



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

POLICY ANALYSIS

Salafis in Lebanon: New Manifestations of a Movement

Saoud Almawla | Jan 2015

Salafis in Lebanon: New Manifestations of a Movement

Series: Policy Analysis

Saoud Almawla | Jan 2015

Copyright © 2015 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Lebanese Salafist Groups and Violence	1
Syria, the Arab Spring, and the Rise of Lebanon's Salafi Extremism	4
Transformation of Lebanese Salafism	6
Conclusion	12

Introduction

Interest in the existence of a Salafi movement, and its possible impact on Lebanon, has increased since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March of 2011. This new interest has often taken the form of incitement against, in particular, the so-called *Takfiri* group of Salafis. Action to counter the Salafi trend became a campaign against the Takfiri, which resulted in a view of the Salafi movement as one that is homogenized, monolithic, and terrorist. The dominant understanding of Salafism then, is that as a movement, it emerged suddenly, and out of nowhere, coming quickly to dominate the political and social life of the Sunni Muslim community in Lebanon. This report will trace out the origins of the Salafi movement, examining it as a social phenomenon that has succeeded because it fills gaps in the current socio-political environment.

Lebanese Salafist Groups and Violence

Allegations made by Hezbollah and its allies against Salafi groups for the perpetration of violence have struck fear in the hearts of sectarian parties. Hezbollah had placed the blame for violent incidents in the country's Sunni population centers—towns such as Tripoli, Sidon (Saida), and Arsaal in the Bekaa Valley—squarely at the door of Neo-Salafis. Hezbollah's opponents, however, have suggested that it was Hezbollah themselves who perpetrated the violence with the aim of sowing the seeds of communal discord between Lebanon's Sunni community and the country's national army. According to this argument, Hezbollah's aim was to create a justification for its own attacks on those cities.¹

This narrative was given to a number of violent incidents across Lebanon, including: confrontations between the military and one Salafist movement led by Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir in the outskirts of Sidon;² the assassination of two Sunni clerics at an army

¹ Karen Bolous, "Arsaal Fears an Armed Strike", *Now Lebanon*, published August 22, 2013: <http://goo.gl/mzOjmP>

² A number of armed skirmishes took place during the months of May and June 2013, in the vicinity of the Bilal Ben Rabbah Mosque in the Ibra district of Saida. The two combatting sides were led by the mosque's imam, Salafi sheikh Ahmad al-Aseer and the Hezbollah-led "Resistance Brigades." The first conflict centered on the demand that the Resistance Brigades leave apartments they had rented in the vicinity of the mosque. The conflict became violent, and escalated to the point that on Tuesday, June 18, combatants were using both artillery and machine guns. On Friday, June 21, Aseer declared that he

checkpoint near Akkar, in the north of Lebanon;³ and for explosions across Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiye)⁴ followed by Tripoli.⁵ These events caused panic throughout Lebanon, which only increased when Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaeda carried out a second wave of bombings with targets across the country.⁶ While the *Takfiri* were being blamed for these events, the discussion around them also raised questions about the veracity of Hezbollah's accusations against them, and further questions about Hezbollah's possible responsibility for the security breakdown in Lebanon.⁷

would postpone maneuvers previously planned for Monday, June 24, until the end of the school examination period, however, skirmishes between Aseer supporters and the Lebanese military turned bloody by Sunday, June 23, when Ibra became the center of a fierce attack by the Lebanese army against Aseer and his comrades. This confrontation left more than 16 members of the Lebanese armed forces dead and wounding scores more, with an unknown number of casualties on Aseer's side. The cleric himself escaped a security cordon alongside former pop star Fadhel Shaker and a tiny group of his closest supporters. Following the incident, a number of prominent Sunni politicians in Saida, including Bahiya Hariri and former Prime Minister Fouad Senouria, accused Hezbollah of involvement in the fighting, with news statements coming out on June 18, 22, 23 and 24, 2013.)

