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Developments in Radicalisation  
and Political Violence

# Votes and Violence: Islamists and The Processes of Transformation

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Omar Ashour

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# **Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence**

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## Summary

As opposed to the common perception that Islamist movements subscribe to a similar set of ideologies defying behavioural and organisational change, there have been multiple transformations that developed within many of these movements, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century and early twenty first century. These transformations can be described as processes of change that are centered on the stated positions of Islamist movements' leaders relative to their positions in the past, usually with respect to the two issues of political violence and democracy. The processes of change within Islamist movements can take three possible paths: the path of radicalisation, the path of moderation, or the path of de-radicalisation. The paper is reviewing and analysing the three processes of change within Islamist movements.

This paper is based on a chapter in Omar Ashour's recently published book *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*. It has been reproduced with the full permission of Routledge.

## About Omar Ashour

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# Votes and Violence: Islamists and The Processes of Transformation

*“Permanent continuity is an impossibility”*

An Arab Proverb

## Transformations within Islamism

As opposed to the common perception that Islamist movements subscribe to a similar set of ideologies defying behavioural and organisational change, there have been remarkable transformations that developed within many of these movements, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century. These transformations can be described as processes of change that are centered on the stated positions of Islamist movements' leaders relative to their positions in the past, usually with respect to the two issues of political violence and democracy.<sup>1</sup> The processes of change within Islamist movements can take three possible paths: the path of moderation, the path of radicalisation, or the path of de-radicalisation.<sup>2</sup>

Generally, most of the studies on Islamist movements attempt to explain the two processes of radicalisation (especially violent radicalisation) and moderation (the positive attitudes towards democracy and democratisation). The literature on this addresses and debates the causes of radicalisation since the late 1970's.<sup>3</sup> As for moderation, fewer works have addressed the causes of that process as it is a relatively

1 Ashour (2009) p.11

2 Those processes will be defined in the following section.

3 Ibrahim (1980, 1982); Roy (1994); Esposito (1997); Anderson (1997); Fuller (2002); Hafez (2000, 2004); Wiktorowicz (2004)

recent development.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, the reasons behind renouncing violence (behavioural de-radicalisation) and delegitimising it (ideological de-radicalisation) have not been sufficiently investigated in the literature, with the exception of a few recent studies.<sup>5</sup>

The focus of this article will be reviewing the three processes of change (radicalisation, moderation and de-radicalisation) within Islamist movements. I start by analysing the studies on radicalisation in Islamist movements. This is followed by a review of studies on moderation processes within these groups. That discussion is followed by highlighting a gap in the literature when it comes to Islamist de-radicalisation.

## What are We Talking about?

Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation and Moderation are processes of relative change within Islamist movements that can occur on the ideological and/or the behavioural levels, evenly or unevenly across issue areas. The three processes are centered on changes in the stated positions and views of Islamist leaders and groups on political violence and democracy relative to their positions in the past.

### *Radicalisation*

Radicalisation is a process of relative change in which a group undergoes ideological and/or behavioural transformations that lead to the rejection of democratic principles (including the peaceful alternation of power and the legitimacy of ideological and political pluralism), demands for revolutionary sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural changes, and possibly to the utilisation of violence, or to an increase in the levels of violence, to achieve political goals. Examples of increasing the levels of violence would be expanding the

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4 The moderation processes started to be “institutionalized” in the late 1990s – most notably in Egypt with the official split of the Muslim Brothers and the *Wasat* Party in 1996 and in Turkey with the Justice and Development Party breaking away from the Virtue Party in 2001. Wickham (2004); Clark (2006); Schwedler (2006)

5 Ashour (2007); International Crisis Group (2007); Ashour (2008); Ashour (2009); Bjore and Horgan (2009).

selection of targets to include civilians, indiscriminate violence and, in techniques, suicide bombings.<sup>6</sup>

### *De-Radicalisation*

De-radicalisation is another process of relative change within Islamist movements, one in which a radical group reverses its ideology and de-legitimises the use of violent methods to achieve political goals, while also moving towards an acceptance of gradual social, political and economic changes within a pluralist context. A group undergoing a de-radicalisation process does not have to ideologically abide by democratic principles – whether electoral or liberal, and does not have to participate in an electoral process.<sup>7</sup> De-radicalisation is primarily concerned with changing the attitudes of armed Islamist movements towards violence, rather than toward democracy. Many de-radicalised groups still uphold misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-democratic views.

Separate from the ideological level, de-radicalisation can occur only on the behavioural level. On that level, de-radicalisation means practically abandoning the use of violence to achieve political goals without a concurrent process of ideological de-legitimation of violence. De-radicalisation can occur in only one of the two levels.

Finally, there is also a third level of de-radicalisation. Following the declaration of ideological and/or behavioural de-radicalisation by the leadership of an armed group(s), there is usually the challenge of organisational de-radicalisation: the dismantlement of the armed units of the organisation, which includes discharging/demobilising their members without splits, mutiny or internal violence.

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6 For instance, the methods utilized by the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) after 1994 exemplify increasing the level of violence.

7 An example would be the Egyptian Islamic Group which – based on their interpretation of Islam – still rejects democracy. However, their newly developed ideology de-legitimizes violence and accepts ‘the other’ – not necessarily as an ‘enemy’.

## *Moderation*

Finally, moderation is a process of relative change within Islamist movements that is mainly concerned with the attitudes of these movements towards democracy. Moderation can take place on two levels: on the ideological level, where the key transformation is the acceptance of democratic principles, most importantly the legitimacy of pluralism and the peaceful alternation of power. On the behavioural level, the key transformation is participation in electoral politics (if allowed). Different levels of moderation can occur within both non-violent radical and moderate<sup>8</sup> Islamist movements unevenly and across issue areas.

## **On Radicalisation: Structural-Psychological Approaches Versus Political Process**

The literature on the causes of radicalisation can be divided into two broad approaches: the structural-psychological<sup>9</sup> and the social movement approaches. Following Ted Gurr's seminal book *Why Men Rebel* (1970), the classic models of the structural-psychological approach posit 'a linear causal relationship in which [socio-structural] strains produce psychological discomfort which, in turn, produces collective action'.<sup>10</sup> Scholars and experts have introduced several types of socio-structural strains and debated their relative importance. The four main types are socioeconomic, identity-based, cultural, and political.

