Understanding Islamism

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Part 1: Does Language Matter? The ‘Islamism’ Question

Dr Martyn Frampton and Tom Wilson

What word should we use to describe those who resort to violence in the name of Islam? This question has recently been the cause of much angst and uncertainty in official circles – and nowhere more so than within the ranks of the British police. In July of this year, reports surfaced that through its Counter Terrorism Advisory Network, the Metropolitan Police had held a consultation on finding an alternative to the term ‘Islamist terrorism’—with Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, the head of national counter terrorism policing, and Chief Superintendent Nik Adams, National Coordinator for Prevent policing, both attending the online meeting.

The suggestion is that this word, encompassing as it does the word ‘Islam’, risks tarnishing one of the world’s great religions – and in the process alienating many British Muslims. Against this are those who argue that Islamism is entirely appropriate, and comes with an established intellectual and cultural pedigree. So, where does the balance of wisdom lie?
Who has opposed using the term 'Islamist'?

A number of individuals, both here and abroad, have criticised the use of the term ‘Islamist’. They include:

- The National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP) was the focus of headlines in July of this year when it emerged that NAMP was urging the police to drop the term ‘Islamist terrorism’. Previously, in a 2019 submission to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry on Islamophobia, NAMP had argued that the “problem” with terms like Islamist and Islamism was that they were “intrinsically linked with the word ‘Islam’”, when the “actions and ideologies taken by these so-called ‘Islamists’ [were] far from ‘Islamic’”. The danger of using such language, claimed NAMP, was that it reinforced “negative stereotypes given to the wider Muslim community, linking Islam to terrorism”, and thereby fuelling “Islamophobia”:  

- Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), the controversial activist group – which was identified by former Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Mark Rowley, as a frequent purveyor of extremist narratives centered on an exaggerated sense of victimhood – responded to the news about the consultations with NAMP by endorsing the calls for the abandonment of terms like ‘Islamism’, saying that, “labelling attackers as ‘Islamists’ or ‘Jihadists’ works to strain relations between Muslim communities and the police, as opposed to combating future acts of terrorism.” MEND stated that: “if the police were to follow through on these plans, it would mark an important milestone in undoing the harms that the counter-terror apparatus has inflicted upon Muslim communities.”

- Cage, which has often been described as an Islamist advocacy group, has consistently said that it does not recognize the term Islamist, and instead describes itself as an organisation with “an Islamic ethos”. In a March 2018 submission to the House of Commons inquiry into Global Islamist Terrorism, Cage’s Director of Research referred to the “problematic language of ‘Islamist terrorism’”, stating that Cage rejected such terms of reference being used to frame the threat.

- Max Hill QC, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, asserted (during his time in the latter role) that it was “fundamentally wrong” to use the phrase “Islamist terrorism” to describe attacks carried out in Britain and elsewhere.

- The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) published a piece on its website in January 2013, urging the media to drop the term Islamist. The CAIR piece claimed that the term Islamist is used as “shorthand for ‘Muslims we don’t like’”, and that the “frequent linkage of the term ‘Islamist’ to violence” is largely “promoted by Islamophobic groups and individuals who seek to launch rhetorical attacks on Islam and Muslims.” Notably, however, CAIR has itself faced accusations of past connections with Islamist extremism.

- Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish president, who in February 2017 argued that this terminology was “not correct because Islam and terror cannot be associated.”

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2. ‘Written evidence submission from NAMP (National Association of Muslim Police)’, Home Affairs Select Committee, October 2019, http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/islamophobia/written/106456.html
12. Ibid.
Sir John Jenkins’ paper—found in the second part of this volume—leaves no doubt as to the academic and intellectual legitimacy of the word ‘Islamism’. In what follows we attempt merely to read his insights across into the contemporary British political context.

In so doing, the first thing to note is that the threat posed by Islamist terrorists must be placed within the wider context of ‘Islamism’ all-told. The ‘men of violence’ are merely the most visible manifestation of a much larger phenomenon: they are simply the tip of a far greater Islamist ‘iceberg’.

**What is Islamism?**

The subject is replete with a wide variety of often contradictory terms that are frequently used as synonyms: ‘conservative’, ‘traditionalist’, ‘fundamentalist’, ‘militant’, ‘radical’, ‘modernist’, ‘reformist’, or ‘reactionary’. Used in different contexts, the same label can denote very different things. That being the case, it is important to establish precisely what we mean by our use of the term ‘Islamism’. Islamism (or ‘Political Islam’) is a worldview which teaches its adherents that Islam is a comprehensive political ideology and must be treated as such.

Most Islamists believe that Islam must be placed at the centre of an individual’s identity, as either the only, or the predominant source of identity. The Islamist outlook is one that essentially divides the world into distinct spheres: primarily, ‘Muslims’ and ‘the rest’. Within the latter category, the ‘West’ looms large—often understood to be a monolithic entity. Crucially, it is this tendency to view the world in terms of discrete identities that makes accommodation between Islamism and liberal democracy so difficult. The individualism and pluralism that lie at the heart of the latter, run counter to the notion of a wholly self-sufficient, Islamic communal-faith bloc that must be preserved.

Islamists frequently presume Muslims to be members of a de-territorialised, globalised ummah, where allegiance is defined through the fraternity of faith alone. Furthermore, they often suggest that Muslims are under constant attack, and it is this perceived perpetual danger that drives the Islamist narrative of victimhood and grievance.

The practical consequences of such an outlook are varied, differing from group to group. It is true that, for the most part, it leads to a belief that Shari‘ah (Islamic law) should be implemented, either within existing nation-states or in the context of a pan-Islamic theocracy (often referred to as the ‘Caliphate’). The absence of a purist Islamic state is judged to be responsible for the current problems of the Muslim world, and only if such an entity is restored, it is argued, will the Muslim world be restored to global pre-eminence. Furthermore, it is equally true that the conception of Shari‘ah law venerated by such groups typically calls for a return to what is imagined to be a literalist, ‘puritanical’ and unchanging Islam, based on the earliest generations of Islamic history.

On neither count is this exclusively the case; there is no single ‘mode’ of Islamist expression. The manner in which different strands of Islamism seeks to achieve their aims is subject to significant variation. Most Islamist movements are not terrorist in nature—although some clearly do support the use of violence in certain contexts (frequently, for instance, as part of ‘resistance’ to perceived occupation). Equally, non-violent Islamism is represented by individuals and organisations of widely differing hues. So while there are those groups that engage in political activity and wish to gain political power to achieve their aims, there are others that reject such political engagement and instead pursue grassroots community work. For the latter, an Islamic identity is to be promoted from the bottom up, via education and proselytisation, rather than being imposed from the top down, through the application of state power. Both variants, though, are subsumed within the designation of ‘Islamism’ offered here.

Almost always, Islamists project their view of Islam as the ‘true Islam’ and pass off disputed theology as uncontested truth. They pretend to constitute the whole of the faith, rather than just a faction within it. Yet it is crucial to distinguish between the two.

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Who are the Islamists?

Broadly speaking, Islamist groups currently operating in Britain originate from two major revivalist networks that emerged in the early twentieth century: the Muslim Brotherhood, which started in Egypt; and the Jamaat-e-Islami, whose origins lie in colonial India.

The Muslim Brotherhood is today an international, networked movement with an established presence in most of the Muslim world, as well as parts of Europe and North America. It exists as much in terms of a shared ideology and inter-personal social networks, as it does through coherent organisational structures. There is no Islamist equivalent of the Comintern of yester-year.

The Brotherhood, like other Islamist movements born in the Middle East and South Asia, did not initially conceive a vision for its activist work in the West, believing that its efforts would be primarily focused in the Levant before targeting the wider world for Islamist conversion. That plan changed with the large-scale migration that brought many immigrants of Muslim background to Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. As increasing numbers of Islamists found themselves exiled from the Arab world in the late 1980s, they developed strategies to further their aims within western society. This included the creation of new organisations, designed to cater to new Muslim communities of settlement in Europe and North America.

In the UK, the then European spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, Kamal el-Helbawy, established the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) in 1997. Numerous academics and commentators have identified the MAB as the de facto British wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. The British Government’s authoritative 2015 review into the Muslim Brotherhood, authored by Sir John Jenkins, describes the MAB as having been “dominated” by the Muslim Brotherhood.

A recent (and several-time) president of the MAB is Anas Altikriti, who has said publicly that he is not a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and claimed that there is no formal Muslim Brotherhood organisation in the UK. However, Altikriti has also said that in Britain, “the closest there is to the Muslim Brotherhood, and which espouses the basic tenets of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, is the Muslim Association of Britain, which I am a member of”.

Beyond the MAB, Altikriti has been involved in the creation of a number of offshoot organisations. Amongst the more prominent have been the now defunct British Muslim Initiative, and the Cordoba Foundation. The latter, founded and led by Altikriti as CEO, was once described by David Cameron as a “political front for the Muslim Brotherhood”.

It is clear that Brotherhood-inspired groups like the MAB enjoy significant cultural and intellectual influence over Britain’s Muslim communities. However, given that the Brotherhood has largely remained an Arab-based movement, its influence in the UK has been achieved by the alliances it has built with Islamist organisations rooted in a South Asian Muslim heritage. Approximately two-thirds of British Muslims have their origins in the Indian subcontinent, making the presence of Islamist movements from South Asia particularly relevant to the lives of the Muslim community here. The most significant Islamist movement to have emerged in the Indian subcontinent is the Jamaat-e-Islami (known as JI), a revivalist group created by Maulana Abul A’la Mawdudi (1903–1979). Formally speaking, the Mawdudist network arrived in Britain in 1962, with the establishment of the UK Islamic Mission (UKIM), an offshoot of the Jamaat-e-Islami. From the time of its inception, the UKIM styled itself in a manner similar to the Muslim Brotherhood.

itself as an ‘ideological organization’, and sought to play a revivalist and political role in British Muslim life, aiming to educate a ‘vanguard to spearhead a life-long struggle in the cause of Allah’.\(^{25}\) It presides over a countrywide network of thirty-nine branches, over thirty-five mosques, as well as a number of Islamic schools.\(^{26}\)

Since the 1960s, there have been a number of other groups founded in Britain, which were also influenced by Mawdudi’s teachings. Of these, the Islamic Foundation (IF) in Leicester is among the most important.\(^{27}\) Established by members of JI to serve as a quasi-autonomous hub for their activities, promoting Islamist ideas throughout the West and providing support for the JI’s global political activism,\(^ {28}\) it remains intimately linked to the organisation. For instance, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, a long-time senator and former vice-president of the JI in Pakistan, was one of the co-founders of the IF and served in a number of leadership roles in the organisation.\(^{29}\)\(^{30}\) Another important early leader of the IF was the now deceased Khurram Murad, also a member of the JI and an important Islamist intellectual in his own right. Khurshid Ahmad, meanwhile, was formerly the rector of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE) – another institution closely aligned to the ideas of the JI.\(^{31}\)\(^{32}\)

Many of these groups have outgrown their demographic origins and established a presence across the UK’s Muslim communities. Furthermore, the fusion of different brands of Islamism has been achieved through the creation of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), an umbrella group created in 1997 to act as a unifying voice and single point of reference for Islamist activists in the UK. Leading Brotherhood figures like Helbawy were involved in the formation of the MCB. And the British Government’s 2015 Review into the Brotherhood stated that it had “played an important role in establishing and then running the Muslim Council of Britain”.\(^ {33}\)

**Islamists on ‘Islamism’: An Acceptable Term?**

As noted above, many groups and individuals identifiable for their articulation of an Islamist worldview, or pursuit of an Islamist agenda, eschew the term. Often, they self-define simply as ‘Islamic’ – or talk of their involvement in an ‘Islamic Movement’. Sometimes, they even go so far as to claim that using the word Islamist is an Islamophobic act. And yet, on occasion many of those same groups and individuals seem to acknowledge that the term has validity and meaning. To give but a few examples:

- **IkhwanWeb** is the Muslim Brotherhood’s official English language website, with its main office located in London.\(^ {34}\) Launched in 2005, the website states that its “main mission is to present the Muslim Brotherhood vision right from the source and rebut misconceptions about the movement in western societies.”\(^{35}\) Importantly, this website routinely uses the terms Islamist and Islamism, both in its own pieces, as well as in the content reproduced from other sources.\(^ {36}\) One piece from April 2011 titled: MB welcomes dialogue with the West without preconditions, refers to “popular Islamic movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, which traces its roots to Islamist ideology born in Egypt,” claiming that the suspicion in western countries towards these movements could in part be attributed to statements from government

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27. A number of Mawdudi’s works are available for purchase from the Islamic Foundation's online bookshop. Several of these are published by the IF itself: [http://sitecreator.siteberry.com/Appdata/build/paltop.asp?GoForFeature=Store&GoForAction=DETAIL&Product_Id=2676&W_ID=1&P_ID=3](http://sitecreator.siteberry.com/Appdata/build/paltop.asp?GoForFeature=Store&GoForAction=DETAIL&Product_Id=2676&W_ID=1&P_ID=3); [http://sitecreator.siteberry.com/Appdata/build/paltop.asp?GoForFeature=Store&GoForAction=SEARCH&W_ID=1&P_ID=3](http://sitecreator.siteberry.com/Appdata/build/paltop.asp?GoForFeature=Store&GoForAction=SEARCH&W_ID=1&P_ID=3); [http://www.jamaat.org/overview/facts.html](http://www.jamaat.org/overview/facts.html).


leaders.\textsuperscript{47} The Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) published a piece on its website in October 2015 defending the Muslim Brotherhood-linked charity Europe Trust.\textsuperscript{38} In that piece, one academic is referred to as an expert “on Islamist parties in the Middle East”, and is quoted as stating that: “not all Muslims are Islamists and most Islamists are moderates!”\textsuperscript{39} Here, it appeared that the Muslim Association of Britain accepts the use of the term Islamist, on this occasion as part of an argument claiming that Islamism forms a largely moderate political movement.

