The future of Islam
Religious Trends in European Islam

Jocelyne Cesari
Professor of Religion and Politics, University of Birmingham
Senior Research Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University

The atrocities and visibility of the Islamic State (ISIS) beyond Syria and Iraq have shed light on the fact that the battle for the true Islam among Muslims is as radical as the battle between "Islam" and "the West." This battle however has been ongoing for several decades (if not centuries) and is broader than being "against" or "in favour" of radical Islam. In this respect, the Islamic landscape in Europe reflects global trends of Islamic thinking and at the same time, local adjustments related to the minority condition. The first strand of Islamic influence in Europe comes from the countries of origin of Muslim immigrants, such as Morocco, Turkey, and Pakistan. In the 1970s and 1980s, states used Islam to maintain connections with their nationals through different kinds of organizations as well as through direct aid, like sending imams for the month of Ramadan. Nonetheless, this type of Islam does not appeal to the majority of the new generations born or educated in the different European countries. There is a cultural gap between the religious expectations of the imams and the Muslim youth. The latter demands for spiritual guidance that takes into account their political and cultural circumstances, which primarily fall in the realm of gender relations and ways of behaving with non-Muslims. Meanwhile, the imams trained in state institutions in Muslim countries do not have the communication skills and cultural understanding of the new generations, and particularly, of young women. During my numerous interviews with Muslims across Europe, I was often surprised by the virulence of the critique of the young women vis-à-vis this kind of

leadership. (Cesari 2013)

The second type of Islamic influence comes from religious figures who are not part of the traditional clerical establishment, and who posit themselves as contenders of religious legitimacy in both Muslim countries and Europe. The proliferation of religious authorities is by no means a new phenomenon, and has been the subject of many studies (Pescatori and Eickelman 1996). Both mass education and new forms of communication have contributed to the increase of actors who claim the right to speak on behalf of Islam in both authoritative and normative ways. Therefore, established religious figures, such as the sheikhs of al-Azhar or Medina, are increasingly challenged by the engineer, the student, the businessman, and the autodidact, who mobilize the masses and speak for Islam in sports stadiums, on the blogosphere, and over airwaves worldwide. This trend predates the Internet, and can be attributed to public education programmes and the increased availability of new technological communicative mediums such as magazines, cassette tapes, and CDs.

The most influential forms of these new types of religious figures also tend to be global. Of course, transnational forms of Islam are not new; after all, pan-Islamism – which refers to religious or political transnational movements that emphasize the unity of the Community of Believers (Ummah) over specific cultural, national, or ethnic loyalties – dates back to the 18th century. Today, the various avenues for communication as well as the circulation of people and ideas make the Ummah all the more effective as a concept, especially when considering that most nationalist ideologies have been on the wane. For this reason, I refer to these movements as "pan-Islamist," although the restoration of the Caliphate is no longer a major goal for most of them (with the

notable exception of ISIS and, before that, Hizb ut-Tahrir).[1] The *imagined Ummah* takes on a variety of forms, the most influential of which are fundamentalist in the sense that they place an emphasis on the revealed text and a Muslim unity that transcends national and cultural diversity.

A distinction must be drawn between on the one hand, the Wahhabi/Salafi movements and on the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood. Both trends dominate global interpretations of Islam but have different positions vis-à-vis modernity.

Global Fundamentalism

Wahhabism, as a specific interpretation of the Islamic tradition, emerged in the 18th century in the Arabian Peninsula with the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abdel Wahab (1703-1792). Wahab's literalist interpretations of the Qur 'an became the official doctrine of the Saudi Kingdom upon its creation in 1932. Wahhabism is characterized by its rejection of critical approaches to the Islamic tradition. Mystical approaches and historical interpretations alike are held in contempt. Orthodox practice can be defined as a direct relation to the revealed text, with no recourse to the historical contributions of the various juridical schools (*madhab*). In this literalist interpretation of Islam, nothing can come between the believer and the Text; customs, culture, and Sufism must all be done away with. Adherents of Wahhabism reject all ideas and concepts that are deemed Western. They contend that the Qur 'an and Hadith, when interpreted according to the precedents of the pious forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*), offer the most superior form of guidance to Muslims. As a stringently revivalist movement, Wahhabism seeks the "Islamization of societies," which entails formulating contemporary ways of life in relation to the conditions of seventh-century Arabia by "returning to the sources" whose "true meaning," Wahhabis argue, was lost over the centuries following Prophet Muhammad's death.

