



## Executive summary

This new report is a continuation of the two previous reports led by Hakim El Karoui for Institut Montaigne, “A French Islam Is Possible” (September 2016), and “A New Strategy for France in a New Arab World” (August 2017). This report aims to describe Islamism’s production mechanisms, in

its various configurations, originating in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood model originating in Egypt and transmitted by Qatar. Beyond the production mechanisms, it looks at the channels of dissemination of Islamist ideas *via* charitable, political and educational institutions, and cultural and technological tools such as the media and social networks in Europe and in the Maghreb, with France as their epicenter. Finally, it describes the way in which Islamism has developed in Europe, and the discourse that leads to a division of society between halal and haram (pure/impure).

The mission of this work is global: to demonstrate and explain the entire transmission mechanism -- from the creation of this world view to the dynamics that enable its spread in France and in Europe. We wish to present the global nature of the phenomenon, the philosophical questions it raises, the places where it is produced, the men and women who implement it, and the political and social networks that disseminate it.

This survey is based on several sources of data:

- Academic literature: more than 200 books and scholarly reports have been analyzed.
- 60 interviews were conducted with institutional, nonprofit and penitentiary actors, religious leaders, and citizens in eight Arab and European countries.
- A pioneering analysis of “Saudi Leaks,” a set of more than 122,000 Saudi Foreign Ministry documents uncovered by WikiLeaks in June 2015 was carried out. This database, searched with key words, provides evidence on the Saudi government’s vision, global strategy and funding abroad.
- Substantial information was gathered and we carried out a thorough analysis of data collected by Twitter and Facebook on the origin and frequency of Islamist content. This data enabled a mapping of the dissemination network of Islamist ideology on social media and the Internet.

- An analysis and selection of 275 *fatwas* allowed us to go to the source of the normative Wahhabi guidelines that are necessary for the daily oversight of the Saudi population.

### The report begins with an analysis of Islamism through its ideological transformations

In the first part of our report, we raise the question of Islamism’s origins. While the doctrine, according to political scientists, takes shape throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its origins can be traced much earlier. First, at the time of the Mongol invasion, when Ibn Taymiyyah heralded a “pure Islamic” thinking against the “bad Muslim” invaders who claimed to belong to this religion. Later, Indian ulema, faced with growing British colonization, also attempted to formalize a political-theological doctrine to respond politically to the British pressure. The question of Islamism was gradually raised throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the symbolic foundation shock that was the intrusion of Napoleon Bonaparte and his scholars in Egypt in 1798, an intrusion that would be followed a few decades later by the beginning of France’s Algerian colonization.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was thus marked in the Arab world by a great debate between three political and intellectual forces: first, the advocates of tradition, be they religious (traditionalist ulema) or political (supporters of different regimes usually linked to the Ottoman Empire), who attempted all through the century to keep their power and counter the blows of the second “modernist” current, which characterized the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter current, in which we find Mehmet Ali, the Khedive of Egypt; Hayreddin, the Grand Vizir of the regency of Tunis and founder of the Sadiki college; and, later, Atatürk and Bourguiba, did not hesitate, as Béatrice Hibou<sup>1</sup> notes, “to refer explicitly to the West and to apply in a highly flexible manner the capacity for *ijtihad*, that is personal interpretation.” They shared their desire for reform with a third group, the “traditionalists” or “fundamentalists,” who believed that a return to an original Islam as a response to the question of modernity raised by Western intervention was the way forward. They all “shared the desire for renewal and the need to respect the laws and values of Islam, in other words to promote a common future by introducing change within continuity.”<sup>2</sup> Religious reformists saw the need to modernize religion through a reform movement, *islah*: that religious reform which they wanted to introduce to bring about social renaissance. Among them, three key figures: Jamal al-Din al Afghani,

1 HIBOU, Béatrice, *Le réformisme, grand récit politique de la Tunisie contemporaine*, in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2009/5

2 *Ibid.*

Mohamed Abdou and Rashid Rida, editor of the “Al Manar” (the beacon) publication. Their speeches were based on the importance of education and of a kind of critical mind and were aimed at reinventing the interpretation of religious texts that were considered archaic. The aim was to take the best of both worlds. From the West, technology or education, by clearly rejecting the colonial principles of domination. From Islam, spirituality and identity, yet through a reinterpretation of the texts, believed to be stifled by a static and sclerotic tradition. Those who would open the way to Islamism, as we know it today, were thus originally modernizers of the religion.

This movement crystallized in the 1920s, clearly a key decade – marked by the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal in 1924, the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailia in Egypt in 1928, the arrival of Rashid Rida in Saudi Arabia and the creation of the association of ulema in Constantine, Algeria in 1931. Later, in the mid-1950s, Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood turned fierce opponent of Nasser and a critic of the West’s moral decay, extended the reach of numerous Islamist concepts and theorizes the passage to violence.

