Coming to Terms: Fundamentalists or Islamists?

No one who reads or writes about events in the Muslim world can avoid the question of how to label those Muslims who invoke Islam as the source of authority for all political and social action. Should they be labeled Islamic (or Muslim) fundamentalists? Or are they better described as Islamists?

The issue has been the subject of a heated debate for two decades. For a while, both general and scholarly usage in America accepted fundamentalism. Islamism emerged in the late 1980s in French academe and then crossed into English, where it eventually displaced Islamic fundamentalism in specialized contexts. More recently, the term Islamism has gained even wider currency, and since September 11, 2001, it may even have established itself as the preferred American usage. Still newer terminology may lie over the horizon.

Behind the battle over usage lies another struggle, over the nature of the phenomenon itself. In fact, the two contests, over English usage and analytical understanding, are inseparable. Nor are they free of associations left by past usages. Here follows a short history of changing usage—itself a history of changing Western perceptions of Muslim reality.

The Debut of Islamism

The term Islamism first appeared in French in the mid-eighteenth century. But it did not refer to the modern ideological use of Islam, which had not yet come into being. Rather, it was a synonym for the religion of the Muslims, which was then known in French as *mahométisme,* the religion professed and taught by the Prophet Muhammad.

This usage dated to the early seventeenth century. It reflected a new willingness, born of the Renaissance, to recognize Islam as a religious system with a founder, like Christianity. But it rested upon the erroneous presumption that Muhammad stood in relation to Islam as Christ stood in relation to Christianity.[1] Nevertheless, the usage became pervasive across Europe. In 1734, George Sale, whose English translation of the Qur'an set a new standard, wrote: "It is certainly one of the most convincing proofs that Mohammedism was no other than a human invention, that it owed its progress and establishment almost entirely to the sword."[2] Even a century later, when attitudes to Islam had changed dramatically, it was still common to call the faith after the Prophet. In 1833, the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine demonstrated the change in European attitudes, even as he employed the old usage: "*Mahométisme* could effortlessly and painlessly accommodate a system based on religious and civil liberty … by nature, it is moral, forbearing,

uncomplaining, charitable and tolerant."[3]

In the eighteenth century, the Western study of Islam made enormous strides, and polemical denigration no longer informed every Western pronouncement. The thinkers of the Enlightenment knew perfectly well that Muslims called their faith Islam. They searched for a way to reflect that understanding through usage and thus classify Islam as a religion appreciated in its own terms.

It was the French philosopher Voltaire who found the solution, when he coined the term *islamisme.* Voltaire had an abiding interest in Islam, and wrote extensively about it, comparing it to other faiths, sometimes favorably. He also understood the role of Muhammad in Islam, leading him to correct his readers: "This religion," he wrote, "is called *islamisme.*"[4] Not only did his usage depart from Sale's, but so did his conclusion: "It was not by force of arms that *islamisme* established itself over more than half of our hemisphere. It was by enthusiasm and persuasion." The great nineteenth-century French dictionary by Littré quoted just this passage from Voltaire's *Essai sur les murs* when it defined *islamisme* as "the religion of Mahomet."

In the course of the nineteenth century, this usage gained ground throughout Europe. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in 1838, found the "root of *islamisme* in Judaism."[5] In 1883, Ernest Renan, pioneer of philology, published an influential essay entitled *L'Islamisme et la science*. As a French historian has noted, Renan's use of *islamisme* "did not have the present-day sense of the political utilization of Islam."[6] Rather, he meant Islam. It is in this sense, too, that Islamism appeared in the *New English Dictionary* (now known as the *Oxford English Dictionary*) in a fascicle published in 1900. It defined Islamism as "the religious system of the Moslems; Mohammedanism." Even the word Islamist appeared there, defined as "an orthodox Mohammedan," and the entry included this example from a magazine article published in 1895: "Judgment should not be pronounced against Islam and Islamists on rancorous and partisan statements."

There are two points worth noting about the use of Islamism and *islamisme* in the nineteenth century. First, while it reflected a more accurate understanding of Islam's doctrine, it did not exclude critical interpretations of Islam's character. In a dispatch of 1873, a British consul wrote of "the inherent characteristics of Islamism," which he called "deficient in vitality," "aggressive," and "carrying in its bosom the seeds of decay."[7] The French Orientalist, Baron Bernard Carra de Vaux, wrote in 1901: "*Islamisme* is a spent religion."[8] In both cases, the reference is to the religion of Islam per se—and in both cases, it is clearly derogatory.

