Introduction: 9/11, the ‘end of Islamism’ and theory?
A lot has been said and written on Islamism ever since the Iranian revolution in 1979. First within the boundaries of academic debate, then, especially after 9/11, also politicians, intellectuals – sometimes with no background or knowledge on the phenomenon – participated in the debates. The ‘discovery’ of the most influential works on Islamism by a larger public during the last years, has engendered an awkward debate. Indeed, just when the hijacked planes hit the towers of the WTC, leading scholars of Islamism were proposing the hypotheses that “political Islam had failed”. Scholars such as Olivier Roy, François Burgat, John Esposito or Gilles Kepel – albeit with sometimes subtle and sometimes real divergences in viewpoint and analysis – argued (as we will discuss later on) that Islamism (or political Islam), both in its mainstream as radical versions, had undergone major changes and evolutions in ideology, strategy and tactics so as to conclude to a ‘failure of political Islam’ as the title of one of Olivier Roy’s book suggests. Needless to say, that these conclusions (mainly but not solely constructed in continental Europe – old Europe?) came under heavy criticism after the traumatizing effects of 9/11. A series of ‘think-tank’ professors such as Martin Kramer or Daniel Pipes offered simple readings of these theories and frameworks to an American public rightfully in search of understanding what had happened. Not only was the ‘wacky world of the French’ attacked –
according to the title of an article by Daniel Pipes – but the whole field of Middle East area studies came under the cross-fire in a rather passionate and at times sordid debate in which accusations of anti-patriotism, pro- or against Israel, pro or contra certain Arab regimes were thrown around. These discussion have had (and still have) an important impact on the whole field of area-studies¹.

Seyla Benhabib posits that there is something ‘strange’ about 9/11 in the sense that the act seen as a political act was reduced in one moment to apocalyptic symbols (Benhabib 2002: 35). It is unclear to what extent these attacks were directly ‘political’ as is it is unclear what could end Ousama Ben Laden’s Jihad. Susan Buck-Morss describes it as a “mute act” (2003: 23) as the attackers perished without making clear demands. What the media were faced with, according to Gupta “in the first instance, and continued to grapple with for some time, was the task of representing a media event of gigantic proportions without any apparent frame, without any clear comprehension of perpetrator, purpose or effect – an event that had enormous political and human significance but with few indications about how to frame that significance and put it into perspective” (Gupta 2002: 20).

The ‘new’ in the 9/11 attacks is the fact that it became clear that parts of international law between nation-states have become obsolete as new non-state actors have the means of using violence without being subject to the constraints of international law or even territories. “(T)he emergence of a supranational ideological vision with an indefinable moral and political content, which can hardly be satisfied by ordinary political tactics and negotiations, are the unprecedented aspects of our current condition” (Benhabib 2002: 37).

Just after the attacks, Gilles Kepel declaimed that they were not a proof of strength of the Islamist movements, but vice versa: just because al-Qaeda felt weak, it perpetrated the attack. This intellectually daring hypotheses was criticized harshly by several commentators, intellectuals and politicians, mostly (but not solely) outside the academic institutions. Thus the central question ever since 9/11 was “how to make sense of Islamism”.

The main goal of this working paper is to reread the abundant literature on Islamism as to reflect on the meaning of the concept and its use in the social sciences, humanities and area studies. Islamism was until recently an object of study specific to the Middle East area studies. With 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’, it seems that Islamism has become a major preoccupation for the whole world. By mapping and describing the concept of Islamism, I will not engage in an ex-post critical lecture of the theories on Islamism to pinpoint shortcomings, mistakes or wrong conclusions. Rather, I will describe how the concept of Islamism was constructed and how different frameworks for analysis were created over time.

First, I will address the issue of the construction of Islamism as an object of study, how and when it came to be used and what different contents were vying for hegemony or explanatory accuracy. I will shortly describe and analyse the hermeneutic field, i.e. the field in which discourses on Islamism are produced and reproduced, criticized and adapted. Secondly, I will describe how the social sciences have tried to define Islamism (as a particular brand of fundamentalism and in relation with modernity and secularism). In a third part, I will discuss the most important theoretical frameworks produced by the area-specialists.

1. Towards a genealogy of Islamism.
1.1 Is there a theory or are there theories on Islamism?

Researchers examine the data they observe in reality and systematically analyse their findings to construct a theory, a story about how the world functions. A theory is “a system of interconnected abstractions and ideas that condenses and organizes knowledge about the social world” (Neumann 1997: 37). There is a certain connection between social theory and ideology in the sense that they both contain sets of specific ideas and assumptions about the nature of the world. But even though complete neutrality or objectivity is hardly attainable in social sciences, it is clearly different form ideology as science posits itself as being conditional, incomplete, unfolding, based on

evidence, able to change with the import of new evidence,… A theory is always in need of concepts as they are the elementary building blocks. And it is here that we are faced with specific problems.

What is in fact Islamism? Or political Islam? And what about Salafism or Jihadism? Raising the question today is not just a matter of theoretical debate in the ‘ivory tower’ of academia. On the contrary, I see it as a necessary question both for understanding the phenomenon under scrutiny scientifically and for the dissemination of more coherent knowledge to a larger public. Returning to the question of definition is therefore not a matter of intellectual arrogance but a necessary path to get our object of study right. Defining something, especially social phenomena, is not a neutral act; it always involves some sort of binding together in words what is fluid in reality (Schmeil 1994: 44). This does not mean however that we cannot try to start such an undertaking. Guillain denoeux was right to stress the need to ‘drain the swamp’ (2002) i.e. “the swamp of analytical confusion surrounding the use of words such as ‘Islamic Fundamentalists’ or ‘Islamic radicals’. Terms have been thrown around lightly, often without a real understanding of their connotations and limitations. There has been little appreciation for the fact that they are artificial constructs, usually elaborated by outsiders, and that they sometimes may confuse more than they explain” (Denoeux 2002: 56).

Even since the advent of Islamism on the scene of world politics, it was obvious that a coherent definition was not at hands. Not only was there substantive debate on what word to use for the phenomenon but also a clear dispute between scholars and researchers from different scientific fields. If the political scientist, François Burgat, starts from the idea that “more of the laws which govern the conduct of homo orientalis are inscribed in manuals of political sociology than in the holy books, there is nothing to prevent the improvement of these books of sociology through the observation in a field other than the West” (Burgat 2003: 8)2 and the orientalist Johannes J.G. Jansen posits that ‘political Islam’ is “fully religion and at the same time fully politics” (Jansen 1997: 178) and therefore “modern political science categories do not fit and are irrelevant” (Jansen 1997: 11); then how are we to make sense of the phenomenon. Are the theories built on different definitions and methodologies talking about the same thing?

What I want to try to do here, is to address one of the issues that were raised during the debates on the legitimacy of Middle Eastern studies in the aftermath of 9/11. One of the arguments used by the detractors of Middle Eastern studies was the rather simplistic conclusion that if the ‘Islamists’ (or radical Muslims) were able to carry out such an incredible attack as 9/11 then it did certainly not fail. This idea was echoed by large parts of the world press, giving credence to the idea that thorough scholars of the phenomenon were living if not in their ivory tower, then at least on the planet Mars. “Scholars of the Middle East tend to write in the indecipherable hieroglyphics and arcane theories of their disciplines, relying on incomprehensible Foucaultean, neo-Marxist, deconstructionist jargon with limited relevance to the outside world.”(De Atkine & Pipes 1995-1996: 1) Pipes, as usual concise and hard in his analyses summarizes it as follows: “Journalists, think-tankers and ex-government officials have largely filled the gap. Their numbers are small and academics insult them as ‘intellectual counterfeiters’ who purvey ‘superficial and twisted analyses,” but they speak a language Americans understand, produced in a timely fashion, and get their subject right.” (Pipes 2001: 1).

