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Youth Representation of Salafi Religious Discourse: Oran as a Case Study

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Abstract

Although contemporary societies have become secularised, religious discourse still holds authority in reality and enjoys significant attention from religious scholars. They employ it to convey messages aimed at transforming people's reality into what their own representations of religion dictate. However, religious discourse is not monolithic; rather, it consists of multiple discourses, with the Salafi trend representing its radical dimension. This research aims to uncover youth representations of Salafi religious discourse, given that youth is the social group fluctuating between the influence of the family's traditional religious cognitive heritage and the influence of incoming values transmitted through various media and communication channels.

This study investigates this issue by addressing the following initial research question: *Do young people perceive and conceptualize Salafi religious discourse within a reality characterised by rapid and radical change—which has turned the hierarchy of values upside down—by drawing from the traditional values prevailing in society, from incoming modern values, or through an attempt to reconcile both systems?* To achieve the objectives of this study, we adopted an *comprehensive* sociological approach by conducting interviews with a sample of young people comprising various age groups, genders, educational levels, and social backgrounds.

Keywords: Salafi religious discourse, Salafism, Youth, Social representations.

Introduction and Methodology

In light of the forgoing, this research aims to analyse religious discourse through the lens of Salafi discourse within youth representations. This is guided by the following research question: *Do youth perceptions of Salafi discourse—by virtue of their openness to various cultures, including modern and secular ones—lead them to reject or adopt Salafi discourse without reservation, or do they accept certain aspects and reject others based on the culture acquired from the family, education, various media, and social media networks?*

We seek to ensure that this fundamental question is clearly framed by clarity, importance, and proportionality. Clarity requires precision; importance requires realism; proportionality requires a genuine question, addressing the study based on what exists, establishing the study of change on the basis of studying the work system; and finally, possessing the characteristic of understanding the phenomenon under study.

We employed all documents related to the subject, selecting texts, reading them methodically, summarising them, making comparisons between them, and comparing them with the interviews that were preceded by meetings with various segments of youth. These exploratory interviews reinforced the preparatory readings related to the starting question.

Concurrently with the exploratory interviews, other methods were employed in this study, such as observation and document analysis. The combination of these readings and exploratory interviews allowed us to reveal several possible problematics, and then to select and clarify the one we deemed most appropriate. Following this, we proceeded to construct the analysis model, which includes concepts and hypotheses linked to one another to form the ideal model, from our perspective.

Conceptualisation requires a systematic, abstract construction that selects from reality only what expresses what is essential in our view. We are here in the process of constructing a concept, which then requires defining the dimensions that constitute it, and subsequently identifying the indicators through which these dimensions can be measured.

We distinguish here between an isolated operational concept, which is constructed empirically through direct observations or gathered information, and systemic concepts, which are constructed through abstract reflection.

We then attempted to formulate the hypotheses in the form of flexible, provisional, and testable answers when confronted with observational data. This means that these hypotheses must be general and capable of confronting conflicting data.

The design of the observational phase is based on answering the following three questions: Whom do we observe? What? And how?

- The first question relates to observing the youth sample selected for the study.
- The second question relates to observing the young people who were interviewed to ascertain their perceptions of Salafi discourse on issues where they differ from the discourse of official institutions and other Islamic groups and sects.
- The third question relates to gathering information about these young people through interviews and participant observation by living among them during our attendance with them at the five daily prayers, Friday prayers, Eid celebrations, and lessons, as well as during and after their interviews.

After this phase, we started analysing the data collected via observation. The latter allowed us to show and compare the observation's results with other anticipated outcomes from the hypotheses. We found that the semi-structured interview technique, followed by the data analysis method, is more appropriate for tracking the pathways of youth than a questionnaire, which is thought to be too limited to answer the questions of why and how, due to the lack of resources to conduct a questionnaire technique for data collection.

This analysis involves three operations:

1. **First:** Enabling us to describe the data.
2. **Second:** Enabling us to measure the relationships between variables.
3. **Third:** Enabling us to compare the observed relationships with the theoretical relationships expected through the hypotheses and to measure the discrepancy between them.

Finally, we concluded the study with a general conclusion, in which we reiterated the following:

- The broad outlines of the methodology adopted in the study.
- The most important theoretical knowledge related to the subject that we acquired during the study.
- Finally, the practical prospects of this study. (1)

Rationale for the Selection of the Research Topic

We were inspired by the core idea of the study topic from the life of an engaged youth who experienced a religious life within the family—where the father belonged to a Sufi order—and our own involvement in several Islamic groups, before completing university studies in sociology. Sociology instilled in us a sense of inquisitiveness about our socio-religious trajectory, or what we would call "spontaneous Salafism" during our youth. This prompted us to move away from religious practice and approach the subject of Salafi discourse from a sociological imagination (2), which allows for the objectification (*objectivation*) of lived religious experience in light of social reality.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the factors influencing the formation of youth representations in general and their perceptions related to Salafi religious discourse in particular.
2. To determine the extent of family influence in shaping youth representations.
3. To assess the extent to which the influence of family socialisation has declined in the face of the media—especially visual media—and social media networks in shaping youth through Salafi representations religious discourse.
4. To understand the impact of religiosity, ritual practice, and mosque attendance on youth regarding representations salafi religious discourse.
5. To evaluate the extent to which Salafi religious discourse influences youth representations to the point of adopting its worldview.
6. To examine the decline of religious discourse among the youth category, particularly following the retreat of the Salafi movement in its central geographic hubs.
7. To understand the influence of the discourses of other Islamic groups on the formation of youth representations in adopting positions that intermediate between extremist and open views.
8. To determine the extent to which educational environments, workplaces, and peer groups influence the shaping of youth representations regarding Salafi religious discourse.
9. To trace the developmental trajectory of youth representations regarding Salafi discourse, shifting from influence to rejection, moderation, or vice versa.

