

# “Fight for Europe”

How Saudi Arabia and Qatar compete to spread their religious influence within European Muslim communities

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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# Preface

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# “Fight for Europe”: How Saudi Arabia and Qatar compete to spread their religious influence within European Muslim communities

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## Introduction

Both Morocco and Turkey have supported state institutional governance of religious affairs within their diaspora. Turkey established Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs) and Morocco established Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs) as their representatives of “official Islam,” the type of Islam that only the state can promote. Both these institutions are in charge of building mosques, delivering religious teaching, training, and appointing imams. Their aim is to promote a national understanding of Islam and control the way their diaspora governs the religious discourse in Europe. Meeting the religious needs of their diaspora also meant maintaining close links and what these links entail in terms of political, economic, and symbolic gains. Within the Turkish diaspora, Diyanet promotes a form of Sunni Islam which represents a more tolerant and moderate alternative to Wahhabism, whereas Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques promotes a ‘Moroccan official Islam’ to counter the influence of other religious discourses. Both institutions have attempted to frame their “official Islam” and position themselves, on the one hand, as the only competent religious authority above their diaspora, and on the other hand, the defender of Muslim communities. Recently, these institutions started emphasizing their role as intermediaries between European states and the diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

Analyzing how Turkey and Morocco try to dominate the religious discourse within their diaspora in Europe, this paper seeks to understand how other Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are trying to shape the religious rhetoric within European Muslim communities. In other words, this paper examines how these two countries compete to spread their religious influence beyond their national borders. This paper argues that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have tried to extend their understanding of Islam beyond their borders in an attempt to legitimize their own regimes and establish their hegemony within Muslim communities in Europe. Besides, the paper argues that the establishment of religious movements, either in the land of Islam or in the west, is not merely a reaction to globalization and the insecurities it produced. These movements attempt to shape globalization processes and produce an

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<sup>1</sup> See Lalla Amina Drhimeur, (2020), « The interactions between the Turkish and Moroccan State actors and governments », İstanbul Bilgi University, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.3979254

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alternative form of globalization that appeals to the threatened and educated young and the bourgeoisie.

From a historical perspective, Saudi Arabia and Qatar seem to have the most important influence on Islam in Europe. While Qatar used its financial and diplomatic means to support the spread of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology in Europe, Saudi Arabia's support vacillated between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist groups. Wahhabism is the state religion in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Bonneyoy and Lacroix, 2016). Though Wahhabism does not regulate Qatar's public life, the regime in Saudi Arabia ensures stricter compliance with Islamic norms (ibid). Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia welcomed members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as they fled Nasser's persecution in the second half of the 20th century (Matthiesen, 2015). After its foundation in Egypt at the end of the 1920s, the movement advocated for a political system based on the texts of the Quran and the Muslim tradition. Calling for the establishment of an Islamic state, it became an alternative form of social and political mobilization (Kepel, 2004a). For the two states, welcoming the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia and Qatar was a strategic decision to counter the influence of nationalist and leftist ideologies (Matthiesen, 2015). Supporting the movement in Europe was also a strategic decision to spread their influence beyond their borders (Commins, 2019).

Based on its financial resources, efficient organization and intellectual capabilities, the Muslim Brotherhood movement soon gained a prominent position among Muslim communities in Europe (Vidino, 2010). One of the many strengths of the movement was its members' ideological flexibility and ability to shift their conception of Europe from a "land of impiety" to a "land of Islam" (Kepel, 2004a). In awareness of the lack of spiritual guidance for Muslim communities, who were left alone by their home countries to manage their own religious life, the Muslim Brotherhood started filling the void and providing religious counsel to migrants (Vidino, 2010).

The Saudi's decision to modernize the country's infrastructures and welcome Western troops in its territories during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led some Muslim Brotherhood members to organize themselves into an opposition movement to the regime and lead anti-government protests (Commins, 2019). The campaign, called the Awakening (Sahwa), was violently repressed. As a result, Saudi Arabia decided to cut its ties with the Brotherhood within its borders and abroad (Matthiesen, 2015). While Qatar continued to support the Muslim Brothers, the Saudi regime, which preserved its aim to extend its religious influence outside Saudi Arabia, started promoting a "quietist" Salafism, one that tends to be apolitical (Bonneyoy and Lacroix, 2016). In what Kepel refers to as the "battle for Europe," Qatar and Saudi Arabia fight over defining the predominant concept of Islam (Kepel, 2004b).

To analyze how Saudi Arabia and Qatar try to influence Muslim communities in Europe, this paper will be divided into three main parts. The first part will examine the political regimes in Saudi Arabia and Qatar and how they frame their understanding of Islam. The second part will focus on how these two countries supported the organizations of the Muslim Brothers in Europe. And finally, the last part will cover how Qatar and Saudi Arabia diverted in their strategies to influence European Muslim communities.

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## Wahhabism is the state religion in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are absolute monarchies. Saudi Arabia is a theocratic monarchy that recognizes the Quran as the constitution and the *sharia* as the law sources. Power is distributed between the royal family and religious scholars. The royal family deals with politics, while religious scholars deal with the religious and social spheres. The religious police ensure strict compliance with religious principles. In Qatar, the royal family holds all the executive and legislative authority and controls the judiciary. Political parties and other political groupings are not permitted. The constitution recognizes Islam as the state religion and *sharia* as the “a main source” of legislation. This first part aims to (1) shed light on Saudi Arabia and Qatar's political regimes, as well as the role that religion plays in the two states, and (2) clarify the difference between Wahhabism and Salafism, which are often used interchangeably in the current public debate on Islam.

### *The regime in Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia is a theocratic monarchy in which Sunni Islam is the state religion (Benjamin, 2016). Quran is the constitution, and *sharia* the source of laws (Nevo, 1998). Political power lies in the king's hands, who is the prime minister and commander-in-chief (Benjamin, 2016). He has absolute control of the government, appointing officials, ambassadors and governors, and legislating through royal decrees, or ministerial decrees that he has to approve (ibid). The education system also serves to promote Islam. Religious studies and Arabic count for more than half of the curriculum in schools (Nevo, 1998). It is an authoritarian monarchy that relies on various strategies of distribution and coercion (Okruhlik, 2002). Distribution policies provide health care services, subsidized food, energy, and subsidized loans, while coercion relies on the security apparatus to limit freedom of expression, mobility, and assembly (ibid). Political parties and national elections are not permitted (Benjamin, 2016).

The royal family (Al Saud) bases its political legitimacy on religion and strict compliance with Islamic norms (Nevo, 1998). This claim emerged after their alliance with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab back in 1744 (Okruhlik, 2002). Al-Wahhab was a religious reformer who lived in central Arabia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Kepel, 2004a). He studied Islamic law in Medina, Iraq, and Iran before returning to his hometown Najd to preach God's oneness and to end practices where people prayed to saints or venerated sacred sites, shrines, and tombs (Benjamin, 2016). He called for the purification of Muslim religious life from any forms of idolatry (Commins, 2019). This approach meant recognizing the Quran and the *Sunna* as the only sources for religious, social, and political organization, adopting the values of the Prophet and his followers, and rejecting any innovations introduced to Islam (Nevo, 1998). The ‘pact’ between ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Al Saud gave birth to the Saudi state (Lacroix, 2015). While Al Saud would help Al Wahhab and his followers spread their religious school across territories, the Wahhabis would help Al Saud establish themselves as the “political masters” of these territories (Nevo, 1998, p. 37). Accordingly, the Wahhabis obeyed the kingdom’s authorities on the condition that the ruler’s decisions and decrees did not violate *sharia* (Al-Atawneh, 2009). This alliance

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enabled al-Wahhab and his descendants to “dominate” religious institutions in exchange for their endorsement and promotion of Al Saud’s politics (Okruhlik, 2002). The Wahhabi religious establishment would dominate religion, culture, and education while the royal family was in control of the domestic and foreign policies, and the army (Benjamin, 2016). This alliance gave birth to a “bicameral system” that distributes power between religious scholars and the royal family (Bonney and Lacroix, 2016). While religious scholars control the sacred and the social spheres, the royal family deals with political issues (Bonney and Lacroix, 2016).

Wahhabism became the state religion since Wahhabis believe Islam to be not only a belief system but also a comprehensive system that allows governing all religious, social, and political spheres of life (Al-Atawneh, 2009). Following this understanding, the royal family ensures the implementation of Wahhabis’ interpretations of the religious text (Lacroix, 2015). The state is administered according to strict religious principles set by the Prophet Muhammad (Nevo, 1998). The political system is based on preserving *sharia* and enforcing its rule (Al-Atawneh, 2009). In exchange for their obedience and loyalty to the ruling royal family, they were able to establish their authority over religious affairs to “construct a puritanical religious culture” and suppress dissent voices (Commins, 2019, p. 3). In conclusion, Saudi Arabia’s religious and ideological establishment is based on the tradition of Wahhabism, of which the state claims to be the “guardian” (Meijer, 2011a, p. 2). Wahhabis call for the strict application of the religious doctrines and people’s compliance with their religious principles (Kepel, 2004a). To ensure conformity to what they understood as “right and wrong,” religious police was created in the 1920s (Commins, 2019). Wahhabis believe that the “coercive power” of the state is the only way to guarantee the protection of Islam (Nevo, 1998, p. 37).