The second point is that Islamism and *islamisme* did not completely displace Mohammedanism and *mahométisme*, even in scholarship. In 1890, Ignaz Goldziher, the Hungarian-Jewish Orientalist regarded as the founder of modern Islamic studies, published his two-volume study of the Muslim oral tradition (*hadith*) under the title *Muhammedanische Studien*. Other notable instances of its continued use in book titles include D. S. Margoliouth's *Mohammedanism* (1911), A.A. Fyzee's *Outlines of Muhammadan Law* (1949), and Joseph Schacht's *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950).

Only at mid-century did this usage expire, primarily because Western writers realized that they also had Muslim readers, who resented it. In 1946, the British Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb wrote an introduction to Islam in the same series that had included Margoliouth's *Mohammedanism* thirty-five years earlier. The publisher wished to keep the same title. Gibb assented, but he was quick to disavow the title on the very first page: "Modern Muslims dislike the terms Mohammedan and Mohammedanism, which seem to them to carry the implication of worship of Mohammed, as Christian and Christianity imply the worship of Christ."[9] In the text that followed, Gibb referred to the believers as Muslims and to the faith as Islam.

But Islamism also began to disappear from the lexicon from about the turn of the twentieth century. Many scholars simply preferred the shorter and purely Arabic term, Islam. In 1913, Orientalists from many countries joined together to produce the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. By the date of its completion in 1938, Islamism had all but disappeared from usage, replaced simply by Islam.

In summation, the term Islamism enjoyed its first run, lasting from Voltaire to the First World War, as a synonym for Islam. Enlightened scholars and writers generally preferred it to Mohammedanism. Eventually both terms yielded to Islam, the Arabic name of the faith, and a word free of either pejorative or comparative associations. There was no need for any other term, until the rise of an ideological and political interpretation of Islam challenged scholars and commentators to come up with an alternative, to distinguish Islam as modern ideology from Islam as a faith.

Fundamentalism and Islam

The term fundamentalism originated in America in the 1920s. As the pace of social change accelerated, Protestant Christians felt threatened by the higher criticism of the Bible and the spread of philosophical skepticism. They sought to reaffirm their belief in the literal text of the Bible and the "fundamentals" of Christian belief, including creationism. These Christians called themselves fundamentalists, a term that gained wide currency at the time of the Scopes ("Monkey") trial in 1925. At the time, it acquired a strongly pejorative association in the minds of liberals and modernists.

In the subsequent few decades, odd references to Islamic fundamentalism appeared in print, but they were rare and inconsistent in their meanings. "If you looked in the right places," wrote the British historian Arnold Toynbee in 1929, "you could doubtless find some old fashioned Islamic fundamentalists still lingering on. You would also find that their influence was negligible."[10] From the context, it is obvious that by fundamentalists, Toynbee meant Muslim traditionalists and not the new activists who, that same year, founded the Society of the Muslim Brethren in Egypt.

Only fifty years later did Islamic fundamentalism come into widespread usage, thanks in large measure to media coverage of Iran's revolution. Journalists, ever on the lookout for a shorthand way to reference things new and unfamiliar, gravitated toward the term fundamentalism. It was American English; it was already in

Webster's Dictionary, and it evoked the anti-modernism that Ayatollah Khomeini seemed to personify. The use of fundamentalism in connection with Islam spread rapidly—so much so that by 1990, the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defined it not only as "the strict maintenance of traditional Protestant beliefs," but also as "the strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, especially Islam."[11] By sheer dint of usage, Islamic fundamentalism had become *the* most cited fundamentalism of all.

Yet the more popular Islamic fundamentalism became in the media, the more scholars of Islam recoiled from it. The reasons varied. Some thought that the term fundamentalism failed to capture the methodology and style of Iran's revolution and comparable Muslim movements. Bernard Lewis, preeminent historian of Islam, made this case against it:

> The use of this term is established and must be accepted, but it remains unfortunate and can be misleading. "Fundamentalist" is a Christian term. It seems to have come into use in the early years of this century, and denotes certain Protestant churches and organizations, more particularly those that maintain the literal divine origin and inerrancy of the Bible. In this they oppose the liberal and modernist theologians, who tend to a more critical, historical view of Scripture. Among Muslim theologians there is as yet no such liberal or modernist approach to the Qur'an, and all Muslims, in their attitude to the text of the Qur'an, are in principle at least fundamentalists. Where the so-called Muslim fundamentalists differ from other Muslims and indeed from Christian fundamentalists is in their scholasticism and their legalism. They base themselves not only on the Qur'an, but also on the Traditions of the Prophet, and on the corpus of transmitted theological and legal learning.[12]