³ "Soldiers Suspected of Killing Sheikh Ahmad Abdulwahed and his Aid Being Investigated: Akkar Clerics Dismayed", Nahar Net, May 20, 2012: <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/40851>

⁴ Incidents took place in two densely populated working class Shi'a neighborhoods known to be under Hezbollah control one in Bir al-Abed on Tuesday, July 9, 2013, and a second in al-Ruwair on Thursday, August 15, 2013.

⁵ These include incidents at two Salafi mosques: the Taqwa Mosque where prayers are led by Sheikh Salem al-Rifai and the al-Salam Mosque which is headed by Sheikh Bilal al-Baroudi, which took place following the Friday prayers on August 23, 2013. Speaking before a military tribunal, the state prosecutor, Justice Saqer Saqer, accused long-standing Tripoli Islamist Sheikh Hashim Minkara, alongside fellow detainees Sheikh Ahmad Ghareeb (Minkara's aid), Mustafa Hourri, and their other co-defendants, of forming an armed and criminal gang. The alleged conspirators were accused of attempting to undermine the state's "civilian and military institutions," of forming a terrorist cell, and of detonating car bombs outside mosques in the north of Lebanon. Saqer also accused Captain Mohammed Ali (a Syrian national) and Khader Arban of the same crime, with reports of the accusations appearing on . Friday, August 30, 2013.

⁶ See *Now Lebanon*: "Justice Saqer Accuses 28 Individuals of Belonging to ISIS," <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/ar/nownewsar/554706>

⁷ See video, "Hezbollah Secretary-General Claims it Likely that "Takfiri Groups" were behind Bombing in Dahiye," published Friday, August 16 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEdGuG8V8Es>

Although there was no official statement on these questions from Lebanese authorities, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah proclaimed that there was clear evidence that a bombing in the al-Ruwais neighborhood in the Dahiye suburb of the Lebanese capital was carried out by "Syrian dissidents and Takfiri groups, as determined by the official security services."⁸ Later, Hezbollah-controlled al-Manar television announced the contents of what it claimed to be the findings of an internal investigation by the movement, which pointed to the town of Aarsaal and accused forces there of plotting the bombings.⁹ As a result of such media agitation, and given the recent victory of Hezbollah and the Syrian regime in recapturing the Syrian territory in the Bekaa Valley adjacent to Lebanon, the inhabitants of the border village were said to have been lying in wait for some sort of military operation targeting "Takfiri terrorists."¹⁰ Later, Al Manar predicted that the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and a group known as the Free Sunni Command in Baalbek would carry out attacks in the Bekaa Valley. These predictions served to frighten, in particular, the Christian community who feared the destruction of local churches. Such tactics have become typical of Hezbollah and its allies and come as a part of a wider strategy of media manipulation.¹¹ Lebanese security sources have cast doubt on the veracity of these claims, however, suggesting that they are a strategic reading of events by Hezbollah, as a tactic to help determine political outcomes. Indeed, Lebanese security services were able to go some way to show that Hezbollah was behind the attacks when they located the users of a twitter account claiming to represent Command of the Sunnis of Baalbek, which turned out to be suspicious. The finding cast doubt on the notion that there was even such a militant group, let alone whether they had been behind an attack.¹² Once this was uncovered, suspicions arose about possible widespread espionage networks making use of social media like Twitter to agitate against Lebanon's Sunni community, particularly the Sunnis of Baalbek.

⁸ See his speech from Monday, September 23, 2013, published the following day in *Al Mustaqbal*, Page 4.

