



Salafi-Jihadist evolution since the Arab Spring, what has changed?

A critical analysis of AQMI and the Azawad case

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Abstracts

English

This dissertation investigates how some Salafi-Jihadists have become more political since the Arab Uprisings of 2011, focussing specifically on the Azawad (Northern Mali) case study where Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) briefly succeeded in establishing an Islamic Emirate in 2012-2013. Using concepts from Social Movement Theory and a layered structure that emphasizes the interplay between macro-, meso-, and microstructures, it begins with tracing the history of Salafi-Jihadism back to its earliest forms. From the late nineteenth century to Sayyid Qutb, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and the creation and evolution of Al-Qaida. The Arab Uprisings were a crucial moment because Salafi-Jihadists realized that non-violent contention was possible. This created a division within the Salafi-Jihadist community with one violent "takfirist" tendency, and another tendency that emphasized consensus, local support, and the use of non-institutional politics. This second tendency is only possible when political space opens, as was the case during the northern Mali civil war in 2012-2013. AQMI worked together with local groups 'Anṣār al-Dīn (AAD), and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Together they succeeded in "doing" politics. The case study opens critical questions on the nature of Salafism and Jihadism, and the academic divisions, and on their use of politics.

العربية/ Arabic

تدرس هذه الأطروحة كيف أصبح بعض السلفيين الجهاديين أكثر سياسةً منذ الربيع العربي في عام 2011، وتركز خاصة على دراسة الحالة في أزواد (منطقة شمال مالي) حيث نجح تنظيم قاعدة الجهاد في بلاد المغرب الإسلامي في تأسيس إمارة إسلامية في عام 2012 - 2013. الأطروحة تستخدم مفاهيم من "نظرية الحركة الاجتماعية" وتركز على التفاعل بين البنيات المختلفة من التشكيلات الكلية والوسطى والدقيقة. وتبدأ بتتبع تاريخ السلفية الجهادية إلى أشكالها في أقرب وقت ممكن، حيث تبدأ في أواخر القرن التاسع عشر إلى حياة سيد قطب إلى المملكة العربية السعودية وأفغانستان ثم خلق وتطور تنظيم القاعدة. كان الربيع العربي لحظة حاسمة لأن السلفيون الجهاديون أدركوا أن النزاع غير العنيف كان ممكناً وقد خلق ذلك قسماً داخل المجتمع السلفي الجهادي، ميل تكفيري وعنيف، وميل آخر أكد على توافق الآراء، والدعم المحلي، واستخدام السياسات غير المؤسسية. وهذا الاتجاه الثاني لا يمكن تحقيقه إلا عندما يفتح المجال السياسي، كما كان الحال خلال الحرب الأهلية في شمال مالي في الفترة 2012-2013 وفي ذلك الوقت عملت قاعدة الجهاد في بلاد المغرب الإسلامي مع الجماعات المحلية مثل أنصار الدين، جماعة التوحيد والجهاد في غرب أفريقيا وقد نجحوا معاً في "العمل" السياسي. في الختام تفتح هذه الدراسة أسئلة حاسمة حول طبيعة السلفية والجهادية، وانقساماتها الأكاديمية، وعلى استخدامهم للسياسة.

Dutch/ Nederlands

Deze thesis onderzoekt hoe Salafi-Jihadisten sinds de Arabische opstanden (2011) politiek bewuster zijn geworden. De nadruk ligt op de Azawad (Noord-Mali)-casus waar Al-Qaida in de Islamitische Maghreb (AQMI) in 2012-2013 kortstondig een staat stichtte. De methodologie is gebaseerd op Social Movement Theory en werkt met een gelaagde structuur die de verwevenheid van drie niveaus benadrukt; macro-, meso-, en microstructuren. De studie vangt aan met een historische kadering van Salafi-Jihadisme, van de late negentiende eeuw tot en met de oprichting en evolutie van Al-Qaida. De nadruk ligt hier vooral op de invloed van de Arabische opstanden die Salafi-Jihadisten toonden dat ook niet-gewelddadige strijd mogelijk was. Hierop ontstonden twee stromingen in het Salafi-Jihadistische kamp. Enerzijds een gewelddadige “takfiri” stroming, en anderzijds een stroming die erkent dat consensus, lokale steun, en politiek kunnen leiden tot succes. Die tweede stroming krijgt enkel de bovenhand wanneer de politieke ruimte opent, hetgeen gebeurde tijdens de Malinese burgeroorlog van 2012-2013. AQMI werkte toen samen met lokale groepen *'Anṣār al-Dīn* (AAD), en de Beweging voor Eenheid en Jihad in West Afrika (MUJAO) om politiek te “bedrijven”. Deze casus resulteert in enkele kritische vragen over de aard van Salafisme en Jihadisme en hoe ze academisch opgedeeld worden, alsook over hun gebruik van politiek.

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To write this thesis, I stood on the shoulders of giants. My research would not have been possible without all of the incredible scholars who proceeded me in discovering this interesting field. I specifically name my greatest influences; Wiktorowicz, Wagemakers, Pierret, Lacroix, Hegghammer, Hafez, and all the other authors I encountered on my journey. I am incredibly indebted to everyone in this field of academics, which I am now proud to call a little bit my own, for showing me the way.

Of course, special thanks and gratitude has to go to Fabio Merone, my guide throughout this process. Our theoretical discussions expanded far beyond the scope of this dissertation, challenging me to continuously improve my thinking.

A word of thanks is deserved by my Egyptian friends Islam, Ahmed, and Hadeel, for helping me fine-tune Arabic translations and for giving their diverging opinions on the topics of Salafism, Islamism and Jihad. Special gratitude also goes to my brother, Ruben, who helped me with the graphics of my timelines, maps, and charts.

Last, but certainly not least, my friends who read this dissertation. First and foremost Wim, who is by now probably as much an expert as I am. Also Ines, for sharing her academic knowledge about referencing and writing a thesis in general. Camille, Eva, and Andreas for reading and commenting. In general, I thank all my friends and family for being there with me along the way, through late nights, frustration, and happiness at the end of each chapter.

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Word count: 25.107

List of abbreviations

GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
AQ	Al-Qaida
AQMI	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
AQI	Al-Qaida in Iraq
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
IS	Islamic State (In Syria and Iraq)
MUJAO	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
AAD	<i>'Anṣār al-Dīn</i> : Defenders of the faith
JNIM	Group for Support of Islam and Muslims
MNLA	The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
SMT	Social Movement Theory

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Figure 2: The Emirate, page 61.

Introduction

Since 9/11, and definitely since the rise of the auto-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), the word *Jihad* has been omnipresent in Western media-outlets. It is a word often misunderstood or misused to delineate a plethora of concepts, events, or ideas. Jihad is an integral aspect of Islam and it does not explain the phenomenon we call Jihadism today. One of the aims of this dissertation is to create clarity about the concept of Salafi-Jihadism and explain its most recent evolutions since the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011. Looking at the various processes of transformation this current has passed through since the sixties, special attention is paid to the effects of the Arab Uprisings. I will clarify the changes of Salafi-Jihadism through a critical analysis of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI).¹ This Al-Qaida sub-branch played a very specific role in the 2012-2015 Malian civil war and forms a perfect –and sadly under-researched- case study. This thesis thus aims to combine new research on Salafi-Jihadism with an expansion of the general field of Salafi-research beyond its MENA-landscape.²

The idea for this research stems from the initial realization that, despite studying and researching Arabic and Islamic studies, I was not capable of understanding or explaining what exactly Jihad meant. This inspired me to make this the focal point of my studies. During my first steps in this vast field of study, a troubling hiatus in most Jihad-analyses appeared: what was happening beyond the MENA-region? This resulted in a bachelor-dissertation that tried to explore one of the many regions outside of the MENA-area where Jihad played a crucial role; the Sub-Sahara Sahel. I researched the role of Islam in the 2012-2015 civil war in northern Mali (also referred to by its Tuareg name: “Azawad”). Throughout this investigation, I encountered the works of Roel Meijer, Joas Wagemakers, and Quintan Wiktoriwicz. Their academic approach to Jihad appealed to me, and led me to explore the Salafi-Jihadi debate in detail. I concluded that I wanted to rethink the popular schemes of Salafi-Jihadism, without solely relying on traditional MENA-region groups and debates. Here, I problematize the Azawad case study within the larger scheme of the Jihadi evolution, both theoretically and practically. More specifically, the evolution of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) towards increasing politicization. How did it come to be that Al-Qaida before 2011 seemed like a thing from the past, but through the events of the Arab Uprisings it became a relevant player yet again? Through this research, I will argue that Jihad should be seen as a means of contention, at least

¹ For abbreviations, I opt to use those that are most frequently used within the literature, in almost all cases, this is the French abbreviation. Footnotes and bibliography follow the rules as set out by the department of history at Ghent University, in its 2014-2015 guide. Arabic will be transcribed according to the rules of al-Masāq magazine, as included in appendix 1.

² MENA stands for Middle East and North Africa and as such, it does not normally include the Sahel-region.

in the analysis of some Salafi-Jihadist movements. I will contextualize recent events and changes in the history of Salafi-Jihadism in the hopes to expand existing research on it.

This introduction will consist of four parts. Firstly, it clarifies some important concepts, in order to avoid any ontological misinterpretation. Secondly, important literature that inspired the theoretical framework is critically examined. This is combined with a discussion of my personal position in the current academic debate. Another section of the literature review will be an analysis of the available literature on the Azawad-region, and the availability of sources, or lack thereof. Thirdly, I will formulate my research question in light of the available literature and sources. The fourth and last part of this introduction is a discussion of the methodology, detailing the epistemological approach and the limitations of the research.

The first concept that needs ontological clarification is Salafism, as it is the crux of this investigation, together with Jihad. Simply speaking, Salafists are Sunni Muslims who aim to follow the example and way of life of the first three generations of Muslims after the Prophet (also referred to as *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*).³ Salafism is an all-comprehensive ideology, as it encompasses the whole of existence, from knowledge to practice.⁴ It is a neo-orthodox current, finding its origin in late nineteenth century Egypt.⁵ It originated with famous thinkers like al-Afghānī, Muḥamad ‘Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍā who introduced a current of somewhat revivalist movements, putting Islam back on the forefront. This early “Salafism” was quite different from the current day phenomenon, as will be discussed later on. Today’s Salafists do not follow any of the four Sunni schools of law (*madhāhib*), which they consider unlawful religious innovations (*bid‘a*).⁶ Only the Quran and the Sunna are lawful sources, and the Law of God (*Sharī‘a*) governs all aspects of life. In general, all Salafists try to convince others of the superiority of their views through preaching (*da‘wa*), albeit in different forms.⁷ Salafism is about individual practices of Muslims and as such, it is not an organized transnational network of any kind. By emphasizing the individual Muslim, Salafism creates the aura of being a-cultural and claims to rid Islam of its unlawful cultural baggage. Even so, the Salafi sphere is not entirely uniform, as it has various currents within different countries.⁸ In general, it can be

³ Joas Wagemakers, “Salafi ideas on state-building before and after the rise of the Islamic State,” in *Islamism in the IS Age*, ed. Marc Lynch (Washington: POMEPS, 2015), 31.

⁴ Henri Lauzière, *The making of Salafism: Islamic reform in the twentieth century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) 201.

⁵ Pessah Shinar and W. Ende, “Salafiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, consulted 28.04.2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0982.

⁶ Lauzière, *The making of Salafism*, 7-9.

⁷ Bernard Haykel, “Salafis,” in *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 483.

⁸ As attempted by Joas Wagemakers in “De culture van het salafisme,” *ZemZem* 6 (2010): 83.

divided into several “branches” or types (as has been attempted by many researchers), these divisions will be discussed at length during the literature review.⁹

Salafism should not be confused with Islamism. Islamism is a political ideology. It tries to claim the public space by mobilizing religious symbols and religious social action. It arose as a reaction to the nineteenth century modernity which encompassed imperialism, colonialism, and all reactions against it.¹⁰ As a reaction against the political and social discontent of this period, Islamists strived for some form of “purification” and Islam became an instrument to revolt against the ruling system. Just like Salafism, it is modern. The difference between these two is that Salafism is following God in all aspects of life, which might (for some) include politics. Salafism as an ideology does not evolve around (Western) political concepts or socio-economic issues, and religion is the most important aspect of it.¹¹ This does not mean that Salafists are against politics or the political system. Islamism on the other hand places politics center stage and religion is merely the way in which politics are conducted, it is thus a political and social phenomenon. This is why there are so many Islamist political parties, whilst Salafists more often occupy themselves with preaching.

The specific branch of Salafism discussed here is Salafi-Jihadism. However, to understand this, one must be aware of what Jihad itself encompasses. Essentially, Jihad means “struggle” and can be generally described as a struggle or striving of any Muslim (Salafi or not) to bring their personal and social life in line with the guidance of God (according to Sunna and Quran).¹² In modern times, Jihad is often interpreted as armed struggle. In the early Islamic period, it was truly an ideology, a way to live. Roughly starting from the ninth century, with the codification of Islam, it became a political concept embedded in the writings of jurists and other scholars. Jihad was interpreted as a “collective duty” (*fard al-kifāya*) against certain political enemies of the state and was thus combined with strict rules on warfare.¹³ A new interpretation of Jihad came from the famous scholar Ibn Taymiyya (13th – 14th century), who de-politicized Jihad from its legal codifications through a new, personal *‘ijtihad* (or legal decision). He saw Jihad against the foreign Mongol occupation as a sacred “individual duty” (*fard al-‘ayn*). More specifically, a Jihad becomes an individual duty when it is defensive (as such, a threat needs to

⁹ Most importantly Wiktorowicz, Hegghammer, and Wagemakers.

¹⁰ Sami Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad* (Leuven: Acco, 2006): 205-9.

¹¹ Sami Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad* (Leuven: Acco, 2006): 195-7.

¹² John Kelsay, “Jihad,” in *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 273.

¹³ On warfare, see: Abu Ḥanifa, al-Mawārdi, Ibn Taymiyya, etc.. For a detailed study on the rules of war, see: Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam; a Reader* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2016): 27-41.

be framed). The separation of Jihad from the political context and emphasis on the individuality opened up space for questioning others' individual commitment to Jihad, and thus their faith.¹⁴ Through time, the idea of Jihad lost its importance and was mostly forgotten, until Salafists who preferred Ibn Taymiyya's individualist approach, stripped of its legal codifications dating back to the tenth century, revived it. Jihad became a malleable term, usable for alternative, revolutionary, politics and contention. These early Salafists of the 20th century found the eternal fight between the "Abode of Islam" and the "Abode of War" to be especially fitting during European colonization and the rising anti-imperialist sentiments.¹⁵ The eventual, symbolic, goal is the complete spread of the "Abode of Islam" and the establishment of an Islamic state, the form or structure of this state is rarely defined. In the early 20th century, this was aimed at transforming society in line with truly Islamic values, as envisioned by Ḥasan al-Banā'.¹⁶ Further on in this dissertation it will be shown how, during the sixties, the concept of Jihad evolved and the classical idea of fighting non-Muslim invaders expanded. Jihad was now targeted against the authoritarian Muslim rulers.¹⁷ In conclusion, when used in this dissertation, the term Jihad will be used as radical contention (in a broad sense, including violence or armed struggle), employed as a means for alternative politics. It is nevertheless mostly couched by Salafi-Jihadists in a teleological way, with a final goal to defend Islam and eventually reach the ideal of an Islamic state.

Even though there are many Muslims that encourage Jihad without being Salafists (e.g. Hamas and Hezbollah), Jihad nevertheless has a very central role in Salafism. All Muslims see Jihad (in the broad sense) as an integral part of Islam, the discussion is about when, how, and where it should be applied. From their preference for radical contention, Salafi-Jihadists argue faster than other Muslims for an armed Jihad.¹⁸ They can be seen as a radical wing of a wider political landscape. Within the Jihadi discourse, there are some important concepts to consider. Firstly, the idea of *takfīr* as a focal point for certain Jihadi groups (most famously the Islamic State group).¹⁹ *Takfīr* means the act of declaring another believer as *kufr* (apostate or unbeliever) and by doing so excommunicating this Other. This is a very sensitive subject as

¹⁴ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 192-4.

¹⁵ See for example: Muhammad b. al-Ḥassan al-Ṣaybani's *kitāb al-siyār* (The Book of Movements).

¹⁶ Founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. See Kelsay, "Jihad," 279.

¹⁷ Rudolph Peters, *Jihad, A History in Documents* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2016). As seen in the ideas of Mohammed Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of the Absent Duty in which he refutes the idea that Jihad can only be defensive, it now encompasses the fight against a Muslim ruler who is no longer considered truly Muslim. Based on classes by Rudolph Peters and personal translation of Farīda al-ġā'ibā "The Absent Duty"

¹⁸ Wagemakers; *Salafism After the Arab Awakening* p18

¹⁹ J.O. Hunswick, "Takfīr," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, consulted 15.05.2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1154.

most Muslims consider it forbidden to do *takfīr* because it causes *fitna* (civil strife) in the ‘*Umma* (Muslim community).²⁰ This concept is very popular among modern Jihadists, and is applied in varying degrees from a single person to a whole society. The Egyptian group *takfīr wa-l-hijra* for example considered most of society to be apostates.²¹ Al-Qaida (AQ) on the other hand tends to be slightly more cautious and mainly claims Muslim rulers are nonbelievers. This constraint might be influenced recently by the ideologue al-Maqdisī (to be discussed at length further on) who delineated strict boundaries for *takfīr*.²²

One step beyond the *kufīr* (apostate/ disbeliever) is the *tāghūt*, a term that in Jihadi circles is often associated with “Tyrant”. Not only is he an apostate, this tyrant imposes his apostasy on others. Apart from this interpretation, *tāghūt* has many meanings in the Quran, such as “devil” or “false idol”.²³ In its most frequent use as “tyrant”, it is an important concept for Jihadists because it is closely related to the debate on the far and near enemy.²⁴ The far enemy being the foreign states that support apostate rulers, and the near enemy being the *tāghūt*; the tyrant who makes his people rebel against the will of God. The near enemy can be more than just the tyrant himself, some groups consider the whole government to be the enemy.²⁵ One of the most adamant discussion among Jihadists is the primacy of either the far or the near enemy, and which should be defeated first. How this debate evolved over time will be detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation. It is safe to say here that for Al-Qaida (AQ) the far enemy has always been important, as they made abundantly clear with for example the 9/11 attacks.²⁶ Yet, the near enemy has never been far away, as will be shown throughout this dissertation.

The concept of *takfīr* in Salafi-Jihadist ideology is closely related to that of *tawhīd* (Unity) or the oneness of God. It is the act of believing and affirming that God is indivisibly one and unique. For Muslims, this strict monotheism is central to their belief as it is mentioned in the first pillar of Islam; the *shahāda* (declaration of faith) which states “there is no other god but God”.²⁷ It is closely related to *takfīr* because the *takfīr*-claim is often made on the

²⁰ Asaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,” in *Contending with terrorism: Roots, strategies, and responses*, ed. Michael E. Brown (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010): 89.

²¹ Oral classes: Rudolph Peters

²² Wagemakers, “De culture,” 86.

²³ T. Fahd and F.H. Stewart, “Tāghūt,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, consulted 21.07.2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1147.

²⁴ Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 110-25.

²⁵ For example Al-Zawahiri in *Bitter Harvest*, see translation in Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 171-81.

²⁶ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 97-101.

²⁷ D. Gimaret, “Tawhīd,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, consulted 21.07.2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7454.

assumption that someone transgressed against the principle of *tawḥīd*. Salafists traditionally distinguish between three parts of *tawḥīd*. Firstly, the unity of lordship (*Al-rububiyya*); only God possesses supernatural powers and everything in the universe depends on his will. Secondly, the Oneness of God (*al-uluhiyya*); only God can be worshipped. Thirdly, the unity of the attributes (*al-‘asmā’ wa-l-sifāt*); God is unique in all of his attributes and nothing is comparable to him. Crucially, some Salafists add a fourth part, namely the oneness of Governance (*tawḥīd al-ḥukm*). God is the only one who has the right to govern and he is the source of the law for those who love him and accept his Sharia.²⁸ The insistence on this oneness of governance can be seen as a Salafi application of Sayyid Quṭb’s concept of *ḥākimiyya* (meaning domination, rule, and sovereignty).²⁹ Quṭb states that only God commands, he is the only rightful ruler.³⁰ In a political sense, this means that God holds all power not only in the hereafter but also in this life. Thus, society must be ruled through Sharia, the Sunna and Quran.³¹ A ruler who does not obey God, should in turn not be obeyed. This analogy puts all Muslim rulers who use a secular system of government or law at risk of revolts.³²

The never-ending emphasis on following Gods command and doing right comes from a concept that is especially popular in Salafi circles; *al-walā’ wa-l-barā’* (loyalty and disavowal). This is the idea that Muslims should be loyal to all that God and Islam commands, but stay away from and disavow all else (for example all non-Muslims). By doing this, they want to be as pure as possible.³³ Some Salafi-Jihadists expand this concept from disavowing individuals to even whole state institutions, such as the Jihadi ideologue al-Maqdisī.³⁴ This thought reached Salafi circles through Ibn Taymiyya (13-14th century) who used it to call upon Muslims to stay on the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) by disavowing all Jewish and Christian rituals. This was adopted by Muḥamad Ibn ‘abd al-Wahāb who expanded it to encompass staying away from all things non-Muslim.³⁵ It can be employed in an apolitical dimension to stay away from all

²⁸ Zoltan Pall, “Salafi Dynamics in Kuwait: Politics, Fragmentation and Change,” in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 175. Note here that Sharia is of course a fluid concept and although it is often employed as if it’s written in stone, there are many interpretations. For more information, see: Devin J. Stewart, “Sharia,” in *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 496-505.

²⁹ All translations are based on Wehr, unless stated otherwise. Hans Wehr, *A dictionary of modern written Arabic (Arabic-English)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979): 230.

³⁰ Sayed Khatib, “Hakimiyyah and jahiliyyah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2002): 146.

³¹ Ibid., 146.

³² Pall, “Salafi Dynamics in Kuwait,” 175.

³³ Joas Wagemakers, “Revisiting Wiktorowicz: Categorising and Defining the Branches of Salafism,” in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 19.

³⁴ Fabio Merone, “Between social contention and takfirism: the evolution of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Tunisia,” *Mediterranean Politics* 22, no. 1 (2017): 6.

³⁵ Wagemakers, “Revisiting Wiktorowicz,” 20.

the worldly worries and remaining focused on God and other Muslims, but it also comes into play in international relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries, which are especially criticized by Salafists. In Jihadi circles, it is used to demand loyalty to God in all spheres of life, including the implementation of Sharia.³⁶

Al-walā' wa-l-barā' is easily linked to another important concept for Jihadists: *ḥisba* (accountability). This refers to the Quranic duty of *al-'amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahī bi-l-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding evil).³⁷ A good Muslim –according to Salafists- does not only have to do good and disavow all else, but has to urge others to do the same. *Ḥisba* makes it a duty for Muslims to intervene in the conduct of other believers and encourage them to do right and reprimand them for doing wrong.³⁸ Each Muslim is personally responsible for protecting and enforcing the rights of God (*ḥuqūq allah*). However, if all of society would take matters into their own hands, discord would arise. Therefore, in orthodox Sunnism, it is interpreted in a manner that it becomes an obligation of the community (i.e. the authorities) to enforce the rights of God, and so it becomes a collective duty (*fard al-kifāya*).³⁹ However, Salafists deem the state unfit for countering evildoers, for them it becomes an individual duty (*fard al-'ayn*).⁴⁰

Literature review

Now that I have explained my views on the inherent meaning of Salafi-Jihadism, I can discuss the views of others and detail how I will build on these authors' works by not only using them as theoretical sources for research, but also by outstepping their theories. First, the central concept of Salafi-Jihadism needs to be framed in the greater discussion on Salafism. After finding one of my first and indispensable sources -Quintan Wiktorowicz- I started exploring Salafism based on his critiques and those who criticized him. Wiktorowicz's categorization of Salafism has been highly influential. His division of Salafists in "Purists", "Politicos", and "Jihadis" was based on the various *manhāj* (the "method" of applying the creed, for example in politics). By focussing on the application of the creed, instead of solely the Salafi ideology it is

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ See for example Soera 3:110. (All Quranic consultation is based on Fred Leemhuis, *De Koran. Een weergave van de betekenis van de Arabische tekst in het Nederlands door Fred Leemhuis* (Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, 1989).

³⁸ Stéphane Lacroix, "To rebel or not to rebel: Dilemmas among Saudi Salafis in a revolutionary age," in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 76.

³⁹ Sami Zubaida, *Law and power in the Islamic world* (London: IB Tauris, 2005): 58.

⁴⁰ Zacharias P. Pieri, et al., "Commanding good and prohibiting evil in contemporary Islam: cases from Britain, Nigeria, and Southeast Asia," *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 1 (2014): 39-42.

easier to separate groups.⁴¹ Wiktorowicz's division was, however slightly provisional, very useful for policy and recommendation. A more nuanced version of this early division can be found in the works of Dutch scholar Joas Wagemakers.⁴² He created his division after the Arab Uprisings and left more room for *fluidity*.⁴³ Surpassing Wiktorowicz's other critics (like Zoltan Pall and Thomas Hegghammer), Wagemakers states clearly that his is but an academic division of various currents within the Salafi landscape that are often intertwined. Salafism is a very complex subject and Salafists themselves might not hold these divisions to be true, and many Salafists might be considered to be somewhere "in between." Wagemakers still discerns three "separate" branches, but adds subdivisions to make room for these mixtures;

- *Quietists* do not believe in parliamentary participation and want to refrain from all politics.
 - *Aloofists* refrain from all types of politics.
 - *Loyalists* refrain from any active involvement but believe they should be loyal to their rulers whenever asked (either because of belief in the regime, or by fear of it).
 - *Propagandists* partake in active propaganda of the regime (for example the Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia).
- *Politicos* believe in the correctness of political involvement (also internationally).
 - Politicos who are interested in party politics, some from a genuine belief in the parliamentary system, others because they see it as *da'wa*. This branch has heavily expanded since the Arab Uprisings.
 - Politicos who believe in political commitment but not in parliamentary participation. An important concept here is *hizbiyya*, or the acceptance of political participation through party-politics, of course framed within Sharia-concepts and Islamic history.⁴⁴
- *Jihadis* (the most ill-defined branch of Salafism). All Salafists see Jihad as an integral part of Islam, but the difference lies in the type of Jihad they support; Jihadists support armed Jihad in various ways:
 - Classical Jihad: Jihad as a defensive type of warfare.
 - Revolutionary Jihad: Jihad to overthrow the Muslim rulers whom they declare to be apostates (*kāfir*).
 - Global Jihad: Jihad to attack Western targets so the West withdraws its support for the apostate rulers.

