Islamists and the global order. Between resistance and recognition

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December 2022

Manuscript prepared for Edinburgh University Press

109.530 words

Contents

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AKP – *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)

AMU – Arab Maghreb Union

ANSA – Armed non-state actor

CPR – *Congrès pour la République*

EU – European Union

EU – European Union

FSA – Free Syrian Army

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GWOT – "Global war on terror"

HIROR – *Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la revolution, des réformes politiques et de la transition démocratique* (High instance for the realisation of the goals of the revolution, political reforms and democratic transition)

IDF – Israeli Defence Forces

IR – Academic discipline of international relations

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

ISIE – *Instance superieure indépendante pour les élections* (Superior independent instance for elections)

ISIS – "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" organisation

JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

JN – *Jabhat an-Nusra* (the Support Front, also known as the Nusra Front)

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

MENA – "Middle East" and North Africa

MENA – "Middle East" and North Africa (MENA)

MTI – *Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique*

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCA – National Constitutent Assembly

NGO – Non-governmental organisation

PCVE – Preventing and countering violent extremism

PLO – Palesitnian Liberation Organisation

R2P – Responsibility to protect

RCD – *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*

SLA – South Lebanese Army

STL – Special Tribunal for Lebanon

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UGTT – Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

US(A) – United States of America

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<PT> I Islamists in a world order under Western hegemony <PT>

<CH> Chapter 1: Setting the stage: How Islamists came to be known as rejectionists and enemies of the world order <CH>

Until the end of the "Cold War", social theorists across disciplines believed that religion would slowly but surely disappear and become irrelevant for political and social life. Secularisation was considered "the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences" (Casanova 1994, 17). As a corresponding normative claim, liberal and deliberative political theory in the Kantian tradition asserted that religion, on the one hand, and the state, politics and sometimes even the public, on the other, must be strictly separated from each other (Reder 2013, 63-66). In what seems like a rather drastic break with the empirical assessments of the secularisation paradigm that occurred in the 1990s, academics warned against the "the revenge of God" (Kepel 1993), "the challenge of fundamentalism" (Tibi 1998) and the "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1993). And finally, after the attacks of 9/11, what is often called "Islamic terrorism" (Jackson 2007) became a top priority on Western security agendas and, as a consequence, provoked new debates in the social sciences. For IR, for instance, the events of 9/11 triggered a critical reassessment of a potential structural secularism prevalent in the discipline. For they had revealed that "all mainstream theories of world politics (…) ignore the impact of religion, despite the fact that world-shaking political movements have so often been fueled by religious fervor" (Keohane 2002, 29). In political and social theory, too, analytical and normative reeevaluations took place, including the debate on "post-secularism" which revolved around Jürgen Habermas' (2001a, 2009) repositioning toward religion. A critical interdisciplinary strand of research, heavily influenced by Talal Asad (1993), pursued an important agenda of deconstruction. It questioned the binary distinction between the religious and the secular, and scrutinised the conditions and effects of the "politics of secularism" as a power practice (E.S. Hurd 2007). Notably, this debate was successful in revealing how the figure of the "Islamist" was produced as the Other in Western hegemonic discourse, serving the self-assertion of an insecure, but idealised secular Self (Mavelli 2013, 163).

This chapter uses this deconstructive lens to trace how "Islamists" (and sometimes even Islam as a whole) have come to replace communism as the spectre that haunts the liberal world in the Western mind (Gerges 1999, vii-viii; Camilleri 2012, 1029). Of course, scholarly debates are now very differentiated in how they analyse political Islam, its intellectual history and its different real-world manifestations. Marc Lynch (2017) identifies two basic postures toward political Islam as present in policy circles in Washington, DC but also in academia. The "splitters" are those who

"produce finely-grained, accurate assessments of the ideological, organizational, and tactical differences among groups which share broadly-defined ideological orientations". However, among some politicians and policy- and security-oriented academics (see, for example, Ganor 2015), a very crude, almost caricature-like image of the "Islamist" threat prevails. These are the "lumpers" who "typically view 'radical Islam' as a coherent whole (…) from the manifestly apparent armed groups and terrorists to the underlying ideological and material support networks and broadly-held public attitudes that create an amenable environment" (Lynch 2017). This more or less monolithic enemy image of "radical Islam" started to grow after the Iranian revolution of 1979, gained importance during the 1990s (the "clash of civilisations" and "religious civil wars"), consolidated into a generalised and ubiquitous enemy image in the 2000s (Al-Qaeda and "new terrorism"), experienced a revival in the 2010s (ISIS and the "caliphate") and has survived until today, especially in conservative and far right circles in the West.

In this view,[16] "Islamists" appear as suspicious not only because of their alleged violence-proneness and "special character" of a would-be "religious terrorism" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, 371). They are also constructed as an anachronism, as a relic from pre-modern times who stubbornly reject the principles of the Western world order as a legacy of the "Westphalian synthesis" and the corresponding "norms of authority" (Philpott 2002, 67; 76): the sovereign state as the only polity with authority, the proscription of intervention into the domestic affairs of other states and the consequent emergence of pluralism in international society, religious freedom and decline of religion's "temporal prerogatives" (Philpott 2002, 75). Islamists are said to challenge the modern state-based order because they rely on divine *sovereignty* (Anderson 2009, 196; Mandaville 2013, 178-179). This renders democratic forms of rule and *legitimacy* impossible, for "any 'Islamist' politics (…) demands a theocratic state in which there can be no debate about right and wrong, or about appropriate social order, because its aim must be 'to bring about the rule of God'" (Teti and Mura 2009, 102). In this reading, Islamists' *normative aspirations* have to be totalitarian (Lynch 2017) and "must eventually produce a caliphate" (Mandaville 2021). They are inextricably linked to the hereafter and do not provide room for concessions to the here and now – which makes it impossible and undesirable to negotiate with them (Nilsson and Svensson 2020, 391; Miller 2011).

