Jihadism as form of lay thinking

Dorra Ben Alaya
University of Tunis El Manar

What[1] is referred to as the "Islamic State of Iraq and Sham" (ISIS) or DAESH (an acronym formed from the organization's Arabic designation), appears today through both common and official discourse, as well as that of the media, as the main face of what is called the organized "global terrorism". It is characterized by a staged violence, particularly on the web, and by spectacular attacks, as arguments for its propaganda.

In fact, it was responsible in 2015 for more than 3,000 attacks worldwide and is ranked first among the ten deadliest organizations. The ISIS stands out also for its novelty in its establishment process as a self-proclaimed state, ignoring national borders, communities and internationally recognized norms. Its borders are not precisely delineated and are moreover, moving with the passing of conquests and defeats. It would thus constitute a kind of *terra incognita* with all what it implies as geographical and ideological imaginary. The ISIS appears through official and media discourses, as the material and concrete place of what terrifies, creates disorder and transgresses all known rules of modern nation-states. Nor should we forget the role played by a historical background dating back to the Crusades, anchoring the ISIS problem in a pre-existing imaginary, opposing "East" and "West", Islam and Christianity, "civilized" and "barbaric" world (Huttington, 1993, 1996).

Many studies have attempted to identify the leading factors to the ISIS membership. They are at micro, meso and macro levels of analysis, ranging from geostrategic to psychological, sociological or political science. At each of these levels, numerous factors interaction and combination contribute to the explanation of what is referred to as "violent extremism" (Ranstorp & Hyllengren, 2013). This shows the phenomenon complexity and the unresolved difficulty of reaching a solution that can prevent violent actions. Many of them aim explicitly or implicitly to respond to the urgent need to prevent or counter current membership and recruitment, by seeking to iden-

[1]This chapter is a revised version of a paper published in 2021 in the *RUDN Journal of Psychology and Pedagogics*, 18(2), 363-374.

tify the living conditions or the individual trajectories role leading to violent action. However, identifying unambiguously decisive factors at the general level in the organization membership, seems to be a difficult task. Neither the degree of poverty nor the education or the origin country religiosity level are determining factors. According to a World Bank report (2016), only the country's overall male unemployment rate seems to correlate with the recruits number, while at the same time the majority say they worked in a trade before joining the organization. Another important finding is that recruits « are far from being uneducated or illiterate ». 69% of them report at least a secondary education, only 15% left school before high school and less than 2% are illiterate. Concerning recruits from the Middle East, North Africa and South and East Asia, « they are significantly more educated than individuals from their cohort in their region of origin. Most has attended secondary school and a large fraction has gone on to study at university ». With regard to the Muslim religion knowledge, their own assessments of their knowledge of it show low levels: only 4% consider that they have a confirmed religion knowledge. The majority (53%) consider their knowledge "basic" and 20% consider it at the "intermediate" level. In addition, the country religiosity degree is negatively correlated with the ISIS recruits number. In conclusion, the report states that it is the combination of the country's high unemployment rate and a high level of education, which has a high probability of leading to "radical" ideas.

These so-called "radical" ideas belong to an Islam minority movement, namely *Jihadist-Salafism* (this should'nt be confused with *Salafism* (Rougier, 2008), which can be only "activist" or "quietist"…) as it stands today (*op.cit.*), i.e. in a total social and political rupture logic with the nation-state model. This is probably the reason why the "Islamist political ideology" is generally described in reference to the "radicalism" or "radicalization" concepts (as it was already the case for the anarchist movement in the late 19th - early 20th century or of the far left actions in the 1970s, in Europe) which Khosrokhavar (2014, p. 8) describes as "the process by which an individual or group adopts a violent form of action, directly linked to an extremist ideology […]". *Jihadist-Salafism* is characterized by, among other things, being selective in sacred references (i.e. the Koran and *hadiths* and by the violence use as a means of establishing the only legitimate political and social governance model in the eyes of doctrine. It should be noted, however, that this is a trend whose history is not recent. It dates back to the 8th-9th century AD, i.e. *Handbalism* (Laoust, 1959 ; Charnay, 2008), one of the four leading jurisprudence schools that form *Sunni* Muslim law, founded by Ibn-Hanbal (1895) whose primary concern was to restore strict respect for the Koran and the prophetic tradition (Nader, 1956), in the face of the emergence of new currents of thought (particularly that of *Mu'tazilites*[2] inspired by Greek philosophy), and to disqualify the interpretation of sacred texts activities designated as "innovation", which is a pejorative concept in this context. In the 13th century, *Ibn-Taymiyya* criticized the rationalist philosophers of the time – particularly *Ibn-Rochd* (*Averroes*) – whom he considered heretics and as the "Aristotle religion" followers whose reference framework is a « polytheistic thought »; and; secondly, some rites

[2]Tenants of *Mu'tazilism*, a Sunni Islam current founded, probably, by *Ibn-Ata* in the 8th century.

