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THE SOUND AND SENSE OF JIHAD: REVISITING THE NOTION OF JIHAD IN JIHADI-THEMED ARABIC CHANTS

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Introduction

In recent years, Arabic chants have received scholarly attention for their strong presence on the battlefield among Salafi-Jihadi groups. From al-Qaʿida in the Arabian Peninsula to the Islamic State in Syria (henceforth: IS) and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Salafi-Jihadi groups have integrated Arabic chants as part of their psychological warfare to recruit new fighters, to galvanise support for their ideology, to fuel people's sentiments against foreign forces and to undermine the ruling governments. This chapter reconciles sound – the auditory experience of chants – with sense, namely, the meaning and interpretation of a particular text, including the affective dimension attributed to the Arabic chants disseminated by Salafi-Jihadi groups. The objectives of this chapter are twofold. First, this contribution draws parallelism between the notion of jihad as deployed in contemporary Arabic political discourse and in Salafi-Jihadi parlance to assess whether the militant meaning of jihad is part of mainstream Arabic political discourse or exclusive to Salafi-Jihadi propaganda. Second, this chapter examines the sound and sense of jihadi-themed Arabic chants at the nexus of tradition and modernity by suggesting a broader understanding of Arabic chants within the Arabic-speaking environment. From an emic perspective, this study investigates Arabic chants of jihadi nature in light of

'invented traditions', illustrating how secular and religious practices are appropriated at the textual and sound level. In terms of tradition, this study compares the uses and functionality of Arabic chants with other long-standing oral and auditory traditions in the Arabic-Islamic cultures.

The Notion of Jihad in Contemporary Political Discourse

The earliest meaning of jihad that is rendered in the Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-ʿArab* is that of 'making an effort or investing one's energy, whether in speech or action'. Associated with it is the meaning of loyalty in war (see also Bengio 1998: 186). Historically speaking, the term jihad is located with the Prophet Muḥammad, who reminded his followers to engage in *jihād al-nafs* or the conscious engagement to bring a positive change, which was regarded as the greater form of jihad (*jihād al-akbar*). On the other hand, jihad of the sword (*jihād al-sayf*), which permitted physical combat with the sword in certain limited situations, was considered as the lesser form of jihad (*jihād al-asghar*) or a 'battle . . . holy war against the infidels as a religious duty' (Wehr and Cowan 2016: 169).

Over the past centuries, the meaning of jihad has migrated from the inner Muslim circle to the political and military realms. The dimension of spiritual exertion as prioritised by the Prophet lost its value among Salafi-Jihadi groups.[1] The notion of jihad has experienced semantic narrowing over time to the extent that it came to be chiefly and irrecoverably linked to violence. According to Ofra Bengio, the principal connotation of jihad, which dates back to the days of the Prophet and is still prevalent today, 'was that of warfare for the sake of Allah against infidels or those who refused to accept Islam.

[1] For the lack of a better term, I adopt the fundamentalist dimensions of the term 'Salafi-Jihadi' to refer to extremist groups within Islam that have a transnational outlook, reject electoral politics, are often reluctant to make truces or engage in political compromises, and focus exclusively on armed struggle. While I acknowledge that the newly coined Western collocation of 'Salafi-Jihadi' may contain 'entirely different meanings from an internal Muslim perspective' and may also be 'reminiscent of false dichotomies often applied to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Muslims in the West' as discussed by my colleague Jaan S. Islam in this volume, I cannot find a more befitting term to refer to the groups considered in this study.

The Qurʾan itself uses the word frequently in this sense' (Bengio 1998: 186). In the political sphere, jihad is appropriated as an ideological tool, especially in times of war. Politicians use the term jihad as part of their political jargon to give conflicts a sense of historical depth and help to obscure their actual causes. In turn, wars are framed as a religious struggle. Due to its strong religious connotations, the notion of jihad resonates with predominantly Muslim communities. The term deprives the opposite side of legitimacy and discredits the adversaries by depicting them as apostates, heretics or infidels. For instance, the Wahhabi community in the Arabian Peninsula used the term jihad with reference to the internecine war within the Wahhabi community and against non-Wahhabi Muslims (see also ibid.: 186ff.).

Similarly, Bengio reports that in preparation for the Iraq–Iran war, the Baʿth Party had to replace its secular political discourse with an Islamicised form of discourse. The scholar argues that this form of discourse

> drew on themes of historical, above all Islamic, provenance. In some measure, this process was intentional and guided from above; in part it was forced on the regime by specific circumstances; and in part it sprang spontaneously from deep layers of the Iraqi collective experience. (ibid.: 159)

Additionally, Bengio reports that at the beginning of the Iraq–Iran war, Saddam addressed a troop of soldiers with the words, 'This is the day of your jihad' (ibid.: 186). Consequently, Saddam was addressed as *mujāhid* in the list of titles, and the term *mujāhid* replaced its parallel secular term *munāḍil*, the former title which originated from the revolutionary ideology of the Baʿth Party (ibid.).

On a similar note, Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's first prime minister post-US invasion, realised that he could not communicate his message effectively to a predominantly Muslim audience unless the political discourse with which he came to power also included a kind of public language that borrowed its idiom from the Islamic tradition. A few months before stepping down, al-Maliki intensified the use of Islamic rhetoric as his last discursive tool to calm down the protests that erupted across the country against his leadership, calling upon the Iraqis to unite and fight back against IS. In this particular context, al-Maliki used three terms to describe the act of struggling or fighting in descending order of importance, namely, *jihād*, *kifāḥ* and *niḍāl*. It is worth noting that the Islamic

term *jihād* precedes the two near-synonyms of secular nature *kifāḥ* and *niḍāl* (see also Gatt 2018: 175).