Research Problem

The research problematic was formulated through a triangle consisting of the following dimensions: structure, process, and meaning. This helped in posing possible problematics to determine the appropriate one, which was formed through two phases: the first involved establishing several possible problematics, and the second involved selecting the problematic most suited to the subject under study.(3)

This problematic centred around the following starting question (starting question): *To what extent have the family, education, peer groups, media, and social media networks contributed to shaping youth representations of religious discourse in general, and Salafi discourse in particular?*(4)

Research Hypotheses

This study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- **First:** Young people originating from families that practice strict forms of religiosity hold perceptions of Salafi discourse that align with it, and it continues to enjoy acceptance among them.
- **Second:** Modern media, especially visual media, has contributed to modernising youth perceptions and their worldview; consequently, they no longer afford significant attention to religion and its discourse, particularly Salafi discourse.
- **Third:** The retreat of Salafi discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the influence of the political system's modernisation—supervised by the new leadership—has caused Salafi discourse to fade, recede, and shrink its horizons within the perceptions of youth in Arab countries.
- **Fourth:** The transformation of the discourse of various Salafi currents (Scientific/Scholarly, Activist/Haraki) into Jihadi Salafism—whose discourse consequently calls for violence in all its forms—has negatively reflected on the perceptions of youth in contact with Salafism. Thus, they reject its discourse even if it is devoid of violence, as long as it brings them trouble.

Literature Review

Émile Durkheim was the first to discuss the subject of social representations in the context of "collective representations" rather than "individual representations." (5). This was followed by Serge Moscovici, who shifted the subject from "collective representations" to "social representations"(6). Subsequently, social science scholars, particularly in social psychology, tackled the topic of "social representations".

In Algeria, the study of social representations is considered recent and is still progressing slowly. According to the research we conducted, we reached the following findings:

Studies on social representations are relatively recent in Algeria, beginning in the late 1990s and the start of the second millennium. (See: *"Work: Forms and Representations"*, Insaniyat, No. 1, 1997; *"Proceedings: Actors and Representations of the Local in Algeria"*, Insaniyat, No. 16, Vol. 6, January–April 2002; *"Lived Experience: Representations and Acculturation"*, No. 37, July–September 2007).

At the level of university theses and dissertations, the PhD thesis presented by Boumediene Slimane on *"Health and Illness in Algeria"*, defended in 2004 at Mentouri University, is considered the pioneer of studies on social representations. Other works followed, where we tracked 47 doctorate en Sciences theses, 3 Third-Cycle PhD theses, 12 Magister dissertations, 103 Master's dissertations, 10 Licence graduation projects, and 8 scientific articles and conference papers; making a total of 215 dissertations, theses, and scientific articles. There are some missing data regarding the specific type of some submitted works. We do not exaggerate if we say that scientific production in the field of social studies is still representations in its infancy compared to the volume reached by social perception studies in the social sciences generally, and social psychology in particular.

After reviewing previous studies on social representations, it became clear to us that this study represents a precedent, as our review did not uncover any prior study that addressed Salafism through the perceptions of youth.

Definition of key Research Concepts

After reviewing several definitions of the terms making up the title—namely: "representations", "religious discourse", and then "Salafi religious discourse"—and recording notes on them, we define the operational concept of "Salafi religious discourse" intended in this study as:

"The sum of what is issued by Salafi institutions and sheikhs across various communication, media, publishing, and public gathering platforms, based on the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah which they deem authentically attributed to the Prophet, and the sayings and actions of the Pious Predecessors (*Salaf*) in the sense they deem as such. This is directed to followers to introduce the Salafi methodology (*manhaj*), urging them to abandon innovations (*bid'ah*), follow the prophetic traditions (*sunan*), prioritise textual traditions (*athar*) over human opinions, correct what they view as deviation and innovation, and mobilise them to adhere to this; and/or directed to opponents to refute their misconceptions and reply to them; and/or directed to other Salafi factions to critique and clarify the correct Salafi methodology as they see it, adopting the literal meanings of reports while avoiding recourse to reason, rational speculation, and metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wil*)."(7)

Target Group of the Study

This study focused on the "youth" category, which is considered the group most open to social media networks, in addition to the culture they receive in the family, school, and the written and audio mediums previously used. By "youth" in this study, I refer to the age group spanning the university years. This delineation implies that referencing the stages of university education indicates a preference for cognitive qualification among the sample targeted for interviews.

Geographic Framework of the Study

We defined the geographic framework of the study as the city of Oran, in order to contact the sample members easily.