⁴¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207-39.

⁴² Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz," 11-14.

⁴³ Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz," 2-25.

⁴⁴ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 159-61.

This general framework by Wagemakers can serve as a baseline of general categories but as he himself mentions, the Arab Uprisings has blurred the lines. My research can be seen as a problematization of these categories by expanding on the specific Salafi-Jihadi branch, showing it to be much more complex. As Roel Meijer aptly points out, not only have the borders between the Salafist currents become fluid, but also the currents themselves are continually forced to adopt different political stances.⁴⁵

Salafi-Jihadism since the Arab Uprisings is under researched. *Salafism After the Arab Awakening* is a crucial book to understand political Salafism since 2011, but only Thomas Pierret's chapter offers some insights in the impact on Jihadism.⁴⁶ Of course, since 2011 there has been an abundance of books, articles, seminars, et cetera on Jihadism, yet unfortunately these are mainly from a policy point of view, without delving into the ideological background of new conflicts, or at least not taking into account various evolutions.⁴⁷ What is often missing here is a study of Jihad as a means for politics and contention, instead of framing the increasing political awareness as a shift towards political Salafism.

Fabio Merone's theoretical framework to research Tunisia's Ansar al-Sharia can prove most useful in this context. Instead of following Wagemakers' division of the Salafi-Jihadi movement according to the type of Jihad they support, Merone speaks of a dialectic between two separate frames or tendencies, which is based less on their underlying ideology, and much more on the way to implement their views in the present. Firstly; the Social Movement frame where the Salafi-Jihadi movement "*participates in a process of contention and tends to represent a social base seeking political legitimization and a degree of acceptance.*"⁴⁸ These movements are active in civil society through preaching and charity. They might perceive themselves to be transnational on an ideological level but they mostly act domestically with regards to their practical organization. In addition, they strive for consensus instead of conflict, they participate in a wider process of contention. Following this trend, some of these movements might be institutionalized, but this is not inevitably the consequence of this path. The general consequence is that they participate in civil society. Secondly the *takfiri*-frame in which: "*the jihadis create exclusive and uncompromising groups that accentuate an apocalyptic vision of the world, which they divide in true Muslims (the Salafi-jihadis) and*

⁴⁵ Meijer, "Conclusion," 220.

⁴⁶ Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, eds., *Salafism after the Arab Awakening* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017).

⁴⁷ See for example Olomajobi's book: Yinka Olomajobi, *Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Africa* (Ibadan: Safari books ltd., 2015).

⁴⁸ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism," 2.

unbelievers (Koffar).”⁴⁹ This trend is much more violent and can be associated with the likes of the Islamic State (IS). They espouse an apocalyptic image of the world in which they are a chosen and exclusive group, the only true Muslims, while all others are unbelievers. These two frames are in a dialectical relationship with each other and are not mutually exclusive. Of course, the level in which a group is able to participate in civil society depends on several factors; mainly the ideological frame, the social praxis and the political opportunity. By analyzing Jihadists in this framework, Merone recognizes that their movement is “*a political actor participating in a process of social or political contention, representing therefore a new generation of radical Islamists*”.⁵⁰ Merone’s framework will form the center of this dissertation, it will be expanded beyond conventional politics by applying it on an al-Qaida affiliate (AQMI) while Merone focused on a more institutionalized group (at that time) ‘Anṣār al-Sharī’a in Tunisia. I agree with Merone that Jihadists can evolve beyond their violent actions and apocalyptic discourses, but this article will show that this path does not inevitably lead to political institutionalization. “Politics” still has a negative connotation for Jihadists, yet this does not rule out more peaceful ways to reach the objective of an Islamic State. As Merone points out, the environment is crucial because it influences the way a movement evolves. Following Hafez, this environment is especially important with regard to the use of violence. A careful study of the Malian context will thus be needed to conclude how the context influences AQMI and its use of violence.

Literature on Azawad

Apart from investigating existing literature on Salafi-Jihadism, I must also look at existing literature on the Azawad-conflict, my case study. In this introductory chapter, only the most events will be narrated. The rise of the conflict will be discussed in chapter two, and the role of AQMI in it is the crux of the third chapter.⁵¹ In 2012, Tuareg discontent in the North of Mali reached its zenith and civil war ensued. Initially, the *Mouvement National pour la libération de l’Azaoud* (MNLA) was the most important player, but not much later this war for independence was taken over by Islamists from three important groups; ‘*Anṣār al-Dīn* (AAD), *Mouvement pour l’unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest* (MUJAO), and AQMI. It took one year, and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ Merone, “Between social contention and takfirism,” 1-3.

⁵¹ Based on many sources (see bibliography) but mostly Thurston and Lebovich, “A Handbook on Mali’s 2012-2013 Crisis,” for Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (2013): 18-32. In addition, N.N. “A timeline of northern conflict,” IRIN, consulted 22.04.2017, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/95252/mali-timeline-northern-conflict>.

brisk international interventions, to expel these Salafi-Jihadist groups from the Azawad (which is the Tuareg denomination for northern Mali). These initial successes did not last long however. The most important Jihadists in the area (AAD, MUJAO, and AQMI) have recently (in march 2017) joined their forces in the new movement *Groupe pour le soutien de l'islam et des musulmans*.⁵² Throughout this dissertation, the “Azawad case” will refer to the presence of Salafi-Jihadi groups in Azawad since 2011, and their activities there, especially their attempt to create an Islamic state (or Emirate) between 2012 and 2013.



Figure 1: The Azawad Region (source: N.N. <http://www.nationalia.info>)

Regarding the literature on this region, I had the advantage of already writing extensively on Mali and the Azawad case, enabling me to gather literature based on my knowledge of the current academic debates. In addition, I relied on the advice of Professor Baz Lecocq, an authority on Malian Tuareg.⁵³ As to the content of this literature, much has been written on the secular causes for conflict, such as the Tuareg-nationalistic influence,⁵⁴ international policy,⁵⁵ natural resources (or the lack thereof),⁵⁶ and the Libyan influence.⁵⁷ Another well-researched topic (since 2011) is terrorism.⁵⁸ The articles discussing terrorism are

⁵² This happened in 2017: Célian Macé, “Cette vidéo est censée situer le Sahel sur la carte du jihad global,” *Libération*, consulted 6.03.2017, http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/03/05/cette-video-est-censee-situer-le-sahel-sur-la-carte-du-jihad-global_1553316.

⁵³ Previously a professor at the department of African studies at Ghent University, Professor Lecocq now teaches at Humboldt University, and we had regular email-conversations in the year prior to this thesis.

⁵⁴ See especially the works of Baz Lecocq; expert on Malian Tuareg. For example Baz Lecocq and Georg Klute, “Tuareg separatism in Mali,” *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 68, no. 3 (2013): 424-34.

⁵⁵ This refers to the impact of French, European, UN, American, and ECOWAS missions, see for example: Oliver Tramond and Philippe Seigneur, “Early Lessons from France’s Operation Serval in Mali,” *Army Magazine* (2013): 40-3.

⁵⁶ “Resources” mainly refers to Uranium and gold-supplies in the North, the lack thereof refers to the drought and lack of farming opportunities. See for example Shuriye O. Abdi and Ibrahim Dauda, “The Role of Islam and Natural Resources in Current Mali Political Turmoil,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6 (2013): 507-12.

⁵⁷ The impact of Qadhāfi’s geopolitical pan-African strategy is crucial here, as well as the impact of his fall on the region. See for example: Laurance A. Ammour, “The Sahara and Sahel After Gaddhafi,” *Notes internationals CIDOB* 44 (2012): 1-5.

⁵⁸ Terrorism does not have one clearly defined definition. In short, I suggest the following definition: The use of, or threat with violence, often against civilians, by non-state actors. With the objective of changing or preserving

interesting from a policy point of view, but fail to offer any insights in regards to religion, ideology, or mindset.⁵⁹ There are only two types of articles that associate Islam with Mali and who write about it extensively. Firstly, research on Islam in Mali,⁶⁰ and secondly research on AQMI (indeed closely related to research on terrorism, but for the sake of clarity it refers here to more in depth investigations about AQMI).

Looking at the first group of authors researching Islam in Mali, there is a remarkable focus on the South.⁶¹ “African Islam” is a recurring theme, referring to the specific local embodiment of Islamic religion, meaning the supposedly more “tolerant”, Sufi approach that was especially popular among black communities in Sub-Sahara West Africa in the nineteenth century. Yet, this is only half of the story as Northern Mali has had a markedly different development.⁶² White Northerners (Tuareg, Arabic, and Berabiche) have a much stronger affinity to the peoples of Northern Africa, which is reflected in their religious experience.⁶³ Their quest for a “purer” Islam has been increasingly popular since the nineties, separating them from the “impure” South.⁶⁴ Many authors mention the importance of Salafism’s rising popularity, but fail to describe the how and what behind this rise, relying on easy platitudes such as “imposing religion”,⁶⁵ wanting “a fundamentalist regime based on Sharia”,⁶⁶ et cetera. The question remains, what is this Sharia, fundamentalism, or Salafism for that matter, according to these authors? Of all authors that I read who discuss religion in northern Mali, only one defines Islamism,⁶⁷ and two define Salafism.⁶⁸ Combining this research with more specific analysis of AQMI in Mali, I find the same lack of defining, and a general lack of

certain values or norms within a society. It involves the strategic attempt to create fear. Islamic terrorism is quite recent and originates in the seventies. See: Thomas Hegghammer, “Terrorism,” in *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 545. And Reuven Young, “Defining Terrorism: The Evolution of Terrorism as a Legal Concept in International Law and Its Influence on Definitions in Domestic Legislation,” *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 29, no. 1 (2006): 30-48.

⁵⁹ Very popular angle since the start of the civil war, see for example Soumaya Sahla, “Mali: Broedplaats voor extremisme, terrorisme en criminaliteit?” *Militaire Spectator* 183, no. 3 (2014): 104-17.

⁶⁰ Crucial names here are Bell, Dowd & Raleigh, Flood, and Solomon.

⁶¹ See especially the works of Benjamin Soares and Alex Thurston.

⁶² See works of Lecocq, Schrijver, Klute, Guidère, Gutelius, Mesa, Olomjobo...

⁶³ See appendix 7 for a two charts on Mali’s religious and ethnic composition.

⁶⁴ Impure in this context is the “pollution” of pure, Sunni principles with animalistic, African “pagan” religious rites and beliefs. David Gutelius, “Islam in Northern Mali and the War on Terror,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007): 59-76.

⁶⁵ Sahla, “Mali: Broedplaats voor extremisme,” 104-17.

⁶⁶ Zachary Laub, “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),” Council on Foreign Relations, consulted 17.05.2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb>.

⁶⁷ William Miles, “Islamism in West Africa: Internal Dynamics and U.S. Responses,” *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2008): 10.

⁶⁸ Baz Lecocq and Paul Schrijver. “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pitfalls on the Saharan Front.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2007): 147.

religious knowledge. To my knowledge, the only scholar with a background in Islamic Studies who currently works on AQMI in Mali (and religion in northern Mali), is Mathieu Guidère. Applying my research on Salafi-Jihadism to this particular conflict is thus an attempt to expand the scope of regular research on Islamism and show that the Sahara is not an insurmountable border, especially in the age of globalization and social media.

Regarding all general research on Mali, there are some noticeably interesting fields of tension amongst the authors. The first one is deciding to which area northern Mali belongs (or in what framework it should be discussed). One framework is the “Pan-Africanism” employed to put Africa as a whole region at the forefront of developments. This however does not seem suitable for the research on any African region because it fails to recognize the vastly diverse influences.⁶⁹ The bulk of research of course considers Azawad in the light of its West African location, central in the Sub-Sahara Sahel belt.⁷⁰ There is much to say for this approach as it is obvious that these countries have much in common; they are part of the same historical evolutions stemming from the Mali Empire to the French Colonization (both occupying most of these present day countries). There is however a much forgotten approach that could link northern Mali to the MENA region as an equally “Muslim”-region.⁷¹ This would also have its advantages because of the similar social structures (tribalism, hierarchical), historical linkages (dating back to at least the Almoravides), and ethnically (with much closer ethnic ties to the North of Africa).

A second field of tension is the influence of the MENA-region on the Azawad. While most authors agree that the ideas of Salafism and Jihadism themselves are foreign, there is more disagreement on the way they should be perceived in Mali. Some authors suggest that it is a local evolution to adopt Salafism within the own, national framework.⁷² These authors speak of the adoption of Salafi symbols within a broader set of influences, conferring a higher degree of agency on the locals. Other authors emphasize foreign influence and point for example to the Deobandi preaching society *tablīgī jamā‘at* with Pakistani origins.⁷³ Obviously, there is a middle ground as both local elements and international influences have been in play in these

⁶⁹ See for example Olomjobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*.

⁷⁰ See for example Miles, “Islamism in West Africa,” 9-13. Or Mohammed Sulemana, “Islamism in West Africa: Context and Enabling Factors,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 7, no. 2 (2015): 19-23.

⁷¹ An exception is for example Thomas; Dominique Thomas, *Génération djihadistes: Al-Qaïda-Etat islamique: histoire d'une lutte fratricide* (Paris: Editions Michalon, 2016).

⁷² For example Lawrence E. Cline, “Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers: The Struggles for Northern Mali,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 6 (2013): 623-4.

⁷³ See for example Baz Lecocq, et. al., “One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: a multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali,” *Review of African Political Economy* 40, no. 137 (2013): 345.

recent evolutions (as will be explained in the third chapter). A general trend in literature is also that AQMI is considered a foreign movement, focused still on the North of Africa, while AAD is deemed a local movement and MUJAO a West African group.⁷⁴

Thirdly, an often returning field of tension is whether AQMI (and by expansion AAD and MUJAO) should be considered a criminal, “terrorist” or insurgent movement. Regarding the first, this is a claim often read in policy papers, especially by military personnel.⁷⁵ Although it is certainly correct that AQMI has a high income due to its criminal activities (mainly smuggling and kidnapping), this is certainly not their core activity.⁷⁶ The latter, claiming AQMI might be an insurgency-movement is less often heard, and almost never refers to AQMI itself, but more to its relation with AAD and MUJAO.⁷⁷ Obviously, AQMI is mostly referred to as a terrorist movement, or any other denomination linked to this. Here, Salafi-Jihadist group is preferred. This of course is one of the central aims of this investigation; to show what kind of group AQMI really is, as I find all labels above inadequate.

A last interesting theme in the literature on Azawad in the period of 2012-present is the lack of research on the Islamic Emirate which was briefly established there. Although several researchers mention the creation of a state (or state-like structures), there is a noticeable absence of further research.⁷⁸ Many authors agree that the Emirate was established by Salafi-Jihadists (although mostly referred to as “terrorists”). There are also other authors who focus more on Tuareg nationalist sentiments leading to the creation a state (especially through the MNLA movement).⁷⁹ Only the authors Bresslin and Gray examine the emirate in a wider search of Al-Qaida to exert effective control.⁸⁰ Some other authors only mention the Emirate as an attempt by AQMI to create a safe haven to retreat to from Algeria, which seems too simplistic an explanation.⁸¹ According to my research, there is no author who investigates the internal

⁷⁴ See for example Caitrona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh, “Briefing: The myth of global Islamic terrorism and local conflict in Mali and the Sahel,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 448 (2013): 502-3.

⁷⁵ For example Laub, “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),” and Roussellier, “Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel.”

⁷⁶ E.g. Between 2008-13, AQMI earned 88 million dollars solely on ransoms: János Tomolya and Larry White. *Terrorist Threats in North Africa from a NATO Perspective*. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015): 35. And see Sergei Boeke, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism, insurgency, or organized crime?” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016): 930.

⁷⁷ See Boeke for an interesting analysis of this claim: Boeke, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.”

⁷⁸ Some authors who mention the establishment of a state are; Abdi, Bresslin & Gray, Cline, De Castelli, Guidère, Lecocq, Flood, Klute...

⁷⁹ These authors are mostly Cline, Flood, Klute, Solomon, and Lecocq. For example, Solomon focusses on the long struggle for Tuaregs to create their own state (since the fifteenth century) and how this state follows in that long history. (Hussein Solomon, “Exploring the Nexus Between Ethnicity and Terrorism in Africa,” *Conflict Trends* 3 (2013): 31.)

⁸⁰ Joshua D. Bresslin, and David H. Gray, “Al Qaeda in North Africa,” *Global Security Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 75- 88.

⁸¹ David Zounmenou, “Rethinking the Tuareg Factor in the Mali Crisis,” *Conflict trends* 3 (2013): 16-23.

management of this state through all available sources (media, internal communications...).⁸² So, the question remains, what happened in this state, and how does it fit in a wider Salafi-Jihadist trend?

Research Question

After careful consideration of all available literature on Salafism and Azawad, it is logical to frame a research question based on the most important lacunas. Within the scope of Salafism, the least researched branch is Jihadism, and what is written about Jihad since the Arab Uprisings mostly concerns the *takfiri* Islamic State group. Furthermore, a lot of the very interesting research on Salafism (and Jihadism) has not been brought up to date with the events of the Arab Uprisings, although these have been highly influential. This combined with a lack of research beyond the MENA-region brings me to the Azawad and its recent evolutions, which picked up speed after the Arab Uprisings. My research question links these lacunas together;

Has Salafi-Jihadism –and specifically Al-Qaida- developed since the Arab Uprisings (2011) to a more political stance and can the “Azawad case” be considered an example of this new evolution?

Methodology

How then, would one answer this question? I propose to use the ideas of Social Movement Theory (or SMT). Charles Tilly pioneered this approach in Western social and political sciences, and it has slowly found its way to the MENA region through authors like Quintan Wiktorowicz and Mohammed Hafez, especially since the Arab Uprisings. Following Mario Diani it can generally be defined as “a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity.”⁸³ Quintan Wiktorowicz extended this theory to include Islamic activism; “*the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes*”.⁸⁴ It is uncommon to employ SMT to research Jihadist organizations or evolutions, and in the conclusion, I will highlight some of the complexities that I encountered throughout my research. However, Social Movement Theory offers quite some advantages and solutions for the problems that were raised.

⁸² Yinka Olomojobo does this only briefly, in one paragraph of his book *Frontiers of Jihad* (Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 220.)

⁸³ Mario Diani from; “Vincent Durac, “Social movements, protest movements and cross-ideological coalitions—the Arab uprisings re-appraised,” *Democratization* 22, no. 2 (2015): 242.

⁸⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed. *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) 2.

The core idea is to treat Islamic activism like a Social Movement to show that it is more than just a result of a particular social milieu, or the acts of one central person.⁸⁵ The key part of linking this theoretical framework to the Arab world is to use specific local knowledge instead of just making false analogies to the West regarding activism and contention.⁸⁶ It is also important to imbue this research with knowledge in Islam –specifically Salafism- itself. For this, I use my knowledge in the field of Arab and Islamic studies. A large part of SMT is concerned with mobilization and resource availability, but here the emphasis will be on the political aspect.⁸⁷

Following the ideas of Wiktorowicz, I frame Islamic activists as strategic thinkers embedded in a political context that influences their choices and decisions in order to recognize their agency.⁸⁸ This activism in a political context does not inevitably lead to an acceptance of political plurality or the participation in party politics.⁸⁹ Some Salafi Islamic activists do decide to participate in conventional party politics, and by participating in some way legitimize it, but this acceptance of institutions is often ideologically framed as an act of *da'wa* (preaching). The act of doing politics is an extension of their preaching and is only legitimized as such to advance their own ideological agenda.⁹⁰ Even so, many (Salafi) movements choose not to participate in institutional politics, nor in political mobilization of informal networks (for example by calling to vote for a certain candidate not coming from within the own movement). These movements are nevertheless aware of their political surroundings and are in a constant dialectic relationship with them, reacting collectively to changes. This collectivity is crucial for Islamic Activism, which often uses networks and alliances.⁹¹ Inevitably, “politics” needs to be defined. An interesting definition would be the acceptance of plurality and democracy on an institutional level, that is however too narrow for this research.⁹² I therefore suggest a broad definition based on Eickelman and Piscatori. To “do” politics, is to negotiate –which includes (violent) contention- about the organization of institutions within a society.⁹³

⁸⁵ Charles Tilly, introduction to *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁸⁶ Wiktorowicz, *Islamic activism*, 292.

⁸⁷ Durac, “Social movements,” 240-5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁹ As it is the case on the other hand with Roel Meijer, “Conclusion: Salafis and the Acceptance of the Political,” in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017).

⁹⁰ Wagemakers, “Revisiting Wiktorowicz,” 27.

⁹¹ Wiktorowicz, *Islamic activism*, 22-4.

⁹² Based on Roel Mijer’s discussion of politics.

⁹³ Dale F. Eickelman, and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

With this additional layer, this dissertation can expand SMT in the direction of contention and open it up for an ontological debate on politics, which it does not include as of yet. This will be combined with contextual information divided over three fields or levels; (1) the macro-level of context meaning the political, social, and cultural structures in which the movement operates; (2) the meso-level of internal dynamics regarding the way a Movement operates; and (3) the micro-level meaning the ideational way a group communicates and influences individuals.⁹⁴ This last level contains the element of culture and framing, pointing to the importance of symbolism and language.⁹⁵ These levels are in constant dialectic with each other, it is meaningless to separate the ideological from the political or social. As warned by Adib Bencherif, this political context should also be expanded beyond state-politics of one nation, and take into account regional and global evolutions, because a transnational movement like AQMI does not limit itself by borders.⁹⁶

Another reason Social Movement Theory is relevant for researching Salafi-Jihadist movements is its focus on “contention” in all its repertoires, from peaceful protests to violent terrorist attacks (these forms are of course not limited to Islamic Activism).⁹⁷ This contention transcends “Islam” as a system of meaning, identity, and basis of collective action.⁹⁸ A crucial question remains why movements would resort to violence as contention when other options are also available. Through SMT it becomes obvious that the use of violence is often motivated not through purely religious beliefs, but rather through the political context of the movement. Violence is the result of tactical considerations and is a logical response to severe repression, which is often forgotten when referring to said violence by calling it “terrorism”.⁹⁹ Such collective action (both violent and peaceful) does not appear from thin air and entails the necessity of an organizational structure (e.g. hierarchy: meso-level) and normative framing (provided by Islam; micro-level), which facilitates mobilization of resources and individuals.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Adib Bencherif, “Les théories des mouvements sociaux et la dialectique des niveaux: un cadre d’analyse pour l’étude des évolutions d’Al-Qaïda au Maghreb islamique,” *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology* 2, no. 2 (2013): 104-5.

⁹⁵ Wiktorowicz, *Islamic activism*, 25.

⁹⁶ Bencherif, “Les théories des mouvements sociaux,” 104.

⁹⁷ The relationship between violence and repression is especially well explained by Hafez and Wiktorowicz in “violence as contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement”; Wiktorowicz, *Islamic activism*, 61-71.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁹ As proven by Mohammed Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Violence as contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement,” in *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 55-71.

¹⁰⁰ Mohammed Hafez, “From marginalization to massacres: a political process explanation of GIA, Violence in Algeria,” in *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 39.

This approach thus offers a deeper explanation of a phenomenon without completely rejecting ideational explanations.

This centrality of contention in all shapes became extremely relevant after the Arab Uprisings because it showed those who used violent contention that another way was possible.¹⁰¹ So, why would violence remain an option for Salafi-Jihadist groups? In addition, is there a new rationale to frame this violence? That is one of the questions this dissertation hopes to answer. Obviously, to answer this question, all levels need to be taken into account. To do so I will first research the macro-level in depth; what political, cultural, and social phenomena caused the rise of the Salafi-Jihadist movements? For the sake of clarity and due to the limits of this research, the focus will be on the events that are significant for the evolution of Al-Qaida, and AQMI specifically, sometimes dealing with the organizational level of AQ. Special attention will be paid to the events after 2011 (the Arab Uprisings). In the second chapter, I will employ this dual analysis to chart the rise of AQMI in the Sahara-Sahel region. In the third and final chapter, all three levels will come into play when I analyze the way AQMI employs its ideology in the Azawad region.

Due to the sometimes international nature of Salafi-Jihadism, various relevant places in the MENA region and beyond will be discussed. This also results in a wide array of sources, which I consulted to familiarize myself with the historical context of Salafi-Jihadism. Beyond the authors I already mentioned (Meijer, Lacroix, Hegghammer, Wagemakers, Hafez, Wiktorowicz, Thomas, and Merone), I tried to use a multitude of different authors that offer different insights into events. The choice of authors is limited through language. Regarding the general events, I consulted works in English, Dutch, and occasionally French and Spanish. To get a deeper insight in some of the Jihadi figures that are discussed (such as Quṭb, al-Farraj, et cetera) I also used the original Arabic texts.

Not only the historical framework needs to be limited, the case study also has its limitations. Primarily the subject, AQMI, which played a central role in the civil war and is still very active. Yet, it is impossible to study AQMI in a vacuum as it strongly interacts with movements surrounding it. So for this research I will also look at its closest allies in Mali; *'Anṣār al-Dīn* (AAD) and *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO). Geographically, Salafi-Jihadism is obviously omnipresent in West Africa (e.g. Boko Haram), and AQMI is active in several countries, a choice of country thus needed to be made. Since 2011, AQMI considerably increased its presence in the Azawad region and especially its

¹⁰¹ Thomas; *Génération djihadistes*, 30.

