

Salafism in Jordan

Since the events of 9/11, Salafism in the Middle East has often been perceived as fixed, rigid and even violent, but this assumption overlooks the quietist ideology that characterises many Salafi movements. Through an exploration of Salafism in Jordan, Joas Wagemakers presents the diversity among quietist Salafis on a range of ideological and political issues, particularly their relationship with the state. He expounds a detailed analysis of Salafism as a whole, whilst also showing how and why quietist Salafism in Jordan – through ideological tendencies, foreign developments, internal conflicts, regime-involvement, theological challenges and regional turmoil – transformed from an independent movement into a politically domesticated one.

Essential for graduate students and academic researchers interested in Middle Eastern politics and Salafism, this major contribution to the study of Salafism debunks stereotypes and offers insight into the development of a trend that still remains a mystery to many.

Joas Wagemakers is an assistant professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. His research focusses mainly on Salafism and particularly Salafi ideology; the Muslim Brotherhood; citizenship, women's rights and rights of the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia; and Hamas. He has published many chapters and articles in this field as well as several books, including: *A Quietist Fihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Salafisme* (2014; co-authored with Martijn de Koning and Carmen Becker); and *Islam in verandering: Vroomheid en vertier onder moslims binnen en buiten Nederland* (2015; co-edited with Martijn de Koning).

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Political Islam in a Quietist Community

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Preface

During one of my fieldwork trips to Jordan in January 2013, I was reading Andrew Shryock's great book *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination*, which deals with the war of words between the Jordanian 'Abbad and 'Adwan tribes, the rivalry between two historians from those tribes and their obsession with roots and ideology. During the same period, I was also interviewing Salafis about conflicts between two opposing Salafi camps in Jordan, who are ideologically close but nevertheless on very bad terms with one another. These conflicts concentrated specifically on two men who we will get to know much better in the pages to come and who are both very keen on stressing their ties to their deceased shaykh.

Shryock's book, though about a very different subject than this one focusses on, at one point seemed to intertwine with my interviews since they both dealt with a similar conflict. During the day, I would interview Salafis about their disputes while reading about tribal disputes at night. This was an interesting experience, although it also points to one of the biggest difficulties in my research: untangling the numerous accusations levelled against Jordanian Salafis by other Jordanian Salafis. Though virtually always friendly and hospitable to me, they were often quite hostile towards their "opponents" in these conflicts, which sometimes made me feel rather uncomfortable during interviews.

It would, however, be wrong to characterise Salafism in Jordan solely on the basis of internal conflicts. My interest in the subject was first coined during my research for a previous book on the Jordanian radical scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Through this experience, I got to know Jordan quite well and liked it a lot. Not only was the subject of Salafism in the kingdom wide open from an academic point of view, but the great hospitality of the people, their friendly demeanour and my large number of contacts there made me want to go back. Although Salafis generally do not have a very good

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reputation, I often found a friendliness and decency among them that were quite striking to me. While Jordan and the Salafi community there certainly have their problems, the nice way I was invited into countless homes and offices is one reason why I hope this book does justice to the Salafism it describes.

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has, in some respects, been a rather arduous exercise since I very often had to wonder whether I had accurately represented everybody's point of view in the sometimes contentious relationships between Salafis in Jordan. How wonderful it is, then, to discard that apprehensiveness altogether and write the acknowledgements to this book, in which I can just thank everybody who helped me in some way during the course of the research for this work or assisted during the writing. The first of these is the Netherlands Organisation for Academic Research (NWO), which awarded me a Veni grant in 2011 and allowed me to start working on this project the following year. I am grateful for the trust they placed in me, and I hope that this book and the many articles and book chapters I have produced since being awarded the grant are proof that it was money well spent.

This book was written while working at the Department of Religious Studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Around the time that I applied for the grant that financed the research project of which this book is a result, the former department of Islam and Arabic was dissolved and integrated into Religious Studies. This was not always easy. Several professors retired without being replaced, and the loss of room in our curriculum for teaching Arabic and other relevant courses, even though these were replaced by other interesting subjects, was a tough blow to the academic study of Islam at Radboud University, not to mention to the morale of particularly some of my older colleagues. Indeed, the loss of so much of our Islam-related teaching time was one of the reasons I eventually left that university for Utrecht University, where I am now employed. Despite all this, however, it was always a joy working there, and that was in no small part because of my wonderful immediate colleagues: Gert Borg, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Lieke de Jong, Martijn de Koning, Roel Meijer and Karin van Nieuwkerk. I would like to thank Karin in particular for her great efforts to steer us through these sometimes troubled waters and for trying to secure a good

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position for me. The fact that I eventually left for a different university was not because of a lack of effort on her part to keep me.

More immediately relevant to this book are those people who helped me by supplying information, websites, articles, books or documents that were somehow related to my research. Through both social media and personal contacts, Assaf David, Tayyeb Mimouni, Reuven Paz, Thomas Pierret and Jillian Schwedler helped me obtain all kinds of information that I would not have had without them. I thank them all for their time and effort on my behalf, and I hope I can return the favours they did me by possibly supplying them with similar information that they are looking for but cannot find.