Following the "splitters", this book insists that the figure of the "Islamist" must be deconstructed to investigate *what kinds of relationship* actually existing actors that are labelled "Islamist" have toward

[16] All of the referenced colleagues here challenge these all too simplistic images about Islam but can show that these clichés exist among policy-makers and/or in some academic accounts. The references should thus be read with the prefix "critically".

a world order under Western hegemony. I argue that the legacies of the secularisation paradigm,[17] which consists of the analytical secularisation thesis and the normative secularism claim, are still tangible in the more problematic parts of political and public discourse on Islamists and underlie their construction as enemy of a world order deemed liberal. The "global war on terror" further contributed to solidifying the image of an Islamist threat: Not only did it put Muslims and Muslim communities under a general suspicion of radicalism and potential radicalisation, and further widened the concept of Islamism to include ever more forms of more or less political forms of Islam. The "evilisation" (Sheikh 2014, 496-497) of first Al-Qaeda and then ISIS also inflated the fear of these "monsters" (Pinfari 2019; Bapat 2019) among Western publics. Without a clear distinction from, sometimes even a deliberate conflation with, other actors, this led to the notion that Islamists are violent *rejectionists* (Maher 2016) of the global order – even though this is only true for a very small minority among them, namely the Salafi jihadists. Despite this, with their *politics of rejection*, sometimes dramatically performed (Pfeifer and Günther 2021), Salafi jihadists have managed to hegemonise the imaginary of Islamism as being diametrically opposed to, and violently fighting against, the Western world order. But political Islam is a plural, modern discourse. So, while some Islamists may indeed reject parts of the world order as built and dominated by Western states, they may also *recognise* (and seek recognition within) this order (Geis, Clément, and Pfeifer 2021) or choose to *resist* and transform it.

<A> A world order without religion? Secularisation and secularism in social and normative theory <A>

Some of the most important reflections on, and basic distinctions in the study of, religion originate from the very beginnings of sociology. Among the most influential Western thinkers of the 19th and 20th century are Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger. In different ways, they all contributed to what came to be known as the secularisation thesis. It predicts – and sometimes tacitly advocates – the decline or even disappearance of religious phenomena in modern societies. What the respective authors understand as "religion", however, varies. The search for a concept (or the rejection of a transhistorically and transculturally valid definition, see Asad 1993, 17) is one of the driving forces for social theorising on religion and at the core of debates in sociology, political philosophy, anthropology, comparative politics, area studies and IR until today.

[17] My understanding diverges from the one proposed by Bruce (2002, 30) in that it includes the normative side of secularism.

One important distinction separates *functionalist* from *substantive* or *essentialist* understandings of religion (Pickel 2011). The former is associated with a Durkheimian tradition (Durkheim 1990, orig. 1912), whereas Max Weber is considered a key thinker for essentialist conceptions of religion. Weber (1972, orig. 1904/1905, rev. 1920) was mainly concerned with the relationship between religion and economics. He assumes that there are characteristic elements to confessions that have specific effects on human, especially economic, behaviour. Notably, the precursors of more elaborate sociological secularisation theories can already be found in Weber's work, too. According to him, one key driver of its eventual demise is paradoxically inherent to the history of religion (more specifically: Protestantism) itself. By relocating the way to salvation to active working in this world (*Weltbearbeitung*) and rejecting all magical means, he argues, Protestantism launched a process of internal rationalisation which coincided with the rise of rationalism in the empirical sciences. In this way, it contributed to the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world (Weber 1972, 263) – a world in which religion itself became increasingly implausible and was relegated to the sphere of the irrational until it finally became the "antirational super-personal power par excellence" (Weber 1972, 564, author's translation).

These theses about religion's self-defeat were further elaborated into secularisation theory in the second half of the 20th century. Following a Weberian tradition, Berger (1990, orig. 1967) conceptualised religion as one form of cosmisation or the projection of the human order to the world. Through religion, "a sacred cosmos is established" (P.L. Berger 1990, 25). What exactly is understood as sacred varies over history, but it is always something extraordinary compared to every-day routine practices, and it is the opposite of both the profane and chaos. Religion bestows "an ultimately valid ontological status" on social institutions and locates them "within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference" (P.L. Berger 1990, 33), thereby both legitimising order and hiding its constructedness. With the rise of modern political orders, however, religion's status changed. The state, first, no longer operated as an enforcement agency religion but rather treated it in a *laissez-faire* mode. Second, the state no longer acted as an arbiter in an increasingly plural field of competing religions. Religion, third, became more and more a private matter, a '"choice' or 'preference' of the individual" (P.L. Berger 1990, 133). It no longer occupied the role of connecting cosmos and nomos. The political order now drew on other sources of legitimacy. Through processes of marketisation and bureaucratisation, religion further loses its mysteriousness and awesomeness. The manifold offers of different religious traditions also challenge them in their individual claims to "unchanging verity" (P.L. Berger 1990, 145). Eventually, religion is reduced to moral and therapeutic functions and subjected to "consumer controls" (P.L. Berger 1990, 148). Operating with a functionalist approach to religion, Luckmann (1991, orig. 1966) came to rather

similar claims about secularisation. As is typical for functional definitions, he employs a very broad understanding of religion. For him, the anthropological capacity of an organism to become a person by transcending its naturalness or biological nature is already "a fundamentally religious operation" (1991, 87, author's translation). As religious operations are part of human nature, they will not disappear but rather change their form and appearance. Consequently, he conceptualises secularisation as the "detachment of *institutional* norms and values from the cosmos of religious meaning-making (*Sinngebung*)" (Luckmann 1985, 39, author's translation, emphasis in original).