The Cordoba Foundation has repeatedly used the term Islamist, both in its publications, and through its website. Most recently, in August 2020, a speaker advertised for an online event on the US elections was described as having written about “the historical experiences of Islamist movements in six different countries”.\textsuperscript{40} Previously, in a summary of the foundation’s September 2015 report Muslim Brotherhood and the Myth of Violence and Terrorism, it was claimed that the western media portrayed the Arab Spring in such a way as to create mistrust and suspicion of those who follow “an Islamic or Islamist ideology”.\textsuperscript{41} The summary for another Cordoba report published in the same month, Egypt’s Stolen Democracy, claimed that the media had seized upon Mohammed Morsi’s “Islamists credentials, and the fact that he brought a brand of ‘Political Islam’ to Egypt.”\textsuperscript{42} Earlier that year, in February 2015, the foundation issued a media release providing an account of its Islam and Democracy National Conference, detailing that topics at the conference “ranged from Islamists’ perceptions of democracy, the State, secularism, violence and extremism”.\textsuperscript{43} Other examples include website articles that refer to “liberal Islamists”, and “moderate Islamists”.\textsuperscript{44} And in February 2009, the CEO of the Cordoba Foundation Anas Altikriti chaired an event titled: ‘The Islamist Revolution and the Role of Resistance’.\textsuperscript{45}

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) is an organisation ideologically aligned with the Islamic Republic of Iran, some of whose leadership have in the past described themselves as “Islamist revolutionaries”.\textsuperscript{46} Unsurprisingly then, there is much evidence of this group freely using the terms Islamist and Islamism. For example, an account on the IHRC website of an event the group held in May 2019 titled Political Muslims, with Sadek Hamid and Tahir Abbas, reports how: “the speakers discussed Islamists”.\textsuperscript{47} In that piece, one academic is referred to as an expert “on Islamist parties in the Middle East”, and is quoted as stating that: “not all Muslims are Islamists and most Islamists are moderates!”\textsuperscript{48} Here, it appeared that the Muslim Association of Britain accepts the use of the term Islamist, on this occasion as part of an argument claiming that Islamism forms a largely moderate political movement.

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• Muhammad Abdul Bari is a former Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, and previously chairman of the East London Mosque.\(^{49}\) Writing for Al-Jazeera in December 2014, in a piece titled: The asphyxiated politics of the Muslim world, Bari warned that the rift between “secularists and Islamists” in certain Muslim countries was having a negative impact on Muslim minorities in the West.\(^{50}\) Previously, writing on his website in 2011, Bari had warned that a “noxious ‘anti-Islamist’ narrative is gradually becoming mainstream” in Europe, and claimed that there was a divisive agenda by some in the West to try to categorise Muslims as “liberals, Secularists, Moderates, Sufis, Traditionalists, and Islamists.”\(^{51}\)

• Azzam Tamimi, a UK-based author and previously an official of the Muslim Association of Britain,\(^{52}\) has routinely used the terms Islam and Islamism. Perhaps most significantly he does so in his 2001 book titled: Rachid Ghanouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism,\(^{53}\) which devotes a chapter to ‘Islamist Obstacles to Democracy’.\(^{54}\) Tamimi has often been an advocate for Islamists, both complaining about their plight, and at other times talking optimistically about their future political prospects. Speaking to the Associated Press in October 2018, Tamimi was quoted as saying that “The Muslim Brothers and Islamists were the biggest victims of the failed Arab spring.”\(^{55}\) Previously, in September 2011, Azzam Tamimi was quoted in the New York Times as stating that in the future the political struggle in Middle Eastern countries would be about “who is Islamist and who is more Islamist, rather than about the secularists and the Islamists.”\(^{56}\) Significantly, Tamimi has also specifically referred to himself as an Islamist. Writing for Al-Jazeera in 2014, in a piece titled The quest for democracy in the Arab world is an Islamic cause, Tamimi referred to events in Algeria in the early 1990s and explicitly stated: “I and many of my fellow Islamists endeavoured at the time to prove to the world that Islamists did not only accept democracy and pledge to respect the results of democratic contests,” but that they were also prepared to share power.\(^{57}\)

• Anas Altikriti, the CEO of the Cordoba Foundation, freely used the terms Islamism and Islamist in written testimony given to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on Political Islam in 2016. He also went to some lengths to defend and excuse some of those bracketed within this term.\(^{58}\) Altikriti thus argued that the kind of violence perpetrated by Hamas was neither exclusive to Hamas, nor was it a result of Hamas’ “Islamist nature”.\(^{59}\)

• Tariq Ramadan, who was previously based at St Antony’s College, Oxford as a Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies, has used the term Islamist as a term of analysis. In his 2013 essay Beyond Islamism, for example, Ramadan stated that “the various Islamist parties or organizations must be described accurately: some are non-violent, reformist and legalist; others are literalist and dogmatic, while still others are violent and extremist.”\(^{60}\) Ramadan insisted that “the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia enjoy popular and electoral legitimacy,” and that “all democrats must respect the verdict of the ballot box.”\(^{61}\) Yet, he also warned that “Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood”, had “not kept pace with world-historical developments”, and that out of a “desire to legitimate their participation in the democratic process”, particularly in the eyes of the West, “Islamists have become a reactionary force...
that, in the name of pragmatism, with one compromise after another, have preserved their religious references while voiding them of their potential for social, economic and cultural liberation.”

Still, Ramadan stressed that this “critique of Islamism is in no way an endorsement of the positions and political programs of its opponents.”

- **Kamal el-Helbawy**, once a prominent spokesperson for the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, is on record as using the term Islamist when discussing the political situation in Egypt. In an interview from February 2011 with ABC News titled Muslim Brotherhood would promote Sharia Law, Helbawy listed “Islamists” as simply being one of a number of political groupings in Egypt, along with liberals and secularists.

During the previous decade, Helbawy created the UK-based Centre for the Study of Terrorism – described as an “independent research and consultancy organisation, dedicated to providing unique insights into the global trends in Islamic resurgence, democratisation, terrorism and extremism.” The Centre briefly published the “Islamism Digest journal”.

- **Rachid al-Ghannouchi**, the Speaker of Tunisia’s parliament and a founder of the Islamist Ennahda Party, was based in London for several decades, before returning to Tunisia in 2011. In a piece published by the Wilson Centre in May 2013 titled Ghannouchi: Islamists now taking on Islamists, Ghannouchi himself observed that “some Islamists and Salafis”, including those in his own party, had wanted the Shi’ah included in the Tunisian constitution. His claim, however, was that “Islamists’ arrival to power does not mean that they will dominate the state”. Rather, Ghannouchi expressed his belief that, “moderate Islamists and moderate secularists can and should work together”.

### Why does all this matter?

The question of what to call ‘Islamism’ matters precisely because the proper identification of the phenomenon is the first step towards a meaningful response. And because the challenge posed by Islamism is at a fundamental level an ideological one, the words and concepts used to discuss it take on particular significance.

Furthermore, the UK is now at a crossroads in the evolution of its response to Islamism. For the last two decades, the ‘Prevent’ strategy has constituted (at least in theory) the core of the Government’s effort to counter the ideology of Islamism. Yet that strategy is about to undergo an independent review, as mandated by the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019. The purpose of that review is to assess how effectively Prevent is delivering on its stated aims, which first and foremost means tackling “the causes of radicalisation” and responding to “the ideological challenge of terrorism”.

Confronting hostile ideologies has long been recognised as an integral element of the national effort to combat violent extremism. The updated CONTEST Strategy, released in 2009, had placed a greater focus on Islamist ideology than had been the case previously, and acknowledged the significance of “perceived and alleged grievances” as drivers of extremism. Discussing Islamist ideology in detail, that incarnation of the CONTEST Strategy had specifically referenced the importance of the writings of figures such as Sayyid Qutb and Abul A’la Mawdudi, in driving the wave of extremism being witnessed at the time.
In this way, the UK’s Prevent programme, like the national Counter Extremism Strategy, has long featured specific mention of both Islamist terrorism and extremism. It is virtually impossible to envisage how either of these policies could hope to function successfully without the accurate terminology or conceptual framework concerning Islamist. It is equally difficult to imagine how the Prevent review could be properly conducted if terms as fundamental as Islamist terrorism, or Islamist extremism, were put out of use.

The last time Prevent was subject to an independent review, in 2011, the then reviewer noted that previously, the scheme had been fundamentally flawed by its failure “to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat we face”. What this meant, was an explicit identification of and commitment to challenge Islamism. These important insights later informed the thinking which underpinned the statutory Prevent duty, which was introduced under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

The parallel Counter Extremism Strategy of 2015 likewise placed great emphasis on understanding the nature and appeal of extremist ideologies—and particularly Islamist ideology—as a crucial step in successfully countering extremism. Yet across the public sector, parts of Government, and wider civil society—it is this proper understanding of Islamist ideology that has very often been lacking. And despite the lessons learned from the 2011 Prevent review and since, we risk coming full circle, with social scientists and anti-Prevent activists leading the call to de-emphasise the role of ideology, and to instead refocus prevention work around subjects such as mental health, issues of social isolation, and factors such as domestic violence. A revamped Prevent programme should resist this campaign, and instead ensure that countering the dynamics of ideology, and particularly Islamist ideology, is a core part of counter-radicalisation efforts.

In this context, it is more important than ever that language has meaning and clarity. We cannot counter Islamism, if we cannot identify it; and we cannot identify it if we lack the terms by which to understand it. Ideas matter – and so do words. In ‘Islamism’, we have a legitimate conceptual tool for understanding the most serious ideological challenge faced by the country today. It is time to reaffirm its validity and proceed with the much more serious business of developing our response.

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Part 2: On Islamism

Sir John Jenkins

Executive Summary

- The starting point for this paper is the debate currently being conducted in certain policy circles, including among senior Metropolitan Police officers in Counter-Terrorism Command (SO15), about whether the terms “Islamism” and “Islamist” are appropriate as official descriptors of certain acts, activities or tendencies, particularly those that give rise to national security concerns.

- A decision on this terminology could affect, for example, how terrorist attacks such as the 7/7 bombings in London or the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing are described by ministers, police and security officials, both in public and behind closed doors, in speeches, policy discussions and official documents.

- These criminal acts, it has been suggested, could instead be described as “faith-based violence”, with the true and often declared motives of the attackers – Islamist suicide bombers in the two examples given above – obscured and artificially left open to question, in an attempt to preserve what the proponents of this approach see as community cohesion and social peace.

- In contrast, this paper argues powerfully, based on a wide-ranging analysis of the relevant history and literature, that the terms “Islamism” and “Islamist” are not just appropriate but absolutely necessary and should continue to be used with due regard for accuracy by the UK Government, police and officials in all Government departments and agencies.

- The terms, it concludes, far from stigmatising a particular community actually serve to articulate a fundamental and crucially important distinction between Islam as a remarkable civilisational enterprise, lived faith, moral compass and code of ethics, and Islamism as an activist, socially divisive and supremacist ideology, which seeks to reorder individual lives, societies and states on the basis of a particular and selective interpretation of revelation and in accordance with what it understands as “the divine will”.

- This distinction—between Islam and Islamism—is clearly brought out in the work of numerous distinguished Muslim scholars such as Bassam Tibi, Aziz al-Azmeh and the late Shahab Ahmed, as well as a multitude of western scholars. It is reflected in the intense polemics within the Islamic world between those whom the equally distinguished scholar Nelly Lahoud has characterised as “Islamists”, “Apologists” and “Intellectuals”, polemics whose often violent consequences over the last century have been documented in detail among other by the Lebanese writer and politician Georges Corm and the late Fouad Ajami.

- In seeking to transcend politics through the power of a historically-situated but a-historically interpreted divine revelation, the paper argues, Islamists subject the present and the future to the tyranny of the past and typically place little emphasis on the fundamental principles of tolerance, choice and individual freedoms on which the contemporary liberal order in the West is based.

- Ultimately, for Islamism, it is the interpretation of Shari’ah that sets the limits of liberty. Although some Islamists accept the need to engage tactically in procedural democracy, Islamists by definition do not regard secular electoral choice as the fundamental expression of a legitimate political community.

- Furthermore, Islamism rejects what we consider to be the self-evident legal equality of individuals regardless of gender or religion. As an ideology, it is constitutively illiberal; its approach to education
and societal cohesion is unlikely to promote inclusivity; it seeks power first; and (as we have seen in Sudan since 1983, Iran since 1979 and Egypt in 2012 and 2013) its understanding of how to run modern states without oppression and in the interests of the citizen body as a whole is fatally flawed.

