

IMEIS Annual Conference 2018

Identity, Legitimacy and Power in the Muslim World

Edited by Juline Beaujouan

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Published by Global Policy Journal at **Smashwords**

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Abstracts

[The Girls of Enghelab Street: Women and Revolution in Modern Iran – Kate Hashemi](#)

Beginning with the 1891 Tobacco Protest, women have played a vital role in revolutionary Iran. In opposition to the post-9/11 zeitgeist's hegemonic framing of the Middle Eastern Woman, as bereft of agency, this paper highlights the agency of the Iranian woman and their involvement within revolutionary struggles in the modern history of Iran. What is of particular concern here is the ways in which hijab is utilized as a revolutionary symbol and the particular narrative of this performative trope as designated by “the West”. The 1979 revolution provided a discursive space in which to rearticulate the hegemonic gender identities as formulated under the Pahlavi regime. Here, the ruptures and continuities of dominant gender identities are highlighted through the use of the chador as a placard for political action. Drawing on this framework of gender (re-)identification, the notion of Iranian womanhood was again contested during the 2009 Green Movement. In considering the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, this paper identifies the rearticulation of the masculine discourse of martyrology as a means of contesting the ideological apparatus of the state. Following from the Green Movement, the girls of Engelah Street again bring the issue of Iranian womanhood to the forefront of revolutionary action. Here, hijab is utilized, quite literally, as a revolutionary flag. While the use of the hijab here appears in stark contrast to that of the 1979 revolution, this protest draws on a definitive history of the headscarf as a marker of female revolutionary action.

[Identity Crisis and Identity Negotiation in a Group of Post-revolution Tunisian Muslim Women – Housseem Hamrouni](#)

On the 13th of August 2017 and as part of an ongoing initiative to reform the country's laws on marriage and inheritance, the Tunisian President Beji Caied Essebsi announced his intention to introduce a law which would guarantee equal inheritance between women and men (an anti-Islamic law). Despite widespread

opposition in a predominantly Muslim country – which also has precedents in challenging Islamic laws such as polygamy (incriminated by the Tunisian law since 1956) – the move found many supporters who are now pressing ahead with demonstrations and marches for this proposal to take legal form. Based on a descriptive survey research, this paper aims to argue that this move has revealed a form of a religious identity crisis on the part of these advocates, most of them women. A close analysis of the Quranic verses that explain how inheritance is allocated in Islam shows that the equality proposal is actually unjust to women and not the other way. The paper argues that this has triggered an “identity negotiation” process (Swann, 1987) on part of these devotees on one hand and some of the opponents of the proposal on the other hand. Another objective that belongs to the foreground of this research is to explore whether this decision is done for the sake of women’s rights or to serve a political agenda.

Not So Quiet After All? The Complexities of Youth Political Engagement in Morocco **Seven Years on from the ‘Arab Uprising’ – Christopher Cox**

Seven years on from Morocco’s 2011 “Arab Uprising” the state of the youth’s engagement with politics remains much the same on the surface as it did prior to the mass-protests. Widespread political apathy, disillusionment with political parties and institutions, and a widely-held belief that the regime has forgotten them continue to persist. However, in-depth analysis reveals the situation to be more complex, where some segments of the youth continue to fight to be heard and listened to. How these youths engage politics post-2011 is even more complex. Based on ongoing research and fieldwork carried out in Morocco this paper intends to shed light on the state of youth political engagement today. From interviews, opinion data and events the paper explores how different youth strands pursue different avenues of political engagement and for what reason(s). Unlike many previous studies the research is based on looking at political participation and opposition from the bottom-up perspectives of the youth. “Formal” engagement explores how some are joining political parties and partake in electoral and official political processes. Conversely, ‘informal’ engagement addresses renewed political activism including ‘street politics’ and civil society engagement. Finally, this paper will shed light on the ‘interplay’ factor, based on

one's own research, where some individuals and groups have sought to balance formal and informal political participation. Overall, the aim of the paper is to provide current insights on youth engagement in Morocco and unpack the complexities within it, especially the legacy youth engagement in 2011 has had on today's.

Legitimacy Crisis and Quest for Identity in a Secular Space: The Case of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria – Oarhe Osumah

At the heart of the struggles between citizens and the states in the Muslim world is the question of legitimacy. Right from the 18th when the social contract theory emerged, there has been the notion that the state exists and is constructed to provide social services beyond the competence of the individual citizens, groups and community. The essence of social contract is beyond meeting the welfare needs of the citizens. It suggests that the state is equipped with the power and resources to adequately meet certain needs. Thus, in historical and contemporary contexts, the legitimacy of the state is assessed by its competence in providing quality social services. Political legitimacy encompasses rightfulness of the state to exercise authority over its citizens. In a world characterized by a high degree of legitimacy, the citizens do not withdraw into identity shelters. Rather the citizens observe laws emanating from legitimate authority that reflect the popular values and traditions. In contrast, citizens withdraw from the state into identity shelters due to legitimacy crisis. Using secondary data, this paper examines Boko Haram insurgency in the context of the Nigerian state performance in addressing youth unemployment, mass poverty and receding Lake Chad Basin in the Northeast. The paper shows that the Nigerian state performance failure in meeting the needs of the people as the underlining factor for the Boko Haram uprising in North-Eastern Nigeria.

Countering ISIS Call for Hijra (Emigration): A Review through the Lens of Maqāsid Ash-Shari'ah Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman

From *Al-Qaeda* to *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), and now the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the so-called Islamic State (IS), *hijra* (Arabic for emigration), has been exploited by these groups to justify their call for Muslims all over the world to

emigrate to *Da'ar al-Islam* or abode of Islam. Historically and in the Islamic context, *hijra* refers to the earlier generation of Muslims who left Mecca for Abyssinia as well as Prophet Muhammad's emigration to Medina. This paper focuses on the notion of *hijra* as interpreted by ISIS to draw Muslims to Iraq and Syria to strengthen its rank and file. It argues that the modern jihadists' interpretation of *hijra* is a misrepresentation of the two earlier emigrations. More importantly, it fails to satisfy the *Maqaasid Ash-Sharii ah* or the objectives of *Shari'ah law*. This paper will make a critical analysis of the concept of *hijra* from the perspective of *Maqaasid Ash-Sharii ah*, and offer an ideological rebuttal strategy to counter ISIS's call for *hijra*. It will also attempt to address the ideological flaws in the call which foreign terrorist fighters (or FTF) are unaware of.

Too Much Leadership for Such a Region: The Competing Status-seeking Behaviours of Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia after 2011 – Luiza Gimenez Cerioli

On March 2018, the ambitious Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), declared that a “triangle of evil” was affecting the stability of the Middle East, namely Iran, Turkey and Islamist groups. Even though Saudi embassy in Ankara later denied that affirmation, it raised the question: why Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey are proactively engaging in the regional turmoil, such as Syria, and, more recently, Qatar? This article supports that the three countries aspire the same goal, regional leadership, explained by their growing status-seeking behaviour. Iran has been a revisionist country since the Revolution; however, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, especially under the assertive and vigorous rule of Erdogan and MBS respectively, are showing dissatisfaction with their ascribed status in the regional system. This article's goal is to understand their status-seeking behaviour as three peer competitors in the same status community. They try to project images of leadership that are antagonistic or mutually exclusive. The fact that Turkey's foreign policy fluctuates and does not choose a side in the open rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia further support this logic. I apply Neoclassical Realism as a comprehensive theoretical framework and process tracing as the main method to detect and describe the status-seeking behaviours. In conclusion, I intend to show that these countries had for a long time aimed for some regional leadership and that they saw the Arab Uprisings and the ambiguous

US' conduct in the region since 2011 as an opportunity to seek for more leadership status.

[Turkey is Growing into Islamic Power in Central Asia: The Relations with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Implications in GCC – Dr. Haifa Ahmed al-Maashi](#)

The Turkish role in the Eurasia region has emerged gradually and steadily for a long time, but it escalated enormously during the era of President Erdogan. Turkey's attempted to extend its influence through the Islamic ideology and economic relations. The successive events of the Arab Spring constituted an important element in enhancing Turkish influence through its formal position in supporting the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood that led the uprisings and revolutions of the Arab Spring in a number of countries in the Middle East. This influence has its reflections on Turkey's new political status in Asia and on its regional and international relations. There is a great potential risk that Turkey's relationship with Central Asia states, specifically Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, may cause a threat to GCC interests in the future. These four countries are located in a geographic linked line that starts from Turkey overlooking the Mediterranean and ends in Pakistan bordering the Indian Ocean. The line forms a strong front connecting Asia and Europe on one hand and Central Asia and South East Asia on the other. The main objective of the paper is to analyze the Turkish role in initiating relations with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and to expose Turkey's intentions in paving the way for establishing an alliance of an Islamic and economic nature with these countries and the possible repercussions on the interests of the Gulf States.

[Iran's Liquid Ideology: An Analysis of the Political Elites' Discourse during Rouhani's Presidency – Olivia Glombitza](#)

While scholars often portray the Islamic Republic of Iran as a fundamentalist theocracy that dominates all aspects of public and private life, the literature on the sociology of power suggests that ideology (and religion, for that matter) is a resource in the elites' competition for power. In line with this approach, this paper

contends that if religion in Iran is used as a resource in order to reach and maintain power by the elites, it is applied pragmatically, depending on the circumstances at a certain point in time. In other words, Iran's religious ideology is not rigid, but rather flexible and hence adaptable over time and according to different situations. The research puts to empirical test the monolithic nature of Iran's Islamic ideology by analysing the discourses pronounced by the three leading representatives of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, Hassan Rouhani and Muhammad Javad Zarif from 2013 onwards, paying special attention to the connection with concepts such as power, politics, authority, security, legitimacy, identity, and justice. By advancing the knowledge of the circumstances, the (adaptive) nature of religious ideologies and the concepts related to the religious discourse and its evolution over time, this paper aims at contributing to the understanding of Iran's political present and pave the way for understanding the future traits of the Islamic Republic.

[The Impact of the Commemoration of Ashura on Shia-Sunni Relations in Iraq – Jafar Ahmad](#)

Within the domain of cultural anthropology, this academic study endeavours to explore the annual commemoration of Ashura observed by millions of Iraqi Shia Muslims and its impact on Sunni Muslims and on Shia-Sunni relationships in Iraq. Ashura itself is the name of the 10th day of the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. On this day, in 680, Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed was killed in Karbala, Iraq by an army of a Muslim leader (Nakash, 1994). The episode in Karbala has created a tradition of commemoration and mourning among Shia Muslims, known as Ashura rituals. In Iraq, these commemorations became so powerful that they were restricted by successive Sunni-dominated governments (1920s-1970s), and were banned (1970s- 2003) under the rule of the Baath Party (1968-2003). However, after the fall of this regime in 2003, Ashura rituals have emerged as the most powerful cultural, religious, and political event. It has been estimated that over 20 million Shia Muslims, Iraqi and from abroad, commemorated Ashura in Iraq in 2017. This research has utilized Structural

Ritualization Theory (Knottnerus, 2016) to explore this understudied commemoration by posing questions such as, why it is appealing to so many Shia and who organize and finance Ashura rituals? Furthermore, and most importantly, what consequences may derive from these rituals on a national and regional level? Overall, all the questions raised in this discussion warrants further examination, which will be carried out using three methods of data collection, namely interviews, content analysis, and observation.

Becoming a Muslim: An Analysis of the Conversion Narratives of Women from the Post-Soviet Bloc in Jordan – Rita Adel Mohammed

This study looks at Russian speaking women from the Post-Soviet Bloc, who have converted to Islam, and who reside in Jordan – a Muslim majority country – most of whom are married to Jordanian men. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, this study investigates the dynamic process of these women’s conversion paths to Islam, and the dynamics of the “new” Muslim identity these women have developed after their conversion. This paper argues that the experiences, motives, challenges, and narratives of women who identify as Muslim converts in Muslim majority countries, such as Jordan, differ drastically from those of Western women converts residing in non-Muslim societies. Thus, this study has the potential to discover a different type of challenges faced by female Muslim converts, in the context they exist in, namely, being a convert in a predominantly Muslim country; in contrast to the body of literature that addresses the issue of western women’s conversion to Islam, and the challenges these women face while re-adapting into their western societies, after adopting a “non-western” religion. Taking into consideration the distinctive cultural identity of women from Post-Soviet countries, this study will potentially provide a chance to draw parallels, compare, and contrast – in broad terms – the experiences of women in the West and their conversion to Islam, and that of women converts in non-western Muslim majority countries, such as Jordan.

[The Agony of Development: Indonesian Muslim Traditionalist in Response Towards Environmental Crisis](#) – [Muhamad Abdul Aziz](#), [Ali Ilham Almujaiddid](#) and [Anang Gunaifi Alfian](#)

A discourse on development and environmentalism often results in agonistic tensions. On the one hand, global power and scientific industrial proliferation seem irreversible. On the other hand, there is a need to critically address their impact on the environment crisis. As a matter of fact, both developmentalism and environmentalism are likely to proliferate worldwide through political-epistemological contestation. In Post-authoritarian Indonesia, the legitimacy of development and the inclusion of environmental concerns are determined by the interaction of actors including religious representatives operating in the context of unequal power relations. The significance of this study lies in the fact that the majority of Indonesian Muslims are traditionalists and affiliate themselves with *Nahdlatul Ulama*, the largest Indonesian Islamic organization. This research examines the religious narratives of *Nahdlatul Ulama* in response to environmental challenges and how religious narratives were produced and translated into political contestation to challenge the dominant explanation of environmental assessment. This field research applied an ethnographic approach to one specific case; Tumpang Pitu Gold Mining Project in Banyuwangi, East Java. The research analyzes the data in the light of traditionalist responses towards development and uses political ecology as a theoretical framework to critically observe the production and translation of political contestation of religious narratives. The results show that *Nahdlatul Ulama*, through their young generation of environmental movement FNKSDA, tries to reinterpret Islamic arguments that challenge the dominant view on the explanation of environmental impacts of government development projects.

Forewords from the Editor

[Juline Beaujouan](#)

Identity is crucial to how individuals and communities organize themselves. Before the end of World War I, it was possible to equate history, religion and language in the Muslim World. This was the case under the Islamic Empires, namely the Ummayyad or Abbasside Caliphates. These strong commonalities – that constructed and formed an Islamic identity – kept between one and two billion people together for centuries. Although the Islamic Empire has been divided, the Islamic identity remains cross-cultural and cross-borders.

However, modern history has brought identity tensions at the inter- and intra-state level. Tensions among nation-states that represent different set of values and compete for power, as this is the case between Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. Tensions between communities within the state, where minorities expose their grievances and challenge the rule of the majority, as this is the case between Sunni and Shia. Tensions between the state – which has been trying to build a national identity since the establishment of the new nation-state order in the Middle East - and its population which sometimes struggles to recognize oneself as part of this national and territorial identity. Tensions between the state and non-state actors, such as the Islamic State or Boko Haram, which in just five years were able to peak at the core of state values and redistribute the power by reshaping existing socio-political, cultural and historical regional features and reconfiguring the geographical borders. Hence, the Islamic World has witnessed the failure of the nation-state project, which has not been able to integrate and absorb a multitude of pre-existing identities.

Although the multiple challenges to identity strongly manifested in the Middle Eastern region, the wave of legitimacy and power contestation rapidly reached the whole Muslim World; from the Maghreb through the Sham and the Ural to South East Asia. Yet, the Muslim identity in Russia and Indonesia faces very different challenges than in Yemen or Tunisia.

In this context of identity disintegration, several questions arise: How to preserve the Muslim cohesion when the historical hard core of this community is plagued

by contestations? Where does legitimacy go when traditional identity erodes? How to reconstruct this legitimacy when the political and social structures have been overthrown?

This e-book offers a multidisciplinary overview of the current situation of the Muslim World in the context of multi-level identity contestations. It gathers insights from academics, analysts and field observers on those challenges within a diverse set of national and cultural contexts.

The Girls of *Enghelab* Street: Women and Revolution in Modern Iran

Kate Hashemi

The orientalist hegemonic framing of “the Middle Eastern woman”, as bereft of agency, has been reinvigorated by the post 9/11 zeitgeist to re-position her subjugation as underneath the politically engaged jihadi male. Within the Iranian context, women are identified as being both physically and spiritually oppressed by nuclear-mad mullahs. This suppression is objectively signalled through state-imposed *hijab*. To the outside (“Western”) world, the ideology of the Islamic Republic is easily identified through the imagery of the *chadori* woman. Here, “the Iranian woman” acts as a semiotic signifier for the nation-state. This conception of the feminized nation state is bound by the rhetoric of what McClintock terms European “porno-tropics”. Here, imperialism is bound by an invasion of “male penetration” into the “[veiled female interior](#)”. In turn, nationalistic discourse reimagines the nation state as a female body in need of protection from an external (male) threat. This paper considers the active role of women in the Iranian revolution and subsequent protest moments. Here, it traces the iconography of the *hijab* through the revolution of 1979, the 2009 Green Movement, and the 2017/2018 protests. This paper questions the inherently male discourse of political action while taking to task the notion of the *hijab* as merely connoting an oppressive, patriarchal force.

The Revolution and the *Chador*

The dominant narrative of Iran within “the West” hails the Pahlavi epoch as a beacon of freedom, juxtaposed against a sea of post-revolutionary mullahs and

veils. However, enforced dress codes under Reza Shah were equally as oppressive as the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)'s compulsory *hijab*. Hegemonic notions of statehood in Pahlavi Iran fused with a particular conception of gender to promote the body as a site of "[political performance](#)". The Pahlavi dynasty's promotion of a pre-Islamic, "modernized" Iran resulted in an adoption of "Western" gender modes; configured from Enlightenment notions of modernity, in conjunction with the myth of Arab conquest in which the *hijab* signified a [non-indigenous Islamic hegemony](#). This process of "modernization" resulted in a subsequent rejection of traditional, Islamic gender tropes. Within this discursive framework, the civic body is transformed into the semiotic site of the nation-state, harbouring cultural signifiers of "Persio-Western" modernity. As with European colonial discourse, Pahlavi Iran signalled a binary opposition of "Western" "modernizing" forces and Islam. Here, hegemonic gender codes complimented "Western" cultural signifiers of modernity. European dress replaced Islamic codes of masculinity to portray the new Iranian man as civilized in comparison to a barbaric, religious "other". The 1936 Unveiling Act under Reza Shah legally procured the marking of women's bodies by "[corporeal inscriptions of citizenship](#)". The forced unveiling of Iranian women afforded the new Iranian man agency in his authority over women's bodies. Moreover, the public commemoration of *kasf-e hijab* (unveiling), or Women's "Liberation" Day, ensured an enduring social agency of masculine citizen-soldiers over "liberated"/coerced female bodies.

In the dominant discourse of "the West", while the unveiling of women's bodies secured Pahlavi Iran's semiotic signification as a marker of freedom, post-1979 re-veiling licensed the IRI as an oppressive "Islamist" state. The revolution, through its dramatic transformation of social norms and values, was an inherently semiotic event. It provided a mass re-articulation of previously established signs and symbols in the national imagination. While the unveiling of women within the dominant discourse of the Pahlavi epoch signified a "modernization of Iran", conforming to European Enlightenment notions of teleological progress, the revolutionary fervour to re-veil displaced this Hegelian trope. In projecting the veiled Muslim woman onto history-proper, revolutionary forces displaced her

anachronistic status in Iranian society. In rejecting the myth of Arab conquest promoted by the Pahlavi regime, Iranian revolutionary discourse re-indigenized the *hijab*. Within this paradigm of knowledge production, rather than the veiled Muslim woman being portrayed as bereft of agency, it was the unveiled woman under the Shah that reflected a [mere tool of “Western” patriarchal forces](#). Pitted against the Pahlavi woman, immoral and impressionable to *gharbzadegi* (“[Weststruckness](#)”), was a new model of Islamic femininity. Here, *chador*-clad revolutionaries were inspired by sacred meta-historical figures in their [revolt against the shah](#). The Qur’anic figure Zeinab was at the forefront of this discursive framework. Hailed as “[a powerful public speaker \[and\] a brave combatant](#)”, Zeinab was promoted as an alternative model of revolutionary femininity. Female revolutionaries modelled themselves on this archetypal mode of femininity, [uniting under the banner khaharan-e zaynab](#) (Zeinab’s sisters). Iranian womanhood was thus rearticulated during this epoch to resemble a confluence of militant activism and Islamic femininity, in which the *chador* became its central mode of signification. This overt politicization of *hijab* provided Iranian women the means to effect a [novel expression of female activism](#), grounded in Shi’i sacred remembrance. Moreover, the reconfiguration of the veil as an empowering political device enabled women from lower socio-economic backgrounds to participate in the public sphere. Here, the strategic adoption of Islamic gender codes enabled the participation of women from conservative families who would otherwise have been excluded from political demonstrations. During the revolution then, *hijab* was utilized as a tool for political action. It provided a unifying banner for female participation for both devout Muslims and secular women alike.

The Green Movement and the *Roopoosh-Roosari*

Shahidian views the IRI as qualifying a “patriarchal triad”. Within this discursive paradigm, a confluence of patriarchy, Islam, and [the nation informs socio-cultural modes](#). While an Islamic frame of reference provided an ideal model of gendered revolutionary subjects, the establishment of the Islamic Republic negotiated a new understanding of these models conforming to the ideology of the new state.

Furthering the ideas of Mutahhari, Ayatollah Khomeini promoted the need for gender roles to take the “[biological dispositions of men and women into account](#)”. Within this epoch, women and men were no longer united on the revolutionary battlefield, but were instead segregated in their performative roles. Here, the Muslim warrior-sister was rejected in favour of a domestication of the Iranian woman. Following the revolution then, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a new law which imposed the *hijab* upon Iranian women. Here, the Penal Code of the IRI provides that:

Women who appear in public without a proper *hijab* should be imprisoned from ten days to two months or pay a [fine of 50,000 to 5000,000 Ryal](#).

It was here that the *hijab* was transformed from a tool for political action into a means of oppression. The political zeitgeist encompassing this new epoch was bound by a particular conception of Islam that established within “the West” a [qualitative difference between the good/secular and bad/terrorist Muslim](#). Within this paradigm of knowledge production, Muslim women were paid particular attention due to the continuation of the Orientalist enthrallment with the veil. Following the election of reformist candidate President Khatami in 1997, the particular configuration of Orientalist discourse on Iran established in 1979 was modified. Rather than being presented as a homogeneous bad-Muslim “other”, Iranian society was portrayed within “the West” as a dichotomy of modern secular-reformist Iranians and their Muslim oppressors. This was emphasized through both popular culture and media outlets with the stark contrast of *chador*-clad women and those with bad-*hijab* (“improper” religious dress).

This dichotomy was highlighted in the e-witnessing of the 2009 Green Movement and the public commemoration of Neda Agha-Soltan. Rajabi positions Neda as simulacra, in the [Baudrillardian sense of the term](#). Here, Neda’s position within the collective memory transforms her status from the actuality of Neda-proper. Neda-as-simulacra gained power through the claim of authenticity provided by e-witnessing. According to Rajabi, this process of simulation transformed the image of Neda into a spectacle in which each image of her “has the potential to facilitate

the creation of narratives that [shift the locus of a collective consciousness](#)". Neda is thus constructed through the collective imagination where her positioning is determined through meaning-making. In witnessing Neda's death, viewers integrated her image within the collective cultural narrative and, in so doing, fused her to [Iran's shared political memory](#). Within this discursive framework, the memory of Neda is mythologized through false characterization, transforming her into a revolutionary icon. Neda's adoption of [Iranian-reformist hijab](#) provided a semiotic reference to what de Certeau determines "[resistance via everyday practices](#)". Here, Neda's *roopoosh-roosari* (manteau-headscarf) combination enabled her signification as a [secular-minded, anti-regime individual](#). Intersecting between *hijabi* (veiled) and *bi-hijabi* (unveiled), the *bad-hijabi* command a site of resistance, "subverting the rigidity of these categories by [redefining and relocating these spaces](#)". In contesting state-imposed codes of Islamic morality, the *bad-hijabi* reject the regime's negation of women's sexuality. Neda's adoption of *bad-hijab* provided the article with further meaning, as her image became synonymous with calls for [freedom and democracy](#). The fascination of the viewer with Neda's "Western"-style clothes under her *roopoosh* highlights the neo-colonial identification of "freedom" with "democracy", or more accurately, [capitalism](#). This depiction of *bad-hijab*, as a form of resistance via a visual manifestation of "a defiant desire for [Western-style democracy](#)", was thus projected onto the life-narrative of Neda. This overt secularization, ignoring any religiosity of Neda-proper, safeguarded her projection onto the discourse of the new, modern Iranian woman. This was characterized within "the West" as "ready and willing to leave behind her backward religious beliefs", [mimicking her European and American sisters](#). This secularization of Neda was furthered in the dissemination of her image where she appears without *hijab*. In negating Neda's *hijab*, such images provided a [legible female subject](#), in which the narrative of (an unveiled) Neda could be claimed as [universal](#). Here, the Green Movement's Islamic reformist character was rejected for a more appealing and relatable narrative within "the West".

Undoubtedly there is an additional dimension to the signification of the death of Neda. Through both the dissemination of the image of Neda's death and her public commemoration, she is transformed onto to discourse of Martyrology. Here, Neda-as-simulacra replaced the hyper-masculine *shahid* (martyr) with an overtly feminized, and secularized, martyr figure for reformist revolutionary action. Through the semiotic annihilation of Neda via new media technologies, she is presented as the hyper-feminized victim of male violence. Within this paradigm of feminized martyrdom, gendered discourses of blood are subverted. While female blood is considered *najesse* (Islamically unclean) in hegemonic discourse, Neda's "martyrdom" positions the spilled blood of a female as equal in significance to that of the [male shahid](#). The commemoration of Neda-as-martyr therefore refutes gender inequality in the IRI by providing an equality of blood sacrificed in martyrdom. Here, female blood becomes a powerful tool for revolutionary action, connoting the painted fists of demonstrators in 1979. Indeed, just as during the revolution when protestors utilized the symbolism of blood to place themselves within the [Karbala paradigm](#), this meta-historical framing of Neda provided a legitimate mythology for the Green Movement. Here, Neda's death delivered a tool for revolutionary sentiment in its positioning within the semiotic reserve of Shi'i martyrdom. This particular conception of the female victim-turned-martyr, in its re-appropriation of the Ashura narrative, acted to redefine the conceptual framework of martyrdom in the modern imagination. During this epoch then, Neda-as-simulacra provided a re-articulation of the masculine discourse of martyrdom to contest the ideological apparatus of the state. Here, the new Iranian woman, signalled by her bad-*hijab* is reimagined to support the post-911 discourse of the good/secular versus the bad/terrorist Muslim.

The 2017/18 Protest and the Girls of Enghelab Street

While the 2017/18 protests were marked by both an opposition to the IRI's regional activities and a disenchantment with the current economic climate, one of the greatest symbols of this period to emerge was within the simultaneous protest movement of *dokhtaran-e khyaban-e enghelab* (the Girls of Enghelab/Revolution

Street). When Vida Movahed removed her *hijab*, fashioned it to a pole, and waved it above her head on a busy [Tehran street](#), she provided reference to both female revolutionary action in Iran and the state's relationship with the *hijab*. While Movahed's protest was a distinct movement, responding to Alinejad's [My Stealthy Freedom project](#); the "where is she" hash tag campaign following her arrest acted to tie her protest to the wider movement. Here, the dissemination of banknotes defaced with images of Movahed's protest visually anchored women's political grievances to the population's disenchantment with the current economic climate. Undoubtedly, Movahed's protest of compulsory *hijab* inspired others to follow suit. Here, over 30 women have been arrested for [publically removing their veils and protesting hijab laws](#). The punishment for breaching such laws is provided as either a fine or a sentence of up to two months imprisonment. However, some of those arrested are facing sentences of between one and 10 years imprisonment for "[encouraging immorality or prostitution](#)". Such charges are indicative of the regime's view of the women as threatening the ideology of the Islamic Republic. Here, public contestation of enforced gender codes acts as a means of questioning the regime's governance of a particular conception of gendered Shi'a morality.

While the *chadoori* woman provides semiotic signification for the outside world to readily identify Iran, the regime itself justifies its ideological positioning through the governing of its citizen's bodies. Certainly, the ideological positioning of the regime was routed in the restoration of morality following the Pahlavi dynasty. While modesty of the Iranian woman was said to have been corrupted by the Shah's regime, under the Islamic Republic, women were encouraged to "return" to the *khaneh* (house) to regain the humility of the [nation](#). Within this discursive paradigm, *hijab* itself acts as visual extension of the *khaneh*'s [architectural space](#). Here, the veil provides a "mobile *andaruni*" ([private sphere](#)). This state-certified patriarchal protection of the Iranian woman thus provided the nation with a means to take back the family's *namus* (honour); which had been previously corrupted by the Pahlavi regime's acceptance of "Western" cultural hegemony. The *hijab* thus holds a Janus position within Iran. While the *chadoor* itself provided a perceived form of "protection" for the "daughters" of Iran enabling them to enrol in

university and participate in the [public sphere](#), it also marked an overt oppression over their bodies. In challenging such an easily recognizable symbol of the regime's ideological framework, the “Girls of Enghelab Street” thus contest the moral code of the Islamic Republic, and, in so doing, its justification of rule. Undoubtedly though, these protests run counter to debates concerning *hijab* within “the West”. While such narratives provide the need to “save” the Muslim woman from a tool of patriarchal oppression, the “Girls of Enghelab Street” draw upon a rich history of Iranian female revolutionary action. Moreover, what is interesting here is the symbolism of *chadoori*-clad women participating in the protests. Certainly, the imagery of women waving *roosaris* on sticks while observing *hijab* forces the international community to witness the political agency of the pious Iranian woman and not just those with bad-*hijab* who could be readily defined as anti-Islam.

Conclusion

When considering the Iranian revolution, 2009 uprising, and 2017/18 protests, it is thus evident that the *hijab* transcends its monolithic construction within “the West” as a patriarchal tool of oppression. While during the revolution the *chador* was utilized as a placard for political action against the Shah, within the IRI, the roopoosh-roosari combination utilized by the bad-*hijabi* represents a form of resistance via everyday practices. Following from the Green Movement, the “Girls of Enghelab Street” again bring the issue of Iranian womanhood to the forefront of revolutionary action. In their adoption of *hijab* as a revolutionary flag in order to protest enforced dress codes within the Islamic Republic, the “Girls of Enghelab Street” thus position themselves within a lineage of female political participation. Here, the movement draws upon a particular conception of Iranian womanhood while negating the “western” discourse of “saving” the Middle Eastern woman.

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Identity Crisis and Identity Negotiation in a Group of Post-revolution Tunisian Muslim Women

Housseem Hamrouni

Introduction

Since its creation on the 13th of August 1956, the Tunisian Code of Personal Status has been playing an important role in the institution of women's rights and the equality between women and men in Tunisia. Its founder, the Prime Minister then and soon to become the first President of the Republic of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba focused his attention on giving the Tunisian woman a unique place in society. Key reforms brought by the Code include abolishing polygamy, instituting a legal procedure for divorce (before that two words from the husband announcing divorce would suffice to dissolve the marriage), and requiring the mutual consent of both spouses for the validity of their marriage, etc. All of these reforms were considered new and daring in Muslim lands because many of them violated sharia. Despite expected widespread opposition in a Muslim country, the Code did take effect and it is still seen as an important landmark and symbol in the country's history in general and Tunisian women's rights in particular.

Since the establishment of the Code of Personal Status, there have not been any noticeable reforms that would match it, but things would soon change after the 2011 Tunisian uprising and revolution. The emergence of two powerful political parties, the secularist big tent Nidaa Tounes and the Muslim democratic Ennahda Movement, brought with it, along with the unrelenting race for power, questions not only of national but also individual identity. The former party won a plurality of parliament seats in 2014 and its founder Beji Caid Essebsi was elected President of the Republic of Tunisia in the country's first post-revolution democratic elections.