### *The regime in Qatar*

Qatar is a hereditary monarchy where the Al Thani family rules the country according to the provisions of the constitution (*BTI 2020 Qatar Country Report*, 2020). The royal family takes all the political decisions in the absence of political parties and democratic political and judicial institutions (*ibid*). The regime is often referred to as an oligarchy based on Islam-centered tribalism (Seniguer, 2013). While Article 35 of the constitution states that “all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion” (‘The Constitution of Qatar’, 2004), some minority groups and migrants keep facing political, social and economic discrimination (*BTI 2020 Qatar Country Report*, 2020). The Qatari Citizenship Act, adopted on October 30, 2005, states that naturalized Qataris can only work for the public sector five years after acquiring the citizenship. Ten years after their naturalization, they can hold legislation position (‘Law No. 38 of 2005 on the acquisition of Qatari nationality’, 2005). The law is highly exclusive as it discriminates between native Qataris and those who acquire citizenship through naturalization (Babar, 2014).

Sunni Islam is the official religion in Qatar (*BTI 2020 Qatar Country Report*, 2020). The first article of the constitution defines Islamic law, commonly referred to as *sharia*, as the primary source of legislation, and “apostasy” from Islam is considered a capital offense (Sader, 2013). Ideologically speaking, Qatar is officially a Wahhabi state (Freer, 2019). The religious

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sphere, however, is not bureaucratized (ibid). There is “no institutionalized form of state religious authority in the form of a grand mufti or bureaucratized state *ulama* (religious scholars) (ibid, p. 1). The ruling family adheres to the scriptures of the founder of Wahhabism as they hail from the same tribe (Roberts, 2017). Wahhabism seems to be more influential within “religious institutions of private education” (Talon, 2011, p. 60).

Although Wahhabism is Qatar’s state religion, its principles are not applied to regulate public life (Bonney and Lacroix, 2016). Salafism exerts influence within the state, particularly within the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic affairs (Freer, 2016). Qatar has also been the Salafi movement’s principal benefactor, hosting various events for Salafi clerics and funding Salafi-controlled charities (Dickinson, 2014). This state-led competition between Wahhabism and Salafism ensures that public and political debate will remain mainly focused on Islam’s role in everyday life and not on political reforms (Freer, 2016).

To clarify further, Wahhabism is only one of Salafism’s trends within Sunni Islam (Bin Ali and Bin Sudiman, 2016). Both share the same ideological background as they believe returning to the religious practices of the “pious ancestors” would allow Muslim societies to regain their glory (Amghar, 2008b, p. 96). In addition, both reject schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib*) and present themselves as a “shield” against Western values of nationalism, secularism, communism, and liberalism (Al-Rasheed, 2006, p. 23). Both rose as a reaction to colonial powers and a response to the enlightenment movement introduced in the Muslim world after Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798 (Meddeb, 2006). This encounter led Muslim theologians to call for the primacy of reason and the use of *bid’a* (innovation) and *maslaha* (*utilitas publica*) to explain that the application of any law should take into consideration the interest of the community as a whole (ibid). Islamic fundamentalists perceived the enlightenment as a foreign influence that corrupts the Muslim faith (ibid). Wahhabism and Salafism reject innovation and support the strict implementation of religious principles. Salafism refers to the pious forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*), the first three generations of Muslims, who thought that studying the fundamental sources of Islam, the Quran and the *hadith*, would purify religion (Meijer, 2011b). It is a religious and social movement interested in creating a distinct communal and personal authentic identity free from any innovations in belief and practice (Haykel, 2011). The movement avoids any participation in, or affiliation with political parties, civic associations, and any other forms of political life since politics itself is a form of innovation that leads to divisions among Muslims (ibid).

Having seen the different religious ideologies that prevail in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the question I will raise now is how these two countries diffuse them within Muslim communities in Europe to increase their influences beyond their national borders. The following section will analyze Saudi Arabia and Qatar’s alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe to answer this question.

## **Towards the “Europeanization” of the Muslim Brotherhood**

Saudi Arabia has become one of the leading centers for the spread of Wahhabism in Europe. This happened first through interpersonal networks of European religious scholars who went

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on a pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and then through state institutional networks of religious associations, Islamic bookshops, and satellite channels like *Iqra* (Amghar, 2011). The regime promoted Wahhabism as a religious discourse that legitimizes the regime of the royal family because it “requires subservience” to the political authority (Al-Rasheed, 2006, p. 26). Promoting its religious discourse beyond its borders, with the help of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a political strategy to “establish its credentials” and hegemony within Muslim communities in Europe (Al-Rasheed, 2006). Similarly, Qatar used the Muslim Brotherhood to increase its influence beyond its borders, in the MENA region or Europe (Roberts, 2017). Qatar’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood also consolidates the regime’s internal legitimacy (Seniguer, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that the establishment the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Egypt made the Islamic movement, which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in a response to European colonial powers (Safi, 1995), more popular (Wickham, 2015). The aim of the Islamic movement was to fight colonialism that threatens Islam and to deliver Muslim society from backwardness and the sense of helplessness and defeat (Safi, 1995). To do so, Muslim intellectuals led by Afghani sought to develop strategies that would enable to restore the Islamic faith and get rid of deficient moral practices (Keddie and Afghānī, 1983). The Brotherhood constructed their movement around two main objectives: the independence from foreign interference and the establishment of an Islamic sociopolitical system (Wickham, 2015). The founder of the movement stressed that the revival of the Muslim world should start with the revival of the individual first, in other words building spiritual strength and integrity, acquiring knowledge of Islamic principles and applying them (Safi, 1995). The superiority of the West was thought to be temporary and for the Muslim world to prosper, education should be reformed and Islam should become the only alternative within a united Islamic state (ibid). The following part analyses how Saudi Arabia and Qatar have sought to form alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood to spread their religious influence beyond their borders, while the latter established itself in Europe.

### ***Saudi Arabia and Qatar’s alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood***

In the 1960s, Saudi Arabia welcomed the Muslim Brotherhood when they were targeted by the Middle East's repressive regimes (Seniguer, 2013). Their arrival in Saudi Arabia led to the rise of “a social movement (...) and its structures which, via the education system, soon extended to almost all fields of social space” (Lacroix, 2015, p. 64). It was a blessing as the country lacked educated cadres (Kepel, 2004a). Their reputation as an anti-leftist group allowed them to access positions of responsibility and trust in exchange for refraining from any political activism (ibid).

Within the education system in Saudi Arabia, the Brotherhood helped create a new generation of students, who then became preachers, bureaucrats, and religious police officers (Okruhlik, 2002). In their turn, these students helped legitimize the regime (ibid). Meeting in Mecca in 1973, they established an advisory board for the movement to create “an international organization” (Lacroix, 2015, p. 55).



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The need to spread Wahhabism beyond its borders came as a result of the rise of leftist and nationalist movements in the Muslim world (Commins, 2019). It was made possible with the help of preachers sent to Europe (Kepel, 2004a). In 1961 the royal family established the Islamic University of Medina to receive students from all over the Muslim world and Europe (Steinberg, 2010). With a budget of over \$US50 million, it established faculties specialized in jurisprudence, Islamic law, *hadith*, *sharia*, Islamic literature, *dawa* (preaching), and other religious studies (Al-Rasheed, 2006). It receives students from over 140 nationalities, who are attracted mainly by the quality of teaching and the generous scholarships it offers (Amghar, 2008b). To further counter the rise of nationalist and secular Arab movements, Saudi Arabia called for creating an international coalition of Muslim governments that would support Islam (Commins, 2019). To this end the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim youth were established (ibid). Along with the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), these organizations, which share responsibilities regarding theological teaching, religious transmission, and charitable activities, serve to grant Saudi Arabia a monopoly over the religious discourse (El Karoui, 2018). Islamic Relief has become the largest Islamic NGO in the world, reputable for its efficiency in providing relief and welfare services (Benthall, 2016). The organization has managed to expand its grassroots and build trust with people because of its Islamic identity (ibid).

Members of the Brotherhood filled these institutions and led the Muslim World League in Mecca (Vidino, 2005). The Muslim World League was established in 1962 as an organization that brings together Muslim intellectuals and scholars (Steinberg, 2010). It also intended to counter the reform of Al Azhar led by Nasser, who sought to modernize religious teaching (Kepel, 2004a). At first, it sought to counter Nasser's national and regional influence. In time, it became the most important Saudi tool to globalize Wahhabism (Amghar, 2011). It manages more than 50 mosques and has branches in nearly 120 countries including every European country (ibid). The League was described as “the institutional embodiment of a rapprochement of the Saudi Arabian religious establishment and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 96). It receives most of its finances from the Saudi government, though it is officially described as a nongovernmental organization (ibid). The League has different structures, including (1) the World Supreme Council for Mosques, in charge of financing, coordinating and managing mosques, (2) the Islamic Council of Fiqh, (3) Islamic relief for charity work, (4) the International Islamic Educational Organization and (5) the International Islamic Organization (Laurence and Vaisse, 2007).

