current literature is its disproportionate focus on IS' use of the internet, especially the use of the social media, to disseminate its message (Bodine-Baron et al., 2016; Bakour, 2017; Berger and Morgan, 2015; Houck et al., 2017; Günther, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Manciulli, 2015; Prucha, 2016). Accordingly, those tools have been widely considered the major reason of IS' succesful recruitmentment campaign among western audiences (Fernandez, 2015). This research acknowledges that IS' messaging is potentially powerful, as it is disseminated on an unprecedented scale, taking advantage of the new mediums offered by the 21st century. However, it suggests that the existing literature overlooks the human factor that leads to engagement. Moreover, what this literature deems an unprecedented revolution in the jihadi groups' communication strategy is only the latest manifestation of the profound changes brought by the introduction of new communication technologies (Archetti, 2012). Hence, this thesis looks at the convergence of different platforms – both new and more traditional media – and how they convey discourses. Indeed, stories on IS consistently rank highly on lists of the most read and most viewed "traditional" news items (Spencer, in Williams, 2016: 6).

The fourth shortcoming identified in the literature on IS' messaging is that it simplifies the messaging scheme by treating it simply as propaganda (Abu Rumman et al., 2016; Azman, 2016; Larsson, 2017; Fernandez, 2015; Pellerin, 2015; Walli, 2015; Winter, 2015). The assumption here is that it can be fought either by being physically removed or by outpacing it by a more powerful message. Consequently, those studies view IS' message as a rhetorical device only.

Accordingly, if governments craft the "right" counter-message, the jihadi organisations would presumably stop committing acts of terrorism and youth would not radicalise. This argument is overly simplistic and misleading. It considers that audiences are passive and assimilate the message as it is, without filtering it through their cognition. This doctoral research recognises that a message may influence audiences by suggesting how to interpret a particular issue (Nelson et al. 1997: 567). However, it argues that the influence is not straightforward. This thesis builds upon several academic contributions that emphasise the active role of audiences both in the selection of the information and in its interpretation (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944; Miller, 2008).

The last criticism relates to the fact that the appeal of IS' message has largely been explained by the group's slick, highly professional production, graphic violence and aesthetic, and effective use of social media (Al-'Ubaydi et al., 2014; Farwell, 2014; Fischer and Prucha, 2014; Friis, 2015; Huyghe, 2015; Stern and Berger, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2015; Winter, 2015). Yet such observations are not the result of a systematic investigation but merely express certain assumptions where the power of IS' message is taken for granted. In other words, existing analyses have intended to explain the group's power of attraction through the analysis of its message, which encapsulated its ideology and could thus account for the group's success. Only Pelletier at al. (2016) have attempted to conceptualise the actual influence of IS' message through the notion of "resonance". This stance undermines the question of IS' discursive power as defined above. It is outlined in this thesis that the potential power of a message arguably consists first in its ability to convey an ideology or representation of the world, second in its ability to be disseminated widely to reach its audience, and third in its ability to effectively influence its audience. Hence, if a message cannot be accessed, albeit well-coined, it will have little chance to be known and, *a fortiori*, to influence anybody. Even if it is accessed, there is no guarantee that a message will have the desired effect on its audience. While it is clear that IS mastered the production of its message, and put tremendous efforts in distributing it with the help of the internet and of worldwide media, it is far less evident that IS' message resonated among its audience. To put it more simply, the success of IS' discourse cannot be assumed on the basis that a great number of individuals joined its ranks or carried out attacks in the name of the Caliphate. As demonstrated by several studies, the causes of engagement in violent jihadi groups are multiple and cannot be reduced to the mere adherence to an ideology (Alonso et al., 2008; Bjørgo, 2005; Bokhari et al., 2006; Ranstorp, 2010).

In an attempt to suggest an alternative approach to the existing methods that examine IS' communication campaign, this research argues that the group's message should be studied along a sender-message-receiver continuum. In other words, one cannot assume that a message is powerful without investigating how the same message resonates among its audience. As a consequence, this thesis highlights the central role of the recipients of IS' message and offers a comparative study between IS' and its potential audience's discourses on the wars in Iraq and Syria. It presents a multi-disciplinary approach that combines an interest in both IS' message and the recipients of this message. The following sections conceptualise those objectives and describe the theoretical framework suggested to analyse IS' discursive power in the MENA region.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis as an Approach

This thesis seeks to uncover how IS used language to depict the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, in addition to the resonance of this language in populations of the MENA region. Hence, this research adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) as an approach to better understand both the sociolinguistic context in which IS operated and the sociological impact of IS' discourse. After providing a brief historical background of CDA, this section will define discourse as a central notion of the research. It will also review the main features and objectives of CDA, in an attempt to outline the rationale behind choosing this approach to study IS' discourse.

2.2.1 Historical Outline

The roots of Critical Discourse Analysis lie in Critical Linguistics (CL), an approach developed by a group of linguists and literary theorists at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s. CL emphasises the role of language in light of its social and historical contexts and articulates the view that any linguistic structure can carry ideological significance (Fowler, 1991: 67). Critical linguists base their textual analysis on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (1978) described as "a means of representing patterns of experience [...] It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them" (Halliday, 1985: 101). Following this definition, critical linguists view language as

simultaneously performing three functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational function refers to the conceptualisation process of the inner and outer world involved in individuals' mental activity. The interpersonal function is a participatory function that expresses the speaker's role in the speech situation, as well as his interactions with other participants. The textual function is a text-forming function through which the verbal and the situational contexts are related. As a result of those three functions, language encodes social meaning and is a "social act". According to Fowler et al. (1979: 185), CL asserts that "there are strong and pervasive connections between linguistic structure and social structure". In other words, language does not merely reflect reality but socially constructs it, embedding a particular worldview and value system. This assumption that language embeds meaning and participates in the construction of the social realities is central to practitioners of CDA (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1993; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). Yet, CDA is not a linguistic system like Fredinand de Saussure's *langue* and *parole*, nor is it similar to Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. CDA is distinctive because it considers that discourse is not determined by individual choices, but by social structures and social differentiation (Fairclough, 1989).

As a separate field of studies, CDA was developed by neo-Marxist and post-modernist approaches of social theorists, such as Foucault (1972), and social linguists, such as Pêcheux (1975), who sought to understand discourse as a prime instrument to carry, transmit and reproduce ideology. CDA borrows concepts introduced by a number of theoretical and philosophical works, such as Foucault's concepts of discourse and power (1972, 1980); Althusser's and Gramsci's work on ideology (1970, 1971); Hall's study of the relation between culture, power and identity (1973, 1996); and Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia (1981, 1993) to cite a few. As such, CDA is "concerned with critique of ideology and the effects of domination" (Fairclough, 1995a: 20). Hence, it is deeply rooted in Critical Theory that is inextricably tied up with the Frankfurt School of Social Research, especially Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. In 1937, Horkheimer urged social theory to "critique and change society and improving its understanding by integrating social sciences to show how social phenomena are interconnected, to produce knowledge that helps social actors emancipate themselves from domination through self-reflection, and to describe, explain and eradicate delusion, by revealing structures of power and ideologies behind discourse, that is, by making visible causes that are hidden" (in Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 6).

CDA started as a new direction of Discourse Analysis in the mid-1980s through works of a group of linguists, such as Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak. It borrows its interest in uncovering the relationship between discourse and society from Critical Linguistics. Yet, in the words of van Dijk, CDA and CL "are at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis" (1993: 131). The main difference between the two approaches lies in the fact that, while critical linguists view discourse as a place where the dominant ideology is merely reproduced, critical discourse analysts point out that discourse is often a site of conflicting ideologies, where existing power relations can be maintained, challenged or resisted (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995a; Thornborrow, 2002; Wodak and Meyer, 2009b).

2.2.2 Discourse: Definition and Characteristics

Discourse has been defined and explained in a multitude of ways. Broadly speaking, discourse can be described according to two main paradigms: structural and functional. On the one hand, structuralists are concerned with the form of the discourse and the "architecture of language" (Chomsky, 2000) such as grammar and lexicon. They view language as an innate and individual property (Chomsky, 1957 and 1965; de Saussure, 1916). On the other hand, functionalists are interested in language use, that is, the content and the meaning of the discourse. They view language as a social phenomenon (Halliday, 1976, 1985 and 2006; Labov, 1987). In her *Approaches to Discourses*, Schiffrin suggests that "discourse is utterances" (1994: 39), with "utterances" described as "units of language production [...] that are inherently contextualised" (Ibid: 41). Defining discourse as utterances, she successfully finds a way to balance the formalists' emphasis on linguistic structures with the functionalists' concern for how language is used in context. In a similar attempt to encapsulate both perspectives cogently, Gee (1999) pairs "small 'd' discourse" and "big 'D' discourse". The former refers to actual language in use, that is, spoken and written language. The latter integrates language as a way of thinking, acting, doing and being in the world into patterns associated with a recognisable social network, or affinity group (Gee, 1996, 1999 and 2001).

Foucault (1972) introduces a different view of discourse as an abstract form of knowledge or a "system of thoughts", understood as cognition and emotions (Jäger and Maier, 2009). The Foucauldian concept of discourse has been defined as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a

topic" (Hall, 1992: 291). Foucault argues that discourse constructs the topic in that it governs the way this topic can be meaningfully talked about (Ibid). Meaning is, therefore, constructed within discourse. As such, Foucault is a constructionist (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009; Lock and Strong, 2010). Yet, unlike constructionists, he is concerned with the production of knowledge and meaning through discourse. The idea developed by Foucault is that discourse produces the object of knowledge and that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. For instance, discourse cannot be a record of historical events or the expression of an individual or collective psychology. In fact, the French philosopher does not deny that things can have a material existence in the world. What he argues is that none of them has a meaning outside discourse. Put in other words, the Foucauldian concept of discourse "is not about whether things exist but where meaning comes from" (Hall, 2001: 73).

A fundamental analytical point in Foucault's concept of discourse is that the latter does not only provide a mere "representation" of reality, but becomes the basis of actions, or "discursive practices" (1975). The term describes practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific knowledges ("discourses") operate and the work they do. Concretely, "discursive practices" are practices that an individual embodies and experiences as s/he interacts with discourse. As mentioned above, the focus of Foucault's analysis is to explore how written or said things could be effectively brought into existence as a "truth" – accepted as "knowledge" – and which result this acceptance may have. To put it in the terms of this research, the Foucauldian approach contends that IS' discourse on "good Muslims" inadvertently informed, influenced and shaped the identity of the group's members to the point where they behaved according to what had been labelled as acceptable and true about them. It follows that members could have changed their daily practices – for example, start killing peers and raping Yazidi women in the name of Islam – due to the identity that has been ascribed to them in IS' discourse.

To fully understand Foucault's approach to discourse, one question remains to be answered: What follows from the acceptance of the reality/"truth" about a given topic? According to Foucault, power is the central tool and aim of discourse. In other words, power and knowledge/discourse are two sides of a single process. The relation between discourse and power is a major contribution of Foucault's work. He maintains that knowledge does not reflect power relations; "power is everywhere", diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1975; Rabinow, 1991). Hence, discourse should be understood as both an instrument and an effect of power, and also a place of resistance to power (Foucault, 1981: 101).

To conclude on the notion of discourse, it is worth mentioning that another input of Foucault is the differentiation between discourse and text. As previously emphasised, the French philosopher does not think of discourse as a piece of text, but as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972: 49). As explained by Widdowson, discourse "is the pragmatic process of meaning negotiation", and text, its product (2004: 8). In other words, discourse is text(s) in context and always refers to larger meaning structures. Fairclough and Wodak add that discourses "are partly realised in ways of using language, but partly in other ways" (1997: 261), for instance, visual or behavioural semiosis. In other words, texts are the concrete but not only realisation of abstract forms of knowledge.

Although Critical Discourse Analysis draws its concept of discourse from Foucault, it develops discourse socially in such a way that it involves social conditions of production as well as social conditions of interpretation. Hence, CDA moved beyond Foucault's approach that ignores any fundamental dependence on anything outside discourse itself. For the practitioners of CDA, discourse is defined in terms of "social practice" (Fairclough, 1989, 1993 and 2003; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Gee, 1990; Scollon 2001; van Dijk 1993, 1997 and 2001; van Leeuwen, 2006; Wodak, 1996, 2000 and 2001a). There is a dialectical relationship between the discourse and its environment, where discourse is a product of its environment and functions in that environment – shaping it – through semantic choices and interactions between readers and receivers. In other words, discourse shapes social settings and it is shaped by them. These social settings constitute the culture of institutions or society as a whole.

This definition of discourse makes a clear social constructionist claim, which stresses the way social reality is constructed and given meaning through the articulation and production of discourses (Lindekilde, 2014: 198). According to Jäger and Maier (2009), through the repetition of ideas and statements, discourse solidifies knowledge, and reflects, shapes and enables social reality. They conclude, "[w]ithout discourses, there would be no (social) reality" (Ibid). In the same vein, Fairclough and Wodak contend that "discourse-language use in speech and writing – as a form of social practice – [...] is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped" (1997: 276). Henceforth, as explained further below, this thesis uses Social Constructionism as a supporting theory for the research.

As the central object of study, this thesis builds upon Hall's interpretation of the Foucauldian concept of discourse. Hence, it is primarily concerned with the group of statements, authored by IS, which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about the wars in Iraq and Syria. The reason behind choosing the Foucauldian notion of discourse is because it is primarily concerned with the interaction between three variables, namely discourse, power and the subject (McHoul and Grace, 2003). One of the main objectives of this research is to understand the relations between IS' discourse and the group's MENA audience within the context of the struggle for regional power. Also, "discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Foucault, 1981: 110), which arguably explains IS' tremendous efforts to coin and disseminate its message above military conquests. Yet this research adopts the approach of discourse suggested by CDA. The latter sees discourse as a social practise that shapes and is shaped by its readers and receivers. Accordingly, this research argues that there are constant interactions between IS' discourse and other regional discourses, which may lead to the creation of a dialectal relationship between discursive actors, and to the continuing evolution of those actors' perception of their environment in the context of MENA politics. As a result, IS' discourse is thought to be dynamic and adaptive.

2.2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis: Main Features and Objectives

Discourse Analysis can be defined as the study of how social reality is linguistically constituted, through the three-dimensional analysis of the interplay between the discursive unit (the text), the "discursive practices" (production, dissemination, reception), and the "social practices" (wider context); and "to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (Fairclough, 1993: 135). Put differently, discourse analysis seeks to uncover "how particular texts either reproduce or challenge established definitions and understandings of social reality by applying particular discursive practices and drawing on discourses inherent to the social context of reception/consumption of the text" (Lindekilde, 2014: 198).

As a variant of Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis might be better explained by presenting the main principles that characterise its practice (van Dijk, 1995a: 17-18; Wodak, 2001a: 69-70; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 271-280). The main tenets of CDA can be summarised as follows:

1. CDA is (social) problem-oriented rather than emphasising some special language issues. As explained by Wodak and Meyer, 2009a: 2), CDA is "not interested in investigating a linguistic unit *per se* but in studying social phenomena".

2. CDA is an approach. It does not stand for a single theory, but rather subsumes a variety of methodologies, based on different theoretical backgrounds. Some of the most prominent approaches to CDA include Norman Fairclough Dialectical-Relational Approach (2009), Teun van Dijk Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis (2006, 2008, 2009) and Ruth Wodak (and colleagues) Discourse-Historical Approach (2001b).

Fairclough focuses on "social conflict [...] and tries to detect its linguistic manifestations in discourses, in specific elements of dominance, difference and resistance" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 27). The cornerstone of his approach is to link discourse, power, and social structures. He contends that "just as even a single sentence has traditionally been seen to imply a whole language, so a single discourse implies a whole society" (Fairclough, 1989: 152). In other words, language is always shaped by – and displays the social condition in which it is produced. Hence, Fairclough understands CDA as the analysis of the dialectical relationships between "semiosis" (discourse as meaning-making) and other elements of social practices, without these different elements being reducible to each other. For example, those other elements include social relations, power, institution, beliefs, and cultural values. According to Fairclough, they are in part semiotic; they internalise semiosis, but are not reducible to it. This is the sense of his dialectical-relational approach, which examines the role of social institutions in shaping discourse practices.

Van Dijk slightly differs from Fairclough in that he argues that there is no direct relationship between society and discourse, but that the two are mediated by cognitive structures. More precisely, he incorporates elements of the standard psychological model of memory into formal text linguistics. In other words, cognition, realised in collective mental models, is the interface between societal and discourse structures (van Dijk, 2009). One individual's cognition is informed by dynamic constructs known as "social representations", that is, the concepts, values, norms and images shared in a social group, and activated and maintained in discourse (Ibid). One of van Dijk's main contributions to CDA is his study of news discourse and what shapes the processes of media texts' production and reception (1989, 1995b and 1998).

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), developed by Wodak and her colleagues, is concerned with the internal inconsistencies within a given text and with elucidating the persuasive or manipulative construction of a piece of discourse (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 64). For that purpose, DHA investigates the historical context, which is incorporated into the analysis of discourse and texts. In other words, assuming a dialectical relationship between discourse and the particular social world it is embedded in, the central tenet of this approach is the importance of bringing together the textual and contextual levels of analysis (De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak, 1999: 7-8). The model of context used invokes historical knowledge across four distinct facets: 1) its text-internal context; 2) its inter-discursive context; 3) its "context of situation", or relation to the norms of institutional, social, or genre frames; and 4) its "broader socio-political and historical context" (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 93; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). The interconnection between various texts and discourses – or intertextual elements – leads directly to the notions of de-contextualisation and recontextualisation, processes in which elements typical of a particular context can be taken out of it and inserted into a new context with which it has not been conventionally associated (Kristeva, 1969; Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Becker, 1995).

3. The CDA approach is interdisciplinary. From its premises, CDA grew out of the work of different disciplines of the 1960s and early 1970s, including linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology (McCarthy, 1991). The focus of CDA on social complex phenomena arguably requires "a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009a: 2). Given the convergence of all these linguistic, non-linguistic, and social sciences approaches within CDA, van Dijk (2009: 62) has argued that a more accurate term for this discipline would be Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). He describes the notion as "a new cross-discipline that comprises the analysis of the text and talk in virtually all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences". This interdisciplinary nature can be seen both in theory and practice. CDA is not based on a single theory or method that is uniform and consistent (Fairclough 2003; Meyer, 2001; Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Hence, the choice of a methodology and theory is "eclectic and unsystematic" (Weiss and Wodak, 2003: 6).

4. CDA especially focuses on (group) relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk. Teun van Dijk (1988) has defined CDA as a field concerned with "the study and analysis of written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias". It deals with the discursively enacted or legitimated structures and strategies of dominance and resistance in social

relationships of class, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, language, religion, age, nationality or world-region (van Dijk, 1995a: 18). In the context of those relations of powers, CDA focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimation, manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds and actions of people in the interest of the powerful.

5. CDA is a critical approach. If this characteristic is quite straightforward, it is less clear how critical CDA is exactly. On the one hand, CDA is critical in the sense that it does not only describe, but it also interprets and explains the relationship between the form and the function of language. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, CDA's roots lie in Critical Theory. Drawing upon the Frankfurt School, CDA is greatly concerned with the role of ideology in the reproduction or resistance against dominance or inequality. One of its main goals is to "uncover", "reveal" or "disclose" what is implicit, hidden and not obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideology (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 2; van Dijk, 1995a: 18). As Fairclough puts it (1992: 12), CDA is critical because it is an unsystematic approach that attempts to show how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideology. In doing so, the practitioners of CDA are not neutral but explore hidden power in discourse in relation to wider social and cultural formations (Rogers, 2004). Finally, CDA displays a critical stance against the elites and the powerful, especially those who abuse their power. In other words, "CDA is biased – and proud of it" (van Dijk, 2001: 96).

2.2.4 The Critiques of Critical Discourse Analysis

Most of the criticisms of CDA do not call into question the existence or epistemological relevance of CDA but highlight its shortcomings. Widdowson points out that practitioners of CDA have fallen back into "a transmission view of meaning, whereby significance is always and only the reflex of linguistic signification" (1998: 142). In other words, there is a gap between the meaning sent by the addresser of the discourse and the interpretation of this meaning by the receiver of the discourse. In a globalised world, people are exposed to many different discourses that they learned to navigate, choosing to accept some and ignore others or even reject several. In the same vein, Chilton (2005) argues that CDA lacks – with the noticeable exception of van Dijk's model – a cognitive theory of language that could show how discourse affects social cognition and *vice versa*. Although Fairclough (1995) and others recognise the need to combine textual analysis with the analysis of production and consumption practices, they provide little evidence of such

practices. Therefore, scholars including O'Halloran (2003), Koller (2004), Chilton (2005) and Hart (2010) advocate integrating Cognitive Linguistics with CDA.

Taking a rather different line of attack, Billig (2003) agrees with CDA's claim that non-critical approaches prevail in the academic world, resulting in keeping existing power relations unchallenged. He also supports CDA's insistence that an interdisciplinary approach is needed. Nevertheless, he argues that a critical approach may itself become a dominant discourse and, consequently, a dominant discipline, with the shortcomings of the approaches it criticises. Hence, Billig emphasises the need for critical discourse analysts to "be reflexively self-critical" (2003: 39). CDA is mainly concerned with the elite and their discursive strategies for the maintenance of inequality. It contends that discourse plays a role in sustaining existing power relations, whereas Foucault attributes discourse the role of both legitimising as well as opposing power (1978: 100-101). Van Dijk recognises that an analysis of the notion of resistance needs to be included in a broader theory of power (1993: 250).

Similarly, critical voices raised concerns over the texts and contexts analysed by CDA. Martin (1992) argues that CDA should not only investigate texts that are found objectionable but also texts that are deemed admirable and motivating. To remedy this flaw, he proposes Positive Discourse Analysis as "a complementary perspective [to CDA] on language and semiosis, which functions to make the world a better place" (Martin 2004: 179). As for Blommaert (2005), he regrets that most of CDA's work applies to societies of the First World, paying attention to texts that are only relevant in the West. He contends that CDA fails to provide a useful "model for understanding discourse in the world today, for the world is far bigger than Europe and the USA, and substantial differences occur between different societies in this world" (Blommaert, 2005: 25).

Finally, one significant criticism stems from the multi-disciplinary nature of CDA, which can be a strength as much as a weakness. As mentioned above, there is no consistent or rigorous methodology of CDA application and analysis. Eclecticism in the choice of theory and methodology can be a source of contradiction. Widdowson gives a severe description of CDA as "a kind of ad hoc bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to hand" (1998: 136).

2.2.5 The Rationales Behind Choosing Critical Discourse Analysis

The rationales behind choosing CDA as an approach for this research are several. It appears that CDA offers a number of advantages for the study of social movements – such as Islamic State – through a discourse-sensitive and linguistic approach.

First, CDA accepts the role of language and social interaction in the production of power relations (Hackley, 2003). CDA stresses that language is not only a channel of communication but a "meaning-making machine" which produces knowledge, forms of behaviour and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1975) and, *in fine*, which "generates, and as a result, constitutes" the world (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 9). This thesis does not only study IS' discourse *per se* but also the creation of knowledge and the social practices it entails in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

Second, CDA will enable the researcher to understand how IS used discourse as a vehicle for its goals and as a tool to shape social reality and gain popular support in the context of a power struggle with the dominant elite/discourse in the MENA region. The main objective in using CDA to study social movements is to show "how movement's texts are composed and draw on existing discourses to communicate particular meanings, and how the reception of texts is, therefore, co-shaped by their discursive context" (Lindekilde, 2014: 198). Doing so, CDA emphasises that the ability to define social reality – or make one particular discourse dominant – is an act of power with important implications for social practices. Furthermore, Alexander (2006) argues that discourse is the preferred place for social movements to give resonance to their goals. He explains that to mobilise support, movement actors should connect their goals and demands to larger meaning structures (discourses) and infuse individual texts with linguistic "signs" that suggest a particular interpretation.

Third, CDA – especially its historical approach developed by Wodak and colleagues (2001b, 2009) – stresses the importance of historical, political and societal influences for the study of discourses, which ultimately result in the development of power relations. Those three features were predominant in IS' discourse. For example, the history of Islamic societies served as the main justification for IS' rhetoric and actions. Several articles and statements linked the time of Prophet Muhammad and the fall of the Abbasside Caliphate to the current crisis of the *Ummah* (the community of the Muslims worldwide) as a result of the mischief of western powers. The political aspect of IS discourse was also paramount in the many attempts to delegitimise other

political actors and to portray itself as a strong political structure under the institutions of the Caliphate. Finally, IS' discourse clearly expressed its disdain for the late societal developments and opposes to it its project to go back to a pure society ruled by the *Shaī'ah* law.

Finally, a prominent scholar of CDA, Fairclough (1995), suggests a three-tiered framework for the study of discourse. The first, micro-level, corresponds to the description of the discourse as a text. The aim here is to highlight textual relations, the rhetorical form and the semantic value attributed to the words, which will inform the interpretation of the discourse. This level of study helps address the first objective of the thesis to be attentive to the meaning given by IS to events and objects. The second tier is the meso-level, which goes beyond the linguistic features of the text to investigate discursive practices, such as the process of production, distribution, and consumption of the discourse. At this level, Fairclough suggests that one should also investigate what mental models relevant actors (in our case IS) draw on to produce their discourse. This refers to the systems of values, norms, and beliefs and enables one to assign a contextualised meaning to the words identified at the micro-level. Arguably, those systems of beliefs and norms echo the beliefs and norms within which the targeted audiences operate. Thus, they ensure the consumption of the discourse by those audiences. Finally, the third tier focuses on the social practices of the discourse, or more precisely the effect of the text in socio-cultural and political terms. It is believed that this final level of study will meet the third objective of this research to illuminate the influence of IS' discourse on the MENA populations.

Those three levels of analysis of the discourse are directly related to the main research question: Did IS' use of language (micro-level) and the way its message is produced, distributed and consumed (meso-level) shape MENA populations' systems of beliefs about the conflict dynamics at work in Iraq and Syria (meso-level) and foster active and concrete support for the group's socio-cultural and political project (macro-level). This three-tier approach will enable the researcher to go beyond the study of discourse as a rhetorical device, which is the product of the subject or the producer of this discourse. The producer of the discourse is him/herself grounded in a social, cultural and political context. This study intends to look at discourse as the fluid product of the subject but also as the product, which shapes the subject. The producer of the discourse uses its message to interact with an audience to achieve a specific goal.

To conclude, CDA is an approach which investigates the link between discourse, society and power. It aims to uncover how "texts either reproduce or challenge established definitions and

understandings of social reality by applying particular discursive practices and drawing on discourses inherent to the social context of reception/consumption of the text" (Lindekilde, 2014: 198). The multi-disciplinary stance of CDA implies that the researcher should choose the most relevant theory and methodology to study the social problem s/he focuses on. The two next sections are devoted to present the chosen theories to investigate the influence of IS' discourse in the MENA region.

2.3 Social Constructionism as a Supporting Theory

As mentioned above, Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis are part of the constructionist approach within the humanities and social sciences. Both approaches consider that basic assumptions with regard to being, self and the world are constructed by individuals living in a historical and cultural context which is produced and reproduced by their discourse. In Foucault's view, discourse is a representation of knowledge, but it also creates knowledge (1972). Furthermore, knowledge and people's representations of reality and beliefs are embedded in the institutional fabric of society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Hence, discourse as a social practice is "socially constitutive" and "socially shaped" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 276).

Social constructionism is a postmodern idea that assumes that knowledge and reality are subjective. In Crotty's words, "there is no true or valid interpretation" (1998: 47). Instead, all meaningful access to reality, including the reality of our mental states, is mediated by what is shared in a society or culture. Therefore, social constructionists focus on uncovering the ways how individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived reality. As such, they place knowledge in the domain of social interchange (Guterman, 2006: 13). Individuals actively construct new knowledge as they interact with their environment. Everything that they read, see and hear is tested against prior knowledge. If deemed viable within the mental world, it may form new knowledge carried by individuals.

This thesis adopts social constructionism as a supporting theory to make sense of the interlinked relationship between language – or IS' discourse – and the society – the populations of the MENA region. Social constructionism understands the fundamental role of language and communication

(Barge 2001; Barge and Little 2002; Cronen, 2001) in the creation of knowledge and reality. Moreover, it acknowledges that the construction of knowledge is a continuing process. Hence, it provides a strong basis for one of the assumptions of this research: There is a dialectic relationship between discursive actors in the MENA region and thus, IS' discourse constantly evolved because it was shaped by concurrent discourses produced in the region and adapted itself to the diversity of its audience.

Social constructionism has been criticised by one of the main scholars of CDA, Norman Fairclough, who argues that it disregards the relative solidity and permanence of social entities, and their resistance to change (2001: 4). Undoubtedly, even powerful discourse may meet some resistance and, as a result, fail to be enacted in the society. This shortcoming is not problematic for this thesis. The latter investigates the power of influence of IS' discourse. As such, it does not assume that IS' discourse was effectively successful in shaping the representations and beliefs of its audience. Instead, it aims to discover whether IS' discourse met support or resistance when received by populations in the MENA region.

2.4 Frame Theory as the Main Theory

2.4.1 Frame Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis utilises Frame Theory (henceforth FT). The concept of frames has been developed as a tool for analysis in various fields, including psychology and sociology (Gonos, 1997), business management (Goldratt, 1990; Watzlawick et al., 1974), artificial intelligence (Minsky, 1975); decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979), negotiation (Gray, 1989; Neale and Bazerman, 1985; Pinkley, 1990), media studies (D'Angelo, 2002; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987; Reese, 2001; Tuchman, 1978) and environmental conflict management (Kaufmann and Smith, 1999; Lewicki et al., 2003). The rationale behind using this theory is that individuals actively classify, organise, and interpret their life experiences in order to make sense of them (Goffman, 1974). In other words, "frames" enable individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences or information (Ibid: 21). Goffman contends that frames are essential to all kinds of perceptions of the world and, thus, to everyday interaction and communication. In the same vein, Entman (1993: 52) argues that "[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them

more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described". Put somewhat differently, "[f]rames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements" (Ibid: 55).

Lindekilde (2014) offers a thorough review of the affinities and differences between CDA and FT. She builds her argument on the observation that Frame Theory is preoccupied with "how ideas, culture, and ideology are used, interpreted, and spliced together with certain situations or phenomena in order to construct particular ideative patterns through which the world is understood by audiences" (Ibid: 199). As this definition suggests, FT and CDA are two similar approaches, as they share a common interest in interpretation and meaning-making. In the field of social movements studies, the resemblance is even more striking, as both approaches view movement actors as "signifying agents" (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198) "who play an active role in interpreting grievances and defining goals, and not just as passive carriers of ideas and ideology" (Lindekilde, 2014: 199). Hence, movement actors participate in creating meaning. This meaning which is created, according to proponents of FT and CDA, is contingent; it is not fixed. The meaning of a given empirical phenomenon varies and transforms over time and across different contexts (Ibid: 203). Finally, both FT and CDA investigate the relationship between texts and their broader contexts of production and consumption, although FT pays specific attention to the sender-message-receiver continuum and relationship.

Taking the argument further, FT might be viewed as a type of Discourse Analysis. FT is the analysis of one's (or several) discourse in an attempt to understand how empirical phenomena are framed within those discourses. In other words, FT is intended to highlight the manner in which the sender of a message uses discursive key elements in order to frame a certain topic in a certain manner so the recipients of the message will view this same topic in that manner. As such, FT appears as the most relevant theoretical framework for this research. It is believed that it will allow the researcher to reach the main objectives of the study: 1) to understand how IS depictd the wars in Iraq and Syria, in an attempt to convince its MENA audience of its representation of the region and to legitimise its struggle for a new order; 2) to investigate if the populations of the MENA region, once confronted to IS' message, effectively endorsed or resisted the group' representation of its environment.

The paragraphs above showed that CDA and FT have similar ontological and epistemological assumptions. Both approaches are fundamentally social constructionist and interpretive perspectives of social movement activity. In addition, they hold a fundamentally dynamic, dialectic, and processual perspective on social reality and meaning construction (Lindekilde, 2014: 203). Yet CDA and FT might differ in the scope of their analytical ambition. While CDA analyses entire texts, FT is analytically narrower in that the identification of core frames and framing elements refers to extracts and not whole texts. Furthermore, the coding strategy in CDA is mostly inductive. Main themes within discourse usually emerge from a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings. In other words, themes are generated from the data through open coding. As for FT, it usually relies on a deductive approach where themes are pre-selected based on previous literature, previous theories or the specifics of the research question. Nevertheless, research using CDA or FT might also combine the inductive and deductive approaches to analyse texts and discourses. Another important difference between CDA and FT lies in the degree of strategic rationality ascribed to actors. Lindekilde (2014: 223) argues that CDA sees the process of meaning-making as partly unconscious, while FT assumes the strategic and deliberative side of language usage of (movement) actors with the purpose of creating consensus and mobilising the recipients of the message. This assumed strategic rationality of discursive agents in FT will be further developed in the following section. Finally, and most importantly, CDA and FT serve different purposes. In other words, each approach has its own way to analyse the question of meaning-making. On the one hand, CDA looks at how an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception bring an object into being. For instance, CDA would be recommended to analyse how Islamic extremism – as a social phenomenon – has been brought into existence in the political discourse in the West. On the other hand, FT looks at how existing objects or topics are framed by different actors, bending their meaning in certain directions. As a comparison with the previous example, FT would provide a useful zoom on how political powers in the West use the discourse of securitisation to justify their policy against individuals considered radicalised.

Hence, considering the object of analysis of this research, it seems that FT is more appropriate. The starting point of the analysis is an existing topic, which is the wars in Iraq and Syria. In this context, IS was one of the many state- and non-state actors involved in the fight. A "war" is nothing more than a series of empirical events – most of them military – between the warring parties. The first part of this analysis aims to uncover how IS selected some of those events and framed them in order to imbue those empirical facts with meaning. IS' discourse developed at an accelerated

pace in relation to the wars in Iraq and Syria. It is assumed that the group's discourse on the conflicts encapsulated its representation of the MENA region and its discursive struggle for a new political and socio-cultural order. To conclude, by understanding how IS framed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, one can better understand the group's motivations, goals and strategies to gather surrounding populations under its banner. The second part of this analysis is devoted to investigating the actual influence of IS' discourse by examining whether the frames the group used resonated in the MENA audience.

2.4.1 Theoretical Implication and Conceptualisation of Framing Theory

Framing Social Movements

In the study of social movements, several scholars have developed an interest in the framing process by which political and religious discourses and ideologies have been used strategically to mobilise supporters and demobilise adversaries (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Ferree et al. 2002; Snow and Byrd 2007). In this field of research, FT thus focuses on explaining the effects of frames on mobilisation and participation in social movements. Drawing on the framing perspective in the study of social movements, Snow and Byrd (2007) have examined the development and articulation of mobilising ideas associated with Islamic militancy and terrorist movements, from the Iranian revolution of the late 1970s to more recent movements, such as al-Qaeda. In their analysis, they focused on the ideology developed by Islamic terrorist movements to encourage the mobilisation of jihadi militants, as well as provide the motivation to commit sensational acts of violence such as suicide bombings.

In the words of Lindekilde, FT provides a useful framework to investigate "the discursive battles over meaning and definition of reality, which play out within and among social movements, and among their friends and foes, often in the public sphere" (2014: 196). Hence, the framing process here refers to the conscious signifying work carried out by social movement actors (Ibid: 206). This definition highlights the deliberate and strategic use of certain ideas and ideologies to mobilise the receivers of a message *vis-à-vis* particular goals (Snow and Benford, 1988). This strategic perspective on framing has been criticised for being overly structural and leaving out cultural and relational factors (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999). Furthermore, framing theorists have been charged with neglecting the collective dimensions that originate in the use of a shared

symbolic language (Hart, 1996). Lastly, Lindstedt (2017) suggested that social movements are powerful agents of change not because they are able to trigger ideological alignment, but because they are able to redefine cultural codes and re-establish the contexts of a dispute. Yet the strategic framework for the study of social movements has become highly influential to analyse mobilisation from a framing perspective, especially through the concept of "collective action frames". Benford and Snow explain, "collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation" (2000: 614). Gamson and Meyer view collective action frames as powerful because they "define people as potential agents of their own history" (1996: 285). Hence, collective action frames not only define a situation as problematic but also give individuals hope by suggesting that the problem can be overcome through concerted efforts. Benford and Snow (2000: 615) view collective action frames as having three core framing tasks: 1) diagnostic framing; 2) prognostic framing; and 3) motivational framing. The diagnostic framing states the problem in a clear, easily understood way. It is the place of a binary discourse where the foes – "they" – create the problem while the social movement – "we" – pledges to find a solution. This solution – and its implementation – is offered in the prognostic framing. If recipients of the message believe in the problem and agree on its suggested solution, they are called to action in the motivational framing.

This triadic relationship is addressed under the heading of "resonance" (Snow and al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988). As explained by Lindekilde, "the idea is to analyse how movement actors [...] attempt to strike [cords] of existing cultural experiences, narratives, and knowledge within the cognitive landscape of targeted audiences" (2014: 196). In other words, "resonance" measures and discusses the degree to which framing succeeds in generating responsiveness in the targeted group of the message or in the audience at large. The concept of "resonance" is the main contribution of the framing perspective to social movements to this research. In the words of Ingram (2014: 4), "[r]esonance is the key to ensuring that [information operation] is not just an information tool but a mechanism of influence". In this thesis, "resonance" will be used to scrutinise the influence or presence of IS' frames on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in the discourse of populations in the MENA region. Nonetheless, this thesis is not directly concerned with IS' power of mobilisation but rather with IS' discursive influence, that is, if the group's discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria resonated in populations of the MENA region. Whether this "resonance" effectively led to support and mobilisation for IS is not the focus of this research, although it might provide useful insights to explain the unprecedented support for the group. Hence, basing the analysis on the framing perspective of social movements might not be the most

appropriate choice. The researcher argues that her analytical scope might relate more to communication studies than social movements studies.

Within the field of communication studies, Frame Theory has been widely used to examine how the media frame events (Tuchman, 1978; D'Angelo, 2002; Reese, 2001; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). As highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, IS has developed an intensive and extensive media apparatus, which could easily be compared to the media network of several state actors. The major part of IS' discourse consists of newsletters and radio bulletins that give the group's perspective on (mainly military) events. Hence, one could argue that IS used framing process to select some aspects of the news events, privilege some over others, define and assesses the problem, point out the causes and propose solutions to the problem. This operation has been called "frame building" due to its analogy with the better-known process of agenda building (Cobb and Elder, 1971). In the words of Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143), news frame is "a central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them". Building on this definition, this research aims to understand how IS – through its official discourse – organised storylines that provided meaning to a series of events happening in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Thence, the interest of this research is essentially to investigate how IS framed the two conflicts. It is believed that this particular topic provided the occasion for IS to articulate its vision for new politico-social structures and a new global order built on its ideological foundations. Accordingly, the following section offers an overview of the literature on framing violent conflicts. This development will highlight specific frames and pave the way to operationalise them and to develop a thorough methodological framework for the case under investigation.

Framing Conflicts

Brubaker and Laitin (1998) noticed that violent conflicts provoke impassioned struggle by the actors involved in them to explain why they are fighting. This contest over the "nature of the conflict" is what Horowitz (1991: 2) has called the meta-conflict. As a major actor in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria between June 2014 and June 2017, IS entered the contest to illustrate its "truth" about the nature of the wars. Frame Theory was used in several studies focused exclusively on the framing of conflicts in the Middle East. For example, it was applied to the media coverage of the two Gulf wars (Fahmy and Kim, 2008; Griffin and Lee, 1995; King and Lester, 2005) and the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Wolfsfeld, 1997, 1993; Blum-Kulka and Liebes, 1993; Kemp and Thiel, 2012). More recently, Bruce (2014) applied Frame Theory to study the Arab Spring covered by five transnational Arab news channels. Corstange and York (2016) investigated the effect of frames on individuals' engagement in the Syrian civil war. Only one study adopted Frame Theory to study IS' discourse and how the group entered a frame competition with al-Qaeda in order to impose ideological domination (Swami-Persaud, 2016). Hence, this research is innovative in that it applies Frame Theory to analyse how a non-state actor depicts a specific topic.

Frame Theory is relevant to the study of conflict dynamics because frames directly affect conflict development. In a conflicting context, parties create frames to help themselves and their audience understand why the conflict exists, which events and actions are important to the conflict, why other parties act as they do and how should one act in response (Gray, 2003). As explained by Kaufman et al. (2003), frames act as "sieves" through which priorities, means and solutions are determined and plans are developed. Frames can be used in two ways during a conflict. They can either be used to conceptualise and interpret events and behaviours or to manipulate and convince. Although many types of frames can be constructed to analyse conflicts, six categories of frames stand out in the literature as particularly applicable to intractable disputes such as it is the case of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria (Gray, 2003; Shmueli et al., 2006; Aarts and Woerkum, 2002; Rogan, 2007). They are as follow;

- Issue/problem frames deal with the nature of the conflict and what it is about. Gray (2003) argues that problem frames shed light on which aspect of the conflict is important to each party. These frames tend to feature a description of the conflict, its causes and the desired solution. Issue frames have a similar function to Benford and Snow's diagnostic framing (2000), which also refers to the two next frames – identity and characterisation frames.

- Identity frames refer to how parties view themselves in a conflicting situation (Rothman, 1997), their affiliation and interests. In other words, identity frames refer to the "self". Van Dijk (2000: 92) argues that the major premise in talking about others includes positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Hence, identity frames constitute the core of the polarised discourse specific to conflicts and usually remain coherent during the course of the conflict. As explained by Schmueli et al. (2006: 4), the more central the challenge to one' sense of self, the more oppositional and polarised one is likely to react.

- As opposed to identity frames, characterisation frames refer to how disputants view other parties to the conflict. Those frames often tend to delegitimise the "others" by using means of stigmatisation, casting doubt on their motivations and exploiting their weaknesses (Lewicki et al., 2003). Those are closely linked to identity frames and both are usually mutually reinforcing. For example, moulding the others' identity serves to reinforce oneself's identity while justifying one's actions toward the others.

- Power frames are used to characterise the form of power which is legitimised in the conflict as well as the form of power which is desired and which form of power will be used to advance one's position. These are also related to the resources that warring parties held and how to influence other's resources. Intractable conflicts are often embedded in struggles to alter existing institutions or power balances. Hence, it is important to understand how actors view power and social control.

- Loss or gain frames refer to how parties to a conflict react to an action and frame their consequences in terms of losses or gains. Tversky and Kahneman (1981: 455) and Schweitzer (2001: 114) argue that in a conflict situation, preventing a perceived loss is often deemed more salient than capturing a commensurate gain.

2.4.2 The Rationales behind choosing Frame Theory

This thesis uses Frame Theory in the study of IS' discourse in relation to the case of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Frame Theory is relevant to both the construction and reception of news. In other words, it puts the emphasis on both the sender and the recipients of the message/discourse and on the sender–message–receiver communicative relationship. Doing so, Frame Theory overcomes the limitation identified in the literature on IS' message which assumes that audiences are passive in the reception and the interpretation of the message. A range of studies within Frame Theory indicates that the recipient of the message and its frames is active (Brewer, 2001; Druckman, 2001; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley, 1997) in "choos[ing] which of the available considerations are relevant and who decides how important each consideration should be" (Kinder, 2003: 378) and in evaluating the frames in light of their presuppositions (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001). Frame Theory, thus, enables the researcher to integrate audiences in the construction IS' discourse. Moreover, as opposed to Critical Discourse Analysis that focuses on

how structures of power are reproduced in discourse, Frame Theory intends to shed light on how existing main discourses and structures are challenged by IS' revisionist message.

Regarding the feasibility of the research, having pre-established categories of frames applicable to intractable conflicts allows the researcher to coin a clear-cut and efficient analytical framework for the study of IS and MENA populations' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, those categories facilitate the operationalisation of frames into questions (Table 2). Those questions are the basis for collecting populations' discourse on the conflicts in the countries under study: Jordan and Tunisia. In addition, the concept of "resonance", developed in a framing perspective of social movements, is essential to this doctoral thesis. While most existing studies investigate IS' discourse *per se*, this research explores whether IS' discourse resonated in MENA populations, and thus, how influential it might potentially have been. It is important to mention that this thesis is not primarily concerned with the ways IS tried to build resonance among its audience, as described by Snow and Benford (1988), but with the similarities and difference in frames used to depict the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in IS and MENA populations' discourses.

Finally, building on FT (and CDA) contributions, this research argues that there were constant interactions between IS' discourse and other regional discourses, which may have led to the creation of a dialectic relationship between discursive actors and the continuing evolution of those actors' perception of their environment. Thus, it proposes the hypothesis that those different discourses were cumulative and that they built upon each other constantly over time. As a consequence, IS' discourse was not fixed, nor homogenous, as the existing literature suggests. IS' discourse continuously evolved because it was shaped by concurrent discourses produced in the region and adapts itself to the diversity of its audience.

To conclude, Frame Theory provides a framework to investigate how IS interpreted and depicted events in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Through the concept of resonance, it also offers a way to investigate the power of influence of the group's discourse. Hence, FT presents a strong theoretical basis to formulate clear research questions and develop a methodology to address them.

Chapter 3 ~ Methodological Framework

3.1 Data Collection

In order to analyse IS' discourse and its resonance in MENA populations, the researcher established a discourse network around IS' messaging. This network includes IS' official political message, state-level official positions and counter-messaging, academic analysis and local population opinions. Every event from those four sets of data was coded according to several variables (date, country, location, language) to provide a holistic snapshot of how IS' discourse was constructed and recontextualised along time, space and across different settings such as military and political events. This research focuses on primary data written in Arabic, English and French. The data were collected in two countries, which provide two case studies for this study: Jordan, and Tunisia. Most evidently, the two countries provided the largest pools of fighters in the ranks of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. This commonality is interesting because the two countries have distinct geographical features. While Jordan is at the doors of Iraq and Syria and long suffered from those porous borders, Tunisia is relatively distant from the territories controlled by IS between 2014 and 2017. Furthermore, the selected countries allowed the researcher to test IS' discursive power on diverse spaces, political systems, ethnic and religious units, languages and audiences. First, while Jordan and Tunisia are home of a majority of Sunni Muslims and endorsed Islam as state religion, the countries' populations have diverse ethnic and linguistic features, which might have an impact on their access to IS message and how they responded to it. As such, Jordan and Tunisia reflect both the common religious identity and Islamic heritage, and the diversity that are characteristic of MENA populations. Second, they have different political systems – one being a Kingdom and the other a republic – the two countries went through similar experiences of governance. After they gained independence from European powers, both countries had to appropriate power and to impose their legitimacy at the domestic and regional levels. Their modern political evolution can be analysed through the prism of the intricate relationship between the state and Islam. As such, those cases study allows the analysis of IS' reformist programme in two contexts that witnessed a sustained trend of

Islamisation of the socio-political arena over the past decades. Yet, Jordan and Tunisia were differently affected by the Arab Spring and, more generally, by the major events that shaped MENA politics since WWII. As a result, each country developed a specific understanding of political power, Islam and the relationship between the two. They thus offer promising cases to investigate whether IS' discourse and the revision programme it articulated had a differentiated impact on diverse socio-political settings.

This thesis focuses on IS' discourse from the declaration of the Islamic state on June 29, 2014 until July 20, 2017, when IS lost Mosul, its last stronghold in Iraq. In an attempt to reflect the formation process of the Islamic state and the group's reformist agenda, this research also includes official speeches from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the its spokesman from the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Shām (ISIS) on April 8, 2013. IS' discourse refers to the direct, official messaging of the organisation coming from its provincial and central media offices (Figure 1), whether it is aimed at friendly or hostile audiences. This first set of data provides a prime means for conveying the group's official message. It is also uncountable. IS is believed to have produced an average of 38 individual batches of events and 90,000 tweets or other media responses each day (Schmid, 2015: 2; Winter, 2015: 5). In other words, there is too much data to consider in an exhaustive way. This initial database was thus subjected to selection. The research focuses on the statements made by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and by the official spokesmen of the Caliphate, namely Abu Mohammad al-Adnani (from June 19, 2013 to August, 30, 2016) and Abu Hassan al-Muhajir (from August 30, 2016 onward); as well as on the newsletters and magazines issued by the group, namely *al-Naba'*, *Dābiq*, *Dār al-Islām* and *Rumīyyah*. Given the carefully rehearsed and chosen nature of those outlets, they undoubtedly articulate an illustrative perspective of the group's discourse and policies. This data is available on IS' media offices' websites, social media and more generally accessible through the Google search engine.

Since IS' fight over power threatened the legitimacy of established ruling regimes in the region, this research integrates state-level discourses. It intends to analyse the official responses to the IS phenomenon, especially the political and rhetorical responses launched by different political actors to delegitimise IS' ideology and project. Including this "counter-discourse" is essential to analyse the dynamics of IS' messaging. However, "counter-discourse" is not the focus of this thesis and therefore, it does not entail a systematic study of anti-IS rhetoric in its own right. This dataset comprises official communiqués and reports available on open sources online in states'

newspapers and broadcasts. The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives of ruling political powers.

Academic papers and reports written and released in the MENA region were integrated into the discourse network in order to provide an insight into the way the IS phenomenon and message are analysed and studied in this region. This dataset was treated both as primary data – analysed as an element of the discursive network around IS' discourse – and as secondary data – in order to inform the interactions between IS' discourse and regional discourses.

Population opinion is important to this research because it provides elements of the context in which IS' messaging is taking place. The researcher did not conduct any large-scale opinion polls herself but relied on existing opinion polls and surveys which have been carried out recently by several agencies (Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, 2017; Asda'a Burson-Marsteller, 2016; Zogby Research Services & Tabah Foundation 2015, Zogby Research Services, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). Those polls have been conducted on topics, which are directly relevant to this thesis such as populations' perception of regional conflict dynamics, the role of religion and identity. Those polls and surveys have the advantage of being recent, context-specific and include a wide and diverse range of the population in almost all MENA countries. This study uses those opinion polls and surveys to identify trends in how MENA populations understand their local environment.

In a second step, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions were conducted in Jordan and Tunisia to scrutinise IS' discourse as it was taken up by the MENA populations. The aim is to gain insight into how individuals understood conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria and how they potentially re-framed the language used by IS in its discourse. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with university students, religious organisations, and journalists. Those populations are accessible. This research recognises that the sample is not representative of the overall population. The sample was differentiated by selecting people with different political views, people who are more secular versus more religious, people politically active versus those who claim they are not, different genders, different ages and different locations. Doing so, this thesis attempts to study the effects of IS discourse on MENA populations sampled in the light of individual socio-cultural characteristics. Those individuals were met individually or in small groups of five people at most. It was chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews in order to lessen the formality of an audio-recorded interview situation and avoid what Labov (in Allen and

Linn, 1986: 304) termed the "observer's paradox", that is, the tendency of interviewed people to change their linguistic behaviour while being recorded. The questionnaires were elaborated on the basis of the frame categories highlighted to study intractable conflicts (Table 2). For example, four questions were asked to participants in order to investigate how they coin and use "problem frames" to discuss the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Those questions are as follow: How do you view the situation in Iraq and Syria? What are the conflicts in Iraq and Syria about? What are the reasons behind the conflicts? Why did they happen?

3.2 Corpus Linguistic Techniques as a Tool of Analysis

This thesis claims novelty by integrating Corpus Linguistic Techniques into Frame Analysis. According to D'Angelo (2002), Frame Analysis can be employed to bridge news production processes with potential news effects on public perceptions. This methodology helps link IS' discourse (news production) and MENA population's discourse (public perceptions). In the case of IS' discourse, because of the lack of a pre-established codebook for frames extraction in the existing literature, this research uses an inductive approach to generate framing-categories through a qualitative analysis of a sample of texts. This enables the researcher to develop a codebook, which will be applied to all the texts. Moreover, such software allows processing a large volume of data. This research follows Reese's suggestion (2007) that Frame Analysis should try to bridge qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as empirical and interpretative ones. Thus, this thesis uses Touri and Koteyko's (2005) analytical design, which integrates corpus linguistics software in Frame Analysis. According to Touri and Koteyko, "the software will enable a more reliable and valid combination of quantitative and qualitative as well as empirical and interpretative examination" (2005: 605). This analysis is primarily data-driven. In other words, the linguistics techniques will not readily reveal frames but will guide to important concepts that will help "diagnose" and "nominate" central ideas around which the frame is constructed. Another advantage to corpus linguistics software is that those central ideas will be extracted empirically rather than personally, which removes the subjectivity of the researcher's judgment. However, the researcher did not aim at harnessing her own judgment, which provides forms of insight that arise from human intelligence and which computing would be blind to. This thesis combines the two. Software is used to track words frequency and the researcher's reading is used to get a more complex understanding of the discourse as a whole.

The preferred tool for Frame Analysis is MaxQDA. Unlike other linguistic software, MaxQDA processes text written in Arabic and other languages. Using one single software, the researcher was thus able to analyse a wide range of discourses in several of the many languages used by IS to circulate its message – Arabic English and French. Adopting such a technique helped to highlight the potential of corpus linguistics techniques in the extraction of frames. It also contributed to the broader research project "Cross-Language Dynamics" by bridging political sciences and the study of modern languages. Keywords and concordance are two preferred corpus linguistics techniques for the analysis of IS' and its audience's discourses. Keywords will be used to compare the frequency of words in one corpus (IS' discourse) with reference to another corpus (Jordanian and Tunisian audience's discourse). According to Touri and Koteyko, these techniques "offer a useful instrument for identifying words that are central to the meaning of a given text in a more evocative way that conventional frequency of occurrence" (2005: 4). Concordances constitute the words surrounding a search term. They allow the researcher to compare instances of keywords use in relation to their context.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Within the discourse networks described above, IS' political message and local population opinions were analysed separately. The researcher conducted an analysis of the six frame categories identified above. The frames present in IS' discourse and the frames present in the Jordanian and Tunisian populations' discourse were later compared. Efforts were made to identify patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities between the discourses (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). This stage highlighted and examined the intertextual elements between IS' discourse and its re-framed versions collected through interviews with Jordan and Tunisian populations. Intertextual devices (Kristeva, 1969; Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Becker, 1995) concern the way in which audiences might not have authentically reproduced IS' discourse, but lifted it from one context and reinserted it into another setting instead (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). For example, the words "kāfir" (unbeliever) is assigned a specific meaning and identity in IS' discourse in the context of its struggle in Iraq and Syria. The thesis explores whether the populations interviewed use the term "kāfir" at all and, if they do, whether they use it in a similar discursive context and with the same meaning used by IS. This

comparison process is believed to uncover whether IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria resonates in MENA populations' cognitive landscape. In the next paragraphs, the researcher gives a detailed analytical framework for IS' official discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Pictures reflecting each analytical step are also enclosed in the appendix (Figure 3 to Figure 6). The process described below was also used to analyse the discourse of sampled populations.

The first part of this research consists in analysing IS' official discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. As the database for IS' official discourse is uncountable, it was subjected to a selection. The research focuses on the statements made by self-appointed Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi since the official declaration of Islamic State in Iraq and Shām (ISIS) in April 2013, and by the statements made by official spokesmen of the Caliphate, namely al-Adnani (from June 2013 until his death on August 30, 2016) and al-Muhajir (from August 30, 2016 onward). This first dataset is composed of 25 official statements. It is completed by the newsletters and magazines issued by IS, namely *al-Naba'*, *Dābiq*, *Dār al-Islām* and *Rumīyyah*. *Al-Naba'* was first published on March 31, 2014, in Arabic and primarily targets the audience within the territories controlled by IS in Iraq and Syria. *Dābiq*, in English, and *Dār al-Islām*, in French, were first published online on March 5, 2014, and December 23, 2014 respectively. The magazines, together with two others in Turkish and Russian, were replaced by a common monthly periodical, *Rumīyyah*, on September 5, 2016 (Figure 2). These bring the total number of media outlets in the dataset to 162. Given the carefully rehearsed and chosen nature of their content, they undoubtedly articulate an illustrative perspective of the group's discourse and policies. Those 162 documents were stored into a Corpus Linguistic Software, MaxQDA, which has the advantage of processing texts written in Arabic and other languages. The documents were organised according to their authors and dates for the official statements and according to their title and date of publication for the newsletters and magazines.

The first analytical step consisted in isolating segments in each document which concern directly the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. For that purpose, the researcher made a first and extensive reading of each document. Selected segments were branded either with "Iraq", "Syria" or "Iraq and Syria" depending on the conflict(s) they directly refer to. Those segments represent the basis for coding. Across the 162 documents of the dataset, a total of 2,713 segments were selected. The second step of the analysis aims to highlight the recurrent themes of IS' discourse. Selected segments were subjected to Word Frequency, Word Combination Frequency and Key Words in Context

searches. Those three corpus linguistics techniques were used in two different ways. First, to highlight the repetitive patterns across IS' discourse, regardless of the language used. Second, to highlight discursive specificities depending on the language in which the message was written.

The results were analysed in two different ways. First, in terms of word(-combination) occurrence in absolute value: in other words, how many times a word or combination of words is repeated in IS' discourse related to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. For example, "Caliphate" is mentioned 3,850 times across the 2,713 selected segments. This first set of results captures the importance of each word(combination) within IS' discourse. Second, results were analysed in terms of the percentage of documents in which a word or combination of words is repeated. For instance, "Caliphate" is mentioned in 82,39% of the 162 documents. This two-layer analysis allowed the researcher to compare the importance given to a word(-combination) in Arabic and non-Arabic language. For example, within the selected segments, the word "*Murtādd*" which designates somebody who rejected Islam, was mentioned 3,571 times in Arabic and only 920 times in English and French. At a first sight, this could mislead the researcher to conclude that the word "*Murtādd*" is more present in Arabic language and that IS' discourse was not coherent but rather, that it differed according to the language employed. However, when paying attention to the percentage of the word occurrences across all documents, the researcher notes that "*Murtādd*" is mentioned in 93.88% of the 162 outlets both in Arabic and non-Arabic written messages. Through this second lens, the researcher can deduce that the word has exactly the same weight across IS' discourse. The latter is thus coherent and homogeneous across languages and across the audiences it targets.