Being a follower of Bourguiba and his policies, who was also a *mujtahid*, Essebsi made his intention clear to follow in Bourguiba's steps and one of his priorities was women's rights, but again at the detriment of sharia in a Muslim majority country.

On the 13th of August 2017, in commemoration of the 61st anniversary of the Code of Personal Status and in celebration of National Women's day, President Essebsi announced his firm intention to proceed with the initiative to reform the country's laws on marriage and inheritance. In an unprecedented move, a first in the Arab and Muslim world, he announced a law which would guarantee equal inheritance between women and men, another law that violates Islamic norms. The President did not miss other opportunities when he appeared in public statements to remind citizens of his decision. The last one was during his visit to Monastir in order to commemorate the 16th anniversary of the death of the leader Habib Bourguiba. He took the opportunity to give updates on the project.

Such an anti-Islamic law has been generating a lot of heat and polemic inside and outside Tunisia, but despite prevalent opposition and resistance, the move found supporters who have been pressing ahead with demonstrations and marches for the law to take effect sooner than later. This paper presents the results of a quantitative research of possible implications of this decision on the religious identity of some Tunisian women. The study investigates the possibility of uncovering a religious identity crisis, or at least symptoms of such a crisis, how it triggered a process of an "[identity negotiation](#)" and whether it has possible implications in politics and to what extent.

Research tool

The investigation is based on a descriptive survey that features 18 questions which was administered in different cities of Tunisia and focused on Tunisian Muslim women. Target group comprised students/researchers (92%) and employed (8%), in the age category of 15-34 years. The survey was conducted in-person and individuals were approached at colleges and universities, coffee shops and fairs.

They knew about the content and the purpose of the survey and they were cooperative. Data was processed using Microsoft Excel software.

The aim of the survey is to address three main issues: possible indicators of a religious identity crisis of some respondents, an analysis of an identity negotiation framework that ensued and finally the possible political implication behind the initiative.

Assumed indicators of an identity crisis

The first part of the survey was designed to see the extent of respondents' knowledge about the religious context of the inheritance issue. It may be relevant first to mention that when asked about their stance on equal inheritance in Tunisia, 55% of respondents said that they are against the idea, 27% said they are for and 18% said that they do not care. In the next, and more relevant, question where they were asked if they can identify the Quranic Chapter which talks about the allocation of inheritance, 47% of respondents was able to find the answer: Surat al-Nisaa (Chapter 4 – The Women). 19% thought that the verses in question are in Surat Al-Baqaraa (Chapter 1 – The Cow), 2% also could not locate them and thought that they are in chapter Mariam (Chapter 19 – Mary) while 19% said that they do not know the answer. 53% of respondents failed to identify the Chapter in which the distribution of inheritance is explained. This may be seen as a first sign of a religious identity crisis.

In the next question I focused on the response of the proponents of the initiative and I asked them if they have read one or more exegeses of the verses that explain how inheritance is distributed according to Islam. 77% said that they did not while the rest signaled that they did read one at least.

The results of these two questions have led me to assume that symptoms of a religious identity crisis have been impelled by this lack of knowledge and confusion about the verses. Islamic scholars, though slightly different in background and

doctrine, have all agreed that the Quran specifies only four cases in which women inherit half of men. On the other hand, there are ten cases in which women and men get equal shares and there are thirty cases in which women inherit more than men do. In some of these cases, [women inherit and men do not inherit anything at all](#).

Furthermore, according to the inheritance science in Islam, the distribution of inheritance is not based on gender, but on three other principles. The first one is the degree of kinship between the deceased and the concerned inheritors: the closer the kinship the more the share, regardless of gender. The second principle has to do with the chronological sequence of generations. The generation which is closest to getting ready for life and its different responsibilities inherits more. The third principle has to do with the financial burden that the inheritor is [religiously and legally bound to handle and provide towards others](#).

In this vein, if we consider the most common of the four cases in which women inherit half of men, the one where female siblings inherit half of what their male counterparts do, there is a logical reason behind this. According to the third principle mentioned, in Islam, and in Tunisian law, the husband is always bound to sustain and financially support his wife even in the event that she is employed and financially independent. It is the religious and legal duty of the husband to sustain his wife and failure or dereliction to do so may be punishable by fines, jail time or both. This is why the brother has two shares of the inheritance and not one: because they will go to provide for his wife and his family. Moreover, the male is obliged by Islam and by law to be the breadwinner not only for his wife and children but also for his mother, sisters and dependent brothers in the event that his father passed away.

Another question the survey asked was whether the respondents are willing, as wives or future wives, to waive such legal obligations in case the law comes into effect. 67% answered: “No, why would I give up on my rights”, and 29% answered: “Yes, I would be willing to share with him the financial burden”. This shows that the majority of respondents are aware of the husband’s obligations and that

sustenance is their right to have and maintain. At the same time they are asking for equal inheritance. My opinion is that this may worsen the already bad marital situation in Tunisia by creating more problems. It may be relevant to mention here that according to the [Tunisian National Institute of Statistics](#), after 2014 there has been an average of 40 daily divorce cases in Tunisia and the figure is on the rise (about 43 per day in 2016). A main reason for this is financial difficulties and their role in spousal problems.

Going back to the issue of identity, the indicators discussed above show that there is indeed lack of knowledge about the issue of inheritance on part of the majority of proponents of the law. They falsely claim that Islam does women injustice because they inherit half of men. This reveals symptoms of a religious identity crisis on part of this group. All the same, advocates kept pressing and pursuing this cause, in the hope of attaining their goal and creating something out of this crisis. As a matter of fact, some researches have shown that new identities may in fact emerge from situations of identity crises where there may be a re-evaluation of various values and beliefs (Waterman, 1985). The next point that will be addressed in this paper is how this identity crisis triggered a process of identity negotiation.

The winds of change

The concept of identity negotiation was first introduced by the social psychologist [William B. Swann in 1987](#). It is a process that takes place between two parties: perceivers and targets. According to Swann, both groups engage in an interaction where they enter with different and sometimes conflicting agendas that are expected to be resolved as the process of identity negotiation occurs. In this vein, Swann also talks about “behavioral Confirmation” which is a process whereby perceivers interact in a way that would encourage other individuals (targets) to confirm perceivers’ expectations.

The proponents and opponents of equal inheritance in Tunisia clearly have two opposing and different agendas. The former group, perceivers, wants to gain more and more supporters from the latter group, targets, which will naturally show

resistance and maintain its religious identity as it is. Part of the survey was designed to see if behavioral confirmation in this process is successful or not. When respondents were asked whether the move to call for equal inheritance is gaining more and more proponents by the day, 63% said yes (40% mentioned that it is a limited growth while 23% of them said it is an important growth). This shows that, although 55% of respondents is against equal inheritance, they still believe that the initiative is being successful in winning and mobilizing more supporters.

One strategy through which perceivers are influencing the action of their targets is by creating “[opportunity structures](#)”. These are social environments that not only promote the survival of their agenda, but also encourage targets to adopt this agenda and support it. An example of this is the demonstrations that were organized by the advocates of equal inheritance. On the 10th of March 2018, more than 70 civic organizations mounted a campaign of marches in the streets of Tunisia to ask for this law to take effect soon. And more marches like this one followed. When I asked respondents about whether such opportunity structures have an effect on the behavior of people, 57% of them responded by Yes. 48% of them said the impact is average, 38% said it is limited while 14% said that the effect is considerable. This goes to show that more people are turning their eyes to this initiative and looking forward to this law to take effect.

One can safely suggest therefore that the process of behavioral confirmation, and by extension the process of identity negotiation, is being successful. Proponents of equal inheritance in Tunisia (although they represent half the percentage of the opponents: 27% and 55% respectively) managed to influence the behavior of some opponents and encourage them to reconsider their position and reconfigure an aspect of their religious identity. If the law would generate for them some psychological and material gain, then why not gravitate towards self-enhancement.

On the other side, some adversaries of the law preferred to maintain their stable identity. When asked about the reason, 40% of them said that the Quran and Sharia must not be tampered with. They did not see equal inheritance as a self-enhancement opportunity. This shows that such polemics may impel the religious

identity to become even more central and stable to some individuals' concept of self.

Liminality and the trickster

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to see if the equal inheritance initiative hides behind it a political agenda, especially because it comes right before two important events: the municipal elections (which took place on May, 6th) and the presidential election which will be held in 2019. When asked this question, 81% of respondents said that they do believe in fact that politics are at the heart of the initiative. In commenting on this, it may be helpful to borrow two terms from anthropology, more specifically from the recently developed sub-field called political anthropology. The terms are liminality and the trickster figure.

Liminality refers to a period of transition that marks a change in an individual, group or a community. It is translated in rites of passage and rituals that assist the passage of a group or an entire community through major changes in life, [especially in crises](#). There are also some guiding principles in each liminal moment such as the three different phases and the [guidance of the masters of ceremonies](#). In political life the concept, as well as the mentioned guiding principles, have a lot of potential applications. Revolutions and wars, for example, are considered to be [liminal moments](#). In the political sociology of Max Weber as well, liminal moments are instances of disorder and anxiety, such as economic crises, wars, revolutions, etc. For him, this can be addressed and resolved when [a charismatic figure, a leader, emerges and intervenes](#).

After the independence of Tunisia from French rule, a liminal moment took place as the nation was preparing for a new autonomous rule and building its republic with the abolition of monarchy. Economic development was slower, public security was weak and society was looking forward for urgent solutions. At that time, Habib Bourguiba, who had been playing an important role in the liberation of the country and negotiating its independence, was affecting people with his persistence and dedication to the cause. He eventually ended up being the leader

that the country needed to clear away the debris and build a new independent and progressive country. At a time when most other countries in the region were racing to arm themselves and build their national defenses, President Bourguiba allocated the national budget on three major sectors: education, health care and women's rights.

Tunisia witnessed another major liminal moment when the revolution of 2011 took place. The revolution left a vast political void in the country which affected the economy and all other sectors, resulting in a state of chaos and national unrest, which still lingers to this day. This again called for an urgent solution, for someone to clear the mess and restore order, but this time there was no one who corresponds to the Weberian charismatic leadership. Max Weber was well aware that it is not guaranteed that in such liminal moments of crisis charismatic leaders would automatically appear. Failure remains always a possibility. In assessing the political situation of post-2011 Tunisia, one of the concepts that may come to mind is that of the [trickster](#).

As a figure and concept in anthropology, the trickster was coined by the American anthropologist Paul Radin. Although there is hesitance to establish an academic and critical position for the term and to accept its legitimate application for politics, the term is still all the same used by [many critics](#). The aim is not about labelling some politicians as tricksters, but rather about recognizing a particular [logic and mode of behaving in political life](#). The trickster takes advantage of situations of crises and communal unrest in order to establish himself among them. Using cunning and ruse, he is able to play on people's emotions and guide them. He hijacks their attention and incites their interest with arguments and with material and psychological promises to gain their growing recognition and support.

In the post-2011 Tunisian context, introducing a law which posits equality between women and men in inheritance at a crucial time in the political scene would be a potentially effective maneuver to gain their support, especially a few months before the presidential elections. Although 90% of the respondents to the survey said they

are not familiar with such concepts as the trickster, 81% still believe that the law is first and foremost a political maneuver to win potential supporters and voters. 19% of respondents on the other hand believe that the intention behind the initiative is purely to serve Tunisian women's rights in particular, and human rights in general, and that it has absolutely nothing to do with politics.

But if we live in a free and democratic country where people's voice and will are important, then why take a one-side decision and initiate a law that concerns all Tunisians and their religious sensibilities and religious identity? If we live in a country of freedom and democracy, then why we do not hold a national referendum and see directly what Tunisian citizens want?

Conclusion

This study attempts to shed light on a possible religious identity crisis which was revealed after the proposal of the equal inheritance law in Tunisia. The majority of proponents exhibited lack of knowledge about the distribution of inheritance according to Sharia, which in fact does justice to Muslim women and not the other way round as claimed by the advocates of this law. As has been mentioned, gender has nothing to do with the allocation of inheritance in Islam. Rather, inheritance is based on three principles: kinship, generations and financial responsibilities of the concerned inheritors.

All the same, the initiative managed to start an effective process of identity negotiation through which proponents have been influencing other Tunisians and gaining their support. One of the strategies used for this end is the creation of opportunity structures (marches and demonstrations) to affect the behavior of targets. While some targets, initially opposing the law, ended up joining the rally, some other preferred to maintain their position and did not see the movement as a social and self enhancement opportunity. Overall, it can be said that the process of identity negotiation is being successful to a certain extent.

The third research question that was addressed is the potential involvement of politics in the initiative. It can be said that since the 2011 revolution, the situation of Tunisia has been unstable on all levels, making it a liminal moment. The current situation has been contrasted with that of the post-independence period. While in the post-independence liminal moment a leader emerged to clear away the chaos and restore order, in the post-2011 period no one who corresponds to the Weberian formula of charisma appeared. Instead, figures who may be associated with that of the trickster emerged. They play on people's emotions and use promises to win the support of a target group for political ends, in a Machiavellian fashion.

Limitations

As with any other research, there are limitations to this descriptive survey project. One of them has to do with the target group as the survey addressed only a number of Tunisian Muslim women aged between 15 and 35. It would have been constructive to include other age categories and to see viewpoints from other religious affiliations in Tunisia. Another limitation is that the survey did not research Tunisian men. More extensive research that includes male respondents and wider age groups and religions should be done.

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Not So Quiet After All? The Complexities of Youth Political Engagement in Morocco Seven Years on from the 'Arab Uprising'

[Christopher Cox](#)

In July 2017, Morocco's King Mohammed VI spoke about the necessity of [greater youth inclusion in development policies](#). Addressing the African Union, he exhorted leaders to fulfill youth potential through providing greater skills training and job opportunities, stressing their importance to future prosperity. In February he declared Morocco's efforts insufficient, challenging elected officials and government to establish [new programmes to better-serve Morocco's young](#).

Sparse mention was made though of encouraging greater youth participation in decision-making, i.e. political inclusion. Indeed, to fulfill youth aspirations would it not make sense to actually include them in the political processes creating such policies? Greater representation in legislatures and government, political party attention to youth matters, and official consultation with youth-based associations are illustrative examples.

The Kingdom of Morocco

Hitherto Morocco remains a "[liberalized autocracy](#)", having relatively-free and fair regular elections to parliament, and local/municipal councils. The Prime Minister (PM) and government are, notionally, the executive decision-making body. The 2011 constitution also, theoretically, ceded more decision-making and regulatory powers from monarch to government. However, much power and [authority remain in the *Makhzen*'s \(the King, palace and its patronage network\) hands](#).

The *Makhzen* is arguably more a fluid institution nowadays, not a traditional aristocracy. Alongside royalty, military heads, and major land-owners, it includes

businessmen enriched by Morocco's economic neoliberalism and political officials. The King and *Makhzen* figures' repeated interventions in policy-making and influencing legislators has long-stifled democratization. This contributed to an ongoing distrust and despair Moroccans, especially the youth, have towards politics creating an [overall sense of marginalization](#).

This paper illustrates Moroccan youth exclusion from formal politics remains a major problem seven years after the 2011 Arab Uprisings that swept the region. Citizens, especially youths, mobilized *en masse* demanding political and socio-economic change. However, despite this, close contemporary analysis indicates a mixed picture regarding youth political engagement. Ongoing formal inclusion problems do not automatically translate to a depoliticized youth avoiding engagement altogether.

Since 2011 some, though few, remain willing to engage in the formal political processes. Others have decided to pursue informal politics of associational activism, campaigning and exerting peripheral political pressure. Whilst some have opted to interplay between the two hoping to facilitate gradual systemic changes from the grassroots. Ongoing data collection, through interviews and statistical gathering, and analysis paints a rather-complex, evolving relationship between youth and politics, whilst concurrently, in some places, remaining the same as it has done for decades.

Problematizing the Youth

Before proceeding "youth" needs defining. This paper adopts the [consensual definition of youth](#) being aged 15-29, people at an early stage of life, recently graduated from compulsory education, entering adulthood. Major interests/concerns include university education, job-seeking, housing, marriage, and/or family-building, aptly deemed a "[period of transition into adulthood](#)."

Treating "youth" as a singular homogeneous actor needs avoiding. As [Belghazi and Moulden](#) argue, the youth are a myriad of identities based on class, profession,

gender, religion, ideology, ethnicity, education level. Whilst their youthhood is a binding identity in one area, it may not be in another. Varying social cleavages impact an individual/sub-group's interests, priorities and motivation for political engagement. Similarities and differences in interests dictates when, why and how certain people engage politically. This equally informs preferred engagement strategies, like more street activist routes (protests and sit-ins), or more formal endeavours (voting, joining parties, and petitioning).

Exploring youth engagement in any setting is therefore complex due to cross-cutting interests and identities. This paper provides a commentary on the recent state of youth engagement and possible future trajectories, mindful of different constituent social cleavages.

A Brief History of Youth Political Engagement Before 2011

Youth engagement with politics is nothing new in Morocco. Youth activism was quite prominent initially in nationalist movements campaigning for independence from France. [Particularly so with the prominent *Independence Party* \(*Istiqlal*\)](#), participating in protests, rallies and sit-ins. Following independence, the youth remained active in *Istiqlal* during the short bursts of parliamentary electoral contestation in the [ensuing decades](#).

Throughout much of King Hassan II's reign (r. 1961-1999) youth involvement in politics hugely regressed. Intensified state repression on opposition through beatings, torture, imprisonment and forced disappearances in the popularly-termed "[Years of Lead](#)" forced many to abandon political activism.

Hassan II's latter years did witness a re-emergence of youth politicization. This principally followed the creation of the *National Association of Unemployed Graduates in Morocco* (ANDCM) in 1991, who's purpose was to represent unemployed graduates/postgraduates and [lobby for employment-based interests](#). The *Alternance* government's emergence in 1998, headed by the long-term

opposition party [Socialist Union of Popular Forces \(USFP\)](#), inspired a brief increase in youth political party membership, especially to its youth wing.

The 2000s under Mohammed VI (crowned 1999) witnessed another retreat, however. Unlike Hassan II's repression, broken promises and disillusionment generated decline. Initial optimism in the USFP was dashed by perceptions of co-optation by the *Makhzen*. The *Alternance* project became discredited as the palace regularly overruled government and directly influenced cabinet policy-making.

The USFP, once considered a vehicle for genuine change, became [viewed as a hollow-shell](#). In turn, the ANDCM struggled to make major headways in pushing for greater youth inclusion in official decision-making. Government creation/oversight of youth-orientated NGOs to encourage political participation, aptly termed "[royally-ordained NGOs](#)" (RONGOs) indicated further efforts to present an open and inclusive political system were really attempts to channel and co-opt youth voices.

Prior to 2011 therefore the youth's political participation fluctuated. The monarchy and *Makhzen* reigned supreme. They repeatedly dominated politics either through repression or co-optation of potentially dissenting voices. These perceptions, and limited spaces for free political expression effectively demobilized the youth but, as 2011 showed, did not completely depoliticize them.

The 20 February Movement, the Youth, and the 2011 Uprising

Mohammed VI did not succumb to the same fate as Ben Ali, Mubarak or even Qadhafi. However, Morocco was hit by the 2011 pan-Arab World mass-protests. Moroccans, particularly the diverse youth, united and mobilized largely under the *20 February Movement (Feb20)* banner. *Feb20* exploited deep-seated frustration and despair at the state of political exclusion and freedom, and unemployment and economic woes youth faced. So-named after the date they first mobilized, in which 300,000 turned up, [protests quickly spread to major cities nationwide](#).

Demands for the regime were quickly developed. These crucially included constitutional change permitting greater democratization through ceding more powers to elected governments, guarantees of ethnic minority Amazigh rights and cultural protection, the PM's dismissal and fresh elections under a [new constitution](#). More youth-specific demands like job opportunities and state welfare provisions were also expressed, alongside calls against state corruption and repression.

The movement was arguably revolutionary by means of Moroccan youth expression. First, notwithstanding previous youth-based associations, a widespread, all-encompassing, nationally mobilized movement had not occurred. Second, Feb20 tapped into new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and social media like Twitter and Facebook to organize and co-ordinate demonstrations. It also established its own news outlet, [Mamfakinch](#), to spread developments and publicize upcoming protests.

Third, the movement, unlike the polity, was quite democratically inclusive and decentralized. Local committees in numerous cities debated, planned and co-ordinated action. Fourth, the movement transcended social cleavages and identities encompassing young Moroccans' diversity. Some were keener to partake than others (e.g. [middle-class students/graduates were less committed than others](#)) but the movement deserves credit for uniting society's different strands.

Fifth, arguably its most profound legacy, was how its very grassroot emergence and civil disobedience challenged the prevailing narrative of state-society relations. Fervent mobilization against the status quo, combined with Mohammed VI's eventual 9th March pledge to listen to protestors' demands indicated to many the [Makhzen were not all-powerful](#). This reinvigorated youth political interest. A young Moroccan activist said in 2017, despite some reservations about *Feb20*, he was grateful for them challenging the then-prevailing narrative and telling the regime [the youth needed to be heeded](#).

Ultimately though *Feb20* struggled to sustain momentum. It was undermined by the proposed new constitution and referendum in July, which its leadership boycotted as they considered it insufficient in [guaranteeing a firm parliamentary monarchy](#). Thereafter, November parliamentary elections which produced a *Justice and Development Party* (PJD) (a prominent opposition party)-led government, supported popular beliefs that Morocco was on the right track; to many, [Feb20's raison d'être was fulfilled](#). Although remaining active the movement's base diminished.

Annual 20th February demonstrations in Rabat dwindle each year. Also re-emerging state repression since late-2011 further dampened the prospects and appetite for street activism. *Feb20* was also a victim of its earlier success. Uniting different societal strands and mobilizing nationwide was commendable but unsustainable. Schisms emerged, particularly [between leftists and Islamists](#). Its disintegration from a national umbrella movement to smaller local pockets aided later regime repression.

Youth Political Engagement Since the Uprising

Formal political participation in elections and parties

The *Feb20* protests and regime responses have had mixed impacts on youth political activity vis-à-vis entry into formal politics. However, the pre-2011 dominant trend of political apathy and distrust of political parties and institutions has continued. [Only 1% of youths](#) actually engage in party politics. Electoral participation too decreased between 2011 and 2016 with a lower national turnout of [43%](#) down from 45% in 2011. [Youth turnout was deemed particularly low](#). The general mood among young Moroccans, including party member interviewees, is one of continued marginalization and exclusion from decision-making.

The *Makhzen* and status quo is regularly referenced for this prevailing view, with an overriding belief party political involvement is futile as policy-making and any significant systemic changes continue to be [top-down](#). Indeed, in the months/years since the 2011 election more Moroccans concluded the

King/*Makhzen*'s concessions were only half-hearted, designed to placate popular outrage. The new constitution is seen as deliberately-ambiguous and [Makhzen tampering in politics has resurfaced](#). Contrary to 2011 pledges, Morocco is still not considered a parliamentary monarchy by many citizens. It is argued a parallel Moroccan political system continues. There are visible formal institutions like the parties, parliament and government. Conversely there are the *Makhzen* and [aligned special interest groups/individuals](#). The latter often prevails when it comes to policy-making. How then can the youth have faith in engaging with formal institutions?

Some interviewed shared this sentiment and referenced the 2016-2017 “Le Blockage” affair as illustration. In electoral politics no single party wins conclusively, so coalitions with several parties are formed. In 2016 the PJD was returned with a greater majority but struggled to form a coalition. Months of political deadlock ensued. The King eventually removed PM-designate and PJD head Abdelilah Benkirane replacing him with Saadeddine El-Othmani to form a government. Some argued the *Makhzen* deliberately scuttled talks so Benkirane, who had clashed with the King when PM early in the 2011-16 parliamentary term, could be replaced with the more palace-pliant El-Othmani. Referring to El-Othmani, one partly-joked “we don’t even know if we have a prime minister. Why? because he is like a puppet. [He does nothing.](#)”

The parties themselves also receive criticism. Many major ones like the *Party of Authenticity and Modernity* (PAM), *Istiqlal*, *National Rally of Independents* and USFP are viewed as *Makhzen*-aligned instruments; co-opted, weak, internally-corrupt, [lacking democratic credentials with self-serving leaderships](#). A trainee lawyer, involved in university politics, said he originally joined the USFP hoping to build democracy beyond campus. He left in 2016 because he claimed “I find out that he [the party leader] is more royalist than the king himself. [My stupid party.](#)” Another, who worked with other youths encouraging their involvement in party politics, said he struggled in convincing them because of such [preconceptions](#).

The youth appear more sceptical of party politics post-2011. They grew up with and many participated in 2011 protests demanding greater democratization and freedom of expression. They fostered new relationships, held debates, voted on actions together democratically. This combined with increased access and Internet use in digesting news and views outside Morocco arguably enhanced expectations of formal politics.

Smaller leftist parties like the *Unified Socialist Party* (PSU), who protested alongside *Feb20* activists, have made concrete efforts to appeal to youth concerns but have [struggled to grow recently](#). The PJD has managed to generate interest through its youth wing but considering recent events and fears of co-optation its youth membership may decline. Overall, youths regularly decry the lack of internal debates and democracy within most parties. Party association can be considered discreditable.

Establishing their own parties has also proved unattainable to many. Morocco currently has a swelling 35 parties. Any new one would struggle to carve a place for itself. Arguably a youth-orientated party may be successful in building a following from the youth constituency, in light of overall negative views on existing parties, but it would be incredibly hard to override views that question the point of formal participation given the *Makhzen*'s centrality. Also, one activist added that the immense bureaucratic and financial hurdles in getting registered led to him and [some colleagues abandoning such a venture](#).

Nevertheless, some young Moroccans have opted to enter formal political participation since 2011. Some acknowledge the ongoing internal problems many parties face, including their own, but argue the best hope for genuine change is through gradual penetration from the grassroots. I.e. join a party, hopefully progress through the ranks and change it from within, and then [attempt systemic changes within the polity itself](#). It is better to be within the system pushing for change than to pressure from the outside.

Another reason is that few alternatives are perceived. Moroccans of this persuasion, usually urban middle-class, university-educated and employed, view *Feb20*'s actions negatively, perceiving street activism "very messy" and [threatening to societal stability](#). This view has gained salience recently with concerns of events elsewhere in countries hit by the Arab Uprisings, especially Libya and Syria. Finally, some acknowledge an increasing return to repression of political activism, where formal politics remains the safest outlet for expression. The few Moroccans who do engage in formal politics remain sanguine about the prospect of making any real impact quickly. A PJD youth member said:

"I think that the parties are following in the shadow of the monarchy. And I think that the political parties only serve themselves. I am in a political party but [this is the reality of the parties](#)."

Informal politics: Street activism and associations

Despite youths' increased political interest since 2011 the modest participation in formal politics has not necessarily been met with a huge rise in informal engagement. First, the strategy of street activism has dissipated substantially. Aforementioned increased state repression on such activism and negative views held of such strategies are accountable. Protests have continued to occur post-2011 but they tended to be more localized and substantially smaller, unlike the nationwide ones that characterized *Feb20*. Personal costs of participation have increased since 2012 with Abdel-Samad arguing that greater repressive measures like online activity surveillance, pre-emptive arrests, arrests at demonstrations, prison sentences and even violence have [dissuaded many from taking to the streets](#).

Feb20's success in mobilizing *en masse* relied immensely on strength-in-numbers and the element of surprise over the *Makhzen* and security forces in 2011. Now, both are prepared to suppress similar mass-mobilization. Crucially, one would argue *Feb20*'s eventual unravelling has had a lasting legacy on youth activism. Groups

since have struggled to forge nationwide movements with the same capabilities and momentum. The underlying social cleavages of *Feb20* which re-emerged after the initial 2011 protests and led to its fracturing remain present in minds today. Consequently, many activists favour the [formation of more-localized movements based around local issues](#). Such organizations are easier for the regime to monitor and repress. This is apparent to many activists who have avoided street tactics.

Superficially, the 2016-17 Rif protests in and around Al-Hoceima contradict this, but those protests underscored complexities in analysing youth political engagement. Although technically youth presence/involvement in the mass-demonstrations and sit-ins arguably showed a continued youth commitment to earlier street activism this negates the protests' special status. They followed decades of locally perceived hostility and discrimination from the Moroccan government and authority towards [Rif residents](#). Indeed, many protestors hoisted the short-lived Riffian Republic flag (1921-26). Decades of local socio-economic neglect and Rif identity became rallying calls for mobilization.

Non-Rif cities witnessed protests in solidarity, including some by remaining *Feb20* activists, but the mobilizations remained very localized, not indicative of overall Moroccan youth political trends. One Marrakech activist agreed that those mobilizations were primarily a local issue, not necessarily inspired by or linked to the *Feb20* demonstrations and objectives, based more around unique issues that had [compounded the region for decades](#). Indeed, the Riffian protests along with the similar locally-orientated 2017-18 Jerada mining demonstrations reflect a growing divergence in youth political engagement since 2011, away from national collective action to locally-based ventures.

Second, instead of continued street activism one would argue there has been a small, but detectable increase, in youth civil society engagement through creating/joining associations. Under the 2011 constitution the creation of youth-based associations has been better-facilitated and encouraged by the regime. Some have seized this opportunity. Casablanca's "Theatre of the Oppressed", comprising former *Feb20* activists, uses performance art to express many young Moroccans'

political and economic [frustrations](#). There has also been an increase in human rights' NGO participation and creation, advocating greater political liberalization and youth inclusion.

Participants are mindful though of the resurging state presence and repression. Consequently, sensitive issues like the King are avoided. They also remain largely localized, making them more vulnerable. Indeed, the allowance of the formation of associations arguably serves the regime as a means of pacifying dissent by permitting youths to express themselves politically but off the streets where they are deemed more threatening.

This is a shared sentiment. 35% view associations positively, more so than parties (2%), but many continue to avoid participation because they question the point of such political expression if it [cannot pressure/influence real changes](#). Also, many young Moroccans are busy job searching and cannot afford the time to commit themselves.

Interplay: Combing formal and informal engagement

A crucial post-2011 trend when it comes to youth engagement, which this research has encountered, has been an increase in those opting to interplay between the formal and informal realms. This essentially takes the form of youth-led “initiatives”; informal associations designed to engage and encourage greater participation in formal politics. Through these endeavours, organizers, often young Moroccans, have sought to bring politics to the youth by exchanging ideas and debating on democratic and formal participation.

Facilitation has been through organizing workshops and conferences trying to secure, with mixed successes, politicians and party officials attendance to share their experiences and answer questions. One example is the *International Republican Institute Morocco*, who worked with local radio stations to organize the “youth video testimonials”. Citizens nationwide were filmed expressing their interests and concerns for the [upcoming 2016 elections](#). The idea was to encourage participating parties to address them. Some have also sought to put-together

petitions/demands to put to government figures, like the [Come Participate programme](#).

The “interplay” is witnessed through the informal channels in which these youths seek to express themselves by encouraging participation in formal politics. The initiatives have arguably received a kick-start from the 2011 constitutional provisions on [association creation](#). Because many seek to directly delve into grassroots action they are largely localized, and set-up by the very same middle-class urban youths who have decided to join political parties mentioned earlier. Indeed, such youths have reflected their desired course of gradual change through grassroots political entry [as a reason for the initiatives](#). They argue, contrary to *Feb20*'s street activism, gradual internal systemic change is needed and so they go about encouraging their local community peers' involvement.

One would expect that if these associations were organised by party activists then their independence is questionable. Some may be extensions of party structures. However, this has not really been the case. One initiative had organizers from the PJD and PAM, parties vehemently hostile to each other on the national stage, and regularly hosted politicians from across the spectrum.

The Marrakech-based *Moroccan Youth Initiative* (MYI), created in 2015, is an example. Organisers interviewed said their role was to “[bring down the political weight... to the youth and masses](#)”. They reported some successes encouraging formal figures to meet half-way and share their experiences. The MYI hosted popular leftist politician Nabila Mounib, Morocco's first female party head whose party, the PSU, has sought to represent youth interests and encourage their engagement since 2011. The initiative also hosted a government minister in 2016. One organizer partly-joked “[it was a very harsh conference, with a lot of energy from the audience](#)”, but was good because it allowed youths to directly put their concerns and questions to a government representative. It could also be argued this reminds the government directly that young Moroccans demand to be heard.

