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Neo-Islamism
Post Arab Spring

Tarek Chamkhi

Abstract

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The Arab Spring has revealed the rise of Islamists and a wave of Islamic movements across the Middle East and North Africa. The role and agendas of the Arab Islamists are up for debate regarding Islamists' commitment to democracy, pluralism and individual freedoms. Central to determining the truth of this is the evolving definition of "Islamism" and what it means to the political parties, to Arab Muslims and non-Muslims, how they view themselves as individuals and groups, whether and how they choose to participate in politics and society, the importance placed upon democracy, and what they view as necessities for their societies.

The article provides a brief historical background on which to describe and define the modern Islamist and includes analysis of differing political scientists. Features of Islamist political parties, namely the AKP of Turkey and the old and new Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots are described. The researcher offers a definition of neo-Islamism that reflects its most modern trends since the Arab revolutions of 2011. These trends translate into neo-Islamism having the following characteristics: non-traditional forms of religiosity; gradualism of Islamism; modernisation of Islam; nationalism, and; pragmatic relations with the West.

Neo-Islamists Post-Arab Spring

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One of the most obvious facets of the 2011 Arab revolutions is the rise of the Islamists and Islamic political parties. In the wake of that major political upheaval in the region, most of those Islamists were either in prison, in Western exile or operating underground. Some scholars argue that while Islamist militants and organisations did not trigger the Arab Spring, or even participate in the Tunisian then Egyptian uprisings, they are 'hijacking' the Arab Spring in their quest for power (Cavatorta 2012; Bradley 2012). Controversies about the role and agenda of the Arab Islamists, as well as their taking part in these revolutions; have reignited the long-standing debate about Islamism and its commitment to democracy, pluralism and individual freedoms.

Genuine academic interest in these phenomena has deepened since the Arab Revolutions as compared to that which occurred after the 9/11 tragedies. Political Islam has rapidly grown into a profitable 'industry' since 9/11, especially inside the United States. This has led to the emergence of a large number of 'half -baked' experts, especially in the media and policy think tanks, with the exception of a few unbiased names (Ayoob 2008).

What is Islamism?

Islamism is a relatively modern phenomenon within Islamic societies across the world. The term itself refers to the social and political expressions, whose aim is to integrate Islam as such into politics, state affairs, economics and civil and constitutional laws. The most accurate definition is probably that of Mohammad Ayoob; who describes Islamism as “a form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organisations that pursue political objectives” (Ayoob 2008: 2). Political Islam is a contemporary political ideology, rather than a religion, religious cult or theology.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's famous slogan: “Islam is the Solution”, indicates that Islamism is a socio-political movement in the first place. However, Islamism, as Greg Barton points out, covers a “broad spectrum of convictions, at one extreme are those who would merely like to see Islam accorded proper recognition in national life in terms of national symbols. At the other extreme are those who want to see the radical transformation of society and politics, by whatever means, into an absolute theocracy” (Ayoob 2008). However, the growth of the Islamist extremism and so called Islamic terrorism has made Islamist movements synonymous with al-Qaeda and alike international groups. (Cavatorta 2013; Roy 2012)

The Tunisian and Egyptian elections in 2011 have shown that no single Islamic party can claim a monopoly over the expression 'Islam' in the political sphere. (Roy 2012d) Islamist extremism, to quote Dalacoura,

constitutes only one element in a wider and more complex picture. Most Islamist movements in the Middle East have taken steps towards moderation and, in particular, towards incorporating human rights and democratic principles into their ideological discourse (Dalacoura 2007:X).

The roots of political Islam are as old as Islam itself. In the days and months following the death of the Prophet Mohamed, various Islamist groups came into existence. Although not all called for Islam as a ready-made solution for their emerging societal problems or political struggles, Islamists were involved in the public arena as political parties, scholastic or sectarian communities called *madhab* (*Sunni, Shia, Alavi,* etc). The most highly regarded scholars and authorities in the field were the Islamic theologians, specialised in dialectic and rhetoric, known as *Ulamaa Kalām* (literally, speech scientists). Kalām is the Islamic philosophy of seeking theological principles through dialectic.

Muslim political theorists "were and are engaged in a series of debates within Islamic tradition about for example, the nature of political authority, the relationship between reason and revealed knowledge, and the proper way to be a Muslim" (Euben, 2006: 298). Islamic philosophers discussed theological themes, such as the holy books, the prophets and messengers, how to prove the existence of God and the God sovereignty, but they also discussed highly controversial political issues in depth.

Ever since that early stage of the Muslim state, scholars and intellectuals have often been used by secular and religious rulers alike, to justify, manipulate and misguide the Muslim communities about their breaches of the sacred texts and to cover their illegal deeds.

Over twelve centuries of Islam, the huge amount of debates hardly ever evolved into an independent Islamic political science, nor even did it reach the extent of developing tools to define and protect personal political rights, public liberties, transition and share of power. As a matter of fact, the modern concept of reinstalling Islam into public life and considering politics an authentic part of religion was developed by 19th and 20th century thinkers who were motivated by the provocation of direct contact with

the West. The most prominent of these thinkers are Jamal Eddin al-Afghani, Mohammed Abdah and Mohammed Rashid Rida, the founder of a famous intellectual magazine called el-Manar. Hassan Al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, reportedly worked with Rida and was strongly influenced by his reformist opinions.

