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REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

**The Relationship between the Salafist  
Current and the Wahhabite Movement**

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**Abstract:** The Salafist current through its ancestral doctrinal content seems, in principle, simple; the name of the current is derived from the right ancestors, whose teachings are adhered to by the majority of Muslims being a mandatory requirement, but some Salafist interpretations exceed the real meaning of some Qur’anic or Sunni texts and hence a lot of confusion and contradictions regarding the real meaning of these principles adopted and propagated by Salafi especially that not only among the ulama, in general, but also among the followers of the Salafist stream themselves. There are many questions about the identity of these Salafist groups, their historical continuity, if it exists and the differences between the existing and historical groups, which have joined this current, to which we will try to answer briefly in a summary but explicit framework in this article. The events of the Arab Spring revealed a series of movements, currents and activities considered marginal as well as this Salafist movement seen previously through a standard stereotypical lens as static and intrinsic, against progress and development, stigmatized for ideological rigidity and cultural immobility, who have become involved in the uprising in the Arab world on different levels, even on the political arena, participating in parliamentary elections and transforming from traditional social formations into modern political formations.

**Keywords:** Salafism; Wahhabism; politics; religion; doctrine; jurisprudence

**Introduction**

We can say that Salafism is a current based on a school of Sunni dynamic thinking and it extends its sphere of influence on the reform of the systems of government, society and life, in general, to what is compatible with the Islamic system in function which urges us to pay huge attention to it.

The Salafists oppose democracy, considering it contrary to the provisions of Islam, because the power of regulation belongs to the Parliament, the people’s representatives and ultimately to the people themselves, and the Salafists believe that only God has this power. Moreover, Parliament’s decisions are transformed into laws and are not adopted unanimously by votes, but by a majority of votes, and some laws, despite the fact that they are contrary to nature, religion and reason, become proxies throughout the country.

The Salafist current through its ancestral doctrinal content seems, in principle, simple; the name of the current is derived from the predecessors or righteous ancestors, whose teachings most of Muslims adhere to as a compulsory requirement to follow their path in understanding and applying the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, but in regard to the “Surviving Group” or the “Victorious Group” we

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will not find any direct basis and only interpretations, which sometimes exceed the historical meaning and context, to which one must refer hence a lot of confusion and contradictions regarding the real meaning of these principles adopted and propagated by Salafist and not only among the ulama, in general, but also among the followers of the Salafist stream.

There remain many aspects and many crucial questions to be elucidated regarding the identity of these Salafi groups, their historical continuity and the differences between existing and historical groups, which have joined this current in one way or another, which we will try to answer briefly, but explicit in this article.

### **Brief History and Clarifications**

The Wahhabi Movement (Mohamad, 2013, pp. 50-60) can be viewed, through political events that propelled it to power, or as a religious movement well-known today.

Mohammad Ibn Abed Al-Wahhab, the representative of this movement, made a “pilgrimage” to most of the capitals of Islamic countries to study what Islam means in the eyes of these geographically dispersed peoples, and especially in the Arabian Peninsula, but also in Syria and Iran where he lived more than 12 years. During this long journey, he really knew what Islam meant in each of these countries, but he also learned about each theory or school of jurisprudence.

When the sheikh Mohammad Ibn Abed Al-Wahhab (Al-Raiki, 2005) arrived in Al-Driaa, in the north of the city of Riyadh, where the emir Mohammad Ben Saud lived, he concluded an agreement with the latter that the sheikh may remain in the emir’s territory, and in exchange the emir to support the movement propagated by the sheikh by the force of a sultan. This state of affairs continued until 1792, when the Sheikh died, and then the families agreed to continue to respect the original understanding that has remained so far.

The political side of this movement is well evidenced by the territorial enlargement of the Saudi government and thus the intensification of its hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula and especially by annexing the region, at that time Makah, but also Medina to the Hejaz region, which led further as through the appointed season, the pilgrimage season of the year, that this movement should again be propagated and strengthened reaching India and Indonesia in the east, Sudan and North Africa in the west.

This movement, from the very beginning, did not take into account the provisions of Al-Shaera nor the provisions of Al-Mutazila, but the provisions stipulated by Al-Salaf Al-Saleh, otherwise, as has been done previously by the sheikh Ibn Taymiya and his disciples.

The movement of Mohammad Ibn Abed Al-Wahhab (Al-Raiki, 2005, pp. 65-85) in the eighteenth century is grounded in Hannabila theory or school and can also be regarded as a statue and consolidation of these theories or schools of Islamic jurisprudence while also representing an example by which a theory can be put in practice and especially that in itself the concept of Salafism can be applied also within the other theories of jurisprudence because the main objective of the current is to purify the faith of the polytheistic habits, to combat superstitions and heresies, an objective that constitutes the reason for which this current has spread both in the Arab Peninsula and in most Islamic countries, but also in countries where there is a Muslim minority. So, the current comes as revitalization, revival of faith and reunification of Muslims through the purification of polytheistic customs, which had begun to return against the backdrop of weakening faith, to which a major contribution was made by the sheikh Ibn Taymiya.