Until the 1990s, the secularisation thesis as formulated in the second half of the 20th century remained largely unquestioned, despite empirical evidence that should have cast doubt on it much earlier (Casanova 2012). One explanation for this may be that core claims of secularisation – like religion's separation from institutions and its relegation to the private sphere – were supported by normative theories of secularism. These hold that "religion *should* be confined to the private sphere" (Shah 2012, 2, emphasis added). In particular, secularism stipulates that institutions be secular and that the democratic state be neutral in its foundations. Such claims build on a strict division between the public and the private sphere, as it is found in liberal political theory (for more recent contributions, see, e.g., Laborde 2017). Following John Rawls, for instance, religions cannot be the basis for public deliberation because they demand the acceptance of one encompassing belief system. Modern societies, however, are marked by the plurality of reasonable doctrines, which means that not all citizens share one single conception of "the good". In the public sphere, members of a society should therefore give good *political* reasons that are intelligible and comprehensible to other citizens, irrespective of the comprehensive doctrine to which they adhere (Rawls 1993, 133-172, 212-254; 1997). Such an "overlapping consensus of reasonable (…) comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls 1993, 144) can be supported by various theories of "the good". This liberal conception not only protects the public sphere from being captured by one encompassing belief system – it also protects religion by making sure that public reason "does not trespass upon religious beliefs and injunctions insofar as these are consistent with essential constitutional liberties" (Rawls 1997, 803).

The relation of religious language and the public sphere is also central for deliberative democratic theories. Jürgen Habermas is not only worth studying as one of the major thinkers in this field. His work on religion is also remarkable because he significantly revised and adapted his position on its role in democratic societies. Originally, he had been sceptical toward religion which, he argued, undermined communicative action by predetermining the goals of, rather than allowing for an intersubjective understanding emerging from, discourse (Reder 2013, 82). In his later works, however, Habermas recognises the moral role of religion in democratic societies and the

foundation of the liberal state (Habermas 2001a, 22-23). Religion bears significant semantic potentials for a post-secular society. By providing a source of solidarity and motivational force for participating in public discourse, it can have a corrective role for modernity's pathologies and a secularisation that is "about to derail" (*entgleisende Säkularisierung*, Habermas 2001a, 12, author's translation). Habermas rejects the notion that citizens be capable and willing to separate political from religious values. He dismisses what he calls the "Rawlsian *proviso*" (Habermas 2009, 129) as an excessive demand (*Zumutung*) from religious citizens (Habermas 2009, 135) but still insists that rule be neutral (*weltanschaulich neutrale Herrschaft*) and communicate through secular reasons (Habermas 2009, 136). He solves this problem by introducing a split into the public sphere. In the "wild" political, or informal, public, religious arguments are allowed – and even desired for their semantic and truth potentials (*Wahrheitsgehalte*) that make political life flourish. The formal public sphere, however, must refrain from religious language. For state institutions (parliaments, courts, ministries, administrations) to both benefit from religion's specific qualities *and* remain neutral, Habermas introduces an institutional *proviso* of translation (*institutioneller Übersetzungsvorbehalt*): Religious and secular citizens in the informal public sphere both have to invest in a reciprocal translation process. The former accept that their arguments have to be translated in order to access the formal public, while the latter open up for the truth potentials of religion (Habermas 2009, 136-138). These citizens, then, live in *post-secular* society as sketched by Habermas.

<A> Religion's violent come-back to social and normative theory and the recalibration of the secularisation paradigm <A>

It is no coincidence that Habermas began to rework his thought on religion in the early 2000s. In a speech given at the occasion of receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2001, he developed his first ideas on a post-secular society. This was a reaction not only to the attacks of 9/11. Rather, he asserted that "whoever wants to avoid a war of civilisations has to remember the unfinished (*unabgeschlossen*) dialectic of our own, occidental secularisation" (Habermas 2001a, 11). Indeed, the 1990s had seen an outright explosion of publications on the supposed violence-proneness of religions (Baumgart-Ochse 2010) with a surprisingly one-sided focus on intra- and (potential) interstate wars (Huntington 1993), militancy (Kepel 1993) and fundamentalism (Tibi 1998). According to these primordialist accounts, religious convictions discretely affect world politics. They regularly create violent conflicts with unbelievers or believers of other denominations by establishing fixed images of an adversary or hostile Other that needs to be fought. While the more simplistic primordialist approaches to religious violence were quickly refuted on theoretical and empirical grounds (Senghaas 1998; Henderson and Tucker 2001; Sen

2006), other projects were more careful in their data collection and claims. One of the most extensive, comparative studies, *The Fundamentalism Project (1987-1995)*, was published in five volumes by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (1991-1995). The project identified fundamentalist movements as groups with family resemblances, reacting to the marginalisation of religion and responding to the challenges imposed on them by the secular modern world. Despite the sophistication of the project, one of the investigators resentfully contended in retrospective that the project "reinforced the perception that religion (…) was becoming a significant national-security problem (…) (and) the notion of a 'clash of civilizations'" (Appleby 2011, 228). The *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s was sweeping.

However, some of the foundations for a more (self-)critical debate in the 2000s were also laid in this period. For sociology and neighbouring disciplines had to come to terms with the fact that "a whole body of literature (…) loosely labelled 'secularization theory' (was) essentially mistaken", given that the world was "as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" (P.L. Berger 1999, 2). A couple of years before Berger's famous restatement, José Casanova (1994) had presented a book on religion's persistence in the public sphere. At the time, as he disclosed later, he interpreted this "as antimodern, antisecular, or antidemocratic reaction" (Casanova 2012, 25) and therefore problematic. Later, Casanova would become an important critic of secularisation on a more fundamental level.

In that sense, Talal Asad (Asad 1983, 1993) and his works on religion from anthropology can be considered as being ahead of their time. His critique fundamentally addresses the way in which sociology and anthropology hitherto built conceptions of, and knowledge on, religion. He is particular interested in the power involved in these knowledge-production processes. Religion is conceptualised as a system of symbolic meanings and generic functions in these theories. It thereby gains a transhistorical and abstract character and is posited as universal – even though it has a Christian history and is deeply entrenched with social practices and power-knowledge formations which are specific to the European context (Asad 1993, 17). The validity of concepts of religion is always connected to particular traditions and historical developments, which is why Asad rejects any attempt to find a universal definition of religion: The act of defining is a product of contingent discursive processes at a certain point in time and space (Asad 1993, 29). Asad's theory calls for analyses of the power involved in authoritatively defining what religion is and where it has its place in society. He became one, if not the central reference author for a critical-deconstructive strand of research on secularism in the 2000s and 2010s that will be introduced in the next section of this chapter.