### *Structural-Psychological Approaches: Socioeconomics?*

Ibrahim (1980, 1996), Ansari (1984), Zubaida, (1989), Anderson (1991), Ayubi (1991), Tessler (1997) and others have emphasized the importance of socioeconomic factors in explaining the psychological alienation and, therefore, radicalisation of Islamist activists. Their arguments mainly

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8 An example of a higher level of moderation is accepting liberal democracy as opposed to electoral democracy.

9 Also referred to as 'frustration-aggression' models

10 Wiktorowicz (2004) p. 6



recycle relative deprivation models<sup>11</sup> to argue that Islamist movements represent modern reactions to rapid urbanisation, overpopulation, unemployment, poverty, marginalisation of lower/lower-middle classes and visible minorities, skewed income distribution, and corrupt elites. Given these socioeconomic strains, disenfranchised youth seek radical changes through protest and, in some cases, violent struggle.<sup>12</sup>

As shown by the scholars who uphold this approach, there is some empirical support to socioeconomic explanations of radicalisation. The works within this category have shown indicators that membership in Islamist movements are partially correlated with socioeconomic dislocations, including poverty, income inequalities, and lack of basic social services.<sup>13</sup> Several case-studies support this line of argument. These cases include the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) membership in Algeria and France,<sup>14</sup> and *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* case in Egypt.<sup>15</sup>

Still, there are several problems with these socioeconomic explanations. First, they fail to answer the question ‘why Islamism?’ These socioeconomically disenfranchised individuals and groups could have chosen ideologies that directly address their grievances, like Marxism. Instead these individuals chose to rally around Islamist symbols and figures. Given that, socioeconomic explanations do not adequately capture the socio-cultural dimension of radical Islamism.

In addition, when these explanations are tested empirically, there is usually a selective focus on the socioeconomically disenfranchised members and leaders of a specific radical group. Therefore, these explanations do not adequately answer the question of why do members of the upper and upper-middle classes get radicalised.<sup>16</sup> After all, both Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri are members of the Saudi and

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11 Gurr (1970)

12 Tessler (1997); Ibrahim (1980, 1996)

13 Davis (1984); Dekmejian (1988)

14 Tessler (1997)

15 Ibrahim (1980)

16 Although relative deprivation theory explicitly addresses the issue of upper class expectations and discontents, the literature on Islamist radicalization tends to focus on lower classes, and therefore advances the notion that absolute deprivation and poverty causes social alienation followed by radicalization. See, for example Davis (1984), Dekmejian (1988).

Egyptian upper classes respectively. Further, none of the 19 hijackers of 9/11 belonged to the lower classes.<sup>17</sup> Due to that selective focus, socioeconomic explanations fail to provide a general framework to explain the causes of radicalisation of Islamist movements.

### *Structural-Psychological Approaches: Identity?*

Other scholars have argued for the relative importance of identity politics in explaining Islamist radicalisation.<sup>18</sup> Their arguments attempt to explain radicalisation as a reaction to the growing influence of Western and other non-Islamic cultures in predominantly Muslim societies, diasporas, or communities. The primary hypothesis of these arguments is that Islamists will uphold radical religious and religio-national identities in response to what they perceive as 'cultural imperialism'. That perception is usually bolstered by non-Muslim military presence like in the Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, and Afghan cases, by long colonial confrontations as in Algeria and Chechnya,<sup>19</sup> by losing 'cultural values', or by integration failures within Western societies. Following this line of argument, radicalisation occurs in a context, or during a process of, 'cultural defence'.

Another identity-related approach, one that differs from the cultural defense thesis,<sup>20</sup> is the political culture argument. This approach is based on two assumptions. The first, like the cultural defence approach, is that Muslims possess a strong sense of religio-cultural identity that affects their behaviours and worldviews.<sup>21</sup> Following from that, the second assumption is that Muslim political behaviour is influenced by Islamic scriptures and classics.<sup>22</sup> Given the broadness and, sometimes,

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17 Fouda (2005)

18 Kramer (1997); Burgat and Dowell (1997), Esposito (1997); Ibrahim (2004)

19 Kramer (1997); Fuller (2002)

20 This argument does not belong to structural-psychological approaches. I mention it here due to its relation with the identity-based 'cultural defense' approach as well as due to the fact that it is common in the literature, media and sometimes political rhetoric.

21 Sivan (1985); Lewis (1991)

22 Sivan (1985); Lewis (1991); This is the point where the two approaches differ. Whereas the cultural defense approach argues that radicalization occurs in reaction to cultural imperialism, the political culture approach argues that radicalism can be traced to, and legitimized by, classical Islamic scriptures.

vagueness of these textual sources, radical interpretations of them are usually an option. Thus, the political culture approach argues that radicalism can be based on Islamic injunctions and identities. Therefore, as opposed to cultural defence, radicalisation can occur without 'cultural imperialism.'

Despite doing a superb job in addressing the salience of cultural norms within Islamist politics, and despite being common within some of the literature on Islamist movements as well as much of the coverage by media outlets, there are many problems with identity-based approaches. First, identity-based explanations that invoke culture suffer from definitional and methodological problems: such as defining culture and explaining how it can be measured in an unbiased manner.<sup>23</sup> In addition, there are several sweeping assumptions at the core of the identity-based approaches. First, there is an assumption that religio-national identities are always strong among Muslims, not just with Muslims who support Islamist movements. Following from that, there is another assumption that political action is a natural derivative of these strong religio-national identities and sentiments as well as religious and ideological narratives. In other words, identity-based approaches assume that there is a linear correlation between identity and political behaviour, as well as scriptures and political behaviour. More importantly, these approaches fail to account for several empirical cases. For example, if identity determines behaviour, why would an Islamist-leaning party like the Justice and Development Party (AKP) relentlessly pursue a European Union (EU) membership for Turkey, or why would Iraqi<sup>24</sup> and Afghan<sup>25</sup> Islamist movements cooperate with the US-led coalition and/or with NATO to overthrow nationalists or Islamist regimes in their countries? It seems the identity-based approach would predict very different behaviour by Islamist actors than that exhibited in these episodes.

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23 Hudson (1995) pp. 29-34

24 Like Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, *al-Da'wa* Party and, to a lesser extent, the Islamic Party (Muslim Brothers in Iraq).

25 Like the Islamic Society led by the former president as well as *Mujahidiyn* leader Burhannudin Rabbani and the Islamic Union in Afghanistan led by former *Mujahidiyn* leader, Abd Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf. The Union is now known as the Islamic Call Organization. In addition, the Northern Alliance that collaborated with the US to overthrow the Taliban in 2001 was mainly an Islamist coalition, with a few exceptions within its ranks.

