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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Exploring Islamism beyond Jihadi Violence

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: DR. ELISA OROFINO & DR. SARA TONSY

LINGUE/LANGUAGES: English

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

For several years Islamism has been associated with *ihadism* and violent extremism both in academia and in contemporary political debates. However, this association can be misleading: Islamism has much deeper roots than *ihadi* violence and it stands as a powerful and complex ideology inspiring thoughts, actions and groups all over the world. Emerging as a protest-for-justice ideology claiming freedom against Western colonisation of the Muslim world, Islamism has triggered both individual and groups worldwide since early 1900s (Esposito & Shahin, 2018; Mozaffari, 2007; Rahnema, 2008). Almost as a sacred ideology – based on the need to revive Islam as the only saving grace for Muslims around the world – Islamism started being widely associated with violent *ihadism* after 9/11. Before then, Islamism was not automatically related to terrorism but to resistance (Ali & Orofino 2018; Mura, 2012). Islamism has worked as the pillar of nationalist ideologies across the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) in the fight against foreign occupation in the early 20th.

The present panel aims to explore the concept of “Islamism” beyond “Jihadi Violence” by while bringing together scholars to discuss the confusion around key terms (e.g. Islam, Islamism, and *ihadism*) and the related consequences. Given that violence is only used by a small and definite portion of Islamists, this panel re-focuses research on Islamism beyond *ihadism* to discuss the relevant role played by non-violent Islamist organisations. The idea of “crisis” in relation to Islam is a contemporary topic that was raised by French President Emmanuel Macron in a public address in 2020 following the decapitation of a high school teacher for showing controversial Charlie Hebdo cartoons in class.

The act of terror was followed by Macron’s statement that Islam is a religion “in crisis.” This declaration was met by widespread discontent in the Arab world. Egypt’s Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, announced his disapproval of Macron’s declaration, triggering a call towards boycotting French products in most Arab countries. However, the entanglements of crises since the 2011 uprising around religion, politics and violence in the region have shaped and re-shaped the Islamism-*ihadi* narrative in several countries. For example, the rise of Islamists to the forefront of the political scene in Egypt, Syria and Tunisia, have led to demands towards reforms in religious discourse, especially after the eruption of violent confrontations. Finally, the crisis of the repeated association of Islamism with *ihadi* violence have affected one of the oldest Islamist organisations in the region, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

This panel originates from the original research work of Dr. Elisa Orofino “Rethinking Islamism Beyond Jihadi Violence” (Vernon Press, 2022), an edited collection to which the co-chair Dr. Sara Tonsy is contributing. Contributors from the groups will present their original research work, exploring Islamism as a different concept from *ihadism*.

Among them, Dr. Badr Karkbi will shed light on the role played by “Progressive Islamists” in Tunisia. More precisely, he will focus on their rejection of violent *jihad* as a methodology to achieve their desired political outcomes and their emphasis on democratic values. Dr. Sara Tonsy will discuss the presence of both violent and non-violent tendencies within the Islamist organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and how this affected Islamism in recent years.

Dr. Panos Kourgiotis will then proceed by analysing the contradictory symbiosis between peaceful *iṣlāhī* (reformist) activism and militant radicalism throughout the early years of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (1928 – 1954).

These are the confirmed speaker. However, the chairs of the panel welcome applications from scholars and experts who work on same research topics.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Dr. Elisa Orofino is the Academic Lead for Research on Extremism and Counter-Terrorism at the Policing Institute for the Eastern Region (PIER @ Anglia Ruskin University). Dr. Orofino has published extensively on extremism, vocal extremist groups, radicalisation, Muslims in the West and social movements. Her publications include journal articles, book chapters, books, edited books and online platforms. Dr. Orofino last monograph *Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Caliphate* (2020, London: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429268892>).

Dr. Sara Tonsy holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Institut d'études politiques, Aix-en-Provence, France. Tonsy is currently associate researcher at the Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulmans (IREMAM) and Mesopolis. Her research focuses on post-2011 power dynamics in the MENA region, political violence and Islamism. Tonsy recently published a monograph based on her Ph.D. research entitled: *The Egyptian Army and the Muslim Brotherhood: Contemporary power dynamics* (Tonsy, Routledge, 2022).

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