Islamism, an ideology embraced by its militants, was conceptualized as a project for society throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century before taking shape in the 1920s. Yet it only became a mass movement in the Muslim world in the 1970s and 1980s. Our assumption is that its popular success is the paradoxical result of the extremely rapid modernization of Arab societies as evidenced by the transformation of the status of women in society, a transformation that is readily measurable by the sudden decline in their fertility or their privileged access to secondary and later to higher education. It is at the very moment when societies start a very rapid transformation questioning the very organization of the family and the gender relations that Islamism became a mass ideology, as if the questions raised by these social changes found answers in a vision of religion and of the organization of society that promoted the exact opposite. Islamism became a form of conservatism.

Another fundamental shift occurred in the early 1970s: Islamist discourse gradually became autonomous, in that it no longer took the form of a response to Western questions, but became an inward-looking way of thinking. Islamism no longer reasoned in the language of the adversary. It wanted to think for itself, with its own concepts and vision of the world. It is at that moment that the formal passage to violence clearly took place, in Afghanistan and in Peshawar, which grew into the intellectual center of anti-Soviet jihad. The development of Salafi-Wahhabism, including under its non-political form, has extended and deepened this movement.

The West, which views itself as the embodiment of universal values and a unique project, finds itself in competition with this ideology: in the Arab and Muslim world, of course, but also in Western Europe and particularly in France, where many French citizens have consciously opted for this alternative project.

### At the heart of Islamism’s production centers

Before being disseminated in the rest of the world, Islamist ideologies were born and developed in three major ideological centers: the Muslim Brotherhood – first in Egypt and later across the Arab world -- Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Turkish-

Islamism in Turkey. A marginal production mechanism was also established in Iran following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Beyond their ideological differences, these four socio-political systems have experienced a fairly similar pace of development and common chronological rifts.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was rapidly established after 1928, at a time of debate between Muslim theologians. It was established using the vernacular of the 1930s political organizations: hierarchy, a paramilitary arm, a strong and simple ideology, a leadership cult. The Muslim Brotherhood drew inspiration from mobilization systems existing at the time in Europe. They managed to create a model, a mass movement capable of blending into the landscape while having a small but efficient hierarchy. The proof lies in the fact that they exist to this day, in multiple forms, without those close to them even being aware of them! They now have subsidiaries in almost all Arab-Muslim countries -- where their presence has never been denied, even during Nasser and Sissi’s waves of repression -- as well as in Europe and in Asia. The organization has developed a kind of resilience that has allowed it to go beyond its primary objectives, to reinvent itself and to distance itself from its leaders. The organization combines its great ideological power with a capacity for associative action that gives it an extensive social presence among the population. Finally, the Brotherhood’s experience of power in 2011 in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt was not a great success, yet somehow, that does not matter: its power is more ideological than it is directly political.

Saudi Arabia is another major production center of Islamism. It has experienced a process of evolution whereby theology fed into politics (and vice versa) and was established with the underlying idea that God had permitted its emergence. The country imagined itself irrespective of Western concepts, and its organization is characterized by the omnipresence of religion: a quarter of Saudi public servants have positions linked to religion in sectors as diverse as the police, education, administration, justice and the issuing of religious norms governing the supervision of everyday life (fatwas). Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia, unlike Iran, is not a clerical state. It is a state that was built at the same time as its clergy. Religion is necessary to the authorities, but it is the authorities that control religion. Indeed, since the 1950s, through a process of progressive institutionalization, political power has gradually taken over the religious realm, which has accepted this loss of independence because the ulema have not lost their social influence and because they have had access to major official, religious (Senior Council of Ulema) and political (Ministry of Islamic Affairs or management of the Muslim World League) functions. The state has always favored Wahhabi preaching, and therefore the influence of clerics, by focusing primarily on the Saudis themselves, on Muslims residing in Arabia who had to be converted to Wahhabism, and then, later, on Muslims worldwide.

The Saudi state was largely built by the Muslim Brotherhood, who were omnipresent in the construction of the educational and religious system. This presence did not prevent the repression of the Sahwa protest movement, a hybrid of Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism that emerged in the 1990s and demanded the re-Islamization of society, the strengthening of clergy’s power, and major social reforms. This repression marked the split between the Saudi state and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Turkey stands out from the rest of the Muslim world through the power of the Sufi brotherhoods and the influence of other religious currents. While Atatürk subjected religion to political control, Turkey, as of the 1980s, gradually built a system that can be qualified today as Turkish-Islamist and that has resulted in the rise of Erdogan – who is in power since 2002, and has made religious principles one of the pillars of the AKP. A state-sponsored Islamism has been established where religion serves the state and not the other way around. Turkey is the only country in the Middle East where the AKP, an Islamist party that can be affiliated with Muslim Brotherhood, was able to come to power and stay there without discontinuity. Turkish-Islamism is a new concept, possibly the prelude to a mutation on both fronts: nationalism and Islamism. For Islamism, nationalism provides a strong historical foundation in the country. For nationalism, Islamism is an instrument of power that allows a reach beyond Turkey's borders, and the development of a neo-Ottoman diplomacy in which religion plays a central role.