Finally, recent empirical works on the relationship between religiosity and political attitudes represent a challenge to these identity-based approaches. Based on his surveys and empirical research in four Arab countries, political scientist Mark Tessler found that 'Islam appears to have less influence on political attitudes than is frequently suggested by students of Arab and Islamic society'.<sup>26</sup> To illustrate this, his study shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between attitudes towards democracy and personal piety in Morocco and Algeria.<sup>27</sup>

More problematic, especially with the political culture approach given its emphasis on primordialism, is the constant failure to explain change within Islamist movements. Case studies and comparative analyses have shown that many Islamist political movements, whether radical or moderate, change their ideologies, identities and behaviour over time.<sup>28</sup> Then, the problematic question for the political culture approach is: if identities are primordial, classic scriptures do not change, and Islamist movements strongly uphold both, why would these groups change their behaviours, ideologies and therefore radicalise, de-radicalise, or moderate?

### *Structural-Psychological Approaches: Politics?*

A third approach within the literature on radicalisation argues for the relative importance of political stress as a source of psychological discomfort and alienation. Radicalisation is perceived here as a reaction to predominant authoritarianism, state repression, and forced exclusion.<sup>29</sup> Francois Burgat best illustrates this approach by arguing that any Western political party could be turned into the GIA in weeks if it was subjected to the same level of political repression that Islamists have endured.<sup>30</sup>

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26 Tessler (2002) p. 351

27 Ibid, p. 350

28 Ashour and Unluckayakli (2006); Ashour (2007, 2008, 2009); Voll (1992); Entelis (1998); Roy (1994, 1999); Wickham (2002, 2004).

29 Hudson (1995); Anderson (1997, 2000); Ibrahim (2002); Burgat (2002); Hafez (2004)

30 Burgat (1997) p. 45

There is strong empirical support for this particular type of structural-psychological approach, most notably the cases of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt<sup>31</sup> (1954-1969), the MB in Syria (1980s), the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria (1992-1997), the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tajikistan (1992-1997), and others. In these aforementioned cases, the tendency to work within a democratic framework and/or established state institutions did exist initially, and radicalisation has occurred in response to exclusion and political repression. Also, radical Islamist movements and ideologies which are prone to violence were all born in authoritarian states during highly repressive periods. Jihadism<sup>32</sup> and Takfirism<sup>33</sup> were both born in Egyptian political prisons where torture ranged from a systematic daily practice in some periods to a selective-but-widespread practice in others.<sup>34</sup> Mainstream Salafism, as we understand it today, was developed in Saudi Arabia, another country whose ruling regime has an inglorious human rights record. The three exclusionary ideologies that guide almost all violent Islamists were not born in a democratic country.

However, that is only one part of the whole puzzle. Similar types of political strains on domestic groups have led to the opposite effect: moderation. As opposed to the Algerian scenario of a decade-long, bloody civil war, political pressures<sup>35</sup> on Turkish Islamists in 1997 led to the moderation of their

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31 The Egyptian MB is an interesting and rich case. Given 55 years of repression and exclusion, it passed through phases of radicalization (1954-1969), de-radicalization (1969-1973) and then moderation (1973 - Present).

32 The core of *Jihadism* stresses the use of violence as a legitimate, and in most versions, **the** legitimate, method of political and social change. Jihadists mostly use selective and literal salafi interpretations of Islamic sources and hence the term "salafi-jihadist."

33 Takfir (excommunication) is the act of accusing a Muslim of abandoning Islam and becoming an unbeliever or an apostate (*murtadd*). Based on that concept, Takfirism is an ideology whose basic assumption labels a whole Muslim community (a village, a city, a country or the global Muslim community) as infidels/apostates, unless proven otherwise. This is the core difference between Takfirism and the rest of Islamist ideologies. This has practical consequences. Takfiri groups can be violent or non-violent. If they became violent, then there is usually a wide selection of targets from all segments of the society, sometimes including women and children like the case of the Algerian GIA after 1994.

34 Ramadan (1993); Ra'if (1993, 2005).

35 The pressures however were by no means equivalent to the pressure tactics employed in Algeria.

rhetoric and behaviour.<sup>36</sup> Political strains have led to similar effects being witnessed in the cases of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party (PJD), the Egyptian *Wasat* (Centre) Party and the Tunisian *al-Nahda* (Renaissance) Party. Thus, while such political strains are necessary to radicalise a movement, they are usually insufficient to do that on their own.

Additionally, radicalisation can occur within democracies, as illustrated by ‘home-grown’ terrorist cases like the 7/7 bombings, several other bombing attempts in the UK, the ‘Toronto 17’ and the Khawaja cases in Canada,<sup>37</sup> and others in Europe and North America. Although the ideological frameworks that legitimise violence were developed in authoritarian states, the organisational and technical training to execute violent action is also exported from such repressive or failed states; the challenge to the political strains approach is why there is a ‘will’ to execute political violence in democratic societies, where there are other channels available to express political grievances?

### *Relevant Arguments about Radicalisation*

Finally, two arguments in the literature on the causes and levels of radicalisation should be mentioned here. First, some scholars have attempted to directly correlate the shape of Islamist activism as well as the level of radicalism with the intensity of the structural strains within the crisis environment.<sup>38</sup> It would follow that the more severe the socioeconomic, identity and/or political crises are, the higher the levels of violent radicalism.<sup>39</sup>

The second argument is more recent and comes from organisational theorists. The main hypothesis of this argument is that the fundamental cause of violent radicalisation is organisational.<sup>40</sup> Based on some of the studies on ethnic conflict and failed states,<sup>41</sup> organisational explanations are

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36 Yavuz (2006); Ashour and Unluçayaklı (2006).

37 9/11 was not included here since the terrorists were from outside the US, although the radicalization of some of them occurred in Europe.

38 Dekmejian (1995) p. 6; Esposito (1992) pp. 12-17.

39 The critique of this argument is discussed in the following section.

40 Rosa (2006) p. 3.

41 Fukuyama (2004); Mowle (2006); Rosa (2006); Marten (2007).

based on the notion that both state and group factionalisation/ de-centralisation increase radicalisation. The state's withdrawal from its classic spheres of influence,<sup>42</sup> including providing services and a monopoly over means of violence, allows radical groups to fill that vacuum and challenge the state. This state withdrawal could be due to lack of capacity, will or both. On the other side, factionalisation of radical groups is positively correlated with an increase in the levels of violence that these groups perpetrate.<sup>43</sup> The empirical examples that are usually cited to support this argument are the cases of al-Qa'ida and other smaller radical groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

Whereas the organisational arguments can partially explain several cases of further radicalisation, they do not explain the causes of this process. Many radical Islamist movements were born in strong, centralised states like Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Factionalisation and de-centralisation have only affected these groups in a secondary stage. 'Failed states' acted as facilitating grounds, mainly for mobilisation, recruitment, training and resource gathering (like the case of Afghanistan), but not as a cause behind the initial radicalisation of the group.