Other scholars, particularly those who sympathized with the new Muslim movements, protested that the label of fundamentalist unfairly stigmatized forward-thinking Muslims. John Esposito, America's foremost apologist for Islam-driven movements, made this argument against using fundamentalism in an Islamic context:

> For many liberal or mainline Christians, "fundamentalist" is pejorative or derogatory, being applied rather indiscriminately to all those who advocate a literalist biblical position and thus are regarded as static, retrogressive, and extremist. As a result, fundamentalism often has been regarded popularly as referring to those who are literalists and wish to return to and replicate the past. In fact, few individuals or organizations in the Middle East fit such a stereotype. Indeed, many fundamentalist leaders have had the best education, enjoy responsible positions in society, and are adept at harnessing the latest technology to propagate their views and create viable modern institutions such as schools, hospitals, and social service agencies.[13]

Esposito added that fundamentalism "is often equated with political activism, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism," a prejudgment by label. Unlike Lewis, who was prepared to make a

concession to widespread usage (it "must be accepted"), Esposito balked: "I prefer to speak of Islamic revivalism and Islamic activism rather than of Islamic fundamentalism."[14]

Edward Said, defender of Palestine and critic of Western representations of Islam, also weighed in. He did not so much object to the term (if it were properly defined) as to the way it had come to be employed *against* Islam:

> Instead of scholarship, we often find only journalists making extravagant statements, which are instantly picked up and further dramatized by the media. Looming over their work is the slippery concept, to which they constantly allude, of "*fundamentalism*," a word that has come to be associated almost automatically with Islam, although it has a flourishing, usually elided relationship with Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. The deliberately created associations between Islam and fundamentalism ensure that the average reader comes to see Islam and fundamentalism as essentially the same thing.

In this usage, claimed Said, "fundamentalism equals Islam equals everything-we-must-now-fight-against, as we did with communism during the Cold War."[15]

The term fundamentalism did have a few academic defenders. In 1988, the University of Chicago, backed by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, launched the Fundamentalism Project, devoted to comparing trends in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Confucianism. The project began with the hypothesis that the acceleration of modernity was forcing the faithful of all religions into a reactive (and sometimes violent) mode. Its organizers defined fundamentalism as "a strategy, or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group … by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past."[16] Some 150 experts on diverse religious traditions contributed to the project, and their papers appeared in five hefty volumes, bearing titles like *Fundamentalisms Observed* and *Fundamentalisms and the State.* The Fundamentalism Project was the most sustained effort to legitimize the term as a tool of comparison across religions. Yet its impact remained limited, perhaps because it never generated a single, powerful statement of its case. Quite often, the organizers and participants hedged their own use of the term with a thicket of reservations and disclaimers.

Sadik J. al-Azm, the Syrian philosopher, provided perhaps the strongest intellectual defense of the use of fundamentalism in an Islamic context. Al-Azm, an iconoclast famous for his past clashes with religious authorities, surveyed the doctrines of the new Islamic movements, and found them to consist of "an immediate return to Islamic 'basics' and 'fundamentals.'" Arab Muslims themselves, he added, had resorted to the Arabic neologism *usuli* (from *usul*, the "fundamentals"), as a calque for fundamentalism.[17] "It seems to me quite reasonable," he concluded, "that calling these Islamic movements 'Fundamentalist' (and in the strong sense of the term) is adequate, accurate, and correct."[18] The Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafi performed the same analysis and reached the same conclusion: "It is difficult to find a more appropriate term than the

one recently used in the West, 'fundamentalism,' to cover the meaning of what we name Islamic awakening or revival."[19]

The Dutch Islamicist J.J.G. Jansen reinforced this argument with a practical one. The term was convenient. "In a way the discussion of the word 'fundamentalism' echoes the discussion once caused by the invention of the telephone," he wrote. "Would not the term 'telephone' be much too simplistic? Would it do justice to the beauty and the many possibilities of the device? How about 'speaking telegraph' or 'electrical speaking telephone'?" Jansen spoofed those who proposed elaborate alternatives like "revolutionary extremist neotraditionalist ultra-Islamic radicalism." The definitions of these far-fetched creations usually were not much different from what people meant by fundamentalism.[20]

But the strongest argument for fundamentalism was its sheer ubiquity. In an entry entitled "Fundamentalism," published in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* in 1995, historian John Voll enumerated the most common objections to the term and made a list of alternatives. These included Islamism, integrism, neo-normative Islam, neo-traditional Islam, Islamic revivalism, and Islamic nativism. "However," he added with a hint of resignation, "'fundamentalism' remains the most commonly utilized identification of the various revivalist impulses among Muslims. More technically accurate terms and neologisms have not gained wide acceptance."[21]

As it turned out, Voll underestimated the potential of Islamism.