Al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh's reformist views of authentic Islam as being a rational religion should be seen within a long tradition of *tajdid* (renewal) and *islah* (reform) in Islamic intellectual history and jurisprudence over centuries (Euben, 2006: 301). The long standing Islamic debates about reasoning (*'aql*) and transmission (*naql*) demonstrate a high level of philosophy and independent judgment (*ijtihad*). Al-Afgani and Abduh "argued that Islam was a rational religion and should be interpreted in ways that could be applied directly to modern life. They believed traditional-bound Muslim leaders had led society astray and that religious thinking should instead be reformed and used as a vehicle for progress" (Abdo 2000: 6).

Islamism's special focus on Islamic political theology, opinion and regulation continued alongside the emerging Islamic states until the fall of Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish modern secular national state by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938) in 1923. A year later, Ataturk abolished the Ottoman Caliphate which was "deemed a universal trauma for nearly all Islamists" worldwide (Al-Rahim, 2011).

While Mustafa Kemal Ataturk blamed the Ottoman decline and destruction on the failure of a rigid Islam to evolve with a modern age, most Arab Muslims regarded the Ottoman defeat as a punishment from God for abandoning Islam. With the 1924 abolishment of the Caliphate, Islam and the state were officially separated. In response, the Muslim Brothers were established in Egypt in 1928, and four years later, Wahabis seized power in Riyyad (Elhadj 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood

Modern Islamism started as a group around 1928, when, to quote Robin Wright, a twenty-two-year-old schoolteacher mobilised six disgruntled workers from Egypt's Suez Canal Company. It was originally a social and religious movement but Hassan al Banna's little group grew into the Muslim Brotherhood. (Wright 2012a: 4).

The Muslim Brotherhood, or '*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*', the first popular Islamist movement in the Arab world; is uniquely established organisation managed to spread to over eighty countries since its inception. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) founder, Hassan al Banna (1906-1949), dedicated his teachings to face the cessation of the last Caliphate, aiming for a transnational Islamic state. Islamism at this early stage that is, during al Banna's life, was direct, simplistic and appeared to contrast with secularism. It called for a bigger role for Islam in public and private life, in opposition to Ataturk's call for the state creed of secularism in Turkey.

Hassan al Banna's opinions of the Islamisation of state and public life set up an absolute ideology about Islam as the only solution for political weakness, underdevelopment, imperialism and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The MB became active in Palestine in the 1930s, just a few years after its founding, providing arms and trained fighters to resist both the British occupation and the invasion of Jewish Zionist settlers (Hessler 2012). Al Banna himself rejected the use of political violence of Jihad within Egyptian society, despite the fact that during the next eighty years, various Egyptian rulers accused the MB of using politically motivated violence or terrorism.

The MB constructed Islam as a modern ideology, and arguably politicised the Islamic faith, and chose not to add religiosity to the lives of its people, unlike what other traditional revival religious groups did. (Roy 2013). This contrasts with the purely legal approach of *Ulamas* (Muslim jurists and religious scholars) who see the implementation of Shariaa as the sole criterion for an Islamic state. *Ulamas* believe that the Islamic state should have the power to implement Shariaa from top to bottom, or to re-Islamise the society onto the path of Islam. Such re-Islamisation is claimed as the duty of those in power (Roy 2013). Either within the MB or other similar Islamic movements, there is a widespread feeling that the cause of “society’s malaise stems primarily from a betrayal from within, rather than a domineering force from without” (Abdo 2000: 8).

Islamic thought during late nineteenth century and from the 1940s through the 1970s focused on anti-imperialist sentiments and socioeconomic concerns, while contemporary Islamic thought and Islamic sentiments focus on family values, nation-state internal affairs, traditional sexual mores, democratic transition and cultural authenticity (Roy 2013; Abdo 2000’ Stepan 2012). The 2011 revolution slogans by the post-Islamist apolitical youth or neo-Islamist cadres, was empty of anti-Western and anti-American slogans, and focused almost on one word: *erhal*, the Arabic term for ‘go’, and chanting “The people want regime change”. This 2011 slogan spread from Tunisian streets, where it was actually uttered as the as the awkwardly-used French word *dégage*, to Cairo's Tahrir Square, to Yemen and the rest of the Arab countries.

The MB has always strived to participate in politics and has run in open elections. Despite Jamal Abd al-Nasser's accusations of coup plot during mid-1960s, which was never proven and always denied by MB, and despite the widespread torture of MB prisoners, and unlike MB splinter groups such as *Gamaa Islamiyya* (Islamic Group) ‘IG’

or *Jihad Islami* 'IJ' (Islamic Jihad), MB was never involved in armed uprisings. "Seventy years of cautious politics hardly qualify a movement as revolutionary" (Roy 2013).

On the international level, the MB is a

transnational organisation that emphasises the independence of its national branches; it declares that its ultimate aim is to establish an Islamic state, but asserts its willingness to participate in the democratic process; it projects itself as pacific, yet some of its branches have been directly involved in violence action; it broadly rejects the West and Western values, yet is increasingly anxious to be seen in Western eyes as a moderate organization that can represent the voice of Muslims (Pargeter 2010: 9).