The original Wahhabi period and the global Salafi Islam of today have different audiences. Salafi interpretations are no longer limited to the Saudi kingdom but are now followed by Muslims around the world. The *fatwas* of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baaz (d. 1999), Grand Mufti of the Saudi Kingdom, and Sheikh Al-Albani (d. 1999) are the shared points of reference for their followers in Europe and the United States, and more generally throughout the Muslim world. The movement has succeeded in imposing its beliefs not as one interpretation among many but as the global orthodox doctrine of Sunni Islam.

The considerable financial resources of the Saudi State have certainly contributed to this religious monopoly. In the 1970s, Saudi Arabia began investing internationally in a number of organizations that "widely distributed Wahhabi literature in all the major languages of the world, gave out awards and grants, and provided funding for a massive network of publishers, schools, mosques, organizations, and individuals." In the West, this *dawa* (proselytization) resulted in the building of new Islamic centres in Malaga, Madrid, Milan, Mantes-la-Jolie, Edinburgh, Brussels, Lisbon, Zagreb, Washington, Chicago, and Toronto, to name just a few; the financing of Islamic Studies chairs in American universities; and the multiplication of multilingual Internet sites. As far back as 2002, the official Saudi magazine, *Ain al-Yaqin,* estimated that the Saudi royal family has "wholly or partly financed" approximately 210 Islamic centers, 1,500 mosques, 202 colleges, and 2,000 Islamic schools in Muslim-minority countries. It is important to note that these estimates do not include the number of institutions funded by the Saudi Government in its entirety or other sources within Saudi Arabia that finance Wahhabi proselytizing. According to some estimates, the Saudi Kingdom spent over $80 billion on various Islam-related causes in Muslim-minority countries. King Fahd alone invested over $75 billion dollars in the construction of schools, mosques, and Islamic institutions outside of the Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. This massive propagation effort has contributed to the promotion of Wahhabism as the sole legitimate guardian of Islamic thought. They also rely heavily on media to spread their message, whether through the circulation of handouts, the creation of websites, or the airing of satellite television shows. For example, in 1984, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opened the King Fahd Complex for Printing the Holy Qur 'an in Medina. According to the website of the

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A pan-Islamic political organization whose goal is to reestablish the Islamic Caliphate by peaceful means. The organization was created in Jerusalem in 1953 by Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, a Palestinian Sunni scholar.

now-deceased King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, the complex produces between 10 and 30 million copies of the Qur 'an each year. Copies of the Qur 'an are available in Braille, as are video and audio recordings of Qur 'anic recitations. By 2000, the complex had produced 138 million copies of the Qur 'an translated into twenty languages

It is extremely difficult to gauge the precise influence exerted by Wahhabism on Muslim religious practice. In the case of European and American Muslims, the influence cannot simply be measured by statistics. In a minority culture lacking both institutions for religious education and the means to produce new forms of knowledge, the easy access to theology that Salafism offers is one of the main reasons for its popularity. The widespread diffusion of Salafi teachings means that even non-Salafi Muslims evaluate their Islamic practice by Wahhabi standards. Even if most Muslims do not follow Wahhabi dress codes – white tunic, head covering, beard for men; *niqab* for women – the Salafi norm often becomes the standard image of what a good Muslim ought to be. Despite the strong presence of many different Islamic interpretations at the grassroots level, the Salafi revivalist interpretation of Islam dominates the Internet proselytization.

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According to this trend, the world is divided into Muslims and infidels, and the image of the West, automatically associated with moral depravity, is always a negative one. Also common in these movements is a worldview that separates the various aspects of life – family, work, leisure – and classifies everything according to the opposition between *haram* (forbidden) and *halal* (permitted). Everything that did not already exist or happen during the time of the Prophet is an innovation, and thus, *haram*. Khaled Abou El Fadl has called this particular spectrum of interpretation 'The Culture of "*Mamnu*" ("What is forbidden") (Abou El Fadl 2005). Islam as it existed during the time of the Prophet, especially during his

stay in Medina, is idealized and essentialized, functioning as an "epic past" and gold standard for life in the present. The smallest aspect of this period serves as the basis for the present day, for "in this era, everything is good, and all the good things have already come to pass."