Southern branch considers it the heartland of their operations at this point.¹⁰² AQMI (and Al-Qaida in general) is looking south, and so should its researchers.¹⁰³ Not only is this research geographically limited, it is also in time. Here, the emphasis will be on the period 2012-present; this includes the civil war (2012-15) but also takes into account all recent developments. A main focal point of this research (and a high point in publications) is 2012-13; during which the short-lived Islamic Emirate of Azawad existed. The used material can be divided in three types; (1) media- coverage from 2012-17¹⁰⁴; (2) academic articles on AQMI, mainly those published after 2013 when AQMI's involvement became clear; (3) AQMI, AAD, and MUJAO's own publications from 2012-17, which includes video-publications.¹⁰⁵ Regarding language, media coverage is mainly in French and sometimes English; academic articles are mainly English and Dutch with some exceptions in French and Spanish; and own publications are exclusively Arab source material.¹⁰⁶ Concerning these publications by Salafi-Jihadists, it is inevitably a slightly one-sided representation of events because no outside media was allowed to enter during the Emirate (with the exception of two documentary filmmakers).¹⁰⁷ It is important to note here that the dearth of sources and the lack of fieldwork on AQMI force me to use material that can be considered as propaganda. I am aware of this flaw and will compensate by critically examining my findings.

In summary, the goal of this thesis will be to answer the question whether Salafi-Jihadism has politicized since the Arab Uprisings, employing SMT. The first chapter traces the history of Salafi-Jihadism. It starts from the influence of Sayyid Qutb, to Saudi Arabia in the nineties, following the birth of the Al-Qaida movement and its experiences in Iraq and during the Arab Uprisings of 2011. With this framework in mind, the second chapter then explores the history of Salafi-Jihadism in Western Africa, highlighting the role of AQMI (formerly GIA and GSPC) and how the turn to Azawad came about. This will inevitably lead to the question that will be answered in the third chapter, how the Azawad case fits into this evolution. Is AQMI acting more political in the Azawad thanks to the influence of the Arab Uprisings?

¹⁰² Derek H. Flood, "Between Islamization and Secession: The Contest for Northern Mali," *CTC Sentinel* 5 no. 7 (2012): 2. See appendix 2 for a map of Mali.

¹⁰³ A slow movement towards the south has been noticeable since before 2011; see for example Al-Qaida-ideologue Azzam Al-Ansari's piece "Al-Qaida turns to Africa" in *Sada al-Jihad* (the Echo of Jihad); an electronic manual spread on Jihadist online forums. This article shows a long term strategy.

¹⁰⁴ Media coverage, especially referring to news-articles will be used to substantiate claims about events, and to show when (and how) I came about the information.

¹⁰⁵ Acquired through Jihadology and Youtube

¹⁰⁶ Videos in local languages (mainly Amazigh) are not included in this research.

¹⁰⁷ Documentary filmmakers François Margolin and Lemine Ould Salem for "Salafistes." And also unofficially Said Belktibia and Benkoro Sangare for their Youtube documentary 365 Jours au Mali.

Chapter one: The international evolution of Salafi-Jihadism

This chapter will mainly explore the macro-level structures that caused the rise of the Salafi-Jihadi movement. This macro-structure will consist primarily of the political and social context and opportunities that gave rise to Salafi-Jihadism and AQ more specifically.¹⁰⁸ However, a movement does not arrive solely because the opportunities were right. The activists within the movement have agency, and thus the macro-level will be combined with the hierarchical implications of the meso-level to briefly highlight how AQ's structures are in a constant dialectic relation to the larger political context. This chapter aims to answer the first part of the research question "*Has Salafi-Jihadism –and specifically Al-Qaida- developed since the Arab Uprisings (2011) to a more political stance*". To know whether Salafi-Jihadists (and AQ) developed in a different way since the Arab Uprisings, a comparison is needed with the period before that. The hypothesis here is that there has always been a dialectic with politics of the macro-level, but that this relationship changed drastically by the remarkably non-violent events of the Arab Uprisings, which showed Salafi-Jihadists that a new stance towards politics and violence was possible.

Before Sayyid Quṭb, there was (proto-) Salafism

What are the roots of Salafi-Jihadism? In the early period of the late nineteenth century, there is no possibility to look at the meso-structures of movements, because there are only thinkers, those who created the groundwork for the movements later to come. It is not correct to refer to these thinkers as Jihadists, even though they also discussed Jihad. One might refer to those thinkers as "proto-Salafists" because they are part of a reformist school of thought that formed the basis of much more than just today's Salafism –and Salafi-Jihadism- but also Islamist currents. The chain of Salafist ideas is traced back through time without taking a teleological stance, as various other branches of thought that are not relevant to this essay will not be discussed.¹⁰⁹ I propose to speak of "Salafi-Jihadists" after Sayyid Quṭb, whose views are examined in the next part. Looking at Salafism's earliest roots there is Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-97), who wanted to fight the decay of Islam by modernizing it.¹¹⁰ On a structural level, this decay can be seen in the global hegemony of the West, and the decline of the (Islamic)

¹⁰⁸ See the work of Dieter Rucht, "The impact of national contexts on social movement structures: A cross-movement and cross-national comparison," in *Comparative perspectives on social movements*, eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer M. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 185-204. Bencherif adds a third factor: the cultural context, I believe it to be less relevant here. Bencherif, "Les théories des mouvements sociaux," 106.

¹⁰⁹ A concern also voiced by author Henri Lauzière: Lauzière, *The making of Salafism*, 33-44.

¹¹⁰ Based on oral classes from Professor Umar Ryad (from al-Azhar and University of Utrecht).

Ottoman Empire. British influence was strong in India, Afghanistan, and Egypt through brutal colonization. After a stint in Kabul, al-Afghānī came to Cairo in the 1870's to reform Islam. As a learned man, he advocated for modernization and rationalization, basing his views not on Western ideas such as democracy, but on Islamic thought and the Quran. He ushered in a new era of Islamic thinking, freeing it from the constraints of the traditionalist Ulama (Muslim scholars).¹¹¹ Socially, this meant the end of the monopoly of the Ulama on Islamic knowledge.¹¹² A long line of reformers descends from al-Afghānī, starting with his Cairene student; Muḥamad 'Abduh (1849-1905) who systemized this program of Islamic reform. He too was a modernist who wanted to bring unity to Islam (pan-Islamism). To do so he pursued the centrality of Quran and Sunnah, freed of all traditions and thus bringing Muslims together without restraints of deferring traditions or *madhāhib*. Through this essence, he advocated for studying the Quran in the context it was created (e.g. polygamy was normal in the time of the prophet, but not now).¹¹³ This enabled him to advocate for modern principles, while basing himself on Islamic sources.¹¹⁴ He advocated for the supremacy of reason over revelation at times and thus cannot be seen as a Salafist in today's meaning.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, at that time 'Abduh called himself Salafist because of this focus on the roots of Islam. In these Islamic principles, he found reason to expand Jihadi thought beyond its classical defensive interpretation and was one of the first to introduce it as a political tool against foreign invaders of Muslim lands.¹¹⁶

The reason we know 'Abduh's thoughts today is his student Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), who published 'Abduh's Quranical exegeses in the journal "*tafsīr al-manār*" but in the process, he added many of his own thoughts.¹¹⁷ More than 'Abduh he stressed a traditional Ḥanbalī-interpretation, but he also followed his teacher in giving prominence to the principle of the greater good (*maṣlaḥa*). According to this *fiqh*-principle, it is allowed to change certain Quranic interpretations in light of the greater good of the community.¹¹⁸

The line of scholars then proceeds to Riḍā's student Ḥasan al-Banna (1906-49), famous for founding the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-ikhwān al-Muslimīn* or MB) in 1928, which was the

¹¹¹ Nikki R. Keddie, "Islamic Philosophy and Islamic Modernism: The Case of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī," *Iran* 6 (1968): 54.

¹¹² Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 49.

¹¹³ Based on oral classes from professor Umar Ryad

¹¹⁴ Based on oral classes from professor Rudolph Peters.

¹¹⁵ Lauzière, *The making of Salafism*, 40. Who, in his work, advocates fiercely against calling 'Abduh a true Salafist, and claims he is more of a freethinker.

¹¹⁶ Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 124-5.

¹¹⁷ Based on oral classes from professor Rudolph Peters.

¹¹⁸ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 50-3, and oral classes from professor Giovanna Lelli.

first institutionalized reaction against the political structures of repression in Egypt by Western powers.¹¹⁹ The MB forms the culmination of these thinkers' thoughts in a grassroots movement that would later influence the course of Egyptian history. However, the focus of this dissertation is not on the Brotherhood, since it is neither Salafist nor Jihadist. Ḥasan al-Banna is mentioned here for his influence on Sayyid Quṭb, as will be explained later on.

During the life of the thinkers previously mentioned, many powers were at play and Western colonial influence reached its zenith in the Middle East and North Africa. Partly as a counter-reaction to this influence, "reformation" along proto-Salafist and Islamist lines was on the rise. A "renaissance" or "awakening" in Islamic thought (*nahḍa*) in the late nineteenth century, also influenced this process. At the same time, the Saudi Wahhabis slowly took up their place in the region and started spreading their own form of Salafism. These Wahhabi Salafists were mostly occupied with purity and *da'wa* (preaching).¹²⁰ So, just like the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, the expansion of Saudi power combined with Wahhabi preaching does not explain the rise of Jihadism; it merely contextualized the environment of the proto-Salafist thinkers. To understand the origin of this violence as a form of contention, one has to follow the path set out in Egypt.

The split of the sixties: Sayyid Quṭb's influence from jail and as a martyr

The proto-Salafists cleared the path for Sayyid Quṭb (1906-66) who, despite never meeting al-Banna, was heavily influenced by him. Perhaps unexpectedly, Quṭb's Islamist mindset was not prominent when he first arrived in Cairo, apart from some anti-Western feelings. Quṭb became more outspokenly Islamist after his (forced) two-year educational mission to the United States in 1948 where he came to believe the West was morally bankrupt and Islam the only way to salvation. Upon his return in 1950, he immediately joined the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and soon filled the vacuum of power in the Brotherhood that was left after al-Banna's death in 1949.¹²¹ This happened during a structural political context of semi-colonialism wherein the monarchy staunchly supported British hegemony. All attempts to modernize Egypt into a strong independent country were crippled and limited modernization only served the rich classes. The MB operated in a social context as a slightly reactionary movement, playing to the opinions of the poor. Since the end of the Second World War, the anti-British forces stood more unified,

¹¹⁹ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 57.

¹²⁰ Lauzière, *The making of Salafism*, 164-5.

¹²¹ Based on oral classes from Professor Caroline Janssen.

including the MB.¹²² Al-Banna believed the main problem causing the Islamic world to weaken was the lack of Islam in the day-to-day management of the state and the lives of its citizens. True belief, said Qutb, should be shown through social action.¹²³ The rise of these true Muslims will eventually lead to a true Islamic state.¹²⁴ Initially, this was the core of Qutb's teachings, but a radical change was needed in order to solidify his views.

The political context of Egypt changed drastically over the span of a few years. With the Nasserist coup in 1952, there came an end to the Western control over Egypt, which is why the MB initially supported the coup committed by the Young Officers. The uneasy marriage between the MB and the state soon ended because Nasser was not planning to share his power. Qutb's prominent role in the Movement landed him in jail. The government crackdown is paralleled with a radicalization in Qutb's views on Islam, politics and violence that would later lead to a split in the entire Brotherhood. Qutb's existentialist doubts about the state as a truly Islamic entity were caused by the brutal crackdowns, for why would an Islamic regime repress its devout subjects? According to his later writings, society fell in what he called *Jāhiliyya*, a "condition" of ignorance, historically referring to pre-Islamic times, meaning that Muslims have lost their religion due to the corrupt Western influence.¹²⁵ The only answer is Islam, and to dictate every aspect of Muslim life through Sharia (due to *ḥākimiyya*, only God is the rightful ruler), thusly, an ideal Islamic society will arise. It is not enough to recognize Islam is the answer; one should act on these convictions. The way this should be achieved according to Qutb is through Jihad, which he defines as a "permanent revolution of the Islamic movement", showing the centrality of Jihad in Islamic Activist thought.¹²⁶ He advocated for this Jihad to be carried out by a "Vanguard", an elitist armed group serving to defend the movement initially. This Vanguard should strive to reach all "milestones" as prescribed by Qutb in his book.¹²⁷ The will to organize this Vanguard in this specific way resulted from the political context Qutb and the MB found themselves in; a single-party regime which suppressed popular participation in politics, coupled with the worldwide rise of left-winged groups espousing this Vanguardist (Leninist) vision of struggle.¹²⁸

¹²² Based on oral classed from Dr. Brecht De Smet (Politics of the contemporary Middle East).

¹²³ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 79.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 80-1.

¹²⁵ Khatab, "Hakimiyyah and jahiliyyah," 164-5.

¹²⁶ See chapter four "Jihad in the Cause of Allah" Sayyid Qutb, "Milestones/ *mu'ālim fī al-ṭarīq*," (Arabic, 1964, Kazi Publications: Egypt). And Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 160-1.

¹²⁷ A.B. al-Mehri, *Milestones, Ma'ālim fī 'l-tareeq*, by Sayyid Qutb (Birmingham: Maktabah, 2006): 28.

¹²⁸ Thomas Pierret, "Salafis at war in Syria: Logics of fragmentation and realignment," in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 143.

Quṭb's ideas spread among members of the MB and left their mark on history. Nevertheless, within the formal organization of the MB, Quṭb's influence was limited when his book "milestones" was refuted by the MB's guide al-Huḍaybi, in an attempt to prevent Quṭb's ideas to tarnish the group. This did not prevent Nasser's repression to target the MB, which led to an increasing amount of exiled Brothers, causing the rise of a global network for the MB. In Egypt, Sayyid Quṭb and many others who were imprisoned and killed under the Nasserist crackdown became the first modern-day Muslim martyrs. At first, this solidified the Brotherhood as a legitimate opponent of the state.¹²⁹ Yet increasingly, the MB was scrutinized from both the outside and within its own ranks as questions arose about its own mistakes that contributed to its weakness. As the political climate shifted with the rise of a new Egyptian strongman, Sādāt, the faith of the Muslim Brotherhood changed with it. Sādāt aimed to co-opt the MB in his fight against leftist groups, which was appealing to the more moderate politically oriented Brothers who wanted to use their political participation as a tool to destroy the regime from within. On the other hand, Quṭb had inspired many to follow a more radical path.¹³⁰ The advantage of this radical wing was that Quṭb died before expounding on all of his ideas, leaving them open for interpretation.¹³¹ In the end, Quṭb's most important lesson was to use theology for very clear political goals.

Many of the exiled Brothers found shelter in Saudi Arabia and even though the Wahhabis were the only ones allowed to publicly deal with religious issues, the Saud family nonetheless made use of the members of the MB, for they were much more educated at that time. King Faisal saw in them a helping hand to create a religious counter-ideology, combatting Nasser's pan-Arabism.¹³² The Brothers took a central place in modernizing the Saudi education and thus heavily impacted the nation's youth. This led to an intense cross-fertilization between the political brotherhood and the traditionalist Wahhabis, which in part helped create a new, internationalist, Salafism.¹³³ The faith of these Brothers will be discussed later on, in the section on the *ṣaḥwa*-movement.

The seventies and eighties: Further radicalization

In the sixties and early seventies, the birth of the Salafi-Jihadist movement could be witnessed, even though it still had to go through its formative years of the seventies and eighties to become

¹²⁹ Gilles Kepel, "the Brotherhood in the Salafist universe," *Current trends in Islamist ideology* 6 (2008): 20-1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 22-4.

¹³¹ Ibid., 25.

¹³² Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011): 38-42.

¹³³ Ibid., 23-4.

what we know today. All the ingredients were present: the repression, radicalization, ideologues that used early Islamic sources, and an internationalizing network, but what solidified this evolution? Salafi-Jihadist movements ideologically grouped themselves around the question how to respond to the political structures where un-Islamic leaders ruled over Muslims.¹³⁴ In addition, on a regional scale, the population was still shocked by the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, which was sufficient evidence for radicals that Nasser's Arab Nationalism was a failing ideology.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, economic macro-structures drove these states to the more conservative oil-patrons of the Arabian Peninsula, which pressured them into partly reconciling with their Islamist subjects. This led to the Egyptian co-option of the MB by Sādāt. As the Brotherhood was happily wooed by the regime, that very same regime grew closer to the West via Sādāt's neoliberal Open Door policy.¹³⁶ On a social level, this did not lead to prosperity for all, but to more inequality.¹³⁷ All those aspects led radical groups to a critical scrutiny of their experiences in the Muslim Brotherhood, which they deemed too favorable to the failing Nationalist regime.

This scrutiny meant an expansion of the word Jihad as it was introduced by Sayyid Quṭb through the works and deeds of various Qutbian-inspired groups in Egypt and, eventually, far beyond. The reason that Quṭb's work became more popular was that the ideology was easily relatable to larger political and economic macro-structures. For instance, the global influence of the West could be seen through Quṭb's work as a threatening invasion of Western culture in Egypt. Coupled with the government's own continuous propagation of religious tropes, this caused the rise of the Islamist movement. Paradoxically, the United States propagated this religious devotion as a way to maintain their grip on the Middle East in light of the communist threat.¹³⁸ On a social level, those leading the Islamist surge were intellectuals who graduated after a government effort to modernize and secularize education. Consequently, these leaders had a more autodidactic knowledge of religion. Thus, they did not follow traditional (Azhari/Ulama) networks of religious knowledge and were able to create a new tradition with a more diffuse corpus of knowledge. They were freely interchanging between their modern and Quranic knowledge.¹³⁹ This is also obvious in the various interpretations of Quṭb's work, which sparked various – rivaling- movements. What all these Islamists had in common was their focus

¹³⁴ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 93.

¹³⁵ Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 150.

¹³⁶ Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 151.

¹³⁷ Based on oral classed by Dr. Brecht De Smet.

¹³⁸ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 103.

¹³⁹ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 102-3.

on the Near Enemy -the regime- instead of the Far Enemy -the West.¹⁴⁰ The first of these movements was the Military Academy Organization in 1971, which wanted to topple the government to create a truly Islamic state. Their plan failed and members were tried.¹⁴¹

In the early seventies, a more successful group stepped into the limelight, *takfīr wa al-hijra*. As their name suggests they declared all non-members unbelievers, but decided in 1971 it was not yet time to attack, instead opting to pull back from society until their numbers grew. Nevertheless, this group was destroyed as well after they assassinated a former minister in 1977.¹⁴² Which radical group would then be able to carry the torch? The Jihad Organization came to the fore in 1980 and members believed that a coup would immediately be followed by popular revolt against the state. They believed only the state and its leader were unbelievers, or *tāghūt* and all other Muslims were just innocent because of a lack of education.¹⁴³ The Jihad Organization found a partner in the *jamā'āt 'islāmiyya*. These university groups dominated political life at Egyptian universities in the early seventies and were initially backed by the government but soon grew independent. The goal of the *jamā'āt* was the creation of a truly Islamic society by peaceful means, but after banishment by the regime, its members turned more radical and paired with the Jihad Organization.¹⁴⁴ As Jihad group's ideologue, Muḥamad 'abd al-Salām Faraj believed Jihad was more than just defense of Islam, it was the spreading of the religion. Jihad is an individual duty upon all Muslims according to him.¹⁴⁵ His writings induced another member of the group to successfully kill Sādāt in 1981, which (again) led to severe repression and a split between the allies of the *jamā'āt* and Jihad.¹⁴⁶ The *jamā'āt* and other radicals continued their networks underground in a bid to shape the next generations of militants.¹⁴⁷

An important member of the Jihad Group was Ayman al-Zawāhirī, one of those who survived the brutal crackdown after the assassination. Al-Zawāhirī too was heavily influenced by Quṭb and saw it as his duty to shape his writings into a concrete worldview. As al-Zawāhirī fled Egypt, his views and those of others like him, took shape in light of political and social shifts in the Middle Eastern landscape.¹⁴⁸ Before those views crystalized in the nineties, it is

¹⁴⁰ For example, how Faraj explains in his booklet the Absent Duty that it is not true that Israel be freed before anything else.

¹⁴¹ Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 155.

¹⁴² Ibid., 155. And Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 96.

¹⁴³ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 97.

¹⁴⁴ Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, 153.

¹⁴⁵ Based on a personal translation of Mohammed 'Abd al-Salām Faraj, "The Absent Duty/ Farīda al-ġā'iba" (Arabic, estimated 1981-2, Egypt).

¹⁴⁶ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 125-6.

¹⁴⁷ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 129.

¹⁴⁸ Kepel, "The Brotherhood," 25.

crucial to investigate which events helped create what we know as Salafi-Jihadism today. Thanks to Faraj and other Egyptian Qutbian adherents, Jihad had already evolved from its origins to defend Islam to a more assertive meaning, including importantly the Jihad against other Muslims who are considered apostates.

Not only did the repression after Sādāt's assassination push many Islamists (and Salafists) to explore new regions, other forces were at work as well. Two years before the assassination, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 shook the (Muslim) world. This motivated Saudi Arabia to significantly increase its religious propaganda worldwide, in a bid to counter Iranian influence (it would be wrong to look at this solely as a Sunni-Shia divide, as much more economical and political factors are at play in this regional divide).¹⁴⁹ The world witnessed the rise of the "Petro-Islam" and Islamic business, heavily supported by Reagan in his fight against communism and socialism.¹⁵⁰ The docile and state-focused Wahhabism propagated by the Saudis was also ideal for dictators across the Arab world fearing revolutionary Islamism. Another consequence of the successful Iranian Revolution was the rise in anti-Shia discourse among Salafists who accused the Shia of *bid'a* and *shirk* (polytheism).¹⁵¹

In order to follow the trail of Jihad through time, the focus now moves to Afghanistan, which had been invaded by the Soviets in 1981.¹⁵² As the Islamic Conference condemned the invasion, many Muslim nations –and the United States- started to fund guerilla warfare against the Soviets. It is there that a young and wealthy Saudi from Yemeni origins named 'Usāma Bin Lādin (1957-2011) would shape his purist ideology and simplistic vision of militancy into a concrete organization. He became his family's representative in the Afghan Jihad and was mainly concerned with funding the local *mujāhidīn* and assuring communication.¹⁵³ Before Bin Lādin rose to fame, there was another Arab active; 'Abd allah Yūsuf 'Azām (1941-89), nicknamed the "Imam of Jihad". 'Azām was born in Palestine and lived in Jordan where he became involved in the Palestinian cause while studying and traveling throughout the Arab world until someone introduced him to his destiny: Afghanistan.¹⁵⁴ 'Azām didn't actively participate in fighting and was more occupied by writing, *da'wa* (preaching), and using his influence to try and convince all Muslims that Jihad in Afghanistan was an individual duty (*fard*

¹⁴⁹ Joas Wagemakers, "Soennitische islamisten en de erfenis van de Islamitische Revolutie," *ZemZem* 4 (2009): 55-9. For an interesting analysis of this conflict, see: Samira Bendadi, "Midden-Oosten: het tijdperk van de sektarische identiteiten," *MO* 124 (2017): 54-7.

¹⁵⁰ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 104-6.

¹⁵¹ Wagemakers, "Soennitische islamisten en de erfenis van de Islamitische Revolutie," 58-9.

¹⁵² Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's endless war: State failure, regional politics, and the rise of the Taliban*, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001).

¹⁵³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 15-17.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 81-91.

‘ayn). By making this Jihad an individual duty, he frames it as a defensive Jihad, with the ‘umma (Islamic community) being under threat on a global scale. Although he failed to convince most Muslims of his cause, he found a partner in the newcomer Bin Lādin and together they created the Service Bureau (*maktab al-mukhadamāt*) to coordinate the Arab volunteers coming to Afghanistan.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile towards the end of the eighties, Bin Lādin stepped out of ‘Azām’s shadow. He became an important figure in his own right due to their ideological and political differences, especially since Bin Lādin opposed the idea of integrating Arab fighters with Afghan units. This is why he created the “base of information” (*Qā’idat al-Ma’lumāt*) to unify all Arab volunteers.¹⁵⁶ Not long after, in 1989, the USSR withdrew, ‘Azām was assassinated, and all the “Afghan Arabs” started to return home. ‘Azām is still seen as the “father of the Afghan Arabs” and is credited for two things. Firstly for theorizing the “global jihad”, and second, for bringing the force of Jihad to focus on the Far Enemy and on those Western powers who dared to occupy Muslim territories. He is also the one who abandoned the idea of Quṭb that only a Vanguard was needed for Jihad, and preferred the idea of a “base” (*qā’ida*) with strong military roots not through terrorist attacks but through guerilla warfare. By conquering Afghanistan it could become the base to reconquer all Muslim territories in a large pan-Islamist project.¹⁵⁷ Lastly, he contributed strongly to creating a cult of martyrdom among radical Sunni Muslims.¹⁵⁸ It is clear how strongly ‘Azām influenced Bin Lādin. Bin Lādin then grew closer to Ayman al-Zawāhirī with whom he shaped the legacy of ‘Azām and Quṭb into a coherent worldview. To follow this ideological evolution, it is necessary to go back to the heart of the Middle East where social, political, and economic changes shaped the nineties.

The nineties: the stage is set

As Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, a new chain of events unfolded which influenced the Muslim world. Firstly, the impact of the Gulf War on politics in the region and Salafists in general will be discussed. Secondly, the following part will detail the influence of these events on Al-Qaida. To understand the evolution Salafi-Jihadism in the nineties, a loose thread on the story on the Muslim Brotherhood and Sayyid Quṭb (see supra) will be picked up.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 93-4.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁵⁷ For this analysis of ‘Azām’s work I am indebted to Kepel and Milelli: Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 97-101. I also used my own translation of ‘Abd allah Yūsuf ‘Azām, “Join the Caravan/ *‘ilḥāq bi-l-qāfila*,” (Arabic, 1987, Afghanistan).