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314

forms that he describes as "deviant", such as *Sufism*[3] (a mystic Islam current existing since the 9th century)[4] which, at that time, began to be organized (Guenon, 1973 ; Houtsma, Arnold & Wensinck, 1913), or the saints cult (Massignon, 1975; 2010). Then, *Abdel-Wahhab* (18th century) gave a new lease of life to the *Jihadist-Salafism* as in its current form. He participated in the founding of a *Salafist* governance characterized by great rigorism, that of Saudi Arabia (de Lage, 2006). From the doctrinal point of view in relation to his predecessors, *Abdel-Wahhab*[5] introduced the excommunication principle ("التكفير") and the idea according to which many of those who believe they are Muslim are not true ones due to the « idols » they associate with God ("شرك"). Therefore they are accused by him of polytheism, apostasy or miscreance. They are literally "those who associate" ("مشركون"), punishable by the death penalty. In the 20th century, Qutb[6] – a member of the early Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – by promulgating violent struggle as legitimate, even compulsory political action against Arab nationalist socialist regimes and the "West", in modern jihadism (Carré & Seurat, 1983) was one of those who gave new impetus to modern *jihadism.* More recently, since 2001, Bin Laden, founder of Al Qaeda, Al-Zawahiri, and, distinguishing themselves from the latter, Zarkawi and Al-Baghdadi (" *Caliph* " of the ISIS) among others, are the main representatives of current *jihadism* (Benichou, Khosrokhavar & Migaux 2015; Rogozinski, 2017). They have led to the jihad globalization while placing it in an apocalyptic perspective. In addition, there is the massive dissemination of jihadist literature both that from the origins and that more recent (in particular that of *Al-Maqdissi* of *Wahhabi* inspiration) at the international level, due to the new communication technologies and virtual social networks constituting extremely efficient vehicles for the *jihadism* ideas (Khosrokhavar, 2014).

Since the first work on "*jihadist terrorism*" that could be traced back to Etienne (1987), the thinking of "political Islamism" in which *Jihadist-Salafism* is classified, has been decoded, often by applying an analysis in terms of ideology, by making use of a predefined conceptual framework that in social psychology refers to general, non-specific mental processes. According to Maher (2017), *Jihadist-Salafism* is a political-religious ideology built around five principles: *jihad*[7] (which literally means "effort" in Arabic and which refers in *Salafist-Jihadist* doctrine to the obligation to armed struggle), the oneness of God[8], the excommunication[9], the covenant and disavowal[10] (broadly referring to the idea that a Muslim would only be a Muslim if he disavows non-Muslims), and absolute divine sovereignty (which refers to what *Salafist* literature more precisely refers to in Arabic, literally, as the "unification of sovereignty"[11]).

[3] A mystical doctrine of Islam organized in brotherhoods (" طرق ").

[4] *Al-Hallaj* (9th century) and *Ibn-Arabi* (13th century) were representatives of the movement.

[5] Abdel-Wahhab. *Kitâb ut-tawhîd*, on line, [http://bayt.al.hikma.free.fr/la_croyance/livre_unicite.html.

[6] Qutb, S. (2002). *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, vol. 30 (freely translated by Adil Salahi), on line https://www.kalamullah.com/shade-of-the-quran.html.

[7] "الجهاد"

[8] "التوحيد"

[9] "التكفير"

[10] "الولاء والبراء"

[11] "توحيد الحاكمية"

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314

In social psychology, the definition of the ideology is not without some difficulties. Those given, are often equivocal, non-operational and questionable (Roussiau & Bonardi, 2001). The notion refers to the idea of a particular sociocognitive system or functioning of "self-explanation" and "self-legitimization" (Deconchy, 1989, p. 242). In Deconchy's terms (2000, p. 118), it is a "specific cognitive posture". According to this author (1989, 1999), it is a coherent system of reality explanations and representations, based on a conviction among its supporters, of the veracity of its content considered as "true", without any "rational" verification. It is as a natural perceiving and explaining framework for events, that is, as realism [...]. Hence the concept of epistemo-ideology (Camus, 2004).