Methodological Framework

In this study, we relied on three academic disciplines as the theoretical framework:

1. **Sociology of Knowledge:** As a theoretical framework to analyse the construction and formation of youth knowledge and their representations of their social reality, including Salafi religious discourse as part of this reality. This is examined through the social circles they passed through and lived with, starting from families, educational institutions, peer groups, reference groups, as well as the media, communication, and social media networks, which have come to exert a major influence on youth.
2. **Sociology of Religion:** Employed as a reference framework for the religious practices of religious groups and the interviewed youth, in order to analyse youth representations of Salafi discourse.
3. **Theory of Social Representations:** Used as a reference framework to study the perceptions of the young people interviewed on the subject. In approaching the topic, we used the interview technique due to the difficulty of conducting a questionnaire technique, which requires vast resources to contact sample members. We also employed the "participant observation" technique so we could obtain specific information to answer the *how* and *why* concerning the youth, where quantitative approach techniques fall short. Hence, we resorted to the sociological imagination to access what cannot be known through the techniques used in both quantitative and qualitative approaches, concerning the unsaid and the unthought. (8)(9)(10)(11)

Study Sample

We defined the study sample as consisting of fifteen individuals of both sexes, aged between 25 and 30 years, from the university category (ranging from Licence to Doctorate), so that we could easily engage with them during the interviews.

Methods Employed

We employed in this study, the fundamental approaches related to the subject matter, based on the premise that the subject itself determines the approach, and within the framework of integration between approaches (12). These approaches used are :

1. The Comprehensive Method : This approach aims to understand the meaning behind human and social actions. Meaning can be reciprocal, thus being cultural, or singular and specific to each individual, thus being individual. These two dimensions are complexly intertwined. According to this approach, an experience, phenomenon, or social reality remains incomprehensible unless it is linked to the meaning given to it by social actors. We call this approach hermeneutical, as it requires connecting the signifier to the signified, etc.
2. The Historical Method as a critical method: This method helped me trace the Salafist phenomenon from its inception and throughout its development in different times and places. I chose to contrast the views and positions of Salafists with those of their opponents in order to examine and critique these views and positions from both sides.
3. I employed discourse analysis and content analysis to deconstruct the young people's responses during the interviews. My aim was to ensure that my own biases did not hinder the process or lead the young people to provide false answers, answers they did not believe, simply to satisfy the researcher.
4. In analysing the statements of young people within their general framework, I also resorted to the situational method or approach: a method developed by the Manchester School, initiated by James Clyde Mitchell, and later refined by Adel Clarke. This method employs three elements: the embodied subjectivity of social actors; systems of time and space and networks of relationships; and multi-situational or micro-social analysis. This method differs from holistic approaches and descending theories. It was used to analyse young people's perceptions of Salafist discourse through their social situations.

Interview Guide Themes

The interview guide centred around the following themes:

- **Theme I:** Youth representations of the emergence and development of Salafism in the Arab and Islamic world, and in Algeria in particular.
- **Theme II:** Youth representations of Salafi religious discourse in dealing with text, reason, and reality (comprising six questions).
- **Theme III:** Youth representations of Salafi discourse in its handling of social issues (questions regarding women's issues: education, political participation, governance, and the judiciary).
- **Theme IV:** Youth representations of Salafi discourse in its handling of cultural and political issues (homeland, nationalism, identity, citizenship, singing, music, photography, and sculpture, explored via two questions).
- **Theme V:** Youth representations of Salafi religious discourse in its handling of economic issues (banking transactions, explored via one question).

To overcome certain limitations we encountered in interviews, we followed this structured process:

1. Preparing the interview beforehand.
2. Contacting the interviewee in advance and mutually agreeing on the location.
3. Listening closely to what the interviewee says and gestures.
4. Recording the interview, subject to the interviewee's consent.
5. Re-listening to the interview carefully while recording important notes.
6. Reviewing how the interview was conducted, noting shortcomings to overcome them in the next interview. This process was maintained for the remaining interviews.

Challenges encountered during the study

We faced several difficulties during the study:

1. A shortage of references related to the study topic, especially the primary sources upon which these references relied. I state this because references often mislead the researcher when trusted blindly without verification and scrutiny by their authors, or when a researcher wishes to add something neglected in the reference.
2. The unwillingness of many young people to be interviewed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, out of fear of infection, while other cases justified their refusal due to the sensitivity of the topic.
3. The difficulty of understanding questions related to themes unfamiliar to many young people, such as those concerning the history of Salafism in the Arab and Islamic world, and to a lesser extent, the history of Salafism in Algeria.
4. The loss of the corrected first chapter and the entirety of the second chapter of the thesis, which cost us re-correcting the first chapter and rewriting the second chapter from scratch.

Thesis Structure

To achieve the goals of this study, we divided the thesis into five chapters:

- **Introductory Chapter:** Posing the problematic, defining hypotheses, highlighting the importance of the topic, reasons for its study, and defining basic concepts that align with the hypotheses and analysis model.
- **Chapter II:** The emergence and development of Salafism in the Arab world, the Islamic world, and Algeria, divided into two sections:
 - *Section I:* The emergence and development of Salafism in the Islamic world;
 - *Section II:* The emergence and development of Salafism in Algeria.
- **Chapter III:** Intellectual landmarks of Salafism.
 - *Section I:* General landmarks of the Salafi intellectual system.
 - *Section II:* Landmarks of dealing with legal texts (subsections: rejection of interpretation, literalism). This section explores six points: taking words literally as absolute truth; denying metaphor as a pretext for interpreting divine attributes; prioritising the literal text over reason; considering all Companions, Successors, and their followers as a legislative authority; reducing matters of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) when applying texts to cases where no text exists; and narrowing the circle of disagreement down to absolute truth versus falsehood.
 - *Section III:* Landmarks of Salafism's treatment of the different "Other", via two points: self-centredness based on their belief that they are the Saved Sect (*al-Firqah al-Najiyah*) and the Victorious Group (*al-Ta'ifah al-Mansurah*); and declaring the differing other as an innovator or infidel, exiling them, and practicing physical and moral violence against them.
- **Chapter IV:** Studying Salafi discourse through six points: manifestations and characteristics of Salafi religious discourse; methods of this discourse; its spaces and techniques; the absent and suppressed elements in this discourse; the commonalities and differences; and finally, the manifestations and turning points of this discourse's transformation from Scientific Salafism to Activist and Jihadi Salafism.
- **Chapter V:** Studying social, economic, and cultural-political issues within Salafi discourse and from the perspective of its opponents, alongside youth perceptions of Salafi discourse regarding these matters.
 - *Section I:* Social issues explored via two subsections:
 - *Subsection 1:* Women's issues in Salafi discourse, the opponents' perspective, and youth representations (comprising women's education).
 - *Subsection 2:* Women holding positions of governance and the judiciary.
 - *Section II:* Economic issues, focusing on non-usurious Islamic banking through Murabaha sales.
 - *Section III:* Cultural-political issues via two points:
 - 1: National identity and citizenship.
 - 2: Art, singing, photography, and sculpture.