Finally, taking a *homo oeconomicus* perspective and founding their arguments in the micro-, meso- and macro-level, Stark and Finke (2000) argued that religion survives because, depending on the regulation of the religious market by respective nation state, it can be a very rational choice to pursue religious practices. This economic perspective was heavily criticised for its reductionism (see, for example, Bruce 2000) but still introduced a new theoretical perspective to sociology, claiming to be able to explain religion's persistence.

What was perceived as "religious resurgence"[18] (P.L. Berger 1999, 10) in the 1990s triggered a myriad of studies in the 2000s that revisited the secularisation paradigm from various disciplinary angles. In IR, the attacks of 9/11 were read as a "challenge (…) to secularism in International Relations" (Philpott 2002). And yet, at first, they entailed only a tentative consideration of religion in mainstream publications and conferences of the discipline (Kubálková 2009). Due to the dominance of positivism and rationalism, IR was not the most accommodating discipline for the study of religion. What was described above as the "Westphalian synthesis" (Philpott 2002) is deeply inscribed into IR's foundations and main theoretical strands, and "the rejection of religion has become even stronger in IR than in most other disciplines" (Laustsen and Waever 2000, 739).

For most realist approaches, if not considered entirely irrelevant, religion is either reduced to rhetoric that serves the legitimation of foreign policy (Barnett 2011, 94; Fox and Sandal 2010, 149-150) or it is relegated to the sphere of the irrational, "almost always caus(ing) the state to act in ways that are counter to its national interests" (Barnett 2011, 93-94). Liberalists are sometimes caught up in a narrative of modernity which sees it as a "linear process in which liberal formations such as capitalism, secularism, and democracy all progress together", sometimes embrace a "thoroughly secular ideology" and a self-understanding that is "antithetical to religion" (Snyder 2011, 12; 17). With the rational, self-interested individual as the core analytical unit, liberalism is the most likely champion of secularisation theory – even though its ability to account for non-state and transnational actors gives it an advantage compared to realism (Haynes 2014, 63). Those liberal approaches which absorbed some concepts from constructivism, such as identity and norms, were more prone to accommodating religion (Moravcsik 1997, 525). Jeffrey Haynes, one of the first IR scholars who substantially worked on religion (see for example (Haynes 1998, 2001), used a soft power approach to transnational religious actors, stressing their ability to influence international politics despite their lack of military and economic resources comparable to a state (Haynes 2008). With an empirically oriented research agenda, Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler proposed to

[18] For a criticism of the "return" and "resurgence" rhetoric, which presupposes an actual previous decline or disappearance of religion, see for example Mufti (2013).

rework influential IR theories, especially realism as "the most influential theory in international relations scholarship" (Fox and Sandler 2004, 167), to systematically take religion into account.

But some authors in IR remained very sceptical toward such endeavours. For instance, Vendulka Kubálková (2009, 28; 29) criticised approaches which remained in a positivist research tradition and tried to integrate religion into existing main theories. To her, such attempts were "forcing 'irrational' religion into secular and positivist categories and treating it as a culture or identity", reducing religion to religious institutions which are categorised as "elements of transnational civil society or expressions of general cultural tendencies" and embracing an instrumentalist view of religion. Instead, a second group of authors demanded a more fundamental inquiry into the "foundational myths and assumptions on which the discipline has been built" (Kubálková 2009, 30). Important impulses for this came from critical security studies, investigating the securitisation of religious referent objects and "on behalf of secularization" (Laustsen and Waever 2000, 739), and approaches inspired by the English School (Thomas 2000, 2005). But first and foremost, IR took inspiration from the debates in other disciplines.

In peace and conflict studies, authors tried to put forward alternatives to the primordialist view of religion as violence-prone (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000; Baumgart-Ochse 2016). Instrumentalists argued that religion was merely a frame applied to conflicts that were actually about modernisation or about socio-economic grievances (Senghaas 2002). Constructivists saw religion not as something external which is attached to the actual conflict after the event but rather as cognitive and normative structure: The social world must be interpreted in order to be intersubjectively meaningful. Religion as one such structure "provide(s) social actors with value-laden conceptions of the self and others" (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000, 647) and it is constitutive for social action, including violence. Mark Juergensmeyer (2005) and others emphasise the functional equivalence of the nation state and religion in providing an ideology of order, which brings them into a rivalry. Consequently, the "sacralisation of political demands" occurred where the secular national state failed to fulfil its promises (Juergensmeyer 2005, 217). Religion emerged as a form of resistance to it, offering the "language of ultimate order" and the interpretation of conflict as the "drama of cosmic war" (Juergensmeyer 2005, 213; 214). Others argued that, in a given situation, elites can (but do not have to) mobilise religion to legitimise the use of violent means (Hasenclever and De Juan 2007). One important insight from this strand of research is that

> "the impact of religious traditions on conflict behaviour is deeply ambiguous: they can make violence more likely, insofar as a reading of holy texts prevails that justifies armed combat (…) (but they can also) make violence less likely, insofar as a reading of holy texts prevails that delegitimises the use of violence in a given situation or even generally" (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000, 650).

The "ambivalence of the sacred" (Appleby 2000) with regard to violence implies room for agency and underlies pleas for inter-religious and inter-civilisational dialogue (Dallmayr 2002; Michael and Petito 2009).