The Brotherhood members also joined the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) in Mecca (Vidino, 2005). WAMY was established in Riyadh in 1972 to build necessary structures to “preserve the identity of Young Muslims” and promote Muslim culture.<sup>2</sup> In practice, WAMY is in charge of coordinating activities of diverse Muslim youth and students organizations worldwide (Steinberg, 2010) in an attempt to curb the influence of Christian religious humanitarian organizations (Kepel, 2004a). It runs hospitals, schools, educational centers and orphanages and offers scholarships to study in Saudi universities (Steinberg, 2010). Both the

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<sup>2</sup> See World Assembly of Muslim Youth: [www.wamy.co.za](http://www.wamy.co.za)

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Muslim World League and the World Assembly of the Muslim Youth “converted” oil revenues into “religious influence” by funding schools, charities, mosques, and hospitals throughout the Muslim communities in the West (Commins, 2019). They were portrayed as the religious arm of the Saudi state’s Wahhabism (Amghar, 2011).

These organizations have certainly played an important role in spreading Saudi Arabia’s understanding of Islam. They helped the Saudi state establish itself as a “religious superpower.” That said, the expansion of Wahhabism in Europe was mainly the fruit of Saudis’ education policy in the 1960s when it welcomed European students (Amghar, 2008b). Once back to their home countries, France, Belgium, or the Netherlands, their preaching helped spread Saudi religious ideology (ibid). For example, Abdelkader Bouziane, who initiated the Wahhabi movement in Lyon, France, was among them (ibid). Returnee students did not just preach but also invited preachers to give conferences in various cities (ibid).

In Europe, Saudi Arabia helped the Muslim Brotherhood preachers set up online websites for citizens who need *fatwa* or religious guidance (Kepel, 2004a). It funded the establishment of mosques and cultural centers and helped organize large Wahhabi congresses every year that bring together thousands of people from all over Europe (Amghar, 2008b). It set up publishing houses around the world (Choksy and Choksy, 2015) and distributed for free its religious literature that codifies the practice of Islam according to Saudi interpretations, which deals with a range of subjects, from Muslim women’s duties and behavior to how to conduct relations with non-Muslims (Al-Rasheed, 2006). Saudi Arabia spent around \$4 billion a year building and funding around fifteen hundred mosques, two hundred Muslim centers, two hundred Islamic colleges, and two thousand religious schools for children worldwide (Benjamin, 2016). In 1969, the Belgian Ministry of Public Works signed a deal with the Islamic and Cultural Center of Belgium, which is linked to the Saudi World Muslim League, to “concede” the Great Mosque in Belgium in exchange of cheap oil (Scolari, 2018). The deal leased the Eastern Pavilion building converted into a mosque and Islamic center for 99 years. This marked Belgium’s official recognition of Islam as a minority religion and its awareness of the necessity to integrate Muslim immigrants (ibid). The deal enabled Saudi Arabia to influence Islam in Belgium but reports from a Belgian Parliamentary Committee described the mosque as a place of radicalization and accused Saudi Arabia of spreading intolerance towards other faiths (Carbonnel, 2018). As a result, the Belgian government decided to put an end to the deal in March 2018 (Le Figaro, 2018).

The alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood was strategic for the Saudis. Firstly, it allowed the state to consolidate its ideological influence in the international arena (Amghar, 2011). Moreover, it helped the state spread Wahhabism, which granted the state “an intellectual added value” at a time it did not attract so many followers outside Saudi Arabia (Kepel, 2004a, p. 210). As a matter of fact, Wahhabi-type associations do not seduce European Muslims who find their rules “stringent” and their way of life “alien” to them (Khosrokhavar, 2010, p. 145). Saudi Arabia sought to forge alliances with other Islamic organizations that, despite not necessarily adopting its Wahhabi doctrine, at least shared the same hostility towards the spread of Western customs which, they believed, corrupt Muslim communities (Commins, 2019). For the Brotherhood, this

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alliance enabled access to management positions within international organizations, and thus, an opportunity to expand their movement to reach young generations of Muslim immigrants in Europe (Kepel, 2004a). The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Muslim World League became apparent when its mosques started offering social, cultural, and educational activities blending religious and social activism (Amghar, 2011). The League supervises mosques, classrooms and libraries because “we try through our various activities, not only religious but also cultural, intellectual, social, to bring out the Islamic being. We organize tutoring courses, conferences to help European Muslims understand that Islam is a global system. We are Muslim every day and not only during the month of Ramadan or during our prayers” (cited in Amghar, 2011, p. 117). Saudi sought to collaborate with the Muslim Brotherhood because they opt for visibility within the public space, create collaborations and establish associations deemed essential for its ideological, religious expansion (Kepel, 2004a).

One of the reasons behind the rapid and successful implementation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe in the 1960s was undoubtedly its ability to secure access to enormous funding from Saudi Arabia (Vidino, 2010a). Large donations from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, which amounted to 80,000 marks, sponsored the construction of the Islamic Center of Munich, led by the Muslim Brotherhood (Vidino, 2005). Also in Brussels, the Saudis funded the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), which claims to promote a form of Islam that considers the specificities of the European context (Khosrokhavar, 2010). In 1989 the Saudis nominated the members of the Brothers to top positions within the Islamische Konzil Deutschland (Islamic Council of Germany) (Vidino, 2005). The Central Council of Muslims in Germany (Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland, ZMD), which was established in 1994 in a joint effort from the Egyptian and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, is closely related to the Muslim World League in Mecca (Steinberg, 2010). The Council has between 15,000 and 20,000 members but claims to represent all Muslims as its former head Nadeem Elias, a Saudi born citizen, managed to become “the most prominent Muslim representative” in the 1990s (ibid, p. 88). The Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland (Islamic Community of Germany, IGD) is its most influential member group (ibid). The success of the Brotherhood in Europe can also be explained by their ability to understand the needs of Muslim communities in Europe and provide a means for the Muslim youth to feel included in education, employment, or voluntary work (Shaw-Hamilton, 2007).

The decision to modernize Saudi Arabia’s economic and institutional infrastructures was heavily criticized by religious Wahhabi scholars who saw modernity as an innovation that would “threaten the traditional Saudi-Wahhabi way of life” (Nevo, 1998, p. 40). Wahhabi scholars started criticizing the state control over religion (Ménoret, 2009). Influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood’s political discourse, some Wahhabis organized themselves since the 1990s into a new religious and political movement, called Sahwa (awakening), which adopted a revolutionary tone (Al-Rasheed, 2006). The movement was a fusion between the Wahhabi tradition and the Muslim Brotherhood ideology (Matthiesen, 2015). It became necessary for the royal family to discourage the militant nature of Wahhabism, to break its pact with political Islam, and domesticate the official Wahhabi *ulamas* (religious officials) to endorse its “modernizing” policies and sustain the regime’s legitimacy (Nevo, 1998). Criticism intensified when the royal

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family welcomed non-Muslim soldiers on “the territories of the holy sites” (Lacroix, 2015, p. 5). They expressed their oppositions during sermons in mosques and distributed tapes and leaflets, secretly denouncing the regime's corruption (Okruhlik, 2002). All over Saudi Arabia, preachers denounced “the moral and political collapse” of the system and demanded religious, economic, and political reforms (Lacroix, 2015, p. 5). The awakening was violently repressed by the regime (Al-Rasheed, 2006). The movement became fragmented into different strands which, nowadays, is limited to a small number of religious scholars (ibid). Eventually, it became a movement among many in Saudi Arabia (ibid).

After repressing the dissent voices within Saudi Arabia, the regime called for a cohabitation between liberals and Islamists that would not question the legitimacy of the regime (Ménoret, 2009). Saudi Arabia started to distance itself from political Islam and to draw closer to religious scholars and preachers, who previously promised to help Saudi Arabia redefine its religious policies to promote a “quietist,” “harmless” religious offer (Amghar, 2011, p. 123). Religious scholars thus retreated from politics to their education programs within society (Al-Rasheed, 2006). Having agreed to put the religious establishment under state control, they withdrew to universities, mosques, and the media to protect their symbolic and financial prerogatives (Bonney and Lacroix, 2016).

In Qatar, the education system is influenced by the Islamic ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Kobaisi, 1979), which found refuge in Qatar in the 1950s and the 1960s, fleeing the repression of president Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt (Seniguer, 2013). That said, the Muslim Brotherhood ideology remains the most influential as the country welcomed one of the Muslim Brotherhood's most prominent cleric, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Roberts, 2017). He became the dean of the College of Sharia at the University of Qatar (ibid). Others were granted important positions within the Ministries of Education and culture as well (Sader, 2013). Brotherhood's presence in Qatar was backed by members of the royal family who promoted them to decision-making positions and put them at the heart of power (El Karoui, 2018). Brotherhood affiliates could establish networks of charities, businesses, schools, and social organizations (Hamid, 2014, pp. 11–12). Their presence was tolerated as long as the movement did not politicize. In exchange for their loyalty to the regime, they had access to state resources, financial and diplomatic support, and the media to export their ideology (El Karoui, 2018). The Brotherhood influenced Qatar's social policies through informal means and bureaucratic posts (Freer, 2016).