Initiatives, like the MYI, continuously utilize social media to spread their message and recruit. This is particularly useful in urban settings, where many of them operate. Most have internet access and social media accounts. The MYI Facebook page regularly provides updates on events and shares videos and photos of youth debates. Local charity work to help those in need is also regularly pursued, like the MYI giving out free meals, which helps build their local support base.

More idealistic youths remain cautious of formal political involvement. Their scepticism is not completely unfounded. There are fears that some initiatives are RONGOs, directly set-up or influenced by the *Makhzen*. An example is the *Consultative Council of Youth and of Associative Action* [accused of being too close to the Youth Ministry](#). Regardless, though real impact on youth participation in formal politics may take years, the proliferation of these associations has increasingly become a dynamic characterizing youth politics post-2011.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore how complex post-2011 youth engagement with politics actually is. A multitude of factors help illustrate continued trends of political disillusionment and apathy. Concurrently semblances of old and new participation, formally and informally appear. Formally, the youth remain largely-excluded from involvement due to the perceived dominance of the *Makhzen* and poor perceptions of many political parties.

Informally, despite *Feb20*'s vehement challenging of state-society relations there has been a substantial decrease in nationwide street activism and even online activities. Personal costs have risen exponentially in engaging online with increasingly repressive online laws and surveillance, with more arrests of bloggers post-2011. Even *Feb20*'s *Mamfakinch* was forced to close its website in 2014 due to such [pressures](#). However, association-based activism has increased, especially among those seeking an interplay of the two realms to hopefully garner gradual change.

Social cleavages have become more prominent lately, moving beyond the days of a unified youth under the *Feb20* banner. 2016-17 Rif street activism was largely defined along local identity lines of decades-old neglect and suffering, with many poor Riffians sick of the prevailing political and socio-economic treatment. In cities further away like Marrakech and Casablanca, middle-class urban youths had taken stock of regional events and were concerned of the negative impact *Feb20*-style politics on society overall. As such this, combined with a resurged repressive *Makhzen* and narrowing of the public space for expression, encouraged greater moves towards associational activism.

There has been a much-greater trend in the localization of political activity in recent years. This has complicated analysing how the youth engage politics, as it varies more from region to region than previously. The youth is far from a homogeneous entity. Clearly though they have not wholly returned to their cocoons; some remain active, in both old ways and new. The means they pursue vary on locality, interest prioritization, perceived personal costs, access to information, and how they think change can be brought about. For example, the interplay approach has, so far, been very much one pursued by urban middle-class youths who do not want to shake the boat but still want there to be changes, gradually.

The youth and politics is not a new relationship in Morocco but has been evolving since independence. The future remains quite unpredictable, because of the increasing localization of youth politics. Some areas may witness an increased move towards the interplay approach. Elsewhere, poorer regions may see sparks leading to intense street mobilizations. Indisputably though the youth collectively are far from being completely quiet.

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**Legitimacy Crisis and Quest for Identity in a Secular Space: The Case of Boko
Haram Insurgency in Nigeria**

Oarhe Osumah

Introduction

In Nigeria, the fault line between western and Islamic civilization has been aflame since the colonial times. Since then, the Nigeria Muslims have intermittently or persistently questioned the country's secular status. In the quest for Islamic identity for the country, immediately after the attainment of independence, there have been agitations and attempts by Nigeria Muslims to make the country acquire an identity of Islamic state. During the Constituent Assembly of the 1978/79, Muslims sought to incorporate sharia law in the 1979 Constitution. In the 1980s, *Maitatsine* religious sect founded by a Cameroonian insurgent, *Muhammadu Marwa*, popularly known as *Maitatsine* castigated and branded the affluent people and those in government as infidels – unbelievers who were hell-bound. He gained the followership of young, single and poor people.

Under General Ibrahim Babangida military administration in 1986, Nigeria was registered as member of the Organization of the Islamic Community (OIC). In 1991, the Shiite Muslim extremists made a [declaration not to recognize un-Islamic government at local, state and federal levels](#). In 1995, the General Sanni Abacha military administration registered Nigeria despite its secular status as a member of the group of Eight Developing (D-8) Islamic countries. The D-8 nations which also are members of the OIC are Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

In the wake of the return to civil rule, the quest for Islamic identity was expressed by the introduction and application of Sharia Penal Code in 12 northern states in the return to civil rule in 1999 in spite of Nigeria's secularity. In the quest for presidency, some of the Muslim candidates had reportedly whipped up Muslim religious identity sentiments. For example, it was reported that Muhammadu Buhari in his bid for presidency in 2011 as the presidential candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change urged Nigeria Muslims not to vote for non-Muslims. In addition, during the 2011 presidential election, there were reports of some people in Bauchi State going from polling units to units urging voters not to vote for an infidel, that is, a candidate who is a Christian. The results of that presidential election showed that ethnic and religious sentiments as [voters polled for their favorite candidates](#).

The boldest and gravest manifestation of Nigeria Muslims quest for Islamic identity for the country is the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency. The task of this paper is to examine within the context of legitimacy crisis, the BH quest for identity in Nigeria despite its secular status. Before proceeding with the objective of this paper, it is imperative to unpack the major concepts; legitimacy crisis and identity.

Conceptual and Analytical Notes on Legitimacy Crisis and Identity

There are various interpretations of legitimacy. The interpretations vary from age to age. During the middle age it was used to express feelings against usurpation. Thus, the element of lawfulness was central to the meaning of legitimacy. Also, the element of consent was considered to be [the essence of legitimate rule](#).

In modern time, the traditional principle of legitimacy was replaced. Legitimacy has been conceptualized as the capacity of the political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are most appropriate for the society. It is the extent to which the population accepts naturally without questioning the organization to which it belongs. The people must wittingly and willingly obey an existing political system, authority or institution accept its sanctity and [consider it worthy of respect and reverence](#).

A variety and plurality of types, sources, patterns and claims of legitimacy has been identified. The various types of governmental legitimacy can essentially be classified into two; [numinous and civil legitimacy](#). The numinous legitimacy is the principle of legitimacy associated largely with religious principles. There is a principle numinous legitimacy that leaders or kings are representatives of god. The King's rule then is god's rule. Also, there is the principle that government whether temporal or spiritual is to derived from grace of God. This presupposes that God ordain leaders and leadership is sanctified by divine power. Another principle of numinous legitimacy is that leadership is derived from a sense of mission based on direct revelation of a Superior will. Such superior will may or may not be of [divine nature](#).

Civil legitimacy exists when a government is founded on a basic agreement to follow certain rules or at least on justifiable assumption that a basic agreement to follow certain rules exists. These rules include the government's obligation to protect civil liberties and to pursue common good. A government of a state should only expect respect and compliance from most of its citizens often only if it satisfies their [genuine needs and aspirations](#). Thus, a government is regarded as legitimate if the people to whom its order are directed believe that the structures, procedures, acts, decisions, policies and officeholders possess the quality of rightness, propriety or moral goodness to make [binding rules](#). A striking element of civil liberty is that governmental offices are ordered by trust rather than exercised by dominion. Thus, a government suffers legitimacy crisis when its actions, inactions or omissions violate or betray popular trust.

The various sources indicate there is no consensus on the standards or measures of legitimacy. For example rivals for power are quick to label their opponents as illegitimate and [advance legitimacy baits to win popular recognition](#). However, the various sources, measures and claims of legitimacy outlined by the different scholars revealed that legitimacy is not a mere abstract or moral feeling but something related with the entire political system. They presuppose that legitimacy is a belief that leads people to accept that it is morally right for officials or leaders of

government to make binding rules. Legitimacy inspires confidence in the government officials that they have rights to govern which is recognized by the governed. Legitimacy enables government officials to govern with a minimum of political resource. It is the soul of governmental power.

The importance of legitimacy is reflected by the quest for it in any kind of human societies in various times and places. In fact, virtually all kinds of political systems such as slavery, feudalism, monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy and democracy in various times and places had recognition of their existence or sought to gain [some forms of acceptance and recognition](#). Also, legitimacy is so vital in modern governance that even the usurpers of governmental power upon assumption of office strive for legitimacy to invigorate their position. Even people concede legitimacy to these usurpers of governmental power. Indeed, the attempts to clothe a usurping power with legitimacy or concession of legitimacy to such a usurping power suggest what the [standards of legitimacy are for a particular society](#).

A political system lacking legitimacy faces crisis, which brings or intends to bring change to the existing social system. A crisis of legitimacy is thus a crisis of change. A clear manifestation of legitimacy crisis is quest for identity or withdrawal from the state into ethno-religious shelters. In the absence of legitimacy, the task of governing becomes difficult. A government suffering from legitimacy deficit or crisis loses popular confidence and is imperiled. Legitimacy crisis has implication for claiming of identity.

Identity is a contested concept. However, the conception of identity has been broadly classified into three categories, [primordialist, constructivist and middle view](#). To the constructivists, identity is seen as innate, largely fixed and change little over time and is inherently conflictual. This presupposes identity claim is a product of irreconcilable differences between or among groups rather than a construction of unscrupulous leader. As [Ted Gurr](#) noted given the existence of identity and interest ethnic entrepreneurs can build militant political movements but only within the limits of group members' expectation about what objectives and actions are acceptable.

The constructivists consider identity as malleable and rapidly changing overtime. They contended that identity is not inherently conflictual but a product of social system, leaders and circumstances. In this sense, religious identity claim is occasioned by self-serving leaders who are [desperate to capture or retain power](#).

A possible middle view is that identity cannot be politicized unless an underlying core of memories, experiences or meaning that moves people to collective action. Historical myths can be shaped from imagined pasts to legitimate current goals. Thus, when identity is constructed it gained followership due to growing economic problems such as unemployment and inflation which shrink opportunities especially for youth. Also, state weaknesses increase the pressure and reduce opportunities increasing the justification to try to exclude the other group so that [your group can keep more of what is left](#).

The various formulations indicate that identity is an ambiguous and fluid sort of thing. Identity claims can be framed with reference to class, gender, language, culture and religion. However, identity is a powerful rallying point. It resonates with people. People can be motivated to [established, defend or protect their identity](#).

Identity and legitimacy crisis can be viewed as interwoven rather than being mutually exclusive. Identity-related values, appeals, claims and inclinations can be understood in the context of legitimacy crisis. Identity claim can diminish to certain degree by increasing acceptance and recognition of the existing political order. The legitimacy of a state plays significant role in diminishing identity claims and appeals base on race, nationality, gender and religion. Rising identity claims and appeals are suggestive of legitimacy crisis. Legitimacy crisis creates opportunities for individuals or groups such as BH to make identity claims. It also invigorates identity claiming in terms of providing basis for individuals or groups to advance claims by framing them in relation to their identity. In this discourse attempt is made to demonstrate how the elements of legitimacy crisis and identity-related claims, values and appeals are embodied and interwoven in the emergence of BH insurgency in Nigeria.

Several models have been developed which can be adopted to illuminate the basis for BH quest for religious identity in Nigeria's secular space. For our purpose, the social contract theory, which is traced to European tradition espoused by some English political thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, is apt and adopted. The theory is predicated on the notion that the construction of state is a product of social contract, an agreement between the citizens and the sovereign state. The agreement according to John Locke is binding on the citizens who had duties and the sovereign state who had obligation. This presupposes that the sovereign state was not absolute but limited by the terms of the social contract. The main term of the social contract is consent. Either of the parties can withdraw its consent if the other party fails to meet its part of the contract. The idea of the social contract is not confined to the European tradition. [Khaled Abou El Fadi](#) noted that in Sunni Islam the rule of the Caliph or leader is premised on a contract between the Caliph and the people; who give their allegiance and consent to the Caliph in exchange for him discharging his responsibilities.

The strength, performance and utility of the state have been judged by the extent, quality and effectiveness of delivery of critical services of social welfare and security. The willingness of people to pay allegiance to authority of the state is strongly influenced by how they view the future. If the future begins to become very bleak, the level of cooperation among the people to pay allegiance to authority of the state becomes marginal. The people in societies that are sliding into high levels of uncertainty can [question the authority of any state](#). The import of the social contract is that lack of consent and state's failure, refusal to deliver or neglect its welfare services to the citizens' fuel identity-related values, claims, and movement such as the BH insurgency.

Overview on BH Construction and Development

The historical root of BH is traced to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan founded the *Ahlulsuna wa'jama'ah hijra* or *Shabaab* (Muslim Youth Organization) in Maiduguri, Borno State. The group grew as a non-violent movement until 2002 when Ustaz

Yusuf Muhammed emerged as [the leader of the group](#). BH professes to be a true believer of unadulterated values of Islam. It repudiates aspects of western education that run contrary to the traditional values and beliefs of Islam. It also opposes the secularism and thus it seeks to Islamize the Nigerian state by destroying institutions and practice that are not Islamic. In addition, it [repudiates democracy](#).

BH members comprised largely the down trodden, uneducated and unemployed. These members constitute the foot soldiers of the group. The members of the group also include members of the armed forces, police and political class. One of the earliest leaders of the sect, Ustaz Muhammed Yusuf was said to have had significant contact with some principal officers of the Borno State government like the former Commissioner for Religious Affairs under Governor [Ali Modu Sheriff](#). These members provide the group with arms and ammunition as well as financial support for conducting violence.

BH deploys various means for recruitment of its foot soldiers. First, some Muslim clerics have been allegedly involved in the recruitment of members for the group through surreptitious preaching to the down trodden about their future. Second, some women suspected to be wives of the sect whose husbands had been killed by the security forces have been allegedly involved in the recruitment of women for the group who have often been used for suicide bombing and conduct of espionage. The women recruits mainly widows and young ladies are said to be enticed with BH male suitors. Third, BH forcefully recruits young locals after [overrunning their villages](#).

The tale of violence about the sect is traced to its attack on December 24, 2003 on public buildings in the town of Geidam and Kanamma in Yobe State. Members of the group occupied the building and hoisted the flag of Afghanistan's Taliban movement over the camp. Nigeria security agents, after the arrest and killing some of the group members, [removed the flag](#). The BH violence continued, when the members on September 24, 2004 attacked Bama and Gworza police stations in Borno state. In the attack the member killed several policemen and [pilfered arms](#).

[and ammunition from the stations](#). The September 24 attack was followed by sporadic attacks on security posts in various parts of Borno and Yobe States until its July 2009 anti-government uprising. The uprising was occasioned by killing of group's members during a funeral procession over their failure to wear crash helmet. In a reprisal, the members attacked Dutsen Tanshi police station, which set the stage for a wave of violence that spread through Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina and Yobe States. The uprising which ended on July 30, 2009, resulted in the death of 800 members of the group and arrest of several others including [Yusuf who died in the police custody](#).

After the death of Yusuf, BH went underground shortly before its leadership was taken over by Abubakar Shekau. Under Shekau, BH developed new violent tactic such as bombing, laying ambushes, abduction and slitting of victims' throats. Furthermore, BH has attacked several locations including churches, markets, recreational centres, mosques, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, communities, schools, prison centres, police formations, Nigeria Immigration commands, media outfits and other public buildings such as the United Nations office in Abuja. BH members have attacked and killed Christians, traditional rulers, politicians, journalists, public servants, traders, school children and teachers as well as Islamic clerics. The violent activities of BH have been felt in up to ten of the nineteen states in northern Nigeria and in parts of Cameroon and Chad Republic.

Apart from killings, BH members of have been involved in abduction especially women and schoolgirls. On April 14, 2014, BH abducted 276 Chibok schoolgirls. On February 19, 2018, BH reportedly kidnapped 105 school-girls from Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State. Although, the Buhari administration has been able to secure the release of 106 Chibok school girls, 104 Dapchi schoolgirls and 16, 000 other abducted persons some are still in BH captivity.

Between July 2014 and February 2015, BH had overrun and controlled several communities in no less than 15 local government areas in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. Some of these communities include Madagali, Mubi in Adamawa

State, Abadam, Ashigashiya, Baga, Bama,, Dikwa, Gamboru-Ngala, Martes in Borno State and Buni Yadi in Yobe State (Ubhenin 2015). The heightened insecurity generated by the intensity and frequency of BH attacks prompted former President, Goodluck Jonathan to claim that BH insurgency was worse than the Nigerian civil war and imposed emergency rule in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe.

On account of the wave of the violent activities of the sect, former Head, Counter Terrorism Bureau of the United States, State Department, Ambassador Daniel Benjamin noted that BH by 2012 was the second deadliest terror group in the world next to Afghanistan's Taliban. By 2014, he noted that BH had become the world deadliest terrorist group [killing at least seven persons per attack in the North-eastern Nigeria](#).

Legitimacy Crisis as Basis for the Emergence BH

The emergency of BH is ascribed to lack of social contract owing to the manner the Nigerian state was created by the British colonialists. The British colonialists lumped together various nationalities without due consultation. At independence colonialism left Nigeria like many other countries weak and laid the foundation of contestation between different groups. Prior to the advent of colonialism, the different identity groups which make up the present day Nigeria were autonomous. Yusuf a BH leader prior his death had made reference to the lack consent in the establishment of the Nigerian state with secular status. Yusuf had explained on the BBC Hausa Radio thus "Our land was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it to a ["kafir \(infidel\) land"](#)". BH quest to Islamize Nigeria can be rationalized as legitimacy deficit of the Nigerian state created by the colonial masters.

Another aspect of numinous legitimacy fuels BH is the belief that God ordain leaders. Thus, BH repudiates democratically elected leaders. This can be deduced from statements credited to Yusuf and Shekau. According to Yusuf, anyone who is genuinely committed to Allah must reject democracy and Western secular influences in totality:

“What will make you a soldier of Allah first and foremost, you make a complete disavowal of every form of unbelief: the Constitution, the legislature… worshipping tombs, idols, whatever. You come to reject it in your speech and your body and your heart. Moreover, Allah and His Messenger and the believers, [you love them in your speech and your body and your heart.](#)”

In a letter written by Shekau, he called for an aggressive opposition to the unbelievers thus:

“The believer will not leave his faith. Likewise, the infidel and the hypocrite will not give up his polytheism and his craftiness. Allah Most High has said, ‘Many of the people of the Book wish to turn you back to unbelief after you have believed’ … Meaning if you don’t follow their goals, you cannot be reconciled with them. There’s nothing that can allow you to get along with the infidel and the hypocrite unless you [become exactly like them.](#)”

Also, the principle of numinous legitimacy that leaders derive inspiration mobilizes forces for BH insurgency in Nigeria. BH repudiates aspects of western education which contradicts the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. In fact, “Boko Haram” literally means western Education is “forbidden”, “sacrilegious”, “inauthentic” or “evil”. Before his death, Yusuf had explained that:

“There are three perspectives on knowledge on Islam. The first is knowledge which is in line with what the Qur’an and the Hadith taught. The second perspective is where such knowledge differs with what the Qur’an and the Hadith contain. The third is a neutral perspective which neither contradicts nor supports the Qur’an and Hadith; for as the Prophet said in a Hadith relating to People of the Book… ‘If they bring to you anything agreeable to the Qur’an, accepts it; but if they bring anything that contradicts Islam, rejects it; and if they bring anything that neither contradicts nor supports the Qur’an, it is your choice to accept or reject it’. Well, this is the perspective I accept. If any form of knowledge is to be pursued for its sake, not following the structure of any government form of education, then [I have my own reservations.](#)”

Instructively, antagonism to western education in Northern Nigeria dates back to the colonial era when the British introduced modern schools into the Sokoto caliphate. When the Islamic clerical class could not read or comprehend the publishing documents such as letters and books introduced into the modern schools, they thought that this modern schooling was a ploy to convert Muslims to Christianity and castigated it as false, duplicitous, inauthentic, and a threat to Fulani hegemony.

Furthermore, the core of civil legitimacy is that the obligation of modern government is to protect civil rights and liberties as well as pursue the common good. Although Nigeria is a rich nation being the fifth Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil producer, about 70% of its citizens are facing grinding poverty surviving on less than US\$1.25 per day. The socio-economic condition is worst in the North with [72% of the people mired in poverty](#). Besides, the North from a comparative prism has the highest level of youth unemployment especially on account of the phenomenon of Muslim child beggars locally called *Almajirai*. According to [Smith](#), the Northeast is “a place where restless, unemployed youth, corrupt politics and unforgiving poverty had helped induce a violent uprising by a seemingly bizarre religious sect”.

Indeed, the records of the arrested BH suspects indicate that the real armies of suicide bombers and terrorists’ foot soldiers are drawn from the ranks of the down trodden and people uncertain about their future. In June 2013 young BH suspects set free by the Nigerian military claimed that BH paid them N5.000 each (about US\$30) to set schools ablaze in Yobe and Borno States and [conduct espionage on soldiers](#). As shown by Hamas which provided health, educational, religious services to the people in Palestine, beneficiaries often give allegiance to entities which [provide them social welfare](#).

In the North evidence of government inability or failure to deliver welfare programme is revealed by the receding Lake Chad. The Lake Chad which used to cover over 25,000 km² in 1960 has shrunk to 2000 km² at present, a [90% reduction in size](#). The shrinking Lake Chad which used to provide livelihood for 40 million

people has engendered poverty, unemployment and huge humanitarian tragedy with 5 million people in need for food assistance and 200,000 children under age [suffering from acute malnutrition](#).

Another striking element of civil legitimacy is trust. Most Nigerian leaders entrusted with public office have betrayed the trust on account of self-serving motivation. BH members condemn widespread elite corruption. At the inception of BH, Yusuf drew youth to him by preaching about the excesses of government officials which resulted in the declaration of secular education as haram (forbidden) to Muslims. His preaching, which attracted the attention of students and lecturers in the tertiary institutions in Borno and Yobe and made many of them in 2004 to withdraw from school and tear up their certificates and joined BH. Musa Kabir (Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi) and Dr. Mohammed Nazeef Yunus (Kogi State University) were some of [such lecturers](#). Also, before his death in 2009, Yusuf had repudiated widespread elite corruption in the Northeast:

“How can you be elected only to embezzle money and accumulate only for yourselves, and in addition bring in to the town a group of mad people (soldiers) in the name of security? Soldiers are deployed here, torturing and exhorting money from people. What the Governor should have said was ‘my people who elected me should not be treated this way by soldiers’. Yet the governor continues to engage in acts of corruption. It is not fair to cheat and accumulate at the expense of ordinary people… [If you cheat you will never get blessings from Allah.](#)”

Conclusion

BH insurgency in Nigeria can be seen as breakdown of social contract or legitimacy crisis. Colonialism laid the cradle by bringing together people of different background and culture. The problem was exacerbated the inability or refusal of the postcolonial inheritors to deliver common good to diminish the identity appeals and values. Thus, to stem the BH insurgency in Nigeria therefore, it will be necessary to create a new social contract to correct “the 1914 mistake” (amalgamation of northern and southern Provinces) by the colonial masters. Also,

serious efforts must be made to check the imbalances and inequalities between the north and other parts of the country through effective administration of welfare programmes. In addition, there is the need make serious efforts to combat elite corruption.

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Countering ISIS Call for *Hijra* (Emigration): A Review through the Lens of *Maqaṣid Ash-Shariḥah*

Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman

Introduction

There were two accounts of emigration by earlier Muslims during the time of Prophet Muhammad in Mecca. The first was to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). The second and the last was to *Yathrib* (Medina). Modern-day Islamist groups such as *Al-Qaeda* (AQ), *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) and Islamic State (IS) assert the need for contemporary *hijra* based on these two historical accounts. IS, claims that the obligation of living under an Islamic state ruled by the *Shariḥah* law could only be fulfilled if one makes the *hijra* to the [territories governed by the Islamic State](#).

While the claim might sound appealing to some Muslims, it could be proven to be false. As far as the *Shariḥah* is concerned, deliberation of the law has to be complemented with the investigation of the objective of divine law known as *Maqaṣid Ash-Shariḥah*. If *hijra* to IS' territories is obligatory as claimed, a critical enquiry of the concept from the perspective of *Maqaṣid Ash-Shariḥah* is essential. Thus far IS has never approached the issue using this methodology. On the contrary, Muslim scholars have challenged the ideological basis of the claim to dissuade the influx of IS supporters. However, no deliberation on the confusion arising from IS' claim has been made from the *Maqaṣid Ash-Shariḥah* standpoint.

IS projects at least seven types of narrative which include religion, economic, social, justice, governance, [territorial expansion and nature](#). This paper, however, is an attempt to tackle the religious aspect of the group's *hijra* narrative with a focus on two out of six of *Maqaṣid Ash-Shariḥah*'s classifications in the early days

of formulation; the preservation of one's faith and soul (*hifz ad-din wa an-nafs*). This essay is presented in five sections. Section one provides an overview of *hijra* through the lens of Islamic history. The second section examines the definition and the history of *maqaqid*. The deliberation then proceeds to discuss its classifications and how it responds to historical context. Section four offers an analysis of the correlation between *Maqaqid Ash-Shari'ah* and *hijra* and scrutinizes the extremists' notion of *hijra*. The final section will draw conclusions from the preceding discussions.

The History of Hijra

The first, *hijra* came about because of the persecution of Muslims by Meccan Arabs. Ibn Hisham noted a comment made by Ibn Ishaq that Prophet Muhammad was physically hurt, and accused of being [a poet, a sorcerer and an insane man](#). The weak among Muslims received the worst treatment. Bilal, an Abyssinian Muslim slave was laid in the hot sun with a huge rock placed on his chest to [revert him to his old faith](#). These instances of ill-treatment were the real reason why the Prophet advised a group of eighty-three Muslims to seek refuge with Negus, a [Christian king of Abyssinia](#) (Ethiopia).

Prior to the second *hijra* to Medina, Prophet Muhammad received multiple visits by groups of Medinans. The parties forged an alliance through two covenants of loyalty known as the [Pledge of 'Aqaba](#). The Medinans vowed to render support and protection to Prophet Muhammad and Islam. This paved the way for Muslims to emigrate to Medina. The Quraysh clan exhibited more violent behaviour toward Muslims when they learned that the number of emigrants grew. They also devised a plan to assassinate the Prophet. This was the turning point where the Prophet after receiving the divine directive from Allah, emigrated to Medina. These accounts proved that *hijra* emerged as a solution to preserve one's right to practice his faith and to protect one's life. This is clearly reflected in the Quran: "To those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression - We will

assuredly give a goodly home in this world; but truly the reward of the hereafter will be greater. If they only realized (this)!" (Quran, 16:41). It can further be deduced that the long-term purpose of *hijra* was a strategic move to safeguard Islam's survival.

IS presented *hijra* in several facades. First, *hijra* is fundamentally required to build the capacity of the caliphate. Muslims especially the professionals and specialists are duty bound to [perform this obligation](#). Second, this move to strengthen the caliphate is tied to the notion of religious obligation thus making it an [act of worship](#). Third, *hijra* defines true conviction of faith. IS asserted that a true Muslim must be willing to sacrifice his worldly life to attain Allah's pleasure. This includes abandoning his family member who [refuses to make his way to the Islamic State](#). The group also stressed that "[abandoning Jihad is a trait of hypocrisy](#)". Fourth, *hijra* will end Muslims' slavery to their "kafir master" which is [systematically engineered through employment](#). According to IS, modern-day employment has compromised Muslims' dignity as the servant of Allah. The dignity can only be reclaimed if one chooses to live in IS-ruled territories and [dedicate his life to Allah](#).

Introduction to *Maqaṣid*

Maqaṣid is the plural form of *maqṣad* which means goal, intention and objective. *Maqaṣid Ash-Sharīḥah* denotes the spirit behind *Sharīḥah* ruling. It illustrates what *Sharīḥah* seeks to achieve through its law. Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), – Izz ad-Din Abd as-Salam (d. 1262) and ash-Shāṭibi (d. 1388) were pioneer scholars of *maqaṣid*. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary scholars formulated definitions to crystallize the idea of *maqaṣid* further to supplement the growing literature on *maqaṣid*. This is necessary given the ever-expanding dimension of *maqaṣid* in relation to the new developments and challenges in life. Al-Qaradawi asserts that "*Maqaṣid Ash-Sharīḥah* functions to attract benefits to human being and [distance them from harm and mischief](#)." [Kamali](#) maintains that due to the philosophically oriented and end-state centric nature of *maqaṣid*, it [received little attention](#) during the early days of the development of Islamic legal thought. It is argued that the notion of *maqaṣid* is the end goal rather than conformity to what is

prescribed by *Shari'ah*. [Auda](#) proposes *maqasid* as “[a branch of Islamic knowledge that answers all the challenging questions of “why” on various levels.](#)” Here, one can ask for the reasons why crimes such as giving and receiving bribes are forbidden in Islam. *Shari'ah* stresses that accumulating wealth through crimes such as robbery and bribery is a cruel and unjustifiable. Hence, they are sinful and forbidden.

In many instances, *maqasid* is embodied in the Quran and the Sunna through identifiable causes. The two fundamental sources of Islam did not confine *maqasid* to clear text alone. For example, in promoting the preservation of goodness and eradication of evil in both the private and public sphere, the Quran states: “To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good” (Quran, 2:148). The Prophet also warned that a believer, despite his faith, will be denied from dwelling in paradise if his evil conduct [cause discomfort to his neighbour](#).

Maqasid may also be understood through another dimension known as *masaalih* or public interest. [Al-Qarafi](#) (d. 1285) linked the two by suggesting that “[maqasid is valid only if it complements toward the fulfilment of *maslahah* \(singular for *masaalih*\) or the avoidance of some mischief \(*mafsadah*\).](#)” Therefore, we can conclude that *maqasid* seeks to identify the wisdom of *Shari'ah* law which is, to preserve personal and communal dimensions of public interest. Any effort to comply with rules but compromises the *maqasid* is unacceptable as it fails to appreciate the innate purpose of *Shari'ah* itself.

Classification of *Maqasid*

During the early stages of Islam *Shari'ah* was observed as a set of rule and value system. It functioned to facilitate order in the day-to-day interaction between humans and the surrounding they lived in. The formulation of the theory of *maqasid* was only deliberated by scholars in the early fourth century. The first classification of *maqasid* was probably pioneered by Al-Juwayni. [He classified *Maqasid Ash-Sharii ah*](#) into three core categories; the *daruuriyyaat* (necessities),

the *ḥaajiyyaat* (needs) and the *taḥsii niyyaat* (improvements). [Auda](#) refers to them as “level of necessity”. Although necessity is essential in one’s life it cannot possibly be sharing a mutual level of urgency. With this, according to the hierarchical order, *ḍaruuriyyaat* occupy the top level of the *maqqaṣid* pyramid followed by *ḥaajiyyaat* and *taḥsii niyyaat* respectively.

Daruṭṭiyyaàt are necessities that projects zero-tolerance towards anything that compromises the preservation of the five fundamental necessities coined by [Al-Ghazali](#). The five necessities are the preservation of one’s faith, soul, intellect, posterity and wealth. [Hallaq](#) notes that *daruṭṭiyyaàt* “[are absolutely necessary for the proper functioning of religious and mundane affairs](#)” because Islam seeks to uphold the welfare of its followers in this world and the hereafter through its law as evidenced from the *maqqaṣid*. A deficit in the implementation could lead to mischief and disorder.

In the protection of faith, the Muslim is required to maintain a good relationship with God by performing acts of devotion such as the daily prayers, the giving of alms, fasting during Ramadan and making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Forsaking or barring it from practice would negatively affect one’s devotion to Islam. Regarding the preservation of life, Islamic teachings forbid indiscriminate killings of the innocent or non-combatants in peacetime and during war. A sound mind is needed to make a sound decision and differentiate the good from the bad. Hence, Islam prohibits intoxicants, alcohol, banned drugs and the likes as they would seriously compromise one’s senses. This explains the fourth necessity that promotes the protection of intellect from elements that could impair its judgment. Islam also calls for the protection of posterity. It thus prohibits premarital sex, adultery and activities that are harmful to family life and future generations. The fifth and final necessity concerning the protection of wealth justifies the prohibition of theft, robbery and piracy and the need to maintain order to safeguard one’s property. This understanding of *maqqaṣid* was formulated during the early stages resulting in a heavy slant toward preserving the welfare of the individual rather than society.