When doing fieldwork in Jordan, I often visited the home or offices of Hasan Abu Haniyya, Marwan Shahada and Usama Shahada, who not only provided me with many names and phone numbers of interesting people but were also willing to discuss my research with me from their various points of view. I thank them for their hospitality, their kindness and their knowledge on the subject of this book. While in Jordan, I always stayed at research institutes, including the Institut français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) and the British Institute in Amman (BIA). I would like to thank the staff at all of these institutes for taking such good care for me. Special thanks are due to Barbara Porter, the director of ACOR, for bringing me into contact with other researchers who shared my interests and saving those wonderful long articles on American politics from her copies of *The New Yorker* for me.

Most important of all for the research done for this book are the people I interviewed all over Jordan. Although I was sometimes refused an interview or, at other times, had to overcome a bit of scepticism, I was generally warmly welcomed by the many Salafis and others I spoke to. Their hospitality, the time they spent talking to me and their willingness to share their knowledge was often truly amazing. This is particularly the case since, in order to cross-check my findings, I often confronted them with uneasy questions that related to episodes of their lives that they would much rather forget. I thank them for their willingness to talk about these issues to a researcher who was not only a stranger and a complete outsider, but was also planning to write a book about these very things. It goes without saying that this book would not have seen the light of day if they had not been open to the idea of discussing Salafism in Jordan with me.

While writing the proposal for this book and the manuscript itself, I was fortunate enough to be aided by the expert help from Cambridge University Press' staff, including the former African, Middle Eastern

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and Islamic Studies editor Will Hammell and his successor Maria Marsh, as well as Cassi Roberts and Ramya Ranganathan. I thank them for their advice, their excellent work and particularly Maria's great enthusiasm for the entire project. I would also like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for taking the time to read the manuscript and for offering valuable advice. The same applies to Jonathan Brown, Emad Hamdeh, Bernard Haykel, Martijn de Koning, Henri Lauzière, Harald Motzki and Jacob Olidort, who were kind enough to read parts of the manuscript and send me their comments. I am particularly grateful to Roel Meijer, who read the entire manuscript and shared with me his insights on how it could be improved. Although these scholars' comments were always useful and have helped make the book a better one, any mistakes left in the end result are, of course, mine alone.

Most of the work on this book that I could do behind my desk was done while listening to AccuJazz.com and many other sources of wonderful jazz. As such, this book was written to Joe Henderson's solid swing, John Coltrane's sheets of sound and Kurt Elling's velvety vocalese, which made working on this project – as great as it was in and of itself – even better. Come to think of it, I hope the musical inspiration I got from these and many other great musicians is not too obvious from the text since I can imagine that a book reflecting such wild improvisations is perhaps not very pleasant to read.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. Not only was this project a burden on them because I went to Jordan for several month-long periods throughout the past few years, but during the four and a half months that it took me to write this book, I was often up working till late at night rather than spending time with my wife. Although this was difficult for all of us, at least I have a book to show for it, while their reward is less clear. I therefore dedicate this book to them, hoping that my wife will see that its contents made it worth the effort and that my children will one day understand why their father was off to far-away Jordan so often.

Note on Transliteration, Names and Dates

The system of transliteration used in this book is the one used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). I have, however, also decided to make a distinction in transliteration that IJMES does not make: the Arabic *alif maqṣūra* is transliterated as “-á” to distinguish it from a *tā’ marbūṭa* (“-a”) and an *alif ṭawīla* (“-ā”). Furthermore, I have transliterated common words (like Qur’an/Qur’ān), names and titles of books in the footnotes but not in the text itself. Finally, some words, such as *ḥadīth*, have not been given their accurate Arabic plural forms (*aḥādīth*) but a simplified English one (*ḥadīths*).

Jordanians have a tendency to drop certain parts of names for reasons of convenience. A prominent Jordanian Salafi shaykh called Muhammad b. Musa Al Nasr, for example, is generally known as Muhammad Musa Nasr. When referring to him and others in footnotes and the bibliography, I will use their full names, but the more popular use of names is adopted in the actual text of this book. Salafi shaykhs also tend to be known under different names, depending on how many of their forefathers they choose to include, for example, which may also differ from occasion to occasion. The full name of prominent Jordanian Salafi shaykh ‘Ali al-Halabi, for instance, is Abu l-Harith ‘Ali b. Hasan b. ‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Halabi al-Athari, parts of which he drops or adds in articles or on covers of books. I have decided to give these names as mentioned in the article or book in the footnotes, sometimes with a few added elements to make them more consistent with other uses of the same name, but to blend them all into one name in the bibliography.

Finally, although Jordanians commonly use the Christian calendar, many Salafi publications mentioned in the footnotes use only the Islamic date of publication (i.e., by referring to Islamic months and years *anno hegirae*). I have decided not only to mention these for easier reference to the original, but also to include the corresponding Christian dates in square brackets for reasons of clarity. These dates were converted using a website linked to the Institute of Oriental Studies at Zurich University in Switzerland.¹

¹ This website can be found at www.oriold.uzh.ch/static/hegira.html (accessed 8 April 2015).