Yusuf al-Qaradawi became Qatar's foremost thinker for both Arab and European Muslim activists (Seniguer, 2013). In the 1990s, he managed to reach the Muslim public worldwide with Pan-Arab satellite channels and the internet (Baroudi, 2014). Alongside counterbalancing Saudi Arabia's influence, the regime uses al Qaradawi to legitimize its liberal social reforms (Talon, 2011, p. 59). Being a close friend of Mozah bint Nasser al-Misnad, the second wife of Sheikh Hamad ben Khalifa, a member of the royal ruling family, Al-Qaradawi serves to diffuse an understanding of Islam based on *Al-wasatiya* or moderation (Seniguer, 2013). According to him, it is the “right approach to Islam” (Baroudi, 2014, p. 4). In 2008, Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad established the Al-Qaradhawi Centre for Islamic Moderation and Renewal with the

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objective of promoting moderation and combating extremism (Hassan, 2014). *Al-wasatiya* in Al-Qaradawi's parlance refers to a moderate and balanced approach to Islam that (1) "appeals to human nature (*al-fitra al-insaniyya*) and human reason; (2) treats the Qur'an and the Sunna holistically; (3) avoids both excessiveness (*tashdid*) and laxity (*tafrit*) in interpreting the Qur'an and *Sunna*; and (4) addresses the spiritual and material needs of Muslim individuals and societies in a balanced way that takes into account variations of time and place" (Baroudi, 2014, p. 4).

The Brotherhood could not have achieved this success without the funding they received to build mosques, remunerate imams, and cover events' and meetings' expenses (El Karoui, 2018). Qatar is believed to have financed 140 Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated projects in Europe, including mosques and Islamic centers, over the past eight years (Chesnot and Malbrunot, 2020). Financing came mainly from Qatar Foundation, headed by Shaikha Moza Bint Nasser Al Misned, and Qatar Charity (ibid).

### *The "Europeanization" of the Muslim Brothers*

Fleeing persecution in their native countries, some Brotherhood members sought refuge in Europe as early as the 1950s (Vidino, 2010a). A small, scattered community that established places of worship in garages and small meeting rooms has grown into a highly dynamic and well-organized movement (Maréchal, 2009). Taking advantage of the institutional and spiritual void in Europe, as many Muslim countries had not yet established their religious institutions and local governments had not begun to interfere in religious affairs, they established transnational networks and modern media platforms (Vidino, 2010a).

#### *A transnational network:*

Soon after they arrived in Europe, they established the first Muslim student associations (Vidino, 2010a) and have gradually managed to create various associations with the aim of carrying out long-term educational activities (Maréchal, 2009). Following the Brotherhood's organizational creed in the Middle East, Brothers first established Muslim student organizations and worship places to attract other Muslim students and immigrant workers who have never contacted the Brotherhood in their home countries (Vidino, 2010b). They conducted different activities, including publishing magazines, organizing meetings, lectures, and group prayers (Vidino, 2010a). Some of these activities aimed to meet the needs of women and children, while others included social services (Maréchal, 2009). Alongside diversifying their activities, they formed charities like *le Comité de Bienfaisance et de Solidarité avec la Palestine* in France or *Al-Asqa* in Belgium and Germany (ibid). They understood the necessity to create diverse organizations that would meet different Muslim populations' needs (Vidino, 2010b). In France for example, they have established a large network of charity in underprivileged neighborhoods and within university campuses where their "social workers" offer help and "spiritual guidance" (Kepel, 2004a). These campaigns allowed the Brotherhood to increase their influence within the Muslim communities in Europe, positioning the Brotherhood as the leading representative

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and mentor (Maréchal, 2009). At first, the members of the Brotherhood believed their exile to be temporary. They saw in Europe an opportunity to better organize their social mobilization to return home and participate in “the liberalization of the political field.” Soon, however, they came to realize the improbability of any return home and adapted their discourse to become the “defenders” of Muslims in Europe (Amghar, 2008a), notably when native governments lacked consistent religious diaspora policies (Seniguer, 2013). Understanding more about the European context in which they operate, the Brotherhood also developed a set of ideals and principles that Muslim communities began to share. Their protests against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and their position when it comes to the caricatures of the Prophet have enabled them to rally thousands of people to their cause (Maréchal, 2009).

The leaders of these different structures in Europe do not openly accept or recognize “the Islamist heritage of the Muslim brotherhood.” Still, the Brotherhood influenced these structures in their mode of action, in their organization, and most importantly, in their discourse and ideology (Amghar, 2008a). Similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which sought to create branches in Syria and Kuwait, the implantation of the Brotherhood in Europe followed the same logic (Vidino, 2010a). Every organization traces its roots to the movement, to the Egyptian center and its principles and objectives, but is allowed to act independently according to the context in which it operates (ibid). When first established in Europe, these organizations shared the goal of the Brotherhood in Egypt, which was to form a multinational Islamist opposition to repressive regimes (Amghar, 2008a). As land of exile, Europe offered the possibility for an ideological reserve and a better, ‘freer’ social mobilization (ibid). Similar to the Brotherhood associations in the Middle East, the Brotherhood in Europe offered social services, Arabic and Islamic classes to children, and spiritual guidance to their followers (Maréchal, 2009). They adopted the same Islamist discourse that insists on considering Islam as “an all-encompassing system” that should be used as a reference to solve political, economic, and social problems of all Muslims (Vidino, 2010a). Because they were motivated by this mission in the name of Islam, they sought to collaborate with diverse communities, including those outside their movement (Maréchal, 2009).

The Brotherhood in Europe also follows the same pattern of expansion as in the Middle East. At first, their associations create local and regional links before forming national and transnational federations of exchange that include mosques, religious and cultural associations (Maréchal, 2009). Finally, some Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Europe set themselves as the spokesmen of the Brothers in Muslim countries. In Paris, members of the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF) aimed to sensitize people during their annual fair about Al-Nahda political prisoners in Tunisia (Maréchal, 2009).

The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) was founded in 1989 in London and then moved its headquarters to Brussels in 2007 (Steinberg, 2010). It brings together different Muslim associations in Europe, including the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France (UOIF) and the Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland (Islamic Community of Germany, IGD), which are closely linked to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (Caeiro, 2011b). The Federation is described as “an umbrella for all major national

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associations affiliated with or sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 157). They share the same objective: promoting an Islamic culture and strengthening community belonging (Maréchal, 2009). The institution-building is typical of the Brotherhood: divided into different substructures, each with a committee that supervises different departments, from education to preaching, to women’s issues and media (Vidino, 2010b).

The Muslim Brothers in Europe have also attempted to position themselves as the leading Islamic authority and have tried to produce religious meaning (Maréchal, 2009). And so in 1997, the Federation established the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) in London to provide *fatwas* (religious advice) for the protection of the Muslim identity and to debate the integration of Muslims in Europe (Caeiro, 2011b). These *fatwas* aim to “meet the needs of Muslims in Europe, solve their problems, and regulate their interaction with the European societies” (Caeiro, 2011a, p. 169). With the European Council for Fatwa and Research's help, the Federation of Islamic Organizations has sought to become the main interlocutor on Islamic questions between European Muslims and European governments (El Karoui, 2018). By offering both modern and traditional interpretations of Islam, it would like to make sure that Muslims remain connected to Islam (Maréchal, 2009).

Al Qaradawi was the founder and first head of the ECFR (‘The European Council for Fatwa and Research: Renewed leadership, renewed hopes,’ 2018). He is also the only one called “ustadh”<sup>3</sup> (professor) and has contributed to the increasing politicization of the ECFR’s work (Caeiro, 2011a). In 2001, for example, the ECFR approved Al Qaradawi’s fatwa calling for the boycott of American and Israeli products and the mobilization of Muslims in Europe against the occupation of the Palestinian territories (Caeiro, 2011a). Furthermore, the ECFR seems to adopt a discourse of *Al-wasatiya* (*moderation*), *the same line of thought that Al-Qaradawi and the Muslim Brotherhood follow* (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2008). The ECFR’s *fatwas* “borrow extensively” from Al-Qaradawi and are often reprinted in *al-Da’wa*, the Muslim Brotherhood edited a magazine in London (Caeiro, 2011a). Aware of the specificities of their European context, they have sought to develop a new Islamic jurisprudence that will regulate Muslims' lives in Europe (Vidino, 2010b).

In the West, they have acquired a new outlook and started redefining their religious qualifications to portray Europe not as the land of the non-believers but as the land of *al dawa* (preaching), where Muslims should try to spread their religion peacefully (Vidino, 2010b). These efforts pushed them to coordinate their activities on a transnational level. They also led them to start producing meaning that would call for the application of Islamic legal texts on a personal basis (Kepel, 2004a)—hence the struggle for Muslim women to wear the veil in French schools (ibid).

The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe also tried to position itself as the main arbitrator between European states and Muslim communities. Brothers became members of the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (French Council of the Muslim Faith, CFCM) and increased their visibility and influence, especially when other Muslim countries did not have representatives

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<sup>3</sup> Ustadh is a honorific term to designate the chairman of the ECFR.

