

# Islamism and Its Sociopolitical Functions<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

In the paper Islamism is described as a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, changing and inconsistent phenomenon. Islamism possesses many levels and manifestations. It is impossible to comprehend modern Muslim (and all the more Arab) societies without an account of the impact of Islam as simultaneously an ideology, cultural environment, modus agenda and mode of life. It would be a mistake to present Islamism as a node on the body of Muslim societies. In fact, Islamism in many respects reflects the essence of modern Muslim societies, of their mode of thought and life. It in many ways helps to maintain social, economic, political and various other spheres of life at different societal levels as well as create a peculiar Islamic pattern of modernization. In this paper we present our own vision of the reasons and grounds for the extensive and deep integration of Islamism into Muslim societies. We will present our views on its broad functions and aspects.

**Keywords:** Islamism, Radical Islamism, Moderate Islamism, Political Islam, Muslim societies, modernization, revolutions, values, democracy, mass movement, self-organization of Islamic society, social mobility

## 1. Preliminary Remarks: Multifaceted and Multi-leveled Islamism

- **Islamism largely reflects the essence of modern Islamic societies**

It is simply impossible to understand contemporary Islamic societies without considering the influence of Islamism as a pastiche of ideology,

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cultural environment, modes of action and ways of life. Without acknowledging this, a number of relevant phenomena will look unexplained and not integrated into the general course of life. To understand Islamism is not easy since it is one of the most complex social phenomena of the present time (Kepel, 2000, p. 25). That is why one of the goals of this paper is to demonstrate that Islamism is not a monolith but rather, multifaceted, multi-leveled, continually changing and often self-contradictory (see, e.g., Achilov & Sen, 2017, p. 609; see also Ayoob, 2009; Denoex, 2002; Schwedler, 2011). It can swing wildly in its manifestations from quite respectable political parties and debates of scientists to a vocal stream of consciousness rant by an illiterate Muslim or violent actions of radical Islamist groups. In addition, “the very concept of Islamism is sensitive to volatile social and political shifts” (Achilov & Sen, 2017, p. 621), and, as a result, the concept of Islamism changes with certain major events.

As experts note, even radical Islam is extremely diverse. There is still no established terminology for its designation: experts speak of Islamism, political Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic terrorism, jihadism, Wahhabism, Salafism, etc. (e.g., Kisriev and Savateev, 2015). Meanwhile, Islamism could be moderate and democratic, but it may also be perfectly undemocratic, as diverse and contradictory, not frozen, but alive as a life, reacting to various changes, ranging from extreme radicalism to quite liberal statements and political actions (Kurzman, 1998; Denoex, 2002; Ayoob, 2009; Schwedler, 2011; March, 2015; Volpi & Stein, 2015; Achilov 2015, 2016; Achilov & Sen, 2017).

This paper does not intend to perform a comprehensive study of Islamism. The main thing that we would like to convey to the reader is the following: behind the threat of radical and terrorist Islamism the most important facts fall out of our scope of attention: and that is that, in fact, radical Islamists make up a very small part of Islamists. Most Islamists are not radicals, though in this mass there is also a certain ‘swamp’, which has the potential to lean towards radicalism under certain conditions.

Such a heightened attention to the radical terroristic Islamism was a reason (among a number of other ones) why for many observers of the Middle East in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Islamism remains “a phenomenon lurking beneath the surface” (Osman, 2016, p. xiii). For that reason, it remains insufficiently understood.

The main goal of this paper is to analyze functions and characteristics of Islamism that make it an ideology in some respects without any realistic alternatives in some Muslim-majority societies, that give it a mass social base, and that help Islamists to perform successful opposition activities. We must recognize that, in general, Islamism largely reflects the essence of modern Islamic societies, their way of thinking and living.

Yet, it is important to emphasize that the majority of the population of modern Islamic countries are not supporters of radical Islamists, otherwise the whole Middle East would have long ago become an analogue of the infamous Islamic State. On the contrary, Islamism in many ways helps to establish social life at different levels of society, creating a peculiar Islamic path to modernization.

Further, we must clearly understand that it will be impossible to reduce the danger of radical, terrorist Islamism by force alone. It is likely to fade away only if it is possible to do this in alliance with moderate Islamism, if it is possible to make moderate Islamists more respectable, open, and engaged in normal political life.

It should be noted that insufficient attention is paid to a number of functions (see, in particular, Yapp, 2004), and in passing these by, the researchers' understanding of Islamism is distorted. In this paper we present our own vision of the reasons and grounds for the extensive and deep integration of Islamism into Muslim societies. We will present our views on its broad functions and aspects.