The Islamist Alternative

The resurrection and redefinition of Islamism, like its birth, took place in France.

In the late 1970s, the French grappled with the problem of how to describe the new Islamic movements that had moved to the fore. *Islamisme* appealed to French scholars for two reasons. First, it had a venerable French pedigree going back to Voltaire. *Fondamentalisme*, the loan word from American English, had none. Second, there was a certain reluctance to deploy the only French alternative, *intégrisme*, because it remained too embedded in its original Catholic context and too implicated in ongoing debates about authority in the church. *Islamisme* in any case had been retired from daily use as a synonym for Islam. Why not impart new meaning to the term? Soon *islamisme* was cropping up in the titles of articles and books.

The retrieval of *islamisme* and its deployment to describe the new movements did not pass without criticism, most notably by Maxime Rodinson, the greatest living French historian of Islam. "In the dictionary, *islamisme* is given as a synonym for Islam," Rodinson reminded his colleagues. "If one chooses this term, the reader may become confused between an excited extremist who wishes to kill everyone and a reasonable person who believes in God in the Muslim manner, something perfectly respectable."[22] For this reason, Rodinson preferred *intégrisme*, which he found perfectly serviceable provided it was carefully defined. But his objections did not persuade younger French scholars, who did not feel bound by entries in old

dictionaries. By the mid-1980s, *islamisme* was no longer simply, or even primarily, a synonym for the religion of Islam in contemporary French usage. Increasingly, it was understood to mean only one thing: Islam as a modern ideology and a political program.

It is possible to date almost precisely when the term made the crossing from French to English. In 1983, it had not yet arrived. That year, Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies organized its annual conference on "New Perspectives on Islam and Politics in the Middle East." Bruce Lawrence, a professor of religious studies, opened with an exhaustive survey of the pros and cons of the term Islamic fundamentalism, as well as its alternatives, but made no mention of Islamism.[23] Neither did any other conference participant. A year later, in 1984, the French sociologist of Islam, Gilles Kepel, published an influential book with the subtitle *Les mouvements islamistes dans l'Egypte contemporaine*.[24] In 1985, it appeared in English translation as *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*. The English translator had difficulty with Kepel's extensive use of *islamiste* and translated it as "Islamicist." A footnote in the translation made this apology: "The term 'Islamicist' is used throughout to render the French 'islamiste'. The loan word 'Islamist' did not gain currency until after this translation had been completed."[25] By about 1985, then, the French seed had been planted in English (though not much before that).

Initially, the term encountered some principled resistance. The American anthropologist Henry Munson, Jr., in a book published in 1988, listed the disadvantages of fundamentalism, but decided to retain it anyway: "I cannot think of an adequate alternative term to characterize those Muslims who advocate a strictly Islamic policy. The term *Islamist* strikes me as a clumsy neologism."[26] Clumsy or not, however, Islamism began to displace fundamentalism in specialized usage. It particularly appealed to scholars who disliked the supposedly pejorative associations of fundamentalism.

Graham Fuller, a RAND analyst and enthusiast for the new Islamic movements, made an early statement in its favor. Fundamentalism, he determined in 1991, "is an unsatisfactory term, suggesting as it does a strict reversion to the institutions of a medieval or even early Islamic state. This more recent phenomenon is better termed *Islamism*, suggesting not so much theology as an ideology whose implications are not at all old-fashioned, but thoroughly modern."[27] In 1993, the political scientist Louis Cantori likewise argued that fundamentalism

> conveys a sense of extremism and dismissal. In reference to Islam, in the world of scholarship, and now internally within U.S. agencies, it is being abandoned as being prejudicial and polemical. Instead, the term Islamism is used increasingly to denote the political manifestation of the religion of Islam. "Islamism" permits one to more dispassionately make distinctions between extremist and mainstream Islam.[28]

Cantori still noted that Islamism had not carried the day in the media: "Unfortunately, journalists especially still use the term fundamentalism and, in the process, fail to recognize and appreciate the moderation of the

Islamic revival's mainstream."[29] But Cantori left no doubt that the term Islamism was gaining ground in academe and in Washington. In this early stage, the use of Islamism was also a marker for scholars more likely to sympathize with the new Islamic movements.