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within this national elected body (Maréchal, 2015). In June 1996, The Muslim Brotherhood launched the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) and established its headquarters in Brussels (Vidino, 2005). This network of 42 national and international organizations, bringing together youth from over 26 different countries, intends to become “the de facto voice of the Muslim youth in Europe” (‘FEMYSO,’ no date). Its establishment marked the shift in the Brotherhood’s focus towards “the recruitment and education of the Muslim youth in Europe” (Steinberg, 2010, p. 157). The forum serves as a “platform of exchange” and brings together different youth organizations. Though it claims to be autonomous, it maintains close organizational and interpersonal links with the Brothers in the Middle-East. Claiming that it represents the Muslim Youth in Europe, it continuously lobbies within the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the United Nations, the European Youth Forum, and other European NGOs (Vidino, 2005).

In France, one of the oldest and well organized religious movements remains the Muslim Brotherhood (Seniguer, 2013). Their influence can be felt when the Brothers sought to establish the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF) and La Ligue Islamique Mondiale (LIM, the Muslim World League) (Khosrokhavar, 2010). The UOIF was officially established in 1983 and changed its name to “Musulmans de France” (Muslims of France) in 2017 (Musulmans de France, no date a). It has often been criticized for its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood (Amghar, 2008a). The UOIF always collaborated with its networks of transnational organizations to train its imams (Venner, 2005). In one of its brochures, it even pays tribute to Hassan al-Banna (ibid). Not only it remains directly connected to other European organizations close to the ideology and structure of the Muslim Brotherhood (Khosrokhavar, 2010), it also recognizes its subordination to the movement (Maréchal, 2015)

It is considered the French branch of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and has become one of the most “potent” Islamic organizations in the country (Khosrokhavar, 2010). As of 2003, the UOIF has become the main representative body in charge of managing the Muslim religion in France (Amghar, 2008a). The creation of UOIF in the 1980s contributed to Wahhabism’s spread in France (Seniguer, 2013). The Union has a “strong base” among Muslim youth and the middle classes in France (Khosrokhavar, 2010). It manages more than one hundred local associations and thirty mosques in different French cities (ibid). The UOIF became increasingly politicized in France after the government banned the headscarf in public meetings and official gatherings (ibid). It issued a *fatwa* describing the ban as being discriminatory and helped Muslim women to take legal actions against their employers (ibid). It also organized demonstrations against Israel during the 2008 Gaza war and lobbied to create and promote Islamic schools in France (ibid).

Under its umbrella, the UOIF brings together many other organizations, including the Young Muslims of France (Jeunes Musulmans de France, JMF), Muslim Students of France (Etudiants Musulmans de France, EMF), the French League of Muslim Women (Ligue Française de la Femme Musulmane, LFFM), Imams of France (Imams de France) and the Welfare and Charity and Rescue Committee for the Palestinians (Comité de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens, GBSP) (Musulmans de France, no date b). However, one of the



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most important subsidiaries of the UOIF remains the European Institute of Human Sciences (Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines, IESH) where imams are trained in France (Khosrokhavar, 2010). Between 1990 and 2004, the IEHS trained more than 300 imams (ibid). The Institute has sought to establish religious schools to strengthen and supervise community belonging and community involvement among European Muslim youths (Maréchal, 2015).

Within university campuses in France, the Muslim Students of France (Etudiants Musulmans de France, EMF) offers students social services. The organization became a kind of “union” that aims to meet “urgent social needs.” It also became a platform for the “re-socialization” of underprivileged and depoliticized Muslim students, who are urged to become “Young Muslims” and activists sensitive to political and religious issues (Kepel, 2004a). To further strengthen their establishment in France, the Brotherhood developed a panel of activities that target different social groups. For example, Jeunes Musulmans de France (Young Muslims of France, JMF) started giving conferences in French. It also organized holiday camps to promote youth community involvement among young Muslims who do not speak Arabic (Maréchal, 2015).

The organizations of the Muslim Brotherhood in France are attractive because they offer a sense of “dignity” and “belonging” to the second and third-generation French Muslims who feel “disrespected” and “rejected” by the French society (Khosrokhavar, 2010). The Muslim Brotherhood offers a new “mode of integration” to these young people who do not see themselves in the “French assimilationist model” (Amghar, 2008a). The Brotherhood is perceived by Muslim youths as a legitimate religious authority because its projects aim to revitalize the Muslim community in a global dimension (Maréchal, 2015).

In Germany, Sa'id Ramadan, the son in law of Hassan Al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, established the Islamic Center of Munich in 1954 to train young Muslims on contributing to the Islamic social movements and the fundamentals of Islamic activism once they return to their home countries (Maréchal, 2015). By 1973, when the mosque was completed, the Brotherhood realized that operating in Europe could help internationalize their movement when a group of Arab students in Munich asked for their help to build a mosque (Vidino, 2010b).

While the Muslim Brotherhood's Egyptian branch chose Munich for its headquarters, its Syrian branch established its base in Aachen near the Dutch border (Vidino, 2005). Together, they launched the Islamische Gemeinschaft Deutschland (Islamic Community of Germany, IGD) that brings together various Arab mosque-associations and opened branches in different cities in Germany (Steinberg, 2010). Reports from the German internal intelligence agencies often mention how the Muslim Brotherhood dominates the IGD (Vidino, 2005). The center publishes a magazine, *Al-Islam*, mainly financed by Bank al-Taqwa (ibid). The bank, which was established in 1988 with significant backing from the Muslim Brotherhood, was accused by the United States and Italy of having links to Islamist terror organizations in 2001 (*The United States and Italy Designate Twenty-Five New Financiers of Terror*, 2002). The IGD is extremely popular within the Muslim community in Germany as several thousand young Muslims attend its yearly meetings (Steinberg, 2010). To further strengthen its role in Germany, where the

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majority of Muslims are of Turkish origins, the IGD has sought to establish alliances with the Milli Görüş<sup>4</sup> to provide social services within their mosques and organize conferences (Vidino, 2005). The ideas of the IGD have gained more popularity among different Muslim communities as it has sought to influence politics in Germany and to influence governmental religious policy towards the Muslims (Steinberg, 2010). The Brotherhood then came to overshadow other religious influences within mosques they helped build and the institutions they helped establish (Vidino, 2010b).

In Belgium, the Muslim Brotherhood organizes under the *Ligue Islamique Interculturelle de Belgique* (LIIB) (Amghar, 2008a). At first, a relatively small number of students created the Union Internationale des Etudiants Musulmans (the International Union of Muslim Students) in 1964. They sought to establish transnational links with other Muslim Brotherhood student associations in Europe, mainly with members of the Association des Etudiants Islamique de France (the Association of Muslim Students of France, AEIF) (Maréchal, 2015). The Brothers have also lobbied within the public system of education to introduce religious teaching in schools since 1978 (ibid). In the Netherlands, however, the Muslim Brotherhood could not establish a strong network, as was the case in other European countries. One reason for this incapacity was the language barrier that discouraged Muslim students from choosing the Netherlands for their studies (Meijer, 2013).

The Muslim Brotherhood has become one of the most influential religious movements in Europe. It has managed to “overshadow most other Muslim organizations, becoming the only movement that has been able to create stable organizations in virtually all European countries and the only truly pan-European Islamic movement” (Vidino, 2010a, p. 107). Their influence has increased since the 1980s because they were able to talk about European Muslims' issues, particularly the youth (Maréchal, 2015). Ad-Dawah mosque in Paris, Al-Khalil in Brussels, or Bilal Center in Aachen, Germany, have become regional magnets where the Muslim Brothers in Europe articulate their ideology (ibid). Its discourse has evolved to offer a new reading of Islam, one that recognizes that Islam is a world system that should govern all areas of life and acknowledges the possibility of a dual belonging, of being both Muslim and European (Amghar, 2008a). The ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood appeals because it no longer matters if one is of Moroccan or Turkish origin. What matters now is that one is Muslim (Laurence and Vaïsse, 2007). It offers them the possibility of fulfilling their spiritual and identity needs while pursuing their social and political integration (Amghar, 2008a). Their long-term educational activities with a “modern” and “rational” discourse that insists on the necessity to preserve a Muslim collective identity have deeply affected Arab-speaking Muslims, mainly since the “Islamic awakening” in the late 1970s (Maréchal, 2015). Besides offering social services, the Brothers address these young Muslim people with respect, insisting on their civil duties and on the need to vote in elections and participate in public life in their European societies (Laurence and Vaïsse, 2007).

Overall, given their resources, organizational apparatus, public visibility and intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> See Lalla Amina Drhimeur. (2020, August 11). The interactions between the Turkish and Moroccan State actors and governments. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3979255>

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flexibility, the Brotherhood managed to gain a prominent position among European governments as privileged interlocutors (Vidino, 2010b). When European countries started designing their integration policies and needed to find interlocutors, the Brothers spoke about the importance of creating a European Muslim identity that combined both religious faith and active citizenship. Soon after 9/11, the Brothers presented themselves as Europe's ally in fighting radicalization among European Muslim communities (ibid).

