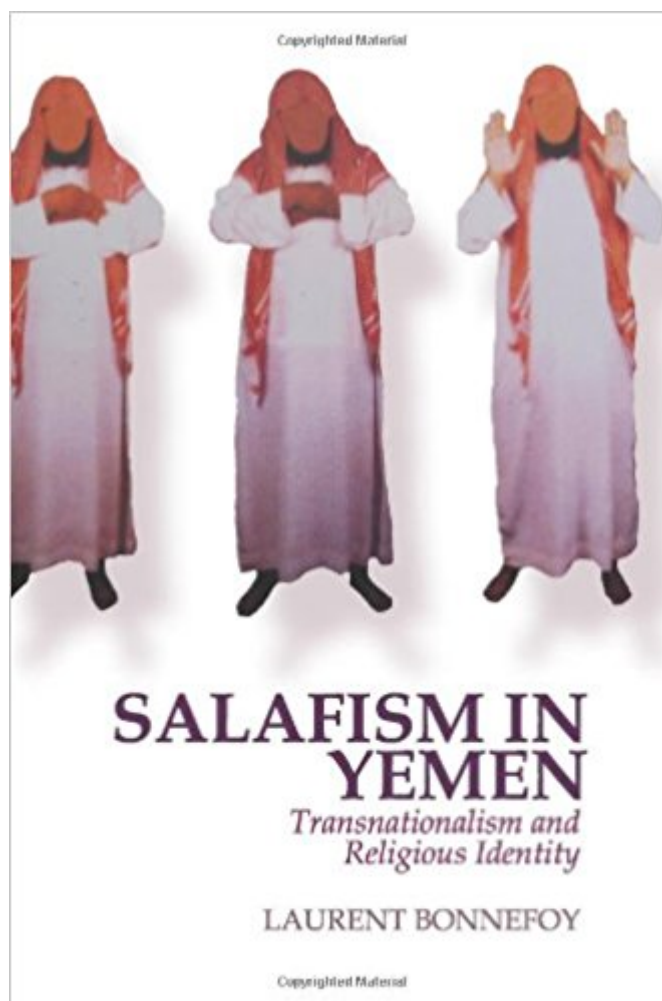


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Salafism In Yemen: Transnationalism And Religious Identity



Synopsis

Over the last decade or so Salafism has become one of the West's new political bogey-men. Many regard the movement as the antechamber of violent groups such as al-Qaeda, and as the by-product of a centralized foreign-policy platform shaped by so-called Saudi interests. Based on extensive research conducted throughout Yemen between 2001 and 2009, and particularly in the southern province of Yafi', this book offers an original approach to Salafism and draws a necessary counter-narrative that takes into account the dynamics of the Salafi movement as well as its relationship to its evolving environment, either local, regional and international. Having studied over a hundred recorded sermons and conferences and dozens of books, and carried out interviews with numerous clerics, intellectuals and activists, Laurent Bonnefoy focuses on the allegedly apolitical Salafi doctrine promoted by the renowned Yemeni Salafi figure, Muqbil al-Wadi'i, who died in 2001. Building on IR theory and political sociology, he references the everyday practices of al-Wadi'i's dedicated followers, their rivalries as well as their own evolving trajectories. He demonstrates that, rather than resulting from specifically planned policies, Yemeni Salafism has, since the early 1980s, evolved through a series of spontaneous, grassroots mechanisms, many of which are shaped by transnational flows, that embed this movement in the complex Yemeni context.

Book Information

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'Salafism in Yemen aptly deals with topics that are incredibly relevant for understanding a region in transition. ... Through years of on-the-ground field work in the remote corners and mountain towns of Yemen, [Bonnefoy] was able to integrate himself into, and thereby study, the country's Salafi movement. This was no small feat. ... Bonnefoy's over-arching argument is sound and increasingly

important. Salafism is not simply a product of Saudi policy, and it is difficult to understand through the prism of the nation-state system. ... He does a fine job of breaking down of Western biases and goes some distance toward accomplishing his goal of "rescuing history" from the nation-state.' * The New Republic * 'Salafism in Yemen is a fascinating, empirically rich investigation of an understudied but increasingly important part of today's Islamic politics. It is perhaps the best study yet produced of the intricate interactions of Yemeni salafism with Saudi Arabia and with the wider international Islamist milieu.' * Marc Lynch, Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University * 'This book is a splendid piece of research and will turn out be a classic on Salafism in Yemen. Laurent Bonnefoy manages not only to go beyond dominant state-centric approaches but he also surpasses conventional wisdoms and pretences that picture the development of Salafism in Yemen as a Saudi "project.'" * Paul Aarts, University of Amsterdam, author of Saudi Arabia in the Balance Paul Aarts, University of Amsterdam, author of Saudi Arabia in the Balance * 'Salafism is one of the most important and pervasive currents in the Muslim world - and yet it remains among the least understood aspects of contemporary Islam. Laurent Bonnefoy's masterful Salafism in Yemen goes a long way towards remedying this problem. Refuting the common misunderstanding of Salafism as a Saudi export, Bonnefoy's work explores the complex interplay between local norms and transnational religious discourse.' * Peter Mandaville, author of Global Political Islam and Associate Professor of Government & Islamic Studies, George Mason University * 'Yemen and Salafism are both making headlines in the news, but both lack academic studies, due to the difficulties associated with field research. The challenge of Bonnefoy's book is to have studied Salafism in Yemen, remarkably succeeding in analysing it in a concrete context, and shedding new light both on the religious movement and on the Yemeni political and religious scene.'

* Olivier Roy, Professor at the European University Institute (Florence) and author of Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways * 'Salafism in Yemen draws on impressive Arabic language skills and extensive fieldwork. In a subject area where difficulty of access and sheer divergence of worldviews can sometimes leave researchers seeming rather detached from their subject matter, it is encouraging to find Bonnefoy telling us early on that his understanding of Salafism in Yemen was informed not only by perusing magazines, pamphlets, recorded sermons and so on, but also by qat chews, outings and table tennis matches with Salafi acquaintances, as well as with the Salafs' opponents. This ethnographic component allows him to shift between macro- and microlevel analysis in ways that enrich his arguments enormously.'

* Asian Studies Journal * 'Laurent Bonnefoy has produced a rich and deeply nuanced examination of contemporary Yemeni Salafism and its relationship and interactions with Saudi Arabia. The product of years of

fieldwork, Salafism in Yemen is a groundbreaking study that is certain to become essential reading for anyone seeking to understand modern Yemen.' * Christopher Boucek, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace *

Laurent Bonnefoy holds a PhD in International Relations from Sciences Po in Paris. He is a researcher in political science at the Institut Français du Proche-Orient based in the Palestinian Territories. Building on four years spent in Yemen, his research focuses primarily on the development of the contemporary Salafi movement in the Arabian Peninsula. He has also researched and published on various issues linked to religious identities and politics in Yemen.

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