¹⁵⁸ This is ultimately very clear from his book *Join the Caravan*,

As was mentioned, many Brothers fled to Saudi Arabia in the sixties and seventies due to the severe Nasserist repression, and took up educational positions there. Throughout the following years, the Brotherhood was able to establish a strong influence in Saudi universities.¹⁵⁹ As the Saudi youths became heavily influenced by their thought, they did not forget their Wahhabi roots. It is then that a rise of new terminology can be witnessed: *ṣaḥwa* (or Islamic awakening). This refers to an Islamic resurgence since the sixties, which went against social norms of that time in Saudi Arabia because their belief-system encompassed all aspects of daily life, even speech. It is ideologically located at the juncture of the Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood schools of thought. These two traditions are highly distinct. On the one hand the MB is, true to Hassan al-Banna's legacy, highly political and anti-Imperialist. Although in later times the Qutbist faction became more dominant, partly due to the influence of Qutb's brother Muhammad, one of the fathers of the *ṣaḥwa*-movement. This Qutbist influence shifted the focus of the MB in Saudi Arabia away from the West, and to the "godless regimes" of the Middle East.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, The Wahhabi tradition is primarily religious and based on dogma and piety, focussing its efforts against non-Wahhabists within Islam.¹⁶¹ The members of the *ṣaḥwa*-movement coupled methods and thinking of the MB (especially on politics and culture) with the strongly religious creed of the Wahhabis (especially on theological matters).¹⁶² This movement is the first spark in Salafist politicization. That is why they will be referred to as "proto-political Salafists", since their political views are not (yet) fully separated from their religion. They already displayed an interest in their social, economic, and political environment (their reality or *wāqiʿ*).¹⁶³

The *ṣaḥwa*-movement grew and went through various transformations both internally, on a meso-level (with various sub-groups or *jamaʿāt*) and externally, in relation to the Saudi government and Ulama.¹⁶⁴ Inevitably, there were some who opposed the "sahwis". Most crucially, the Jihadi-movement proved to be a rival despite having many similar views. As the invasion of Afghanistan moved many (young) Saudis to act through Jihad, a new powerful network started to emerge, threatening *ṣaḥwa*-dominance. In addition to this threatening influence the Jihadists promoted a more internationalist Salafism and Islamic activism, whilst

¹⁵⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 42-50.

¹⁶⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 42-53.

¹⁶¹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 51-2.

¹⁶² Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 52.

¹⁶³ Meijer, "Conclusion," 228.

¹⁶⁴ This evolution is not the main concern of this thesis however, and for more information, I highly recommend Lacroix's extensive analysis of the Sahwa movement, especially the first three chapters.

the *ṣaḥwa*-movement operated on a more national level.¹⁶⁵ Notwithstanding the fact that the Sahwis also propagated Jihad in Afghanistan, they disagreed with ‘Abd allah Yūsuf ‘Azām that it should be an individual duty (*fard ‘ayn*), and certainly that it should be the most imperative of the individual duties. They disagreed firstly because the Afghans followed the Maturidi *madhab*, which is more inclined to Sufi practices. A true Muslim should put his efforts into preaching *tawhīd*, and thus bring the Afghan Muslims into the fold, before ever considering Jihad by the sword. Secondly, they disagreed because they believed the Afghan armed Jihad to be nothing more than serving American objectives. In contrast, their focus was on the Arabian Peninsula before anything else. With this argument, they mainly rebutted the internationalism of the Jihadists. Lastly, and more unspoken, they just feared that if they supported the armed Jihad, they would lose their influence completely in favor of ‘Azām.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, most Jihadists were recruited from Saudi *ṣaḥwa*-circles.¹⁶⁷

Simultaneously with these evolutions, the *ṣaḥwa*-movement became more and more hostile towards the traditional Ulama at first and later on the Saudi regime as well. This intensified when the government got closer to the United States. These hostilities urged the Saudis to take steps to regulate and coerce the Sahwis into submission.¹⁶⁸ Then, in 1990, the ultimate catalyst emerged: The Gulf War Crisis. The Saudis worked closely together with their American allies but were heavily criticized for it. To offset their critics, they started a counterattack through the loyal Wahhabi Ulama, which denounced the Sahwi views, thus creating and perpetuating the social divisions within their society. Because, as the elite and loyal Ulama clamoured to support the regime, it became obvious to the population that the elites had been co-opted.¹⁶⁹ The dissatisfied protesters were mostly Sahwi and grew more and more powerful, claiming the title “Ulama” for themselves and mobilizing the masses for protest.¹⁷⁰ They called for an Islamic democracy, in accordance with Sharia, and aimed to strengthen the role of religion in society and politics. In 1993, the rising tension and repression pushed the *ṣaḥwa*-movement into the arms of their historic opponents, mainly the Jihadists.¹⁷¹ ‘Usāma Bin Lādin was initially mostly concerned with regional insecurities, even offering to help protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq with his mujahideen. He initially remained indifferent to the Sahwi

¹⁶⁵ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 109.

¹⁶⁶ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 110-3.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-2.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 166-75.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

struggle for political participation.¹⁷² It wasn't until the Saudi's stripped Bin Lādin of his citizenship in 1993 that he became an avid supporter of the *ṣaḥwa*-insurrection.¹⁷³ This newfound alliance indicates that a closing of the political arena to open participation of the *ṣaḥwa*-movement led them to the Jihadist path. The Sahwis became much more supportive of fighting Jihad abroad, abandoning their initial nationalist reservations. In 1995 the Sahwis and Jihadists committed their first joint action: a car-bomb explosion.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile the Gulf War had other major implications. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait gave the United States the leverage it needed to become a major player in regional politics.¹⁷⁵ The US-support for its allies in the Gulf War meant that those regimes that had tried to play both sides of the fence (the USSR and USA) now decisively chose for the West. On a macro-political level, these regimes fossilized and became more authoritarian in a way, trying to break all Islamist opposition (as Saudi Arabia had broken the *ṣaḥwa*-protests).¹⁷⁶ The regimes attempted to stay in control but globalisation put democracy first on the protestors' agenda. As the regimes were forced by the West to allow some form of democratization, some Salafist movements showed their pragmatism by compromising and participating in liberalization in a bid to enter the political arena.¹⁷⁷ This split within the Salafist movement showed that it was now more than ever impossible to consider it a singular trend.¹⁷⁸ In general, most Salafists still preferred to stay out of politics, but for Jihadists a completely new age began. With Islamists (and some Salafists) partaking in conventional politics, armed violence became less popular and thus the violent groups began to lose popular support. Violence became increasingly international and radical.¹⁷⁹ This evolution was strengthened by highly efficient national repression, pushing Jihadists into the international sphere. Not only did the government repress radical groups, they actively sought to provoke deadly violence among the radical groups in order to delegitimize them.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, networks created in Afghanistan were highly international, and put to use connecting "Afghan Arabs" all over the MENA region.¹⁸¹ Since the Gulf War also had devastating economic consequences, poverty pushed more people to

¹⁷² Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 21.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 195.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 196.

¹⁷⁵ Peter W. Rodman, "Middle east diplomacy after the Gulf War," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 2 (1991): 3-4.

¹⁷⁶ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 25.

¹⁷⁷ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 137.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹⁷⁹ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸¹ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 140-1.

joining in Jihad.¹⁸² Furthermore, on a cultural level, people felt threatened ideologically by the West and found comfort in traditionalist values espoused by radicals. During the nineties, there was one group above all others that best embodied this internationalist radical anti-Western sentiment: Al-Qaida.

Al-Qaida's evolution: from Afghanistan to a worldwide franchise

The previous segment described the wider political atmosphere of the nineties: the Gulf War, globalization, and social conflicts. The following section will evaluate how Al-Qaida adapted itself to this scheme. The eighties had ended with the creation of the “Base of information” (*Qā'idat al-Ma'lumāt*) and 'Usāma Bin Lādin moving closer to Ayman al-Zawāhirī. Along the way, the shorter name “Al-Qaida” became in vogue, signifying both “the base” and “the rule”: a base to impose the Rule of God.¹⁸³ This name represents al-Qaida's structure; a solid elitist group (base, or “vanguard”) of committed militants. On a meso-level, the organization consisted of a loose international network. As the Afghan veterans started to return home, they initiated a process of “Afghanizing” in their country of origin, turning them into the battlefield in the struggle against the unbelievers.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, many other fighters weren't able to return home and were thus rendered stateless, traveling between new conflicts (Jihads).¹⁸⁵ Bin Lādin was the ultimate example of the uprooted internationalist Jihad: stripped of his nationality, he turned to Sudan where he initiated his first African connection.¹⁸⁶ Traveling back and forth through Yemen, Sudan, and Afghanistan, Bin Lādin united various factions of Islamists in the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders”, declaring war on all enemies of Islam.¹⁸⁷ This organization is now considered synonymous with Al-Qaida.

Al-Qaida strived for spectacular actions, as shown by the 1993 WTC bombing, and the Kenya and Tanzania attacks of 1998. These were not just wanton acts of violence without motive, as some would suggest. Firstly, the dates, targets, and locations always carried a very specific meaning, infused with Islamic symbolism.¹⁸⁸ In addition, Bin Lādin was a child of his time and understood the free media landscape which, no longer under control of the regimes, craved real-time dramatic images.¹⁸⁹ He was also aware of his political surroundings and

¹⁸² Nazem Abdalla, “Impact of the Gulf crisis on developing countries,” *report for the UNDP's Gulf Task Force* (1992).

¹⁸³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 35-6.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸⁵ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 146.

¹⁸⁶ Princeton N. Lyman and J. Stephen Morrison, “The terrorist threat in Africa,” *Foreign Affairs* (2004): 75-86.

¹⁸⁷ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 147.

¹⁸⁸ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

understood the need to oscillate between various semantic registers in order to appeal to a wider public, which is why he used a different –more political- vocabulary in his international messages.¹⁹⁰ For maximum impact on the minds of the enemy (the “infidels”), he brought the fight beyond the borders of the *dār al-‘Islām*, targeting civilians in the West and Middle East. By internationalizing violence and attacking different locations, Bin Lādin de-territorialized Jihad. Violent Jihad became part of the daily lives of Muslims.¹⁹¹ Although the violence was not random and clearly targeted Saudi and US interests, Al-Qaida lacked ideological depth. The times that leaders of radical movements were highly trained in religious affairs had passed, Bin Lādin’s autodidactic approach allowed him to appeal to a wide audience by changing and adapting his message at will.¹⁹² This incoherent message never included references to a social project in which Al-Qaida showed clear hopes or realistic steps towards establishing a truly Islamic society or state.¹⁹³ Bin Lādin also influenced the number two of Al-Qaida: Ayman al-Zawāhirī. Under influence of Bin Lādin, he started to believe the fight against the Far Enemy should hold primacy over the Near Enemy on which he had always focused during his time in Egypt.¹⁹⁴

9/11: repercussions

As Bin Lādin’s Jihad moved further and further West, Al-Qaida set its sights on the WTC-towers in New York. With this attack, they made Jihad a focal point of the international community. It is not clear whether Bin Lādin fully comprehended the political repercussions on a global level such as the war in Iraq (see *infra*).¹⁹⁵ The War on Terror that ensued greatly influenced the organizational structures of Al-Qaida. As Bin Lādin was forced into hiding, the influence of the core structure (Al-Qaida Central) waned.¹⁹⁶ Bush’s harsh response also diminished possibilities for a central network. Many fractions and networks within the larger network spawned. Some wanted to join the Al-Qaida umbrella of international resistance against the West, hoping to increase their notoriety. Others within the network started to criticize Bin Lādin for damaging the Salafist agenda with his radical violence.¹⁹⁷ The

¹⁹⁰ See for example: N.N. “Full text: bin Laden's 'letter to America',” The Guardian, consulted 7/09/2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>.

¹⁹¹ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 156.

¹⁹² Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 30.

¹⁹³ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 147.

¹⁹⁴ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 156.

¹⁹⁵ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 191.

¹⁹⁶ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 37-8.

¹⁹⁷ Floor Janssen and Joas Wagemakers, “Is al-Qa’ida echt failliet?” *Internationale Spectator* 65, no. 7/8 (2011): 393-4.

organization evolved into a layered structure with AQ-Central as the highest echelon, with the next level being “franchises” which are mostly controlled by a mixture of the “Afghan Arabs” and locals (for example, AQMI). These franchises fight both their local regimes as well as Western targets.¹⁹⁸ Al-Qaida became more of a brand name.¹⁹⁹ The last level is that of the non-affiliated sympathizers, attracted by propaganda. This propaganda and the spread of the layers helped spread Jihadist ideology. Consequently, Jihadism spread and infused conflicts that, originally, had local non-religious roots (like in Mali).

Although the goals and ideology of the organization remained unchanged with an anti-Western rhetoric to protect and free the ‘*Umma* through Jihad, most of the attacks focused on the Near Enemy.²⁰⁰ The various franchises exist in a political structure where social disparities and sectarian conflicts were (and are) prevalent, allowing them to exploit local discontent. Combined with state-repression, the local franchises tended to refocus their attention on the more immediate (Near) enemy.²⁰¹ As will be shown further on with the example of AQMI, these franchises slowly became able to elaborate on a local political and social agenda (e.g. creation of an Emirate, strategies towards non-Muslims, Islamic values...).²⁰²

Al-Zarqāwī’s Iraqi experience

One of the first independent franchises to be fully operational was the Iraqi branch (AQI), led by Jordanian-born ‘Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī (1966-2006). Through Salafist influences in his homeland, he turned to Pakistan in the nineties where he met his spiritual master ‘Abū Muḥammad al-Maḥdī (see *infra*). In the late nineties, he reallocated to Kurdistan, where he created the umbrella-group ‘*Anṣār al-Islām* in 2001, which focused on attacking Kurds. Meanwhile, he also started attacking Iraq’s Shia population and, since the American invasion in 2003, American soldiers.²⁰³ With his attacks on the Shia population, he exposed the looming religious division of Iraq. His decision to focus his Jihad on Iraq was mainly because of its central location in the Middle East, an ideal base from which to spread his Jihad. First, he would need to unite the various Sunni factions.²⁰⁴ In 2004, Al-Zarqāwī pledged his allegiance to Bin

¹⁹⁸ Thomas, *Généralisations djihadistes*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ As heard on a Jihadology-podcast with Barack Mendelsohn, who wrote a book about Al-Qaida’s franchising strategy.

²⁰⁰ Janssen and Wagemakers, “Is al-Qa’ida echt failliet?” 395.

²⁰¹ Thomas, *Généralisations djihadistes*, 21.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰³ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 242-6.

²⁰⁴ Al-Zarqāwī explained his plans in his letter to Bin Lādin and al-Zawāhirī, for an English translation, I used Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 251-67.

Lādin. AQ-central grudgingly allowed al-Zarqāwī to join the AQ umbrella and rename his organization al-Qaida in Mesopotamia in order to keep Jihad relevant.²⁰⁵ This merger happened notwithstanding the fact that there were many disagreements between the two in approach, tactics, and ideology.

Al-Zarqāwī was much less educated than most of his predecessors who waged Jihad in Afghanistan. He represented a new generation of Jihadists from lower social classes who compensated their lack of education with increased radicalism and a more practical approach. To legitimize his extreme use of violence, he needed to reinterpret Jihad in itself. He was convinced that all the ideological theorization around Jihad stood in the way of actually participating in Jihad. Therefore, the emphasis came to be on action, which allowed him to put violence markedly central in his ideology. This violence was widely propagated through al-Zarqāwī's innovative use of propaganda, for example broadcasting executions.²⁰⁶ Likewise, he made extensive use of *takfīr*, especially against the Shia population.²⁰⁷ The anti-Shia strategy put the Nearby Enemy first, before the West.²⁰⁸ His Shia focus exacerbated sectarian tensions that had been looming in Iraq for some decades. This sectarian Jihad quickly turned into an outright sectarian civil war that still drags on in Iraq until this day.²⁰⁹

On a macro-level, this new Jihadi strategy had many consequences. In 2006, al-Zarqāwī was assassinated and local Sunnis revolted against his Jihadist ideals, which was a true PR-disaster for AQ. He became one of the Martyrs for Jihad, but Iraq never really overcame the Sunni-Shia sectarian division. Moreover, his emphasis on violence estranged many Muslims, damaging the chances of Jihad in the long term.²¹⁰ At an organizational level, it is unlikely that AQ-central viewed his death as a loss since his independence was a liability. Concerning their franchising methods AQ also learned from their experiences with al-Zarqāwī. Instead of just allowing any organization to join, the union was more codified and prepared, carefully choosing when to announce a merger based on the political landscape. This shows early attempts of AQ to think politically and act within the political landscape as a Social Movement. AQ had to reconsider its methods and how they were legitimized on a micro-level. Still, it was not until 2011 that a true existentialist crisis came about in Jihadist circles.

²⁰⁵ As heard on a podcast on Jihadology with Barack Mendelsohn.

²⁰⁶ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 238.

²⁰⁷ Oral information from dr. Fabio Merone.

²⁰⁸ Kepel and Milelli, *Al Qaeda in its own words*, 37.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 238-40.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

Al-Maqdisi: The present-day ideologue

Before discussing the importance of 2011, one sidetrack is needed: ‘Abū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, a Jihadi ideologue (or *mufaḥirīn*). Little is known about him, but as his name suggests he is Palestinian, and grew up in Kuwait. In contrast to his former protégé al-Zarqāwī, al-Maqdisī is highly educated and aims to theorize Jihad. His ideology is best described by Joas Wagemakers who calls him a Quietist Salafi-Jihadist.²¹¹ His thought is influenced by Saudi Salafists (which is why he appeals more to them than to Jordanian Salafists, who blamed him for not partaking in any fighting), and by Ibn Taymiyya. He believes all present-day rulers in the Muslim World are disbelievers because they do not apply full Sharia, which is against *tawḥīd al-rububiyya*.²¹² Because of this, Jihad against the rulers is permitted, since they are *kufār*. Despite this willingness to declare rulers as unbelievers, he does not agree with Jihadists applying *takfīr* excessively (for example against all Shia) and he focusses his attention only on the rulers.²¹³ As one of the major ideologues and contributors to Jihad, his criticism of wanton takfirism was a heavy blow for Al-Qaida (and al-Zarqāwī) as he called upon believers not to fight other Muslims.²¹⁴

Worrying about the situation in Iraq during al-Zarqāwī’s leadership around 2002, he created the website *tawḥīd*, an online library of Jihadi-Salafist literature including his own work.²¹⁵ This renowned webpage allowed him to increase his readership. With the failure of the Iraqi experiment, a critical scrutiny of the Jihadi experience was in order. Al-Maqdisī, who had always viewed Jihad more as a method than as a goal in itself, was convinced that the social component of Jihad was more important than the violence. The support of the people is crucial and therefore social consensus is needed. This shows al-Maqdisī’s strategic (and political) thinking which became highly influential, foreshadowing the reaction of Salafists (and particularly Salafi-Jihadists) in the wake of the Arab revolutions.²¹⁶

Arab Uprisings

The first part of the research question relates to the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism (especially AQ), and how it became more politically active since the Arab Uprisings of 2011. To

²¹¹ For meaning, see the introductory part. Joas Wagemakers, *A quietist jihadi: the ideology and influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012):75 and onwards.

²¹² Wagemakers, “De culture,” 84-6.

²¹³ Wagemakers, *A quietist jihadi*, 59-70.

²¹⁴ Janssen and Wagemakers, “Is al-Qa’ida echt failliet?” 393-4.

²¹⁵ This website is often referred to in literature for its extensiveness, and appeared to have consisted of an Arabic (www.tawhed.ws) and an English (www.tawhed.net) version, however both are inaccessible at the time of writing.

²¹⁶ Based on conversations with Fabio Merone, recounting his conversations with members of ‘Anṣār al-sharī’a Tunisia, who regularly referred to the al-Maqdisī forums and its content.

investigate this, a recapitulation is in order on how political Salafi-Jihadism has been viewed up to this point. As described previously in the literature review, there are three types of Salafism and political and Jihadi-Salafism are considered separate. Even so, these categories often overlap, as is shown by al-Maqdisī a quietist Salafi-Jihadist (see supra). The origins of Jihad can be found with Sayyid Quṭb, who clearly developed his ideology in dialectic response to his political surroundings of repression. Later on there is a clear split between the political wing of the Brotherhood, and those who believed in a more radical approach. Since then, Salafi-Jihadists, with al-Qaida at the forefront, have attempted to stay away from politics since they believe it transgresses against *tawḥīd*. Their actions nonetheless, have always been in a dialectic relationship with global and local political events. The emphasis has been strongly on Jihad, with a culmination in the experience of al-Zarqāwī in Iraq. Al-Maqdisī had already realized a change of mind was needed, but it took a string of revolutions to change the Salafi-Jihadist movements, combined with the death of al-Qaida's founder and charismatic leader 'Usāma Bin Lādin.

The death of its leader in May 2011 didn't influence al-Qaida's structure, which remained a nebula of franchises. On the other hand, he left a void as a symbol, which was filled by his second in command Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī.²¹⁷ Since 2011, al-Qaida's leadership has been aware of their mortality, which is why they are preparing some figureheads for the new generation, Bin Lādin's son Hamza could be one of those.²¹⁸ His death also meant a temporary lack of oversight from AQ-central, allowing local affiliates to focus more on local affairs, challenging the primacy of the Far Enemy and global Jihad.²¹⁹

What influenced AQ the most however, was the spread of the Arab revolutions. Although their rhetoric had focused greatly on the *tāghūt* Arab leaders, and their attacks had also been aimed at destroying the regimes, AQ was remarkably absent from the revolutions. Many observers thought that the secular nature of the uprisings had dealt the final blow to AQ's popularity whose numbers had already been dwindling due to a lack of legitimacy and popular support because they solely focused on religion and failed to see the dire socio-economic and cultural realities of many Muslims.²²⁰ This was however not taking into account the movement's flexibility to reinvent itself, nor the failure of many of the revolutions to end

²¹⁷ Thomas, *Génération djihadistes*, 22-3.

²¹⁸ Caroline Kenny and Brian Todd, "Osama bin Laden's son Hamza put on US terror watch list," CNN, consulted 10.09.2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/05/politics/osama-bin-laden-son-terror-watch-list/index.html>.

²¹⁹ Thomas, *Génération djihadistes*, 26.

²²⁰ Thomas, *Génération djihadistes*, 30.

society's grievances.²²¹ Nonetheless, the revolutions did cause a significant existentialist crisis within the Salafi-Jihadist community.

Firstly, the opening of political space caused bigger shifts within the Salafist community in general, not just the Salafi-Jihadist branch. On one hand, there was an emerging division between quietist Salafists. Some prominent quietist clerics who had always been mute about repression, had criticized the uprisings in 2011, believing that they might cause worse regimes to take control. This stance was solidified in the years following the revolutions, when long-term effects became visible.²²² Others disagreed with this stance and came to see the value of politics and hence moved on the spectrum towards political Salafism. On the other hand, political Salafists saw the opening of the political arena for Islamist parties like the MB as an opportunity to create political parties as well, formalizing their structures.²²³ The "politicos" employed a completely new repertoire of contention (for example sit-ins), as the younger generations moved further away from the ideological anchors that had founded modern Salafism.²²⁴ Salafists had started to mature in their conception of politics and instead of condemning politics based on it causing chaos (*fitna*), and innovation (*bid'a*), they embraced *hizbiyya* (party-politics) as a rational process of cooperation. Even when and where authoritarian practices return, it seems unlikely that this trend can be fully reversed because the modernist rights-based discourse has now entered Salafist-thought.²²⁵ The biggest threat to full acceptance of Salafists within the conventional political arena will be their ability to accept plurality, especially with regards to representation by other sectarian groups like Shia Muslims.²²⁶

Secondly, besides the general shifts among Salafists, a more profound and less researched realization shook the Salafi-Jihadist community, which is even less likely to accept plurality. The popular uprisings contradicted Salafi-Jihadists view that only a solid base or vanguard using violence could cause significant political change and topple a regime.²²⁷ Meanwhile, they saw their popularity decline as the political Salafists achieved much more from within the political arena, especially after the Muslim Brotherhood lost its legitimacy.²²⁸ This caused the rise of two tendencies within the Salafi-Jihadist community. Some Salafi-

²²¹ Janssen and Wagemakers, "Is al-Qa'ida echt failliet?" 395-6.

²²² Laurent Bonnefoy, "Quietist Salafis, the Arab Spring and the politicization process," in *Salafism after the Arab Awakening*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (London: Hurst Publishers, 2017), 209-14.

²²³ Thomas, *Générations djihadistes*, 30.

²²⁴ Meijer, "Conclusion," 230.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 234-7.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

²²⁷ Pierret, "Salafis at war in Syria," 143.

²²⁸ Thomas, *Générations djihadistes*, 30.

Jihadists saw the value of participating in other forms of contention and finding a social base to represent, not necessarily through conventional politics but through civil society.²²⁹ As they had focused on global Jihad for so long, it would be wrong to say they completely abandoned this rhetoric on an ideological level, but their day-to-day practices started to veer towards the localized approach. In this local space, they found their own spaces of political participation and contention. Others were not so quick to abandon the long traditions of armed Jihad, especially those following the trend of al-Zarqāwī. The takfirists continued to create vanguards (exclusive and uncompromising groups) that accentuate an apocalyptic vision of the world. They refused to heed al-Maqdisī's warning and continue practicing *takfīr*.²³⁰ Their violent tendencies are exemplified by the practices of the Islamic State group. These two ideal types of a Social Movement-like approach on the one hand, and a takfirist approach on the other, are not mutually exclusive and should be seen as two ends of a spectrum. Jihadists have agency and consciously move on the spectrum between the ideal types depending on their political, social, and cultural surroundings. It would be wrong to equate the Social-Movement tendency with political Salafism, since they still adhere much more to the idea and praxis of Jihad, and mostly steer clear of the conventional political arena than their counterparts.

Before putting this theory to the test by analyzing AQMI's rise in West Africa, it is interesting to discuss briefly how AQ in general embodies these two new trends. AQ's doctrine remained unchanged in its essence: rejecting the West, the Arab regimes that had managed to stay in power, and moderate Islamists.²³¹ AQ's various franchises mostly followed the first path of localizing their efforts and adapting as a network. 'Usāma Bin Lādin had, before his death, also called for patience to rebuild the lost networks, among other things this included avoiding conflict with other (political) Islamists. He believed that as these Islamists took power, the Jihadists' path would be easier than under repressive regimes. Nonetheless, when contestation grew violent (as it did in Syria) AQ fulfilled its classical role.²³² Bin Lādin's successor al-Ẓawāhirī continued his predecessor's policy as he called to support Islamic revolutions after which a good Muslim should focus his attentions on creating the Caliphate. Of course, meanwhile the enemy remains anyone who fights Islam, which is especially the West.²³³

²²⁹ Merone, "Between social contention and takfirism," 2.

²³⁰ Ibid., 3.

²³¹ Thomas, *Génération djihadistes*, 29.

²³² Ibid., 32.