Libya's former leader Colonel Muʿammar Gaddafi exploited the religious associations of jihad during his last years in power to guide and spur aggression against a perceived internal or external enemy. In a speech held in the city of Benghazi on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday in 2010, Gaddafi mobilised Islamic terms in his bid to raise aggression against the perceived external enemy, namely, Switzerland, for banning the construction of new minarets. Libya's former leader also targeted the internal enemy, which consisted of Salafi-Jihadi groups whose competing ideology was gaining currency in the Islamic world in general, specifically in Libya. More subtly, Gaddafi used this occasion to score political points by linking the transnational struggles of the Muslim communities across the globe with Libya's political turmoil. Gaddafi initiated his speech by reminding his audience that jihad is a religious duty (*farḍ*). He then advanced this idea by moving from the religious to the political realm to introduce his own interpretation of jihad. According to the politician, jihad consisted of defending oneself, one's religion, fighting in the path of God (*kifāḥ fī sabīl allāh*), the Prophet, the Qurʾan, the mosques and specifically al-Aqsa mosque (Libyan pen 2021: 14:44). At the same time, Gaddafi positioned himself against other interpretations of jihad. He registered his disagreement with the Salafi-Jihadi interpretation of jihad, claiming that the acts of jihad carried out by groups such as al-Qaʿida constitute 'terrorism' (*irhāb*), 'crimes' (*ajrām*) and 'mental illnesses' (*maraḍ nafsī*). Contrarily, Gaddafi expressed his support for the 'sacred Palestinian struggle' (*al-kifāḥ al-filasṭīnī al-muqaddas*), which he considered as a clear example of jihad. Targeting Switzerland as the perceived external adversary, Gaddafi declared that any Muslim worldwide who attempted to engage in any way with Switzerland was an infidel (*kāfir*) working against Islam, Muḥammad, God and the Qurʾan. He also accused Switzerland of destroying places of worship and instigated his audience to boycott Switzerland, its products, planes, ships and embassies.

The process of transposing Islamic terminology from the religious realm to the political sphere is one of the most frequent persuasion strategies in Arabic political discourse that extends beyond the speeches of Saddam Hussein, Nouri al-Maliki and Muʿammar Gaddafi. These examples demonstrate that the militant meaning of jihad, which promotes violence against a perceived enemy, is

not exclusive to the Salafi-Jihadi paradigm but has been instrumentalised as a persuasion strategy in mainstream Arabic political discourse for many decades.

The Notion of Jihad in Arabic Chants

The notion of jihad is subject to competing interpretations in the religious, political and military realms. In the context of Arabic chants, Salafi-Jihadi groups have adopted a narrow understanding of jihad to the extent that the term appears exclusively in its militant form in modern Salafi-Jihadi propaganda. For example, in a chant attributed to the famous chant singer Abu Mazin and disseminated through al-Qaʿida propaganda channels, the notion of jihad is expressed in terms of its violent and transitional dimensions.

بِجِهادِنا سَنُفَتِّتُ الصَّخْـــرا وَنُمَزِّقُ الطاغوتِ وَالكُفْـرا
بِعَزيْمَـةٍ جَبَّـارةٍ كُبْـــرى وَإِرادَةٍ لا تَعْرِفُ القَهْـــرا
وَنُجَنِّدُ الوِجدان وَالفِكْـــرا بِدِمائِنا سَنُلَوِّنُ الفَجْـــــرا
وَنَروذُهُ يا أُمَّتـــي نَصْرا بِكِفاحِنا سَنُحَوِّلُ المَجْـــرَى
بِجِهادِنـــا بِالمِشْعَلِ الوَقّاد سَيَزُول لَيْلُ الشِرْكِ وَالإِلْحاد
وَنَخوضُها بِعَزيْمَةٍ وَجَلاد وَنَفُكُّ جَوْرَ القَيدِ والأَصْفـــاد

By means of our jihad, we will crumble the rocks,
and tear the infidels and apostasy apart.
With great, fierce determination
and a will that knows no defeat,
We will recruit the hearts and minds
and we will colour dawn with our blood.
O Muslim polity, we want this to be a victory,
our fighting will change the path.
Through our jihad and our luminous torch,
the night of polytheism and apostasy will disappear.
We will fight with strength and determination,
we will defeat the unjust restrictions of the handcuffs.[2]
(Said 2016: 335)

[2] The English translation is my own.

The violent dimension of jihad is amplified through the frequent use of the *fa''ala* verbal form, which indicates an intensive, reiterative or habitual action (Wright 1955: 137). Examples include 'crumbling' (*nufattitu*), 'tearing apart' (*numazziqu*) and 'colouring dawn with blood' (*nulawwinu al-fajrā*). Similarly, the transitional dimension is expressed through the notion of 'changing the path' (*nuḥawwilu l-majrā*). The term jihad is also accompanied by positive-connoting terms such as 'fierce determination' (*ʿazīma jabbāra*), 'victory' (*naṣr*) and 'luminous torch' (*mishʿal al-waqqād*).

In Salafi-Jihadi rhetoric, the act of dying for the group is often depicted in terms of jihad and it is compared to the strength of the lion, which is the ultimate symbol par excellence evoking qualities of bravery, strength and valour in the Islamic tradition. The IS-affiliated chant *Ummati Kānat Lā Tarḍī l-Wahan* ('My Muslim polity was not satisfied with the weakness') calls upon the 'lions of Islam' who are 'the embodiment of jihad' to fight against the Persians who are referred to as non-Arabs (*ʿajam*).