Normative reassessments were made during the 2000s in political theory and philosophy as well, beginning with Habermas' sketch of a postsecular society and soon followed by the works of Charles Taylor, who became one his most important critical interlocutor. Besides his genealogy *A Secular Age* (Taylor 2007), he also developed a normative critique of (liberal) democratic theory's obsession with religion as its Other. "'(S)ubtraction stories' of modernity in general, and secularity in particular" suggest that human beings slowly but surely "liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge" (Taylor 2007, 22). For his enterprise, disaggregation is the key. He identifies three secularities among which he highlights the one which refers to the changing conditions of belief as the most striking: Religious belief has not only lost its status as default mode of accessing the world, it has even become "hard to believe in God in (many milieux of) the modern West" (Taylor 2007, 539). While, as in the Habermasian post-secular society, believers and nonbelievers live side by side, a hierarchy is established between them. An epistemic distinction separates secular reason, as available to "any honest, unconfused thinker", from religiously grounded arguments which "will always be dubious and in the end only convincing to people who have already accepted the dogmas in question" (Taylor 2011, 53). Secular reasons are *a priori* more convincing in the field of moral and political orders because they are deemed neutral. Religion, in contrast, appears as irrational and potentially dangerous. "(R)eligiously informed thought is somehow less rational than purely 'secular' reasoning. (This) attitude has a political ground (religion as threat), but also an epistemological one (religion as a faulty mode of reason)" (Taylor 2011, 51). According to Taylor, however, it is unclear why secular reasons should be any more accessible than religious ones in principle: "If we take key statements of our contemporary political morality (…), I cannot see how the fact that we are desiring/enjoying/suffering beings, or the perception that we are rational agents, should be any surer basis (…) than the fact that we are made in the image of God" (Taylor 2011, 54).

The debate on secularism should therefore be readjusted: Overcoming its fixation on religion, it should ask for the adequate "response of the democratic state to diversity" – which, for Taylor, refers to *any* viewpoint (Taylor 2011, 36). Habermas countered this claim by arguing that religion demands from their believers that they participate "in cultic practices in which no Kantian or Utilitarian has to participate in order to make a good Kantian or Utilitarian argument" (Habermas and Taylor 2009). For Taylor, however, these non-religious epistemic universes also presuppose certain experiences and they may be as inaccessible as religious language. Therefore, secularism's

neutrality claim should not single out religious language as inadequate for the formal public sphere: The state's self-articulation "can't be in Benthamite language, it can't be simply in Kantian language, it can't be in Christian language" (Habermas and Taylor 2009).

Sociology reacted to the empirical challenge of the secularisation paradigm in two main ways. One group of scholars considered a final rejection as premature and worked to reformulate and refine secularisation theory's claims. For instance, Steve Bruce (2002) disaggregated the secularisation thesis into several causal linkages which can be studied empirically. Eventually he insists that "religion diminishes in social significance, becomes increasingly privatized, and loses personal salience" (Bruce 2002, 30) – at least in the form of Christian, church-based religious belief in Western states. In other contexts, however, specifically in ethnic civil wars or conditions of rapid social change, religion may not disappear. Similarly, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2011) linked the survival of religion in some but not in other places to varying levels of affluence and existential security.

The second group of scholars took their criticism further and came up with different results. Casanova (2007, 105), like Bruce, made the case that secularisation theory needs to be conceptually divided into its sub-theses. For "what usually passes for a single theory of secularization (are actually) three separate propositions (…): 1) secularization as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, 2) secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and 3) secularization as a marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere" (Casanova 2006: 12). According to him, only the first thesis is sufficiently supported by empirical evidence to be defendable as a core of secularisation theory. But Casanova went further. He scrutinised public religion in different contexts and showed that the empirically observable processes of secularisation diverge from, and therefore need to be compared with, each other. There are multiple "secularisms" and "secularities" (Casanova 2009; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012) at work as public religion interacts in different ways with the state, political and civil society. Most importantly, religion need not always be "a threat to the public sphere or to democratic politics" (Casanova 2012, 26).

Casanova's work contributed to deconstructing the binary opposition between "the secular" and "the religious". If there is a plurality of options in how to organise the relationship between religion on the one hand, and the state, politics and society on the other, then there is no single path to the secular age or, for that matter, modernity (Eisenstadt 2000b). Casanova suggests that the some ideological forms of secularism operate subtly as an "epistemic knowledge regime that may be unreflexively held and phenomenologically assumed as the taken-for-granted normal structure of

modern reality, as a modern *doxa* or as an 'unthought'" (Casanova 2009, 151, emphasis in original). In this way, he also lay the foundation for criticising the secularist bias present in every-day, political and (some) academic accounts of religion, which will be discussed in the next section.

<A> Deconstructing secularism and the Muslim Other through critical theory <A>

So far, this chapter reconstructed the secularisation paradigm's origins and main claims. It also showed how what was perceived as "religious resurgence" and "religiously motivated violence" in the 1990s challenged the secular assumptions that inhered various disciplines. The disciplinary adjustments ranged from a reformulation of secularisation theory to a normative reassessment of religion's role in society to theoretical adaptations which allowed for the accommodation of religion. What many contributions to this dynamic debate had in common, however, was the imagination of religion as something which is *a priori* located and meant to be outside the realm of politics. One important strand of research takes a meta-perspective on religion as the opposite of the secular as constructed in secular discourse. To the authors belonging to this debate, the divide between the religious and politics is not natural but rather a "powerful political settlement" (E.S. Hurd 2012, 47). Secularism, then, is a "power-knowledge regime (…) that shapes modes, forms, and practices of religiosity compatible with and instrumental to the reproduction of state sovereignty" (Mavelli 2014, 174). It is precisely this authority of the modern secular state to continually define religion, to draw and redraw the line between religious and secular realms, to define and redefine the "'proper place of religion' in a secular society" (Asad 2006, 526) and to "become involved in the regulation and management of religious life" (Mahmood 2015, 3) that comes under scrutiny in the debate on the "politics of secularism" (E.S. Hurd 2007).[19]