### *Structural-Psychological Approaches: Are They Really That Useful?*

In the literature on social movements, stark criticism is levelled against the structural-psychological models.<sup>44</sup> The same critiques are relevant to the study of radical Islamist movements. One of the main critiques is that structural strains, regardless of their versions (socioeconomic, political, identity-based), are ubiquitous to all societies but they do not always lead to violent radicalism. On the contrary, poorer societies coupled with repressive regimes tend to produce fewer rebels – whether Islamists or not. In Leon Trotsky's words, 'the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection, if it were the masses would be always in revolt'.<sup>45</sup> Regarding Islamists specifically, several scholars have shown that the variations in Islamist violence in the Middle East does

42 Richards and Waterbury (1987)

43 Hafez (2004) p. 23

44 McAdam (2001).

45 Trotsky (1961) p. 249.

not correspond to variations in structural strains (especially socioeconomic strains) across the region. The cases examined include Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.<sup>46</sup>

Another critique of these approaches is related to their static nature and the validity of their vision of linear, causal relationships. Islamists do not always turn to violent struggles and radical ideologies whenever there is intense structural strain. If that was the case, the overwhelming majority of Islamist movements would be armed and violent.<sup>47</sup> Also, even when the choice is in favour of violent struggle and radicalism, and even when the structural-psychological approaches are successful in explaining that choice in specific cases, the explanation is limited to the nature of the grievances. In other words, the purpose (dogmatic vs. pragmatic), the scale (national vs. international), the scope (limited vs. expansive), the intensity (sustained vs. sporadic) and the duration (brief vs. protracted) of armed militancy, all associated with the violent radicalisation process, are left unexplained by structural-psychological approaches.

Finally, structural-psychological approaches, at least in their classical versions, imply that structural change is required for a shift towards de-radicalisation and moderation. Yet, empirical evidence overwhelms that implication. Among the “anomalies” are the cases of the *Wasat* Party and the Islamic Group in Egypt, the Justice and Development Parties in Turkey and Morocco, the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan, and several individual and factional cases in the United Kingdom. Structural-psychological approaches do not adequately explain change under continuous structural strains, whether real or perceived.

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46 Hafez (2004).

47 The largest and the most popular of these movements are unarmed and believe/participate in electoral politics, like the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and many of their autonomous branches in Jordan, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Sudan, Kuwait and other countries; the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in Tajikistan, *Islah* (Reform) Party in Yemen, and the National Outlook Movement and its associated parties in Turkey.



## *Neither Structure, Nor Agent: Is It The Process?*

Despite the aforementioned critiques, most of the literature on Islamist movements in general, and Islamist radicalism in particular, is confined to structural-psychological explanations. Recently, alternative approaches have been advanced to explain the causes of Islamist radicalism as well as the shift towards moderation: these are under the umbrella of social movement theory, and include resource mobilisation theory, the political process model, and collective action framing.<sup>48</sup>

The political process approach was developed and utilised by social movement theorists.<sup>49</sup> This approach addresses several limitations of the structural-psychological approaches, especially its lack of dynamism and emphasis on causal linearity. Regarding Islamist movements, the premise is that 'it is neither necessary for Islamists to be contended to become moderate nor sufficient for Islamists to be deprived to become rebellious'.<sup>50</sup> The political process model emphasizes the dynamism of the political environment and asserts the primacy of process over structure. Resource mobilisation theory emphasizes the availability and mobilisation of resources - whether the resources are material, organisational, ideational or institutional. For the proponents of these approaches:

social and political movements do not correspond mechanistically to existing conditions; rather, they continually mobilise resources, apply them in various forms of collective action or 'tactics' and experience the consequences of those strategies in a fully interrelated process that also affects subsequent 'rounds' of mobilisation, action and outcome.<sup>51</sup>

In this sense, Islamist politics is perceived as an intersection of political opportunities, mobilisation strategies, as well as mobilising frames and symbols that resonate with Muslim cultures.<sup>52</sup> To sum up, social movement theory attempts to

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48 Yavuz, (2003); Hafez (2004); Wicktorowicz (2004); Wickham (2002, 2004).

49 Tilly (1978); McAdam (1982); DeNardo (1985); Tarrow (1996); McAdam et al. (2001).

50 Hafez (2004) pp. 19-20

51 Snyder and Kelly (1979) p. 219

52 Tilly (1997) pp. 151-157; McAdam et al. (2004)

explain Islamist radicalism (and/or moderation) by investigating the political environment in which Islamists operate, the mobilisation structures through which they garner resources and the ideological frames through which they legitimise their actions.

The main critique of process-oriented approaches is that it is a catchall – almost the polar opposite of parsimony. These approaches fail to provide a manageable set of causal variables that explain Islamist transformations. Terms like ‘political environment’ could include many variables like domestic institutions, regime types, international/regional actors, geopolitics, political cultures and historical peculiarities. Using those broad terms might be useful in studying a single case or a few cases in a relatively homogenous region. However, producing cross-regional generalisable analysis will be difficult. Even so, the interplay among the three dimensions of social movement theory (political environment, mobilisation structures and ideological frames) can be the key to understanding change within Islamist movements, especially under continuity, when some of, or most structural strains remain constant.

Another critique is that, despite the presence of ideological frames as a main dimension in the approach, many scholars assign that dimension a secondary, dependant role. The assumption that Islamists use violent methods only when all other options are exhausted<sup>53</sup> represents a demotion of ideology. In several cases, as well as in specific time-frames, ideology became ‘too sacred’ to be violated and thus it determined the strategic choices of a movement, regardless of both the actual capabilities/resources of that movement and the available strategic alternatives. Empirical examples include the case of al-Jihad factions and their decisions, based on their ideology, to militarily confront the powerful, well-established Egyptian regime in the 1970’s during a period of relative liberalisation.<sup>54</sup> Similar examples supporting that argument can be found in the Algerian case with the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (1998-2007) and in Saudi Arabia with al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (1995–Present).