⁹ "Aarsaal Receives Hezbollah Secretary-General's Message," *An Nahar*, September 25, 2013: <http://www.annahar.com/article/70329> -هكذا-تلقت-عرسال-رسالة-حزب-الله

¹⁰ "Tufail now under Control of the Syrian Regime and Hezbollah," *Now Lebanon*, June 23, 2014: <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/ar/nownewsar/552799> -الطفيل-بيد-النظام-السوري-وحزب-الله

¹¹ "Chahhal: 'Ahrar as Sunna' is a Murky Group who Smear the Good Name of Islam", *Now Lebanon*, July 5, 2014: <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/ar/mediawatchinthePRESSar/554476> -الشهال-لواء-أحرار-السنة-فصيل-مشبه-يشوه-صورة-الإسلام

¹² See *Al Hayat*, July 7, 2014;

This sentiment was revealed at the highest level of the Lebanese government, when the country's Minister of the Interior Nihad al-Machnouk responded to alleged threats made by a group claiming to be the Command of the Free Sunnis saying: "I do not dignify comments such as these with any significance, since they have the tell-tale markings of an espionage story, and the sources of such rumors are well known."¹³ A government investigation that was leaked to the Lebanese media claimed that the group known only as the Command of the Free Sunnis of Baalbek only ever existed on Twitter. The Lebanese authorities went so far as to conclude that the individual responsible for running that group's account was a Hezbollah emissary to Syria.¹⁴

While fact, fiction and media manipulation were eventually made relatively clear, the strategy had its impact. Even as the accusations about the involvement of Lebanese Salafists in violence were shown to be false, the role of Lebanese Salafis began to take region-wide dimensions. On Sunday, June 6, 2014, a Lebanese suicide bomber known only as "Abu Hafs" blew himself up in a coffee shop in the working class neighborhood of Wishwash in central Baghdad.¹⁵ Acting under the banner of ISIL, the actions of Abu Hafs revealed that Lebanese extremists were capable of striking as far as Iraq, and in some measure realized the fears manufactured by Hezbollah.

Syria, the Arab Spring, and the Rise of Lebanon's Salafi Extremism

That Shi'ite Hezbollah fought alongside the Syrian regime in the midst of the Syrian revolution has led to increased sectarian tension between Lebanon's Sunni and Shi'ite communities, as well as a sense of resentment and marginalization for the Sunni community. This resentment was conducive to the formation of a radical Salafist group calling supporters to join the jihad alongside rebels in the Syrian revolution.¹⁶

¹³ *An Nahar*, July 7, 2014

¹⁴ "Investigations into Ahrar as Sunna Over; Group led by 'H.M.'," *Lebanon Files*, July 6, 2014: <http://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/738261>

¹⁵ As reported in the pan-Arab *Ash Sharq Al Awsat* on July 8, 2014, the man's real name was identified as Mustafa Abdulhay: <http://www.aawsat.com/home/article/133471>

¹⁶ On March 2, 2013, Sheikh Chahhal threatened to issue a fatwa (edict) against those who "trespassed against the Sunni Sect.. In a proclamation issued on April 22, 2013, Ahmad Aseer made clear that the "duty of all those capable, and particularly those in Lebanon, to carry out jihad in Syria." Another Sunni cleric, Sheikh Salem al-Rifai of the Muslim Clerics' League, stated "Hezbollah involvement in Syria is

The situation made Tripoli a natural flashpoint in the struggle, due to the long-standing enmity between its majority Alawite neighborhood in Jabal Mohsen and the majority Sunni and working class district of Bab at Tabbaneh. Commenting on the extent of confessional polarization between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Lebanon, the UN Secretary General's semi-annual report to the Security Council on UNSC Resolution 1559 stated: "Over the last six months, the ongoing turmoil in the Syrian Arab Republic has further affected Lebanon, increasing political polarization and concern that the unrest in Syria could have negative consequences for Lebanon's stability."¹⁷

Increased interest in the role of Lebanese Salafists can first be linked back to the Arab Spring, but particularly to the war in Syria, where the sectarian divides that emerged during the course of the war has spilled over into Lebanon. When Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, Salafis returned in droves, in particular to Tripoli and its satellite region of Akkar. By 2011, Lebanon's Salafis were strong enough to provide shelter for Syrian refugees entering the north of the country, which in turn enhanced the group's influence. Given the absence of a strong leader for Lebanon's Sunni community, the Salafists came to play a dominant political role.