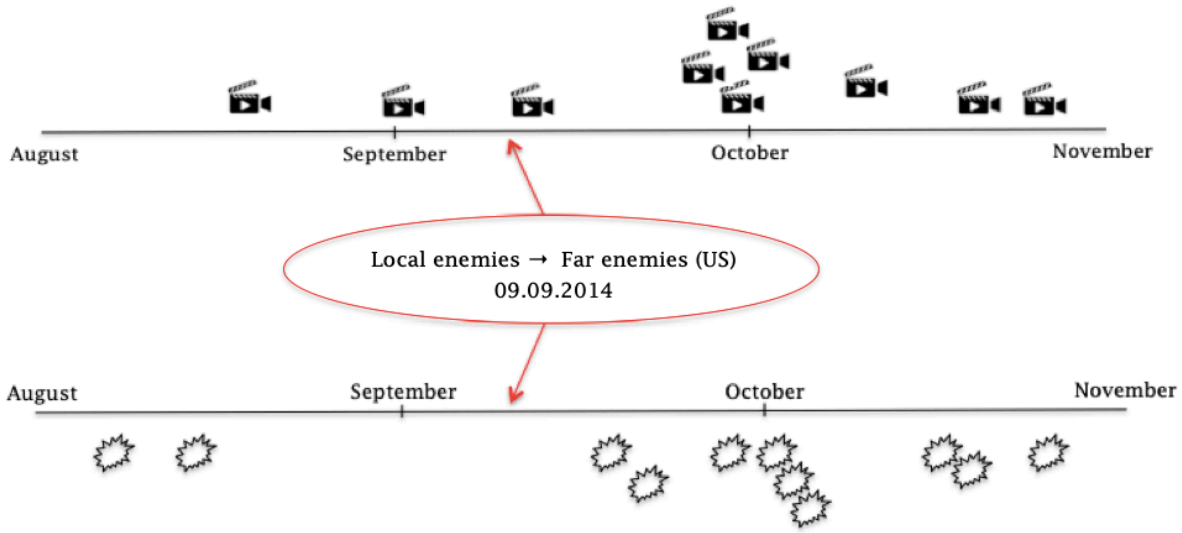
Finally, the selected segments were coded along with conflict analysis theory frames as described above: issue/problem, identity, characterisation, power, and loss/gain frames. In order to make more sense of the results, the frames were put into a broader message spectrum consisting of additional IS' media outlets and related military and political events. On the one hand, the researcher exhaustively recorded and classified all official media outlets released by IS' official media offices (Figure 1) between January 2014 – the beginning of main military gains by IS in Iraq – and June 2017 – the fall of Mosul. Those media outlets include official statements, central command and provincial videos, *Surat* recitations, *Nashīds*, radio broadcasts, photo reports, books and general rules, *Da'wah* literature and infographic (Table 3, Table 4). On the other hand, the researcher extensively recorded and classified all key military and political events associated with the conflicts and more broadly with Middle Eastern politics between January 2014

and June 2017. Those events, which are essential to understand IS discourse, were given a code following this classification: IS' military conquest/gain; IS' military loss; IS' attack; pledge of allegiance to IS; airstrikes against IS; para-military expansion; death of IS' top figure (Table 5, Table 6). Those events were tracked on IS' media, international media and national defence statements from countries involved in the conflicts.

For example, the results of the coding show a shift in focus from local enemies, mainly Bashar al-Assad regime and the Iraqi/Iranian alliance, to a far enemy, the United States. The shift is noticeable in a discourse given by official spokesman al-Adnani on September 9, 2014. The broader media outlets and events surrounding this shift greatly deepen the analysis. The record of additional IS' media outlets shows that, over the same period, IS released several videos in which it directly addressed and/or targeted the United States and its allies. In total, ten videos in English and Arabic were released between August 19, 2014, and October 25, 2014. This accounts for the general focus on the new, far enemy in IS' discourse. It also demonstrates the centrality of the US in IS' rhetoric.

The account of key events related to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria indicates that on August 7, 2014, President Obama announced the beginning of airstrikes against IS in Iraq to defend the Yazidi stranded in Sinjar. On August 18, 2014, Iraqi and Kurdish forces took control of the Mosul Dam from IS. They were aided by continuing US airstrikes. On September 19, 2014, French airstrikes hit the Iraqi town of Zumar, killing dozens of IS fighters. On September 23, 2014, the US were joined by five Arab countries to launch its first airstrikes against IS in Syria. On the same day, IS released a video in which it built upon foreign intervention in the conflicts. Five days later, airstrikes began in Kobani, Syria. In the first three days of October, Turkey and Australia brought their support to the US and promised to join the fight. In mid-October, intensive US airstrikes targeted IS in Kobani and more bombings killed hundreds of IS fighters in southern Iraq. In other word, the increased focus on the US as IS' main enemy echoed a stronger involvement of the US in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Military context of Islamic State's discursive shift to "far enemies"



Beaujouan, 2017

To put it in a nutshell, paying attention to IS' core official discourse only is inadequate to understand the extent to which the group is responsive to its enemies' actions. Adopting a comprehensive analysis, this research acknowledges that the group is highly reactive to its environment. IS had the capacity to quickly adapt its discourse to the course of the conflicts and to build a rhetoric that delegitimised competing actors and their actions.

Each frame package idenfitied during the analysis should reflect the three dimensions of the discourse described by Fairclough. Each package should refer to:

- At a micro-level: The semantic value of the keywords with regards to the cultural, historical and political context in which they are used; how the producer of the discourse represent itself and others (Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000) and how it constructs each group's identity (Goodwin, 2003) within the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.
- At a macro-level: Which are the solutions to the perceived problem and which social practices those solutions entail? For instance, one frame package in IS' discourse refers to the involvements of the American military in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. This is a problem because the Americans were perceived by IS as "Crusaders" whose mischief and colonial domination erased the religious education of Islamic societies in the MENA region. Socially speaking, this perceived problem should be resolved by boycotting American products, studying Arabic instead of English, and attacking American targets.

Chapter 4 ~ Tribulations of Islamism in the MENA Region

This chapter situates the rise and establishment of IS' Caliphate in the modern developments of the MENA region. It argues that IS was the epitome of regional dynamics: the rise and establishment of a non-state actor as a reaction to the failure of regional and national political projects in the context of the nation-state system. Hence, studying IS' discourse can provide a lens to understand regional dynamics at the social and political levels.

Coleman and Rosenow (2016: 202) contend that "security threats and insecurities are not simply objects to be studied, but the product of social and political practices". In the case under study, IS and its supporters are still widely and commonly deemed a security threat, not only for the countries where they operate but for the stability of the whole MENA region and for the international community at large. Coleman and Rosenow's argument suggests that the jihadi group and its supporters originated in socio-political regional and national contexts, the two being inextricably interlinked and interdependent. In other words, IS could be seen as the product of a socio-political determinism that, this thesis argues, started when the modern nation-state model was imposed over MENA populations and ruling elites in the post-colonial era. More specifically, this research contends that the failure of the nation-state model and the "westernisation" (Patai, 1955; Fauzi, 2005) of the MENA region, if not resulted in, accelerated the pace of four main mutually reinforcing dynamics:

1) The multiplication of non-state actors;
2) The politicisation of Islam at the regional and national levels;
3) The changing relationship between religion – in the case under study Islam – and the state;
4) The Islamisation of radicalism, that is, the Islamisation of the rejection of the regional order in the MENA region.

Those four dynamics climaxed in the rise of radical violent Islam in general, and in the emergence of IS in particular. To say it differently, IS was only the latest chapter of the development of Islamism in the MENA region. The notion of Islamism is crucial for this research. It is believed

that a better understanding of Islamism as a regional experience can inform the comprehension of IS' discourse, namely its resonance in the MENA region. As a strong socio-cultural phenomenon, it offered an ideological platform for the radical ideas of IS. As a failed political experience, it provided a subject of grievances and rejection that allowed IS to display a reformist agenda and attract support.

4.1 Attempt at Conceptual Clarification

This research uses the term "Islamism" instead of "political Islam". Drawing on a paper written by the International Crisis Group (2005), it argues that the conception of "political Islam" is a creation of western experts, governments and researchers to explain the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Furthermore, "political Islam" entails that there is a converse form of "apolitical Islam". Yet apolitical Islam was no more than a historical occurrence that refers to the "short-lived era of the heyday of secular Arab nationalism between 1945 and 1970" (Ibid). Hence, it is quietist/non-political Islam that should be explained as a peculiar phenomenon. Several members of Islamic political parties expressed their reserve concerning the use of "political Islam". As explained by Abdel Hamid Jlassi, former Vice President of Ennahdha Movement and current member of the Tunisian Shura Council; "Islam is a personal religion which is interdependent from public life. Before the advent of [nations] states in the MENA region, there was no confusion as it was understood by all that – to borrow the western terminology – the temporal leader was also the religious leader" (Interview, 2018). In other words, in the pre-modern era, Islam imbued every aspect of private and public life. It was redundant if not unnecessary to talk about "political" Islam. Only with the advent of modernity, Islam became a distinct political project.

The second reason that led the researcher to adopt the term "Islamism" is that it allows the study of Islamic movements in general, whether at the societal or at the political level. It is thus less restrictive than "political" Islam. This research focuses on the MENA populations' perceptions of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and whether IS' discourse had an influence on their perceptions. Thus, it is primarily concerned with the character of those populations, more than with the character of the political system(s) that governs them. Furthermore, several Islamic movements, such as Ennahdha in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood, began their mission with grass-root charitable and preaching activities before slowly being dragged into politics (El-Sherif, 2014;

McCarthy, 2018). Nonetheless, the researcher does not belittle the political face of Islamism. Instead, she recognises the impact of top-down policies in shaping the features of populations. From the beginning of Islam, the Islamic character of MENA populations stemmed from the use of Islam as a faith but also as an ideology to legitimise specific policies and interests (reference). This is all the more true in the MENA region. After World War I and until now, the political elites – both religious and secular – have used the media and education as tools to shape the populations' perceptions and sustain their rule (Helfont, 2018; Ezzat et al., 2018; Leihs and Roeder-Tzellos, 2015; Berenger, 2006; Zureik, 2013; Prokop, 2003). This process of instrumentalisation of Islam in the modern era will be further explained in the case of Jordan and Tunisia. To sum up, Islamism is used as a lens that allows the researcher to study the interlinked relationship between religion, state and society.

As a subject of study, Islamism describes the contemporary process of "Islamisation" (Lapidus, 2002: 828-30) or "Islamic revival(ism)" (Lapidus, 1997 and 2002: 521-23; Momayezi, 1997) of post-colonial societies. This approach of Islamism is problematic because it implies that the MENA societies, at some point, stopped being Islamic. It is a historical distortion and negates the fact that the populations under study have seen their lives ruled – at the social, economic and political level – by Islamic norms for more than a millennium. Moreover, Islamism here implies a rejection of modernity. First, it appears that Islamism is both a rejection and a product of modernity. Second, the academic discourse that Islamism is the rejection of modernity as a whole is not so different from IS' discourse that promoted a return to the old Islamic order ... albeit via 21st century-social media. In other words, a more nuanced approach to Islamism is needed, where Islamism might be regarded as the rejection of western practices perceived as imposed and as belonging to non-Islamic settings such as capitalist economy or mixed schools. As a matter of fact, several Islamic groups – such as Ennahdha in Tunisia – have been able to adapt their socio-political programme and to navigate between traditional Islamic teachings and the latest development of the 21st century.

Numerous definitions of Islamism have been suggested by western and non-western, Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers. This thesis takes upon the definition of Islamism as an ideology suggested by Fred Halliday (2006) who refers to Islamism as "the whole body of thought which seeks to invest society with Islam which may be integrationist, but may also be traditionalist, reform-minded or even revolutionary". This wording has two advantages. First, it describes Islamism as a spectrum that encompasses all forms of Islamist movements from integrationists to

fundamentalists. The commonality between those movements is that they use Islam as both an inspiration and an instrument for their reformist project. Second, this definition emphasises society as the target of Islam. Islamism can be applied not only at the political but also at the societal level. As such, this definition fits the focus of this doctoral research: the populations of the MENA region. It also allows the researcher to study IS as a multi-faceted development of modern history, that is, as the fruit of religious, political and social dynamics which can all be studied through the prism of Islamism.

To conclude and as an attempt to bridge the epistemological gaps identified above, this research argues that Islamism denotes the multiplication of Islamist movements in the socio-political sphere since the late 1970s, that reject the "westernisation" of their society and offer a reformative socio-political programme to bring Islam back to the front stage of regional politics in the MENA region.

4.2 Historical Embedding

4.2.1 Islamism in the MENA region

Before focusing on the local specificities of the two cases study, this research will briefly present the ascendance of Islamic movements to regional politics in the MENA region. Indeed, Islamism is first and foremost a regional phenomenon that originates in the dismemberment of the defeated Muslim Ottoman Empire after WWI. At that time, the Ottoman lands were divided into British and French spheres of influence. The experience was deeply traumatic for populations of the region, as they were suddenly deprived of a common identity, history and political system. Since then and until today, several state and non-state actors have tried to heal the scar left by the infamous 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, by offering an alternative to the imposed nation-state system in the MENA region. In this context, thinkers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1837–97), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Ridha (1865–1935) preached Islamic alternatives to the political, economic, and cultural decline of the empire (Mortimer, 1982: 93, 237-40, 249). Later, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) developed the idea of Islamic-nationalism in the Middle and the Far East as a way to break free from the British rule. Yet, in the post-World

War II period, secular alternatives initially attracted more support. Islamism, which denounced nationalism as un-Islamic, was overshadowed until the end of the 1970s (Nafi, 2008).

Pan-Arabism and Kurdish irredentism (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 2002: Natali, 2004) emerged as ideologies based on the unity of Arab people and on the unification of independent countries of the Arab world. Kurdish aspirations to unify territories scattered between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey were never intellectually conceptualised, nor materially implemented. Instead, Kurdish grievances and attempts to reclaim independence were always circumscribed by national contexts. As for pan-Arabism, its popularity was at its height during the 1950s and 1960s, advocated by several Arab leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Muammar Kadhafi in Libya and the leaders of the Ba'ath parties in Syria and Iraq. Yet all attempts to implement pan-Arabism collapsed in a few years as exemplified by the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria (1958-1961), the Arab Federation between Iraq and Jordan (1958-1961) the Federation of Arab Republics that merged Libya, Egypt and Syria (1972-1977) and the Arab Islamic Republic which tried to gather Tunisia and Libya but never emerged in practice. The Arab defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and the inability of pan-Arabist governments to generate economic growth severely damaged the credibility of pan-Arabism as a relevant ideology. At the national level, the long opposition between Islamism and secularism was abandoned such as in Egypt and Jordan. Such developments facilitated the first summit conference of Muslim heads of state in Rabat in 1969. By the late 1970s, secular regionalism was permanently eclipsed by (pan)Islamist ideologies.

The upswing of Islamism was ratified by three major events that occured between January and December 1979. In January and February 1979, maybe the most important episode of MENA modern politics happened. The Iranian Revolution (January – February 1979) led to the establishment of the first "Islamic" state – in the form of a republic – in the MENA region since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The revolution was also the first battle won against an oil-rich, westernised and pro-American secular monarchy of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. The symbolic impact of the event was massive in the Middle East and brought a recovered pride for millions of Muslims – Shī'ia and Sunni. It brought about the realisation that regime change was possible through revolution. Moreover, as explained by Adnan Abu Odeh (1999), the revolution revealed a new model of leadership, where religious figures could themselves become politicians. In other words, this development shed light on the political aspect of societal change (Ibid) and the (re)politicisation of Islam since the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The Iranian Revolution was immediately followed by the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 by armed insurgents that called for the overthrow of the House of Saud. The event – although often disregarded – is interesting in term of the reaction it engendered. While one could assume that it would prompt a backlash against violent Islamist movements, the two regional spearheads of Islamism, Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shī'ia Iran, responded in quite an opposite way. Saudi Arabia shored up its fundamentalist credential, and Ayatollah Khomeini accused the United States of fomenting the seizing, prompting a series of anti-American demonstration across the Near and the Far East. The US Embassies in Libya and Pakistan were burned shortly after (Wright, 1985: 149).

In December 1979, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the subsequent struggle of the *mujāhidīn* saw the advent of global jihad in the fight against the Soviet occupation. This jihad is associated with the religious figure of Abdullah Yusuf Azzam. Azzam was a Palestinian Sunni Islamic scholar. He is often credited for creating enthusiasm for the Afghan jihad in the greater Muslim world. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Azzam issued the fatwa "Defense of the Muslim Lands, the First Obligation after Faith" declaring defensive jihad in Afghanistan "*fard 'ayn*" (a personal obligation) for all Muslims. This is indicative of the latent power of religious scholars in the Middle East. This power of influence remains until today and has been targeted by IS repeatedly in an attempt to delegitimise the "wicked scholars" in the competition for religious domination (Dābiq 11, 2015: 53; Rumīyyah 4, 2016: 6; al-Muhajir, 2017: 7). The globalisation of jihad went together with the Islamisation of the Palestinian resistance movement, that gave birth to Hamas in 1987, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, as explained by Bergen and Reynolds (2005), "[t]he jihadists gained legitimacy and prestige from their triumph both within the militant community and among ordinary Muslims, as well as the confidence to carry their jihad to other countries where they believed Muslims required assistance". The veterans of the Afghan campaign returned home with experience, strong ideology and the hope to continue armed jihad in their countries. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was seen by many Islamists and Muslims as the defeat of a superpower at the hands of Islam.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) has a unique value in the Islamisation of the MENA region. First, it paved the way for sectarianism in the MENA region and evolved into today's entrenched Iran-Saudi Arabia regional power struggle. The belligerents encapsulated a religious identity: Sunni

Islam for Saddam Hussein and Shī'ia Islam for Ayatollah Khomeini. During the war, each side consciously linked religion to politics to garner internal allegiance and external support (Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy, 2016; Wright, 1980 and 1985; Chubin and Tripp, 1988). The strategy was allegedly successful and several regional powers indirectly participated in the fight along sectarian lines. Hence, the conflict initiated a process of strengthening of religious identity – Sunni or Shī'ia – as a reaction against the perceived enemy. Second, Saddam Hussein lived up to his name and was promoted as "the sword of the Arabs" (*Saif al-Arab*) against the Persian enemy (the Arabic word "saddam" means the one who confronts) (fieldwork interviews, 2018 and 2019). At the national level, the war marked the failure of integration under Arab nationalism. Saddam used war and emergency rules as a pretext to establish an unprecedented totalitarian dictatorship. The Arab leader accelerated the crushing of organised Shī'ia opposition and used chemical weapons against his civilian Kurdish population. The Reagan administration severely condemned the latter and Iraq began to lose the support of the United States (Hiltermann, 2013). At the regional level, the Iran-Iraq war operated a major power alteration in the Middle East. On the one hand, Iran's radical Islamist goal of exporting the revolution isolated it internationally and provoked violent reactions from the Gulf monarchies and Iran's neighbours. The Islamic Republic was forced to adopt a policy of non-confrontation and normalisation of relations (Hassan-Yari, 1997). On the other hand, Saddam utterly failed to gain leadership over the Gulf region. His obstinacy culminated in the invasion of Kuwait in an effort to restore internal legitimacy through military glory.

However, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, he brought a major change in the notion of jihad. Jihad shifted from targeting non-Arabs to being used against Sunni Muslim Arabs. At the same time, the Iraqi Ba'ath party modified its secular discourse and started to Islamise the society, a strategy initiated in the mid-1980s. The shift in Hussein's politics from pan-Arabism to pan-Islamism (Baram, 2014; Bengio, 1998) had a spillover effect on the MENA region and increased the pace of Islamisation of the society. Yet the invasion of Kuwait was followed by the Gulf War, waged and eventually won by the West in 1991. This was a hard blow in the face of all Arabs. In the words of Ragland (2005: 37) the war "further angered a public not only socially and economically in tatters, but largely sympathetic with Saddam Hussein and now humiliated as a race at the hands of the Americans". Saudi Arabia never recovered its loss of prestige, especially as the American troops remained stationed in the Kingdom, accelerating the path of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. As a consequence, Saudi Arabia was seen as a puppet and started being attacked by domestic Islamic groups. At the regional level, one of the

many results of this was an aggresive campaign against government officials and tourists in Egypt, a bloody civil war in Algeria and a series of attacks orchestrated by Saudi Osama Bin Laden, that would climax in the 9/11 attacks.

Finally, at the national level, the long-lasting authoritarianism and lack of pluralism, the continuous corruption at the administrative and political levels, the lack of economic reforms, and the constant threat to territorial integrity led to the erosion of state power and to internal contestation of several Arab states' sovereignty in the MENA region. This erosion generalised to the whole MENA region in the wake of the Arab Spring. To sum up, between 1967 and 1990, the MENA region entered a two-fold process of "de-regionalisation" (a term used by Ehteshami) and erosion of states' power. The absence of leadership at the regional and national levels accelerated the rise of several non-state actors, whose credential was mainly asserted by a religious discourse. The emergence of those non-state actors was undeniably accompanied by the rising popularity of pan-Islamism. Some of those non-state actors are the *Ikhwān* or Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928 and its offshore all over the MENA region such as in Jordan (1945), Iraq (1960) and Palestine (1987); *al-Jabhah al-Islāmiyyah lil-Inqādh* or Islamic Salvation Front formed in 1989 in Algeria; *Shabība Islāmiyyah* or Islamic Youth established in 1970 in Morocco; and al-Qaeda that emerged in 1987 during the Afghan war.

In early-2011, this two-fold disintegration was epitomised by the Arab Spring. The wave of popular revolts shook the national and regional order(s), creating a vacuum of power in several countries, as well as the cradle for the establishment of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. On the June 29, 2014, in Mosul, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself the Caliph of the newly established Islamic State. By self-declaring itself a new "state" actor, the group entered in direct competition for power and legitimacy with the existing states and other political entities operating in the region. Hence, IS epitomised the dynamics at work in the MENA region: the rise and establishment of a non-state actor as a reaction to the failure of regional and national political projects in the context of the nation-state system.

4.2.2 Islamist Activism in Iraq and Syria

This section analyses the specificities of the Iraqi and Syrian settings, in an attempt to situate IS in the broader context of Islamist activism in those two countries. Although sectarianism is

relatively new in the modern history of jihadi movements, it has taken on unprecedented importance in IS' discourse in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Yet since their establishment as autonomous states after WWII, it seems that both countries share a tradition of discriminative state policies and sectarian violence. The Pew Forum index report described Iraq and Syria as countries with "high" government restrictions on religion from 2009 to 2011. This rose to "very high" after the breakdown of the conflict in Syria in 2011 and after the declaration of Islamic State in Iraq in 2014. While it is difficult to estimate the direct impact of the Iraqi and Syrian contexts on IS' vision of jihad, it is safe to say that both countries provided an environment prone to increased sectarian tensions. This assumption can be nuanced by the fact that other jihadi groups operating in the same areas – especially in Syria – did not display such a strong stance against different ethnical and religious populations.

Iraq – The Cradle of Islamic State

Before the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime at the hands of the United States in 2003, religion was but one of the many aspects to be under the tight control of the state. In 1991, the Iraqi regime suffered several downturns that could have altered the fate of the country. That year, Iraq was compelled to withdraw from Kuwait after a failed and costly occupation. Moreover, Hussein's rule was directly confronted by the Arab *Sha'abān Intifāda* in the south of Iraq, and the Kurdish National Uprising in the north. Yet, far from faltering, the Iraqi leader tamed the revolutionary waves initiated by the minorities. In addition, Saddam Hussein embarked on a state-sponsored faith campaign (*hamla imāniyyah*) to regain state legitimacy and brandished Islam as the common ground of its enemies (Ayubi, 1991: 74). The leader was strongly supported by the Iraqi religious leadership. The latter – alarmed by the prospect of civil disorder (*fitna*) – launched a common call to calm lawfulness and to order. Hence, under Saddam Hussein's iron hand, radical Islam never had the chance to develop into activism. According to Jabar (2003: 269-70), another explanation is to be found in the very nature of the Ba'athist regime – secularist and socialist. The latter, he argues, probably provided the least hospitable environment to radical Islam in the Middle Eastern region.

Following the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing global campaign on terrorism, Saddam Hussein was toppled by a US-led intervention in April 2003. Under the American influence, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) dissolved the coercive arm of the Iraqi state and implemented the

de-Ba'athification of the state. This policy quickly resulted in general chaos and the institutional collapse of the state. The ensuing vacuum was exploited by several non-state actors, including local and foreign Islamists. The US occupation of the country from 2003 triggered the proliferation of armed insurgents and jihadi groups – although it is not clear whether those fighting under the banner of Islam eventually outnumbered the other elements. In the words of Desker (2005), those groups were an "amorphous mix of foreign Salafi, local jihad, and ex-Ba'athist Sunni elements mounting a serious assault on the Allied occupation". Infamous *Jamā'at al-Tawhīd wal-Jihad* (Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad) – led by the Jordanian and Afghan jihad veteran Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi – was created on this occasion. The group later pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 and became known as *Tandhīm Qaeda al-Jihad fi Bilād al-Rāfidayn* (Organisation of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia) – commonly branded as al-Qaeda in Iraq. It represented well the type of jihadi groups that emerged at that period: populated by both Arabs and Iranians who previously fought in Afghanistan – locals and foreigners – with the initial aim to fight the foreign occupation (Ibid). As such, the Iraqi insurgency primarily targeted symbols of the American presence, but also locals accused or suspected of "collaborating" with the enemy. The insurgency was quickly rebranded as jihad and sanctioned by leading figures of the Salafi-jihadi current such as Saudi al-Qaeda member Yusuf al-Ayeri in his book *The Future of Iraq and the Peninsula After the Fall of Baghdad* (Paz, 2005). In November 2004, a group of Saudi clerics issued a call for Iraqis to undertake jihad against "occupation" targets in the country (Jones, 2005). The Iraqi jihad gained momentum. In January 2005, no less than 40,000 hardcore fighters were taking part in the insurgency, while a total of 200,000 were believed to sustain it by providing intelligence, logistics and shelter (Desker, 2005). In April 2005 only, 67 suicide attacks were conducted (Ibid). Outside of the battlefield, jihadi groups in Iraq would beneficiate from technical progress; they would sustain support and recruitment through nascent virtual communication campaign.

As opposed to the previous experience in Afghanistan, the Iraqi theatre brought an element of sectarianism to jihad. Sectarian attacks took place in several Shī'ia holy cities and shrines. This violent sectarianism was probably epitomised by the attack in Najaf, near the Imam Ali mosque, in August 2003. The suicide bomb killed 126 pilgrims, including the senior Shi'a religious cleric Ayatollah Mohammed Bakir al-Hakim (The Guardian, 2003). In 2006, *Jamā'at al-Tawhīd wal-Jihad* and several other jihadi groups merged under Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The latter's goal was to establish a "caliphate" in Sunni areas of the country. Although driven out from Sunni strongholds by the important American strike campaign and Sunni *Sahwat* on the ground, the

group kept operating in the shadows. Placed under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2010, ISI saw the Syrian conflict as an opportunity to expand its ambition and became Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in April 2013 (ISIL). In Iraq, the group resumed the insurgency which escalated into a civil war when several main cities fell into the hands of the jihadists in early 2014. In June the same year, ISIL surprised the world when it took Mosul in just a few days and established an Islamic state. Since then, several Sunni jihadi groups that had been formed after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 took part in the war. They all fought on the side of Ba'athist loyalist groups and opposed IS(IL). This was the case of *Ansār al-Islām* (Defenders of Islam), *al-Jabhat al-Islāmiyyah lil-Moqawama al-Iraqiyyah* (the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance), *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn* (the Army of *Mujāhidīn*), and *Jamā'at Ansār al-Sunnah* (Organisation of the Helpers of the Sunnah).

Syria – The Islamisation of an insurgency

As explained in the previous section, several insurgent Sunni and ideologically-driven jihadi groups were created in Iraq after the 2003 US-led military occupation in the country. Those groups were rather isomorphic in their nature, composition and objectives. They were also evolving in the transnational jihadi margins, taking advantage of the porous borders with Syria, Jordan and Iran. Interestingly, those insurgent groups were supported by the Syrian regime, which was directly threatened by the American long-term vision of the Middle East. In fact, insurgents were trained in Syria, in coordination with the Syrian secret services (Bazcko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay, 2018: 184). Yet in 2009, Damascus operated a drastic policy shift when the US withdrew from Iraq. Obama's administration initiated a policy of rapprochement with Damascus, lifting travel restrictions in early 2010 and re-activating diplomatic channels between the two countries. In return, al-Assad committed to cooperate on the security front; the Syrian regime dismantled jihadi networks and imprisoned thousands of fighters.

In 2011, another turn of events came to alter Syria's policy. The popular peaceful protests were met with violent state repression. Simultaneously, al-Assad released hundreds of Islamist militants from Sednaya prison, in the north of Damascus. The move was intended to portray the opposition as "terrorist" – a word the Syrian President used multiple times to qualify the insurgents – to gather both domestic and international support (Black, 2013). Besides, several observers detected clear signs of cooperation between al-Assad and jihadi factions between 2011

and 2014. On the one hand, it was believed that Syrian government forces did not engage in a military confrontation with jihadi groups when they had the opportunity to do so. Instead, regime forces focused their efforts on moderate elements of the opposition (Sherlock and Spencer, 2014; Vinograd and Omar, 2014). On the other hand, the Syrian government has been accused of engaging in energy deals with insurgent groups, purchasing oil and gas from territories controlled by ISIL and *Jabhat al-Nusra* (Borger and Mahmood, 2013; McKernan, 2017).

Upon their release from prison, several hardcore Salafi-jihadists formed a number of insurgent groups in late 2011 and early 2012 (Abouzeid, 2014). Namely, Hassan Abbud founded *Harakat Ahrār al-Shām al-Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant) in December 2011, while Abu Mohammad al-Jawlani became the leader of *Jabhat al-Nusra* (Victory Front), al-Qaeda branch in Syria. Until 2013, those two factions stood out from an array of poorly established jihadi groups that coexisted and shared the immediate goal of defeating Bashar al-Assad. Other prominent jihadi formations included *Liwa' Suqūr al-Shām* (Hawks of the Levant Brigade), *Liwa' al-Haqq* (Truth Brigade), and *Liwa' al-Islām* (Brigade of Islam). They were joined in their fight against al-Assad's regime by *Jaysh al-Sūrī al-Hurr*, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a loose faction of officers of the Syrian Army Forces who defected.

Interestingly, in Syria, the proliferation of jihadi groups was not triggered by an external occupation, whether Soviet in Afghanistan or American in Iraq, but rather by an "internal occupation", that is, the brutal military response of the al-Assad regime against those protesting it. Ironically though, the Syrian regime did not become active in the war against insurgent jihadi groups until the Russian intervention in September 2015 and – to a lesser extent – the pressure of European countries and the US to fight IS. The Russian intervention – together with the increased Iranian presence through Hezbollah and other militias – brought a strategic turn to the conflict as the Syrian regime was finally able to take back main cities from insurgent groups.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the Syrian theatre has been characterised by the fluidity of insurgent groups, which successively formed and broke several coalitions both within the FSA and jihadi groups and in-between the two. For example, in 2014, units of the FSA merged with jihadi factions *Liwa' Suqūr al-Shām* and *Jaysh al-Islām* into the Syrian Revolution Command Council. In another instance, *Jabhat Tahrīr Sūriyyā al-Islāmiyyah* (Syrian Islamic Liberation Front) was created in late 2012 by the alliance between *Liwa' Sūqur al-Shām*, *Liwa' al-Tawhīd* and *Jaysh al-Islām*. Most of those coalitions were formed locally, such as *Fatah Halab* (Aleppo

Conquest) formed in 2016 in Aleppo, and *Jaysh al-Yarmouk* (Army of Yarmouk) created in mid-2012 in Daraa. Between 2011 and 2014, all insurgent (jihadi) groups and alliances focused on securing men and logistic supplies in order to defeat al-Assad's regime – which resulted in countless infightings. In 2013, the advent of ISIS on the Syrian battlefield brought a strategic shift, as insurgents groups pledged to counter the growing involvement of foreign fighters in Syria and the transformation of the Syrian revolution into a global jihad (Pierret, 2015).

While *Harakat Ahrār al-Shām al-Islāmiyyah* epitomised a local, Syrian Islamist project, *Jabhat al-Nusra* attested the presence of international jihad on the Syrian theatre. The latter group was composed of veterans of the Iraq war sent by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, then leader of Islamic State in Iraq, to establish a branch across the border. At that time, al-Nusra was purposefully presented as a Syrian enterprise, gaining legitimacy from the local populations and fighting groups. Yet in March 2013, when al-Baghdadi wanted to expand ISI in Syria and asked al-Jawlani to announce al-Nusra as part of ISI, the Syrian leader rebuffed the order. Al-Nusra, he argued, was under the sole command of al-Qaeda leader al-Zawahiri, and the latter had forbidden to announce the presence of al-Qaeda in Syria (McCants, 2015: 1543). Al-Baghdadi ignored the argument and declared the establishment of ISIS (or ISIL) in April 2013, merging the Iraqi and Syrian entities. Called upon to give his verdict on the dispute, al-Zawahiri ruled that al-Nusra should be independent of ISI and ordered the latter back to Iraq. Al-Baghdadi defied the historical leader and revoked ISIS allegiance to al-Qaeda. Ever since, both groups have been engaged in an endless series of military and discursive battles through their fighters and media.

This split between al-Nusra and ISI marked a strategic change in ISIS' military campaign, that became incredibly aggressive against all the other jihadi groups operating in Syria – in addition to the group's effort to portray a war against the Europeans and American "Crusaders" and the Iraqi and Iranian "Rāfidhī" (Baczko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay, 2017: 191-194). The antagonism between ISIS and Syrian jihadi groups was fuelled by the fact that, after the split, most Syrian fighters joined al-Nusra, while ISIS attracted a majority of foreign fighters, including veterans from Afghanistan, Iraq and Chechnya wars. Those fighters were hardcore Salafi-jihadists and imbued the group with a strong and radical ideology of intolerance towards other groups. Actually, there were no Syrians in the high ranks of ISIS. Maybe the only exception was Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman of the group, until his death in August 2016.

This shift – together with the pressure of the US and the Gulf states to put an end to their funding – pushed a coalition of insurgent (jihadi) groups to sign a covenant with other armed groups in May 2014 (al-Hamadee, 2014). The coalition included *Harakat Ahrār al-Shām al-Islāmiyyah*, *Jabhat al-Nusra* and former Free Syrian Army units; it was named *Jaysh al-Fatah* (the Army of Conquest) and vowed to focus on national Syrian objectives. Hence, the arrival of ISIS on the Syrian front in April 2013 broke the insurgency, and the Syrian war became what some called "the war of jihadists against jihadists" (Lahoud and al-'Ubaydi, 2014). Until 2014, ISIS focused on securing supplies routes from the Iraqi safe-haven into Syria. On the other hand, the rest of the insurgency relied on routes from Turkey to the fronts in Aleppo, Hama and Homs; and from Jordan to Daraa, in the south of Syria. Those routes all met in northern Syria – which became vital for all insurgent groups – both jihadi and non-jihadi ones. This is how the conflict between ISIS and other insurgent groups erupted in January 2014, in an attempt to control key supplies lines as well as logistic chains (Baczko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay, 2017: 192-193).

In the context of the fight against ISIS – and not so much more against al-Assad's regime – the hundreds of insurgent groups merged into large coalitions, such as *Jabhat al-Islāmiyyah* (the Islamic Front). Yet ISIS was able to make quick gains in Syria at the expenses of the Syrian insurgency. As a result, the group shifted its state-project and resources-control ambitions to expanding to Iraq. The country of the two rivers, which so far was used as a sanctuary and training area by ISIS, became another battlefield for the establishment of an Islamic state. The successful assault on Mosul and the announcement of the Caliphate in June 2014 ratified the campaign and ISIS became Islamic State (IS). Competition for power was re-directed to al-Assad regime in Syria and the Iraqi government, while IS' regional ambitions triggered the involvement of an international coalition comprising some of the most powerful countries in the world.

The following Part II presents the analysis of IS' framing of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. The researcher will mainly develop IS' views on the causes and expected future of the conflicts (Chapter 5) and on the antagonistic warring camps (Chapter 6). Doing so, these two chapters will outline avenues for further reflection on the group's potential discursive power, but also on its rhetoric weaknesses.

Part II

Islamic State's Frames on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

Chapter 5 ~ Naming the conflicts in Iraq and Syria

5.1 The Main Characteristics of Islamic State's Discourse on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

The following sections present the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of IS' official political discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. As this research mainly focuses on the group's discourse between June 2014 and June 2017, the analysis refers to IS' discourse and rhetoric using the past tense. This investigation highlights five key characteristics of the dataset surveyed. It argues that those main features – further developed across Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 – provide premises to explain the impact and influence of IS' discourse on its MENA audience. This hypothesis is nuanced in the conclusion of Part II. The latter also suggests that in addition to its military defeat in Iraq and Syria, IS' discourse might have lost its power of influence as it distanced itself from regional politico-social dynamics at work in the Middle East.

A critical characteristic and asset of IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria is its responsiveness. The group was highly reactive to the shifting dynamics of the two wars. For example, the refusal from al-Nusra Front (currently *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām*) and other Sunni groups to be affiliated to the Caliphate was much discussed in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and al-Adnani's utterances between June 2013 and January 2014. They both called the event a "*fitna*", meaning chaos or disorder. The rift also helped the group to coin a discourse in which it portrayed itself as "the last rampart" to protect the Islamic *Ummah*. Moreover, the United States' involvement in the conflicts in August 2014, followed by a coalition of countries worldwide, gave an occasion to IS to frame an "IS against the world" scenario. It also provided the opportunity for the group to justify its violent behaviour, which was presented as fair retaliation to the coalition airstrikes and killing of ordinary Muslims.

Second, IS' discourse was revisionary and innovative. IS was and remains a revisionist power as it sought to completely change the regional – and *in fine* world – social and political structures.

IS' revisionism was anti-modernist, meaning that the answers to today's crisis were sought in glorifying and revising the past. Doing so, the group borrowed from major Islamic thinkers of both Sunni and Shī'ia tradition such as Abul Ala Maududi, Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Ruhollah Khomeini, who all suggested to oppose the "Crusader" (colonial) rule by reviving the past, instead of simply reforming and adapting it to the current context. Hence, IS did not coin a new discourse; rather it borrowed from traditional Islamic teachings.

However, the application and operationalisation of this discourse were innovative among jihadi groups. IS viewed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as a first step towards the revival of an old system – the Caliphate – which would protect the Sunni Muslims and rule in accordance with original Islamic teachings. This pre-modern system was also thought to undo the wrongdoings of modern state powers such as geographical borders and democracy which are man-made and thus in direct competition with the rule of God. Although several individuals and groups, such as al-Qaeda, used jihad to fight the established nation-state system before, they viewed the Caliphate as a long-term goal which would ratify their victory. On the contrary, IS was the first of its kind to operationalise the Caliphate and to set it as a prerequisite to victory.

This revival of the old order was made through language. In its video clip "Breaking the borders", released on June 29, 2014, IS did not only break the geographical and concrete borders between Iraq and Syria, but it also broke the invisible and imagined borders between nations, regions, religions, and cultures. Language was used as a tool to deconstruct as many competing identities to allow each individual to enter the global and communal culture promoted by IS. In other words, while modern states promote the idea of plural and complementary identities within multiple entities represented by nation-states, IS suggested a completely different model for social and political organisation where individuals would have one single and shared identity within one single and shared entity which is the Caliphate. Doing so, the group promoted the re-organisation of the world system under the leadership of one political system, one leader, and one culture/identity – Sunni Islam as it is interpreted by the group.

Third, and maybe most importantly, IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was highly cultural. The group used socio-culturally loaded terms when referring to its enemies, whether they were Muslims or not. Non-Muslims were called "*kufār*" (plural of *kafir*), which refers to those who are in essence non-Muslim, that is, those who do not belong to the *Ummah* in its

original meaning. As for its Muslim enemies, IS designated Sunnis who opposed the group as "*murtāddīn*" (apostates). The term refers to the Muslims who rejected to pay *zakāt* (a religious tax or charity) to Caliph Abu Bakr after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. They were consequently considered rejectionists of Islam. In another instance of IS' use of cultural terms, Arab regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar or Jordan – which are militarily and politically involved in the conflict against IS in Syria and Iraq – were called "*tāghūt*" (traditionally transgressor, denoting a tyrant).

In the same vein, IS attributed the adjective "*Nusayrī*" to the Syrian regime. It refers to Ibn Nusayr, who founded the Alawite sect in the 9th century. Today, the name is used as a derogative word for Shī'ia. IS based its argument on two fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah's, a 14th century Islamic Scholar, who wrote: "[Nusayriyyah] are [kuffār] [disbelievers] according to the agreement of the Muslims" (Dābiq 10: 8); "There is no doubt that jihad against these people and the implementation of the [hudūd] [punishments] upon them [are] from the greatest acts of obedience and obligations" (Ibid: 9).

Finally, Shī'ia regimes in Iran and Iraq were designated by the term "*Rāfidha*", rejectionists. Following the Sunni tradition, IS advocated the inherently treacherous nature of the sect that was accused of having betrayed the Caliph al-Musta'sim in 842 AD and brought the end of the Abbasside rule in favour of the Tatars. The group's discourse insisted on the conflicting history between the Sunni and the Shī'ia, and between Iran and Iraq, blaming the Shī'ia for seeking revenge for the murder of Husayn Ibn Ali in 680 AD, and for the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s (Dābiq 11: 6). By doing so, IS fuelled the narrative of a sectarian war in Iraq and Syria.

Van Gorp (2007: 69) explains that, when cultural themes constitute the central framing idea of a message, the latter will surely strongly resonate with the knowledge of receivers. The fact that IS used words that echoed pre-existing experiences, knowledge and associated feelings in its audience exponentially increased its power of influence. For example, the term "*Rāfidha*" is a derogatory attribute that carries negative associations among Sunni Muslims. In the audience's mental representation, whatever actor is attributed with this term would be categorised as an enemy and whichever action is associated with this actor would be deemed illegitimate.

The cultural nature of IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria is reinforced by the fact that the group's message was repetitive and consistent. As emphasised by Van Gorp (Ibid), "the more often schemata are confirmed by further information, or by congruent framing devices, the more difficult it becomes to refute or change them by counterframing". The examination of the results of keywords (combination) and words (combination) in context reveals that the most repeated words in IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria are attributives that designate either IS itself or the group's enemies. "*Murtādd*" and "*Rāfidha*" are the most cited words across IS' media production in both Arabic and non-Arabic. They are closely followed by "*Nusayrī*" and "Crusaders". It seems that IS used language to implement a whole new system of codes and meaning. The audience of IS' message was then expected to interpret their environment, in this case, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, using this system of codes.

5.2 The Crisis of the *Ummah*

IS' discourse on the wars in Iraq and Syria was coined around the notion of the *Ummah* – the Muslim community worldwide, or "nation" as described by IS. The group's rhetoric on the conflicts originated in the assumption that the *Ummah* went through a protracted crisis, caused by the ancient enmity of the Crusaders – referring to western, traditionally Christian, powers. The latter were accused of "hav[ing] thrust[ed] their claws into the Ummah's body for centuries" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). The crisis peaked with the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of the Sykes-Picot borders on Middle Eastern populations after World War I. On this occasion, the Crusaders have "usurped" and "carved up" Iraq and Syria among themselves (Rumīyyah 8: 39).

The rejection of the nation-state system – that emerged from the Great War – was a strong marker of IS' rhetoric on the crisis of the *Ummah*. The leaders of the group described the new regional order as deeply traumatic for the Muslim community and Muslim identity. Certainly, the political landscape was drastically altered. The religious Caliphate and its universal vocation were replaced by several nation-states, geographically circumscribed entities where the religious and temporal authorities were dissociated. Furthermore, the new borders gave birth to national doctrines that consolidated the fragmentation of the people (al-Naba' 32:3). Even pan-Islamic ideologies that emerged as a reaction to the new regional order were not able to remedy the division, splitting

the *Ummah* along national, linguistic and doctrinal bases (Ibid). As a result, the Sykes-Picot Agreement gave birth to "Sykes-Picot nationalities", "Sykes-Picot systems" and "Sykes-Picot religions" (Ibid). As such, the new political system went against the very nature of Islam which, IS argued, cannot be narrowed to borders: "Islam doesn't know drawn borders to confine it, and isn't [immobilized] at these lines" (al-Adnani, 19 June 2013). In the same vein, in his first speech as a caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi urged Muslims worldwide to rush to the territories of the newly established Caliphate, emphasising that "Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis. The earth is Allah's" (1 July 2014). Those two excerpts express IS' resentment against the new borders, which the group considered non-Islamic, depriving the *Ummah* of its unity and oneness. Nation-states were thus seen as a factor of division and the Sykes-Picot agreement was portrayed as a "conspiracy" against the Muslims (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013). IS portrayed Islam and its fundamental values under the wrath of western powers, which dispossessed the *Ummah* of its lands and core identity. Muslims eventually lost control and legitimacy over their own lives.

Hence, IS saw the aftermath of WWI not as a mere reconfiguration of existing political structures, but as an affront to the Muslims who evolved from rulers to ruled-over, from free and independent to imprisoned in artificial national borders and submissive to the Arab tyrants and their Crusader masters. In other words, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was not a simple political transformation, but also a deep emotional trauma for Islam and the Muslims. The "cursed" and "artificial" borders should henceforth be "erased from the map and removed from the hearts" (al-Adnani, 19 June 2013).

IS took its argument further, asserting that, once implemented, the nation-states became the *locus* of dictatorship and oppression of the Muslims. Yet the group did not attribute the crisis of the *Ummah* to exogenous factors only. For IS, the Crusaders do not bear the sole responsibility for the ordeal of the *Ummah*. Although orchestrated by the Crusaders, the new regional order was sustained by some other endogenous actors; the "*tāghūt* puppets", the Arab leaders that were put in power after WWI (Rumīyyah 8: 39). In early 2014, al-Adnani upbraided the Muslims for their support to their rulers: "It is time that you disbelieve in democracy [...] It is time for you to know that democracy is nothing but a tool and method by which the Tawāghīt (tyrants) are empowered and by which they wage war upon the Religion of Allah" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014). Following this argument, IS represented the Muslims as the victims of a wide "plot" involving both distant and nearby enemies, all under the supervision of the world community. In a long article published in the fifteenth issue of *al-Naba'*, IS demonstrated that the League of Nations endorsed the

disempowerment of the Muslims communities that were placed "almost everywhere in the world under the tutelage of the Crusader states" (al-Naba' 15: 12). Its successor, the United Nations, was similarly accused of having sustained the "coercive democracy" and the "supremacy" of the Crusaders over the world, especially through the veto power of the "five super-states" of the Security Council (Ibid). As a consequence of this collective conspiracy, the Muslims did not enjoy any respite since the end of WWI and were abandoned by all. This was especially the case in Syria, where the Crusaders put "[Baathist] tyrants" in power. Even with the advent of the civil war in 2011, IS deplored, the country was left in the hands of the "apostates" such as the Free Syrian Army and other nationalist factions; all alleged enemies of the Muslims (Dābiq 12: 29).

In IS' words, the wars in Iraq and Syria were but another invasion of the Muslim lands by the Crusaders; and the primary victims were predictably Muslims, especially defenceless civilians: "[T]he [Nusayri] regime carried out an airstrike in Ar-Raqqah, resulting in five shuhada' and multiple wounded, all of them civilian casualties" (Dābiq 1: 43); "[h]e [Obama] then ordered airstrikes leading to the killing of Muslim men, women, and children in Iraq and Shām" (Dābiq 4: 42); "[America] was not outraged when it saw the horrific scenes of the women and children of the Muslims taking their last breaths with their eyes glazed over due to the chemical weapons of the [nusayriyyah] – scenes which continue to be repeated everyday" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). Such representations helped IS to frame the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as the undeniable proof that the world would keep waging war on the *Ummah* and disregard its ordeal. In other words, the crisis would continue forever unless the cycle is broken. The group thus urged its Muslim audience to acknowledge the evidence and take action: "Take a lesson from our people in Iraq, for history repeats itself [...] They (Sunnis) tasted humiliation, disgrace, and many misfortunes at the hands of that army [Iranian] over a period of ten years [...] So take a lesson" (Ibid). For indeed, after painting a gloomy picture on the situation of the *Ummah*, IS predicted a drastic transformation that would lead the Muslims to reclaim power and dignity from their executioners: "It is time that those claws are pulled out and those hands are severed" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017); "remove the garment of dishonour, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone" (Dābiq 1: 8). Al-Baghdadi foresaw that the wars in Iraq and Syria would be "a great bestowal" (19 January 2014). This phrasing is highly symbolic and reveals the importance attached to its discourse by IS. "Bestowal" refers to the act of conferring honour or presenting a gift. The conflicts were thus imbued with a highly positive meaning; they were seen as the opportunity to bring the crisis of the *Ummah* to an end.

To summarise IS' view on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, both instances were pictured as evidence of the Crusaders and their allies' ancient hatred against the Muslims. Those enemies have seized the opportunity to wage war on Islam once again, pretending to fight "terrorism" (the word was always put into brackets in IS' discourse). Yet a new actor finally entered the game and came to the rescue of the *Ummah*: Islamic State. The Caliphate was determined to accomplish its divine mission and restore the Islamic Golden Age. The latter depended on the outcome of the wars in Iraq and Syria: "If the Muslims are victorious – and this will be the case by Allah's permission – they will be [honored] with all [honor] by which the Muslims will return to being the masters of the world and kings of the earth" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014).

5.3 The Characteristics of the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria in Islamic State's Discourse

First, it is essential to mention that IS viewed Iraq and Syria as one single conflict. This interpretation is reflected in the rest of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 by the use of the terms "war" or "conflict" in the singular. As explained by al-Adnani as early as June 2013; "Iraq and Syria will remain one theatre, one front, one command, and they won't be separated by borders" (al-Adnani, 19 June 2013). This reading fitted the broader discourse of the group that considered unity the most central attribute of the *Ummah*. This unity was expressed through the *tawhīd* (oneness, monotheism) doctrine and through the formula "la ilaha illah-allah" ("there is no God but Allah") that appeared on the flag of Islamic State and its Caliphate. Consequently, IS opposed all types of racial, cultural, national and geographical borders. Dividing Iraq and Syria would have implied the recognition of the Sykes-Picot borders and would, thus, have contradicted the group's doctrine. Al-Adnani offered a twofold justification of this interpretation. The first one was based on the Islamic tradition: "Abu Bakr and Umar [the first and second Rashidun caliphs] (may God be pleased with them) used to move the armies and leaders between Iraq and Syria like there was no difference between the two armies, and this is what we are doing now" (19 June 2013). The spoekesman added that the division might have resulted in a lack of military efficiency and conflicts of loyally between the two leaders of each frontline (Ibid). Those arguments were given in the context of the split between *Jabhat al-Nusra* in Syria (later renamed *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām*) and Islamic State in Iraq. The "one war" rationale was therefore aimed at delegitimising al-Nusra's command and at justifying IS' offensive against its former ally.

While Iraq and Syria were considered one single war, IS seemed to be fighting two interrelated but distinct battles. A first battle against the rebel groups in Syria, which started from the defection of al-Nusra in mid-2013. A second battle against the "real" enemies of the *Ummah* and IS, that is, the Crusaders and their allies. Reading IS' media outlet, it appeared that the first war jeopardised the second, as it kept the soldiers of the Caliphate busy on several fronts while all Muslims should have rallied under its command to fights the historical enemies of the *Ummah*. In January 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi called his Muslim audience to stop fighting the rebel groups in Syria and to focus their efforts on the Syrian and Iraqi armies (al-Baghdadi, 19 January 2014). He also accused al-Nusra of having "stabbed [the Caliphate] in the back". Nonetheless, the self-declared caliph opened the door to reconciliation and alliance: "This battle is a battle of the entire Muslim Ummah [...] So here is the State extending its hands to you, so you can stop fighting it, and we will stop fighting you, and we can fight the [Rafida]" (Ibid). This magnanimous rhetoric shifted after the "separatist" group enter into alliance with other jihadi opposition factions against the Caliphate. IS' perception of its enemies is further developed in Chapter 6.

According to IS, the war in Iraq and Syria were the scene of several battles and it was fought through several campaigns. By its own admission, the Caliphate faced military, economic, political and media offensives (Dābiq 2: 26). It is interesting to note that the group did not mention the counter-ideological offensives that attempted to delegitimise its discourse, in spite of the multiple attempts by western and Middle Eastern governments to launch counter-discourse initiatives to deter individuals from joining IS. Still, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was described as an "all-encompassing war" where IS' enemies "dedicated their media, wealth, armies, and vehicles to wage war against the Muslims and the [mujahideen] [holy warriors, jihadists]" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). Similarly, al-Adnani observed that "[d]ozens of nations have gathered against [IS]. They began their war against us at all levels" (9 September 2014). Furthermore, IS depicted the proliferation of enemies as historical: "It has not occurred in history that the nations of kufr [unbeliever] gathered with all their religions and creeds" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). The multitude of warring actors could be explained by the very nature of the conflict in Iraq and Syria, which IS defined as a "proxy war". First, Syria crystallised all interests because it was and remains the centrepiece of a regional chessboard. Hence, actors who sought regional domination must ensure power in the country. In the words of al-Baghdadi; "everyone trades with [Syrian people's] blood, racing each other so that they can sit on [their] shoulders, or even on [their] corpses" (19 January 2014). Second, IS contended that great powers were unable to wage new wars or to

directly get involved in the conflict. As explained in the ninth issue of *Dābiq*, "[f]irst, the crusaders have become too weak to wage their own wars. This is due to the blessed operations of September 11th and the subsequent jihad in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They are too weak financially, militarily, and psychologically to fight another war ... Because of their weakness, they have been forced to rely upon their allies and agents to fight their wars" (Dābiq 9: 57)

Another primordial characteristic of the war in Iraq and Syria in IS' discourse was that it was described as a religious war, "a major jihad" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). As such, this was not the war between nation-states and the Caliphate, but the war of "the enemies of Allah" against the Muslims. This characteristic was also used as a tool to delegitimise several factions which were believed to fight for nationalist interests, and thus, fight the wrong war. Concerned with its status of "pure" Islamic representative, IS clarified; "[o]ur war with Kurds is a religious war. It is not a nationalistic war – we seek the refuge of Allah. We do not fight Kurds because they are Kurds. Rather we fight the disbelievers amongst them" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). The religiosity of the conflict had one major consequence: The rejection of the "Arab Spring" and the revolution in Syria. IS systematically referred to "the events" or the "so called Arab Spring", enclosing the phrase in quotation marks. The group believed that "the hazy events" were a product of nationalism and Arab tyrants (Dābiq 9: 20), and only brought chaos in the region, as well as the gradual decline of Islamic values (Dābiq 12: 40). It slammed other jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda for "excessively praising the Arab revolution or what is referred to as 'Arab Spring'" (Dābiq 6: 45). More than the events that shook the MENA region from December 2010, IS fully discarded the notion of revolution, which it associated with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. As such, revolution was deemed as an instrument of control by the elites and as mock democracy rather than a tool of popular expression (al-Naba' 113: 3).

As a religious war, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was pictured as an umpteenth crusade against the Muslims. Hence, the latter were compelled to wage defensive jihad, which had a twofold justification. First, as mentioned earlier, the *Ummah* had suffered the oppression and repression of illegitimate regimes for decades. At the time when IS lauched its military campaign, the Muslims were still portrayed as paying the price of their life under the bombing and execution of invading armies. The latter's cruelty knew no limit as they targeted all Muslims, including women and children. Jihad was thus morally justified. Second, IS drew a parallel between the conflict in Iraq and Syria and the Afghan jihad in the 1980s against the Soviet Union. The Afghan jihad had been authorised – even encouraged – by numerous religious and legal authorities. Confronted

with a similar situation – the invasion of Muslim lands – the Caliphate shall retaliate in a similar manner (al-Adnani, 13 October 2015). IS thus provided a second, legal, justification to the war. Still referring to the Afghan experience, the group emphasised that jihad had military virtues because it was a factor of unity and strength against the enemies: "Parties with different backgrounds fought a 'common' enemy, ignoring all matters that distinguished them from each other" (Dābiq 1: 18). Finally, jihad was deemed essential, a *sine qua non* pre-requisite to a new world order in the favour of the Muslims: "[T]here are no rights without Jihad, no justice without Jihad, no honour without Jihad, no security without Jihad, no hope without Jihad, no life without Jihad" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014).

Besides, for IS, the war was not only religious; it was sectarian and targeted Sunni Muslims. The group hammered that this was "a war against Muslims or against the Sunnis", which depicted "the violations by the enemies of the Islamic state against the Sunni people" (al-Naba' 13: 15). As a result, in the words of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; "this battle [was] the battle of the entire Muslim [umma]". The first excerpt was a clear indication that the *Ummah*, as interpreted by IS, excluded the Shī'ia Muslims. In fact, as it will be developed in the following chapter, the ultimate enemies of IS were the *Rāfidha*, whom the group accused of pretending to be Muslims to better divide the *Ummah* from within.

IS' discourse insisted on the fact that the war in Iraq and Syria was unprecedented and different from the previous experiences of jihad in Afghanistan and in Iraq. As emphasised by al-Baghdadi; "it has not occurred before in the history of our Ummah that the entire world gathered against it in one battle as is occurring today" (26 December 2016). IS' soldiers were believed to "have entered into one of the hardest and largest battles in history" (Rumīyyah 11: 5). Yet, unlike in the past, Islamic State stood strong in defence of the Muslims, as explained by al-Muhajir: "[T]he situation of the Muslims in the land of the [Khilafah] differs from that previous period, for the Islamic State is the one who confronts and defends *Dār al-Islām* and prompts the people of faith, refining the zeal of the youth of Islam to liberate themselves from the bondages of slavery and subordination to the nations of kufr" (4 April 2017). In the same vein, al-Adnani called Muslims to be active actors of their history, as they were facing "a battle which is one of the decisive, critical battles in the history of Islam" (9 September 2014). In other words, IS ensured that the Muslims would not reiterate their previous mistake and passively witness their fall and disgrace.

Finally, the war in Iraq and Syria was a prophetic war, "a divinely-warranted war between the Muslim nation and the nations of disbelief" (Dābiq 15: 78). In the first issue of *Dābiq*, IS wrote: "As the [mujahidin] of the Islamic State swept through Iraq claiming one victory after another, it became clear to both friend and foe that this was not just a random sequence of victories" (Dābiq 1: 48). The group systematically gave credit of its military accomplishments to Allah: "The storm raging through Iraq wasn't the doing of the [mujahidin]. It was simply the help of Allah" (Ibid). Each announcement of a victory was laced with phrases such as: "Allah facilitated the causes of success", "thanks to Allah", "all praise is due to Allah alone" and "Allah opened the way for us". IS further claimed that Allah had promised victory to the Muslims and already helped them achieve domination over the Crusaders in the past. In the twelfth issue of *Rumīyyah*, the group recorded how the Muslim armies "had crushed the armies of the Cross [...] when the Crusaders were at the peak of their strength" (Rumīyyah 12: 35). Hence, it was believed that history would repeat itself and that the *Ummah* would vanquish their former oppressors. The same article concluded: "This is the promise of Allah, and Allah does not fail in His promise" (Ibid).