### *Diversified media platforms*

To further disseminate their ideas and connect with activists, the Muslim Brothers in Europe organize conferences, publish articles, books, create websites, and even establish their own publishing houses (Maréchal, 2015). The creation of media tools "opened up new spaces of religious contestation where traditional sources of authority could be challenged by a wider public" while promoting a "media Islam" useful for political and religious mobilization (Mandaville, 2012, p. 70). Various news bulletins and magazines flourish under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe. L'Essence Ciel, Le Musulman in France, Al-Islam in Germany and AL-Europiyya in different European countries (Maréchal, 2015). What is crucial here is the production of Islamic meanings in an idiom that is comprehensible to those Muslims who have grown up in European societies.

It is about "bringing Islam into the forums of popular culture," about making it available to those young people who find themselves unemployed or alienated (Mandaville, 2012). They also establish their own publishing houses: Médiacom in Amiens, Gédis in Boginy, or Tawhid in Lyon produce books explaining the Islamic thinking, offering spiritual guidance and training for children (Maréchal, 2015). Globalization has also enabled Muslims to communicate and interact with each other (Mandaville, 2003). The internet has offered a valuable tool to the Brothers to spread their ideas. Beyond the fact that each Muslim Brotherhood organization owns its own website, the Brothers have sought to create others, including islamiyya.net and saphrnet.info, to diffuse their debates (Maréchal, 2015). The internet became a space where Muslims can meet others "like them," allowing them to create "a new form of imagined community or a reimagined umma," a kind of nostalgia for a lost homeland and a lost culture (Mandaville, 2003, p. 170).

These networks have altered the relationships between the diaspora and the homeland, giving substance to the feeling of belonging to an Islamic community (Roy, 2004b). Globalization has facilitated the rise of "media Islam" or "soundbite Islam" where meaning and ideas "bridge time and space almost effortlessly" (Mandaville, 2012, p. 70). The internet makes it possible to reconstruct a Muslim identity (Roy, 2004a). When national identities seem to be weakening, this virtual space offers the possibility of belonging to an Umma, though virtually (ibid). After the crisis of Arab nationalism and secularism in the Muslim World, Islam started replacing ethnicity as a source of belonging, a sense of identity among Muslim communities in Europe and the Brothers seized the opportunity by providing an identity discourse that

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transcends “ethnic and national barriers” and offering a feeling of belonging to “a borderless community based on equality and brotherhood” (Vidino, 2010b, p. 172).

## **Qatar and Saudi Arabia’s competing strategies to influence European Muslim communities**

Unlike Wahhabists, most Salafists are not interested in politics in their formal sense of seizing the state and power through either violent or non-violent means (Haykel, 2011). This does not mean that Salafists are all apolitical. Salafism covers three different political sensibilities. There is Salafism of predication (*salafiyya al-da’wa*) that tends to be politically “soft” because Islam is above any political questions (Amghar, 2008b, p. 96). This quietist Salafism prefers to focus on education and the spreading of faith to purify Muslim society and usually does not express any objection to political power (Meijer, 2011b). Second, activist Salafism tends to prefer confrontation and engage in politics if the ruler is deemed deviant (ibid). In this respect, Wahhabism is the activist branch of Salafism since it calls for political reforms (ibid). Finally, Salafi Jihadis believe in the use of violence against the existing political power to establish the caliphate (Haykel, 2011).

Globalization theories often present religious movements as “a reaction to the dislocations and uncertainties produced by globalization” itself (Vertigans and Sutton, 2002). But this is to reduce these movements’ capacity and willingness to participate in change (ibid). Wahhabism and Salafism for example are not merely an opposition to the globalization of western values or culture in general or a reaction to the adoption of western and modern lifestyles within Muslim societies, they attempt to understand and shape globalizing processes by “promoting an alternative religious and cultural form of “directed globalization”” (ibid). Thus, they appeal not only to those feeling threatened and need to feel a sense of belonging, but also to the intellectually educated and the bourgeoisie (ibid).

### *Qatar’s continuous support for the Muslim Brotherhood*

Unlike Saudi Arabia, Qatar has never cut ties with the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East or Europe. It continued to finance its activities further strengthen its regional and international influence. It set up one of the world’s largest news organization: Al Jazeera. Qatar also sponsored public figures (Tariq Ramadan) to diffuse its politico-religious messages and cultivate the image of an enlightened country.

#### *The Politics of Al Jazeera*

The most important media tool the Muslim Brothers have used to promote their ideas remains Al Jazeera. From a small office in Doha, Al Jazeera became a media giant and a “place of worship” for millions of viewers (Mansour, 2018). In just fifteen years since its foundation, its audience has amounted to 50 million viewers worldwide, more than what the CNN and the BCC combined reach (Cherribi, 2017). The term Al Jazeera refers to the “geographical cradle of the

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Arab-Muslim civilization, the Arabian Peninsula, a geostrategic area, at the junction between the Asian continent and Africa and whose heart today is the Middle East” (Mansour, 2018). It also refers to “a small peninsula inside the Big Peninsula, the Emirate of Qatar, an oasis, a stretch of land of about 10,400 square kilometers jutting out into the Persian Gulf” (Talon, 2011, p. 16), an entirely invisible emirate before becoming one of the most influential countries in the region. The creation of Al Jazeera in 1996 was the reflection of Qatar’s ambition to become a regional power with an international reach (Mansour, 2018). It intended to compete with Saudi Arabia, which managed with its media ventures based in Europe to extend its influence beyond its borders (Zayani, 2019). After Al Jazeera launched its English website and news channel in 2006 and thus increased its audience, it helped put Qatar on the international map and provide the country with a stronger political and religious voice (Figenschou, 2013).

Al Jazeera started small with only six hours of programming to become news around the clock, twenty-four hours a day with fifty offices worldwide (Cherribi, 2006). It has become a network with a wide range of programs, websites, reports, and talk shows in different languages, including Arabic, English and Turkish (Cherribi, 2017). Its largest audiences are in Arab and Muslim countries, followed by Europe and North America (ibid). By providing a “different spin” and media coverage of events in the Arab world, Al Jazeera distinguished itself with its ability to “nurture a sense of community among the Arab diaspora” (Zayani, 2019). It has radically altered the sense of distance between Arabs and Muslims in different parts of the world, “bringing them together in real time and in a common language alongside intense images and a shared political discourse”(Lynch, 2006, p. 41). It has become famous because it offers

[A] vision structured around a context of international Islamic identity. Al Jazeera reflects the on-going process of the politicization of an Islamic identity and, in that sense, points to the “Other.” In fact, there are two polarities in this struggle. Both of them are caught in the process of globalization, which risks becoming even more acute and more dangerous and may border on a more important polarization. (Bayramoglu, 2001).

Al Jazeera portrays Islam as “an alternative to established elite, Westernized, and secularized governments, which seem to lack the home-grown credibility of more intrinsically Muslim power structures” (Cherribi, 2017, p. 50). It is attractive because it represents a “partial reversal of the globalization process” where information is no more a monopoly of the West (Zayani, 2019). Al Jazeera made itself available when Muslim immigrants and their descendants in Europe felt abandoned (Cherribi, 2017). The Brothers have sought to become the main advocate of Muslims’ causes and led protests against the cartoons of the Prophet and the Israeli settlements in an attempt to present themselves as the “first line of defense for Islam and Muslims all over the world.”(Vidino, 2010b, p. 174). Other countries have also sought to create their own international satellite channels to compete with Al Jazeera. The European Union established Euronews Arabic with a budget of 50 million euros. However, Al Jazeera remains

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the reference point particularly among Arab communities in Europe (Corbucci, 2012)

One of the most emblematic programs of Al Jazeera was “Sharia and life.” The weekly program has ten million viewers around the world (Cherribi, 2006). It hosted Al-Qaradawi, one of the most influential and respected imams to tackle various aspects of modern life from an Islamic perspective (Mansour, 2018). He embodies Al Jazeera’s religious voice that has enabled the network to construct its dominant narrative (Cherribi, 2017). That said, Al-Qaradawi’s influence is not only thanks to Al Jazeera, but also thanks to his website ([www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net)) that offers *fatwas* or religious advice (Mansour, 2018). He also established his own website (Qaradawi.net) that provides information about his life, career, and activities including his recent religious advice, conferences, speeches, and electronic books (Baroudi, 2014). The website operates in Qatar, Cairo, and Washington. It employs around two hundred researchers and offers religious advice both in Arabic and English (Vidino, 2010b). What also distinguishes Al Jazeera is its focus on the veil as a symbol of cultural and religious belonging to a transnational Muslim community (Cherribi, 2006). The veil is presented as a way of distinguishing oneself from the non-Muslim other. Accordingly, it is “a form of protection” from the untrustworthy. It adds the values of respect, trustworthiness, and is a kind of “crown” of distinction and aura of religiosity” (ibid, p. 128).

On April 1, 2004, Al-Qaradawi dedicated his show *Sharia and Life* to talk about the prohibition of the veil in French schools, confirming the importance of the issue for his network (Cherribi, 2017). This network would like to act as a “watchdog for the international Muslim community (ibid, p. 49). Though he insists on the importance of dialogue, given that “Islam is a religion of dialogue, and the Quran is at its base a book of dialogue” (cited in Lynch, 2006, p. 87), his speeches occasionally focused on the West, which according to him intends to destroy the Muslim civilization (Lynch, 2006). To protect the Muslims from the moral corruption of the West, he calls for the establishment of Muslims’ “own religious, educational and recreational establishments,” a separate community, a “small society within the larger society,” a kind of “Muslim ghetto” (cited in Vidino, 2010b, p. 168).