Key Findings of the study

With regard to Chapter II (Section I)

Salafism did not originate in the Abbasid era, as many researchers believe, but rather dates back to early Islam with Abdullah ibn Umar. It developed in the medieval era with Ahmad ibn Hanbal, then further evolved with Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah and his companions, and was finally revived in the modern era with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. We demonstrate that several Salafisms emerged parallel to the textualist trend, including: Reformist or Enlightened Salafism with the Imams Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida; National Salafism which emerged in the Maghreb countries during colonization, emphasizing national identity and distinction from the coloniser; and finally, Salafisms derived from Wahhabism, including: Traditional or Scientific Salafism; Sururism (which blended Muslim Brotherhood ideology with Salafism, representing a "salafization" of the Brotherhood); and Jihadi Salafism, which grew out of shifts at major historical milestones: the evolution of scholarly Salafism, namely Afghan Jihad and the Gulf War.(13)

Regarding Section II: The Emergence of Salafism in Algeria

It began during the French colonial era with reform figures and later the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema. We traced its post-independence evolution, especially with students who pursued studies in Saudi Arabia, such as Sheikh Ferkous, Abdelmalek Ramdani, and others. Regarding the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, we concluded that their Salafism fluctuated between several influences, namely Wahhabi Salafism—since some members resided in the

Hejaz for Hajj, study, and journalism, including Abdelhamid Ben Badis, Mohamed Bachir El Ibrahimi, and Tayeb El Okbi. The Association's link to Wahhabism manifests through their statements and mutual visits.

The alignment of reform figures and the Association's scholars with Wahhabism and the reform movement is evident in their declarations acknowledging the credit of these movements' leaders, mutual visits, meetings, residencies, and discipleship. Ben Badis, El Ibrahimi, and El Okbi stayed in the Hejaz after Hajj; El Ibrahimi stayed in Syria where he met Rashid Rida; Ben Badis stayed in Tunisia, studying and teaching there; and Muhammad Abduh visited Tunisia and Algeria in 1903. The impact of these encounters manifested clearly in the positions of the reform figures, revealing shared principles alongside points of divergence.

- **Convergent Perspectives,** We find: The scholars of the association praised Wahhabism; they adopted the same Wahhabi stance on manifestations of polytheism, which led them to take a hostile stance towards Sufism and fought against them, such that Sheikh El Okbi teaching the book *Kashf al-Shubuhat* by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab; the treatise *Al-Shirk wamazahiruhu* by El Mili, considered a counterpart to Muhammad Abduh's *Risalat al-Tawhid*; the adoption of the Wahhabi concept of innovation (*bid'ah*); relying on strict Wahhabi opinions regarding innovation; emphasizing the original sources of Islam and holding a negative stance toward scholastic theology (*ilm al-kalam*) in interpreting texts. (14)
- **Divergent perspectives** Practicing political activity and recognizing the merits of democracy. Regarding primary sources of legislation, the Association contradicted Wahhabism: the Association prioritized the Qur'an over the Sunnah, whereas Wahhabism prioritizes the Sunnah over the Qur'an to the point of establishing rulings via the Sunnah that may contradict the explicit text of the Qur'an.

Regarding the adoption of Reformist School principals and disagreements with them,

•**Convergent Perspectives :**

the Association agreed on: opposing blind imitation (*taqlid*) of a specific school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*), with Ben Badis explicitly declaring he did not follow Imam Malik in everything; prioritizing the Qur'an; opening up to various modern fields of knowledge; and focusing on aspects of civilisation and welfare. (15) We also find Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi mentioning what makes the association differ from Wahhabism, saying: "We are Malikis despite your noses, and they are Hanbalis despite your noses, and we are in Algeria and they are in the island, and we work on the path of reforming pens, and they work on them with feet, and they work on the shrines with picks and we work on their builder, the contractor"(16). Hence, the enlightened orientation of the reformist movement of the Islamic University—denied by pioneers of Scientific Salafism that began in the 1970s—cannot be claimed as purely Wahhabi without reformist influence, or vice versa.(17)

•**Divergent perspectives :**

While the association agrees with enlightened Salafism in the aforementioned points, it differs with it regarding Sufism. According to Nour El-Din Abu Lahia, the association derived benefits exclusively from Sheikh Muhammad Abduh's reformist stances; its intellectual roots are vastly different from his. To illustrate this point, we see Ibn Al-Aliwa's response to the association, defending Sufism and Sufi practices based on Sheikh Muhammad Abduh's approach. He confronts them with this argument, demonstrating that Muhammad Abduh, despite his Salafist leanings, did not reject Sufism; on the contrary, he championed it and was, moreover, a distinguished mystic. (See: Abu Lahia, 2015: 83-84; see also: Ahmed Ibn Al-Aliwa, Al-Nasir Ma'ruf fi al-Dhab 'an Majd al-Tasawwuf, 1990: 83-92).