- **The Notion of Islamism. Does moderate Islamism exist?**

Modern Islamism is a derivative of Islam, a relatively young political ideology, somewhere around 100 years old. We can assume that modern political Islam, as an ideology, rose around the mid-20th century. It was initially connected with an awareness of the Western domination and the challenge it poses to Muslim societies. But it became especially active in the last 40 years, since the 1970s. Naturally, since the 1920s, Islamism has travelled along an intricate path (for detail see Grinin, Korotayev, Taush, 2018).

In recent decades, the development of Islamism is closely linked to the Islamic Resurgence – a special kind of Islamic modernization. In short,

Islamism is often defined as ‘politicized Islam’ or ‘political Islam’ (see, e.g., Levin, 2014, p. 4; Ignatenko, 2004, p. 40; Achilov, 2016, p. 252; Achilov & Sen, 2017, p. 608), which is convenient, but because of the brevity of the label, it is not entirely true. Islamism is not only a political, but also a social ideology, a way of life and action. But in any case, of course, it is true that Islamism makes Islam not only religious, but also a political ideology.

It is important that Islamism is not only heterogeneous, but almost the main enemies of radical Islamists are not secularists, but moderate Islamists (Osman, 2016, p. 260). Therefore, it does not always make sense to focus specifically on the fundamentalist character of Islamism, since in the case when moderate Islamism seeks to fit into a society where many institutions are secular, fundamentalism recedes into the background. And one can hardly disagree with Samuel P. Huntington (1996, p. 110) when he notes that “Islamic ‘fundamentalism,’ commonly conceived as political Islam, is only one component in the much more extensive revival of Islamic ideas, practices, and rhetoric and the rededication to Islam by Muslim populations. The Resurgence is mainstream not extremist, pervasive not isolated”.

It is important to point out that many definitions of Islamism are rather definitions of radical Islamism, and not of Islamism in general, as they do not take into account the existence of such an exceptionally important phenomenon as moderate Islamism.

In this respect, the following definitions of Islamism appear to be much more adequate:

“Political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam” (Hooper, 2015), or:

“The term “Islamism”... represents a form of social and political activism, grounded in an idea that public and political life should be guided by a set of Islamic principles. In other words, Islamists are those who believe that Islam has an important role to play in organizing a Muslim-majority society and who seek to implement this belief” (Poljarevic, 2015).

“A body of faith” that “has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion” (Fuller, 2004, p. xi).

It should be noted that some experts tend to restrict the “Islamists” labels to radicals, whereas they prefer to designate moderate Islamism with some other terms (say, ‘Islamic activism’ – see, e.g., Tsaregorodtseva, 2017). What is more, there is a tendency to doubt the existence of moderate Islamists, or to just reject their very existence:

‘My contention is that those ‘Islamists’ who have genuinely accepted the rules of the system they participate in should not be called Islamists, because they no longer have the desire to overthrow this system’ (Woltering, 2002, p. 1134)<sup>4</sup>.

Below one can find an even stronger formulation:

«Moderate Islamism is an oxymoron. There may be moderate Muslims but definitely no moderate Islamists» (Bisk, 2015, p. 132–133).

Of course, there may be different opinions, but according to our reasoning, such an approach is unproductive in two ways: the scientific and the practical. First, Islamism, in the very meaning of the word, is linked to the prominence of Islam and the dissemination of its principles to different spheres of life, but it should not necessarily require the violent overthrow of the ruling regime. Secondly, there are many cases of transition of moderate Islamists to radical Islamism (say, part of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after July 2013 [see, e.g., Ketchley, 2017], or some Syrian moderate Islamists who radicalized after 2011 [see, e.g., Abboud, 2016]), and vice versa, for example, radical Islamists in Iran have now become moderate enough to, say, observe the rules of democratic elections (Rajaei 2007). (for other examples of the transformation of radical Islamists into moderate Islamists see, e.g., Schwedler, 2011; Bayat, 2013; March 2015; Hossain, 2016; Amin, 2017). In our opinion, it is better to have a general term for Islamists; but a better term than ‘Islamists’ seems difficult to offer.

In addition, despite the enormous differences in attitude towards terror, participation in political life, etc., Islamists are united by certain common ideological approaches. Yet, as must be obvious by now, these approaches

are not only blurred, but Islamists vary greatly with regards as to what degree to implement its manifestations (Kelsay, 2007, p. 166).