Ongoing developments in human life demand a fresh look at the *maqqaṣid*. Consequently, [some scholars](#) added the preservation of “honour” as the sixth. Ibn Taimiyyah expanded the notion by including the rights of [neighbours](#). This marks the beginning of the re-demarcation of the boundaries of *maqqaṣid* from the individual realm to a wider scale that includes the larger society. In 1993, [Qaradawi](#) suggested freedom, justice and social welfare among the higher objectives of the *Shariḥ*. They paved the way for the introduction of the “universal *maqqaṣid*”. The universal *maqqaṣid* connotes the general world community including non-Muslims, animals and the environment. This is probably what [Al-ḥ Alwani](#) suggested by asserting there exist three elements in “supreme” *maqqaṣid*, one of which is “...*umraḥ*” or the development of civilization.

The *Maqqaṣid* – Hijra Nexus

The *hijra* to Abyssinia gives rise to two important points in discussing the choice of localities where Muslims should settle in. First, it proves that Muslims should relocate to a locality that grants rights to practice one’s belief and protect him from discrimination due to his religious orientation. Second, the potential destination for *hijra* could be to settle in a non-Muslim-ruled territory and the one not administered by *Shariḥ* law. The former Grand Mufti of Egypt Gad Al-Haq Ali Gad Al-Haq (1978 – 1982, died in 1996) issued a [fatwa](#) that reads: “If a Muslim feels that his religion is safe and he is able to practice it freely in a country that essentially has no religion or it accommodates religion other than Islam, it is allowable for him to stay. If he fears for his religion, morals, property or self-worth, then it is obligatory for him to move to a country where he can be safe.” The *fatwa* emphasised the importance of religious tolerance. Accordingly, the presence of religious intolerance that could compromise one’s safety warrants a relocation to a place where similar danger is not prevalent.

The absence of *maqqaṣid* in practising *hijra* was also found in the teachings of AQ and JI. In his post-9/11 speech, Osama bin Laden asserted that the rise of an Islamic state is dependent on [five conditions, one of which is hijra](#). *Hijra* is also placed as one of JI five [founding principles](#).

Before we begin to analyse the *maqaasid-hijra* nexus it is important to identify two types of arguments put forth by IS in its *hijra* rhetoric. First, *hijra* is obligatory upon “all” Muslims, and second, [the destination of hijra is to IS](#). The following paragraphs will elaborate on how Maqaasid Ash-Shari’iah is completely absent in IS’ arguments.

Hijra as Religious Obligation

Islamic rituals fall into two types, obligatory (Fardh) or voluntary (Naafilat). According to IS, *hijra* falls under the former. [The group asserts](#) that “... hence every Muslim reserves his right to relocate (himself) to [Da’irat ul-Islam] and settle there.” [The group argues](#) that relocating to IS is an act of worship in the cause of Allah: “[Hijra] in the cause of Allah is among the best form of worships that place the slave close to his Lord.” Accordingly, Muslims should emigrate from his country (especially in the Middle East) which was created based on Sykes- Picot “[false border demarcation](#)” (*al-hudud al-mustanacat*) to IS to support the caliphate and redraw the border. The arguments above explain IS members’ action of [burning their passports after reaching the territory safely](#). IS also persuades Muslims to emigrate to its territory by declaring those who do not perform *hijra* for whatever reason, to be a sinner:

“Therefore, every Muslim professional who delayed his jihad in the past under the pretense (sic) of studying [Shari’ah], medicine, or engineering, etc., claiming he would contribute to Islam later with his expertise, should now make his number one priority to repent and answer the call to [hijrah], especially after the establishment of the [Khilafah]. This [Khilafah] is more in need than ever before for experts, professionals, and specialists, who can help contribute in strengthening its structure and tending to the needs of their Muslim brothers. Otherwise, his claims will become a [greater proof against him on Judgment Day](#).”

[IS insists](#) that the barometer of one’s faith is measured by his willingness to break ties with his loved ones. Their understanding of this tenet is drawn from their reading of the following *hadith*: “The Messenger of Allah said, “Verily Islam began

as something strange, and it will return to being something strange as it first began, so glad tidings to the strangers.” Someone asked, “Who are the strangers?” He said, “Those who breaks off from their tribes.” [IS argues](#) that “strangers are those who left their families and their lands, emigrating for the sake of Allah and for the sake of establishing His religion.”

The Response

The argument that *hijra* would make a Muslim closer to God is inaccurate. If this is true, the Meccans and those who reside in the Holy Land would deserve this privilege by virtue of their proximity to the [Ka'aba](#) and the Al-Haram Mosque. Prophet Muhammad [was reported to have said](#) “Whoever performs ablution in his house and then comes to the mosque of *Quba* (named after a location) and prays in it will have a reward similar to performing the *umrah* (small pilgrimage).” This suggests that one can attain the reward of an *umrah* by performing the ritual in the manner indicated by the *hadeeth*. Hence, it is the type and the quality of ritual that could get one closer to God regardless of his whereabouts. Location is not a fundamental.

Also, the *hadith* that praises Muslim emigrants who are considered as “strangers” is not a strong determinant to affect *hijra*. It should be read against the religious backdrop of 7th century Arabia. First, the assertion about Islam “being something strange” came about in the context of the Prophet warning Muslims that the religion would not be easily accepted given the conventional climate then that was alien to monotheistic belief. Those who subscribe to monotheism would be seen as strangers. This was the reality then as Meccan Muslims observed Islamic teachings that were at variance with the common practices of polytheism and idolatry. The second part of the text “Those who breaks off from their tribes” should be read in the light of the social change that was taking place then. For example, a Muslim would distinguish himself from the other faith groups through his observance of religious obligations. His abandonment of the old religion (polytheism and idolatry) and adoption of a new one (monotheism) would appear strange in the sight of other faith groups. The *hadith*, therefore, was a directive for a new Muslim

to detach himself from the religious practices of his tribes, not blood ties. Acting against the order would nullify his faith.

It is also important to note that Muslims are religiously obliged to maintain a cordial relationship with family members of different beliefs. The Prophet evidently manifested this teaching by treating his two paternal uncles Abu Talib and Abu Jahal with kindness although they refused to accept Islam. A literal approach to reading the *hadith* causes IS to miss the underlying message of *maqasid*. A convert must leave his past religious beliefs and practices behind upon his conversion to Islam as this is in tandem with one of *maqasid* objectives, which is to preserve the faith. However, this does not necessarily require one to leave his homeland and abandon his responsibility as a Muslim and a member of his community. This contradicts what God said in Quran: “And remember We took a covenant from the Children of Israel, (to this effect): Worship none but Allah; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, And orphans and those in need” (Quran, 2:83). The fallacy of IS’ *hijra* narrative from this standpoint is therefore self-evident. Even without making the *hijra* to IS Muslims are already practicing Islam freely in their country of residence. Their presence in their existing localities, in addition to maintaining family and community ties, are more needed as the spirit of *maqasid* in preserving faith could continue to be observed there.

Hijra to Da`r ul-Islam

IS stressed the obligation to perform *hijra* from “[da`r ul-kufr to Da`r ul-Islam](#)”. [It asserts](#) that “...it is compulsory upon Muslim to live in [Da`r ul-Islam], and he is permitted to travel within its provinces and cities, and he is forbidden to live in [Da`r ul-Kufr], and it is compulsory upon him (to abandon it) and emigrate to [Da`r ul-Islam].” IS gives its own criteria of an Islamic state. First, the state must be led by a caliph. Second, the state’s operations must be based solely on divinely revealed *Shari`ah* law. Third, political ties or peaceful relationship with *toghut* governments are forbidden. Lastly, *Da`r ul-Islam* does not recognize “false border” and neither does it recognize the notion of nationalism and nation-state. [Al-Baghdadi said](#), “It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black

man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.” IS’ reinterpretation of Islamic state is significant because it delegitimizes other self-claimed Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia etc. which, according to the group, have failed to project the true image of an Islamic state. This was an attempt to shape the public perspective of what is an Islamic state and how it should behave on the international stage. IS also projects falsely how life was in Medina under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad.

Response to IS

The categorization of territories into *Da‘ar ul-kufr* and *Daer ul-Islam* is *ijtihad* or an independent reasoning issued by learned scholars. *Ijtihad* is an instrument used to respond to contemporary religious, political, sociological and economic issues that have no ‘direct’ precedence in Islamic history, and nothing of similar nature can be drawn from the Quran and Sunna. Both these two primary sources of Islamic teachings do not classify a territory as *Da‘ar ul-Islam* and *Da‘ar ul-Kufr*.

In discussing religious freedom and security in a certain locality, earlier Muslim jurists such as Abu Hanifah suggested two types of land and territory – *Da‘ar ul-Islam*, land ruled by Muslims and in which Islamic law is enforced or the opposite which is *Daar ul-Harb* (abode of war) although war or situation that leads to war wasn’t imminent. The Hanafis also opined that the former could become the latter in the following situations: after conquest by unbelievers, when the conquered territory is adjacent to *Daar ul-Harb* and the lives of Muslims and [dhimmi](#) are [endangered](#). On the other hand, the majority of jurists from the [three schools of thought](#) added *Da‘ar ul-‘Ahd* (territory of truce) as the third type of territory. It sometimes reads as *Daar ul-Sulh* (territory of peace). Both referred to the territory ruled by non-Muslims who have come into a treaty with Muslim ruler. Today, such concept is better known as international treaties that prohibit transgression.

It can be safely presumed that almost all, if not in its entirety, United Nation member states adhere to this international norm. Because religious security and to some extent personal security were the cause of concern when the terms *Da‘ar al-*

Isla m and *Daʿi al-Kufr* were first formulated centuries ago, the debate has practically lost its relevance today as the global community recognizes the freedom of professing faith and the right to live and be protected from danger. Hence, when a Muslim's safety is protected by the law in a locality where he lives and he is not exposed to religious discrimination, the goal of *maqasid* (of protecting one's faith, soul, dignity and well-being) is clearly achieved without him limiting his choices of places to live to only in the IS. This was the wisdom behind the order for earlier Muslims to leave Mecca for Christian-ruled Abyssinia because the territory upheld the abovementioned values.

IS also attempted to strengthen their position on *hijra* by arguing that many Muslims made a mistake by choosing the land of the Christians when it comes to emigration. In its [justification](#), the group maintains this was not the case when earlier Muslims settled in Medina after the second *hijra* and in the lands of the *khilafah* after the establishment of the Umayyad and Abbasid Empire. Although the emigration did materialize, it is important to note that those mass emigrations were influenced by many factors. First, Muslims emigrating to Medina wanted to be closer to Prophet Muhammad to benefit from learning about Islam directly from the Prophet as part of strengthening and preserving their faith. Second, Medina promised religious freedom for all; for the first time, Muslims were able to practice their faith publicly without fear of ill-treatment from others. Again, the element of *maqasid* was at play in this case. Third, regarding emigration to the land of Umayyad and Abbasid, it is argued that both lands were the center of gravity then. The caliphate and showing solidarity to the ruling caliph were not the only reason for mass emigration. Indeed, social interactions, business opportunities and intellectual engagements were also strong pulling factors. In fact, the peaceful coexistence of interfaith communities living under these caliphates as recorded in history could be one of the reasons of emigration of both Muslims and non-Muslims to the caliphate. As [Duran](#) noted, "To these [Dhimmi] - Christians, Zoroastrians, Sabaeans, Jews - the Umayyad caliphate offered a degree of toleration hardly equaled in contemporary Christian lands."

Maqaasid, both in its traditional and contemporary understanding seeks to safeguard Muslim and public interest. What is more prominent in IS controlled territories is showcasing the group's authority and power to execute what they called "*Shari'ah* law" toward fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Hence, IS claim on the obligatoriness of *hijra* is far from the truth.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that the two emigrations in Islamic history were the outcome of continuous ill-treatment targeted at earlier Muslims. In addition to recognizing the root cause of *hijra* in its classical sense, it is equally important to examine the events from the *Maqaasid Ash-Sharii'ah*'s standpoint. This is essential in order to appreciate the wisdom for prescribing Islamic law. IS, on the other hand, relies heavily on historical narrative and literal interpretation of religious texts to support their *hijra* propaganda. The group has total disregard of the importance of the *maqaasid* dimension in this respect. In other words, they fail to convincingly answer the "why question: Why is *hijra* needed today when there is no persecution of Muslims? Why is Muslims' presence in the so-called "fabricated borders" more important than abandoning efforts built by earlier generations?

IS' *hijra* propaganda has appealed to some because it not only controls territories but also commands its own military, administers its own judicial system and most importantly, it is led by a "caliph". This is a structure that very much resembles past Islamic caliphates and many would and have fallen for this misconception. However, as presented in this paper, not many are aware of the discourse of *Maqaasid Ash-Sharii'ah*, let alone its classifications and the development it had undergone in response to an ever-changing environment. If they are aware of *Maqaasid Ash-Sharii'ah* other than just *Shari'ah*, they would be able to comprehend why IS' call for *hijra* does not bear any weight. They will realize that IS' call is incongruent with the spirit of *Shari'ah*.

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Notes

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Note 2. Jasser Auda is the Chairman of the Maqasid Institute, a global think tank based in London, UK. He is a Professor and Al-Shatibi Chair of Maqasid Studies at the International Peace College South Africa, and a Visiting Professor for the Study of Islam at Carleton University in Canada. He is also a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research. He holds a PhD in the Philosophy of Islamic law from the University of Wales, UK, and a PhD in systems analysis from the University of Waterloo, Canada. He is known for his works in Maqasid and some of his contributions in this realm include: *How do we realise Maqasid Al-Shariah in the Shariah?* (2016); *Rethinking Islamic law for Minorities: Towards a Western-Muslim Identity* (2016); *Maqasid Al-Shariah: A Beginner's Guide* (2008); and *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (2008).

Note 3. His name is Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Idris. A Berber origin Maliki jurist and legal theoretician of the thirteenth century who lived in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt. Among his many works are *Al-dhakhirah* (The stored treasure), *Al-furuq* (Differences [between apparently identical legal precepts]) and *Nafais al-usul* (Gems of legal theory). His writings influence Islamic legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) which spread throughout the Muslim world.

Note 4. Wael B. Hallaq is a scholar of Islamic law and Islamic intellectual history. Some of his scholarly works include *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul al-fiqh* (Cambridge, 1997); *Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2005); and *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (Columbia University Press, 2013) which won Columbia University Press's Distinguished Book Award for 2013-2015.

Note 5. Ka'aba is the cube covered in black cloth located at the center of the Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is the Qibla, a direction where Muslims turn to when performing their prayer.

Note 6. Non-Muslim but protected under Muslim treaty.

Note 7. Such as Ma□
Ahmad bin Hanbal.

s ash-Sha fi i€ and

**Too Much leadership for Such a Region: The Competing Status-seeking Behaviours
of Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia after 2011**

Luiza Gimenez Cerioli

On March 2018, while visiting Egypt, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) declared that a “[triangle of evil](#)” was affecting the stability of the Middle East, namely Iran, Turkey and Islamist groups. Even though Saudi embassy in Ankara later denied that affirmation, it raised questions about the increasing engagement of Tehran, Ankara and Riyadh in regional matters. In this article, I support that the three countries aspire for regional leadership, and that Neoclassical Realism is a useful framework for understanding their status-seeking behaviour. This theory recognizes the dominance of the systemic structure as a condition for international politics and is attentive to state-level variables affecting outcomes in foreign policy.

According to [Deborah Larson, T.V. Paul and William Wohlforth](#), status refers to collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes in the international system. [Andrew Prosser](#) affirms that there are many dimensions of status, such as autonomy, diplomacy, population, history, development, territory, technology and others. Leaders make choices about international politics in a social sphere in which they must pay attention to their [relative position](#). However, a state’s estimative of its status is based in part on the interpretation of the behaviour and speech of others, a judgment that may leave it either satisfy or dissatisfy with its [ascribed status](#).

[Jonathan Renshon](#) describes the concept of “status community” as a reference group to the states that gather themselves into groups of peers. In this case, status

is not about “to have” and “not to have”, but how much one has in relation to the other peer competitors. States will be then discontent with their ascribed status when they perceive that they are being ascribed a lower status in the status community that they think they deserve. Status dissatisfaction corresponds to the perception a state has about how fair its ascribed status is among the status community and in the systemic level. By studying status dissatisfaction, one can detect the ambitions of a country towards the system and how it thinks the system should work, namely, if it is pro-status-quo or revisionist. Hence, this article aims to describe Iranian, Turkish and Saudi behaviours among the Middle East-Muslim status community and how much their actions after 2011 reflect a quest for higher leadership status.

Power Structure in the Middle East

The Middle East defies any attempts at generalization and resists [explanations mirrored in Western experience](#). Throughout its history, foreign intervention, imperialistic enterprises, transnational ideologies and artificial boundaries have continuously marked the region. Hence, to understand it as a regional system and to analyse the agency of regional actors it is essential to recognise that the actors simultaneously balance elements from global, domestic and local environments. To [Tareq Ismael](#), one should perceive the Middle East as a subordinated or penetrated regional system, in which the majority of what happens is dependable on extraterritorial power relations. Countries decide on their foreign policy strategies while managing multiple dependence and pragmatism, in a constant bargain relation with the international structure and the [regional and domestic societies](#).

The primary goal of regional powers is to ensure regime survival and predominance, but their ambitions go beyond sovereign or territorial integrity, such as international recognition, development, leadership, and so forth. According to [Martin Beck](#), the Middle East never produced a regional power in the

sense of one actor with power capabilities that significantly outweigh the power of other local peers. However, throughout history, many states showed clear pretensions of a leadership position, such as Egypt during the 1960s or Iraq in the 1980s. The region has an abnormal high dispersion of power, in which the culture of anarchy and insecurity prevail, leading states to a more competitive than cooperative behaviour. Countries that perceive themselves as regional powers had direct or indirectly fought wars, have weak local institutions and are unable to progress on a concert of power. The degree of US' intervention in regional and domestic affairs further exposes the features for the absence of a real Middle Eastern power.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have, at some point in their history, highlighted elements from their nation-building to present themselves as essential actors to the Middle Eastern concert. To be recognized as a regional power is a question of status since the existence of a community is necessary to validate this label. I argue that, after the Arab Spring, Tehran, Riyadh and Ankara are projecting competing images of regional leadership to a particular status community, the Middle East-Muslim. I claim that the three countries are somewhat dissatisfied with their ascribed status and are increasingly critical to the overall situation of the penetrated regional system security.

Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Status Community

Even before its 1979 Revolution, monarchical Iran perceived itself as a significant regional actor, embedded in a chauvinist state ideology that praised the superiority of the Aryan nation and [the glory of the Persian empire](#). With the inception of the Islamic Republic, however, this sense of Iranianism was substituted for a universalistic Islamic character. Ayatollah Khomeini flipped Iran's state identity: Tehran began to see itself as a bastion of Islamic revolutions, the voice against imperialism, the defender of the oppressed everywhere and a [radical challenger of the status quo](#). This projection as "the unique Islamic regime" and "bulk for Third World resistance" transformed Iran into a romantic vehicle for social emancipation, especially among Shias.

According to [Adib-Moghaddam](#), the Islamisation of the Iranian state identity opened up communicative channels with sub-state actors and political groups that struggle against marginalization in the region. Since the 1980s, Iran has justified its isolation and its sometimes aggressive foreign policy under the narrative of resistance against extraterritorial interventions, monarchical regimes and Israel. That explains why the majority of Iran's closest friends are transnational Islamic groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, actors who also present themselves as revisionists. Resorting to a political imaginary infused with strong religious rhetoric, Iran projects itself as genuinely regional power, which is decided to work in the name of the region's interests and can guide and protect all Muslims.

Saudi Arabia was centralized through strict observance of Wahhabi Islam and loyalty to the House of Saud. Ibn Saud managed to entrench both religious and ideological beliefs within the Najd region and shifted the balance of power away [from the tribal structure towards a state](#). The tribal nature and the geographic vulnerability of the Najd region explains the regime's perception of being continuously surrounded by real or potential enemies. Riyadh believes that any exterior instability can affect the State-society relations domestically and be a [threat to the continuance of the regime](#). Also essential to Saudi foreign policy is Muslim religion, as it [consolidated its national values](#). The country projects itself as the leading representative of the Muslim world, home of Mecca and Medina, and the first state to be ruled according to the Sharia. Riyadh see itself as a natural leader in the Muslim community and a guarantor of a stable regional order under Islam.

The sense of vulnerability led Saudi Arabia to depend on external security, namely, the US. Since the 1970s, Riyadh and Washington shared interests and threats in the Middle East and had developed an [oil-for-security bargain relationship](#). Both countries want to maintain the flow of the oil market to the West and to ensure that the Middle East does not fall under other extra-regional power's influence. To re-establish its uniqueness among the Muslim community after the Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia narrowed its state identity to Sunni Islam as it saw the

[Shiism as a threat](#). Since the 1980s, Riyadh has intensified monetary donations to other Sunni countries and in return received their validation of a status quo under US' security umbrella. As one of the leading partners of Washington in the region, for decades Riyadh projected itself as a moderate Islamic country, providing assistance and guidance, but typically remaining on the backstage of hard-power politics.

Finally, Turkey did not always have the Middle East as the centre of its foreign policy. On the contrary, it has a history of reluctance to get more involved in the region, and mutual perceptions of distrust have marked its [relations with Arab countries](#). Kemalism, which defined the Turkish state after the fall of Ottoman Empire, embraced a Western secularist model of state, which drove the country away from other Middle Eastern nations. That started to change in the eve of the 2000s with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP, in Turkish), which advocated for a greater role of religion in the society and a [deeper engagement in the Middle East](#). It invoked the Ottoman past and cultural ties to justify Turkey's participation in the region, implicitly claiming a [historical leadership role among other Muslims](#). Following up astounding economic growth, AKP aimed diversification of relations outside the West and re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy under the [“zero-problem with neighbours” doctrine](#).

AKP's rhetoric became vigorously betrothed to the Middle East, and economic ties evolved through the increase of [financial and infrastructural deals](#). To gain Muslim's minds and hearts, former Prime-Minister (2003-2014) and current President (2014-) Recep Tayyip Erdogan promoted a Turkish model, based on a relatively independent foreign policy, an image of mediator in the region and an increasingly anti-Israel stand. Ankara wanted to exert regional influence by projecting itself as a model to other states to emulate: a model of capitalist success, moderate Islam and [successful governance](#). Turkey wanted to shift away from an image of a Western satellite to an order-setter country, emphasising principles of security, political dialogue and [economic integration](#). Despite the economy,

however, this rhetoric had not yet corresponded into effective engagement in the geopolitics of the region until the [Arab Spring](#).

It is possible to perceive that Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia share the same status community, projecting leadership images to the Middle East regional system and, particularly, to the Islamic nations. Being traditionally a status quo partner of the West, Saudi Arabia has a complex rivalry relation with Iran. Tehran is a revisionist country openly against foreign meddling in the region and the US' partnership with Riyadh. Turkey, since the AKP's ascension, not necessarily has a anti-status quo behaviour, but it surely wants to modify the way it is perceived in the region and to have a more prominent role than the one it is traditionally ascribed. Its relations with Tehran and Riyadh were increasingly positive in the first decade of 2000, as the regional context was permissive for its pragmatism. Structural changes in the Middle East after 2011, however, are leading to some critical confrontations in this arrangement.

The unsettling period post Arab Uprisings

The events after the so-called Arab Spring opened greater space for [regional competition](#). In one hand, the possibility of widespread uprisings dismantling long-stand regimes was perceived as a significant threat to those that depend on the stability of the status quo, like Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the rise of unsatisfied people with their governments appeared as an opportunity for Iran and Turkey to increase their status. In a first moment, Turkey and Iran projected themselves as models for the protesters: the first as a successful example of secular Muslim democracy, the latter as a resilient case of Islamic revolutionary republic. Ankara took a pro-change agenda, siding with oppositions and aiming to use their social capital to [gain influence in the region](#). Iran was more cautious but still tried to create a link between itself and [newly empowered Islamic groups](#). Conversely, the Saudis were very suspicious and unsettled by the events and taking a counterrevolutionary approach domestically and abroad to [prevent more disruptive forces](#).

The Arab Spring gave a sense of urgency to the foreign policy of the three countries and exposed their regional goals and the problems they were facing. Turkey and Iran, which were experiencing closer relations during Ahmadinejad's and Erdogan's terms, started to compete directly in Egypt and Syria as their interests clashed. In Egypt, both expected to increase their influence over elected Muslim Brotherhood government in 2012 and Ankara seem to be in the starting grid. The tables turned when a military coup ousted President Mursi and replaced him with General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a close friend of the Saudis. Egypt quickly became under Saudi's economic and political sphere of influence, cooling down its emerging relations with Turkey and Iran. It is essential to notice that Saudi interests in Egypt were antagonistic to Turkish or Iranian ones. Riyadh was uncomfortable with the political rise of Muslim Brotherhood and worked hard to discredit the group's Islamic credentials aiming to, in contrast, consolidate itself as the [leader of moderate Sunni Islam](#). The coup was, then, a successful contra-revolutionary move in the Middle Eastern game favouring the House of Saud.

In the Gulf, Riyadh was not willing to run the risk of having an enemy in its backyard. Unconventionally, it took the upper hand and invaded Bahrain in 2011 to control protests and in Yemen 2015 in a war against the Houthis (a Zayed-group supposedly backed by Iran). Yemen became the primary theatre for the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, with growing accusations from both sides. While one can cast doubt on the range of Iranian involvement, Saudi Arabia is immersed in the conflict, and its success has been far from ideal, with Yemen quickly becoming a vast humanitarian crisis. Different from the Egyptian case, Turkey sided with the Saudis in Yemen, supporting the military operation and [accusing Iran of aiming regional domination](#). In 2016, however, Erdogan visited Tehran for economic matters, where he, with current President Rouhani and Ayatollah Khomeini, proposed joint mediation efforts to [bring peaceful outcome to Yemen](#). I argue that Turkey ambivalence in picking sides in the Iranian-Saudi rivalry is an illustration of its regional goals, portraying itself as another contestant for regional leadership, not a second-tier regional actor trapped in a long-standing competition.

That point is evident when observing the Syrian case. Since the beginning of the conflict, Iran (and Russia) had backed Assad's regime, Tehran's sole Arab ally. Contrariwise, Saudi Arabia had been the first Arab country to condemn Syrian government actions and to openly call for arming the Syrian opposition. While in the first glance it seems contra-intuitive that a status-quo state supports protesters when the revolutionary one aims for the continuity of the oppressor regime, the zero-sum rivalry game in which Tehran and Riyadh have been playing explains. The fall of Assad would be a significant loss to the Iranian regional project, therefore a success to the Saudi one. Turkey's domestic and regional interests in the conflict further complicate the power struggle chess that Syria became. Since the beginning, Ankara supports the Free Syrian Army and calls for the fall of Assad. That resulted in a deterioration of Iran-Turkey relations and [considerable proximity with Saudis](#).

However, the war in Syria is much more complicated than the preceding paragraph suggests, involving a plethora of regional and foreign factors. The migration crisis, the power rise of the Kurds due to their fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the attempt of a coup in 2016 increased Turkish threat perception. That coincides with Erdogan's authoritarianism increase. Consequently, since 2017, Turkey seems to be setting its sights on a more modest role as a power broker in Syria (Madani 2016). The best example is its participation in the trilateral conference for peace with Russia and Iran – the Astana Summit. The recent political, military and economic rapprochement between Iran, Russia and Turkey is under the narrative of preserving Syrian's territorial integrity and [avoiding partition related to Kurds](#). This approximation, however, is fragile and still in developing stages. In January 2018, Turkish Operation Olive Branch, a military action in northern Aleppo, already made Iran uneasy. It is interesting to notice that Russia recognizes the importance of Saudi Arabia for the Syrian resolution and has strived to get the country's support to the Astana Summit results, although these efforts have not been successful until now.

Another relevant regional matter is the Qatar crisis, which started in June 2017. A Saudi-led Gulf coalition cutted off diplomatic ties with Qatar alleging that it funds terrorism and has inappropriate close relations with Iran. In this scenario, Tehran and Ankara supported Doha, affirming that Riyadh's demands, such as shutting down Aljazeera or closing diplomatic posts in Iran, are outrageous. Tehran and Doha share a massive offshore natural gas field and essential economic ties. Also, Turkey vehemently rejected to shut down its military base in Qatar. Ankara is now strengthening its presence in Qatar, deploying soldiers to the emirate to [stress its military and political support](#). In November 2017, Turkey and Iran signed a deal to enhance efforts in Qatar, indicating another regional topic in which both countries are [interested in cooperating](#). To make the situation even more complicated, Israel publically backed Riyadh's blockage announcing it would [close Aljazeera Jerusalem bureau in July 2017](#).

Finally, it is necessary to outline the importance of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) in Saudi foreign policy since 2017. The young prince is the face of the military intervention in Yemen, the audacious economic project Saudi Vision 2030 and domestic social-political reforms. Determined to display his country as a regional leader and a moderate Islamic partner to the West, he has curbed the anti-Iran rhetoric, increased its relations with many Arab countries, especially Egypt, became closer to Israel and travelled to many partners in the West, such as UK, France and the US. Both father and son seem to be resolute to establish the supremacy of Saudi Arabia regionally, becoming an essential geopolitical actor. To [Madawi Al-Rasheed](#), they decisively shifted Saudi foreign policy from cautious diplomacy and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to a more interventionist doctrine, attempting to become an undisputed Arab regional power. Domestically, Salman and his son increased their popularity by promoting some reforms towards women freedom, invest in economic diversification to reduce the oil dependency and launch a massive political witch-hunt against corruption – which can also be associated with the goal of dismantling opposition in the dynasty. [Bruce Riedel](#) stated that the two leaders had already managed to install, with domestic support,

one of the most assertive, ideological, and sectarian foreign policy in Saudi Arabia's history.

Status seeking behaviour

Tehran, Riyadh and Ankara perceived the Arab Spring as an opportunity for enhancing their foreign policies towards a more participative regional engagement. When one observes their national identities, the three countries have been using their history and culture to inflate a rhetoric of leadership. However, the events after 2011 created the opportunity to marry speech with policy, seeking for greater recognition of their status as leaders. Iran has been a revisionist country since the Revolution, insisting that it should be the voice guiding other Islamic revolutions against a Westernized status quo. It is, therefore, safe to assume that Tehran would be thrilled with the emergence of Islamic revolts in the region, even if the Iranian aspiration to be perceived as [a revolution model was not achieved after all](#).

However, Turkey and Saudi Arabia dissatisfaction with their ascribed status is relatively new. Ankara turned its attention to the Middle East and, particularly, to the Muslim community with the rise of AKP under the assertive rule of Erdogan, who claimed that Turkey was no longer a [passive pawn for the West in the region](#), Riyadh, on its turn, emboldened by the emergence of the Gulf as a centre for stability and economic power in the Middle East since the end of the 2000s, has been spreading the range of its regional influence. Riyadh has been proactively engaging regionally to be recognized as a leader that is conservative at its core, designed to protect the order and to guarantee the supremacy of the Sunni ideology.

As mentioned, status is a relative concept, and, because the Middle East is a penetrated regional system, the role of the US must be brought to the equation. This article supports that the erratic comportment of the Obama's administration towards the region served as a further boost to the status-seeking behaviour of the Riyadh and Turkey. First, to Saudi Arabia, Washington reacted poorly to the Arab Uprisings, especially when it comes to Egypt and Syria. The Saudis have always

perceived the US as the primary partner in protecting the regional order, but [Obama was casting doubts among them](#). Riyadh took then the lead to fulfil this role, what can be perceived in the unprecedented military intervention in Yemen. To further instigate Saudi's suspicions, Obama signed the JCPOA nuclear deal with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) – a significant success for Rouhani policy that raised awareness to the possibility of a rapprochement between Iran and the US. Even though currently those hopes are hanging in a thin line after president Trump's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the deal, by the time it was signed the Saudis were frightened that a sanction-free Iran would have more recourses to [influence instability agents in the region](#).