This debate took primarily place in IR but drew heavily on contributions from other disciplines, especially the works from anthropologist Talal Asad. It starts from the deconstruction of oppositional binaries which not only separate religion and the secular but also establish a the subordination of the former to the latter (Wilson 2012, 58). Such oppositions include "*belief* and *knowledge*, *reason* and *imagination, history* and *fiction, symbol* and *allegory, natural* and *supernatural*, *sacred* and *profane* (…) (and) pervade modern secular discourse, especially in its polemical mode" (Asad 2003, 23). One particularly important distinction opposes the violence-proneness of religion, especially Islam "as peculiarly (violent) (undisciplined, arbitrary, singularly oppressive)" (Asad 2003, 10), to secularism's claimed concern with reducing "pain and suffering as such" which is actually about "the pain and suffering that can be attributed to religious violence because that is

[19] In the literature, this strand of research is sometimes labelled "post-secularist", see for example Mufti (2013); Mavelli and Petito (2012); and Wilson (2014).

pain the modern imaginary conceives of as gratuitous" (Asad 2003, 11). In this perspective, the Westphalian peace is part of a "liberal mythology" (Thomas 2000, 819) according to which peace is the merit of the privatisation of religion, the secularisation of politics and the rise of the modern state. At the same time, however, the "myth of religious violence" can not only help "to marginalize discourses and practices labeled religious" (Cavanaugh 2009, 225) but it can also be used to legitimate the resort to the use of secular force against religious actors. For, as Cavanaugh (2009, 226) puts it, "their irrational violence must be met with rational violence", which may include the use of military force and war.

It is no coincidence that the critical debate on the politics of secularism gained traction in the 2000s. The US and its allies began waging the "global war on terror" (GWOT), framed as necessary counter-violence against the threat of "Islamic terrorism". However, the characterisation of secularism as a hegemonic discourse on, and authoritative settlement of, the relationship between religion and politics is a more systematic intervention and not be limited to the empirical post-9/11 context. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd argues, for instance, that secularism can operate as a "conceptual apparatus" (E.S. Hurd 2007, 114) through which events are perceived in foreign policy-making. According to her, two variants of secular discourse inform practice in international relations and its theorisation in IR until today. The first discursive tradition, laicism, is a legacy of Enlightenment and claims that religion has successfully been banned to the private sphere or entirely disappeared. Judeo-Christian secularism, in contrast, sees "the separation of church and religion (as) a Western achievement that emerged from adherence to common European religious and cultural traditions" (E.S. Hurd 2012, 43). Both traditions have a certain connection to Orientalism, as they were developed at least partially with a view to the Muslim Other. Today, the two versions of secularism construct political Islam as a refusal to accept the public-private divide and as a divergence from "'normal' politics" (E.S. Hurd 2007, 117):

> "In laicism, political Islam appears as a superficial expression of more fundamental economic and political interests and an infringement of irrational forms of religion upon would-be secular public life in Muslim-majority societies. (…) In Judeo-Christian secularism, political Islam appears as an undemocratic commingling of Islam and politics that stands in sharp distinction to the modern (…) separation of church and state" (E.S. Hurd 2007, 118).

As can be seen from this, the binary of the secular and the religious is also often linked to the "divide between the West and the rest of the world" (Cavanaugh 2009, 205), especially the "Muslim world". The politics of secularism debate is closely linked to post-colonial thought. It also decidedly formulates its critique against the backdrop of the diagnosed obsession of Western secular discourse with Islam and especially "Islamists" and "political Islam". It is characteristic to

the construction of this religious subject that it is neither internally differentiated nor has clear conceptual boundaries. Secular discourse "equates the appearance of Islamic religion in political practice with fundamentalism and intolerance" (E.S. Hurd 2007, 118), thereby neglecting the contestations of how religion and politics should relate to each other *within* the discourse of political Islam (E.S. Hurd 2007, 128) and stylising "Islamism" as a general threat to modernity.

The debate's merit is in particular that it, first, disclosed the deeper roots of the Western production of Islam as its "ultimate 'Other'" (Mavelli and Petito 2012, 932; Euben 1999; Asad 2009) in secularist discourse. Second, it also provided the tools to deconstruct the enemy image of "Islamism" which has become pervasive in political and public debate and some intellectual circles since George W. Bush declared the "global war on terror". At the same time, this strand of research as an "emergent orthodoxy" (Mufti 2013, 7) in the study of secularism has been criticised in two main respects. The first is its tendency to create new essentialised images in the course of deconstructing others. This refers not only to the structural understanding of secularism, which makes it seem oddly unchangeable and agency-free. By adopting the "West" and "non-West" divide, authors in the field also run the risk of reessentialising both "in a manner that mirrors the narratives of orientalist scholarship" (Lord 2019, 688). The "Muslim world" is portrayed, then, as being primarily inhabited by religious subjects (Enayat 2017, 92-93), which also ignores actually existing developments and advocates of secularisation in this geographical area (al-Azmeh 2020). In a "jargon of authenticity" (Mufti 2013, 11), authors who criticise the flat imaginary of Islamism as a form of totalitarianism (Cavanaugh 2009, 222) or the idea of a "responsibility of Islam as a religion and Arabs as a people for acts of terror" (Asad 2003, 3) may actually carry out undue reductions themselves. They take

> "varieties of contemporary political Islam as representative of the (Sunni) Islamic 'tradition' as such (…) (and suggest) that as a spiritual, intellectual, and political culture, Islamism marks a 'return' of Islam, either uncontaminated by, or having shaken itself free of, the liberal thought and practice of the modern West" (Mufti 2013, 10).