In a similar vein, IS framed the conflict as an apocalyptic war. Literally, "apocalyptic" means "an uncovering" and can also refer to a disclosure of knowledge or to a revelation. In all contexts, the revealed events usually entail some form of an end-time scenario or revelations into divine, heavenly, or spiritual realms. In the rhetoric used by IS, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was a vector for a revelation: "[Y]ou can see the reality becoming clearer day after day [...] The crusaders have returned with a new campaign. They have come so that the dust clears, the fog disappears, and the masks fall, and thereby the hoax of falsehood is exposed and the truth becomes clearly visible" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). Moreover, the war would supposedly allow the Muslims who fought along with the Caliphate to access paradise in the aftermath. IS asserted that the conflict in Iraq and Syria was the sign that the end of the time had begun, introduced by the revival of the Caliphate which was considered as a "monumental event in the history of the Ummah" (Dābiq 1: 38) and as "the final stage of the Ummah before the Day of Judgement" (Dābiq 14: 64). IS referred to the prophesied battle of Armageddon, *al-Malhama al-Kubrā*, that would take place in *Dābiq* and oppose the Muslims and the Romans (or the Christians widely in the modern context). The latter's defeat would trigger the arrival of the Dajjāl, who would be fought by allied Muslim and Christian armies. IS foresaw that the struggle for power and the crisis of the *Ummah* had reached their climax; thus, it emphasised the imminence of the final battle. The discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria was filled with temporal deixis found in repetitions of "soon", "today",

and "now"; and phrases like "a day will come", "a new era". The following section examines how IS envisaged the future of the conflict and the post-conflict period.

5.4 The Expected Future of the Conflicts According to Islamic State

As illustrated above, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was highly legitimate for IS. It was thought as defensive jihad and was aimed to liberate the *Ummah* "after years of crisis, siege and starvation" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). As such, it was a "revenge upon the cross-worshippers for recently killing hundreds of Muslims in Shām, including their women and children" (Dābiq 12: 43). Moreover, the conflict was the mere realisation of a divine plot and of Allah's promise to the Muslims. This legitimacy entailed consequences on its outcome. One striking feature of IS' discourse on the war in Iraq and Syria was the group's bold refusal to give up and even anticipate defeat: "[W]e will not bargain with it nor back down from it until God Almighty raises it above or we die without it" (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013). Instead, IS had a clear vision of how the conflict would end up with the blatant defeat of the "collusion of enemies".

IS' discourse on the future of the conflict revolved around two dynamics; the Caliphate's steady advance toward the final victory, and the weakening of its enemies. On the one hand, the fifteenth issue of *al-Naba'* offered an interesting analysis of the upcoming of international relations with respect to the war in Iraq and Syria (al-Naba' 15: 13). The paper opened on the projection that the sustained resilience of Islamic State would lead to the involvement of more nations in the war. These nations would have to choose between two options. They would either join one of the two existing camps against the Caliphate – American-led or Russian-led – henceforth reinforcing international polarisation. For IS, this scenario was highly plausible because the group's enemies were already involved in quarrels and power competition (Dābiq 9: 59). Alternatively, those enemy nations would form new alliances led by emerging countries – meaning other powers than those traditionally part of the Security Council. IS argued that those emerging countries struggled for a reconfiguration of world governance. Hence, the war in Iraq and Syria was embedded in a global context or power redistribution where the autocratic world governance made way to the multiplication and polarisation of forces in the context of the war between the *Ummah* and the rest of the world. This second option would result in further fragmentation and competition.

Simultaneously, IS expected to attract more and more Muslims and to regain the strength and oneness of the *Ummah* for the final battle (al-Naba' 15: 13).

IS not only relied on the fragmentation of its enemies but also on the decline of each of them independently. In other words, the group expected that the nations engaged in the war would not be able to bear the costs of the conflict "without expecting a decline in [their] economy and power, and weakening it to other nations of disbelief" (al-Naba' 15: 13). In November 2014, IS adopted an ironic tone to assess the outcomes of "$424 million dollars' worth of airstrikes over Iraq and Syria". The American bombings, according to the group, "have resulted in little more than the continued expansion and consolidation of the Islamic State" (Dābiq 5: 36). When President Obama decided to send troops on the ground, once again, IS pointed to the cost of the operation: "The US budget alone is worth more than $6 billion for almost 18 months of air strikes; it is much less costly than taking soldiers down on the ground" (al-Naba' 15: 12). It predicted a tragic end for the American soldiers, foreseeing that high human loss would result from direct engagement (Ibid).

To conclude, IS' imagined upcoming conflict would oppose divided and weakened apostate states on the one side, to a united and strong Caliphate blessed by Allah one the other side. Consequently, the ending of the war was quite straightforward. IS deemed the fight of its enemy as "illusory" (Dār al-Islām 4: 34) and predicted that the war in Iraq and Syria was "the last campaign of the crusaders" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). In line with its belief, the group envisaged two radical solutions: "Either we will exterminate them by Allah's might and strength – such that they lose in this world and in the Hereafter – or die trying" (Rumīyyah 11: 4). In other words, the war would be followed either by victory and eternal honour or defeat and terrible humiliation for Muslims. Until one camp would annihilate the other, the war would never end and draw the world in ever more polarising chaos and division: "It will not end except with the supremacy of one of the two groups" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014). Naturally, IS and the *Ummah* were expected to triumph, as the jihad in Iraq and Syria was "the clear sign of [the] enemy's destruction and eradication being near" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2014).

5.5 Islamic State's Strategic Use of Gain-Frames

Studying how IS reacted to military actions – gains or losses – is revealing of the group's wider communication strategy in the context of the conflict in Iraq and Syria. A striking feature of its discourse is that it framed all military actions in positive terms, or in terms of "gain". IS ignored the potential losses inherent to a major-scale conflict: "The state will not abandon any spot of the territory it has gained, nor will it become smaller after its growth" (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013). In the event of a victory, the group saw a sign of its soldiers' steadfastness and of Allah's help. In the opposite situation where it would encounter a difficulty, the group would ask its soldiers to be patient and to consider the struggle as a divinely warranted test of their faith. IS' soldiers were often called to remember that Prophet Muhammad and his Companions also experienced military struggle and were rewarded for not losing hope in their God. As reminded by al-Adnani in the middle of the battle for Mosul: "He [Allah] will never abandon us" (4 April 2017). Hence, whatever happened to Islamic State was considered as the wish of Allah and, as such, was welcomed (al-Baghdadi, 8 April 2013). As a consequence, there could not be any loss or defeat. In April 2017, when the group suffered heavy military forfeitures and was about to be driven out of Mosul, al-Muhajir addressed his audience in these words: "An [Ummah] whose young and old race towards death and destroy themselves cheaply in Allah's cause, will never be defeated" (4 April 2017). In other words, IS would never lose; it would always remain to fight in defence of the *Ummah*: "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria shall remain in existence, so long as we have a vein that pulses and an eye that bats" (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013).

This communication strategy can be explained in light of several factors. First, IS saw the war itself as a gain. As emphasised above, the conflict in Iraq and Syria was portrayed as a historic opportunity to regain the glory of the *Ummah* and to put an end to a protracted crisis. It also weakened the Crusaders, exposed the truth, and gave the Muslims the chance to fight in the path of Allah. As a consequence, single events that were related to this broader positive context could not but be considered profitable. Second, the conflict was part of a prophecy that announced the final victory of the *Ummah*: "[A]ll this is but a precursor to the solid victory and a sign of the clear conquest that Allah has promised His slaves" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2014). Military gains followed the natural course of the conflict and of the prophecy. Finally, the overwhelming use of gain-frames in IS' discourse can be seen as a strategy to raise the morale of the Caliphate's soldiers and deter the military strength of its opponents. It shows that IS also fought on the psychological

battlefield of the war. Because IS assimilated itself to the *Ummah*, the only losses that were referred to in the group's discourse were those which had been endured by the Muslims for decades at the hands of the Crusaders and other tormentors. The group also mentioned the losses that would occur in case of defeat; they were believed to be incommensurable: "If this were to happen, there would be neither any god nor any value in life" (al-Adnani, 5 December 2016). Once again, this served the strategic aim to foster support for the Caliphate and fitted the group's apocalyptic view of the war. IS did not effectively envisage to be defeated. As long as the conflict would carry on, real losses would be avoided.

Since there were no losses to prevent, IS adopted a radical military strategy aimed at securing gains at all costs. Yet those costs were still not considered negative. Human fatalities were deemed unimportant: "[T]he bombs have certainly killed many [mujahidin] but more arrive to take their place every day" (Dābiq 12: 50). This was reinforced by the fact that IS' soldiers accepted – if not awaited – the fatal ending of their struggle. The group argued that they "[were] all prepared to fight in the cause of Allah down to their last drop of blood" and were "all seeking to be killed in Allah's cause" (Rumīyyah 12: 4). These claims could be interpreted in two ways, depending on which audience was targeted in IS' media outlets. On the one hand, this message was a warning towards a hostile audience. Through this discourse, IS invited its opponent to surrender and put an end to an ever-lasting and costly war. On the other hand, these claims were encouragements aimed at persuading IS' soldiers not only to fight but to sacrifice themselves for the cause of their religion. Following the group's rationale, jihadists had nothing to lose because they were living (and dying) for the sake of Allah and would thus be rewarded in the aftermath: "Either they attain shahadah and meet the Lord of the creation, or they attain victory" (Rumīyyah 12: 33). In other words, the gains that could not be achieved in this world would be granted in the afterlife. Through this discourse, IS sustained what Nietzsche termed a "regulatory fiction" (1974). Death was a regulatory fiction used by IS because it affected all aspects of the individual jihadist's life. Eventually, death became life and acted as an inhibitor of the moral conscience which nature is to strive for survival. It helped the individual – in this case, IS' fighters – to accept the horror of the war, knowing that s/he could overcome them and transform them into much more intense and numerous joys. Without directly referring to real, material contents, the regulatory fiction played with the "as if". Jihadists could not be sure that their faith and bravery would be rewarded after death, but they lived and behaved as if it was a proven fact. Hence, they chose to endorse this fiction and let it regulate their life. In this virtual way, the regulatory fiction acted as a possibility

taken into account for itself. It was the mythical entity that shaped the society governed by IS. The latter's discourse acted as a tool of mental coercion and control that ensured the continuity of its socio-political project in the context of the war in Iraq and Syria.

Going back to IS' strategic use of gains-frames, the group portrayed the war in Iraq and Syria as a succession of victories. As pages turned, the reader of IS' magazines and newsletter got the impression that Iraq and Syria were under the total control of the group. The latter was portrayed as a wave surging on the Middle East, like an unsinkable ark rescuing the Muslims from the roaring seas. The group gave three arguments for that series of conquests. First, its soldiers were strong, well trained and had high morale. Those characteristics allowed them to take Mosul from the Iraqi army: "[I]n June 2014, a few hundred of fighters of the Islamic State were able to take control of the city of Mosul – the second biggest city of Iraq – after routing an Iraqi army strong of more than 30,000 men" (Dār al-Islām 9: 22). In addition, the soldiers of the Caliphate were confronted with weak and coward enemies: "[T]here's only one gear in Iraqi army tanks: reverse" (Dābiq 12: 50). The group constantly emphasised its opponents' "inability to effectively wage war against the Caliphate" (Dābiq 10: 33-34). Finally, IS and its soldiers were assisted by Allah who "facilitated the causes of [their] success". A victory that had been announced in the Qur'an and promised by Allah should come as no surprise.

As a consequence of IS' strength and its enemies' weakness, gains came easily, quickly and in great number: "[T]his string of victories demonstrated the [mujahidin]'s ability to make rapid and significant gains" (Dābiq 12: 25). The group highlighted the rapidity with which it achieved its military goals; victories were usually achieved "in just a matter of hours" (Rumīyyah 3: 44) or "after only four days of fighting" (Rumīyyah 6: 36). Furthermore, IS systematically gave a detailed description of its victories, listing the human and material damages inflicted on its enemies. The number of human casualties was rarely accurate, but instead, given through phrases such as "dozens were killed", "wounding a great number of them", "afflicting heavy losses", "several were wounded" and "many of them were killed". The same went for territorial gains: "[T]ook control of a vast territory", "took total control of the city". As for material gains, IS insisted on damaging or securing heavy weaponry: "[S]hoot down a helicopter [...] with anti-aerial weapons" (Dār al-Islām 8: 109), "took 4-wheel drive vehicles as well as a truck mounted with a 14.5 machine gun, another mounted with a 37mm machine gun" (Rumīyyah 2: 33), "the [mujahidin] took ghanimah [booty] of more than 50 tanks, 28 various-calibre artillery pieces, 7 BMPs" (Rumīyyah 6: 36), "11 Hummer vehicles and 5 Cougar vehicles" (al-Naba' 54: 4). This editorial choice gave the

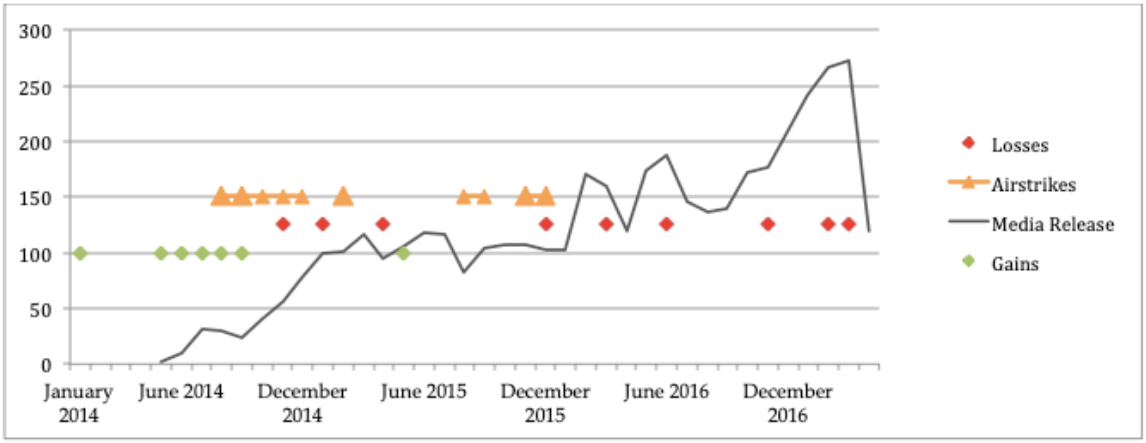
impression that IS was fighting a traditional, symmetric war and possessed a military arsenal as sophisticated as that owned by the most powerful countries involved in the conflict. Doing so, the group asserted its military capabilities, which might also act as a deterrent for its enemies. Another discursive strategy employed by IS was to emphasise strategic gain and casualties: "[I]s considered very important as it connects together four wilayats" (Dābiq 9: 29), "took control of the strategic infantry school" (Dābiq 12: 26); and important human assets: "[M]ultiple Sahwat leaders amongst the casualties" (Dābiq 9: 28), "including a number of leaders and officials" (Rumīyyah 3: 42), "including a captain" (al-Naba' 1: 3; al-Naba' 14:13). In addition to the traditional gains inherent to war, IS proudly displayed the support its received from local populations: "[T]hese victories galvanise the soldiers of the Caliphate and attract more and more civil populations towards the support of their sons and their soldier brothers" (Dār al-Islām 4: 34), "Scenes of jubilation have taken place in all cities of the Caliphate, the black banner proudly floats in the sky of Palmyra" (Ibid).

Interestingly, terminologies related to gains were among the most cited words in the group's discourse on the war in Iraq and Syria. The results of words (combination) frequency search accounts for the group's disproportionate focus on military gains and on damages inflicted to the enemies. For instance, "kill" and its derivatives (killing, killed) rank 6 among the group's discourse across Arabic, English and French; and "destroy" ranks 16. Similarly, "capture", "succeed", "liberate" and "victory" all rank among the first 100 most cited words in all languages.

The consistency of IS' use of gain-frames across languages and times is remarkable because the group effectively suffered heavy defeats from 2015 onwards. Hence, one might wonder: Was IS' morale so high and its faith in victory so strong that it had become indifferent to military loss? Was the group so convinced about the Muslim triumph that it deluded itself to the extent that it could not recognise clear defeat? While IS did not explicitly mention its military vulnerability in its discourse, the group's media activities reveal that it was actually highly sensitive and reactive to its downturns on the ground. As shown by Figure 8 below, the more it suffered military losses, the more IS' media efforts increased. For example, one can observe an escalation in media release between the end of September 2014 and January 2015. This time frame corresponds to important military events in the context of the war in Iraq and Syria. On September 23, the United States and five Arab countries (Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Jordan) launched their first airstrikes against IS in Syria. In November, IS lost the city of Baiji in Iraq. Sinjar, in Syria, was lost for the first time in December. Finally, in January 2015, Kobani was recaptured by the

Kurdish forces. Hence, it appears that IS was driven out of three major cities in three months and suffered intense airstrikes by a growing coalition. During this same period, the group's total media production was multiplied by 75%. In December 2014, IS also tried to reach a broader audience and started publishing *Dār al-Islām*, the first of a series of 12 magazines disseminated in French. One can conclude that the more IS suffered on the military battlefield, the more it bolstered its efforts on the discursive front. This process can be observed in 2017. The group's media activities peaked in the middle of the last phase of the Mosul offensive launched by the Iraqi army supported by airstrikes of the Coalition in March 2017. At that time, although it was about to experience its greatest loss, IS' media efforts were at their highest. They sunk in April 2017, two months before IS was completely driven out of the city. It is very likely that IS' media material and staff were annihilated in the battle. To summarise, there seems to be a strong correlation between IS' losses and the group's media activities, proving that the Caliphate was effectively very sensitive and aware of its military ups and downs.

Figure 8. Islamic State's Media Release vs Key Military Events (January 2014 - April 2017)



Beaujouan, 2017

This fifth chapter has sought to shed light on IS' perception of the characteristics of the conflict in Iraq and Syria. Drawing on the analysis of loss/gain frames in IS' discourse, it has shown that IS displayed consistent confidence regarding its ability to fight a coalition of state and non-state actors, and to eventually win the war. On the other side, this apparent conviction was nuanced by the reactiveness of the group's media apparatus to losses on the ground. The chapter has also built on the analysis of problem frames in IS' discourse to offer the group's perspective on the

nature of the conflict and its causes. IS portrayed the war as embedded in two main discursive plots. The first is the crisis of the *Ummah*, of which the conflict was only the last chapter, proving the renewed hatred of the Crusaders against the Muslims. It was thus "the war of the nations of disbelief altogether against the Ummah of Islam" (al-Baghdadi, 26 December 2016). The second is the global shift of governance that gave the opportunity to new actors to challenge the great powers. These two dynamics resulted in the growing polarisation of the conflict: "There are only two armies, two camps, two trenches" (al-Adnani, 21 May 2016). On the one hand, "the sons of the [Khilafah]" who stand for truth, belief, monotheism. On the other hand, the "nations of kufr" who fight for falsehood, disbelief and polytheism (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014). The war was further depicted as the struggle between two fundamentally opposed groups, "with no third remaining", or what the group phrased "the extinction of the grey zone" (Dābiq 7: 54). This polarisation was paramount to IS' discourse, of which more than 90% contained direct references to either Islamic State or to its enemies. The following chapter attempts to untangle the web of actors and affiliations that constitute the two warring camps. It reviews the group's perspective on each actor's identity, role in the conflict, interests and affiliations.

CHAPTER 6 ~ THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF AND THE OTHER

6.1 THE UNIQUE IDENTITY OF ISLAMIC STATE

6.1.1 Islamic State's Ambiguous Paternalistic Figure

IS' discourse displayed a complex construction of the group's identity through assimilation with the *Ummah*. This discursive strategy involved interesting consequences on the support expected by the group. The assimilation between IS and the Muslim community was especially present in the utterances of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. In one of his first speeches, in January 2014, the self-declared caliph addressed the *Ummah* in those words: "As for us, we can only say that your blood is our blood, and your destruction is our destruction" (19 January 2014). A few months later, IS' spokesman used the same analogy: "[W]e are from you and you from us" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014). The comparision is not surprising as IS consistently affirmed its role of defender of the *Ummah*, a "bulwark" against its enemies (Rumīyyah 5: 4), its "hardened fortress and solid [armor]" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016). Similarly, the soldiers of the Caliphate were a frontline that "preserve[s] the towns of the Muslims behind them" (Dār al-Islām 7: 51). In the first issue of *Dābiq*, the group explained the reason of its involvement in Syria: "[T]he Islamic State quickly got involved, answering the cries of the weak and oppressed Muslims" (Dābiq 1: 40). It appears that the very existence of IS – as well as its deeds – were dependent on the Muslim community. Put differently, the *Ummah* was IS' *raison d'être*. There was thus an interdependent relationship that endorsed the complete reliance between the *Ummah* and IS. If this ensured Muslims that they would be protected as long as the Caliphate would exist, it also meant that IS' defeat would involve the defeat of all Muslims. Hence, a *sine qua non* condition to the survival of the *Ummah* was its full support to its protector.

IS' role as a defender of the Islamic *Ummah* had two implications. First, the group – or more widely the Muslims – did not launch the war in Iraq and Syria. Muslims were attacked and thus, it was legitimate to defend the community. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi claimed that the Caliphate was "obliged to raise up to support them" (8 April 2013). In the same vein, al-Adnani reminded the

United States and Europe: "[T]he Islamic State did not initiate a war against you [...] It is you who started the transgression against us, and thus you deserve blame and you will pay a great price" (9 September 2014). This reference to the obligation to defend the Muslims and their religion strongly echoes the notion of jihad. While jihad is a religious obligation for all Muslims, an important number of Islamic scholars and thinkers make clear that only defensive jihad is legitimate, as opposed to offensive jihad. It is thus likely that IS' defensive stance aimed at attracting as much "scholarly" support as possible and to counteract potential criticisms. IS' fight was legitimate, "a noble cause" (Dābiq 9: 30) as it followed Allah's wish and the steps of Prophet Mohammad. In addition, all Muslims had the moral obligation to join the Caliphate in the defence of Islam, which ensured the group necessary support in its war against the Crusaders and other tyrants: "[E]very Muslim is intended by this war. And he is obliged to defend the religion of Allah ... this war is every Muslim's war ... it is upon him to engage himself in it in order to defend his religion" (al-Baghdadi, 26 December 2016). For al-Baghdadi to put the final nail to his argument: "[I]f he [a Muslim] disobeys, then for him is destruction, loss, and the attainment of Allah's anger and wrath" (Ibid).

In spite of the apparent simple nature of IS' identity as the defender of the *Ummah*, it seems that the relationship between the group and its *protégés* was more intricate. The analysis of its discourse reveals that IS took on the role of an ambiguous patriarchal and paternalistic figure. On the one hand, it portrayed itself as a caring and protecting father that was ready to fight for his beloved children and to secure their access to the best honour in this life and in the aftermath. As ensured by al-Adnani in early 2014: "We want nothing for you but pride and honour in this life, and salvation and happiness in the hereafter" (3 April 2014). In the same utterance, the spokesman guaranteed its audience that; "[they] will see nothing from us but mercy upon you and compassion towards you" (Ibid). As such, the group's discourse displayed reassuring and comforting words, raising the morale of the *Ummah* and its soldiers while they faced fierce attacks. Seemingly aware of its ruthless reputation, IS also asserted it was forgiving and that, as a sacred temple, it remained open to all for protection. Not only the Caliphate welcomed those who wanted to rest under its "shadow", but it also opened its doors for those you would come in repentance (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). As such, the Caliphate contrasted with "the splintering, infighting mess that is collectively referred to as the Middle East" (Dābiq 12: 49).

On the other hand, IS portrayed itself as an authority figure that gave lessons to its children and warned them when he judged that they were straying from the right path. As early as April 2013,

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi advised Muslims on the choice of their ruler: "[Y]ou have experienced dictatorship and injustice for long years so beware from replacing these years of injustice by the injustice of democracy" (8 April 2013). Listing the atrocities committed by the Iranian army in Iraq after the beginning of the civil war, al-Adnani urged the *Ummah* to "take a lesson [...] for history repeats itself" and asked: "[F]or what would all this have been for? So take a lesson" (9 September 2014). Moreover, the group insisted on the fact that the Caliphate's soldiers had made great sacrifices to defend the *Ummah*. Al-Baghdadi reminded its audience: "[W]e left our homes and families to establish [shari'a]" (19 January 2014), while al-Adnani praised the soldiers who "sacrificed everything in the path of Allah to give victory to the Religion of Allah and to assist the oppressed" (3 April 2014). The *Ummah* was reminded of the price of the victory: "[W]e would not think you to be ignorant of the great sacrifice of [the Caliphate's] sons" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). In other words, Muslims were expected to show gratitude and be worthy of those sacrifices. Doing so, IS strengthened the dependent relationship based on the feeling of personal guilt and collective shame of the Muslims, but also of complete devotion, if not submissiveness.

In IS' discourse, shame went together with guilt. On the one hand, guilt involves a feeling of responsibility, the awareness of having done something wrong; it arises from one's actions either real or imagined. On the other hand, shame is a painful feeling about how one appears to others and to oneself; it does not necessarily depend on one's actions. In other words, shame is the collective manifestation of guilt. IS convinced its Muslim audience that, centuries ago, something had gone wrong and that the Muslims themselves were the cause of their disgrace. They became victims, suffering injustices and multiple assaults around the world. They also became isolated as the whole world "plotted" against Islam. IS never clearly mentioned what led to the steady decline of Muslim power. If one reads the group's discourse between the lines, it appears that the lack of (re)action of the Muslim community resulted in the current crisis. IS apparently accused Muslims of not retaliating against the Crusaders when the latter came to invade holy lands and to erase their Islamic identity. Worst, they obeyed them, as well as their "puppets" (*damiyyah* in Arabic) rulers in the Middle Eastern region. Doing so, the *Ummah* not only lost its status, but it betrayed Allah and failed in defending Islam. This would explain why Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi compared the *Ummah* to the sons of Israel ("Bani Israil"), implying that they did not listen to Allah's warning and were subsequently cursed: "You tasted humiliation and disgrace to the extent that you grazed on it, and you strayed just as Bani Israil strayed before you" (2 November 2016). "Bani Israil" refers to chapter 2 of the Holy Qur'an and relates the story of the tribes of Israel that were cursed by God for doubting Its words. They were consequently exiled out of the holy land and went

astray in the desert for 40 years. This reference in IS' discourse can be considered a clear warning against the Muslims, who were summoned to go back on the right path and become good Muslims again. Hence, Muslims must blame themselves for their current situation. The feeling of guilt/shame was supposedly reinforced by the questions regularly asked by al-Adnani to his audience: "What do you wait for as the people have become two encampments and the heat of the war increases day by day?" (9 September 2014); "[d]o you not hear the cries of the weakened Muslims in Shām and see their condition, with the enemies having viciously [mobilized] against them?" (13 October 2015). To conclude, in IS' discourse, Muslims were guilty of the fall of the Islamic Golden Age; and they shall feel ashamed for becoming the slaves of the western nations. In other words, by violating Allah's law, they became bad Muslims. Naturally, both guilt and shame entailed a solution to undo the wrongdoing and feeling of shame. Hence, the *Ummah* was called to immediate action in order to salve their conscience and to put an end to their destructive passivity.

Another important notion in IS' discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria is that of responsibility. There was a time when Muslims were ruling the world and living in prosperity. Yet they were guilty of *allowing* this Golden Age to vanish and they lost their power and honour at the hands of the Crusaders. From that time, the natural order – that of Muslim domination – stopped and would not resume on its own. Henceforth, the *Ummah* was deemed responsible by IS. Consequently, it must re-establish the order of things, which implied the re-establishment of the Caliphate. Muslims must *make* it happen. This responsibility justified the fact that they should give their full trust and support to IS, the only actor capable of protecting them, bringing their honour back, and eventually retrieving the glory of the *Ummah*. It is interesting that IS chose to coin its discourse around the notions of guilt and responsibility, for those are absent of Islamic eschatology. Conversely, both concepts are cornerstones of Christianity and Judaism (Dein, 2013; McLane, 1905; Nagypál, 2013). Authors suggest that the discourse used in those religions is based on the feeling of guilt and responsibility, which derive from the original sin, but also from the sacrifice of his son by God in order to save the humankind. Those feelings entail the complete devotion of Christians and Jews in an endless quest for repentance and salvation. Hence, whether it was a conscious discursive strategy or not, IS distanced itself from its favoured inspiration: traditional Islam.

Following the discourse detailed above, Muslims had a double obligation: the religious obligation to fight in defence of Islam and the moral obligation to fight to recover their honour. Yet the

Ummah would not fight alone. IS and its soldiers were sent to help Muslims to gain remission for their sins and the reconciliation with their higher ruler. IS pictured itself as a "blessing" sent by Allah in order to save the Muslims and gave them a second chance – shall they be worth it and prove their devotion to the divine envoy. As enquired by al-Adnani in October 2015: "O Muslims, is it not the time to [realize] that the Khilāfah is your only salvation". The eulogy to Islamic State went together with the denigration of the *Ummah*: "[T]he Ummah is void of any stances of pride and honour except in the actions of the Mujāhidīn" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014), "[y]ou will find no hope for the weak and oppressed except through the Mujāhidīn" (Ibid), "you have no one after Allah – O Ahlus-Sunnah in [Sham] – except the [Khilafah] state to safeguard for you your religion" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). Moreover, the Caliphate's soldiers were repeatedly portrayed as unique, displaying the perfect combination of high moral values and unprecedented military might: "This is the small group striking armies and nations if the world" (al-Adnani, 21 May 2016). The group regularly acclaimed "the lions of the [Khilafah]", praising their "military might and strength" (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014) that enabled them to "have humiliated the apostates from the Turks, the Sahwat, the Kurds, and flocks of the [Nusayriyyah]" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016). IS' soldiers were honoured in each of the group's magazine for their "resilience", "determination to punish the enemies of Allah" (Dābiq 9: 32), for their "steadfastness, perseverance, and conviction" (Rumīyyah 12: 4). An additional asset lies in their behaviour towards the enemies of the *Ummah*: "[W]e are the harshest people towards the [rafida]" (al-Baghdadi, 19 January 2014), "whose hearts are devoid of any mercy towards the [nusayriyyah]" (Dābiq 2: 42). The glorification reached its paroxysm at the very end of the battle for Mosul, when al-Muhajir addressed the armies of the Caliphate in these words: "O people of chivalry, honour and esteem", "knights of martyrdom and lions of jihad", "O marks of [honor] and glory and source of rage for the immoral" (12 June 2017). Those many qualities made the Caliphate and its armies "the insurmountable obstacle and solid rock upon which their resolve would break" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016).

IS asserted that the conflict in Iraq and Syria erupted like a "trial" that would make the truth clear and condemn the perpetrators of crimes against the *Ummah* to life sentence. Altogether, the roles that IS offered to endorse were reminiscent of Prophet Mohammad's functions as a warrior, a statesman and a judge during his time in Mecca. This analogy was a strategy typical of IS discourse; the group attempted to retain a sense of continuity with the pure Islamic tradition. The Islamic nature of IS was an integral part of the group's identity. For instance, the soldiers of the Caliphate were often considered direct descendants of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad:

"Just as the prophet and his companions, the [mujahidin] of Iraq fought all the unbelievers without exception" (Dār al-Islām 7: 11), "O grandsons of Khalid and Abu 'Ubaydah, O heroes of Islam" (al-Muhajir, 12 June 2017). The last excerpt is particularly interesting as it mentions two of the most respected historical figures of Islam. Khalid, most known under the name Ibn al Walid, was a commander under Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr; he belonged to the Quraysh tribe. Abu 'Ubaydah was also a commander under Umar and one of the Ten Promised Paradise. The two were thus military figures under the command of the Rashidun Caliphates and fighting for the sake of Islam. Similarly, IS' soldiers were depicted as "the sons of Tawhīd and lions of jihad" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016), "the defenders of Allah' religion" (Dār al-Islām 4) and "fight[ing] in Allah's path and for its satisfaction" (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013). With this comparison, IS not only praised its army, but it compared its Caliphate to that of the Rightly Guided caliphs. The latter ones are considered by Sunni Muslims as model leaders who scrupulously followed the path of Prophet Muhammad, and their rule was characterised by rapid military expansion. This shows IS' wish to portray its Caliphate as an example of pure Islamic rule. Finally, IS also framed its identity with positive words aimed at further legitimising its struggle and secure support among the Muslims. The group often referred to itself as "truthful", "sincere", "right", "pure" and "upright".

To summarise IS' rhetoric, Muslims had been in the wrong for centuries, but this situation was finally coming to an end. The Caliphate had been re-established and the group would put the *Ummah* back to the right path. Muslims had given up on their Islamic nature, but they had finally been rescued by IS, which embodied the purest form of Islam and pledged to re-educate them. This strategy of guilt-tripping, denigration and victimisation of the Muslims, doubled with a displayed devotion and unconditional support for them, supposedly aimed to alienate the *Ummah*'s reasoning and ability to make any choice but following the rational model offered by IS. Muslims lost their faith in Allah and their honour, subsequently accepting their fate as oppressed. Yet Allah did not abandon them and sent Islamic State to provide the necessary religious guidance and help them claim their honour back. It would thus be *logical* to be grateful for this last chance and all Muslims should *naturally* support the Caliphate. Coming back to the metaphor of the paternalistic figure, IS – as a loving father – aimed to fix the wrongdoings of the *Ummah* and naturally expected the lesson to be learned and to receive eternal gratitude.

6.1.2 Islamic State: Alone Against All in its Fight for the Ummah

The declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014, "the first state in 'modern' times set up exclusively by the [mujahidin]" (Dābiq 1: 38), was a momentum used by IS to build a series of goals. As developed above, the main and long-term goal of IS was to "return the Ummah to its previous status and its past glory" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). The group pledged to fight "until Sharī'ah returns to all the lands of the Muslims usurped by the crusader" and the latter "pay[s] the jizyah in humiliation" (Dābiq 12: 43). It was believed that this would "cure the frustration of the believers" (al-Baghdadi, 14 June 2013). This goal has remained the primary interest of the group through time, victories and defeats. In July 2015, IS warned its enemies: "[W]ar will not lay down its burdens until Islam rules every land and region, and until the Muslims are honoured and leadership returns to them" (Dābiq 10: 42). Yet this ultimate objective required a number of preliminary steps. The first one was achieved on June 29, 2014, when IS announced the re-establishment of the Caliphate. The latter was based on the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition, making it a model of Islamic governance (Dār al-Islām 7: 11). This was yet only the first step as the group pledged it would "continue to expand and redefine the maps (al-Adnani, 3 April 2014). Furthermore, IS intended to give faith to the *Ummah*. It argued that the Caliphate was the proof that "the Ummah's unity was not beyond reach, as long as it was pursued on the basis of the Tawhīd of Allah" (Rumīyyah 8: 39). Al-Adnani also praised IS' soldiers for "complet[ing] the hope of the oppressed in all lands" (3 April 2014).

The declaration of the Caliphate could also be seen as a political and military statement directed towards the enemies of IS. The group aimed for a direct confrontation with the United States, for indeed the glory would only return to the *Ummah* when the prophetic battle against the Romans would be won. IS firmly believed that the Christian Crusaders – mainly America and its allies in Europe – would surrender and ally with IS to fight Satan and its allies at the end of the time. In this context, IS proved to be a fine strategist and realised that it could not defeat powerful countries without direct confrontation. Hence, it multiplied provocations to trigger the American engagement on the ground in Iraq and Syria. In an address broadcast in September 2014, the group's spokesman directly addressed President Obama to ask him whether he had not understood that the battle could not be decided from the air, referring to the American airstrike campaign initiated in August 2014 (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). Al-Adnani also anticipated that American forces would inevitably "return greater in number than they were before" (Ibid). In January 2016, an article published in al-Naba' entitled "Soldiers of the Cross ... on the ground"

offered an ironic reflection on the expected deployment of American troops on the Iraqi ground (al-Naba' 15: 2). A few months later, the group renewed its prediction: "The crusaders will ultimately find they cannot face the Islamic State except directly, face-to-face, or else – due to their nonstop bleeding – the crusaders will be forced to disengage from their war against the Muslims until the time decreed by Allah for al-Malhamah al-Kubrā" (Dābiq 9: 59).

Those aims and interests isolated IS from its enemies but also from its allies. The group's discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria claimed no affiliation with any warring factions. IS was alone against all. This isolation is surprising as several Sunni jihadist groups were amongst the non-state actors to struggle for power in Iraq and Syria. At the beginning of the conflict, IS was known under the name "Islamic State in Iraq" and was solely operating in the country of the two rivers. The Sunni jihadi trend in Syria was represented by *Jabhat al-Nusra*. The latter was officially merged with ISI on April 8, 2013, into one single entity "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām". The group was supposed to operate under a common command and strategy. Yet al-Jawlani, the leader of the Syrian branch, quickly rejected the merger. The move was referred to by IS as "chaos" or "fitna", and it devoted considerable media efforts to analyse the split and delegitimise its former ally. IS slammed the "defectors" for "deceiv[ing] the Ummah". On June 19, 2013, in a speech entitled "Leave them alone with their devising", al-Adnani explained that the "schism" had forced Islamic State in Iraq to expand their campaign to Syria in order to deter the "secessionist movement and heal the rift" (19 June 2013). Since then, al-Nusra had been categorised as a Sahwat faction and clashed with IS on multiple occasions.

It seems that IS became alienated from its fellows, to be the only remaining representative of true (Sunni) Islam and defender of the *Ummah*. Yet, far from being a disadvantage, the group capitalised on this status. Referring to the soldiers of IS, al-Adnani reminded the Muslims: "You will find no hope for the weak and oppressed except through the Mujāhidīn" (3 April 2014). According to the dichotomous representation of the regional and world order, the enemies of the *Ummah* and of the Islamic Caliphate all belonged to the same out-group identity and should be fought equally. IS boasted that it not only united the *Ummah* but also "the sect of kufr". The group suggested a "post-Sykes-Picot order" that would implement a new division of the people on the basis of infidelity, rather than a division based on country, race or tribe (al-Naba' 32: 3). This raises the question: Who belongs to the "sect of unbelievers" and is henceforth considered an enemy of the Caliphate? The following section attempts to answer this question, providing a typology of IS' long list of enemies.

6.2 Islamic State's Enemies – One Identity, Many Faces

IS' discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria was actors' oriented, meaning that it disproportionately focused on the opponents of IS. The quantitative analysis of IS' media outlet shows that, on average, the group devoted three times as many efforts to delegitimise its enemies than to legitimise its own actions as part of the conflict. Yet the pallet of enemies was wider in the group's discourse in non-Arabic languages, where no less than 20 names of actors involved in the conflict rank among the 100 most cited words – and 34 within the 400 most cited words. Those names account for *only* 11 references among the 100 most cited words in IS' discourse in Arabic – and 13 within the 400 most cited words (Table 7).

Table 7. Most Cited Actors in Islamic State's Discourse on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

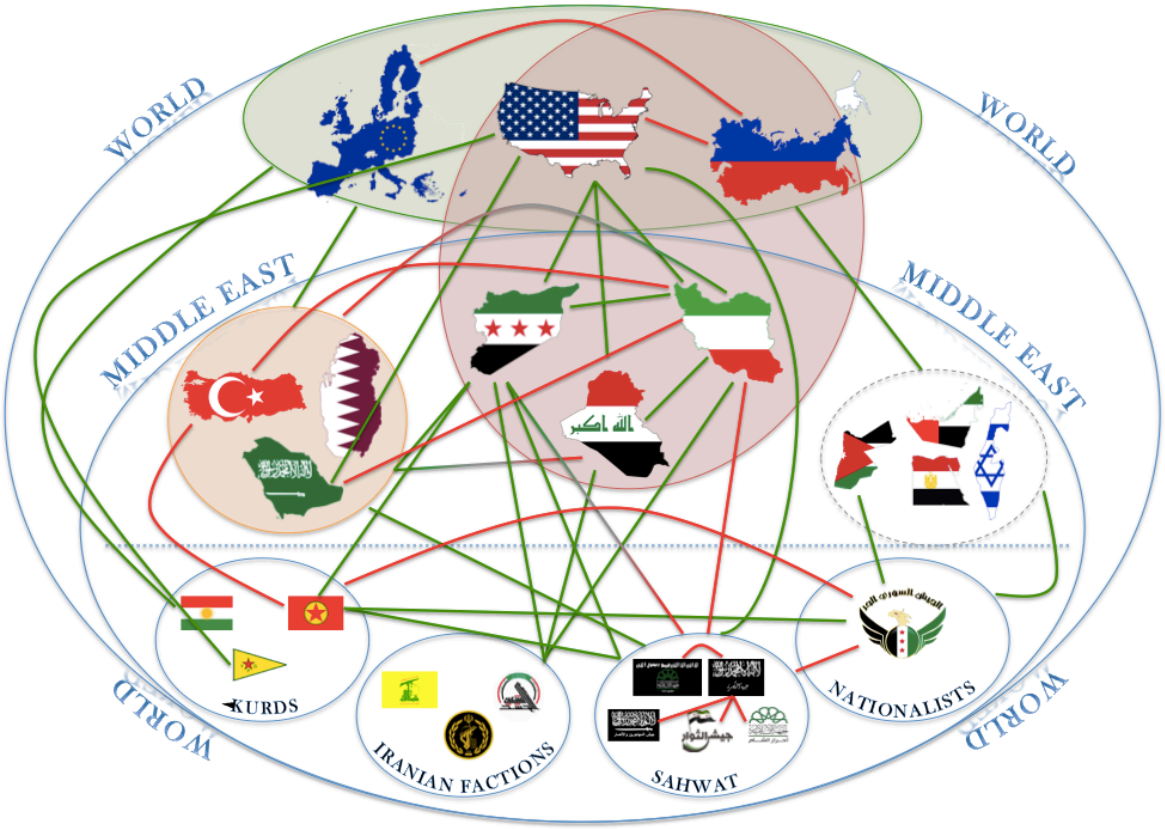
	Arabic	**Non-Arabic (English & French)**
1 – 100 most cited words	. Murtadd . Islamic State . Mujahidin . Crusaders . Rafidha/i . Russia . PKK . Khilafah . Sahwat . Militias . America	. Murtadd . Islamic State . Mujahidin . Crusaders . America . Taghut/Tawaghit . Kufr/Kafir . Turkey . Kurds . Iran . Rafidha/i . Khilafah . Nusayri . Sahwat . PKK . Russia . Militias . Safawi . Coalition . Saudi Arabia
100 – 200 most cited words		. Jawlani (al-Nusra) . Sunni . Free Syrian Army . PMF/PMU . Shia . Peshmerga
200 – 300 most cited words	. Turkey	. Mushrikin . Arabs . Jews . Ikhwan
300 – 400 most cited words	. Nusayri	. Hezbollah . Yemen . Afghanistan

Beaujouan, 2018

One might argue that the group's discourse in Arabic was more centred on Iraq and Syria and more polarised. For instance, neighbouring Middle Eastern countries were almost not mentioned. Only Turkey and its relationship with the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) factions were deemed important to explain the conflict. Moreover, the discourse in Arabic put much emphasis on the Sahwat factions, while the very appellation remained foggy and generic in English and French media outlets. On the other hand, IS' discourse in non-Arabic languages displayed tremendous efforts to show that the whole world was gathered against IS, although extremely divided and suffering shifting alliances. The conflict in Iraq and Syria was portrayed as a chessboard where virtually all regional actors – state and non-state – were playing. Hence, IS' discourse in French and English was more reflective of the complex dynamics at work in the conflict and seemed to offer a more faithful picture of the Middle Eastern order. For example, Yemen was deemed another important battlefront in IS' discourse in English and French. The group argueed that just as in Syria, two major powers – Iran and Saudi Arabia – were fighting for regional dominance. The group also argued that Iran intervened in the context of its war against Sunni Muslims. On the opposite, IS' discourse in Arabic did not mention the case of Yemen in the context of the conflict in Iraq and Syria.

In its struggle for power and legitimacy, IS used language as a tool to shape the two camps' identities – the *Ummah* and the Others – through a careful choice of words in order to create patterns of association. While the Caliphate's fight was glorified and promised victory, its enemies were dehumanised and demonised, imbued with attributes such as "evil", "arrogance", "anger", "envy", "dogs", "hyenas" and "vile". Similarly, IS' discourse regularly displayed qualifiers such as "filth", "impurities" and claimed that its role was to "clean" and "purify" the Muslim lands. Those terms were usually used against Shī'ia and Sunnis who rejected IS' rule, showing that the group was harsher on "bad Muslims" than on non-Muslims. The following sections attempt to decipher IS' perception of its enemies in the context of the conflict in Iraq and Syria. It refers only to those considered by the group as main enemies and actors of the conflict. Those actors' identity, goals and interests, and alliances are also analysed. The net of actors engaged in the conflict in Iraq and Syria, as well as their alliances – in the eyes of IS – is presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Islamic State's Mapping of the Conflict in Iraq and Syria



Beaujouan, 2018

6.2.1 International Intervention in the Conflict in Iraq and Syria

The Crusaders were undeniably pictured as IS' main enemies at the international level. If the designation mainly referred to the United States, it also encompassed European countries and Russia. Their main goal was allegedly "to wipe out Islam and the Muslims, and to turn the people back from their religion" (Rumīyyah 12: 33). For that purpose, they adopted a strategy of "dividing the region and submitting it and its people to the authority of the Magian [Rafidah] [Iranian Shi'ites]" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016). Hence, according to IS' discourse, the Crusaders all favoured the Iranian Republic; they wished to put it in power over the Middle Eastern region. This geopolitical strategy would explain that the Crusaders launched a war on Sunni Islam. This interpretation reinforced the idea that the conflict in Iraq and Syria was a religious war. The appellation "Crusaders" itself is imbued with religious connotation as it refers to those who took part in the crusades, the religious wars sanctioned by the Latin Church and aimed at recovering the Holy Land from Muslim rule between the 11th and the 13th centuries. Occasionally, the US,

Europe and Russia were also called "soldiers of the Cross" and "brethren", which refers to a name adopted by a wide range of mainly Christian fraternal groups from the 13th century onwards.

IS subdivides the Crusaders into two sub-groups: Crusaders from the West and Crusaders from the East. The first category included the United States and Europe, although it quasi-systematically designated the US. The latter's primary motive of involvement in the war in Iraq and Syria, IS claimed, was to "wage war against Islam and the Muslims" and to "break the strength of the [mujahidin]" (al-Adnani, September 2014). The US was infamous for its enmity against the *Ummah* as explained by IS' spokesman: "They watched with happiness seeing the killing, abuse, expulsion, and destruction, neither interested in, nor concerned about, the hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded, and imprisoned Muslims, and the millions displaced – including men, women and children" (al-Adnani, 9 September 2014). Moreover, IS asserted that the US would not have got involved in Syria if it was not "to protect the value of the dollar amongst other economic interests" (Dābiq 6: 61). The group specified that all those interests were covered under the alibi of "saving the world from 'terrorism and barbarity of the Islamic State'" (Ibid). Yet the group explained that the US did not adopt a strong strategy to secure its goals and western interests. First, in spite of two resounding failures in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the "Crusader masters" got involved again in the Middle East. Since they could not defeat the soldiers of the Caliphate through their proxies and aerial bombardments, they were obliged to deploy their army on the ground, in spite of the increased costs of the operation (Dābiq 12: 49). They did so even though they promised their populations that they would not get involved directly on the ground but instead would rely on regional armies and factions. In spite of billions spent on airstrikes and arming local militias, the US only showed its "powerlessness" and "weakness" in Iraq and Syria. Second, in spite of their historical conflictual relationship, IS argued that "Obama insist[ed] upon strengthening 'the Persian Crescent' and Russian influence in the region" (Dābiq 4: 40).

Referred to as "Crusaders Europe" or "the Romans" in IS' discourse, the European countries shared the US' ultimate goal to "attack the cradle of the [Khilafah]" (Rumīyyah 3: 9) and to "put the [Rafida] in power in the Middle East" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). They were also believed to bribe Saudi Arabia into a policy of secularisation that abandoned Islam and "turn[ed] all its people into disbelievers, spread immorality among them, and topple[d] anything that can be counted as being from the signs of the Sharī'ah and its people" (Ibid). Yet, as explained by the self-proclaimed caliph, "acting from a distance did not give them satisfaction so they had to get

involved directly via military participation". For him to conclude: "[T]hey are the head of every tribulation and the reason for every calamity" (Ibid).

In collaboration with its fellows, Russia's "church has declared it a holy war against the Muslims" (al-Adnani, 13 October 2015). Interestingly, the Russian Orthodox Church was dismissed by IS, and the Russians were referred to as "pagans". On the other hand, not only "the drunken brown bear" "arm[ed] the Assad regime against the Muslims of Shām" (Dābiq 12: 43), but it got directly involved in the conflict, "assaulting the lands of Shām" (al-Adnani, 13 October 2015). This happened in spite of the fact that it previously faced "its own disasters in Afghanistan and Chechnya" (Dābiq 12: 43). According to IS, Russia may have been the more heinous and violent of all the Crusaders. As it was "blinded by its bloodthirsty hubris", the red army bombed non-military targets (Ibid). Yet IS reassured its audience by asserting that the "Red Army's" intervention did not change anything, "except that the opportunity for reward from Allah is now greater" (Ibid: 47). IS' soldiers were thus encouraged to fight another enemy of the Sunnis to get closer to Allah. Russia was mainly seen as a strong ally of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. In an article published in *al-Naba'* in March 2016, IS wrote that Russia's main role was to pressure the Crusaders in order for them to accept a number of compromises that would eventually guarantee al-Assad to remain in power (al-Naba' 22: 11). According to the group, the success of the Russian strategy pushed Putin to announce the withdrawal of its troops from the Syrian field in March 2017.

If the Crusaders were the architects of the conflict against IS in Iraq and Syria, they chose to fight the battle through their proxies in the Middle East itself. Those proxies were both state and non-state actors. According to IS, they all shared a hatred of Islam – especially Sunnis – and saw the conflict as an occasion to prove their loyalty towards, and gain the favours of their "Crusader masters". For this reason, they were referred to as the "puppets of the Crusaders" (Dār al-Islām 4; Dābiq 15: 27; Rumīyyah 10: 5).

6.2.2 Regional State Actors

Although Iraq is the cradle of Islamic State, the country of the two rivers was relatively spared by IS' discursive attacks. The country was mainly blamed for its alliance with Iran, as the Iraqi regime was believed to be "backed by Iranian intelligence, military, and finances" (Dābiq 4: 40). IS went

further, arguing that Iran was the "founder" of post-2003 Iraq (Ibid). The group also pointed to the Iranian Shī'ia militias – such as Hezbollah and the Abul-Fadl al Abbas battalion – fighting to defend Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities. Furthermore, a cornerstone of IS' delegitimising discourse was Iraq's animosity against the Sunnis. The group contended that the Iraqi regime resented the Caliphate for the severe and rapid defeat the Iraqi army faced in Mosul and elsewhere. As a consequence, it sought to "inflict harm on Ahl al-Sunna [the Sunnis]" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016). One instance of this "thirst for vengeance" was described in the eleventh issue of *al-Naba'*. The newsletter narrated that the Iraqi army – helped by Iranian Shī'ia Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMU) – voluntarily opened the door of a water dam in order to drown Sunni villages in Diyala province, in the East of Baghdad (al-Naba' 11: 6). It was believed that the action was taken in retaliation for previous defeats against the Caliphate. Finally, IS insisted on Iraq's incompetence and inability to defend itself against the *mujāhidīn*, in spite of the strong and costly support of the Crusaders (Dābiq 6: 32). The country, IS argued, has neither strength nor legitimacy, it was "a disjointed jumble of regions and tribes that never recovered from the American invasion and cannot return to what it once was" (Dābiq 12: 49). As a result, the Iraqi army "had been largely superseded by the Popular [Mobilization] Units" (Dābiq 2: 48), fostering the Iranian control over the country and its populations.

IS' discourse was much more abundant about Syria. The group painted a portrait of the country with the face of its leader, Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian regime was personified under the president's attributes, and his individual background was assigned to all the country. This process was then used by IS as a tool of delegitimisation of al-Assad's regime. The group called the Syrian president "Murtādd-[Tāghut] Bachar al-Assad". *Murtādd* refers to those who rejected Islam at the time of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. Used by IS, the term denoted al-Assad's belonging to the Alawite minority, a sect that arguably belongs to the Twelver Imanate Shī'ia order, al-*Ithnā 'ashriyyah*, the largest branch of Shī'ia Islam. In IS' rhetoric, Bashar al-Assad was not a Sunni Muslim; therefore, he should be fought. In the same vein, the group attributed the adjective "Nusayrī" to the Syrian regime. Doing so, it reinforced the sectarian character of the conflict. Ibn Nusayr founded the Alawite sect in the 9th century, but the name came to be used as a derogative word for Shī'ia. Here again, IS pointed to the religious background of Bashar al-Assad. The group's religious argument was based on the two fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah's, a 14th Century Islamic Scholar, who wrote: "[Nusayriyyah] are [kuffār] [disbelievers] according to the agreement of the Muslims" (Dābiq 10: 8) [...] "There is no doubt that jihad against these people and the

implementation of the [hudūd] [punishments] upon them [are] from the greatest acts of obedience and obligations" (Dābiq 10: 9). Finally, al-Assad was described as a "*tāghūt*", which means "tyrant" in Arabic. In an article featured in *Dābiq*, the American journalist and captive of IS John Cantlie wrote: "There was never any legitimacy to his [Bashar al-Assad's] tyrannical rule" (Dābiq 8: 65). It seems that IS justified its use of the adjective "*tāghūt*" by Bashar al-Assad's "despotic government" and enmity against Muslim populations. Certainly, IS accused the Syrian president of perpetrating genocide against Muslims via "systematic massacres, chemical wars, rapes, as well as famines caused by sieges" (Dābiq 3: 35). In the ninth issue of *Dābiq*, the group explained: "Every time the Islamic State advances and inflicts severe losses on the Nusayrī army and militias, in revenge, the regime conducts random airstrikes on places where Muslims live" (Dābiq 9: 19). The discourse was similar in the French-language *Dār al-Islām* magazine where a paper stated: "The army of Bashar (May [Allâh] exterminate them) bombed 12 times the city of Raqqah, targeting ordinary Muslims with the sole goal to inflict a maximum of damages" (Dār al-Islām 6: 41). In conclusion, for IS "[h]is [al-Assad] evil is so clear-cut it does not require a trial to prove his apostasy and crimes" (Dābiq 12: 13).

In addition to al-Assad's religious background, IS repeatedly referred to his political identity and his belonging to the Ba'ath party. The Caliphate accused the "[Baathist] [Nusayriyyah]" of having fought the mujāhidīn in Iraq and elsewhere. An issue of *Dābiq* emphasised the role of the Syrian Ba'ath Party in the US' rendition programme mounted after the 9/11 attacks (Ibid: 20; 49). It continued: "Many mujāhidīn [were] sent to Syria only to be tortured at the hands of the [Baathist] [Nusayriyyah] on behalf of the Americans" (Ibid). IS' delegitimisation of Bashar al-Assad could be summed up by the following sentence: "Bashar al-Assad is a [murtadd] tāghūt belonging to the apostate Nusayrī sect and apostate [Baath] party; it is an obligation to kill him even if he were never to have killed a single Muslim" (Ibid: 13). Notably, IS' discourse on Syria was much more verbally violent than the group's discourse towards other of its enemies. This violence reached its peak in the fourth issue of Dār al-Islām that referred to the "impure Nusayrī army", "those impurities are only good at bombing with explosive barrels (Dār al-Islām 4: 34).

Finally, the Syrian government was accused of trying to alienate the local populations from IS. It did so by bombing the areas controlled by the group. The bombardments forced the population to leave and enter what the Syrian regime called "reconciliation areas", a phrasing rejected by IS. The latter claimed that this strategy was propaganda aimed at portraying areas controlled by the Caliphate as destroyed (Dābiq 9: 72). The group claimed that the Syrian government used a

similar strategy as the Iraqi one, attacking the local populations in order to make Sunnis pay the price for IS' advances in Syria. Yet those were described as "hopeless attempts" to discourage IS. Instead, this approach was yet another evidence of the Syrian regime's "military bankruptcy" (Ibid) and "inability to fight the jihadists on the ground" (al-Naba' 2: 9). To conclude: "Assad is pretty much finished, with the crumbling ruins of his despotic government now only controlling one-quarter of Syria" (Dābiq 12: 49). IS' discursive strategy regarding Syria was quite similar to that adopted against Iraq. Both governments were portrayed as illegitimate, weak and fundamentally heinous towards the Sunnis. Since they could not represent and protect their people, IS stood up as the natural bulwark and substitute to assume power over those populations.

Iran was the second most cited actor across IS' discourse in three languages – 8,144 frequencies across segments directly related on the conflict in Iraq and Syria – although the discourse in non-Arabic language gave it more importance. IS' discourse referred to Iran as "[Safawi] 'faqih'" only twice. Yet the reference suggested a complex narrative. First, Iran was believed to be trying to revive the "Safawi Empire", the Safavid dynasty that ruled over modern Iran after the 7th-century Muslim conquest. This empire, IS argued, had a long history of enmity towards Sunni Muslims. Certainly, the Safavid dynasty was known for establishing the Twelver school of Shī'ia Islam as the official religion of the empire. IS contended that the first ruler of the "Safawi Empire" – Sheikh Safi al-Din Abolfath Ishaq Ardabili – "was the most anti-[Sunnī] ruler to come into power since the fall of the Ismā'īlī 'Ubaydī state based in Egypt" (Dābiq 11: 52). Ever since all his successors have allegedly tried to change the religious demography of several Arab and non-Arab countries in order to impose Shī'ia Islam dominance. In modern times, Iran fostered this strategy by taking much of the power in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. For IS to conclude: "Suddenly the '[Shia'] Crescent' was growing from a crescent into a solar eclipse, ultimately threatening Islam everywhere" (Dābiq 11: 52; Dābiq 12: 46; Dār al-Islām 7: 28). Iran was believed to advance its strategy on the ground through Shī'ia militias. The latter ones were notably fighting against IS in Iraq and Syria, especially Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation Units), Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Interestingly, those Iranian Shī'ia militias were not targeted by a strong, content-rich, discursive offensive from IS. They were mainly mentioned in statistical reports of the military casualties inflicted by IS to its enemies. This might be explained by the fact that IS was largely defeated at the hand of those militias. Those defeats did not fit IS' strategy to frame its military deeds in terms of gains.

Second, IS used the "*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*" doctrine as the main vehicle to delegitimise Iran's religious leadership (especially in *Rumīyyah* 10 and 11). "*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*" advocates a guardianship-based political system, which relies upon a just and capable jurist (faqīh) to assume the leadership of the government in the absence of the infallible Imam, Mahdi. The current Iranian political system is based on this doctrine. According to IS, the Iranian tyrants exercised their authority as deputies of the Mahdi (Rumīyyah 10: 26). The emphasis on Iran and the discursive efforts to delegitimise it fitted into a larger narrative which IS coined to express the crisis of the *Ummah*. This crisis should be understood not only as a struggle for power (between Muslim and non-Muslim and between Sunni and Shi'a) but also as a struggle over identity. Within this context, Iran – as the religious and political leader of Shī'ia Islam – was considered a threat, and thus a direct and geographically close enemy of Islamic state.