We outline the split of Salafism in Algeria into three factions: Reformist Salafism (still linked to the Association); Scientific Salafism (influenced implicitly by Sheikh Al-Ashmawi, then Saudi sheikhs); and Activist Salafism (led by Ali Belhadj in the 1970s, later consolidating with the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS]). Each faction denied the "Salafi" status of the other, especially between Scientific and Activist Salafists. The conflict began when Activist Salafism adopted political action and established a political party (FIS), which is strictly forbidden among Scientific Salafists. (18)

Analysis of Youth representations of Salafism's History

Reviewing the responses of interviewed youth regarding the history of Salafism, we found that their representations varied between superficial, fragmented, and confused accounts lacking historical accuracy. They frequently conflated ancient Salafism with the modern period, and traditional Salafism with enlightened/reformist Salafism. In four interviews (Interviewees 3, 6, 7, and 8), knowledge was completely absent, leading us to conclude that young people do not care for theoretical history. The exception was the second interviewee, whose knowledge was historically precise due to personal reading via the internet, social media networks, and satellite television.

Analysing youth representations of Salafism's history in Algeria from a sociological representations, we found their views aligned broadly with specialists, though lacking precision. They viewed the primary actor as the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema or its founder, Abdelhamid Ben Badis, alongside co-founders like El Ibrahimi and Sheikh Sahnoun (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 12). Interviewee 12 attributed the emergence to pioneers of Enlightened Salafism (Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh), an intersection matching specific historical analyses. Interviewees 9, 10, and 11 attributed the rise of Salafism to the absence of a localized religious reference framework, a lack of moderate discourse, and the failure of mosque imams to champion youth issues.

Some highlighted the role of youth who studied in Saudi Arabia, noting prominent figures like Sheikh Abdelmalek Ramdani. Interviewees 9 and 10 pointed to indirect structural factors, such as Algeria's transition from a managed economy to a market system, which produced a vulnerable, impoverished class that turned to religiosity to compensate

for daily hardships. They also noted openness to incoming cultures via book fairs, which introduced Salafi and Wahhabi literature.

With regard to Chapter III: Intellectual Landmarks of the Salafi System

Opposing researchers (Sunni and Shia) identified major intellectual characteristics of Salafism across three sections:

- **General Landmarks:** Prioritising men over truths; limiting legislative authority to the Companions and early generations; sanctifying the past over the present/future; focusing on narration (*riwayah*) over comprehension (*dirayah*); memorisation over understanding; textual tradition (*naql*) over reason (*aql*); leaning toward imagination over rationality; forcing tradition and reason to bend to speculation in religious truths; prioritising literalism over abstract meaning in worship, personal, social, and emotional aspects; neglecting and contradicting higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid*); and leaning toward prohibition, severity, and restriction in practical matters. (19)
- **Treatment of Legal Texts:** Denying interpretation (*ta'wil*) and metaphor (*majaz*) as text protection; prioritising the literal text over reason; strict adherence to literalism with an absence of objective awareness; and narrowing disagreement to a binary of truth versus falsehood. (20)
- **Treatment of the Different Other:** Self-centredness rooted in the belief that they represent the Saved Sect and Victorious Group; and declaring the other an innovator or infidel, excluding, abusing, or killing them for fighting "the truth." (21) (22)

Youth perceptions of these intellectual landmarks converged on a single narrative: Salafi discourse privileges men (the *Salaf*) and contemporary sheikhs over Quranic truths; values narration over comprehension; values memorisation over understanding; prioritises tradition—no matter how weak—over reason; subjects tradition and reason to speculation when establishing religious and natural facts (especially cosmological ones); enforces strict literalism over meaning; prioritises Hadith narrations over the authority of the Qur'an; rejects metaphor, resulting in anthropomorphism (*tajsim*) and comparison (*tashbih*) of divine attributes to creation; silences reason; and relies on early generation reports even if they clash with Quranic constants, authentic Sunnah, historical facts, science, or logic.

We conclude that these youth representations are tied to developments in contemporary media, especially social networks, which exposed hidden traditional heritage. Classical texts like Al-Ghazali's "*Iljam al-Awam an Ilm al-Kalam*" (Restraining the Laity from Theological Speculation) no longer hold meaning for modern youth. Social media bypassed all censorship over speech and writing. The rise of these tools caused the family's role in teaching children and youth to decline, just as print media (books, magazines, newspapers) and audio cassettes—which peaked from the 1980s through the 1990s—receded. Salafi interactions with the other remain centered on self-righteousness (the Saved Sect) and condemning the differing other as an innovator, infidel, or enemy of truth. We dedicate the fourth chapter to addressing six topics, which are as follows: the manifestations and characteristics of Salafist discourse, its methods, spaces and media, the common and different topics among Salafist movements, the absent topics or what is called the unthought, the suppressed topics or what is called the unspoken, and finally we addressed the manifestations and stages of the transformation of Salafist discourse among Salafist movements from traditional scholarly Salafism to activist Salafism and jihadist Salafism.

In the first section, we examine the manifestations and characteristics of the religious discourse of Salafist movements through three aspects: the proselytizing aspect, the preaching aspect, and the argumentative aspect.