²³³ Nowhere is this clearer than in al-Ẓawāhirī's "roadmap", or steps for the future. Ibid., 33-5.

Chapter two: Salafi-Jihadist evolution in West Africa

Before delving into the events in Mali after 2011, context is needed. This chapter will detail the origins of the conflict and the origins of Salafi-Jihadism in Africa to get a full understanding of the political, social, and cultural (historical) situation.

The long history of Islam in West Africa ²³⁴

Islam came to Western Africa through trade in the late seventh century, and slowly spread through the influence of traders and missionaries.²³⁵ In the thirteenth century, it became the official religion but was only practiced by the elite.²³⁶ As a minority-religion, West African Islam evolved to be open towards other religions and consequentially was heavily influenced by local animistic beliefs and Sufism.²³⁷ The seventeenth century witnessed a first challenge to this tolerant image, when a series of “Jihads” spread throughout the region with clerics challenging the rulers who were only Islamic in name.²³⁸ Puritan Muslims are thus not a foreign concept to West Africa. During the French colonial period, the Sufi-influenced tolerant form of Islam was actively propagated, as the *marabout* spiritual leaders were easily co-opted.²³⁹ It is precisely this type of Islam that is targeted nowadays by all types of puritan reformers, Islamists and Salafists alike. Under French rule, Islam became the majority-religion and flourished, yet its more puritan version was repressed because the French feared the strong transnational Islamic solidarity of these reformist movements.²⁴⁰ When colonial rule ended, attitudes of the elites towards Islam did not change because Muslims were still seen as a cause for problems. *Marabouts* continued to be co-opted and the public sphere was dominated by the state. It wasn’t

²³⁴ This is loosely based on another academic paper I wrote for the course “Islam” (Prof. Dr. Gino Schallenberg), called “Islam in Mali” tracking the historical evolution of Islam in this region, written in 2015.

²³⁵ Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 113.

²³⁶ Peter Clarke, *West Africa and Islam* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982) 41.

²³⁷ For a fascinating analysis of the life and works of al-Ḥajj al-Sālim Suwārī, a 15th century missionary who developed a theological framework for tolerant African Islam, see: Lamin Sannah, “The Origins of Clericalism in West African Islam,” *The Journal of African History* 17, no. 1 (1976): 53-68. Another author, Ousmane Kane, explains the influential opinion of Suwārī as follows: God wants some people to stay longer in the state of ignorance than others. Conversion will occur according to God’s plans, thus proselytizing and military jihads are an unacceptable interference. On the other hand, it is wrong to equate this version of “African Islam” with a standardized system. Interpretations of correct Islam vary from country to country and from city to rural areas, it also depends on race and the colonial experiences of each separate country. This “African Islam” is more prevalent for example in southern Mali, whilst the North has long had a more traditionalist Sunni interpretation.

²³⁸ Kane sees some interesting similarities between these early Jihads and those of the 20th and 21st century. Ousmane Kane, “Islamism: What is new, what is not? Lessons from West Africa,” *African Journal of International Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2008): 163-8.

²³⁹ Benjamin Soares, “Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,” *African Affairs* 105, no. 418 (2006): 83.

²⁴⁰ Benjamin Soares, “Islam and Public Piety in Mali,” in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, eds. A. Salvatore and D. Eickelman (Leiden, Brill: 2004) 207. For the spread of Islam “from below” during French colonial rule, see: Brian James Peterson, *Islamization from below: the making of Muslim communities in rural French Sudan, 1880-1960* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011).

until the late eighties that processes of democratization and liberalization started, which precipitated an increase in Islamic NGO's in West Africa.²⁴¹

As of the nineties grassroots-movements appeared throughout West Africa, often supported by Middle Eastern money, with both economic and proselytizing motives.²⁴² One of the most notable foreign movements that spread throughout the region is the Society for Spreading Faith (*jamā'a al-tablīg*), the world's biggest grassroots-movement. These are not Salafists, but conservative Sunnis who proselytize among other Muslims to lead them to a purer life. Their emphasis is on Islamic education and modesty, which they feel is not compatible with the historical "African Islam".²⁴³ They condemn violence and only believe in a personal Jihad. There is a lot of enmity between them and Jihadi-Salafists who consider *jamā'a al-tablīg* as idolatrous.²⁴⁴ Since the late nineties, they became popular in Northern Mali, particularly among the Tuareg and the leading tribe of Ifoghas.²⁴⁵ Many Malians distanced themselves from this movement after 9/11, but it never completely disappeared. Tabligi *da'wa* was only rivaled by Salafist preaching (including Wahhabis backed by Saudi Arabia), especially since the late nineties.²⁴⁶ Since Salafists preached more for social and political change (vis à vis the more individualistic approach of the *jamā'a al-tablīg*) it became increasingly popular among communities that were pauperized. For Mali, this meant that the impoverished North, where longstanding grievances against the South and its "African Islam" were widespread, was naturally more drawn to this type of preaching. So, the successful spread of Salafist Islam throughout West Africa (and especially Northern Mali) is caused by historical structural evolutions. On an economical level, countries struggled after decolonization. Autocratic rulers in many cases followed decolonization, not aiding development. When democratization finally set in, globalization perpetuated inequality.²⁴⁷ In addition, perpetual prebendalism complicated both the economic and political situation of many countries. These evolutions alone however,

²⁴¹ Chanfi Ahmed, "Introduction to special issue: performing Islamic revival in Africa," *Africa Today* 54, no. 4 (2008): vii-xiii.

²⁴² Gutelius "Islam in Northern Mali."

²⁴³ N.N. "Tablighi Jamaat," *American Foreign Policy Council*.

²⁴⁴ Lecocq and Schrijver, "The War on Terror," 145-7.

²⁴⁵ The tribal system of Malian Tuareg is too complicate to explain in this thesis. In short there are various tribes that have historical relations and hierarchical structures. The rivalries between these tribes (and sometimes internally between clans) also strongly influenced the conflict of 2012-15, with many Tuareg choosing an armed movement based on tribal allegiances. Racism between these clans also influenced shifting alliances between certain groups. For in depth research on the Tuareg tribes, I recommend the work of Baz Lecocq.

²⁴⁶ Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 211.

²⁴⁷ William F.S. Miles, *Political Islam in West Africa: State-Society Relations Transformed* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007): 8-11.

were not enough to lead to an Islamic Emirate in the region, for that, it is important to look at the evolution of AQMI, which started further north.

The rise of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb

AQMI originated in Algeria in the early nineties when a military coup prevented Islamists from ruling the country after an electoral victory, and the ensuing civil war and chaos led to the creation of The Islamic Armed Group (GIA) in 1992.²⁴⁸ Many of its members were recently returned Afghan Arabs who propagated the uncompromising Salafi-Jihadist ideology, especially in light of brutal government repression.²⁴⁹ GIA quickly radicalized and declared most outsiders apostates.²⁵⁰ As of 1994, they expanded their radius of action and turned to global terrorism, with attacks in France. These international actions did not mean a decline in local operations, and while they continued to kill many civilians throughout Algeria, GIA's support networks vanished.²⁵¹ Many within the organization understood that this was the path to self-destruction and in 1998, a large part of GIA broke off under the leadership of Ḥassān Ḥaṭṭāb and formed the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).

The genesis of the GSPC heralded a new era. There are two marked trends within its evolution; firstly an increasing alignment with AQ and secondly an expansion towards the south. Regarding the alignment with AQ, it took a couple of years before both parties conceded. Around 9/11, and especially after the Iraqi war, Ḥaṭṭāb actually tried to veer his organization away from global Jihad, but other important members disagreed; notably Nabīl Ṣaḥrāwī, who replaced Ḥaṭṭāb in 2003, and 'Abd al-Mālik Drūkdil, who replaced Ṣaḥrāwī after his death in 2004 and remains the current emir of AQMI.²⁵² Drūkdil particularly wanted to participate in the pan-Islamist approach of AQ, also in a desperate attempt to remain relevant as an organization, as their membership- numbers had been plummeting.²⁵³ Growing closer to AQ, and eventually adopting its name made GSPC more relevant. There were close ties between

²⁴⁸ The Islamist party was called *Front Islamique du Salut*. Boeke, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," 918-9.

²⁴⁹ Zemni, *Politieke islam, 9/11 en jihad*, 143.

²⁵⁰ J. Peter Pham, "Foreign influences and shifting horizons: the ongoing evolution of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (2011): 242.

²⁵¹ Alta Grobbelaar and Hussein Solomon, "The origins, ideology and development of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Africa Review* 7, no. 2 (2015): 150.

The GIA-emir Jamal Zitoune led this increase in violence against civilians. See: Guido Steinberg and Isabelle Werenfels, "Between the 'near' and the 'far' enemy: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Mediterranean Politics* 12, no. 3 (2007): 408-9.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁵³ Eric Ouellet, Jérôme Lacroix-Leclair and Pierre Pahlavi, "The institutionalization of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI)," *Terrorism and political violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 653-6. And Pham, "Foreign influences and shifting horizons," 244-6.

him and the earlier mentioned al-Zarqāwī, and Drūkdil sent many fighters to support the Iraqi Jihad to show his commitment to the global jihadist cause. This interaction brought the two groups together on an organizational level and influenced the Algerians in their tactics, for example, they started to commit suicide attacks, which wasn't done before in this region.²⁵⁴ This was combined with an alignment on an ideological level as they searched for ways to legitimize these new tactics, which they tried to do through the implementation of a cult-like status for martyrs, as is common within AQ-networks.²⁵⁵ The change on an ideological and organizational level went hand in hand with new ways of communicating these changes through media. There is a notable shift to the use of modern media, with the GSPC slowly adopting the video-format to spread their message, just as Bin Lādin had done.²⁵⁶ This alignment on an ideological level meant the acceptance of the official primacy of the Far Enemy, however, GSPC never really let go of the concept of the Near Enemy, they just reframed it and remained focused on Algerian targets. The alignment between GSPC and AQ was also positive for AQ, even though GSPC remained focused on its near enemies. AQ needed to spread its fields of operation in order to commit to their global vision of Jihad. Throughout this period of alignment, AQ could make sure that the GSPC wouldn't form a risk to their operations before eventually allowing it to adopt the brand name "Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb".²⁵⁷ Aligning with GSPC furthermore meant access to their extensive networks in Northern Africa, and to the Algerian diaspora in the West.²⁵⁸

Even though the Far Enemy became increasingly important in the GSPC's discourse, the local political, geographical, and social structures still grounded their actions and kept them focused on the Near Enemy. This is related to the second evolution, a move towards the south. This was partly due to a necessity because socially, the GSPC was not popular in Algeria, and politically the Algerian government, backed by the West, was too good at repression.²⁵⁹ The countries in the south had less funds to repress Jihadists, so they flourished. Not only was it a necessity, the south also harbored many opportunities from a strategic point of view. It lies at a crossroad between Arab and African culture and it contains many natural resources (notably oil). Additionally, the borders of the Saharan countries are virtually uncontrolled. Lastly, the

²⁵⁴ Boeke, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," 918-9.

²⁵⁵ This alignment and the risks that it entailed are explained beautifully in Ouellet, Lacroix-Leclair and Pahlavi, "The institutionalization," 657-61.

²⁵⁶ This evolution is clearly described by; Manuel R. Torres Soriano, "The Road to Media Jihad: The Propaganda Actions of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 1 (2010): 72-88.

²⁵⁷ As heard on a podcast on Jihadology with Barack Mendelsohn.

²⁵⁸ Pham, "Foreign influences and shifting horizons," 244-6.

²⁵⁹ Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 187.

inhabitants are somewhat susceptible to the Jihadist message due to historical memories of Jihad and social, economic, and political marginalization, which is particularly the case with the Malian Tuaregs that are part of this case study.²⁶⁰ On a meso-level, the GSPC was highly decentralized at this point, so it is not clear how much of the move south was part of a larger plan. One man, Mukhtār Bilmokhtār (° 1972), mainly led the southern expansion.²⁶¹ This Algerian Afghan veteran was a close friend of Ḥaṭṭāb and even though he was a part of the GSPC remained rather independent. Through various weddings, he imbedded himself in the Malian Tuareg trade networks, in order to establish a successful smuggling operation, which funded the GSPC (and later AQMI).²⁶² The trade networks managed by AQMI throughout the Sahara are built mainly on narcotics, cigarettes, and human trafficking.

The 11th of September 2007, after careful consideration, a long period of alignment, and in commemoration of 9/11, al-Ṣawāhirī finally announced the formal pledge of allegiance by Drūkdil to Bin Lādin. The GSPC officially changed to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.²⁶³ It is here that my gaze turns to the absolute meso-level to analyze the structure of this group, with the last part discussing the structural influences. First of all, AQMI isn't a strictly hierarchical organization, it is more a network with various internal factions which are often rather autonomous.²⁶⁴ A central leadership with a *shūra*-council presided over by the emir Drūkdil, leads this network, it also includes regional commanders and leaders of committees. There are four committees: the political, military, judicial, and media committee.²⁶⁵ It is especially this last committee that has evolved greatly since the creation of AQMI, with the creation of its own media service: al-Andalus Institute for Media Productions, of which many videos were used in preparation of this dissertation.²⁶⁶ Apart of the committees, it are the fighters that make AQMI interesting. Each unit is called a battalion or brigade (*katība*). The hierarchy is quite loosely structured, allowing each member and *katība* a lot of freedom. Each member swears a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) to his leader, who in turn swears allegiance to his leader and so on up the chain of command. This means that members of lower rank are not necessarily close to their senior leaders, but very close to their personal commander. The chain of command goes all the

²⁶⁰ Pham, "Foreign influences and shifting horizons," 247-52.

²⁶¹ There is an interesting rivalry between Bilmokhtār and his eternal rival 'Abū Zayd, but since the latter is already deceased, I will not discuss it further here. Although, 'Abū Zayd wielded considerable influence and had stronger ties to the leadership in Algeria.

²⁶² Ibid., 186.

²⁶³ Torres Soriano, "The Road to Media Jihad," 82-4.

²⁶⁴ An emirate here is understood at an organizational level with an emir leading a group, not in a state-sense, as we will see further on is coined in Mali.

²⁶⁵ Boeke, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," 921-4.

²⁶⁶ Torres Soriano, "The Road to Media Jihad," 84.

way to AQ-Central's leader al-Zawāhirī.²⁶⁷ The implicit code of loyalty is internalized by all members and the *bay'a* itself has Quranic origins.²⁶⁸ Therefore, each *katība* is a nucleus of loyalty based on these standards, linked together through the leaders. Ethnically speaking, these battalions, and most of the central leadership for that matter, are led by Algerians. However, as was pointed out earlier, AQMI's field of operations now greatly transcends its original heartland of Algeria. This opens the question if AQMI can just move into the sub-Saharan region without "Africanizing" its leadership. The locust of this debate was Azawad, this dissertation's case study.

Mali, an unexpected case study ²⁶⁹

This section will further delineate the macro-structures, which were briefly discussed in the introduction.²⁷⁰ In 2012, the fourth Tuareg-rebellion since Malian independence (in 1960) resulted in a full-blown civil war, not limited to the ethnic Tuareg in the north of the country.²⁷¹ Several secular elements worked together to create a perfect storm resulting in the war. First and foremost, rising poverty, caused by persistent draught and limited economic means, meant rising discontent.²⁷² The focal point of this northern discontent was the Malian state, located in the southern part of the country and led mostly by the black, southern majority. The governments increasing policy of decentralization meant that the North was on its own facing severe social tensions.²⁷³ Not only poverty and racial discontent of often 'whiter' northerners being ruled by blacker southerners caused discontent. While the Arab Uprisings of 2011 were seemingly far away on the other side of the Sahel, its influence nevertheless reached far. The fall of Qadhāfī in 2011 meant the return of the many, armed, Malian Tuareg who had been trained and fighting in his army since the seventies.²⁷⁴ Returning to their homeland in dire

²⁶⁷ Mathieu Guidère, "Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique: Le Tournant des Révolutions Arabes," *Maghreb-Machrek* 2, no. 208 (2011): 63.

²⁶⁸ Especially in the Quranic verses: al-Fath, verse 10 and al-Naḥl verse 91, which refer to the oath of Ḥudaybiyya.

²⁶⁹ This is loosely based on my bachelor-dissertation, which looked at Islam in the Malian conflict, and closely analyzed the principal groups in the conflict: Ansar al-Din, MUJAO, and AQMI: "Islam in het Malinese conflict (2012-15)" written in 2016.

²⁷⁰ The following is written based on a multitude of articles, but structurally mainly follows Alex Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, "A Handbook." and N.N. "A timeline of northern conflict."

²⁷¹ See appendix 3: Political history of the Azawad.

²⁷² I avoid here going into the greed-grievance debate and how poverty does or does not cause war. For sources, see: Richard Reeve, "Security in the Sahel: Part I- Stabilising Mali in 2013-2014," Oxford Research Group, consulted 19.03.2017, http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/stabilising_mali_2013_14.

²⁷³ Jacques Roussellier, "Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel: Al-Qa'ida's Franchise or Freelance?" *Middle East Institute* (policy brief no. 34), consulted 27.03.2017, <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Roussellier.pdf>.

²⁷⁴ Some believed these Tuareg fought on their own free will and traveled to Libya for economic purposes, where they willingly joined the army (mostly the pan-Arabic Islamic Legion). See: Jeffrey Gettleman, "Libyan Oil buys

circumstances, they resolved to liberate their ancestral home and founded the nationalistic and secular *Mouvement National pour la libération de l'Azaoud* (MNLA). Meanwhile, it was reported that armed Islamic groups were active in the North as well, especially AQMI. This resulted in a large portion of the army, mainly soldiers, accusing the president of mishandling the situation and staging a coup in March 2012.²⁷⁵ This weakened the central government enough for the MNLA to cooperate with three Salafi-Jihadi groups active in the region (AAD, MUJAO, and AQMI) and proclaim the Azawad as an independent state.²⁷⁶ Influenced by the Salafi-Jihadi movements, this state was known as “The Islamic Emirate of Azawad”.²⁷⁷ These groups weren’t keen on sharing their newfound power with more secular groups such as the MNLA, and soon after the proclamation they seized full power of the North.

The 2013 march south towards Mali’s capital Bamako by these Salafi-Jihadists sparked international concern for the country’s stability. France, the old colonial power in this part of Africa, intervened with *Opération Serval*. This mission aimed to push back the “Islamists” by cooperating with the Malian government and the expelled MNLA-rebels.²⁷⁸ In addition, a multitude of international Missions was launched to stabilize Mali and prevent the “Islamist” threat to succeed.²⁷⁹ The Islamic Emirate of Azawad was dissolved mid-2013, with Salafi-Jihadists dispersed across the Sahel-Sahara region. However, hostilities never ceased and despite the 2015 peaceaccord, the Salafi-Jihadists are more active than ever.²⁸⁰ The most important Jihadists in the area have recently joined their forces in the new movement Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (or JNIM from its Arabic initials), in March 2017.²⁸¹

Allies for Qaddafi,” The New York Times, consulted 7.05.2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/world/africa/16mali.html?_r=0. On the other hand, others believe that the Malian fighters were often forced, or at least hired to join this army; see: Andrew McGregor, “Special Commentary: Can African Mercenaries Save the Libyan Regime?” The Jamestown Foundation, consulted 7.05.2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/special-commentary-can-african-mercenaries-save-the-libyan-regime/>.

²⁷⁵ See appendix 4 “Political history of Mali and Adam Nossiter, “Soldiers Overthrow Mali Government in Setback for Democracy in Africa,” The New York Times, consulted 20.07.2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/africa/mali-coup-france-calls-for-elections.html>.

²⁷⁶ See appendix 5: Armed groups in Mali. Throughout my research I noticed the absence of any type of summary of armed groups in the Azawad, and their linkages. To help visualize and systematize the information I found, I created a timeline and summary of the most important movements.

²⁷⁷ See Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1 and 2.”

²⁷⁸ N.N. “Opération Serval,” French Badges, consulted 26.04.2017, <http://www.frenchbadges.com/fb/operation-serval/>.

²⁷⁹ These missions are European training mission in Mali (EUTM), MINUSMA by the UN, and AFISMA by the neighboring ECOWAS countries. In addition, Serval was replaced by the region-wide French mission: Berkhan.

²⁸⁰ N.N. “Ceasefire Agreement between Mali Government, Armed Groups Opens ‘Narrow Window of Opportunity’ for Peace, Under-Secretary-General Tells Security Council,” UN press, consulted 7.03.2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11443.doc.htm>. And Alex Smith, “Mali signs UN ceasefire to end conflict with northern rebels,” BBC News, consulted 22.04.2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31544438>.

²⁸¹ See appendix 5. This happened in 2017: Célian Macé, “Cette vidéo est censée situer le Sahel sur la carte du jihad global,” *Libération*, consulted 6.03.2017, http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/03/05/cette-video-est-censee-situer-le-sahel-sur-la-carte-du-jihad-global_1553316.

Although, research focusing on the role of greed, grievance, resource mobilization, and state building in the Malian civil war is lacking, that is not the aim of this thesis. For now, I contend myself with taking these macro-structures into account without delving into them in an all too elaborate fashion.²⁸² Here, emphasis will be on the organizational and ideological differences between each group, to help understand their role in relation to AQMI. The rise of these movements can be framed within the larger structural trends of how Islam in West Africa evolved (see supra). Islam spread with the help of wealthy Middle Eastern donors, but in the case of the Azawad, the Tuareg-population was already very pious.

The first group that needs to be discussed is *'Anṣār al-Dīn* (AAD) which was founded shortly after the beginning of the civil war (2012), following an internal split in the MNLA. It is the most “Malian” of the Salafi-Jihadist groups with regards to origin, members (mainly Tuareg) and objectives. Iyad Ag Ghaly, a prominent Tuareg leader who mobilized many of his tribe to join him, founded AAD. Strong ties between rivaling Tuareg tribes are crucial in forming allegiances in the Azawad region, and often a stronger mobilizer than religion.²⁸³ This sociological and cultural factor had a strong impact on the internal structure of AAD, whose hierarchy follows tribal structures and relations.²⁸⁴ Iyad Ag Ghaly is a powerful regional figure and has played an important role in previous rebellions before aligning with AQMI in 2012.²⁸⁵ Apart from the central place of Tuareg fighters, there are some reports of fighters from Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Algeria.²⁸⁶ Prior to my discussion on its ideological and religious level, it is relevant to mention that as of March 2017, AAD became part of a new group; JNIM.

With regards to the ideological and religious level, AAD is more focused on the local Malian population, than on the larger global Jihad; they prioritize the Near Enemy.²⁸⁷ At the time of the civil war, they did not fight for independence, but for the implementation of Sharia

²⁸² I discussed most of them in my bachelor dissertation.

²⁸³ Lecocq et. al., “One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts,” 347.

²⁸⁴ It is important to notice that Tuareg are a highly diverse group, similar to the Kurdish situation, with various dialects, and sometimes different ethnicities (e.g. the Bella-slave tribes within the Tuareg Cast system). Tuaregs in Mali are divided in tribal federations with horizontal and vertical relations between tribes, this is not static, but rather a fluid arrangement and tribal allegiances can evolve. Here of course, I need to heed the warnings of for example Burbaker and Laitlin’s *ethnic and nationalist violence* (1998) that ethnicity is a social construct, implementing this discussion on the Tuareg case would unfortunately bring me too far. For an excellent explanation of the Tuareg tribal system see: Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, “Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali: Approaches to Engaging Local Actors,” report for *Rand corporation* (2013). And Baz Lecocq, “A Rough Guide to Politics in Northern Mali,” in *Time for a new approach on terror in Africa?* Eds. Jean-Christophe Hoste and Julie Godin (Ghent: Academia Press, 2014), 14.

²⁸⁵ Looking at network structures, Ag Ghaly is a central player and as such, he is often mentioned in literature. Important to mention is also his strong connection to the *jamā'a al-tablīg*, who are widely accredited with converting Iyad Ag Ghaly to a more conservative lifestyle. See for example Sahla, “Mali: Broedplaats voor extremisme,” 106.

²⁸⁶ Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 204.

²⁸⁷ Dowd and Raleigh, “The myth of global Islamic terrorism,” 503-4.

in the whole of Mali (North and South). Following this path for religious freedom –as all religious political parties are banned in Mali- AAD filled a desire for people in the North to express their religious identity more outspokenly.²⁸⁸ This demand is also inherent in its name, meaning “defenders of the faith”. They aim to defend the faith by ridding Mali of all that is *shirk* (polytheism), and to uphold *tawhīd* (Unity), which in turn will lead to a virtuous Islamic society.²⁸⁹ According to Lecocq et. al., this fits into Iyad Ag Ghaly’s wider attempts to bring the Tuareg community closer in line with the worldwide –Orthodox- Sunni *Umma*. AAD believed these objectives would only be met through a rigid Salafist ideology.²⁹⁰ The Malian government could only be turned through a holy war.²⁹¹

AAD was not the sole actor in the Azawad, and the most important one is undeniably AQMI. The previous section ended with the rise of AQMI and its structure, but how does it fit into the Malian landscape? As was mentioned, the movement started spreading towards the south for a multitude of reasons such as geographical conditions, political instability, trade-networks, repressed population et cetera. There, it was especially Mukhtār Bilmokhtār’s *katība* “*al-Mulathamīn*” (the Masked Men) that became imbedded in local society through marriages and trade alliances. For a long time they operated without much contestation from competitors or the state because apart from some kidnappings and attacks, they largely occupied themselves with smuggling, which did not pose a threat to the central government in Bamako. Earlier, I posed the question of AQMI could “Africanize” in the Sahel, and as a preliminary answer I can already say there were many tensions regarding ethnicity, as well as regional prioritization. Many of the fighters and leaders in Mali felt that they were not acknowledged or respected by the AQMI-leadership in Algeria. This led to some interesting internal discussions.²⁹² Mukhtār Bilmokhtār disagreed with ‘Abd al-Mālik Drūkdil (Emir of AQMI) on financial matters (and the role of kidnappings), the acquiring of weapons, internal communication, and internal organization.²⁹³ This internal strife and Bilmokhtār’s unanswered call for more autonomy caused him to form his own group *Signers in Blood* in late 2012. Not long after that, he started to cooperate with a group that had broken away from AQMI the previous year: MUJAO.