Finally, IS depicted Iran as a rejectionist, *Rāfidhī* (plural of *Rāfidha*), sacrilegious and Magian state. *Rāfidhī* is a derogatory term that directly refers to the Shī'ia, those who rejected to recognise the Rightly-Guided caliphs as legitimate successors of Prophet Muhammad and hold Ali to be the first successor. "Magian" is a derivative of "Magi" which denotes the followers of Zoroastrianism, the main religion of the Sassanian Empire that included modern Iran. The religious nature of Iran would noticeably be the main proof of its enmity towards the *Ummah*, as explained by al-Adnani: "The polytheist [Rāfiḍah] are the most evil to tread upon this earth, more evil than the Jews and the Crusaders" (3 April 2014). The spokesman also warned its Sunni audience not to fall for Iran's claim to defend them and secure their areas (al-Adnani, 12 March 2015). In fact, Iranians "[would] never show mercy towards Ahl as-Sunna" for indeed, "they believe that killing the Sunni draws them closer to their false 'gods'" (al-Adnani, 23 June 2015). To conclude, IS delegitimised the Iranian regime, painting the regional picture with the brush of sectarianism. The group tried to convince its audience that the Iranian regime was illegitimate from both a religious and political perspective. At the regional level, Iran was depicted as the major actor that played a devil's game by using Syria, Iraq, and other allies and puppet governments to realise its grand scheme of achieving a "Shī'ia Crescent". At the religious level, Iran was considered to be worse than the Jews and the Christians for that it used and deceived Islam in an attempt to destroy it from within.

An article published in the ninth issue of *Dābiq* deciphered the goals and affiliations of the many actors involved in the conflict in Iraq and Syria. While Iran, Iraq and Syria were without doubts deemed the most important regional players, IS also cited less crucial regional enemies. This was the case of the "triad of apostasy" formed of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Dābiq 9: 58). IS blamed those actors for funnelling aid to rebel factions who declared war on the Caliphate (Ibid; al-Naba' 17:5). The three countries are also believed to be involved in other major conflicts against the Sunnis in the Middle Eastern region, especially in Yemen. Turkey faced the strongest discursive offensive. Turks were qualified by IS as "amputated hyenas" (Rumīyyah 3: 6) and "the brothers of Shaytan (Satan), role models for the [murtadeen] (apostates), and allies of the atheists" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). It seems that IS mainly targeted the "[Ikhwani] Turks" for their relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, or as designated by the Caliphate "[Murtad] brotherhood". The organisation was not considered Islamic; rather IS claimed it "emerged as a poisoned spearhead" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). Furthermore, Turkey was presented as a "firm, military arm of the Crusader coalition against Islam and its people", "the labouring agents of the Crusaders" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). Finally, IS slammed the "secular, apostate state of Turkey" for attempting to keep its war on the Islamic state "'under wraps', hiding behind the [murtadd] factions" (Rumīyyah 3: 2). Doing so, President Erdogan was "soiling his hands with the blood of the Muslims" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016). Yet IS believed that the Turkish leader's main goal in Syria was not to attack Sunnis but to "exterminate the apostate PKK and to prevent them from shaking his transient throne" (Rumīyyah 5: 4; al-Naba' 73: 8). Indeed, IS analysed that Turkey's government was "brittle" (Rumīyyah 3: 3) and that "the expansionist agenda of the PKK threaten[ed] the stability of the region and increase[d] the fears of the apostate government of [taghut] Erdogan" (Dār al-Islām 7: 27). According to IS, the Turkish strategy was behind the agreement between Ankara and Washington for further cooperation in the Syrian city of Manbij, held by the Syrian Kurdish factions which Erdogan portrayed as the terrorist offshoot of the PKK (al-Naba' 38: 8).

The same article published in the ninth issue of Dābiq mentioned other regional actors, although their role and interests in the conflict in Iraq and Syria were not deemed major by IS. This was the case of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Jordan. The latter was especially criticised for hosting training camps for the Free Syrian Army and for its strong relationship with the southern front of the FSA in Daraa (Dābiq 12: 44 and 45). More importantly, IS emphasised the confusion of those three actors, who supported the Russian intervention in Syria, while being "hooked on American aid" (Ibid). As for Israel, it was conspicuous by its absence from IS'

conception of the regional chessboard. IS only mentioned the "Jewish state" to denounce its rapprochement with Iran through the Russian intervention in Syria, and its direct – also discrete – involvement on the Levantine battlefield (al-Naba' 31: 3). This quasi-absence echoed the discretion of the Israeli intervention in the conflict in Syria and Iraq since 2011.

6.2.3 Regional Non-State Actors

Although their role was not given the same importance as that of state actors in the Middle Eastern region, non-state actors were given a central place in IS' discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria. This was especially the case of the Sahwat; the reference ranks 17 among the 100 most cited words in IS' discourse in Arabic. The term originally refers to the tribal Awakening Councils in Anbar, south Iraq, that rose up against al-Qaeda during the 2007 US troop surge. The Sunni groups collaborated with American forces and eventually reclaimed their areas form the jihadi organisation. The term gained a pejorative connotation among jihadi circles. IS claimed that the Sahwat were used by the Americans to play Sunnis off against each other; only to be betrayed three years later when the US handed over the power to a Shī'ia government that marginalised the Sunnis (Dābiq 9: 57). IS' discourse did not clearly define "Sahwat"; nor did it list the groups to which the appellation applied. It appears that the group used the term in a rather generic way, referring to Sunni rebel factions fighting the Caliphate with the financial help from the Crusaders and other regional state actors. Interestingly, jihadi groups that pre-existed the launch of the Sahwat in 2014 were also assimilated, in a clear attempt to delegitimise them.

In a broader approach, IS put all opposition factions – secularist and Islamic – under the same "rebels" banner. The reason for this move was that all supposedly shared the same enmity against the Islamic state and, by extension, against the *Ummah*. Moreover, all were believed to share the same mission, "the establishment of a nationalist, democratic tāghūt" (Dābiq 12: 15). This common aim was demonstrated by the several "declarations of nationalism and democracy" signed by the opposition factions, including the Sunni Sahwat and those allied to al-Qaeda (Dābiq 12: 11-16). This was especially the case of the members of the Syrian National Coalition, who signed no less than three declarations between mid-September 2015 and the beginning of October 2015. They were imitated by another coalition of rebel factions, *Jaysh al-Fatah*. More negotiations followed, this time directly between Bashar al-Assad and the Sahwat under the supervision of Russia at the beginning of 2016 (al-Naba' 22: 11). According to IS, such

declarations were proof that those factions favoured tyrannical rule over Islamic rule and the man-made law over *Sharī'ah* law. Those declarations also attested that rebel factions were ready to bargain their own principles in order to secure the military aid of the Crusaders, gain air cover in their fight against IS and secure international political support (Dābiq 12: 14).

An article published in the eighth issue of *Dābiq* offered a typography of the rebel factions in Syria before and after the creation of the Sahwat in 2014 in the context of the conflict (Dābiq 8: 52-56). Before the launch of the Sahwat, IS argued, Syrian rebels were divided into four groups: Islamic factions with an international agenda (IS-like groups), "Islamic" factions with a national agenda (such as Jawlani Front, *Jaysh al-Islām* and *Ahrār al-Shām*), nationalist factions with an "Islamic" agenda and secularists with a national agenda (Free Syrian Army and affiliates, Supreme Military Council). Interestingly, IS did not put much effort into delegitimising secularist actors, presumably because of their great difference with the Caliphate, both in terms of identity and goals; and because of their inability to become serious adversaries on the battlefield (al-Naba' 38: 5). The Caliphate mainly referred to their level of corruption, claiming that they were "[m]ilitias of unprincipled mercenaries [...] not difficult to change with cash and cigarettes" (Dābiq 12: 44). IS also questioned their objectives and opposition to Bashar al-Assad. On the one hand, the group pointed to the fact that many FSA leaders were former Ba'athist officers. Moreover, it alleged that secularist factions cared more about the money they could get from the international and regional actors than about the future of Syria such as regime change (Ibid).

The two "Islamic nationalist" categories were likewise targeted by IS, that attacked their ideology. The group claimed that those factions were "infected" with erroneous Islamic ideologies, notably with ideas fostered by Salafist scholar Muhammad Surur, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sufism (Dābiq 8: 53). Furthermore, those "jihad claimants" were believed to wage war against the Caliphate in collaboration with the secularist factions, henceforth, sharing goals and interest with non-Islamic fighters. IS took the argument further, claiming that Islamic factions' leaders actually belonged to the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian Military Council. Finally, Islamic factions were accused of being funded by Arab regimes such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which were supposedly ruled by tyrants applying democratic principles and enforcing the nationalist borders drawn by the Crusaders. Hence, IS deemed those factions non-Islamic and systematically framed the word "Islamic" with quotation marks to show its disapproval. Those factions were declared *kufr*; as they refused to apply the *Sharī'ah* and they fought IS. The latter also pointed out the poor religious practices of their soldiers. Before the launch of the Sunni Sahwat, IS argue that its

presence on the battlefield (under *Jabhat al-Nusra* and then Islamic State in Iraq) triggered a process of "superficial [Islamization]" (Dābiq 12: 33). As explained by the group, the polarisation of the world into two camps forced the polarisation of the political and religious spectrum in Syria. Secularists and nationalist factions thus feigned an Islamic tone, changing their discourse, banners and names, to appeal to a larger audience and attract wider local support. Only with the launch of the Sahwat in 2014, a process of de-Islamisation began.

Regarding Jihadi factions, their behaviour towards the Sahwat justified their excommunication from the *Ummah*. First, "jihad claimants" allied with Sahwat against IS. However, as explained in *Dābiq* "from the nullifiers of Islam was 'backing and aiding the mushrikīn against the Muslims'" (Dābiq 11: 7). In other words, any actor that cooperated with enemies of the Muslims becomes in turn an enemy of the Muslims. As a consequence, those jihadi factions should be fought. The second argument given by IS opens the way to a broader reflection on the group's ideology; "the excuse of ignorance was the shield the jihad claimants would use to defend the hypocritical factions whose apostasy had become apparent" (Dābiq 8: 55). Said differently, they "exaggerated the concept of excuse due to ignorance" (Ibid: 56). Those two excerpts entail two conclusions: Ignorance should not be an excuse for apostasy, and the one who excuses an unbeliever on the basis of ignorance becomes guilty of unbelief. As such, it seems that IS endorsed the doctrine known as "*Takfīr al-'adhīr*", or the "excommunication of the excuser". It is interesting because IS' official stance was not to immediately excommunicate the one who excuses unbelief on the basis of ignorance. The rationale was that this most radical interpretation would lead to excommunication in infinite regress. Actually, it would lead to excommunicate al-Baghdadi himself. The latter did not excommunicate al-Zawahiri who may be considered an unbeliever as he refused to excommunicate Shī'ia Muslims. Hence, it seems that the previously cited excerpts might reflect the internal ideological divide within IS. It is all the more curious that IS led a severe campaign of repression against its most radical elements in 2015, the same year the article was published (Middle East Monitor, 2015).

When they joined the Syrian battlefield in 2014, the Sahwat were classified by IS into two categories according to their ideological stance: "nationalist *Ikhwānī*-oriented resistance factions" (such as *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn*, the *Shāmiyyah* Front and *Faylaq al-Shām* in Syria; and such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades, *Jaysh al-Rāshidīn* and *Jaysh al-Muslimīn fil-'Irāq* in Iraq) and "nationalist Sururi-oriented 'jihadi' factions" (such as *Ahrār ash-Shām*, *Jaysh al-Islām* and the Jawlani front in Syria; and such as the Islamic Army in Iraq, *Jaysh al-Mujāhidīn* and the *Jaysh*

Ansār as-Sunna in Iraq) (Dābiq 11: 53). Such a classification was, *per se*, used by IS to attack the ideology of the Sahwat. As for the "jihad claimants", the Sahwat adhered to ideas developed by two ideologues rejected by the Caliphate: Sururi and the Muslim Brotherhood. IS went further to describe a process of "ikhwānisation of 'Jihad'" (Dābiq 11: 53). This assimilation between the Sahwat and the *Ikhwān* (Arabic for Muslim Brotherhood) entailed the rejection of their Islamic nature. The Muslim Brotherhood were fiercely attacked in IS' discourse. The latter described the organisation as "a secularist party with an 'Islamic' cloak" (Dābiq 14: 43) that allied with the Crusaders and Arab tyrants and chose to enter the political process, therefore, competing with Allah's rule. This politicisation of Sunni rebel groups was deemed responsible for the successive formation, merger and break up of various Sahwat factions in Iraq and Syria (Dābiq 11: 53).

Another motive for delegitimisation was the poor religious morale of the Sunni Sahwat that were consequently named "*murtāddīn*" (apostates, plural of *murtādd*). According to the Islamic tradition, the term refers to the Muslims who rebelled and refused to pay *zakat* to the Caliph Abu Bakr during the Ridda wars (632-633 CE). Similarly, IS' discourse mentioned the "Sahwat factions of [riddah]" (Dābiq 9: 28). As for jihadi factions, they were labelled *kufr* for favouring the men-made laws over the law of God. Moreover, IS argued that Sunni rebels made "irjā claim", meaning that they delayed the deed (*amal*) and dissociate it from belief (*'imān*). In other words, believing in Islam for them would be enough to claim Islamic nature; yet they did not follow Islamic principles. In fact, the Sahwat would have given up on their Islamic values and goals to replace them with corruption and addiction to "tāghūt aid" (Dābiq 9: 59). Since they pretended to be Sunni but effectively rejected Islam, the Sahwat were considered to be "hypocrites and deviant innovators", "deviant factions" (Dābiq 7: 38), "factions of apostasy and treachery", "factions of disgrace" (al-Adnani, 13 October 2015). IS' discursive offensive peaked in the complete dehumanisation of the Sahwat, qualifying them of "the scum of men" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016).

Finally, the Sahwat were blamed for their alliance with nation-states, especially the "Crusaders", in their fight against IS: "All of them are shields of the Cross, defenders of the [Nusayriyyah]" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017), "serving as the crusaders' eyes on the ground" (Dābiq 9: 28). In addition, according to IS, their treacherous nature appeared in the light of their shifting loyalty. The group underlined that, after forging a truce with the PKK in Aleppo, they used the same Kurdish group as an enemy to fight along with the Turkish forces (Dābiq 11: 9). As several rebel factions, the Sahwat were also slammed for negotiating with the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. This

explains why IS talked about the "de-[Islamization]" of the Syrian battlefield after the launch of the Sahwat; the latter had their loyalty towards the Arab and Turkish tyrants (Dābiq 12: 12). Allying with multiple enemies of the Sunnis, the Sahwat deceived the *Ummah*: "[T]he Sahwat of cuckoldry, lowliness, and treachery have perpetrated of the massacre of Ahlus-Sunnah" (al-Muhajir, 4 April 2017). Thus, the Sahwat were a reason why the *Ummah* faced hardship and distress (Ibid). Yet, in spite of their enmity against the Muslims and the support they received from the Crusaders, the Sahwat' inability on the ground forced the Crusaders to find other allies and to fully relying on airstrikes (Dābiq 4: 42).

An interesting aspect of IS' discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria is that the group not only delegitimised the Sahwat and jihadi factions, but it also developed a strong religious rhetoric in order to differentiate itself from those rebel groups. Undeniably, they were the closest to IS in terms of identity and goals, thus threatening the Caliphate's legitimacy as the sole and "true" protector of the Sunni *Ummah*. Moreover, this focus on the Sahwat factions might be the proof of IS' fear to alienate the Sunni population in Iraq and in Syria, and to be driven out of those two theatres of operation by the local populations as it was the case in Iraq in 2007. One analogy chosen by IS to differentiate itself from the Sahwat is particularly noteworthy. In the eighth issue of *Dābiq*, the group explained that associating the Caliphate with the Sahwat would equate to say that "the Iman (belief) of 'Abdullah Ibn Ubay (Ibn Salul) and that of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq are equal" (Dābiq 8: 55). Abu Bakr was a companion and commander of Prophet Muhammad and succeeded him as the Caliph when the Prophet died. This is also the name chosen by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, IS' leader. On the other hand, Ibn Salul was an Arab who converted to Islam. Yet the sincerity of his conversion was disputed and he became infamous for his numerous conflicts with Prophet Mohammad. In other words, by associating the Sahwat Sunni factions in Syria to Ibn Salul, IS made it explicit that the Sahwat displayed false Islamic claims. IS further explained that debating on Ibn Salul's sincerity would be absurd, as he exposed "clear-cut traits of hypocrisy" all his life. Worst, one could not imagine that Ibn Salul himself would have to determine whether Abu Bakr, one of the most respected figures of Islam after Prophet Muhammad, had committed any injustice against Ibn Salul. In another analogy, IS compared the conflict between the Caliphate and the Sahwat with the wars of apostasy, or Ridda wars, between Abu Bakr and rebel Arabian tribes. The latter, while affirming that they had converted, refused to subsume to the caliph's authority. Following those parallels, IS' discourse clearly delegitimises the Sahwat while assertinf its Islamic credential and legitimacy. The Sahwat were compared to "false" Muslims,

who should henceforth be banned from the *Ummah* and fought just as the Crusaders with whom they collaborate.

A striking and unusual feature of IS' discourse towards the Sahwat factions and other jihadi groups was its inconsistency across time. This rare – if not only – case of discursive variation might possibly reveal IS' feet of clay. While the group was at the peak of its strength and multiplied conquests in Iraq and Syria, al-Adnani called for unity among Muslims in order to fight its greater regional enemies: "Can you not see that we accept the repentance of your sons, even if they killed from us thousands and thousands? Can you not see that we do not turn them away nor ask them for justice, except but to drop their weapons from us, and to restrain from supporting the [Rāfiḍah] and [Ṭawāghīt] and to come back to Allah's Religion?" (3 April 2014). From 2015 though, IS adopted a strategy of steady verbal assaults aimed at delegitimising rebel warring groups in Syria. In June 2015, al-Adnani accused the "apostate" Sahwat of "treason and betrayal" (23 June 2015) while in December 2016, al-Muhajir referred to them as "anti-IS Sunni forces" (5 December 2016). In February 2017, the sixth issue of *Rumīyyah* slammed those groups for their peace agreement with the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Overturning the group's discursive offensive, in this last speech of August 26, 2018, al-Baghdadi evoked his desire to put an end to those Sunni fratricide quarrels. The self-declared caliph called the Syrian Sunni factions to pledge allegiance to him and join his group. It mirrored the strategy employed at the very beginning of the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict. This most recent call to gather under one command intervened while IS' controlled area had considerably shrunk and the caliph himself was thought to be dead. Clearly, the group could not afford to sustain multiple frontlines and must remedy considerable human and material losses. This demonstrated that IS was sensitive to the urgency to regroup in order to keep the insurgency going.

Besides the rebel groups aforementioned, IS used the general term "Kurds" to refer to important regional players in the conflict in Iraq and Syria. As other non-state actors, they were categorised as "proxies" of the Crusaders in the war against the Islamic state. Al-Muhajir stated: "[T]hey are nothing but a spear which the Crusaders have sharpened against anyone who wants to return the *Ummah* to its previous status and its past glory" (4 April 2017). IS' discourse mainly referred to the Iraqi Peshmerga and of the PKK. Both groups were delegitimised through their connections to the Iraqi Shī'ia and Syrian Alawite regimes. Interestingly, the Syrian People's Protection Units (YPG) were only rarely mentioned by IS. One might hypothesise that IS did not differentiate

between the PKK and the YPG, in a similar way that Turkey considers both groups as Kurdish rebel factions. Moreover, IS questioned their religiosity, referring to the Kurds in general as "atheists". While the group recognised that the historical Peshmerga – who fought against the nationalistic Arab regime of Saddam Hussein – were respected warriors, it criticised the latest generation of Kurdish fighters. IS claimed that they were "fainthearted mercenaries void of any creed who only wait for their meagre wages" (Dābiq 4: 41). In other words, they did not fight for their ideology – the Kurdish identity and independence from Iraq – but had become a professional army that only fought because it was paid for it. Yet, in spite of their expertise, the Peshmerga allegedly remained unable to "effectively wage war on the [Khilafah]" and had a "largely inept role on the frontlines against the mujāhidīn" (Dābiq 10: 30 and 33). IS claimed that the Iraqi Kurds had clear goals in the conflict in Iraq and Syria; they were believed to fight against IS in order to please the Crusaders and secure the latter's support regarding the Kurdish claim for independence from Iraq (Ibid).

As for the "communist PKK", IS used their ideology as a tool of delegitimisation (Dābiq 7: 38). The Caliphate claimed that they were nothing more than a "Kurdish Shabbīhah" (Dābiq 9: 57; Dābiq 10: 34). "*Shabbīhah*" refers to Alawite groups of armed militias in support of the Ba'ath party. In IS' discourse, the PKK was thus associated with the Alawite sect and the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. In spite of this much-emphasised alliance, IS insisted on the "Machiavellian" nature of the PKK (Dābiq 10: 34). After initially supporting Bashar al-Assad, the group formed alliances and signed a truce with the Syrian leader's enemies, the Free Syrian Army and Islamic factions. The PKK eventually resumed its cooperation with the Syrian regime (Ibid). As a result of those shifting alliances, the Turkish Kurds were not considered loyal and truthful. Their evil nature also stemmed from their goal to operate a demographic change in the Middle Eastern region, replacing the Sunni majority with the Kurdish minority (Dābiq 12: 44). To that end, "the PKK demolished entire villages, destroyed entire neighbourhoods of homes, and displaced entire communities" (Ibid). The Kurdish group was thus pictured as a real threat for the *Ummah*, although IS followed its usual discursive strategy and outlined the Kurdish "obvious incompetence" (Dābiq 10: 31).

6.3.4 Shifting Alliances: "You think they are together ..."

According to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, his group faced a "collusion of enemies" in Iraq and Syria. All the enemies of IS and of the Muslims gathered in an "evil plot" (Dār al-Islām 5: 6) in order to wage war on Islam. An article published in the eleventh issue of *Dābiq* compared the conflict in Iraq and Syria to the Battle of the Trenches or the battle of *Ahzāb*. The latter took place in 627 and opposed Muslims, led by Prophet Muhammad, to the Confederates, a gathering of Jewish, Arab nomad tribes and the Quraysh of Mecca who rejected Prophet Muhammad's leadership. The situation in Iraq and Syria was apparently similar in that IS faced "Jewish, pagans, and hypocrite parties" (Dābiq 11: 46). As illustrated in previous developments, enemies were referred to in religious terms or as competing religious sects, reinforcing the sectarianisation of the war; together they formed "the coalition of kufr". IS mainly referred to "the enemies of Allah – the Jews, Christians, atheists, [Rafida] [...], apostates, and all the nations of disbelief" (al-Baghdadi, 2 November 2016). It was believed that their inherent enmity towards the Muslims was the primary reason of their holy war, as "[s]eeing the Muslims living in honour and security therein deprived them of sleep" (Ibid). As a result, all those actors, as different they may be, were allied in the war against Islam and all had the same slogan: "The eradication of Islam and its people" (al-Muhajir, 5 December 2016).

The grand design of the conflict in Iraq and Syria, with all the actors and alliances it involved, was explained at great length and in considerable detail in two issues of *Dābiq*, published in August and November 2015. Interestingly, this period corresponds to a major military escalation in the conflict: France ramped up its airstrikes against IS in Syria and deployed its Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier in the eastern Mediterranean; British and German parliaments voted to conduct airstrikes against IS in Syria; and Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud announced that 34 countries would join together in the fight against Muslim extremism in the region. At the same time, IS experienced great losses as Baiji refinery, Sinjar (for the second time), Tishrin Dam and Ramadi were seized from the Caliphate. On the political front, on July 14, 2015, Iran agreed to long-term limits of its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, suggesting a historic *rapprochement* between the Islamic Republic and the United States. Finally, in December 2015, Syrian opposition politicians and rebels issued a statement of principles to guide peace talks with the Syrian government. This was thus a time where alliances were reshuffled and more actors entered the conflict.

The three main alliances presented in the aforementioned magazine articles of *Dābiq* are the Crusaders Coalition, the Sahwat Coalitions and the Front Stage Cooperation (Dābiq 11: 46-54). The Crusaders Coalition is quite straightforward; it gathered the United States, European countries and Russia. According to IS, they were all allied to the Jews against IS and had been deploying their armies against Sunnis worldwide for long years. The Coalition was launched in 2001 in Afghanistan with "Operation Enduring Freedom", before expanding to several regions such as "the Horn of Africa, the Trans Sahara, and the Caucasus" (Dābiq 11: 6 and 47). It was reinforced after a second major campaign in Iraq in 2003, which was followed by the most recent battle against the Islamic state in 2014 in Iraq and Syria. No less than 70 countries worldwide were part of this global alliance. Yet, as noted by IS, "[n]one of these various campaigns were successful in preventing the revival of the Khilāfah" (Dābiq 11: 47). As for what IS termed the "Sahwat Coalitions", it actually gathered a plethora of rebel groups. The Caliphate analysed that, in Iraq, the jihadi factions formed the Jihad and Reform Front, while the resistance factions formed the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance and the Jihad and Change Front. Other jihadi and resistance factions merged into the Political Council for the Iraqi Resistance. In Syria, the Sahwat formed two main alliances; Islamic Front and *Jaysh al-Fatah*. In spite of their divergent nature and long-term objectives, IS argued that those numerous coalitions shared the immediate goal to defeat the Caliphate. To that end, they "allied to one another – thought, evaluated, plotted, collaborated amongst each other, and all of them participated in the concocted treachery" (Dābiq 10: 51). An example of this marriage of convenience was the cooperation between Sunni Sahwat faction, the secularist FSA, the Syria Revolutionaries Front, and the "Marxist" PKK (Dābiq 8: 8).

Yet the most interesting insight on IS' view of the Iraqi-Syrian field related to the so-called "Front Stage Cooperation". This coalition gathered the United States and Iran, together with Syria and Russia (Dābiq 11: 48). The Caliphate also referred to the "Crusader-Safawī-[Nuṣayrī] coalition" (al-Naba' 13: 15; Dābiq 9: 19). The group argued that those actors had "mutual kāfir interests" and shared strong enmity towards the Caliphate (Dābiq 11: 20).

The cooperation between the US and Iran was believed to be the cornerstone of this alliance. According to IS, it was initiated within the framework of the United Nations' "Six Plus Two Group on Afghanistan" between 1997 and 2001. Then, the Geneva Contact Group "entailed Iran providing intelligence to the crusaders [...] and arresting mujāhidīn who attempted to cross the Iranian border on their way to Iraqi Kurdistan or other destinations" (Dābiq 11: 48). This

led, IS argued, to the creation of the "apostate puppet Afghan regime" (Ibid). In 2003, Iran and the United States allegedly cooperated again, this time "mainly through the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office", which resulted in "the formation of the Safawī regime of Iraq" (Ibid). The Caliphate accused this newly-created Iraqi regime of being "a puppet of Iran". Finally, both actors engaged in the fight against IS. It thus appeared that Iran and the US were faking their mutual hostility to better cooperate through third parties such as "the Safawi Iraqi regime" (Dābiq 11: 49). The teamwork was purportedly topped by the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" nuclear agreement. Once again, IS claimed that the United States pretended to oppose the nuclear programme, since the latter "would probably only be used against the [Sunnah] in defence of the Jews who will follow the 'Mahdī' of the [Rāfidah]" (Dābiq 12: 46; Dār al-Islām 7: 28). Finally, the Caliphate emphasised the regional consequences of the American strategy in the context of the conflict in Iraq and Syria: "[T]heir policy of backing the Safawī regime in Iraq and negotiating with the Safawī leadership in Iran gave the [Rāfidah] the strength and confidence to mobilise internationally. The [Rāfidah] quickly took parts of Yemen" (Dābiq 9: 58). This tactic fitted IS' narrative of a regional sectarian war between the Sunni Muslims and the Shī'ia Muslims. Furthermore, this alliance eventually discredited the Iranian Republic. Since the 1979 revolution, the legitimacy of the Iranian regime has rested on an anti-Israeli and anti-American narrative and on the ideological opposition to the presence of both states in the Middle East. IS used this argument and deconstructed it to make the case that the historical opposition between the US and Iran was a lie, and that the two states worked together to reshape the identity of Muslim communities across the MENA region.

Syria is the third cornerstone of the "Front Stage Cooperation". The country's alliance to the US, Iran and Russia was used by IS to further delegitimise it. Most notably, IS used Syria's ties with the United States and Russia – two Crusader states – as evidence of the regime's anti-Islamic agenda. Doing so, it accused the Syrian regime of taking part in the "crusade" airstrikes against "true Muslims" (al-Naba' 100: 15, Dābiq 4: 40; Dār al-Islām 6: 41). In the same vein, the Caliphate stressed that Russia armed the Syrian regime "against the Muslims of [Shām]" (Dābiq 4: 40). Furthermore, Syria was believed to take advantage of this alliance with the US. Chiefly, Syria attracted American financial support, eventually working for its own sectarian interests (Dār al-Islām 6: 41). Further, the country was accused of relying on the American army in the fight against the Islamic state, in an attempt to remedy its lack of leadership, weakness, and inability to "hitting targets accurately" (Dābiq 4: 40). Just as its alliance with Iran, the US was believed to

cooperate with Syria through proxies, especially the Turkish PKK. Also, IS pointed at the American insistence to "preserv[e] the [Baathist] regime and its Nusayrī army so as to guarantee a transition towards a pluralistic state" (Dābiq 11: 50). Finally, the American passivity to investigate and sanction the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime was seen by IS as a clear sign of connivance.

The Front Stage Cooperation came full circle with the alliance between Syria and Iran. IS referred to Syria as an "agent of the Iranian government", a "puppet", and an essential actor of the "Shī'ia Crescent" and the "Faqīh state" which was believed to be at war against the Sunni *Ummah* (Dābiq 3: 38). As such, the Syrian regime did not only ally with IS' far enemies (namely the US and Russia) but also with the group's regional foes, both state and non-state actors (al-Naba' 13: 15). For instance, the Caliphate pointed to the territorial exchange between the Syrian regime and Sahwat factions (Dābiq 9: 16; Dābiq 11: 49), and to the military cooperation with Iranian militias (Dābiq 12: 27).

In spite of the multitude of coalitions and politico-military alliances against the Caliphate, IS asserted that the global plot was doomed to failure. First and foremost, because the prophecy announced the Islamic victory over the Crusaders and their allies. As phrased by the group, "Allah is the best plotter" (Dābiq 9: 50). Second, because the enemies' camp was not united. In other words, there was strong competition amongst all actors. Hence, IS believed that the "collusion of enemies" would break from inside.

6.3.5 "... but their hearts are divided and they are allied against each other"

After reviewing all the main actors involved in the conflict in Iraq and Syria, as well as their alliance against the Caliphate, IS nuanced the strength of this "doomed plot". On the one hand, international actors competed over regional domination *via* their proxies (both state and non-state actors). The cooperation between the Crusaders, Iran and Syria in the context of the conflict in Iraq and Syria was a marriage of convenience. In spite of having a common Islamic enemy and a shared interest in fostering nationalism, those actors' hostility towards each other was real. IS warned its audience against the belief that all were "covert members of the same secret society" or "grandiose conspiracy theory" (Dābiq 9: 19). In other words, outside of the Syrian and Iraqi

context, those actors had diverging ideologies and interests. Chiefly, the US and Russia represented the former bipolar world governance and competed for influence over the MENA region (Dābiq 12: 43). They also competed over and through proxies. As exemplified by IS, Russia directly "enter[ed] into yet another conflict with the West, by targeting the [Sahwah] allies of America in Shām" (Ibid).

On the other hand, regional state actors were competing over who would be the Crusaders' favoured allies, and thus would gain influence over the MENA region. According to IS, this was mainly the case of Iran on the one side, and Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia on the other side. The latter ones, IS argued, feared that Iran's "long-term ambitions would disturb their own thrones" (Dābiq 9: 59). In another instance, "the apostate triad" raised its voice on the issue of the Iranian nuclear deal. This attempt was presumably intended to prove to its "crusader masters" it could influence regional politics and the "American-[Rāfidī] relations" (Ibid). To conclude, the relationships between regional state actors in the MENA were dominated by "greed, fear, and envy" (Ibid). The enmity was likewise blatant among regional non-state actors. In IS' analysis, the latter were competing over the financial help of the main international and regional state actors, which allowed them international recognition and the advancement of their personal goals. Their greed was equalled only by their level of corruption and military weakness. For example, IS explained that, after being the preferred proxy of the US, the Free Syrian Army deceived their "masters" for being too corrupted and lacking a coherent leadership (Dābiq 9: 57). As a result, the Americans turned to the PKK, thus indirectly supporting the Syrian regime, the FSA's main enemy. As for the Sahwat, in spite of forming numerous coalitions, they remained "independent factions refusing to dissolve into a greater entity" (Dābiq 11: 54). IS predicted that their "ikhwānization" would cause their loss: "[T]hey will begin pointing their arms at each other in pursuit of political dominance on what little land they have 'liberated'" (Ibid). As summed up by the Caliphate, there were numerous and omnipresent oppositions between the Sunni Sahwat and the Shī'ia militias, between the secularist and the Islamic factions, between the Jawlani front and other Islamic factions and between the Syrian Kurds that supported Bashar al-Assad and the opposition factions (Dābiq 9: 59). At the international and regional, state and non-state levels, all the warring actors involved in the conflict in Iraq and Syria were united by the "common enemy": IS. Yet they all competed against each other, and their hearts were divided. This competition was believed to be the key to IS' final victory.

Part II Findings and Reflections

Power and Social Control According to Islamic State

IS' discourse on the war in Iraq and Syria offered a dialectic construction of the world. On the one hand, the group's rhetoric attempted to frame a generalised enemy of Islam – the camp of *kufr* – that is deemed responsible for the suffering of the Muslims around the world. This camp of oppressors rejected Islam and the *Sharī'ah* to form a society governed by man-made laws. IS adopted a similar discursive strategy of delegitimisation against its foes, highlighting their hatred against Muslims, especially the Sunnis. This hatred was either natural – stemming from the different religiosity of the Crusaders and the Jews for example –, or it expressed itself through alliances with historical enemies of the *Ummah* – such as the cooperation between the Sunni Sahwat factions and the Crusaders or the Syrian government. The enemies of the Caliphate were also pointed at for their poor morale, lack of Islamic faith and pitiable military performances on the battlefield. On the other hand, IS offered a solution to this modern deviance: The establishment of an Islamic state that would be governed by the *Sharī'ah* only, in accordance with the will of Allah. By declaring the re-establishment of the Islamic state on January 29, 2014, IS positioned itself as the guarantor of the *Ummah*'s survival and the guarantor of the Islamic rule.

IS' dichotomous representation of the world strongly echoes Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb's theory of *hākimiyyah*, defined in relation to *jahiliyyah*. According to Qutb, *jahiliyyah* is a condition characterised by the sovereignty of the people over the people ("*hākimiyyah al-'ibād li al-'ibād*") (Qutb, 1992: 1256-1257). This condition must be changed to establish the law of Allah. In IS' words, the world before the conflict in Iraq and Syria was in a state of *jahiliyyah* where power was held by tyrants, backed by the Crusaders. The source of power was illegitimate because it came from men and not from Allah. Also, power corrupted rulers who favoured their own interests instead of those of the people they governed. Worst, those *tāghūt* transgressed Islamic principles. Finally, the modern form of power was deemed illegitimate by IS because it was used as a tool to oppress Muslims. Crusaders, regional tyrants and opposition groups alike refused to implement the *Sharī'ah* and govern according to the wish of Allah (Dābiq 10). Furthermore,

according to IS, there was an imbalance of power, especially in Syria where the Alawite minority ruled over the Sunni majority. There was thus a pressing need to change the current model of governance. To that aim, Qutb suggested the establishment of an Islamic state, which he thought as a form of government and an imagined community that will implement *hākimiyyah*. *Hākimiyyah*, as defined by the Egyptian thinker, is the highest legal and governmental authority, the authority of Allah over the people, the sole legitimate sovereignty. As a result, in the Islamic state, the source of governmental authority does not derive from the transfer of the sovereignty from the people to representatives or from the belonging to a specific lineage, but from the activity of facilitating the application of the *Sharī'ah*. In other words, who implements the *Sharī'ah* automatically become the agent of authority. Hence, a true Islamic state has no rulers. Moreover, the *Sharī'ah* is a source of legitimacy and imbues the Islamic state with a moral superiority compared to modern nation-states. Along Qutb's argument, IS never depicted itself as the potential ruler or entity above the Muslim *Ummah*. Yet it undertook great efforts to portray itself as a good administrator or governor. An issue of *Dābiq* cited a Muslim woman living under IS' rule in Yarmouk camps: "[W]hat they have brought forth for the people of the camp within days hasn't been provided to us by the factions over years!" (Dābiq 9: 70). Most importantly, the group clearly rooted its governmental legitimacy in its respect and application of the Islamic laws and principles, "with what Allah had sent down". Several articles published in *Dābiq* and *Dār al-Islām* offered detailed accounts of the high morality of IS' governance. Notably, the Caliphate applied Allah's legislation, imposed the obligation of praying and to pay the *zakāt*, it created the *hisba* (Islamic police) and applied the Islamic sentence and judged according to Allah's rule. IS also imposed the tax (*jizya*) on people of the Book – Christians and Jews (Dābiq 10: 51; Dār al-Islām 5: 8). In the same vein, al-Adnani argued that the Islamic state was only declared after "the [shari'a] [law] of God" began to be applied (19 June 2013). Finally, the Islamic Caliphate was believed to be "a better model for future stability in the region" (Dābiq 12: 49). While the despotism of existing rulers in the MENA region brought division among Muslim populations, the Islamic state was "a Muslim Empire a country in which there [were] no tribal or religious clashes. There [was] only one sect and only one creed" (Ibid). Its very nature thus guaranteed the unity of the *Ummah* and was thought to bring an end to "the splintering infighting mess that is collectively referred to as the Middle East" (Ibid).

Moreover, IS' rhetoric on the war in Iraq and Syria reflected Sayyid Qutb's rejection of the false dichotomy between the material world and a transcendent order. It can be argued that IS' language was biblical in the sense that it announced the Evangelion or the gospel in Christianity,

meaning "Good News". This refers to the news of the coming of the Kingdom of God, or the sovereign rule of God, recorded in the Bible (Mark 1:14-15). The declaration of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was announced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a speech entitled "Give Good News to the Believers" on April 8, 2013. With the establishment of Islamic State in June 2014, the hereafter world and its ruler materialised and became history. In other words, IS' discourse was not only about how Muslims could repent from their sins in order to escape the *jahili* world to heaven – the regulatory fiction evoked earlier. Rather, IS announced the descending of heaven and Allah's saving of Its people through the covenantal promises made at the very beginning of Islam. Yet the sovereign divine rule demanded change and loyalty or, in religious language, repentance and faith from all. This rhetoric ensured IS with the loyalty of all Muslims in its mission to establish the Islamic rule.

The researcher argues that IS sought to secure support through two discursive strategies. First, the group used a well-articulated identity rhetoric. As emphasised before, IS' main goals were to restore the fractured Muslim identity/*Ummah* and to establish an Islamic government. IS' discourse took the argument further as it assimilated the group to the *Ummah* and to the Islamic state as a form of government. In other words, IS was not only the true protector of the Muslim community and guarantor of the Islamic rule; it *was* the *Ummah* and the Islamic state. As such, it did not *per se* have a distinctive identity as a jihadi organisation. This discursive strategy differed from other jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda for instance. It offered several advantages to IS. First, the group appropriated religious legitimacy against Muslims and non-Muslims that would contest it. Since it was one with the community of the Muslims, and with the Islamic state, opposing IS would equate to opposing the rule of Allah and the very interest of the *Ummah*. Furthermore, following Sayyid Qutb's argument, IS gained *de facto* legitimacy by its strict implementation of the *Sharī'ah* as opposed to the arbitrary power and laws endorsed by *tāghūt* rulers. Doing so, IS directly challenged the legitimacy of state and non-state actors, claiming sovereignty over the lands and people of Syria and Iraq. This discursive campaign of legitimisation was mirrored by a stronger discursive offensive against the enemies of the Caliphate. Following the dual division of the world between the Islamic state and the camp of *kufr*, IS' audience was given an identity choice (Ingram, 2016): either joining the Caliphate or fighting it. This was, however, a fake choice because IS was the materialisation of the Islamic identity and the Islamic divine rule. Moreover, in the group's discourse, the Islamic victory had been promised by Allah. Survival was thus linked to Islamic State.

Second, IS adopted a honour vs. shame binary nexus to announce the realisation of Allah's reign and the long-awaited restoration of the *Ummah*'s honour. As such, the categorisation of IS as a "terrorist organisation" is misleading in the sense that it focuses the attention of observers on the terrorist nature of the group, or on the incredible violence it used to reach its goals. Yet IS' discourse was predominantly dominated by an honour/shame nexus, instead of a fear/power nexus. In other words, it seems that IS built upon the old use of terror inherited from Robespierre, who famously stated that "the terror is nothing but justice, prompt, severe, inflexible" (1794). This line of thinking crystallises Machiavelli's claim that "it is far safer to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both" (1513). Hence, while IS made good use of terror as a tactic of physical and psychological control, it seems that the group's primary objective was not to terrorise, but to shame both friends and foes. On the one hand, Muslims were accused of passively witnessing their enslavement by western powers. On the other hand, IS pointed to the historical guilt of the illegitimate rulers in Muslim countries. The group did so using a discourse of humiliation and belittlement. This discursive strategy purposefully elevated the status of IS to the guardian of the Islamic faith, savour of the *Ummah*'s honour, and conventional state actors in face of the most powerful countries involved in a war against terrorism. This shame/honour nexus strongly echoes collectivist or group-oriented cultures where honour is used as a carrot and shame as a stick to control moral behaviour. Doing so, IS' shame/honour discourse was a tool to attract support, ensure social control and gain political power.

To conclude, in the conflict in Iraq and Syria, it seemed quite straightforward that IS wished to gain power resources – military, human and natural resources that could sustain its rule but also be sold for financial resources. Yet IS did not only strive for military power in the narrow context of this conflict. The group strove for a new social contract – based on religion – for a socio-political organisation of the people (*al-Nās*). This new social contract took the form of an Islamic state, historical precedent and transborder imagined body of governance that would gather the *Ummah* in one single *locus*. Hence, IS aimed to gain and secure governmental power over the populations and territories in Iraq and Syria. In this context, social control was exercised through the use of a shame/honour rhetoric that secured support for IS. Finally, IS did not seek political power in the material, "perishable" world. It seemed that the group intended to secure legitimate, natural power in the name and desire of Allah, over the world in this life and in the aftermath.

The Potential Weakness of Islamic State's Discourse

As emphasised in the previous paragraphs, IS' discourse on the conflict in Iraq and Syria was evolving but coherent. It remained within the framework of identity and power struggle. The group was able to quickly integrate new elements and to structure its discourse adequately. However, experts such as Jabar (2017) have suggested that politico-social dynamics in the Middle East were shifting from identity politics to issue politics. As he observed the shifting alliances in the context of Iraqi elections, Jabar (2017) argued that the politicisation of ethnic and communal identities – which was the core of IS' discourse – was losing its unifying potency, allowing political, social and class divisions to creep in. In other words, religious and ethnic divisions would be slowly transcended by intra-communal politics.

Two recent instances are indicative of this transformation. The first one is rooted in the Iraqi context that gave birth to ISIS and later IS. In summer 2012, during the no-confidence motion to unseat former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a political alliance emerged bringing together Shī'ia, Sunni and Kurdish political blocs. More recently, during the Iraqi federal election of May 2018, those new alliances grew stronger. For example, the leftists-secularists Communists allied with the religious Shī'ia Sadrists movement. For the latter, abandoning its sectarian affiliation allowed him to brandish its nationalist credential and appeal to more secular voters. The strategy was efficient as the Sadrists, against all expectations, triumphed. Second, in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, Christian areas in Lebanon seem to have mediated their response to the influx of mainly Sunni Syrians according to social class instead of religious identity (Betts, Ali and Memisoglu, 2017: 17). Christian municipalities allegedly selected the refugee population and offered better perspectives of integration to wealthy Sunni than informal settlements in Sunni municipalities.

This shift from identity politics to issue politics was not reflected in IS' discourse. Sectarianism remained the cornerstone of the group's argumentation. This raises the question of the group's ability to justify its struggle without relying on the real or imagined threat to the Sunni community. Indeed, the call for jihad and the legitimacy of IS' role in Iraq and Syria was entirely based on the critical endangerment of the *Ummah* and on the obligation to address this threat. It is likely that this shift would have political, social and cultural consequences that may change the realities in Iraq and in the region. The fragmentation of sectarian identities from within may well alter power

relations among competing blocs who share the same identity. How will IS' discourse cope with this change in the future? Interestingly, this shift from identity to issue politics is a reaction against both the failure of nation-state building, and against the manipulative construction of identities. Those two features also had a central role in IS' discourse and its delegitimisation of current world order and socio-political organisation.

On the other hand, the researcher argues that IS' reformist agenda, especially on the concept of an Islamic state as opposed to the nation-state, is subject to debate. The real reform brought by IS in Iraq and Syria might well be the implementation of a new form of governance under the auspices of the Caliphate. By the group's own admission, the Islamic state "was the first state in 'modern' times set up exclusively by the [mujahidin]" (Dābiq 1). Apart from the materialisation of the "jihadi state", it seems that the notion of Islamic state as portrayed in IS' discourse is not a particular form of governance. In the context of the crisis of the *Ummah*, Muslims were summoned to migrate from the *jahili* world to live under the shadows of the Caliphate. Besides, IS defined the *Ummah* as a "nation", as its members shared a common religion, the language of the Qur'an, values and beliefs among others. In other words, the group attempted to equate the Muslim nation with the territoriality of the Caliphate. This strongly echoes the very definition of a nation-state. Although theoretically infinite, the *de facto* Islamic state did have material, territorial borders that corresponded to the military frontline between IS and other warring factions. As such, it appears that the Islamic state was merely a nation-state that was based on religion and implemented another form of sovereignty, the natural sovereignty of Allah over Its people. Hence, the researcher claims that IS' discourse lacked conceptual clarity as it did not oppose the concept of nation-state but what the nation-state encapsulated: the replacement of the last Muslim Empire, the division of the Muslim community, and non-Islamic theories of sovereignty and governance such as democracy, the civil state, patriotism, nationalism, secularism, socialism, and so on. It follows from the above that IS was striving for a state that would gather the Muslim *Ummah* and govern according to Islamic principles. Contrary to its claims, IS was fighting a nationalistic war, a war for the Muslim nation and the Islamic state. This "nationalism" of IS had an important implication on the notion of sovereignty fostered by the group. It seems that it held a rather modern understanding of sovereignty, which is based on an isomorphic relation between territory and identity crystallised in the nation-state (Pasha, 2013: 118). To conclude, IS did not differ from the actors engaged in the world of power politics; since the group strove to govern a certain category of people according to a set of existing (religious) laws. This claim shakes the foundations of IS' identity and of the agenda it projected in its discourse. Surely,

it deconstructs the legitimacy of the group which laid on the rejection of modern governance and on an identity that was defined in contrast to modern rulers.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 gave several hints on IS' potential discursive power, but also on the weaknesses of the group's rhetoric on the wars in Iraq and Syria. Part III will test those assumptions by analysing the perceptions of the Jordanian (Chapter 7) and Tunisian (Chapter 8) audiences on the same conflict. Those two cases studies will put the resonance of IS' discourse under scrutiny, after offering an overview of the rise of Islamism in Jordan and Tunisia.

Part III

MENA Frames on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

CHAPTER 7 ~ THE CASE OF JORDAN

Jordan offers a promising case for the study of Islamic State's discursive power. Although not a direct target of the group's discourse and military strategy, the objective dynamics in the country have – in the past – provided an opportunity for jihadi groups to gain strong support in the Hashemite Kingdom.

Between June 2014 and June 2017, IS released 16 videos targeting Jordan, of which 12 were directly related to the capture and killing of the Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh in February 2015. Most notably, on February 25, 2015, a video entitled "A Message to Jordan" addressed King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein and threatened to "cut off [his] neck". In another infamous video released on December 7, 2015, the son of a Jordanian Member of Parliament (MP) proudly burned his Jordanian passport and renewed the threat to King Abdullah and other MPs. Shortly after, the militant carried out a suicide bombing in Iraq. IS' main argument to delegitimise the Hashemite Kingdom was the latter's participation in the international coalition against the group. Jordan was accused of taking part in the "crusade" against the "true Muslims". Consequently, IS depicted King Abdullah II as a *tāghūt* (tyrant) heading an apostate regime. The group used Jordan's close ties with the US, its neutral policy towards Israel, and its support for the Russian intervention in Syria as proof of the kingdom's anti-Islamic agenda.

According to Faleh Abdul Jabar, former director of Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies, IS' discourse should not be regarded as the main reason why people joined or supported the group (2017). He believed that the ideology portrayed in the group's media outlet was outdated because it used classical texts. Middle Eastern populations, he argued, could not understand those obsolete references, and thus, could not endorse IS' message. Like numerous academics based in Amman and Beirut, Jabar contended that one needs to look at the regional and national objective dynamics in order to grasp the success of IS and its discourse.

7.1 The Rise of Islamism and the Threat of Salafi-jihad in Jordan

In Jordan, the regional and national objective dynamics mentioned by Jabar are threefold: First, the regional proximity of the kingdom with Iraq and Syria; second, its vulnerable economic situation; and third, the steady Islamisation of its socio-political environment since WWII (Abu Rumman, 2017). Before the advent of the Caliphate in June 2014, these dynamics provided strong incentives for jihadi groups to gain sympathy and support inside the country. Indeed, IS was only the last chapter of Jordanian (violent) Salafism, which had developed since the 1980s.

7.1.1. Jordan – An Immediate Neighbour of Syria and Iraq

The geographical proximity of the Hashemite Kingdom with Syria and Iraq, where IS controlled vast territories between early 2014 and mid-2017, had grave consequences. Jordan shares a 375 kilometre-border with Syria, as well as a 370 kilometre-border with Iraq. Those borders are strategic. The territorial legitimacy of established governments and the broader regional order have long been contested by Islamist revisionary groups such as IS. The latter assaulted the border crossing between Jordan and Iraq on June 22, 2014 (Chulov and Carroll, 2014); and carried out three suicide attacks on April 25, 2015, leaving five Iraqi soldiers dead (al-Arabiya, 2015). Following the last incident, the borders with Iraq were closed. They re-opened in late August 2017 only. The road access to Jordan from Syria was closed in April 2015 to limit the influx of Syrian refugees. The kingdom shut its last points of entry after the June 21, 2016 attack, which was allegedly supervised by IS supporters from the Syrian Rukban refugee camp. The debate about the opening of the borders was rekindled in late June 2018. While the Russian-led offensive on Daraa started on June 18, 2017, about 13 kilometres north of the border with Jordan, 80,000 Syrian refugees rushed to the kingdom's doors (Gorvett, 2018). The people of Jordan were divided evenly between those who promoted the opening for humanitarian purposes and those who feared that another human wave of Syrian refugees would further destabilise the Kingdom (fieldwork interviews, 2018; Ayesh, 2018). The border eventually remained closed.

The arrival of Syrian refugees in Jordan was considered a serious security threat. As mentioned earlier, several IS fighters would have infiltrated the Rukban Syrian refugee camp, located only a few miles from Jordan. Six months after the June 2016 attack, on December 18, 2016, the second

and last skirmish inside Jordan occurred at Karak Castle. It resulted in the killing of 19 security forces and civilians. The security forces found no evidence that the attackers had ties with Syrian refugees. In May 2017, Brigadier General Sami Kafawin, the commander of Jordan's army in the Rukban camp area, estimated that up to 5% of its residents – about 4,000 people – might be Islamist militants (Adayleh, 2017). In fact, humanitarian workers and military personnel attested that gun battles happened daily within the camp, which served as a cache for several weapons systems (Ghreiz, 2017). Yet, although the threat was serious, there was a fear that instability inside the camps and the targeting of the refugee population in Jordan might jeopardise the country's ability to attract international humanitarian aid. Hence, the kingdom found itself in an uncomfortable position where Syrian refugees could very quickly shift from being an opportunity to attract funding into a real security threat inside Jordan.

The proximity of Iraq has been a long-standing problem for Jordan. The porosity of the borders and common jihadi networks between the two countries posed a direct security threat to the Hashemite Kingdom between 2002 and 2005. During that period, infamous Salafi militant Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi organised a series of attacks against Jordan from the Iraqi areas, where he was fighting the American occupation in the name of jihad. Besides, the 2005 attacks, which left 60 people dead, were carried out by Iraqis. Hence, the security of Jordan depends on the stability of Iraq and it tied to the latter's ability to deter violent organisations.

7.1.2. The Economic Fragility of Jordan

Since the late 1980s, the economic situation in Jordan has been closely linked to the popular appeal for an Islamic alternative. In the early 1990s, the pace of Islamisation of the Jordanian society accelerated under a major change in the kingdom's economy. Before the Gulf War (1990-1991), Jordan was heavily dependent on trade with Iraq and the Gulf states. The already weak economy was severely impacted by the conflict which resulted in the siege of Aqaba port, south Jordan, the main passage for Iraqi imports and exports, and goods transport (Treaster, 1990). Moreover, the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 brought a halt to Arab financial aid, subsidised Iraqi oil, remittances from expatriate Jordanians working in the Gulf, and to a lesser extent, international tourism (Reed, 1990/91; Swaidan and Nica, 2002). In addition, the Gulf countries imposed sanctions on Jordan for abstaining to support the Arab League-resolution in favour of foreign intervention in the Iraq-Kuwait crisis (Lesh, 1991: 37). They stopped importing

Jordanian products and delivering visas to Jordanian and Palestinian workers. Overall, 300,000 employees were forced to return to the kingdom, which represented a 30% increase in the total labour force in the kingdom (Harrigan, el-Said and Wang, 2006: 275). Finally, Jordan's economy was further burdened by over a million refugees in transit. At the national level, in 1989, the debt crisis and the rise of food prices caused riots which ended with the resignation of the government (Andoni and Schwedler, 1996). The result of the 1989 parliamentary elections – Jordan's first in over two decades – confirmed the shift in the kingdom's political landscape. The masses turned to the Jordanian Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood or *Ikhwān* ("Brothers" in Arabic) secured 22 of the 80 seats in the house of Parliament, while independent Islamist movements won an additional 12 seats. The Salafi organisation suddenly became the country's strongest democratic opposition party (Robinson, 1997). Following the 1992 agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the wave of privatisation, and the freeze on public sector wages and employment led to further disenchantment of the Jordanian public. Altogether, the economic situation of Jordan was translated into a political and societal shift towards Islamism.

The scenario experienced during the 1990s repeated itself in the late 2000s. The global financial crisis in late 2008 strongly hit Jordan. The economic growth dropped and the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) inexorably declined until 2013. Latent regional changes and instability had a major impact on tourism, foreign investment, the interrupted arrival of gas from Egypt and the reduction of goods exchange between Jordan and Syria to reach Europe. For example, the loss of major trade routes with Syria after 2011 caused a 9% loss in Jordan's trade balance in 2012 only (MoPIC, 2013). In addition to the external shock, in 2012, Jordan was impacted by the peak of an energy crisis and by the massive influx of Syrian refugees. Numerous social and political reforms that had been initiated before the Syrian conflict were paused. Furthermore, the rapid population growth in Jordan inexorably led to increased competition over access to services and the labour market. As of 2017, 18.3% of Jordanians was unemployed, including 34.8% of the youth (Worldbank Statistical Database, 2017). Moreover, a 2017 report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) affirmed that the low working conditions accepted by Syrian refugees put Jordanian workers at a disadvantage. The influx of Syrian refugees also resulted in growing tensions between the Syrian and non-Syrian refugees, the host communities, and migrant workers. According to the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Imad Fakhouri, the direct financial impact of the Syrian refugee crisis was estimated at around US$2 billion annually, which equated to 20% of the total annual national revenue and 5% of the GDP (The Jordan Times,

2017d). The UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimated the indirect impact reached US$3.5 billion a year (Ibid).

The growing grievances against the government's miss-management of the refugee crisis, as well as the lack of job opportunities in Jordan, were possible drivers to support radical religious discourse. The burden of the Syrian refugee population was particularly heavy for low middle classes citizens, who were the most prone to engage in violent extremism (Abu Rumman, 2017). These economical dynamics were reinforced by the traditional religiosity intrinsic to the Jordanian population.

7.1.3. The Long History of Islamism in Jordan

Jordan was introduced to Islam after the Arab Muslim armies of Rashidun Caliph Ibn al-Whalid – the famous "Sword of Islam" – won the battles of Fahl (635 CE) and Yarmuk (636 CE) against the Roman-Byzantine Empire. Following the conquest, Jordan fell under the domination of the successive Islamic Empires, until it was established as an independent state after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 20th century.

As synthesised by Beverley Milton-Edwards (2017: 3), "[modern] Jordan's Islamist trend is historically rooted in the genesis of the state, active in its political structures, and deeply embedded in society". Since the end of World War II, the Middle East has been the laboratory for many failed political projects amongst which pan-Arabism, nation-states, the lack of reforms, and the alternatives offered by the Ba'ath parties and the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, in Jordan, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood was symptomatic of a progressive Islamisation of politics and society.

Historically, modern Jordan was never a deeply religious country. Until the 1950s, three political trends characterised the kingdom's political environment; socialism, communism and pan-Arabism. Although ideologically different, those three trends were all secular movements. The political settings of Jordan shifted during the Cold War. First, in 1956, the United States substituted the British power (Oren, 1990). Second, the American arrival was followed by the adherence to the Eisenhower doctrine (Hahn, 2006). This policy prescribed the limitation of political instability in the Middle East, which could lead to the development of international

communism. Finally, in 1956, Nasser assumed power in Egypt and became increasingly popular, especially when he nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956. Nasser threatened the popularity of most of the Arab leaders, especially the monarchs including King Hussein I (Ashton, 2008:46). In Jordan, the Egyptian charismatic president found support inside the army to the extent that, in 1957, few Arab nationalist units within the Jordanian military carried an unsuccessful coup against their king. To counter the growing Arab "secular" nationalism, King Hussein I imposed martial law and banned all political parties but the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter was registered under the law of charitable clubs and associations. In other words, in Jordan, political Islam was used as a tool to counter Nassererism and more broadly, regional secular aspirations. Hence, the Islamisation of the Jordanian society was a systematic and deliberate policy that relied on the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordanian politics (Wiktorowicz, 1999; Dreyfuss, 2006).

From the 1970s, three events were crucial to understanding today's Jordan and the Jordanian perspective on Salafi violent groups such as Islamic State. First, the Iranian revolution had a specific impact on the Hashemite Kingdom. Besides the general influence of this event as detailed in the fourth chapter of this thesis, the Iranian revolution witnessed the arrival of a Shī'ia power and, with it, the pre-eminence of a Shī'ia narrative. The main reaction in the MENA region was to endorse a religious counter-power – Sunni Islam – epitomised by Saudi Arabia's redoubled efforts to spread Wahabbism (Axworthy, 2017). Although different and often in direct competition with the Wahhabi courant, the Muslim Brotherhood used the regional rise of Sunni Islam as an opportunity to grow even stronger in Jordan. Besides, it is worth noticing that, at that time, Jordan and Iraq had excellent relations. Iraq was a fierce opponent of the new Iranian power. One may assume that the Hashemite royal family favoured a domestic Sunni ally in order to gain further political and economic support from Iraq.