As Lebanese Salafis consolidated their base between 2005-2011, anxieties within the broader Sunni community grew over the lack of a single leadership. Neither the Future Movement dominated by the Hariri family, nor the religious authorities Dar al-Fatwa (gripped by internal conflict), were able to step into the power vacuum. This only served to heighten such anxieties.¹⁸

dragging [Lebanon] towards internal dissent, and pushes the Free Syrian Army to bomb Lebanese villages." That statement followed on one day after an announcement rallying support for the victims in the village of al-Qusayr in the Hama countryside, along the Syrian-Lebanese frontier. This news was preceded by the announcement of the killing of 17 young men from Tripoli who were on their way to do battle with the Syrian regime under the auspices of a Sunni cleric named Khaled al-Mahmoud based in Bab at Tabbaneh. They were the apparent victims of an ambush set by the Syrian military in the area of Tal Kalkh on Saturday, December 1, 2012. (See media reports on Sunday, December 2, 2012; March 2, 2013 and April 22 and 23.)

¹⁷ See the *Sixteenth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)*, October 17, 2004;

¹⁸ Since 2011, the Sunni political leadership represented by Hariri (and others) was opposed to the Mufti Mohammad Rachid Qabbani and had accused him of serving Hezbollah and Syria. In August 2014, The Mufti was replaced with an official seen as closer to Hariri, who was also more in line with Egyptian officials and Saudi Arabia.

Contributing to the rise of the Salafi movement in Lebanon has been the growing popularity and influence of specific Salafist clerics for the Sunni public. This is a trend that can also be observed across the region. In Lebanon, these populist clerics include sheikhs like Salman al-Awda and Sheikh al-Ar'our, known for their antagonism towards Shi'ite Muslims. Their anti-Shi'ite has found a receptive audience amongst Lebanon's Sunni community due in large part to the support that the Syrian regime (Alawite) receives from Iran and Hezbollah (both Shi'ite). Sunni Islamists and especially Salafis have come to see this cooperation between the communities as proof that their Shi'ite compatriots and Hezbollah wanted to become the dominant power in Lebanon. Specifically, Sunni groups saw this as meaning the domination of Sunni Muslims. From this perspective, Sunni groups saw events in Lebanon as connected to those in Iraq and Bahrain, where Iran is seen to be working to establish a "Shi'ite Crescent" across the Levant and Mesopotamia.¹⁹

Transformation of Lebanese Salafism

Salafism as a religious movement has been present in Lebanon since the 1950s in one form or another, but limited to small groups or regions. In the last twenty years, however, it has gained importance principally by virtue of its entry into the Lebanese political landscape. Previously, Lebanese Salafis had restricted themselves to proselytizing and charity work, but with the struggle against the Syrian regime and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, the groups entered into politics. The politicization of the Salafis in Lebanon can be seen to have been governed by the violence of the Syrian conflict.

At its core, however –and as in other Arab countries—the Salafist movement in Lebanon is primarily a social one. Even Salafi political bodies tend to be "unofficial," primarily civil or voluntary organizations, and are an integral part of a community's social fabric. The groups have succeeded because they have been able to fulfill what T.B. Bottomore has suggested is a criteria around which they formulate a creed capable of inspiring

¹⁹ The term "Shi'a Crescent" was coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan and first used in an interview given to the *Washington Post*, during a visit to the United States at the beginning of December 2004. He used the term to express his fear of a pro-Iranian regime emerging in Baghdad, which he suggested would create an unbroken chain of Shi'ite influence stretching from Iran to Lebanon, and challenge the balance of power that currently stands with Sunni Muslims. King Abdullah II suggested that such a development would pose serious questions for the economic and political stability of many of the countries in the region.

enthusiasm and commitment to continued political activity. The groups have also been able to create a theory that capable of explaining all major phenomena, have done well in clarifying what the aims of the movement were, and have drawn up alternative aims and goals and been able to show how these would be achieved.²⁰