During this show, Al-Qaradawi also warns Muslim communities against how globalization helps spread Western influence within Muslim communities and consequently lead to their deviance (Sader, 2013). In such a globalized world, the Brothers would like to position themselves as the guardians of the Muslim identity, explaining to Muslim communities in Europe how to conduct their religious life according to Islamic principles (Vidino, 2010b). Al Jazeera positions itself as the “defender of Islam” and the defender of the Muslim vulnerable. Its coverage of the riots in France that began in October 2005 was tinted with victimization that emphasized the Muslim origins of immigrants and their marginalization and the hardship they often endure in terms of racism, discrimination, and unemployment (Cherribi, 2017). That said, the Brothers do not call for complete isolation from society. Therefore, their statements are not merely religious. They become politicized, for example, when Al-Qaradawi (1) campaigned about the Palestinian or the Iraqi cause, (2) organized protests against the cartoons of the Prophet in the Netherlands (Baroudi, 2014), or (3) when the Brothers speak about the

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importance of participating in public life. They adopt “a conservatism without isolation, and an openness without melting,” participation without assimilation, and the preservation of a strong Muslim identity (Vidino, 2010b, p. 171).

While European states fear that Al Jazeera becomes a challenge to the European immigration policy (Zayani, 2019), European Muslim communities find in Al Jazeera “a source of empowerment in the face of a rising Islamophobia”(Cherribi, 2017, p. 212). What boosted Al Jazeera's position within Muslim communities in Europe was the way it framed their areas of interest. The right to wear the veil in France was described in heroic terms as the “resistance of the Muslim communities” to the “arbitrary” rules of the “godless” French (ibid). It is part of a strategy to depict the world in binary terms, such as “good and evil, the West versus Muslims and Arabs” (Cherribi, 2006). For European Muslims, Al Jazeera presents itself as the “voice of the voiceless,” as a platform to guide Muslims in exile, Muslims suffering from injustice, displacement, and Islamophobia (Cherribi, 2017).

Two of its programs focus on the Muslim diaspora in the West. As I mentioned earlier, *Sharia and life* and *A rendezvous with the diaspora* have sought to nurture nostalgia towards one's country, the holy places of Islam and “Islamic memory.” It attempted to create identification tools with a transnational Muslim community and construct a global Muslim identity (Cherribi, 2017).

#### *Tariq Ramadan or the “modern” Muslim Brother*

Tariq Ramadan was born in Switzerland in 1962 (Benthall, 2016). He studied literature in Geneva before spending some time in Cairo to study Islamic law (Benthall, 2016). Tariq Ramadan is the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. He is an Islamic intellectual and theologian and a visiting professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar. Speaking French and English fluently, he became one of the most influential spokesperson of Islam in Europe, especially when Muslim communities lacked a legitimate representation (Seniguer, 2013). In 2004 the *Time* ranked him among the world's one hundred most influential people (Kepel, 2004a). His approach to Islam, “his attempt at ‘updating’ it without renouncing its core message,” is heavily inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood (Khosrokhavar, 2010). Being portrayed as a role model for the youth, Tariq Ramadan was often invited to speak at events organized by UOIF in France (Venner, 2005). He has acquired public notoriety thanks to the press. He makes the front page of *Le monde* or the *New York Times*, organizes talk shows where he uses “his charm to captivate viewers of all ages, all origins and all faiths” (Kepel, 2004a, p. 323).

Tariq Ramadan's moral and political influence is more prevalent within the second and third-generation Muslims who, unlike the first discreet generation, understand the importance of the fundamental principles of faith, the importance of participating in public life and the importance of belonging to a transnational Muslim community (Seniguer, 2013). Similar to Al-Qaradawi, Tariq Ramadan speaks in favor of allowing Muslim girls to wear the veil in schools.

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He declared that “all citizens without exception [should] stand up and say, together, very loud and clear, that there is no minority citizenship in France, that these questions concern everyone in the same way, and that all in all, it is the political class itself which is feeding the community that it says it wants to fight. Rights are rights and claiming them is a right!” (Kepel, 2004a, p. 328). According to Ramadan, being able to wear the veil is a universal right (ibid). Thus, Tariq Ramadan’s understanding of Islam, or at least what he preaches, is similar to Mozah bint Nasser al-Misnad’s conception of Islam (Seniguer, 2013).

Therefore, it is not a surprise that Tariq Ramadan chairs the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) in Qatar (ibid). Qatar’s collaboration with Tariq Ramadan enables the regime to diffuse its politico-religious messages to Muslim communities in Europe and maintain a brand image of an “enlightened” Muslim country (Seniguer, 2013). It is also a way for Qatar to counter Saudi influence in Europe and strengthen its leadership on religious movements (ibid). Tariq Ramadan has been accused of intellectual inconsistencies and of holding a “hypocrite” and a “double language,” which tends to be “democratic” towards European natives and “fundamentalist,” anti-secular towards European Muslims (Khosrokhavar, 2010).

### *Saudi Arabia bets on “quietist” Salafism*

At first Saudi Arabia allied with the Muslim Brothers and promoted an understanding of Islam as a comprehensive system that should regulate both life and the state (Amghar, 2011). However, the rise of criticism among religious scholars towards the Saudi regime’s “modernizing” policies pushed the royal family to discourage Wahhabism’s militant nature in an attempt to preserve its religious and political legitimacy (Nevo, 1998). Following the post-9/11 international criticism that Saudi Arabia is fueling religious radicalism, it became necessary to promote an apolitical Islam that would not contest Western regimes nor the Saudi regime (Amghar, 2011). This form of Islam was what is commonly referred to as the “quietist” Salafism. The objective is to develop political and economic collaborations with Europe, to portray Saudi Arabia as the protector of European Muslims and anti-terror states (ibid).

“Quietist” Salafism claims to be a strictly religious discourse, but this does not mean that this discourse does not carry any political intentions. On the contrary, it only means that it supports the status quo and refuses social and political change (Amghar, 2008b). In other words, it underpins the existing Arab regimes and, above all, the regime in Saudi Arabia (ibid). It focuses on preaching and social activism while being indifferent to politics since it pleads, above all, for respect for public order (Bonnefoy and Lacroix, 2016)

The break with the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam pushed Saudi Arabia to look for an alternative, “harmless” religious offer. Accordingly, it positioned religious scholars and preachers close to the regime within the international religious establishment. It became necessary to replace the Muslim Brotherhood with pro-regime preachers and scholars (Amghar, 2011). Starting from the 1990s, Saudi Arabia limited its financial support to organizations belonging to the “quietist” Salafism and even depoliticized its religious teaching



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within the University of Medina, hiring scholars known for their hostility to political Islam (Bonney and Lacroix, 2016).

In Europe, Salafism became widespread among young people from lower-income neighborhoods (Amghar, 2008b). Starting from the 1990s and particularly in the 2000s, Salafism established itself in Europe to become one of the most structured assemblies of religious movements (El Karoui, 2018). For example, in France, the Ministry of Interior estimated that Salafists' number is between 20 to 30 thousand people, originating mainly from the Maghreb (Adraoui, 2019). France seems to be the “epicenter” of the Movement in Europe, followed by Belgium and the Netherlands (Amghar, 2008b, p. 95). Also, in Germany, Saudi Arabia has a significant religious influence among Muslim communities (El Karoui, 2018). The impact can mainly be felt in Bonn, Hamburg, and Berlin (ibid).

One of the main reasons for the movement’s appeal is its claim to “religious certainty” and “religious authority,” given that it relies solely on a strict interpretation of the Quran and *Sunna* of the Prophet Muhammed (Haykel, 2011). Salafism is appealing because it portrays its followers as successful entrepreneurs, “self-made” tradesmen who managed to build their profitable businesses in a European society where economic opportunities are limited (Amghar, 2008b, p. 112). Financial and economic success and what it entails in terms of “social prestige and respectability” are portrayed as divine rewards because they are authentic in their faith and religious practice (Adraoui, 2011, p. 13). It offers directions in life while also allowing for “self-fulfillment, individual choice and assertiveness” (Meijer, 2011b, p. 11). What also helped the rapid expansion of Salafism in Europe is the disillusionment of young Muslim generations with the European integration policies that they accuse of ‘disrespecting’ their identity (Kepel, 2004a). Notions like citizenship, integration or even political participation are empty, but Islam, in its self-sufficient nature, meets all the needs (Adraoui, 2011, p. 13).

This disillusionment has weakened Muslim youth’s “allegiance” to their national community. Instead, it has created the urgency of opting out of society (ibid, p. 2). Still, they felt the need to belong to a global religious community, and Salafism has filled this void (ibid). Within this global religious community, the youth in the Netherlands breaks away from the dichotomy of being “Moroccan” and “Dutch” because all that matters now is to be Salafi, to belong to an authentic Islam that is neither “Moroccan” nor “Dutch”(de Koning, 2011, p. 3).