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53 Shahin (1997); Hafez (2004)

54 Ideology, however, is still a variable. Al-Jihad has followed the IG’s lead and initiated a de-radicalization process in 2007.

## On Moderation: Inclusion, Repression and Political Process

The literature on moderation can be divided under four broad theoretical categories: Inclusion-moderation, rule-and-moderate, repression-moderation and political process. Under each of these categories there are empirical cases that can be interpreted as supportive. Therefore, this section discusses some of the literature that focuses on empirical cases of moderation.

Most of the empirical literature on moderation is post-2001, but the first of these empirical studies was published in 1993 and it discussed Hizbullah's transformation from a revolutionary militia to a political party that participated in the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections.<sup>55</sup> Since moderation is associated here with the practical abandonment of violence, groups that have armed wings and use violence like Hamas or Hizbullah will not be discussed, even though they accept electoral democracy and participate in elections. More relevant to the moderation process as defined here are the cases of the Wasat Party in Egypt and the AKP in Turkey. Those two groups broke away from relatively moderate, larger movements namely the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and the Turkish National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş Harekatı* - MGH). The latter was represented by the Welfare Party (*Rifah Partisi* - RP) between 1983 and 1997 and by the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* - FP) from 1998 until 2001.

### *The Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis*

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis is advanced by scholars such as Michael Hudson,<sup>56</sup> Gudrun Kramer in 1995 and Lisa

55 Hamzeh (1993); 11 years later, Hamzeh followed this article with a more comprehensive study of Hizbullah's transformations in his book *In the Path of Hizbullah* (2004).

56 Although Hudson's argument is nuanced. He argues for 'limited accommodation' of Islamists a policy that was largely pursued in the Jordanian case (between the Hashemite Regime and the Muslims Brothers/Islamic Action Front). He does not recommend full inclusion of Islamists in a political process as a route towards moderation. See: Hudson (1995) pp. 235-241, 242-244.

Anderson in 1997 and 2000. Generally, their works attempt to hypothesise about the potential causes of moderation. These works are based on modifications/extensions of structural-psychological approaches and they usually follow a linear, conditional ‘if...then...’ argument.

More specifically, the inclusion-moderation hypothesis reverses the frustration-aggression models and the repression-radicalisation approach. The main argument is that if Islamists are radicalised due to repression and exclusion, then including them in the political process will have the opposite effect: moderation.<sup>57</sup> However, as shown before in the previous sections, the relationship between repression and radicalisation, although valid in several cases, is not always linear. Repression and exclusion could lead to moderation as the cases of the *Wasat* Party and AKP demonstrate.<sup>58</sup> In addition, as argued by movement scholars, empirical evidence shows that ‘it is neither necessary for Islamists to be contended to become moderate nor sufficient for Islamists to be deprived to become rebellious’.<sup>59</sup> Following that line of argument, the inclusion of Islamists can be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for their moderation as argued by the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. Moreover, most of the literature that discussed the inclusion-moderation hypothesis left the space between inclusion and moderation unaccounted for. The mechanism(s) by which Islamists moderate, due to their inclusion, were left largely unspecified.

### *Moderation Cases ...and Critiques*

In 1997, Glenn Robinson raised an important question: can Islamists be Democrats?<sup>60</sup> To answer that question, he analyzed the behaviour of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the MB in Jordan. He concluded that the IAF/MB ‘has been consistently in the forefront of democratising

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57 Anderson (1997) pp. 24-29.

58 Wichkham (2004); Yavus (2006); Dagi (2006); Ashour and Unluçayakli (2006).

59 Hafez (2004) pp. 19-20.

60 Robinson (1997) p. 373

the Jordanian polity since liberalisation began in 1989'.<sup>61</sup> He attributed that behaviour mainly to the inclusive policies of the Hashemite regime. Therefore, his study confirmed inclusion-moderation in this specific case. His study was followed by several others addressing similar research questions and the same case of the IAF. However, they were more critical of inclusion-moderation. More recent studies have been conducted by Janine Clark and Jillian Schwedler.<sup>62</sup>

Clark was very critical of inclusion-moderation. She tested the hypothesis by monitoring IAF's 'cross-ideological cooperation' as possible evidence of moderation. The Jordanian Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) was analysed, where the IAF's Islamist and secular parties interact and coordinate policies in several issue-areas. Clark concluded that her investigation sheds doubt on the 'inclusion-moderation' hypothesis as well as on the 'cooperation-could-lead-to-moderation' argument.<sup>63</sup> This is due to the fact that her findings show that 'the IAF's willingness to cooperate with other HCCNOP parties is limited to issues with no bearing on Shari'a' and therefore, she concludes, the moderation of the IAF has been both limited and selective.<sup>64</sup>

Another empirical study that is critical of inclusion-moderation is that of Schwedler. As opposed to Clark, however, Schwedler reaches a different conclusion regarding the IAF. When comparing and contrasting the IAF with the Yemeni *Islah* Party, Schwedler concluded that 'while the IAF had moved significantly in the direction of accommodating and embracing democratic principles, the *Islah* party, as a whole, had not'.<sup>65</sup> In her perspective, the IAF is a successful case of inclusion-moderation. The *Islah* is not. Therefore, according to Schwedler, including Islamists in the political process could sometimes lead to their moderation.

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61 Ibid, p. 374; Robinson's article did not distinguish between electoral and liberal democracy. Therefore, his conclusion about the MB/IAF being a force behind democratization is limited to the electoral dimension of the democratization process. The IAF/MB stances regarding women's issues for example is far from liberal. See: Clark (2006) pp. 541-553.

62 Schwedler (2006) also included the Yemeni case of the *Islah* Party.

63 Clark (2006) pp. 559-560

64 Ibid, p. 560

65 Schwedler (2006) p. 191.

The two authors have reached different conclusions about the same case-study for definitional and contextual reasons.<sup>66</sup> First, while Schwedler defines moderation broadly as ‘the movement from a relatively closed and rigid world view to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives’,<sup>67</sup> Clark only mentions the association between moderation and the willingness to participate in a democratic system, without providing a clear definition.<sup>68</sup> The broad definition in Schwedler’s case, coupled with definitional vagueness in Clark’s case, has contributed to their reaching different conclusions about the moderation process of the same group.