That is why it appears equally wrong to try to consider moderate Islamists as non-Islamists, and to fail to distinguish between radical and moderate Islamists. It is more productive to recognize the presence of both radical Islamism and moderate Islamism<sup>5</sup> (for a detailed explanation of this approach, see the following papers: Kurzman, 1998; Denoeux, 2002; Ayooob, 2009; Schwedler, 2011; March, 2015; Volpi and Stein, 2015; Achilov, 2015, 2016; Achilov& Sen, 2017).

So, if we summarize different approaches to the definition of Islam, trying to take into account different trends in Islamism, then we could say that *Islamism is a political trend and ideology, widespread in Muslim, especially Arab countries. Islamism is based on the idea of placing a high value (or even superiority) on the rules and traditions of Islam, on the need to build life (in varying degrees) in accordance with variously understood principles of Islam; it is oriented at the organizing politically around people who put some Islamic (or interpreted as Islamic) ideas and principles at the center of political life.*

## 2. General Characteristics of Islamism

- **The Mass Character of Islamism, its Intelligibility and Usefulness**

Islamism is a mass and ramified movement. Islamists operate in many, if not almost all, social groups. It is important that many of these groups come from the lower strata of society where there are even more sympathizers to their cause than in other social strata. These are largely the strata from which their strength originates. Although the organizations themselves may be numerous, their number is naturally limited due to certain requirements for members, especially if the organization operates underground or semi-underground. But the number of sympathizers is very high. Especially, we repeat in the poor strata, but also in the lower stratum of the middle class (see Osman, 2016). Islamists actively penetrate into business, education, even in the lower municipal bodies. They also organize medical assistance, mediate in the delivery of money to families of migrants, and so on. Islamism not only spiritually but also functionally permeates the social fabric of society. Therefore, even with a strong secular state, bans on Islamism and repression against its activists, it is extremely

difficult to squeeze it out of society. Islamism also relies on culture and ideas that are understood by the absolute majority of people, regardless of their level of education, namely religious and cultural and religious-political ideas. This is its other advantage over other political trends. Being a grassroots movement, Islamism is also, most often, an opposition movement. Its strength is also likely to exist in its role as an opposition movement. Since there are always such things for which the authorities and the elites could be criticized, their accusations on the part of Islamists are understandable; one might say that criticism itself appeals to the masses. Do not forget about the historical egalitarianism and even democratism of Islam, in the sense that it did not have a hierarchy of clergy. It is on this basis that Islamism is possible as a broad current based largely on popular activists, and not just high-level intellectuals.

Islamism and self-organization of Islamic society. However, Islamism is not only a mass movement; it is also a form of self-organization by the population both locally and – through the cells of organizations – on a broader (up to pan-Islamic) level. Self-organization on a local level is probably of special importance, given that the mosque is an exceptionally convenient way for discussion and distribution of benefits, as well as for organizing protests. This in fact was proven by the Arab Spring events.

Islamism in Egypt and in a number of other countries took its shape as a process that can be characterized as the society's self-organization from below in order to improve life, religious education, mutual aid and propaganda of the provisions of Islam. Due to participation in political life, and then just after the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and resulting persecutions, the movement of Muslim Brothers became political and took on the role of the opposition to the government. The proliferation of Muslim Brothers in various countries contributed to the spread of Islamism through the model of self-organization in different parts of the Islamic world (see below, for example, about Sudan). We must understand that the success of the Islamists' self-organization is quite naturally derived from the nature of Islam itself, its support for the communities of believers at different levels, from local to the level of Islamic *ummah* as a whole.

This self-organization allowed Islamists to accumulate certain funds, collect donations, etc. Today these are very large funds, MBs have become one of the richest Islamic organizations (see Osman, 2016, p. 26). This is facilitated by a wide network of intermediaries in the transfer of money, financial assistance and other financial transactions from millions of

migrants working in the Gulf countries – so called *hiwalah* system (Osman, 2016, p. 23–24), direct or indirect participation in business, donations, etc. This makes it possible to create a system of hospitals, schools, to build mosques and to do many other things that, on the one hand, are extremely necessary for the lives of the masses of people, and on the other, raise the authority of Islamist organizations (note, however, that after the 2013 counter-revolution the MB social network in Egypt has been greatly suppressed).