Second, from December 1979, the war in Afghanistan saw the advent of global jihad in the fight against the Soviet occupation. The globalisation of jihad went together with the Islamisation of the Palestinian resistance movement, that gave birth to Hamas in 1987, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Litvak, 1998; Dunning, 2014). In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood, although it always maintained a public stance of non-violence, supported the Palestinian cause and the forceful policies of its Palestinian offshoot (Muslim Brotherhood, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). Doing so, the Muslim Brotherhood legitimised violent Salafism, paving the way to public and private support for Salafi-jihadi groups in Jordan.

Third, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) has a unique value in the Islamisation of Jordan. King Hussein I was the first Arab leader to fire a rocket at Iran. He also started a campaign of glorification of Saddam Hussein in Jordan and promoted him as "the sword of the Arabs" against the Persian enemy (al-Sabaileh, 2017). However, when Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, he operated a major change in the notion of jihad that shifted from targeting non-Arabs to being against Sunni Muslim Arabs. At the same time, the Iraqi Ba'ath party transformed its secular discourse and started to Islamise the society. The shift in Saddam Hussein's politics from pan-Arabism to pan-Islamism (Baram, 2014; Bengio, 1998) had a spillover effect on Jordan and increased the pace of Islamisation of the Jordanian society. Yet the invasion of Kuwait was followed by the Gulf War, initiated and eventually won by the West in 1991. The defeat was a hard blow in the face of the Arabs, especially in the streets of Jordan. Those landmarks coincided with the end of the Afghan war in 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the Arab *mujāhidīn* (holy fighters) in Afghanistan led to the return of a large number of fighters to their respective countries. With them, they brought a recovered prid and a new alternative to change their own countries by raising arms, imagining the restoration of Islamic governments (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, 2015).

In Jordan, the series of regional developments was epitomised by the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral success in 1989. The Islamists were given five cabinets portfolios: The Ministry of Education (Abdallah Akaylah), the Ministry of social development (Yusuf al-Azm), the Ministry of Justice (Majid al-Khilafa), the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs (Zayd al-Kilani) and the Ministry of Health (Adnan al-Jaljilu) (Ryan, 2008). Although the public opinion turned against some major measures imposed by the Islamist ministers, the Muslim Brotherhood was gradually able to reshape the cultural identity of the Jordanian society. The city of Zarqa is the perfect example of this Islamisation. Back in the 1950s, Zarqa was the capital of Jordanian secularism (Fawzi, nd). For that reason, it was targeted by the Muslim Brotherhood ever since the 1960s (al-Sabaileh, 2017). Later on, it became famous for being the birthplace of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. Nowadays, Zarqa is considered as the hardcore of Jordanian Islamism and Salafism. The city's current elected mayor belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. It was only a few years ago when he was arrested for attending Zarqawi's funeral and for giving a speech glorifying the deceased. Still, he is highly popular. The historical symbiotic relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian state led analysts to describe the party as the "loyal opposition" of the royal family

(Ryan, 2008; Boulby, 1999: 54-55; Abu Rumman et al., 2013: 13, Abu Nowar, 1989: 207). In the realm of this struggle for power, Jordan experienced a systematic societal change.

To conclude, the Middle Eastern regional dynamics since the end of WWII have deeply shaped the political and social traits of Jordan. The influence of Nasser and King Hussein's national and regional policies had a profound impact on the development of Jordanian Islamism. The kingdom shifted from being secular to endorse a moderate form of Salafi Islam. Internally, the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Islamisation of Jordan is equally important. While the organisation adopted a public stance of non-violence, there was, and there is still significant ideological overlap between the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda and its offshoot in Syria al-Nusra Front, and IS. Even though IS scorned the Muslim Brotherhood as a "devastating cancer" (Dābiq 14, 2016: 28), the two organisations shared the same ideology based on the ideas of the late Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb. Moreover, Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and al-Baghdadi all belonged to the national chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and Iraq (McCants, 2015; Counter Extremism Project, 2017). In a TV interview aired in November 2015, Jordanian intellectual Fehmi Jadaane said: "Ideologically, ISIS is not that different from other political-religious movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and others. The difference is one of degree, not of essence. They share the same original ideology, but their actions differ in degree" (Sky News Arabic, 2015). On the same note, speaking on *al-Ghad* TV in October 2017, Husni Ayesh, a Jordanian historian of Palestinian background, stated that IS "developed from the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, emerging from beneath its cloak" (al-Ghad, 2017). In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood provided a platform to violent Salafi groups; al-Qaeda and IS can be seen as violent extensions of core Brotherhood.

The ideological commonality between the Muslim Brotherhood and IS may have accounted for the lack of clear opposition against the jihadi group in the Hashemite Kingdom. One instance of this confusion was the refusal of Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood leader Hamza Mansour to describe IS as a terrorist organisation, while giving a TV interview on February 2, 2015 (JoSat TV, 2015). Altogether, the Muslim Brotherhood, which remains the strongest and most respected religious force in Jordan, was unable to produce a strong political and religious counter-discourse. This might be explained by the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood undoubtedly benefited from IS. According to Amer al-Sabaileh (2017), the Salafi organisation used IS' extremism to picture itself as the lesser evil, the more moderate and politically active option. The

Muslim Brotehrhood thus presented a viable alternative and saw its status and power consolidated in Jordan.

7.1.4. The Rise of Salafi-jihad in Jordan

In Jordan, the Salafi-jihadi current was introduced in the early 1980s by Muhammad Salem Rehal, a Palestinian who fled Egypt after being involved in President Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981. The Jordanian jihadi trend was later taken over and popularised by Nasser al-Din al-Bani. The latter was a Damascene scholar who had been disseminating his radical and violent ideology in the Brotherhood strongholds, especially in Zarqa, since the 1970s (Wiktorowicz, 2000: 222-226). Nevertheless, all attempts to create jihadi groups in Jordan in the 1980s were foiled by the Jordanian *mukhābarāt* (intelligence services).

Salafi-jihadi groups were brought to the forefront in the mid-1990s, after a series of internal and external landmarks. In the early-1990s, the normalisation of Jordanian relations with Israel resulted in the 1994 Peace Treaty. Although the Muslim Brotherhood opposed the king's policy, its political arm, the Islamic Action Front, adopted a strategy of non-confrontation with the kingdom's leaders. In the eyes of the Jordanian masses, who had turned to the Salafi group during the 1989 and 1993 elections, the *Ikhwān* failed to stand against the Israeli enemy (Brown, 2006: 8). Moreover, the abortive socio-economic transition process of the Jordanian society to modernity led to the further erosion of the government's legitimacy and to the rejection of liberalism by a wide range of the population (Richards, 2005). As a result of the youth dissatisfaction with the Jordanian government and the moderate Islamic alternative offered by the Muslim Brotherhood, a few groups stood out as spearheads of radical Islam mixed with armed activity, although they lacked an integrated ideology. For instance, those groups included *Jaysh Mohammad* (Army of Mohammad, 1991), *Afghan Jordanian Group* (1994) and the Sufi-inclined *al-Nafīr al-Islāmī* (Islamic Clarion, 1992).

According to Abu Rumman and Shteiwi (2018), Salafi-jihad became a single intellectual framework when Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi formed *Jamā'at al-Tawhīd* (Organisation of Monotheism) in 1992, also called *Baya'at al 'Imam* (Pledge of Allegiance to the Prayer Leader) by Jordanian authorities. The two met in Peshawar, Pakistan,

and were reunited in Jordan after the end of the Afghan war. Their Salafi organisation legitimised and endorsed jihad against the Israeli army in Palestine. As a result of their attempt to attack the Hashemite Kingdom, both leaders were arrested and imprisoned in March 1994. From their cell, al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi trained fellow prisoners and distributed magazines and leaflets that laid the comprehensive foundation for Salafi-jihad locally and globally (Ibid; Ragland: 41-42). Among these books were Maqdisi's *The Creed of Abraham and the Methods of the Oppressor in Diluting it and Manifest Lights on the Unbelief of the Saudi State*, and *Bay'at al-Imam, Pledge of Allegiance to the Imam*. Both figures also invested their time in prison to allocate roles and responsibility in the spread and implementation of the Salafi-jihadi ideology. While al-Zarqawi assumed the political leadership of the organisation, al-Maqdisi was designated as the ideological and spiritual leader. In other words, the two unified the sword and the pen of Jordanian jihad. Informal networks of connections and loyalties, primarily at the geographical level, began to develop around the two core leaders, especially the case in Ma'an, Mafraq, Salt, Irbid, Zarqa and Karak.

In 1999, al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi, along with Salafi comrades, benefitted from a royal amnesty when King Abdullah II acceded to the throne. The implication of al-Zarqawi in the millennium plot and the failed attack against the Radisson SAS hotel in Amman before the New Year's Day pushed him to escape to Pakistan, and later to Afghanistan. There, he gathered a number of Jordanians and other Arabs in Herat camp and strove to establish a regional Salafi-jihadi organisation of his own, *Jund al-Shām* (Soldiers of the Levant). When the war broke out in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, the group moved to Iraqi-Kurdistan. In Iraq, Zarqawi connected with Sunni Kurdish Salafis and founded *Jamā'at al-Tawhīd wal-Jihad* (Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad) in 2003. The group later pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004. The Iraqi episode had a strong impact on Jordan's legacy of Salafi-jihad. *Al-Tawhīd* group overshadowed the national resistance movement and became the major threat to American troops in Iraq. In addition, *Jund al-Shām* was targeting the "close enemy" in neighbouring countries. Al-Zarqawi gave a new dimension to jihad: a "glocal" jihad focused on defeating both the far and the near enemy. In the words of Marwan Shehadeh (2005), "the Americans succeeded in their globalisation of the war on terror, but on the other hand, the Salafi-jihadis succeeded in globalising the terms of Jihad". Between 2002 and 2005, al-Zarqawi supervised a number of assassinations and bombings in Jordan. While all attacks were not successful, they testified the transformation of Jordanian Salafi-jihad under the leadership of al-Zarqawi. Salafi-jihad lost its purely national character. While the logistical preparation of the attacks was done outside of the

national borders, it was imported and hit the Jordanian society on its soil. Al-Zarqawi's greatest plans succeeded in August 2005, with the rocket attacks on an American naval ship off the coast of Jordan (Fatah and Wong, 2005), and in November 2005, with the bombing of three hotels in Amman (Phillips, 2005).

To put it in a nutshell, (violent) Islamism in Jordan is closely linked with social movements. In other words, radical religious ideologies and discourses are not the facts of scattered individuals, but rather the result of a political and social sustained trend. While easier to spot, this trend is also harder to tackle because it is strongly embedded in the popular regional and national culture of Islamism. This offers a strong hypothesis for the support of the Jordanian population for IS' discourse, although ideological support does not automatically entail physical engagement in the violent operationalisation of the group's discourse. The Syrian crisis and the prominence of IS' discourse arguably brought a new development to the Middle Eastern region. According to Abu Rumman (2017), the sectarian issue in Jordan "appeared" after the Syrian crisis and the involvement of Hezbollah. As in the past, Jordan's society has been impacted by regional instability and operated a new shift from Islamism to sectarianism. In a show posted on the Internet by ANB TV on August 31, 2014, Palestinian-Jordanian politician Muhammad Bayudh al-Tamini talked about the threat to the Sunni in the Middle East and the soundness of IS' actions: "There is no such thing as 'ISIS ideology' – it's Islam. [...] The (Syrian soldiers) who were slaughtered yesterday at the Tabqa airbase deserved to be slaughtered 100,000 times over" (ANB TV, 2014). The politician justified his radical position by the belonging of Syrians soldiers to the Alawi sect, a branch is Shī'ia Islam, and by the bombing of Sunni populations by the Syrian regime.

7.1.5. The Jordanian Factor in Syria

The Islamisation of the socio-political arena in Jordan led to expected consequences on the direct support and involvement of Jordanians in jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq. Most notably, Jordanian individuals played a key role in *Jabhat al-Nusra* (later renamed *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām*), although the group's leader, al-Jawlani, is Syrian. According to Milton-Edwards (2017: 14), the Jordanian support for al-Nusra stems from residual ideological belief and loyalty to al-Qaeda, symbolised by Jordanian leaders such as al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada.

In 2014, Fadel (2014) pointed to the Jordanian leadership of *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām* under Abu al-Miqdad al-Urduni, Abu Samir al-Urduni and Abu Shama'a al-Urduni. In fact, Anjarini (2015) contends that al-Jawlani is only a symbolic Syrian leader chosen to assert the group's "national" credential in Syria. Moreover, the ideology of *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām* is strongly inspired by Jordanian scholars such as Sami al-Uraydi, born in Amman and graduated from the University of Jordan (Wagemakers, 2018: 194). Also, Jordanians such as Mustafa Saleh Abdel Latif (under the *nom de guerre* Abu Anas al-Sahaba) and Iyad al-Tubasi (under the *nom de guerre* Abu Julaibib) were among the founders of the jihadi group. They both commanded soldiers in southern Syria, including in Daraa, which is only 13 miles from the Jordanian borders (Milton-Edwards, 2017: 14).

Notwithstanding the Jordanian influence in *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām*, the Syrian jihad was characterised by fractious dynamics and shifting allegiances. For instance, in 2013, al-Nusra split from ISIS. Since then, the two groups had been fighting militarily and ideologically to gain legitimacy and attract fighters inside Syria. The rivalry spilled over in the Hashemite Kingdom, drawing the leaders and ideologues of Jordanian Salafi-jihad into the dispute (Wagemakers, 2018: 198-200). The puzzlement was not only ideological but had direct consequences on the Syrian battlefield. Late-2014 and 2015 witnessed several defections from al-Nusra to IS, including from Jordanian leaders such as Abu Samir al-Urduni and Saad al-Hunaiti. The latter became an Islamic judge in IS' state apparatus in Raqqa but he was executed on official charges of "disobeying order", in other words, collaboration (The New Arab, 2015).

In terms of public support for jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq, Jordan faced pro-IS demonstrations from mid-2014. On June 23, 2014, hundreds of Salafi-jihadi activists held a rally in Ma'an to support IS and called for the cancelling of the "Sykes-Picot border" (Su, 2014). The demonstrations were led by Jordanian Salafi scholar Abu Mohammad al-Tahawi, who later pledged allegiance to IS in 2015 and was subsequently imprisoned. The demonstration came only three weeks after IS had published a video "Message to Our People in Ma'an" that featured the un-Islamic nature of the Jordanian regime and its security services. In the same vein, on July 23, 2014, a Jordanian local Salafi group, the Sons of the Call for Tawhīd and Jihad, pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Ben Solomon, 2014).

It is estimated that an average of 2,000 Jordanians joined the ranks of IS and *Jabhat Fateh al-Shām* in Syria, with figures varying between 300 and 3,000 depending on the source. This figure places Jordan second only after Tunisia in the number of citizens who have joined Salafi-jihadi groups in the MENA region. The increasing threat of Salafi-jihad in Jordan triggered a comprehensive and early response by the Jordanian government.

7.1.6. The Multi-faceted Response of the Jordanian Government to Salafi-jihad

During a regional conference held in Amman in November 2017, the State Minister for Media Affairs, Mohammad Mumani, asserted that Jordan's strategy to fight terrorism was based on a holistic approach combining military, security, and ideological approaches (Jordan Times, 2017e). Despite the fact that there had been few IS' attacks on the Jordanian soil, the threat was taken seriously by Jordanian authorities, which had a major impact in the country. In 2014, the government amended the 2006 anti-terrorism law, including a broadened definition of terrorism and strengthened punishments. The original law defined terrorism as "any intentional act committed by any means that leads to the death of a person or causes bodily harm or damaging public or private property ... with the goal of harming public order and subjecting the peace of society or its security to danger" (Human Right Watch, 2014). Yet in 2014, the requirement of a connection to an act of violence was replaced by the reference to acts that "sow discord" or "disturb public order". The law has been used several times in order to legitimise the government's crackdown on peaceful expression and assembly. For example, in July 2015, a journalist was investigated for revealing information about a foiled terrorism plot (Alami, 2015). The following year, a professor was detained for three months for criticising Jordan's participation in the international coalition against IS (Osman, 2016). As explained by a lawyer working in Amman, the general character and the vagueness of those criminal offences might turn dangerous and be used to restrict liberties and incriminate Jordanian people without strong legal motives (Abdullah, 2017)

In addition to consolidating its legal apparatus, the Hashemite Kingdom made a top priority of its security strategy to keep full control of its territorial integrity. For instance, on March 1, 2015, former Jordanian Minister of Information Saleh al-Qallab urged the government to prevent the Iranian presence at the country's border with Syria, even "at a cost of a war" (al-Qallab, 2015).

He presaged that Iran might use the chaos in Syria to spread its influence and create a Shī'ia crescent, should al-Assad succeed in defeating the opposition. On July 13, 2015, in the wake of IS' attacks in Paris, Tunisia and Kuwait, the kingdom strengthened the security procedures at the entrance of Amman and other provincial cities. On February 27, 2017, Fahad al-Khitan, a senior columnist for the Jordanian daily newspaper *al-Ghad*, warned that the presence of IS in Sinai might directly threaten the Jordanian port town of Aqaba. He criticised the Jordanian government for over-relying on other armies to protect its borders from the group (al-Khitan, 2017).

Certainly, Jordan's security agenda has always been greatly influenced by external powers. First, because of its strategic geographical and political position in the heart of the Middle East, the kingdom was exposed to the spillover effect of regional tensions such as Salafi-jihadi groups in Iraq and Syria, Saudi-led concerns over the "Shī'ia Crescent," and the recent divisions within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Second, Jordan increasingly relied on foreign powers' funding, which subsequently shaped its national security policies. The United States has understood the importance of the Hashemite Kingdom. Consequently, it massively invested in Jordan's security to the extent of overruling the kingdom's historical relationship with Britain. After the execution of the Jordanian pilot by IS, the American aid was expanded to US$1 billion per year for core military and security assistance (Lamothe, 2015). Those links were strengthened under President Trump's mandate. In February 2017, King Abdullah II was the first Arab leader to be received in Washington. More surprisingly, Japan became another major contributor to Jordan's security sector, especially in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. In 2016, the Japanese embassy presented a US$5.17 million plan to the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to implement the "Improving Safety and Security to Respond to the Syrian Refugee Crisis" project (The Jordan Times, 2017c). In February 2017, the Jordanian Armed Forces-Arab Army (JAF) received several vehicles as a grant (The Jordan Times, 2017b). In August the same year, the Japanese government gave US$1.494 million grant to the UNOPS to finance the "Improving Safety and Security for Syrian Refugees at the Refugee Camps in Jordan" project. In a public statement, Shuichi Sakurai, ambassador of Japan, said that "Japan has acknowledged that security is one of the top priorities in managing refugee camps; because assistance for the refugees, who are living in severe condition, can be provided only under a secure and safe environment" (The Jordan Times, 2017c). Japan's efforts to maintain Jordan's socio-economic stability arguably show that Japan understood the kingdom's capital role for regional stability. Moreover, Jordan still

represents one of the only opportunities in the Middle East to expand Japan's influence through infrastructure and business investments (The Jordan Times, 2018).

The sensitivity to external dynamics and the paramount dependency on foreign powers have been vehemently criticised by the Jordanians. The kingdom's population condemned the performance of King Abdullah II, deploring that Jordan lost its decision-making power over issues that directly affect the country and its people (Milton-Edwards, 2017). Indeed, foreign powers' patronage is a double-edged sword for Jordan. For example, the growing American presence in the country has not gone unnoticed and triggered attacks which targeted US security personnel and facilities (Schenker, 2017). Moreover, President Trump's decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in December 2017 put Jordan in a delicate situation. Unable to strongly oppose the American move, King Abdullah expressed his concern that it might put pressure on Jordan to become a second state for more Palestinians – they were already two million in the kingdom at that time – and enable extremist discourses to feed angry and desperate Muslims in the region (The Jordan Times, 2017a). The ambiguous contribution of foreign powers to instability in the Middle Eastern and to limiting the effects of this surrounding instability is symptomatic of Jordan's politics. As summed up by Susan Razzaz (2018), Jordan is a main pawn in the region, yet at the end of the day, it is just a pawn.

Complementing the security approach to the threat posed by IS, Jordan launched several projects – both private and state-sponsored – aimed at delegitimising the jihadi group and preventing the spread of religious radicalism in its society. For example, in October 2014, a private theatre staged an anti-IS satirical play (Sky News Arabia, 2014). On the same note, in October 2015, the government launched a TV campaign broadcasting animation films aimed at deterring young people from joining terrorist organisations. In January 2015, the Ministry of Education distributed a 32-page booklet to high schools entitled "An Open Letter to Ibrahim al-Badri, aka al-[Baghdadi]" (Kenner, 2015). The booklet aimed at refuting IS' ideology. Yet the Jordanian press and several politicians criticised the Jordanian education system. In an article published on November 15, 2015, Jordan's former Minister of Culture, Sabri Rbeihat, called the Jordanian government to "purg[e] curricula of ideas that denigrate life, [aggrandize] death, and accuse others of heresy" (al-Ghad, 2015a). In June 2015, the expert on education, Dr. Dhuqan Ubaydha, published a long study titled "Daesh in Curricula and Textbooks", which outlined the many problems of Jordanian curricula, specifically their extremist content (al-Ghad, 2015b). The Jordanian Ministry of Education responded to those criticisms by asserting that a curriculum

reform was underway and would remedy the flaw outlined above (al-Ghad, 2015c), yet the project was delayed by the pressure on education created by the Syrian refugee crisis.

Finally, Jordan attempted to contain radical speeches by its imams, especially during the Friday sermons, which gather thousands of citizens. In 2014, the Ministry of Religious Endowments, Ministry of *Awqaf*, announced that it had fired 26 imams for various reasons, including leading prayers for IS or *Jabhat al-Nusra* and spreading these groups' ideology (Arabic CNN, 2014). This was the case of an imam of the Zarqa governorate, in September 2014, after he called worshippers to help IS if the group entered Jordan. In other instances, several imams refused to lead memorial prayers for the Jordanian pilot burned alive by IS in February 2015. Yet these arrests aggravated the lack of "approved" preachers in Jordan. Out of 6,000 mosques in the country, half of them do not have an official imam (The Jordan Time, 2017d). This is the result of a plan led by the Ministry of *Awqaf* to reduce the number of mosques that host the Friday prayers. While the government could not control what was being said during those weekly sermons, it intended to ensure that imams used "genuine" Hadith (Prophet Mohammad's teachings) and relevant subjects that were directly related to people's lives, instead of politics. For that matter, the Ministry of *Awqaf* issued weekly unified topics and verified Hadith to the intention of imams (Mustafa, 2017). Nonetheless, in spite of several announcements made in 2016 and 2017, the government was not able to train and appoint a new generation of preachers that would foster a culture of tolerance and dialogue in the kingdom.

Because of the steady Islamisation of the Jordanian society and politics, Jordanians could not clearly disown IS as a non-Islamic group, despite the fact that the majority of the society opposed the group's violent behaviour. As emphasised in the previous paragraphs, and put aside its violent implementation of Islam, IS' religious discourse pre-existed and was embedded in the Jordanian socio-political culture. Hence, IS' discourse could have been exported and supported inside of Jordan. Nevertheless, there were counter-powers to IS inside Jordan, albeit insufficient. For instance, prominent Jordanian Salafi-jihadi leaders, such as Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, refused to issue fatwas to condemn the Jordanian government or call for violence against it (Magid, 2016). Al-Maqdisi's refusal to issue such verdict was particularly meaningful, as he was the spiritual guide to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the forerunner of IS in Iraq. From November 2013, both Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi publicly condemned IS through a series of letters published by al-Nusra Front (Bunzel, 2013; Othman, 2013). In a missive issued on April 28, 2014, Abu Qatada labelled IS "the dogs of Hellfire" and slammed the group over the

beheading of journalists, which he considered "un-Islamic" (Qatada, 2014). In May 2014, al-Maqdisi wrote that IS had a "deviant" ideology (Joscelyn, 2014). In February 2014, both leaders formally prohibited Jordanians from fighting with IS in Syria (al-Ghad, 2014). The Caliphate retaliated against the two scholars, referring to them as "idolatrous" and "donkey of knowledge" (Dābiq 7: 6; Dābiq 10: 58). Yet, after repeatedly rejecting IS' call to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Jordanian scholars refused to further discuss disputes with the jihadi group through official channels such as interviews aired on Jordanian TV shows. Moreover, if Abu Qatada and al-Maqdisi rejected IS, they remain fervent proponents of al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's offshoot in Syria. Hence, their argumentations did not entail a strong counter-discourse to violent Salafism.

7.1.7. Jordan's Participation in the International Coalition against Islamic State

As early as mid-2013, Jordan got indirectly involved in the war in Syria, hosting US-run training camps for FSA fighters. The story was revealed in April 2014 by American journalist Sara Williams. Neither the US nor Jordan confirmed the information, at a time when the kingdom was trying to remain impartial. In September 2014, Jordan did not take part in the newly launched international coalition against IS in Iraq and Syria. The debate around the military intervention against the group polarised the Jordanian public opinion. On the one hand, King Abdullah asserted Jordan's duty to confront "terrorist [organization]". In November 2014, the ruler addressed the Jordanian Parliament in those words; "[o]ur religious and humanitarian duty demands that we confront with strength and firmness all those who try to instigate sectarian wars or distort the image of Islam and Muslims. Accordingly, the war on these terrorist organisations and their radical ideology is our war because we are targeted and we must defend ourselves, Islam, and the values of tolerance and moderation by fighting extremism and terrorists. [...] This is our war, and the war of true Islam..." (The Jordan Times, 2014). On the other hand, military and political figures stressed the necessity to remain impartial and uninvolved. In a public address aired on Yarmouk TV on September 12, 2014, retired General Musa al-Hadid hammered that the anti-IS coalition was attached to the US' interests in the Middle East. He claimed that; "[i]f [it was] not for America, there would have been no ISIS. [...] This is not our war" (Yarmouk TV, 2014). On the same note, Jordanian MP Bassam al-Manasir expressed his regrets that Jordan did not remain neutral in the war against IS and should have consulted the Parliament before joining the coalition (al-Ghad al-Arabi TV, 2014).

The capture of Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh by IS and his gruesome immolation in February 2015 brought all Jordanians together. The press, politicians and religious leaders all strongly reacted to the execution. Al-Rai (2015) wrote, "[we] will not rest until we have our revenge". Jumana Ghunaimat, editor-in-chief of the Jordanian daily *al-Ghad* explained: "[his death] has turned this war into a war waged by all Jordanians. [...] We must give these terrorists a taste of the pain that they caused us" (2015). Samih al-Maaita, former Minister of Communications, stressed that "[d]eath is the fitting punishment for anyone who holds [IS] ideology, and for all members of this stream" (al-Rai, 2015). Finally, in a short video broadcast on Roya TV channel (2015), religious leader Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi bashed IS for using slaughter and immolation. He said: "[s]uch immolation cannot be justified either by Islamic law or by reason [...] These people have distorted the image of the Jihadi movement [...] Jihadi Salafism has nothing whatsoever to do with this". On February 5, 2015, Jordan launched an intense bombing raid against IS in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the murder of the pilot. The country has been militarily involved in the conflict ever since, targeting IS' positions in Syria and hosting major airbases for the planes of the international coalition.

In a nutshell

Jordan faced numerous challenges to keep the threat of Salafi-jihad and popular support for militant groups such as IS and *Fateh al-Shām* outside its borders. IS was physically at the door of the Hashemite Kingdom, and the group's radical ideology was strongly embedded in the country's political, social and religious structures. Besides, Jordan proved highly sensitive to the regional instability and dependent on foreign powers. The spillover effects of the Syrian conflict worsened the already fragile political and economic situation of the kingdom. The lack of reform and the absence of a strong religious and political counter-discourse fed the grievances of the Jordanian population and endangered its resilience to IS' extremist discourse. Unfortunately, the military weakening of IS might not have solved Jordan's vulnerability. As expressed by Lt. Gen. Mahmud Freihat, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff, when IS was defeated in Iraq and in several parts of Syria, "[t]he only hope [of the IS fighters] will be to turn toward the Jordanian border" (BBC Arabic, 2017). On the same note, Amer al-Sabaileh warned that the vacuum left by IS' fall might be filled by new terror groups in the region, leading to an increase in criminality in Jordan (2018).

7. 2 The Jordanian Populations' Frames on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

This section builds on almost 70 interviews with residents of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, including Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees. These insights were collected via focused group discussions and one-to-one interviews conducted in Amman, Ajloun and Mafraq. The following paragraphs highlight the perceptions of the individuals surveyed – Jordanian citizens but also Syrian refugees in the kingdom – on the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria, along the lines with the frames categories used to analyse IS' discourse on the two conflicts. All words in quotation marks correspond to language and terms used by the Jordanian population during the research.

7.2.1. Iraq and Syria: The Heart of the Regional Chessboard

The vast majority of the Jordanian population surveyed identified the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as two different conflicts, while this perception was even stronger among Syrian refugees living in the kingdom. Nonetheless, debates reflected some degree of disagreement on the specificity of each conflict. Most notably, the diversity of the discourses on their multiple causes accounted for the complexity of the wars' dynamics. This lack of a clear and unified understanding also demonstrated that the regional turmoil could not be explained through a single lens of analysis. For the majority of respondents, the dynamics that led to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria are context-specific. In Iraq, the "civil war" emerged from sectarian – Shī'ia against Sunni – and ethnic – Kurdish against Arabs – tensions. A good number of participants traced the beginning of the Iraqi conflict to the demise of Saddam Hussein, orchestrated by the US, that was replaced by an interim government in Iraq. Following this argument, a two-step process led to violent fighting in the land of the two rivers: first a "rebellion" against the "occupation" of the American "invaders", and second, a civil war among the Iraqi people. In Syria, the Jordanian population surveyed unanimously described the beginning of the conflict as an "*intifāda*" (uprising) against the repressive regime of Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian refugees interviewed in Jordan insisted on the revolutionary nature of the conflict, emphasising that the Syrians initially fought for their rights and to free themselves from "tyranny" (*al-istibdād*). Furthermore, all respondents acknowledged and regretted that the revolution quickly became politicised and turned into a war between rebel factions instead of a coalition against al-Assad's regime. Hence, according to the majority of the

Jordanian population surveyed, it appears clearly that the conflicts in Iraq and Syria emerged from two different dynamics: a rebellion against the external occupation of the country in Iraq, followed by a war among the Iraqi people; and a rebellion against the internal tyranny of the government in Syria. In both cases, the conflicts were deemed "necessary" by the respondents, as they aimed to tackle illegitimate and repressive regimes.

Even though the majority of the Jordanian population interviewed made a clear distinction between the wars in Iraq and Syria, participants also underlined that both conflicts shared multiple similarities. Mainly, they emphasised that the perpetrators and victims were the same in the two countries. On the one hand, civilians, Sunni Muslims, and more generally Arabs, were considered the main victims. Some also mentioned the impact of the conflicts on Iraq and Syria as nations, both in terms of destructions and division. Finally, a much smaller number of Jordanian activists and students raised concerns about the impact of the conflicts on neighbouring countries that hosted large populations of refugees, and on the concept of democracy in the Middle East, together with the rights and freedoms it should guarantee. On the other hand, the entire population surveyed in Jordan pointed to the crucial role of international actors in the perpetuation of the wars in Iraq and Syria. Notably, "Shī'ia Iran", Russia and the United States were seen as "puppeteers" of the regional turmoil. This common perception was widely shared across gender, age, education level and social background. Iran – often referred to as the "Shī'ia power" or "Shī'ia master" – was perceived as the main enemy at the regional level. It should be reminded that 92% of the Jordanian population are Sunni Muslims, while only 1% are Shī'ia or Sufi. Similarly, the vast majority of Syrian refugees in the Hashemite Kingdom belong to Sunni Islam. Some participants argued that the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq as of December 2007 left an unstable and weak Iraq that became "an open door" for Iran to establish its influence and advance towards Syria. The end-goal of this strategy was believed to be the "destruction of the Sunni Ummah". Another similarity between Iraq and Syria, according to the respondents interviewed in Jordan, was the historical sectarian nature of the political authority, characterised by a ruling minority repressing the Sunni majority. In this sense, the conflicts were not only seen as revolutions against illegitimate powers but as rebellions of the oppressed Sunni majority against the Alawi and Shī'ia tyrannical ruling elite. This argument was used by a smaller number of the Jordanian population surveyed to argue that the conflicts in Iraq and Syria were in fact one single conflict. The latter was believed to have erupted as a consequence of the sectarian diversity, the marginalisation of the Sunni majority, and of the political repression based on sectarian lines. Yet those participants specified that sectarianism *per se* did not exist before the two conflicts but was

used as an instrument of mobilisation in both cases. In other words, sectarianism was not visible at the society level until the crises started.

The share of the Jordanian population that perceived the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as one common conflict also mentioned that resources – oil in Iraq and gas in Syria – catalysed disputes between regional and international state actors. Finally, they referred to the strategic geographical location of Iraq – sharing borders with Iran – and Syria – as a coastal country – as a common cause of the conflicts. As a result, in the words of those respondents, two mutual and interlinked dynamics led to the eruption of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. On the one hand, both countries experienced a crisis of governance that was exacerbated by the centralisation of power and the soaring corruption of the political elites. On the other hand, both countries suffered from an identity crisis that resulted from the marginalisation of the majority of Sunni citizens in governance. As a result, the conflicts were inevitable and necessary to revolt against deteriorating economic conditions, corruption and tyrannical regimes. Only a few voices wished that the conflict between the Syrian people and the government was solved through negotiation instead of violence. To put it in a nutshell, the Jordanian population that referred to Iraq and Syria as a single conflict identified resources and power-sharing disputes, in addition to the deteriorated relationship between the centre – at the governmental level – and the peripheries – at the society level – as the original causes of the turmoil in both countries.

Another common perception among all participants was that, although the conflicts in Iraq and Syria were anchored in national politics, both struggles quickly took a regional and international shape. The Jordanian population surveyed unanimously put the two conflicts at the centre of a broader scheme for regional hegemony. More precisely, the sectarian tensions that laid the foundation of the wars were mirrored at the regional level, where Iran was believed to act against the Sunni populations and where western powers – led by the US – were thought to defend the "Jewish state" of Israel. Some participants also referred to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as the theatres of an ideological struggle between imperialism and communism, that is, between the United States and Russia. In all cases, those two "western powers" along with Iran were considered as non-Arab powers that instrumentalised the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in order to weaken Arab states in the hope of imposing their domination and asserting their own interests. Along those lines, one participant noted that the wars in Iraq and Syria were representative of a power shift in the Middle Eastern region, namely the demise from Iraq and Syria – along with Saudi Arabia and Egypt – and the rise of Iran and Turkey as regional powers. Hence, if the

conflicts in Iraq and Syria were never described, *per se*, as religious wars by the Jordanian population surveyed, the underlying assumption was that the interests of the powers involved were incompatible with the existence of a strong and united Sunni Muslim community in the Arab world. Put differently, although participants did not refer to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as religious wars or as wars in the name of religion, they widely recognised that religion gradually became a main dynamic of multi-layer rivalries. It follows that religion, along with sectarian divides, assumed a central role in the discourse of the Jordanian population to explain regional politics. The question thus arises: where does IS stand in this perceived *de facto* war against the Sunni Ummah?

7.2.2. Islamic State – A Pawn of the Great Powers

A striking feature of the answers given by the Jordanian population surveyed about the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was the absence of IS. In more than 80% of the cases, the group was not referred to by the participants, until they were directly asked about it. Similarly, the group was never mentioned as a main actor of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Along the same line, when asked about IS, a great number of respondents simply answered; "it does not exist, it is nothing". A Syrian refugee who was interviewed in Mafraq wondered; "if they really exist, where are they? I did not see them". Yet it is difficult to assess the real reason for this repeated omission. Did the participants silence their thoughts due to the sensitivity of the topic, or did their exclusion of IS reflect the general perception of the Jordanian population? After all, at the time the interviews were conducted, between mid-2018 and mid-2019, the group had been officially defeated in Iraq and Syria. Large-scale polls conducted in Jordan and other countries of the MENA seem to support the second hypothesis. According to a survey conducted with 822 Jordanian in September 2015, at the peak of IS' military domination, 76% of the respondents thought that IS was playing a significant role in causing the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. This rate was relatively low compared to other countries where between 90% and 100% of the respondents attributed an important role to the Salafi-jihadi group in the two wars (Zogby Research Services, 2015a: 9 and 12). Similarly, the same study found that 65% of the Jordanian population surveyed considered "Daesh" as a serious problem, while the results reached between 95% and 100% in Egypt, the UAE and Turkey (Ibid).

The apparent "non-existence" of IS reflected another common perception among the Jordanian public: the group did not exist *per se* because it was depicted as a "western creation". Opinions about who created IS and why it was created differed among the respondents. Some argued that the group was obviously funded by the US, with the help of the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, in order to protect Israel from Arab enemy states such as Iraq and Syria. For this share of the Jordanian population interviewed, foreign support only could explain IS' quick military conquest, its high-tech weapons, and the proliferation of its "propaganda". Others hinted that IS was, in fact, a "security company" involving more than 18 countries. The latter ones were believed to "plot" in the shadows in order to overthrow current governments and install leaders that would be loyal to the US and its Saudi ally. According to those respondents, IS was also supported by Russia in an attempt to portray Bashar al-Assad as the lesser evil for Syria's future. The perception of IS as a "tool" of western state actors was widely shared across the Jordanian population surveyed. A few highly-educated respondents linked the group to the "conscious political Islamisation of the MENA" as a strategy to counter ideologies that threatened political elites, such as the socialists and communists during the 1970s and the 1980s. As a result, IS would be contingent to the regional circumstances, that is, the fight against a new regional enemy, the Shī'ia. Whether put in academic terms or not, the shared perception of the Jordanian public interviewed depicted IS as the last development of foreign interests in the MENA region – a mere instrument of western actors. Only one respondent, a sheikh from northern Jordan, thought that IS was the product of the system and of the authoritarian regimes. Besides, marginalisation and oppression were seen as important factors to explain the success of IS' recruitment campaign in the early years of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Finally, a social activist in the field of legal awareness pointed to the role of the media, especially inside Syria. According to him, the media portrayed the Syrian conflict as a war between the Alawi and the Sunni, which attracted Sunni to join IS.

Whether IS was effectively created or only used by western powers to intervene in the conflicts that ravaged Iraq and Syria, all participants questioned the Islamic nature of the group. First, they never referred to it as "Islamic State" (*dawlat al-islāmiyyah*) or "the Caliphate" (*al-khilāfat*). Second, the Jordanian population surveyed noted that the violence usd by "Daesh" was quasi-systematically directed toward civilians, unarmed Muslims and the factions which "resisted" the US, Israeli forces, and tyrannical regimes in the MENA region. Several respondents cited the Qur'an to explain why IS could not be considered a Muslim group: "Whoever kills an innocent person it is as if he killed all of humanity" (Qur'an 5:32). Raising the lack of coherence of IS' discourse, numerous Jordanians wondered why the group – while pretending to fight "the US,

the Jews or the Israeli" – did not focus its military efforts on those "invaders". In the same vein, they pointed to the fact that the damages inflicted by "Daesh" on US and western targets were so limited that they could, in fact, be purposefully circumscribed. This, they argued, raised questions on IS' actual intentions. Those findings seem confirmed by a series of polls and surveys conducted in Jordan between 2014 and 2017. According to a poll published in September 2014 by the Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan, 62 percent of Jordanians view IS as a terrorist organisation (Shteiwi, 2018). The group's popularity was then at its height. In 2015 and 2016, respectively 61% and 75% of the Jordanians stated that they considered IS as a complete perversion of Islam (Zogby Research Services, 2015b: 15; Zogby Research Services, 2015a: 15; Zogby Research Services, 2016: 13). In 2016, 94% of the kingdom's population was believed to have a negative opinion of the group (Pew Research Center, 2015). Finally, according to the Jordan-based NAMA Intelligence Services, since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, a constant 4% to 5% of the Jordanian population showed open support for IS, while only 1 to 2% believed that the group represents Islam (Braizat, 2017).

Nonetheless, those results must be nuanced. A small proportion of the Jordanian population interviewed for this research recognised that its opinion, and that of the public in general, shifted after the burning of the Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh in February 2015. It would appear that before the tragic incident, IS had some popular support in the kingdom. This assumption seems to be confirmed by the polls and surveys cited above. By several Jordanians' own admission, when it announced the establishment of the Islamic state in June 2014, the group was seen as finally triggering "the dream of the Caliphate" and of the recovered dignity of the Arabs after decades of "humiliation at the hands of Israel". Several participants explained that the "dream of the Caliphate" was included in school curricula and that many Jordanians grew up with the wish to see the Caliphate established as a better system of governance. One participant recorded a revealing story. In early 2013, in Amman, he found himself sitting in a cab next to an FSA fighter. While the two passengers and the driver started talking about the conflict in Syria and the role of the rebel factions, the FSA fighters mentioned his affiliation. The driver immediately asked both passengers to leave his cab. The reason? The FSA was a secularist group "taking orders from western powers" instead of joining the ranks of al-Nusra and fighting Bashar al-Assad. At that time, al-Nusra was still the Syrian branch of Islamic State in Iraq. This popular support for IS' project was echoed by a lack of religious counter-discourse and by political support for the religious groups fighting in Syria – albeit non-official. A couple of Jordanians living in the northern districts of the kingdom described the organised transfer of Islamist fighters that was

facilitated by the Jordanian military each night at the border with Syria, while Gulf countries and Qatar financially supported the process. More stories about the FSA and the Jordanian military selling weapons provided by western powers to IS also surfaced during field research in the kingdom – although those stories never filtered to the public at large.

7.2.3. Iraq and Syria: Lands of Occupation?

While IS was generally excluded from discussions on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the Jordanian public surveyed pointed to Iran, Russia and the US as the main actors of the wars and contributors to regional instability. Respondents adopted a common discourse on the interests and strategies of those state actors. They believed that Iran was involved for religious reasons, while the US and Russia sought to protect Israel, which had always portrayed Iraq as a security threat. Some also argued that Russia was using the conflict in Syria to restore its former glory on the international stage. Inhabitants of Mafraq shared their concerns to see the Russian flag floating at the border between the Hashemite Kingdom and Syria. These findings were substantiated by a 2016 opinion poll that found that Jordanians deemed the interference by the US and Iran one of the main factors to the conflicst in Syria and Iraq (Zogby Research Services, 2016). According to another poll, 99% and 70% of Jordanians view Iran the United States respectively as fuelling extremist sectarian violence in the Middle East (Zogby Research Services, 2015: 34). In all cases, the three enemy states were considered as "invaders" and enemies of Arab states. Furthermore, their thirst for regional hegemony implied an "anti-Arab policy", especially directed against the strong Arab states such as Syria and Egypt. The "deal of the century" was and remains a very popular belief in Jordan and has been mentioned countless times to explain the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. According to the Jordanian population surveyed, both conflicts could be interpreted as steps to achieve the "deal", that is, to impose a "greater Israel" in the Middle East. Finally, respondent mentioned the Gulf countries and Turkey as second-rank actors which were believed to be indirectly fuelling the wars in Iraq and Syria by facilitating the transfer of Islamists and to finance "terrorist" factions. Yet those state actors were not given much importance as they were commonly considered to be the "puppets" of western powers.

In the Iraqi context, most respondents stated that the US had been joined by an international coalition of western countries against IS. Moreover, the US allied with the Kurdish Peshmerga, who were trained by France. Turkey allegedly got involved in order to protect the Turkmen.

Interestingly, the government of Baghdad was not mentioned as an actor in the conflict, neither were Islamist groups. When it comes to Syria, opinions were more diverse and reflected the complicated patchwork of groups involved in the conflict. The Jordanian public interviewed unanimously saw Russia, the US and western countries in general as the main actors of the conflict, which they instrumentalised in order to protect Israel. The latter was believed to be driven by its interest in the Golan Heights, which it occupied since the second *Nakba* in 1967. Interestingly, respondents acknowledged China as a strong supporter of Russia within the UN Security Council. At the regional level, Lebanese Hezbollah, Turkey, the Kurds and Saudi Arabia were commonly cited, while Iran remained the central piece of the chestboard. A substantial number of participants interviewed said that the change in the nature of the Syrian conflict led to a change in alliances. They argued that when the conflict started and was depicted as a sectarian conflict, two main alliances emerged: US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries against Russia, Iran and al-Assad. The latter alliance was believed to represent the "Shī'ia crescent" in the Middle East. It was later joined by the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian-backed militias such as the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces. In a second phase, when the war in Syria became the centre of international strategic interests, alliances shifted and opposed US, Israel and Saudi Arabia on the one side, and Turkey, Iran and Russia on the other side.

The Jordanian population surveyed insisted on the fact that the main actors of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria were also those to benefit from it. Iran was able to extend its religious ideology to the whole of the Middle East. Israel was protected from its Arab neighbours and extended its domination over parts of the Syrian territory. Russia and the US gained regional hegemony but also developed their economy through the weapons market. Besides, a few well-informed respondents mentioned that the main powers involved in the conflicts were affiliated to international companies that prospered during the wars. This was, for example, the case of the Halliburton oil company, owned by former US vice-president Dick Cheney, and the security service company Blackwater, controlled by American "aggressors".

7.2.4. Political (Il)Legitimacy in an Uncertain Future

As stated above, the vast majority of the Jordanian public interviewed deemed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria necessary, as the revolution against the illegitimate ruling elite. The illegitimacy of the Iraqi and Syrian regimes before the two conflicts was mainly due to the level of violence and

sectarian policies used against the populations, the lack of popular support deriving from fair elections, and the influence of foreign powers on those national "tyrannical" governments.

In the view of the Jordanian population surveyed, post-2003 Iraq was controlled by the US and by Iran. Many participants were of the opinion that "nobody is legitimate since the fall of Saddam", emphasising the lasting legacy of the Iraqi leader. On the contrary, others argued that Saddam Hussein could be considered as the first "dictator" to be removed from power in the context of the Arab Spring. Although those respondents saw the event as a salutary step forward for the Iraqis, they also emphasised its lack of legitimacy because it was "initiated by the invaders". They further claimed that the US built a system of "political Islamisation" which led to the fragmentation of the country that sunk into sectarianism, extremism and corruption. When the US finally left the country, the latter fell under the domination of Shī'ia Iran. In any case, the country was in the hands of the "occupiers" and decisions were made by foreign powers that were not elected and did not serve popular interests. Several participants added that Iraq was "a parody of democracy" or "a democracy of formality", denoting an "imposed" political system, therefore reflecting the "colonial past" of the country. As explained by several Jordanians, "democracy is a veil that covered the complete failure of the American policies on the Iraqi ground. Democracy cannot be based on sectarian quotas". A social activist concluded: "The only change brought by the US in Iraq is that the corrupted authority of Saddam Hussein was replaced by a democratically elected corrupted authority".

As for Syria, the Jordanian population surveyed was more divided. On the one hand, the majority considered the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad as illegitimate because of its "authoritarian" nature and because the president came to power following "a coup", referring to his succession to his father Hafez al-Assad. Moreover, those respondents argued that a regime that kills its own citizens simply cannot be considered legitimate. On the other hand, a smaller number of participants interviewed in Jordan stated that the Syrian regime was recognised by the international community before the Arab Spring and should thus be regarded as legitimate. Regardless of their opinion about the Syrian regime, all the Jordanian public surveyed wished that fair elections in a multiparty system would be organised and supervised by the UN after the conflict. Participants unanimously placed the source of authority in the sole hands of the "people", who should be the only ones to "chose for their country" and to have their interests represented by their government. To conclude, they acknowledged the need for political transformation in both Iraq and Syria.

Yet the foreign presence was seen as a major cause of previous conflicts and as an insurmountable obstacle to the future of the region. When asked about their opinion on conflict management in the region, all the Jordanian residents interviewed expressed their defiance towards previous peace processes. They mainly mentioned the fact that conflicts in the Middle East have systematically been solved through military intervention as opposed to diplomacy and dialogue between warring parties. They also regretted that local actors were not included in conflict resolution, while foreign powers once again fought for hegemony and their own interests. The resolution of conflicts, they summarised, has only brought more conflicts, the imposition of a "democracy of formality" and the replacement of tyrants with other tyrants who were loyal to foreign powers. For those numerous reasons, none of the respondents was optimistic about the future of the region, although many said that they put their hopes and faith in Allah. As expressed by several participants: "It is important for us to remain optimistic even if there does not seem to be any reason to be positive". The foreseen partition of Arab countries in smaller entities and the refugee issue in the region led one Jordanian youth to assert that there was no hope for progress or development. For most of the Jordanian population surveyed, the long-term project of Israel, supported by the US, to divide the Middle East, as well as the existence of natural resources catalysing international rivalries, were the two main obstacles to peace in the region. As for the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, participants were divided on the exit of the wars. Some expected that "new Sykes-Picot agreements" would be imposed by the western powers and that Syria and Iraq will be partitioned along religious or sectarian lines. Some others asserted that the conflicts would not be brought to an end unless transitional justice mechanisms are put in place to reconcile the people and the government. Another share of the Jordanian public surveyed feared that al-Assad would remain in power under the auspices of Iran and Russia which would eventually lead to the return to a *status quo* in Syria.

This chapter presented the first case study of this research. It opened with the presentation of the rise of Islamism in Jordan under the auspices of the royal family. As for Salafi-jihad, if the current appeared relatively late in the 1990s in the Hashemite Kingdom, Jordanian figures came to play a key role in the development and spread of the violence ideology in the MENA region. The chapter then built upon in-depth interviews with multiple and diverse elements of the Jordanian population. Results of those conversations revealed that grievances against illegitimate governments in the Middle East region, as well as the perceived occupation by foreign powers,

nurtured a feeling of constant threat to the majoritarian Arab and Sunni Muslim communities in the kingdom. The geographical proximity with Israel and the Shī'ia hegemonic aspirations completed the dramatic picture drawn by the Jordanian public. Hence, if IS was unable to directly menace the kingdom from its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, the group's reformist programme for a new regional order surely suggested answers to the regional political and identity crisis depicted by countless participants interviewed in Jordan.

CHAPTER 8 ~ THE CASE OF TUNISIA

The "Tunisian exception", that is, Tunisia's relative success and stability after the 2011 revolution, made it unlikely for the country to fall under the radar of Salafi-jihad. Yet, in 2015, Tunisia provided the main pool for jihadi recruits fighting in the ranks of IS. This apparent paradox makes Tunisia an interesting case study for this research.

Between June 2014 and June 2017, IS released 11 videos targeting Tunisia, of which 7 were released in 2015. All but two of the videos were directly related to attacks committed in Tunisia. Besides, Tunisian fighters in IS' ranks have been praised in additional videos claiming bombings in Iraq and Syria. Most notably, on December 18, 2014, a video entitled "A Message to the People of Tunisia" staged three Tunisian fighters who urged their compatriots to join the Caliphate and topple the Tunisian regime.

Tunisia has not been the target of a spcefic discursive campaign in IS' written media outlet. The only exception may be the eighth issue of *Dābiq*, that published an interview with Abu Muqatil al-Tunisi, who assassinated politician Mohammed Brahmi in July 2013. The interview was translated into French and circulated in the third issue of *Dār al-Islām*. After the killing, the jihadist fled to Syria to join IS. In the three-page interview, al-Tunisi threatens the Tunisian and French *tāghūt* governments, foreseeing that they will be slaughtered (*Dābiq* 8: 59-62). The Tunisian regime – whether led by the Islamists or not – has been targeted several times by IS. In January 2016, following the Tunisian involvement in the international coalition against the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, the group published several videos where it violently accused Tunisia of killing Sunni Muslims. IS also slammed the Tunisian government for striving to "westernise" Muslims by cultivating a western lifestyle. Two months later, in the wake of the Ben Guerdane attack, IS launched another media campaign that called to topple the Tunisian regime. In March 2018, *al-Naba'* published a short editorial that slashed Tunisian Islamists for adopting democracy. This came in the middle of a national debate about equal inheritance for sons and daughters – a legislative shift that went against the *Sharī'ah* law.

8.1 The Rise of Islamism and the Threat of Salafi-jihad in Tunisia

8.1.1 1956-1970: Post-independence Official Islam

Tunisia was introduced to Islam in 670 when the armies of the Umayyad Caliphate entered the region of *Ifrīqīyyah*. They established the city of Kairouan as a military base, where they built one of the country's most famous mosques up until now. Following the conquest, Tunisia fell under the domination of the successive Islamic Empires, until it became colonised by the French in 1881. The country gained independence with Habib Bourguiba in 1956 and declared the Tunisian Republic in 1957.

According to Michael Willis (2012: 155), "of all the developments that have impacted on the politics of the Maghreb states in the post-independence area, none has equalled that of Islamism". In the context of French colonialism, Islamist and nationalist movements shared the rejection of the French presence. Delphine Henry argues that nationalism "activated 'political' Islam", which sought roots in domestic, as well as Islamic identities (1990: 87). Although Tunisia gained independence in 1956, the new Republic aligned its mandate with a western-style modernisation trajectory. President Habib Bourguiba and his party Neo-Destour projected to transform Tunisia into "a prototype of a secular state in a Muslim context" (Frégosi, 1995: 110). As a result, the role of Islamists in the post-independence political and cultural dynamics was purposefully curtailed by the state (Layachi, 2013). Jlassi, former Vice President of Ennahdha Movement and current member of the Tunisian Shura Council, went further, arguing that Bourguiba imposed an "anti-religious secularism" on the country (2018). Examples of this policy were the prohibition of the fast during Ramadan and the integration of the Zaytouna Mosque-University into the University of Tunis in 1960.

Besides, Bourguiba tried to institute an "official Islam" through both rhetoric and action. In 1967, he created the Directorate of Religious Affairs – which would later become the Ministry of Religious Affairs – to control religious norms and actions from above. The President abolished the religious courts (*Sharī'ah* in 1956, rabbinical in 1957) and replaced it by a single-state judicial system (Perkins, 1986: 111). In 1956, the Tunisian government promulgated the Code of Personal Status (CSP), which formally broke with traditional Muslim jurisprudence to

institutionalise equality between women and men in a number of areas (Sfeir, 1957). Finally, in May 1957, the state took control of public *habous* lands (*waqf*) – lands donated for Muslim religious or charitable purposes – and of the financial management of mosques and religious schools. This series of reforms led to what Mabrouk called the regime's "administrative [monopolization] of Islam" (2012: 52).

At that time, the Tunisian state did not meet resistance from Islamists, whose priority was to prove that Islam could be an integrative and loyal part of the political regime. Furthermore, some voices argued that Bourguiba did not attempt to break with religion, but rather to enable the state to take over religion. Hajji (2004: 61) reminded that, in 1962, Bourguiba declared that Islam was "the primary basis on which the Tunisian state was instituted [...] the basis even of the national struggle". Those words are reminiscent of the 1959 Tunisian Constitution, which preamble specifies that the text was promulgated "in the name of God", and which the first article stipulates that Islam is the religion of Tunisia. Finally, Bourguiba proclaimed himself *mufti* (religious scholar who interprets Islam, namely *Sharī'ah* and *fiqh*), regularly praising the Islamic heritage of his people (Layachi, 2013).

Researchers unanimously agree that Islamism in Tunisia emerged in the late 1960s, yet outside the political realm. In the words of Bouldy, "[t]he period from 1967 to 1973 marked a most significant turning-point in Tunisia's most recent history" (1988: 596). At that time, the political system was in crisis as a result of the failure with its experiment of socialist planning. On the economic front, there was increased competition between oriented economy and market economy in the country. Moreover, the period was characterised by the rising authoritarianism of Bourguiba's one-party rule – although the Tunisian statesman enjoyed genuine popularity during his long political life (Brown, 2001: 44). Those dynamics strengthened the communist elements in their posture of defiance *vis-à-vis* the President. Before it was legally banned in 1963, the Communist Party had catalysed the political enmity of Bourguiba. While the prohibition left the political field free to Bourguiba's newly renamed party, Socialist Destourian Party, the Communists remained actively involved in student circles and in the syndicalist movements. In particular, a strong Maoist student movement emerged in the universities and was rapidly joined by a media movement led by the *al-Ghad* newspaper (al-Jourchi, 2018). This student movement not only undermined the President's authority, but also competed with the Islamists who used universities as their preferred field of religious education and recruitment. As a result of anti-religious state policies, and notwithstanding the absence of strong religious opposition, Islam

progressively became a social problem. The question was: is there enough Islam in Tunisia? In this context, the Zaytouna Mosque-University was the theatre of a "renewal of religiosity" (Ibid). The religious centre took on the mission to re-educate young Muslims and to instil a strong sense of identity among the Muslim population. At that time, Zaytouna was producing 90% of the graduates in Tunisia, and thus, potentially very influential.

8.1.2 1970-1980: The Instrumentalisation of Islam

The revivalism of Islam was soon endorsed by Bourguiba himself. After the dismissal of trades union leader Ahmed Ben Salah in 1969, the President became deprived of his natural allies on the social democratic left. Simultaneously, he was facing the opposition of the Marxist left. Finally, Bourguiba needed to convince the government and population about a new liberal economic policy. He thus turned to the Islamists. The latter ones were seen as "a necessary counterweight to the radical left opposition" (Willis, 2012: 156). This strategy echoed similar policies in Arab countries, to the extent that a wave of Islamism swept across the MENA region in 1975-76. It was probably initiated by Egyptian President Sadat, who wanted to counterbalance the influence of the Soviets and of Communism. In 1970, the Egyptian government released a number of imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The ideology of the movement expanded and reached Tunisia in the early 1970s. At the same time, the Palestinian cause gained international recognition under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. The Palestine Liberation Organisation launched a string of violent actions against the state of Israel, strongly contributing to the emancipation of the Arab Muslim identity. These two dynamics were considered timely opportunities by the Tunisian government.

In this context, the Tunisian government readjusted its discourse, becoming less aggressive toward religious traditions and precepts. The state's program of modernisation slowly bent towards what Frégosi described as a "policy of progressive re-Islamisation from above" (1995: 94). While Bourguiba was shown breaking the fast of Ramadan on live television in 1964, from 1969 he started encouraging its observance, adjusting working hours in the public sector. In another instance, in 1973, the government invited magistrates to reject the marriage of a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim man, therefore consecrating a "confessional public order" (Meziou and Mezghani, 1980). Besides, religion was used by the Ministry of Education to limit the critical spirit of the youth in order to fight leftist groups. Religious education became a separate discipline in

school curricula and . As a result, Islamism started spreading through schools as a reaction against the left. At that time, a schoolteacher named Ghannouchi took advantage of the context to advocate for the building of a mosque within his school. At the beginning of the 1970s, Ghannouchi and others formed *al-Jamā'at al-Islāmiyyah* (the Islamic Group) as a clandestine social movement with an ideology close to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. This marked the start of Ghannouchi's career as the leader and ideologist of the Islamist group that will become Ennahdha and propel his leader at the country's helm after the 2011 revolution.