يا أسودَ الدّينِ يا رَمْزَ الجِهاد في زَمانٍ قادَ عُرْبَهُم عَجَمْ

O lions of Islam, the embodiment of jihad,
in the past, the Arabs ruled over the Persians.
(Gatt 2020: 268)

It is worthy to note that in some cases, the militant form of jihad is framed in terms of traditional motifs that have developed from pre-Islamic onto Islamic and modern times. One example is the motif of asceticism (*zuhdiyya*) which deals with 'the binary sets of life and death, the worldly and the outwardly, and the ephemeral and immortality' (ibid.: 198). The verb *zahada* means 'to renounce', 'to withdraw' and 'to forsake'. In the pre-Islamic period, the motif of asceticism dealt with renunciation (*zuhd*) and calling others to lead a life of abstention (*tazahhud).*[3] With the advent of Islam, the concept of asceticism was retooled to encourage and praise those who shun luxury in favour of a simple and pious life. In fact, *zuhd* in the Qurʾan conveys the general meaning of 'a life of self-denial and devotional exercises' (Hamori 2008: 265).

[3] See Lane (1863); Ibn Manẓūr (1955–6); Wehr and Cowan (2016), *z-h-d*.

The ascetic impulse in jihadi-themed Arabic chants does not only refer to the binary sets of life and death; it also links the call to a life of abstention with the militant meaning of jihad. Militant activists and supporters of IS are reminded that the transfer from a temporal to an everlasting spiritual state can only be realised if they perform jihad and sacrifice themselves for the group. This blended reinterpretation of the ascetic concept and the militant meaning of jihad appears in an IS-affiliated chant known by its incipit *Kun Maʿa Allāh Naqiyyan* ('Be pure with God').

إنْ أَرَدْتُمْ عِزَّةً في كُلِّ أَمْـر دونَكُمْ خوضوا مَيادينَ القِتالِ
ذِرْوَةُ الأَمْرِ جِهادٌ فارْتَقوها فازَ مَنْ لَبّى وَضَحّى كُلَّ غالي
كُلُّ مَنْ يَدْعوهُ يَلْقاهُ قَريباً يَسْمَعُ الهَمْسَ بِذَرّاتِ الرِّمالِ
يا إلهَ الكَوْنِ جِئْنَاكَ حُفَاةً وَعُراةً فَاكْسُنا ثَوْبَ المَعالي
رَبُّكَ الحامي فاسأَلْهُ خالِصاً تَلْقاهُ يُنْجيكَ فِي سودِ اللَّيالي
كُلُّ ما فَوْقَ البَرايا زائِلٌ ثُمَّ يَبْقى وَجْهُ رَبّي ذُو الجَلالِ

If you desire the glory in every matter other than yourselves,
then embark boldly in the arenas of fighting.
The peak of the matter is jihad, so rise to it,
for whoever heeds the call and sacrifices everything precious succeeds.
Everyone who calls him meets him soon.
He hears the whisper in the tiny particles of sand.
O God of the Universe, we have come to you barefooted and naked,
so clothe us in the garments of excellence.
Your Lord is your patron, so ask him sincerely.
He will save you [even] in the darkest of times.
All that is above creation is transitory.
What remains is the face of the Lord of Majesty.
(Gatt 2020: 201–2)

In this excerpt, the notion of jihad takes on a transitional dimension. The recipients of the chant are reminded to abstain from the luxuries of life because anything that is worldly is temporary (*zāʾil*), and anything which is outwardly such

as God is ephemeral (*yabqā*). The difference between human beings and God is projected through the clothing images. Humankind is described as appearing 'barefooted and naked' (*jiʾnāka ḥufātan wa-ʿurātan*) in front of God, whereas God is depicted as the one who clothes humans. This imagery recalls Islamic teachings about the Day of Resurrection, whereby the people will be gathered 'barefooted, naked and uncircumcised' (*tuḥsharūna ḥufātan ʿurātan ghurlan*).[4] Jihad is also framed in terms of fighting and self-sacrifice, and it is referred to as 'the peak of the matter' (*dhirwatu l-ʿamri jihādun*). The 'peak of the matter' is an intertextual reference to a passage from the Prophetic traditions which states that 'the head of the matter is Islam, its support is prayer, and the top of its hump is jihad' (*raʾsu l-amri al-islāmu, wa-ʿamūduhu l-ṣalātu, wa-dhurwatu sanāmihi al-jihādu*).[5] The orientational metaphor of going 'up' to reach jihad is also reminiscent of Islamic metaphors of ascending to heaven after death, such as Prophet Muḥammad's ascension to heaven known as *miʿrāj*. It is noteworthy to mention that metaphors assigned to Islam in classical Islamic scholarship are appropriated in jihadi-themed Arabic chants to narrow the gap between Islam and the militant interpretation of jihad. This connection is highlighted in the Islamic teachings attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661CE), the son-in-law of the Prophet, who argues that the four pillars of faith consist of forbearance (*al-ṣabr*), conviction (*al-yaqīn*), justice (*al-ʿadl*) and struggle against the evil (*jihād*).[6]

While reminding the recipients about their Islamic teachings, the chant advances by providing its interpretation of jihad, namely, actively fighting on the battlefield (*mayadīn al-qitāl*), heeding the call to jihad and sacrificing everything (*labbā wa-ḍaḥḥā kulla ghālī*). The sequence of the motif of asceticism followed by the militant meaning of jihad demonstrates that while jihadi-themed Arabic chants are replete with motifs of religious nature, their use is made from a vantage point beneath the transcendental status of the Qurʾan and the Prophetic traditions.

[4] Available at <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6527> (last accessed 5 January 2022).

[5] Available at <https://tinyurl.com/dhirwatul-amri> (last accessed January 2022).

[6] 'Faith . . . stands on four pillars: forbearance (*al-sabr*), conviction (*al-yaqin*), justice (*al-ʿadl*), and struggle against the evil (*jihad*)' (Qutbuddin 2013: 132–5).

In a different IS-affiliated chant called *Ḥayātu al-Dhulli Lā, Lā Artaḍīhā* ('I am not satisfied with a life of humiliation'), the notion of jihad is depicted in the contradictory terms of 'life and death' and 'humiliation and honour'.