Yet, the organisation that has spread its branches over eighty countries has failed to lobby governments worldwide, contrary to what one might expect from a transnational organisation that may claim hundreds of millions of potential members, be it activist or mere sympathiser. The MB has "no great geostrategic design" as Roy observed (Roy 2013). However, the organization never stopped its general rhetoric about solidarity with and belonging to the Muslim *Ummah*, the worldwide Muslim community.

One of the most prominent contemporary Islamist ideologist, Indian-turned-Pakistani Abul Ala Mawdudi (Maududi) (1903-1979) was the real classifier of the major MB ideological concepts. His approach to Islam was quintessentially political (Ayooob 2008). As Mohammed Ayooob asserts,

Mawdudi accepted only politics as a legitimate vehicle for the manifestation of the Islamic revelation and as the sole means for the expression of Islamic spirituality, a position that correlated piety with political activity, the cleansing of the soul with political liberation, and salvation with utopia (Ayooob 2008: 67).

Mawdudi was the first contemporary Islamic thinker to write about the Islamic state in a modern ideological context. Al Banna wrote about the Islamic state before Mawdudi, but

his writings are mainly made up of speeches, sermons and letters rather than academic research or ideologist' approach. Mawdudi concept of Islamic state was the fruit of modernity and hence made him aloof from classical political thought of earlier Islam. The outbreak in the wake of decolonization of ethnic and religious riots in the homeland, the Indian subcontinent has led to the formation of Hindu and Islamic separate states in 1948. The latter, which came to be known as Pakistan, had much influence on Mawdudi and inspired him to adhere to the brand new concept of modern sovereign nation-state, which might at first glance seem contradictory to the concept of the universal *Ummah*. In fact, Mawdudi meant to link the concept of 'state' to God's sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*), which ultimately results in Muslims being governed according to Shariaa along God's path (Ayoob 2008).

One of the most charismatic thinkers of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, Seyyed Kuttb, was said to be responsible for the Egyptian *jihadi* and *Salafi* groups which prospered in the 1970s. Seyyed Kuttb was sentenced to death in a court-martial, and then executed on 29th August 1966 under Gamal Abdel Nasser regime.

Islamism has had a significant evolution during the past twenty years, at times leading to contradictory messages and agendas. Islamism gained ground during the 1970s and 1980s, especially after the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on 6 October 1981. Later on, the spotlight shifted to Afghanistan and Afghan *mujahedeen* warfare and related victories against the Soviets. Meanwhile, North African Islamists in Algeria were denied access to power, when Salvation Islamic Front (FIS) was pushed aside in 1992 in a military coup, as consequence of the Islamists win of Algeria's first free election since independent in 1962. Algeria entered a decade-long civil war, during which over 200,000 civilians were killed. To quote Olivier Roy; "[The] bloody aftermath

of the Arab world's first democratic election had a ripple effect on the calculations of Islamist groups across the region" (Roy 2012c).

Over the next twenty or thirty years, ordinary Muslims became fed up with the bloodshed that violent extremism caused. The toll of death and destruction that radical Islamism left in its wake also diverted interest in militancy and jihad (Roy 2012c).

Term Confusion: Post-Islamism, Neo-fundamentalism and Neo-Islamism:

The term neo-Islamism has been widely used in the last twenty years in the media, and consequently by academics from various institutions to describe the phenomena of political Islam. Academics such as Khalifa (2012), Ibahrine (2012), and Boubekeur (2012) use the term without defining it, though it appears that they mean the so called "moderate Islamism" mostly associated with the Muslim Brotherhood movements, and might be extended to Turkey's AKP.

Mark LeVine sums up this terminology confusion in the following terms:

What makes the people and situations I have encountered 'new', 'post' or 'beyond' the traditional boundaries of what scholars describe as 'Islamism' (that is, religiously-grounded politics or social activism) is that they involve a redefinition of Islam and Muslim practice in which the bona fides of a particular action or believe from an orthodox Islamic legal or theological perspective, is no longer the primary criterion for judging whether it is properly 'Islamic' (Boubekeur 2012: 206).

As for Robin Wright, author of *The Islamists are Coming: Who They Really Are* (2012b), she uses the term "neo-Islamist" to describe moderate members of the MB and its affiliates (such as Tunisia's Ennahda Party or Morocco's Freedom and Justice Party) reputed to be progressive, pragmatic and striving for *Shariaa's* goals rather than its literal

implementation. In this regard, the neo-Islamists, to borrow Robin Wright's words, can be described as:

more flexible, informed, and mature in their political outlook. For them *sharia* is about values, civilization, and political context. Neo-Islamists are seeking the ultimate objectives of *sharia* but without bonding each situation to a certain religious text. They believe that Islam is dynamic and not a set of fixed rules and tenets, but rather an organic belief system that can adapt to or live with the times. Neo-Islamists can be progressive and, on some issues, even liberal, neo-Islamists trust the reform scholars (Wright 2012b: 9).