In Washington, Islamism did gain at the expense of fundamentalism. The term made a few cameo appearances in policy statements, and then received an official definition from Robert Pelletreau, Jr., assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, in remarks made in 1994. Pelletreau warned that "Islamic fundamentalism" had to be used "with requisite caution," and only to refer to the broad revival of Islam. Within that broad revival, there were subdivisions:

> In the foreign affairs community, we often use the term "Political Islam" to refer to the movements and groups within the broader fundamentalist revival with a specific political agenda. "Islamists" are Muslims with political goals. We view these terms as analytical, not normative. They do not refer to phenomena that are necessarily sinister: there are many legitimate, socially responsible Muslim groups with political goals. However, there are also Islamists who operate outside the law. Groups or individuals who operate outside the law—who espouse violence to achieve their aims—are properly called extremists.[30]

Here, then, was a three-tiered division: there were fundamentalists; some of these were Islamists; and some of these were extremists. Only the last constituted a threat. This statement was pregnant with its own analytical contradictions. For example, did a decision by a Middle Eastern government to put a movement outside the law automatically render it extremist? Or did only espousal of violence do so? What about movements that employed both bullets and ballots simultaneously?

But despite the statement's logical lacunae, it established Islamism in the official lexicon as a synonym for politicized and ideological Islam. By 1996, Pelletreau had devised a full-blown definition of Islamism, firmly establishing the term's privileged status:

> We normally use the term "Islamist" to refer to Muslims who draw upon the belief, symbols, and language of Islam to inspire, shape, and animate political activity. We do not automatically seek to exclude moderate, tolerant, peaceful Islamists who seek to apply their religious values to domestic political problems and foreign policy. We do, however, object strongly to Islamists who preach intolerance and espouse violence in the domestic and international arenas.[31]

The shift in preferences could be measured by running terms against one another on Internet search engines. In a Google search early in 2003,[32] the exact phrases "Muslim fundamentalists" and "Islamic fundamentalists" together returned 45,300 results; "Islamists" returned 82,100. The exact phrases "Islamic fundamentalism" and "Muslim fundamentalism" still returned more results than "Islamism," 58,280 compared to 23,900. But it was probable that the growth lay in the use of the term Islamism. The clear preference for "Islamists," and the strong showing of "Islamism," were especially remarkable given that the major print

media outlet in the United States, *The New York Times*, uses neither Islamism nor Islamists.[33]

But the very success of these neologisms undermined the intent of those who had imported them from France. They had hoped that the term Islamist, used in place of fundamentalist, would dispel prejudice. But militant Muslims continued, as before, to commit or justify highly publicized acts of violence. As Islamism gained currency, it too became associated with benighted extremism, from the Taliban to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, culminating in the mega-terror of Usama bin Ladin. Critics of Islamism found it easy to add Islamism to the list of dangerous twentieth century "isms" that had defied the liberal West and gone down to defeat.

"Islamism Is Fascism"—thus ran the headline of an interview with analyst Daniel Pipes.[34] "Islamism Is the New Bolshevism"—thus went the headline of an op-ed column by former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher.[35] The entry of Islamism into common English usage had not improved the image of these movements and paradoxically made it easier to categorize them as threats of the first order. As fundamentalists, these Muslims might have claimed some affinity to Christian and Jewish fundamentalists, who were generally tolerated. As the Muslim equivalent of fascists or bolshevists, they were clearly marked as the enemies of democracy and freedom.

Ultimately, of course, the problem of these movements was not what they were called. It was what they did. And as long as these movements continued to spawn, nurture, or tolerate the most violent forces in contemporary Islam, they would bring stigma to whatever term was applied to them.

Muslim Responses

On the whole, the debate over usage in the West bore little relationship to the parallel debate in the Muslim world over what to call the new Islamic movements. The arguments on behalf of various Arabic, Persian, and Urdu terms are a topic that deserves its own treatment, based on other sources. But from time to time, Muslims expressed opinions over what terms Westerners should use.

Leaders of the new movements generally followed the lead of their Western sympathizers in rejecting the use of "fundamentalism." Rashid al-Ghannushi, the former leader of Tunisia's An-Nahda party, gave a speech in London in 1992 in which he "emphatically" rejected the term fundamentalism "insofar as it reflects the negative connotations implied by Western usage."[36] The same year, the head of the National Islamic Front in Sudan, Hasan at-Turabi, told a U.S. congressional committee that fundamentalism was "a misleading term in the sense that it describes a phenomenon which is very liberal, very progressive, and forward-looking, rather than a movement which is dogmatic, conservative, if not reactionary."[37]

If fundamentalism was unacceptable, then what term did these Muslims recommend to Westerners? In 1988, the French academic François Burgat published *L'Islamisme au Maghreb*, a landmark book very sympathetic to the new movements. Nonetheless, Abbassi Madani, the leader of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front

(FIS), reprimanded him: "In your book, you must first of all change the title! Why 'Islamism'? It is Islam that is at work in Algeria, nothing but Islam. We are Muslims!"[38] From Madani's point of view, any label but Muslim was pejorative by definition.

Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual mentor of Hizbullah, was asked by an English-language periodical in 1992 whether he thought fundamentalist or Islamist was more appropriate. Like Ghannushi and Turabi, Fadlallah rejected fundamentalist because of its "violent" associations. But like Madani, he also found Islamist unacceptable. It was a term "used by outsiders to denote a strand of activity which they think justifies their misconception of Islam as something rigid and immobile, a mere tribal affiliation." And his conclusion was identical to Madani's: "Having thought a good deal about this matter, I am satisfied to use the word 'Muslim,' which includes all the activities carried on within the scope and fold of Islam."[39]

Fadlallah later revised his position, apparently when he learned that Western sympathizers with movements like Hizbullah were promoting the term Islamist. "I object to the word 'fundamentalism,'" he told the same English-language periodical six months later, "a term which has overtones of exclusivism. I prefer the term 'Islamist movement,' which indicates a willingness to interact and live harmoniously with other trends of opinion, rather than to exclude them. In the Western perspective, 'fundamentalism' has implications of violence, and the Islamists have never chosen violence. Rather, violence has been forced upon them."[40]

Fadlallah had taken his cue from foreign friends. But like other so-called Islamists, he was ambivalent about being called one—and with good reason. If Islamism came to be presented by its critics as a deviation from Islam itself, it too could appear pejorative.

New Permutations

To all intents and purposes, Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism have become synonyms in contemporary American usage. An author's choice can no longer be regarded automatically as a substantive statement about the subject itself. The choice of one term or another has been reduced to a matter of style. (This journal has long allowed both.)

Yet the Muslims whom these terms purport to describe are in constant motion, and their actions are sure to have an impact upon Western perceptions and the categories created in the West to explain them. The pressures will come from two directions.

The first will be the theory mills of France, which twice invented Islamism, in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. The wheels are turning again. The same French scholars who defined *islamisme* twenty years ago have now determined that it is *passé*, since it never succeeded in seizing power. Where there was once *islamisme*, there is now only *postislamisme*, also sometimes labeled *néofondamentalisme*. Its adherents are supposedly more interested in Islamizing society than pursuing power.

This purported discovery has prompted a debate in France over whether Islamism ever existed in the first place.[41] Alain Roussillon, an authority on Egypt, claims that it didn't. The concepts of *islamisme* and *postislamisme,* he argues, are impositions of ethnocentric Western sociology. Orientalist in effect, they make Muslims into exceptions and postulate one "truth of Islam" that supposedly defines Muslims from one end of the Islamic world to the other. And the inevitable confusion between Islam and *islamisme* "reduces the analysis of contemporary Muslim societies to the discourse and practices of their most radical and marginal components."[42] Not so, responds Oliver Roy, one of the chief interpreters of the new movements (and father of the term *postislamisme*). *Islamisme* may be a construct, he admits, but Muslims themselves constructed it. If it appears to be Western in origin, this is because thinkers like Ayatollah Khomeini were deeply influenced by radical Western thought.[43]

Arcane as this debate may sound, it touches on the question of whether Western scholars have a license to represent "the other" in categories they themselves label and define. At some point, the debate is sure to cross the Atlantic, and it is not impossible that scholars who once embraced the term Islamism as non-prejudicial may yet repudiate it.

The second source of pressure will come from the ascent of other terms that have gained in popularity since September 11. "It was called 'Muslim Fundamentalism' in the beginning. Now the term 'Jihadism' is in vogue." So wrote a columnist in Pakistan's leading English-language daily in 2000. [44] At that time, the use of jihadism was largely confined to the Indian and Pakistani media. But the terror attacks in the United States, the war in Afghanistan, and the battle against al-Qa'ida, have facilitated the term's migration to the West. At present, jihadism is used to refer to the most violent persons and movements in contemporary Islam, including al-Qa'ida.[45] But the widespread Muslim reaffirmation of the duty of jihad, coupled with expressions of Muslim sympathy for al-Qa'ida and suicide bombings, could transform jihadism into a household word in the West. Since September 11, it has figured in the titles of several university-press bestsellers dealing with Islamism or Islamic fundamentalism as a whole, such that the transformation may already be underway.[46]