حَيَاةُ الذُلّ لا،لا أَرْتَضيهـــا وَحُبُّ المَوتِ بِـالـعِزِّ مَـرامُ
فَـلا وَاللهِ لاَ أَخْشـــى المَنايا فَما لِلْـعَـبْـدِ في الدُّنْيـا مَـقـامُ
وَإِنَّ المَوْتَ في دَرْبِ الجِهادِ لَفَضْـلُ اللهِ يُؤْتـي مَنْ يَشاءُ
فَيا دَرْبَ الجِهادِ هَلُمَّ إِنّـــي لِـحُـبِّـكَ لا أَكِـلُّ وَلا أَنـامُ
سَأَبْقى وَافِيـاً بِالعَهْدِ مَهْمـا خُـذِلْـتُ مِنَ الـبَريَّـةِ أَوْ أَلَـمُ
وَمَهْما سامَني الأَعْداءُ قَهْراً سَأَبْقى ثابِتـاً مَـهْمـا أَسـامـوا

I am not content with a life of humiliation,
longing for an honourable death is the purpose.
By God, I swear I do not fear my fate,
for the servant does not reside in the [material] world.
Indeed, death in the path of jihad
is a gift God gives to whomever He wills.
Come forward O path of jihad,
for your love, I am neither weary nor can I sleep.
I will remain loyal to the pact
even if I suffer from setbacks or blame from [other] humans.
Whatever oppression enemies afflict me with,
I will remain steadfast against whatever they intend to do.[7]
(Gatt 2020: 203–4)

Through text, Salafi-Jihadi groups like IS demand visceral commitment to the group. In this chant, the notion of jihad has a performative dimension and is directly linked to one's readiness to fight and die for the group. The performance of jihad is expressed in terms of several attributes that project how cadres should approach their death through jihad. These attributes include honour (*ʿizz*), fearlessness in the face of death (*lā akhshā al-manāyā*), worldly transience (*fa-mā li-l-ʿabdi fī al-dunyā maqām*), God's gift (*faḍlu allāhi*),

[7] This verse echoes the Qurʾanic verse which reads: 'And to establish prayer (*aqīmū al-ṣalāla*) and fear Him. And it is He to whom you will be gathered'. See Qurʾan, 6:72.

eagerness (*la akillu wa-lā anāmu*), loyalty (*sa-abqā wāfiyan*) and steadfastness (*sa-abqā thābitan*). The phrase 'the path of jihad' (*darb al-jihād*), which appears twice in this excerpt, is a loaded term that echoes the phrase 'jihad in the path of God' (*jihād fī sabīl allāh)*, explicitly reminding the recipients that jihad is a religious duty ordained by God.

The link between jihad and death is explicitly pronounced in an IS-affiliated chant *Yā Fawza Man Nāla al-Shahāda* ('O victory in obtaining martyrdom'). The listeners are invited to heed the call in the chant and perform jihad. Death by jihad is beautified and the audience is reminded that their blood drops will remove their sins and their corpse will be covered with musk and perfume once they die.

يا فَوْزَ مَنْ نالَ الشَّهادَةَ صادِقاً تُمْحى الذُّنوبُ إذا الدِّماءُ تَقَطَّرُ

وَإذا الزُّهورُ تَعَطَّرَتْ بِعَبيرِها مِسْكٌ تَفُوحُ جِـرَاحُـهُ وَتُعَطَّرُ

وَتَجَهَّزوا يا إِخْوَتِـي لِعَدُوِّكُمْ وَتَسَلَّحـوا بِالـحَـقِّ لاَ تَتَأَخَّروا

قوموا لِحَيَّ عَلى الـجِـهـادِ فَإِنَّهُ عِـزٌّ إذا ما نَسْتَجيبُ وَمَفْخَـرُ

O victory for whoever accepts martyrdom truthfully,
The dripping of blood washes away the sins.
When the flowers exude fragrance,
his wounds emit musk and [his wounds] are perfumed.
O brothers of mine, prepare yourselves against your enemy,
be armed with the truth and do not linger.
Rise to perform jihad,
because when we respond to it, it becomes genuinely high-ranking and a source of pride.
(ibid.: 264–5)

In some cases, jihad acquires a spatial dimension. In another verse extracted from the same chant, militant fighters are encouraged to fight in 'the arena of jihad'.

فأمْضـوا بِـجَـدٍّ مِـنْ مُـجِـدٍّ هِـمَّـةً وَتَـذَكَّـروا سـاحَ الـجِـهـادِ تَـذَكَّروا

Go ahead in all seriousness and vigour from an earnest person,
and keep in mind the arena of jihad.
(ibid.: 264)

The listeners of the chant are reminded that their companions were ready to leave the comfort of their home and emigrate in order to sacrifice their lives for the sake of jihad.

إِخْـوانـكُـمْ شَـدّوا سُـروجَ مَطيِّهِمْ كابولُ شَدَّت والنَّجائِب ضمَّروا

وَتَـذَكَّـروا أَهْـلَ الجَـزيـرَةِ إِخْـوةً تَرَكوا النَّعِيمَ إلى الـجِـهـادِ وَغـادَروا

Your brothers have tightened their horse's saddle,
Kabul is in dire straits, and the noble warriors dwindle one by one,
Do you remember those who lived in the [Arabian] Peninsula as brothers?
They left their comfort to join jihad, and departed.
(ibid.: 264)

Through implicit references to the Prophetic traditions, the spatial dimension of jihad is compared to the pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*) to the city of Mecca.