The wider Tunisian religious movement played the game of President Bourguiba, expressing opposition to the left and backing the government in a religious review called *al-Ma'ārīfa* (the knowledge). The publication was printed in the main printing house of the state – together with Muslim Brotherhood literature (such as Banna, Qutb and Maududi) and Algerian Maliki texts (fieldwork interviews, 2018). There was no doubt about the complicity between Bourguiba and the Islamists. This marriage of convenience echoed a general and common strategy in the Arab world to thwart the expansion and influence of the left. During this process, the Islamists steadily slipped from cultural, social, and religious issues to the political arena. In Tunisia, (political) Islamism was still in its gestation phase. Yet its involvement in the affairs of the Tunisian state testifies to a change in the balance of power within the political system in favour of the religious current. As noted by Frégosi, the development of Islamism in Tunisia ultimately had a great impact on the regime, posing the question of the future of relations between the state and religion (1995: 115).

From the end of the 1970s, three events shook the relative stability of the Tunisian state and led to the further politicisation of the Islamists. In January 1978, a general strike broke out, triggering violent repression from the state. It marked the fracture between the Destourian Party and the main national trade union organisation, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (*Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens*, UGTT). Quite strikingly, *al-Ma'ārīfa* changed its focus from preaching Islamic principles and social topics and began to take an interest in politics (Allani, 2009: 259). Notably, the review implicitly backed the government and directly attributed violence to the Union and the leftists.

In 1978 a loose coalition of Islamist groups was formed under the name Movement of Islamic Renewal. By August 1979, the newly named "Islamic Movement" (*Le Mouvement Islamique* or *Jamā'at Islāmiyyah*) emerged from the coalition. As explained by Jlassi (2018), the Islamists went

through a period of existential questioning. The discontent with the government and the lack of a political party that could represent their strand resulted in a self-discovery, an enrichment of the Islamists' political identity. In other words, there was a broad realisation that Islamism – Islam in the political realm – was a terrestrial continuum to spiritual Islam (Ibid). The Islamic Movement held its first congress in August 1979, in secret, in order to set the founding rules of the organisation. At the same time, the Iranian revolution left a lasting legacy on Tunisian Islamism. Before the event, Tunisian Islamists were what could be qualified of a "rightist anti-system force" (Ibid). In 1979, Tunisian Islamists and young Muslims embraced the Iranian revolution which symbolised the popular uprising and the sympathy toward the poorest elements of the society. For instance, *al-Ma'ārīfa* praised the moral qualities of Khomeini and described the revolution as a triumph for Islam and for all the miserable and deprived people on earth (Allani, 2009: 259). Finally, the legitimacy of the government was further shaken in 1980, when Libyan-supported guerrillas launched an armed action against the Tunisian regime in Gafsa (Koven, 1980). In the words of Susan Waltz, the three events described above created an impetus for the [mobilization] and [organization]" of the Islamists (1986: 653).

8.1.3 1980-1987: The Confrontations between the Islamists and the Tunisian State

The 1980s were marked by direct confrontations between the Islamists and the Tunisian government. Uncovered by the police in December 1980, the Islamic Movement came to the conclusion that its clear political identity involved the necessity to resort to open activities. The Movement adopted a confrontational attitude, insisting on "considering the party in power a principal enemy" and pledging to "make a broad coalition with the opposition parties with the aim of overthrowing the regime in power" (Allani, 2009: 260). In June 1981, the Movement was renamed Islamic Tendency Movement (ITM) (*Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique* or *al-Ittijah al-Islāmi*). Its program was openly opposed to modernisation, secularism and the influence of European countries. These goals resulted in a first wave of prosecutions, followed by a series of imprisonments in 1984. 1984 was a year of social unrest and augured Bourguiba's decay. Following the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government increased the price of bread, triggering demonstrations by the poorest elements of the Tunisian society. The protests were unconsciously organised by Islamist locals and consciously supported by the ITM (Kahlaoui, 2018). A similar scenario was to happen in Algeria in 1988, ultimately fostering the Algerian Civil War.

The Islamist movement grew from preaching activities in the mosques in the 1970s to becoming a well-organised and public movement in the 1980s. In fact, the ITM overtook the leftist student movement in universities and the Marxist tendencies in the UGTT. It was also active in the Tunisian organisations for human rights, and more surprisingly, in the army (Ibid). By the mid-1980s, the Islamists had infiltrated all levels of the Tunisian society, with a stronger manifestation in rural areas of the country. As a result, the government did not only face a new political opponent, but also a quick change in popular mentality and behaviour in favour of Islam (Jouili, 2018). In other words, the Islamists offered an alternative social and political project to the ideological and institutional weakness and lack of legitimacy of Bourguiba's government. Both dynamics presented a clear threat to the legitimacy of Bourguiba's regime and sent an alarm to the state.

Yet the ITM was at the height of its political mobilisation. Since 1984, the Islamists had been able to rely on a strong ally within the government: Prime Minister Muhammed Mzali. The latter intended to reach a compromise between the state and the ITM, preaching the principle of modernity through the safeguard of Islamic and Arab identity (Mzali, 2007). The controversial relation was evidenced by the meeting between the Prime Minister and Abdelfattah Mourou, the number 2 of the Islamist organisation, in July 1984 (Allani, 2009: 262). One year later, Mzali declared that he was willing to legalise the Movement as long as it did not politicise Islam (Ibid).

The Islamist appeal stemmed from mutually reinforcing dynamics: worsening socioeconomic conditions, increased state repression, the patent decline of the secular opposition, and the absence of a strong state ideology amid a search for identity in the context of fading nationalist and socialist ideologies perceived as the legacy of French occupation (Layachi, 2013). Besides, the Tunisian case echoed the regional rise of Islamism as an answer to the failure of Pan-Arabism. According to sociologist Mohammed Jouili, at that period, the social environment shaped the identity of Tunisian Islamism. In his view, the peak of the ITM's political mobilisation corresponded to a domestic ideological competition between urban Islamism and rural or suburban Islamism. The latter displayed rather conservative religious philosophy due to the harsh economic situation Tunisians faced in the countryside. On the other hand, the former embraced a more humanist, modern and intellectual form of Islam, that acknowledged the position of Tunisia at the crossroad between Europe and the Middle East. Eventually, urban Islamism

prevailed, which might explain the identity of Tunisian Islamism and its moderate strand under Ennahdha (Jouili, 2018).

8.1.4 1987-2011: Islamism under Ben Ali Era

Ben Ali assumed power in the wake of the November 7, 1987 coup. Interestingly, this overthrow was supposedly attempted in order to counter another coup planned by the Islamists on November 9 (Khalaoui, 2018). The new leader of the Tunisian state ordered the release of hundreds of political prisoners, including Ghannouchi. When the latter recovered his freedom, one of his first statements was: "We have trust in God but after God, we have trust in President Ben Ali" (Kallab, 1988b: 26). Ghannouchi added: "Ben Ali refused to obey Bourguiba's orders to kill Ghannouchi and his colleagues in prison [...] doing so, he not only saved one person but a whole nation" (Kallab, 1988a).

The honeymoon between Ben Ali and the Islamists lasted until the beginning of 1989. During those few months, the ITM was allowed to participate in the High Council of the National Pact and in the Islamic High Council. Conversely, the Movement was renamed Ennahdha Movement (Rennaissance Movement) as a reassuring sign that it would not try to monopolise Islam. Ennahdha accepted the principle of the modern political regime and recognised the necessity to preserve the previously acquired women's rights in the *Code du Status Personnel*. On the other hand, from his arrival to power, Ben Ali multiplied gestures and courtesies *vis-à-vis* the Islamists and the Muslim population. At first sight, this policy denoted the will to rectify the state's image after years of religious abuse, and to break with Bourguiba's secularism. Yet, Delphine Henry argued that Ben Ali's strategy was mainly aimed at "vampirising the agenda of the Islamists by multiplying symbolic proofs of his attachment to religion" (1990: 140). This interpretation was shared by Frégosi, who pointed to Ben Ali's role as Bourguiba's Minister of Interior in charge of the repression of Islamism. He explained: "Ben Ali had become convinced that repression alone could not succeed in eradicating the Islamist phenomenon. Hence, for him, it was necessary not to interrupt the repressive spiral, but to complete it with a cultural component" (Frégosi, 1995: 113). In other words, Ben Ali's policy of re-Islamisation of the Tunisian society was a way to defuse the Islamist contestation.

Along with this strategy, the new President introduced all his utterances by the traditional formula "In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful", and concluded with a *Sūrah* of the Qur'an.

Also, the Minister of Interior, Habib Ammar, affirmed the wish of his government to "give Islam the pace it deserve[d]" (Daoud, 1989: 688). The National Pact (*Pacte National* or *al-mithāq al-watanī*) of November 7, 1988, announced that "Tunisia, an integral part of the Arab world and the Islamic nation, is attached to its Arabity [Arabness] and its Islamity" (Tunisian External Communication Agency, 1992). After thirty years of integration to state education, Zaytouna University was restored in its independence. In another instance, the Tunisian government introduced the call for prayer in audiovisual media, as well as the broadcast of the Friday sermon on television. Tunisia experienced a pious atmosphere, while its leader displayed what Ben Achour described as a "heavy bigotry" (1992: 172).

Yet the marriage of convenience between Ben Ali and the Islamists quickly came to an end. In 1989, Ennahdha was allowed to participate in the first free parliamentary elections as an independent movement. This designation aimed to counter a law passed in February 1989 that banned all parties based on race, linguistic, regionalism and religion. The Islamists obtained 13% of all votes, scoring up to 30% in parts of Tunis outskirts (Layachi, 2013). The Tunisian regime remained traumatised by this unexpected political success and initiated an incredibly harsh repression. Ghannouchi, the historical leader of Ennahdha, left the country only one month after the elections. The same year, the Ministry of Education, Muhammed Choufri, initiated a "pedagogical purification" of Islam in schools, universities but also in mosques and the media (Mabrouk, 2012: 60). On the other hand, imams became state officials; they were paid state salaries and appointed by the Prime Minister's Office (McCarthy, 2014). Numerous imams were actually members of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party. These policies showed that Ben Ali's openness to traditional religious values did not fundamentally alter the rule that drove the political game under Bourguiba: authoritarianism.

The state policy was met with great opposition from Ennahdha. The movement took the opportunity of the first Gulf War (1990-1991) to mobilise public opinion. As in several other countries in the MENA region, Tunisian Islamists portrayed the war as a struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims, equating it to the opposition between the Tunisian state and the Islamist movement (Allani, 009: 265). The government reacted to those declarations by banning Islamic *al-Fajr* newspaper in December 1990, and by dissolving the General Union of Tunisian Students (*Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisiens* or *al-'ittihād al-'ām li-talaba tūnis*) in March 1991. The tension with Islamists culminated in an attack on the office of the government Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party in Bab Souika. Between 1991 and 1992, upwards

of 8000 Ennahdha party members were arrested (Willis, 2012: 168). Many others fled the country. In spite of the deep penetration of the Tunisian society by the Islamists, the state repression was not condemned by the population. Neighbouring Algeria's aborted experiment in Islamist political participation and the ensuing decade of Algerian civil war probably acted as an efficient deterrent against supporting the Islamist rebellion in Tunisia. It was not until June 1996 that Ennahdha officially decided to give up its confrontational stance and to adopt a moderate policy aimed at fostering national dialogue (Allani, 2009: 265). Yet the movement did not re-organise before 2007, leaving a religious vacuum in Tunisia.

The religious vacuum purposefully left by the Tunisian government pushed the society to accept the idea of violent Islam. This violence materialised in the years 2006-2007, at the same time when Ennahdha secretly re-organised. At that time, Tunisia became once again the scene of bloody confrontations between the police forces and Salafi-jihadi groups affiliated to al-Qaeda. Simultaneously, the Islamist movement slowly re-emerged, mainly through the University of Sfax and among lawyers associations (Kahlaoui, 2018). Unlike in the past, Islamists in Tunisia had gained a status of victims after the harsh repression and the wave of exiles caused by Ben Ali regime. This led to another surge of Islamism within the Tunisian population.

8.1.5 Post-2011 Revolution Tunisia: Power Exercise and Moderation

In the words of Layachi (2013), the 2011 Tunisian revolution reflected "the failure of systems that inhibited for too long both religious and secular voices of dissent". The revolution was followed by a renewal of Tunisia's identity. As observed by Haugbølle and Cavatorta (2012: 20), Tunisia's new identity model marked both the rejection of Bourguiba's exclusion of religion from public life, and of Ben Ali's instrumentalisation of religion for political goals. The revolution also gave the Islamists the opportunity to regain freedom, but also the political space. The revolution brought great change in the nature of the Islamist movement. Before 2011, Ennahdha was a national liberation movement, a resistance that had no political program, but instead, a "political SMIG", in reference to the guaranteed minimum industrial wage (Jlassi, 2018). After the revolution, Ennahdha became a political opposition movement and a contender to the executive.

The Islamist movement eventually assumed power after winning the October 2011 elections. The first post-revolution government was a coalition – unofficially called Troika – of three parties:

leading Islamist Ennahdha, social democracy Ettakatol, and centre-left Congress for the Republic (CPR). Ennahdha's new responsibilities and experience of the political instrument led to the softening of Islamism and the birth of a new Tunisian Islam – although Sharī'ah remained the party's electoral program. In 2013 and 2014, a national dialogue allowed Islamists to adopt a fluid and dynamic identity. As a cultural organisation, Ennahdha remained religiously conservative, yet rather liberal on issues of democracy and human rights. As a political party, Ennahdha adopted a socialist strand on the centre-left of the political spectrum. In the end, although the cultural Ennahdha was attached to its religious traditions, the political Ennahdha primarily fought for a new country and, to that end, it recognised that adjustment and flexibility were needed (Ibid). Ghannouchi was the first to endorse this flexibility. For example, he and Essebsi – often comically referred to as "the two sheikhs" – collaborated to exit the 2013 Bardo crisis (Marks, 2016). Ghannouchi compared the cooperation to the signature of the Hudaybiyyah Treaty between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe of Mecca – that affirmed peace between the two cities and allowed Prophet Mohammed to come back to Mecca. He concluded: "What has just happened in our country will be a conquest" (MEMRI TV, 2014). In 2016, the Islamist leader went as far as to assert that, following the Tunisian revolution, "political Islam has lost its justification" and, henceforth, "Ennahdha [left] political Islam to enter Muslim democracy" (Le Monde, 2016). He explained that Ennahdha was a political party with "an Islamic point of reference" but also a "moderate civil national party opened to all Tunisian men and women" (Ibid). In June 2016, the party's 10th Congress adopted a reform focused on the moderation and elaboration of a reformist trend. Ennahdha also took the decision to separate the ideological preaching (*da'wah*) from politics (*hizb al-siāsī*), no longer allowing its leaders to simultaneously hold positions in political and religious community organisations (Marks, 2016). Doing so, the Islamist party definitely repudiated the principle of *Shumūliyyah* (comprehensiveness) and broke with its long-standing alignment to the classic Muslim Brotherhood tradition. The concept, highlighted in Hassan al-Banna canonical *Risālat al-Ta'alīm*, had been ratified by Ennahdha 1987 convention in the following words: "Islam is not restricted to the realms of creed and ritual, but rather also comprises the social, political, and economic domains" (Ennahdha, 2012: 5).

To summarise, Ennahdha epitomised the Islamist movement in Tunisia since the country's independence from French rule. Despite the transformation of names and the alteration of its nature, Ennahdha remained the same Islamist movement, led by the same historical figures such as Ghannouchi. Before its political birth in 1981, Ennahdha was relatively close to quietist

Salafism (Marks, 2015). With the sudden liberalisation that followed the 2011 revolution, Ennahdha was confronted with another form of a more radical and violent Islamism: Salafi-jihad.

8.1.6 Salafi-jihad in Tunisia

Tunisian Salafism emerged during the French rule and corresponds to "the patriotic expectations of the peoples who rejected colonial domination" (Addi, 2009: 341). Yet Salafism in its most violent form developed more recently; it started in the 1990s with the group *Tandhīm al-Qaeda* that multiplied the fronts in all countries of the Maghreb (Allani, 2009). As Marks notes, "[s]ome have [characterized] Salafism as a phenomenon, a tidal wave that crashed into Tunisia from the Wahhabi Gulf without warning" (2013: 107). This view echoes the official stance of Ennahdha and numerous Islamists who tried to distance themselves from the most violent elements of Islamism. Mounia Ibrahim – a Member of Parliament under the Ennahdha flag – illustrated this interpretation during a meeting at the Tunisian Parliament in August 2018. She argued that, deprived of religious education and a local model of religiosity during Ben Ali's era, young Tunisians accessed religious knowledge through religious channels broadcasting in the entire MENA region. Those channels – such as Saudi *al-Majd* and Egyptian *al-Nās* – promoted Wahhabi-inspired Salafi literal Islam, contributing to the rise of religious extremism in a country where Islam was traditionally moderate and tolerant. According to MP Ibrahim (2018), those channels have brought a form of "counter-knowledge". Physically isolated from the leaders and other militants – who were in prison or in exile – religiously-oriented youths were united only through shared spirituality, virtual networks and great Arab causes such as Palestine and Iraq (Merone and Cavatorta, 2012). Yet Merone and Cavatorta asserted that Tunisian Salafism has strong domestic roots (Ibid). First and foremost, Ben Ali's harsh repression against the Islamists arguably played a key role in the radicalisation of several elements. The harsh subjugation of the Islamists by the Tunisian regime paralysed the organisational structure concerned with the recruitment of potential Ennahdha members or supporters. This vacant space was appropriated by jihadi networks which operated in the shadows (Mabrouk, 2012: 60).

Surely, although they became more visible after the 2011 revolution and the resulting political liberalisation of the country, Salafi-jihadi groups predate the 21st century. Arguably, the Salafi-jihadi movement in Tunisia emerged as an offshore of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb – created in 1997. The group was especially active in Algeria where it conducted dozens of violent

offensives; but it also drew attention from the international community when it killed 19 people in the attack on a synagogue in Djerba in April 2002 (Ghorbal, 2009: 11). Tunisian jihadists came into direct confrontation with the regime in 2007 when the Tunisian security services uncovered an attempt to strike the regions of Soliman and Boumhel in the southern suburbs of Tunis. The resulting confrontation that occurred between the police and the activists led to the death of at least 12 jihadists and the arrest of hundreds of people (Allani, 2009: 266). According to the French press, these actions were directed by Lassad Sassi, a former Tunisian police officer linked to the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) (Thedrel, 2007). Nonetheless, until the 2011 revolution, Tunisia was not a fertile ground for Salafi-jihad. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and in the context of Bush's war on terrorism, Ben Ali used the threat of "terrorism" to portray itself to western allies as a "seasoned bulwark against the threat of Islamist extremism" (Willis, 2012: 191) and stiffen his dictatorial regime (Ayeb, 2011: 469). For example, the *Groupe Combattant Tunisien* (Tunisian Combatant Group) – created in Afghanistan in 2000 to install an Islamist government in Tunisia – was never able to operate in the country.

After the 2011 revolution, a combination of factors culminated in the growth of Tunisian Salafi-jihad. On the one hand, thousands of militants imprisoned by Ben Ali's regime were released from prison following the March 2011 general amnesty. This included 1,200 Salafists, among whom 300 had previously fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia (International Crisis Group, 2013: 14). One of them was Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi, who will become the main figure of Tunisian Salafi-jihad. Simultaneously, exiled jihadists who had fled Ben Ali's crackdown came back to Tunisia. On the other hand, the post-revolution permissive environment enabled jihadi groups to conduct preaching (*da'wah*) openly. Open stands were installed in front of mosques, in the streets, for passers-by to see (fieldworkd interviews, 2018). In addition, it was believed that up to 1,100 out of 5,100 mosques in Tunisia fell into the hands of radical imams after 2011 (Cristani, 2014). Those mosques engaged in propaganda activities aimed at encouraging Tunisian to join the jihad in Syria (al-Arabiya, 2012). For instance, Bechir Ben Hassen became infamous for its violent and sectarian preaching. In a video posted online in late December 2014, the Tunisian cleric called to purge Tunisia of the Shi'a (MEMRI TV, 2014). One month later, he suggested that anyone who cursed Prophet Mohammad should be executed (MEMRI TV, 2015).

In addition, toppling Ben Ali did not resolve the country's deep social problems. Worst, the revolution increased the marginalisation of poor people and several became disillusioned with the lack of change. In 2017, more than 36% of youth Tunisians were unemployed (World Bank,

2017). As reminded by Marks (2013: 110), the largest concentrations of jihadists resided in economically depressed areas. Religious charitable organisations saw this economic struggle as an opportunity to recruit, and affiliation entailed the payment of sums of money to members (anonymous fieldword interviews, 2018). Finally, Ennahdha, although being the first Islamist party in power, accepted the principle of democracy as a means to govern society, breaking with its most traditional stance. Besides, the new government failed to include young people in the state structure and the decision-making process. As a result, in addition to political, educational and economic marginalisation, young Tunisians suffered from the lack of interest of Tunisian political parties, that "reflected well-known figures of an earlier generation" (Marks, 2013: 110). Exclusion and lack of political change in the country triggered the rise of anti-system sentiment that expressed itself through Salafi-jihadi organisations. The latter offered the response to the failures of Islam proposed by the Troika.

The growth of Salafi-jihad on the Tunisian political stage after the revolution was epitomised by the legalisation of several Salafi-oriented parties. This was the case of *Hizb Jabhat al-'Islāh al-Islāmiyyah al-Tūnisiyyah* (Tunisian Islamic Reform Front) in 2011, *Hizb al-Rahma* (Party of Mercy), *Hizb al-'Assāla* (Party of Authenticity), *Hizb al-Tahrīr* (Party of Liberation) and *Parti tunisien de la prospérité* (Tunisian Party of Prosperity) in 2012, and *Mouvement d'unification islamique de Tunisie* (Islamic Unification Movement of Tunisia) in 2013 (International Crisis Group, 2013: 22-23). Outside of the political realm, *Ansār al-Shari'ah fi Tūnis* (Supporters of Islamic Law in Tunisia) (AST) was created in April 2011 by Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi. Although founded on the ideology of international jihad, until 2013, the group explicitly rejected violence. In the words of Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi, Tunisia should remain "a land of prayer" (Torelli, Merone and Cavatorta, 2012). Instead, AST focused on structuring itself as a political force through *da'wah* (preaching) and *hisba* (vigilante activities to enforce religious norms). For example, the group organised several "occupy mosques" campaigns aimed at chasing imams who were deemed too loyal to the previous Ben Ali regime. The group also conducted a campaign to raise awareness on the situation of Tunisian prisoners in Iraqi jails. Finally, it advocated making blasphemy a criminal offence, to introduce gender segregation in public spaces, and to encourage charitable activities (Merone and Cavatorta, 2012). AST's activities mirrored the post-revolution process of jihadi development in Tunisia that started from the civil society – through religious associations that operated in an utterly liberal environment. Until 2013, the country tranquillity was disrupted by only one attack. In September 2012 – in the wave of assaults against US embassies in Egypt,

Libya, Yemen and Sudan – Tunisian protesters set fire to the US embassy and to an American school to oppose the publication of anti-Islam videos (Reuters, 2012).

Tunisia witnessed an escalation of jihadi violence with the shocking assassination of secularist politicians Chokri Belaïd and Mohammad Brahmi in April and July 2013. The crimes were claimed by a Franco-Tunisian jihadist militant in a video where he called Tunisians to pledge allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Simultaneously, *Katibat 'Uqbah Ibn Nafi'* (KUIN) (Oqba bin Nafi' Brigades) – a transborder jihadi group operating between Algeria, Tunisia and Libya – engaged in bloody skirmished with the Tunisian security forces in Jebel Chambi Mountain on the Algerian border (Louden, 2015: 14). In July 2014, the group renewed the experience when it ambushed military checkpoints in the same zone, killing 15 security forces. On the other hand, AST's leader – Abu Ayyad al-Tunisi – adopted a more violent discourse directed toward the state. He openly stated his goal to transform Tunisia into a "land of Jihad". In January 2014, AST received the formal support of prominent Jordanian cleric Abu Qatada. Previously, the latter had repeatedly attacked Ennahdha for its alliance with secularists and warned the party against violent retaliation. AST's wave of violence allegedly aimed at "weaken[ing] institutions in order to better organise itself, while diverting the democratic process to show Tunisians that this non-Islamic state is tyrannical in essence and encourage them to join the movement" (Crisis Group, 2016: 4).

In August 2013, the Tunisian government officially declared AST a terrorist group and launched a full-scale crackdown on domestic jihadi networks. The counter-terrorism campaign did not prevent a simultaneous bombing in Sousse and Monastir in October 2013 but disrupted a plot that was believed to target Djerba island in December the same year. None of these attacks were claimed by local jihadi groups. Before 2011, there was only one terrorist operation every five years. Between 2011 and 2014, there were more than 50 terrorist operations in Tunisia (Allani, 2018). During those years, Salafi-jihad became increasingly entangled with organised crime – fuelling violence inside Tunisia (International Crisis Group, 2014: 8).

Ansār al-Sharī'ah was allegedly eradicated in 2015 as a result of the government's crackdown (Crisis Group, 2016: 4). Yet that same year, in the wake of the declaration of the Caliphate in Mosul, Tunisia witnessed a series of 11 violent attacks linked to Islamic State. In March and June 2015, more than 60 foreign tourists were killed in the Bardo Museum in Tunis and at the Marhaba Hotel in Port al-Kantaoui. In November 2015, a dozen members of the presidential

guard died in a suicide attack in central Tunis. All attacks were claimed by IS. In March 2016, a commando squad of 60 mostly Tunisian jihadists attempted to seize the city of Ben Guerdane, 30km from the Libyan border in the country's south-east, by storming the military barracks and the National Guard post (Ghorbal, 2016). Inhabitants, together with military forces, repelled the attack. The Ben Guerdane incident marked the end of Salafi-jihad in Tunisia.

While Salafi-jihad was gaining ground in Tunisia, it seems that the ideology carried by violent groups in the country met worrying support, especially in the young population. According to a study conducted by the Tunisian National Youth Observatory (ONJ in its French form) in late 2014 on 1,700 youth living in the greater Tunis, one third of young Tunisians supported or sympathised with Salafi-jihad – although they wished to see it restricted to its religious dimension (preaching and charity) (ONJ, 2014). In March 2015, the ONJ conducted a similar research on the perception of Salafism by the Tunisian population. Among the 1,200 individuals surveyed across the country, almost 28% considered Salafi-jihad "acceptable" or "rather acceptable". Once again, the percentage of youth endorsing the ideology was much higher than that of other age groups (ONJ, 2015). On the other hand, pan-Arab media such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* allegedly played an important role in facilitating the response to the jihad call. Those media portrayed the Syrian conflict as an opportunity to help "Muslim brothers" in Syria and Iraq and encouraged their audience to later return to their home countries to fight the *tāghūt* governments (Khachena, 2018).

Those perceptions were maybe best reflected by the high number of Tunisians who joined the jihad in Syria. Depending on sources, between 3,000 and 7,000 Tunisians would have joined the ranks of IS in Iraq, Syria and Libya. The following sections attempt to offer an outlook at the multiple explanations for this phenomenon.

8.1.7 The International Involvement in Tunisian jihad

In 2014, Tunisia had become the main incubator of jihadists fighting in Iraq and Syria. Most of them joined the ranks of IS and attracted international media coverage on the occasion of several attacks claimed by the Caliphate. In December 2016, a 24-year-old Tunisian drove a truck through a crowded Berlin Christmas market, killing 12 and wounding 50. A similar attack

occurred in July 2016, during Bastille Day celebrations in France, where 86 people were killed by a Tunisian who had lived in France for 10 years before his crime.

According to sociologist and director of the International Youth Observatory Mohammed Jouili, the massive departures of Tunisians to Iraq and Syria have multiple explanations (2018). First, jihad was a reaction to the "secular" Islam shown by Ennahdha. After the euphoria of the 2011 revolution, Tunisian political Islam was unable to provide convincing answers to the double "future and meaning crisis" and identity malaise developed by "the offshore of Ben Ali". The Iraqi and Syrian jihad could thus be seen as the activation of Tunisians' "operational identity". Second, leaving Tunisia to join the jihad in Iraq and Syria carried a symbolic value in the Islamic profession of faith. While Tunisian Salafi-jihadists were reluctant to make jihad inside the country and kill nationals, Iraq and Syria offered an opportunity to fight for a right cause (Ibid). Surely, many Tunisians view the Syrian conflict as the persecution of the poor by al-Assad regime, which resonated as an echo of the Iranian revolution (Kahlaoui, 2018).

Importantly, between 2011 and 2014, departures to Iraq and Syria were not condemned by Ennahdha, while the latter was the only powerful representative of young Islamists in Tunisia. It could even be argued that the government contributed to the general resentment against the Syrian regime. In February 2012, Tunisia's then President and rights defender Moncef Marzouki cut relations with Syria in reaction to al-Assad's repression of pro-democracy uprisings. This attitude fuelled the recruitment of jihadists. As for Ghannouchi, when asked about Salafi demonstrators, he infamously responded: "They are our children [...] The Salafist youth reminds me of my youth" (La Presse, 2012). Along the same line, then Home Minister Ali Lareyidh adopted an ironic tone when he argued that young militants "only train[ed] to get rid of cholesterol" (Mahroug, 2017). More recently, when asked how Ennahdha considered Tunisian jihadists, a party official answered; "Our position is to see these fighters as both victims and perpetrators" (fieldwork anonymous interview, 2018). The same representative hinted at a justification for jihad: "As long as the Ummah feels offended and the big issues, such as the Palestinian case, are not addressed, young people will always have the attraction of going to fight in the name of jihad" (Ibid).

Massive departures to Iraq and Syria were facilitated by the complete freedom that characterised post-revolution Tunisia. Training camps were established in the mountainous zones bordering Algeria, and Libya, and played a crucial role in providing military training to wanabe jihadists

(Cristani, 2014). During the 2011 Libyan revolution, weapons were sent from Qatar through Tunisia. Many of those weapons remained both in Tunisia and in Libya. In 2015, it was believed that 1,000 to 4,000 Tunisians had joined Islamic State or al-Qaeda in Libya (Gartenstein-Ross, Moreng and Soucy, 2015: 16). The suicide bombers who conducted the attack against the Bardo Museum and in Sousse in 2015 allegedly trained in Libyan Sabratha facilities. As for the 2016 Ben Guerdane attack, Tunisian authorities claimed that it was directed by IS leadership in Libya (AFP, 2016).

On the financial front, it is an open secret that Qatar and Turkey funded several Islamist charitable organisations and Quranic schools to arrange travels to Iraq and Syria via Turkey. In addition, Qatar paid salaries to Tunisian fighters departing for jihad (fieldwork anonymous interviews, 2018). In Tunisia, the links with Turkey and Qatar remain taboo. Yet, economic agreements account for the special bonds between the three countries. In 2015, Qatar's investments in Tunisia exceeded US$1 billion, making it Tunisia's most important Arab partner and second-most important global partner in terms of foreign direct investment (Gulf Times, 2015). Between 2011 and 2015, Turkish funding in Tunisia reached US$500 million, including US$200 million in security (China Daily, 2017). Between 2012 and 2014, the Troika government gave economic portfolios to Islamists ministers. The latter reinforced Turkey's special treatment of Tunisia. In December 2012, the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) between Turkey and Tunisia was established. In June 2013, its first meeting resulted in the signature of 21 agreements and action plans in various areas of cooperation, as well as 24 sister city protocols (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). In December 2017, Tunisia and Turkey signed four economic agreements to bolster their military, economic and environmental cooperation. Those agreements facilitated the movement of funds, goods and humans between the two countries. Turkey's interest in Tunisian jihadists is quite straightforward. One could argue that those fighters provided both the manpower and the cover to discretely advance Turkey's strategy in northern Syria. Turkey's policy was facilitated by the admiration of Ennahdha. For the latter, Turkey had always been a model that offered domestic Islamisation through moderate and modern Islam. Besides, both parties shared the singularity of having managed to lead an elected government. Hence, it would appear that Tunisian jihadists were encouraged to accomplish their holy mission by a network of socio-economic and political dynamics operating both at the domestic and international level. Ideology, on the contrary, did not account for a strong driver of engagement.

8.1.8 Tunisia's Repressive Response to Salafi-jihād

After the 2011 revolution, the power-sharing between Islamists and two secular parties was imbued with a spirit of compromises and non-confrontation. At that time, policymakers recognised the necessity to develop a comprehensive approach to Salafi-jihādi violence. As a result, Ennahdha advocated for a two-pronged approach. One the one side, the party suggested reactivating local legitimate sources of religious knowledge and scholarship. One the other side, it recommended fostering political inclusion and socio-economic development (Marks, 2015). For instance, the party chose to support moderate Salafi political parties such as *Hizb al-Assāla* (the Authenticity Party) and *Jabhat al-Islāh* (the Reform Front). The proposed approach was thus based more on engagement, dialogue and Islamic re-education than repression.

Between 2011 and 2014, none of the political parties firmly condoned Salafi-jihād and the departures to Libya, Syria and Iraq. On one side, the Troika government showed its willingness not to clash with *Ansār al-Sharī'ah*. This was mainly due to the fact that an internal Islamist conflict between Ennahdha and more violent trends of Salafism would have been an obvious weakness and given leftists the opportunity to return to power. Other voices argue that Ennahdha remained passive in the effort to appeal to a wider Islamic base. According to Cristiani (2014), the absence of political response to the growth of Salafi-jihād in Tunisia results from a pact between Ennahdha and Salafi organisations. The latter were incentivised to fight jihād in Syria in order not to end up in jail for life in Tunisia. Finally, in 2011, the Troika government was firmly opposed to Bashar al-Assad and, therefore supported the revolution in Syria. Similarly, Tunisian democrats were at odds as they firmly condemned the interventionist policies of western countries in the MENA region, such as the Frenchs support to *Jabhat al-Nusra* in Syria (Chérif, 2018). As such, no initiative was taken to formulate a strong counter-discourse and dissuade Tunisians to support, and even join, the Syrian jihād – with all the consequences it could have at the domestic level. Yet, in May 2013, following the double assassination of Belaïd and Brahmi, Tunisia adopted a securitised approach to tackle Salafi-jihādi violence. In just one year, over 2,000 Salafis were arrested for either direct or indirect involvement in various acts of violence (Boukhars, 2014).

The period of hesitation regarding the fate of Tunisian jihādists came to an end in 2014, when the government of Nida Essebsi came to power. In an attempt to contain the flux of Tunisians travelling to Libya, Iraq or Syria, the Ministry of Interior imposed a travel ban to individuals under 35 suspected of wanting to join jihād. Known as S17, the measures were instituted as part of a

"national plan to combat terrorism". According to the Ministry of Interior, as of January 2018, 29,450 people had been prevented from travelling to conflict areas on the basis of S17 measures (Amnesty International; 2018: 4). Meanwhile, the Tunisian authorities were able to prevent further attacks and dismantle several recruitment networks, like in Bizerte in October 2014 (Cristiani, 2014). In December 2014, Tunisia pledged to join the international coalition against IS in Iraq and Syria. Nonetheless, the country did not play a major role and was summoned to participate more actively by the European Parliament in late 2016.

In June 2014, the Tunisian government created a commission under the control of the Ministers of Religious Affairs, Interior and Justice. This commission had the mission to examine all mosques already under observation and to appoint new imams (Verdier, 2014). After Sousse attack in June 2015, the commission recommended closing 80 mosques thought to foster further violence (Reuters, 2015). Notwithstanding those efforts, as of 2018, imams keep calling for the stoning of the government – even in touristic and wealthy cities such as Sidi Bou Said (Chérif, 2018). This is in spite of the fact that a Tunisian law forbade talking about politics during sermons in mosques (Ibid).

In 2015, as violence increased and attacks multiplied on Tunisian soil, the government advocated for a mixture of policing measures and attempts to shatter the incubators of extremism (Gartenstein-Ross, 2015: 16). Over 100,000 members of security forces were deployed and charged with protecting the territory (Associated Press, 2015). Moreover, the government launched the Agency for Defence Intelligence and Security – an independent army force – and the National Commission on Counter-Terrorism, tasked with developing a new, comprehensive strategy on counter-terrorism. Within two weeks of the Sousse attack, Tunisian authorities had reportedly carried out more than 700 security operations, arresting at least 127 people (AFP, 2015). Finally, and maybe most importantly, Tunisia passed a new anti-terror law, which measures have been described as including numerous violations of international human rights norms by rights advocates (Amnesty International et al, 2015). Among others, the law provided that those convicted of terrorism could face the death penalty, and those convinced of expressions of support for terrorism could receive prison sentences. Finally, authorities were allowed to detain suspects for 15 days without access to a lawyer or appearance before a judge (Marsad Majles, 2015). According to Eric Goldstein, deputy director at Human Rights Watch, this law was no less a threat to citizens than terrorism itself (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

In 2016, around 20% of the public budget was devoted to security, twice as much as in 2011 (Crisis Group, 2016: 7). The 2016 Ben Guerdane incident proved that investments increased the Tunisian authority's capacity to provide an efficient response to the hreat of insurgency. Nevertheless, the violent assault triggered the establishment of new security measures. Tunisia built a 200km system of sand barriers and water trenches along the Libyan border. The US supplied surveillance drone to patrol along with the mechanism (Powelton, 2015). The latter reinforced a militarised buffer zone across Tunisia's southern borders with Libya and Algeria – enforced in 2013 (AFP, 2013). Finally, in early 2017, Tunisia set up the National Intelligence Centre, an institution designed to overcome problems with coordination and information-sharing between intelligence agencies (Dworkin and El Malki, 2018).

Several human rights organisations raised concerns about the fact that Tunisians have lived under the state of emergency almost constantly since the 2011 revolution. The exceptional measures were only lifted between March 2014 and July 2015, and for a few weeks in October before the attack on the national guards in Tunis. The government renewed it most recently in February 2019 (Middle East Monitor, 2019). In 2017, Amnesty International reported that the use of torture and other ill-treatment was still widespread in Tunisian detention centres, especially those operated by the Ministry of the Interior's terrorism investigation brigades (Amnesty International, 2017). Similarly, Human Rights Watch documented the abusive use of emergency power by the Tunisian government (2016). The number of house arrests without charges were at the centre of critiques. In 2018, Amnesty International published a second report where it pointed to numerous arbitrary restrictions on movement on the basis of S17 measures. Furthermore, despite the creation of an anti-terrorism judicial pole to deal with the cases of returning jihādists, Tunisia has failed to apprehend the importance of a reintegration or de-radicalisation programmes (Dworkin and El Malki, 2018).

Moreover, several experts and politicians regret the lack of engagement of Ennahdha, the sole legitimate political actor close enough to the Salafi ideology to provide a strong, peaceful counter-discourse to the rising violence. The party defended itself, claiming that it was a victim of Salafi-jihādi groups, as much as any Tunisian citizens. As reminded by MP Ibrahim, "Jihādi groups in Tunisia and Syria accuse Ennahdha of being 'murtādd' because of its participation in the political process" (2018). She also reminds that, when it was leading the government, Ennahdha adapted its own policy asked its Ministries to tackle Salafi-jihādi violence. To that end, the government

increased the budget of certain ministries whose role was considered key in regard to integration and, therefore, the fight against radicalisation (Ibid).

In a nutshell

Although geographically relatively distant from Iraq and Syria where the Caliphate controlled a vast territory for almost three years (2014-2017), Tunisia has not been immune to the IS phenomenon. The post-revolutionary rise of Salafi-jihad in Tunisia came as a by-product of both regional and local events. The violent trend grew quickly as a radical response to what democracy and political Islam could not deliver. In spite of the evident threat and multiple attacks on Tunisian soil, the government was unable to establish a strong and comprehensive framework to tackle the attraction of jihad. The country also lacked a solid religious and political counter-discourse. Although Tunisia has never been a cradle for the ideological development of Salafi-jihad, the high number of Tunisians in IS' ranks, as well as several studies (mostly conducted by the ONJ), proved the relative support of the Tunisian population for radical religious discourse. While IS has been militarily defeated in Iraq and Syria, the chaos that still prevails in Libya and the imminent return of thousands of jihadists to Tunisia will pose an unprecedented challenge to the new democracy. Finally, held up as the sole success story of the Arab Spring, Tunisia remained stuck in transition. As of March 2019, the country provided the highest number of migrants attempting to flee the socio-economic hardship of their homeland and to join Europe by the sea (Malsin, 2018). Consequently, the rising frustration of Tunisians might provide a fertile soil for the anti-system radical discourse propagated by IS.

8.2 The Tunisian Populations' Frames on the Conflicts in Iraq and Syria

This section builds on the perceptions of more than 50 Tunisian citizens. These insights were collected via questionnaires and one-to-one interviews conducted in Tunis, Sousse and Sfax between July 2018 and March 2019. The following paragraphs highlight their perceptions of the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria, along the lines with the frames categories used to analyse IS' discourse on the two conflicts. All words in quotation marks correspond to language and terms used by the Jordanian population during the research.

8.2.1 Iraq and Syria: Conflicts Against the Arabs

One striking feature of the discourse of the Tunisian population surveyed is the apparent lack of knowledge or interest in the situation that has been raging in the Levant for more than eight years. In other words, the daily considerations of the Tunisian respondents – especially the youngest ones – seem quite far removed from the regional turmoil. This apparent detachment strongly contrasts with the general immersion in regional politics witnessed in Jordan. Three factors might explain this difference. First, Tunisia is geographically relatively far from Iraq and Syria, while Jordan is a direct neighbour of the conflict zones. Second, Tunisia remains stuck in political transition after the initial fervour that followed the Arab Spring in late 2010. Ever since, the country has struggled to find stability at the political, social and economic levels. Hence, it seems that domestic priorities undermine regional dynamics. Finally, several individuals reported that the Tunisian public tends to distrust foreign academics (anonymous interviews, 2018). This feeling rose after well-known anecdotes spread in a post-2010 context. According to several individuals met in Tunisia, the period of intense liberalisation and freeing of speech was used as an opportunity for several intelligence services in the MENA region to enter Tunisia and question the populations. Intelligence officers – supposedly mainly coming from Israel – would present themselves as academic researchers who wished to interview Tunisians. Following these "interviews", many Tunisians were reportedly tortured and imprisoned. Although this information was conveyed by several Tunisian participants during the field research, it remains difficult to verify as it has not been reported by the media or human rights organisations. Yet the observed results of this apparent lack of interest or distrust were that Tunisians did not open easily on subjects as sensitive as the wars in Iraq and Syria and the role of IS in those two countries. When they accepted to discuss, they would generally give short and vague answers and resort to the classical "I don't know". Still, some trends stood out in the Tunisian public's perception of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

Notably, three-quarter of the surveyed population viewed the situations in Iraq and Syria as one common conflict. A widespread comment was that "as always, the populations [in Iraq and Syria] pay the price". Indeed, the vast majority of Tunisian respondents agreed that the populations, especially the "innocents" such as women and children, and the countries as such were the greatest losers in the conflicts. Yet it appears that in the mind of the Tunisians, Syria has suffered more than Iraq. Some argued that the MENA has lost in terms of stability and wealth since virtually the entire region has been more or less directly impacted by the conflicts.

Maybe the most interesting and widespread depiction of the commonality between the two contexts was that of a "plot" or "a huge conspiracy" against the Arabs. Respondents mainly cited the domination imposed by foreign powers on Iraq and Syria to justify the recurrence of bold statements such as "The US wants to dominate the region" and "Israel is waging war on the Arab countries under the auspices of their American master". In other words, the wars in Iraq and Syria would be part of a grand strategy aimed at facilitating the expansion of Israel in the MENA region. This strategy would be supported by the US, which was seen as trying to control the Syrians lands for the benefit of Israel and to monopolise natural resources in Iraq. Moreover, several Tunisian participants argued that one goal of the American-Israeli alliance was to dismantle the Syrian army, which was known to be one of the strongest armies in the region. Finally, a small number of Tunisians surveyed referred to the presence of "terrorist groups" on both theatres of conflict.

One-quarter of the Tunisian public that participated in the research made the distinction between the Iraqi and the Syrian contexts, based on the specificities of domestic dynamics. Nonetheless, there was consensus on how different both conflicts were. One the one hand, some differentiated the "civil war" in Iraq from the "war against terrorism" in Syria. In the Iraqi context, it is interesting to report that only 10% of the participants considered the infighting as a sectarian conflict. On the other hands, several Tunisians defined Iraq as a struggle against the American occupation and Syria as the locus of a civil war between al-Assad's regime and the Syrian population. Among this 25% of Tunisians who differentiated the two cases, a few reflected on the evolution of the conflict dynamics at the national levels. In Syria, they argued, the struggle for freedom and rights evolved into a war between al-Assad's regime and its own people, amid the interference of "terrorist" groups. In Iraq, the initial war was launched against the American "colonisers" who invaded the country in search of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) – only one respondent referred directly to the fall of Saddam Hussein as a cause of the conflict – but quickly transformed into a civil war between Iraqi groups.

Whether the warring situations in Iraq and Syria were seen as one common or two distinct conflicts, the majority of the Tunisians public surveyed described a "war for political power" launched by western countries against the Arabs and the Arab countries. Interestingly, only three respondents (out of over 50) pointed to religion as the main cause of the turmoil. Only one of them adopted a purely religious view of the situations, arguing that the Mahdi had come down

and that the final battle announced in the Islamic prophecy was approaching. Interestingly, the two others blamed Islam for triggering occupation, authoritarianism in the region, as well as the Islamists' fight for power. More generally, respondents admitted that the situation in both countries was confusing, as they described it as "a mixture of civil wars, terrorism and wars for power". Put in the words of a young student from Tunis, the wars were "about religion, politics, terrorism and hatred among others". The diversity and ambiguity of the Tunisian discourses collected accounted for the complexity of the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. It also reflected the intricate nature of multi-level and multi-dimensional conflicts that could be compared to Russian dolls.

8.2.2 IS – The Veil over the Real War

The majority of the Tunisian population surveyed viewed IS as a main actor of the conflicts, whether the group was thought to have caused it or simply highjacked it. Half of the respondents argued that "IS was created to destroy", while the target of destruction was subject to debate. The jihadi group was often described as "an intruder" and a "game" organised by the United States to worsen the conflicts, weaken national actors and gain power in the midst of the mess. Other participants believed that IS' aim was to destroy the Muslims, Iraq and Syria. In the words of the Tunisian public interviewed, the group was considered "a cover", "a veil" or "a cloak" that dissimulated the true interests of the main warring parties and the real dynamics of the wars. In the same vein, some Tunisians even presented Bashar al-Assad as someone who allegedly created IS to portray Syria under the threat of religious extremism and gain support from the international community in his fight against oppositional religious groups. The Syrian president was accused of effectively "fighting Islam". This position is interesting because it distances al-Assad from the Muslim Syrian population and portrays him as an enemy of Islam. It is very likely that Bashar al-Assad is not considered a Muslim because of his belonging to the Alawite sect, a branch of the Shī'ia Twelver, while the majority of the Syrian population is Sunni. Hence, this depiction oppositional relationship between the Shī'ia president and his Sunni population is highly sectarian. Finally, other Tunisian participants mentioned the role of the states that are not directly involved in the Syrian conflict, but which funded IS such as Qatar and Turkey. To sum up the thrughts of the Tunisian public interviewed, outside the conflicts, IS does not exist.

The portrayal of IS was sometimes nuanced depending on the context where it operated. In Syria, the group was widely seen as a terrorist organisation. However, in Iraq, it was considered part of the resistance to US domination and thus, a legitimate actor that can hardly be called "terrorist". Yet the great majority of Tunisian respondents did not legitimise IS' actions in Iraq and Syria, defining the group as "dangerous", "criminal" and even composed of "animals". Interestingly, the respondents surveyed were divided on whether IS was the cause of the conflicts or a mere result of the structural problems in the two countries. A first group argued that IS' rejection of the Iraqi and Syrian governments and its will to impose the *Sharī'ah* law led to the conflicts. For the second group, IS was not to be blamed more than the citizens themselves, who let corrupted politicians and foreign actors threaten their rights and identity for decades before finally reacting against illegitimate powers.

Finally, some 20% of the Tunisian participants completely distanced IS from Islam and rejected the religious credentials of the group. One of them explained, "they only pretend to be Muslim to gain popular support". Those results can be analysed under the light of several polls and surveys conducted in Tunisia between 2016 and 2018. In 2018, only half of the Tunisian population considered groups such as al-Qaeda and IS either as "non-Muslims" or as a "perversion of Islam" (Zogby Research Services, 2018: 13). In 2017, another study found that 72% of more than 700 Tunisians considered such groups as "misguided and tarnishing the image of Islam" (Zogby Research Services and Tabah Future Initiatives, 2017). They were 92% in 2016 over more than 2,000 Tunisian participants (Zogby Research Services, 2016: 13). From those results and the observations made in the context of this doctoral research, it clearly appears that the percentage of the Tunisian public that challenges IS' Islamic credentials gradually decreases. As for the Tunisians that explicitly identify as devout Muslims, the rejection of IS is even weaker. According to a research conducted with more than 2,000 Muslim Tunisians in 2017, only 19% viewed IS as non-Muslims, while 33% considered the group as "a misguided perversion of Islam" (Zogby Research Services and Mantada Forum, 2017). Besides, 65% of the surveyed population depicted the establishment of a caliphate or a Muslim state as a positive development, giving strong *de facto* support to IS' socio-political project (Ibid: 9). These results, nonetheless, strongly contrast with the general rejection of religious violence of the Tunisian population, and with the peaceful gatherings that always following violent attacks in the country in order to show the popular cohesion against violent extremism.

8.2.3. Syria and Iraq: A Net of Regional and International Actors

An overwhelming majority of the Tunisian population surveyed pointed at the United States, Arab governments and IS as the main actors of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Several rationales were offered to justify the position of Arab governments – including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE – as main actors of the conflicts. First, the latter were identified as those fuelling the turmoil by selling weapons and funding some of the fighting groups. Second, a great number of the Tunisians surveyed argued that all Arab countries should be considered responsible for the protracted situation in the region, as they contribute to it "with their silence". Finally, some respondents claimed that the current Arab rulers were imposed by the "western world" and thus, did not act in favour of their Arab populations but in accordance with the interests of those who put them in power. This position was not widely shared though, as a great number of the Tunisian participants reported that the conflicts in Iraq and Syria actually opposed the governments to terrorism. It is interesting to note that only two individuals mentioned religious sects – namely Sunni and Shī'ia – as main actors of the conflict in Iraq. Finally, in spite of the predominance of the "War against the Arabs" narrative, Israel was scarcely mentioned, and the same applies to Russia and opposition groups in Syria.

Several respondents, especially the youth, admitted that they were lost in the too many groups involved in the two conflicts. Indeed, the Tunisian public did not come up with strong and shared views on the alliances involved in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. On the one side, the particicpants described a political alliance between the US and Arab leaders, the latter following the orders dictated by the US. On the other side, the US, Russia and, interestingly, China would have formed an economic alliance. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia was believed to be allied to IS because of the group's Salafi ideology. Following a different line of reasoning, numerous Tunisians argued that the US had created IS to advance its own interests in Iraq and Syria. Participants also opposed Russia – who was believed to support al-Assad – and the US as the main state power supporting Iraq. Besides, Israel appeared in the discussion, on the side of the US. Finally and most interestingly, Iran was mentioned only once, to side with the US, Russia and Turkey, in spite of the public opposition between the American democracy and the Iranian republic. It appears that the Tunisians public is overwhelmingly unfavourable to the presence of the main international and regional powers in Iraq and Syria, notably the US (70%), Saudi Arabia (94%) and Iran (95%) (Zogby Research Services, 2018: 15). The three countries and Russia were considered as playing a negative role with regard to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, especially Iran and its backed militia

(Ibid: 23). The vast majority – more than 80% – of the respondents argued that "foreign powers" benefitted the most from the regional turmoil. Were commonly cited the United States, followed by Israel and its Zionist government, Russia, Saudi Arabia and European countries.

The overwhelming majority of Tunisian respondents believed that the actors involved in the conflicts sought power in the MENA region and hegemony over natural resources. Notably, Iraq was widely recognised as a country blessed with petrol, oil and gas, which would explain the US-invasion and following infightings. Only a small number of respondents believed that some non-state actors in Iraq – such as IS – sought to restore Islamist power. In Iraq, the western and Arab state actors were accused of trying the dismantle one of the strongest armies in the region, while some pointed to the geographical position between Israel and Palestine. Generally, a majority decribed the two conflicts as "pure colonialism" aimed at "transforming the Arabs into a wasted nation". By way of conclusion, the Tunisian public interviewed agued that the long-lasting nature of the Syrian chaos came as no surprise, as most actors needed the conflict to last in order to secure their interests.

8.2.4 Illegitimate Rulers and Political Distrust

Most of the Tunisian respondents acknowledged that the situation in Iraq and Syria was better before the conflicts. Although they acknowledged that the Syrians and Iraqis lived under tyrannical rulers, "at least, they were living at peace". The participants notably admired that multiple sects cohabitated in Syria in spite of their diversity. They also emphasised that Syria was a sovereign state and had a powerful army. The Tunisian public's perceptions of Iraq were different; respondents emphasised that the Iraqi state crumbled at all levels after the demise of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Hence, it appears that the stability of Iraq and Syria under Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad were valued by the Tunisian participants. Yet 70% of them were highly critical of the current decision-makers in both countries, arguing that they were illegitimate; while less than 20% favoured the Iraqi and Syrian rulers and 8% preferred not to express an opinion on this matter.

The main rationale given to justify the lack of legitimacy of current rulers was the authoritarian nature of their regimes where people in charge were not elected by "the people". This was the case in Syria where Bashar al-Assad was chosen by the Parliament as the successor of his late

father Hafiz al-Assad. Moreover, Tunisian respondents pointed to the role of foreign powers in the region. Several claimed that the Iraqi and Syrian regimes were "puppets of stronger countries", referring to the great powers. The choice of the word "puppet" is very interesting as it echoes the lexicon used by IS to voice the influence of western actors in the state affairs of Arab countries. In the same vein, a smaller number of Tunisian participants mentioned that Iraq and Syria were "not free" in their decisions, the latter being made by external state actors such as the US or Iran. Furthermore, corruption was mentioned as a cause of illegitimacy of the Syrian and Iraqi decision-makers. As explained by a university teacher, "they serve their own personal interests instead of that of the country and its population". Adopting the strongest stance on political legitimacy in the MENA, a smaller number of Tunisian showed their disgust for current rulers, qualifying them of "criminal" and "monsters", which echoed some of the adjectives they used to describe IS' members. On another note, a small but not negligible part of the Tunisian population surveyed offered a pragmatic view of the situation, arguing that the ruling elite may not be legitimate but that "desperate times call for desperate measures".

As an alternative to the illegitimate power in Iraq and Syria, only 37% of the Tunisian population interviewed stated that a democratic government elected by the people should lead the countries. This relatively weak percentage accounts for the diversity of opinions on the question of power legitimacy. Answers were almost evenly divided between those favouring elected governments, the people themselves, "other actors" or the current decision-makers. As for the last group, it was apparently favoured for a pragmatic reason; only the powerful decision-makers could impose their decisions and rule a country in a period of crisis. This position was echoed by one participant who stated: "The clean political parties have lost a lot in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. People do not trust them anymore and will not let them rule because they assimilate the political game with corruption and see their relations with western countries as undermining their legitimacy. Instead, people want strong actors who are independent of the foreign states and will rebuild the country quickly".

Moreover, priorities on the characteristics of desired rulers differed greatly. While several respondents emphasised the need to rule according to the country's interests, few Tunisians argued that legitimacy would stem from independence from the "colonisers" and from the United States. Equally interestingly, the majority of the Tunisian public surveyed was simply unable to establish a clear profile of a potential legitimate and well-adapted actor to rule Syria and Iraq in post-conflict settings. Finally, it is curious to note that none of the Tunisian participants wished to

see the Islamists or other religious-driven actor take power in Iraq and Syria. This position might be explained by the failure of the Islamist Ennahdha government to break the stalemate, reform the institutions and put Tunisia on the track of economic development after 2010. In the same vein, the majority of the Tunisian population surveyed insisted on the fact that the arrival of a more legitimate actor should not go along with a complete institutional reform of Iraq and Syria. In other words, the political system should remain the same, only power should be redistributed. Here again, it seems that the revolution left a bitter taste in the mouth of thousands of Tunisians who do not wish the Iraqi and Syrian populations to go through the same experience of protracted uncertainty and stagnation, even though they seem to be going through a protracted period of something much worse – violence and destruction.

8.2.5 The Anticipated Gloomy Future of the MENA Region

When asked about its opinion on conflict management in the region, more than half of the Tunisian population surveyed expressed its defiance towards past conflict resolution processes. The other half was evenly divided between those who trusted political settlements and those who prefered not to answer the question. The main reason for the lack of faith in conflict resolution in the MENA region was the political shape of the process. A Tunisian elderly woman explained: "I cannot trust politics. Conflicts are about politics and are solved for more politics, so I cannot have faith in the 'resolution' of wars in the region."

Yet, quite paradoxically, more than half of the participants showed faith in the future of the region, believing that it will eventually be able to move forward. Opinions were greatly nuanced though, and a "better future" was usually foreseen under multiple conditions. For example, the most optimistic Tunisian respondents achnowledged that the full recovery might take decades. Others relied on the strength of the national armies to keep the populations safe from external interferences. Finally, a number of Tunisians expressed the confidence that "the Arabs will win one day". This sentence is extremely interesting in the context of this research. It reveals a certain frame about the war, a war between Arabs and non-Arabs where the former have been constantly defeated but still believe in victory. This is reminiscent of IS' narrative about the future of the conflicts, although the group does not refer to an ethnic struggle but depicts a general confrontation between the (Sunni) Muslims and the rest of the world. In another perception that echoes IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, a number of Tunisians surveyed

emphasised the fact that the MENA region will need to break free from external – mainly American – influence before it can stabilise. As a young participant put it, "only if the region is not subordinated it can move forward". In the same vein, a student argued that "there might be peace at some point, but the Arab nations will not achieve progress because they were under American influence for decades". For the less optimistic ones, the strength of the general plot between the "colonisers", their puppets in the region, and the silenced Arab countries makes it impossible for the MENA to move on from continuous conflicts.