Some media outlets have adopted the phrases militant Islam and militant Muslims. The dictionary definition of a militant is someone prepared to do battle; in American English, its clearest association is with the violent fringes of the antiwar and civil rights movements of the 1960s. The implication of militant Islam is that the new Muslim movements have a propensity toward violence. (Daniel Pipes has used the term in the title of a recent book.)[47] In contrast, sympathizers of these movements have shown some preference for the phrase political Islam. This choice suggests that the defining characteristic of the new movements is not their inclination to do battle, but their willingness to engage in the give-and-take of politics. (Fawaz Gerges and François Burgat have used political Islam in recent book titles.)[48] Political Islam may well be an oxymoron, since nowhere in the Muslim world have politics been separated from religion. But political Islam, like militant Islam, is immediately intelligible to the English reader, and one or both phrases might overtake Islamism in the future.

Western Desires

The actions of Muslims will affect the Western choice of terms. But Western perceptions, hopes, and prejudices will play an equal or greater role. Debate over terminology has always surrounded the West's relations with Islam, and its outcome has been as much a barometer of the West's needs as a description of the actual state of Islam.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the traveler Sir Thomas Shirley complained about fellow Englishmen who called the "Great Turke" (the Ottoman sultan) the "king of the Muslims" (*Musselmanni*). Why? "Musselman" meant believer, and any Christian who acknowledged "a Mahometan to be a faithful believer doth confess himself to be an infidel."[49] At various times, Westerners have needed Muslims to be infidels or believers, threatening or peaceable, foreign or familiar. It is impossible to predict which terms will prevail in the West's own struggle to come to terms with change in contemporary Islam. It will depend on what Muslims do—and on what the West desires.

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[1] This was, however, an improvement over terms like Saracen, Moor, and Turk. Bernard Lewis points to a European "reluctance to call the Muslims by any name with a religious connotation, preferring rather to call them by ethnic names, the obvious purpose of which was to diminish their stature and significance and to reduce them to something local or even tribal." But as Dominique Carnoy points out, "*mahométisme* perhaps had the name of a religion, but it was limited to rituals that lacked the essence of belief: the presence of the True God." Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 7; Dominique Carnoy, *Représentations de l'Islam dans la France du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Harmattan, 1998), p. 312.

[2] Quoted by Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), p. 300.

[3] Quoted by Claudine Grossir, *L'Islam des Romantiques, 1811-1840* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984), p. 157.

[4] Quoted in André Versaille*, Dictionnaire de la pensée de Voltaire par lui-même* (Brussels: Complexe, 1994).

[5] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1961-77), vol. 3, p. 155.

[6] Henry Laurens, *La royaume impossible: La France et la genèse du monde arabe* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), p. 202, n. 23.

[7] Quoted by Marwan R. Buheiry, "Islam and the Foreign Office: An Investigation of Religious and Political Revival in 1873," in his *Formation and Perception of the Modern Arab World* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1989), p. 72.

[8] *Questions diplomatiques et colonials*, May 15, 1901, p. 582.

[9] H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (London: Home University Library, 1949), p. 1.

[10] Arnold Toynbee*, A Journey to China* (London: Constable, 1931), p. 117.

[11] *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 477, 628.

[12] Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 117, n. 3.

[13] John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 7.

[14] Ibid., p. 8. The term revivalism, although it had some currency in the 1970s, lacked a clear political dimension. It has fallen into disuse.

[15] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp. xvi, xix.

[16] Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, "Introduction," in Marty and Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3.

[17] *Usuliyyun*, wrote the political scientist Nazih Ayubi, "is a term, less than a decade old, that represents a direct translation of the English word 'fundamentalists'. It is not a bad translation, as there is actually a branch of Islamic studies known as *usul al-din* (fundamentals of the religion)." Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 256.

[18] Sadik J. al-Azm, "Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered: A Critical Outline of Problems, Ideas and Approaches," *South Asia Bulletin, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 1 and 2 (1993), pp. 95-7.

[19] Quoted by Bassam Tibi, "The Worldview of Sunni Arab Fundamentalists: Attitudes toward Modern Science and Technology," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 85.

[20] Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Hurst, 1997), pp. 14-5.

[21] *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, s.v. "Fundamentalism."

[22] Quoted by François Burgat, *L'islamisme au Maghreb* (Paris: Karthala, 1988), p. 14.