In this way, agency is only accorded to those who programmatically reject Western legacies like secularism, while all others are somehow implicated in the logic of colonial domination and contemporary imperialism (Lord 2019, 688-689). What is more, Islamists are portrayed as untouched by modernity, "even though their revivalist claims of religious authenticity are undeniable products of the very cultural logics they disavow and disown" (Mufti 2013, 12). Islamism and modernity are inextricably linked to each other.[20] But this trait of Islamism tends to be overlooked in the debate on the politics of secularism because authors only subject secularism

[20] It is important to note that Asad himself explicitly states that Islamists should be "understood on their own terms as being at once *modern* and traditional, both authentic and creative at the same time" (Asad 1996, emphasis added).

to their critical analysis, not (political) Islam (Enayat 2017, 93).[21] This second point of criticism contends that one-sided deconstructions make it seem like, on the one hand, non-Western intellectual traditions do not have the potential to become hegemonic or seek domination over others. On the other hand, they also tend to equate liberalism, of which secularism is a part, with the West. This means that either other Western intellectual traditions, from "forms of communitarianism and conservatism (…) to forms of radical thinking and practice" are defined away – or that liberalism "is being utilized to indicate the culture and politics of the modern West as such, (but then) it can hardly be conceived of as a unitary intellectual system" (Mufti 2013, 13).

One does not have to agree with all the readings of, and criticisms addressed to, key contributors to the deconstruction of secularism (for a differetiated discussion, see March 2015). For the remainder of this book, I take away one message from the controversy between the scholars who contribute to the politics of secularism debate, on the one hand, and their critics, on the other. The relationship between Islamists and the West, or in this book: the world order under Western hegemony, needs to be complicated in two ways. First, I see the danger of drawing an all too simplistic picture of *both* Islamism and the West, as identified by the second group of authors. Neither secularism nor the Western world order should be conceived of as unchangeable or unequivocal structure. Both are discursively contested from within and from without the West – which is itself home to various practices and intellectual traditions, including several secularisms and liberalisms. The power of these structures should also "not be understood as absolute, but hegemonic and therefore constantly open to struggle and contestation" (Mavelli and Petito 2014, 6). In this sense, Islamists – like other actors in a world order under Western hegemony – have agency. This has so far been neglected as direct object of inquiry in the critical debate on secularism (March 2015, 110-111). This book aims to contribute such a perspective by offering an empirical analysis of Islamists' empirically observable position *vis-à-vis* the Western-dominated world order. In order to do so, it is necessary to disaggregate and draw a more nuanced picture of the Western-dominated world order, which is what I will do in chapter 2.

Second, however, I concur with the former group of authors in their assessment that there *is* an obsession of the West with a supposedly dangerous Islam and especially what is framed as Islamist threat. As I show in the next section, there is a plethora of evidence of both the securitisation of Islam and the "evilisation" of Islamism in the GWOT era. What is more, the position of violent rejectionism as held by a small group of Salafi jihadists has managed to almost exclusively capture the imagination of what Islamists think about, and how they behave toward, the Western-

[21] It has also been argued that the binary divide between an essentialised 'West' and 'Islam' was coproduced by Islamic thinkers in categories that were similar to those used by Orientalists, see Jung (2011).

dominated world order. This might be called the Al-Qaeda-ISIS-effect on Western perceptions of political Islam.[22] But Islamist agency and the repertoire available to them exceed violent rejection, as the next section will show.

<A> The stubborn persistence of the Islamist enemy image <A>

As other disciplines, IR, peace and conflict studies and security studies reconfigured their theoretical understanding of religion and its role in politics under the impression of supposedly pervasive Islamist threat. Even before 2001, scholars of international security diagnosed that the danger of religion "has most keenly been felt in the form of an alleged threat from (…) primarily Islamic fundamentalism" (Laustsen and Waever 2000, 705). With the attacks of 9/11, the destiny of what was then called "Islamic terrorism" as the top item on Western security agendas was sealed. A plethora of studies appeared, seeking to understand political Islam and in particular its violent manifestations, as well as adequate policy-reactions (for a rich and critical discussion, see Volpi 2010). Even though phenomena that relate to Islam, the "Middle East" and North Africa (MENA) and Muslim majority societies were (and are still) over-represented in social science accounts of religion, empirical studies diversified. The "obsession" with Islam itself became the basis for innovative theory-building and critical inquiries, as the previous chapter demonstrated. For the concepts of "political Islam" and "Islamism", however, the academic attention dedicated to them entailed a blurring of important distinctions, the proliferation of definitions and, simultaneously, the interchangeable use of terms that describe divergent phenomena, actors and behaviours (Volpi 2010, 149-150).

This conceptual vagueness in academic discourse fed into, but was also informed by, a highly securitised public and political discourse on "Islamic terrorism". As concepts in use, "Islamism" and "political Islam" were often directly associated with jihadism, violence and terrorism. This was one effect of the "global war on terror" (GWOT) frame which George W. Bush introduced into his rhetoric after the attacks of 9/11 and which subsequently diffused – albeit not without resistance or calls for alternative framings – to European and other contexts. In the course of the GWOT, several practices, laws and institutions were established to fight terrorism in and beyond the West (Josua 2021), accumulating to what has been called a "transnational counter-terrorism order" (de Londras 2019). In the United States, the GWOT frame served the legitimation of several measures of counter-terrorism through externalisation (Hellmuth 2021), among them torture, offshore detention and extraordinary renditions, mass surveillance, the use of military

[22] In that way, they also essentialise the idea of the West and equate it with liberalism. For uses of the "West", see (Hellmann and Herborth 2017).

force, from lower scale military and special operations to drone strikes in several countries to the full-fledged wars in Afghanistan (2001-2021) and Iraq (2003-2011; 2014-2021) conducted by coalitions of Western (and Arab) states.