²⁸⁸ Georg. Klute, “Post-Gaddafi repercussions in Northern Mali,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 35, no. 2 (2013): 64.

²⁸⁹ Flood, “Between Islamization and Secession,” 4.

²⁹⁰ Lecocq et. al., “One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts,” 346.

²⁹¹ Olomojobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 204.

²⁹² Discovered through left behind correspondence in Timbuktu.

²⁹³ These letters are now classified, but some were found by Associated Press. The full letters were seen by Professor Mathieu Guidère, who offered an interesting analysis in: Mathieu Guidère, “The Timbuktu Letters: New Insights about AQIM,” *Res Militaris* 4, no. 1 (2014): 25-40. And see also: Rukmini Callimachi, “In Timbuktu, al-Qaida left behind a manifesto,” AP Big Story, consulted 20.03.2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org>.

MUJAO is a splinter group that broke away from AQMI in 2011. On the organizational level, it mainly consists of Mauritians and Malians, but it rarely includes ethnic Tuareg.²⁹⁴ The relative influence of Malians in this movement is unknown but its leadership consists mostly of foreigners. The leader of the movement is the Mauritanian Hamada Ould Muhammed Kheirou. Its leader in Mali during the emirate was al-Shinqīṭī, a name referencing Mauritanian origin. This foreign leadership does not mean that the movement is perceived by locals as threatening or invasive. Concepts like “foreign” have a different nuance in the Sahara as many societies are closely linked and related. The Tuareg for example are present in much larger numbers in neighboring states like Niger.²⁹⁵ What is more important than nationality, is ethnicity and race. On an ideological level MUJAO posits itself as a multi-ethnic organization in response to racism within AQMI ranks, especially against darker skinned Africans.²⁹⁶ This would lead some to proclaim MUJAO’s ideology as “black-African Jihad”.²⁹⁷ Even though MUJAO professed to support the cause of black Africans, their actions point to the contrary, with one black disgruntled ex-commander even going as far as saying they only use black Africans as cannon fodder.²⁹⁸ Race is a tool in a wider conflict and besides these racial claims there is no clear evidence on MUJAO’s ideological orientation. As was already mentioned briefly, MUJAO did not exist for long. In early 2013, it aligned itself with Bilmokhtār’s *Signers in Blood* in a new movement called “the Sentinels” (*al-Murābiṭūn*). This happened during the existence of the Emirate but most Salafi-Jihadists were temporarily driven into the bordering desert by the French intervention in Mali soon after. To avoid confusion, while analyzing the Emirate, only the term MUJAO will be used.²⁹⁹

After this discussion of Malian politics, it is now time to turn to the final element of this thesis; how is the cooperation between these groups and AQMI a sign of a more political stance of Salafi-Jihadists. The last chapter will thoroughly examine the Azawad-case as an example of increasing politicization of Salafi-Jihadists.

²⁹⁴ Pezard and Shurkin, “Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali,” 11.

²⁹⁵ Lecocq et. al., “One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts,” 345.

²⁹⁶ Cline, “Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers,” 627.

²⁹⁷ See for example Alex Young, “Trials of Timbuktu: How Mali Can Combat Terrorism,” *Harvard International Review* 34, no. 4 (2013): 9-10.

²⁹⁸ Jessica M. Huckabey, “Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections,” *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (2013): 467-84.

²⁹⁹ This is also a consequence of the fact that the sources are not easy to date.

Chapter three: The Azawad Case

All of the above information will now be combined in this last chapter to demonstrate how AQMI has developed in the Azawad case to a more political stance. The first part details how AQMI entered the conflict, and what implications this had for the practical organization in the area. The second part concerns practical matters and the “on the ground” management of the Islamic Emirate of Azawad, based on the available sources. The third and last part is a combination of these practical matters with the larger framework to demonstrate a clear attempt by AQMI to use the local space as a place for contention and politics.

Entering the Azawad case

As mentioned above, AQMI had been present in the Azawad region for quite some time, especially Mukhtār Bilmokhtār’s *katība* “*al-Mulathamīn*”, which had been embedded in the local tribal structures through marriages and participation in trade networks. However, the presence of AQMI changed in 2012, when various factors drove the local population of the North (mainly Tuareg) to rebel against the government in the South. The MNLA demanded Azawad-independence and claimed some initial successes. It should be clear that it is not the purpose of this thesis to claim that AQMI caused the Azawad uprising, rather, that its leaders saw an opportunity in a changing political landscape and navigated within this evolving political space. A critical moment in the conflict was when the cooperation between MNLA on the one hand and AQMI, AAD, and MUJAO became apparent. It is in this decision that the first signs of strategic thinking by AQMI become evident.³⁰⁰ In a discovered letter to AAD, Drūkdil describes how this approach would serve three main goals; (1) if the project of creating an Islamic State would fail, the blame would be shared with the nationalists; (2) the initial administration of the region and the necessary international relations would be difficult to manage, and help was needed in these initial stages; (3) it was an important opportunity to build bridges in the Azwadi community so that the Jihadists are not perceived as outsiders.³⁰¹

This letter from Drūkdil also gives insight into the power relations between the Salafi-Jihadists. For AQMI, this “project” in the Azawad is a new road, a “seed” to develop side by side with its global jihadist agenda and it is clear AQMI wanted a more “managerial” role supporting and aiding local Salafi-Jihadists, with an unmistakable hierarchy.³⁰² Drūkdil himself

³⁰⁰ The strategic thinking behind this decision is explained by Drūkdil himself; ‘Abd al-Mālik Drūkdil, “Instructions regarding the Islamic Jihadi-project in Azawad/ *tawjīhāt bi ḥuṣūṣ al-mašrū‘ al-‘islāmī bi ‘Azawād*,” (Associated press: Arabic, estimated 2012, Algeria), 1.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 1-2.

³⁰² Ibid., 1.

describes his letter as a set of recommendations and directions. The letter also contains a reprimand for AAD members (which will be discussed later), making it clear that there is a hierarchical relation between the organizations. It is through AQMI's long-term presence that they were able to identify the key players in the Azawad-region, in this case Iyad Ag Ghaly. The letter also demonstrates Drūkdil's awareness of the international political sphere. He is aware that the presence of an Al-Qaida affiliate would warrant unwanted international attention and a possible intervention.³⁰³ Therefore, local proxies were needed. The choice of AAD and MUJAO as proxies is explained through their close ideological affinity.

The pact between the three Salafi-Jihadist groups and MNLA didn't last long because AAD and MUJAO decided to govern the Emirate alone, forcing MNLA to retreat and collaborate with the Malian government. Drūkdil recognized MNLA as an important player and did not approve of this decision to expel them. He judged that infighting between armed groups would have a negative impact on the project, especially because MNLA-presence offered Jihadists some protection, shielding them from counter-terrorist initiatives.³⁰⁴ His objections came too late however, and at this point, the Azawad came to be managed as a truly Islamic State or Emirate. AQMI still remained in the background, pulling the strings and maintaining contact with the organizations on the ground as well as send supporting troops.³⁰⁵

The administration of Azawad was divided as follows; the Kidal-district and Timbuktu-district were controlled by AAD, the GAO-district, and to some extent the Mopti-area as well, was in the hands of

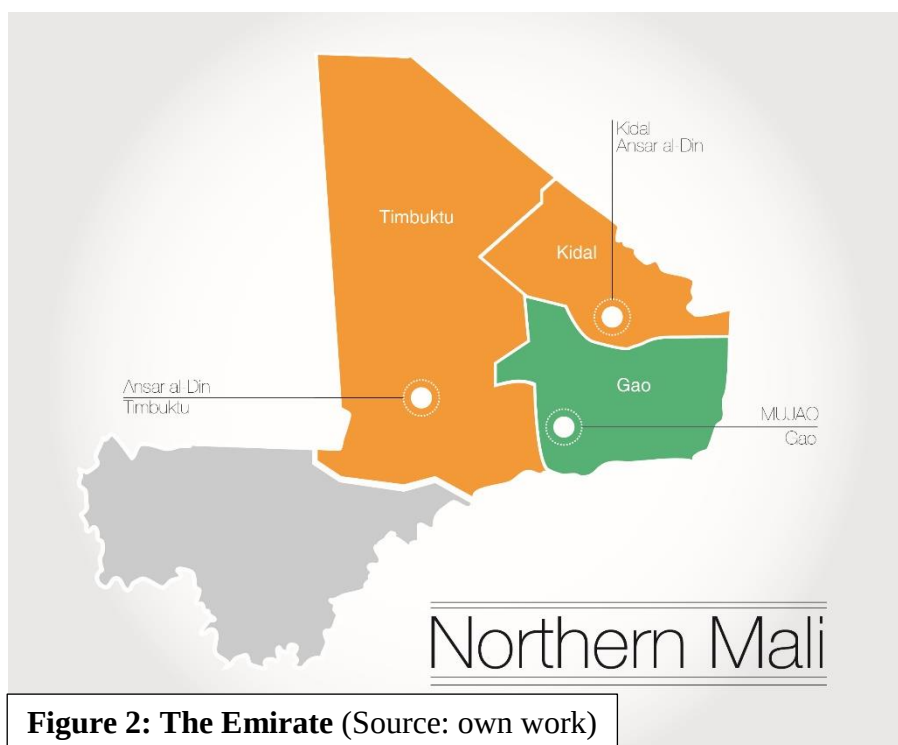


Figure 2: The Emirate (Source: own work)

³⁰³ “And so, It is very probable, perhaps certain, that a military intervention will occur (...)”// “We should not be at the forefront.”

³⁰⁴ Drūkdil, “Instructions,” chapter 3, 3.

³⁰⁵ AQMI's support is mentioned at various points in Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1 and 2.”

MUJAO. The following section will shed light on the “on the ground” management of the Azawad-region, showing how their activities are small acts of politics. The analysis will be based on video-material of this period, and translation of documents that were found after the Emirate fell to foreign intervention.³⁰⁶

The Islamic Emirate of Azawad: A closer look

The aim of this dissertation is to find out to what extent Salafi-Jihadists “do politics”. AQMI (and MUJAO and AAD) entered the Azawadi political arena through the creation of an Islamic state. If politics is considered here to be a negotiation on the place or organization of institutions in a society, it would be wise to start with a close analysis of the institutions created in the Emirate. What does the implementation of an Islamic project mean on a practical basis, and what does it entail? In the next section, I will discuss the theoretical implications more in depth, while limiting myself in this chapter to some critical observations. Through practical examples, I will show here how the Islamic project in the Azawad builds on past experiences by AQMI, how AQMI thinks and acts strategically, and how they attempt to build up some form of consensus and legitimacy among the local inhabitants. In short, how this “negotiating within a society” materializes and how politics was done on a daily basis. It is important to say here that, with regard to the local inhabitants, their reaction to this project is hardly reported. Nevertheless, a few media articles point to the population’s initial happiness with the rise to power of the Salafi-Jihadists, which only later turned to discontent.³⁰⁷ Four main themes of concern for the Jihadists can be discerned in their management; (1) the effective control of a pseudo-state; (2) the economic matters; (3) the social matters; and (4) the institutional matters and all of the problems that become evident when trying to implement certain institutions.

The first point that is evidence for “doing politics” is the ways in which effective control was created over the Azawad region. First of all, there was the obvious control and strong influence of AQMI’s leader Drūkdil, who resides in Algeria. His influence on this project is noteworthy since he is such a high-ranking member in the general AQ hierarchy, and as such stands rather close to them on an ideological level. His involvement demonstrates that the Azawad case is not a mere marginal project or anomaly. Drūkdil’s first realization was that the Islamic Emirate of Azawad needed a local leader, whom he found in the figure of Iyad Ag

³⁰⁶ For the interventions, see appendix 6: Global influences in Mali.

³⁰⁷ Alex Smith, “Life in Timbuktu: how the ancient city of gold is slowly turning to dust,” The Guardian, consulted 07.11.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/16/-sp-life-timbuktu-mali-ancient-city-gold-slowly-turning-to-dust>.

Ghaly (leader of AAD). The emir was aided by a *shura* (or advice) counsel, an Islamic type of governance.³⁰⁸ Although the Emirate of AQMI, AAD, and MUJAO was united in name, each region was administered in different ways. According to AAD, this difference in governance offered much needed flexibility with regards to local specificities of each region.³⁰⁹ For AAD this meant using important members of local tribes and ethnical groups as figureheads or local representatives to gain local support and legitimacy. To attain a certain level of coherence in their administration, they used existing administrative structures when these were not in competition with their interpretation of Sharia.³¹⁰ AAD reported that their representatives did “*shuttle-tours in which they came in contact with the whole society along with the leadership of the people and their ministers.*”³¹¹ They made a point of meeting local leaders and notables in order to study the existing forms of administration and incorporating these as much as possible.³¹²

Establishing effective control over an area also means providing security from internal and external threats and understanding the Emirate’s place on a regional political level. Creating consensus is therefore not only needed internally but also externally through truces and agreements internally with other armed groups like the MNLA, and externally with the Malian government for instance (although this last one was quite improbable). Within the Emirate, there was the strategic understanding that some form of consensus or agreement with specific groups would be desirable. Within the texts is the proclaimed openness for dialogue and negotiations, of course within the bounds and limitations of Sharia.³¹³ From a religious point of view, if the Emirate were an Islamic state, negotiations would not be possible because this would signify an acceptance of the other party as an equally legitimate entity.³¹⁴ However, considerable political realism is shown in the practicality of negotiating with NGO’s and emissaries from southern Mali, and with sending emissaries to Burkinabe armed groups for instance. Drūkdil said in his letter to local operatives; “*As for foreign policies, you must adopt*

³⁰⁸ ‘Abd al ‘Azīz Ḥabīb and Zakarīā’ Būghrārah, “The complete story of the Islamic Emirate of Azawad, part 1/ *al-Qiṣṣa al-kāmila li-l-‘imāra al-‘islāmiyya bi-‘Azawād, al-juz’ al-‘awwal*” (Arabic, estimated 2015, Mali), 5. Roswitha Badry, “Consultation,” in *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Bowering, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 116-7.

³⁰⁹ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1,” 6.

³¹⁰ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1,” 5. And Laurant De Castelli, “Mali: From Sanctuary to Islamic State,” *RUSI Journal* 159, no. 3 (2014): 62-8.

³¹¹ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1,” 9.

³¹² Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 2,” 1.

³¹³ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1,” 6.

³¹⁴ Based on knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence and the excellent monograph: Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: an introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: the Jurists* (London: Psychology Press, 1981): 201.

mature and moderate rhetoric that reassures and calms. To do so, you must avoid any statements that are provocative to neighboring countries and avoid repeated threats."³¹⁵ The threat of an imminent intervention meant Drūkdil had to be sensitive to legitimacy and the public image of the Emirate. This is probably why he felt the need to disassociate the Emirate from international terrorism and the Al-Qaida brand name, preferring instead to play a role in the background.³¹⁶ A practical example of this sensitivity to the public image of their project is also shown in the care they took for captured opponents; making enemy soldiers testify in front of a camera of good conditions during their imprisonment.³¹⁷ Through these attempts, they probably hoped for some leniency and goodwill from neighboring states and the Malian regime.

The proclivity towards seeking forms legitimacy and consensus also became apparent on the economic level. Attempting to create a good economic environment is a strategic choice to ensure support from the local population. Before the Emirate was established, and without a doubt more so during the civil war during which the Emirate existed, the economic situation in the Azawad region was dire (and it still is). The arid landscape yields even less crops due to severe drought, which is exacerbated by mismanagement on a national level. The main source of income for locals is therefore smuggling, which builds on the ancient Tuareg-North African trading relations.³¹⁸ In the 21st century, these old gold-trading routes are used to transport drugs, weapons, and people.³¹⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, AQMI, and especially AAD – with its large Tuareg membership- were well embedded in these networks, which play an important social role in the North. Preceding the establishment of the Emirate, one Tuareg even referred to AQMI as the main employer in the region.³²⁰ Of course, the establishment of an Emirate severely damaged this flourishing local economy as multiple international missions (especially Berhkane, MINUSMA, and AFISMA) targeted smuggling routes to reduce income of the Salafi-Jihadists.³²¹ In addition, the only flourishing legal branch of the economy – tourism- also understandably faltered during the civil war. This sector still hasn't recovered,

³¹⁵ Ibid., unknown chapter of letter.

³¹⁶ Drūkdil, "Instructions," 1-2.

³¹⁷ Unfortunately, the Youtube-video has since been removed, but was found under the title 'الفديو الكامل لعملية فتح ازواد من جماعة انصار الدين' ("The Full video of the conquest of the Azawad by Ansar al-Din) consulted 1.06.2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JGrH4XaSuM>.

³¹⁸ Lecocq, "A Rough Guide," 13.

³¹⁹ Abdi and Dauda, "Islam and Natural Resources in Current Mali," 510.

³²⁰ Said Belktibia and Benkoro Sangare, "365 jours au Mali," Youtube, Consulted 18.05.2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fglCYZgIroU>.

³²¹ See appendix 6 for these missions.

and the destruction of important Sufi-shrines – which attracted many tourists- during the Emirate, has also damaged Malian international appeal.³²²

Smuggling has always been crucial for the Azawad, but one might question whether this is defensible from an Islamic point of view. An interesting discussion was held within AQMI's juridical committee in 2008 on this topic. They suggested that smuggling was permitted, but that there are other, more Islamic forms of income, namely *jizya* (taxes on non-Muslims) and *diyya* ("blood money" or ransom for a hostage).³²³ Smuggling is crucial for local inhabitants, but for AQMI, it is ransom that keeps it economically viable. On average, they earn 6.5 million dollars for a single Western hostage. From 2008 to 2013, AQMI earned 88 million dollars on ransom payments, followed by MUJAO (20 million dollars) and AAD (6.8 million dollars). This explains the strong position of Salafi-Jihadists in comparison with for example the MNLA.³²⁴ Even though most of AQMI's income in general comes from ransom payments, revenue was also earned through taxes. Islamic taxes (*zakat*) were levied on goods and paid by all Muslims.³²⁵ The only other permitted form of taxes was *jizya*, which is only levied on non-Muslim men living in *dār al-islām*.³²⁶ This might show that non-Muslims in the area were not specifically targeted for attacks because, as was stated by Drūkdil, "*Muslims fight the kāfirs either until they become Muslims or unless they pay jizya.*" All other forms of taxes besides *jizya* and *zakat* were considered *ḥarām* (forbidden according to Sharia). In a video posted online, Islamic police of Azawad can be seen harassing a Malian tax collector.³²⁷ Lowering taxes during the Emirate can be interpreted as a response to the public discontent over high taxes levied by the southern government. Nevertheless, multiple local businessmen claimed that the lack of costumers –and especially foreigners- made business harder.³²⁸ A last minor form of revenue was the confiscation of property of apostate Muslims.³²⁹

Central in the project of Salafi-Jihadists, and again a clearly strategic choice, was the provision of social services, which were paid for mostly through the tax revenues. The establishment of these social provisions is in essence "making politics" through the

³²² Thomas Escritt, "Mali rebel destroyed ancient Timbuktu shrines, ICC told," Reuters, consulted 13.05.2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-warcrimes-mali-idUSKCN0W34B2>.

³²³ Guidère, "Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique," 62.

³²⁴ Tomolya and White, *Terrorist Threats*, 35.

³²⁵ Aron Zysow, "Zakāt," Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, consulted 15.05.2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1377.

³²⁶ Guidère, "Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique," 62.

³²⁷ N.N. "عين على أزواد" (Eye on Azawad 1), Youtube, consulted 1.06.2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ijqnxq_Gt_I. (This video is also no longer accessible on Youtube).

³²⁸ N.N. "غاو - مالي: بضائع بلا ضرائب وانخفاض في الزبائن" (Gao-Mali: Goods without taxes and the lowering of customer-numbers), Youtube, consulted 1.06.2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv4IGCcORhc>.

³²⁹ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, "The full story, part 1," 8.

establishment of (new) institutions. The reason this was of such importance can be found in the cause for the civil war; services offered by the Malian government had been lacking since the establishment of a Malian nation in 1960, despite repeated promises to improve the situation after previous uprisings.³³⁰ What were these social services? A first point was education. Aside from preaching (*da'wa*), education –especially religious education– was crucial.³³¹ There are some reports –albeit scarcely researched– that MUJAO in Gao, and probably AAD as well, abused the existing networks of Quranic schools to preach violence and recruit child-soldiers.³³² A second form of providing social services was caring for the weak within society, fulfilling thusly their Islamic duty and rallying local support for their project at the same time. These weak included orphans and widows of fighters.³³³ This was a much-needed function due to increasing poverty and drought in the region during the years leading up to the civil war. Thirdly, AAD called on all civilians to volunteer or contribute to the project financially. A specific call went out to local traders, asking them to provide for the basic needs of the population, such as medicine and food, despite the ongoing conflict. In propaganda-texts, AAD-fighters claimed to set a good example by donating their wages to the poor and providing breakfast for the weak.³³⁴

A fourth point is the provision of basic services like safety, healthcare, water, and electricity. Drūkdil himself highlighted the need for these services.³³⁵ To this end, AAD wrote that they allowed humanitarian organizations to operate in the region as long as they followed two rules. Firstly, they had to report on all their activities and, secondly, they had to follow Islamic rules (i.e. women had to be veiled). According to them, all organizations followed these guidelines. However, that is to be doubted, considering the kidnapping of the Swiss nun Beatrice Stockly due to her active preaching.³³⁶

³³⁰ For these uprisings, see appendix 3. Cline, “Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers,” 618.

³³¹ ‘Abd al ‘Azīz Ḥabīb and Zakarīā’ Būghrārah, “The complete story of the Islamic Emirate of Azawad, part 2/ *al-Qiṣṣa al-kāmila li-l-‘imāra al-‘islāmiyya bi-‘Azawād, al-juz’ al-thānī*” (Arabic, estimated 2015, Mali), 1.

³³² Krista Larson. “Mali Islamists claimed to have recruited child soldiers from schools,” Africa- News and Analysis, consulted 24.05.2017, <https://africajournalismtheworld.com/2013/02/24/mali-islamists-claimed-to-have-recruited-child-soldiers-from-schools/>.

³³³ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 2,” 7.

³³⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

³³⁵ Boeke, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” 924-6.

³³⁶ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1,” 7. Beatrice Stockly was kidnapped twice: first in 2012 during the existence of the emirate for a duration of ten days. She has since been captured again in 2016. See: N.N. “New video message from al-Qā’idah in the Islamic Maghrib: “Just Like (You) Capture, (You) Also Will Be Captured: Appeal of the Swiss Citizen ‘Beatrice Stockly’,” Jihadology, consulted 13.05.2017, <http://jihadology.net/2016/06/16/new-video-message-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrib-just-like-you-capture-you-also-will-be-captured-appeal-of-the-swiss-citizen-beatrice-stockly/>.

To ensure the continuation of their social services, some form of internal security was needed. Within the Emirate, there was a clear attempt to construct a Weberian monopoly on violence.³³⁷ Concerning the following of commands, fighters had the choice between obeying and execution.³³⁸ Moreover, strict rules were imposed on all those within the Emirate with regards to security; (1) entry in the cities was forbidden for columns of cars (above three cars); (2) showing weapons inside the cities was not allowed; (2) showing banners or flags inside the city was also forbidden; and (4) preaching publicly for a certain armed movement was also prohibited.³³⁹ Of course, all Emirate fighters were exempted from these rulers. The ability to protect citizens from violence legitimized AAD especially. However, despite these attempts to safeguard the cities, fighting and insecurity was rife throughout the existence of the Emirate and continues until today in 2018.

In addition to all of the above, there are the institutional matters. By imposing Sharia on the population, a more complete control of civilian life was achieved. Salafi-Jihadists had long attacked the positivist forms of law that were practiced in Mali, albeit mostly rhetorically before 2011, since they did not stage many large attacks on Malian political targets before this period. Positivism is, in their view, derived from Jewish and Christian customs and therefore only lead to violence and injustice.³⁴⁰ Sharia was implemented almost immediately, and upheld by a religious police. Fighters on the ground, both from AAD and MUJAO, prohibited alcohol, corruption, prostitution, et cetera.³⁴¹ They even went so far as to prohibit smoking, music, and education for women.³⁴² For example, religious police would walk around on the streets to supervise women's clothing.³⁴³ Unexpectedly, it was AQMI's emir Drūkdil to caution them in their hasty application of Sharia, especially in two main areas. Firstly, the destruction of (Sufi) shrines, which had been met with international outrage. Secondly, implementing religious punishments (*hudud*) when trying to stop things that are forbidden (*harām*) through whippings et cetera, including prohibiting women of going out, preventing children from playing... Drūkdil states that "*this behavior, even at an individual level, is contradictory to the policy of*

³³⁷ See more on Max Weber: Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters, *Weber's rationalism and modern society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³³⁸ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, "The full story, part 2," 12.

³³⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁴⁰ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, "The full story, part 2," 6.

³⁴¹ Belktibia and Sangare, "Video: 365 jours au Mali."

³⁴² Olomjobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 220.

³⁴³ François Margolin and Lemine Ould Salem, "Salafistes," (documentary: 1h 12 min), France: 2016. They showed this practice in the Gao province.

the Salaf, so your officials need to control themselves (...)”.³⁴⁴ He argues here that the local operatives did not take into account the environment in which they are active, and that it is “ignorant of religion” because its people have not lived under Sharia rule for centuries. Moreover he refers to their (AQMI’s) past experience, which “*proved that applying Sharia in this way, without taking the environment into consideration, will lead to people rejecting the religion, and engender hatred toward the mujahidin, and will consequently lead to the failure of our experiment.*”³⁴⁵ With this statement, he shows AQMI can learn from past experiences and adapt itself into a local context.