Self-organization from below allowed Islamists to realize a number of functions important for the population and self-expression of the lower social strata; it gave an opportunity to a significant number of people to show themselves. In contrast to the authorities, who, as a rule, do not notice ordinary people, in this organization a person and his affairs can get attention and care. In addition, private, grass-roots, voluntary associations run by Islamists became important providers of social goods normally associated with the state. As Huntington rightly pointed out, in essence, Islamist groups created an Islamic "civil society" that duplicated, surpassed and often replaced the activities of the usually weaker institutions of secular civil society (Huntington, 1996, p. 111–112; see also Woltering, 2002, p. 1140; Berman, 2003, p. 260; Ismail, 2006, p. 100).

After the 1992 earthquake in Cairo, these organizations ‘were on the streets within hours, handing out food and blankets while the Government's relief efforts lagged.’ In Jordan the Muslim Brotherhood consciously pursued a policy of developing the social and cultural ‘infrastructure of an Islamic republic’ and by the early 1990s, in this small country with population of 4 million people, there were operating a large hospital, twenty clinics, forty Islamic schools, and 120 Quranic study centers. Next door in the West Bank and Gaza, Islamic organizations established and operated ‘student unions, youth organizations, and religious, social, and educational associations,’ including schools ranging from kindergartens to an Islamic university, clinics, orphanages, a retirement home, and a system of Islamic judges and arbitrators... (Huntington, 1996, p. 112). In general, the scope of activities of Islamist organizations is enormous. According to Alexander Ignatenko, in the mid-2000s there were more than 500 Islamist NGOs operating in the world (Ignatenko, 2009, p. 181).

It is useful to note that in case of a weakening statehood, the potentialities of self-organization in Islamism can be very noticeable. Thus, for example,

only 3–4 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, under the weakening positions of government bodies, traditional institutions of social self-organization began to manifest themselves and become important among which the religious structures were ones of the strongest. As a result, jihadist groups appeared in the North Caucasus (Savateev, Neflyasheva, Kisriev, 2017, p. 562). Self-organization was also evident in territories where the state structures of Iraq and Syria were not operating.

- **Sociopolitical Functions**

Islamism is multifaceted not only in conceptual and practical terms but also in terms of moderation and radicalism, its shades of dogmatism, the scale of its application within countries, its ability to adapt to modern trends for self-preservation, its pursuit of political power, and much more. Islamism is very multi-functional in terms of its ability to replace other institutions (including state ones, as mentioned above). This diversity of Islamism is supported through the main, fundamental provisions of Islam which are often open to multiple interpretations. It is not surprising that among different Islamists one can find completely different understanding of the laws of Islam. This also explains the flexibility and adaptability of Islamism. As a result, some Islamists may regard certain things as approved by the Quran and the sacred tradition, while others would regard them as forbidden, and condemn them<sup>6</sup>.

This, in fact, helps Islam adapt to particular situation, without prohibiting much of what is taking place today (especially education, the use of modern technologies, contacts, etc.); and when some phenomena (for example, women's participation in politics) finally is approved within the Islamic community, many Islamists will begin to proclaim that Islam has always supported it (or has always struggled with what is condemned in modern life<sup>7</sup>). Thus, Islamism, being a politicized form of religion, can be inclined, depending on the circumstances, either toward pragmatism or toward fundamentalism, which makes it rather flexible to changes.

However, flexibility and adaptability are characteristic of other universal, totalitarian ideologies as well; for example, although Marxism directly claims that private property is evil and it must be abolished, the Social Democrats and even the Chinese Communists fully admit private property and recognize its exclusive importance.

Islamism as a form of unification of society in the Muslim world and the form for a single culture. Islam is the world religion which places above all not ethnicity and not belonging to a specific state but belonging to the Muslim community (*ummah*). In Islamism (especially radical), one of the main provisions is the superiority of Islam over other religions and the belief in its future victory throughout the world. Even those who consider this point as absolutely far from realization are, nevertheless, obliged not to be critical of it. Thus, Islamism is becoming an ideology that is potentially capable of uniting hundreds of millions of people in many countries. This has already happened to a certain extent, but it cannot be completed to the full since the Islamists are split and quarreling with each other, secondly, because there is a constant struggle between Islamism and the secular direction of development. The above-mentioned huge number of Islamist organizations simultaneously shows both the strength of Islamism and its disunity. But one way or another, Islamism is international, which allows major Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to found branches in many countries, have its own network in many places, and influence the inhabitants of different societies.