Regarding religious preaching, its language operates within a closed conceptual framework from which it does not deviate. Hence, the language of Salafists appears one-dimensional, general, and self-contained. Since Salafist discourse targets groups with a modest social and cultural background, Salafism adapts its language towards them, employing a simple style that blends classical Arabic with colloquial Arabic, suitable for their understanding.

Salafist discourse in religious preaching focuses on the afterlife, employing examples from the lives of the early Muslims (Salaf) as a benchmark for the behavior of the audience, aiming to elevate them to the level of these exemplary figures. They echo Imam Malik's saying: "The latter generations of this nation will not be reformed except by that which reformed its first generations."

This preaching exhibits a rigid and intensified form of fanaticism, particularly through warnings against doctrinal doubts and errors. A doctrinal system prevalent in this discourse is characterized by a strong emphasis on prohibition and the forbidden.

Salafists seize every opportunity: Fridays, holidays, weddings, funerals, circumcisions, and so on, using all available media and communication tools. This includes written materials such as books, magazines, and pamphlets. The use of audiovisual media has evolved from cassette tapes to satellite television channels and social media platforms via the internet. Salafist discourse manifests itself on three levels:

The emotional level, which involves shaping the emotions of viewers and influencing their tastes and choices based on the presented Salafist model;

The cognitive level, which involves providing the target audience with knowledge that steers them away from polytheism and towards monotheism and a literal interpretation of the foundational texts;

The behavioral level, which is the most profound, through the presentation of content that embodies values contrary to the prevailing model of religiosity in society, most importantly adherence to the requirements of Salafist discourse, such as wearing the niqab, growing a beard, and shortening clothing, among other things.

The Salafist discourse is characterized by several features, including: identification, a focus on the past, marginalization, fragmentation, superficiality, and selectivity.

This section also demonstrates that the Salafist discourse resorts to argumentation with opponents in order to refute the opponent and establish what they consider to be the sole truth. This discourse employs a strategy of surrounding the listener with sacred texts, resorting to accusations of immorality, heresy, and apostasy.

In the second section, we address the methods used by the Salafist discourse, including: vocal appeal, characterized by its powerful delivery, volume, and tone of incitement; the use of sarcasm; the use of similes, metaphors, and allusions; the use of gestures and movements; emotional framing through introductions and conclusions; and the use of persuasion, intimidation, and repetition.

In the third section, we address the spaces of Salafist discourse and the media outlets it employs, including mosques, religious institutes and centers, and the aforementioned written and audiovisual media.

In the fourth section, we investigate the absent, the unthought, the silenced, and the unspoken, particularly concerning politics, methods of selecting rulers, and the system of governance; as well as economic issues and matters related to developmental progress. We began with a jurisprudential introduction, noting the contemporary Salafist focus on matters of creed and worship, while neglecting economic, financial, and developmental issues. Fatwas often disregard the problems of contemporary reality, focusing instead on idealistic solutions to these problems.

Regarding the intellectual approach, we examined three approaches through which we analyze Salafism's treatment of economic and social issues: the approach of disregard, which is the dominant characteristic among contemporary Salafist scholars; the approach of asceticism, which some call the secular approach because it separates religion from politics and economics; and the educational approach, which is considered the most realistic discourse and emphasizes reviving the value of work in citizens.

In the fifth section, we address the commonalities and differences between the various Salafist currents: the traditional scholarly current, the activist current, and the jihadist current.

As for the common themes among Salafist movements, I mentioned the following:

Despite the differences between Salafist movements, there are some points of agreement among them, including:

- The doctrine of monotheism, especially the religious dimension which is based on three elements: the oneness of God's essence, attributes, and divinity;
- The application of Islamic law.

Regarding the different issues among Salafist currents, we identified the following differences:

- The Oneness of God's Rule: This is adopted by both the activist and jihadist Salafist currents, while it is rejected by the scholarly Salafist current;
- Obedience to the Ruler: This prohibits rebellion against the ruler and deems it religiously forbidden. This is adopted by the scholarly Salafist current, while it is rejected by both the activist and jihadist Salafist currents;
- Publicly Advising the Ruler: This is adopted by the traditional scholarly current, while it is rejected by both the activist and jihadist Salafist currents;
- Peaceful Means of Change: Such as elections, demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins: These are adopted by the activist current, while they are rejected by both the traditional scholarly and jihadist Salafist currents. (23)

In the sixth section, we address the manifestations and stages of the transformation of Salafist discourse from the scientific current to the activist and jihadist currents, through the practice of politics via demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, and elections in the Salafist activist current; and the approach of armed violence in changing the systems of government in the Arab and Islamic world in the Salafist jihadist current.

Regarding the manifestations of the transformation of Salafist discourse, we addressed this point in two sections:

In the first section, we focused on the conceptual transformation at the theoretical level, emphasizing the influence of Sayyid Qutb's thought, particularly his two books: "Milestones" and his commentary "In the Shade of the Qur'an." We clarified the conceptual additions introduced by Sayyid Qutb, including:

1- The concept of Tawhid (monotheism) in its two aspects: the political, through the concept of "sovereignty" (hakimiyya), and the social, through the concepts of "ignorance" (jahiliyya), "faith" (faith), and "Islam" (Islam). From a practical standpoint, the activist discourse added the concepts of "ignorance" (jahiliyya), "community" (jama'a), and "vanguard" (tali'a), which the jihadist movement adopted and practiced.