However, Drükdil’s words were not heeded fully. Both in the areas under control of AAD and MUJAO, Sharia was upheld by religious police. Withal, a video shows that, in Timbuktu, punishments were strictly enforced by a tribunal to “Command good and prohibit evil”.³⁴⁶ These courts passed harsh sentences and images of stoning of adulterers, cutting the hands of thieves, and lashings spread from Malian to western media.³⁴⁷ A propaganda-esque video by MUJAO, depicting life in Gao under the Emirate, followed the course of a trial of some men accused of drug trafficking (alcohol in this case). The video starts at the court, and follows the proceedings until the convicted men are punished.³⁴⁸ It appears to be an attempt to show the outside world that life in Azawad carries on, and that the local organizations are capable of due process. The organizations used Youtube amply to show “regular life” in the Azawad, for example by filming how fighters return stolen vehicles to their lawful owners.³⁴⁹ Implementing Sharia also included battling a recurrent economic problem in the Azawad region, which is strongly entangled with governmental management and its local officials: corruption. Representing themselves as a break with the past, AQMI, AAD and MUJAO opted for a “chief against corruption”, charged with battling this phenomenon in society.³⁵⁰

Remarkably, AAD saw the implementation of an Islamic system of law as too great a task for any movement, or group of movements, to undertake and succeed. They believed that the whole society should be involved in this project. However, implementing these institutions with the whole of society entailed one obvious problem inherent to Azawad-society, namely

³⁴⁴ Drükdil, “Instructions,” 3. N.N. “Unmarried couple stoned to death in Mali for ‘violating Islamic law,” *The Guardian*, consulted 12.05.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/17/unmarried-couple-stoned-to-death-mali-islamic-law>.

³⁴⁵ Drükdil, “Instructions,” 3.

³⁴⁶ Belktibia and Sangare, “Video: 365 jours au Mali.”

³⁴⁷ Margolin and Ould Salem, “Salafistes.”: shows stoning and hand cutting.

³⁴⁸ N.N. “عين على أزواد 2 مجريات الحياة في منطقة أزواد الإسلامية” (Eye on Azawad 2: course of live in the region Islamic Azawad), Youtube, consulted 1.06.2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnRLHs-LDxk&t=696s>.

³⁴⁹ N.N. “Eye on Azawad 1.”

³⁵⁰ Margolin and Ould Salem, “Salafistes.”

racism.³⁵¹ Racism between the various groups and movements in the Azawad-region had to be fought. Race was briefly mentioned while discussing MUJAO, but it was also influential in the events of the Emirate in general. Racism was a generally important factor in the civil war, because the Azawad Tuareg (and Berabiche-minority) have always strongly opposed the southern dominance in racial and ethnic terminology.³⁵² This ethnical and racial component is exacerbated through the organization of Tuareg society in clan-confederation and tribes, along which mobilization in the North occurs. This system is not static and tribal alliances shift in accordance with the larger political and economic context.³⁵³ In times of conflict, tribal alliances offer a form of security and certainty.³⁵⁴ The organization of Salafi-Jihadists in the region forms no exception, especially AAD is organized along tribal lines (mainly consisting of members of the dominant tribe Kel Ifoghas, which leads the major tribal federation Kel Adagh).³⁵⁵ During their control over the Azawad area, navigating the racial complexities of the region proved a challenge for AQMI, AAD, and MUJAO. Even though the Tuareg are dominant in the north of Mali, there are many black inhabitants.

On an individual level, there seems to have been many accounts of racism, and a feeling of superiority from the fighters. Even Drūkdil refers in his manifesto to the *zinjiyya*, a derogative term to refer to darker skinned persons.³⁵⁶ There are some reports that suggest the execution of Sharia-punishments was especially aimed at black inhabitants.³⁵⁷ In addition, the thorough research by Jessica Huckabey points to a deep racial divide within MUJAO, which professes to be an egalitarian organization.³⁵⁸ Despite these reports, or maybe because of them, AQMI, AAD, and MUJAO attempted to counter these allegations on the organizational level. For example, even though Drūkdil uses a depreciative term, he emphasized the need to extend bridges to all races in the Azawad. AAD went even further and wrote; *we believe that all Muslims are our brothers, whether they are Arab or non-Arabs, White or Black, as said God the Highest: "The believers are but brothers"*.³⁵⁹ AAD continuously refers to "our brothers" the black Africans. In an attempt to counter the racial and ethnically exclusive image, AAD used the presence of documentary makers to convict a Tuareg who murdered a black man in

³⁵¹ Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, "The full story, part 2," 2.

³⁵² Cline, "Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers," 618.

³⁵³ Lecocq, "A Rough Guide," 14.

³⁵⁴ Klute, "Post-Gaddafi repercussions," 63.

³⁵⁵ Baz Lecocq is an expert in this area, see: Baz Lecocq, "Mali: This is Only the Beginning," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 14 (2013): 62. For a clear overview of tribal affiliations, see: Pezard and Shurkin, "Toward a Secure and Stable Northern Mali," 4.

³⁵⁶ Drūkdil, "Instructions," 2.

³⁵⁷ Olomjobo, *Frontiers of Jihad*, 215.

³⁵⁸ Huckabey, "Al Qaeda in Mali," 467-84.

³⁵⁹ Quranical verse: 49:10. Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, "The full story, part 2," 3.

Timbuktu.³⁶⁰ It is safe to say here that all three organizations understood the importance of race and ethnicity in the Azawad society, and attempted to profile their respective organizations accordingly.

This section has given some insight in the practicalities of managing the Islamic Emirate of Azawad. In early 2013, the Emirate ceased to exist with international interventions attacking the strongholds of local Salafi-Jihadists. Since then, Jihadists have been scattered across the Sahelian desert countries but have recently regrouped with a new union of MUJAO, AQMI, AAD, and other new Salafi-Jihadist groups in the region. They have started staging attacks against the foreign occupiers of the Azawad, which they claim to be crusaders.³⁶¹

Political contention in the Azawad

The information that becomes apparent from the sources needs to be analyzed in depth with relation to the theoretical framework. The goal of this dissertation was to look at the evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, specifically since the Arab Uprisings, and investigate whether a change is detectable and a political turn came about. This thesis would then be applied to the case study of AQMI and the Azawad case. To investigate this, I have chosen to use the SMT framework combined with an emphasis on politics.

The important task at hand is to elaborate on politics in the Azawad. Politics is negotiating the organization of institutions within a society. An Islamic activist who “participates” in politics, is a strategic thinker embedded in a political context that influences their choices and decisions. This activism and political participation does not necessarily lead to participation in conventional party politics, or the acceptance of plurality. These forms of “politics” are framed ideologically as an extension of the *da‘wa* (preaching) duty, which is central for Salafists. A political group is thus aware of its political surroundings and is in a constant dialectic relation with these surroundings, reacting collectively to changes. All of this is manifest in the Azawad case and AQMI’s participation in it. The political element is also demonstrated through AQMI’s evolution, which was both influenced by the local context and exerted influence over MUJAO (as an offshoot that would later rejoin AQMI) and AAD (as a partner).

The first structure to investigate is the macro-context in which AQMI operated throughout the period of 2012-13 in the Sahelian region, and how they responded to this

³⁶⁰ Margolin and Ould Salem, “Salafistes.”

³⁶¹ See appendix 5. And for the announcement see: N.N. “New video message from Jamā’at Nuṣrat al-Islām Wa-l-Muslimīn: ‘The Correct Equation’,” Jihadology, consulted 07.08.2017, <http://jihadology.net/2017/07/01/new-video-message-from-jamaat-nu%E1%B9%A3rat-al-islam-wa-l-muslimin-the-correct-equation/>.

dialectically. Regarding the politics in the wider region, AQMI was vehemently attacked and targeted by the Algerian army, with American aid. This naturally pushed the organization towards the more ungoverned southern part of the Sahara.³⁶² The Arab Uprisings had shaken the political climate in Northern Africa. There was no room for violent contention and Jihad at that time in Tunisia and Egypt especially, since they had just successfully toppled the regimes in a peaceful manner. Libya was also a less favorable option due to the American presence there. A pragmatic answer to these geopolitical challenges was therefore a move south.

The participatory approach towards local politics was catalyzed, as mentioned previously, through the outbreak of the Malian civil war. It is here that a new approach or “project” as Drūkdil would call it, was tried and tested. A project of change that was formed by the experiences from the past. The initial campaign by the MNLA, which AQMI supported, caused the government to retreat southward. Although Mali was still a unified state, a Weberian absence of a monopoly on violence left the field of contention open. AQMI, being locally embedded through Mukhtār Bilmokhtār’s *katība* “*al-Mulathamīn*” was well positioned to take advantage of this situation. Together with MUJAO and AAD, it tapped in to its social and cultural surroundings. This is exemplified by its emphasis on corruption, a fair justice system, and a two-sided approach to race and ethnicity. Regarding this two-sided approach, the Emirate leaders tried on the one hand, to extend their hand to the black population of the North through official communication. On the other hand, black Azawadians bore the brunt of suffering throughout the installment of Sharia rule, thus assuring the whiter Tuareg and Berabiche of their superiority. Drūkdil illustrated this emphasis on the local by cautioning MUJAO and AAD against the harsh and swift implementation of Sharia, taking into account local (Islamic) beliefs. This shows how especially AQMI realized the importance of the local context and more crucially, local support and legitimacy for their project.

Even in the naming of their state, AQMI was clearly aware of local politics. By calling their project an Emirate, they positioned it as an Islamic entity. In Islamic jurisprudence, an “emirate” has a more local or regional claim, as opposed to the universal claim of the “caliphate”. Notwithstanding, throughout history these terms have not always been clear-cut.³⁶³ In any case, the emirate is not only a religious, but also a worldly affair and as such, the emir carries military, religious, and worldly duties. Due to the absence of any universal claim of an “emirate”, which is antithetical to the claims of global jihad, it might seem peculiar that AQMI

³⁶² Torres Soriano, “The Road to Media Jihad,” 82-5.

³⁶³ As suggested by the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba (756-929), which carried the same inherent meaning as a Caliphate. (Based on classes of prof. Dr. Van Steenberghe, University of Ghent).

chose to establish an Emirate.³⁶⁴ However, a distinct advantage of this would be that -on a religious level- the conditions under which a caliphate can be established are very strict. Doing so, AQMI would open up their embryonic state to international scrutiny of Islamic Ulama in the same way that IS has been criticized in recent years. Be that as it may be, the project was also referred to by the secular denomination “state” (*dawla*), especially in the initial stages.³⁶⁵ Through the cooperation with MNLA, the Emirate could hide under the guise of being a secular independence project and avoid international attention and intervention. This of course did not last long. In any case, the declaration of Azawad as an independent state is in itself a response to local demands and is a break with previous AQMI tactics in the region, let alone wider tactics employed by al-Qaida on a global scale.

Of course, AQMI, might have had an ulterior motive in constructing an Islamic Emirate below the Sahara. Competition for supporters and new fighters from all around the world is fierce among different Salafi-Jihadist groups. Earlier in this thesis, I mentioned al-Zarqāwī, whose Iraqi AQ franchise brought sectarianism and the extensive use of *takfīr* to the forefront of the Jihadi experience. His group Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) became the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) after his death, which would later –due to specific geopolitical conditions- turn into IS. AQI and ISI attracted many international fighters, including some from the African continent. The creation of an Emirate could be seen as an attempt to become a more appealing choice for black Africans willing to fight some form of Jihad as opposed to the alternative of fighting in the Middle East. Further research into the comparison between AQMI’s Azawad Emirate and the Islamic State Caliphate that was established a year later might offer interesting insights about similarities or lack thereof between these two projects. The latter can already be considered to be much more takfirist and apocalyptical in comparison with AQMI’s equally purist but more political project. Besides this intercontinental comparison, even on the African continent itself, and within the West African region, Salafi-Jihadists groups abound (for example Boko Haram and al-Shabāb). Competition between various groups for manpower is a real struggle with groups constantly fragmenting and reorganizing in new formations and alliances.

³⁶⁴ AQ already founded two other Emirates: Afghanistan and the Caucasus, these had however a very different nature. The Caucasus-Emirate should be seen more as a salafi-Jihadist group carrying out attacks, instead of a pseudo-state like the Azawad. See for example Alexander Knysh, “The Caucasus Emirate: Between Reality and Virtuality,” *Keyman Program in Turkish Studies Working Paper Series* 9, no. 1 (2009).

³⁶⁵ Mostly “emirate” in Ḥabīb and Būghrārah, “The full story, part 1 and 2.” And mostly “*dawla*” in Drūkdil, “Instructions.”

Besides the international politics, a more local or national level of politics should also be considered. With the Emirate, AQMI attempted for the first time to truly engage with the local context, and fulfill in the Azawad the need for an independent government. It is for this reason that I have sometimes referred to the emirate as a “pseudo-state”, which stands in stark contrast with AQ’s international infamy for large-scale terrorist attacks. Looking at theories on the concept of statehood within international law, many of the concepts that are mentioned were actually briefly fulfilled by the Azawadi Emirate.³⁶⁶ Formal international requirements might not have been fulfilled completely, these are; (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.³⁶⁷ However, as a “pseudo-state” the more functional approach to statehood actually applies; taxation, regulating citizenship, providing internal security, offering social services, and facilitating economic growth.³⁶⁸ These are all -to some extent- met by the Islamic Emirate of Azawad as I showed through the evidence in the previous segment. One might assert that IS also fulfilled many of these requirements in some form. Both groups are in a process of state building. What is different however is AQMI’s open engagement with the local. In this light, a comparison can be seen with IS’s regional counterpart Jabhat al-Nuṣra (and to some extent ‘aḥrār al-Shām). The split between Jabhat al-Nuṣra and IS was mainly based on these differences. Jabhat al-Nuṣra fits more into the scheme of AQMI whilst IS follows the more apocalyptic path, fully disregarding any local alliances. AQMI’s engagement with the local context of the Azawad can be seen through the following decisions; the focus on fighting corruption, using race and ethnicity as a tool, providing care for the poor, employing nationalist sentiments and AQMI staying in the background to make it seem like a local project. Showing this “local turn” is also the fact that they talk to locals in their videos and attempt to form a relationship with the locals. This can serve as an attempt to counter their “foreign” image.

The use of politics is not only striking on the macro-level of politics, but also on the meso-level of organization. AQMI did not establish this Emirate on its own, but in cooperation with AAD and MUJAO. Again, on a comparative level, this constitutes an important difference with IS in Iraq and Syria, which is fighting a lonely war without any local allies. For AQMI to

³⁶⁶ Of course I am talking here of the declarative theory of state, and not the constitutive theory which postulates that a state can only be a state when it is recognized by other states. See: William Worster, “Sovereignty: two Competing Theories of State Recognition,” *Exploring Geopolitics*, consulted 9.04.2017, http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/publication/worster_william_sovereignty_constitutive_declaratory_statehood_recognition_legal_view_international_law_court_justice_montevideo_genocide_convention/.

³⁶⁷ This is based on the Montevideo Convention.

³⁶⁸ Categorization based on; Quinn Meham, “How much of a state is the Islamic State?” in *Islamism in the IS Age*, ed. Marc Lynch (Washington: POMEPS, 2015).

accomplish cooperation, negotiation and strategic thinking was essential. AQMI had to identify the powerful players in the region and forge them into a united formation. The extent to which these three groups were truly united will be hard to ever investigate, but it is evidently clear from the communication that the relation was at times strained. Evidence of this can be found in the reprimand Drūkdil sends to AAD for applying Sharia too harsh. Views on what role the local element should play, and to what extent it should take precedence of religious matters notably differed in the case of applying Sharia. In addition to identifying powerful groups, race again played an important role. AQMI's leadership and its rank and file mainly consists of Algerians, through working with the Azawadi AAD and the West African MUJAO, AQMI could ensure the continuing claim of being local, even without the participation of the MNLA. Nevertheless, it was probably this internal dissent that eventually caused the downfall of the Emirate. Fighters of MUJAO and AAD concluded that the Azawad was not enough, and that their project should include the whole of Mali. Encouraged by the retreat of the Malian army, they moved South in the direction of the capital Bamako. Their 2013 conquest of the city of Konna in Mopti, the department straddling the border between North and South, provoked the French invasion at the request of the Malian government.³⁶⁹ This precipitated the demise of the Azawadi Emirate. It was only in 2015 that AQMI succeeded in bringing MUJAO (then already known as "the Sentinels") back into the fold. Earlier this year, AQMI finally succeeded in formally allying itself with AAD, among other groups through the creation of a new organization; Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM). These internal contradictions also point to the agency of individual members within the "unity" of the Emirate. Especially the letter by Drūkdil to AAD, and his communication with Mukhtār Bilmokhtār shows that there were various contradicting opinions. Each individual operated within a specific political context. Drūkdil has always been more influenced by the Northern African context. Bilmokhtār and Iyad Ag Ghaly are more embedded in the Malian political frame. What is abundantly clear from the sources is that agency and power is scattered among different individuals.

The ideological level is hardest to investigate due to the dearth of sources. Various frames overlap in the written sources and videos, most importantly nationalism, religion, power, race, and politics. However, without fieldwork, it is hard to establish a full view of the ideology of AQMI, or AAD and MUJAO for that matter. Therefore, I would only like to focus on the

³⁶⁹ Of course, France had considerable interests in maintaining a stable Mali as a former colonizer but also due to the country's large Uranium sources and potential oil and gas fields. Hussein Solomon, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Africa: Fighting Insurgency from Al Shabaab, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 75.

change of the meaning of Jihad. As was discussed in the introduction, Jihad has been framed as defensive warfare because the *‘Umma* is under threat, which makes it an individual duty (*fard al-‘ayn*). This defensive element is also present in the Emirate with Salafi-Jihadists fighting the secular government, a *tāghūt* in their eyes, dominated by Sufi Muslims. The international military missions –the Far Enemy attacking a Muslim emirate- helped the Salafi-Jihadists propagate an image of defensive war.³⁷⁰ Be that as it may, this dissertation shows that only defining violence in terms of (defensive) Jihad loses sight of the clear attempt to participate in the local context. Violence is employed to safeguard a population, or certain portions of it, and to fight the battles that are important for locals. For example against an unjust government, against invading international missions... It is impossible to see or study these attempts as separate from the political and social strategy of AQMI (and by extension AAD and MUJAO). They are two sides of the same coin. As such, Jihad becomes a more complex term, encompassing all forms of alternative, revolutionary politics and contention.

So, why does violence remain a viable option for Salafi-Jihadist groups like AQMI? I suggest that it is with the closing of the window of political opportunity in which they can operate, that violence in the form of terrorist attacks again becomes an option. After the influx of various international missions, and with the proliferation of armed groups uniting for or against peace with the south, the Emirate had no way of continuing this project. Indeed, many mistakes were also made at the internal level such as the harsh implementation of Sharia, which antagonized the local population. Taking all of the above into account, it is logical to conclude that Salafi-Jihadists are becoming more political when the opportunity is right.

³⁷⁰ For example, Hamada Ould Muhammed Kheirou, leader of MUJAO claimed that if ECOWAS attacks them, it is only natural that they retaliate. Margolin and Ould Salem, “Salafistes.” Interview with Ould Muhammad Kheirou.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyze the evolution of the international Salafi-Jihadist movement through the case study of the Azawad Emirate. In particular, I asked the question; *“Has Salafi-Jihadism –and specifically Al-Qaida- developed since the Arab Uprisings (2011) to a more political stance and can the “Azawad case” be considered an example of this new evolution?”* The first part concerning a new evolution of Salafi-Jihadism since 2011 was demonstrated in the historical chapter and answered in the affirmative. Can this pivot also be seen in the Azawad case? A first important influence of the Arab Uprising is the returning Malian Tuareg who fought in Qadhāfi’s army.³⁷¹ When the Arab Uprisings turned against the Libyan leader, the Malian Tuareg returned home with their weapons and training, and thereupon invigorated local discontent with what they learned from Libya; uprisings are an effective means for change. The lessons and experiences of the Arab Uprisings also found their way to the Salafi-Jihadists via AQMI’s international network. Although I haven’t done field research to provide these assumptions with empirical evidence, this is a most likely inference from field research conducted by others.³⁷² In the globalized world of today, it is unthinkable that AQMI would not know about the ubiquitous revolts and protests that proliferated through the MENA-region in 2011, and was influenced by them. This dissertation focused on the consequences of this influence.

The Azawad case can be seen as a very clear example of the wider evolution of Salafi-Jihadism. The Salafi-Jihadists who were present in the Azawad region recognized that the uprising of the northern Tuareg meant an opening of the political space that could be employed for their own gain. Within this opening of political space, a new way of being Salafi-Jihadist was experienced. The goal of establishing an Islamic State –or Emirate- was briefly attained through a new, less violent, path. Two years later, the political space closed again with the international intervention of the French, meaning that violence again became the only possible form of contention. However, the closing of political space does not have to mean the end of this learning experience. In this span of two years, many new non-violent forms of contention and (informal) political participation were employed by AQMI in the Emirate. It is therefore not correct to assume that, since the Emirate is already destroyed, the exercise of analyzing it is not worthwhile. Political space can easily open again for all the reasons that caused the 2012 revolt to come about (i.e. poverty, drought et cetera). As Drūkdil wrote so eloquently:

³⁷¹ Ammour, “The Sahara and Sahel After Gaddhafi,” 1-5.

³⁷² I refer here specifically to the field research done by Fabio Merone in Tunisia.

“And if we can achieve this positive thing in even a limited amount, then even if the project fails later, it will be just enough that we will have planted the first, good seed in this fertile soil and put pesticides and fertilizer on it, so that the tree will grow more quickly. We look forward to seeing this tree as it will be: stable and magnificent.”³⁷³

The second part of the research question concerned the more political stance of Salafi-Jihadists. For this, I chose the base my framework on Social Movement Theory because it would allow me to look at the dynamics of different layers and the influence of politics on the structure of a movement and on its ideology. It is an uncommon approach, but it has helped me to shed light on this process of politicization. However, a weakness in the Social Movement Theory framework appeared concerning this research. Although the framework gives the opportunity to investigate political realities, it does not offer a research frame for epistemological and ontological questioning of the nature of politics. A deconstructivist approach of certain concepts of SMT would be interesting no doubt. The elaboration of an adequate framework to research politicized Salafi-Jihadists will be an important next step in further research. Unfortunately, the creation of such a new framework does not fit within the scope of this investigation. Conscious of this flaw in the frame, I nevertheless have offered some observations that can elaborate and enrich several current academic debates. This dissertation has aimed to contribute to academic debates on the Azawad, which often gloss over the Emirate as an unimportant interval. Ancillary, this dissertation adds to the academic debates on Salafi-Jihadism and Salafism more generally.

Clear predictions about the future are impossible without a large dose of speculation, but I can argue from my research that this Azawad-experience is part of a more general development of the Salafi-Jihadist movement. This movement has become more complex and political through historical and practical experience. These trends can be observed in the further evolutions of the Jihadi landscape in Mali, after the fall of the Emirate. A more intense unity is achieved since the 2017 union of many Salafi-Jihadist groups in the new JNIM, which, for now, mostly focusses on violent attacks against military targets. The groups show that they are able to overcome shortcomings from the past, their internal division being one of the primary weaknesses. The battle for control of the Azawad is not over, and after four long years, international missions have not succeeded in rooting out Salafi-Jihadism in the region. The Malian government is weak, especially in the North, and neighboring countries are also grappling with Jihadist threats. It is therefore not unthinkable that political space can open up

³⁷³ Drūkdi, “Instructions,” 2.

again, and JNIM might be likely to fill that space with a new Islamic project. On a global scale, this type of research on Salafi-Jihadism can also prove to be relevant in the case of AQ's role in Yemen for instance, or an analysis of Jabhat al-Nuṣra along the same lines.

In the general scheme of this dissertation, I have touched on many more subjects besides the Azawad case. First, my use of the SMT frame has helped me organize and research this topic but it is not a panacea and more work needs to be done on the nexus of contention and politics in this setting. Secondly, more research needs to be done taking into account political-philosophical questions on how we define and employ the concept of politics. Central in this dissertation has also been the general scheme of Salafi-Jihadism. If Salafi-Jihadists become more political, what inherent meaning do the categorization of Quintan Wiktorowicz and Joas Wagemakers still carry? Roel Meijer pointed out that categories and borders between various currents have become fluid. Why then, do we researchers adhere so strongly to these arbitrary categorizations? What meaning do the words Salafism and Jihadism still bear in this rapidly changing world? I believe that although they should be critically applied, they are both still meaningful categories for differentiation between different currents. Be that as it may, it might be more interesting to consider Jihad not as antithetical to the politics of “politicos” but as a more radical form of contention on the same spectrum.

In all, this dissertation has opened up many questions for further research. The change and continuous adaptation of Salafi-Jihadism is not over as various movements continue to learn from new experiences and changing political circumstances. Monitoring these evolutions in the coming years will give more insight into their actions when political space opens again.

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Appendix 1: Style-sheet al-Masāq

ف f ر r ع ʿ

ق q ز z ب b

ك k س s ت t

ل l ش sh ث th

م m ص ṣ ج j

ن n ض ḍ ح ḥ

ه h ط ṭ خ kh

و w ظ ṣ د d

ي y ع ʿ ذ dh

غ gh

ā	a	-iyy
ū	u	-uww
ī	i	-ay
		-aw

Arabic definite article

Use the unassimilated form al- (ال) for both ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ letters e.g. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.

Tā’ marbūṭa ة

Tā’ marbūṭa is marked by /-a/ e.g. rujūla; ‘imāra . In an idāfa compound, tā’ marbūṭa is marked by /-at/ e.g. Madīnat al-Manṣūr.