Also, the comparative contexts and issues-selection were two other factors that contributed to the different conclusions. Clark was looking at the IAF’s stances on the issues of honour crimes, women parliamentary quotas and personal status laws (particularly women’s divorce rights) within the HCCNOP context. In other words, she was comparing the IAF’s positions on issues of women rights to those of progressive, leftist and secular parties, which are also members of the HCCNOP. Therefore, her conclusion, that the IAF’s moderation is limited and selective is not surprising. However, this conclusion was influenced by her selection of issues, context and comparative-cases. Schwedler, on the other hand, is comparing the IAF to the *Islah* party, which is relatively new to the democratic process, has historical ties with Saudi Salafis and former Arab-Afghan Jihadists<sup>69</sup> and operates in a more conservative Yemeni context. In comparison to the *Islah*, the IAF will tend to look moderate and therefore confirm the inclusion-moderation thesis. Compared to leftist seculars on issues related to women rights, it will not. Given that, more attention should be paid to definitions, comparative contexts, and issue-selection when studying and attempting to generalise about the moderation process of Islamist movements.

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66 There are also other reasons, mainly based on the causal variables the two authors chose to use. I will not discuss them here due to space limitations.

67 Schwedler (2006) p. 3

68 Clark points out that Islamists and secular liberals have different understandings of democracy, but she does not elaborate on their perspectives. See: Clark (2006) p. 542.

69 For example, Abdul Majid Zendani, the leader of the *Islah* Party, was the Emir of the Arab-Afghans for a short period following the assassination of Abdullah Azzam, the ‘godfather’ of the Arab-Afghans.

## *The Rule-and-Moderate Hypothesis*

A related hypothesis to ‘inclusion-moderation’ is the ‘rule-and-moderate’ one advanced by Saad Eddine Ibrahim.<sup>70</sup> This is based on his research trips in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Israel as well as his interactions with the Egyptian MB. Ibrahim initially hypothesised that the closer Islamists are to political power in a democratic process, the more they will moderate their behaviour.<sup>71</sup> To support the hypothesis empirically, Ibrahim cites rhetorical and behavioural changes towards moderation within groups like Palestinian Hamas, Lebanese Hizbullah and the MB during electoral processes and after electoral victories.<sup>72</sup>

Much like the ‘inclusion-moderation,’ theory the ‘rule-and-moderate’ hypothesis has some validity. Borrowing from Givonai Sartori’s work on European political parties,<sup>73</sup> one can argue that most Islamist movements have the status of ‘permanent opposition’. Given the lack of accountability and governmental responsibilities, these movements tend to promise their supporters more than they can realistically give them and use vague symbolic slogans that resonate well culturally, such as ‘Islam is the solution’. However, once close to, or in office, these movements will need to moderate their behaviour and act responsibly if they want to avoid political or economic disasters and keep their base of support.

Despite the argument advanced above, a main problem with the ‘moderate-and-rule’ hypothesis, in addition to the critiques directed at ‘inclusion-moderation’, is that at the core of the argument there is an assumption that the grassroots of the Islamist movement and its supporters prefer moderate policies. Therefore, if the politicians/leaders do not pursue a moderate agenda, these supporters will not vote for them. This is not always true as with the case of Algerian FIS demonstrations, for example.<sup>74</sup> In addition, there are several cases that suggest the opposite of the hypothesis: Islamists pursue a more radical

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70 Ibrahim (2006, 2007a, 2007b).

71 Ibrahim (2007) p. 13.

72 Ibid; Ibrahim (2006) p. 13

73 Sartori (1966)

74 Shahin (1997) p. 160; I also demonstrate this through the examination of the de-radicalization cases in Algeria and Egypt in the following sections.

rhetoric whenever they are closer to office. In Algeria, one can argue that after the FIS won the municipal elections in 1990, it did not moderate its behaviour or rhetoric. For example, Ali Belhaj, deputy leader of the FIS, asserted that he did not believe in democracy,<sup>75</sup> despite the fact that the FIS was closer to power through a democratic process!

### *The Repression-Moderation Hypothesis*

The 'repression-moderation' hypothesis emerged more recently after witnessing the transformations of the Egyptian *Wasat*, the MB and the AKP towards a more liberal Islamist trend under continuous structural strains. This approach argues that applying pressure on Islamists coupled with limited accommodation in the electoral process will lead to their moderation. The works of Mona El-Ghobashy (2005) on the Egyptian MB and Ihsan Dagi (2006) on the Turkish AKP represent this line of argument. It is important to note here that the works focusing on 'repression-moderation' are only attempting to explain a single case-study, while 'inclusion-moderation' is aiming toward a more general hypothesis.

In her study, El-Ghobashy traces the transformation of the Egyptian MB<sup>76</sup> from a 'highly secretive, hierarchical, anti-democratic organisation led by anointed elders into a modern, multivocal political association steered by educated, savvy professionals not unlike activists of the same age in rival political parties'.<sup>77</sup> She mainly attributes that change to the MB's participation in, and experience with, rugged Egyptian electoral politics. El-Ghobashy argues that within the Egyptian authoritarian context, the MB had to moderate their

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75 Belhaj (1992) p. 34; Ayachi (1993) p. 170

76 The Egyptian MB represents the spiritual leadership of the other MB international branches. The decision of the General Guide of the Egyptian branch is perceived as non-binding recommendations to the other branches. See: Al-Za'atra (2005) p. 6.

77 El-Ghobashy (2005) p. 374; El-Ghobashy has overstated her case a bit here. It is true that the MB was secretive in the period between the mid-1950s and early 1970s, but this was mainly a reaction to survive under Nasser's repression. It is also true that the MB had a secret armed wing that primed in the 1940s. However, the organization as a whole did not adopt a secretive policy. In addition, their political behaviour can hardly be interpreted as 'antidemocratic'. Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the MB, participated in parliamentary elections as early as 1942. See: Mitchell (1969) p. 307. In most of their history, the MB was neither 'highly secretive' nor 'antidemocratic'.



behaviour to be able to fend-off state repression and maintain their 'influence and relevance with the public and influential international actors'.<sup>78</sup> She calls this 'self-preservation'.