US's relations with its NATO ally Turkey has been at odds lately. Washington has been colluding with Kurds to fight ISIS in Syria, as it considers that they are [the most effective partners against the militants](#). Turkey, on the contrary, affirms that these Kurdish groups are linked to terrorist cells and that it is unacceptable to partner up with them. There has also been diplomatic estrangement as the US refuses to extradite Fethullah Gulen, a Pennsylvania-based Turkish cleric whom Erdogan accuses to be involved in the 2016 failed coup. Under this hostile atmosphere, Erdogan has increased his anti-American rhetoric at home while US' politicians have explored the possibility of retaliation to [respond to AKP's growing authoritarianism](#).

In this complicated scenario of trembling old alliances and emerging new ones, Russia is establishing itself as a reliable actor on the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Since Moscow's 2015 intervention in Syria, Putin has actively engaged with many countries in the region, signing investments, energy and arms deals, [emphasizing then political and economic relations](#). Russia is expanding economic ties in the area, and here I want to call the attention to Saudi Arabia's first ever royal visit to Moscow in 2017 and the growing Turkish economic dependence on Russia. Turkey has an urgent need for natural gas and its primary sources are Russia and Iran; combining diplomacy with the economy, the three countries are planning to [boost cooperation after the Astana Summit](#).

Putin is determined to set foot in the Middle East, and this will have, therefore, consequences over the battle for regional leadership status among Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The collaboration between Tehran and Moscow in Syria led to the understanding that Iranians have an advantage in this matter. However, Iranian partnership with Russia – as the recent rapprochement between them and Turkey suggests – is fragile and probably short-lived. There are long-standing divergences between the three countries and [their national interests are not congruent](#). Bringing Turkey to the Astana dialogue will only be truly useful if it manages to alter Turkish commitment against Assad. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia should seek a better compromise between Ankara and Washington over their support to Syrian opposition, so the animosity between both NATO allies is once again reduced. Turkey is becoming more and more critical to the Saudi-Iran rivalry and the competition between American and Russians. Finally, in this race for greater regional status, Tehran, Ankara and Riyadh must keep an eye on China, who is becoming an increasingly active player in the region, particularly when it comes to infrastructure and military investments, [fundamental in a post-Arab Spring scenario](#).

Final Remarks

To keep up with geopolitics in the Middle East after 2011 is a hard task. Many self-perceived powers are intervening in regional politics, the presence of foreign actors is still massive, and conflicts are becoming increasingly more intricate, fusing domestic and global factors. In this highly complex scenario, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia struggle in a bid to emerge as dominant forces that can [dictate the outcomes in the Arab World](#). They had for a long time aimed at some level of regional leadership. However, they saw the Arab Uprisings as an opportunity to seek greater status. Rouhani, Erdogan, and Salman and MBS intensified their outreach to Muslim communities, what translated into more aggressive rhetoric and proactive engagement.

The importance of extraterritorial powers, however, is essential here. If the Saudis perceived the election of Donald Trump as a relief and a return to normal relations,

the possibility of the dismantling of the nuclear deal threatens the Iranians and the US association with the Kurds dissatisfies the Turks. Moreover, Russia and China are lurking around, waiting for the moment they can also rise as power brokers in the region. Finally, Trump's decision to strike missiles in April 2018 against Russian ally Assad is a clear example of how restrictive to autonomous regional politics the Middle East became. Regional power status-seeking behaviour is still too reliant on more powerful extra-regional actors, and there is yet no perspective for the emergence of a somewhat independent Middle Eastern power in sight.

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Turkey is growing into Islamic power in Central Asia: The relations with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the implications on GCC

Dr. Haifa Ahmed al-Maashi

Introduction

Turkey's role in the Central Asian region has been steadily rising for more than two decades due to internal and external factors. At the internal sphere Turkey witnessed a grand reformation within its political and economic structure. Those changes were not random but were based on a specific ideology and individual political vision led by the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. These changes coincided with radical political changes that took place in Central Asian region after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Islamic ideological states which sought to get closer to Turkey to secure their political and military front against Russia. In the Middle East, serious events took place following the uprisings of the Arab Spring, which contributed to changing the balance of power in that region. These factors have made Turkey a major focus of geostrategic changes sweeping the region in a large and accelerating manner, which qualifies it to play the role of a leader and to assume political and economic leadership within a specific region. This is most evident through its relations with neighboring countries, directly or indirectly, in the Central Asian region, where it shares with them geographic ranges and historical ties. Its relation with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan is a clear example of a relationship that could lead to strategic alliances.

The role of Turkey in Central Asia may not be consistent with the role of the Gulf States and may contradict greatly with their policies. However, there is a great potential risk that Turkey's relationship with Central Asia states, specifically

Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, may cause a threat to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) interests in the future. These four countries are located in a geographic linked line that starts from Turkey overlooking the Mediterranean and ends in Pakistan bordering the Indian Ocean. The line forms a strong front connecting Asia and Europe on one hand and Central Asia and South East Asia on the other. The relationship between Turkey and these countries is growing and it is influencing the relations of the GCC with both sides. This may turn into a future conflict of interest between different alliances or coalitions of a military or economic nature within Eurasia, which will affect the interests of the Gulf States in general.

With Turkey's growing strength in the region as a regional power, much of its strategic plan focuses on closer ties with Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as pivotal countries in the Central Asian region and that might contradict with the interests of major powers such as China and Russia and other countries. Therefore, Turkey's relations with these three countries have its repercussions within the region and on the interests of the Gulf States whether in the Asian sphere or worldwide.

There are a number of thorny issues that Ankara is trying to guide in the next phase to strengthen its new status in the region. And there is maybe unannounced intention to form a regional axis with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Central Asia to counter the United States (US) influence and its allies in the region. Especially as the situation in the Gulf is troubled as a result of the Yemen war and the Qatari crisis and Turkey's political, military and economic support for Qatar.

This paper aims to analyze the role that Turkey can play in managing a strategic alliance with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which may qualify it to become an important political pole in Asia and redistribute the map of political power in the region and the world and the possible repercussions on the interests of the Gulf States.

Methodology

The main objective of the paper is to analyze the Turkish role in initiating relations with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan within a strategy that may pave the way to establish an alliance with these countries and the possible repercussions on the interests of the Gulf States. The analysis will concentrate on addressing five key issues of common concern at the regional and international levels and are directly and indirectly linked to the Turkish role and GCC interests.

The key issues

1-The Taliban issue and the process of peace negotiations

2-The influx of refugees between Ankara, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan

3-The border problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan

4-Turkey's role in expanding its economic influence

5-The collapse of the Iranian nuclear deal

The analysis of these issues will focus on two elements:

The first element: Exposing the elements of inconsistency and consistency between Turkey's policies and the policies of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The second element: Discussing the direct and indirect effects on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) policies either as an entity or as a single state.

The Taliban issue and the process of peace negotiations

This issue sheds light on the Turkey's status towards Taliban and the limits of its role in light of Turkey's refusal to adopt a military agenda in facing Taliban whether inside Afghanistan or in Pakistan. Turkey is still insisting in playing a marginal role with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through a military force inside Kabul, to prepare for the post-conflict reconstruction. This file reveals the overlap of relations between Turkey and the three Asian countries in confronting Taliban,

and the differences among these states in the development of counter-terrorism policies.

The main objective of the Turkish military presence in Afghanistan is to confirm the strength of relations between the two allies which date back to a longtime ago. Turkey plays the military "protector" of Afghanistan, a role Turkey played during the reign of Kemal Ataturk, but the current role is to eliminate terrorism of non-Afghan elements coming from Pakistan who take refuge in Afghan territory.

Since 2012 until present Turkey is showing its support for peace negotiation in the Afghan crisis. In 2012 Turkey mediated between Taliban and the government of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan with the presence and support of Pakistan at that time, in addition to the opening of a Taliban office in Ankara in agreement with Pakistan. The agreement might highlight that the consensus between Turkey and Pakistan was more solid than the consensus between Pakistan and the Karzai government in dealing with the Taliban issue. These talks had been repeated more than once in recent years in attempts by Ankara to bring the three parties closer together: Pakistan, Afghanistan and Taliban.

In 2018, Turkey has suggested a trilateral meeting of officials from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey to [discuss the peace process in Afghanistan](#). The talks confirmed that Turkey's relations with the Afghan government focused on economic interests and common security threats, although Ankara believes that it is capable of establishing and directing such multilateral dialogues.

The international intervention to carry out such negotiations came from countries such as the United States, China and Russia, but the negotiations did not produce a positive result, especially since the United States did not abandon its policy of getting rid of the Taliban leaders. This strategy was part of US counter-terrorism policy. The assassination of Mula Omar in 2014 had a negative impact on the role of the US and its allies within the GCC to intervene as a mediator in negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Thus, it is clear that the Turkish

role in dealing with the Taliban is stronger than international interventions or the interventions of US allies, whether from Europe or the GCC.

The present position of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia is against Taliban and in support of the legitimate government in Kabul. UAE has been working with International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since the first decade of the second millennium to confront the Taliban as a terrorist group which undermines its position as a mediator in the peace negotiations in Kabul.

The recent terrorist attack on the UAE ambassador by the Taliban in January 2017 which led to his death and a group of Emirati diplomats in the guest house of governor of Kandahar, emphasizes the absence of any form of cooperation between the two parties.

For Saudi Arabia the situation is more complicated, since it was one of the countries that recognized the Taliban rule before 2001 and played a big role in supporting the jihadists against the Soviets, but this role changed completely after the American intervention in Afghanistan. Some believe that Saudi Arabia has a pivotal role in peace negotiations through its strong relations with Pakistan. This Saudi role at the moment is directly connected with the US approach represented by Trump administration.

The Pakistani possible intention to get closer to Taliban and play a pivotal role in the peace negotiations is determined on the relationship between Pakistan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, where Pakistan is a common ally for both Saudi Arabia and Turkey. However, recent developments in the Saudi-Pakistani approach regarding the Yemen war and Pakistan's rejection of Saudi Arabia's appeal to intervene with its forces in Yemen impacts negatively on the relations between the two allies while relations between Pakistan and Ankara remained at a stable level.

Doha has "deep and tangled" links with the Taliban that go back to 2013 and perhaps to a much longer period. As time passed by, the Qatari state sought to position itself as an interlocutor in an effort to secure the continuation of the course of the talks in Afghanistan and to bring the points of view closer among all

parties. But after 2013, Doha has become a "[mediator ground](#)" for Taliban officials brought to Qatar after a long search for them by the United States and the Afghan government. Taliban is still consider Qatar vital for any kind of future peace talks. But after the Qatar crisis and the divisions within the GCC countries we might witness a new role that links between Turkey and Qatar to facilitate peace negotiations in Kabul.

Within the scope of the Afghan crisis, both Pakistan and Afghanistan have different plans and agendas that contradict each other. As a result, this crisis indirectly contributes in directing Islam Abad, Kabul and Ankara's international alliances. And this has become evident recently with the ongoing changes within the US administration, and its repercussions on the agendas of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. These changes forced Pakistan and Afghanistan to choose different allies where Pakistan headed toward China and Russia and Afghanistan headed toward India.

The influx of refugees between Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan

There are 145,000 Afghans in Turkey, according to Amnesty, Turkey says [nearly 30,000 Afghans have entered the country since the start of the year 2018](#). Afghan migrants come to Turkey on a daily basis at a rate of 500 people per day. For them Turkey is a safe place either to stay or to move from there to Europe. The presence of Afghans in Turkey is either temporary or permanent, but it is a security concern that Turkey has overcome by deporting hundreds of Afghans and returning them to Kabul in an agreement with the Afghan government. According to media reports Turkey has reached an agreement with Afghanistan on returning undocumented Afghan nationals and [more than 200 have already been deported](#).

Turkey's anti-refugee measures have been reinforced by a controversial European Union (EU)-Turkey migration agreement in March 2016 to curb refugee and migration flows to the European Union. But there are international observers who think EU should be "working with Turkey to keep its borders open to refugees,

providing financial support for Turkey's refugee efforts, and sharing responsibility by stepping up [resettlement of refugees from Turkey](#).

The issue of the Iranian refugees in Turkey is different as their numbers started to increase with the start of the Iranian revolution and then the Iran-Iraq war. And it started again after the Gulf wars as a result of the unstable security situation, although their numbers have been reduced in recent years. And even the motives of leaving Iran and coming to Turkey have changed from security motives to religious motives related to social factors where some individuals felt that their beliefs are being violated by the government. Most of those Iranians immigrants view Turkey as a transit station for Europe and the United States. But the recent European resolutions regarding refugees and Trump's decision to ban the entry of Iranians have detained many of them inside Turkish territory.

Ankara's treatment of the issue of Iranian and Afghan refugees confirms that the latter constitute a security concern for Turkey as a result of the proliferation of terrorist organizations in Afghan territory such as Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. In addition, their numbers are large compared to the limited number of Iranian refugees who are not considered a threat to Ankara in the mean time.

The issue of Afghan refugees is especially important for refugees who flee from Afghanistan to Iran and settle there instead of going to Turkey or to another country. These represent Afghan Shiites who are looking for better ways to live in Iran. [Some observers](#) think that Iran has exploited Shiia Afghan within the Sunni-Shiite confrontation inside Syria. Iran has exploited the difficult conditions of these refugees, especially those coming from the Bamian region, one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan. They were deported to Syria by the thousands to form the forces of the Fatimids and Zeinabis.

The Gulf States specifically Saudi Arabia and UAE consider these Afghani refugees a big threat to the security of the region, especially if Iran exploits them in other conflict areas such as Yemen, which falls within the military influence of Saudi Arabia and UAE at the present time.

The border problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan

The tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan continues as a result of the exploitation of the border by terrorist groups, in addition to the problem of Pashtun minority who are distributed between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This issue highlights the position of Turkey in playing the role of mediator in the reconciliation between the different parties. It also reveals the GCC role with regard to this issue and the implications on the relations between these countries and the GCC.

“The boundary line known as the Durand Line, 2,640 km, was established in 1893 as a result of an agreement signed between the Government of British India and the Afghan Prince Abdulrahman Khan. The main purpose of Britain's insistence on the agreement was to create a defensive line for Russia, which was a buffer zone between Afghanistan and British rule. According to the "Durand Line" agreement, Afghanistan has abandoned a few provinces, including Swat, Chitral and Chag , although it has acquired other historically unregulated areas such as [Nuristan and Asmar](#)”.

The Pashtun tribes are divided between the borders within the provinces of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is a dilemma for these tribes. Kabul believes that most of the Pashtuns are affiliated with them and must be granted the right to self-determination and this is rejected by Islamabad because this might prove that Afghanistan has rights to some of these provinces inhabited by Pashtun .

Turkey is seen as a very good mediator between Afghanistan and Pakistan as it is the friendly state for the two neighbors. Although Turkey has no direct borders with the two countries, relations have been strong for decades, qualifying Turkey to play an important role in resolving the border disputes between the two neighbors. Their trilateral relations was clear during the convening of Trilateral Ankara cooperation process since it was launched in 2007 reflecting the size and dimensions of relations between the three countries. The trilateral summits between Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan have found some common ground

between Islamabad and Kabul however they have also served to [highlight their continued distrust](#).

Turkey's intervention in solving the border problem between the two neighbors was limited because in recent years the issue has intensified into military confrontations, most recently in 2017, in which 50 Afghan soldiers were killed. Thus, the border problem will continue as long as Kabul is confident that Islamabad provides a safe environment for armed militias specially Afghan Taliban, a claim which is supported by several international actors.

Pakistan thinks that the accusation to be attributed to Kabul and not to it. Pakistan thinks that Pakistani Taliban militants are operating from Afghan soil, taking responsibility for a series of attacks last year and calling on Kabul to get rid of militants' "safe heavens. The Pashtuns can easily travel back and forth across the border, but the [deteriorating political ties between the two countries](#) are now causing them problems. Lately, Pakistani authorities began [building a barrier along the Afghan-Pakistan border](#) on the outskirts of the city of Chaman, in Baluchistan province at the west of the country.

Therefore, the issue of borders will continue to raise problems between the two neighbors for a long time, which may affect any possible alliance between Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, whether with regard to the Taliban or in enhancing economic relations between the three states.

Turkey's economic influence over Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan versus GCC influence

Turkey's role in expanding its economic influence within Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the extent of cooperation between the different parties and the implications of forming alliances or economic blocs may contradict with the policies of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or threaten the interests of the Gulf States.

Turkey is a preferred economic option for Afghanistan, especially because Turkey has close economic relations with the European Union and its proximity to the Afghan border facilitates the process of commercial movement in addition to being a Sunni religious state and therefore its investments and economic projects will not be exposed to security threats near areas controlled by the Taliban, about [40% of Afghanistan](#) at the moment. In addition, Afghanistan is one of the most competitive markets for Turkish and Iranian goods.

Turkey seeks to exert greater influence in the markets where Turkish products can be promoted in order to benefit from the Turkish investment inside Afghanistan in forming production and export bases for Turkish products to promote them to neighboring countries to Afghanistan [such as Pakistan and Iran](#).

Ahmet Davutoğlu, the former Prime Minister of Turkey, wrote in his book "Strategic Depth," that his country has economic interests in Afghanistan. He attaches great importance to Central Asia and Afghanistan. He says that Kabul does not possess only large mineral wealth, but that this region is considered very important by Turkey as it also constitutes a route of [trade and transfer of energy to Asia](#).

However, there is information indicating that the level of trade between Afghanistan and Turkey is declining year after year. Trade between the two countries in 2010 was about US\$265 million and in 2016 it dropped to [US\\$155 million annually](#).

Military cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan may be much stronger than economic cooperation, which is evident in military arms deals and frequent military dialogue meetings between the two countries. [A report](#) indicates that Ankara and Islamabad agreed to develop the F-16 fighter aircraft by adopting Turkish technology and spare parts, which would have cost Pakistan US\$75 million. The Pakistan Air Force also benefits from the expertise of the Turkish defense arms company "Aslsan" to improve its expertise in electronic warfare and

countermeasures to supply fighter bombers between China and Pakistan. Also, the Pakistani army has long been interested in buying the Turkish attack helicopter T-129 Atak, in addition to buying some military equipment directly and benefiting from Turkey to improve its defense industry.

Economic cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan exists in areas such as energy, transport, communications, infrastructure, trade, oil, gas and information technology. Turkish exports to Pakistan rose 39% in 2016 compared to 2015. It should be noted that both parties are founding members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which includes several Central Asian countries and the founders of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Following the framework agreements of 1976, the two States established the Joint Economic Commission mechanism and since then [regular meetings have been held](#) between public institutions in Ankara and Islamabad.

Iran's economic relationship with Pakistan is particularly strong, because of the religious and political factors, most notably that Pakistan has the largest Shiite community in the world after Iran, so Iran is keen to strengthen its relations with Islamabad despite some border problems caused by [clashes in Balochistan](#).

On the other hand, GCC states have great interest in enhancing their economic relations with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, although the level of economic cooperation varies from one state to another according to political and diplomatic relations. Pakistan appears to be the most qualified country to be a stable economic ally for the GCC states.

The UAE investments in Pakistan include communications, aviation, banking, real estate and oil and gas. Currently, more than 18 Emirati companies are operating in Pakistan. For Saudi, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is highlighted by various projects and investments, although in the recent period both countries are directing their economic cooperation according to their own economical visions. In the context of the recent Gulf crisis, Qatar has begun to move away from the GCC with regard to its economic relations with Pakistan,

where it is working hard to strengthen its trade relations with Islamabad especially through its natural gas imports to gain its support as a military ally. In spite of that, the neutrality adopted by Islamabad helped it to maintain its relations with all GCC states.

The ECO train project between Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan is a key factor in promoting long-term economic relations between these countries. It is a joint initiative started in 2009 between Ankara, Islamabad and Tehran with the aim of developing joint rail-based economic activities and began to operate effectively on August 4, 2009, with the first train from Islamabad to Turkey via Iran. [This route continued until December 2011](#), when it stopped working. And the idea evolved later theoretically to include Afghanistan within the project to establish a rail line from Pakistan to Afghanistan and Iran to Turkey.

The Economic relations between Turkey and Iran

Turkey is a lifeline for Iran during its economic crises because it is geographically and religiously close to it. By virtue of its neighborly relations, Turkey remains an important gateway for Iran to promote its goods or to import goods from abroad. Such time-bound relations on specific crises may create volatile and unstable economic relations. This is contrary to the existing economic relations between Turkey on one hand and Afghanistan and Pakistan on the other hand.

There is a wide concern among Iran and Turkey to enhance their private sector as it considered a vital area for different investments. That was clear after launching JCPOA and the suspension of some economic sanctions on Iran, where the private sector was a way out of the economic crisis in Iran.

The collapse of the Iranian nuclear agreement

After the withdrawal of US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it is vital to expose the Turkish role in exploiting the division of positions within the international community, which is divided between those who supported the agreement and those who oppose it. The limits of the impact of the US withdrawal

from the nuclear agreement will be highlighted through the position of the rest of the five countries participating in the agreement and the Iranian position itself in suspending Iran's tasks or ending it altogether. This vision has not yet been fully understood. As for the relations between Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the impact may emerge within the security and economic ranges.

Increasing the level of US sanctions means greater interventions for the US government in the region, especially in areas where it is currently present, such as Afghanistan, and this may push Iran to adopt a non-unified positions with the government of Kabul that is pro-US government. The situation with Turkey on the security scale may be quite different because Turkey defines its relations with the United States through its security and political interests. This was evident in the Syrian war, specifically in the case of Afrin, in which the US government was very cautious in dealing with the Turkish presence there or within the confrontations with Turkey in favor of the Kurds. Turkey may adopt the same directions with Iran in dealing with its security interests. This was manifested in the Turkish-Russian-Iran tripartite alliance on the Syrian crisis, where Turkey did not hesitate to extend its hand to those parties in order to secure its borders and stop the threats on Turkish security. The United States may take advantage of Ankara's "priority agenda of interests" to strike a wedge between Turkey and Iran, through exploiting the Syrian crisis to reach a kind of compromise with Turkey.

On the economic front, the initial impact of the collapse of the Iranian nuclear has been evident in the depreciation of the Iranian currency and the retreat within the oil production and export operations for a number of countries. Also the negative influence will reach a number of important projects between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan such as the Iran-India-Pakistan gas pipeline project and the Shabar port project linking Iran to India, Afghanistan and Central Asia. But there is a positive side that Afghanistan's departure from India could bring it closer to Pakistan and China in the China-Pakistan economic corridor project. On the other hand, economic transactions between Iran and Afghanistan may be affected, especially since Iran is a major trade route for Kabul that connects it with other countries.

This may also bring Afghanistan and Pakistan closer to strengthening their trade relations and [looking for other trade routes](#).

The collapse of the nuclear deal could be reflected in Turkey's export level after it rose as a result of the recovery of the Iranian market and a drop in sanctions after Turkey lost regional markets such as Syria or [its exports declined in markets such as Iraq and Egypt](#).

Turkey's imports of oil and gas from Iran may be greatly affected, especially since Turkey is a country dependent on importing most of the energy from abroad. For Pakistan, the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement is reflected negatively on its various projects with Iran, whether the project of gas pipelines, which began in 1995 and is not yet completed and another project is the Taby gas pipeline project, which includes Pakistan Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, India and [scheduled to commence work in 2019](#).

The contradiction between the agenda of the GCC countries, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain and the agenda of Turkey and Iran regarding the collapse of the nuclear agreement may provide different indications, notably that Turkey and Iran may seek to strengthen their economic and military relations significantly and some members of GCC such as Qatar and Oman may join them. This kind of cooperation might lead to the establishment of an economic alliance between Turkey, Iran, Qatar and Oman to strengthen economic relations.

Main Results

- The relations between Qatar and Taliban on one hand and Turkey and Qatar on the other have contributed to the convergence of views that will support the position of Taliban in any future peace negotiations, especially after the involvement of the Gulf crisis. This enhances Turkey's ability to guide any possible negotiations in the future.
- The rivalry between Iran and Turkey in supporting their religious communities within Afghanistan (Sunni Afghans and Afghan Shiites) contributes in creating

tension between the two neighbors within the scope of the Afghan crisis. However, the escalating US presence inside Afghanistan and the disruption of relations between US and Iran may push Afghanistan and Iran to strengthen their relations in confronting the US government and its intervention in the region.

- The strong military cooperation between Turkey and Pakistan opens the door to future military alliances between the two countries. This may form a partial alliance as an initial stage for a larger alliance.

- Turkey's common relationship with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, which made it a good friend of both countries, qualify the three countries to play a pivotal role in the region, especially in the military sphere.

- The US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement may be a double-edged sword for Turkey's relationship with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This withdrawal may include negative aspects to weakening Turkey's economic role in terms of energy resources, as well as shaking Iran's economic position. On the other hand it may direct those countries to choose alternative ways, which strengthen the idea of initiating an alliance.

Conclusion

There are rising common threats that are confronting Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the region. This may push them to ally against the perceived threats which will contribute in strengthening their military, political and economic relations. But, the problem lies in leadership within the scope of such alliances. This will represent Turkey and Iran as eligible candidates to manage such a leadership, although the current situation of Iran makes Turkey more qualified especially with its close relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The economic agenda is a key element in such a strategic alliance between Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It depends on Turkey's ability to manage such an agenda among these countries to promote common interests. Turkey has balanced bilateral relations with those countries. Moreover it possesses the military

capabilities and strategic location to launch a coherent economic agenda. However, there are a number of obstacles that may hinder the implementation of a successful joint economic agenda over the long term, most notably the alliances of each of these countries outside the group where such alliances may be exploited negatively to raise differences among them rather than strengthening their relations.

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Iran's Liquid Ideology: An Analysis of the political elites' discourse during Rouhani's presidency

Olivia Glombitza

Introduction

While the Islamic Republic of Iran is often portrayed as a static and archaic fundamentalist theocracy that dominates all aspects of public and private life, the literature on the sociology of power suggests that religion, as ideology, is a resource in the elites' competition for power. In line with this approach, this paper contends that religious ideology in Iran is used as a resource in order to reach and maintain power by the elites and that it is flexible and applied pragmatically, depending on the circumstances at a certain point in time.

Approaching Iran through its uniqueness as an Islamic Republic whose foundation is rooted in Islamic revolutionary ideology, this paper examines the monolithic nature of its ideology by means of analysing the discourses of the three most prominent representatives of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khamenei, Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Javad Zarif from 2013 onwards [through critical discourse analysis](#). And at the same time, paying special attention to the connection with concepts such as power, politics, authority, security, legitimacy, identity, and justice.

With Hassan Rouhani's election as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2013, the world community has seen a country struggling hard to chase away the shadows of the past in order to re-enter the international stage and to rise like a phoenix from the ashes after a successfully accomplished nuclear agreement, only

to fall from grace again a short while afterwards. Rouhani inherited a country in distress from his neo-conservative predecessor that is continuously facing difficulties on all fronts, at the international, regional and domestic level.

By advancing the knowledge of the circumstances, the adaptive nature of religious ideologies and the concepts related to the religious discourse and its evolution over time, this paper aims at contributing to the understanding of Iran's political present and pave the way for understanding the future traits of the Islamic Republic.

Sociology of Power and Ideology

The theory of the [sociology of power](#) holds that hierarchical societies, like the Iranian one, are composed of mainly two kinds of actors, those who govern, the elites, and those who are governed, the people. The elites are engaged in a continuous competition for power with other elites, with the aim to improve their overall position by differentially accumulating more power than their competitors. Accordingly, the sociology of power defines elites as composed of individuals that hold a superior hierarchical position in social institutions and their ability to retain this position depends on their capacity to [compete for the accumulation of power](#) and on [their alliances with others](#).

Key in this competition is the [control over power resources](#) that may be of [political, economic, coercive or ideological nature, etc.](#) In line with this approach, this article focuses particularly on the power resource of ideology, which in the case of the Islamic Republic takes the form of [Islamic revolutionary ideology](#). According to the sociology of power, ideology is a powerful resource in the hands of those who control it because it represents a system of beliefs that does not require any explanation [to be accepted as truth](#). More concretely, ideologies are the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members, which means that social, political or religious beliefs may be the base for a [shared ideology of a social group or movement](#). Studying Islamic revolutionary ideology thus means to examine how ideology serves to “sustain social relations which are asymmetrical with regard to

the [organization of power](#)” and how it “[serves to sustain relations of domination.](#)” While all ideologies such as nationalism or forms of religious fundamentalism seek legitimacy, “they claim to be returning to the past, and to one “true”, given, interpretation of identity and community. In reality they are modern movements that select and reformulate elements from the past [to meet contemporary purposes](#)”. The Islamic Revolution and its ideology are no exception. The Islamic revolutionary ideology is a modern creation, developed based on the ideas of [various influential ideologues](#) that on one hand derives legitimacy from the texts and concepts of Islam and on the other hand, incorporates modern elements from different theories and movements [such as socialism and nationalism.](#)

Power Structure of the Islamic Republic

Islamic ideology is the Islamic Republic’s ruling elites’ most potent legitimizing factor for exercising political power. While in exile in Najaf, Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini developed his concept of the “[guardianship of the jurist](#)” (*velayat-e faqih*) which was later cemented in the [constitution \(article 5\)](#) and which formed the base for legitimizing the governing role of the [Supreme Leader](#). Appointed for life by the Assembly of Experts, he is the single most powerful individual in the Islamic Republic ([article 110](#)). He can remove the President from office and he has the authority to counteract the decisions of the executive and the legislative. He also has effective power over the 12-member Guardian Council ([article 91](#)), which has the authority to veto parliamentary decisions, to vet electoral candidates, to monitor elections and [to certify their results](#). This means that although the people are free to vote for the candidate of their choice, they are only able to choose among presidential candidates that have previously been approved by the Guardian Council ([article 115](#)). In theory, the President is the second most powerful individual in the Iranian state, but in practice, his powers are limited and far less than often presumed ([article 113](#)). To obtain a position in government it is indispensable to [display affiliation](#) with the [dominant Islamic ideology](#) and numerous high-ranking political positions are in fact exclusively destined to [members of the clergy.](#)

Political Factions

Through the continued politicization of religion by the political elite and because many top institutions of religion and politics are [one and the same](#), religious and political discourse are practically inseparable. However, the Islamic-revolutionary leadership elite, composed of both Shi'i and laypersons that controls all of Iran's power centres and [important power resources](#), is by no means homogeneous, but deeply divided. These divisions only intensified after Khomeini's death in 1989, leading to an increased and ardent power struggle within the leading elite. The array of different opinions and views on a number of diverse subjects are aligned in various political factions, though this does not mean complete homogeneity within each faction. Although all factions more or less move along the same Islamic lines, still there are [divisions on specific matters](#) of economic, social or religious nature. As the frequently used distinction of moderates and conservatives does not adequately reflect the [different ideological tendencies in Iran](#), this paper adopts a division into three [main political factions](#), namely [reformists](#), [pragmatists](#) and [fundamentalists](#).

The Beginning of Rouhani's Presidency: 2013

When Hassan Rouhani won the presidential elections on 15 June 2013, he took over a country that had seen eight years of the [neo-conservative government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) and was suffering considerable from extensive economic and financial sanctions as well as isolation from the international system. As a consequence, Iran experienced growing economic hardship, including difficulty to trade oil, its most important asset and primary source of foreign currency. During Ahmadinejad's presidency, tensions especially with the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia had escalated. As a result, the new government is under heavy pressure. Hence, [Rouhani's discourse](#) greatly contrasts the prior inflammatory rhetoric of Ahmadinejad. He builds on a more pragmatic approach on the international stage and reengages in dialogue in order to seek relief from the sanctions and to enable Iran to re-enter the international community.

Consequently, he needs to build up trust in his government to convince as many countries as possible of Iran's benevolent nature. Hence, Rouhani's strategy entails to positively represent and praise his government, its actions and slogans as well as Iran and the Iranian people and to connect them to concepts with positive connotations. At the same time, he negatively represents and delegitimizes those governments and their actions that are opposed to Iran or Iran's allies, such as the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel by connecting them to concepts with negative connotations.