Wright divides Sunni Islamism into three categories:

- The first category refers to classical Islamism, which includes mainly the Salafis and some ultra classical thinkers of the Muslim Brotherhood like Sayyid Qutb;
- The second category refers to neo-Islamism described above;
- Wright's third category is post-Islamism, where “its adherents separate religious and political discourse, although they do not divorce values from politics” (Wright 2012a).

Under Wright's classifications, the post-Islamists will not embrace classical secularism, but on the other hand, they will not propagate Shariaa. As individuals, they might be pious Muslims and consider values and morals to be pivotal in political life. Wright cites Turkey's AKP as a typical example of post-Islamism (Wright 2012b).

Olivier Roy opines that “the new Islamist brand will increasingly mix technocratic modernism and conservative values”, and that the Muslim Brotherhood post-Arab revolution, “may have to translate Islamic norms into more universal conservative values, such as limiting the sale of alcohol in a manner more similar to Utah's rules than

to Saudi laws, and promoting ‘family values’ instead of imposing *Sharia* norms on women” (Roy 2012c).

Francesco Cavatorta uses the term “new Islamists” briefly in describing the new religiosity associated with the Arab uprising and spontaneous cooperation with institutionalised political Islam. It appears that he means what Asaf Bayat calls post-Islamism (Cavatorta 2012; Bayat 2007 and 2009).

In the mid-1990s Asaf Bayat (1996) observed the emergence of moderate Iranian youth gathered around the reformist president Muhammed Khatami, calling them post-Islamists. Later on, he upgraded his terminology to include break-way fractions from the MB in Egypt such as *al-Wasat* Party, which during the late 1990s tried to gain legalization, then the *Kefayah* (Enough) movement of Ayman Noor during the 2000s. Bayat defines post-Islamism as the “condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency to secularise religion” (Bayat 1996: 45), a definition quite similar to that of Olivier Roy. (2008, 2011)

Cavatorta, on the other hand, explains that post-Islamism describes a phenomenon where

countless social movements and ordinary citizens have progressively become agents of change through their daily life. They do not need any sort of legitimisation from above to carry out specifics of behavior, making social processes extremely complex and detached from authoritarian control and from institutionalised organisations such as political parties, including Islamists (Cavatorta 2012: 6).

Fifteen years later, (Bayat 2011) stressed that “post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic or secular; a post-Islamist movement dearly upholds religion but also highlights citizen rights. It aspires to a pious society within a democratic state”.

Bayat describes the youth of modern Iranian protest as the same people who filled Bourguiba Avenue in the front of Tunisia's Interior Ministry on 14 January 2011, and the same people who protested in the millions in Tahrir Square leading up to the ousting of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarek (Bayat 2011). Among the similarities of these groups, is the understanding of the vital nature of social media to their political activities and to their practice of Islam. By this recognition, the 2011 revolutionaries have exceeded previous organised Islamist movements and have led the way. (Bayat 2011)

The changes which led to post-Islamism in the last twenty years according to Olivier Roy, do “not mean that Islamists disappeared, but that their Utopia did not block social, political or even geo-strategic realities” (Roy 2011). Furthermore, post- Islamism emerged as a frame within which Islamic politics have a chance to become more inclusive. Muslims may confidently remain pious Muslims but also be eager for a democratic state (Bayat 2011).

During the late 1990s and early 2000s critics disputed Bayat's concept of post-Islamism, arguing that what has changed is not political Islam (that is, practicing politics within an Islamic frame) but only a particular revolutionary version of it.

On the other hand, Francois Burgat and John Esposito (2003) argue that

the reassertion of Islam in Muslim politics challenged the presuppositions and expectations of modernisation and development theory that was predicated on the belief that modernisation required the progressive secularisation and westernisation of society. Thus, many have questioned whether Islam is compatible with modernity, democracy, civil societies and pluralism (Esposito and Burgat 2003: 3).

In this context, Esposito and Burgat suggest that the post-Islamists are re-Islamising their societies and the globe, and not by de-Islamising or secularising, as Bayat and Roy believe in their concept of post-Islamism.

Furthermore, in his book, *Face to Face with Political Islam* (2003), Francois Burgat disagrees with his fellow citizens Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel regarding the failure of political Islam and the post-Islamism concept. Burgat's view is that the "failure of political Islam" was, in many respects the forerunner of the decline of Islamism discussed by Roy (1994) as well as the founding stone of "post-Islamism". According to Burgat, for the adherents of the post-Islamism thesis, the failure or "irrelevance" of Islamism is primarily a result of the inability of various movements to defeat dictatorial regimes (Burgat 2003:180). The French experts on political Islam appear to have been affected by their exposure to the events surrounding FIS's defeat in 1990s Algeria. Olivier Roy assures the reader in his book *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994: 27) that "the coming to power of movements such as the FIS will only make more apparent the emptiness of the phantasm of the 'Islamic state'".

Roy may have come to a different conclusion, however, if he reviewed his ideas in the wake of the Arab Spring. Though the Islamist groups were not the leaders of the revolutions, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, individual post-Islamists were (Bayat 2011; Roy 2011, 2012).