### **Directions of the Current Islamic Salafism**

If we look closely and study the current Salafist (Raded, Mohamad, Sulaiman, & Mohamad, 2013, pp. 100-135) groups we will observe groups, which claim their characteristics without acquiring their name (the Wahhabi and the Muslim Brotherhood) and other groups, which are proceeding to a complete takeover (the School of Scientific Salafism or the Jihadi Salafism School).

The events of the Arab Spring revealed a series of movements, currents and activities considered marginal as well as this Salafist movement seen previously through a standard stereotypical lens as static and intrinsic, against progress and development, but the changes imposed by democratization and escalation of protests in the Arab world it has overturned a series of perceptions related to the region and its cultural heritage, so the different Salafi currents stigmatized for ideological rigidity and cultural immobility have become involved in the revolt in the Arab world on different levels, even on the political arena, participating in parliamentary elections and transforming from traditional social formations into modern political formations.

### **The Historical Link - The Birth of the Salafist Current**

The historical connection can be highlighted by the antagonistic directions followed by the Muslims after the death of the prophet Mohammad by the formation of the two great groups: Ahl Al-Raii and Ahl Al-Hadith (Raded, Mohamad, Sulaiman, & Mohamad, 2013, pp. 100-135) on the issue of interpreting the text of the Qur'an and hadiths.

Ahl Al-Hadith adopted an interpretation of the text of the Qur'an, which is in line with that of Al-Salaf Al-Saleh (Raded, Mohamad, Sulaiman, & Mohamad, 2013, pp. 100-135), the companions of the Prophet, as the most appropriate in this regard, and in alternative to resort to reason because reason is the only methodological source on which Islam itself is based as a religion. While Ahl Al-Raii are orators, philosophers and followers of logic.

### **Chronological Evolution of the Salafist Current (Ezmi, 2018, pp. 50-255)**

1) Historical Salafism - religious current of revitalization and resurrection of the faith emphasizes the Quranic text as it was explained and narrated by Salaf focusing on the issues related to the worship, established by Imam Ahmad Ben Hanabal. The emergence of this Historical Salafism is also regarded as a historical moment of great magnitude, especially as it comes to resist the rational tendency based on the interpretation of the Quranic text. The eighth century witnessed the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate after the Tatar conquest when this current revived for the second time, with Ibn Taymiya and his school as its principal representative;

2) Wahhabit Salafism - Salafist current based on Historical Salafism, came into being in the eighteenth century. The main representative is Imam Mohamad Ben Abed Al-Wahhab (1703-1791) who preached in favor of monotheism, delayed any prayer except those addressed to Allah and opened the gate of jihad. Wahhabit Salafism is considered a guide to all the later Salafist currents that exist in the Arab and Islamic world;

3) Reformed Salafism (rectification) - Salafist current that was influenced by Wahhabit Salafism, only that the moment of its appearance coincided with the frictions with the west and thus reoriented its directions of action becoming problematic through its activity of thinking and infusion. The main representatives were Sheihul Mohamad Abdo (1849-1905) and Mohamad Rashid Reda (1865-1935);

4) National Salafism - a Salafist current that is in opposition to foreign powers, clinging to the concept of Islamic Jihad and legitimacy in rejecting aggressors. Strive for the establishment of a national Islamic state. This current was concentrated in the Maghreb countries and the main representatives were Abed Al-Hamid Ben Badis (1889-1940) and Ilal Al-Fassi (1910-1974);

5) Kinetic or mobile Salafism - Salafist current propagated by the Muslim Brothers, more specifically by his representative Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1948) in circumstances of cultural and political crisis of the Islamic movement that wanted to be reformist;

6) Jihadist Salafism - Salafist current in which Sayyid Qutb is considered the main representative (1906-1966). In fact, his book Milestone is the main source for the application of the jihad in two small concepts: governors and ignorants.

### **The Issue of the Nodal Relationship between Doctrine<sup>1</sup> and Jurisprudence<sup>2</sup>**

The great political events (Abu Bashir, 2014, p. 67) that took place after the death of the prophet Mohamad had a great influence on the formation of the doctrine, the jurisprudence and the different movements and currents in the Arab and Muslim world that exist today and from which the different political or even partisan visions especially emerges. Each adept of a theory or a schools further form currents or movements or even political parties, in the present meaning, such as the Muslim Brothers in Egypt who have their own vision, which leads to differences of approach imposed by the ulama. These differences of approach represent what is known as Ijtihad as a basic principle, which was decided by the prophet in Sunnah and taken further by his companions (Al-Salaf Al-Saleh) being put in practice in a scientific manner.

The multitude of jurisprudences, ideological and doctrinal visions, and later also political, have been known to Muslims since the time of the Caliphate, and even from the time of the four Rashidun Caliphs. There are also books, which come to attest the assertions written by: Ibn Al-Saed Al-Batlushi and Ibn Taymiya.