In his discourse, he is arguing against implied allegations of facilitating terrorism and violent extremism, by clearly separating Iran from violent actions by stressing that it does not add to the violence in the region but to peace. To do so, he connects Iran to the concepts of peace, security and stability and depicts Iran itself as a victim of the growing violence and extremism in the region and the rest of the world. To highlight Iran's position against violent extremism, he proposes a project called [World Against Violent Extremism](#) (WAVE). Furthermore, he stresses the concepts of human rights, prudence and moderation in connection to his government and presents it to be open, accommodating and hospitable, playing on Iran's famous hospitality. But while looking for sympathy, Rouhani also demands respect, i.e. respect for Iran's inalienable rights and non-interference by other countries in its affairs.

Rouhani is clearly signalling his religious affiliation by opening and closing his speech with reference to Islam, i.e. to God, the Prophet and with citations from the Holy Qu'ran. Furthermore, he is connecting religion to the concept of democracy in stating that Iran managed the realization of democracy consistent with religion, thereby negating implicit allegations that the Islamic Republic was not a democracy or that Islam was not compatible with democracy. In addition he uses religion as a unifying factor to conjure up closeness among the participating nations by saying that all divine religions share the belief that a good and bright future was awaiting the world. Islamic revolutionary ideology features when Rouhani makes reference to the unjust case of Palestine. The Islamic Republic's

general stance is to be against the oppressor and [to be with the oppressed](#), in Iran's case this means to be against Israel and to be with Palestine.

Overall, however, Rouhani does not construct an Iranian identity based on Islam, but on Iran's cultural and historic heritage, by for example quoting the famous poet Ferdowsi, who is well known beyond Iran's borders.

The foreign minister, [Mohammad Javad Zarif](#) unmistakably forms part of Rouhani's government. Their discourses go very much hand in hand, using the same concepts, ideas and expressions. Like President Rouhani, Zarif's objective is to improve relations with the international community and Iran's neighbours in the region and thus tries to invoke trust with his discourse. Zarif likewise engages in positively representing his government by implying that the negotiations and agreement on the nuclear issue would not have been possible without its re-election. He stresses the concept of unity, naming cooperation as the solution to supersede the region's problems such as instability, insecurity, and to reach security and prosperity. Highlighting unity, he refers to common interests, common objectives, common challenges, etc. implying that the states of the region have more things in common that unite them than separate them, and hence, the states of the region are dependent on each other, which calls for regional cooperation. Unlike Rouhani, Zarif does not outwardly proclaim his religious affiliation, but he uses religion as a unifying factor by calling on Islamic solidarity and common bonds of religion of Iran and its neighbours. Like Rouhani, he also connects religion with democracy, saying that the presidential election of 2013 had been a proud manifestation of the ability of an Islamic model of democracy to bring about [change through the ballot box](#).

[Khamenei](#) as well engages in the negative representation of Iran's opponents, connecting the concept of injustice and naming explicitly the US and Israel, which he calls the Zionist regime, and thereby implicitly stating Iran's non-recognition of the state of Israel.

References to Islam and Islamic revolutionary ideology run like a red thread through Khamenei's discourse. True to his fundamentalist Islamic viewpoint, he emphasizes the preservation of the [Islamic Revolution and its values](#). Iranian's social lives should be formed on the basis of the sharia, the divine religion and divine values and rules. When it comes to foreign relations, one such value is, as previously stated, to be with the oppressed and to be against the oppressor. Khamenei is also calling on the government of Rouhani to uphold the ideals and goals of the revolution, such as the creation of an Islamic civilization, and to adhere to Islamic guidelines. In Khamenei's discourse, he joins Islam with the concepts of power, politics and legitimacy, [but also to democracy](#), which he calls a religious democracy based on Islam. Like Rouhani he fends back implicit allegations that Islam and democracy were not compatible, but to the contrary, that Islam was in fact the breeding ground for democracy. Khamenei strengthens his arguments with frequent quotes from the Holy Qu'ran and strongly emphasizing Islamic values.

Halfway Through the First Term: 2015

Midway through Rouhani's first term, Iran's position in the international community and its relations with the world changed significantly since the beginning of his presidency. Especially since Iran and [six other countries](#) reached an agreement on Iran's nuclear program (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in July 2015, the Islamic Republic has started to rise like phoenix from the ashes. Media coverage started to be more favourable and generally the auspices, especially regarding economics and finances are positive.

The increased confidence is evident in [Rouhani's discourse](#), and he also does not hold back with criticism. A deadly accident in Saudi Arabia during the annual Hajj pilgrimage, gave rise to increasing tensions in the already strained relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia and Israel are the countries that have voiced the most concern about the nuclear deal and have not altered their hostile positions, but maintain a strong opposition to Iran.

Overall, Rouhani continues his strategy of positive self-representation and negative representation of Iran's opponents and old enemies, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US. Rouhani also refers to Israel as the Zionist regime, in non-recognition of the state of Israel.

Peace is the most prominent concept throughout his whole discourse, and Rouhani emphasizes that Iran, despite having displayed peaceful intentions, had fallen victim to the unjust and unfair measures illegally imposed on it. Rouhani places special accent on representing Iran as part of the solution to the growing threats of terrorism and instability in the region, not the cause. He exemplifies Iran's good nature and fit with western values, by presenting Iran as a democratic country that is supporting the stabilization of the region, the fight against terrorism and [the development of democracy in other countries](#). In addition, Rouhani demands respect for Iran's sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs from the outside.

Again he uses the Iranian identity, connecting it to the Iranian past, its historic and cultural heritage. Rouhani uses the concept of religion in connection to the nuclear issue to evoke trust. He implies that since the Islamic Republic is a very religious nation, the fatwa pronounced by the Supreme Leader on [nuclear weapons can be trusted](#). Islamic ideology is perceptible in the support for Palestine, as well as in choosing words such as prudence, piety, spirituality, or the path of goodness and purity. Ending his discourse, Rouhani again calls for unity by proposing a "[United Front Against Extremism and Violence](#)".

In Zarif's fear and insecurity [evoking discourse](#), violence is the most recurring concept. His argumentation leads to an implicit but strong criticism of Saudi Arabia, depicting it as the root of violent extremism. He further criticizes western, especially the US' political and military intervention in the Middle East, and that the chaos created thereby was a breeding ground for violent extremism. Zarif implies that powers outside of the region, particularly the US, had [no business in interfering there](#). He calls on Western and United States' illegitimate actions in the region that have caused violence, instability and insecurity. Zarif is connecting in

his words human values such as compassion, empathy, patience, tolerance and forgiveness to religion and particularly Islam. Zarif states that the Islamic Republic does not form part of those who misuse Islam in their extremist efforts in the region, causing harm and destruction, but that Iranians strongly condemn such actions and instead actively engaged in preventing the spread of violent extremism. He refers to the [proposal of former President Mohammad Khatami](#), “A Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations” and President Rouhani’s proposal of “A World Against Violent Extremism” to underline Iran’s proactiveness and good nature, all the while implying that Iran already has the solutions to common problems, it is now for the international community to follow suit and implement Iran’s proposals. Like Rouhani, Zarif points out a way forward for the international community by proposing an eight-point strategy to solve the problem of violent extremism in the region and with this, definitely placing Iran on the side of the good versus the evil. He is calling for unity in the fight against violent extremism and terrorist groups.

Islamic revolutionary ideology is almost absent from Zarif’s discourse, but like Rouhani, he also makes reference to the theme of the oppressed and oppressors, by reminding of the plight of Palestine. Sovereignty and territorial integrity is a recurring concept.

[Khamenei’s whole discourse](#) is filled with references to Islam and Islamic revolutionary ideology. He separates good people, believers, and bad people, the non-believers and is particularly connecting those [individuals or institutions to Islam that he favours](#). Negatively represented are primarily the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia by connecting them to the concepts of violence and terrorism and therefore Khamenei delegitimizes their actions. He further implies that Iran’s opponents had made efforts to [ban the spread of Islamic revolutionary ideology](#), but had been unsuccessful. He connects Islam again to democracy, specifying it as Islamic democracy based on Islamic values and argues for the compatibility of Islam, and therefore of Islamic lifestyle with innovation, cooperation and national unity.

And further, he connects the concepts of independence and freedom to the Islamic Revolution, offering his own explanation of these concepts and arguing these concepts were an [integral part of the revolution](#). He goes on to advocate that Islamic culture meant power and influence and further in his discourse, he links Islam with the [concepts of power, authority and politics](#). Khamenei also calls on Rouhani's government to be careful and not to be deceived by the enemy. He lifts a warning finger towards Rouhani's government but he does not outwardly criticize it.

The Beginning of Rouhani's Second Term: 2017

On May 19 2017, Hassan Rouhani wins the presidential election for a second term. On the one hand, Iran experiences again increasing difficulties on the international front, where Iran's position and image is on the decline again, as reflected in the rhetoric of the US president. And on the other hand, Iran is experiencing difficulties on the domestic front, where coordinated attacks were launched on parliament and Khomeini's shrine and protests over the economic situation had erupted. The positive economic and financial auspices have not played out; the citizens continue to experience economic hardship, leading to internal dissatisfaction with the government and the regime. A medium-range ballistic missile test draws attention from the international community, raises questions of trust and prompts a subsequent investigation.

[Rouhani persists](#) on his strategy of positively advocating for himself and his government, while at the same time casting a negative light on Iran's opponents and their actions. He continues to stress that his government stands for freedom and democracy and that Iran is a democratic, tolerant and free country where human rights and dignity were respected, thereby responding to implicit allegations that Iran was a theocracy and neither democratic nor free and that human rights were frequently violated. Rouhani tries to evoke trust by recurring to concepts that are universally accepted and regarded as indispensable, such as human rights, justice, etc. He gives evidence for this by mentioning his government's "[Charter of Citizens' Rights](#)".

He heavily criticizes Israel and Saudi Arabia explicitly bringing them in connection with injustice and violence. He contrasts this by connecting Iran to the most recurring concepts of peace and moderation. In line with Islamic revolutionary ideology, the theme of being for the oppressed and against the oppressors is brought up in connection to Palestine. Again he links Iranian identity with its cultural and historic heritage, but not exclusively. Now he connects the Iranian identity also to the Islamic revolution, and therefore connects [Islam as a second foundation for Iranian identity](#).

[Zarif highlights](#) the result of the elections, stressing that the Iranians had chosen moderation and constructive engagement based on mutual respect by [voting for Rouhani](#). He goes on to negatively speak about the United States, Saudi Arabia and their actions. His discourse is marked by irony and he uses the [same vocabulary like Rouhani](#) to defame Saudi Arabia. He also presents Iran as part of the solution to the problems in the region, and not the cause, by naming and positively emphasizing the actions Iran has taken in the region. He is not overtly using Islamic ideology or religion in connection to Iran. He is in turn referring to the dominant stream of Islam in Saudi Arabia, Wahabbism, and stating that this stream is informing the ideology of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda.

Khamenei is opening and closing [his discourse](#) with reference to Islam and continues to make reference to religion throughout his whole discourse. Khamenei extends God's blessings and good wishes to the ones he favours. Also, he continues to separate in believers, his supporters and non-believers, his opponents.

Throughout his discourse, he refers to Islamic values and some of the [pillars that the Islamic revolutionary ideology is constructed upon](#). The preservation of Islamic revolutionary ideology and consequently the [revolutionary spirit](#) is one of Khamenei's highest priorities, and he implies that Iran went astray when it comes to the goals of the revolution.

Hence, he charges the Assembly of Experts with the task of adopting a fundamental and strategic outlook towards the Revolution and its path in order to ensure

compliance with it. At the same time, he implies that the government was not the right organ for this task, as they were acting according to reformist values and not following his fundamental idea of the revolutionary path.

His discourse is saturated with Islamic revolutionary ideology, and he negatively represents the West, but also Rouhani's government and parliament, by arguing that erroneous executive decisions were the cause for economical problems such as [high inflation](#). Throughout his discourse, Khamenei continues to criticize Rouhani's government, pointing to its wrong orientation towards international relations, while neglecting domestic affairs.

Khamenei connects Islamic revolutionary ideology with the concepts of authority, responsibility, and compulsion in order to bring Iran's citizens to piety. To this aim, he finds it important to exercise power over people and to influence their minds by means of spreading the discourse of the revolutionary ideology and by showering people with the revolutionary motives and spirit during [Friday sermons](#).

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the nature of the Islamic ideology exhibited by the three most prominent representatives of the Islamic Republic is not monolithic, but flexible and applied pragmatically. Because of the structure of the system, where religious credentials serve as entry barrier to politics, the discourse of the political elite of Iran moves along similar Islamic lines and a certain amount of Islamic ideology is always present.

However, there are significant distinctions, which are attributed to differences due to the individual's position in the system and their political affiliation as well as the circumstances, i.e. the place where the discourse was pronounced and the requirements and conditions of a particular moment in time. An important point to remember is the constant competition among the political elite to reach and maintain political power, further conditioning their discourses.

President Rouhani forms [part of the system](#) and he was approved by the Guardian Council because of his religious credentials and prior revolutionary record and various positions in the system, however, in his discourses at the UN, he keeps a rather low religious profile. Religion does not serve him as primary argument, especially since the prior display of fundamental Islamic ideas by Ahmadinejad was not well received. Notwithstanding, religiosity is used for special purposes. For example in connection to hot topics, such as the nuclear issue where the fatwa issued by Khamenei is used to build trust. Generally, the use of religiosity is meant to portray the Islamic Republic as a nation of good, pious people who would do no harm and to generate positive feelings towards Iran. Rouhani and Zarif, pertaining to the same government and faction of reformists, use the same concepts, ideas and expressions. Corresponding to his position as foreign minister, which means dealing primarily with foreign and not domestic relations, Zarif's discourse addresses an international audience. While using much less religious references, he uses religion as a unifying factor to include Iran in the international community.

In sum, Rouhani's government needs to appeal to the international community to position Iran in the best way possible in order to improve the domestic situation and therefore gain the favour of his voters, which is essential for the reformists to stay in power. Concepts such as democracy, freedom and moderation are used to this aim. At the same time, the government needs to appease its opposition as much as possible. For this reason, Rouhani's government is forced to show more Islamic ideology as the support of the Supreme Leader increasingly dwindles over the course of the presidency in order to improve relations.

Comparatively, Khamenei uses the most Islamic ideology and Islamic references. He is uncompromising in his discourse, as his position in the system is practically unshakable. Unlike Rouhani's government, he does not depend on people's vote, being cleared by the Guardian Council or the endorsement of the Supreme Leader. Therefore, he shows the least pragmatism in his speech, and is the most constant in using Islamic ideology. Khamenei is not concerned with the concepts of freedom or democracy or the Iranian identity based on its cultural and historic heritage to

win the favour of the international community, to improve Iran's position and image and consequently gain increased domestic support, but to the contrary, with authority and power and the preservation of the values and spirit of the Islamic revolution which ultimately legitimize the regime and thereby securing his power position and the continuity of the system.

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Notes

Note 1. Critical Discourse Analysis is a holistic approach, taking into consideration both the discourse itself as well as its context. Based on this approach, the analysis of discourses for the article focused on explicit and implicit meaning, lexis, argumentation, rhetorical tropes, topics, themes, ideology and concepts.

Note 2. The importance assigned to each power resource depends on the respective system and may vary from case to case. In some cases, the essential power resource may be the state, in others capital, and in others corporation, coercion, information or ideology, or a combination of various resources.

Note 3. Article 5 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic stipulates that the during the absence of the Mahdi, the 12th imam, “the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran shall be the responsibility of a Faqih who is just, virtuous, has contemporary knowledge, is courageous and efficient administrator“.

Note 4. See article 110 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Supreme Leader’s responsibilities and authorities.

Note 5. See article 91 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran for more information its composition and responsibilities and authorities.

Note 6. Article 115 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic states the selection criteria for the president: “The President shall be elected from among distinguished religious and political personalities having the following qualifications: He shall be of Iranian origins, have Iranian citizenship, be efficient and prudent, have a record of good reputation, honesty and piety, and be true and faithful to the essentials of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official Faith of the country”.

Note 7. See article 113 and following of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic for the responsibility and authority of the President.

Note 8. “Islam, especially the government’s version of Shiism, has gained tremendous weight in Iranian society over the past thirty years. Not only must all those applying for government jobs be loyal to the constitution, which enshrines Shiite Islam as the state religion, but one’s public persona as a devout Shiite has

become a form of social capital that allows one to gain others' trust, expand social and financial networks and strengthen business relationships" in M. Khalaji (2008). 'Iran's Regime of Religion' in *Journal of International Affairs*, 65(1), p. 131-xiii.

Note 9. "Clerics are employed at every level of almost all government bureaus, and a number of high-ranking political positions are reserved for the clergy. For example, according to Iran's constitution, the supreme leader, the head of the judiciary, six of the twelve members of the Guardian Council, the intelligence minister and all eighty-six members of the of Experts – a body that appoints the ruling jurist and oversees his activities – must be chosen from among clerics. Furthermore, the supreme leader has representatives in universities and the security forces, including the police, ground forces, air force, navy and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as in a number of other government bureaus and in various countries in the Middle East, Africa and Europe, almost all of whom are clerics" in M. Khalaji (2008).

Note 10. "The Islamic Republic was formed amid a whirlwind of events. This has been repeatedly mentioned, but we should not forget that the heart of this statement is the preservation of God's religion in people's lives, in society and in our country. The heart of this statement is the formation of our social lives on the basis of sharia, the divine religion and the divine values and rules" in A. Khamenei (2013).

Note 11. "Our democracy grew out of the heart of Islam as well" in *Ibid*.

Note 12. The P5+1 are the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China and France plus Germany.

Note 13. "As we aided the establishment of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are prepared to help bring about democracy in Syria and also Yemen. We support the consolidation of power through the vote of people rather than with arms" in United Nations (2015).

Note 14. “These policies grew out of sheer oblivion towards the region’s inner dynamics and led to feckless and clumsy attempts to stamp an alien model onto societies that are of completely different traditions, cultures and lifestyles” in *Ibid*.

Note 15. Affiliated with the faction of reformists.

Note 16. For example, “I would like to welcome the dear and honourable brothers and I thank you for enlightening our work place with the light of your presence. The Assembly of Experts and its members are so significant that one feels your presence in any place will - by Allah's favour - be a source of blessings. The Assembly of Experts can be a complete embodiment of divine tranquility because the existence of this divine tranquility is one of the signs of faith: ‘It is He Who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith’” in A. Khamenei (2015).

Note 17. “The significance of this Revolution does not lie in its overthrowing a regime. The reason why it shook the whole world is not this, rather the reason is that it presented a new thought system to the world. Today too, this thought system is continuing to develop throughout the world. Despite the effort that they are making to conceal and to deny it, this thought system is spreading everywhere and it is attracting many hearts in the world - whether in the world of Islam or to a lesser degree, in the world outside Islam. Hearts continue to be attracted to it. This thought system has preserved its novelty and freshness” in *Ibid*.

Note 18. The famous slogan “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic” is a kind of movement from the specific to the general. It is an expression of the general after the specific. First, we say, “Independence”, and then we say, “Freedom”. Independence is part of freedom. If we only look at individual freedom, this is one side of the coin.

Note 19. “The establishment of divine values, the implementation of divine laws and the rule of God’s religion and the rule of Islam” in *Ibid*.

Note 20. “Iran does not seek to restore its ancient empire, impose its official religion on others, or export its revolution through the force of arms. We are so confident in the depth of our culture, the truth of our faith and tenacity and longevity of our revolution that we will never seek to export any of them in the way neo-colonialists do, with the heavy boots of soldiers. To promote our culture, civilization, religion and revolution, we enter hearts and engage minds. We recite our poetry and engage in discourse on our philosophy” in United Nations (2017).

Note 21. “The vote manifested the determination of Iran’s electorate to continue on the path of moderation and constructive engagement based on mutual respect that brought the world the nuclear deal in 2015” in *Ibid*.

Note 22. “For example, one of the important aspects of our Revolution was that it was a revolution of "Neither East nor West." Today, the east [power] does not exist, but the western one does exist with full power and strength. What does "…nor West" mean? It means that we should not be infatuated with the west, that we should not be influenced by it, and that we should not cherish western culture. It means that we should cleanse the country and its culture of assimilation into the decadent western culture, that we should not be under the influence of the west in the area of politics, and that we should not join the west and be submissive to it“ in A. Khamenei (2017). *Leader’s Speech in Meeting with Members of Assembly of Experts, Tehran, 21 September*.

Note 23. “The condition for the continuation of the Islamic Republic’s life is the existence of revolutionary motives and the revolutionary spirit. If the revolutionary spirit does not exist, the Islamic Republic will not exist either. There will be a government, but it will not be the Islamic Republic” in *Ibid*.

Note 24. “One of the main elements which constitute economic power is the power of national currency. This means that national currency should have the power to purchase and it should create sources of wealth for citizens and for those who have any money. If we reach a point where national currency decreases and goes down on a daily basis due to erroneous executive polices, incorrect decisions and various

instances of negligence, this is retrogression and moving backwards. We should identify this and then, we should present and define demands on this basis. These demands can be addressed to the administration, the Majlis and all the rest“ in *Ibid.*

Note 25. “When you reach a certain conclusion about an important and fundamental matter of the Revolution, you should turn it into a discourse. For example, you should publish it in various publications. You are a large group of people. Many of the gentlemen in this meeting are Friday prayer leaders, and outstanding personalities in different provinces and in the capital. They have minbar and they can speak to the people. You should repeat these concepts until they turn into a discourse. A discourse is a common thought among the people and a public demand that is made by the people. When something turns into a public demand and discourse, it will naturally get close to implementation. The same is true of this issue. The issue of paying attention to reliance on domestic hands for the sake of solving the problems of the country should turn into a well-established idea in the people's minds. This should be repeated, explained and clarified so many times until it turns into a definite discourse” in *Ibid.*

Note 26. The president has to pledge allegiance to the constitution and the system according to article 121 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic: “I, as the President, upon the Holy Koran and in the presence of the Iranian nation, do hereby swear in the name of Almighty God to safeguard the official Faith, the System of the Islamic Republic and the Constitution of the country; to use all my talents and abilities in the discharge of responsibilities undertaken by me; to devote myself to the service of the people, glory of the country, promotion of religion and morality, support of right and propagation of justice; to refrain from being autocratic; to protect the freedom and dignity of individuals and the rights of the Nation recognized by the Constitution; to spare no efforts in safeguarding the frontiers and the political, economic and cultural freedoms of the country; to guard the power entrusted to me by the Nation as a sacred trust like an honest and faithful trustee, by seeking help from God and following the example of the Prophet

of Islam and the sacred Imams (Peace be upon them), and to entrust it to the one elected by the Nation after me”.

The impact of the commemoration of Ashura on Shia-Sunni relations in Iraq

Jafar Ahmad

Introduction

This paper sets out to explore the impact Ashura rituals on Shi'a-Sunni relations in Iraq. The main arguments presented in this paper are based on assumptions underlying the core concept of [Structural Ritualization Theory](#) (SRT) stipulating that, when used strategically, rituals can alter social relations between different groups and shape the power structure of society. The importance of the proceeding discussion stems from a lack of analysis in the related literature of the impact of cultural elements such as Shi'a rituals on Shi'a-Sunni relations. Within this context, the focus of previous studies has been more on foreign influence and less on the culture of Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis.

Overall, the objective of this study is to direct attention to critical ways in which rituals and social relations intersect through the annual commemoration of Ashura (Ashura rituals) in Iraq. In order to achieve its aim, this study is structured to discuss the following: (1) historical context of Ashura rituals, (2) the nature of Ashura rituals in Iraq, (3) the Sunni views of these rituals, and (4) the prominence of Shi'a rituals in impacting Shi'a-Sunni dynamic, which will be presented chronologically under three main time periods: pre-1921, between 1921 and 2003, and post-2003.

Historical Context of Ashura Rituals

During the annual commemoration of Ashura, Shi'a Muslims – a minority within the Islamic *umma* (community) – mourn the death of Husayn bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. The Shi'a regard him as one of their twelve infallible *Imams* and a member of the *Ahlulbayt* (family of the Prophet Muhammad). In 680, Husayn rose up against the perceived unjust Muslim *caliph* (appointed leader), Yazid bin Abi Sufiyan. On the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, known as Ashura or ten (*ashra*) in the Arabic language, he, his family and companions, [were assaulted and killed in Karbala](#), Iraq by the army of the aforementioned *caliph*.

The Battle of Karbala marked a turning point in Islamic history. It is a powerful event which has divided Muslims, due to the high-profile individuals involved including Husayn on one side and the *caliph* (acting as the Prophet's successor) on the other side, and the lack of agreement as to whether this event was simply a battle or rather a [legitimate religious or political uprising](#). However, the most divisive issue is the circumstances and nature in which Husayn and his male companions [were brutally killed](#). The women, including Husayn's sister Zainab, the granddaughter of the Prophet, survived the battle but [were taken captive](#). Furthermore, whilst there is a tendency to ignore the significance of the episode of Karbala among the majority of Muslims, this event generated traditions and rituals of [public mourning among the Shi'a](#).

In Iraq, where the Shi'a are the majority and the Sunni form a sizable minority, Ashura rituals, which form the core of Shi'a identity, were initially restricted by successive Sunni-dominated governments (1921-1968) and ultimately banned (1968- 2003) under the rule of the Baath Party, a nationalist Pan-Arab political and revolutionary movement with [underlying Sunni views](#). However, since the fall of the regime, the commemoration of Ashura has emerged as the most powerful cultural, religious, and political event in Iraq and it is estimated that in Iraq in 2016, over 20 million Shi'a pilgrims, from Iraq and further afield, [commemorated Ashura](#).

The Nature of Ashura Rituals in Iraq post- 2003

During the annual commemoration, the country practically comes to a standstill and massive security measures are put in place to protect Shi'a participants from attacks by Sunni groups and/or *Daesh* (ISIS). The streets of Shi'a neighbourhoods are adorned with flags and banners, reflecting their views of the Battle of Karbala, and marching pilgrims from various cities proceed to the holy city of Karbala, where Husayn is buried. Generally, Shi'a mourners of both genders dress in black and engage in self-flagellation, whilst also congregating in gender-segregated areas for sorrowful, poetic recitations performed in [memory of the death of Husayn](#).

As part of the mourning traditions and rituals, the commemoration of Ashura re-invokes conversations and images of the Battle of Karbala, on many occasions [in excruciating detail](#). The overall narrative adopted in these commemorations, which has been developed over a period of twelve centuries, depicts two sides; the *Ahlulbayt*, and the "Others" who denied the *Ahlulbayt* their right of leadership and who killed, abused, and oppressed them. In this same narrative, whilst the *Ahlulbayt* are glorified, [the "Others" are denounced](#).

Furthermore, the accompanying narrative adopted in the commemoration has a great impact on evoking emotions from Shi'a who gather to [commemorate the killing of Husayn](#). Also, the Shi'a cook, socialize, discuss politics and other challenges they experience during these commemorations, further creating a sense of Shi'a solidarity and underscoring a sense of [separateness from the Sunni](#). It is for these reasons that the commemoration of Ashura tends to highlight Shi'a identity, but, in turn, for the exact same reasons, it is often [viewed with caution by the Sunni](#).

The Sunni View of Ashura Rituals: Different Perspectives

Whilst Ashura is a day of mourning for Shi'a Iraqis generally, the Sunnis perceive Ashura as a day of fasting, a recommended, but not obligatory religious practice on this day. According to Sunni scholars, supported by *hadith* (a saying of the Prophet Muhammad), Muslims are encouraged to fast on the day of Ashura, in order to follow the tradition of the Prophet, who also fasted on this day, in order to honour

Allah's will in saving Moses and the Israelites from the Egyptian pharaoh. Thus, many Sunni do not recognize Ashura as the day when Husayn was killed, but rather as a blessed day, consistent with the *Sunna* (tradition) of the Prophet. Based on this, it could be argued that the day of Ashura has some religious connotation for the Sunni, but for a completely different reason. Furthermore, it could be argued that the Sunni believe that the commemoration dwells on a hostile history, which lies at the root of the initial split of the Muslim world into two main sects, as it annually evokes memories of the [killing of Husayn](#). In addition to dwelling on this hostile history, some of the rituals practised during the commemoration are perceived as *haram* (non-Islamic and thus forbidden) by Sunnis, given that they [expose mourners to physical harm](#). Moreover, on some occasions, the narrative adopted in the commemoration of Ashura alludes to cursing some well-regarded [historical Sunni figures](#). For all of these reasons, the annual re-invoking of such a narrative could agitate the Sunni.

Finally, given that Ashura rituals allow Arab Shi'a Iraqis to be aligned with non-Arab Shi'a, particularly with their Iranian neighbour, the Sunni view Shi'a Iraqis [with suspicion](#). Traditionally, the Shi'a of Iraq and Iran have cordial relations with each other perhaps, because of their similar shared beliefs and rituals, including the [commemoration of Ashura](#). The fact that the Shi'a majority of Iraq share similar religious practices with the Shi'a majority of Iran implies Shi'a Iraqis being disloyal, partly because the relationship between Sunni Arabs and Shi'a Persians has been characterized as hostile. The source of these tense relations is related to the contemporary power struggle in the region between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in addition to a long history of rivalry between Arabs and Persians dating back to the [conquest of the Persian Empire](#) by Arab Muslims in 651. Based on this, the annual commemoration of Ashura could cause further tensions between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis.

In contrast to the Sunni, the commemoration of Ashura is embedded in Shi'a doctrine and recognized as a religious duty which means to continue the revolution of Husayn. Thus, those who commemorate Ashura will be generously

rewarded in the hereafter, with the most rewarded ritual is the act of public weeping over the suffering of Husayn in Karbala. [It is asserted](#) that the “[*Imams*] themselves encouraged their followers to weep for them, thereby seeking to evoke every year the sorrow and the memory of Karbala, and to transmit it to generations to come”. [Ali Shariati theorizes](#) that the subjugated and persecuted *Imams* had no means to continue the revolution of Husayn, other than through weeping and mourning his death. In Shariati’s view, the *Imams*’ rationale for commemorating Ashura is that if they are unable to fight injustice, the least they can do is try to inform others of the tragedy of Karbala. Thus, arguably, from early on, Ashura rituals have been strategically used to achieve cultural change within the Muslim *umma*.

In [al-Wardi’s view](#) however, Ashura rituals have become more about intercession from Husayn, than continuing his revolution. To elaborate, by commemorating Ashura, the Shi’a strongly believe that Husayn will intercede on their behalf to fulfill their material needs (cure them from illness, for example) in this life and to save them from punishment in the hereafter. Furthermore, whilst the Shi’a believe that all *Imams* have the power of intercession, they believe that Husayn’s is stronger, perhaps due to his [tragic demise](#). Mourning his death, in this case, from a Shi’a perspective, means sharing his suffering and by so doing, receiving rewards [in this life and the hereafter](#). In other words al-Wardi argues that these rituals are more about rewards and people’s needs, than religious aspects (to continue Husayn’s revolution against tyranny and injustice) and/or of Husayn’s values and principles.

In the following sections, discussions underscoring the prominence of Ashura rituals in creating changes within Iraqi society will be presented chronologically under three main time periods: pre-1921 (the creation of Iraq as a political entity), from 1921 to 2003, and post-2003.

Ashura Rituals and Shi’a-Sunni Relations pre-1921: Powerful Rituals

Prior to 1921, Iraq represented more a geographical designation rather than a political or sociocultural one and as such, there was [no Iraqi nationalist sentiment or platform](#).

Notwithstanding, Ashura rituals played a crucial role in Shi'a-Sunni dynamics. The following discussion will highlight the prominence of Shi'a rituals in various contexts, including the conversion of Sunni tribes to Shi'ism during the nineteenth century, the rise of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and the 1920 Iraqi revolt against the British; all of these have ultimately altered Shi'a-Sunni relations and shaped a new form of Iraqi Shi'a nationalism post-2003.