It is characterized by making the product of contingencies, as an historical and logical necessity (Deconchy, 1999, p. 119). Within this conceptual framework, the ideological explanation system is considered as opposed to an optimal thinking system whose prototypical form would be scientific verification. This conceptual framework – like any theoretical framework – is not exempt from implications: first, the contents of ideologies are studied only as particularisms; and second, the ideology notion refers to an unusual functioning. It is associated with the orthodoxy notion which, according to Deconchy (1971, p. 35), characterizes an individual who "accepts, and even asks, that his thought, language and behaviour being regulated by the ideological group to which he belongs and in particular by the group power apparatuses". Generally, adherence to *Salafist-Jihadist* doctrine is implicitly interpreted as a sort of "madness", an abnormality, often signified by "out of the ordinary".

This idea is clearly expressed through some definitions of islamist "radicalism", such as Bernier's (2016), according to which it is expressed in an "unusual way", and may eventually lead to the use of "non-ordinary means". The phenomenon analyses are generally based on two postulates: that of a clear rupture between erroneous information processing *versus* valid one, individual rationality *versus* collective irrationality, optimal cognitive functioning *versus* biased one; and a more specific and implicit one of a clear limit between a supposed Muslim "ordinary", "moderate", "reasonably religious" common sense, and a "radicalized" thinking. The first postulate, an epistemic one, refers to a "preliminary and fixed conception of what thinking *should* be" as expressed by Moscovici (2013, p. 227), i.e. the idea of a norm, that of a "normality" of thinking *versus* a biased thinking. These are the presuppositions of a dominant cognitivism in social psychology, undermined by the social thinking paradigm as initiated by Moscovici (1976). By introducing common sense knowledge as a legitimate scientific object in social sciences, he reintroduces the reflective and symbolic dimension of human social behavior (Greenwood, 2004; Kalampalikis, 2013). The paradigm has also a far-reaching epistemological implication: rationality is no longer the prerogative of the individual or the scientific thinking; and it is no longer defined according to the veracity criteria according to an objective reality facts. By taking up the legacy of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl, Moscovici (2013, p. 46) affirm that "all that is rational is social and all that is social is rational". He refers to "the rationality of popular knowledge". He stipulates that social thinking would have its own rationality whose logic derives from social situations and which is generated by the social relations constraints. It is based on the collective construct of meanings need, in order to act.

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314

In this perspective, *jihadist* thinking can be interpreted as a certain" knowledge mode" expression that is contextually determined. It is an "evaluative knowledge" Beauvois (1984) that makes sense in the eyes of its members. But before continuing, we should specify that what is expressed here is a purely epistemological posture, which must not be interpreted as a legitimizing attempt of the *jihadist* thinking. What is proposed here is only to consider this thinking from its own logic taken in a phenomenological level and in relation to the particular contexts of its diffusion, in order to understand the dynamics of the actions it claims. Given the difficulty of defining a typical profile itself, express the impasse by focusing exclusively on what makes individuals and their unique trajectories joining the *Jihadist* movement of the violent *jihadist* ready to carry out an attack, it is, in our opinion, towards the *jihadist* thinking internal elements and their links with the context, which we must look to find a way of explanation. It is on the basis of these proposals that we have sought to understand the tremendous attraction and fascination power the *jihadist* thinking exerts on its supporters, and more particularly in the Tunisian context. This means that we consider that the internal jihadist "rationality" and consistency would have a powerful reality structuring power among those who adhere to it.

As an illustration of this power, a UN experts report[12] notes that until August 2018, between 20,000 and 30,000 jihadists were still fighting in the ISIS ranks despite the military setbacks it is undergoing. In addition, there are 3000 to 4000 fighters in Libya, as well as those in Southeast Asia and West Africa. Thus, in the same way as an idea formulated by Crettiez (2011), the assumption underlying our reflection is that of an "resonance" (Snow & Benford, 1988) of the jihadist discourse as it currently circulates, with a loss of meaning of the key notions that underlie community life in a "modern" nation-state among the lay thinking in Tunisia as formulated by Ben Alaya (2013). This meaning loss would be the result of the dictatorship several decades to which succeeded, since the fall of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, an important social, economic and political crisis. A large part of the Tunisian state authorities have lost much of their credibility and the confidence of the population (Ben Alaya, 2015). This is accompanied by a very strong sense of injustice, humiliation and lack of recognition among young people (Melliti & Moussa, 2018; Ben Alaya, 2015). More importantly, Ben Alaya's work shows that young Tunisians from different backgrounds, manifest a pragmatic paradox experience in the sense of the Palo Alto systemic theory of (*cf.* Bateson, 1995; Winkin, 1981) due to recurring double-bind situations in which they face concrete interactions and experiences that totally invalidate the explicit official discourses about the rule of law, modernity, institutions, justice, equality and human rights. The only issue that remains in such context is to deny the reality to which the dominant thinking categories refers. This category thinking system is considered by young people as principles that are "imported from Europe". In other words, there is a meaning loss of the rule of law notions that are disabled by concrete experience. It is, in our opinion, in the context of this loss that the jihadist discourse could impose its own thinking framework. To formalize this, we use the description of one of the social representations formation processes as described by Moscovici (1961): the anchoring.