شُدّوا الرِّحالَ إلى الجِهادِ عَسَكُم أَنْ تُـقْـتَـلُوا فِالله أَوْ أَنْ تُـنْـصِـروا

Be ready to travel and perform jihad.
You may either be killed for the sake of God or be victorious.
(ibid.: 265)

The command 'be ready to travel' (*shuddū l-riḥāl*) in this verse appears in the Book of the Pilgrimage (*Kitāb al-Ḥajj*). According to the Prophetic traditions, ʿAisha narrated that ʿUmar said, 'Be ready to travel for Ḥajj (*shuddū al-riḥāl fī al-ḥajj*), as it is one of the two kinds of jihad.'[8]

Reconciling Sound with Sense

The relationship between music and text has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for the past centuries. The English poet Alexander Pope writes in one of his poems titled 'Sound and Sense' that '[t]he sound must seem an echo to the sense'. In the Arabic poetic tradition, the nearest equivalent of the complementary pair of 'sound and sense' appears in the discussion between form (*lafẓ*) and content (*maʿnā*) (Van Gelder 2012: 3). In the seminal work

[8] Available at <https://tinyurl.com/shuddulrihal> (last accessed 5 January 2022).

al-ʿUmda, the Tunisian poet and literary critic Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 1063 CE) compares the relationship between form (*lafẓ*) and content (*maʿnā*) to the relationship between the body and the soul, arguing that 'the sounds are a body its soul being the sense; they are connected to it as is the soul to a body, which is weak through their weakness and strong through their strength' (Ibn Rashīq 1972: 124).

On a similar note, in the discussion about medieval music compositions, David Wilson argues that 'the music does not attempt "to interpret" the text; rather, it is a vehicle for a poetry that is already highly stylized' (Wilson 1990: 344). Wilson also stresses that '[t]here is no attempt to integrate music and text emotionally. Rather, the melody is a musical element governed by its own rules onto which text is placed' (ibid.: 241). To date, however, there are no universal principles that intimately link the sound of a poetic or musical composition with its sense. For this reason, it is erroneous to argue in favour of a harmonious correlation between the sound and sense in Arabic chants. This chapter argues that the efficacy of the sound and sense is linked to the simultaneous attribution of tradition and modernity.

Tradition and Modernity

From an emic perspective, the dichotomous relationship between tradition and modernity holds the key to the effectiveness of jihadi-themed Arabic chants. This relationship concurs with what Eric Hobsbawm calls 'invented traditions', which include both 'traditions' which are 'actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period . . . and establishing themselves with great rapidity' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2013: 1). The concept of tradition consists of the appropriation of material culture borrowed from the manifold domains of Muslim cultural production. This process selectively reconstructs material culture that is already meaningful to speakers of Arabic and Muslims in a positive way. Effectively, Salafi-Jihadi groups continually engage in a complex process of appropriating, reclaiming, reimagining and recreating traditions belonging to mainstream Arabic-speaking and Islamic communities to push forward the Salafi-Jihadi ideology and derive their legitimacy from traditional practices related to violence, warfare and hegemonic discourses (see also Gatt 2020).

Appropriated Qurʾanic citations, formulaic religious expressions, ancient wisdom, allusions to Islamic figures and warriors feature in different forms of written and audiovisual productions, including poetry, chants, speeches, newspaper articles, school books, videos, iconography and nomenclature.[9] IS, for example, appropriates the figure of the Prophet by 'interweaving a range of allusions to the figure of the Prophet and reclaiming the spiritual and worldly inheritance of Muḥammad and the *ṣaḥāba*' (Günther 2021: 469). Additionally, Salafi-Jihadi groups exploit the 'aura of factuality' created around the figure of the Prophet in mainstream Islamic culture to 'bolster hierarchical power structures' and to incentivise 'authorities to cloak themselves in the aura of the past in order to legitimise their present endeavours' (ibid.: 448–73).

Whether secular or religious, the selective reconstruction of traditions seems to be a fundamental persuasion strategy underlying Salafi-Jihadi messaging and propaganda. Links to historical events are so unprecedented that they need to be invented by 'creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity, either by semi-fiction . . . or by forgery' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2013: 7). The main objective of exploiting different traditions in the case of Salafi-Jihadi cultural products is to establish historical continuity with the Islamic past and to deliver a narrative that raises the level of enthusiasm among the supporters. Given that the Arabic and Islamic traditions span over millennia, Salafi-Jihadi groups have a vast array of references at their disposal. This issue is best explained by the historian Hugh Kennedy, who admits that in the vast historical records, one may find references both to 'an aggressive and fiercely controlling' caliphate as well as a caliphate that is 'generous and open to different ideas' (Kennedy 2016: xvi).

At times, 'invented traditions' not only use 'old materials', but 'may also be forced to invent new languages or devices, or extend the old symbolic vocabulary beyond its established limits' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2013: 7). The Salafi-Jihadi narrative borrows conflicting elements from tradition, including pre-Islamic or 'un-Islamic' practices. For example, several scholars have noted that the ethos of blood vengeance – an integral part of Salafi-Jihadi ideology

[9] The manipulation of tradition in the Salafi-Jihadi milieu is discussed in Boudali et al. (2006); Kendall and Khan (2016); and Hegghammer (2017).

and propaganda – is essentially pre-Islamic and contradicts Qurʾanic teachings (Fakhro 2018: 402–22). Names of historical figures are also used to this effect. For example, IS named its all-female morality policing brigade after the seventh-century female poet al-Khansāʾ even though such brigades have no equivalence in the Islamic tradition (see also Gatt 2020: 89). In the poetic realm, Salafi-Jihadi propaganda includes frequent references to pre-Islamic verses (Kendall and Khan 2016: 228–9).

In Salafi-Jihadi communication, tradition is attributed simultaneously to modernity. The notion of modernity includes the use of twenty-first-century technology. Whereas the Salafi-Jihadi narrative is intricately linked to the Arabic and Islamic traditions, the transmission of Salafi-Jihadi communication, including chants, relies increasingly on modern technological advancements. Militant Islamist groups have embraced chants as a novel art form since the late 1960s and have continually developed it to different extents (Said 2016: 45ff.; Pieslak 2017: 67ff.; Hegghammer 2017: 188). Modern technology is evident in the high-quality production of flashy magazines, videos and audiovisual material such as chants. The production of chants shows the amalgamation of strict conformity to traditional poetic conventions coupled with sound effects from the battlefield, including gunshots, explosions or the sound of marching soldiers.