What I want to do is restudy the construction of the object of Islamism and its definition. I suggest that the theories produced by the ‘wacky intellectuals’ cannot be proven ‘wrong’ just because of the fact that 9/11 happened. Indeed, I will show that the divergence of meaning has not so much to do with the actual arguments presented by these scholars, but with an incommensurable definition of the object of study, i.e. Islamism. It is because scholars and academics define Islamism in a certain way (and not another) that they can conclude to a ‘failure’ of the phenomenon. Critics of these theories start from a different definition of the phenomenon and therefore tend to conclude – sometimes diametrical

2 Even though I use a quote from his 2003 translation of ‘L’islam en face’, first published in French in 1995, this idea was one of Burgat’s starting points in his early publications and research in the mid eighties.
opposed—things. I consider this refocusing on the definitions of Islamism (and its subsequent theoretical consequences) as necessary for the academics and scholars to ‘defend’ their insights from all too simple counter-arguments. By doing so, I also hope to raise questions that indeed need to be addressed and could lead to new terrains of scholarly investigation and research. On another level, this endeavor will enable me to depict how the ‘fight over an object of study’ is but a reflection of our (changing) academic organizations and means of producing knowledge.

1.2. The Construction of Islamism: some notes on method
One of the difficulties of defining Islamism has not only to do with the difficulty of understanding reality. It is also the consequence of the fact that the object is constructed by insiders and outsiders synchronically—who are located in different power-settings with divergent interests—in a dialectic way. Therefore we need to construct the hermeneutic field of Islamism (Ansart 1990: 39), i.e. the system of positions in which the different actors constructing Islamism operate. Because of the fact that the discourses of actors-insiders and the discourses of the observers-outsiders are in constant interaction, systems of representation (including social sciences) are part of the management of the real, the course of things of history. Put simply, Islamism and its discourses but also the theories that try to make them knowable, manageable or comprehensible are also part of the very production of reality. Both insiders and outsiders are engaged (sometimes consciously sometimes unconsciously) in representing the real so that they become articulated in relationships of power; the stakes of which are the enunciation and production of sense and the sense of the action(s) to be undertaken.

To construct this hermeneutic field of Islamism, we rely mainly on two methodological devices. The tool of strategic location describes the relationship of an author with the study object, it is a way “of describing the author’s position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about” (said 1995: 9) while strategic formation refers to a “way of analyzing the relationships between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, eventual textual genres, acquire mass density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter culture at large” (Said 1995: 9). Analyzing the context in which the concept Islamism was constructed does not entail any conclusion as to the validity of the concept or the theories based on it, rather it enables us to analyze more accurately the ways in which the concept was constructed.

On a methodological level, I subscribe to the premises of critical theory and is therefore necessarily historical and reflexive because it evokes conceptual awareness (both of the observer and the observed), the situating of theory and practice in time and self understanding. The method is archaeological because it is concerned with “elucidating the concepts through which human collectivities organize and constitute themselves and the meaningful shift(s) in such understandings” (Bell 2002: 332). Thus we will focus, in what follows on the historicity of conceptual change and its understanding of how political legitimacy is embedded in and constrained by the set of political vocabularies at any given time” (Bell 2002: 328) and at the same time include a “reflexive historical sensitivity to the process of interpretation through locating texts not only in time and space but, more importantly, in the linguistic context(s) in which they were produced” (Bell 2002: 329).

This reminder of the importance of ‘reconstruction of genesis’—to borrow an idiom of late Pierre Bourdieu—is important as it stresses the fact that analyses should confront “the complex ways in which certain cultural forms become represented as nonhistorical at the same time that those representations were profoundly situated in (…) historical conditions” (Dirks 1996: 35-36). This is all the more important when we look at Islamism and its different forms and interpretations. The whole issue of Islamic authenticity refers directly to problems of the historicity of interpretations but is evacuated because of the fact that ‘innovators’ represent themselves as ‘traditionalist’. Put differently, the language of the actor is not a mere reflection of truth as all kinds of influences and factors should be incorporated into the analysis (Patterson & Monroe 1998). It is only through such an approach that we can incorporate the self-reflexive inputs of the Islamists while, hermeneutically translating them in interpretation that political science can analyse.
We can map the field as follows:

![Diagram](image.png)

**Fig. 1: Hermeneutic field Islamism**

The figure does not illuminate us on the theories of Islamism, it is just a visual representation of the ideal-typically discourses that exist on the issue. In reality some actors (insiders or outsiders) can belong to one or more of the positions, or can ‘move’ from one to another position over time. Typically there are three different sorts of discourses that are constructed towards different ends. Politicians define Islamism for the construction of a useful policy towards the phenomenon, the media want to inform the public and academics try to construct scientific and sound knowledge. Albeit these different goals to produce a discourse on Islamism, it is obvious that they are interdependent to a certain extent. Academics who are producing knowledge on Islamism cannot be blind to the discourses of politicians or media. The different registers on which these discourses are used and produced are forming together the hermeneutic field of Islamism. In what follows, I will only focus on the academic discourse.

### 1.3. What is Islamism? The genealogy of a concept and the reasons for ambiguity.

Defining Islamism has always been a delicate subject within the Middle East area studies. From the first studies till now, several definitions have been proposed, discussed, accepted and rejected. Different reasons can be pinpointed for the difficult birth of the concept:

**Who is to study Islamism?** From the time of the Iranian revolution both social scientists and classic orientalists (used here in its non-Saidian comprehension) tried to study the phenomenon and vied for academic hegemony. As we have noted in the introduction, the different premises with which Burgat and Jansen start, can only by definition lead to differences in methodology, theory and conclusions. The academic and political debates on area studies point to the shaky theoretical foundations on which the production of area-specific knowledge rests. Area Studies in general and Middle East studies in particular have "no firm theoretical foundation" and they are "an intellectual by-product of modern state territorialism and of those state-supported institutions... [and] serve disciplines, professions, business and national interests" (Ludden 1998: 1). Accusations and charges of parochialism, Middle Eastern exceptionality, and a general disposition against theory have always been a feature of the field of Middle Eastern studies (Bayat 2001). These commonplace criticisms are well known to all scholars studying the Middle East and should not be exaggerated. It is true that, to a certain extent, some area specialists – whether on the Middle East, Asia or Africa – have sometimes covered themselves in a self-made exoticism thus rendering intra-regional comparison more difficult and theory-building more unusual. During the 1960s, political scientists and sociologists frequently criticised Middle East studies for its ideographic nature, and instead, they suggested that their own nomothetic or theory-driven approaches were more inclined to produce the kind of general knowledge that was necessary for the modernisation of these societies. In the 1970s however, it was the critique of Orientalism (Turner 1978, Said 1995 [1979]) that put pressure on the field of Middle East Studies. For Said and

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3 This paragraph is based on (Zemni 2004)
others, it seemed that most of our knowledge on the Middle East, its politics, culture, religion and society, was biased by largely unconscious historical processes of constructing otherness, tied to institutions and structural mechanisms of thought that reflected the supremacy of the West. Even if this criticism reflects a cyclical sense of crisis within the field, one should not forget the fact that several area researchers have always been engaged in theoretical debates and that their insights have helped to question more general theories of social sciences – as with Theda Skocpol’s (1979, 1982) re-evaluation of her theory of social revolutions after the Iranian revolution – or they have manufactured new theoretical concepts that could be applied elsewhere – like in the case of the ‘rentier state’ based on evidence and facts collected in the Gulf region (Luciani 1990).

Modernization theories. Modernization theories (whether in their liberal or (neo-)Marxist version) assumed a certain teleology of evolution which blurred our vision and analyses of the Arabic and/or Muslim societies (Larrain 1994). In fact, the Iranian revolution was both for social scientists as for orientalists a big surprise, an unexpected event. This ‘irruption of religion’ on the political scene – which is nothing else than the consequence of our longtime blind spots – of Islam onto the international scene of politics led inevitably to a conceptual quagmire. Indeed, there is a close relationship between the life-history of science and its theoretical outlooks. Modernization theories were based on the rather simplistic dichotomy of a ‘modern West’ and a ‘traditional Rest’ and that the Third World was, in its development efforts, following the ‘Western’ road to modernity. “The occultation of heuristic Eurocentrism behind a screen of objectivist social sciences implies in the case of postwar American Middle East Studies a smooth passage to a normative Eurocentrism.” (Salvatore: 1997: 108). Both in its liberal and communist/socialist versions, modernizations theories posited the ‘end result’ as the mirror image of its own society. “Theorists posited contemporary Western/Soviet society as an end point towards which the Third World was ‘developing’. In so doing, it would achieve both the same economic successes (industrialization) and similar political organization (democracy/socialism)” (Lee 1996: 181).