Islamism as a peculiar way of modernization. Islamism is often treated as a reaction to globalization and modernization that has swept the world, and in some cases as a search for a special form of Islamic societies in terms of modernization and globalization. In this last sense, Islamism allows Muslims to develop and adapt the Western achievements while preserving their own identity. Of course, Islamism by no means has proved its greatest effectiveness in terms of modernization, but nevertheless it performs a certain function. Iran can serve an example here since its development proceeds under the ideological leadership of politicized clergy, yet, here one deals with a peculiar type of Islamism. In Iran ideology is to a certain extent separated from direct political functioning, that is, there is some kind of ideological control, distinct from the political functionaries at the highest level. This allows the country to develop fairly well. Perhaps this is the result of the victorious Islamism, which was forced to adapt the ideology of Islamism to ruling a country. The second point is that Islamism in Iran is of the Shiite variety, therefore there is almost an equal sign in Iran between nationalism and Islamism, which is strengthened by rather strong roots of statehood. At the same time, in contrast to the Iranian nationalism, Arab nationalism means belonging not to any particular state, but to the Arab super-ethnos.

Above, we considered the functions of Islamism at a macro-scale (the entire Islamic community, the entire Islamic world). However, as already mentioned Islamism is a multi-level ideology. Accordingly, its functions can be traced at the level of an individual state.

Function of political opposition. Islamism is an oppositional movement that, even when underground, does not allow autocratic regimes to forget that the opposition exists, it can resist, and in fair elections it can come to power. Thus, the presence of Islamists hampers authoritarianism.

The controlling function of Islamism. Islamism is able to somehow influence the political authorities and elites, forcing them to make certain decisions. Islamists are at the head of organized struggle to fulfill certain requirements, etc. Hence, from this point of view, Islamism acts as a kind of control in a society which is over and above the power and institutions of society itself. It also helps to convey protest voices in a world of injustice to those who can hear them. Since Islamism performs the function of effective opposition to the government, it also sometimes can unite separated groups of opposition-minded representatives of free professions and intellectuals. For example, by the end of the 1990s, the Egyptian ‘brothers’ constituted the majority in the leadership of trade unions of lawyers, doctors, engineers, university professors (Akhmedov, 2009, p. 150–151).

The struggle for morality. Islamists are very active when performing the function of voluntary moral police, even in some of those countries where they are not in power. The merits of Islamists include the eradication of prostitution in many Islamic countries, which has helped to reduce the spread of AIDS there (see, e.g., Shishkina et al., 2014). Also it has opposed and limited the trade in alcohol. As we have already said, Islamists support family values, sometimes they control the social order in an area, at least to a certain degree.

Like any providentialist ideology, Islamism performs a compensatory function, making the lives of many people meaningful and full of ideals. Islamism unites societies both internally and against the outside world, forming an image of the enemy to be combated.

Among other functions we would mention the following:

Social mobility functions. Islamism acts as a powerful social institution, which enables a social lift for many people. Accordingly, it gives great opportunities to those for whom the usual career paths are success in business, etc. are difficult. Since Islamism is a mass and grass-roots movement, it gives ordinary people many opportunities to express themselves, develop their abilities, gain credibility, make a sort of career, etc. (while the current socio-economic and political system does not give them the opportunity to achieve any significant success).

Islamism as an extension of people's participation in religious interpretations and preaching. In addition, the peculiar Islamic reformation has expanded the opportunities for religious people to interpret sacred texts, write and speak on this topic and thereby make their spiritual careers. Thus, the interpretation of sacred texts, preaching in different forms, comes, thanks to Islamism, far beyond the traditional Islamic religious custom. In fact, the 'cadre' men of religion (*rijāl al-dīn*) lose a certain share of their popularity, forced to give it to unofficial Islamist spiritual leaders. There is a situation where the traditional 'men of religion' remain within the framework of purely religious activity, and Islamism takes upon itself missionary activities and the implementation of the dogmas of Islam in practice. The decrease in the importance of traditional Islam and the Islamic 'men of religion' is compensated for by the fact that Islam is increasingly being interpreted by all people who are not indifferent to it. That is, there is an understanding of Islam through personal perception, as is the case with the Reformation. It is possible that such a discrepancy between professional "men of religion" and Islamists in Sunni societies (in Iran, the situation is different) is due to the fact that most of the professional Sunni "men of religion" are an integral part of the state apparatus, while, usually Islamists function as the opposition to the state (Vasiliev, 2017, p. 42). Indeed, the official religion with its dominant worldview is oriented to the preservation of the existing order of things and for this reason alone cannot be the ideology of political opposition.

