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**TITOLO/TITLE: Exploring Islamism beyond Jihadi Violence**

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

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

For several years Islamism has been associated with *jihadism* and violent extremism both in academia and in contemporary political debates. However, this association can be misleading: Islamism has much deeper roots than *jihadi* 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 *jihadism* 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 20<sup>th</sup>.

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 jihadism) 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 jihadism 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-*jihadi* 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 *jihadi* 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, scheduled publication 2022), an edited collection to which the co-chair Dr. Sara Tonsy is contributing.

## 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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### LIST OF ABSTRACTS AND SHORT BIOS OF THE SPEAKERS

#### 1- Dr. Elisa Orofino (short bio above)

PIER, Anglia Ruskin University

#### **Exploring Islamism as a different concept from jihad**

For more than two decades Islamism has been associated with jihadism and violent extremism both in academia and in contemporary political debates. 9/11 marked an indelible date in history and established a strong bond between the concepts of 'Islamism' and 'jihadism'. Although very different, the two terms soon started to be used as synonyms, implying important concerns for all matters related to Islam and the Muslims around the world. 9/11 also marked the raise of inflamed debates on the "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 2000, p.99), "Islamophobia" and "securitization" which implied an alleged incompatibility between the West and Islam and a level of insecurity for Muslims to live in the West. This study sheds light on the difference between Islamism and jihadism as two different but related concepts. While Islamism has much deeper roots than jihadi terrorism and it stands as a powerful encompassing ideology inspiring thoughts all over the world, jihad stands as a methodology for action. This study concludes Islamism and jihad do not always progress simultaneously within group-actors and even the concept of jihad can be considered beyond violence. This is possible by focusing on three sub-jihadi categories, i.e. 1) the jihad of the hand (or the sword) which is the military struggle; 2) the jihad of the tongue (verbal opposition to what is not right/acceptable for Islam), 3) the jihad of the soul which entails the inner struggle of every believer should engage to achieve purification and to reject sin.

#### 2- Dr. Danila Genovese

**The War on Terror and the War of Terror.**

**The reflective politics of an elite of grievances and their young acolytes quest for justice.**

**The case of Al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect**

In the aftermath of 9-11, 7-7 and the 2017 terror attacks in London and Manchester, public discussion of the causes of terrorism was largely limited to the assumption that there could be no explanation for terrorism beyond the ingrained

fanaticism of the Islamist perpetrators. The analysis that tended to prevail saw terrorists as motivated by a radicalism that was inherent to Islam. This study attempts to comprehend the discourses and practices engaged in by two British 'extremist' Islamist parties, banned since 2006: al Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect. On the base of the author's empirical work in London and its outskirts, the paper examines how their representation and their practices of self-representation are reflective; it also demonstrates that their agenda is the mirror image of the strategies of the War on Terror. The study introduces the concept of a fetishist desire for politics, nurtured by the Islamist actors, and it explores dynamics of radicalization among them. On the base of the author's conversations and interviews with those parties young members, the paper tries to argue that a radical ideology doesn't necessarily lead to violence. Likewise, it suggests that the choice of violence taken by the political actors is crucially interwoven with their social and personal experience in life, where violence, in absence of other institutional channels, seems to be the best mean to attain a form of 'justice'.

### 3- Dr. Francesco Alfonso Leccese

#### **Title: Al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān: A non violent Islamist movement and its Sufi roots**

Al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān (Justice and Spirituality) movement represents a rather peculiar case among contemporary Islamist movements. This movement was founded in 1987 by 'Abd al-Salām Yāsīn (1928-2012), a former member of the Budšīyīya Sufi order, a Sufi brotherhood he left in 1972. The al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān movement is therefore an example of a political movement that can be defined as Islamist despite originating in a Sufi context. This case study is representative of the specificity of Moroccan Islam and of the country's religious authority which has a Sufi legitimacy. On the one hand, the king of Morocco Muhammad VI in recent years has emphasized his role as religious leader by co-opting and promoting a rediscovery of Sufism and international conferences such as "The Sidi Shiker World Meetings of Tasawwuf Affiliates". On the other hand, leading exponents of the Budšīyīya Sufi order have held top positions within some key ministries such as that of religious affairs. In this political context, al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān represents a movement that emerges in opposition to the monarch's religious leadership and as a critique of the political quietism of the Sufi zawiya. The analysis of the al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān movement will highlight the heterogeneity of the movements defined as Islamists starting from the different theological roots of origin. Specifically, despite political activism overshadowing the Sufi theological matrix, the attempt to preserve some Sufi characteristics, such as the devotional practices of the wird (litany, daily invocation of ḡikr), and the nonviolent approach, allow us to define al-'Adl wa-l-Iḥsān as an emblematic case of a non-jihadist political Islamism.

### 4- Helen Murphey

#### **Title: Redefining Identity: The Intersection of Islamist Frames and National Discourses in post-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia**

Under Egypt and Tunisia's pre-revolutionary regimes, Islamist actors had been vilified for alleged transnational associations inimical to the nation-state and national identity. Ben Ali promoted Tunisia as a moderate regional 'exception', in contradistinction to violent Islamist 'extremism' (Zemni, 2016: 133; Boukhars, 2014: 5); in Egypt, Islamist groups were characterised as foreign enemies targeting the country due to its important regional role (Ranko, 2015: 122-123). These narratives had been instrumentalised to associate Islamism with jihadi violence, locating it outside of a 'moderate' national identity. These fears associating Islamism and violence migrated into the post-revolutionary era. Consequently, Islamists venturing into the political arena affirmed their place in national discourses previously used to justify their own exclusion. In Tunisia, Islamist actors adopted the concept of Tunisia as uniquely moderate; Egyptian Islamists warned of external threats. Nevertheless, notions of transnationalism remained symbolically powerful (Piscatori, 2019). How did Islamists' conceptualisations of national identity develop throughout the course of their political socialisation? I address this question through exploring the appropriation of the tunisianité concept by the Islamist parties Ennahda and Jabhat al-Islah in Tunisia, and the use of the 'saboteur' narrative by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi party Hizb al-Nour in Egypt. Through contextualising the historical discursive connection between Islamism and violence, I hope to contribute theoretically and empirically to the larger panel discussion by exploring how non-violent Islamist organisations appropriate, contest and reshape narratives of violence and national identity.

### 5- Dr. Sara Tonsy (short bio above)

**Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulmans (IREMAM) and Mesopolis**

#### **Title: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from Sayyid Qutb to 2013: Continuities and Ruptures**

The Muslim Brotherhood organization (MB) is one of the longest living political actors in Egypt. Since its founding by Hassan el-Banna in 1929 it has been one of the most active anti-colonial movements in the Middle East and beyond. However, there are various eras through which the MB passed and which heavily marked the organizations' internal governance, policy towards the use of violence and discourse. Some elements became a core part of the organizations' existence over the years and they became evident during recent repression of the group. This study addresses the two questions: 1) Comparing the current repression with the one under Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970), how has the importance of discourse and recruitment changed for the MB? and 2) Can this comparison enable the differentiation between Islamism and jihadism?

The research reveals the different factions within the MB and their relation to violence since its founding. The presence of both violence and non-violence discourses within the same organisation enables the reflection on the complexity of intertwining religion and violence in Egyptian politics. This research examines the Brotherhood's literature and uses empirical information collected for the author's doctoral thesis. The empirical information ranges from interviews to observations during the period 2011-2017. This study concludes that the MB have never completely abandoned violence, harbouring internal discourse and maintains a double organization based on both Islamism and jihadism.