The premises of social sciences. Another reason why Islamism is difficult to grasp is the fact that modern science is based on anti-foundational premises, i.e. the ideals of the Enlightenment in which science and religion became (sometimes violently) divorced. It is even arguable that science, to a large extent, thanks its very existence on the fact that it succeeded in countering the social domination of the church and its intellectual hegemony. The paradigm of secularization, one of the central tenets of sociology and political science, became only possible by the process in which the church and its teaching lost power and control over Western European societies and sciences. Therefore we are faced today with the rather difficult question of how to deal scientifically with religion in general and Islamism in particular. A large number of studies of Islamism have assumed (for better or for worse) that the Islamist movements are somehow at odds with modernity. Islamism is seen as a reaction against modernity, an irrational irruption of hatred based on the cyclical resurgence and renewal of the Islamic faith (Ghalioun 1997). Thus, Islamism, is easily described as a pathological phenomenon. “(O)nly when the divine order of things no longer held sway could rationality become a dominant force in public life. Thus rationalization became the measure and substance of modernity itself”. (Euben 1999: 21).

1.4. Concepts competing for usage
The first questions asked were not on the definitions of Islamism but more basically, on which term to use. A whole range of analyses introduced or proposed concepts such as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic resurgence (Abu Rabi’ 1996), Islamic revival (Dekmajian 1985), Islamic radicalism (Sivan 1985), Muslim politics (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996). In France, scholars spoke about fondamentalisme, intégrisme4 and even

4 The terms of ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘integralism’ are not easy to define (cfr. further) nor are they alike. While fundamentalism originally designated a movement within American Protestantism in the beginning of the 20th century, integralism comes from the history of the Catholic Church. The main difference being that
**khomeinisme.** In Arabic the first words to be used were *usuliyoun* (those who want to return to the roots), *irhabiyoun* (terrorists), *mutatarrifoun* (those who want to divide the community), *ikhwan* (the brethren) or *khwanjiyya* (North African derogatory name for brethren) and finally *islamiyoun* (a neologism used as contradistinction to the plural word Muslims, moslimoun). It seems that because a part at least of the movements under study defined themselves as Islamist, that Islamism gained more and more currency. It was mainly through the work of François Burgat, one of the first to carry out extensive field research on the phenomenon, that the concept got accepted more and more.

By the end of the 1980s Islamism was defined as a political ideology that was based on a certain interpretation of Islam by Burgat or as “the movements that see in Islam a political ideology and that consider that the Islamization of society passes through the instauration of an Islamic State and not just the implementation of sharia’a”⁵ (Roy 2002: 29) according to Olivier Roy. Problems arose on the conceptual clarity and rigor of these definitions. As Sarah Ben-Nefissa remarked, Burgat’s definition would make Sadat an islamist as he was clearly using ‘a certain interpretation of Islam for his political projects’. Leonard Binder was one of the first to trigger the alarm bell by remarking that “the rise of Islam is an ideological dimension of the movement to restrict the power of the state – movement – a movement constituted of a loose coalition of bourgeois factions, some rural agrarian capitalists, notables and estate owners, and, virtually proletarian members of the state-employed, the petite bourgeoisie, the under employed intelligentsia and the large student population. The interests that these segments appear to have in weakening the state apparatus or in gaining a larger share of influence within it are not compatible, so one of the purposes of the contemporary ideological process is to mask the divergence of these interests. This may be one of the functions of new Islamic ideological formations” (Binder cited in Roussillon 1988: 97). Alain Roussillon, student of Mohammed Arkoun and subtle thinker saw in the constant use of the concept of Islamism the failure of scholars to understand the different evolutions through which the Arab world was going and certainly the complexity of the phenomenon of Islamism that was, in his eyes, unable to capture the multiplicity of contradicting aspects of the phenomenon – “l’indice de l’échec à totaliser les aspects contradictoires de “l’éveil islamique” et à rendre compte de la façon dont ceux-ci font sens par rapport aux évolutions “profondes”, socio-économiques, dont la société égyptienne, et plus généralement les sociétés musulmanes, sont à l’heure actuelle le théâtre” (Roussillon 1991:305).

The end result was that during the nineties it seemed that the more Islamism spread in society and took many shapes and forms (both in terms of ideology as strategy), the more it seemed to elude the possibility of defining it. Bobby Sayyid, for example, uses a vary wide definition stating that Islamism “is a discourse that attempts to centre Islam within the political order, Islamism can range from the assertion of a Muslim subjectivity to a full-blooded attempt to reconstruct society on Islamic principles”(Sayyid 1997:17). Thus, an Islamist is “someone who places his or her Muslim identity at the centre of her or his political practice. That is, Islamists are people who use the language of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies …”(17). This large definition has both positive and negative aspects. Negative is the fact that it seems so large and vague that nearly every political movement referring to Islam in some way, is an Islamist movement. The positive other side of this critique is the fact that such a definition is a way of unifying the vast movements of groups under one ‘umbrella’-concept. It then gives us the possibility to introduce other concepts which can diversify, categorize and define the different tendencies within the vast ideology and movements of Islamism. Critique remained though. Henry Munson Jr. for example rejected the term ‘Islamist’ for it appears to privilege them as being the ‘true Muslims’ (Munson 1996).

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⁵ “Nous appelons "islamistes" les mouvements qui voient dans l'islam une idéologie politique et qui considèrent que l'islamisation de la société passe par l'instauration d'un Etat islamique, et pas seulement par la mise en œuvre de la charia” (Roy 2002 : 29).

Fundamentalism is a form of religious radicalism based on founding scriptures, integralism is founded on the power of the church as the sole interpreter of the religious texts. (Pasquinelli 1998).
Whether the concept of Islamism was used, or whether other, more generalist terms such as fundamentalism or revival were used, all the definitions incorporated elements of three discussions that surrounded the phenomenon i.e. (1) the idea of the impossible distinction between Islam and state, (2) the idea of the totality (or even totalitarianism) of Islam as a general framework for understanding the Muslim individual, society and state and, (3) the idea of historic recurrence, the idea that Islamism was nothing else but a ‘classical’ resurgence or cycle based on a perpetual resurging of Islam.

As factual evidence from different countries was gathered, it became clear that some Islamists were indeed against a separation between Islam and the state, while other were arguing against that same idea (whether by ideology or pragmatism). Some Islamists reverted to violence as a political means to achieve their goals, while other rejected any form of violence. Some Islamists were proponents of an economic system that resembled leftist notions of solidarity while other were more prone to capitalist ideas. Some Islamists were accepting (again sometimes only pragmatically) democratic ideals while others were harshly opposed to them. Some sought to enter the political scenes of the Arab states while others worked ‘from below’.

Besides these factual findings, social scientists also discovered the more unconscious consequences of the advent of Islamism. Proof was presented that Islamists were actively (albeit unconsciously) more important for women’s emancipation than had ‘revolutionary’ Arab states been. Islamists promoted the diffusion of (technological) knowledge and know-how, creating the opportunity for marginalized sections of society to enter a process of upward social mobility. Still, other movements were seen as conducive to processes of democratization instead of the assumed opposite argument.