Roy's insistence that political Islam has failed after the Arab revolutions is predicated upon his 1994 standard of the non-implementation of *Shariaa*, rather than on actual acquisition of political power (Roy 2012).

Bayat explains that post-Islamism

refers to a political and social condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters. Islamists become aware of their system's anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule. The continuous trial and error makes the system susceptible to questions and criticism (Bayat 2005).

Burgat goes further to criticise the promoters of “post-Islamism”, demonstrating that the processes of re-Islamisation and modernisation are far from being mutually exclusive. “The problem comes less from post-Islamism’s recognition of modernity than from the belated nature of this recognition: this modernity has long been evident, even if deliberately and explicitly denied in the discourse of the political actors concerned”. He gives examples of a significant minority of academic observers like Esposito, Fuller, Binder and Entelis who back this view (Burgat 2003: 221).

Within the Tunisian context, for example, the new religiosity and adoption of modernity before the uprising (while most Ennahda leaders and supporters were either in exile, in prison or underground) influenced the way in which Ennahda was re-established, behaved and, to an extent, changed during its revival in Tunisia after January 2011 (Cavatorta 2012).

Ennahda is classified as “post-Islamist” amongst its supporters, candidates and voters, according to Roy and Bayat’s descriptions. Ennahda leaders concluded that the events of the Jasmine Revolution that ousted Ben Ali, despite their absence as an organised movement, proved that if they do not catch up with the trends of the protesters, they would lose ground forever. (This is not to say that Ennahda leaders and supporters did not attend the protests in their individual capacity; they in fact did.) Ennahda would have to turn the old format of “brotherhood” into a true modern political party, “trying to rally a larger constituency than hard-core devout Muslims, recasting religious norms as more vague conservative values (family, property, work ethic, honesty) adopting a neoliberal approach to the economy, and endorsing a constitution, and parliament and regular elections” (Roy 2011a).

The Turkish ruling party AKP similarly provided an interesting example of “how the failure of Islamism in government in the mid 1990s led to rethinking of it in society

which eventually delivered series of poll victories of the AKP” (Cavatorta 2012). Notable here is the fact that the AKP and Ennahda Islamists members did not sacrifice traditional preaching within a movement or party. Rather, the groups as a whole made the adjustments which corrected their previous errors and changed their priorities from global *shariatization* to democracy and the nation-state. The same individuals belong to the same Islamic parties, but with merged interests, in an era with new rules and constraints. They are not post-Islamists; they are Islamists with a new world view.

Another popular term in current use is ‘neo-fundamentalism’, which describes a similar sort of Islamist from the social behavioral view, but with different political aims. Neo-fundamentalists believe in changing their country and the world through political violence rather than democracy and civil society. Olivier Roy coins ‘neo-fundamentalism’ to define the *Salafi jihadist* and more radical *jihadi* organisations such as al Qaeda and its fragments worldwide. “The contemporary trend called neo-fundamentalism combines technical modernism, acculturation, the rejection of both traditional Muslim and modern Western cultures, and globalisation” Roy explains (Roy 2008, 2011a).

What Roy emphasises here is that the old style jihadi, which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, was weakened in places like 1990s Algeria. Neo-fundamentalists adopted a new attitude post-9/11, doing their best to de-culturise their lives and their societies around them in favour of a Utopian universal *Ummah* (worldwide united Muslim community):

[Neo-fundamentalism] appeals to the well-educated, and the disenchanted, offering a system for regulating behaviour in any situation, from Afghan deserts to American College campuses. Contrary to the Islamists who wanted to build an Islamic State in a given country and thus became embroiled in nationalism, neo-fundamentalists are championing the transnational Ummah, they address the

Universalist yearning of Muslims who cannot identify with any specific place or nation (Roy 2011a).

In 2012, Olivier Roy considers the new wave of Islamists post-Arab Spring to be moderate and compatible with democracy. He goes further to contradict his previous theories by concluding “Since the Arab uprisings began in late 2010, political Islam and democracy have become increasingly interdependent. The debate over whether they are compatible is now virtually obsolete. Neither can now survive without the other” (Roy 2012b). This observation turns every Islamist into a post-Islamist who has reconciled with democracy and has turned it into the norm, and also acknowledges that Islamism and Islamists did not completely fail, so much as revisit and revise its old paradigms. However, the researcher distinguishes them from traditional Islamists, by classifying them as neo-Islamists.

Due to the recent Arab revolutions, the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy is no longer at the center of theological debate. What Asef Bayat (1996) observes is an emerging new form of religiosity, which seems more in tune with the democratic ethos. Furthermore, Roy observes that some moderate Islamic thinkers who lived in exile during the last twenty years, such as Rachid Ghannouchi, co-founder of Tunisia's Ennahda Party, came to the conclusion almost twenty years before the Arab uprisings that democracy was a better tool to fight dictatorships than the call for either *jihad* or *Shariaa* (Roy 2012b).

Definition of neo- Islamism:

From the discussion above, and in the absence of a proper definition, we propose the following definition of neo-Islamism:

Neo-Islamism is the phenomenon within the Muslim Brotherhood following the first Gulf war which has adjusted and developed since 1991 in response to the urgent question (to explain their failure to execute state shariatization and society Islamisation): “What went wrong?” and to be in a better position than the traditional Islamism of the 1970s and 1980s to participate and rule in a free democratic society.