- **The Social Base of Islamism**

Regarding the social base, it is worth noting that the issues of social base, social roots and conditions conducive to strengthening of Islamism are insufficiently studied. For example, M. E Yapp (2004: 180) points to "the absence of sufficient attention to the social background of Islamists in general and jihadists in particular."

Islamism has spread to almost all social strata of society, including the intelligentsia (including doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, teachers and civil servants), businessmen and politicians. However, the most popular support is mainly from sympathetic youth from marginal sections of urban population, people working in the informal sector of economy (which is very large in Islamic countries), including rural migrants to cities (Huntington, 1996; Levin, 2014, p. 20). Since these people can hardly integrate into the urban environment, they often become marginalized and likely objects of Islamist propaganda (on the situation with rural migrants within urbanization processes and their impact on instability, see Kepel, 2000; Grinin and Korotayev, 2009; Grinin, Korotayev, Malkov, 2010; Korotayev et al., 2011; Korotayev, 2014; Korotayev, Malkov, Grinin, 2014).

Secondly, the number of migrants from poor countries to the rich ones grew rapidly. In 1975 there were about 1.2 million immigrant workers in the countries of the Persian Gulf, whereas by 1985 their number increased up to 5.15 million (Addleton, 1991). Moreover, over 72% of them were from the Arab region (Stoklitsky et al., 1985, p. 29).

At the same time, these movements do not enjoy the support of rural elites (Huntington, 1996). Young people play a huge role among both supporters and functionaries. It is not surprising, since already in 1975 in Muslim countries 60% of the inhabitants were children and youth up to 24 years old (Kepel, 2000, p. 67, see also UN Population Division 2019). It is significant, for example, that of the 290 arrested members of the Egyptian extremist organization Al-Jihad, 70% were young people from 21 to 30 years old from the lower stratum of the middle class (43.9% of them were students, 14% were workers, 12.1% were representatives of free professions) and 10.7% were unemployed (Ismael and Ismael, 1985: 119 cited in Levin, 2014, p. 17). Among the ideologists of Islamists there are many representatives of the intelligentsia who have received modern higher education; this is sometimes people with academic degrees. Among them, of course, one can find idealists who consider it possible to build ‘the state of Islam’ on earth. As for the leaders and activists, among them quite a few have a superficial image of Islam, but they have good organizational and practical skills that often allow them to achieve their goals. These people are mostly pragmatists from among educated urban youth of 20–30 years. They are mostly middle-class people who are dissatisfied with

corruption, nepotism, and glaring social inequality (Yapp, 2004, p. 181; Levin, 2014, p. 19–20).

In general, young people of different backgrounds, both educated (students and intellectuals) and uneducated strata, are important. At times they are the most important supporters of Islamists. "... one is struck by the fact that the great majority of supporters of Islamist ideology are young people, and often most of them are well educated"— writes Robbert A. F. L. Woltering (2002, p. 1136) supporting this statement with references to Fargues (1993, p. 1–20), Sidahmed (1997); Levtzion&Pouwels (2000). He also adds that the dominance of youth in these groups of Islamists is also their distinctive feature. "The leaders are young and the followers are very young" – notes Yapp (2004, p. 180) with respect to Islamists; note that this makes Islamists more consolidated, this also makes it easier for them to understand each other. Besides "as with most revolutionary movements, the core element has consisted of students and intellectuals. In most countries' fundamentalists winning control of student unions and similar organizations was the first phase in the process of political Islamization, with the Islamist "breakthrough" in universities occurring in the 1970s in Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and then moving on to other Muslim countries. The Islamist appeal was particularly strong among students in technical institutes, engineering faculties, and scientific departments. In the 1990s, in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and elsewhere, "second generation indigenization" was manifesting itself with increasing proportions of university students being educated in their home languages and hence increasingly exposed to Islamist influences. Islamists also often developed a substantial appeal to women, and Turkey witnessed a clear demarcation between the older generation of secularist women and their Islamist-oriented daughters and granddaughters" (Huntington, 1996, p. 112–113).

Islamism has a strong social base and performs important functions in a society, it is well organized, understandable to the masses, supported from below, so there is no ground to expect its weakening in the near future. The most important task is to promote its shift towards moderation, cooperation with the authorities and other countries, while focusing on enhancing modernization. Let us hope that the successes of modernization will support the processes of reducing radicalization of Islamism, making Islamists more pragmatists.