- Above all, the paper argues, the UK Government must recognise that to challenge the phenomenon of Islamism it is essential to be able to identify and name it.
- The British Government must not cede ground to Islamists, who for decades have misleadingly claimed to be the representatives of true Islam, by failing to understand their motives, the roots of their ideology and the consequences of the social and political gains they seek to make.

### On Islamism

There has been much comment recently about a debate within certain official circles in the UK about the appropriate terminology to be adopted when describing, reporting or commenting on acts of extremist violence committed in the name of Islam. Senior officers within the Metropolitan Police Force in particular seem exercised over this issue. It has reportedly been argued that the use of terms such as ‘Islamism’ or ‘Islamist’ is prejudicial to Muslims and damaging to social cohesion on the grounds that what Islamists believe and do is un-Islamic. Critics of the use of these terms wish instead to use some such term as ‘faith-based violence’ or ‘irhabi’ (the generic modern Arabic word for ‘terrorist’), which does not name the religion and, they claim, would be more palatable for Muslims. The Deputy Commander of CT in the MPC, Nik Adams, has been quoted as welcoming the debate and promising to listen to the ‘community’.

Why is this such a contentious issue and what should we make of it?

In truth, the contemporary imbroglio is merely the latest salvo in a long-running dispute on this issue, which has traversed the boundaries of popular commentary and academic scholarship. At the heart of this dispute sits a distinct socio-political movement – or series of movements – which clothes itself in the language of religion. Its adherents proudly insist that their actions, up to and including those of a violent nature, are Islamic. In response, many have argued that such claims should not be taken at face value. To do so, it is claimed, is both to besmirch one of the world’s great religions and to afford undue recognition and legitimacy to those who do not deserve it. Against this are those who insist on taking such individuals at their word and trying to capture the ideological essence of their project in language.

Where, then, does the balance of wisdom lie? In what follows I hope to explain why the term Islamism should not, and cannot, be avoided.

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‘Islam’ v ‘Islamism’

It is important first to understand how the term ‘Islamism’ arose and why it has become so widespread in the scholarly literature and among commentators and professionals. It superseded a number of earlier terms in broadly the same semantic field, including ‘Islamic Revivalism’, ‘Islamic Fundamentalism’ and ‘Political Islam’. 78 All have been attempts to describe the same phenomenon, namely the highly selective deployment of canonical and non-canonical Islamic texts, together with a bricolage of Islamic jurisprudence and history, in the service of an activist socio-political ideology. That ideology seeks to reorder contemporary individual lives, societies and states in accordance with what it understands as the divine will. 79

It is true that this ideology can sometimes seem no more than an extension of mainstream Islamic beliefs and doctrines. 80 And many Islamists claim that what they do is simply Islam – properly understood. But there is a profound if subtle distinction, exhaustively documented in the literature on the subject. 81

Islam contains multitudes. It is a religious faith; a code of ethics; a complex, diverse and multi-cultural system; an often contradictory discursive tradition; a global community of believers; a discoverable history; a 1400-year old corpus of subtle, sophisticated, and usually pragmatic textual, jurisprudential and credal exegesis; a set of human experiences and practices from mysticism through puritanism to libertinism and all stations in between; and a civilizational project. 82

78. Perhaps the dominant term from the mid-1970s until the late 1980s. Richard P Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, OUP 1993 – originally published in 1969, but based on research that started in the early 1950s – is the classic (and earliest) account of the dominant Islamist movement of the C20th. He uses various terms to describe the MB’s ideology, including ‘revivalist’ and ‘modernist’. The contributors to Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Byron Haines and Elison Findly (eds), The Islamic Impact, Syracuse University Press 1984 use ‘revivalist’ but also ‘fundamentalist’ and indeed ‘neo-totalitarian’. ‘Political Islam’ became more fashionable in the 1980s. Armando Salvatore, Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity, Ithaca Press 1994, for example, uses the term, but also explores in various ways the semantics of ‘revivalism’, ‘reformism’ and above all ‘modernism’. In response to the arguments advanced in various works by the Syrian-German scholar, Bassam Tibi (who uses both ‘Political Islam’ and ‘Islamism’), he also discusses the difference between Islam and Islamism. Karoui 2018 uses ‘Islamisme’ throughout (as opposed to ‘fundamentalisme’ in the 2016 report, which is less directly concerned with the ideology). Most recently, for example, Raud Koopmans, Das verfallene Haus des Islams, Munich 2020 consistently uses ‘Islamischer Fundamentalismus’, but the Center for Global Policy generally uses Islamism (and specifically recommends this as a term to avoid confusion with ‘Islam’ in ‘Islamism’, 29 August 2017 at https://cgpolicy.org/multimedia/islamic-vs-islamist-in-the-fight-against-terror/). And the distinguished French scholars, Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy, like Tibi, use both ‘Political Islam’ and ‘Islamism’ in their writings from the 1990s onwards – and indeed ‘post-Islamism’ (a term popularised by the US-Iranian scholar, Asef Bayat) or ‘neo-fundamentalism’, ‘Intégrisme’ is another term often used in French. Since then ‘Islamism’ seems to have become on balance the preferred term. There is a short but useful early discussion of the genealogy of some of these terminological matters by Xavier Ternisien, Intégrisme, fondamentalisme et fanatisme, Le Monde, 8 October 2001 at https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2001/10/08/integrisme-fondamentalisme-et-fanatisme-la-guerre-des-mots_229565_3210.html.

79. On the whole definitional debate see Salwa Ismail, Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism, IB Tauris 2003, Chapter 1. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, Shariaization of Malay-Muslim Identity in Contemporary Malaysia, MBRAS, December 2018, Vol 91, Part 2, Number 315, 49-78 at https://www.academia.edu/41117522/Shariaization_of_Malay-Muslim_Identity_in_Contemporary_Malaysia_MBRAS_vol._91_part_2_no._315_2018_pp._49-78 writes: “Islamists’ here denotes ideologically-oriented activist Muslims who prioritize Islam’s political role and display tendencies to steer Malaysia towards the direction of becoming an Islamic state—an entity whose theoretical underpinnings are grounded around the goal of full-fledged implementation of shari’ah (Islamic law) within its national boundaries. In a nutshell, Islamists are Muslim thinkers and activists who espouse ‘Islamism’—a political ideology which demands that true Muslims seek to establish a juridical Islamic state governed by the shari’ah in order to realize the ideals of Islam as a comprehensive way of life (din al-hayah).” Aaron Zelin, From the Archduke to the Caliph: the Islamist Evolution that led to the Islamic State, in The First World War and Its Aftermath, T G Fraser (ed), Gingko Library 2015 at https://www.academia.edu/19349433/From_the_Archduke_to_the_Caliph_the-Islamist_evolution_that_led_to_the_Islamic_State, quotes the similar definition of all Islamists by the US scholar, Peter Mandaville: “forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of the Islamic political order in a state whose governmental principles, institutions, and legal system derive directly from the shari’ah.” It has also been described by Guilain Denoeux as “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives … provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from Islamic tradition.” Stéphane Lacroix, Awakening Islam; The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia, Cambridge MA/London 2011, 281 writes: “The term ‘Islamists’ is used in a relatively broad sense to designate any formally or informally organized agent acting or wishing to act on his social and/or political environment with the purpose of bringing it into conformity with an ideal based on a particular interpretation of the dictates of Islam.” And Nelly Lahoud, Political Thought in Islam: A Study in Intellectual Boundaries, Routledge 2005, 2 defines Islamism as “… the term currently used to identify a complex of political currents that understand Islam as a political ideology; an Islamist being an adherent of currents. A common characteristic of such; Islamism is a selective and literal approach to the foundation texts, Qur’an and Hadith, that is, selecting Qur’anic verses and Hadith reports without due sensitivity to context or alternative interpretations, but whose literal sense is conducive to their political objectives. Also common among Islamist is the objective to bring about an Islamic state, which has the shari’ah as its constitution.”

80. See Mustafa Akyol, How Islamists are Ruining Islam, The Hudson Institute, 12 June, 2020. “However, it is not that easy to neatly separate Islamism from mainstream Sunni or Shia Islam. Islamists—parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt—may be further politicizing the religion, and terrorist groups are taking a perverse element of wanton violence. However, what they are all championing is none other than the Shari’ah, the legal tradition of Islam, whose mainstream interpretations are full of commandments that are hard to accept from a modern point of view. Examples would include the execution of apostates and blasphemers,stoning of adulterers, amputating the hands of thieves, public lashings for all kinds of sins, dress codes imposed on females, supremacy of men over women, supremacy of Muslims over non-Muslims, and the overall idea of a closed society that is not just inspired by religion but also policed by it.”


82. The historically and geographically diverse diversity of Islam is interestingly reflected in different ways in contemporary expressions of the faith, as Karoui 2016 explains, “Islam en France est fragmenté et divers: il n’y a pas un islam mais des islam, nourris et diffusés par des institutions et des mouvements nationaux, des organisations transnationales ou des États étrangers. Cette multiplicité d’acteurs dans le champ musulman français, les tensions qu’ils suscitent et les rivalités qu’ils nourrissent, contribuent à la complexité de la compréhension de l’Islam en France.”
Islamism – in all its manifestations – is a distinctively modernist, politically purposeful and revolutionary ideology and social movement. It is dehistorised, decontextualised and deculturated.

This distinction between Islam and Islamism – is clearly brought out in the work of distinguished Muslim scholars such as Aziz al-Azmeh and the late Shahab Ahmed. They differentiate between, on the one hand ‘lived’, and on the other, ‘textual’ or ‘utopian’ Islam.

Students of the phenomenon have adopted the term 'Islamism' precisely because they recognise it as both arising from, making sense within but separate from 'Islam'. Moreover, it has come to be seen as a specifically problematic, socially disruptive and often threatening ideological current (for various reasons, some good, some not) – not simply by governments and publics in the West but also by many and perhaps a majority of Muslims getting on with their lives. Even when from the C19th onwards more and more of them found themselves under non-Muslim rule, they often adapted themselves to the situation as best they could. The law provided answers was how far doing something would assist or impede the journey to salvation, not whether it was allowed or forbidden in the here and now. Assessing the moral status of human acts was the work of the jurists (ālīqāhā). They classified human acts as either forbidden or permitted and, within the latter category, as disapproved, indifferent, commendable or obligatory, trying to work out God’s view of them on the basis of the Qur’an and statements by the Prophet, plus some subsidiary sources — it was to God and His Prophet, as represented in the here and now by the jurists that the law owed its authority, not to the rulers. Also see Muhammad Hashim Kamali, Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence, The Islamic Texts Society, 2003 and Joseph Schacht, An Introduction to Islamic Law, OUP 1964. And their enforcement is the responsibility of the community as a whole (Nazih Ayubi, Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World, Routledge 1991, Chapter 2). This is done in the interests of a public morality that both expresses and confirms the ‘Muslimness’ of that community. This requires in turn a set of procedural and jurisprudential as well as moral rules for the community and the ability to compel their acceptance. That means that the community of the faithful is also a political community in the sense that it acknowledges the need for a religiously legitimate ruler with a monopoly of lawful coercive power. This can be seen in the foundational document of the first Islamic community of which we have a record, that established by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina sometime around 622AD (that is, a year or so after the hijrah from Mecca). This document is generally known in English as The Constitution of Medina. It is first recorded in Ibn Hisham's Kitab Sirat Rasul Allah (The Life of the Prophet of God), a C9th AD recension of a lost C8th original by Ibn Ishaq. It is known under various titles in Arabic: al-Ma'rif, Sāhīh al-Madīnā, Mīthaq al-Madīnā, Tawāṣṣul al-Madīnā, Īṭtā' al-Madīnā, Ṣūrūr al-Madīnā. It is essentially meaning the same thing (see W Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Medina, OUP 1956, Chapter 7 and for the historicity of the document, Theodor Nöldeke and others, History of the Qur'an (edited and translated by Wolfgang H Behn), Brill, 2013, 320ff). It established Islam not as a kinship group – the norm in tribal societies – but as a rule-bound community (the ummah) which claimed precedence over other groups by virtue of accepting a specific divine revelation as authentic, comprehensive, true and final. In so doing it established an aspirational model for all future Islamic political communities. None of this, of course, stopped most Muslims getting on with their lives. Even when from the C19th onwards more and more of them found themselves under non-Muslim rule, they often adapted themselves to the situation.
Muslims living both within and outside the Islamic world and the governments of the states in which they live.  