Another characteristic common to all Salafis is their extreme inflexibility regarding the status of women. The rules determining proper dress for women – namely *niqab* (*face covering*) and a long loose garment covering the entire body – are presented as absolute and may never be questioned. This puritanical interpretation of female behaviour regulates not only dress, but also female roles as wives, mothers, daughters, and participants (or nonparticipants) in the community. Mixed-gender interactions are forbidden in both public spaces and schools, and male superiority is constantly reaffirmed. Additionally, fundamentalist movements reject political participation, holding that the believer must maintain a separatist stance in relation to public institutions.

Today, the burning question is whether these versions of Islam, based on an anachronistic reading of scripture, have a necessary correlation with the unleashing of violence and the development of jihadi movements, particularly among young Muslims in the West. These versions do in fact contain similarities with jihadi discourse, using the same vocabulary (especially when talking about the West) and often even the same religious terminology. This may explain the connection many youth feel exists between Salafism and jihadism. One must not assume, however, that all Salafis eventually become jihadis. Other factors, such as the level of political socialization and education of these youths, are more decisive in their attraction to radical groups. We should note that the majority of jihadis – such as Hamas or Hezbollah – are not pan-Islamists. The obvious exception here are al-Qaeda and ISIS, which have brought jihad to the global level. We have deliberately omitted both in this study as they are aimed at political action and not transmission of the Islamic tradition.

The Inclusive Approach of the Muslim Brothers

In contrast to groups like the Wahhabis and Salafis, there is also religious activism that does not require

a rejection of cultures. This stance is exemplified, for example, by some of the Muslim Brotherhood. Like the Salafists of today, followers of the Muslim Brothers consider the Salaf – the first generations of Muslims and companions of the Prophet – as their point of reference, and refuse to follow a particular school of jurisprudence. Contrary to Wahhabi-inspired Salafists, however, followers of the Muslim Brothers rely on *ijtihad* – the power to interpret the revealed text – as a way to construct a form of jurisprudence adapted to the circumstances of modernity.

From its inception, the Muslim Brotherhood has been a part of the pan-Islamic movement. Its teachings emphasize a return to the revealed Text, the legitimacy of *ijtihad,* and political and social engagement. The movement's political vision has continually evolved from socio-educational or health-related charity work to political candidacy, and passing through a period of underground activity (like for example during the political repression under Gamal Abdel Nasser). The Muslim Brotherhood has covered a vast spectrum of modes of action, which have been adopted at one point or another, if only temporarily, by almost all other Islamist movements from Egypt, the Middle East and the Maghreb. Political radicalization and the recourse to tactics of violence are by no means the fate of all Muslim Brothers. In fact, the movement has become divided over the question of violence as a means for political ends. Jihadist groups – i.e., those that legitimate the political use of violence (such as the Egyptian-based Jamaat Islamiyya) – developed and became radicalized in their confrontations with the authoritarian regimes of the Arab-Muslim world. The global mobilization of certain jihadi groups, such as al-Qaeda, is a direct consequence of these struggles between nation-states and their jihadi opponents.

Europe and the United States have become the preferred terrain for the redeployment of this movement's civically-oriented activities, as there are a number of different organizations who derive their inspiration from the Muslim Brothers. The leaders of all these organizations display a remarkable social and intellectual homogeneity. The first generation of leaders, all from the urban educated middle class of the Middle East or Southeast Asia, received their training in opposition movements within Muslim countries. In the past decade, however, a new, European-born generation from the educated middle class has achieved prominence in organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain. Both generations of leaders are involved in the struggle for official representation of Islam by the respective countries in which they live, and have been at the forefront of discussions with governmental actors for the creation of representative bodies of Islam. In response to their new democratic and pluralistic context, the Muslim Brotherhood has reconnected with its historical origins as an activist movement with a devoutly religious outlook. Its code of behaviour is based on respect for the institutional and political environment of the host country, together with the preservation of its religious and ethical heritage. This "re-evaluative" approach manifests itself, in part, in the organization of various educational, charitable, athletic, and cultural activities.

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Sheikh Qaradawi is the most prominent religious figure inspiring the followers of this trend who want to reconcile the demands of Islam and secular life, without losing their soul in the process. The author of more than 50 works, including *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism* (1984), Qaradawi became famous for his participation in debates televised on al-Jazeera. Born in Egypt in 1926, his entire education was focused on Islamic Studies; he received his doctorate in jurisprudence from Al-Azhar University in 1973. Along with Sheikh Faysal Mawlawi of Lebanon, he was one of the first to become interested in the minority condition of Muslims living in the West in the early 1980s. He is currently the president of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, created in London in 1997 on the initiative of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE).