There are grounds to expect that with the growth of education and culture, Islamism will become softer. Achilov and Sen (2017) note that moderate Islamism correlates with higher levels of education, in contrast with radical Islamism. Also, the rising living standards contribute to further moderation of Islamism (Achilov & Sen, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

### **Revolution, values, democracy and some modern trends**

The analysis of values shows that many Muslim societies in the course of their modernization demonstrate a large variance in value perceptions due to considerable differences in education level, culture and income of different population layers (not to speak about the differences caused by confessional heterogeneity of population); these are, to a certain extent, split societies. At the same time the analysis shows that Islamist values predominate (even in the most advanced societies, like Tunisian, they remain very popular). It would be unreasonable and even dangerous to ignore this fact. At the same time, we revealed that Islamist values are far from inherently contradicting the Western liberal values. The matter is the emphasis and priorities of this array of values. That is why, in our opinion it will take much time and need hard work to promote liberal values and not to replace but to combine them with Islamist ones.

Islamism may seem something terrible and unbearable to a Western man (and there is some truth here). At the same time, moderate Islamism undoubtedly has its positive sides, including the moral aspect (in particular, it encourages the priority of the spiritual over the material and restricts the itch for gain). Islam makes all Muslims generally equal before Allah and respectively, his law. In this context Islam and Islamism seem especially democratic. Thus, Islamism represents a whole system of moral and spiritual values, rather up to date in certain respects which can appear frequently enough to provide a normal life for a huge number of people and entire societies.

What is the problem then with Islamism with respect to modern values? In our opinion, it may be presented in terms of two distinct concerns. First, the Islamists, especially the radicals, figuratively speaking look not to the future but to the past; and second, they are not ready to admit a number of modern values especially the Western ones. These values are often rejected not because they are bad by themselves but because they do not fit the

Islamist dogmas (i.e., they are bad because they contradict Qur'an or Sharia law). Also, the Islamists try to impose their views on other members of society justifying this with the belief (or espoused claim) that they have the supreme power sanctioned from above.

The female's status in Muslim society is one of the major stumbling points in the relations between Islam and the West, as well as one of the main values heatedly debated. In fact, numerous real problems are abundant here. Nevertheless, if one sets aside the external attributes (hijab, dresses etc.), female rights are generally recognized including the right to vote, education, jobs and many other things (yet, there are many problems here, and still the movement in the right direction is still obvious).

Here one should bear in mind that when brought to their (extreme) maximum, the rights of individuals are also likely to conflict with social values and other people's rights (as is apparent today in the right to bear arms in the United States). Thus, a gradual expansion of the scope of individual's rights is more socially adaptive since it allows societies to integrate these rights into their national social compact.

There is another painful issue in the balance between Islamism and democracy already described above which also produces non-uniformity among the Islamists.

Why have revolutions in the Arab countries failed to establish a stable democracy? The matter is that revolutions frequently lead to dictatorships even more cruel than the pre-revolutionary ones, and moreover, to the societies' degradation (see, e.g., Huntington 1968; 1993; Gurr 1988; Grinin 2012, 2016; Grinin, Korotayev 2016; Grinin, Issaev, Korotayev 2016). One can often speak about the so-called Thermidor Law when a revolutionary wave is followed by a reactionary wave which can take the form of dictatorship. In other words, revolution does not necessarily lead to democracy and the transition to democracy requires a certain level of development, mentality and readiness of a significant part of population. Otherwise, revolutions can even delay the transition to democracy as we see in the cases of many Arab countries.

The correlation between Islam and democracy is one of the most complicated and disputed issues with respect to mutual understanding between the West and the Arab world. Is Islam compatible with

democracy? Probably, to a certain extent, it is. At least the last decade demonstrates that some Islamic movements are capable to integrate into democratic processes. But one can hardly ignore the fact that this democracy has certain distinctions from the Western democratic standards. In particular, since the Islamists enjoy a broad popularity among the Muslim population, the democratic procedures are generally profitable for them. That is why it is impossible and dangerous to try to completely separate democratic and Muslim values, but it is necessary to search for a certain balance between them.

In general, moderate Islamism does not contradict democracy and respect for certain human rights but of course, within the Islamic framework. In the course of the Islamists' integration into political landscape, they come to perceive democracy more as a value. But certainly, much depends on the political moment. Thus, a spokesman for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement said in July 2013: "We have our own belief in the democratic system, and we are ready to die for it" (Chumley 2013). But today Muslim brothers are driven underground and that is why many would obviously change their attitude to democracy. This shows the ambivalent attitude of Islamism towards democracy which we discussed above. Besides, this also suggests that the coalition with moderate Islamism against the radicals may strengthen the trust to democracy and improve its perception as a value. In a number of Muslim countries democracy is considered to be a great value even in the eyes of Islamist parties who see it as a means to find success.