Ihsan Dagi advances a very similar argument when he investigates the causes behind the AKP's departure from mainstream Turkish Islamism as represented by the MGH and its moderation of rhetoric and behaviour. In a volume edited by Hakan Yavus (2006) about the AKP,<sup>79</sup> Dagi argues that after the 1997 'soft' coup, the insecurity of the AKP led it to internalise the human rights discourse and the pro-democracy position. In other words, the pressures and threats from the military establishment have led to the internalisation of liberal behaviour/ideas and, therefore, to the moderation of the AKP.<sup>80</sup>

The two aforementioned case-studies demonstrate that moderation of both behaviour and ideology could develop under repressive conditions. However, the main problem with the 'repression-moderation' approach is that it does not explain why repression sometimes leads to radicalisation (Algerian FIS, Tajik IRP) and why it leads to moderation (Turkish AKP, Egyptian Wasat) in other cases? This is one of the reasons that the 'repression-moderation' approach is limited to few case-studies. Even within these case-studies, the explanation provided by this approach is not comprehensive. The 1995-1996 military trials for civilian MB activists in Egypt and the 1997 'soft-coup' against the MGH Islamists in Turkey were not the first incidents of repression. The MB activists had been objects of state repression since the late 1940s and the MGH's since the 1970s. Given this timeline, why did they relatively moderate only in the mid-1990s and 2000s? State repression alone cannot provide an answer for this question.

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78 El-Ghobashy (2006) p. 394

79 The volume investigates the reasons behind the AKP electoral victory in 2002 and assesses the possibilities for another victory in 2007. Most of the contributors predict a 2007 electoral victory if the AKP continues its relentless pursuit of the EU membership as well as if it continues to moderate its Islamist discourse.

80 Dagi (2006) p. 103

## *The Political Process Approach*

As I argued above in the radicalisation section, structural-psychological approaches can not account for change under constant structural strains. Several empirical studies on moderation have shown that this kind of change could occur. Among those studies is the one done by Carrie Wickham about the Egyptian *Wasat* Islamists. Using a more dynamic political process approach, Wickham provides a framework for analyzing the process of Islamist moderation. According to Wickham, the two variables that have led to the *Wasat* ideological moderation are political learning and strategic calculations, much as the comparative theory would predict. She notes that ‘the *Wasat* party is interesting precisely because it is a hard case, in which the precipitants of moderation are weak and the deterrents to moderation are strong’.<sup>81</sup> Wickham concludes that ‘the *Wasat* Islamists revised their ultimate goals and took a public stand in favour of values associated with democratic civil culture when the regime was not democratic’.<sup>82</sup> By that conclusion, she demonstrates the limitations of the structural-psychological approaches, the advantages of the political process approach, as well as a main problem with the ‘inclusion-moderation’ hypothesis.

Moderation, however, is not the only process that merits explanation, and moreover the *Wasat* party is not the only Islamist ‘hard case’ that moderated under adverse or discouraging structural conditions, as shown in the following section. Also, the variables mentioned by Wickham need further explanation. What causes Islamists to initially revise their strategic calculations and political knowledge? The research direction of this paper is moving in this way, mainly to address the causes that lead groups as different as the IG, al-Jihad, the MB and the AIS to rethink their ideologies and behaviours.

## **On De-Radicalisation: A Gap in the Literature**

Between the two ends of the Islamist spectrum, taking-up arms and aiming for sweeping change (violent radicalisation) on

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81 Wickham (2004) p. 223

82 Wickham (2004) p. 224

one end and accepting/participating in a democratic process (moderation) on the other, there is a point when an Islamist movement decides to abandon violence behaviourally, de-legitimise it ideologically, and act on that by dismantling its armed units organisationally. On that spectrum, this is the point where the de-radicalisation process starts.<sup>83</sup>

As shown in the above review, the literature on Islamist movements has attempted to explain the two processes of radicalisation and moderation. Islamist de-radicalisation, as defined above is neither addressed nor theorised about sufficiently in the literature. Due to the importance of that process for both academic and policy purposes, the causes and the dynamics of de-radicalisation of armed Islamist movements, factions and individuals should have a place in future research agendas.

### *The Phenomenon of De-Radicalisation: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics*

In late 1951, Hassan al-Hudaybi, the second General Guide of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt decided to dismantle the main armed wing of the Society that was known at the time as *al-Nizam al-Khass* (Special Apparatus – SA).<sup>84</sup> The leadership of al-Hudaybi was already being challenged, and the decision was extremely controversial within the movement. It led to further factionalisation and internal violence within the Society. Ultimately, it took approximately two decades for the leadership to dismantle the SA and its offshoots completely. Since the early 1970's, the MB has abandoned violence against national regimes, and has de-legitimised and prohibited that type of violence by ideological and theological arguments. Additionally, the leadership of the MB in Egypt has also dismantled all of its armed units. These conditions indicate a successful, comprehensive de-radicalisation process that took place on the behavioural, ideological and organisational levels.<sup>85</sup>

In a very similar but shorter process, *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Group – IG) – the largest armed Islamist movement

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83 Ashour (2007, 2009)

84 Ashour (2009) pp. 64-74

85 Ibid., p. 64

in Egypt during the 1980's and 1990's – declared a unilateral ceasefire in July 1997 that surprised observers, officials and even many IG members and commanders.<sup>86</sup> The ceasefire declaration contradicted the militant literature of the group, the previous vows of its leaders to continue the armed struggle until it had topple the Mubarak regime and the increasingly violent tactics used by the IG affiliates since the late 1970's. In 2002, the leadership of the IG not only dismantled its armed wings, but also renounced its radical literature, published new books and replaced its curricula with those of the relatively moderate Muslim Brothers.<sup>87</sup> Members of the *shura* (consultative) council of the IG issued several books explaining its new non-violent ideology. As with the Muslim Brothers, this seemed to indicate a de-radicalisation process that had taken place not only on the behavioural (strategic/tactical) level but also on the ideological level. By 2007, the IG's de-radicalisation process looked to have been consolidated: no armed operations since 1999, no significant splits within the movement and around 25 volumes authored by the IG leaders to support their new ideology with both theological and rational arguments. Two of the volumes were critiques of al-Qa'ida's behaviour<sup>88</sup> and a third was a critique of the 'clash of civilizations' hypothesis, arguing instead for cultural dialogue.<sup>89</sup> The drafting of these volumes by the same movement that co-assassinated President Anwar al-Sadat for signing the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty was a significant development. This process of de-radicalisation removed more than 15,000 IG militants from the Salafi-Jihadi camp currently led by al-Qa'ida.