On the general issues of Islamism see, for example, Tibi 2009 and 2012; Azmeh 2009, Devji 2005 and Brown 2014. The list could be multiplied almost indefinitely. On the popularity or otherwise of Islamism in the Arab World – its epicentre – the signs were there to see during the Arab Spring. There were already some very striking broader polling figures in 2013 (see http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/16/egyptians-increasingly-slum/) from a leftist/Nasserist perspective, Taher Mukhtar, Wahjan II-Nafis at 'Ulmah: Al Ilhwan wa' Askar ( "Two Sides of the Same Coin: The MB and the Military"), Misr al Arabiya, 9 December 2014 at http://www.misralarabia.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%A5%D8%B1/43347-%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AD%D8%B1). The findings gave an early account of disillusion with the MB in Egypt, Mark Tesler, Arab Attitudes Towards Political Islam After the Arab Spring, CPPF paper, April 2014 backed this up (in Egypt in 2011 37% of Egyptians wanted religious leaders to have influence over government decisions. 43% disagreed and 20% disagreed strongly; in 2013 20% wanted them to have such influence. 44% disagreed and 36% disagreed strongly). For a remarkable difference between June and July 2013 see the digests of Gallup's polling released in August 2013: Mohamed Yousis, Egyptians’ Views of Government Crushed Before Overthrow, Gallup, 2 August 2013 at http://www.gallup.com/poll/163796/egyptians-views-government-crushed-overthrow.aspx. As the distinguished American observer of Islamisms, Nathan Brown (Roundtable on The Future of Islamism: A Starting Point, Jadaliyya, 14 November 2014 at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15112/roundtable-on-the-future-of-islamism-a-starting-point and The Brotherhood Withdraws Into Itself, POMEPS, 24 January 2014 at http://pomeps.org/2014/01/29/the-brotherhood-withdraws-into-itself/) remarked at the time, "The challenge for Islamism is not simply that the Brotherhood lost office but that it is now reviled by much of the society and being purged from the Egyptian state". ‘The hatred for the MB expressed by so many in Egyptian public life (and .. in many private conversations) is overwhelming and likely unprecedented’. The collective memory of martyrdom so prominent in the EMB now is one it simply does not share with most of the society’ and “In almost all non-Islamist public spheres, the events of Rabaa fit into a very different story, one of the defeat of terrorism”.

Where did Islamism come from?

Throughout history there have been many disputes among Muslims about the nature of legitimate rule, the obligations of power, the boundaries of the Islamic community, its relationship to non-Muslims, both in and outside the territories controlled by Muslim rulers, and the legitimate use of physical force. But it is hard to talk of a specifically Islamic theory of political organisation. And Muslims have throughout the centuries – and more particularly since their encounter with a disruptive global modernity sometime between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries – adapted themselves to a variety of often non-Muslim systems.

But at the same time there emerged an important school of thought which held that the subjection of Muslims and their states to ‘infidel’ authority (something that traditional Islamic jurisprudence, which had evolved at a time of unquestioned Muslim hegemony, found hard to conceive and firmly rejected) was not just

(continued)
On this view, the problem was in part that the people were infused with too little Islam, rather than too much – the latter being the view of many Victorian era colonial officials, like Lord Cromer, who dominated British-occupied Egypt. Some Muslim activists went on to claim that Islam actively required armed resistance to western intrusion (something that appealed, of course, and still appeals not just to emergent Islamists but more widely – informing the hugely influential work of Frantz Fanon, for instance).  

Many self-declared Muslim reformers (again, like al-Afghani, his colleague Muhammad Abduh, or the latter’s protégé, Rashid Rida) argued that it was only by adopting the ways of temporally successful non-Muslims that the restored global Islamic community (as they conceived it) could recover not just its dignity but its secular power and help Islam advance once more towards the God-given goal of world domination. This borrowing of western methods was to be accompanied, they asserted, by a revival of a properly Islamic spirit and practice. And it is precisely here that Islamists distinguish themselves from non-Islamists: namely in the way in which they think such a restored and morally-renewed community should come into existence, and what this says about the nature of politics and of government.

These ideas, as they have evolved, are very different from the western tradition or indeed that of classical Islamic state practice, its jurisprudents and theorists. The terms Islamic Fundamentalism, Political Islam and Islamism all refer to this radically innovative mobilisation of Islam – not as a faith, or even as a civilisational project, but as a self-validating political ideology designed to reshape, not tradition, but modernity.

The foundational model for this form of sacralised, highly activist and contestatory social movement was the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), launched by Hassan al-Banna in the Egyptian provincial city of Ismailiya in March 1928.


94. See Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798 – 1939, CUP 1983 and Mitchell 1993, 220ff. Secular reformers such as Muhammad Ali Pasha in Egypt of Sultan Abdul Hamid in Turkey probably shared similar views, but with different ambitions.

95. The importance of the separation of political from spiritual authority was a major theme of the Constitutional movements in the Ottoman Empire and Iran which flourished between the mid-C19th and early C20th (Faleh A. Jabar, The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq, Saqi, London, 2003, 277ff [with references]). It worked in Kemalist Turkey and partly in Pahlavi Iran and the new Iraqi state after 1921 (where the issue was used by the Mujtahids of Najaf and Karbala to stir unrest) but not elsewhere. A characteristic response can be seen in the distinction drawn by certain Salah scholars between Christian and Islamic/Islamist views of political authority and their emphasis on the historical context within which secular sovereignty and eventually representative democracy emerged. They use this as an argument for the essential incompatibility of Islam and democracy; see Ovamir Anjum, Salafis and Democracy: Doctrine and Context, The Muslim World, Issue 00, 2016 at https://www.academia.edu/31257969/Salafis_and_Democracy_Documentation_and_Context/

96. The terms Islamic Fundamentalism, Political Islam and Islamism all refer to this radically innovative mobilisation of Islam – not as a faith, or even as a civilisational project, but as a self-validating political ideology designed to reshape, not tradition, but modernity.

In different guises the same argument occurs in some earlier more sophisticated Islamist discourse and more crudely later: see Fouad Ajami, The Arab Predicament, CUP 1992, 60ff. This is an interesting case of polemists applying a particular standard of historicity to one tradition and another to a second. Behind it doubtless lies the fear that opening Islamic tradition to historical enquiry will compromise the claims of Islam – as both Islamists and traditional jurists understand it – to absolute authority on the basis of sola scriptura: there is after all no parallel in the Islamic tradition to Lorenzo Valla’s demolition of Papal claims to temporal authority through his scholarly exposure of the Donation of Constantine as a forgery in 1440. Hobbes – who pointed out correctly that Christianity does not have a code of revealed law and extensively if idiosyncratically considered the relationship between the sovereignty and laws of earthly rulers and those of God in Chapters 31-32 and Part 3 of Leviathan – might have located the difference not in some essential quality of Arabness, Islam or Europeanness but in the importance for the western tradition of scepticism about the possibility of ever knowing the Divine Will. This refusal to accept prophecy at face value – which caused Hobbes and Hume after him to be accused of atheism – is more or less absent in the Islamic tradition. Indeed most Islamic scholars would identify the prophetic function as the essential underpinning of the soteriological and therefore Islamically legitimate state (even if they then use this – and an account of western political structures as functional rather than ideological – to argue for some sort of separation of powers under Islam: see for example the discussion of Muhammad Baqr al Sadr’s political thought at Jabar 2003, 280ff). In an illuminating contrast, even Savonarola – an ordained Dominican – argued in his 1498 Tract on the Constitution and Government of the City of Florence not for theocracy or the rule of the saints but for a Republic, with “the whole body of the citizens as the supreme authority in political affairs” (Skinner 1997, Chapter 6; see also 201ff) for the intertwining of humanism and legal scholarship in early modern Europe and 208ff for the parallel emergence of a Biblical criticism founded on historical and philological methods not faith alone, two seminal moments in the development of modern European political thought.

Al-Banna urged al-Azhar scholars to organise. But in order to carve out a space for itself in a world consisting precisely of such nation states, it needed to give a new and persuasive account of their socio-political failings and promote a new, distinctively Islamic and drastically confrontational model for their remedy.

Advocates of this approach in the Arab world and elsewhere called for the placing of a flat-screen version of Islam at the centre of political, social and economic life. They defined the largely Christian and secular West as the moral and cultural ‘Other’ and claimed that the restoration of a specifically pan-Arab caliphate, to replace the tarnished Ottoman version, would restore the allegedly lost glory of the Muslim world.

They drew on the ideas of earlier Islamic reformists, mixed with elements of what came rather misleadingly to

97. Al-Banna's account is in his Mudhakkirat al Da'wa wa il Da'ya, conveniently translated by Calvert 2008 op cit, 15f.


99. The MB deliberately sought to reassert the primacy of Islam over politics. The account of their motivation in The Cordoba Foundation, The MENA Report, Vol 1, Issue 11, November 2013, 21 at https://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/TCF_MENA_NOV_WEB.pdf is characteristic: “Al-Banna urged al-Azhari scholars to organise voice their disapproval to the Egyptian authorities, seeking change and the revival of the umma, using Egypt as the springboard. His efforts were unsuccessful, as it proved very difficult to change centuries of tradition of separation between Din wa Dawla (religion and government). Since 661 AD, Muslim scholars had been separated from the sphere of politics; their role in the process of appointing new caliphs was observed as long as the ‘ulama were not vocal or organised in their disapproval of the sovereign... Members of the Brotherhood believe that moral and Islamic religious values fused with democracy would rid society of these ill (sic excessive individualism, the debasement of women and social chaos, all indicative of the MB’s view of the world), while keeping the positive aspects of political stability... The Brotherhood views the separation of the state and church not as an Islamic issue, but relevant to the specifics of Western history. It believes that Islam developed as a complete system of ethics and laws, a perfect unity in all aspects of life. Power, in the eyes of the ideologues, is vital to support the values and teachings of the religion, without which Islam loses its authority and in turn the ability to protect its teachings and values. This would lead to divisiveness and weakness as Islam is dispossessed of its power.” The whole report is well worth reading as a revealing – if sanitised - Islamist-flavoured account of what the Brotherhood stood and stands for.

100. The instrumentalisation of a revived caliphate was also at the centre of debate during World War One in the Arab Bureau in Cairo and indeed in the circles around the great French proconsul in the Maghreb, General Lyautey. It remained an issue in the region for at least the next 20 years, from the Azhar Caliphate Conference of 1926 onwards. See Elie Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth, Routledge, 2014 and Kedourie 1970, Chapter 7, Egypt and the Caliphate, 1915-1952. For Lyautey see Jalila Sbai, Quand la France révait d’un califé pour son empire musulman, Orient XXI, 8 septembre 2016 at http://orientxii.info/magazine/quand-la-france-revait-d-un-calife-pour-son-empire-musulman,1454. For connections between IS and this debate see Zelin 2015.
be known as Salafism, as well as Sufism, German romanticism and European – particularly Italian – fascism, together with badly understood and rarely acknowledged twentieth century European prophets of western decline like Oswald Spengler or Arnold Toynbee. Al-Banna was often ambiguous about what he wanted and exactly what he meant. But he created the template for all future dissident and insurgent Islamist movements, from those which saw a route to absolute power through electoral politics to those which chose instead revolutionary

101. The romantic nationalism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Reden an die deutsche Nation (Addresses to the German Nation) and of Johann Gottfried Herder, as mediated through later German thinkers, together with the dialectical historicism – but not the materialism - of Hegel and Marx seem to have provided, often at second-hand, a particularly powerful inspiration. See, for example, The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought (multiple editors), Princeton 2013, 333ff. For an extended discussion of the roots of Turkish Islamists and its connection to the German Romanticism see Lefèvre 2013, 194-5.

102. Al-Banna was often ambiguous about what he wanted and exactly what he meant. But he created the template for all future dissident and insurgent Islamist movements, from those which saw a route to absolute power through electoral politics to those which chose instead revolutionary
and vanguardist violence.105