Ashura Rituals and the Conversion of Sunni Tribes to Shi'ism: 1830-1920

There is no evidence suggesting that the Shi'a were ever close to forming Iraq's majority population before the ninetieth or, even, the [twentieth century](#). It was only following the mass conversion, mainly during the nineteenth century, of the bulk of Iraq's nominally Sunni Arab tribes to Shi'ism, who settled in Shi'a dominated areas, that the share of the Shi'a grew to constitute the [majority of the population](#). Within this context, it has emerged that Ashura rituals played a crucial role in the process of [converting the Sunni tribes into Shi'ism](#). Calling Ashura rituals "[Shi'a propaganda](#)", al-Wardi (1969) argues that these rituals appealed to tribesmen, except for the weeping aspect, given that in Bedouin culture weeping is a sign of weakness. Thus, Shi'a religious leaders adjusted "Shi'a rituals to conform with Arab ideal attributes of manhood and Iraqi tribal style of celebration...which included clamorous receptions, horse riding, and firing weapons [in the air](#)". In addition, since the tribesmen always preferred to hear songs of heroes, religious leaders used "Arabic poetry to dramatize the heroic stand of Husayn and his companions in the [battle of Karbala](#)".

The impact of this conversion on Shi'a-Sunni relations is significant and an element that has become crucial to the ascendancy to power of the Shi'a majority, in the first democratic election held after the fall of the Baath Party in 2003.

Ashura Rituals and the Rise of Wahhabism

It has been noted that Wahhabism has emerged in Arabia to counter the influence of Shi'a rituals, whilst the literature also indicates that the rise of Wahhabism has [reinforced Shi'a identity in Iraq](#). Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), the founder of Wahhabism in Arabia, advocated a purging of Shi'a rituals and practices, including Ashura and the visitation to *Imams'* shrines, which he considered idolatrous, impure and wrong-headed [innovations within Islam](#). However, the rise of Wahhabism has also had an impact on the Shi'a because it motivated Shi'a religious authority (*marja'eya*) in Najaf in the nineteenth century, to convert Iraqi's Sunni tribe to Shi'ism to [counter the Wahhabi influence](#).

Furthermore, the Wahhabis were not satisfied with simply imposing strict Islamic rules in Arabia, rather, motivated by their ideology of abolishing Shi'a rituals and beliefs, they attacked Karbala in 1802 and attempted to raid Najaf, the [two main shrine \(holy\) cities in Iraq](#). This act was perceived as a threat to the Shi'a and thus served as a [rallying cause for them](#). One could argue that perhaps a similar dynamic between the Shi'a in Iraq and the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia has resurfaced post-2003, contributing to further increasing the gap between Arabs, Iraqis and Saudis, which has its implications for the notion of Arabism. Interestingly, Ashura rituals have not always been used for dividing Muslims, as featured in the following discussion; they can also contribute to some level of Shi'a-Sunni unity.

Ashura Rituals and the 1920 Iraqi Revolt

When discussing sectarianism in Iraq, there is a tendency to refer to the Shi'a-Sunni alliance formed in 1920, arguing that when context permits, co-existence and even harmony between them is possible. In 1919, a coalition of Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis was formed to defend Iraq against the British invasion. The *marja'eya* (Shi'a religious authority) in Najaf and Karbala assumed a leading role in this coalition, issuing a fatwa (religious ruling) calling for *jihad* (fight against the infidels), the British forces. To achieve its aim, in the period leading up to and

during the 1920 revolt, the *marja'eya* attempted to reduce sectarian barriers. Within this context, it has emerged that the commemoration of Ashura played a crucial role in facilitating this unity. To try and create a common denominator, which would help mobilize Arab Sunnis and Shi'as, the *marja'eya's* speeches during Ashura rituals focused on the disgrace to Arab honor; a symbolism to which Arabs in Iraq could relate well and which had [no connection to their sectarian identity](#). [Nakash](#) notes that the Shi'a and the Sunni "have gained confidence by this union whether imaginary or real".

Overall, this coalition succeeded in showing solidarity and a great resistance. However, the British forces were ultimately able to crush the 1920 revolt. Despite its defeat, the Iraqi revolt was perceived a watershed event in contemporary Iraqi history, given that for the first time, Sunnis and Shi'as, tribes and cities were brought together in a [common effort](#). However, whilst [al-Wardi](#) acknowledges the Shi'a-Sunni unity and the bravery shown in attempting to defeat the British invasion, at the same time, he doubts that this unity would have continued. In his view, the unity displayed by both the Shi'a and Sunni against the British was unexpected and a rare event that should not be used as mark of precedence, adding that the circumstances that led to this unity are unlikely to be repeated, which has proven to be the case. He rationalizes his view on the basis of their inability to compromise or consider the other's point of view, due to the two inherited cultural elements of *al-Asabiya* and *al-Methaliya*. [Al-Wardi](#) asserts that Iraq can never shed its Bedouin values of *al-Asabiya* and *al-Methaliya*, because they have become part of its identity.

In summary, when examining events in this period, two major themes emerged. First, no other cultural event has impacted Shi'a-Sunni relations the way Ashura rituals had done. Second, and most importantly, is the willingness of Sunni Iraqis to relate to Ashura rituals if, of course, the right circumstances are in place.

Ashura Rituals and Shi'a-Sunni Relations Between 1921 and 2003: Suppressed Rituals

This is a crucial period for Shi'a-Sunni relations given that the establishment of modern Iraq created new realities, including the exclusion of the Shi'a from the state building process after which a strong form of Iraqi nationalism emerged that did not include Shi'a culture [including symbols and rituals](#). However, this nationalism disintegrated mainly due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and subsequent Shi'a uprising in 1991.

In 1921, the British installed Faisal, a Sunni Muslim, as king and a government, which came to be [dominated by the Sunni in Iraq](#). The exclusion of the Shi'a from power disappointed them particularly the *marja'eya* (religious leaders) and, unsurprisingly, this dynamic was reflected in Ashura rituals. Thus, since the beginning of their occupation of Iraq, the British paid attention to these rituals, as the practice of mourning rituals fluctuated between public freedom at times and restriction or prohibition at others. The Sunni dominant government motivated the restriction against practising the Ashura rituals, as they became the Shi'a leaders' main means of highlighting the [Shi'a's grievances against the government](#). In fact, the restriction on Ashura rituals became a theme adopted by successive Sunni-dominated governments. However, despite of this conflict between the *marja'eya* and Sunni politicians, the overall Shi'a-Sunni paradigm, on communities' level, could be characterized as "[normal](#)". In the meantime, a form of Iraqi nationalism started to emerge promoted by the state in which neither Ashura (Shi'a) ritual nor the episode of Karbala had any presence.

This Iraqi nationalism (*wataniyyah al-Iraqia*; Iraqi territorial nationalism) emerged to assert that Iraqis are a nation and promote the cultural unity of Iraqis which involves the recognition of an Iraqi identity stemming from ancient Mesopotamia including its [civilization of Babylonia](#). Arguably, this form of nationalism developed to counter the influence of the Ottoman and [British occupation and influence](#). In the meantime, other Arab countries including Syria and Egypt were experiencing similar sentiments of defending and protecting their land from foreign influence (imperialism) contributing to the creation of an ideology of Pan-Arabism or Arabism (*qawmiyyah al-Arabia*; ethnic or racial nationalism), which asserts that the

Arabs constitute a single nation. Advocates of Pan-Arabism have often espoused socialist principles and [strongly opposed western political involvement in the Arab world](#). It also sought to empower Arab states against outside forces by [forming alliances](#). Its popularity soared during the 1950s and 1960s as a reaction to the [creation of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948](#).

However, despite not being a particularly “Shi’a” form of nationalism given that the Shi’ism of Iraq was not recognized as part of Iraqi identity, [the majority of Shi’a Iraqis embraced Pan-Arabism](#). It has been argued that western style education, introduced to Iraq by the British in the 1920s, allowed Iraqis, Shi’a and Sunni, to venture beyond their sectarian boundaries. New generations that previously would have been under the sway of their local communities and if provided with education would have been recipients of the religiously guided teachings of religious figures, were now being taught “[Arabness](#)” from a near universal curriculum. It is hard to overstate the impact of this phenomenon on a country which for centuries had belonged to a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural empire with a multitude of faiths and religious sects and in which “[national identity](#)” was non-existent. In addition, Shi’a and Sunni Iraqis found a common cause, to protect their Arab identity, in light of the perceived “existential” threat as a result of the creation of the State of Israel. Perhaps what is also interesting is this threat was perceived as directed against Arabs; the Arab identity was at stake, and not Muslim identity. As evidence, this era witnessed the rise of a secular figure with then president of Egypt, Jamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970), who became an iconic figure in the Arab world, particularly for his strides towards Arab unity and anti-imperialist efforts. Furthermore, the rise and popularity of secular movements signalled the decrease of religiosity in Iraq and the Arab world. Al-Wardi emphasizes this argument by pointing out that when religiosity decreased and the Arab nationalism sentiment increased in Iraq in the 1950s-60s, Ashura rituals lost their intensity and were broadly perceived even by the Shi’a themselves as a backward practice [particularly amongst the educated](#).

Overall, since 1921 and up until the Baath Party assumed power in 1968, the Shi'a-Sunni discourse could be characterized as [remarkably universalist](#). However, several socio-political elements have helped to reverse this relative stability characterizing Shi'a-Sunni dynamics, increased religiosity in the region, and impacted Iraqi nationalism, in particular: (1) the rise of the Baath Party in 1968, (2) the rise of Shi'ism in Iran in 1979, and (3) the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The Baath Party (1968-2003): Alienating the Shi'a

The tyrannical style of the Baath Party rule set the stage for a power struggle with the Shi'a majority in two ways. First, the secular views of the ruling party collided with the Islamic views of the Shi'a religious leaders, resulting in the alienation of the Shi'as in Iraq. Second, the increased representation of Sunnis in the circles of power and consequent exclusion of Shi'as, was interpreted as an attempt to [alienate Shi'as](#). The alienation by the Baath Party provoked sectarian sensitivities, as the Shi'a perceived this alienation as a threat to their identity. Slogans shouted during Ashura rituals against the government indicated the polarization of Iraqi society, with calls to overthrow the government [replete with Shi'a overtones](#).

As such, one of the first assaults to the Shi'a at the beginning of Baath rule was the banning of Ashura rituals alienating the Shi'a and leaving them with the feeling that they were not part of this new era of Iraqi nationalism that was centred on Arabism. It has been reported that despite the extreme measures put in place by the Baath Party to discourage the Shi'a from commemorating Ashura, in 1977, thousands of them [turned out to practise Ashura](#). Given that the Shi'a challenged the ban imposed on commemorating Ashura, in response, the regime forces attacked the pilgrims, resulting in the killing and wounding of numerous participants. According to a prominent Iraqi scholar, [Ibrahim al-Haidari](#), Ali al-Wardi (1913-1995), widely regarded as the most distinguished and influential Iraqi sociologist was troubled by this incident; wondering about ways to discourage the Shi'a from commemorating Ashura, or looking for alternatives to the commemoration, in order to avoid future incidents. In response to al-Wardi's concerns, al-Haidari notes that it is impossible to suppress Ashura rituals and/or

even think about alternatives given that these rituals are ingrained in the [Shi'a collective memory](#). However, al-Haidari suggests that it may be possible to reduce their intensity if other social venues, including sports clubs, social clubs, and political platforms to provide Iraqis, including the Shi'a, with an alternative opportunity to socialize and discuss their affairs.

In addition to the killing and wounding of numerous participants during Ashura, a large number of Shi'a activists were arrested, including a well-regarded and one of the most influential Shi'a *mujtahds*, Muhammad Baqer al-Sadr. Given its dictatorial nature, the regime of Saddam Hussein eventually took drastic measures following the Shi'a protest during Ashura rituals executing Muhammad Baqer al-Sadr along with his sister, Bint al-Huda and sending shock waves through the [Shi'a community in Iraq](#). Thus, it could be argued that the threat from Iraqi sectarianism predated the Islamic Revolution in Iran and hence [made Saddam Hussein apprehensive](#).

The Rise of Shi'a Iran (1979): Reviving Shi'ism

What exacerbated the tension between the Shi'a Iraqis and the state was the rise of Shi'ism in Iran as a result of the [Islamic revolution in 1979](#). This revolution succeeded in reviving Islamic teaching of the Shi'a's interpretation of Islam, not only in Iran, but also on a regional level. Most importantly, the leader of the Islamic revolution, Ruhollah Khomeini (1930-1989), placed a heavy emphasis on using the commemoration of Ashura as a powerful means to unite the Shi'a and defeat their enemies. Since then, the revival of Ashura rituals has become a theme adopted by Shi'a communities throughout the Middle East and beyond.

The rise of Shi'ism in Iran however, was interpreted by the majority of Arabs as a threat to the notion of Arab nationalism awaking the traditional antagonism between them and the Persians. This view was embraced and adopted by the regime of Saddam Hussein placing a great emphasis on the Arabism of Iraq. One of the first casualties of adopting such a notion was Shi'a Iraqis with Iranian background. In 1980, feared they act as a fifth column, they were expelled from

their homes and thrown on the Iraqi-Iranian border, which further alienated the Shi'a, suggesting a very narrow understanding to [what it means to be an Iraqi](#).

However, the clampdown on the Shi'a majority was followed by a calculated attempt by Saddam to try to appease them during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) by stressing *al-wataniyyah* (Iraqi territorial nationalism), in which "Arabs" were pitted against the eternal enemy the "Persians"/"Iranians". A historical analogy was made with the Battle of *al-Qadisiyyah* in 636 when the expanding Muslim armies defeated the Sassanians and thus paved way for the conquest of Persia. The modern war against the Persians/Iranians was thus referred to as *Qadisiyyat* Saddam (Saddam's *Qadisiyyah*). This way, Saddam conceptualized the war as a natural outcome of an [eternal enmity between "Arabs" and "Persians"](#). Not surprisingly, the notion of Iraqi nationalism increased during the Iraq-Iran war; numerous Iraqis including Shi'a and Sunni lost their lives in this war believing that they were defending Iraq and the Arabs from the Persian expansionist plots in the region. In addition, most Arab nations supported Saddam in this war, including the Gulf States and Jordan recognizing him as the [defender of Arab nationalism](#).

By the end of the war, however, Iraq was [almost financially bankrupt](#). It has been suggested that the resulting eight years of fighting did not conclude with either side being able to claim victory. However, what did result was an increase of tensions between the regime of Saddam Hussein and its allies, the Gulf States, in particular, Kuwait. By the time the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, Iraq was not in a financial position to repay the billion of dollars it borrowed from Kuwait to finance its war and requested that Kuwait forgive the debt because Saddam Hussein argued that the war had [prevented the rise of Iranian hegemony in Kuwait](#).

Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait and the Subsequent Shi'a Uprising: Waning of Sunni Dominance

Kuwait's reluctance to pardon the debt created strains in the relationship between the two countries, which resulted in its invasion by Iraqi forces in 1990.

Consequently, the majority of Arab countries, including the regime's allies during

the Iraq-Iran war, turned against Iraq and in addition, welcomed foreign powers to liberate Kuwait, an act that fractured and eventually contributed to the collapse of Arabism. In the days following the defeat and decimation of the Iraqi Army during Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait in 1991, the Shi'a in the south and the Kurds in the north, seized on the weakness of Saddam Hussein's armed forces to try and overthrow the Iraqi Baathist regime that had oppressed them for decades. At one point, the Kurdish forces in the north and Shi'a protestors in the south controlled 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces, shattering the [notion of a united Iraq](#).

In terms of the uprising of the Shi'a in 1991, the regime's use of excessive force to quell it further alienated Shi'a Iraqis and aligned them with the Iranians given that Iran was the only country to offer and provide [support for the Shi'a](#). It is ingrained in the memory of Shi'a Iraqis that they did not get support from Arab nations despite their sacrifice during the Iraq-Iran war, shattering the notion of Arabism. In addition, the stance of the majority of Arab nations offering no support (financial and/or moral) for Iraqis (Shi'a and Sunni) during the sanctions imposed on Iraq from 1991 to 2003 further disappointed not only the Shi'a but also Iraqi Sunnis. Arabism at that point became a meaningless concept and crumbled on all three fronts: the state, the Shi'a and the Sunni. Thus, not surprisingly, by 2003 there has been little attention or sentiments for Arabism, with its Sunni underlying meaning.

In summary, when reflecting on the events of this period (1921-2003), it has emerged that Ashura rituals lost its power and prominence, once enjoyed pre-1921. Instead, a robust notion of Iraqi nationalism developed with Arab identity-at its core without however including Shi'a symbols. Despite being perceived as a Sunni underlying form of nationalism, the majority of Shi'a Iraqis embraced it especially during 1950s and 1960s implying the willingness of the Shi'a to step out of their sectarian zone, to unite with Sunni Iraqis in pursuit of protecting their Arab identity. However, this changed for a variety of reasons including the Baath Party's limited view of Iraqi identity, the rise of Shi'ism in Iran, and the collapse of Arabism due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In addition, the aforementioned events have

contributed to underscoring religious and cultural differences between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis.

Finally, there was a growing perception by the international community that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a security threat to it, particularly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This perception, coupled with the events of 9/11, provided a strong motive for the U.S. government to initiate action to [topple the regime of Saddam Hussein](#). The subsequent success in toppling this regime in 2003 created the opportunity for the majority Shi'as in Iraq to assume power.

Ashura Rituals and Shi'a-Sunni Dynamics post-2003:

After 2003, an election placed the majority Shi'a in power, which has contributed to the increasing tension between the two sects, marking 2003 as a major [turning point in Shi'a-Sunni relations](#). In addition, it became evident that the restriction and banning policies adopted by previous governments were ineffective in dealing with Ashura rituals. The Shi'a resumed their rituals and in fact, they have become one of the main markers of Iraqi society. Most importantly, a brand of nationalism emerged in which the episode of Karbala underscores its core principle, replacing *al-qawmiyyah* and *al-wataniyyah*. However, this form of nationalism which emphasizes the Shi'ism of Iraq has alienated Sunni Iraqis and placed the Shi'a in an uncomfortable position with the Sunni majority of the Arab world.

Contextualising of the Resurfacing of Ashura Rituals and its Implications

In April 2003, scenes of elation erupted in Baghdad in response to the news that the US military forces had successfully toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. In Karbala, for the first time in approximately forty years, [around two million Shi'a Iraqis gathered to commemorate Ashura](#). For the Shi'a, they were finally free to be themselves, free to challenge Sunni power and their perception of what it means to be a Shi'a - all in the absence of any notion of Pan-Arabism which had been shattered in the previous decades. In turn, Ashura rituals symbolized a new beginning for the free Shi'a and the end of Sunni dominance. The broader Sunni

reaction to Ashura rituals has been that “these actions are not right…Shi’a do not know the [proper practices of Islam](#)”. Indeed, it did not take long for Sunni Iraqis to react to the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. In the same month, April 2003, whilst scenes of celebration were still evident in Baghdad, protests erupted in against the American presence; in Fallujah, a city with an [overwhelming Sunni majority](#). Therefore, at first glance, the Shi’a perceived the US invasion as liberating, whilst the Sunni perceived it as an occupation and, as a consequence, the Sunni started to revolt, with many of the attacks by Sunni insurgents directed at US military forces and the Iraqis who collaborated with them.

It is true that the Sunnis initially directed their anger at US forces. However, it did not take long for Sunni insurgents and affiliated groups to widen the scope of their attacks, targeting the Shi’a as well. In 2004, reports indicated that a series of planned terrorist attacks killed many Shi’a Iraqis who were commemorating Ashura, marking it as [one of the deadliest attacks on the Shi’a](#). As such, within one year of the fall Saddam Hussein’s regime, the Shi’a felt that they were under attack once again. However, this time was different, as the Shi’a was no longer controlled by a Sunni regime and, therefore, unsurprisingly, even more Shi’a participated in the commemoration of Ashura in the following years. Consequently, it can be argued that the commemorations of Ashura have come to represent more than a just mourning period, but also a battle of self-determination for the Shi’a. It can be further argued that whilst previously it was perceived as an improper religious practice, the commemoration started to reflect a sectarian split.

Since 2005, terrorist and criminal activities have started to target [almost all aspects of society](#). Suicide attacks carried out by Sunni affiliated groups designed to target, and/or threaten to target, shrine cities, Shi’a neighbourhoods or Shi’a participants in the Ashura commemorations, draw the Shi’a community together, galvanizing them against the common perceived threat, the Sunni, and [increasing their sense of identity](#). This heightened sense of identity is ultimately reflected in their religious practices and further deepens the chasm between the two sects. In 2006, the terrorist attack on one of the *Imams’* shrine, the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra

not only served as a rallying cause for the Shi'a, but also [triggered a mass Shi'a retaliation](#). Most importantly, this escalated threat against the Shi'a was manifested in Ashura rituals and the attack signified that not only the Shi'a themselves, but their *Imams*, were under attack- an act that evoked the memory of the killing of Husayn in Karbala. In response, even more Shi'a participated in the commemoration of Ashura to challenge and defy the Sunni insurgency, with the support of the Shi'a-dominated government.

Similarly, terrorist activities targeting Sunnis, especially Sunni figures associated with the Baath regime, have increased the sense of identity among Sunni Iraqis and galvanised them against their common perceived threat, [the Shi'a](#). Their sense of identity has further increased due to the growing influence of Shi'a militias, particularly during the rule of [Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki](#) (2006-2014). In addition, his government successfully promoted long-learned religious traditions, the Karbala paradigm and the martyrdom of Husayn to rally support and receive loyalty. Thus, the narrative of Karbala, "Us" (the Shi'a) versus "Them" (the enemy of the Shi'a), became an everyday reality and was no longer limited to the annual two months' [commemoration period of Muharram and Safar](#). Since then, Ashura rituals have been used strategically by Shi'a-dominated governments for their own sectarian agenda; financially supporting the rituals, with many government officials publically participating in Ashura rituals. It should be noted though that the politicization of Ashura is not novel. Iran has adopted a similar approach to unite the Shi'a and [defeat their enemies](#). After all, what is better than using the narrative of Karbala and the tragedy of Husayn as an inspiration for fighting injustice and tyranny?

Overall, Ashura rituals can be viewed as a powerful Shi'a system corresponding to various circumstances and contexts; altering relationships and creating changes within Iraqi society. The fact that Sunni Iraqis lack such a system, with the capacity to mobilise and unite them offering a platform for expressing their own views and beliefs, has placed the Shi'a in a better position, politically, culturally, and socially. In addition, the absence of the Sunni from one of the biggest events in Iraq, Ashura

rituals, compounded by the participation of Shi'a from different nationalities, including Iranians, could reasonably be seen to implicate the Sunnis, particularly in terms of national identity. Within this context, it has been argued that Ashura rituals “[make Shi'a Islam a convenient state-builder](#)”. Certainly, the argument that the Shi'a-dominated governments trying to emphasize the Shi'a identity of Iraq by utilizing Ashura rituals has merit. Given the dominance of these rituals, the Shi'a seem to be claiming the “cultural ownership” of Iraq.

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**Becoming a Muslim: An Analysis of the Conversion Narratives of Women from the
Post-Soviet Bloc in Jordan**

Rita Adel Mohammed

Introduction

Whilst converts to Islam constitute only a small percentage of the Muslim community in the West, their existence has attracted much media attention as well as scholarly debates. Being a female Muslim convert in a western context is particularly difficult; women are commonly viewed as cultural symbols, and their conversion evokes a range of sensitive debates, and may result in [stronger reactions on part of the majority non-Muslim society](#).

There is a wide range of literature available on the topic of Muslim converts in the West, with more and more literature addressing gender and conversion. However, it is unfortunate that scholarly debates generally overlook the experiences of Muslim converts in Muslim societies. In contrast to the body of literature that addresses the issue of western women's conversion to Islam, this study looks at [Caucasian Russian speaking women](#) from the Post-Soviet Bloc, who have converted to Islam, and who reside in Jordan – a Muslim majority country – most of whom are married to Jordanian men. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, I investigate the dynamic process of these women's conversion paths to Islam, and the dynamics of the “new” Muslim identity these women have developed after their conversion.

The argument of my study is as follows: the experiences, motives, and narratives of women who identify as Muslim converts in Muslim majority countries, such as Jordan, differ drastically from those of western women converts residing in non-

Muslim societies. Thus, this study has the potential to discover a different type of challenges faced by female Muslim converts, in the context they exist in, namely, being a convert in a predominantly Muslim country.

Gender and Muslim Converts in the Western Context

The visibility of western converts to Islam in the media has been under [increased scrutiny of the western media](#). This matter has been receiving the attention of some scholars that have referred to a growing conversion of western nationals to Islam as the “[phenomenon of the late twentieth century](#)”, and “part of the story of the politics of new Muslim communities in the West, of new Muslim sociologies in the West, indeed of [new Wests](#)”.

Both men and women convert to Islam; however, and ironically, despite common view in the West of Islam as a [patriarchal, chauvinistic and backward religion](#), women show more likelihood to convert to Islam and constitute “[the largest numbers of these new Muslims](#)”. Accordingly, conversion of western women to Islam and especially during the hype of racism and Islamophobia has not only received a [lot of attention](#), but also studying and analyzing the instances of adoption of Islam by western women became a “focal point of western efforts [to understand Islam](#)”. In this respect female conversion to Islam is ideologically and symbolically important; women are constructed as “[symbols of ethnic and religious boundaries](#)” and thus gender issues are very sensitive when it comes to dichotomy between what is viewed as the West and what is viewed as Islam- an “antithesis” to the western lifestyle. Since women are treated as national, cultural or ethnic symbols, their conversion to a different religion, and especially Islam, is one of the main reasons why female converts regularly face [hostility in their own societies](#).

Being a Muslim in a western society is not an easy choice, especially in the context of prevailing Islamophobia. With conversion to Islam new Muslims are becoming objects of [intense scrutiny, suspicion and hostility](#). Growing hostility towards

Muslims is even more difficult to deal with while being a woman since observing female Muslims are distinctively “visible” in the public sphere.

This hostility faced by women is often accompanied by a feeling of alienation. Embracing Islam in the context of being a Muslim convert in a non-Muslim majority society, and very often a society which views Islam and Muslims with suspicion, is that life event which is most commonly accompanied by the traumatic experience of being alienated from, and being misunderstood by one’s own society. Indeed, the feeling of alienation experienced by a huge number of western converts residing in post-industrial western context is a common experience:

”To feel a foreigner in one’s own society is a weird experience; the sense of being either misunderstood or regarded as an exotic oddity” – [Anne Sofie Roald](#)

Social status or some loss of it is another issue to look at when speaking on western converts to Islam. Modern American sociologists argue that religious behavior could be explained by applying the rational choice theory. According to this understanding of religious behavior, an individual’s religious preferences are stemmed from the need to maximize one’s profit and limit the costs by maximum – or what is referred to as the “[maximizing behavior](#)” model. However, as far as the western countries are concerned converting to Islam is a costly decision; this decision often comes at the cost of political disenfranchisement as well as [social stigmatization](#).

Women who are visibly Muslim may suffer from social stigmatization more than others; especially that in the public western discourse the hijab is symbolic of women’s oppression. Moreover, in a world where people are often categorized by the color of their skin, racial aspect of conversion cannot be overlooked. In this context white women who convert to Islam are viewed as traitors to their culture and by default as “less white”, and wearing a hijab only adds to this dilemma – “On wearing the hijab as a convert, a White woman loses the prestige her “Whiteness” bestows on her, becoming symbolically “Black” or culturally “[other](#)”.

Embracing Islam in a Muslim Majority Society: A way in?

Having talked about female Muslim converts in the western context, what does it actually mean for non-Muslim women to convert to Islam in Jordan, and as far as this paper is concerned, what does it mean to be a Caucasian Muslim convert from the Post-Soviet space in a predominantly Muslim society? In Jordan, where around [97 per cent of the population follows Sunni Islam](#), and where Islam is the religion of the State according to the constitution, converting to Islam by definition bears a different meaning and a totally different experience.

Legal Protection and Family Acceptance

In my interview with a Russian speaking Islamic Studies professor from Chechnya who is based in Jordan, on my question on why does she think Post-Soviet women in Jordan embrace Islam I received the following answer:

“These women come here, and they come here to stay. They marry Muslim men, and since they get married to Muslim men embracing Islam makes their life easier. Educated women, women who know their rights are aware of the laws and traditions (…)

She (a woman from a Post-Soviet country) knows that since she came to a Muslim country, a Muslim society, married a Muslim man, and she is planning to have mutual children with that man, it is much better for her to be of the same religion as her husband, especially – and God forbids – if unpleasant things happen such as divorce or death of a spouse (…). Finally, she becomes part of a Muslim family with Muslim traditions such as fasting, praying and etc. and these traditions have a huge impact on her life”

The answer I received illustrates a very problematic understanding of the so-called “Muslim society”, whereby everyone born to a Muslim father is thought of as a practicing and observing Muslim. This understanding completely disregards the multifaceted Jordanian society of Muslims and people of other faiths who do not necessarily actively practice religion. That being said, this quote indicates that

women's conversion to Islam might potentially facilitate these women's "access" into observing Muslim families, and the society as a whole. Most importantly, embracing Islam promises a better legal protection under local laws.

In Jordan just as in most Muslim countries, marriage as other matters related to personal and family affairs such as inheritance, child custody, and divorce fall under the [Personal Status Law](#) – these laws said to be derived from "Islamic Sharia". Upon marrying a Jordanian, a foreign woman gets automatically entitled for a Jordanian citizenship, however any non-Muslim woman – whether Jordanian or not – who is married to a Muslim man is a potential victim of Jordan's Personal Status Law.

According to the Jordanian Personal Status Law, a woman whose religion is not Islam does not inherit from her Muslim husband. In terms of custody the Personal Status Law entitles a Muslim woman to have custody over her child until the age of 15, unlike a non-Muslim woman whose custody continues only [until the child is 7 years old](#). Thus, women who are married to Jordanian Muslim men gain not only a different social status upon their conversion, but also a different legal status which promises these women more protection and gives them more rights.

There are many [scholarly debates](#) on how "[Islamic](#)" Personal Status Laws in Muslim countries are. Whatever the scholarly debates are, the reality is that women are particularly vulnerable under such laws. Women who leave their countries are even in a more vulnerable position as with coming to Jordan they often lose familial support and a social network which might offer protection. As a result, and given the discriminatory nature of the Jordanian Personal Status Law, some women chose to convert to Islam for practical reasons.

"I changed my religion to Islam once I discovered that I was pregnant [...] I was not able to get pregnant for a very long period of time, but once I became pregnant, the first question that came to my mind was which religion will my child follow? Acknowledging my legal vulnerability and my stance as a second wife where there was another Arab (Muslim) wife and children from my husband's first marriage, I

asked myself how can I protect my child? I became very concerned with this issue”
– Valentina, Ukraine

Conversion to Islam upon marriage is not only profitable in terms of having potentially more legal rights, but is also an important aspect of these women’s socializing into their new families, especially if these families are religiously observing. The religious choices these women make gain even more importance when these mixed couples are either expecting or raising a child. Children born out of this wedlock are automatically considered to be Muslim, and some women see it as their duty to raise their children according to what they believe Islam represents – their understanding of “Islam” quote often being heavily influenced by their husband’s cultural background:

“We (our family) don’t allow our girls to go out as they please and wherever they please. Young girls are weak and there are many seductions out there, and if they do something wrong how can we punish them for that, if we ourselves let them fall into seductions?” – Antonina, Ukraine

The Privilege of Being a White Muslim

In a report on British Muslim converts to Islam it is highlighted that while white British women converts “lose” their social status upon embracing Islam, at least as far as the majority society is concerned, heritage Muslim community in Britain treats such cases as “victory” – “a white convert is seen as a trophy and she is figuratively given pride of place on the [mantle-piece of the Muslim household](#)”.