2. Social sciences in search for Islam(ism)

2.1. Islamism: another brand of fundamentalism?

The question whether Islamism is the Islamic form of fundamentalism was asked from the early 1990s on. If Islamism was but another brand – the Islamic one – of fundamentalism, then cross-cultural comparison with Christian and Jewish (perhaps even Hindu) fundamentalism became possible. Olivier Carré saw fundamentalism as “the idea that an absolute return to the Scriptures should be effectuated, as sole foundation of all critique and of every innovation” (Carré 1984: 35) while John Voll saw it as the “reaffirmation of foundational principles and the effort to reshape society in terms of those reaffirmed fundamentals” (Voll 1991: 347). Marty and Appleby argued in their vast study on fundamentalism that albeit crucial differences between the religions, fundamentalism was a ‘hypothetic family’ and defined it as “a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements, which manifests itself as a strategy, or a set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or a group. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved ‘fundamentals’ are refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism (...) (and) are accompanied (...) by unprecedented claims and doctrinal innovations.” (Marty & Appleby 1991: 835). Some five years, and some 5000 pages later, there was much more doubt as to the usefulness of the concept. Marty and Appleby (1995), however kept the term but defined it as “a process of selective retrieval, embellishment, and construction of ‘essentials’ or ‘fundamentals’ of a religious tradition for the purposes of halting the erosion of traditional society and fighting back against the encroachments of secular modernity.”(Marty & Appleby 1995: 6).

The crux of this second definition is highly debatable. The relationship between fundamentalism⁶, modernity and secularism is a particular difficult and contested one. Euben (1999), for example, remarks that if fundamentalism is depicted as being anti-modern or pre-modern, the

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⁶ Burell (1989: 5) defines fundamentalism as: “an assured and unwavering conviction that a certain body of beliefs, usually derived from ‘sacred’ writings and often associated with the life and teaching of a particular personality, unquestionably represents the truth, and that it is the duty of all the faithful to live their lives and direct their activities in accordance with those beliefs.”
dynamics and essence of the movement cannot be studied. For her, it reflects the difficulties that the social sciences have in grasping the modern day practices of religion, as the social sciences are based on an anti-foundational basis, just because of the fact that social sciences were only created through the process of secularization. Furthermore, Middle East area specialists, rejected the term fundamentalism for different reasons. As Sidahmed and Ehteshami (1996: 2) summarize: “The use of the label ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ has become widespread, especially in the media, and is increasingly penetrating the academic circles. Yet, if tolerated or even employed as a label, the term is still far from being established as a concept. Scholars still find it difficult to accept and use it because of its indiscriminate deployment by the media and similar circles and because of its popular association with extremism and fanaticism. Other critics argue that the term gives the mistaken impression of the existence of a monolithic movement throughout the Muslim world, that the term is offensive (...) and (...) that the term was taken from a particular Christian context and deployed into the Islamic field without due appreciation for the appropriate differences and peculiarities of the respective religious traditions”.

In François Burgat’s view the idea or theory of ‘three fundamentalisms’ is a “distorting lens that is pernicious as it reassuring” (Burgat 2003: 24). In his analysis, the use of the ‘three fundamentalisms’ cannot account for the political claims of the Islamist movements nor can it be used as a base for comparison as it obliterates political context, power and interests. Referring to the murderer of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, Burgat says “What do we really ‘explain’ when we compare a privileged student from a rich and democratic country who is hostile to any territorial compromise with the radicalized fringe of a powerful popular movement opposing an ‘undeckable’ dictatorship?” (Burgat 2003: 24). Burgat thus suggests that comparing the ‘three fundamentalisms’ is in fact concealing more than it elucidates. “What speaking out in an undifferentiated way against ‘fundamentalisms’ often does is, in fact, to conceal the refusal to take into account more complex situations and claims far more legitimate than their reading through a religious lens may suggest. Used for the three monotheistic religions, this illusory comparison obscures the major impact of the conflictual imbalance between the ‘Judeo-Christian’ North and the ‘Muslim’ South and the various domination effects that come with it. It also hides the structural differences between the political settings of the ‘Muslim’, ‘Christian’ and ‘Jewish’ protagonists. It thereby masks the whole secular aspect of the Islamic mobilization that is too quickly locked up in its sole religious dimension while it actually serves to carry more widely cultural, but also political (nationalist or even ‘democratic’) claims. By over-ideologizing the reading of socio-political upheavals in the Muslim world, the comparison perpetuates the age-old essentialist and theologico-centrist bias of the Orientalist perspective” (Burgat 2003: 24).

Nikki R. Keddie accepts some of the objections to the term fundamentalisms but reckons that comparison is still possible and useful. She introduces the term New Religious Politics (NRP) or religiopolitics to counter the critique that fundamentalism is a U.S. protestant phenomenon and the critique that fundamentalism stresses too much religion at the expense of politics. New Religious Politics (NRP) has certain features. “These features include, first, an appeal to a reinterpreted, homogenized religious tradition, seen as solving problems exacerbated by various forms of secular, communal, or foreign power. Second, these are populist movements that aim at gaining political power in order to transform governments on the basis of their religiopolitical program. Third, they are not led by liberals or leftists and have predominantly conservative social views. For most groups this includes patriarchal views regarding gender, family relations and social mores, although there are a few exceptions” (Keddie 1998: 697). The introduction of a new term, the NRP, is, according to Keddie, an improvement for comparison even if we have to deal with movements that differ significantly in terms of ideology, activism, theology and leadership. Comparison does not entail that these movements are the same. Keddie then goes on to single out the causes for the existence of these movements in some areas and their absence in others. Her main argument is that “a search for a secure identity in the face of rapid socio-economic and cultural changes; growing income gaps;
changes in the status of women, the family, and sexual mores; and the growing and often popular power of secular central governments and their failure to meet the economic and cultural needs of their subjects (...) are justly stressed (...) but will be assumed as a background common to many countries" (Keddie 1998: 702) as they are not enough to explain the emergence of strong NRP-movements. NRP movements “thus far tend to occur only where in recent decades (whatever the distant past) religions with supernatural and theistic content are believed in, or strongly identified with, by a large proportion of the population. In addition, there must be either or both significant religiosity, i.e. a belief in the basic tenets of the religions, its God and scriptures and/or communalism, i.e. a strong quasi-nationalist identification with the own religious community against others” (Keddie 1998: 702).

2.2. Islamism, modernity, secularism and globalisation.

The debate whether Islamism is the ‘Islamic’ brand of fundamentalism is tied to the question of modernity and/or globalisation. Islamism and Islamist movements are predominantly seen as anti-modern and/or anti-democratic on the bases of two premises:

1. Modernity, by definition, entails or presupposes a decline of the social importance of religion.
2. Islam is a ‘unique’ religion, in the sense that it is not ‘only’ a religion but a ‘complete way of life’, in which religion, state and politics cannot be separated.

Modernity has become synonymous in the West with the rational ordering and organization of society. In a modern society, religion, is but one field of societal action that is functionally differentiated from other spheres of activity such as politics, the economy, education,... Modern societies define themselves as societies in which religion plays a private role. Therefore, Islamism, that blurs the private-public divide, can only be seen as something from the past, as something traditional. As secularism is seen as a precondition to democracy, Islamism thus becomes an obstacle to the democratization of the Arab-Islamic world.

The idea that democracy can only come about when religion is sufficiently privatized goes a long way as it is based on the Western (or Euro-centric) idea that progress and evolution are teleological routes towards modernity. This idealization of modernity and its avatar, democracy, has a negative impact on our self-understanding and indeed, on democracy. The idealization is a one way road to self-overstatement and the stigmatization of the Other. It is quite easy to idealize Europe’s modernity while forgetting to mention that Nazism, Fascism, totalitarianism with its history of Endlösung, Auschwitz, torture and annihilation of liberty and freedoms, were but accidents on the golden paved highway towards democracy. In doing so, the ‘we’ are always the ‘good’, the ‘other’ is always ‘missing something’.

“(B)oth pessimistic and optimistic prognoses of the post-Cold War world are content implicitly to assume and thus reinforce the idea that religio-political movements (among others) stand in relation to Western, secular power and international order as the chaos of the particularistic, irrational, and archaic stand in relation to the universalistic, rational and modern” (Euben 1990: 7).