[12]Report submitted to the UN Security Council on 23 August 2018 [https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/261/77/pdf

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314

This recourse seems adequate as a social representation is formed facing an "ordinary experience rupture (which) triggers meanings and explanations search of what strikes us as strange and disturbing" (Moscovici, 2013, p. 109). However, it should be noted that in our approach, the anchoring process should concern a "familiar" object that has become "unfamiliar". Or more precisely, it should concern what we thought being familiar and which surprises us for not being in adequacy with the social interactions reality. It is as if the referents, once anchored in a "modernist" reference framework, had lost their meaning because the framework itself had become a source of ambiguity and strangeness. In contrast to the anchoring process as usually described, there would be the adoption of a new framework for "re-anchoring" the objects that we thought were known and that they have fallen into the strangeness. The anchoring as defined by Moscovici (1961) is the process by which pre-existing frameworks of thought are implemented to apprehend novelty. Except that in our concern, the objects are already known and it is the frame that is new. It would be the substitution of one framework by another to reinterpret in a new way, the already existing objects. The aim of anchoring in this case would not be familiarizing strangeness, but resolving a paradox, re-familiarizing the "known" that is no longer familiar (which is in line with Kruglansky and Webster's theory (1996; 1994) of intolerance towards ambiguity among extremists).

The hypothesis of a re-anchorage process implies that anchoring could be circular, and could lead to a first period of characterization of the object, followed by a downgrading to a strange object (to the point of infamy in *jihadism*). The stigmatization of once-familiar "non-Muslims" in *jihadism* could be one of the origins of this demotion into "being to be killed". To explain the power of this imperative to annihilate this "stranger" who is the "miscreant", we can take up the notion of stigmatic anchoring formulated by Moscovici (2002b) who notes:" […] his presence [the stranger] is felt […] as a disorder that one cannot ignore. The deficiency we feel is the deficiency of a common world. More specifically, a loss of familiarity or coherence in the way of being in the group. This is why the awareness of this loss is an existential problem that affects the whole person" (p. 23).

In view of the above, *jihadist* thinking would find its place in contexts where none of the categorization systems in place among collectives has the power to integrate key objects that govern living together. Alongside the fundamental texts of *Jihadist-Salafism*, the *Jihadist* discourse as it currently circulates, responds in the long term to the need to give a new meaning to the experienced problems, while offering keys to exit, presented as effective and definitive. For the "injustices" and "inequalities" imposed by "a State that favors only the rich", it substitutes a divine, supra-human right, the just and equitable nature of which constitutes its very essence concretized by the law of retaliation[13]. To the "contempt" shown by "the rich classes" for the "poor classes", it imposes a hierarchy based on loyalty to God and where each person can, by his own faith and conduct (in other words by his own means), reach the highest ranks. To a difficulty in projecting oneself into the future, he offers an infinite perspective of eternity through a very elaborate eschatological vision and apocalyptic narrative. To the feeling of helplessness in the face of difficult events and living conditions, he

[13] "قصاص"

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314

invites the individual to play an active role not only in his own life, but also in an epic progression of the world and in the inevitable destiny of the divine will. In a few words, *jihadist* thinking restores in the individual in search of meaning, through his participation in a community of elected representatives (that of "true" Muslims)[14], a self-glorious image and a power, which one believes distorted by the failing law of men.

Conclusion

It is by taking into consideration the meanings conveyed by jihadist discourse, in correspondence with those existing (or vacant) among the common sense and in a particular context, that the influence of *jihadist* thinking can be understood. The implications are multiple. First, an exploration of common sense thinking as a whole, i.e. extended to a *non-jihadist* population, seems useful, if not essential, to understand the possible relevance of the doctrine to individuals. Secondly, it means that explicit adherence to *jihadist* thinking would not be in total rupture with the ordinary social representations. Another point should be raised. It is to "ordinary" aspirations that *jihadist* thinking claims to respond. "Justice", "equality", "equity", "respect"… are values to which explicit reference is made by the current. Putting the analyzes made in a radical opposition framework with the "ordinary" referents, could be a dead end. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in *Salafist* doctrine in general, the source of these values is external to the social, supra-human and therefore considered as absolutely infallible. It excludes therefore any dialectic.

[14]The "*Umma*" "(أمّة)".

Published in : Papastamou, Stamos ; Moliner, Pascal (Eds.), *Serge Moscovici's work. Legacy and perspective*, Editions des Archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813004314, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813004314