As for the future of Syria and Iraq, the Tunisian public surveyed was almost evenly split between the expectation of a better future and the anticipation of further violence. Interestingly, several participants were torn apart between what they hoped and what they witneseds every day on television. Hence, they hoped for peace but foresaw more violence. Interestingly, it seems that Tunisians respondents were more optimistic about the fate of Syria while they feared it getting marooned in sectarian divides and external influences. One young woman even went as far as to predict a "World War III" between the Arabs on the side and the colonisers and their allies on the other, which would lead to the collapse of the Arab world. This scenario was contemplated by a few – mostly young – Tunisian participants. They made a clear link between the fate of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and the fate of the region. The latter was generally considered to have been deeply and negatively affected by the conflicts in the two countries, both in terms of wealth and stability. Unable to bring a clear answer on the future of Iraq and Syria, few Tunisians called for the solidarity and collective action of the Arabs and the Muslims to solve the wars, although it was unclear whether this unity should take a diplomatic or military shape. As described in the previous paragraph, numerous respondents pointed to the American influence in Iraq and Syria as a serious obstacle to the resolution of the conflicts: "Peace will not prevail until we get rid of the US". On a very different note, only a couple of middle-aged male Tunisian participants hoped that the conflicts may have raised politicians' awareness and sense of responsibility that would prevent wars to happen again in the future. Finally, it should be noted that about 15 of the Tunisians surveyed did not foresee any change and expected nothing from the future of the MENA region. These results are echoed by a study conducted in ten MENA countries in 2018 about the future of Syria. It found that only 6% of the Tunisians were "very hopeful" that developments were moving towards the resolution of the conflict. Tunisians were the less optimistic population among the 10 countries surveyed – although more than 70% of them still hoped that negotiations would lead to national unity in both Iraq and Syria (Zogby Research Services, 2018: 20 and 25).

This eighth chapter presented the second case study of this research. It introduced the rise of Islamism in Tunisia in the shadow of an intricate relationship between the Islamists and the state. As for Salafi-jihad, if the current developed as a branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, it became much more visible after the 2011 revolution and benefitted from the concomitant rise of ISIS and latter IS in Iraq and Syria. The chapter then built upon questionnaires and in-depth interviews with multiple and various elements of the Tunisian population. Those interactions highlighted the relative detachment of the Tunisian participants from the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria, which did not undermine the popular grievances against the perceived influence of foreign powers – especially the United States – in the MENA region. Opinions were also characterised by the mistrust in the political game, as well as the lack of optimism on the fate of the conflicts. Hence, it seems that perceptions described by the Tunisian public surveyed strongly echoed IS' violent opposition to western actors, as well as its radical alternative to a crumbling regional order.

PART III FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

As demonstrated in the two previous chapters, the instrumentalisation of Islamism as a political tool is a strong commonality of different histories and experiences of government in Jordan and Tunisia. Successive rulers have used Islam and Islamism as the centrepiece of their policy of divide and rule. In other words, Islamism in those two countries evolved along its intricate relationship with the state. In Jordan, King Hussein endorsed a moderate form of Salafi Islam to counter the growing influence of Nasser's secular pan-Arabism. As a result, the kingdom went through a process of systematised Islamisation that relied on the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, while the monarchy struggled to contain the growing popularity of its new political adversary. Although the Muslim Brotherhood boycotted the most recent elections to protest the so-called unfair practices in the electoral system – and was deprived of its official registration by the state – the Jordanian Islamists still enjoy popular support through the Islamic Action Front and other non-affiliated candidates (Sweis, 2016). In Tunisia, Islamism was shaped by successive anti-religious policies, its promotion as a counterweight to the radical left opposition, its endorsement by the state and state-organised crack-down. Only after the 2011 revolution, the Islamists – under the colours of Ennahdha – came back into the political game. During the first free municipal elections in 2018 – in spite of a low turnout – the Islamist party beat its rival *Nidaa Tounes* and won numerous seats in Tunis and Sfax, the two largest cities in the country (Mzalouat, 2018). Hence, it seems that Islamists remain a strong political force in Jordan and Tunisia; they have successfully integrated the state apparatus and remain involved in both central and local governance.

In Jordan and Tunisia, the instrumentalisation of Islamism had a two-fold impact. One the one hand, the politicisation of Islam fostered division within the country at the political and social levels. In this regard, the Tunisian case serves as a powerful reminder that MENA politics and the socio-political struggle are more complex than the common framing in terms of Islamists versus secularists or Islamists versus modernists. As suggested by Ayari (2018:17-18), ideological divides such as religions are often "a surface script that masked deeper cleavage in regional

origins, class, and power". Instead, it might be enlightening to adopt an anthropological perspective that emphasises the confrontation between the old established and urban elite – that of Bourguiba and Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia – and a younger emerging peri-urban elite that seeks to integrate the structures of power.

On the other hand, state-sponsored anti-Islam policies triggered a revival of Islam that is common to Jordan and Tunisia, although it stemmed from different dynamics in the kingdom. This process appears to echo Danahar's words; "religion, not nationalism or Arabism, is now the dominant force. God has returned to the Middle East" (2013: 3). Should this revival of religiosity be considered the cause of support for IS' Salafi programme for the socio-political organisation of the region? At best, it might have contributed to it. Would the MENA populations support such a radical programme if it was not infused with Islam? Nothing could be less certain. One could hypothesise that only a socio-political project imbued with Islam would be considered radical enough to break with the long cycle of failed secular political experiments. Yet, the Arab Spring was no Islamic revolutions. In fact, IS itself refused to legitimise those secular uprisings and opposed the very notion of revolution that the group deemed as an instrument of control by the elites and as mock democracy. It remains that the election of Islamist parties such as Ennahdha in Tunisia and the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt after the 2011 revolutions substantiate the popular aspiration for a political project that has not been experienced before. Finally, the Islamist alternative might be considered a fair answer to years of state-sponsored crack-down of religion at the state and at the societal levels. In the same vein, supporting socio-political programmes that put at their core a millennial religion that acts as a common identity to millions of people in the MENA region might be perceived as a just and innate reaction to a political system mainly imported from the West.

Yet Islamist credentials do not suffice to bridge the gap between the ruling elite and the MENA populations; and the divide seems to be inexorably widening. While Tunisia has failed to reap the benefits of the 2011 revolution, Jordan is considered relatively stable compared to its crumbling neighbours. Nonetheless, both countries have suffered popular discontent toward the governing elites, as clearly stated during the interviews conducted with more than a hundred of inhabitants of Jordan and Tunisia. The apathy to politicians and politics, in general, is a striking feature of the Jordanian and Tunisian publics' frames on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and on the future of the MENA region. The distrust proved especially stark among young respondents. Several pieces of research put forward assumptions to explain the fracture. Adopting a historical

perspective, Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag (2007:13) argue that, in many post-colonial contexts, youth have played a major role in the mobilisation of independence struggles, nationalist movements and early nation-building efforts. Indeed, the presence of Tunisian young people in the events that led up to the revolution was extremely important. In Jordan, young activists have always been the spearhead of demonstrations against the government between January 2011 and late-2012, and a later in 2018 and 2019.

In spite of their role in mobilising dissent and dissatisfaction, Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag contend that the youth potential was subsequently contained through exclusive institutional structures. Indeed, seven years after the 2011 revolution, Ezzine (2017) noted that; "Tunisian youth are not playing the roles expected of them in public affairs, as evidenced by their complete absence from leading party positions, their sparse participation in voting since the revolution, and the absence of a national youth policy that would [institutionalize] their participation in public life and decision-making". Figures show that barely 20% of Tunisians aged 18-35 years voted in 2018 local elections (HuffPostMaghreb, 2018). Moreover, the average age of ministers in Habib Essid's government that was composed in the aftermath of the 2014 elections was 56.6 (Shemsfm, 2015), while less than 7% of the Members of Parliament currently in office are under the age of 35 (Marsad Majles, 2019). Finally, only 2% of Tunisian youth are active in political parties (ONJ, 2015) and 69% affirm that they do not trust political parties (Noonpost, 2015). In Jordan, the situation is hardly better. The fact that the minimum age to run for parliament is 30 years and that over a US$700 deposit is required to stand act as effective obstacles to youth inclusion (Milton-Edwards, 2018). Similarly, the average age in the three provinces with the youngest mayors – Madaba, Aqaba, and Kerak – was 46 years in 2017 (RASED, 2017). Furthermore, in 2016, only 35% of the Jordanians aged 17-30 voted in the legislative elections (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018).

Hence, it appears that young people in Jordan and Tunisia are compelled to be part of a society and of a political project that fails to integrate them and ignores their daily struggle. Recounting the multi-dimensional insecurity (economic, political, social, physical and ontological) of the youth in the MENA region, Murphy (2018) describes them as being stuck in "the contradiction of the present": post-industrial societies where job prospects remain scarce, neo-colonial democratic regimes that fail to include citizens, a globalised world that offers much improved life experience compared to previous generations but where possibilities for a bright future diminish. The interviews conducted with the Jordanian and Tunisian populations for this research clearly

highlight their weariness and the feeling that they are not the agents of their own future, whether at the domestic or regional level. One of the consequences of this youth disengagement, distrust in politics and lack of perspectives is arguably radicalisation and support for violent groups such as IS. While Jordan and Tunisia provided the largest poll for jihadists recruitment in Iraq and Syria, the typical age of those fighters was believed to range 18-29 (The Soufan Group, 2015).

A final interesting point to be discussed is the common perception of a large number of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations interviewed who viewed IS as a creation and tool of the western powers. According to several experts on Salafi-jihad and internal observers, outside the capitals – Amman and Tunis – a great percentage of the population lacks knowledge because of poor education and the scarce access to traditional media such as newspapers. In other words, older generations are sometimes unable to read, while the younger ones prefer more modern media. As a result, the populations living in the peripheries watch TV and/or spend a great amount of time on social media. Their perceptions and understanding of national and regional phenomena are thus deeply affected by those media. Yet experts and observers attested that the (social) media have been framing the conflicts in Iraq and Syria – and more globally in the MENA region – in sectarian terms. In addition, they portrayed IS as an excuse for the US and Iran to intervene in the Middle East. While the US was pictured as defending Israel to achieve the deal of the century, Iran was seen as trying to break down the Sunni community. In other words, it appears that media frames acted as a powerful filter used by Jordanian and Tunisian societies to interpret the conflicts.

The role played by the media must be understood in the light of the apparent lack of willingness of the Jordanian and Tunisian governments to take responsibility for the rise of IS and the popular support it attracted. Both countries' governments started reacting to the phenomenon only years after the first departures to the Iraqi and Syrian jihad. As emphasised in the two previous chapters, the states' responses were mostly repressive, accounting for the difficulty to coin a unified counter-message that would delegitimise the Caliphate and its violent policies. It seems that a common rhetoric adopted by the ruling elite and the populations was to say that IS was simply not a Muslim group. And yet, how to differentiate IS from the religion it claimed to represent? How to delegitimise IS without simultaneously undermining some of the most important pillars of Islam, the effective struggle of the Muslim community during the past decades, and the very teachings of some religious public figures that endorse a rather traditional reading of the Qur'an? In other words, how to delegitimise IS without causing more division and

discontent, and thus, fuelling the group's narrative about the inadequacy of the current rule? The same dilemma could be observed at the societal level. This rejection *en bloc* of IS' Islamic nature allowed Jordanians and Tunisians to escape the dangerous debate on the nature of Islam, the interpretation of the holy book, and the legitimacy of Islam as a socio-political programme in a region that seems stuck between the wish to evolve toward an inclusive and democratic form of governance on the one side, and the desire to reaffirm its historical Islamic identity in the face of growing external influence.

Chapters 7 and 8 presented the two case studies of this research: Jordan and Tunisia. They offered an overview of the rise of Islamism in both countries, and reflections on the perceptions of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations on the conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. The next and final part IV of this doctoral thesis will analyse the processes of reproduction and/or resistance to IS' frames in Jordan and Tunisia in order to evaluate the penetration of IS' discourse within the two populations under scrutiny. It will then conclude this research by reflecting on the role of language in the study of reformist groups and global regions such as the MENA.

Part IV

Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter 9 ~ The Resonance of Islamic State's Discourse in the Jordanian and Tunisian Populations

This final analytical chapter attempts to highlight the reproduction and resistance, commonalities and differences between the discourses articulated by IS and the public interviewed in Jordan and in Tunisia on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. It is the fruit of a comparative analysis of the conflict frames that attempted to identify patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities between the two sets of discourses. This stage highlighted and examined the intertextual elements (Kristeva, 1969; Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Becker, 1995), that is, the way Jordanian and Tunisian audiences might have endorsed or rejected IS' interpretation, or might not have authentically reproduced IS' discourse, but lifted it from one context and reinserted it into another setting instead. Intertextual devices can be recognised through certain techniques that represent the words and utterances of others, such as: direct and indirect quotation; mention of a person, document or statements; comment or evaluation on a statement or text; use of recognisable phrasing, terminology associated with specific people or groups of people or particular documents; use of language and forms that seem to echo certain ways of communicating, discussions among other people, types of documents (Bazerman (2004: 3).

9.1 Islamic State and Populations' Frames Compared

The results presented and analysed in the sections below should be analysed under the light of the three wordcloud figures that illustrates the words that were used most frequently in the discourses coined by IS and the populations interviewed in Jordan and Tunisia. Those figures allow the visualisation of a weighted list of the words and underlying concepts deemed most important in relation to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. The importance of each word is shown with font zise.

Figure 10. Words frequency in Islamic State's Discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria

Beaujouan, 2019

Figure 11. Words frequency in the Jordanian Audience's Discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria

Beaujouan, 2019

Figure 12. Words frequency in the Tunisian Audience's Discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria

Beaujouan, 2019

9.1.1 The Resonance of Islamic State's Framing of the Issue at Stake in Iraq and Syria

Issue frames across IS and populations' discourses catalysed the main debates and discussions over the causes and the nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. On the one side, IS deployed its rhetorical skills to convince its audience that both countries witnessed another instance of the war on the (Sunni) *Ummah*. In the group's words, the Crusaders and their allies seized the opportunity to wage war on Islam once again, pretending to fight what they call "terrorism". Hence, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria resulted from and epitomised the ancient hatred against the Muslims; the fight must be won by IS to restore the glory of the Islamic Golden Age. Furthermore, IS attributed several characteristics to the conflicts. First, both theatres were depicted as one single conflict, as part of the same "crusade". Henceforth, the latter must be fought by one single command under the sole banner of the Islamic state. Second, the group pretended to fight a multi-layer conflict that should be understood as the combination between a local struggle against insurgent groups and a global fight against the "Crusaders" and their allies. Third, IS argued to be involved in a religious war, a (defensive) "jihad" that opposed "the enemies of Allah" to the Muslims. Besides, the group not only deemed the war religious; it was described

as a sectarian struggle between the Muslim and non-Muslim on the one side, and between the Sunni and the Shī'ia on the other. This latest characteristic is central to IS' framing because it set the stage for the exclusion of Shī'ia Muslims from the "shadows of the Islamic state" and from the identity promoted by the group.

On the other hand, the perceptions on the causes and nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria collected in Jordan and Tunisia was far less straightforward than the vision endorsed in IS' discourse. The public interviewed in both countries clearly emphasised the complexity of multi-level wars in Iraq and Syria. Particicpants were generally unable to come up with a single and "easy" explanation to the chaos that ravaged Syria and threatened the precarious stability in Iraq. In the words of the individuals sampled, an obvious commonality between the two arenas of confrontation was the fact that Arab civilians – especially the Muslims – were the main victims, or more precisely, the collateral damages of a global war for power. Hence, they rejected the depiction of a war *on* Arabs and Muslims. Furthermore, they excluded religious or ethnic hatred from the potential causes of the conflicts, although they pointed to foreign interventions as a main driver to the popular revolt in Iraq. As such, the discourse of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations proved much less religious and sectarian than that promoted by IS. For instance, the word "jihad" was never mentioned in the interviews and none of the respondents referred to western powers according to the religious credentials used by IS. Instead, the respondents chose more "secular" words such as "revolution" and "uprising" (these notions were strongly rejected by IS), as well as "invaders" and "occupiers" that remain imbued with deeply negative connotations. Even though the vast majority of individuals sampled in Jordan and Tunisia identified themselves as Muslims, "Islam" rank only 30 among the 200 most used words during the interviews.

This observation must be nuanced by two observations. First, the analysis revealed a strong sentiment of "plot" or "conspiracy" – albeit indirect – against the Arabs and the Muslims. The majority of the respondents recognised that the interests of the state actors involved in Iraq and Syria were incompatible with the existence of a strong and united Sunni Muslim community in the Arab world. Put differently, although participants did not refer to the conflicts as religious wars or as wars in the name of religion, they widely acknowledged that religion gradually became a main dynamic of the conflicts. It follows that religion assumed a central role in the discourse of the Jordanian – and to a lesser extent the Tunisian – populations to explain regional politics. In fact, the two conflicts were described as part of a more global strategy led by the US and supported

by western powers and some Middle Eastern leaders to dominate the region via their local antenna: Israel. This goal would entail the weakening and the division of the Arab lands that are mainly inhabited by Muslims. The latter one became the *de facto* victims of the hegemonic aspirations exhibited by an alliance of western, Israeli and Persian actors. This would explain why a number of particicpants in each country – although much more important in Jordan – regretted the demise of Saddam Hussein, who embodied the last Arab ruler who could resist the American hegemonic ambitions in the region. It suggests that MENA populations might value a leader – whether religious or secular – who can impose their priorities and aspirations to global powers. For indeed, in IS' discourse, Saddam Hussein was not considered a model to be followed or a figure missed, quite the opposite. The Iraqi leader was mentioned 12 times across the database surveyed in Arabic, English and French. According to the group, Saddam Hussein was a "*tāghūt*" (Dābiq 9: 57; Dābiq 12: 45; Dār al-Islām 7: 26, al-Naba' 1: 9; al-Naba' 22:13) and his secular party was an "apostate party" (al-Naba' 41: 12). As for its ideology, Dābiq noted; "the pan-Arabism of the [Baa'thist] regimes – including those of Bashar, Saddam, and Nasser – is beneath the feet of the Arab mujāhidīn of the Khilāfah" (Dābiq 11: 20).

Second, sectarianism was a common assumption and at the background of all discussions on the conflicts in the MENA. For instance, respondents in Jordan and Tunisian often referred to Iran as the "Shī'ia power" or "Shī'ia master". Yet it is important to precise that the sectarian divide was only rarely phrased in sectarian terms by the Jordan and Tunisian participants interviewed. Instead, the sectarian opposition was implied in their discourse. More precisely, the sectarian tensions that laid the foundation of the conflicts were presumably mirrored at the regional level, where Iran was believed to act against the Sunni populations in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and where western powers – led by the US – were thought to defend the "Jewish state" of Israel. Finally, it is interesting to note that Jordanians were more inclined to deliver a sectarian discourse about the conflicts than the Tunisians, who worried more about the fate of the "Arabs" rather than the future of "the *Ummah*". This might be due to the kingdom's geographical proximity with Iran and to its past deep involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This observation acknowledges the fact that MENA populations are diverse and are still struggling with a multitude of sometimes competing identities. It raises the following questions: Which identity prevails in each country? Can the pre-eminence of the Sunni Muslim identity *per se* explain the leverage of IS' discourse on the crisis of the *Ummah*? Jordan and Tunisia are homes of a majoritarian Sunni population. Both countries also provided the largest pools of fighters in the ranks of Islamic State. Yet, as

explained in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, it seems that the two populations experienced very different turns of events since 2010. Moreover, they exhibited distinctive patterns of engagement in the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts. These observations might stand for the fact that IS' religious discourse alone did not account for the group's success in attracting fighters. One can also relativise the role of religious fundamentalism in the rise of radical and violent Salafi movements such as IS. Instead, one should consider the failure of the nation-state model as experienced in the MENA region. In other words, the failure of the state as a conciliator between identities and as a provider of essential services would have incentivised "left behind" citizens to search for an alternative and endorse different state projects such as that promoted by IS. Finally, as an indicator of this failure, a number of respondents stated the injustice or unfairness of the current systems in Syria and Iraq, which would explain the eruption of both conflicts. Hence, if the wars were not considered as jihad, the Jordanian and Tunisian public recognised the defensive stance initially adopted by the Iraqi and Syrian populations. This perception was especially widespread in Jordan, while Tunisians were more nuanced on the justification of the revolution in Syria. In spite of the collapse of the Syrian state and the crawling instability in Iraq, a significant number of Jordanians maintained that both wars were necessary to topple the illegitimate rulers, and more precisely sectarian regimes in favour of the Shī'ia elite in both countries. This somehow echoed IS' argument about the legitimacy of the wars in Iraq and Syria and the "unholy" power-sharing arrangements in the two countries.

Finally, IS deemed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria unprecedented – as "the entire world" was believed to be involved in the fight against the Islamic state – and prophetic. The turmoil allegedly announced the imminence of the final battle and the victory of the Sunni Muslims that had been announced in the Holy Qur'an. As a result, the Muslim victory was firmly expected by the group and was thought to bring an end to the prolonged crisis of the *Ummah*, while its enemies would get divided and eventually crumble. This point on the future of the conflicts might be the main point of divergence between IS' and MENA populations' discourses. Jordanian and Tunisian publics expressed a clear sentiment of fatigue, as the wars were depicted as two instances among many. In other words, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria were not the first, neither the last to divide the region and its inhabitants – nor they should be considered different from other conflicts. Only two Tunisian respondents articulated the idea of a final prophesised battle. As such, the end of the world scenario promoted in IS' discourse was not relayed at the population level. Moreover, the majority of the respondents hoped for a peace that would allow all individuals – regardless of their religion and ethnicity – to live together in a nation-state governed by non-corruption and

legitimate rulers. This depiction strongly opposed the developments predicted by IS where the Muslims would finally subjugate their old Crusader and Shī'ia enemies under the umbrella of one borderless Caliphate. By contrast, Jordanian and Tunisian respondents imagined three main possible futures for the conflicts: more violence, a peace that would either preserve national unity or partition Iraq and Syria along sectarian lines, and the re-establishment of the *status quo ante* – which has already been returned in Iraq.

To sum up, although the discourse of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was not religious *per se*, it partly echoed IS' religious depiction of the regional turmoil. The language and frames used by the particicpants interviewed strongly suggested that religion and sectarianism were underlying features that infused all aspects of local and regional politics. This trend was especially strong in Jordan. The "Arabs" and the "*Ummah*" were generally seen as the first victims of the foreign interventions in the region, and of illegitimate governmental systems at the state level. As such, IS' formulation of the "problem" or issues at stake was partly reproduced by the populations interviewed for this research. The pre-eminence of sectarianism as an analytical filter used by the Jordan and Tunisian publics also seems to contradict one of the hypotheses on the potential weakness of IS' discourse formulated at the end of Part II. If indications of a shift from identity politics to issue politics were not reflected in IS' discourse, they were also missing from popular perceptions. As such, it is unlikely that IS' message would immediately become less potent as the result of shifting political dynamics.

9.1.2 The Strong Rejection of Islamic State's Identity Framing

While IS' frames on the causes of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria seemed to strongly echo the perceptions of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations, the groups' identity and struggle hardly achieved any consensus between the two sets of discourses compared. IS' rhetoric between 2014 and 2017 displayed a complex identity construction through its assimilation with the *Ummah*. The group took on the role of a patriarchal and paternalistic figure whose benevolent struggle for its Muslim fellows shall entitle the Caliphate to receive full support. Furthermore, IS presented itself as a standalone defender of the Sunni Muslims, a major actor in the conflict against the Crusaders, their Arab puppets, and the plethora of fighting groups in Syria and Iraq that pretended to deliver the people from tyranny. Finally, and maybe most importantly, IS claimed to be the sole truly and purely Islamic actor in the region that could establish an Islamic state

according to the *Sharī'ah* law and the will of Allah. The analysis of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations revealed a sharp rejection of IS' narrative, both on its nature and its mission in the context of the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts. In fact, all arguments articulated in IS' discourse were deconstructed by the populations interviewed for this research. They described IS as a tool created and utilised by the very actors the group claimed to fight – the United States and its allied Arab leaders. As such, the populations' discourse opposed IS' framing of the conflicts as the confrontation between the Caliphate and the rest of the world. The jihadi group was exposed by the Jordanian and Tunisian participants for its role in a large military and political alliance. Following this interpretation, IS' self-attributed status of defender of the *Ummah* must be revoked. The group's struggle would, in fact, be directed against the *Ummah*, in an attempt to crush the Arab nations from inside and eventually allow the United States and Israel to gain momentum in the region. As such, IS was described as a "cover" or a "veil" that hid the "real" war. This last comparison is highly ironic when the group claimed striving to "unveil" and "uncover the reality" (Rumīyyah 10: 40). The un-Islamic nature of IS was emphasised as a logical sequence to its enmity against the *Ummah* and its affiliation to non-Muslim (and non-Arab) actors. In a different vein, a number of Jordanian and Tunisian participants questioned the very existence of IS and its Caliphate. In both cases, the nature of the group as a main actor of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in its own right was subject to debate. Finally, it should be mentioned that IS was commonly depicted as a spoiler in the context of the two wars. It follows that the group should not be regarded as responsible for its own success. This representation is a solid rejection of the gain-oriented discourse built up in IS' rhetoric on the conduct of hostilities in Iraq and Syria. This popular sentiment was especially strong in Jordan, where a number of participants made a counterintuitive case that could be assimilated to a conspiracy theory. According to their argument, IS was part of a larger US-led alliance and received considerable financial and military assistance on the ground from several Arab leaders. For the fewer Jordan and Tunisian individuals who portrayed IS as a standalone actor, they argued that the group did not attract members via its ideology. Rather, IS became the *de facto* recipient of the fruits of grievances fuelled by decades of tyranny, oppression and misgovernment in the region. To conclude, in the words of the public interviewed in Jordan and Tunisia, IS fell from grace and took on the role of a tormentor in the collective consciousness. One could wonder whether this widespread description accurately represented the sentiments of the MENA populations or whether it was used as a discursive trick to differentiate IS from Islam and, thus, avoid the sensitive debate around the nature of Islam and what social practises it entails.

Prima facie, the depiction of IS outlined above suggests that the identity frames constructed by the group failed to resonate in the MENA audience interviewed. This failure arguably resulted from a perceived strong discrepancy between IS' discourse and its violent practices. The latter led to a loss of legitimacy and popular support. In other words, it became obvious to the vast majority of the Jordan and Tunisian populations that IS' actions did not fit its words. The media and numerous – albeit modest – campaigns of delegitimisation launched against the Salafi-jihadi group seem to have successfully shaped the public's opinion. This perceived inconsistency between IS' project and its violent practices may also explain why the group attracted unexpected popular support until early-2015. Before the Islamic state was officially declared and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed the role of Caliph, the group was striving for territorial conquest and was not offered the opportunity to rule any population through the establishment of governance mechanisms and institutions. When IS started making important gains on the battlefield and imposing its authority on populations, its violent and restrictive policies were not justified, neither by a supposed external threat nor by the application of the *Sharī'ah* law. While the group alleged to have brought peace, exactions and insecurity only increased. Hence – and although IS strictly stuck to its initial project to establish an Islamic state based on the strict application of the original Islamic principles – populations inside and outside the territories of the Caliphate rejected the violence used by the group against those who would not accept its rule. This public disavowal of IS' rule would explain the waves of military defections the group suffered from as of late-2014 (Solomon, 2014; The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2015; Neumann, 2015) and the spreading disillusionment with the group in the MENA region. In other words, while the empirical Caliphate promoted in IS' discourse initially attracted a great deal of interest and support – whether material or ideological – the enterprise failed to convince MENA populations in practice and left IS deprived of people's loyalty. In the words of the majority of the Jordanians and Tunisians interviewed, IS replaced one form of tyranny – the secular tyranny of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and the US-imposed regime in Iraq – with another form of *pseudo* religious tyranny. Finally, this analysis suggests that the bulk of the populations interviewed – while reclaiming its Islamic heritage and identity – rejects the strict application of the *Sharī'ah* law that would not be contextualised in space and time. Rather, it appears that a humanistic Islam that recognises diversity and endorses the living together represents a more faithful image of a public wish in the MENA.

9.1.3 Converging Characterisation Frames

IS used language as a tool to shape a two camps' representation of the world: IS assimilated to the *Ummah* and the "Others". The latter camp was undeniably depicted as led by the Crusaders and their "*tāghūt*" Arab allied at the international level, and by the Shī'ia at the regional level. IS notably pointed to the "Front Stage Cooperation" to refer to the alliance between the United States, Russia, Iran and Syria. While IS' identity frames failed to resonate among its audience, it appears that its discursive construction of the "Others" echoed the perceptions of the Jordanian and Tunisian populations. As illustrated in Figure 11 and Figure 12, the public's discourse emphasised the role of state actors in the conflict dynamics at play in Iraq and s Syria. Though not termed as such, the "Front Stage Cooperation" was a recurring feature highlighted by the populations interviewed. Specifically, the United States, Russia and Iran were seen as the major actors that pulled the strings in the two conflicts. Once again, religion was an underlying feature of the discussions on military and political alliances. The Jordanian and Tunisian publics surveyed largely believed that Iran was involved for religion reasons – its enmity against the Sunni – while the United States supported the "Jewish state of Israel". While not voicing the "hatred" against the Muslims as IS deliberately did, the participants pointed to the open "anti-Arab" policies of those three powers. The latter countries were also commonly described as "puppeteer", thereby directly reproducing the language used in IS' discourse. This notion of puppeteers is particularly important because it encapsulates the idea that power or agency is taken from the hands of the populations and their leaders. Regional powers, especially the Gulf monarchies, were considered to be puppets of western actors such as the US. This widespread representation is a potential leverage for revisionist non-state actors such as IS because it is prone to instil a sense of illegitimacy which can foster the wish for radical change to claim power back. Besides, the vast majority of the participants surveyed argued that "foreign powers", especially western countries, followed by Israel and Saudi Arabia, benefitted the most from the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as they gained political and economic influence, and increased regional control through the access to natural resources and leadership over Arab leaders. This common perception contrasts with IS' assertion that the two conflicts would reverse the course of history and favour the Muslims over the foreign powers in the MENA region.

The United States was the source of most of the rancour voiced during the interviews with Jordanian and Tunisian individuals. More specifically, they uttered aversion to American military interventions and interferences in regional affairs. While the Americans were not imbued with a

particular religious identity, they were widely portrayed as "invaders" and one of the main causes of the regional instability. The country's recurring interventions were seen as a justification for popular revolt and as a violent mode of actions against what was perceived as an illegitimate ruler. Moreover, the populations interviewed clearly positioned themselves as victims of these foreign occupations. This rhetoric not only strongly echoed IS' discursive delegitimisation campaign against the United States and other western powers, but it also favoured the endorsement of an "Us against Them" framing of the conflicts, where "They" abuse their power against "Us" who are destitute and lack a spearhead to protect our interest and identity. Because eventually, losing the control over who rules "Us", through which institutions and via which alliances, would equate to losing one's identity as a citizen and as an integral part of a state. When the state identity disappears under the *aegis* of a foreign power, it will naturally be supplanted by a stronger, pre-existing, and shared identity; even more so if this identity is under threat as it is perceived to be the case of Islam in the MENA region. To conclude, IS and the publics surveyed in Jordan and Tunisia framed the nature and interests of the main actors involved in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria in a similar way. As for the secondary actors, it is interesting to note that the Jordanian and Tunisian participants did not evoke the non-state groups fighting in Iraq and Syria – especially Salafi-jihadi groups that opposed IS. One might wonder whether the respondents might just have got lost in the number of actors and interests at stake in the conflicts and thus chose to focus on the main ones, or whether their discourse reflected IS' efforts to undermine competing non-state actors and appear as the only non-state Islamic alternative to the existing rulers.

9.2.4 Power Frames – The End of the Caliphal Dream?

In its discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, IS adopted a discursive strategy of delegitimisation against the current regional rulers, highlighting their hatred against Muslims, their lack of morale and their submission to foreign powers. The group offered a solution to this modern crisis: the establishment of an Islamic state that would be governed by the *Sharī'ah* law in accordance with the will of Allah. Accordingly, IS strove for a new social contract – based on religion – for a revised socio-political organisation of the people. As for the Jordanian and Tunisian populations surveyed, while they shared IS' rejection of the current rule and the necessity to reform the structures of power, they disagreed on the method to tackle illegitimate governments. On the one hand, the shadow of the foreign powers on internal affairs in MENA countries remained at the heart of debates – especially in Tunisia where the shadow of the French

occupation was still much present in people's memory. In Iraq and Syria, the governments that preceded the advent of IS were commonly described by the Jordanians and Tunisians participants as illegitimate because they were not chosen by the people, nor did they represent their interests. Corruption was also an obvious bone of contention. This shared sentiment potentially offered strong resonance to IS' populist programme and the group's struggle to uplift the ordinary Muslims who feel that their concerns and interests had been disregarded by established elites.

Yet, it is important to mention that after eight years of regional turmoil, incommensurable violence and unprecedented destruction, the Tunisian and Jordanian publics still prioritised stability over legitimate and capable rulers. This was a striking observation in Tunisia, where the stability of Iraq and Syria under Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad was highly valued. In other words, at the time this research ws conducted, it seems that time had come for the wind of political change to leave room for reconstruction and unification. This opinion *per se* put IS and its radical reformist programme out of the political game. Regarding political legitimacy, the vast majority of respondents were divided along two main lines: 1/ the people should be the source of authority, 2/ the actor(s) who will be able to restore order and rebuilt the region would be the *de facto* accepted ruler. The latter option – that stemmed from a desperate need for peace and stability – is worrying for the future of the MENA region. It would possibly entail a certain form a totalitarian power which could easily slip towards an absolute rule and, eventually, another form of tyranny.

The prevalent pledge for national unity and the allocation of power to the people strongly opposes the core pillars of IS' political philosophy that revolved around the notion of Qutb's *hākimiyyah*. In other words, the fact that the majority of the populations surveyed in Jordan and Tuhisia located the centre of legitimacy in the people apparently entails the radical rejection of IS' state project that placed the sovereignty of Allah over that of the people. In addition, it seems that this observation goes against a widespread perception among certain observers and the general public outside the MENA region that the Arabs and the Muslims just "hate" anything that can be branded as "western" such as human rights and democracy (Lewis, 1990; Zakaria, 2003). In fact, this research highlights the need to decolonise those essential notions and to adopt a "humanistic" approach instead. Democracy is a universal concept that must be adapted to the context – historical, cultural and religious – where it is implemented. Democracy is the power of the people in the hands of the people. Yet, the people – beyond the essential biological and moral characteristics that unite them – are diverse. Democracy, thus, should reflect this diversity. As

such, the MENA populations must appropriate a democracy that they still consider as an imposition of foreign powers. If democracy in the MENA region must be a Muslim, or Arabic, or Kurdish, or Khariji democracy, let it be. As argued by Bayat (2007), "democratic ideals have less to do with the essence of any religion than with how it is [practiced]". The same is true with the notion of the nation-state, which remains widely associated with a western invention imposed to the MENA region as a result of the Sykes-Picot agreements.

In a Nutshell

This first section critically compared the conflict frames articulated – more or less consciously – by IS and the populations interviewed in Jordan and Tunisia. It also evaluated the potential resonance of IS' discourse in those populations. The results of this analysis clearly emphasised similar interpretations of the issues at stake in Iraq and Syria and more globally in the MENA region. IS and the publics surveyed offered a common depiction of illegitimate rulers that disregard the interests and needs of their populations. To this *local* picture shall be added an *international* layer that brings foreign western actors into the regional game for power over resources and people. Those dynamics take place in an increasingly sectarian context that witnesses the opposition between a Sunni majority and a Shī'ia minority at the national and regional level. According to a widespread perception of the region, this sectarianism would be fuelled by the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran over regional leadership on the one side, and by the alleged struggle of the Israeli "Jewish government" to dominate a Muslim-dominated region on the other side. This depiction entailed for the representation of an "Us against Them" situation where the local populations felt threatened by a multitude of internal and external actors. This sentiment of being under attack was prone to justify a defensive stance in a highly militarised and, thus, violent context.

The nature of IS' mission in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was the main point of divergence between the group and the populations surveyed in Jordan and Tunisia. While the latter endorsed the "issue" or need for (radical) change – and even the theoretical solution of unifying the Muslims under a Caliphate suggested in IS' discourse – the implementation and practices entailed by such solution were subject to debate and rejection. It is important here to restate that interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2018, that is, after the group had the chance to prove its governmental abilities and became infamous all across the world for its violent

practices. This would explain the massive rejection of IS' identity frames by the populations surveyed. For indeed, Jordanian and Tunisian participants admitted that their perception of the group changed and that a more peaceful implementation of its caliphal project would have probably proved more effective and attracted increased popular support. To conclude, a second precision is due. It is not possible to affirm that the Jordanian and Tunisian populations blindly "reproduced" some of the frames constructed by IS on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. On the one hand, the majority of respondents stated that they accessed the group's discourse on a daily basis via traditional and social media. Yet, on the other hand, a similar representation of the MENA region than that given in IS' rhetoric was relayed by a multitude of other non-state and state actors. In other words, the depiction of a MENA where foreign powers have taken the lead over the local governments and people is widespread in the streets, in the media, and partly at an institutional level. In other words, IS did not craft a new representation of the region, it adapted it to its own discourse and objectives. Yet, IS' discourse potentially had a strong influence, or at least, found attentive and sympathetic ears in its audience.

9.2 The End of "Daesh State of Falsehood"?

This section is organised around a series of questions that should lead the current debates on the post-IS state of affairs in Syria and Iraq but also in the MENA region and more globally in all countries that have been directly or indirectly affected by the war launched by the Caliphate. It is essential to mention that, and this testifies to the complexity of the matter, this section does not allude to a number of issues that will play a key role in the management of the post-IS domestic and regional order. Such issues – which exceed the research stream of this thesis – include but are not limited to transitional justice from an epistemological and implemental point of view; the shift of power politics in the MENA region that saw the United Stated adapting its exercise of power, coupled with the growing role of China and Russia; the management of former IS' fighters whether by punitive actions or social reintegration programmes; de-radicalisation programmes; the fate of the displaced populations; the thousands of wives and children of IS' fighters that remain in limbo.

9.2.1 Did Islamic State Succeed?

This is probably one of the questions all academics and policymakers tried to answer, while it is virtually impossible to provide a straightforward response. The very point of departure to answer this question – what did IS want to achieve? – is contingent on the subjective analysis of the researcher. This is why the next paragraph takes the form of a conversation filled with self-wonderings and additional interrogations about IS' impact and legacy. This reflexion follows the general assumption that stems from the analysis of IS' discourse on the wars in Iraq and Syria. It contends that those two conflicts provided the contextual framework for IS' multidimensional strategy aiming for the revival of the Caliphal system of governance.

Although IS surprised the whole world with the rapid and unexpected capture of major cities such as Mosul in Iraq, the group's military advance was quickly stopped by an ever-increasing number of enemies on the Iraqi and Syrian grounds. On June 29, 2017, exactly three years after the announcement of the Islamic state, former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced "the end of the Daesh state of falsehood" (Mostafa, 2017). On December 9, 2017, the French President Emmanuel Macron predicted that the group would be defeated in Syria in early-2018 (France Télévision, 2017). On March 23, 2019, the US-backed alliance of Syrian fighters announced that the jihadist group had lost the last pocket of territory it controlled, bringing a formal and definitive end to the Caliphate that once controlled over 88,000 square kilometres and ruled over eight million people (BBC News, 2019a). Hence, it appears that IS' military campaign has been brought to an end and can be branded a failure both in Iraq and Syria.

The success of IS' media campaign must be assessed more carefully. First, IS was able to craft a thoroughly articulated message to carry its vision of the world and its programme for the socio-political reorganisation of the people in the MENA region. In that sense, IS achieved something that no other Salafi-jihadi group was able to do before, that is, declaring the establishment of the Caliphate and imposing its control over large lands and populations. Second, the group was able to make full use of the new medium of communication offered by technical progress. IS' efforts to establish a central platform where all its media would be accessible was circumvented by state actors in a cyber counter-offensive. Yet the group's texts, videos and images flooded traditional and social media across the world. Tracking IS' media campaign online for the purpose of this research was not a difficult task, and all participants met in Jordan and Tunisia stated being exposed to the group's discourse on a daily basis, without even trying to access it. Therefore, the

dissemination of IS' message was successful, although it was greatly facilitated by media and governments around the world. Third, the success of the dissemination process enabled IS to reach a wide and diverse audience not only in Iraq, Syria and the MENA region but across the world. The distribution of its message was fostered by the translation of media output in tens of languages. Finally, the power – potential or actual – of IS' discourse is probably the most difficult to assess. This research demonstrated that IS' discourse was socially constructed and deeply embedded in the regional and national socio-political contexts. As such, the success of IS' message might not be the discourse itself but the fact that it echoes and projects assumptions and perceptions that are shared across the region. IS' discourse resonated with grievances based on the failure of the socio-political model of governance perceived as imposed in the post-colonial area. Yet, it also appeared that IS failed to transform its discourse into a "truth" or accepted form or "knowledge" according to the Foucauldian approach to discourse explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Finally, IS was unable to transform the pre-existing relation of power between the ruling elites and revisionist powers. IS' discourse did not attract as much support as that of the elites who were able to consolidate their hegemony over domestic and regional power institutions through their military and discursive counter-attack on the Caliphate.

IS military and media campaigns were aimed at promoting the group's revisionist socio-political programme that revolved around the establishment of an Islamic state in the form of a Caliphate. The group was able to establish such a state in Iraq and Syria and to test its governing capabilities over the territories it controlled. Moreover, the Caliphate dramatically expanded over the first months of its short life. Also, IS was initially able to deliver essential services and to respond to the pressing needs of the populations under its rule. Nonetheless, it failed to provide the long-term safety and accountability that were expected from a governmental structure. Eventually, IS was compelled to abort its state project, although it never declared defeat. Even though the group created a precedent for a Caliphal rule in the MENA region, several features tend to suggest that IS' political campaign was also a failure. On the one hand, the violence it used to enforce its power alienated the populations and left plenty of living witnesses of its tyrannical rule. As such, it is likely that IS will fail to attract much popular support in the future. The group turned the myth of the Islamic Golden Age into a red river of victims. As for those who lived under "the shadows" of the Caliphate, the majority of them quickly turned their backs to their Islamic state. Numerous prisoners tried to minimise their role in the caliphal structure and to return to their home countries, hoping not to be punished. On the other hand, one could wonder why IS took the risk to turn its ideological caliphate into a material state that provided an easy target on the

ground for the coalition forces? Such a tactical mistake may invite observers to reconsider IS' supposed aim to maintain the Caliphate. Another question that is worth debating is why IS isolated itself so much from its ideological brothers, Salafi-jihadi groups in Iraq and Syria such as al-Qaeda branch *Jabhat al-Nusra*? The group promoted the Caliphate as an umbrella and unifying state, which would have given a coalition of Salafi-jihadi groups a strong momentum on the military front. Instead, as soon as 2013, IS adopted a discursive strategy of differentiation and its discourse became centred on delegitimising its counterpart jihadi actors. Yet, as the Caliphate fell, so did the dream to overrule al-Qaeda as the most prominent Salafi-jihadi power in the region. While the Islamic state is no more and IS struggles to be the most relevant Islamist actor on the ground, al-Qaeda branch in Syria – renamed *Hayat Tahrir al-Shām* – remains a main actor of the conflict and has been able to attract fighters and the military support of both Islamic and secular fighting factions.

To conclude, IS did not succeed in imposing its socio-political programme as a sustainable alternative for the existing governing schemes in the MENA region. The group also failed to win the hearts and minds of the people and other jihadi groups, although it impacted the memories of many. Yet concluding that IS lost the war at all would be misleading.

9.2.2 Did Islamic State Lose the War?

In the words of several international leaders, the battle against Islamic State has finally been won. Yet, if the group has been militarily evicted from its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, its ideological power remains. Several politicians and analysts fear that IS will remain a threat in the Middle Eastern region and beyond. While some point to the transformation of IS into a clandestine global network (Clarke, 2017) or an insurgency and to the group's presence in the Iraqi and Syrian peripheries (Frank, 2018; Joscelyn, 2019), others emphasise its resurgence in both countries (Cafarella et al., 2019; Kube et al., 2019). Moreover, one might argue that the group achieved its strategic objective by creating momentum for a Salafi-jihadi rule in the Middle East.

After IS' loss of Mosul in summer 2017, the group's media outlet almost disappeared. Only *al-Naba'*, its Arabic newsletter, remained published regularly, while the number of videos uploaded online daily decreased considerably. In April 2019, a video featuring the Caliphate's leader al-Baghdadi came at a great surprise; not only because rumours announced him dead and victim of

internal plots. In his announcement, the self-declared caliph gave an 18-minute speech where he acknowledged the difficulties facing its armies: "Indeed, the battle for Islam and for its people with the Cross and its people will be a long battle." Trying to raise morale, al-Baghdadi repeatedly reminded the "steadfastness of the Muslim Ummah". But more importantly, his speech marked a change of priority from maintaining the Caliphate to waging jihad; and a change of strategy from conventional warfare to guerrilla: "Our battle today is one of attrition and struggle with the enemy. They need to know that jihad is continuing until the Day of Resurrection and that God ordered us to age jihad and did not order us to achieve victory". As such, IS operated a strategic shift from a war in-between states and nations to an asymmetric conflict between the group and its multiple enemies. Doing so, IS went back to a traditional form of Salafi-jihad: an insurgency – mainly launched from the desert countryside – mostly against military targets.

On December 13, 2018, Kurdish news agency *Rûdaw* reported that in one month alone, IS attacked villages in Iraq's disputed Khanaqin district (in the north-west of Baghdad) over 143 times, forcing villagers to flee their homes (Rûdaw, 2018). On June 29, 2019, five Iranian IS militants threatened to strike the Iranian government in a short video released by *Nashirnews*, IS' channel on messaging application Telegram. On July 7, 2019, Iraqi security forces launched the "Will of Victory" operation to target IS sleeper cells in Nineveh, Anbar, and Saladin provinces. Furthermore, two years after it officially drove IS out of the country, the Iraqi military still regularly conducts operations to dismantle hundreds of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that remain in the Iraqi villages and countryside. Between March and July 2019 only, the US-led coalition announced the removal of more than 3,000 IEDs in Iraq (van Wilgenburg, 2019). Also, the US-led military coalition is still active. On August 17, 2019 for instance, the French military announced that two Rafale jets conducted an airstrike targeting an IS tunnel in north-eastern Iraq (État-major des armées, 2019). Finally, IS continues to carry and claim small-scale attacks in Iraq and in Syria where it is still active in Deir-Ezzor desert areas. The US Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat IS, James Jeffrey, said in March 2019 that Washington believed there were still between 15,000 and 20,000 IS "armed adherents active" in the region, many of them in sleeper cells (Rûdaw, 2019). At the time of writing, the Caliphate's last major acts of war killed and wounded 250 people in a single attack in Kabul (BBC News, 2019b) and 40 soldiers in Nigeria (al-Arabiya, 2019). Lately, the group has also claimed several attacks in South-East Asia such as the one on July 1, 2019, when around 100 people were killed and wounded in two suicide attacks launched by IS' soldiers. Meanwhile, there are significant numbers of IS-affiliated militants in Afghanistan (Nangarhar province), Egypt (Sinai region), Yemen, Libya, South-East Asia

(mainly Sri Lanka and the Philippines) and West Africa (Somalia, Nigeria and in the Sahel). In May 2019, the group even announced the creation of two new provinces in India and Pakistan. In a nutshell, IS will remain disruptive in and beyond the MENA region.

Finally, one could argue that the short-lived Caliphate served a number of purposes. First, IS educated a new and young generation of soldiers, both militarily and ideologically. The group's exceptionalism is that it created what can be called "democratic jihad" or a "jihadi diaspora" where anybody can launch a violent action in the name of the Caliphate – no matter who s/he is, where s/he lives and without demonstrating strong links to the Salahi-jihadi ideology. Hence, the end of the Caliphate does not necessarily mean the end of jihad in the name of the Caliphate, and the latter's shadow is likely to remain for years to come. Second, IS created a precedent for the establishment of an "Islamic state", which will allow the group and its subsequent versions to play one of its favourite rhetoric tricks: the return to a "Golden Age". In the context of Salafi-jihad, IS built history. When the group grabs the next occasion to rise to power, instead of referring to the Abbasside Caliphate and its fall at the hands of the Mongols, IS will be able to refer directly to a much closer, vivid memory of the Caliphate in Raqqa and Mosul that fell at the hands of the "Crusaders" and their "*murtādd*" allies. Hence, the fall of the Islamic state in Syria and Iraq feeds IS' discourse on the crisis of the *Ummah* and its greatest struggle against the Crusaders and their puppets in the MENA. In other words, IS succeeded to engrave memories of governments, populations and akin groups all around the world.

From the elements outlined above, one can legitimately wonder whether IS – or any related rebranded group – will come back to Iraq and Syria, and in which form. After all, it seems that the group survived the military offensives launched against its Caliphate in both countries, in a similar way that al-Qaeda survived its defeat by the US-led campaign in Iraq in 2007. The then-most-infamous jihadi group retreated to desert areas to regroup and organise its tactic of disturbing local politics and fostering sectarian strife. In 2011, the Syrian civil war gave al-Qaeda the opportunity to return to the front stage. It seems that after it lost its territorial control, IS followed a comparable strategy and will patiently wait to gain momentum again while expending its network outside the MENA region. IS arguably does not need a material Caliphate to maintain its relevance with regular attacks that are massively relayed by media across the world. As predicted by Bendaouidi (2018), IS' followers "will try to keep their cause alive".

9.3 The Prospects of the Post-Islamic State MENA Order

The results of the comparison between IS and MENA populations' frames are particularly interesting because they go beyond the mere study of IS' discursive power and the group's influence in the region. The analysis outlined in the first section of this chapter suggests ways forwards to understand the place of Islamism and the state in the MENA after the Arab Spring, as well as the perceptions of the populations towards existing systems of governance.

In the MENA region, and even more so in the Middle East, the legitimacy of the state as a territorial unit of governance remains debatable. Most notably, the ruling elites and the national borders – along with the resulting imposition of a national identity – are still considered by many as illegitimate because imposed by western powers after WWI. The shadow of the "western puppeteer" never really stopped hanging over the region, reinforcing the popular sentiment of being ruled over by a distant elite. In fact, the geostrategic alliance between Arab leaders and foreign actors to secure the former's power, often at the expenses of the populations, has inspired prominent academic work (Barnett, 1998; Hudson, 1980; David, 1991). It follows that the rebellion against the foreign occupation in the region, embodied by the existence of a "Jewish" state of Israel in the middle of Arab Muslim countries, remains a powerful argument for (violent) mobilisation and for the promotion of a common identity around a common struggle. The wave of popular protests that spread across the region like wildfire from December 2010 was a blatant example of the perceived lack of political legitimacy. As for Iraq and Syria, decades of chronic illegitimacy opened a transnational power vacuum that was quickly filled with a myriad of armed groups drawing on a religious discourse to destabilise the established order. These dynamics arguably played a role in the initial support to IS' revisionary program that opposed both the nation-states system and corrupted ruling minorities in Iraq and Syria. In other words, IS promoted a form of Islamic populism aimed at providing freedom from the domination of foreign powers while regaining dignity and tangible resources to an *Ummah* conceived to be both downtrodden and homogeneous. In that sense, the Caliphate represented a reformist post-modern answer to failed governance, the popular disenchantment in politics and ruling elites, and to the perceived threat to Islamic historical and socio-political heritage in the MENA region.

Yet if the Arab Spring and IS' disruptive campaign were symptomatic of the structural sclerosis that paralysed the MENA, both dynamics apparently failed to bring about radical changes and to

shake the established order. In fact, states and regimes remained tenacious in their hold on territory and power, even in Yemen and Libya where the state system is crumbling. Since 2010, only Tunisia and Egypt experienced strong changes in their systems of governance.[1] In Egypt, less than a year after Muhamad Morsi was elected the first president since Hosni Mubarak's resignation, he was deposed by a military *coup d'état* that was followed by a violent crackdown of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters. As for Tunisia, while it offers a case of peaceful and *a priori* successful transition from Ben Ali's authoritarian rule, the country remains vulnerable to transnational jihadi groups who find a safe-haven in Libya, while it struggles to durably establish a strong and legitimate democracy. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad achieved a *tour de force* by staying in power with the blessing of the world's strongest countries. Similarly, and although popular unrest continues in the southern Anbar province, Iraq has survived the rapid military offensive led by ISIS in 2013 and 2014. The country retained its territorial integrity, taming the Kurdish political parties that sought to achieve greater independence after their valuable and decisive military support against IS. Finally, the country of the two rivers remains ruled by a government that nurtures its privileged relationship with Iran. In other words, after years of war, Syria and Iraq are still ruled by "the minority", a perception that could also apply to Bahrain where the protests of the Shī'ia majority against a Sunni ruling minority were rapidly cracked down in 2011. In the Gulf monarchies, the lack of transparency of the political process impedes the analysis of power legitimacy. Finally, the constitutional monarchies in Jordan and Morocco were able to reform their system and answer the needs of their populations so that the protests were quickly circumscribed, although Jordan was shaken by further popular dissent against the corruption of the royal family. To conclude, it clearly appears that political legitimacy has not spread across the MENA. Moreover, after debating around the division of the Iraqi and Syrian territories into sub-state entities, both countries eventually remained united and under the control of their central government. As predicted by Louise Fawcett in 2017 in her analysis of the regional state system after the Arab uprisings "States and their borders, albeit contested, are likely to stay" (Fawcett, 2017).

If the MENA region has proved incredibly resilient in the face of the Arab Spring, IS threat and other political dynamics such as the GCC crisis, it has and will nonetheless remain shaky and unstable. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria, along with the advent of IS, revealed stark internal

[1] At the time of writing, Algeria was also experiencing regime change, although not directly linked to the Arab Spring.

divisions. While the Caliphate was considered for years as the common enemy, state and non-state actors failed to unite against the threat. The rift became apparent in a number of instances. None of the international coalitions created to fight the group – the US-led Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF–OIR) and the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) – provided an inclusive platform for state actors irrespective of their identity features and geopolitical interests. As such, the divides between the US and Iran, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russian, Russia and the US, Syria and Turkey (to cite only a few) have in fact deepened. Evidently, IS exposed the failure – or at least the lack – of regionalism in the MENA. The absence of political and military reaction from the GCC – caught up in an internal crisis since June 2017 – was a striking point of the war against the Caliphate. It can even be argued that the military campaign against IS gave rise to new crises in the region. The Kurdish case provides a blatant example. The Kurds in Syria and Iraq willingly chose to become "proxies" in the war against the Islamic state in the hope that they will be rewarded and eventually advance their own agenda. Yet, while the Kurdish military support proved vital in both countries, their protectors ultimately eluded the question of external support to their longstanding aspiration for greater autonomy. The United States announced its military withdrawal from the Syrian ground in April 2018, leaving the Kurds of *Rojava* backed into a corner, entrapped between hostile Turkish and Syrian forces. In Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), the referendum on the question of independence from Baghdad tuned into a military assault against the Kurds when they could not find any external support to their democratic initiative. In another instance of the growing regional fragmentation, Salafi-jihadi groups were also unable to unite under a single banner while such cohesion would have provided a strong tactical advantage to their struggle against the MENA nation-states. In fact, Syria – and Iraq to a lesser extent – quickly became a nest of infighting jihadi groups which added a layer of complexity to the conflicts. As highlighted in the analysis of IS discourse, the group devoted growing efforts to fight and delegitimise its fellows instead of focusing on the alliance of "Crusaders". Finally, IS' binary worldview reinforced the sectarian divisions and rivalries that tear the MENA apart. Sectarianism has become a major dynamic to explain local, national and regional feuds and is now encapsulated in all military and political regional alliances as mirrored by the quasi-exclusively Sunni IMCTC.

On the other hand, foreign presence and upper hand on the national and regional politics of the MENA states is at a climax, especially in Iraq and Syria. Most recently, the external influence has become dominant in the security-military spheres. On July 1, 2019, Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi issued a decree to gradually subjugate Iran-backed militias known as the Popular

Mobilisation Units (PMU) to the Iraqi state. The announcement followed the reincorporation of the militias into the country's armed forces in December 2016, decided by a parliamentary bill approved by then President Fuad Masum (Antonopoulos, 2016). While allegedly aimed at reinforcing the leadership of the Iraqi state over the militias which loyalty to Iraq is subject to important debates, in the KRI, the decree was perceived as the mere formalisation of the PMU's integration into the Iraqi army. The announcement was particularly badly received as the Iraqi government always refused to incorporate the Peshmerga into the central security-military apparatus, while the Kurdish factions have played an instrumental role in the survival of the state institutions after IS' military offensive. On the day after the official announcement, Kurdish newspaper *Rûdaw* pointed to the growing influence of the PMU not only at the military level but also in the political sphere (Saleh, 2019). The parties that compose the newly-formed *Fatah* Alliance, that won the second-highest number of seats in the Iraqi parliament after the May 2018 elections, each possesses its own PMU faction, the newspaper argued. It concluded: "Abdul-Mahdi's decree seeks to sever these political ties 'on an individual or [organizational] level'" (Ibid). In addition, the move came at a time when Iraqi leaders voiced growing concerns that the country might turn into another battleground, this time, between Iran and the United States. On the margin of a government summit held amid tensions escalation between the two states, the Iraqi President Barham Salih emphasised the country's determination not to be drawn into a proxy war: "Enough of wars, enough of conflict [...] We don't have the stamina, we don't have the energy, we don't have the resources or the willingness to become victim to yet another proxy conflict" (CBS News, 2019; Cornish, 2019). The President also warned that IS would benefit from any conflict in the country that could be a distraction from Iraq's "real priority" of "combatting terrorism" (CBS News, 2019). The fragmentation of the Iraqi security apparatus between the army and the militias, together with the exclusion of the Peshmerga which cooperation is crucial to the country's territorial integrity revives the spectre of de-Ba'athification process that resulted into a dramatic security gap and the inability the contain the 2004 insurgency and IS' military assault.

In Syria, similar dynamics are at play, although the conflict has always been branded a proxy war between international and regional powers. On July 8, 2019, Bashar al-Assad announced numerous changes in the top security personnel – the most important restructuring since the 2012 bombing of the National Security headquarters in Damascus. The decision was interpreted by several Syrian opposition media as a sign of external growing influence (Al Masdar News, 2019; Khalifeh, 2019; Mardasov, 2019). The reshuffling started in early 2019, allegedly under the

pressure of Moscow in an attempt to weaken the Iranian influence in the Syrian intelligence and security apparatus (al-Arab, 2019; Arabi21, 2019; al-Modon, 2019; Mohammed, 2019; Orient.et, 2019; Zaman Al Wasl, 2019). Russia, seen as the main beneficiary of the reform, attempted to dilute the importance of the Syrian reorganisation (News.ru, 2019). Yet, as analysed by Paul Khalifeh (2019), the move was seen as "part of a larger rivalry between Russia and Iran over the control of Syria's military and security agencies and thus part of the framework of a geopolitical competition between countries that are, theoretically, allies". According to former Lebanese General Elias Hanna, Assad's reshuffling "gives Russia the upper hand to the detriment of Iran" (Ibid). A similar analysis was offered by the Saudi Independent Arabia in a paper untitled "Will Russia overthrow Iran's influence in the Syrian security services" (Rustum, 2019).