[23] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Muslim Fundamentalist Movements: Reflections toward a New Approach," in Barbara Freyer Stowasser, ed., *The Islamic Impulse* (Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1987), pp. 15-36.

[24] Gilles Kepel, *Le prophéte et pharaon: Les mouvements islamistes dans l'Egypte contemporaine* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984). According to Rodinson, it was Kepel who popularized the term: "Recently I reproached Gilles Kepel, who had briefly been my student, for giving currency to the term '*islamisme*' to designate present-day Muslim political *intégrisme*." Interview with Gérard D. Khoury (1996 or 1997), in Maxime Rodinson, *Entre Islam et Occident* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), p. 249.

[25] Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharoah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 22, n. 1. "Islamicist" is the term most often used to describe Western students of Islam (on the model of physicist).

[26] Henry Munson, Jr., *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 4.

[27] Graham E. Fuller, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the Northern Tier Countries: An Integrative View* (Santa

Monica: RAND, 1991), p. 2. Nevertheless, he used fundamentalism in the title of this paper, suggesting that had he used Islamism, its meaning would not yet have been widely understood.

[28] Interview with Louis J. Cantori, *Middle East Affairs Journal*, Spring-Summer 1993, p. 57.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Remarks by Robert H. Pelletreau, Jr., Middle East Policy Council, May 26, 1994, "Symposium: Resurgent Islam in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, Fall 1994, p. 2.

[31] Speech by Robert H. Pelletreau, Jr., Council on Foreign Relations, May 8, 1996, at http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/bureaus/nea/960508PelletreauMuslim.html.

[32] Jan. 26, 2003.

[33] In a search of the newspaper's electronic archive on Jan. 25, 2003, "fundamentalism" and "fundamentalists" appeared in connection with Islam in over 9,000 articles published since 1996. "Islamism" and "Islamists" appeared in less than 300 articles.

[34] Eric Boehlert, "Islamism Is Fascism: An Interview with Daniel Pipes," *Salon.com*, Nov. 9, 2001, at http://www.danielpipes.org/article/81. Pipes: "Islamism is a totalitarian ideology. An Islamist is a danger in the same way a fascist is a danger."

[35] Margaret Thatcher, "Islamism Is the New Bolshevism," *The Guardian* (London), Feb. 12, 2002. In the body of the article, Thatcher did not use the term "Islamism." "Islamic extremism today, like bolshevism in the past, is an armed doctrine," she wrote. "It is an aggressive ideology promoted by fanatical, well-armed devotees. And, like communism, it requires an all-embracing long-term strategy to defeat it."

[36] Rachid Ghannouchi, "Islam and the West: Realities and Potentialities," in Ahmed Bin Yousef and Ahmad Abul Jobain, *The Politics of Islamic Resurgence: Through Western Eyes* (Springfield: United Association for Studies and Research, 1992), p. 48. This was a speech delivered in London on Oct. 6, 1992.

[37] Hearing testimony of Hasan at-Turabi, May 20, 1992, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Africa and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 8.

[38] Quoted by François Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1993), pp. 9-10, n. 3.

[39] Interview with Fadlallah, *Monday Morning* (Beirut), Aug. 10, 1992.

[40] Ibid., Feb. 1, 1993.

[41] *L'Esprit* (Aug.-Sept. 2001) published contributions to the debate, which was also summarized in *Le Monde*, Oct. 8, 2001.

[42] Alain Roussillon, "Les islamologues dans l'impasse," *L'Esprit,* Aug.-Sept. 2001, pp. 93-115

[43] Olivier Roy, "Les islamologues ont-ils inventé l'islamisme?," *L'Esprit,* Aug.-Sept. 2001, pp. 116-38.

[44] Jafar Wafa, "Recalling Islamic Millennium," *Dawn* (Karachi), Feb. 4, 2000.

[45] French academics have put the term into academic circulation as "jihadist-Salafism." The qualifier of Salafism—an historical reference to the precursor of these movements—will inevitably be stripped away in popular usage. "Jihadist-Salafism" is defined by Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 219-22; and Guilain Deneoux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating

Political Islam," *Middle East Policy*, June 2002, pp. 69-71.

[46] Two prime examples: Kepel, *Jihad*; and Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[47] Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York: Norton, 2002).

[48] Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); François Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam* (London: Tauris, 2002). Burgat's book is a translation from a French original, entitled *L'Islamisme en face*. The author or the publisher decided against using "Islamism" in the English book title—perhaps evidence of doubt about the term's status in English.

[49] Quoted by Nabil Mattar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30