2- On a practical level, the jihadist movement added concepts unknown to the traditional scholarly tradition, such as: the community (jama'a), jihad, loyalty and disavowal (wala' wal-bara'), false deities (taghut), and the victorious group (ta'ifa al-mansura).

Regarding the shifts in discourse within Salafist movements from the traditional scholarly Salafist current to the activist and jihadist Salafist currents, we identified five pivotal moments that influenced this discourse:

First: The migration of prominent figures from the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly to Saudi Arabia. Here, we discussed the emergence of a fusion between the Salafist and Brotherhood currents, especially through Muhammad Qutb and what came to be known as Sururi Salafism, which arose under the influence of Sheikh Muhammad Surur;

Second: The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Afghan jihad, in which those called "Arab Afghans" participated;

Third: The Second Gulf War in 1990-1991;

Fourth: The events of September 11, 2001;

Fifth: The events of the Arab Spring uprisings. (24)

In light of the proceeding discussion in Chapters Two and Three to establish a theoretical background encompassing the history of Salafism in the Arab and Islamic world in general, and in Algeria in particular; the features of the Salafist system; and Salafist discourse, we intend to address, in Chapter Five, the perceptions of Algerian youth regarding certain topics according to Salafist stances on them.

As for the perceptions of young people, they measure Salafist discourse against the criterion of practical reality and daily life, far removed from theorizing and philosophizing that bears no relation to their reality. Thus, we conclude that Salafist discourse has lost much of the youth who previously embraced and adopted it. Here, we find that social media has played a significant role in this regard, and one of the main reasons for the decline of the Salafist movement is the Saudi regime's retreat from Wahhabism and its adoption of a new agenda open to the current global order led by America and Israel; as well as the legacy of the Salafist-jihadist movement in many countries, which has left negative effects without providing solutions that ordinary people can find in their daily lives.

At the end of this discussion, which focused on social issues in Salafist discourse, in the view of opponents, and the youth's perception of this discourse

With regard to Chapter V: Social, Economic, and Cultural-Political Issues

This chapter provides the theoretical background for field research mapping a segment of Algerian youth within Oran.

- **Women's Education:** Rulings are divided into two groups: the first contradicts the spirit of Islam by prohibiting women's education, limiting it to learning *Surah An-Nur* out of fear of temptation; the second aligns with Islam. Authors advocating for education include Shams al-Haq Azim abadi (*Uqud al-Juman*), Abu al-Hasan ali al-Qabisi, Al-Alusi (*Al-Isabah*), and Wakil Ahmad bin Qalandar (*Tanqih al-Bayan*). They refuted all narrations relied upon by those banning female literacy. (25)
- In the modern era, Mustafa Kamil opposed the women's liberation movement in *Al-Liwa* newspaper, and Mohamed Talaat Harb wrote *Education of Women and the Hijab*, viewing liberation as the westernisation of Eastern society. Conversely, advocates included Al-Tahtawi (*Takhliis al-Ibris* and *Al-Murshid al-Amin*) and Muhammad Abduh, who called for women's educational associations, alongside Qasim Amin's *The Liberation of Women*.

We demonstrate that while modern Salafists permit women's education, they maintain that a woman's primary place is the home, exiting only out of necessity and without mixing with males—as stated by Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Najdi in *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* and Sheikh Ferkous in his fatwas. Prohibits rely on *Surah Al-Ahzab* (v. 33) and *Surah An-Nisa* (v. 34), alongside weak narrations such as "Do not teach your daughters writing..." and "Do not lodge them in upper rooms; teach them the spindle and *Surah An-Nur*." Scholars trace the modern women's education movement to Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, where local women observed French women, as recorded by Al-Jabarti in *Aja'ib al-Athar*. Al-Tahtawi was similarly influenced by French civilization. The movement later slowed when the "Siyufiyyah" primary school closed in 1873. (26)

In the Maghreb, particularly Algeria, interest in women's issues began during early French colonisation, influenced by the Egyptian reform movement via scholars like :

- 1- Sheikh Abdelkader El Medjaoui (*Al-Luma' fi Nazm al-Bida'*), who saw women as the foundation of Algeria's revival, and Sheikh Ibn al-Khoja (*Al-Iktirath bi-Huquq al-Inath*), who argued for equal education;
- 2- Ibn al-Khoja refuted prohibits, praised female reading, noted the dire consequences of female illiteracy, and blamed male ignorance for keeping women uneducated. He criticised corrupt customs like denying women inheritance, seizing their dowries, forcing financial payouts during *khul'* divorce even if the husband was at fault, and the *Ta'laqit* custom among the "Fliq" tribe, where a widow was forced into marriage without her consent;
- 3- Sheikh Omar bin Qaddour also published on female ignorance and corrupt customs in *Zulfiqar* newspaper (1913);
- 4- The Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema established mosque classes for mothers and magazines for female reformist writers.