Hence, it appears that the structural conditions that led to the emergence of IS in Iraq and to its expansion to Syria remain. Both countries are prey to a perceived lack of political legitimacy, conspicuous foreign influence, growing ethnic and sectarian divisions, and both still lie at the centre of regional geopolitical confrontation between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey who seek regional leadership. This political, ethnic, and sectarian fragmentation generates a self-reinforcing dynamic that is common to the whole region and severely threatens its relative stability. More generally, although unsteady, the region remains unchanging (Zartman, 2017). One reason of this lack of change is maybe the fact that the actors who master the global system fear its disintegration and ensure that recognised governments in the MENA region maintain their *de jure* monopoly over the use of force and thus, their legitimacy, although they might not have the *de facto* control over their territories. From an epistemological perspective, this observation echoes Norman Fairclough's criticism of social constructionism that it fails to acknowledge the fact that social – and political – entities are relatively solid and resistant to change. It remains the case that MENA states urgently need to reconcile their populations with the governing elites that are still associated with corruption and differentiated treatment on the basis of ethnicity or religion. The Arab Spring and the initial – albeit relative – popular support for IS' socio-political project were symptomatic of the public discontent with their leaders, their corruption, lack of skills and dependence on the global powers such as the United States. During interviews conducted in Jordan and Tunisia, several respondents explained that they initially supported IS' fight against the occupiers (the US and Israel) and the Arab tyrants. Similarly, by several participants' own admission, the group was seen as finally triggering "the dream of the Caliphate" and of the recovered dignity of the Arab Muslims after decades of humiliation at the hands of the foreign powers. It seems that the incredible violence used against civilians and the Muslim population in Iraq and Syria by IS was

one of the main reasons for the group's loss of support. Hence, one could wonder whether IS would have been able to attract increased popular loyalty had it concentrated its military efforts against symbols of the states it was fighting? What does this initial popular support entail for the future of non-violent Islamist movements that offer an alternative source and exercise of power?

In the modern MENA region, Islamist movements appeared with a similar ideology coined around the defence of the Islamic identity in the face of multiplying secular ideologies, especially after the collapse of the caliphal system of governance after WWI. Those movements have in common that they view Islam as a frame of reference and a general guiding principle, setting the establishment of a *Shaī'ah*-based Islamic state as a goal – sometimes within the borders of the nation-state. The Arab uprisings changed the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of Islamism in the MENA region (Affan, 2019: 2) and altered the very nature and *raison d'être* of Islamist parties. In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood saw the Arab Spring as an opportunity to redefine their relationship with the Hashemite monarchy from participation to political partnership (Jebreel, 2019: 100). Yet their pressing call for reform was perceived as an attempt to wage "a soft coup" against the king and was severely repressed (Abu Rumman and Bondokji, 2018: 37). The Jordanian Islamist movement also suffered from an internal rift that culminated in the creation of the National Congress Party-Zamzam on October 5, 2013 (al-Neimat, 2014) and the Participation and Rescue Party (PRP). In the words of Abu Rumman and Bondokji (2018), Jordan is witnessing a period of "post-Islamism" triggered by the failure of Islamists experiences in the MENA region, especially in Egypt, as well as the organisational crisis in the Muslim Brotherhood between the hardliners and the reformists. The authors describe the two newly-created parties as post-Islamists considering "their focus on the national question versus the Islamist ideology that [characterizes] the Islamist parties and the re-placement of the concept of the 'Islamic state' or 'Islamic point of reference' in their discourse with the 'civil state'" (Abu Rumman and Bondokli, 2018: 105). Tunisia experienced a similar shift, maybe the most radical change in terms of ideology and structure since the advent of the Arab Spring. These transformations were detailed in Chapter 7 and shaped the Tunisian political landscape in the post-Ben Ali era. After it was placed at the heart of political power in 2014, Ennahdha gradually adapted its identity to the political game and the need to penetrate additional social sectors and gain legitimacy. Notably, the Tunisian Islamist party abandoned Islam as its main frame of reference and reviewed its definition of the Islamic state around the notion of the "nation" (Abdelmoula, 2019: 22).

Ennahda's approach – and that recently developed by the Jordanian post-Islamist parties – seem in line with the vision articulated by the populations interviewed in the framework of this research. The analysis of their discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria highlighted their will to "rediscover" Islam and incorporate it within the existing structure of the state, rather than establishing a fully different system of governance based on religion. In other words, it appears that there is no rejection of the (nation)-state as a system of governance but a strong denunciation of the nature and practices of those who control the state and, henceforth, the lives of the people. While these results cannot be extrapolated to the entire MENA, the generalised lack of political legitimacy calls for the pressing need to reform the structures of power in the region. For indeed, the results of the interviews conducted in Jordan and Tunisia clearly emphasised the will of the governed to be the source of legitimacy, although they might not always be the source of power. This sentiment corroborated the wave of popular revolts that erupted in late 2010 and keeps shaking the established order and asking for more accountability, such as in Algeria and Sudan. Moreover, over the past decade, power-sharing provisions have become increasingly analysed in terms of sectarianism. For indeed, in 2016, nearly half of young Arabs believed that Sunni-Shī'ia relations have deteriorated since the beginning of the Arab Spring, a perception that existed across the Arab world (Asda'a Burson-Marsteller, 2016: 13). This common view gravely endangers the project of peaceful governance endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the MENA populations. Those dynamics are clear indications for the pressing necessity to transform power-sharing modalities towards more inclusion and equity, in a way that mirrors the mosaic of people that constitutes the MENA region.

To conclude, it could be argued that without a structural shift of governance and democracy, as well as its application in MENA counties, IS' discourse is likely to be used again and adapted to a new context or a new war. MENA states need to place their populations at the centre of governance. Otherwise, researchers and observers will need to reassess the notion of democracy, the adequacy of this system of governance in the MENA region, and its adaptability to any context (Green, 2014).

Chapter 10 ~ Final Conclusion

This final chapter concludes with a synopsis of the main research question and the intellectual endeavour towards developing a strong and comprehensive framework to answer it. It then provides a general summary of the findings before highlighting the challenges and limitations of this academic undertaking. Finally, it offers a review of the contributions to the literature and findings' implications for future research, suggesting some final reflections based on the experiences gained while conducting this research.

10.1 Positioning and Findings

Guided by the general investigation on the role of language in relation to key contemporary issues shaping the modern MENA region, this thesis sought to comprehend IS' use of language and the latter's influence on MENA populations' perception of conflict dynamics in Iraq and Syria. This core inquiry led to the formulation of two research questions:
1) How did IS depict the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, in an attempt to convince its audience of its representation of the region and to legitimise its struggle for a new order?
2) Did IS' frames on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria resonate in the larger MENA socio-cultural context?
Representing IS' communication campaign as a sender-message-receiver continuum, this thesis aimed to give primary importance to the message and its audience. To do so, it tried to highlight three distinct but related dynamics: the "meaning-making process" in IS' discourse, the latter's promotion as a general "truth", and the "shaping process" that consists in using this "truth" to influence its audience's representation of its environment.

This thesis situated the research in the body of work relating to critical discourse analysis (CDA) that provided deep insights into the concept of discourse and offered several advantages to study IS as a social movement through a discourse-sensitive and linguistic approach. Mainly, CDA offered strong premises to investigate the link between discourse, society and power. It also

highlighted the role of the discourse as a tool to shape social realities and gain popular support in the context of power struggle. Finally, this thesis adopted CDA prominent scholar Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for the analysis of IS' discourse at the micro-level (text), at the meso-level (discursive practises), and at the macro-level (social practices the discourse entails). This framework was particularly well suited to grasp the process of production, dissemination and reception of IS' discourse. This thesis chose to highlight the constructionist stance of CDA to make sense of the interlinked relationship between the fundamental role of language in the creation of knowledge and reality. In other words, discourse as a social practice is socially constitutive and socially shaped. This provided strong support to one of the main premises of this thesis, that IS' discourse was a product of its environment, evolved along with the production of concurrent discourses in the MENA region, and adapted itself to the diversity of its audience. The importance given to social constructionism in the study of the discourse accounted for the contextualisation of Islamism in its historical, geographical and socio-political settings in the MENA region in general (Chapter 4) and in Jordan and Tunisia as case studies (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

After clarifying the concept of discourse and its potential power of influence, this thesis built its theoretical framework around Frame Theory (FT) to analyse how IS interpreted and depicted events and objects in the context of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria and how the group used this representation of the wars to project its socio-political Caliphal project in the MENA region. Moreover, FT offered a way to investigate the power of influence of the group's discourse through the concept of resonance, that is, the degree to which frames succeeded in generating responsiveness in the targeted group of the message or in audiences at large. This thesis considered IS' discourse from the declaration of Islamic State in Iraq and Shām by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on April 8, 2013, until July 20, 2017 when IS lost Mosul, its last stronghold in Iraq. Moreover, this thesis collected the discourse of a share of the Jordanian and Tunisian publics that provided the two case studies for the investigation of IS' discursive power. Corpus Linguistic Techniques were chosen as an analytical tool to code the datasets, highlight linguistics patterns and specificities, and analyse conflict frames.

The analysis and comparison of the conflict frames present in the discourse produced by IS on the one side and the Jordan and Tunisian populations interviewed on the other side revealed interesting findings (Chapter 5 to Chapter 9). On the one hand, the Jordanian and Tunisian

participants articulated a clear discursive link with IS' depiction of a "crisis of the *Ummah*" or the subjugation of the region and the Muslim identity at the hands of foreign western powers, corrupted Middle Eastern rulers and different sects. Moreover, it clearly appeared that a majority of the populations interviewed supported the idea of a radical socio-political change that would reshape the structures and balance of power. On the other hand, while IS' rhetoric on the *causes* of the perceived crisis and on its *solution* seemed to resonate in sampled populations, the *social practices* this solution entails were the main bone of contention between the two sets of discourses. IS sought to secure popular support through the articulation of a two-fold discursive strategy coined around an identity choice and the use of an honour vs. shame binary nexus. In other words, supporting IS would entail the protection of one's Muslim identity on the one side and the restoration of one's honour lost at the hands of the enemies of the *Ummah* on the other. The populations surveyed in Jordan and Tunisia rejected the choice offered by IS through its discourse. They mainly opposed the assimilation between the group and the Muslim identity, emphasising the violent and sectarian nature of the Caliphate's policy. In other words, while IS discourse succeeded to echo these audiences' perception of the regional dynamics, it failed to reshape their representation about their own identity. IS discourse was unable to transform the very nature of Islam and of what a Muslim can endorse for the sake of religion. In that sense, while IS succeeded in giving resonance to the grievances and resentment of its audience in Jordan and Tunisia, the group failed in its endeavour to attract generalised support for its Caliphal project of radical socio-political change for the MENA region. According to the populations surveyed, the Muslim identity must not go together with the support for an Islamic state that would be implemented through violence. Nonetheless, this apparent rejection of IS' project must be nuanced at the regional and state levels. After years of conflict in Iraq and in Syria, the conditions that initially gave rise to IS remain. So do the dynamics that nurtured the popular grievances against perceived illegitimate rulers. Hence, it is crucial that MENA states and governments embark in a process of structural changes in order to address the popular need for political legitimacy, representation, inclusion and justice.

10.2 Research Challenges and Limitations

Three limitations arose during data collection. First, the sensitivity of the research project annihilated efforts to meet and discuss with several individuals in Jordan and Tunisia. It also

probably prejudiced the honesty of the answers given during interviews. Even though all precautions were taken to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the discussions, several participants refused to share their views on IS and its role in Iraq and Syria. Others provided vague answers that could hardly be integrated into the analytical process. This was especially the case in Tunisia where the freedom brought about by the revolution did not go along with the safety that would allow its citizens to freely express their views on any topic. In another respect, the sensitivity of the research sometimes stemmed from the consequences of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria experiences by some participant at the personal level.

Second, the number of individuals surveyed was limited to between 60 and 70 in each country – about fifty participants for interviews, focus-groups discussions and/or questionnaires and around ten experts on Islamism, Salafi-jihadi movements and regional politics. Also, several locales were excluded from the research due to safety and ethical considerations, such as the bordering areas between Tunisia and Libya. As a result, the sample selected to collect Jordanian and Tunisian views on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria was not fully representative of the populations in these two countries. Yet efforts were made to differentiate participants according to their gender, age, geographical and social background, religion and political views. Moreover, the research was not limited to the *citizens* of Jordan and Tunisians but included the *inhabitants* of those countries. For example, Syrian refugees in Jordan were included in the sample. Besides, the quality of the in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions compensate the number that could have been greater. Most interviews were conducted in the participants' daily settings which allowed for relatively "protected" discussions, as well as for the integration of the researcher into their normal life. This facilitated the collection of their thoughts and perceptions but also of their behaviours and attitudes. Furthermore, interviews were not the sole, albeit the main, reason to meet participants. The discussion was part of a broader encounter between the researcher and the participants. In other words, interviews were usually preceded or followed by a shared meal with or a tour of the participants' neighbourhood. The encounter would typically last between two and three hours. This approach arguably helped the researcher to develop a relationship of trust and to situated individuals' perceptions on the subject of the interviews into a broader spectrum of their living settings. Finally, interviews were complemented by anonymous questionnaires, participants observations during the several weeks spent on the field, and by informal discussions with individuals outside the framework of this research. As such, the findings presented in this thesis are not the mere results of interviews and focus-group discussions *stricto sensus*, but of a deeper investigation of the wider popular mood in Jordan and Tunisia. As a result, the analysis

of IS' discursive power presented in this thesis is limited to those two national contexts. While time, security and ethical considerations did not allow this research to be conducted in additional contexts, it would have been particularly interesting to investigate IS' discursive influence in countries where the state is failing – such as in Yemen – and in countries where the group had the opportunity to rule over local populations and challenge the state as the legitimate governmental body – such as in Iraq and Syria.

Finally, this thesis did not reflect and analyse the temporal evolution of IS' discursive power in Jordan and Tunisia. This research started in October 2016, with fieldworks being conducted between December 2016 and August 2018. As such, data collected in the field must be located after IS' military exploits in Iraq and Syria and while the group was already experiencing difficulties on the battlefield, waves of defections, and a strong discursive counter-campaign launched by MENA and western governments. Hence, if the analysis touches upon the transformation of the sampled populations' perceptions of the group and its struggle, it was unable to grasp it fully. It would have been enlightening to systematically capture the discursive snap when IS' message started losing its initial power of influence and to measure its diminishing resonance. Analysing the MENA populations' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria and comparing it with IS' message before 2016 may have revealed a higher degree of reproduction and similarities. It could have provided stronger evidence that IS' discourse remained highly coherent over time but found a decreased echo when the message was confronted with the group's violent practices in Iraq and Syria.

10.3 Research Contributions and Implications

This thesis modestly contributed to the literature on strategic communication approaches to political violence by establishing an analytical framework that explains the role of language in the development of violent extremism. More specifically, this research provided a comprehensive case study of IS' discourse by bridging several gaps identified in the literature related to the group's communication strategy. Firstly, it studied IS discursive efforts across three languages – Arabic, English and French – and integrated a multitude of media outlets, moving beyond the academic focus on the group's English publication in *Dābiq* magazine. Doing so, it offered a systematic, inclusive and thorough analyses of the group's message. Secondly, this research conceptualised

the actual influence of IS' discourse through the concepts of frames and resonance. It distanced itself from existing studies that assumptively link IS' success to appeal to a wide audience with the group's ability to coin a highly professional and graphic discourse and to disseminate it via an effective use of social media. Thirdly, this thesis went beyond the simplistic depiction of IS' message as mere propaganda. As such, it contributed to the body of literature that recognises the role of audiences in the selection and the interpretation of a message. It is clear that IS' discourse was generally heard by a wide – both friendly and hostile – audience in the MENA region. This thesis asked the question of whether IS' discourse was also listened to? And if so, did it resonate and shape its audience's representation of the regional dynamics? Going beyond the simplistic assumption that IS' message was powerful because it used advanced rhetorical strategies, this thesis demonstrated that the real power of any discourse lies in its ability to be received and appropriated by its audience.

From an analytical point of view, this thesis suggested an original approach to the study of the communication efforts of non-state actors. The latter ones have capitalised on the introduction of new communication technologies to build complex and global communication networks and reach an ever-growing audience. This allowed several non-state actors to become serious adversaries to state institutions, using discourse as a vehicle to carry their grievances and revisionist programme. Integrating Corpus Linguistic Techniques into Frame Analysis, this research provided a strong framework to systematically analyse a discourse, bridging the divide between the production processes and the potential effects on public perceptions – from a theoretical aspect – and between qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as empirical and interpretative ones – from a methodological perspective.

Finally, this thesis shed light on the relevance of studying political phenomena through language. Most evidently, the study of IS' discursive offensive in the MENA region corroborates CDA's claim that ability to define social reality – or make one particular discourse dominant – is an act of power with important implications for social practices. More specifically, this investigation offered an insight into how language and its framing role can have practical consequences in politics. On the one hand, language was used by IS as a tool of unity and division in the context of identity politics. Through language, individuals were assigned an in-group or out-group identity which determined the policies that should be applied to them. Language also defined how these individuals viewed themselves, where they placed their loyalty and with whom they allied or were expected to do so. On the other hand, as exemplified by the study of IS' discourse, language can

be used to break geographical and cultural borders and gather highly diverse individuals under one authority, one banner. IS' discourse targeted different audiences across the world and it was able to spark support across different cultural settings. In this case, language became transnational, transregional and even transcultural. In other words, language embodied a collective culture – in the case of IS, Sunni Islam as it is interpreted by the group – which transcended national and regional modern identities. This discourse hence became a potentially powerful political alternative to the failure of nation-states, nationalism and secular regionalism in the MENA. Finally, this research demonstrated the ability of language to bridge time, namely the past, the present and the future. Frame Theory was particularly relevant to understanding the constant link between those three dimensions. The frames specific to IS' discourse on the conflicts in Iraq and Syria integrated the past – through history –, the future – through expectations and goals – and the present – through the direct context in which the utterance took place. Similarly, IS used a pre-modern discourse rooted in traditional Islam. This pre-modern discourse mainly went back to the 7th century with the teachings of the Qur'an, and to the 13-14th century with the teachings of Sunni theologian Ibn Taymiyyah. The group applied this pre-modern discourse to a modern context, the wars in Iraq and Syria, hoping that it would shape post-modern political and social realities. This linguistic turn accounts for the role of language as a "living shaping device" that is constantly re-interpreted and adapted to new contexts. To conclude, moving beyond the study of IS, this doctoral investigation offered a strong analytical framework – based on innovative theoretical and methodological approaches – to examine how non-state actors use language coined into a discourse in the context of a struggle for power. Looking at IS through this prism also speaks to the changing core, but continuing importance, of Area Studies as a multidisciplinary endeavour to make better sense of global and complex regions such as MENA.

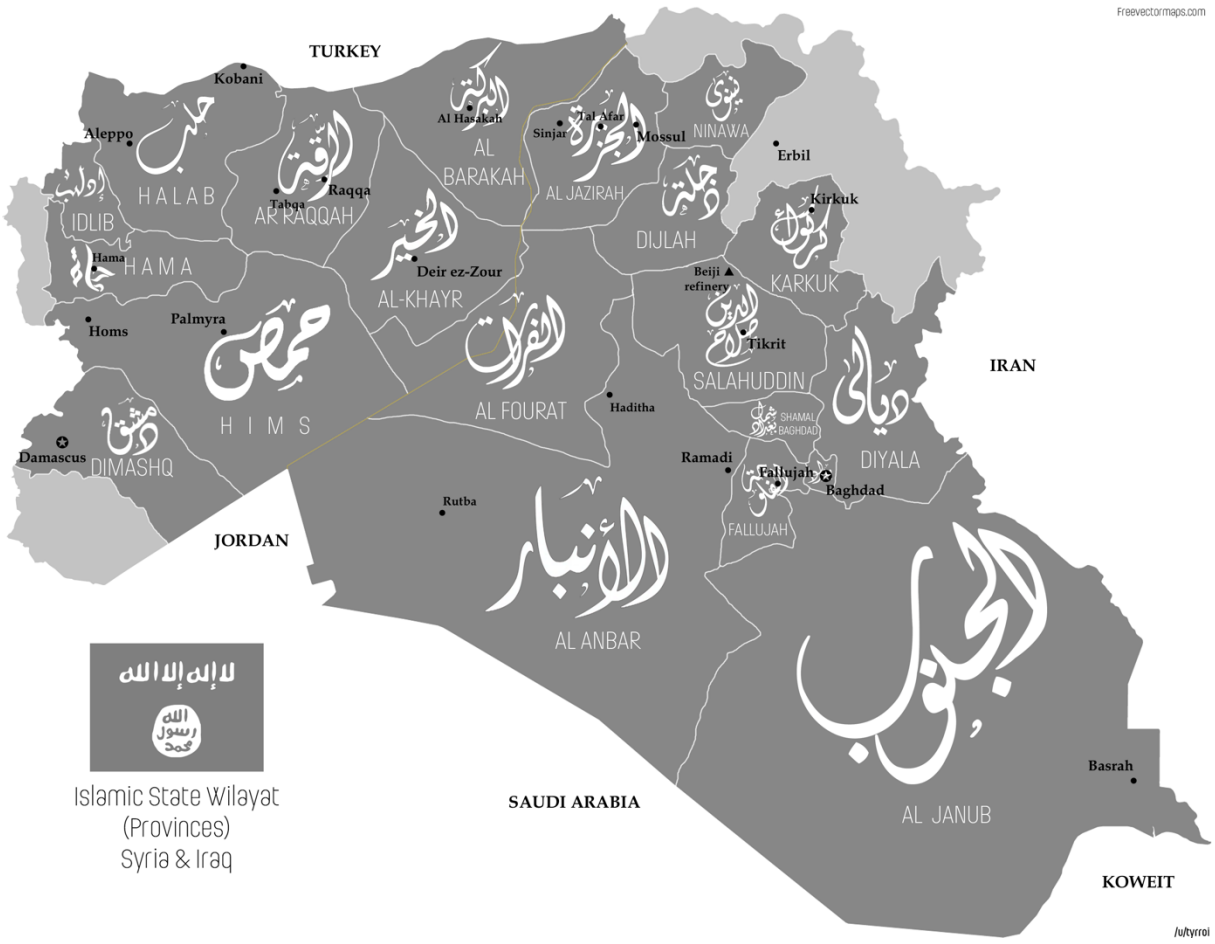
This thesis did not conclude the debates on IS' communication strategy and on its discursive influence in the MENA region. Instead, it suggested multiple ways forward to foster interest in non-state actors' discursive competition for power and introduced a much-needed debate on the ways to measure and analyse the actual power of influence of discourses. The analysis of IS' discursive power presented in this thesis did not intend to isolate the impact of IS' discourse from other discursive influences. Yet IS' discourse – and the discourses promoted by non-state actors in general – was part of a dynamic network of influences constituted by competing discourses – conveyed through friends and family circles, media, political representatives and religious figures among others – and personal experiences. While this research examined *if* IS' discourse resonated in the Jordanian and Tunisian audiences surveyed, further analysis should investigate

why it succeeded or failed to do so. Situating IS and other reformist non-state actors within such discursive competition would provide deeper insight into IS-like groups and their presumed central role in the political game. Related to this "web of discourses", this thesis touched upon the role of traditional media – mainly TV and radio – and more modern media – social media, especially Facebook – as sieves through which IS' discourse was filtered and potentially altered before reaching its audience. For indeed, when asked about whether they ever had access to IS media outlet and through which channel, every single respondent confirmed that they were in regular if not daily contact with IS' discourse through traditional and social media. Similarly, the latter platforms have widely relayed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, providing an additional layer of analysis to the regional dynamics. Hence, further studies are needed to determine whether and how popular perception and frames are partly shaped by the media, taking into consideration the loyalty of a number of editorial contents to ruling elites and states institutions. Finally, the future of Islamism in the MENA region, notably the development of post-Islamist parties and their relationship with the state, constitutes a timely subject of investigation in a region where popular voices seem to call for the need to ingrain Islamist initiatives in political partnership, inclusive pluralism and general political reform.

Part V

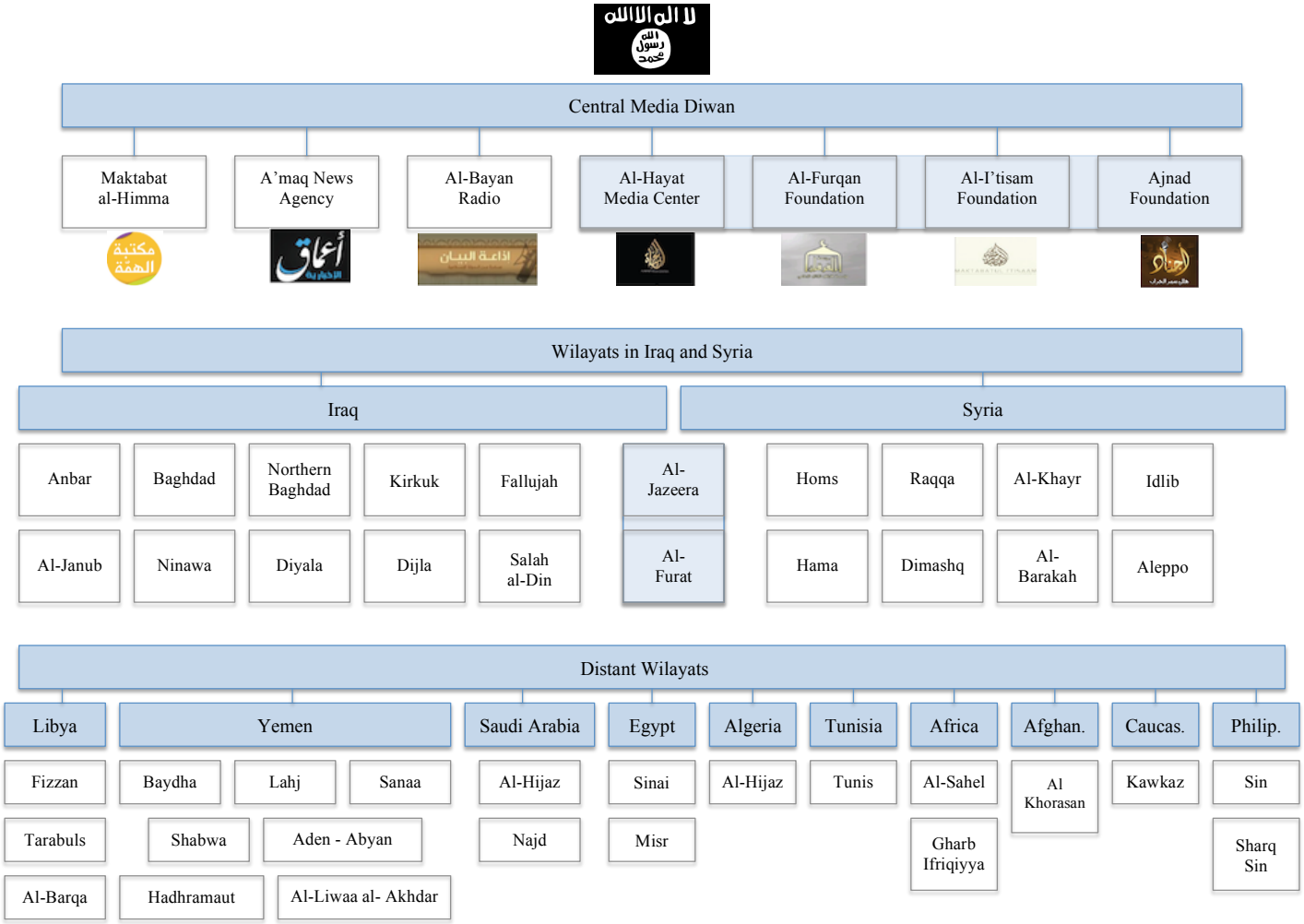
Appendix

Map 1. Islamic State's Claimed Caliphate as of June 2017



Beaujouan, 2017

Figure 1. Islamic State's Media Structure



Beaujouan, 2017

Figure 2. Timeline of Islamic State's Magazines Issues (May 2014 - May 2017)

Beaujouan, 2017

Table 1. Literature Review on Islamic State's Message

Main Theme	Author (Date)	Language Analysed
Combatting IS' Discourse Counter-Narrative	Berger (2017)	English
	Brems (2017)	English
	Cutter (2017)	English
	Fernandez (2015, 2016)	English and Arabic
	Ferguson (2016)	English
	Hughes (2016)	English
	Ingram (2015, 2016)	Unknown
	Kuznar (2016)	English
	Phillips (2017)	English
	Russell and Rafiq (2016)	English
	Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman (2017)	English and Arabic
	The Carter Center (2016, 2017)	French and Arabic
Main Theme	**Author (Date)**	**Language Analysed**
IS' Communication Strategy	Azman (2016)	English
	Gambhir (2014)	English
	Gartenstein-Ross et al. (2016)	English
	Ingram (2014, 2015, 2016)	English
	Kibble (2016)	English
	Langemaijer (2016)	English
	Milton (2016)	English and Arabic
	Pellerin (2016)	English and French
	Ryan (2014)	English
	Shiloach (2014 to 2018)	English and Arabic
	Whiteside (2016)	English
	Winter (2015, 2017)	English and Arabic
	Zelin (2015, 2016)	Quantitative study including Arabic material
Main Theme	**Author (Date)**	**Language Analysed**
Analysis of *Dābiq* (IS) vs Inspire (al-Qaeda)	Huey (2015)	English
	Ingram (2017a, 20107b)	English
	Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2017)	English
	Novenario (2016)	English
	Reed and Ingram (2017)	English
	Vallee (2015)	English
	Vergani and Bliuc (2015, 2018)	English

Main Theme	Author (Date)	Language Analysed

IS' Use of the Internet	Baron et al. (2016)	Arabic
	Bakour (2017)	Arabic
	Berger and Morgan (2015)	English and Arabic
	Houck et al. (2017)	English
	Günther (2015)	English
	Klausen (2015)	English and Dutch
	Manciulli (2015)	English
	Prucha (2016)	Unclear
	Winter (2015)	Quantitative study including Arabic material
Main Theme	**Author (Date)**	**Language Analysed**
Analysis of IS' Language	Abu Rumman et al. (2016)	Arabic
	Benraad (2017)	English and French
	Colas (2016)	English
	Drischell (2017)	English
	Kuznar (2017)	English
	Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2017)	English
	Rawabet Center (RCRSS) (n/d)	Arabic
	Vergani and Bliuc (2015 and 2018)	English
	Walli (2015)	English
	Wassar (2017)	Arabic
	Wignell et al. (2017)	English
	Winkler et al. (2016)	English

Main Theme	Author (Date)	Topic Analysed	Language Analysed
Topic Specific Analysis of IS' Message	Al-Dayel and Anfinson (2017)	Statehood	English
	Benjamin (2016)	Message distribution strategy	English and Arabic
	Christien (2016)	Youth	English
	Droogan and Peattie (2017)	Main Themes	English
	Dukhan and Al-Kheder (2017)	Nasheed	English and Arabic
	Frissen (2018	Quranic references	English
	Georges (2016)	Ummah	English
	Hadra (2015)	State-building	English and Arabic
	Kiefer et al. (2016-2017)	Youth	English
	Musial (216-2017)	Western Women	English
	Otterbacher (2016)	Recruitment	English
	Shemesh (2015)	Nasheed	English, Arabic, French, German
	Williams (2016)	Western Media	English
	Winter (2017)	Martyrdom	Arabic

Table 2. Frames Operationalisation

Frames	Key Issue	Interview Guide
Issue/problem	. Issue at stake . Contents of the conflict . Causes of the conflict	. How do you view the situation in Iraq and Syria? . What are the conflicts in Iraq and Syria about? . What are the causes of the conflicts? Why did they happen?
Identity	. Personal/in-group identity . Own role in the conflict . Out-group identity . Other parties' role in the conflict	. Who are the main actors in the conflict(s)? . How do you view IS s part of the conflict(s)? . What are the interests of those parties in the conflict(s)? . How do they contribute to the conflict(s)? . Which are the alliances within the conflict(s)?
Characterisation	. Characterisation of self . Characterisation of other parties . Affiliation / relationship	
Power	. Power relations . Power resources . Legal/Policy issue	. What do you think of Syria and post-2003 Iraq before the 2011 revolution (i.e. general situation, political structures, legitimacy of power holders)? . Do you think those who make decisions now in Iraq and Syria are legitimate? Why? . Who should have legitimate power in Iraq and Syria? Why?
Loss or Gain	. Risk and uncertainties . Fear of losing existing benefits	. Who benefits from the conflict(s)? . Who loses the most from the conflict(s)? . What are the risks and losses in the conflict(s) for the actors involved?
Process/conflict Management	. Structures/institutions involved in conflict management . Trust . Legitimacy of the conflict . Future expectation on the conflict	. Do you trust the way conflicts in the MENA have been managed in the past? Do you think that the region is able to move forward? Why? . What do you expect in the future of the conflict(s)?

Table 3. Islamic State's Written Resources. Provincial Statements / Reports (Extract)

Date	Source	Highlight
4 January 2015	IS attacks Saudi Arabia, near the border city of Arar	
6 January 2015	Diyala Province	Claims an attack on Iraqi forces in the al-'Atheim sub-district, killing and wounding tens of soldiers and forcing others to retreat.
7 January 2015	Ninawa Province	Claims an attack on Kurdish Peshmerga militiamen in Hamdaniya, northeast of the city of Mosul, and planting explosives in their positions.
8 January 2015	Ninawa Province	Claims an operation against Iraqi forces near the area of Huwaish, west of Samarra, involving five suicide bombings by Saudi, Syrian, and Uyghur fighters.
8 January 2015	Barqa Province	IS fighter executing two journalists, Sofien Chourabi and Nadhir Ktari.
11 January 2015	**Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi creates Wilayat Khorasan in Afghanistan/Pakistan**	
12 January 2015	Tarabuls Province	Claims kidnapping 21 Christians and published three pictures of them.
13 January 2015	Salah al-Din Province	Claims responsibility for an attack on the Al-Askari Shrine mosque in Samarra, Iraq that involved four suicide bombings and a missile strike.
15 January 2015	Northern Baghdad Province	A fighter from the United Arab Emirates carried out a suicide bombing on Iraqi commandos in al-Tarmiya.
15 January 2015	Raqqa Province	An Egyptian fighter carried out a suicide bombing against "Kurdish parties" in Kobani, and published pictures of the bomber and the explosion.
17 January 2015	Tarabuls Province	Claims credit for a bombing at the Algerian Embassy in the capital, Tripoli, and published a picture of the blast.
19 January 2015	Sinai Province	Claims bombing a M60 tank of the Egyptian army, destroying it and killing the soldiers inside.
22 January 2015	Ninawa Province	Claims six attacks on Kurdish Peshmerga elements and "apostates," including four bombings, one of which was carried out by a Kazakh fighter.
24 January 2015	Dimashq Province	Claims killing approximately 50 Lebanese soldiers in a clash in Ras Baalbek.
24 January 2015	Ninawa Province	Alleges that the Peshmerga used poison gas on Muslim civilians in Mosul, and vowed a "backbreaking" response.
26 January 2015	**Kobani is recaptured by Kurdish forces**	
27 January 2015	**Attack at the five-star Corinthia hotel in Tripoli, Libya.**	
27 January 2015	Tarabuls Province	Claims credit for an attack on the Corinthia Hotel in the capital, Tripoli, and dubbed the operation the "Battle of Abu Anas al-Libi".
27 January 2015	Tarabuls Province	Statement on the two-man suicide raid on the Corinthia Hotel, claiming the killing of six foreigners including an American, a Frenchman, a South Korean, and two Filipinos.

Table 4. Islamic State's Videos Resources. Central Command Videos (Extract)

Date	Source	Spoken Language (Subtitles)	Runtime	Highlight
3 January 2015	Al-Hayat Media Center	English (Arabic)	8:15	From Inside al-Mosul
6 January 2015	Al-Hayat Media Center	Russian (Arabic/English)	13:11	A Message from Brother Abdullah al-Molduvi
13 January 2015	Al-Hayat Media Center	Russian (Arabic/English)	7:38	Uncovering an Enemy Within . Confessions of two alleged Russian spies living amongst the group . Their execution by a child.
20 January 2015	Al-Furqan Foundation	English (Arabic)	1:41	A Message to the Government and People of Japan
24 January 2015	Al-Furqan Foundation	English (Arabic)	2:52	This Message was Received by the Family of Kenji Goto and the Government of Japan
29 January 2015	Al-Furqan Foundation	English (Arabic)	0:30	A Message from Kenji Goto to the Government of Jordan
31 January 2015	Al-Furqan Foundation	English (Arabic)	1:07	A Message to the Government of Japan . Beheads Japanese Hostage Kenji Goto Jogo
9 February 2015	Al-Hayat Media Center	English (Arabic)	12:01	From Inside Halab . John Cantlie Gives Tour of Aleppo in Video . Interviews French Fighter Calling for Attacks in France
14 February 2015	Al-I3tisaam	Arabic	9:49	A Message to Jordan
14 February 2015	Al-I3tisaam	Arabic	-	Vivid Message From the Bacillus City of Baiji 2
15 February 2015	Al-Hayat Media Center / Tarabuls Province	English (Arabic)	5:02	A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross
25 February 2015	Al-I3tisaam	Arabic	0:49	A Message to Jordan

Table 5. Key Military Events in Iraq and Syria in November 2014 (Extract)

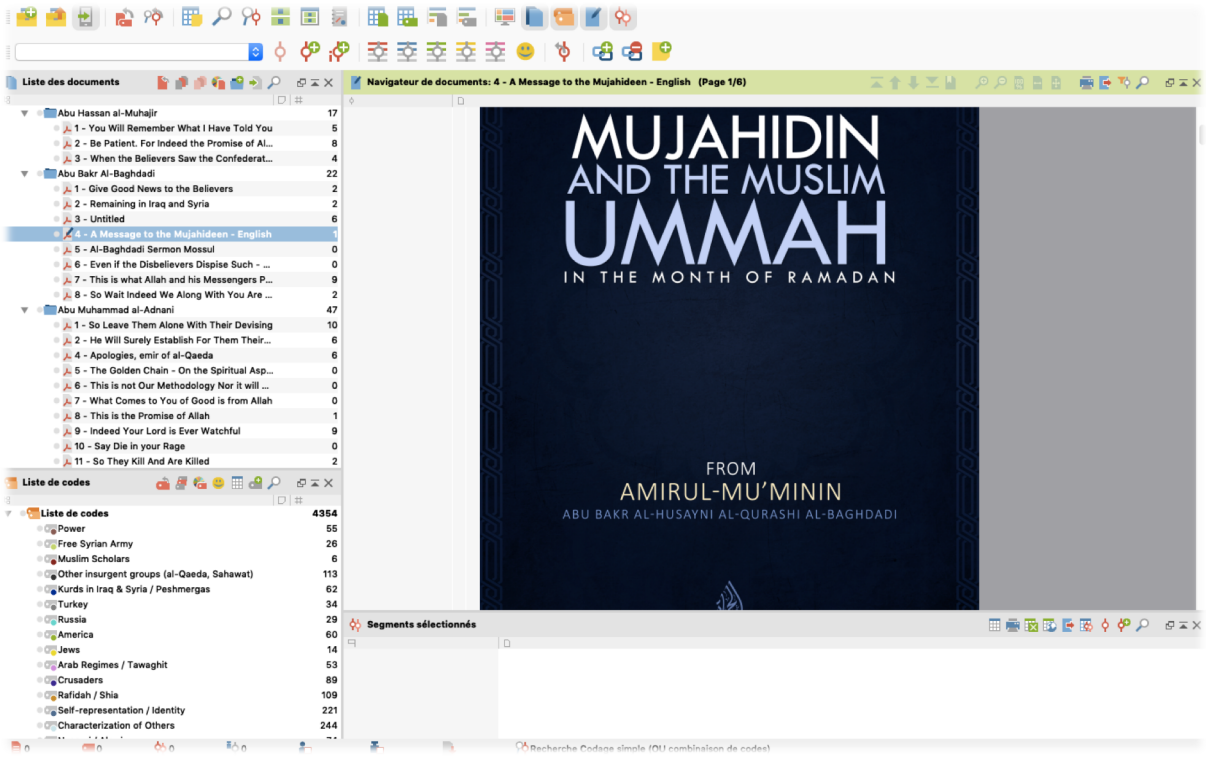
Date	Event Summary	Event Nature
02.11.2014	Car bombings killed 44 Shia pilgrims and wounded 75 in Baghdad	IS' military attack
03.11.2014	ISIS claimed to have captured the Jahar gas field in Homs province, Syria.	IS' military conquest/gain
03.11.2014	Canadian planes launch their first airstrikes against ISIS near Fallujah	Airstrikes against IS
07.11.2014	A US airstrike killed 20 ISIL militants near Mosul, including Abu Ayman al-Iraqi, a top ISIS Military Chief in Iraq, who was replaced by Abu Suleiman al-Naser	Death IS' Top Figure
08.11.2014	Six car bombings killed 40 people and wounded 90 in Baghdad and Ramadi	IS' military attack
09.11.2014	The Syrian Air Force bombed the ISIL-held town of Al-Bab in Aleppo province	IS' military loss
10.11.2014	The armed group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, based in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, pledges allegiance to the Islamic State	Pledge of allegiance to IS
10.11.2014	Abu Habeeb al-Jazrawi, based in Libya, pledges allegiance to the Islamic State	Pledge of allegiance to IS
10.11.2014	RAF drones were launched in their first airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq	Airstrikes against IS
11.11.2014	A car bombing killed eight people and wounded 13 in Baiji, which had been largely recaptured by the Iraqi Army; more car bombings killed nine people and wounded 24 in and near Baghdad	IS' military attack
13.11.2014	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi creates Wilayat Barqa, Wilayat Tarabuls and Wilayat Fazzan in Libya; Wilayat Sinai in Egypt; Wilayat al-Jazair in Algeria and Wilayat Yaman in Yemen	Para-military Expansion
14.11.2014	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi creates Wilayat Najd in central Saudi Arabia and Wilayat Haramayn (the two Holy Cities) in Mecca and Medina	Para-military Expansion

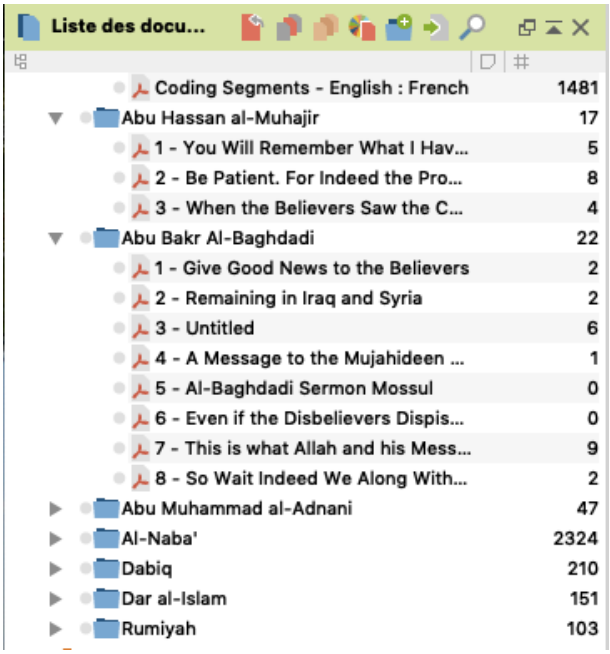
Table 6. Key Political Events in the MENA in 2014 (Extract)

Date	Event Summary
03.06.2014	Bachar al-Assad wins the presidential election with 88,7%.
29.06.2014	ISIL announced the establishment of a new caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed its caliph, and the group formally changed its name to the 'Islamic State.
05.07.2014	First apparition of the Caliph of the IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in a video in Mosul
10.08.2014	Erdogan wins the Turkish presidential election with 52%.
11.08.2014	Iraqi President nominates new Prime Minister. Iraqi President Fouad Massoum acts to replace polarizing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, nominating Haider al-Ibadi, deputy speaker of Iraq's parliament and a member of Maliki's Dawa Party, as the new Prime Minister.
19.08.2014	A video shows the beheading of US journalist James Foley and threatens the life of another American if President Barack Obama doesn't end military operations in Iraq.
02.09.2014	IS releases a video showing the beheading of US journalist Steven Sotloff.
29.09.2014	Ashraf Ghani officially becomes the President of Afghanistan.
15.10.2014	The Pentagon names the campaign against ISIS "Operation Inherent Resolve".
17.11.2014	A video shows the beheading of US hostage Peter Kassig.
31.12.2014	In Tunisia, Nidaa Tounes party candidate Beji Caid Essebsi becomes president after beating Marzouki in the elections.

Figure 3. Anaytical Framework - Step 1

Storing the 162 documents (dataset) into the Corpus Linguistic Software (MaxQDA).





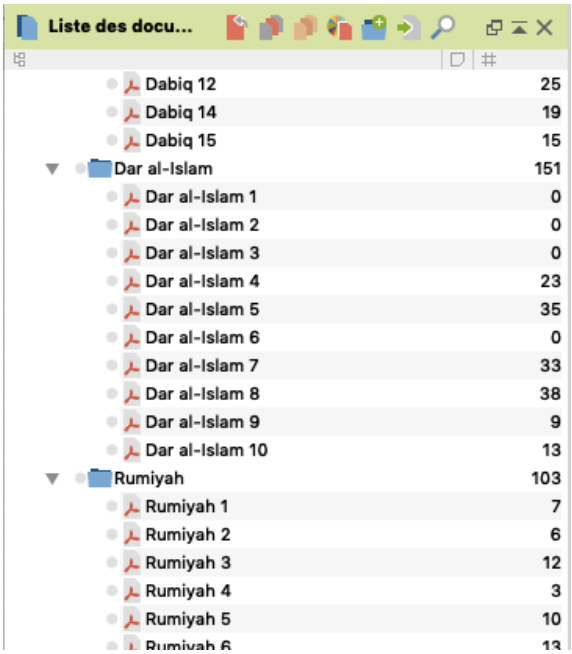
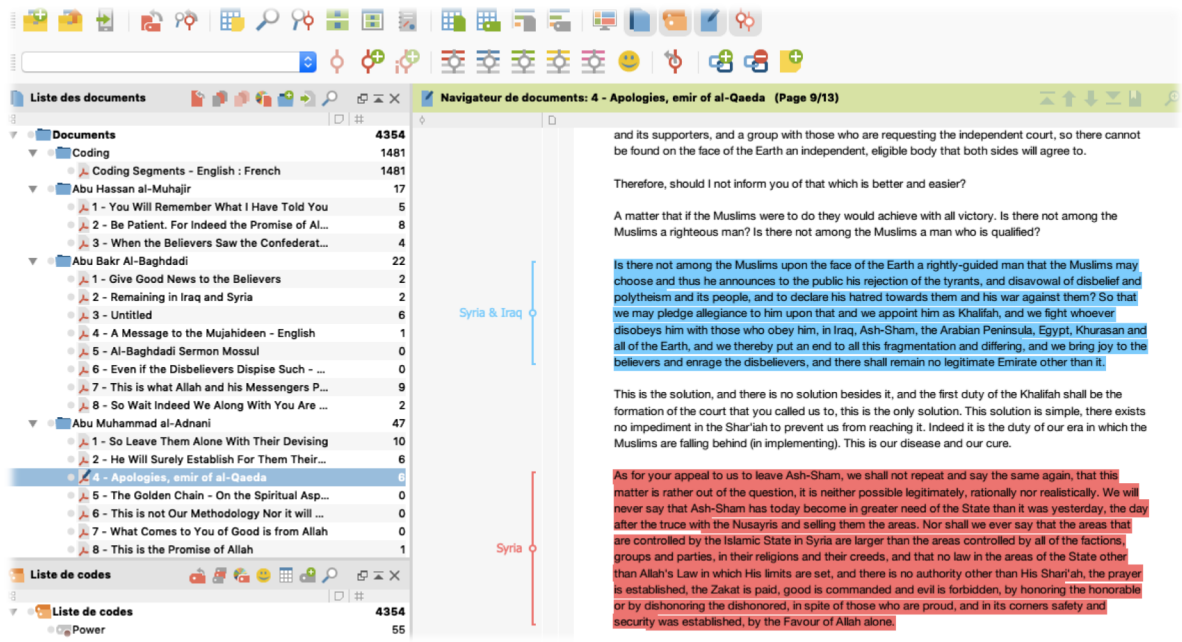


Figure 4. Anaytical Framework - Step 2

Isolating the segments directly related to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. The 2,713 segments and corresponding 36,796 words selected constituted the basis for coding.



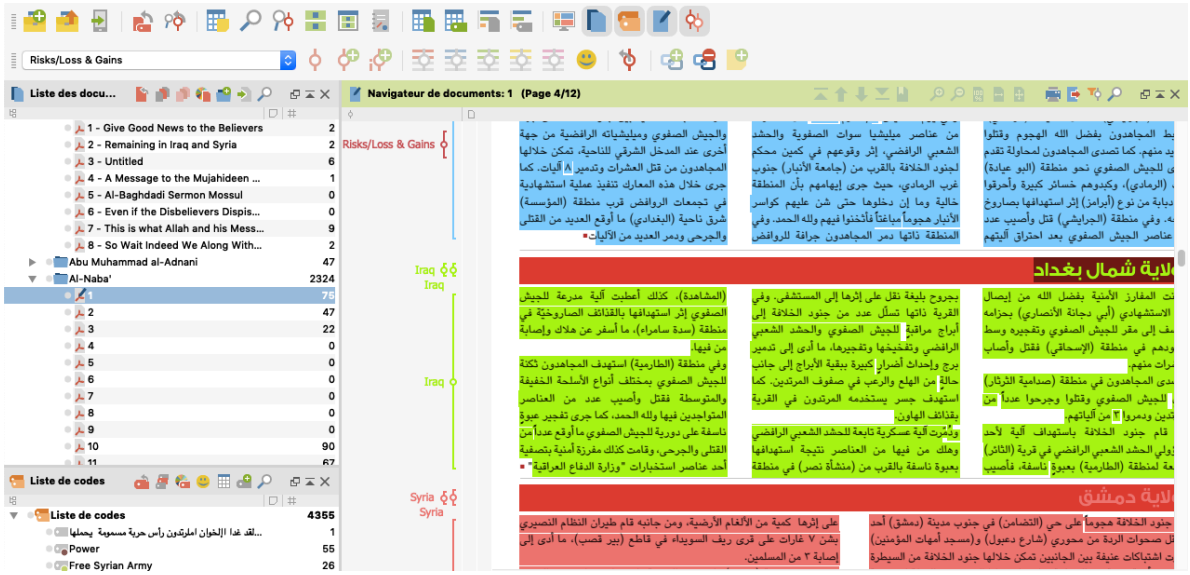


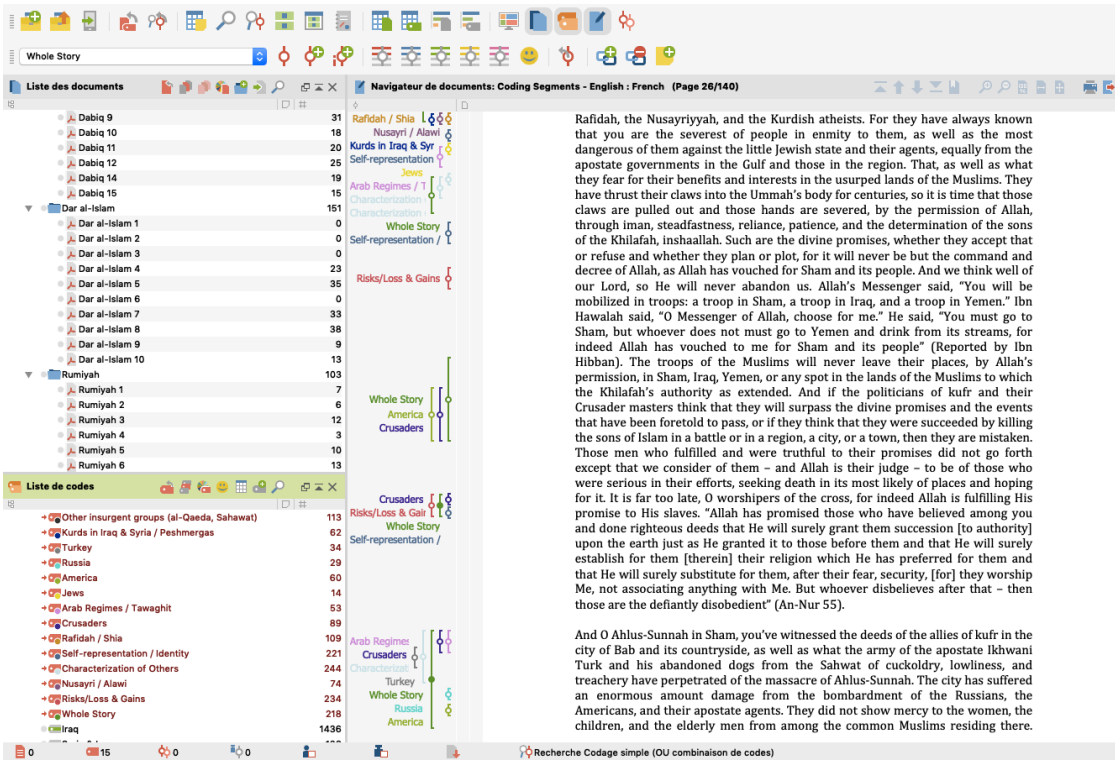
Figure 5. Anaytical Framework - Step 3

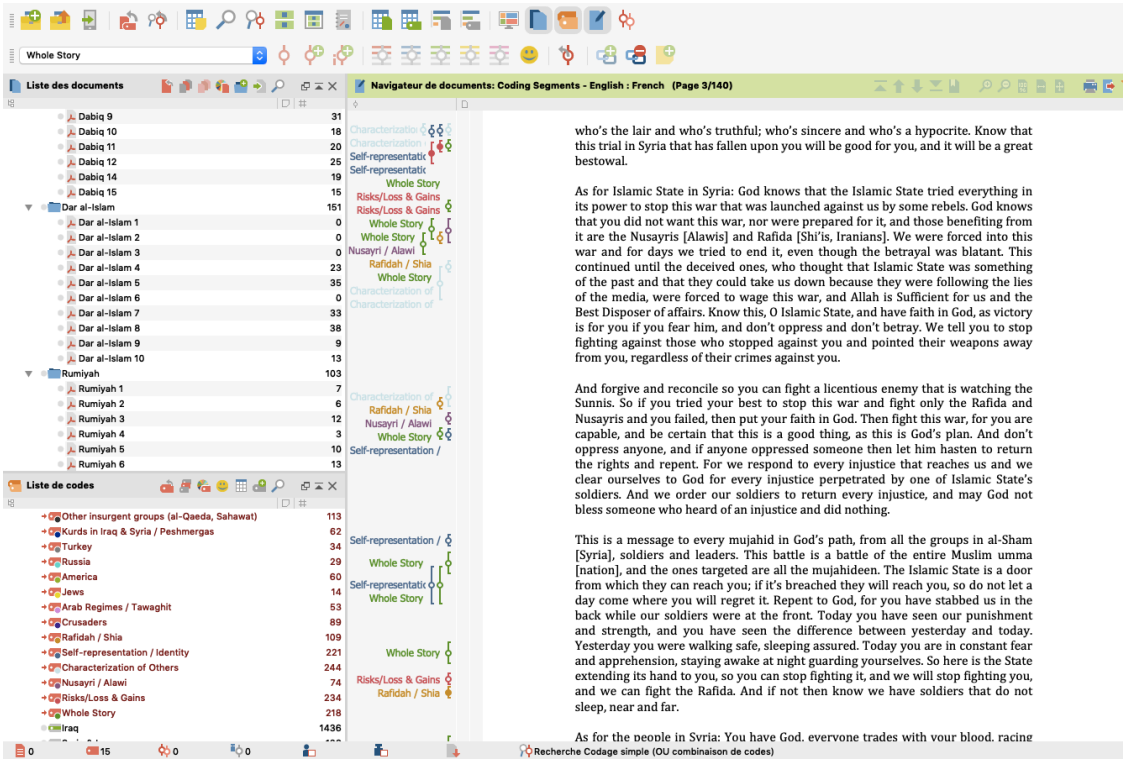
Highlighting the recurrent themes of IS' discourse using corpus linguistics techniques such as word frequency, word combination frequency and key words in context.

	Mot	Longueur de mot	Fréquence	%	Rang	Documents	Documents %
2	murtad - المرتدين	8	9468	2,50	1	131	82,39
3	rafidah - الرافيض	7	8144	1,88	2	129	81,13
4	soldier - جنود	4	7105	1,88	3	133	83,65
5	army - الجيش	5	5595	1,48	4	126	79,25
6	area - منطقة	5	4979	1,14	6	120	75,47
7	allah - الله	5	4753	1,26	5	136	85,53
8	dawla/state - الدولة	6	4015	1,06	7	138	86,79
9	islamic - إلسالمية	9	3968	1,05	8	136	85,53
10	attack - هجوم	4	3851	0,83	13	115	72,33
11	khilafah - الخالفة	7	3850	0,99	10	131	82,39
12	kill(ed) - مقتل	4	3762	0,99	9	92	57,86
13	wilayat - لوالية	6	3657	0,97	11	120	75,47
14	village - قرية	4	3226	0,58	16	112	70,44
15	mujahideen - المجاهدون	9	3146	0,83	12	132	83,02
16	destructive/destroy - ي_	6	2655	0,54	20	88	55,35
17	nusayri - النصيري	7	2693	0,15	68	116	72,96
18	targeted - استهدف	6	2658	0,25	39	92	57,86
19	istishadi - االستشهاديّي	14	2566	0,68	15	97	61,01
20	site/position - مواقع	5	2478	0,48	24	92	57,86
21	elements - عناصر	5	2258	0,50	22	89	55,97
22	explosive - ناسفة	5	2162	0,38	31	114	71,70
23	hit - وإصابة	6	2157	0,57	17	92	57,86
24	number - عدد	3	2120	0,56	19	119	74,84
25	mechanism - آليات	5	2052	0,24	40	91	57,23
26	Hashd - الحشد	5	2017	0,53	21	92	57,86
27	arm/weapon - أسلحة	5	1875	0,50	23	123	77,36
28	vehicle - عربة	4	1849	0,23	41	90	56,60
29	road - طريق	4	1798	0,48	25	92	57,86
30	al hamdu(lilah) - الحمد	5	1795	0,47	26	91	57,23
31	gathering - تجمع	4	1671	0,17	56	89	55,97
32	operation - عمليات	6	1655	0,31	34	116	72,96

Figure 6. Anaytical Framework - Step 4

Coding the segments along conflict analysis theory frames.





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Chapter 10 – Final Conclusion

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