We find it extremely difficult to expect pure democracy conforming every Western criterion. One should point out that an explosively increasing popularity of democratic ideas among many Islamists is associated with the fact that Islamist conceptions are very popular among people in many Muslim countries and thus they have real chances to take power by democratic means. In fact, free elections in Muslim-majority countries naturally could end with the Islamists' victory which cannot but provoke the Islamists' appeal to this form of political organization of a state.

For many citizens of Islamic countries, even for most of them, Islam makes an important part of their worldview and everyday life. That is why Islamists often win elections. It is not surprising that in the Muslim world one can hardly find a country where Islamism has not become an influential and stable factor of domestic and foreign policy. What emerged

at the end of the last century as some episodes turned into one of the major trends in the world politics (see, e.g., Malashenko, 2015).

That is why, at the present stage Islamism cannot be eliminated and still the Muslim societies can well grow beyond it (Bayat, 2007, 2013; Hossain, 2016; Amin, 2017; Holdoa, 2017), and this may take a long time. One can agree that Islamism— regardless of how it is defined, and which movements, parties and groups are affiliated with it— will remain the political actor on the national, regional and global stages for more than one generation (Malashenko, 2015, p. 122).

Here we also come to another important point: under democracy the power belongs to those supported by the majority, but they frequently use power in unreasonable ways which often becomes a problem. It should be clear that until a society is completely ready for democracy, one should not be in a hurry with its introduction. However, with development of certain institutions, society can start to approach the implementation of democratic policies and rights. Thus, in general, the Islamic world, though slowly and with difficulties, moves in the right direction. With the development of the world, technologies, etc. a certain convergence occurs in the perception of values. In particular, the development of information technologies promotes the distribution and adoption of similar information and values both in the West and in the East. Nevertheless, the differences in the perception of values are still rather considerable and they will hardly be smoothed in the near future (if ever).

The military coup in Egypt in 2013 (see, e.g., Korotayev, Issaev, Shishkina 2016) and the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power, which they had gained in a legitimate way, greatly changed the Islamists' sentiments, and at the same time undermined the belief of many Muslims that there may be found a peaceful way of integrating Islamists into formal political life in this country. As a result, many Islamists have got misleading ideas from recent events. Tarek Osman considers this a very serious crisis and a possible turning point. He writes that Islamists who return to sacrifice practices, that is, to terrorist activities, risk to be sent to prisons, whereas, what they foremost need to do is to change views. At this time (i.e., in 2013) the Islamists returned to the idea of affecting social morality instead of participating in political life. Hence, the situation comes back to the beginning of the political evolution of the Islamists so the danger of a new radicalization of Islam is growing. This diminishes the significance of their

previous political success (in 2011–2013) and reduces expectations for political success in the future (see Osman, 2016, p. 244–248).

Those Islamists, who return to the strict norms of Islam and conservatism, are barely intelligible to young people who have a different lifestyle. According to Osman, the Islamic youth are no longer ready for blind obedience, as they used to. On the contrary, large groups of young people tend to make up their own mind and thus introduce innovations into their understanding of Islam (Osman, 2016, p. 245–246).

In any case, the struggle to rule the minds of the youth is the most important front in relation to Islamism. The state and secular organizations have much to do here. And moderate Islamists should be able to mitigate the rigidity of ideological dogmas as much as possible in order to actively fit into the modern political landscape. Thus, Islamism is on the verge of change, although the danger of its radicalization is still strong. But we hope that as the society develops, Islamism will start to gradually transform into post-Islamism.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, not only some Islamologists, but also some liberal Muslims (see, for example: Tibi, 2012, 2013) adhere to this approach, as well as some politicians.

<sup>5</sup> However, many of the moderate Islamists themselves prefer to call their version of Islamism not ‘moderate Islamism’ but ‘post-Islamism’ (see, for example: Bayat, 2007, 2013; Hossain, 2016; Amin, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For example, Clifford Geertz (1971: 15) notes that ‘In Indonesia as in Morocco, the collision between what the Quran reveals, or what Sunni (that is, orthodox) tradition has come to regard it as revealing, and what men who call themselves Muslims actually believe is becoming more and more inescapable’.

<sup>7</sup> For example, slavery.

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