For Iran, Saudi Arabia's main ideological rival, the export of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, though a crucial milestone in the history of Islamism and extending well beyond the Shia world was a failure. The revolution of 1979 was a combination of nationalism, anti-Western revolutionary fervor and social revolution that mutated into a religious revolution. Nevertheless, to this day, the Islamic Republic is the only successful example of the political triumph of a Muslim clergy. The Islamic Republic is today struggling to find a stable model that federates the younger generations, who are facing current economic difficulties and social constraints. To make up for this, the regime's officials alternate between religious and nationalist roles. This nationalist aspect of the discourse also hinders the possibility of exporting the Iranian model outside its borders, while also creating a way out for the system of the Iranian mullahs, who may well move from Islamism to nationalism, pure and simple, in a kind of *pas de deux* with Turkey.

## People, Organizations, and Media: How Islamism Spreads

Islamism is a globalized ideology. Confined, until the 1960s, to the Muslim world, it later spread to all territories where Muslims are present, including in the West. Several channels, which we have grouped into three categories, formed the basis of the expansion of Islamist ideologies: organizations, people and the media.

Wahhabi religious diplomacy is therefore made up of five principal entities, whose organizational objectives are proselytism and the export of their religious ideology:

- The Muslim World League (MWL), the Saudi royal family's diplomatic instrument, whose purpose is to "organize the cooperation between Islamic states in the different political, economic and cultural areas;"
- The Islamic University of Madinah (IUM), a training institute for imams, preachers, and missionaries in which 80 percent of students are of foreign origin.
- The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), an assembly whose purpose is to defend Muslim identity by educating a new generation;

- The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), a charity organization dedicated to the defense and the protection of Muslims.
- The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) whose purpose is to strengthen cohesion in the Muslim world, mainly around diplomatic, economic or scientific questions.

While Saudi Arabia links Wahhabi proselytism and the defense of its national interests, as demonstrated by the diplomatic telegrams analyzed in this report, the European Muslim Brotherhood defends political and social positions that must transcend national identities. European Muslim Brotherhood has established organizations that are national (Union des Organisations Islamiques d'Europe) [Union of Islamic Organizations of France] and continental (Fédération des Organisations Islamique d'Europe) [Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe]. While in Europe the Muslim Brotherhood was able to develop skillfully in the 1980s and 1990s, it has since had difficulties renewing its leadership and accepting that the new generations born in France be promoted by gradually overtaking those born in the Arab world. Above all, they have been caught off guard by the rise of Salafism, which is profiting from European youth's great religious needs and from young people's attraction for this simplified version of Islam.

The primary objective of Turkish religious organizations in Europe is the maintenance of links between the diaspora and the community of origin, in a pure spirit of Turkish-Islamism: French Islam, European Islam, that's the enemy! Moreover, Europe today is seeing a convergence of Turkish Islamic institutions such as the DITIB and Millî Görüş, former opponents who have now become competitors.

Yet the major organizations are not the only channels used to disseminate Islamism. Individuals traveling between countries have had a key role in its dissemination. These couriers may have been political refugees fleeing the repression of "secular" regimes; students, including Muslim Brotherhood followers, come to study non-religious matters who then settled down; preachers with proselytism as their principal mission; and immigrant populations importing religious practices and behaviors from the countries of origin while continuing to have links with them. Everywhere – in the Middle East starting as of the 1930s, in the Gulf in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the Maghreb in the 1970s and 1980s – Islamist ideas have circulated with those who promoted them.

Salafism has therefore developed in France with the impetus of two Salafisms complementing each other very effectively, as can be seen today. State Salafism – advocated by Saudi Arabia, initially aimed at Africa and Asia, and later at the most fragile European countries (Belgium and Bosnia in particular) – has invested little in France, where Salafism arrived *via* individuals, particularly Algerians, driven out by the civil war that was starting in Algeria in the early 1990s. With Saudi television channels and Al Jazeera targeting the Maghreb as of the 1980s, these different state, media and individual players have contributed to the theological and religious indoctrination of French Muslim populations of North African origin which, through their family and friends, have gradually been exposed to Wahhabism.