While the traditional form of reformist Salafism was limited to questions of religious faith, its new radical is in direct confrontation with a social environment that it sees as amiss. Radical Salafism (or Neo Salafism) seeks to introduce its formula for religious perfection into all aspects of political and social life, to allay the damage the community sees as having been done by modernization and materialism. Implementing this vision is part of a desire to rebuild an entire social system in accordance with principles derived from sacred religious texts. However, these religious texts contain no shortage of inconsistencies, as evidenced by the social circumstances that give rise to fundamentalism. This extremist approach to both religious rhetoric and to action is tempered only by the group's ability and willingness to integrate into political institutions.

Contemporary Salafism is a sociological, anthropological, political, and psychological phenomenon that merits extensive attention in order to better understand not only its size, but also the role it plays in society, and its ability to attract a large following in a society polarized by sectarianism such as is the case in Lebanon. With its focus on society's uneducated underclass, Salafism has proven capable of remarkable mass mobilization. This is principally because of its reliance on the simplification of practices: from a simplification of the articles of religious faith (for example, of the concept of "*tawhid*" or the singularity of God); of religious behaviors (for example, the emphasis on the *Salaf*, the pious forebears of the Muslim community, and the replication of the actions of the earliest Muslims down to the smallest detail allows replicating the piety of the earliest Muslims). Salafism offers a religious norm that has been gradually able to displace the prevailing "authentic" religious practices in cities like as Tripoli, which had previously been the home of a Sufi-influenced folk religion. In regions of central Arabia such as Nejd, Salafism has been able to replace the imported Wahhabism. This raises questions about the robustness of the religious norms that were previously in place, and their inability to withstand an assault by a seemingly alien ideology that has nothing in common with its surrounding Mediterranean environment. Many observers

²⁰ T. Bottomor, *Political Philosophy* (in Arabic translation), Al Taleea Press, Beirut, 1986, p. 62;

regard that—at least in the case of Tripoli—imported religious norms have been blended in to the city’s Mediterranean milieu. In particular around power and filiation structures where, religious roles have been found for some of the traditional social players in the family-centered neighborhood (*Hara*). The use of neighborhood youth as vigilante groups is one example that is able to bolster the ability of the social periphery to deploy violence. This takes power away from the more central authority of the government. In Tripoli today, this has also overlapped with a pattern of local migration: while affluent families have left the heart of the Old City and its traditional neighborhoods to live in newer suburbs, poorer migrants from the rural hinterland have moved in, joining in with the poorer denizens unable to leave.²¹

Salafism has thus been part of a sociological transformation that today encompasses both traditional forms of “folk religion” and the participation of the population in political and public affairs. The principal reason for its strength has been the failure of older structures—the Tawhid Movement, official Sunni Muslim institutions and the Jamaat Islamiya—in the face of the Sunni-Shi’ite polarization following Lebanon’s conflicts of 2005 and 2006. Neo Salafist movements filled the gaps in the earlier order, in particular dissatisfaction within Lebanon’s Sunni Muslim community that the leadership (in particular the Future Party) had become centralized in the hands of limited elites who were out of touch with their constituents.

Given the context within which Salafism grew in Lebanon, and the conditions under which it has been taken up, it can only ever be a catchall, descriptive term for a type of religiosity driven by sectarian-confessional sentiment. Further, Salafi groups seek to maintain their independence in the face of all other prevailing societal relations; it looks to preserve an isolated purity even in relation to its grassroots amongst the broader Sunni Muslim community.

In seeking to understand the current Salafi trend, it is crucial to understand it not only as a movement opposed to the standing social and political institutions, as religion as something that it is only draped in as a mode of protest against contemporary cultural adaptations, but most significantly, it must be seen as a self-conscious movement. This self-consciousness has been instrumental to the way in which Salafism has become its own identifier. This can be seen in the multiple symbolic systems deployed by the new movement.