As modernity and democracy go hand in hand, explanations for the different developments between Europe and the rest of the world (and especially the Muslim world) were found in (a) the difference between Christianity and Islam and (b) the idea that Islam cannot make a distinction between the private and the public, between religion and state, between politics and religion; all alleged preconditions for democracy. The idea that secularization was intrinsic to Christianity is a strong thesis of sociologists of religion. The French sociologist, Marcel Gauchet, describes Christianity as “la religion de la sortie de la religion” (Gauchet 1995).

Even though these analyses can offer us some insights on the Islamist ideology from the

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7 We could add that the current debates in Europe on the place and role of Islam, is also conducive to this idea. Everywhere, Muslims are ‘summoned’ to accept the ‘norms and values’ of Western societies and Islam as asked to have its own ‘Enlightenment’.
perspective of political theory or philosophy, it is clear that these analyses do not provide any real insights into the Islamists movements, their concrete logic, its changing over time, their organizational structures, their type of leadership, ...

One notable exception of the modernization thesis is based on Weber’s famous thesis that Protestantism and its values lays at the core of capitalist (and thus modern) development. Indeed, Islamism has sometimes been compared to the advent of Protestantism. The method pursued by Weber to delineate the Christian activism of The Protestant Ethic is suggested as a helpful model for analyzing the complexity of Islamism.

Menderes Cinar offers an interesting framework of analyses to get out of the impasse of too vague and essentialist defined concepts such as modernity or secularism. “Islamism is best studied on a ground other than Islam and best problematised on other grounds than its religiosity” (Cinar 2002: 36) because modern societies are “heterogeneous entities united through the activity of politics, which also determines the role, sphere and functions of religion (and therefore it is possible) to problematise Islamism solely on the basis of its politics and political stance toward society.” (Cinar 2002: 36).

3. Political theories of Islamism?

3.1. The rockets of decolonization (François Burgat)

François Burgat was the first scholar to paint a general picture of Islamism that was not just a diatribe against the political forms that Islamism took. Burgat framed Islamism within the larger context of decolonization; the movement in which the southern shore of the Mediterranean tried to take its distance from the impact of the West and the legacy of colonialism. In his view the Arab and Muslim countries first freed themselves politically and militarily by obtaining their independence and national sovereignty. A decade later they tried to free their economy of the grip of the West. Most of the countries tried to pursue economic development through the use of socialist or communist economic ideas. Still later, these same countries endeavored to gain a cultural independence. Burgat sees this as the “third level of the rocket of decolonization” (Burgat 1988: 67). Islamism, he argued later, was an ideology that tried to access universality from its own premises, achieving real independence, that is political, economic and cultural. For Burgat Islamism was some sort of highway for the Arab and Muslim world to enter modernity on its own terms.

These ideas and hypotheses were supported by evidence Burgat collected in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen and Jordan. The political goal of the Islamist movements was to establish an Islamic State. The strategies and tactics to achieve that goal could differ largely from country to country. Burgat tried to show that these strategies were largely dependent on the political situation of the country in which these groups emerged. As the regimes in place were the most powerful actor of the systems, Islamist – in his view – mainly reacted against the political moves of the regimes. Therefore Burgat was the first to posit that violence was not an essentialist part of Islamism but that theories of violence – legitimized on Islamic grounds – were constructed from the reality of the political conflicts in the Arab countries. From then on, Burgat made a distinction between the violent and the non-violent groups; showing their divergent dynamics within social reality. The violent groups were compared to a large extent to the leftist revolutionary groups of world history while the non-violent groups were seen as democratizing forces within the Arab world, not so much because of their doctrinal or ideological production but because they enhanced the political participation of parts of the population who (until then) were left out the political arena, they challenged the idea of one-party-systems, ... Burgat thought the Islamist movements were undergoing a process of normalization, that is, a process in which bit by bit, Islamists accepted the prerogatives of the modern nation-state and the idea that they were but one party amongst others contesting power within the political arena.

3.2. The decline of Islamism ? (Gilles Kepel)

This idea of a normalization or banalization of Islamist movements is also in the center of the theories of Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy. In its French edition, Gilles Kepel’s book was entitled “Jihad. Expansion and Decline of Islamism” (2000). He too foresaw a growing dichotomy within Islamism between one the hand some sort of
mainstream Islamism that he sometimes refers to as ‘islamo-democracy’ or ‘islamo-nationalism’ and an Islamism that is geared towards the jihad. Pretty much like his colleagues, Kepel, noted a shift within mainstream Islamism away from the two key words that constituted the movement in the 1970s, that is the Islamic State and the shari’a. Instead, he argues, Islamist movements are willing to integrate the political field of their respective countries and have incorporated the idea that political participation is to be preferred over a position of marginality. This dynamic – which is sometimes called hizbiyya or partyism – is the outcome of internal theoretical debates (a growing concern of inclusion, democratization,…) and the willingness of some states to incorporate parts of the Islamists within the system (Morocco). The other tendency – the one of the jihadis – is also a change in scope and ideology of the original revolutionary Islamist movements. The revolutionary Islamists were in the 1970s engaged in a fight against their regimes. They wanted to overthrow the regimes in order to establish from above an Islamic State. Then they would proceed to create a ‘new Muslim men’. All these attempts have failed however and the revolutionaries fled mostly but not solely to the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan where they were trained ideologically and militarily to fight the Russian presence in Afghanistan. After the retreat of the Russian army; essential ideological changes began to appear within the revolutionary movement. The al-qaeda group that was constituted around the charismatic Ousama Ben Laden, has apparently given up on the idea of an Islamic State. In stead they speak of a much vaguer caliphate that should encompass the whole of the Muslim world to begin with and finally the whole world. This thinking gave way to the proclamation of the jihad against the West. Even though al-qaeda is a very dangerous group, it is obvious that these fighters have no real national home anymore. They are de-territorialized fighters that have little or no significant social constituency in the Arab word. All this led Kepel (an with him others) to deduce that Islamism had in a sense changed completely from its original course or, in Olivier Roy’s well know words, ‘failed’.

Gilles Kepel’s analyses of Islamism comes from political sociology. He sees Islamism as the product of both generational pressures and class conflicts. Islamism was mainly embraced by youngsters, the (devout) middle classes and a part of the intellectuals. The shaky and instable alliances between these groups accounts, according to Kepel, for the emergence of different types of ‘Islamisms’ during the 1980s and 1990s. For Kepel, the failure of Islamism means that the historic alliance between these three groups has exploded. First ha states that “the Islamist intelligentsia’s role was to gloss over this clash of social agendas and reconcile the two groups to the shared pursuit of power” (Kepel 2003: 67). However, the two groups, the young urban poor and the devout middle class had opposite ideas on the role and function of the ‘Islamic State’. While the young urban poor ‘imbued it with a social-revolutionary content, (…) the latter saw it as a vehicle for wresting power for themselves from the incumbent elites, without fundamentally disturbing the existing social hierarchies” (Kepel 2003: 67). Mainstream Islamism started to evolve more along democratic and/or nationalistic lines while, the radicals (jihad) became detached from any real social basis. A pivotal group for Kepel’s theory is the ‘devout middle classes’. It is this group (or class) that dictates – through its strategic and ideological choices – how the others react.

The straight forwardness of the theories of both Burgat and Kepel, led others to raise a lot of questions and problems. A growing number of field researchers, focusing on one or two countries, felt that the Islamic referent was being used more and more in contradicting ways by several actors. Roussillon, another French scholar and former student of Mohammed Arkoun, noted that the totalizing theories on Islamism could not make sense of all the uses of Islamic terminology in modern politics. [Ferrié e.a.] Olivier Roy, who is now in Princeton, tried with the publication of his latest book to make a comprehensible new framework for the different modalities in which ‘Islam’ seems to be embedded in politics and society.

3.3. The implosion of Islamism and its different logics (Olivier Roy).

Olivier Roy’s ‘L’islam mondialisé’ (2002) (global Islam) offers us a very insightful and interesting
analyses of both the dynamics of Islamic politics in the Arab World and in Europe. Olivier Roy’s framework of analysis is much more complex than these of Burgat or Kepel. Roy is clearly looking for a way of dealing with all the different logics in which Islam functions in a modern and global world order.