Islamism and Violence

Al-Banna may initially have conceived of jihad as one of several means to an end. (Jihadism) conceives of jihad as the only legitimate means to an end that the jihadis are yet to envision. Until further notice, then, jihad is the end itself”. In both cases there is a doctrine of permissible coercive physical force. The difference is in the symbolic valency of such force. Some author’s “The Evolution of Modern Jihadism in the online Oxford Research Encyclopedia: Religion, at https://oxfordre.com/religion is another useful source of some of these issues. Omar Ashour, Collision to Crackdown: Islamist Military Relations in Egypt, Brookings 2015 at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/collision-to-crackdown-english.pdf claims that al-Banna opposed revolutions. But what he opposed were coup plots and the like. His disapproval toward terrorism within were fine. And, as he acknowledges, in both 1952 and 2011 the EMB in fact supported such coups. See Mitchell 1993, 312 for the essentially revolutionary nature of the MB, and 319. “For out of the fact of power in being, and in use in defence of ‘eternal goals’, emerged a self-righteous and intolerant arrogance which opened an irredeemable gap between the MB and its fellow citizens”. The judgement echoes what many people saw happen in Egypt in 12/13. Mawdudi acknowledged this in 1939: “The truth is that Islam is a revolutionary ideology which seeks to alter the social order of the whole world and rebuit it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals”: this remains a common theme - Vidino 2010, 120f. So Devji 2005, 26f. “This (sc Islamic fundamentalism) had been part and parcel of Cold War politics and was concerned with the founding through revolution of an ideological state, fashioned in many respect on the communist model that was so popular in Africa and Asia following the Second World War.... communist ideas about the party as vanguard of the revolution, the state as an explicitly ideological institution meant to produce a utopian society, and the like, were central to the movement”. See also Ranko 2014, 836 “Damit wollte die Gruppe ihre intellektuelle Führerschaft in der aufkommenden ägyptischen Demokratie-bewegung etablieren. Dies ist jedoch kläglich gescheitert, wie die Massendemonstrationen gegen Präsident Mursi im Jahr 2013, die in dessen Sturz durch das Militär mündeten, zeigen.” For the claim to represent Islam see again Ranko 2014, 1076 [an interview with an MB activist]: “Als ich Hussein die Frage stelle, weshalb die MB in Politik und Gesellschaft engagiere, obwohl das für eine offiziell verbotene und verfolgte Gruppe äußerst riskant sei, schaut er mich völlig ungläubig an und scheint sich fassungslos zu fragen, wie mir diese offensichtliche Tatsache nur entgehen könne. "Naturally, weil wir die Stimme des wahren Islam sind, sagt er " - and also the reflections at 1115f Sheri Berman, Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society. Perspectives on Politics, 1(2), 257–272, doi:10.1017/S1474085407003044, APSA Vol 1/No 2, June 2003 at http://arengioendowment.org/pdf/files/berman.pdf is excellent on the revolutionary purpose of the Islamist civil society movement in the Middle East and North Africa. This is the same trend that is described by Samuel Tadros (1), Mapping Egyptian Islamism, The Hudson Institute, 18 December 2014 at https://www.hudson.org/research/10862-mapping-egyptian-islamism. 11 "This criticism points to an inherent feature of the Brotherhood despite its claims to the contrary: its methodology is ultimately dependent on state power to enforce its vision. Hence, despite the early stages indicating a bottom-up approach of focusing on the individual, the family, those stages are merely necessary to reach power.” One reason the EMB gave up violence was that peaceful gradualism was a more effective socio-revolutionary tactic. Mawdudi al-Rasheed, Saudi Islamist Euphoria (delivered at John Stom Diecky Center for International Understanding and ISIS Workshop on The Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Spring, London, 9-11 September 2013) discusses the “representative discourse in support of revolution” of the Sahwa Shikh al-Awada, a reference point for MB supporters inside the Kingdom, who wrote ‘Asl al thawa (‘Questions of the Revolution’) in 2012 in response to the Arab Spring: “he defines revolution as building on the past, reform and reconstruction rather than destruction. It always starts peacefully but may later become militarised when confronted by opposition;” for the complete text see http://medias.imaltoday.net/real/glsa-thawra/glsa-thawra.pdf and for further commentary Mawdawi al-Rasheed, Muted Modernists, London 2015. Henry Kissinger, World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History, Penguin 2014 talks of the revolutionary ambition of ‘al Banna’s project for world transformation” More widely, Shadi Hamid, The Essential Nationalism of the Islamic State’s Appeal, The Atlantic, 31 October 2014 at http://m.thenational.com/ international/archive/2014/10/the-roots-of-the-islamic-states-appeal-382175/ - criticises Kissinger and suggests that Islamism is an essential element in re-legitimising a Western typo ge the region. But between the variousations he draws are clearer than the similarities, and his portrayal of the MB as a largely constructive illiberal movement seems to me highly questionable. In any case, an observation of Clement Thorne in (in an interview for ‘L’âme de l’iran by Jean-Pierre Perrin: personal copy, speaking of Iran, applies to the MB as well: “Il y a toujours cette dialectique entre nation et revolution. Les pur revolucionnaires sont dans la negation de l’international national, comme le sont d’une facon generale les islamistes. Ils pensent que la creation de la nation a ete inventee par les Occidentaux pour diviser l’Oumm (la communauté musulmane). C’est ce qui distingue Khomene lui meme, en accord avec les Freres musulmans (dans le monde arabe) sur ce point. C’est Rafsandjani qui a rebildung l’idee de l’international national.” We may have already passed beyond notions of the Westphalian: for some reflections on which see Brendan Simms, Michael Axworthy and Patrick Milton, Ending the New Thirty Years War, The New Statesman, 26 January 2016 at http://www.nevostatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/01/ending-new-thirty-years-war...

106. It is instructive to examine the definitions of jihad (praising the assassins of Sadat, the Afghan Mujahidin and various insurgent movements in Eritrea, the Philippines and Palestine) of the fifth MB Murshid (Supreme Guide - in theory the supreme position in the Brotherhood as a whole). Mustafa Mashshour, Volume 5 Of The Laws Of Da’wa: Jihad is the Way (The was published in 1995) translated into English at http://paklaw.org/STORAGE/special%20reports/Jihad%20is%20the%20way%20by%20Mustafa%20Mashshour.pdf. There are some helpful reflections on the evolution of the wider concept in the C20th under the pressure of evolving Islamist doctrine from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) onwards by Aaron Zelin, Socio-Political Background and Intellectual Undergirding of the Ikhwani Breakaway Fractions: 1954-1981, The Washington Institute, August 2013 at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/open/Zelin20130820-Jihadology-BrotherhoodBreakaway.pdf. Devji 2005 traces the subsequent metamasis of the concept away from its moorings in traditional models of authority and religious genealogies. David Thomson, Les Revenants, Seuil, 2016 and Graeme Wood, The Way of the Strangers New York 2017 provide graphic testimony from Islamic State fighters about their own understanding of jihad: for them it is not about cultivating the inner virtues. Classically, offensive jihad needed the authority of a properly constituted Muslim sovereign or Imam at his head. That obligation rise to a specialised vocabulary designed to describe those who waged war in this sense – so jihadah, mujahid, marab, ribat and so forth. In the early Islamic period (and under the Ottomans) some new structures occurred with great regularity. But as Islamic empires grew, so did social and political strains, heading to division, conflict and instability. This was not dissimilar on the face of it to the strategy which medieval Europe employed out of the wreckage of the late Roman Empire and its Gothic, Vandal, Lombard and Frankish successor states. But, as already described, whereas emergent European states came to see themselves as the heirs to Roman law, particularly with the revived study of the subject at Ravenna and Bologna and the attention paid specifically to the Codes Justinianus from the C11th onwards (Kimmer 1997 and the masterful account by Max Weber; Politik als Beruf, Hofenberg 2016), Islamic states saw themselves as heirs to the Roman imperial authority under God.

105. Lahoud 2010, 144 remarks, “Islamism” conceives of military jihad as one of several means to an end. (Jihadism) conceives of jihad as the only legitimate means to an end that the jihadis are yet to envision. Until further notice, then, jihad is the end itself”.

106. For the period around the Fifth Congress, see Mitchell 1993, 14-16, King Faisal Institute, Al Ikhwân al Muslimûnîn: Al ēidyya wuulatu qAttu al Muwaajihat al Dawlatî al Watanîyyati bi-Mizr (The Muslim Brothers: Ideologies Against the Nationalist State in Egypt) – Mazaar (King Faisal Institute), September 2013 3, 5 and Ashour 2010, 35f. Mitchell 1993, 322 sums up the period until 1954 thus: “Violence with the Brothers…was in many ways a response to the situation in Egypt….The difference lay in the Islamic dimension, which the Brothers claimed as their own, and…precipitated a variety of coexistence in both political and social life... characterized primarily by rigid intolerance”. Brynjar Lia, The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Ithaca 1998, 3f., who states that in 2014 the Brotherhood accounts of their own actions, is more forgiving. Gilles Keppel, Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam, I.B.Tauris 2002, 29 in contrast describes the actions of al-Nizam-al-Khas as “systematic terrorism”.

107. Al-Nizam-al-Khas: Mitchell 1993 has the foundational account in English of this body.
assassinations – targeting the Egyptian government, Egyptian Jews and the British.  

On top of this, there is the question of the Brotherhood’s relationship with the writings of the essayist, novelist and socio-cultural critic, Sayyid Qutb – executed by Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser’s government in 1966. Qutb, who had gravitated towards the Brotherhood in the late 1940s, became its most significant and protean ideologue. He remains central in complex ways to the Brotherhood and Islamist thinking in general. Qutb’s
110. The relationship with Qutb is undoubtedly complex but highly significant. There is a sample of his writings with commentary in *Euben and Zaman 2009, Chapter 3* and some remarks on Qutb and the equally important Mawdudi, in *Gilles Keppel, Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam, IBTauris 2002, 23ff*. Qutb’s views were contested at the time within the MB, leading to a qualified written rebuttal in the name of the then Supreme Guide. And it may well be that the case is more complex than the former. But he advocated violent jihad to establish a theocratic Islamic state, and the real issue is the influence his writings have had and still have. These principally ‘in the Shadows of the Qur’an’ and ‘Milestones’ continue to be seen as inspirational by AQ and other jihadi groups. They remain part of the MB’s curriculum. They have never been subject to a proper critique within the MB or wider Islamist movements. And since his execution by Nasser in 1966, on the grounds of plotting a coup with the violent populist group, the 1965 Organisation (something he admitted in his pamphlet ‘limadha ‘aadamuunii”, “Why Violent Jihad?”). Qutb’s Milestones has been implicated in the radicalisation of inmates in many recent MB leaders have shown a distinct Qutbist strain in their thinking. *Ayman al-Zawahiri* cited him specifically as the father of jihadism in his memoir, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*: see *Fawza Gerges, The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global, CUP 2007, 4ff* and Thomas Hegghammer, *The Caravan: Abdullah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad, CUP 2020, 39ff* for the wider genealogy. Muhammad Mahdi Akel, the 7th Murshid, who was imprisoned with Qutb, is captured on film by Prazan 2013 describing Ma‘asir, see “as a fine book, nothing reprehensible” and Qutb himself as a martyr and a great man. Prazan 2014, 1437 - 1441 amplifies this apologia and at 358 quotes Dr Hanan al-Banna, founder of the UK-based Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), as a self-confessed admirer of Qutb. *Kandil 2015, 3548* remarks: “yet Qutb’s writings have remained the main stock of every [MB] curricularist ideology, its foundation and the bread-and-butter of cultivators on all levels”. In recent times, a good account of the use of his writings as a reference for harki (activist) Salafism is Hassanein Bai Hanieh and Dr Muhammad Abu Ramadan’s *The Islamic State Organisation*, *The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin 2015 at 15ff. Ahrar al-Sham and *GIA* writings have been used to justify multiple forms of violence by other Islamist groups (Kindle edition), 2010, 232. Ahrar al-Sham’s list of attackers (GB) and its various offshoots today, including the Islamic State (IS), Jabhat Fatih al-Sham/n-Al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham.111 That violence has been characterised by the Muslim scholar, Aziz al-Azemh, as an inevitable way of Allah...
Understanding Islamism

Qutb was deeply influenced by the thought of his contemporary, the South Asian Islamist ideologue, Abul A’la Mawdudi, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, from whom he seems to have derived the ideas of ‘jahiliyyah’ (the pre-Islamic state of ignorance which both men used to characterise the condition of modern Muslim communities) and ‘hakimiyah’ (the absolute sovereignty of God from which there can be no human derogation). The two of them are perhaps the most important and influential Islamist thinkers of the last 100 years.

Islamism as construed initially by al-Banna, and most systematically by Qutb and Mawdudi, is a transformative project. It rejects most existing political systems as un-Islamic. It seeks to replace the secular and post-Westphalian world with a revolutionary new Islamised order, both nationally and internationally. And this is where the distinction that some like to draw between ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ Islamisms breaks down. The Muslim Brotherhood, often seen as an exemplar of the former current, has always been clear that it hopes for the return of the Caliphate – however distant a goal this has been. Furthermore, it has been prepared to sanction the use of physical force in circumstances where events do not move in its favour, or they are not allowed to operate with sufficient freedom (the judgement of which they reserve to themselves).

Particularly in its Qutbist and subsequently Salafised-forms, it has also been a school for many of the most dangerous Islamist connoisseurs of the search for an unattainable authenticity.

112 Azzam 2004, 22. He distinguishes helpfully between the 'Islam cuco' and the 'Islam utopique, as does Ahmed 2016, Saleim Morgan, The Mosaic of Islam: A Conversation with Perry Anderson, Verso, London/New York, 2016 points out that, “the only way Islamic terrorism can be defeated is by understanding its theology and producing a counter to it. As long as we deny this, there is no way we can gain the upper hand over militant Islam.” It is not therefore simply a matter of producing better washing machines (as Nixon famously suggested to Khrushchev during the Kitchen Debate in 1959). The literature on the relationship between ideology (including Islamism) and violence is huge: for a judicious review and some helpful conclusions see Donald Holbrook and John Horgan, Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut, Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 13, Issue 6, December 2019. Olivier Roy remarks in the French Sénat Rappor, “les acteurs capitalisent sur le sentiment envers l’Occident, en présentant la promotion de la sharia comme la défense d’une authenticité culturelle face à l’occidentalisation”. Indeed.

113. See Seyyed Vadi Reza Reza Norouz, Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism, OUP 1996; The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought (multiple editors), Princeton 2013, 332ff; and Ehsan, 2010, 213ff. For the JI see Nasr 2001, 93ff. The JI’s activist youth wing, the Islami Jamaat-e-Talaba (IJT), through its “powerful and radical Islamist onslaught against the state” was instrumental in the overthrow of the Bhutto government in Pakistan in 1977 and the seizure of power by the Islamising General Zia ul Haq (an admirer of Mawdudi, who attempted to introduce his writings into military promotion exams) with all the disasters which that entailed.