This example shows the increasing importance of the media, in addition to organizations and people: First, books, which

today play a major role in the spread of Salafism, because their availability free of charge and their simplicity make them easily accessible; then, tapes, which throughout the 1980s and 1990s were distributed in the Maghreb and in Western Europe to spread the Islamist message; and satellite television channels, starting with Al Jazeera which was able to offer an unprecedented level of political debate in the Arab world, as well as the construction of a propaganda system intended to promote the Muslim Brotherhood and its religious leader, Youssef al-Qaradâwî; then Saudi religious television channels (Iqraa in particular), which contributed to the Islamization of Muslims throughout the world. Today, the Internet and social media have taken over with impressive force, like the export scheme used by the different forms of Islamism to convince Muslims of the soundness of their cause and their religious interpretations.

## Islamism in Europe

What is the impact of this ideology and its propaganda system in France and in Western Europe? The majority – often silent – is clearly involved in a process of integrating the predominant ideological system, and therefore rejects Islamism in its discourse and even more in its day-to-day reality. Yet Muslims sensitive to Islamist arguments today constitute an important minority of the Muslim population in France. Moreover, surveys show that young French Muslims are not only sensitive to Islamist arguments, they are also prepared to accept some kind of violence when it is committed in the name of religion; they are prepared to question scientific achievements when these are in opposition to religion; a significant minority among them have an “absolutist” vision of religion.

What is Western Islamism? We have analyzed the discourse on social media. Islamism presents itself as a rational system, since it is solely based on the study of texts, the literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah. Preachers encourage the faithful to deepen their scriptural knowledge. Salafist discourse, which is completely dominant aims to demonstrate the idea of a Western decadence that is embodied by female modes of behavior that are viewed as abnormal and by the acceptance of homosexuality. In response, Salafists propose scrupulous adherence to a magnified tradition, viewed as the only safeguard against this decadence. Any criticism of the system coming from the outside is impossible, since it is emanating from a perverted world in which the faithful must live; this reality is interpreted as a sign of divine selection, since God tests those he loves. The Muslim Brotherhood do not advocate a physical separation of Muslims, yet they are at the center of a dual movement of citizens’ mobilization around a Muslim identity and adaptation of religious and communitarian demands from a secular republic that does not recognize communities.

Audience analysis on the Internet and more specifically on social media has enabled us to evaluate the incredible impact of this religious ideology. On a global scale, the Saudi ulema are among the most influential intellectuals in the world: they stand out on Twitter and Facebook and are followed by millions if not tens of millions of people. Among Muslim influencers, they are by far the ones with the most influence, far more than the Muslim

Brotherhood’s main religious figures. Far, far more than those who are today the representatives of a European Islam that seeks to be integrated in the West.

On French-language social media today, a distribution of tasks is being observed: religious discourse is voiced almost exclusively by the Salafists, who have set up a veritable transmission mechanism of ideas between Arabia and France. Former French students of the University of Madinah play a major intermediary role, participating in the most visited Salafist websites while interacting a great deal with their Algerian contacts. Not surprisingly, Muslim Brotherhood personalities take care of the political discourse, which is embodied in various forms: victim-based, identity-based, protest, post-colonial, Islamo-leftist or even directly political narratives. They have a smaller audience on social media than the Salafists, yet are more present in the media discourse.

Beyond the discourse itself, an alternative economic system is emerging before our very eyes. It is as if a small ideological continent was forming before us, with its system of thoughts, its beliefs, its economy, its social codes and its organizing principal: halal, which is much more than a way of ritually slaughtering an animal and is rather a way of life. Halal goes hand in hand with haram, and in this halal/haram, pure/impure dichotomy, everything can be sullied or on the contrary purified. To avoid contamination, one must beware of haram. What is true in the production process of meat for consumption extends to life in general. Halal’s scope today extends beyond food, offering the possibility of a “halal life.” Halal consumption, widespread among Muslims but also among many non-religious people of Muslim origin, is increasingly seen as an identity-based and ethical practice, and today extends far beyond the Islamist movement.

Our report concludes with an analysis, conducted in four European countries (France, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom), of the sociological and spatial organization of Islamist movements and their development. These comparisons reveal common dynamics in Europe: the Islamist movements started to be established in the 1970s. Depending on the circumstances, the Tabligh, as in France, Belgium or the United Kingdom; or Turkish Islamism networks, as in Germany, played the role of initiators. The Muslim Brotherhood movement grew in Europe in the 1980s in all of the countries that we are studying. Today, the momentum lies with the Salafist movements. However, between the French Republic refusing to recognize communities and applying a rather restrictive form of secularism, and Belgium recognizing religions and including three recognized communities in its constitution, legal and institutional frameworks are different, and lead to different establishment systems. The wave of Islamist terrorism, the rise of anti-Semitism among some Muslims, the separatism advocated by Salafists, and its growing visibility in the public space have given Islamism an unprecedented topicality.

This issue must be treated with the weapon of reason: it must be understood to be countered more effectively. That is the purpose of this report.