The dependence of Salafi-Jihadi material on modern means of transmission stems from the increasing need to reach different categories of people transnationally, including Muslims and Arabic-speaking individuals residing in Arab countries as well as others living outside it. The possibility of streaming the events taking place on the battlefield in real-time via social media has created an unprecedented scenario that narrows the gap between individuals across the globe and militants of Salafi-Jihadism.

At the textual level, Arabic chants circulated in the Salafi-Jihadi milieu resonate culturally with the Arabic-speaking communities because of their rigid structure and Islamic rhetoric. At the level of sound, the added effects accompanying modern manifestations of Arabic chants disseminated by IS such as explosions, gunshots and marching may appeal to the global youth because these effects glamorise the life of militant Salafi-Jihadi fighters.

In popular culture, similar sound effects are evident in rap and hip-hop music. A contemporary subgenre of hip-hop music known as ‘drill’, for

instance, engages with similar effects and it is 'often rhythmically rigid – with a snare falling on the third beat of each bar – drill moves to skippy, syncopated hi-hat patterns echoing the rapid fire of a machine gun'. Different to other forms of hip-hop, drill music is characterised by 'its combative energy and its particular concern with gang conflict and murder' (see also Davies 2021). The subliminal sound effects are intended to replicate the soundscape of the human world. In the case of jihadi-themed Arabic chants, the sound effects mirror the noise of the battlefield, whereas in the case of hip-hop music, the sound effects are often linked to the underworld, including attacks between gangs, drug dealing and street crime.

On a sociocultural level, Arabic chants serve as a multi-functional platform that appeals to foreign-based and grassroots recruits. Generally speaking, this means that consumers of music may witness similar experiences to grassroots recruits when listening to Arabic chants. For non-Arab consumers, the sound of Arabic chants may be reminiscent of music. For Arabic speakers or Muslims living in the Arab or Islamic world, the sound of incantation is culturally authentic because it alludes to imaginations of a glorious heritage. To that extent, the sound and sense of Arabic chants function as a potent bridge to transmit the Salafi-Jihadi ideology globally across mainstream Islamic and non-Islamic cultures.

The Uses of Arabic Chants

The different uses of jihadi-themed Arabic chants shed light on the strategic function and practicality of music in the Salafi-Jihadi subculture. Although academic scholarship taking theories from the field of music as its focal point has reaped significant results, this research is hampered by the contradiction of the Salafi-Jihadist ban on music for its sensually arousing potential.[10] Moreover, given the uncompromising stance of Salafi-Jihadism on music, it is implausible to assume that Salafi-Jihadi composers borrow elements from non-Arabic or Arabic music as a blueprint for Arabic chants. Keeping this in mind, this study benefits from a comparative and contrastive analysis of cultural practices in the Arab and Islamic world that may have contributed to the success of Arabic chants in a particular milieu.

[10] The Salafi-Jihadi stance against music is well-documented in scholarly literature. See also Said (2016) and (2012: 863–79); and Pieslak (2017: 63ff.).

On a cultural level, Arabic chants derive their authenticity in terms of sound and sense from the Islamic idiom and the poetic style. At the textual level, chants enjoy several intertextual connections with traditional values, the Qurʾan and the Prophetic traditions. At the sound level, chants instrumentalise the emotional charge of the oral performance induced by the beautiful chanting voices reminiscent of the Qurʾanic recitation (*tajwīd*). In mainstream Islamic cultures, chants are mobilised for educational and religious purposes. Salim ʿAbd al-Qadir Zinjir (1953–2013), for instance, composed children's poetry in the form of Islamic chants for education, motivation, good upbringing in the Islamic faith and active participation in one's community. Emotionally laden messages transmitted through sound help transmit different messages subliminally. The oral performance of Qurʾanic recitation is 'at the center of Islamic corporate and individual piety' (Denny 1989: 5). In principle, *tajwīd* focuses on clarity of expression, the proper timing of syllables and the phonetic changes to the spoken word, which convey the values of magnanimity and salvation.

Stylistically, the Qurʾan and Arabic chants of jihadi nature represent different forms of rhythmic discourse developed from the secular and the sacred traditions respectively, involving an internal sound system that facilitates memorisation. Both stylistic features are birthed in the oral tradition and are aimed at an auditory culture that responds positively to rhythmic discourse. The composition of the Qurʾan follows a rhymed prose style (*sajʿ*), whereas the structure of Arabic chants is based on the classical Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*). The act of memorising verses from the Qurʾan is the primary source of identification among the Muslim communities. According to the Quran Academy, those who memorise the Qurʾan (*ḥāfiẓ*) are privileged on various levels. Memorisers are elevated in this world and the Hereafter, they are protected from the fire of Hell, they are always in the company of the high angels, their deed of memorisation will intercede for ten members of their family who were destined to go to Hell and, finally, they will be able to recite the Qurʾan at all times (Khan 2014).

On the battlefield, the integration of the oral traditions (Qurʾan and poetry) narrows the gap between the sacred and the secular spheres. With the advancement of technology, the secular and sacred spheres became interconnected. Depending on the atmosphere, militants would alternate between playing the Qurʾanic recitations and chants on their car stereo (see also Hegghammer 2017:

189). This alternation benefits Salafi-Jihadi propagandists who continually seek to influence their followers' judgements and provoke actions. An example of this link is the depiction of pre-Islamic and even 'un-Islamic' values such as blood vengeance as part of the Islamic tradition (see also Gatt 2020). This link is further accentuated in Salafi-Jihadi audiovisual material, whereby recited verses borrowed verbatim from the Qurʾan and the Prophetic traditions and Arabic chants are integrated at various stages of Salafi-Jihadi propagandist videos. Violent scenes of beheadings and shooting on the battlefield are equally accompanied by the soothing voices of Qurʾan recitation and jihadi-themed Arabic chants.