114. In addition to the writings cited elsewhere see, for example, Nahwa al Hour (’Towards the Light’), al-Banna’s 1936 open letter to King Farouc: http://ikhwanweb.org/article.php?208=802 and the other excerpts translated in Calvert 2008, 15ff. For Qutb, Mu’alim fi Turq (Milestones) is the critical text.

115. Partly because they proclaim the virtues of ‘al-wasaytahya’ (‘the middle way’). But this isn’t some form of Anthony Giddens Third Way. It is a specifically Islamic reference to two Qur’anic verses (2:143 and 68:28) which allow considerable latitude of interpretation.


radicals of our time — from Muhammad Surur Zain al-Abedinn118 through Osama bin Laden119 to Abdullah Azzam,120 Abu Mus’ab al-Suri121 and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.122 They advocate or deploy extreme violence not simply to terrorise but as a self-authenticating and publicly performative expression of their ideology.


Ahmed Mansour, Al Jazeera’s star interviewer (often seen as sympathetic to the MB), in a notorious interview with the AQ-aligned Jabhat al-Nusra’s Abu Muhammad al-Azem,128 which highlighted the sources of their respective ideologies are the same. See: http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=ahmad+mansour+interviews+abu+mujahid+al+nusra&qpvt=ahmad+mansour+interviews+abu+mujahid+al+nusra&view=detail&mid=4C040EA561B2CD0A204C0D0E56618E2C4E062866FFORM=VYDFVR


121. For al-Suri see Lia 2014.


Muhammad Sayyid Rassas, Min Hassan al Banna ila Abu Bakr al Baghdadi wa baynahauma akhurana (From Hassan al Banna to Abu Bakr al Baghdadi – and Others in Between), Al Hayat, 28 August 2014, at http://althayat.com/Articles/4302508/176-8-26-2-7-10-27-1-27-


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**Islamism and Muslims**

Despite all of this, the message of the Brotherhood has been and continues to be seductive for many Muslims. The group’s eschatological and self-justifying narratives of conspiracy and righteous suffering represent a claim to privileged knowledge about the real workings of the world that promises to unmask occult forces.123 We see this in the regular use by Islamists of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, or their insistence that it was the US or the Jews who were responsible for 9/11. We see it in the belief widely held among Islamists that the West created the Islamic State. And we see it in their not entirely consistent claims that ‘moderate’ Islam is also a western plot.

In the face of such diabolical forces, the Brotherhood has remained confident that through divine guidance and Godly endurance it will achieve eventual victory. This is reflected in its theologisation of history, where Islamists such as Hamas can evoke the Battle of Khaybar, the Prophet Muhammad’s victory against the Jews of that place in the seventh century, as a harbinger of victory in the present. It is this same faith, too, which informs the Brotherhood’s response to the disasters that befell it in Egypt in 1954 and 2013. Its defeats are seen as tests of faith and destined to be overturned.124

But it is also important to note that the deadliest enemies of Islamists are often other Muslims. Leave aside President Sisi, Shaikh Muhammad bin Zayed, King Abdullah of Jordan, Shaikh Muhammad bin Zaid, Prince Muhammad bin Salman or other authoritarian Muslim rulers whom Islamists and their allies stigmatise. Consider those ordinary Muslims or former Muslims who regularly and at some cost speak out against the excesses and presumptions of Islamists, which they see as tarnishing the name of Islam.125 They do not deny that Islamists are also Muslim: to do so would be to fall into the very trap Islamists have set, that of takfîr, the denunciation of other Muslims as infidel, which casts them out of the community and exposes them to mortal danger.126 Historically, this anathema – like the declaration of heresy – tended to be reserved for extreme situations and often only reluctantly deployed.127 Many Islamists on the other hand take their lead from Qutb, who declared that all existing Muslim societies – and by implication their rulers and those living there -- were effectively un-

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124. For the MB’s theologisation of history see for example Milton-Edwards and Farrell, 2010, 213 and 274; and Michaël Béchir Ayyari, Ennahda and the Test of Power (2011-2013) (delivered at John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding and IIFS Workshop on The Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Spring, London, 9-11 September 2013): “The problem was that Islamic contestation was not dead and the Arab Spring made lots of Islamists believe that these quasi world-wide-scale changeements were a kind of divine sign, reviving Islamic millenarianism” – English slightly adapted). Ashour 2015 quotes a military supporter of the 2011 revolution: “They believe that if they have patience... God is going to intervene last minute to save them as a result of their patience.”
125. An instructive example is Egypt where the anti-Islamist tamarudd movement succeeded in 2013 in putting millions of mostly pious Muslims on the streets to protest against the then EMB-dominated government. The success of the anti-MB forces would not have been possible, for all the efforts of certain influential figures and external funding, without substantial domestic support, based on rational assessments of the MB’s competence and not unreasonable fears about their intentions, from ordinary Egyptians and the institutions of state. Kandil 2015 is excellent on this phenomenon. Other examples are the Algerian writer, Kamel Daoud, forced to spend much of his life in exile in France because of threats from Islamists, and indeed the anti-Islamist Bangladeshi bloggers who have paid with their lives in recent years for daring to criticise Islamist extremism in their own country. See US-Bangladesh blogger Avijit Roy hacked to death, BBC News 27 February 2015 at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-31656222, and Jason Burke and Saad Hammadi, Bangladesh blogger killed by machete gang had asked for police protection, The Guardian, 7 August 2015 at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/07/machete-gang-kills-secular-bangladeshi-blogger-niloy-shakrabarti.
126. As with Nasr Abu Zaid and Farag Foda in Egypt in the 1980s. Ghattas 2020 is excellent on these cases, as is Ajami 1998.
127. On the whole subject see Camilla Adang, Hassan Ansari, Maribel Fierro and Sabine Schmidtke, Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfîr, Brill, 2016 and Lahoud 2010. For a more political perspective see, for example, Ray 1999, 41-2 and Gilles Kepel, Away from Chaos: The Middle East and the Challenge to the West, Columbia 2020, 13 and 211. The original takfîris were the Khawarij, a group of warriors in early Islam who seceded – “khawarij” - from the forces of the Prophet’s son-in-law and eventual fourth Caliph Ali when he resorted to arbitration to resolve a conflict over the succession. It is they who coined the phrase “la hukma illa li-illahi” – “judgement/dominion belongs to God alone”, the ultimate origin of the doctrine of “halâkimiyâ”, which Mawdudi and Qutb. See Lahoud 2010 277f and Encyclopedia of Islam sv. The term Khawarij was applied to groups of dissenters in the Islamic Middle Ages (there is a lintel inscription preserved inside Qal’at Nimrud, the citadel of the great Mamluk Sultan, Baibars, in the Golan Heights, where the term is paired with “mutammaridâna” – ‘rebels’) and by critics to the MB as early as 1948 (Mitchell 1993, 320). It is now often used to describe jihadis like Al Qaeda and its offshoots - sometimes by themselves. Ayman Al Zawahiri, for example, stigmatized ISIL as Khawarij in an audio recording on 8 May 2016: see Sam Heller, Al-Qaeda’s Al-Zawarij Plays Politics, RFERL 22 May 2016 at http://www.rferl.org/content/al-Qaeda-al-Zawarij-plays-politics/27746629.html. Takfîr is largely but not exclusively Sunni. It seems occasionally to have been used among Shia communities too, often to stigmatise rival Shia groups, even allegedly in the earliest days and then, for example, by the late C18th/early C19th Ulûl mujtahids, Vahid Behbehani and Muhammad al Tabataba’i, against Akhbaris and Sufis: see Zachary M. Heen, Usuli Shi’ism: The Emergence of an Islamic Reform Movement in Early Modern Iraq and Iran, PhD Dissertation submitted to the Department of History, University of Utah, 2011, 67, 79 and 106 at http://bahai-library.com/pdf/h/heen_usuli_shisim-hidden.pdf. Devji 2015 seeks to modify our understanding of this self-ascription by locating it in a world of floating signifiers.
Islamic. It is an accusation they deploy with gay abandon. 

Islamism in the West

Historically, through its critique of European colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa and its championing of an Islamic Caliphate, the MB developed wider ambitions. This started with expansion into the region but also into Islamic-majority regions in the Horn of Africa and the Balkans. Then, largely as an unplanned consequence of Nasser’s repression after 1954 and the subsequent flight of many senior figures into exile in the West, it developed an international network outside the Arab and Islamic worlds, including branches in the US and Europe, notably Germany, Switzerland, France and the UK. This gave impressive resilience to the existing Brotherhood model and added new fields of expansion, particularly among the growing communities of Arab and other Muslims in Europe and the US. In 1963 the MB sought to formalise its presence in Europe with the establishment in Germany of a secretariat under a senior Syrian MB figure, Issam al-Attar. Simultaneously, a prominent Egyptian exile, Yusuf Nada, built a complex personal, business and banking network from his base in the West.
in Lugano, Switzerland. There was a similar trajectory in the US.\footnote{131}

Muslim Brothers and other Islamists had established themselves in the UK,\footnote{132} Germany and Austria by the early 1960s. And Europe became an important base for the MB’s growing global networks from the 1970s onwards. After the release of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (EMB) leadership by Sadat, they re-established their governing structures at a meeting in Mecca and regrouped with others in London in 1973 to establish the Islamic Centre of Europe (ICE). Moreover we have recently seen the creation by the MB-linked Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE) of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR: with a parallel Fiqh Council in North America, both of which have links with the Doha-based International Union of Islamic Scholars) which treats European Muslims as a single Islamic community.\footnote{133}

The MB’s international network for the promotion of its distinct ideology, attracting many who are not formally members of the MB. Indeed, outside of Muslim-majority countries there is an extensive, formal membership has remained shrouded in ambiguity. But since a recent book makes clear, this has been a deliberate choice on the part of activists who have preferred to operate in secrecy.\footnote{134}

By 1960, the Muslim Brotherhood had already established itself as a significant political force in the Middle East. It had begun to develop a transnational network, coordinating its activities across different countries and regions. This network was facilitated by the development of international communication technologies, such as the telegraph and telephone, as well as by the personal networks of MB members.

The MB established a number of key institutions, including the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT) in London, which was established by Qaradawi in 1986, and was initially managed by the late Saudi financier and MB member Adnan bin Abdullah. The IIIT was later succeeded by the European Council for Development and Research (ECODIS) in 1990, which was also managed by the MB.

By the late 1990s, the MB had established a significant presence in Europe, with a network of mosques, schools, and other institutions. The MB also established a number of international organisations, including the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), which was established in 2004.

The MB’s activities in Europe were coordinated by the MB’s European Office (MOE), which was established in 1992. The MOE was responsible for coordinating the activities of the MB’s European branches, and for supporting the work of MB members in Europe.

The MB’s activities in Europe were also facilitated by the development of international communication technologies, such as the internet. The MB established a number of websites, including the European Muslim News (EMN) and the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT) website. These websites were used to disseminate the MB’s ideology and to coordinate the activities of MB members in Europe.

In conclusion, the MB’s activities in Europe were facilitated by a number of factors, including the development of international communication technologies, the establishment of key institutions, and the coordination of the activities of MB members by the MB’s European Office (MOE). Despite the challenges faced by MB members in Europe, the MB has managed to establish a significant presence in the region, and has been able to coordinate its activities across different countries and regions.
Still, the MB has long been an effective and disciplined communicator, through books, cassettes, magazines, and local TV channels. But satellite channels, websites and social media have enabled the MB, like other Islamist groups, to project a presence and message internationally in ways barely imaginable 30 years ago. The best example is, of course, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian Islamist preacher and jurist given citizenship in Qatar over 30 years ago.136

And where the MB paved the way, other Islamists followed, including: South Asian movements such as Jamaat- e-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat; Iranian-backed Shia movements;137 and now the Turkish diyanet. Several developed in parallel with the Brotherhood, and there were moments of cross-fertilisation. Some, for instance, have roots in movements that originated in nineteenth century British India (Deobandism or Ahl-e-Hadith) and which helped shape what became the MB. For obvious reasons the South Asian groups tend to be more visible in the UK and their Turkish counterparts in Germany and Austria. There are also Kurdish Islamist movements in Denmark and

136. Qaradawi's relationship to the MB is complex. He was reportedly offered the post of Marushi more than once but has preferred to maintain an apparently independent platform while expanding his influence within the MB internationally. He was not excluded from the UK in 2008. See in general Bettina Graef and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, The Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, London 2009 particularly the contribution by Hussam Tammam, Yusuf al Qaradawi and The Muslim Brothers: The Nature of a Special Relationship, at 53ff and Vidino 2010, 98ff. There is an interesting critique of Graef and Skovgaard-Petersen for ignoring Qaradawi's intolerance by Khaled Houbi, Al Qaradawi ist kein Symbol des islamischen Toleranz, Die Welt, 2 October 2010 at https://www.dw.de/debate/kommentare/article6435289/Al-Qaradawi-ist-kein-Symbol-islamischer-Toleranz.html. See also Martyn Frampton and Shiraz Maher Between 'Engagement' and a 'Values-Led' Approach: Britain and the Muslim Brotherhood from 9/11 to the Arab Spring. Qaradawi's appearance on 20 February 2011 to lead communal prayers in Cairo's Tahrir Square was symbolic. He had been barred from doing so in Egypt after 1981. On his triumphant return he was flanked by the EMB leadership. Rumsi 2014, 1185 remarks that he "gilt an international reputation" in the years following 9/11 but this was followed by a "second-class citizenship", in that some prominent political leaders returned to that of Khomeini to Tehran in 1979 after 14 years in exile. Satellite Salafism, often Saudi-inspired, is also popular. This represents competition and also reinforcement for the MB: for example the Saudi Salafi Shaikh, with a massive following on Twitter, Mohammad al-Arifi (excluded from the UK in 2013 and often in trouble with the Saudi authorities) has frequently tweeted in support of the EMB. See also the excellent profile of Maliki by


Shikaki published his book “Khomeini – The Islamic Solution and the Alternative,” in which he expressed his support for Khomeini, the "philosopher and warrior." In the book, Shikaki quotes a fatwa of Khomeini that states that the effort to destroy Israel is a religious duty. Shikaki called for Shiite-Sunni cooperation, and mentioned the 1959 fatwa of Sheikh Al-


Shikaki published his book “Khomeini – The Islamic Solution and the Alternative,” in which he expressed his support for Khomeini, the "philosopher and warrior." In the book, Shikaki quotes a fatwa of Khomeini that states that the effort to destroy Israel is a religious duty. Shikaki called for Shiite-Sunni cooperation, and mentioned the 1959 fatwa of Sheikh Al-
Sweden.\textsuperscript{138} Initially the focus for Brotherhood exiles was simply on using Europe as a base to regroup after the disasters of the 1950s in Egypt. And their focus remained the Arab world. But as they became more settled and interacted with other groups, and as Muslim migration into Europe accelerated, new opportunities arose to shape politics in the countries of settlement.