Olivier Roy’s hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

- Violent Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda or the Algerian GIA are not Islamist strongholds but are the consequence of the failure of the historical Islamism to create both in reality as in theory an Islamic State.
- The Islamist movements – that is the “movements that see in Islam a political ideology and that consider that the Islamization of society passes through the instauration of an Islamic State and not just the implementation of sharia’a” – are largely absent from political violence and are thus becoming more and more banal and national in scope. Furthermore they are also absent from the processes of the Islamization of society.
- The process of Islamization is a general process in which different societal actors use the Islamic referent for their own agenda and purposes. The use of the Islamic referent can be used in several logics such as the state in need for Islamic credentials and legitimacy; independent sheiks in need for a constituency and moral purity; entrepreneurs in search for a market, youngsters in search for ‘hidden freedoms’,…

This process is called post-Islamism by Olivier Roy, which means that all the politics that are couched in an Islamic terminology but do not center their (social) action on the organization of state power are not Islamist. This post-Islamist trend can take several forms and is the consequence of the failure of Islamism.

The predominance of the political over the religious makes the Islamist banal and pragmatic. Even though in a lot of cases the Islamists do not seem to be democrats by ideology, it is their practice that shows their flexibility. But that sometimes leads them to forget about their social and economic projects. In a sense, Roy argues, most of them have not a real project and therefore the question of norms and values becomes central to their political agenda. That is what Roy calls neo-fundamentalism. That is what he calls the failure of Islamism.

Islamists have tended to emphasize so much the States reason (more than their ideology) over the religious sphere so that from the 90s onwards two reactions ensued from other societal actors: (1) theologians and intellectuals tried to restore the autonomy of the religious sphere to free it from the political control and (2) all kinds of social organizations and individuals prohibited the monopolization of the representation of the religious consciousness.

The Islamization of society is in a sense the reflection of the failure of Islamism because it shows that the logic of the different forms of Islamization is not political. It thus comes to show the failure of conflating or totalizing the political and the religious. There is a serious de-ideologization of Islamist movements leaving the way open for the creation of ‘secular spaces’ of societal action. These spaces do not necessarily mean a disappearance of religion but the fact that these spaces are not politicized. A group of mainly French and Egyptian political scientists and anthropologists have tried to grasp these dynamics by focusing on societal processes in which ‘Islam’ played a role but not as a ‘central factor’. On the contrary, they argued that even though Islam played a significant role on different levels, it was somehow encapsulated in frameworks that it did not control nor even produced (such as democracy, human rights,...) (Ferrié 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Ben Nefissa 1997, Tozy 1999).

Thus Islamism had the paradoxical effect of diversifying the process of Islamization and therefore giving more autonomy to the religious

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8 “Nous appelons ‘islamistes’ les mouvements qui voient dans l’islam une idéologie politique et qui considèrent que l’islamisation de la société passe par l’instauration d’un État islamique, et pas seulement par la mise en œuvre de la charia” (p.29)

9 What is interesting to note is that the defence of an autonomous religious sphere is enhancing secularization but in a reversed way as compared to France where intellectuals tried to free the political from the religious control.
from the political. It is thus nothing more than the juxtaposition of individual preferences that is in contradiction with the Islamist idea of the total social foundation on the basis of Islamic precepts. Two tendencies of islamization have overtly developed: (1) the conservative reislamization and the (2) social movement based more on individual initiative and the action of notables.

- **Non political neo-fundamentalism:**
  - With the centralization of the Islamic agenda, several religious institutions were developed with the help of the states to counter the Islamist discourse. Religious education spread, Islamic media developed rapidly, ... A very conservative moral discourse led to a growing impact of religious (but not directly political) issues that became politicized. The different ‘affaires’ in Egypt and elsewhere concerning the publication of certain books or the ideas of thinkers (Foda, Mahfouz, Nasrin, Abu Zayd, …) led the governments by the second half of the 1990s to counterattack.
  - Central problem of the ‘chariatization’ of the law: The charia is not a positive law system (as we know it in Europe). It as a system or a whole of norms that the judge applies to particular and individual cases. The judge therefore is not bonded by promulgated or voted laws because the charia is a work of constant interpretation. The State therefore loses one of its principal functions, i.e. the function of legislating. !!!!!

- **Post-islamism**
  - Refers in a sense to the ‘privatization’ of the re-islamization. Individuals and social groups have contested the state’s prerogative to make Law by referring directly to the charia. One example is the growing sector of Islamic business that actually has not so much to do with religion but with bypassing the States control over the economy. Another example is actually the Taliban, who are, for Olivier Roy, the uttermost example of the failure of political Islam and are thus neo-fundamentalists. He argues that the Taliban underrated the state by calling it an ‘emirate’. The consequence is not just a name change but a clear example of how the insistence on the charia empties the state from its main functions. Mullah Omar was not a head of state trying to regulate society. He was only ruling by interdiction, i.e. setting out the limits of what was possible. The so-called Taliban government was only there to enforce the limits, leaving all the rest to the free will of the actors who then could set out to exploit all kinds of opportunities ranging from smuggling, trading, drug trafficking,...All this further emptied the essence of a modern State. However, this form of neo-fundamentalism is perfectly compatible with the process of globalization or liberalization of the economy. Neo-fundamentalist do not touch the question of economic or social policy (in contradiction to the Islamist).

On the issue of the violent groups, Olivier Roy is also clear. For him they are not Islamists but neo-fundamentalists. Neo-fundamentalism is sometimes referred to as salafism or wahhabism. Roy thinks it is better to speak of neo-fundamentalism because of two important features namely (1) the theological scripturalism and (b) anti-Western culture. Other traits are: everything is brought back to the Koran, Sunna and shari’a; not interested in the social question, nor philosophy or political science, against the use of all terms that are seen as ‘western’ going from classes, society, economy to ideology or...
modernity, obsessed with the ‘fallacy of bid’a or innovation’, the uttermost heresy; religion is seen as a simple code of haram/hallal bypassing spirituality; all integration in Western society is rejected; against democracy, anti-intellectual ... Within this tendency there are two major streams that are divided not on theological grounds but on what they perceive as the prime or major point of attention: ‘jihad’ versus ‘dawa’. In both the cases, for Roy, these groups are very modern, part and parcel of the process of globalization. He argues that the spread and the success of neo-fundamentalism “can be explained because it correspond precisely to phenomena of contemporary globalization: destructuration of traditional societies, re-foundation of imaginary communities starting from the individual” (p.144).

3.4. Global Islam! Transnationalism....: Wither failing?
There is a correlation between the process of globalization and the Islamism, or ‘global Islam’ as Olivier Roy would call it. Paul Lubeck (1999) defines this correlation as an antinomy i.e. a contradiction between conclusions which seems equally logical. Islamism is by its mere existence, a shift from the rationale of Enlightenment. Globalization stimulates communication and mobilization through the new informational and travel technologies across the Muslim umma. It is the intensification of the availability of global communication “which makes possible for the first time a globalization of Islam... While Islam had always claimed universalistic status, it was, prior to the emergence of contemporary communications systems, actually unable to impose this type of uniformity and universalism.” (Turner 1994: 86).

The question whether Islamism has failed is an awkward one. It is incumbent on the chosen definition of the phenomenon itself. If one accepts Olivier Roy’s definition of Islamism (and its offspring such as jihadism, salafism, post-Islamism,...), then his theory, genealogy and analyses of the phenomenon is logically congruent and based on sound evidence. However, if one rejects the defining features of Roy’s definition, like François Burgat, the picture gets somewhat blurred and we can ask ourselves if we are still talking about the ‘same thing’. Sheri Berman (2003) for example, argues that the capture of the state is in itself not a sufficient feature to conclude if Islamism is failing as “civil society can be as powerful an agent of revolutionary change” (Berman 2003: 266). This only shows us that we are still facing a problem of definition. According to Berman, “what defines them as members of a coherent movement is not their choice of particular means, but rather the nature and scale of their ends – the establishment of an Islamic state” (Berman 2003: 257). Even though Roy would probably agree with this definition, there is a clear divergence in understanding the ‘nature and scale of the Islamist ends’. Roy argues, at least since the mid 1990s that Islamist movements had ended their revolutionary mobilizations, privileging instead a strategy of ‘political entrism’. In Roy’s vision, this makes these movements very banal and ordinary, quasi-nationalist movements without revolutionary agenda. In the end, what separates Roy and Berman is their assessment whether this entrism leads to more stability or to a subtle revolution that does not topple the state but manages “to effect a profound social and cultural transformations nonetheless” (Berman 2003: 264).