Salafi-Jihadists strategise Qurʾanic recitation on the battlefield to the extent that, as early as the 1980s, a Salafi-Jihadi group made up of predominantly Arabic speakers 'recited the Qurʾan on loudspeakers as a form of psychological warfare against the enemy'. Likewise, al-Qaʿida operatives in Somalia 'recited the Qurʾan to boost the morale of his own men' (Hegghammer 2017). The IS female poet known by her pseudonym Ahlam al-Nasr argues that through her writing, which consists of text with embedded Qurʾanic verses and poetry, she hopes 'to arouse desire and motivate the supporters, enraging and causing them to commit suicide against the disbelievers' (al-Nasr 2018).

Popular Appeal of Arabic Chants

Arabic chants are widespread among Salafi-Jihadi groups due to their popular appeal. Arabic chants are popular on the battlefield because they are culturally authentic and practical. Additionally, chants enjoy a popular appeal due to their links with mainstream Islamic traditions (Gatt 2021). In the Arabic-speaking environment, the appeal of Arabic chants goes beyond the Salafi-Jihadi milieu. Historically informed, chants date back to the tense political atmosphere arising in Egypt and Syria during the 1970s in the period known as 'the Islamic Awakening' (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya*). Chants of Islamic and political nature were instrumentalised as a pivotal part of the counter-culture challenging the status quo during that time, including Muslim rulers (see also Gatt 2020: 124ff.; Said 2016: 45ff.). From this time onwards, chants have featured as a tool to communicate messages of political or religious nature in mainstream Arabic and Islamic cultures.

The practice of incorporating chants as an integral part of a group's culture, its daily rituals and discourse is not only restricted to the Salafi-Jihadi groups. Other Arabic-speaking ideological groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas, and non-Arabic speaking groups such as the Taliban, have equally resorted to chants as an auditory vehicle to communicate their messages. Similarly, mainstream political parties in the Arab world have produced national chants (*anashīd waṭaniyya*) as a musical accompaniment to propagate the pan-Arab nationalist ideology.[11]

Formally, Arabic chants produced by pan-Arab nationalists, Islamic preachers, Islamists and Salafi-jihadists are unified through the shared, rigid structure of the *qaṣīda*, with its end-rhyme and fixed metre.[12] However, the content of the chants differs significantly depending on the affiliation of the chants. For example, chants produced by Salafi-jihadists tend to differ contextually from chants produced by pan-Arab nationalists.[13] For this reason, it is imperative to regard chants in general terms as a 'communicative vehicle' that facilitates the diffusion of particular national, Islamic or ideological values (see also Gatt 2022). This does not mean that there is a clear-cut distinction between different sociopolitical and religious realms such as the Islamic and Salafi-Jihadi spheres. Salafi-Jihadi groups often exploit Islamic chants verbatim or with minor adaptations for their own benefit.[14] IS, for example, made frequent use of Islamic chants to legitimate its discourse and operations and to consolidate its image and identity as part of mainstream Islamic culture (see also Gatt 2020: 82). Thus, the circulation of chants is 'not just about engendering militancy, but also about identity building' (Lahoud 2017: 54). While one may argue that Arabic chants of jihadi nature bear striking resemblances to chants of Islamic nature, the jihadi-themed chants are often identified by their aggressive political activism, which includes a transnational outlook and an exclusive focus on armed struggle (Gatt 2020: 21ff.).

[11] Other examples are found in Gatt (2020: 59–63).

[12] Although chants are based on the classical Arabic ode, structural alterations exist, such as the deviation from the strict monorhyme.

[13] The national anthems in the Arab world follow the structure of the classical Arabic ode, with some alterations. Neo-classical poetry in Arabic is also intrinsically linked to pan-Arab nationalist ideology. See also Gatt (2020: 60ff.).

[14] For examples of ascetic verses of Islamic in nature, see also Gatt (2020: 198ff.).

Shared Functions of Music and Arabic Chants

In our attempt to broaden our understanding of Arabic chants, this section maps out similarities between the various functions of Arabic chants among Salafi-Jihadi groups and music globally. The anthropologist Alan Merriam provides a thorough anthropological investigation of the uses and functions of music across different cultures (Merriam 1964: 209–28). As a reference point, this study adopts and adapts the use and function of music listed in Alan Merriam's work about the functions of sound in Arabic chants of jihadi nature. The uses and functions will be discussed with reference to the projection of the sound and sense of jihad in Arabic chants of jihadi nature.

The Function of Aesthetic Enjoyment and Entertainment

In warfare, music fulfils the functions of aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment. Radical organisations such as the Taliban have exploited the power of chants as 'a source of entertainment' and as 'a key component of the Taliban information and propaganda war' (Johnson and Waheed 2011: 3–31). Similarly, jihadi-themed Arabic chants are identified through their alluring soundscape, which is exploited to entice recruits into the ranks of Salafi-Jihadi groups. Modern facets of Salafi-Jihadi groups like IS borrow sonic effects from the battlefield to create rhythms such as the blast from explosions, the clashing of swords, the marching of soldiers and the stuttering of gunfire (Gatt 2020: 125). Additionally, Arabic chants produced by modern Salafi-Jihadi groups include other technological means of aestheticisation such as pitch correction, the digital reverb effect and delay (see also Dick 2019: 97; Weinrich 2020: 261ff.).

The Function of Expressing Emotions

Chants do not express individual emotions at a specific point in time but are intended to express and evoke emotions collectively for a particular group. Generally, music and Arabic chants of jihadi nature fulfil the general function of stimulating, expressing and sharing collective emotions. The soundscape of music and Arabic chants alike functions 'as a mechanism of emotional release for a large group of people acting together' (Merriam 1964: 222). Through text and music, Arabic chants exploit key emotions such as sorrow, pride, desperation, shame and hope to create sympathy for the Salafi-Jihadi groups and fuel the people's resentments against the adversaries, recruit new fighters

and undermine the government of the country. If music can arouse collective emotions within a particular group, then it is precisely this ability which 'makes it a valuable tool in propaganda, recruitment, membership retention, morale, and motivation to action' (Pieslak 2017: 77).