²¹ See Khaled Ziada, *Harat al Ahl Jadat al Lahoo* (“Family Neighborhoods and Avenues for Play”), Beirut, An Nahar Press, 1995, pp. 90-96;

The first symbolic system is that of purity, allowing adherents access to an ideological discourse allowing them to self-identify as pure. This complements the self-identification of the vigilante youths living in the traditional neighborhoods of the old cities, youth who have articulated their mission as one of purifying the city. This is also consistent with the *modus operandi* of more established activist, radical political Islamist movements, which have worked to construct new neighborhood mosques. These mosques are built with the help of the laboring classes, who also participate in convening specialist classes devoted to the memorization of the Koran and other religious practices. As it is being practiced in Lebanon, this Neo Salafism can be read as an expression of populist religiosity on the part of the working class: it is another example of what has been called “civil society” in other contexts, where the faithful arrange their own devotional affairs away from any governmental involvement.

Yet a parallel facet of the Neo Salafism –and a second level of symbolism—is the emergence of a new kind of individualist behavior. This system expresses the desire of the religiously devout to distinguish themselves from general society in everything from the clothes they wear and the food they eat to their practice of religious rituals. This is the sector of Salafi elite sporting beards with shaved moustaches, and wearing long, traditional gowns; amongst women in this group, there is also an emphasis on veiling, including the face-covering *niqab*.

Making use of these symbols, neighborhoods are divided at times with physical boundaries, rendering some neighborhoods ‘pure and free’ of any admixture or assimilation across societal divides. This has been the case between the neighborhoods of Bab at-Tabaneh and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, as well as for Dahiye, and the predominantly Sunni Muslim districts that surround it. It is physical, rigid boundaries such as these that allow for the creation of symbols demarcating clear boundaries between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ These symbolic systems and sub-identities are renewed and reinforced through constant practice. In this new system, ritualized observances become not only a religious practice, but also a definition of resistance that allows practitioners to create for themselves a fantastical and legendary identity; one that allows them to overcome some of the difficulties in their daily lives.

When identity becomes a focus of popular agitation and daily politics, and a sacred cow for ethnic and religious groups and indeed of entire nations, then social and economic motivations for behavior are replaced with cultural and religious factors in the sphere of social conflict. Throughout, the mosque remains the focus of social action, having either replaced or augmented the niche traditionally filled by the café amongst the poor and

marginalized. The mosques allowed the youth who operated within them to finally become visible, to appear before the rest of society, reversing their previous invisibility. For youth, the mosque is the first 'liberated' social space they encounter, one in which they have a wide margin of freedom from official, bureaucratic and religious bodies.²²

The most significant, and altogether frightening, aspect of all of this has been the burgeoning spread of demands by Salafi groups for the establishment of an Islamic state, the implementation of Sharia law, a rejection of and antipathy towards societal diversity and pluralism, and an opposition to the social integration that was the hallmark of the nation-building project. With the failure of nation building came the rise of sub-national identities, including ethnic and sectarian affiliations, and a concomitant decline in identification with the state and a deterioration in the meaning of citizenship.²³

Neo Salafism is thus simply a mechanism for religion/sect to reassert its role as a form of resistance, and to move from that, from a symbol of marginalization to a mode of dominance. It is a revitalized, energetic religious expression of the rejection of routine, superficial actions and elite practices. After refuting the current religious authorities, the Neo Salafist movement invents its own set of religious leaders with immense moral power bordering on divinity. This gives rise to a sense of sanctified enthusiasm and awe, inspiring further group cohesion and pride.

The Neo Salafist attempts to reframe the Sunni confession in the context of the present political conflict in the Middle East essentially rests on a tribal conceptualization of sect. In other words, the Salafi movement is based on a larger, imagined group's chauvinism.²⁴ This is a group that "first and foremost, adopt[s] the thinking of a

²² This was the juncture that led to a series of battles for the control of a number of mosques. The battle between the Dar al Fatwa, Lebanon's official Sunni authority, and the *Ahbash* charitable group, supported by both Syrian and Lebanese espionage agencies, was only one such battle. Sheikh Osama Qassass, killed by members of the *Ahbash* in Tripoli, is regarded as being the first martyr slain by the Salafis.