This has produced a new landscape of Islamist politics in the West, populated by a wide variety of different actors, sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating. They have transferred the turbulent and contestatory politics of Muslim-majority polities, where the goal is to capture power in order to make governance more Islamic (as they define it), to the very different very different of the western secular state. The aim is to carve out space for the expansion of an activist Islamist movement, which they hope will shape the secular polity in ways that both bolster and confirm their authority as agents of divinely-sanctioned change.\textsuperscript{139}

And yet, despite their pretensions, many of these actors are not religious scholars and pursue wholly temporal ambitions. In this sense, someone like Qaradawi is an outlier. His scholarly credentials are not typical of the average Islamist activist, who instead is likely to be a member of the professional lower middle-class and operates within the framework of a secular (with a small ‘s’) organisation, which purports to speak for a faith bloc. Their goals are social and political before they are theological.

They act as privileged gatekeepers, both to a constructed ‘Muslim’ community, which they claim the right to define and represent, and to an Islamic tradition they claim the right to interpret.\textsuperscript{140} In so doing, they seek to mobilise Muslims behind an agenda of communalism, sustained by a narrative of grievance and victimhood, in the service of an ideology that at its heart contest the legitimate foundations of the modern western state.\textsuperscript{141} That


\textsuperscript{139} Because of the historical connections between the AKP and Hamas, see for example Joby Warrick, Double Game? Even as it Battles ISIS, Turkey Gives Other Extremists Shelter, The Washington Post, 10 July 2016 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/double-game-even-as-it-battles-isis-turkey-gives-other-extremists-shelter/2016/07/10/86cco040-4053-11e6-a66f-aade1883b0b1_story.html

\textsuperscript{140} In terms of the position of Muslim minorities in secular western democracies is entirely new, there is nothing authentic or traditional about it, of course. Karasoul 2018 is good on this. For Qaradawi’s views on the ‘jurisprudence of minorities’ (fiqh al-aqiṣiyât) see particularly 110 and 324ff. And for an in-depth treatment of the issue see Uriya Shavit, Sha’irs and Muslim Minorities: The wasati and salafi approaches to fiqh al-aqiṣiyât at Muslim, OUP 2015.

\textsuperscript{141} The 1979 Iranian revolution, the conflict in Afghanistan, the Russian-Afghan and the Balkan wars were all much more focal points for this narrative. Vidino 2010 gives a good account of this process. There are also striking personal accounts from British and other Muslims – Islamists and non-Islamists - in the BBC Radio 4 documentary, How Islam Got Political, 10 November 2005 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hlt programmes/analysis/transcripts/10_11_05.txt. One says, “What these HT (sc Hizb-ut-Tahrir) members taught me was that Islam is not a religion. It is an ideology, that something has political, economic and social system and religion is just something within it, something personal between you and God and the personal code between you and God. So this sort of capitulated me more than anything else that was happening in youth culture.” In terms of victimhood and confrontation, the comments of the former radical, Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, are highly relevant: “I think political Islam - the road it has put us on is a road to destruction. I think today, as a result of this approach, we are against everybody. We simply cannot afford to have the whole world against us. We have to have friends. Every project, idea we have is based on some kind of a confrontation and I think the time has come that Muslims wake up and challenge these dangerous ideas.”
is why in Germany, which has the advantage of a Constitution setting out clearly the requirements of citizenship, the domestic intelligence agency, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), has no hesitation in describing even peaceful Islamists and Islamist movements as “Verfassungfeindlich” (“inimical to the Constitution”).\footnote{For the whole debate in Germany – of considerable interest in this context – see Vidino 2010, 155 ff. For the expression see for example the latest BfV report for 2019 at https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019.pdf. This echoes a consistent theme in all previous reports on the subject.} The Dutch and Austrian governments have taken a similar position. They routinely identify the Muslim Brotherhood and its various offshoots as damaging to social cohesion and the workings of a liberal society.\footnote{For example Netherlands Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, From dawa to jihad: The various threats from radical Islam to the democratic legal order, December 2004 at https://fas.org/irp/world/netherlands/dawa.pdf and my article A Lesson from Vienna on Countering Islamist Extremism, Policy Exchange, 17 July 2020 at https://policyexchange.org.uk/a-lesson-from-vienna-in-countering-islamist-extremism/} That in itself should give us pause.

**How should we respond to all this?**

First of all, we should resist the temptation to seek to understand Islamists through our own cultural or epistemological categories. There is a tendency to think of them as a version of the Christian Democrats where the men have beards, the women are veiled and they pray 5 times a day. Long-time Islamist activists like the Tunisian, Rachid al-Ghannouchi who announced in 2016 that his political party, Ennahda, was leaving the fold of Islamism and should instead be seen as a body of ‘Muslim Democrats’, certainly understand the utility of the analogy.\footnote{Tunisian, Rachid al-Ghannouchi who announced in 2016 that his political party, Ennahda, was leaving the fold of Islamism and should instead be seen as a body of ‘Muslim Democrats’} But it is misguided. There are undoubtedly many varieties of Islamism. And there have been reformists within movements like the MB who want more openness and plurality. But true reformists tend to leave.\footnote{See 1997, 7, in reference to the work on Islamic intellectual currents of the Syrian modernist poet and critic, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), “A Lesson from Vienna on Countering Islamist Extremism, Policy Exchange, 17 July 2020 at https://policyexchange.org.uk/a-lesson-from-vienna-in-countering-islamist-extremism/} It is also true strictly speaking that in orthodox Islamic jurisprudence the properly constituted politico-religious community is the caravan of salvation and therefore the only legitimate Islamic polity. But this reflects what Aziz al-Azmeh (again) describes as the utopian element in Islamic political thought, which in practice Muslim rulers have invariably sought to reconcile with the more urgent needs of the profane present.\footnote{For a usefully detailed examination of the absolutist claims of the Islamic State and other jihadi-salafi actors in the context of classical and modernising Islamic jurisprudence see Arnold Yasin Mol, Denouncing Terrorism in the West: English Publications of Anti-terrorism Fatwa’s as Western Islamic Discourse with an analysis of the Open Letter to Baghdadi, Leiden 2019 at https://www.academia.edu/30084548/Commentary_on_the_Open_Letter_to_Baghdadi_upcoming.} In the actual practice of Muslim-ruled states the conduct of politics has generally been autonomous. The ruler and the religious community is the caravan of salvation and therefore the only legitimate Islamic polity. But this reflects what Aziz al-Azmeh (again) describes as the utopian element in Islamic political thought, which in practice Muslim rulers have invariably sought to reconcile with the more urgent needs of the profane present.\footnote{See Vidino 2020 has vivid and illuminating testimony from some of those who did.} In the actual practice of Muslim-ruled states the conduct of politics has generally been autonomous. The ruler and the religious community is the caravan of salvation and therefore the only legitimate Islamic polity. But this reflects what Aziz al-Azmeh (again) describes as the utopian element in Islamic political thought, which in practice Muslim rulers have invariably sought to reconcile with the more urgent needs of the profane present.\footnote{For the whole debate in Germany – of considerable interest in this context – see Vidino 2010, 155 ff. For the expression see for example the latest BfV report for 2019 at https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019.pdf. This echoes a consistent theme in all previous reports on the subject.}

Islamism on the other hand seeks to transcend politics through reliance on divine revelation.\footnote{See for example: https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019.pdf. This echoes a consistent theme in all previous reports on the subject.} Its adherents typically place little emphasis on the tolerance, choice and individual freedoms, which most in the West claim as consistent with Islam as long as it does not contradict Shari’a itself.\footnote{As Islamists themselves openly assert, themselves openly assert. See The Cordoba Foundation 2013, 21: “Since the Qur’an is the true and literal word of God, and the Hadith is the word of God through the teachings of His Prophet Muhammad, then salvation and justice could only be achieved by the adherence to the two main sources of the Shari’a. A return to the principles or the spirit of Islam is imperative – but without abandoning the principles and trappings of modern civilisation, providing it does not contradict the Shari’a. The spirit of the Shari’a is paramount, and since the preservation of life, religion, kinfolk, justice and wealth are the main objectives, then any man-made system, law, idea or invention is regarded as consistent with Islam as long as it does not contradict Shari’a itself.”} Its adherents typically place little emphasis on the tolerance, choice and individual freedoms, which most in the West claim as consistent with Islam as long as it does not contradict Shari’a itself.\footnote{See https://www.academia.edu/30084548/Commentary_on_the_Open_Letter_to_Baghdadi_upcoming.} The latter checks the former’s exercise of power; the former controls affairs of state.\footnote{See Lahoud 2005, 7, in reference to the work on Islamic intellectual currents of the Syrian modernist poet and critic, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), “Time, then, is subservient to revelation. Accordingly, what pertains to religion comes to be above time and consequently above history.”}
Understanding Islamism

is constitutively anti-Semitic\(^\text{150}\) and homophobic; its approach to education and societal cohesion is unlikely to promote inclusivity;\(^\text{151}\) it seeks power first; and as we have seen in Sudan, Iran and Egypt in 2012 and 2013, its...

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\(^{151}\) Mariz Tadros, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt*, *Routeledge* 2012 is – among other things - a useful survey of the MB’s social attitudes.
understanding of how to run modern states is fatally flawed.\textsuperscript{152}