In 2007, al-Jihad Organization, the second largest armed organisation in Egypt, with strong ties to al-Qa'ida, had also initiated a de-radicalisation process. The process is being led by the former emir (commander) of al-Jihad (1987-1993) and al-Qa'ida's ideologue, Dr. Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (alias 'Abd al-Qadir Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz as well as Dr. Fadl). To recant his old views, al-Sharif authored a two new book entitled *Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World and The Uncovering*. In addition, al-Sharif and other al-Jihad commanders toured Egyptian prisons between February and April 2007 to meet

86 Ibid, pp. 90-115; Ashour (2007) p. 596

87 Ashour (2009) p. 4; Zinah (2003) p. 16

88 Zuhdi et al. (2002, 2003)

89 Ibrahim et al. (2005) pp. 225-247

with their followers and discuss the de-radicalisation process. That process has been only partially successful however, as three factions within al-Jihad still refuse to uphold it. These factions also refuse to leave the organisation and one of them is in alliance with al-Qa'ida. The process is thus still ongoing at present.<sup>90</sup>

In Algeria, similar de-radicalising transformations occurred in 1997. Like the IG of Egypt, the self-declared armed wing of the FIS,<sup>91</sup> known as the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), declared a unilateral ceasefire. The ceasefire led to disarmament and demilitarisation processes that aimed for the reintegration of the AIS members as well as other armed Islamist factions into Algeria's civil ranks. The demilitarisation process included subgroups from the notorious GIA and the GSPC.<sup>92</sup> These groups and factions issued several communiqués to explain and legitimise their decisions to dismantle their armed wings. Unlike the Egyptian groups however, the Algerian groups did not produce any ideological literature to reconstruct a new ideology.

The phenomenon of 'de-radicalisation' is not only confined to the countries previously mentioned. In the 2000's, it took place in several other countries, albeit on a smaller scale. These de-radicalisation cases include Libyan, Saudi, Yemeni, Jordanian, Tajik, Malaysian and Indonesian armed Islamist groups, factions, and individuals.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, The Egyptian de-radicalisation processes had international repercussions. For example, the transformations of the IG have influenced several members of the British Islamic Liberation Party and caused them to abandon the Party's radical ideology.<sup>94</sup> In Libya, the Fighting Islamic Group (FIG) modelled their de-radicalisation

90 Ashour (2009) pp. 102-108; By early 2008, most of al-Jihad factions had joined the de-radicalization process. The main exceptions were the faction led by Ayman al-Zawahri, which joined al-Qa'ida, and two small factions in Egyptian prisons whose refusals were based on their rejection of the ideological component of the process. See: Jahin (2007) p. 12

91 In general, I shall use the acronym by which an Islamist group is best known, regardless of which language it is based on. Especially in the cases of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian groups, the acronyms are based on their French initials. Otherwise, acronyms are largely based on English initials.

92 Now the GSPC is known as al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Countries of al-Maghreb (QICM).

93 Ashour (2009) pp. 136-146

94 Nawaz (2007) p. 6

process after that of the Egyptian IG and recently published a book in which they ideologically and theologically de-legitimised violence against national regimes. In Saudi Arabia, government-sponsored *al-Munasaha* (Advising) Programs, as well as interventions from independent Islamic scholars, succeed in de-radicalising mainly individuals and small groups who supported or were loosely linked to the al-Qa'ida. In Tajikistan, the IRP that led the United Tajikistani Opposition (UTO) in the civil war of 1992-1997, again led the UTO into a fragile peace agreement with the Tajik government. Similar to the IG in Egypt and the AIS and other armed groups in Algeria, the IRP called for 'Jihad' in 1992 and then for a ceasefire, a compromise and a peaceful resolution of the conflict in 1997. In Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, government-sponsored de-radicalisation programs aimed particularly to convince of mid-ranking commanders and grassroots of the *Jama'at Islammiyya* (JI) to abandon violence and de-legitimise it ideologically. The de-radicalisation processes of these movements had removed tens of thousands of former militants from the ranks of al-Qa'ida's supporters and acted as disincentives for would-be militants. Despite that, there is not sufficient investigation of the causes and the dynamics of that process in the literature. This is surprising in light of the great interest in explaining Islamism and the huge volume of literature produced after the 9/11 attacks.

## **Conclusion: Old Themes, New Patterns**

In the literature on Islamist movements, radicalisation is the most explored process of change. This is probably due to the fact that it is associated with several important events that sparked Western and international interest beginning in the 1970's with the Iranian revolution, moving into the 1980's with the assassination of President Sadat in Egypt and continuing into the 1990's and the new millennium with events all over the world from the Algerian civil war to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the US, 7/7 in the UK, and 3/11 in Spain. Despite that coverage, radicalisation was mostly investigated through the lenses of structural-psychological approaches with all of their aforementioned limitations. Recently, radicalisation was explored through the more dynamic social movement theory

approach, which promises a better understanding of that phenomenon.

Compared to radicalisation, fewer works have addressed the process of moderation within Islamist movements. The process itself is relatively new, nonetheless investigating it by reversing structural-psychological approaches as well as through the social movement approach offered several important insights, as demonstrated for example by Lisa Anderson's works (1997, 2000) as well as by Wickham's study of the Wasat Party and the MB .

Given that de-radicalisation processes are the least addressed in the literature, future research agendas on Islamist movements should focus on that new and on-going phenomenon. The areas of investigation can analyse the causes behind the process as well as the conditions under which this process might be successful.<sup>95</sup> Aside from these two essential research topics, there is also a specific type of interaction between de-radicalised groups/individuals and radical ones that merits attention: the 'domino effect'. De-radicalised Islamist groups often interact with other violent groups operating in the same context under similar conditions and, importantly, in many cases the former influence the latter. For example, the lead taken by the IG and the interaction with its leaders has facilitated and influenced the de-radicalisation process of al-Jihad Organization in Egypt.

Finally, with several armed Islamist movements in more than seven countries having initiated de-radicalisation processes, the question of whether or not this is going to be a trend in armed Islamism arises. In other words, will these processes of ideological, behavioural and organisational de-radicalisation turn into an 'end of history' for salafi-jihadism and armed Islamism, or will de-radicalisation reversals and/or radicalisation patterns dominate the future? Despite the existence of several cases of de-radicalised armed Islamist movements, there are also concurrent trends of violent radicalisation – most notably in Iraq, Algeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and even parts of Europe and North America. Therefore, it is still too early to predict the dominant global trends in Islamist transformations. However, the comprehensive transformations that occurred and

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95 Ashour (2009) p. 136

the current debates between former al-Qa'ida ideologues and al-Qa'ida leaders might be the initial signs of an 'end of history' process for many salafi-jihadist groups and factions. Therefore, analysing the causes and dynamics of de-radicalisation is crucial for both academics and policy-makers.



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