So, the multitude of doctrines and theories of jurisprudence was ruled by the Sunnah of the prophet and Ijmaa, and later found in social, political and economic life, but what no one has taken into account and has not foreseen since the time of the companions was the possibility for another group, of Muslims, to issue Fatwa declaring other Muslims as Kafirun because of the disagreement in Ijtihad, but the principle by itself was regarded and considered as a basic principle of diversity of opinion being a factor of power.

These contradictions between Islamic Doctrine and Islamic Jurisprudence are what have led today to religious fanaticism, to a blind imitation in the Arab and Muslim society of an “ulama” or another, for example Al-Baghdadi with reference to DAESH, to jurisprudential fanaticism, to separation, to takfir, to conflicts and aggressive fighting and positioning to extremes in the Arab and Muslim world.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Aqidah - The covenant of faith known as I believe with all the perceptions and differences that it has among Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Fiqh - Islamic jurisprudence with the four Sunni theories or schools, plus the Shiites

### **Salafist Schools and their Evolution**

1) The Salafist Scientific School of Conservation and Rectification are those schools that guide the proper adoption of Sharia science as it emerges from the Holy Book and Sunnah of the Prophet. In practice, they are the schools of the four imams: Abu Hanifa Al-Numan, Malek Ben Anas, Mohamad Ben Idris and Ahmad Ben Hanbal;

2) The Salafist School for Defense came into being as a result of the participation of certain ulama in the debates with Ahl Al-Kitab, who wanted to impose their point of view in order to consolidate their political hegemony through the economic factor, which exceeds the principle of freedom of thought known up until that time by all Muslims, with reference to the Abbasid caliphs, also with whom Imam Ahmad Ben Hanbal fought through his various journeys holding sermons and for which he was also imprisoned, having a different vision from the vision of the caliph himself;

3) The Intransigent Salafist School is borrowed from the Salafist Scientific School of Conservation and Righteousness, the first aiming at the Holy Book and Sunnah and the second aiming at rejecting everything that came from another faith except the Islamic one where no evidence could be found in this sense. Thus, in the case of these schools, the preservation becomes and rectification affirming Al-Badaa<sup>1</sup> this position of these schools has led that each new vision is likely to be a heresy;

4) The Salafist School of Transition is represented by Imam Ibn Taymiya, who is the bridge between the first Salafist and the present schools that emerged as a result of the efforts of Imam Mohamad Ben Abed Al-Wahhab. The most famous imams representing this school are Ahmad Ben Hanbal, Ibn Taymiya and his pupil Ibn Qaeem Al-Jozia;

5) The Jihadist Salafist School - despite the fact that some schools have existed in parallel in the Arab and Muslim world, they have tried to impress a Sufi vision in Muslim society. Imam Ibn Taymiya introduced the concept of preservation for the defense of faith in the Salafist school, and after the Tatars conquered part of the Muslim territories resorted to applied jihad.

### **Conclusions**

The evolution of Salafi schools follows precisely the internal social and economic challenges of each period, as well as the external challenges in order to protect the Islamic Ummah.

The Salafist trend that followed Ibn Taymiya did not develop as a curriculum, but rather took a jihadist turn knowing, however, that Ibn Taymiya's approach was aimed at the "external enemy", at that time Tatar and not other Muslims.

Through the agreement between the emir Mohammad Ben Saud and Mohammad Ben Abed Al-Wahhab, the Salafist current has passed to another stage of existence, that of intellectual reform and political domination, and what has been particularly important is the call of Imam Mohammad Ben Abed Al-Wahhab resorting to the concept of defense within the Salafist school, rectifying it in a jihadist manner manifested by the economic factor, which no other imam had dared to that date with other Muslims, nor Ibn. Taymiya and neither Ahmad Ben Hanbal. In this way, the movement included the teachings and provisions of the Salafist stream and the political emirate (Salafism and the State), especially since the war prizes at that time were the main source of funding for the tribes, the powerful emirates. We can thus assert that the doctrinal factors, as well as the case-law manifested further in the

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<sup>1</sup> Heresy

various movements and trends, played the role of a “moral excuse” by which the hegemony between tribes was practically justified.

The jihadist curriculum of the Salafi School adopted by Imam Mohammad Ben Abed Al-Wahhab was the one that brought him criticism during his lifetime and until now. This opposition has been and still internal and external. The internal opposition that the imam faced was from the other ulama followers of other theories of jurisprudence and even those who embrace a Salafi perception adopted in all the theories of jurisprudence on a practical and a theoretical level, on the practical level the curricula adopted by Wahhabi was and remain the one mostly challenged especially as it weakened the cooperation between Muslims.

External opposition began with the influence of the Ottoman Empire, especially since this Wahhabi conservatism was not well regarded in the empire. The main concern was the objective of this current, which would not only consist in propagating Sharia science but creating an internal dissension between Muslims and especially among the Ulama, which led the Ottomans to use the armed forces against the followers of this Wahhabite movement.

The contradictions existing in Islamic Doctrine, on the one hand, and Islamic Jurisprudence, on the other, must first be emphasized and explained in a scientific way, studied in a historical context, reaching up to the present time, because the real problem facing the space of reference comes from inside and then from the outside.

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