It would be fair to state that the neo-Islamist phenomenon started during the 1990s with the Sudanese Islamist leader Hassan Turabi, who influenced other MB leaders and activists in the region, including Rashed Ghanouchi himself (Ghanouchi 2011). Also, the earliest “Islamic governance” experiences, (apart from the Sudanese coup d'état led secretly by dual Islamists Omar Bechir and Hassan Turabi), involved the Turkish counterpart establishing the first modern Islamist-secularist power share. The Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, or RP), headed by the father of Turkish modern Islamists, Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011), entered a coalition in 1996 with Tansu Çiller's Correct Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, or DYP) which lasted one year before the Turkish army and secular elite demolished the RP. Shock and political failure led the way to a younger leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the successful mayor of Istanbul, to review the coalition's methods and pave the way for Turkey's version of Neo-Islamism.

Professional pragmatic young Islamists such as Prime Minister Erdoğan have made the issue one of semantics. Erdoğan has refused to be called Islamist or neo-Islamist. He prefers instead to be called a neo-secularist, and advocates a neo-secularism which does not contradict Islam (Kuru 2013). The AKP denies being an Islamist or neo-Islamic party, despite Erdoğan's close ties with MB movements in the Arab world, support for their causes, and provision of logistics for conferences, academic support, and economic and commercial agreements with newly elected governments since the Arab Revolution, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt.

The concept of secularism, however, “[varies] significantly; as recently as 2008, the AKP itself was defined by the majority in Turkey’s Constitutional Court as being ‘anti-secular’ and only narrowly escaped a move to have it shut it down on those grounds” (Kuru 2013).

While it is difficult to compare the Tunisian Ennahda Party with AKP due to historical differences and experiences in the current strife between Islamism and secularism, (Torelli 2012) leaders like Rashid Ghanouchi believe that Ennahda will take the path of AKP and will achieve the same success. Arab MB leaders such as Ghanouchi, Yussef Qaradawi and Salim al-Awaa have gradually transformed party definitions of the state, citizenship, the Islamic nation and political participation in the last twenty years. This transformation in ideology would be necessary to align the party with the new religious youth, the instruments of change in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, and to encourage them to join or vote for the party in their first free election. This is where the so-called “post-Islamism” forces join these newly renovated parties after the Arab revolutions according to Bayat and Roy (Bayat 2011; Roy 2011). "Neo-Islamism" describes this new mixture of the individual ‘post-Islamist’ activists and the old-fashioned, but renovated Islamic parties, plus the latest ideological developments and tactical choices.

In a recent article, Roy uses the word ‘new Islamists’ to describe these particular Islamist parties that are facing this era of transition, from illegality under the old regimes, to power, and the enormous, notable changes in ideology and day-to-day politics. The term ‘post-Islamism’ would apply to young students and newly graduated unemployed men and women who never joined traditional Islamism or read its literature, but at the same time are as religious, pious and confident about their ‘Islamic status’ as any other

Islamist. 'Independent Islamist' may describe a post-Islamist who practices social Islamist activism, but remains outside political parties and organisations.

As was the case in Turkey with AKP since the early 2000s, Ennahda in Tunisia, and JDP in Egypt and Morocco, new developments and pragmatic strategies have allowed the neo-Islamists to make sweeping gains in every election since the 2011 and 2012 Arab revolutions (Khalifa 2012).

This new generation of Islamists who may transform the region and the Muslim world and establish a new era of politics and society, are worth studying closely to understand their ideas, agendas and motivations, as well their ongoing evolution and actions on the ground.

Consequently, we can sum up the characteristics of neo-Islamism in the following five main trends: the renewal of religiosity, gradualism, modernization, redefining nationalism and improving relations with the West.

1- The addition of new forms of religiosity: These are reflected in the Islamists' day to day private and public religious practices, due to media and communication revolutions, social media, satellite TV and a global wave of revolt and "occupy street" movements worldwide. Such new practices are demonstrated in the increased secularisation in private life and social context as Bayat observed in mid 1990s (1996).

American reporter for the *New Yorker*, Peter Hessler, summarises this trend of decreased religiosity during his visit to the Muslim Brotherhood's new TV station in Cairo in June 2012:

We chatted about one of Egypt's new *Salafi* stations (Egyptian slogan: The channel that takes you to heaven) which Ghorab said was boring. "when people just sit there and talk, it might as well be a radio" he said. I asked why there is so little religious programming on Egypt 25 (MB new Satellite TV station) "man is

not so religious all the time”, he said. “Even if he does all prayers, it’s only thirty minutes a day. The rest of the time we eat, we work, we have sex, we have love. Why would we make the station about religion, religion, religion all the time? (Hessler 2011).

2- *Gradualism of Islamisation:* While Roy and Bayat believe that the post-Islamist tendency towards secularization is both strategic and of free choice, the researcher posits that neo-Islamist secularization is merely factual, and if evidenced, would be only tactical. This socio-political behavior, which Torelli (2012: 76) calls de-radicalisation, should be understood within the historical context of neo-Islamism and neo-Islamists' struggles for their goals. This step involves both an official and unofficial adoption of AKP style pretended secularism.