Arabic vocalisation in transcription

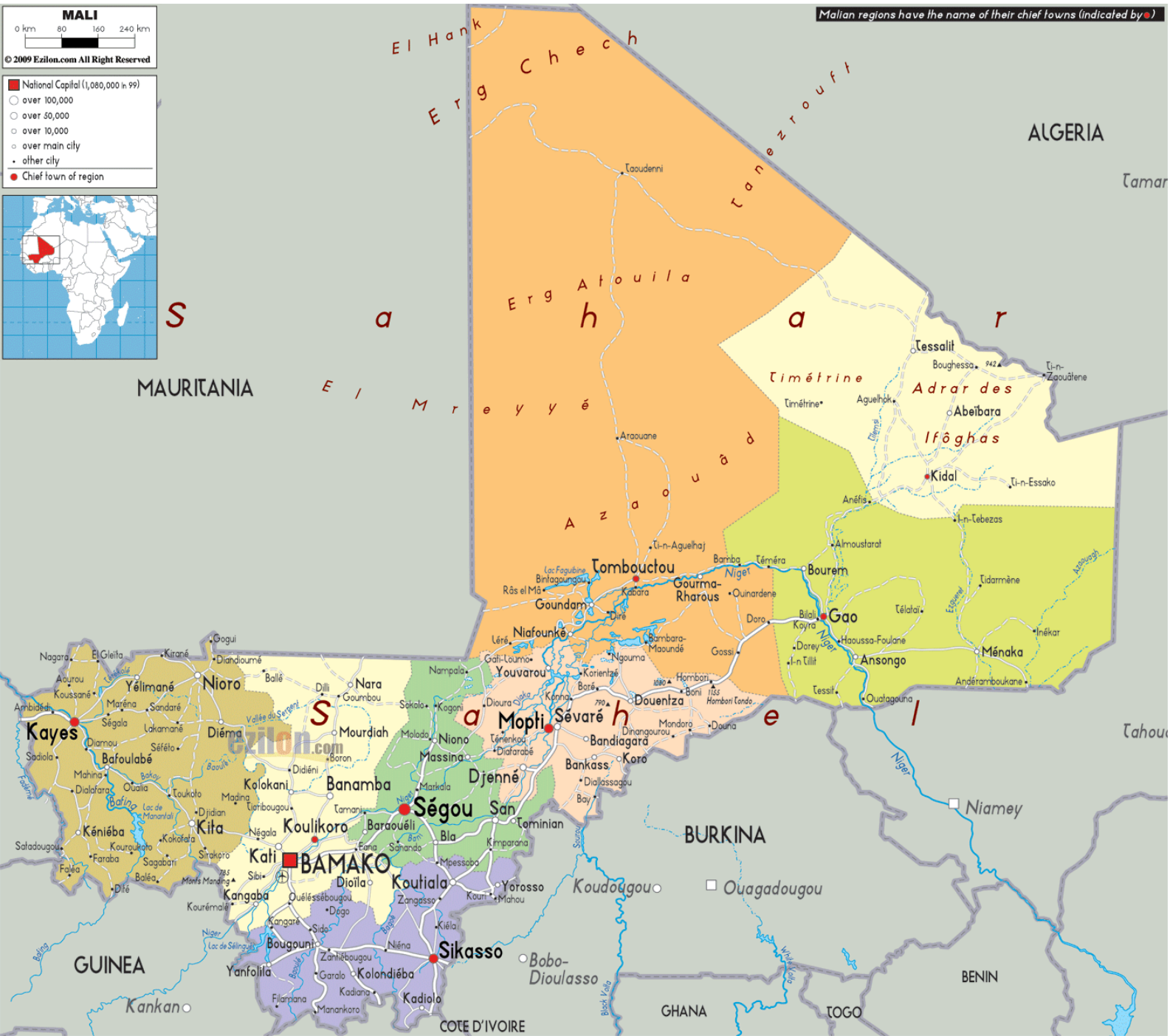
Except in cases where a greater level of clarity is required, full vocalisation of final vowel inflections is not necessary.

Other Arabic transliteration notes

Note the following examples:

- Abū l-Qāsim
- al-Ṭabarī’s Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk.

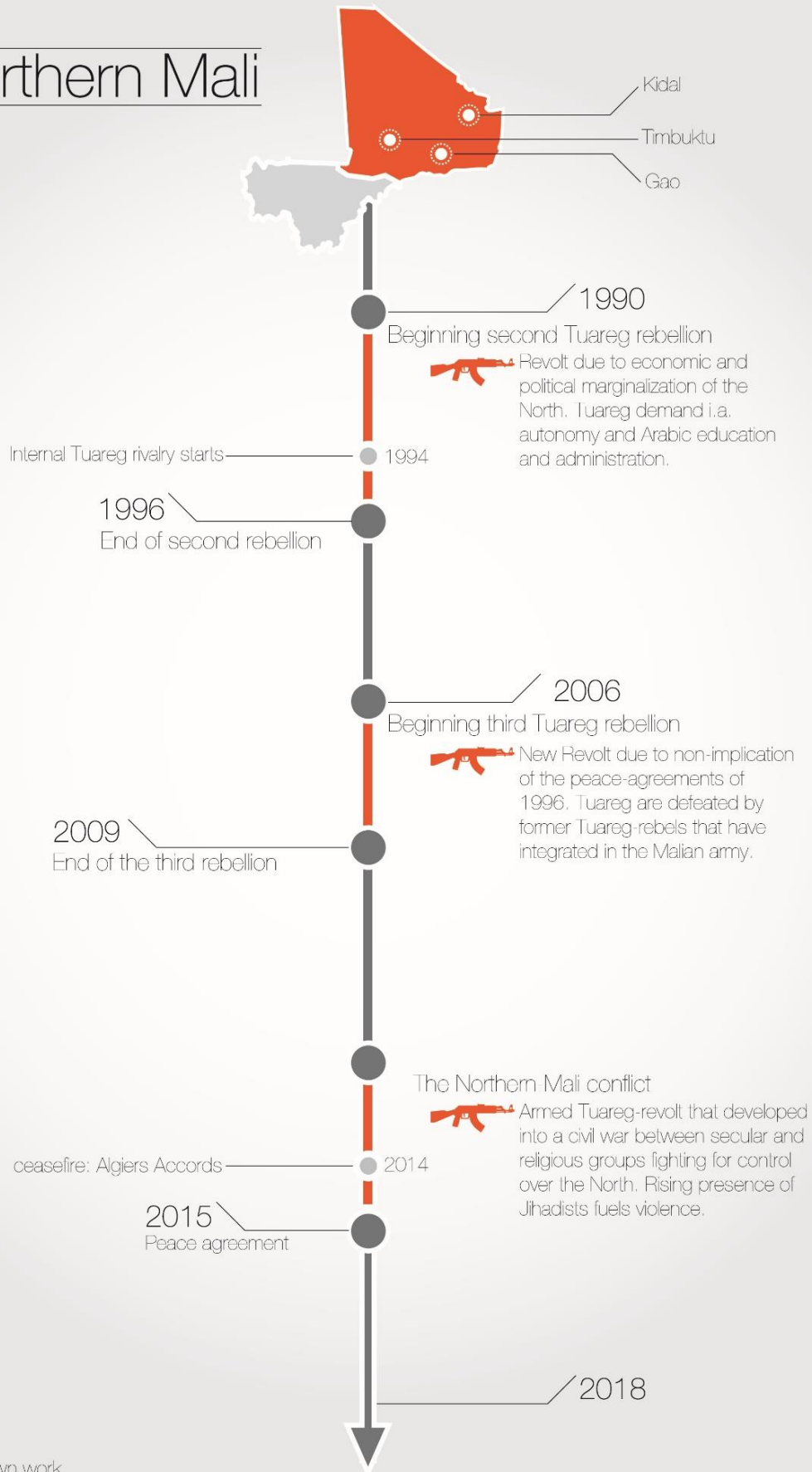
Appendix 2: Map of Mali



Source: N.N. <http://www.mappery.com/map-of/Mali-Political-Map>.

Appendix 3: Political history of the Azawad

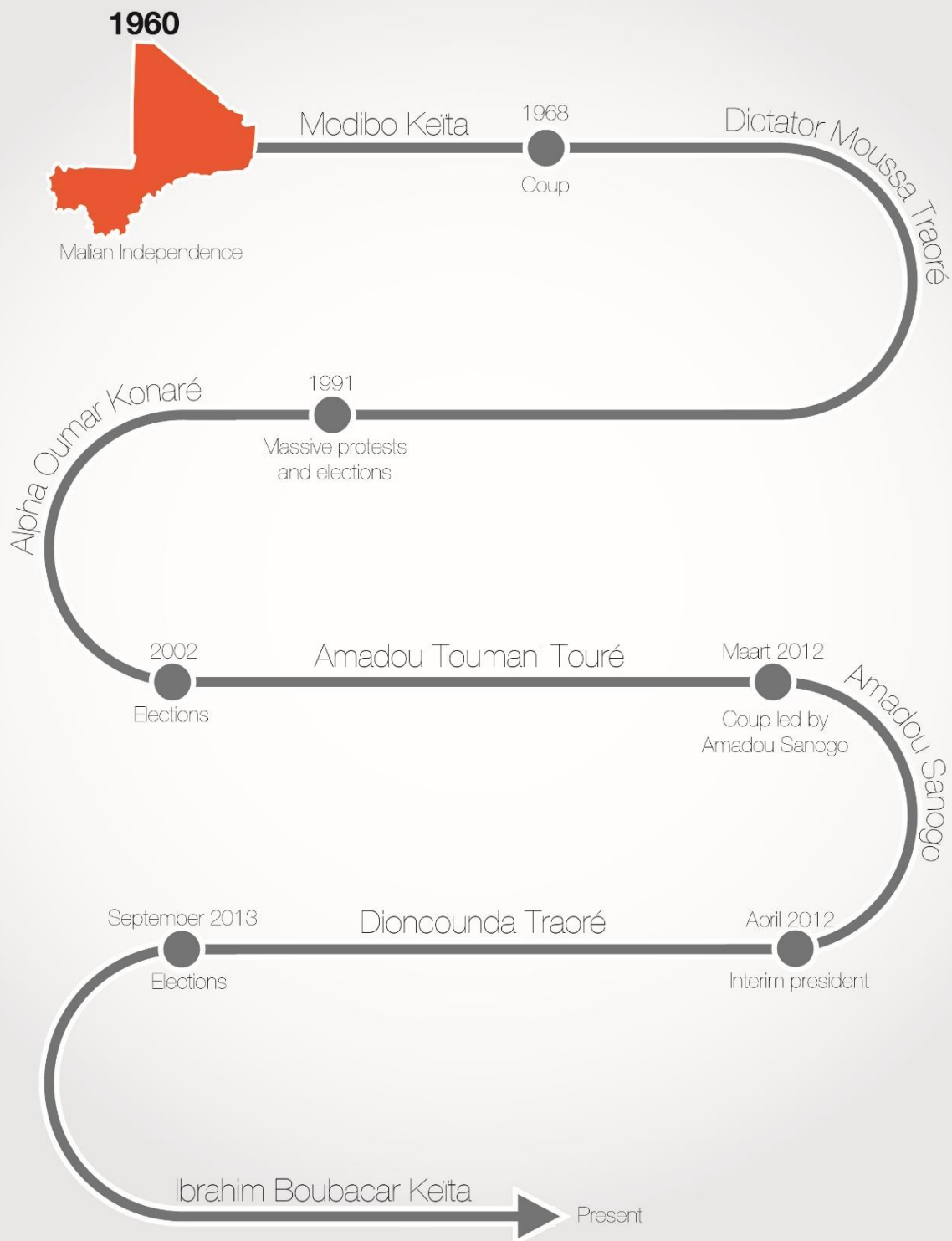
Northern Mali



Source: Own work

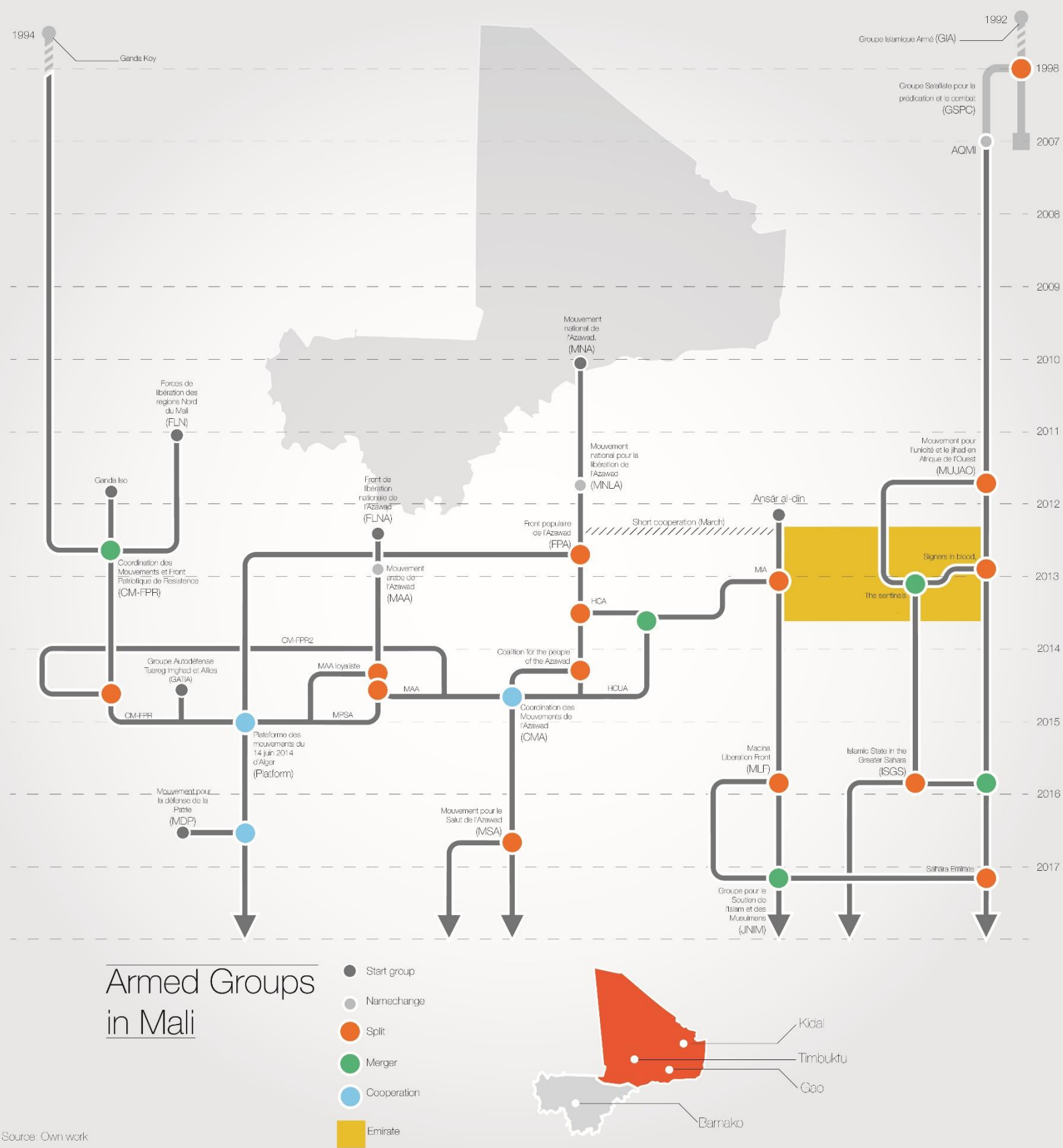
Appendix 4: Political history of Mali

Mali's Presidents



Source: Own work

Appendix 5: Armed groups in Mali



A quick guide to Mali's armed groups

Salafi-Jihadist groups

GIA: Armed Islamic Group

Algerian militant Islamist group created in 1991 by Algerian Afghan veterans as a reaction against the 1992 coup to prevent the Islamist political party FIS from winning the elections. Less active since 1998 due to internal factionalism.

GSPC: Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

Split from the GIA in 1998 as a response against GIA actively targeting citizens and active *takfir* policy. GSPC also targeted the Algerian state.

AQMI: Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb

Continuation of the GSPC under a different name due to an alignment with Al-Qaida. Originally continued the Algerian focus but now active throughout northern and western Africa. Divided between various “emirates”, among which the Sahara-Emirate. Led by emir ‘Abd al-Mālik Drūkdil. Together with MUJAO and AAD, it controlled the Islamic Emirate of Azawad. The **Sahara-Emirate** is now part of JNIM (with AQMI’s consent).

MUJAO: Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa

Split from AQMI to focus more on West Africa and claims to be more inclusive for West African members (mainly Mauritanian). Controlled the Islamic Emirate of Azawad with AAD and AQMI.

Signers in Blood Battalion (A.K.A. Masked Men)

One of the southern battalions of AQMI, led by Mukhtār Bilmokhtār, split off to focus more on the southern Sahara.

Al-Murābiṭūn: the Sentinels

Merger between MUJAO and the Signers in Blood Battalion. Returned to AQMI in 2015 and is part of JNIM since 2017.

ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara

Split from al-Murābiṭūn, small group. Aligned with the Islamic State group.

AAD: ‘Anṣār al-Dīn: Defenders of the Faith

Strives for the implementation of Sharia in the whole of Mali, mostly Tuareg members. Leader is Iyad Ag Ghaly. Controlled the Islamic Emirate of Azawad with AQMI and MUJAO. Currently part of JNIM.

MLF: Macina Liberation Front

Split from AAD to focus more on Fulani (black-Malian) Fighters. Currently part of JNIM.

MIA: Islamic Movement of Azawad

Split from AAD to focus on nationalism instead of Salafism (although it still focusses on the conservative form of Islamism). Distanced itself from AQMI and approached the HCUA. Negotiates for peace.

Other movements (secular and religious)

MNA: National Movement of Azawad

Separatist movement in the North of Mali, soon after creation became MNLA.

MNLA: Nationalist Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

Political and military organization that strived for an independent Azawad. Members are mainly Tuareg. It is a secular organization with some religious demands.

HCUA: High Council for Azawad

Split from MNLA and rejects armed struggle. Worked together with MIA to form the HCUA.

FPA: Popular Front of Azawad

Split from MNLA because it rejected independence. Is open for dialogue with all parties involved. Shortly was a part of the CMA but soon after became a Platform-member.

CPA: Coalition for the People of Azawad

Split from MNLA, part of negotiations with the government.

FNLA: National Front for Liberation of Azawad

Militia of Northern Malian Arabs who rejected MNLA control and wanted to protect Malian Arabs. Later became MAA.

MAA: Movement of Azawad Arabs

Secular movement that aims to protect Arabs from Azawad. It is prepared to work with the French to fight terrorism, smuggle, and crime. Strive for more Azawad-autonomy.

➔ **MAA loyaliste**

Split from MAA and became part of the Platform.

➔ **MPSA:** Popular Movement for the Health of Azawad

Split from MAA, joined Platform. Supports Malian unity but wants more self-determination for the Azawad. Sees themselves as a national political movement.

MPGK: Patriotic Movement Ganda Koy

Paramilitary group in Northern Mali founded in 1994 as a response to rising tensions between Tuareg and black tribes. Mostly consists of Songhai, Bambara, Fulani, Bozo and Tuareg-Bella (or slave-Tuareg). Especially fought Salafi-Jihadists. Loyal to the Malian regime.

Ganda Iso (A.K.A. Sons of the Land)

Inspired by the Ganda Koy movement. A paramilitary group that became especially active in northern Mali since the civil war.

FLN: Forces for the Liberation of the regions in Northern Mali

CM-FPR: Coordination of the Movements and Patriotic Front of Resistance

Founded in 2012 after a unity between Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso, and FLN. Mostly black Malian fighters.

→ **CM-FPR II**

Split from the CM-FPR.

GATIA: Auto-defense Group for Imghad-Tuareg and Allies

Loyal to the Malian regime and focusses on the interests of Imghad-Tuareg-Tribes.

CMA: Coordination of Movements of Azawad

Negotiation partner during and after the civil war.

- MNLA
- HCUA
- MAA
- CPA
- CM-FPR II

MSA: Movement for the Health of Azawad

Split from CMA, founded by members of MNLA, HCUA, and MAA. Goals are similar but aim is to represent the Azawad-people as a united group.

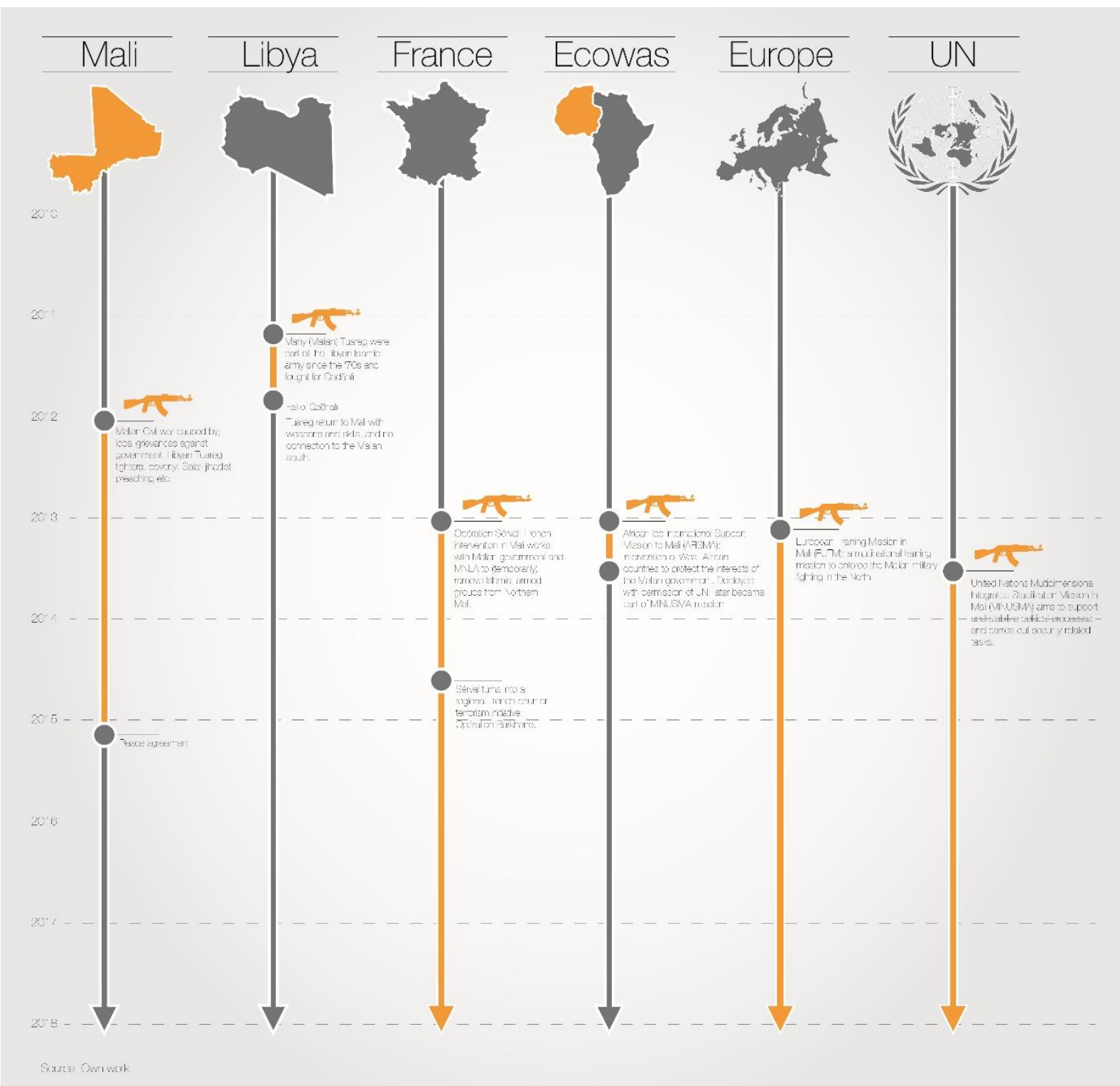
Platform (A.K.A. Platform of movements of 14th of June Algiers)

Alliance of various groups that are in favor of the Malian government. Founded during peace negotiations between the government and CMA in Algiers. Important for later negotiations.

- CM-FPR
- GATIA
- MAA-Loyaliste
- MPSA
- FPA
- **MDP:** Movement for the Defense of the Homeland
New group that joined the Platform immediately after being founded in 2016. It is a political and military group, created to protect Fulani-Malians.

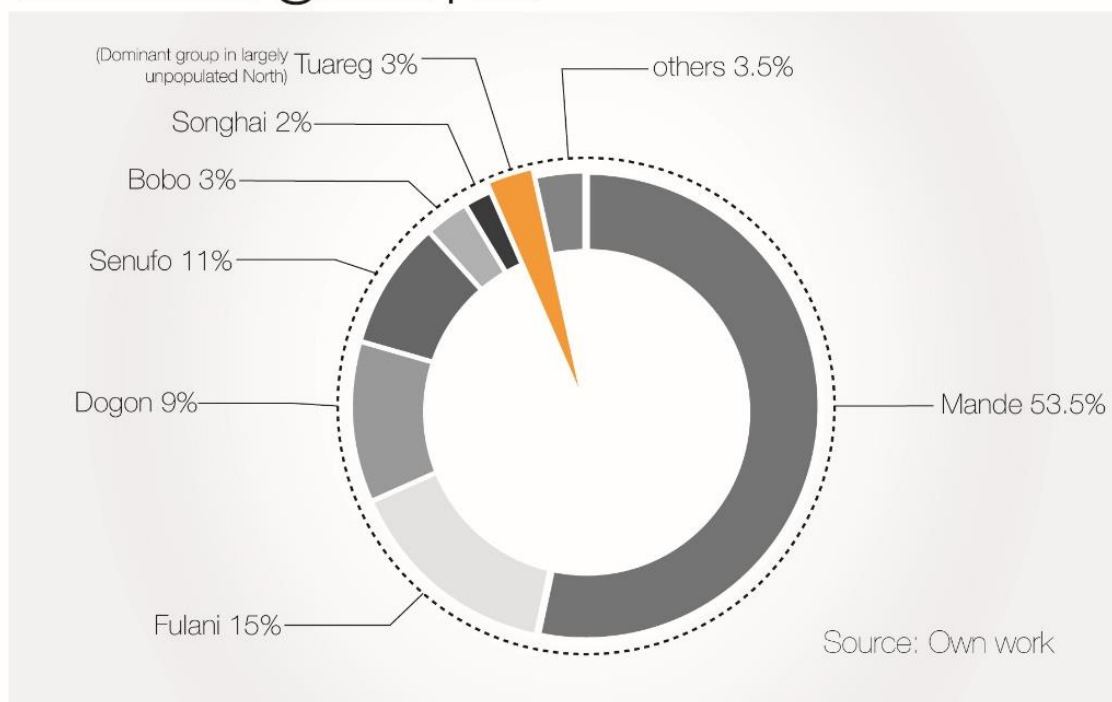
Note: This summary is non-exhaustive and consists of the most important players in my opinion. Summary is based on the gathered literature and news coverage of the Malian conflict, see bibliography). Most importantly “A timeline of northern conflict.” IRIN, Thurston and Lebovich’s “A Handbook on Mali’s 2012-2013 Crisis.”, and coverage on MaliActu.

Appendix 6: Global influences in Mali.



Appendix 7: Religion and ethnicity in Mali

Ethnic groups



Religion