Salafism offers the prestige of having “access to Truth” to those who feel humiliated, repressed, discriminated migrant in an “alien” European state (Meijer, 2011b, p. 9). It offers the “total truth”, an alternative that rejects discrimination and so appealed to the youth more than the Brotherhood (Meijer, 2013, p. 70). Some of them turn to violence to express their “social resentment” while others, more numerous, will choose to ‘withdraw’ from society and live in “closed communities” (Kepel, 2004a, p. 295). Some will prefer to ‘migrate’ to Muslim countries motivated with a need to ‘break away’ from a European social construct that, they feel, is hostile to Islam (Adraoui, 2019). The basic power of Salafism however lies in its ability to solve modern identity crisis, to “empower” the youth, to offer a model of identification (ibid) that brings different Muslim communities together thanks to its universal, de-territorialized, de-culturised and globalized nature (Roy, 2004a).

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Promoting a “quietist” Salafism, which seems to be apolitical and not interested in politicizing Islam serves to position Saudi Arabia as the defender for the assertion of religious identity in Europe, one that meets the needs of all Muslim communities regardless of their race, language or origins (Amghar, 2011). Salafism seems to empower these “dropouts” because it gives them the feeling they “are chosen” and places them at the center of their communities (Adraoui, 2011, p. 3). It seems to offer answers to existentialist questions, offer respect and prestige among peers, equality, and a feeling of belonging to the same community despite their differences of origins (Adraoui, 2019). Most importantly, it appeals to them because it enables a specific social resistance to European societies' norms and values in a social context that seems to marginalize and stigmatize them (ibid).

Promoting Salafism for Saudi Arabia meant promoting allegiance to the regime. It meant creating clientelist networks that would help maintain and strengthen its symbolic influence and present Saudi Arabia as a “wonderful” country “that defends Muslims around the world in defiance of the West. When I see reports on TV about Saudi Arabia that show it is a weird society with corrupt power, it is propaganda and journalists' manipulation. Saudi Arabia is the country of Muslims, it is my country in a way if I can say that” (cited in Amghar, 2008b, p. 106). Because Saudi Arabia strictly applies Islamic texts, for them, it has become “the most perfect political and religious system” and the abundance of oil and fortune is a divine material “reward” for practicing Islam in “its pure form” (Adraoui, 2011, p. 4)

Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists compete to clarify Islam in Europe. While the Brothers favor a public visibility strategy, the Salafists prefer discretion, for Europe is a “land of disbelief” (Kepel, 2004a, p. 303). They instead engage in religious activism within their entourage and within territories they “control” (ibid). Within these territories, the aim is to preserve their Muslim identity hence the importance of visible markers, the beard for men, and the black niqab for women (ibid). These visible markers are used to stress the difference between “us” and “them,” while saying “we are better than you” (Meijer, 2011b, p. 10). It is a “marker of a distinctive form of engagement with the world,” made evident through a distinct dress, discourse, and religious practices (Haykel, 2011, p. 2). An effort to build a “counter-identity” to both the culture of their parents and the culture of the European society where they were brought up (de Koning, 2011). It is a way to distinguish between a Muslim and a non-believer, to show one’s pride that a Salafi is no more a pariah but a person who dictates now his relation to his society (Adraoui, 2011). For women, the niqab reflects a quest for authenticity but, above all, individuality, a way to express distinctiveness and contrast to the European society where the niqab is highly contested (de Koning, 2011).

Believing that politics divide the Muslim community, Salafism focuses on religious education and preaching. Therefore, Salafists adopt a strictly religious discourse (Amghar, 2008b). This “quietist” Salafism has been encouraged by Saudi Arabia because it tends to be apolitical and would not challenge the legitimacy of the regime within its own borders or abroad (El Karoui, 2018). The focus is on educating individuals about Salafism because education is believed to help Islam rise as “a dominant force on the world stage” (Haykel, 2011, p. 12). This “quietist” Salafism was promoted thanks to European Muslim students who graduated from

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Saudi religious universities thanks to mosques' funding, the assistance of cultural centers and similar organizations (Amghar, 2008b, p. 102).

However, Wahhabism and Salafism use online platforms to wage a battle against each other (Kepel, 2004a). Though they prefer to 'withdraw' from society, the Salafists engage in online debates trying to attract to their movement those who were "deviated" by the Muslim Brotherhood (ibid, p. 301). The "defeat" of the Brothers in the Arab world and their inability to seize or retain power made them even more convinced of the necessity to avoid political participation and focus on themselves (Adraoui, 2011, p. 14). This rhetoric does not mean that the Salafi discourse is entirely and strictly religious. On the contrary, it is highly critical towards European societies, the "land of disbelief," such that it calls its followers not to engage in public or citizen life. It urges them to limit their social activities within their own communities (Amghar, 2008b). They 'withdraw' from society because they are afraid interacting with non-believers will contaminate their faith's purity (Meijer, 2011b).

Salafists do not engage in any form of political participation in European societies because they believe it is against Islam (Amghar, 2008b). They are apolitical and reject voting or any expression of civil participation (Meijer, 2011b). Since European societies are not regulated according to Islamic laws, democratic participation is equated to associationism (shirk) (Amghar, 2008b). Moreover, political action is forbidden because it leads to "civil strife" (fitna) (Haykel, 2011, p. 12). They also refuse to take part in protests, not even in those against the caricatures of the Prophet, because "When there are demonstrations made by Muslims to defend other Muslims, me and the brothers never go there. To make our voice heard, we must not use western methods. I do not want to mix Islam with French politics. The sheiks advise us not to go" (Amghar, 2008b, p. 108) and "If I protest or petition or vote, it's as if I put Islam, the best religion and the best thing of humanity, with the political baseness of the French. Never in my life, I'd rather do nothing. Either way, that's not the way to act" (cited in Amghar, 2008b, p. 109).

Feeling they do not belong to their national community, migrant youth confine themselves to life in their neighborhood. They are convinced that Islam offers all answers and that it is "a total system of values and codes that reject all other influences" (Adraoui, 2011, p. 2). This does not prevent them from building mosques, websites, formal and informal networks to spread the call (*dawa*) and to inform about the critical state of the global Muslim community (Ummah) (de Koning, 2011). These networks are usually informal based on trust between relatives and friends, on a certain notion of "sisterhood" and "brotherhood" who actively engage in religious exchanges on the internet and thus help spread Salafism (ibid).

Pressure from Saudi's Western allies and breaking with political Islam pushed Saudi Arabia to downsize its Islamic charities, including the Islamic Relief Organization and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) (Benthall, 2016). In 2004, Saudi authorities formed a high commission to supervise its charities (ibid) and tighten the rules that regulate them (Shaw-Hamilton, 2007).

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## Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood intended to build transnational and international ties to strengthen the legitimacy of the Saudi rule, counter the influence of secular and leftist movements in the region, and promote the state's understanding of Islam (Commins, 2019). The same applies to Qatar. The Muslim Brotherhood was relatively successful in establishing itself as the "true defender" of Muslims (Maréchal, 2015) since the Brothers (1) were better organized, (2) sought to create transnational European organizations, (3) had their members elected within diaspora cultural and religious institutions, and (4) resorted to modern means of communication. They became one of the most prominent movements in Europe thanks to their ability to position themselves as a privileged mediator between Muslim communities and European public actors on issues ranging from religious practices to racism (Amghar, 2011). Furthermore, they could offer concrete initiatives to "empower" Muslim communities at the educational (e.g., the establishment of schools), financial (e.g., the establishment of Islamic banks), and legal levels (e.g., the creation of the European Council for Fatwa and Research) (Maréchal, 2015).

In 2002, the League Secretary-General requested to meet with Nicolas Sarkozy, former France president, to discuss Islam's institutionalization in France (Amghar, 2011). They also could frame "an Islamic citizenship" that offers Muslim youth an understanding of Islam that considers European specificities and creates a Muslim cultural framework that makes it possible to be both Muslim and European at the same time (ibid). To do so, they campaign for the integration of Muslim communities in both the political and social systems in Europe and ask Muslims to register on the electoral lists and vote (ibid).

Salafism, on the other hand, calls for a particular 'withdrawal' from public life. Followers usually confine themselves to their immediate entourage. Salafism especially appeals to the youth who lack national, political, and symbolic belonging and express a particular hostility towards their societies (Adraoui, 2019). While the Muslim Brotherhood engages in politics and calls for the establishment of an Islamic state to protect Muslims' faith, Salafism focuses on purifying religion from any idolatry, refusing to engage in any form of political opposition out of fear of anarchy and division (*fitna*) (Amghar, 2008b). The Muslim Brotherhood tends to be strong in societies where the nationalist causes are dominant. Therefore, it is "worldwide a more powerful force than Salafism" (Meijer, 2011b, p. 17).

The movement has not been able to engage sufficient numbers of second and third-generation European Muslims with their concepts. However, they remain the main Muslim movement capable of monopolizing the Islamic discourse due to their capacity to organize large-scale events, establish their own publishing houses, distribute their texts, and dominate the literature (Vidino, 2010b). In its attempt to position itself as the main interlocutor between European governments and Muslim communities, the Muslim Brotherhood compromised its reputation (Bakker and Meijer, 2013). Among youths, the Brotherhood organizations are perceived as gathering personalities from high social ranks (ibid.). The Brothers have alienated their own supporters and are now being challenged by other movements, including Salafism (ibid).

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