The nature of this new generation of political parties focuses on quantity rather than the quality of its members' religious devotion. It is no surprise then, that Ennahda in Tunisia, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt, the Development and Justice Party (DJP) in Morocco, and the AKP in Turkey have opened their doors for membership to any citizen regardless their religion or religious practice. Under these new rules, Tunisian and Egyptian Jews and Christians are free to join these parties. That was not the case under old-fashioned MB procedures.

Similarly, some observers have noted that this neo-Islamism phenomenon has led to an environment where “we have political Islamists without Islam” (Al-Rahim 2011). He added that in this new Islamism, there is no clear “[explicit] campaigning in the name of religion”. The AKP example demonstrates an effective socially conservative campaign upholding public (Islamic) morality and virtue, whilst fighting systematic corruption largely associated with the oldest centre-left Kemalist political party in Turkey (the Republican People’s – *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP).

In other aspects, Ahmet Kuru, distinguished two types of secularism of state:

a- *Assertive secularism*, which requires the state to play an active role in excluding religion from public sphere, and making it a private affair; countries that embrace this form of secularism include France, Turkey (pre-AKP rule), Mexico, and until recently, Tunisia.

b- *Passive secularism*, which requires the state to assume a passive role in accommodating the public visibility of religion. It is the dominant paradigm in the United States, the Netherlands and Senegal, amongst others (Kuru 2013).

What AKP did as a half-step towards its final aims of full Islamisation, and with major help from the Gülen movement, has succeeded in moving Turkey towards passive secularism by defeating assertive secularists in elections over the last ten years, and pushing them back in civil society, the media and the bureaucracy. What Erdoğan defended in his 2011 visits to Tunisia, Libya and Egypt was passive secularism, not assertive.

Tunisian Ennahda has gone so far as to agree not to include *Shariaa* as the main source of all laws in the Tunisian post-revolution constitution. This not a tendency towards even passive secularism, but a tactical step imposed by the constraints of the political atmosphere. On 15 November 2011, at the evening of the Ennahda ballot win, and while negotiating with other secular parties to form a coalition government, Ennahda's Secretary General Hamadi Jebali, who would become the new Prime Minister later on, refers to the new government as the sixth Islamic caliphate. This slip of tongue led the liberal Ettakatol Party to suspend its participation in the new government, but later they reconciled after being promised powerful government positions (Chilton 2012).

These political choices are widely discussed in the latest MB ideologist literature such as the works of Qaradawi and Ghanouchi (Ghanouchi 2011), and meet an outstanding access within the ideological framework of gradualism and the Islamic public

interest known in Arabic as '*maslahah mursaleh*'. Tariq Ramadan, a Western Islamist ideologist and academic, declared that "what is good for the world must be good for Islam, and what is bad for the world and its people can no longer be considered good for Islam" (Boubekeur 2012; Ramadan 2012). Theologically, this new thinking of gradualism, accepting Western political values of democracy, liberties and human rights, etc., found deep roots in the works of some of Islam's greatest jurisprudence philosophers, like Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292–1350), Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) and Imam al-Shatibi (?-1388). They all agreed that wherever there is good and positive interest, there would be the correct religion of Allah.

Gradualism is change that occurs or should occur in small steps. In politics, a gradualist believes that tiny changes are better than rapid ones. The so-called neo-fundamentalists, according to Roy (2011, 2012) do not believe in gradualism and desire the Islamic state and a pious Islamic society instantly. Most of these forces see the neo-Islamism steps of gradualism as political weakness, forbidden '*haram*' concession, and they might even call ideologists like al Qaradawi and Ghanouchi '*kafirs*' (heretics) as *Salafis* did over the past twenty years.

3- Modernising Islam: Modernisation in this context means the maximum level of acceptance of the tools of modernity and most of its concepts, as most scholars observe in their discussions of the post-Islamism phenomenon (Bayat 1996, Roy 2008 and 2011, Cavatorta 2012, Esposito and Burgat 2003). While modernisation does not necessarily mean Westernisation or economic and technological development, neo-Islamists would argue that Islam is compatible with modern scientific inventions, cutting-edge technologies as well with most democratic and pluralist values that spread from the West.

Asef Bayat (1996) may be right when he sums up post-Islamism in the phrase of an Iranian diplomat in 1995: “We don’t mind destroying mosques in order to build freeways”. In fact, the traditional Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood has always maintained its aspiration towards modernization, despite hesitating about Western values of democracy and human rights until the early 1990s. It was then that the new Islamists emerged with their ‘controversial’ adoption of democracy, the nation-state, the right of women to rule, and condemnation of violence and terrorism.

Bayat and Roy focus overwhelmingly on the Arab youth's use of social networks and media, street sitting and protest, use of foreign languages, consumption of cutting edge western merchandise like signature jeans and American fast-food chains, etc., as an exclusive phenomenon of post-Islamists, (though Roy credits the practices to so-called neo-fundamentalists, also). The plain fact is, almost all modern Islamists use modern tools, or alternatively, Westernism, to various degrees. Even the *Jihadi Salafis* or *Hizb ut-Tahrir* cadres, who still believe that democracy is religiously forbidden and an evil Western tool of domination, are computer and social media savvy, and experts in the latest Western brands of various products.