This pan-Islamist elite should be distinguished from 'parochial' leaders, whose sphere of influence is limited to the neighbourhood or the town. Parochial leaders usually use cultural models taken from their Islamic home country; they tend to reproduce the traditions of the Muslim countries they come from. The pan-Islamist elite also differs from the bureaucratic leaders sent to

Europe by certain Muslim countries, to uphold the 'doxa' of their country of origin (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, and Tunisia).

Cosmopolitan Islam

There are also forms of global Islam characterized not only by inclusiveness but also by hybridization with cultures in different contexts. This outlook characterizes Sufi groups and certain members of the intellectual elite, as well as numerous individual Muslims, and may be identified with the term, "cosmopolitan."

In this particular context, cosmopolitanism refers to a certain mindset and ability to navigate between supposedly incompatible worlds and cultures. Irony and reflexivity are the two distinctive features of cosmopolitanism at the personal level. The purpose of irony, as both a cultural method and a contemporary mindset, is that of achieving emotional distance. Reflexivity, on the other hand, is defined as the capacity to contextualize one's own beliefs in order to make room for the values of others. For the individual, then, a cosmopolitan stance implies the relativism of one's own belief system, as well as a dialogic approach to other cultures. Although a cosmopolitan approach to global Islam is also present in the Muslim world, it is increasingly visible in the West and constitutes a significant part of the secularization of Islamic thinking and practice. Here, secularization means a growing emphasis on individual choice in religious practice. It is important to note however that all current transnational forms of Islam, including fundamentalist ones, emphasize the search for authenticity, emotional identification with the Islamic tradition, and religious choice as an individual matter. In other words, individualization is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of cosmopolitanism. Thus, to meet the criteria of cosmopolitanism, this individualization must be combined with an acceptance, or even an appreciation, of religious and cultural pluralism, which is another component of the secularization process.

This cosmopolitanism can be seen in the emergence and development of certain syncretic practices, most notably among Sufi groups. Most of them place an emphasis on the universality of humankind, their proximity to other faiths and traditions, and a praise of syncretism in terms of rituals and philosophies. In the West, this syncretism has gained an even greater force since

some of these groups do not require one to be Muslim to become a member. It is important to note however, that these kinds of groups attract more middle-class urban individuals who did not grow up in Muslim families but can convert into these Sufi groups.

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Cosmopolitanism is also a feature of a specific segment of the Muslim elite in the West, which is currently creating a space for exchange in which ideas, controversies, and slogans can circulate – at least in their English-language versions. Cosmopolitan leaders are more commonly drawn from the intellectual sphere – students, academics and other intellectuals, as well as activists and converts to Islam – rather than from the world of religious associations or mosque leadership. They are the ones most actively involved in reforming Islamic thought, although it is certainly still very much a fringe movement, and Western Muslims remain, by and large, more conservative and more conformist than one might suspect. But it is nevertheless a significant effort to break the vicious circle of the apologist mindset, which continues to dominate contemporary Islamic thought.

Conclusion

The variety of forms taken by Islamic trends demonstrates that the opposition between "moderates" and "radicals" insufficiently accounts for the complex relationship between religion, society and politics in the West and beyond. It is not difficult to understand how and why Islam can be called upon as a resource for combating a West which has been essentialized as a destructive and oppressive entity. It is in such a context that the more conservative interpretations of the Islamic message (Wahhabism

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and rigid forms of Salafism) have gained so many followers in Europe and in all parts of the Muslim world. However, a distinction must be drawn between fundamentalists and radicals insofar as a return to the fundamental texts of Islam, or fundamentalism, need not be a synonym for religious extremism that is minimally defined as the systematic rejection of other belief systems. At the same time, however, cultural globalization accelerates the process of the hybridization of Islamic messages with different national and political contexts, including those of Europe and America, by generating a heretofore-unseen reflection on the necessary conditions for tolerance and respect of the Other.

Nonetheless, the conservative trend seems to prevail over the cosmopolitan one, especially when it comes to transmission and education about Islam. One reason lies in the lack of strong Islamic institutions of education in the West and in the soft power of Saudi Arabia. The second reason is class differences and the fact that the educated Muslim elite is not at the forefront of education or transmission of Islam for the masses. In these conditions, education on religion and especially about Islam in different European contexts is crucial to undermine the appeal of global fundamentalism on which radicalism can grow.

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