These reformist schools faced obstacles from French administrators who feared Arabic education and counter-introduced European workshops (run by Madame Lucie and Madame Marie) to influence Algerian women under the guise of embroidery classes. Meanwhile, obsolete local customs treated women's education as a red line. (27) (28)

• **Women in Political Life and Judiciary:** Salafists bar women from political participation, governance, and the judiciary based on an alleged consensus (*ijma*) of scholars, supported by figures like Ibn Baz and Al-Shabrani. However, Hanafi scholars like Ibn al-Humam and IbnNujaym introduced nuances: while maintaining the prohibition on appointing women, they conceded that if a woman judges a case, her ruling is valid and enforceable. Permissive views allow a woman's judgment in areas where her testimony is legally acceptable (excluding corporal punishments/*hudud* and retribution/*qisas*), particularly in financial matters. These fatwas highlight a socio-legal dialectic. (29)

• Proponents of women's right to absolute governance and judiciary base their views on a critique of the texts used by prohibits and point to historical and contemporary examples of successful female governance, such as the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) praised in the Qur'an, Indira Gandhi, and Golda Meir and others (30)

Deconstructing the famous Hadith of Abu Bakra "A people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never succeed" yielded four critical perspectives:

1. Challenging the Hadith because the Sunnah is not binding in constitutional/state affairs (Abdelhamid Metwalli El-Shawarby, Mohamed Izzat Druza).
2. Challenging the Hadith as fabricated or contextually specific (Muhammad Sulaiman al-Ashqar, Fatima Mernissi).
3. Challenging the Hadith based on disputed authenticity (Bassam Al-Amoush, Muhammad al-Ghazali).
4. Challenging the Hadith because Abu Bakra was its sole narrator (Mohamed Imara, Al-Sallabi, Ayman Al-Najjar). (31)

Youth representations on this topic drew from lived experience, television, social media, and interactions at mosques. The family's role and print/audio media have declined in favour of mobile internet access, which bypasses censorship.

- **Islamic Sects and Groups:** Salafi discourse positions differing Islamic groups entirely outside the boundaries of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* (the Sunni mainstream). For example, a fatwa by Sheikh Ferkous expelled all other Islamist groups and movements from the Sunni sphere, which in Salafi terminology equates to Islam itself. This raises questions, such as how the Ibadis can be excluded from *Ahl al-Sunnah* when they themselves never claimed to be part of it. (32) Youth perceptions are shaped by experiencing this exclusionary discourse firsthand in mosques, seasonal events, television, and social media, marking a retreat in family and school authority in the face of mobile internet dominance.
- **Islamic Banking and Economics:** Salafi discourse and critical perspectives non-usurious Islamic banking practices, specifically Murabaha sales. Sheikh Ferkous issued a fatwa declaring Islamic banks to be usurious institutions merely circumventing the prohibition of interest (*riba*). Opposing views include a rebuttal by Haider Nasser, media director of Al Baraka Islamic Bank in Algeria, which was countered by the administration of Sheikh Ferkous's website. A prominent specialist opponent, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, authored several works on the topic, including *Murabaha Sale to the Purchase Orderer as Practiced by Islamic Banks*, replying to Rafiq Yunus Al-Masri's critique. He supports Haider Nasser's opinion, which was mentioned earlier. (33) Representations of this economic issue stem from practical, everyday interactions rather than theoretical or literary readings.
- **Homeland, Nationalism, Identity, and Citizenship:** These issues bridge political and social spheres. Salafi discourse reduces identity to a single religious dimension: Islamic brotherhood. This is clear in Sheikh Al-Huwayni's audio tape *Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'* (Loyalty and Disavowal) and Sheikh Ferkous's online fatwas. (34) Conversely, Reformist. Salafism offers a different view; Abdelhamid Ben Badis addressed the topic within colonial Algeria across articles like "I Live for Islam and Algeria" (published in *Al-Chihab*) and "The Homeland and Nationalism... Truth is Above All and the Homeland is Before All" (published in *Al-Muntaqid*). He also used his introduction to Tawfiq al-Madani's book *Mohamed Osman Pasha* to refute French claims that Algeria was historically part of France. (35)

Opponents of the strict Salafi view, like Mohamed Sayyid Ismail, argue that Salafi discourse reduces the homeland to a mere plot of land, failing to grasp the historical transition toward the modern state built on secular nationalism. Salafism remains anchored in a transnational religious identity tied to medieval imperial expansions. Youth perceptions here rely almost exclusively on visual media, following the decline of family influence and print/audio mediums. (36)

- **Art and Photography:** Salafi discourse treats singing, music, photography, and sculpture as strictly prohibited (*haram*), drawing on verses and Hadiths stripped of text and social context. Opponents argue for the permissibility of art and photography by critiquing Salafi textual interpretations and citing scripts showing permissibility, such as the statues made during the reign of Prophet Solomon. This camp demonstrates that prohibitive texts arose within historical contexts of debauchery or specific Sufi practices—where gnostic-influenced musical listening (*sama'*) was treated as an act of worship. Thus, classical fatwas targeted those corrupt contexts rather than rendering all singing and imagery inherently forbidden (37). Youth representations of these artistic prohibitions are shaped by contemporary lived experience and social media, reflecting the general decline of traditional socialisations structures, (family and school), and written and audio media, and even visual media, especially local media, which the young man previously called inevitable (imposed). Through this argument, we demonstrated that Salafist discourse prohibits singing, image-making, and sculpture based on verses and hadiths taken out of their textual and social context to justify the prohibition, even though they appeared in different contexts.

Conclusion: This study focused on young people's perceptions of Salafist discourse, rather than on the discourse as Salafists themselves perceive it. Therefore, this study offers a unique approach to the subject. It also focused specifically on young people because they are caught between the traditional religious knowledge of their families and the influence of imported values disseminated through various media and communication channels, particularly social media.

The study concluded that young people's perceptions suggest a decline in the role of the family, as well as written, audio, and some visual media, with social media taking center stage in their education. We do not deny that young people acquire their knowledge of Salafist religious discourse from their interaction with spaces where Salafism is active, primarily

mosques. Young people's representations of Salafist discourse suggest a decline in its influence, especially after its decline in its center, namely Saudi Arabia, as the Saudi monarch recently stated.

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