No doubt, neo-Islamist claims for cohesion between Islam and democracy are still subject to discussion and waiting further testing in coming years, but the intention, at least, appears to be pro-democracy and against the use of violence in achieving political change.

In view of the failure of the old Islamism of the 1980s and 1990s and the current failure the Iranian “Islamic Revolutionary” state, some observers doubt the compatibility of democracy and Islam in the first place. One journalist has already assumed the “death of Tunisian secularism” following Ennahda’s election victory in October 2011 (Bradley 2012: 17).

The rise of post-Islamism appears to be a revision of the old Islamism more than a turning away from it. Most of the neo-Islamist young men and women, who might be engaged in anything from studying at Oxford University, lecturing at the faculty of medicine in Cairo or operating the cash register at an international fast-food outlet in Istanbul; whether Arab, Turkish or Iranian, Sunni or Shia, are aware of the corruption of the Iranian regime by its theocratic and sectarian attitudes and they do not want new governments in Tunis or Cairo or Rabat to follow the same path. They do not want religious *sheiks* and *mullahs* to rule them. (Bayat 1996; Roy 2011).

However, if the Arab neo-Islamists succeed in following AKP step by step, they would modernise their countries in the same way as their Turkish brethren did (Cavatorta 2012).

4- Nationalist Islamism: The international jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the followers and supporters of *Hizbu-ut-Tahrir*, seek the collapse of the nation-state and reestablishment of the global unified Caliphate for the whole *Ummah*. Hassan al Banna focused clearly on the Islamic union and Islamic state and encouraged the development of branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in neighbouring countries, including Syria, Libya, Lebanon and Sudan during his lifetime. Ideologists who came after him, for example, Seyyed Qutb and Abu Aala Mawdudi, talked frankly about the global Islamic community and an Islamic state that crossed racial and ethnic boundaries.

Neo-Islamism, on the other hand, has focused on what it has achieved out of the Sykes-Pikos agreement between major colonial powers at the end of World War I over ninety years ago (Al-Rahim 2011). The neo-Islamists tend to focus on state politics, though sometimes release inflamed statements or positions over Arab and Muslim events, and burning issues, such as the Iraq wars, the Palestinian Israeli conflict, and occasional oppression and imprisonment of fellow Islamists in various Arab states.

Some neo-Islamists refuse to consider the *Ummah* being brought to a single Islamic transnational state. Their parties do not accept members from other countries and their political and economic objectives are directed exclusively to the nation-state in which they live.

5. Pragmatic relations with the West: Generally, the neo-Islamists desire good relationships with the United States and Europe. After the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, Ennahda and MB leaders met with American and European officials to discuss future relations. Some Ennahda leaders went to Washington early in 2011 to “negotiate” with their American counterparts regarding the future governance of Tunisia. In general, MB politicians have maintained consistent condemnation of terrorism and targeting of civilians despite their criticism of the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which they consider invasion (Abdo 2000).

Another of neo-Islamism’s leaders, Erdoğan and his party AKP, enjoy a cooperative relationship with the USA and NATO nations, as Turkey is an active and strategic NATO member. Erdoğan is keen for Turkey to join the EU, despite the continuous rejection by its European neighbours, allegedly due to the country’s religious and ethnic nature.

Recent American State Department’s leaked documents and interviews seem to suggest that the United States’ new strategy in the Arab world is to work closely with these neo-Islamists, supporting them in power so as to replace the old autocratic allies, while continuing to fight *jihadis* considered as a threat to US security since 9/11 (Elmaazi 2012).

As Abdullah Elmaazi observes, the situation of the current moderate Islamic movement is similar to the developments seen during the peak of the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s. He explains:

In Europe, when the fight against communism was at its peak, centre-left social democratic reformists acted as the best bulwark against revolutionary communism. The Social Democratic parliamentary parties were able to steal the communists' thunder by subscribing to some of the basic narrative of Marxism, introducing major economic and social reforms; however, these parties also maintained a fundamental commitment to the tenets of liberal parliamentary democracy (Elmaazi 2012).

Conclusion

Some pundits doubt that the Muslim Brotherhood movement is changing conceptually, adopting democracy or considering any new or moderate versions of Islamism nor is it reviewing Islamic fundamentalism. American author, John Bradley, went so far as to suggest that Islamists are hijacking the Arab Spring (Bradley 2012: 2).

The West would do well to monitor the spread of Arab democracy in coming years. Judging from the recent military coup that deposed Mohammed Morsi in Egypt, the ongoing violence in Syria, and relative stability of the new Tunisian government, the only thing that can be counted on is that, despite the overwhelming outrage at Middle East's authoritarian regimes and the hope of the Arab Spring, Islamist parties are diverse and no future can be certain. Despite the majority's apparent longing for democracy, and Islamist parties' claims for compatibility with democratic rule, only time will reveal the long-term impact of neo-Islamism on the political scene in the Middle East and North Africa, and on society at large in that part of the world.

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