Certainly, the core tenets of Islamism run against not only classical Islamic understandings of power but also their contemporary western equivalents. It is always likely to produce – at best – what Fareed Zakaria, Shadi Hamid and others have called “illiberal democracy” and culturally and socially coercive states.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{152} Israelis understandably emphasise the MB's anti-Semitism. But it is not a delusion, as a glance at Hamas’s Charter or the documents – including wiretap transcripts – from the European Muslim Brotherhood, Mediterranean Politics, 3 November 2016 at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/fulf/10.1080/13622935.2016.1230941. Jane Kinninmont, Moving Target: UK-GCC Relations and the Politics of 'Extremism', Chatham House, September 2016 at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/research/publication/2016-09-14-moving-target-extremism-kinninmont-final-2.pdf provides a useful summary of the issues for the UK. It has also become a wider concern: see for example the interesting studies produced by Universität Wien, Institut für Islamischen Studien at https://ii.uniwien.ac.at/forschung/laufende-projekte/ contested but not discredited by Austrian Islamists) and Lorenzo Vidino, The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria, George Washington University and the University of Vienna, August 2017 at https://extremismgouv.soc.io/sites/extremismgouv.soc.io/files/MB%20in%20Austria-%20Print.pdf. Note the comments of Marc Lynch, Did We Get the Muslim Brotherhood Wrong?, POMEPS, 3 February 2014 at http://pomeps.org/2014/02/03/did-we-get-the-muslim-brotherhood-wrong/, “The Brotherhood's commitment to democratic procedures never really translated into a commitment to democratic or liberal norms. It always struggled with the obvious tension between its commitment to Shariah and its participation in democratic elections” and those of Roel Meijer, Islamist Movements and the Political After the Arab Uprisings, POMEPS, 24 January 2014 at http://pomeps.org/2014/02/04/islamist-movements-and-the-political-after-the-arab-uprisings/. Berman 2003, 266 had already noted in the Egyptian context that “...there is no reason to believe that civil society activity will have democratic, liberal or even particularly laudable results.” Interestingly she compares the Egyptian experience of a hallowed-out state faced by “extremist movements ... supported by a vibrant associational infrastructure” with that of Weimar Germany. For an account of traditional Shariah approaches to homosexuality and indeed wider issues of lifestyle and political pluralism, see Brown 2016: his arguments are not entirely persuasive but he draws an interesting distinction between this and harder-line Islamists. The MB in power in Egypt welcomed the participation of women politically but that was strictly defined as subordinated to men and they remain ideologically opposed to gender equality, as the text of the constitution and their reactionary contribution to discussions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015 made clear: see for example Al Arabiya, Egypt’s Brotherhood States “Un-Islamic” UN Declaration on Women’s Rights, Al Arabiya 16 March 2013 at https://english.alarabiya.net/en/2013/03/16/Egypt-s-Brotherhood-states-un-Islamic-U-N-declaration-on-womens-rights.html. They also refused to participate in the mass Egyptian demonstrations of December 2011 protesting against violence against women: Juan Cole, The New Arabs, New Y ork, 2014, 202. It wasn't just them: “Members of al Islam (the Yemeni MB) rapidly appeared as the dominant force of such committees and imposed part of their agenda. On Change Square in Sanaa, a demonstration initially calling for the resignation of the entire government separated into two groups, one demonstrating for freedom and the other imposing the organizing committee in which many Brotherhood members were at one point represented: “Women who were opposing gender separation or were known for their liberal stance were even beaten up”: Laurent Bonnefoy, The Islah Party in post-Saddam Yemen, unpublished paper from LSE Conference on The Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Spring. 9-11 September 2013. There were similar assaults – to which I was witness – in Tahrir Square in Benghaz in September 2011. This is not to deny that women can be effective and even influential times strong participants in Islamist movements. But it always is within strict boundaries: see for example: Janine di Giovanni, Enter the Muslim Sisterhood, Newsweek, 19 December 2013 at http://www.newsweek.com/enter-muslim-sisterhood-244958 and Roula Khalaf, The Muslim Sisterhood, Financial Times, 2 November 2012 at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/167164a6-1e34-11e2-8e1d-00144feabdc0.html. The Syrian MB claims to be pluralist and democratic. It articulated its vision for the post-Assad future in 2012: see Syria Resources, Building the Syrian State: A Plan by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Carnegie, 17 January 2013 at http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=50663. But it has also said “appropriate values must be put in place to ensure that men and women continue to fulfil the mutually complementary roles God has assigned to them.” Leftena 2013, 172. There are some interesting reflections on what would need to happen for all this to change in Omanya Abdel-Latif, In the Shadow of the Brothers, Carnegie, October 2008 at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/women_egypt_muslim_brotherhood.pdf. It has not happened even inside Hamas. Tarek Masoud, Rethinking Political Islam? Think Again, POMEPS, 24 January 2014 at http://pomeps.org/2014/02/05/rethinking-political-islam-think-again/ remarks, “The brief experience of Islamism in power has given us precious little reason to review the view of Islamists as fundamentally illiberal. He goes on to suggest that this is not simply because they are Islamists but something in the Egyptian political system. But we see the same phenomena in Sudan, Iran and Turkey. And for examples from the UK see Perry 2020, 17f. Vidino 2010 has numerous examples of similar features from other MB branches and associates. Tharwat al Khirbawi, Sir al Ma’bad ‘Secret of the Temple’, 2012 records a respected Shaikh mocking the MB by saying that for them, “Islam is the solution: Muslims are the problem”: see Kandil 2015, 3294. El-Sherif 2014 talks about “ilegible, divisive and hate-based religious politics .... Islamists’ sectarian hate speech, threats against freedom and secular lifestyles...The Islamist ideologically entrenched, non-Muslim anyone who was not an Islamist... it eschewed liberal values of pluralism, tolerance, and respect for individual freedoms in favour of theocratic intolerant notions of communal discipline and authoritarian control”. Christine Schirrmacher, “Leftening Religion”: Apostasy from Islam as judged by contemporary Islamic Theologians, in Jan 2016 has numerous detailed examples from Qataradawi and Mawdudi of what Islamist intolerance looks like in practice.\textsuperscript{153} See Shadi Hamid, Temptations of Power, Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East, OUP 2014 (Kindle Edition). When Yusuf Nada, in the remarkable Mansour 2014 talks of Arab monarchies and military governments (including Egypt’s) as “idolatry” and their citizens as ‘slaves’ he is essentially saying they are un-Islamic and therefore illegitimate. This is not simply an Islamic version of Christian Socialism, Moral Rearmament or R H Tawney’s notion in the 1920s of a newly re-moralised social order in Britain. Its nearest European analogue may be in the providentialist and socially interventionist Calvinism of the late C16th and C17th that led to the culpabilities of the Rules of the Saints in Geneva, the Anabaptists of Münster and in England to that "society of souls", the Rule of the Major-Generals between 1655 and 1659: Paul Lay, Paradise Lost: The Rise and Fall of Cromwell’s Protectorate, London 2020 (Kindle Edition). It may be fantasy: but it continues to have a powerful appeal. For a liberal critique of all anti-western metaphysical and totalising ideologies see Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalil, Occidentalism, London 2004, a companion piece to Robert Irwin’s, For Lust of Knowing: Orientalism and its Enemies, Allen Lane, 2006.
This is not simply a historically contingent anomaly which can be removed by exposure to even more liberalism. Islamism – to which the Brotherhood is central – constitutes a profound ideological challenge to the modern western conception of the state and its foundational principles. And that same Islamism continues to threaten the constitutive basis of contemporary Muslim majority states, the embedded historical practice they reflect and the state systems within which they operate.

Naming Names

It is for these reasons, then, that it is important to name such phenomena carefully, honestly and openly. To do so is not some sort of malign Orientalist reflex. It is not to stigmatise Islam as a religion or a civilisation, as Islamist apologists tendentiously would have us believe: quite the contrary. Nor is it an undertaking means of ignoring or suppressing justified criticism of discriminatory practices. It is rather to draw a fundamental distinction between Islam as a lived faith in a complex world, and Islamism as an epistemically impoverished, but dynamic ideology.\(^{154}\)

It is important to recognise that the ideology which inspires Islamists is derived from authentically Islamic sources and reflects certain Islamic teachings. It is also important to understand that the methods by which these sources are selected and interpreted are heterodox\(^\text{155}\) – and that Islamists use them to construct political meaning and drive activism in innovative and highly irregular ways.\(^{156}\) As a result of this, they are routinely challenged by more traditional sources of authority in the Muslim world. In Indonesia, for example, the Nahdlatul Ulama, perhaps the world’s largest Muslim organisation, has for decades been a fierce critic of the local Islamist movement.\(^{157}\) So have many senior religious scholars in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Nevertheless, the way in which Islamists appear to offer certainty in an unstable world, continues to bring them success. Around the world, they have proven far more successful than their less absolutist rivals in injecting Islamist discourse into the public space\(^\text{158}\) – particularly in western societies where governments tend to keep their distance from issues of religion.

To challenge this phenomenon it is essential to be able to identify it. That is why the use of the term ‘Islamism’ and its cognates in reference to the trends I have described is now standard international practice, including among Arab and Muslim scholars writing in English or other European languages.\(^\text{159}\) In Arabic they will use a similarly specialised vocabulary to identify particular groups within an Islamic frame of reference.\(^{160}\) Arab Islamists will do the same – sometimes in order to distinguish themselves from others whose views they reject. But they will often simply use terms that suggest they see themselves not as dissidents but in fact as the only properly authentic Muslims.\(^\text{161}\) The Islamic State called itself that for a purpose: to assert a claim to be the only Islamically legitimate political community on earth.\(^\text{162}\) And this points to a central problem in any effort to remove the term ‘Islamist’ from the political lexicon in the UK or elsewhere. The real alternative is not some

\(^{154}\) On this point see for example Lahoud 2005, 20ff.

\(^{155}\) Islamic jurisprudence and exegesis have generally agreed rules, though they may differ between different canonical schools of thought.

\(^{156}\) There is a good discussion of how this works by The Change Institute, Studies into violent radicalisation: The beliefs, ideologies and narratives, The European Commission, February 2006 at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/doc_centre/terrorism/docs/et_radicalisation_study_on_ideology_and_narrative_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/doc_centre/terrorism/docs/et_radicalisation_study_on_ideology_and_narrative_en.pdf)


\(^{158}\) See the French Sénat Rapport 2020, 60ff and Karoul 2018, Part III for an account of this phenomenon in France and elsewhere in Europe. The analysis applies in the UK.

\(^{159}\) See for example Ayubi, Devji, Euben, Mandaville, Volpi, Tamam, Kepel, Roy, Lacroix, Hegghammer all op cit. For the use of “political Islam/Islamist” by Islamists themselves see for example the various articles in The Cordoba Foundation 2013.

\(^{160}\) For example, “al islamiyayun, al islam al iyayi” (the name of a well-known book on the subject by Muhammad Sa’id Ashmawi), al madd al islam, al sahwa al islamiyyah (the name of the wave of Islamist revivalism, a combination of MB activism and Salafi doctrine, that swept the Gulf and then the wider Middle East from the late 1970s onwards), al harakat al islamiyyah, al taratun al islam, al salafiyyah al ‘ilmal al maddakhat al jihadiyyah al harakat al islamiyah and so forth. A more recent coinage is “al islamiyyah”, which continues to draw a distinction between the ideological current and the religion while clearly acknowledging the connection. A good discussion of this terminology is [Hadi Salem Mashour (الحيدى سالم مشورة) Al Islamwiyah is not from Islam, J. M. Dorsey, Indonesia: A Major Prize in the Battle for the Soul of Islam, Free Center, 2 September 2020, 60ff and Karoul 2018, Part III](https://freecenter.org/perspectives-papers/indonesia-islam/), [Al Bayan, 21 February 2019](https://www.albayan.ae/opinions/articles/2019-02-21-1-3493677).

\(^{161}\) Hassan al-Banna named his movement ‘The Society of Muslim Brothers’. After his death Mitchell 1993 reports that his successors continued but rejected “al nahdhat al islamiyah” (Islamic Renaissance), which in turn would inspire the renaming of the affiliated movement in Tunisia under Rachid al-Ghannouchi. In Kuwait the main Islamist movement is known as the Islamic Constitutional Movement (al harakat al dustouriyyah al islamiyah) in Jordan as ‘the Islamic Action Front’. *Hamas* is the Arabic acronym for ‘the Islamic Resistance Movement’.

\(^{162}\) The Arabic acronym, Da’esh, which has a dissembling sound because of its resemblance to other words in Arabic meaning ‘tread/stamp on, run over’ or ‘monstrous/obscene’, still contains the word ‘Islamic’ encoded at its heart.
fatuous bromide like ‘faith-based violence’ (which begs the question: which faith?) or ‘ikhābi’ (why Arabic rather than, say, Serbo-Croat or Inuit?). If we take Islamists at their own estimation, then we should simply use the terms ‘Islamic’ and ‘Muslim’. That would be the real injustice.

And that is why the terms ‘Islamism’ and ‘Islamist’ are so important. They point – uncomfortably perhaps – to the reality that Islamists claim not just to be Muslims but to be better Muslims than others. Simultaneously, the use of such terms reminds us that Islamism is not Islam.

These are the critical first principles upon which any serious response to Islamism must be based. Without clarity of language there can be no clarity of policy. Semantic parlour games help no-one. At best they are a distraction; at worst they risk obscuring or distorting the nature of the phenomenon that we face. As described here, that phenomenon has a name established in academic and popular understandings – Islamism. We must not be afraid to use it.

163. On this question see Cook 2014. In spite of the special pleading of Islamists and their apologists, there is no Christian, Jewish or Hindu equivalent to transnational Islamism. Where is the Catholic Da’esh, the Lutheran AQ, the Orthodox mujahideen, the Old Believer PIJ, the Maronite Jal, the Wee Free Hezbollah? PIRA didn’t shoot, bomb, torture, kneecap and extort because they wanted the Pope to rule the world, believed in imposing a belief in transubstantiation on recalcitrant Calvinists or thought we should all be more Thomist. They did so because they were violent republicans and mythographic nationalists who’d read Lenin. And the Catholic Church consistently condemned its acts of terror. Sinn Fein remains a left-wing Irish nationalist movement, no less so now, when Catholicism has lost its traction in the Republic of Ireland, than when a majority of the population went to Mass every Sunday. When Jewish militants in the 1980s conducted a campaign of violence against Palestinian mayors, Shin Bet called them the Jewish not the Faith-Based Underground. The same applies to Hindu farangi extremist in India.


165. Or, as Karoui 2018 writes, “L’idéologie islamiste fait peur. Mais ce n’est pas la peur qui doit nous guider, c’est la raison. C’est en comprenant les rouages de la machine islamiste que nous pourrons apporter une réponse au défi qui nous est adressé ….. L’Europe doit s’emparer de la question de l’islam, sans passion ni haine mais avec exigence et raison : c’est l’intérêt des musulmans d’Europe qui doivent échapper à l’emprise des pays d’origine et à l’emprise islamiste, c’est l’intérêt aussi de l’Europe tant la question de l’islam et la peur que cette religion suscite est devenue commune et centrale dans le débat politique continental.”