Likewise, through my interviews with the Post-Soviet white converts it was evident that those women are very well aware of the privileges associated with their whiteness, as well as of the mostly positive responses they get upon their conversion. This is how [Darya](#), a woman from Russia in her fifties speaks of how she was welcomed by [her husband’s family](#) in Occupied Palestine:

“By the time we got married my husband’s dad was already dead, but my mother-in law as well as my husband’s sisters were very welcoming of me. You know I was

that “unique bird” – with blonde hair and blue eyes, it was a big thing for a small village- in that village I was the first “*Russiye*” who ever came there (···) it was very unusual to have a Russian wife back then, and it was considered to be very prestigious”.

Darya wasn't one of the women who have converted to Islam once married, it took her about 10 years to eventually identify herself as a Muslim. As it is usually the case, Darya was encouraged to know more about Islam by her husband who, although never forced her convert to Islam, was instrumental in Darya's access to Islamic knowledge – “many women are pressured to embrace Islam by their husbands, but this was not the case with my husband. He never insisted on my conversion, but he used to bring me literature on Islam in Russian”, says Darya. Needless to say that Darya's conversion to Islam was very warmly welcomed by her family, as well as by her circle of friends and acquaintances in Jordan.

Darya's case is by no means an exception. The place of the “trophy” and the social prestige associated with converting to Islam while being white is very often that “bonus” which comes along with women's conversion to Islam, especially if those women marry into conservative Muslim families. White women who convert to Islam do not lose, so to say, the prestige of being white. On the contrary, unlike Western women embracing Islam, such a prestigious standing as a New Muslim in a Muslim majority society comes with much lesser “social loses” such as stigmatization, hostility or increased scrutiny, at least as far as the Jordanian context is involved.

Religiosity, Identity and a Soviet Past

“You know how they taught us that religion is the opium of nations?” asked Svetlana, when speaking of her conversion to Islam after being raised in Soviet Russia. Svetlana, like many women from her generation, remembers very well the hostility of the state towards religion.

Eradication of religion at a State level was an ideological objective of the Soviet Union. With the structural establishment of the Soviet regime, the ruling Communist Party was systematic in the elimination and repression of all religious activity in the public sphere. Religious establishments were closed, religious leaders jailed, all Church property confiscated, and atheism was massively propagated. In this massive war on religion, the Communist Party waged war on main religions of each region of the former USSR, seeing religion as being an [ideological opposition to Communism](#).

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not only bring about cultural diversification and liberalization but also an identity crisis and “an increasing anomie in the social and political realm”.

Identity crisis and as follows the feeling of disintegration in the Post-Soviet Society was of painful experience to women who have moved to Jordan. Some of the women of the older generation left the Soviet Union to come back to newly independent Post-Soviet States:

“When I visit Ukraine I feel that everything is so distant and unfamiliar. Yes, the nature is beautiful, but the way people think and behave is strange to me now (...) People’s values and priorities have changed, those are not the same values and priorities we once had...our upbringing was different, we had a different outlook on life” – Valentina, Ukraine

Naturally, in the absence of social cohesiveness following the collapse of the Soviet Union ethnic, linguistic and [religious identities gained more importance](#). Religious revival and collective attitude change towards religion in Post-Soviet countries dates back to the early 1990. Narratives of common religious identity provided some sort of community cohesion and served as a [substitute to the Marxist discourse](#). Religious identity also rapidly became a “latent component” in the formation of ethnic belongings such as in case with the growing importance of Islamic identity for Tatars. Religious identity also intervened in the formation of nationhood such as in cases of [Armenia or Lithuania, or even Ukraine](#).

Taking into consideration the historic background of women coming from the previous USSR, perhaps it is not so unpredictable then that some women who left the Soviet Union and came to reside in Jordan found a substitute to a Marxist discourse in Islam.

“When I used to date my husband I used to tell him that there is no God (...) Of course we were constantly told that there is no God and this left a mark. For the younger generation it is different; they try to find God and I think that it is a right thing to do” – Darya, Russia

Women belonging to a younger generation have a different trajectory of being involved in religion, and it would be difficult to estimate how does Soviet past shape younger generations' relationship with religion. However, what seems to be particularly appealing to women embracing Islam is how Islam regulates both private and public life – this aspect seen as being almost absent in their home setting.

Conclusion

The West is witnessing a growing number of Muslim converts. In terms of gender, there are more female converts to Islam than there are male converts. The West has been puzzled by the growing incidents of female conversion to Islam – a religion which has been largely described as incompatible with the western lifestyle. The issue of women's conversion to Islam thus received much media coverage, and naturally the topic of western women in Islam has not escaped academic scrutiny. That being said, while the issue of women converting to Islam in the west has attracted much interest, the experiences of women converting to Islam have been underrepresented and less spoken of.

By converting to Islam in a western society women make a difficult choice. Such choices are likely to be accompanied with social alienation from one's society and sometimes even family, political disenfranchisement and very often comes at the expense of one's social status. However, how does converting to Islam differ for

women who reside in Muslim majority societies? Also, as far as this paper is concerned, what does it mean to be a Caucasian Muslim convert from the Post-Soviet space in a predominantly Muslim society? These are two main questions I aim to answer in this paper.

In my attempt to answer these questions, I argue that by converting to Islam in a country like Jordan, women may seek better legal protection under the so-called Sharia Laws. Moreover, conversion may also have additional “bonuses” such as being accepted by the husband`s family, especially if this family is religiously observing. In comparison to western women experiences, such “bonuses” come with lesser “loses” such as the loss of social status and a status of being a “white woman”. Finally, in this paper I argue that some of the women from the former Soviet Union, and especially those belonging to an older generation may have found an alternative to the Marxist discourse in Islam.

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Notes

Note 1. It has to be pointed out to the linguistic, ethnic, and most importantly religious diversity of Post-Soviet countries. In terms of language, I choose Russian for the following reason: due to the policies of Russification of all countries belonging to the Soviet Union (Pavlenko, 2008), Russian, as a hegemonic language of the Soviet bloc, remains the language that is widely used among nationals of Former USSR. Thus, Russian serves as a mother tongue to most of these women, or it is a language they master/understand perfectly.

Note 2. The Quran is the most important source of moral principles and guidance for Muslims, but the Quran itself is not a codified law, which makes the interpretation of the text of crucial importance (Abdelkader, 2014).

Note 3. For privacy considerations all the names have been altered.

Note 4. Darya's husband is a Jordanian of Palestinian roots, while after completing his education in the previous USSR Darya's husband returned to Jordan – he insisted that Darya meet his family who lived in Palestine at that time.

Note 5. In Jordan, it was/is very common to refer to all Post-Soviet women as “Russian” or Russiye. The Russian-speaking women are aware of the fact that they are commonly referred to as “Russian” regardless of the country of their origin.

The Agony of Development: Indonesian Muslim Traditionalist in Response Towards Environmental Crisis

Muhamad Abdul Aziz, [Ali Ilham Almujaiddiy](#) and [Anang Gunaifi Alfian](#)

Introduction

During the presidential election campaign in May 2014, Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla designed nine priority agendas called *Nawa Cita*. This program was initiated to show the priority of change towards a politically sovereign Indonesia as well as independence in the field of economy and culture. The program was eventually included as part of the national mid-term development plan of 2015-2019 (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah*, RPJMN) and officially launched in January 2015 after Jokowi and Kalla were inaugurated as Indonesian president and vice president. The RPJMN consists of three parts, which are the National Development Agenda, the Sectoral Development Agenda, and the Regional Development Agenda. [Nawa Cita is explicitly accommodated in the first part of the RPJMN.](#)

The basic idea of *Nawa Cita* program lies in the president's vision of national sovereignty in politics, economic, and culture, derived from an assessment that Indonesia is suffering from [three types of situations](#). First, the inability to ensure safety to all citizens. Second, the poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and excessive exploitation of natural resources. Third, the national intolerance and the crisis of character. However, during the three years of Jokowi's presidency, the development agenda has been deemed incompatible with the *Nawa Cita* program that had been promoted during his campaign. Instead of fighting for the people's rights over the sovereignty of the land and natural resources, Jokowi is "flirting" with private and foreign investors in carrying out the infrastructure development

agenda which is often a violent process and ends up in socio-agrarian and environmental conflicts.

The Agrarian Reform Consortium (*Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria*, KPA) recorded that 659 agrarian conflicts took place throughout 2017, within inflicted areas of 520,491.87 hectares (ha). Compared to 2016, the number of conflicts has increased by 50 percent. On average, almost two agrarian conflicts occur within one day, while they involved at least 652,738 heads of households. Plantations occupied the first position of all sectors; with 208 monitored conflicts, or 32 percent of the total number of conflicts. It is followed by property conflicts (30 percent), infrastructure with 94 conflicts (14 percent), agriculture with 78 conflict (12 percent), forestry with 30 conflict (5 percent), coastal or marine with 28 conflict (4 percent), and mining sector with 22 conflict (3 percent). Thus, during the three years of Jokowi and Kalla's presidency from 2015 to 2017, there have been [1,361 agrarian conflicts](#). This data implies that Jokowi's development program does not have a strong political will to implement agrarian reform and ensure social-environmental justice.

From the data above, Jokowi's development program can be considered to use the [exploitative capitalist paradigm](#) instead of social justice and environmental rights. The discourse of developmentalism in third world countries is always seen as a [form of new imperialism and a western patriarchal project](#) using the model of western economic development, productivity, and growth. The word "development" itself has actually a different connotation compared to the discourse of developmentalism today. [Gustavo Esteva](#), for example, pointed out that the word "development" was actually used in biological metaphors before the Second World War. It is only in 1949, through the concept of "fair deal", that the President of the United States Harry Thurman divided the world into "development" and "underdevelopment" countries through the [doctrine of economic growth](#). [Arturo Escobar](#) further identified that this doctrine forces every movement and ideology to follow the capitalistic notion of this development discourse, even for anti-capitalist movements and ideologies, by giving new concepts such as "another development", "participatory development", "socialist

development” and others. Hence, the “underdeveloped” countries are colonized by developmentalism discourses as it remains today in the form of the hegemony of the world economic system which indirectly makes the third world as a representation of the "real" world.

Considering the circumstances, it is important to look back at [Karl Polanyi's theory](#) of “double movement”. The theory reveals that it is inevitable for market movement of capitalism or neoliberalism to meet its counter-movement that consequently would challenge the economic system of capitalism. The resistance movement here is not limited to secular movements, but includes all forms of movements that carried out criticism toward the capitalist system, or extractive capitalism in the particular context of Indonesia. This paper critically studies the resistance movement of Indonesian Muslim traditionalists in challenging the dominant explanation of environmental assessment within the context of government development project. It also examines the religious narratives of this movement which is built upon as an alternative paradigm that takes an ontological alliance with western anti-capitalist thoughts and is of paramount importance to addressing environmental problems that transcend physical and cultural borders.

FNKSDA: Post-Traditional Muslim Environmental Movement

Nahdlatul Ulama and *Muhammadiyah* are the two largest [Islamic organizations](#) in Indonesia. Both are widely known as Indonesian representative organization promoting a pluralist and peaceful face of Islam and a model of a [democratic, moderate, and tolerant Islam](#). These organizations are usually defined as [traditionalist and modernist Islam](#), following the account of their intellectual founders, Hasyim Asy'ari and Ahmad Dahlan, as well as their prominent thinkers such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholis Madjid. The term Islamic post-traditionalism was first used by [some scholars](#) who pioneered the study of Islamic discourse and politics in Indonesia. In general, the term refers to the young Muslim academics and activists who are affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama*. They are also referred to as the [third post-colonial generation of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals](#) who take inspiration from contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Muhammad

Abid al-Jabiri, Mohammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. These intellectuals are heavily influenced by structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructionism, and postmodernism philosophical [ideas of European philosophers](#). Hence, post-traditionalism denotes the new era of Muslim intellectual discourse that seeks to understand religious and political phenomena in Indonesia. However, do these intellectuals have a certain concern for environmental issues?

In Indonesia, the term “[environmental movement](#)” first appeared on the 5th June 1972, at a symposium entitled "15 Years of Environmental Movement: Towards Environmental Development" organized by the State Minister for Population and Environment (KLH) in conjunction with the United Nations (UN) International Conference on Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. Previously, the agrarian and environmental movements had been deprived during the New Order regime because they were considered ideologically aligned with the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI). In post-authoritarian Indonesia however, there was new hope for the agrarian and environmental movements. At that time, the government passed a decree of the People’s Consultative Assembly (TAP MPR no. IX/2001) which commissioned the Indonesian government to [implement agrarian reform](#) in order to achieve legal certainty, protection, justice, and prosperity for all Indonesian people. This decree then became a milestone among the environmental movement in Indonesia to build synergies that share a similar concern and pay attention to the same issues, namely environmental rights and socio-ecological justice.

After the TAP MPR no. IX/2001, environmental movements in Indonesia is divided into at least two camps. First, the emergence of issues and agenda of ecological justice that place the arrangement of ownership, control, and utilization of land and natural resources as its foundation. Second, environmental movements that [promote sustainability and nature conservation](#). The synergy and tensions between both environmental movements lie within two aspects. First, ideas, discourse, and ideology. Second, practices and field activism. Meanwhile, there are two factors of the synergy and tensions, which are the similarity of defended victims and the

similarity of the criticized policy. These synergy and tensions determined the change in agrarian policy and natural resource management and resulted in the achievement of two different goals of the movements which are agrarian justice and ecological justice.

However, the agrarian and environmental movements seem to have been launched only by the actors outside the two largest Muslim organizations; *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU). Whereas both organizations have the same great potential in addressing the environmental crisis and challenges, their religious stance might explain that they have not get fully involved. In an attempt to change this, the young generation of *Nahdlatul Ulama* held an intensive discussion that focuses on the issues of agrarian conflict and natural resources management. The majority of the participants involved during this intensive discussion were young people from the [Nahdliyin](#) – the followers of *Nahdlatul Ulama* – background. Furthermore, there was a common awareness about many agrarian conflicts across regions in Indonesia, specifically those that occur in the Island of Java. They concluded that most of the affected communities of agrarian conflicts come from the *Nahdliyin* background, whose majority lives in rural areas.

On the other hand, they observed that the Central Board of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (*Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama*, BPNU) paid little attention to this problem. Some members of BPNU committee were even directly involved in agrarian conflicts in Lapindo and Banyuwangi, supporting the corporation against the community. Therefore, during these intensive discussions, there was a communal awareness of the need for a movement that pays attention to agrarian conflicts and natural resources management, especially for *Nahdliyin* community. These discussions resulted in a decision to hold a broader discussion forum, involving social activists from different regions – mainly connected through to the NU young generation's network – to discuss the issue of natural resource management and agrarian conflicts in the broader scale.

Afterward, they decided to present a semi-formal discussion entitled “*NU dan Konflik Tata Kelola SDA*” (NU and the conflict of Natural Resources Management),

located at the Institute for Islamic and Social Studies (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial*, LKiS) on July 4th, 2013 in Yogyakarta. The young generation of NU showed concern over the issue of natural resource management and the excesses caused by infrastructure development, mining project, and plantations. The main concern was over the impact of those issues on the sovereignty of local communities in their environment in [various regions](#) including Pati, Batang, East Kalimantan, Cirebon, Mojokerto, Kulonprogo, Mandailing Natal. Generally speaking, this young generation of NU has been involved in and advocated for natural resources management in their local environment.

As a result, the participants agreed to formulate an alliance aiming at preparing network media to consolidate the circulation of information and to make the mainstreaming issues of natural resource management among the formal institution of NU. *Front Nahdliyin untuk Kedaulatan Sumber Daya Alam* (FNKSDA, Front Nahdliyin for Sovereignty of Natural Resources) was created to fill the gap left by NU, which so far focused on the issue of religion as such and left their adherents to be uprooted from their lands and displaced by the government's development projects.

Islam as Cultural and Political Discourse

In Indonesia, "[Cultural Islam](#)" is used as an alternative to Islamic politics to show that Indonesian Muslim culture is as authentic as that of Middle Eastern Muslims for instance. The emergence of FNKSDA as a cultural identity is a form of criticism towards *Nahdlatul Ulama* which, so far, did not show any firm commitment to the agrarian issue and the impact of development regime on the socio-ecological crisis. [Hairus Salim](#) said that globally, the neoliberal economy, especially in the form of extractive industries and privatization, has massively violated the human rights of peasants and other small communities towards their land and environment.

On the other hand, Heru Prasetya states that the structural NU has never been aware of and get in touch with these issues. They perhaps think that many NGOs have taken the leading role in advocating for the resolution of conflict over natural

resources and environment. Meanwhile, the internal NU organization and young activist affiliated groups such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* Student Association (*Keluarga Mahasiswa Nahdlatul Ulama*, KMNU) and Movement of Indonesian Muslim Students (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia*, PMII) do not have an interest in those issues. They tend to focus on democracy, religion, and tolerance instead of environment and sovereignty over natural resources. FNKSDA, hence, is a forum for NU adherents who share the same concern for the sovereignty over natural resources, in addition to religion, democracy, and tolerance. Those issues have been mostly cultivated by the majority of [youth and middle-class of Nahdliyin](#).

Despite using cultural identity, FNKSDA still has a political agenda in the form of social advocacy and activism. In political ecology, one does not need to participate in practical politics and run for electoral democracy to achieve a political goal or to have influence on policymaking. This argument built upon the differentiation between politics and the political. Politics is “[technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures that operate within an unquestioned framework of representative democracy, free market economics, and cosmopolitan liberalism](#)” or “[the set of practices and institutions through which order is created and organizes human coexistence in contexts of conflictuality provided by political conditions](#)”. Meanwhile the political is “[a space of contestation and agonistic engagement increasingly colonized by politics](#)” or “[the dimension of antagonism as the constitutive of human societies](#)”.

FNKSDA used the theological and practical approach as their implementation and methodology of “political ecology.” One of the theological approaches was to reinterpret the meaning of *Jihad* and was suggested by NU’s founding father, Hasyim Asy’ari, back in 1945-1946. In line with this tradition, FNKSDA implemented *Jihad* against extractive capitalism which it perceived as the new form of colonialism. According to FNKSDA, capitalism is a system that does not match the environmental perspective of Islam. For instance, it does not meet the concept of sovereignty and private ownership. To put it simply, everything in heaven and earth belongs to God. Human beings are only allowed to utilize (*al-*

intifa') the public and collective ownership in a way that has been determined by the Sharia in terms of how to get it, how to use it, and how to distribute it.

Public or collective ownership applies to goods such as water sources (*al-ma'*), mining (*ma'dan*), forest (*al-kila'*), and energy (*an-nar*) which is based on the canonical sources of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. For example, the Messenger of Allah (saw) said: "The Muslims have collectively the three things: forest/pasture, water, and fire/energy" (HR Ahmad and Abu Dawud). At this point, Islam is very different from capitalism that legitimizes private property rights over all goods that private ownership can afford. Capitalism also continues to undermine the list of collective goods which consequently can lead to the privatization of the state. In contrast, Islam wants state ownership of certain goods as representation of people's ownership. Certain goods, as referred to in the 1945 Constitution, are the earth, water, and natural resources contained therein. The production branches which manage the livelihood of the people shall be controlled by the state and shall be used for the prosperity of the people as much as possible.

Meanwhile, in a practical approach, FNKSDA coined a program called *Pesantren Agraria* (Agrarian Islamic School). *Pesantren Agraria* is certainly different from the mainstream model of *Pesantren*. It involves the study of western critical theories such as political economy, ecology and development, combined with the study of Islamic classical traditions such as *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *fiqh*, and *maqashid al-sharia*. The *Pesantren* are held in various different places that are experiencing conflicts over natural resources. Until now, FNKSDA took on twelve cases of conflict and advocacy. Through this *Pesantren Agraria*, it does research, regeneration, advocacy, and analysis of environmental issues faced by the communities that are assisted. The results of these activities are then submitted to the structure of NU through discussion of problems (*Bahtsul Masail*) and great congress (*Muktamar*).

Tumpang Pitu Gold Mining Project: How is the Agony of Development Depicted?

To give a depiction of how the development, environmentalism, and local response altogether turn into a struggle, a case of gold mining can be a dramatic scene of

how a production of space is contested. Tumpang Pitu Gold Mining in Indonesia tells much of the conflicting relationship among actors and interests. It also reflects the struggle within Indonesian Islam over effective and ethical relations with global capitalism.

The existence of mining can be traced back to 1980-1986 when a group of geologists called *Lebong Tandai Group* mapped the potential and prospect of mineral resources in Jember, a city close to Banyuwangi. Other gold mining were built in [many other areas](#) of Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, and Timor. This invention of gold-containing land has attracted business corporation and foreign investors to come and caused demonstration from local people who felt threatened by its existence. As the “developmentalism” mantra explicitly spelled out by new order regime, the moaning agony just get louder and persisted to the present time. The reason is that the development often neglects the ecological and environmental balance in its policies, while it also marked the transitional period from authoritarian Indonesia to *Reformasi* (1995-2000). Right after *Reformasi* (Post-Authoritarian era), many NGOs, communities, and activists mushroomed and more freedom was expressed.

In 1995, the government issued a permit of mining called *Kuasa Pertambangan* (KP) to Hakman Group including a permit to conduct surveys and to explore the potential of a mining project. Three companies were given this permission and were given jurisdiction over different areas. Jember city was given to PT. Jember Metals and PT. Hakman Group, while Banyuwangi city was given to PT. Banyuwangi Metals. During this time, the government eagerly supported the plan. The regents of Jember and Banyuwangi also helped to accelerate issuing the permit. Despite the ambition of the government to take advantage of this mining project for local income, many NGOs working on environmentalism and land sovereignty criticized such development project. They argued that it failed to take environmental health and the local dweller who might be affected by the project into consideration. Traditionalist religious organization also took part in the debate over the ethic of the project, asking whether the mine would be beneficial or

harmful to the people at large. The outcome of the debate emphasized that the mining project was thought to be potentially both beneficial and dangerous to the environment. The benefits included building infrastructures, increasing the Local Budget Income (PAD), and creating job opportunities for local people. Yet, the damage to the environment threatened to cause a serious impact because the location of the mining project in national conservation area.

Responding to this problem, the major Muslim traditionalist organization called *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) held a [seminar on 28th October 2000](#). The aim of the seminar was to rethink the urgency of the mining, as it would certainly damage the environment and narrow people's access to natural resources. NU recommended to cancel the mining permit and increase the PAD (local income) based on existing potential like farming and agriculture. The NU also outlined religious argumentation in a file called *Bahsul Matsaail Jember*, released on 19th November 2000. It consists of seven points. First, the exploitation of natural resources is essentially allowed as long as it is not going to cause environmental damage. In the case under study, the extractive mining project in Jember would certainly damage the environment and thus, is forbidden to proceed. Second, conservation areas that aim to maintain the availability of water have to be prioritized because water is a need in Islamic prayer and is the main resource for flora, fauna, and the life of biodiversity. Third, the conservation of water should be ensured by keeping water catchment area in a balanced condition and an environment preserved from deforestation. Fourth, conserving the water resources is a holy work as the God command that exploiting it for the purpose of economic income is forbidden. Fifth, forest conservation is needed to reduce global warming. Sixth, mining activity amounts to forcing God to reduce the benefit of the Earth through land erosion, flood, landslide and the decrease of biodiversity. Seventh, mining activity will certainly drive the people of NU away from their ancestors' land on which they have built a living and the religious environment in the obedience of God.

These points of *Ulema's* discussion were quite significant as they became debated by the Jember government at that time. As a consequence, the location of the

mining project was moved to a close city named Banyuwangi, where the potential to find gold was higher. The permission given by the city's regent in 2006 marked the beginning of the conflict in Banyuwangi. The conflict was between those who oppose the mining project and the mining corporations. As it was recorded in the chronology of the dispute, several demonstrations were held by the fishermen and local people around the mining areas from year to year. The [most severe demonstration](#) happened in 2015 when a crowd of people entered the mining corporations, destroyed their office and broke heavy tools and mining machinery.

In 2009, the NU of Banyuwangi held a similar meeting to the one previously held by NU Jember under *Bahsul Masail committee*. It came to the conclusion that the mining project was forbidden from a religious perspective (Bahsul Masail PCNU Banyuwangi). Unlike the previous meeting, the recommendation was never delivered to the governmental level. Today, even the religious figures inside NU are divided between those who support and oppose the mining. As the consequence of this ambiguous religious stance, the local society around the mining – area whose majority is affiliated to NU on the basis of religious orientation and cultural commonality – has split into the supporters and the opponents to the project. Some researchers depicted how the relationship between neighbors and even within families is filled with suspicion and hatred because of the cleavage over the mining. Although it might not be as crucial as it seemed, such latent conflicts can potentially manifest themselves again in the future.

When this research was written, the majority of religious authorities seemed to be in a difficult position. On one hand, the religious stance politically supports the government. On the other hand, the religious committee attempted to impose a clear limit on the legitimization of mining based on religious reasoning. The *Bahsul Masail* in 2009 was actually not the first warning and ban of mining for creating harm toward the environment and society. In the transition period from the New Order Era to the reformation, the *Ulama* stood by its critical position toward the government policy regarding the extractive mining in Jember. However, in the Tumpang Pitu gold mining case, the religious authority seemed to be

powerless when it comes to national business. It is true that in the case of Freeport Mining, the leader of NU, KH. Aqil Siraj urged the president to increase the national share in the Freeport ltd. Company. Yet, the religious authority could not make any further criticism.

The decision made by NU of Banyuwangi Regency failed to raise the importance of environmental conservation. Some of the organization's religious leaders say that the government has made a decision to turn Tumpang Pitu mountain into the vital object for national income; hence, religious institution should support it. On the other hand, highlights serious problems as advocated by activists of FNKSDA. The main issues are as follows: First, the AMDAL permit is flawed because it was never guaranteed that the Open Mining Method, that uses hazardous cyanide fluid, does not cause any environmental damages. Second, the permission signed by the city's regent does not comply with the administrative procedure. Third, the shift of status from conservation land to productive land is highly political and based on business interests. Those issues should prohibit the mining project according to the religious perspective mentioned above. The first of these criticisms is often problematic in Indonesia generally. The environmental study, which any industrial corporation should pass, has to be qualified according to certain standard including the management of waste, environmental safety and ecological concern. Yet, the Tumpang Pitu gold mining corporate has never proven that the permit ensures ecological safety since the mining is located inside a mountainous conservation area. The second problem reflects the ineptitude of local bureaucracy regarding the democratic system, whereas the third issue shows how the will to conserve is not the main priority of the government. Instead, conservation areas have been turned into productive lands in order to take financial advantage of the gold potential.

Conclusion

The ongoing agrarian conflict in Indonesia during Jokowi's regime has not been able to provide guarantees of environmental rights and socio-ecological justice. Instead, the president's development program gave birth to the agony of the

people who occupy the disputed land, as they are preparing to be "excluded" any time and "away" from the land that constitutes their identity. Meanwhile, the environmentalism showed by the main religious organization is still poor.

Contemporary Muslim intellectuals focus more on issues of religious democracy and ideas about individual liberation, than on the liberation of the environments and those who have lived in these environments for generations. Attention to the environment exists only when the state is concerned, yet there exists no practical agenda for a better environment.

Meanwhile FNKSDA, as a new environmental movement, emerged from the post-traditional Muslim intellectuals of *Nahdlatul Ulama*. It entered an "empty space" in the context of unequal power relations and the contestation of the current exploitative capitalist paradigm by using theological approach and field activism. Although classified as new and not yet having a large structural influence, FNKSDA can provide alternative worldviews on how governments alter its environmental and development policies. FNKSDA thus promoted the antagonistic ambition to offer new alternatives for environmental development and to challenges the dominant and hegemonic discourse of environmental assessment.

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Notes

Note 1. These statistics are based on the final KPA 2017 record that describes the national agrarian situation and analyzes the dynamics of agrarian policy of the past year. The Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) annually records the number of structural agrarian conflicts that occur in Indonesia in various sectors. This material is part of KPA's work to support advocacy and conflict resolution efforts. Agrarian reform programs which are ran by the government have many shortcomings. For example they have violated the 1960 UUPA legal aspiration as well as the existing technical constraints among government agencies that overshadow the agrarian field. The political pledges for agrarian reform, that are added to infrastructure development policies, ignore people's rights and consequently create inequality over land tenure. Ding so, they add to the long list of agrarian conflicts. For further information please visit official website of KPA at www.kpa.or.id.

Note 2. Nahdliyin in general means the follower of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), or simply the people who practice the rituals of NU. Sometimes identified also as cultural NU to differentiate with the structural one. They do not necessarily hold an NU member card.

Note 3. This *Jihad* is also known as “Jihad Resolution”, which is a formulation of the “Jihad fatwa” issued to face the arrival of six thousand British troops under the command of Brigadier General Mallaby, Commander of the 49th Indian Brigade, at Tanjung Perak Port, Surabaya. In addition, the Dutch colonizers with the NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) who had previously been expelled joined the Allied army. The arrival of the Allied and Dutch forces was going to undermine the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. See further in M. van Bruinessen (1994). *NU: tradisi, relasi-relasi kuasa, pencarian wacana baru*. PT LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 1994, p. 57.

Acknowledgements

The e-book's editor would like to address a special thank you to Prof. Anoush Ehteshami, Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (IMEIS), for his everlasting support and trust. The Global Policy team joins the e-book's editor to thank all the authors for their contributions and patience. This volume is the fruit of their time and thoughts on a multi-faceted and changing Islamic World.

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Christopher's PhD examines the evolution of youth political activism since the 2011 'Arab Uprisings' in the lesser-explored cases of Morocco and Jordan. Before coming to Exeter he completed a BA in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Leeds with First Class Honours, followed by an MRes at the same institution. In 2016 Christopher attained an ESRC 1+3 (MRes and PhD) full scholarship with the South West Doctoral Training Partnership (SWDTP) to study at Exeter. In the past he has conducted fieldwork in Morocco, written articles for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and peer-reviewed for the SWDTP Tor journal.

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Luiza is a PhD Student at CNMS, part of the Political Science Faculty. The thesis under development aims to create a strategic triangular framework to understand the relations between the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia and how this affects the regional system of the Gulf. Luiza has a MA in International Relations by the University of Brasília and a BA in International Relations at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, both in Brazil. Her main fields of interest are Gulf politics, mainly Iran and Saudi Arabia, the US' role in the Middle East and how International Relations Theory can be useful to the region.

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Olivia is a PhD candidate in the program "Politics, Policies and International Relations" at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona since 2017. Her thesis "Islamic Ideology as an Instrument of Power" researches the instrumentalization of religion in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Olivia holds a Master in "Media, Communication and Culture" at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and a Master in "Intercultural Competence and Conflict Management" at the Università degli Studi di Verona.

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Housseem is a young researcher and teacher in training from Tunisia. He has a Master of Arts research degree in English Literature and is now a doctoral candidate. Housseem believes in research and education as tools to improve oneself and society.

Kate Hashemi – Middle East Consultancy Services, England

Kate is the lead Iran researcher at the Middle East Consultancy Services. She recently graduated with distinction from SOAS University of London and holds an MA in Iranian Studies. Kate's research is centred on the security situation in the MENA region, gender-based issues, and the plight of refugees and IDPs in the "Middle East".

Oarhe Osumah – Ambrose Alli University, Department of Public Administration, Nigeria

Oarhe is a senior lecturer at the Department of Public Administration at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. He was educated at the Edo State University (now Ambrose Alli University), Ekpoma and the University of Benin, Benin City. He has authored and co-authored several articles published in both local and international journals. He has participated in local and international conferences, workshops, and symposia.

Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman – S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies & Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Muhammad is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Islamic Theology at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt in 2003. He later obtained his Master in Counselling from Monash University in 2009 and Masters of Science in International Relations from RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2014 under the school's Study Award. Prior to this, he was active in social activities as a member of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, associate member of Fatwa (Islamic legal ruling) committee, arbitrator and resource panel for Shariah Court Singapore, Board of Visitor of Singapore Armed Forces Detention Barrack. Muhammad is also a member of UNCCT Counter-Terrorism Advisors, with special expertise on religious rehabilitation.

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