Different types of music may also foster interpersonal bonds and provide 'a communal basis for social relationships, and at the same time [they] also draw demarcation lines between different social agglomerations, whereby "we" are mostly connoted in a positive sense and "the others" in a negative sense' (Barber-Kersovan 2004: 7). In an IS-affiliated video called *Purification of the Souls*, militants appear sitting on the ground holding rifles and chanting verses led by a child (see also Zelin 2017: 14:57). This extract illustrates how Salafi-Jihadi propaganda appropriates ideas and memories related to the poetic tradition to build group rapport. Beyond words, the upbeat melody of Arabic chants imparts the exaltation of the ego, promoting glory, pride and territorial victories, the stirring of new courage and vigour in enlivening chants, grief in the laments to fallen fighters and anger against the adversaries. On the battlefield, Arabic chants help boost the fighters' morale, express solidarity with one another, ease the hardship of the battlefield and build group rapport through collective incantation (see also Gatt 2020: 144). In this context, then, music 'provides a rallying point around which the members of society gather to engage in activities which require the cooperation and coordination of the group' (Merriam 1964: 227).

The Function of Physical Response

The Salafi-Jihadi ideology, which revolted against the image of idlers and replaced it with 'an activist and self-sacrificial ethos', is sounded out in the groups' chants (Lahoud 2017: 55). Salafi-Jihadi groups use the sounds, tones and rhythms of chants to stir up emotions of anger and grief that promote violence and send humans, mainly men, into battle. Gratrud argues that people tend to be less critical of messages that are set to music. This benefits extremist groups because 'it facilitates the delivery of messages that air grievances, glorify violence, and dehumanise the enemy' (Gratrud 2016: 1052). Although physical reactions to music are probably culturally shaped and therefore one cannot assume that a particular type of sound elicits a particular physical reaction, 'physical response seems clearly to be an important

function of music' (Merriam 1964: 224). Arabic chants contribute to the political identity of the respective organisations and also operate in tandem with militants in recruitment strategies, engendering a culture of militancy and motivating actions against the perceived enemy. More specifically, music and Arabic chants play a pivotal role in eliciting, exciting and channelling crowd behaviour by encouraging the 'physical reactions of the warrior and the hunter' (Merriam 1964: 224).

The Function of Validation of Social Institutions

Arabic chants are rooted in a war environment (see also Said 2016: 45ff.). In times of political turmoil, where anti-establishment movements seek to obtain political power, different ideological groups exploit the sociopolitical function of music to create an organisational identity and validate their institutions. In the case of Salafi-Jihadi groups, claims of legitimacy are sounded out in the groups' chants because the auditory component signals authority and also serves as a warning against the opponents in a war zone. For example, IS used chants on the battlefield to demarcate the groups' territory (Marshall 2014). It is also a common practice for militant jihadists to play chants on the car stereos while patrolling Salafi-Jihadi compounds, or to play chants on large speakers during social gatherings or while on the battlefield. Chants are also set as ringtones on mobile phones (Marshall 2014; Said 2016: 864; Hegghammer 2017: 189; Seymat 2014). The auditory element also reminds the listeners of 'the proper and improper in society' and tells 'people what to do and how to do it' (Merriam 1964: 224–5). For sympathisers of Salafi-Jihadi groups, the act of memorising Arabic chants signals their affiliation and represents their loyalty to and membership in the group.[15] Engaging in listening to or chanting jihadi-themed Arabic chants shows one's willingness to be identified as part of the group and one's motivation to engage in the group's activities. To sum up, jihadi-themed Arabic chants communicate implicit messages continually, serving multiple functions in the group. These functions demonstrate that the sound and sense of jihadi-themed chants should be appreciated beyond the aesthetical layer made up of words set to rhythm.

[15] Music also plays an important role in the process of radicalisation. See also Moeller and Mischler (2020).

Conclusion

This study set out to reconsider the notion of jihad in jihadi-themed Arabic chants and determine the causes of their efficacy among Salafi-Jihadi groups. This research has examined how the meaning of jihad has developed from its spiritual dimension to violent, transitional, spatial and performative dimensions that result in death. The discussion has shown that while it is fair to conclude that the notion of jihad in jihadi-themed Arabic chants appears almost exclusively in its militant form, this tendency is not exclusive to the Salafi-Jihadi groups. Evidence suggests that the militant dimension of jihad had already been broadly circulated and 'legitimated' through mainstream political discourse about warfare. It was also argued that the incantation of jihadi-themed Arabic chants is reminiscent of the oral secular and sacred traditions, mainly the Qurʾanic *tajwīd* and poetic recitations. The participatory auditory practice of chanting appeals to the Arabic-speaking and Muslim cadres because it legitimates and sacralises the message, and restores a sense of pride in the Arabic and Islamic heritage. At the textual level, this chapter has revealed that sound is reinforced through an Islamic repertoire and intertextualities to the Qurʾan and the Prophetic traditions. Additionally, the text is characterised by its simplicity and directness of style, its bipolar worldview between good and evil and its pious militancy-scriptural rhetoric. Authenticity is emphasised through the replication of the main features of the classical Arabic ode, including its fixed metre, end-rhyme and common themes. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that jihadi-themed Arabic chants share similar functions and uses to international music. In terms of modernity, this study has outlined the shared functions and uses of music with the role of Arabic chants in the Salafi-Jihadi milieu and has argued in favour of a broader understanding of this cultural artefact. Taken together, this work has exemplified how the sound and sense of jihadi-themed Arabic chants work in tandem to promote a cultural product that continues to develop dialogically with its globalised sociocultural and political environment.

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