In the debate between Burgat and Roy we face the same problems of definition. Olivier Roy suggested that political Islam had failed and turned either in violence (terrorism) or in ‘traditional fundamentalism’. The impasse that was responsible for this failure was to be found in the internal contradictory logic of the Islamists. Roy argues that Islamists first considered the establishment of a true Islamic state and truly Islamic society as the sine qua non for Islamic individual virtue. Over time however (mainly during the 1980s), still according to Olivier Roy, Islamist have forsaken this idea and have taken up the ‘traditional’ claim that politics (and thus also modernity) could only be based on individual virtue. Thus, no Islamic state without ‘real Muslims’ but no ‘real Muslims’ without an Islamic state. François Burgat does not deny this trend within Islamism, nor does he have a quarrel over the interpretation of the data. His main contention with Roy’s thesis has more to do with the content of the term Islamism itself. “Should we – and this is the crux of the matter – tar all Islamists with the literalists brush and deny thereby the existence of everything that does not fit in with this pattern?”. (Burgat 2003a: 160).
The discussion between Roy and Burgat and the work of a growing number of scholars in the US, have started to de-centre the issue of Islamism. Instead of trying to grasp a ‘presumed’ essence of Islamism, general social theories are being applied to political phenomena in the Arab and Muslim world. A growing amount of literature views Islamism as a social movement and applies social movement theory (SMT) to the different groups within their specific contexts and localities.

3.5. The democratic impetus of Islamism (Graham Fuller)

Fuller’s analyses of Islamism is quite close to Burgat’s. Fuller is convinced that Islamism, defined as “the belief that the Koran and the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet’s life) have something important to say about the way society and governance should be ordered” (Fuller 2002: 49). This ideology is nowadays the most successful ideology within the Muslim world and therefore it is likely that that Islamism will develop itself organically into a Liberal trend that, in the long run, will achieve democracy. This trend, is to be compared with the birth of Christian-democracy Europe.

3.6. Islamism and the question of violence I: terror, fitna and clash of civilizations?

The question of violence is important to understand the Islamism. There are two central questions that observers have always put central stage. Depending on the answers given, different theoretical constructs (sometimes diametrically opposed but internally logically congruent) can be elaborated. The two questions are:

1. Is violence essential to Islamism? Is violence in other words not just a means, part of an instrumental tactic or strategy or is it an essential ‘ingredient’ of Islamism?
2. How to account for the violence of Islamism from an analytical viewpoint?

Action-reaction. François Burgat, for example, argues that violence has never been an essential part of Islamism. For him it is but the tactical means of the radicalised fringe of Islamism. Violence, to him is consubstantial to the policies of the Arab regimes towards the Islamist movements.

“Revolutionary violence is more than the concoction of a particularly totalitarian ideology with unscrupulous, power-hungry candidates; it is the relatively predictable, if not natural, result of the behaviour of the governmental and international environment. It should be remembered that the methods of political opposition are to a large extent determined by the methods of those in power.” (Burgat 2003: 78). For Burgat, this action-reaction model accounts for the difficult relationship between regimes and Islamist opposition but is not significant in itself.

Fitna. Gilles Kepel, presents another picture. He sees the ‘idea of jihad’ as a growing central concept of the radical fringe of Islamism. As we have noted above, he sees this as the outcome of the dynamics of ‘mainstrem’-Islamism. The rift between violent and non-violent movements has led to a fitna (Kepel 2004), in internal strife between moderate groups and radical (violent) groups that are producing a new ideology that is altering the central concepts of Islamism (showing their historicity and changing contents). Thus, according to Kepel, there is a growing clash within Islam. Emmanuel Sivan11 echoes this thesis. “The clash within Islam – and this is the clash that counts, not the alleged clash of civilizations – is between radical Islam and the powers-that-be. Conservative Islam – for example, Friday and Ramadan preachers on state-sponsored TV stations – supports the governing regime on political matters and radical Islamists on social and cultural matters.” (Sivan 2003: 34).

Clash. Other, mostly non-Muslim observers, have argue that violence has became the central modus operandi of Islamism. The existence of non-violent movements is acknowledged but authors like Huntington or Fukuyama, think that the radical and violent fringe of Islamism will become the most important brand of Islamism. Through their violent actions, and counteractions of regimes and the

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11 Sivan defines radical Islamism as a conglomerate of movements and organizations. “While many radical Muslims concluded that they had to wrest power from the ‘apostate’ rulers, whether by force or by through the electoral process, others have preferred to create a political or social lobby or to fall back (…) upon creating their own socio-political presence within society” (Sivan 2003: 27).
international community, Muslims will be more and more pressed into choosing ‘a camp’. This would inevitably lead to a ‘clash of civilizations’. Huntington himself, dismissed however the idea that 9/11 was a sign or the beginning of such a clash.

3.7. Islamism and the question of violence II: salafism and jihadism?
The most important tendency of the 1990s was the fact that a clear and possible definitive cleavage appeared between the ‘classical’ Islamist movements and the salafiyaa current that we can further subdivide between a large non-violent tendency and a violent one.

The important and socially influential Islamist movements have all tended to integrate – for the better and the worst – into the national political arenas in which they operated. They have clearly rejected the idea of the use of violence as a means of political action and show a clear willingness to become legal political formations. They have incorporated the notion of nation-state as the theatre of their political involvement.

The Salafiyya however rejects this idea, and has on the contrary, developed from the 1980s onwards an ideology which stresses the idea that Islam is practicable everywhere and at every time. This means that the Salafiyaa sees Islam not so much as grounded in a certain territory or space but as defined by the practice of Muslims everywhere. In their view, the Muslim umma is highly virtual. Their concern lies not within politics or society but in the individual practice of Muslims living by a theological and scriptural code of conduct. Everything in their daily practices is brought back to the Koran and the Sunna and they reject every ‘Western’ notion of political science or philosophy. They aren’t busy either with the social question (social justice) nor with economy. Their sole purpose is to live according a self-declared ‘authentic’ Islamic way of life that is obsessed with the idea of sin (or haram) and thus reject any innovation or ‘bid’aa’. The salafiyaa current is not an organized transnational movement but is more a stream of thought connecting individuals, organizations or movements worldwide. The essence of this stream of thought is the fact that the ‘Islamic code of conduct’ is not only seen as a simple code of prohibitions but lived as a an ethical order imbued with values that give meaning to the personal life of the Muslim (Roy 2002: +/- 108).

As such, this current can be framed within different forms of societal action and organizations that are very similar in ideology but largely different in action, strategy and goals. Olivier Roy has convincingly described these possibilities. First there is a large a-political tendency that is present all over the world that sees jihad as nothing else than the ‘purification’ of belief and faith from all innovations and especially ‘Western’ perversions. This tendency is first and foremost non-political as it does not seek to access power but to preserve an ‘Islamic’ way of life outside the scope of the state. In organizational terms, this sub-current of the Salafiyaa can be highly personalized or some sort of micro-community that is centered around a mosque, neighborhood or organization. The second tendency emphasizes the need to ‘spread the word of God’ (the da’wa) and is also highly a-political, stressing the personal obligation to abide and live by God’s words but does not make any political claims. A third current is more hard to define coherently and refers to the internal debates within and between the Islamic jurisprudence and thinkers. Some of the major Islamic clerics have, since 9/11, showed their reluctance to be overly dependent on state institutions (e.g. Saudi-Arabia) while others have entered heated debates on present issues such as the 9/11 attacks, the suicide bombings,… A fourth sub-current of Salafism are the jihad movements. Thus defined, it refers to a group of people and/or organizations (such as al-Qaeda) that stress the fact that violence as part of the jihad encompasses the fight against infidels there were Muslims are under attack.