²³ For more information on this period, see *Islamist Groups and Violence (Arabic)*, Madarek Publishing, Beirut, 2011.

²⁴ Hamoud Hamoud, *The Brotherhood of Fundamentalism and Sectarianism: the Brotherhood of Damascus as an Example (Arabic)*, Compass Publications, Berlin, 2003, pp. 24-30.

religious sect that sees itself locked in a battle to defend the sacred, and to promote it amongst others."²⁵

It is sectarian, inward-looking chauvinism—whether it is based on religious beliefs or, as in the case of the Kurds, on ethnicity—which provides a group with internal cohesion, consistency, and purpose. Such sentiment gives spirit to groups like the Salafis, particularly in situations where a multitude of groups share the same space. Similarly, the sectarian mechanism is only ever produced in reference to other, different groups: indeed it is only ever produced as part of a wider context of sectarian conflict.²⁶

In order for a sectarian identity to take shape, there must be a surrounding environment with which it identifies, but, equally, against which it can be distinguished. In other words, context is an active factor in the propagation and longevity of identity. Sectarian identity will thus always be, to some extent, a product of the society, culture and heritage that gives rise to it. Of course, certain factors may play larger roles than others, with religion, in particular, being crucial here. Importantly, the centrality of religion to these identities is not echoed in greater devotion or faith, but rather reflects a strategic decision as a mode of self-assertion. Benefiting from the lack of formal religious institutions governing the Sunni Muslim faith, the Neo Salafis have been able to identify their movement with a broader Sunni Islam. They further appropriate the right to represent the collective memory of the majority of Sunni Muslims in opposition to other groups that they view as having illegitimately monopolized representation of Sunni Muslims. In Lebanon, this has come to be the Future Party and the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Jamaat Islamiya.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 26

²⁶ “Field” (French: “champ”) was a concept introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, who believed that society was composed of groups with varying degrees of relative autonomy, and their own internal logic. Such a division allowed sociology to study each of its fields separately, to understand each in its own essence. According to Bourdieu, these fields have very real, material existence: they are expressed by institutions which define and manifest their meaning, but are never removed from social actors. See: Patrice Bonnewitz, *Premières leçons sur la sociologie de Pierre Bourdieu*, 2eme ed. (PUF, Paris, 2002).

Conclusion

The Syrian conflict, and increased confessional polarization between Muslim sects regionally, has been key to understanding the transformations that have radicalized the Salafi movement in Lebanon. This radicalization can be understood to have gone hand in hand with a novel Salafist self-identification that distinguished it from all other sections of the community, including its broader Sunni Muslim environment. All of these transformations had taken effect before ISIL captured large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, and declared an Islamic Caliphate, with leaders fighting against the Syrian regime and declaring fealty to the leader of the Islamic State.^{27,28, 29} The question that remains is how to predict the future of the Salafi movement. From this moment and political context, there is enough to indicate potential sectarian war bloodier than anything Lebanon has ever seen.

²⁷ Known by the acronym ISIL –the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (alternatively, “Iraq and Syrial”, “Iraq and Sham”) — the group is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Adopting a jihadist Salafi line, the group seeks to establish an Islamic Caliphate and apply Islamic religious (Sharia) law across the region.

²⁸ ISIS declared a caliphate on June 29, 2014, announcing that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was to be recognized as the ‘Caliph of all Muslims.’ Spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani declared that the names “Iraq” and “Syria” were fetishistic relics of an earlier system and would no longer be used: from now on, the group and the territory it controlled would be known simply as the “Islamic State.”

²⁹ Report in al-Araby al-Jadid on ISIS controlling Deir az-Zour and laying siege to rebel towns, July 7, 2014: <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/48b9db89-3481-4d75-bc04-15cac2455123>