The salafiyya’s relation to politics and authorities that are not based on a ‘divine order’ is reminiscent of La Boétie. It is a politics of complete denial. By not subjugating to a political order – considered unlawful and illegitimate – they feel freed from a form of ‘voluntary slavery’. Even though they will not engage in active politics, and certainly not use violence as a political means, they think that sooner or later the ‘system’ will break down underneath its own contradictions just like a giant may succumb under his own weight with feet of clay. The denial of authority and power of the salafiyya is an escape.
into the creation of a virtual community tied locally through social relations organized around a codified and a rigorist version of Islam, and connected to other such communities all around the world through the modern communication systems, especially internet.

The spread and success of the Salafiyya is chronological with patterns of globalization. This is not only (although there is a connection) the consequence of heightened personal mobility or the possibilities of new communication techniques and technology (internet, mobile phones, email...). More important is the fact that under globalization identities can be more and more formulated in terms that do not refer to any specific territory or space. The Salafiyya can thrive in every social context as long as a certain 'virtual' Islamic umma is imagined. The virtuality of this umma is also testimony of the fact that Salafist activist have been fighting localized (folkloristic) forms of culture which in the past were seen as 'localized' cultural experiences of Islam.

That is why they reject certain wedding practices typically from Kandahar, Cairo or Abidjan and propose an own wedding – defined as authentically Islamic – that is the same whether it is celebrated in a village of Afghanistan, a mosque in France or in the Indonesian jungle. Thus the umma is recreated under globalization as a community solely based on religious norms and values defined against all forms of culture. What counts for the salafiyya (except the jihad-fighters) is solely the creation of an "authentic Islamic identity' devoid of any clear political and/or economic program.

### 3.8. Islamism as an anti-systemic movement?

Burgat and Roy have suggested that part of Islamism's success was that the ideology was able to recapture and translate the anti-imperialist discourse of leftist, secular movements of the 1970s into an Islamic framework. The anti-imperial struggle of Islamism was present since the 1970s as a part of its worldview. In his study of the growth of the Algerian FIS and the subsequent loss of legitimacy of the FLN, Robert Malley clearly finds parallels and significant comparison between the 'old, leftist anti-imperialism' and Islamism. “In Third Worldist rhetoric, history recounted the exploits not just of the nation per se but of its socially progressive, revolutionary element. Out of the depths of the past came the mythic tale of a common political will that had guided the people throughout the centuries. In other words, if history is the preferred discursive category, it's privileged object is the revolutionary people. The aim thus becomes to give a voice to the "people", the "popular masses", that is, to "the truth of history- a truth that has existed since the beginning of time, but that, as of yet, has remained speechless. A curious dialectic is at play here: historical continuity and revolutionary fraction; retrospection and anticipation. It is explained by another unquestioned Third Worldist assumption, the notion of a revolutionary invariant, a popular will always in existence and impervious to time, a revolutionary spirit released by the past and into the future. In the end, Third World politics involves this dizzying oscillation between yesterday and tomorrow, for projections into the past are the surest guideposts for the future, and revolutionary change the most faithfull tribute to ancient times." (Malley 1996: 97).

Therefore, he says that “Third Worldism, in its own way, has reverted to Rousseau as opposed to Marx, or perhaps to the Rousseau in Marx. With Rousseau, it tends to say corrupt (original emphasis) where Marx said capitalist (original emphasis), to speak of moral effort where he would have preferred class struggle.” (Malley 1996: 98).

“(T)he Third Worldist political pedagogue is portrayed as torn between leading and following.” (Malley 1996: 102). By this Malley means that the Third World leader tries to bestow knowledge on the masses but it is not a knowledge he 'invents' but rather the finding of something already there: the unspoiled, unadulterated will of the people. The leader in this sense is a mere follower (something he shouldn't forget in order not to become 'arrogant') of that will, someone who tries to lead it up its natural historical way. Violence makes up a substantial part of Third Worldism. It is not a simple glorification of violence as standing up against the colonial enemy. It is, as Frantz Fanon has demonstrated and resonated in the works of Sartre, Cabral and even Vergès, an act which liberates the colonized from it's chains, it gives him back his personality in totality and, at the same time, it uproots the colonial in the 'white' colonizer. The violence thus makes integral part of the people's historical-revolutionary will. Next to that the question
of power and the State is central in Third Worldism. "Running to Third Worldism is the certainty that control of the state is the paramount goal of and that all else will eventually follow." (Malley 1996: 106). The predicament and/or tension of Third Worldism is that it tries to combine the objective of popular power with the means of a centralized hierarchized authority.

3.9. Islamism as a social movement
A new theoretic framework for assessing and studying Islamism comes from Social Movement Theory (SMT). The SMT approach has taken up the challenge to apply the vast and rich knowledge on social movements in the context of the Arab-Islamic world. One of the central elements of this approach, and proclaimed as the strong point of the theory according to Wiktorowicz (2004), is the ability of SMT to take Islamism ‘seriously’, i.e. it does not define Islamism as a consequence of structural or cultural strains. Instead it approaches the Islamist movements as a rational actor taking strategic decisions and reformulating ideological propositions under changing circumstances. SMT has proved to be a very promising research agenda and has been applied on different topics and subjects concerning the Islamist movement. Quintan Wiktorowicz’s edited volume on Islamic activism has brought together divers and interesting research on a range of different manifestation of Islamist mobilization. Importantly, it has been able to use SMT as a more neutral, distanced and objective framework of analysis as it focuses on the dynamics of Islamist movements without centralizing Islam as the determinant factor (Meijer 2005).

The end of Islamism: Some Tentative conclusions
- The failure of political Islam has nothing to do with a process of de-Islamization. It is in the growing autonomy of the political and the religious even when the political is said to be a part of the religious. The big Islamist movements have accepted the reality of their national framework of politics and seem to become ‘normal parties’.
- These parties have lost their ideological strong points. They accept the nation-state (instead of an Islamic State), the speak of pluralism and democracy (and not Islamic democracy) and of civil society (in stead of Islamic society). The outcome is that they seem then to focus on a mix of anti-imperialism, authenticity and the question of women, the issues that revolves the most on norms and values.
- That is close to the general process of Islamisation of societal demands but is different from it because this generalized process is in a sense dispersed over and through different logics that are in essence in contradiction with the older Islamist ideologies. The idiom Islam can and is used within several different logics of notabilization, corporatism, identity constructions,...) that are diluting the object. So, by incorporation of the Islamists in the political field the nation-state is strengthening while, at the same time, it is also bypassed by a growing number of logics that tend to be global and transnational (brotherhoods, movements of predication, migration, jihadis,...)
- Roy sees two possible options for the ME states. Or they become democratized without democrats i.e. they become more and more open to parliamentarism, elections, political parties etc. which in the end can bring about changes in the power structure or, second option, an incorporation of the neo-fundamentalists and strengthening of the power by the defense of ‘Islamic values’ and thus not changing the central assets of power. This is a problematic option as it is that kind that was chosen in Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia and gave way to international jihadism.
- The problem of the US is that they seek for a strategy in Ben Laden that is based on the State. The nexus of the problem is that Ben Laden is just transcending the logic of states. Second problem for the US is that the two of its best partners in the ME region (Saudi-Arabia and Pakistan) are harboring most of the jihadis or at least have facilitated the spread of the ideology.
- In these times of de-ideologisation and globalism the traditional anchors of political and intellectual frameworks seem to disappear. The concepts and ‘typical’ places of actors are fluid and diversified. Parts of ideological families that were opposites yesterday are touching today etc. However, there seems NOT BE an Islamic essence that makes Jerusalem and Antwerp
part and parcel of the same process of Islam in movement. On the contrary, the clash of civilization and its theories are emptied at the same time that they try to re-establish some clarity in a world of chaos in full transition.

- Social sciences at large apply general terms and concepts but fail to grasp the specific features of Islamism and especially its political nature.

Bibliography