Stacey Gutkowski (2014, 5, emphasis in original) calls these the "9/11 wars" and suggests that they revealed "secular *ways of war*, habits of doing and behaving in war". In her study of the British secular security *habitus*, she is able to show that the British security and public discourse on Islam, Islamism and jihadism evolved over time to become more knowledgeable and differentiated. However, the initial reaction to 9/11, constructed as "unintelligible, insurmountable and 'cultural' trauma for the West" (Gutkowski 2014, 20), was marked by hysteresis. State apparatuses were not calibrated to respond to jihadism. This concerned, on the one hand, a lack of military and tactical abilities in counterinsurgency wars among European and US armed forces that found it difficult to adapt to what seemed like an ever-changing insurgency. The "military approach to counter-terrorism" was premised on the assumption that "fighting them 'over there' is better than waiting until terrorist attacks at home" (Boyle 2019, 385) but proved a failure. For the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan, this entailed a blending of counter-terrorism, focused on the use of kinetic force, with the "winning the hearts and minds"-approach of counter-insurgency (Boyle 2019, 386-389), as set down in the US Counterinsurgency Field Manual from 2006 and the subsequent COIN doctrine.

On the other hand, Gutkowski argues, hysteresis was also visible in the way knowledge on Al-Qaeda and jihadism was produced. As she demonstrates for the British case, in their attempt to learn as quickly as possible about this previously underestimated phenomenon, security circles readily found and embraced the myths of religious violence and the clash of civilisations. This led to the "production (…) of jihadist Islamism as a reified (and surprisingly coherent) knowledge category for British foreign and security strategists, politicians and senior officers" (Gutkowski 2014, 29). In 2001-2003, the "'diagnostic moment' of the 9/11 wars" (Gutkowski 2014, 95), the enemy was constructed as a "global Islamist threat" or "global jihad". Even among academics it was not uncommon to equate al-Qaeda with Islam. There was an outright "fetishization of (…) Islamic fundamentalism" (Gutkowski 2014, 95). But according to Gutkowski, Salafi jihadism in the al-Qaeda brand had "yet to pose a realistic threat to the current liberal, secular global order" (Gutkowski 2014, 18).

Given the failures of the counter-terrorism measures taken, the US shifted to a "'strategy against violent extremism' (to address) (…) a wider perceived problem of 'support in the Muslim world for radical Islam'" (Kundnani and Hayes 2018, 6) from 2005 onwards. The turn to "violent

extremism" and "radical Islam" reinforced the effects of the GWOT *within* Western societies. Here, the idea that there was a "direct connection between 'Islam' and 'Terrorism'" (Mavelli 2013, 165) had increasingly taken root, despite a more nuanced discourse among parts of the political elites security circles. The fear that individuals would radicalise and become "lone wolves"(Byman 2017), part of a "leaderless jihad" (Sageman 2008) or perpetrators of "stochastic terrorism" (Robinson 2021) reinforced the image of a potential threat "from within" Western societies in the form of "homegrown terrorism" (Hafez and Mullins 2015). The shift to the PCVE ("preventing and countering violent extremism") terminology further blurred the distinction between violent action and ideological sympathy (Kundnani and Hayes 2018, 6), abetting the general suspicion toward Muslim individuals, communities and organisations and the securitisation of Islam (Mavelli 2013). Not only were Muslims increasingly subjected to extraordinary measures, such as renditions and detentions. Western societies also discussed the "Muslim question" (Mandaville 2021) in several variations, such as the possibility of "appropriate integration" of Muslims, the Muslim "threat" to Western values like democracy, freedom and secularism and the fear of a cultural "Islamisation" of European societies through the "waves" of Muslim refugees, as propagated by anti-Islamic movements and parties (see, for example, Mavelli 2012; Roy 2013a; Nabers 2016). The "global war on terror", then, gave rise to Islamophobia as a phenomenon of global scope (Bakali and Hafez 2022).

Public and political discourse also fell for several conceptual and normative slippery slopes attached to the terms "Islamism" and "political Islam": On the one hand, the two terms were often equated with Islam. This meant that Muslims were viewed as the Other of Western values because they were not able to draw a line between private faith and public politics. On the other hand, "Islamism" and "political Islam" were part of the larger set of labels to describe the "global threat" they posed, among them "militant Islam", "Islamic fundamentalism", "Islamic extremism", "jihadism", "Salafi jihadism", "jihadi terrorism", "global jihad", "Islamic terrorism", "violent extremism", "religiously motivated terrorism" etc. (Volpi 2010, 149-150). And while careful and differentiated analyses were present from early on and important counter-discourses emerged during the GWOT years, too, the idea of a "global Islamist threat" persisted. It was renewed and, to some degree, dramatised through the rise of ISIS in the 2010s. While the group's inception dates back to 1999, it reached the peak of its power in 2014 (Bamber-Zryd 2022). Due to its sophisticated media strategy (Harmon and Bowdish 2018, 209-213), ISIS "captured the imagination of a global public and positioned itself at the centre of (…) security debates (at the time)" (Friis 2018, 244). It managed, through transgressive forms of violence (Friis 2018, 256) and mediatisation as a constitutive part of this violent logic (Pfeifer and Günther 2021), to convince a global audience

that their evilness went "beyond anything we (had) ever seen" (Friis 2015; Richards 2017; Rogers 2018; Fermor 2021).

ISIS' rise and considerable success in gaining and holding territory in Iraq and Syria, the attacks it committed in Europe and the military efforts by the "Global Coalition against Daesh" since 2014 had an important effect: "Islamism" was associated with the violent rejection of not only Western values and norms but the global order and its core principles and institutions *per se*. A lack of distinction between Salafi jihadism, on the one hand, and Islamism as well as other forms of political Islam, on the other, led to the perception the ISIS' performance of violent rejectionism is somehow representative of how Islamists position themselves toward the world order. More generally, it also contributed to the ignorance of Islamist diversity and intra-Islamist struggles (Milton-Edwards 2014). In 2020, on the occasion of the anniversary of the 2019 attacks in Nice, French Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin reminded the public that "we" are at "war against an internal and external enemy […], the Islamist ideology […] a form of 21st century fascism".[23] This snapshot of a very martial framing of the problem should not be considered as typical for Western political discourse and, even though more examples from other European and North-American states could be named, the "lumpers" might be a minority compared to the "splitters" (Lynch 2017). And still, the effect of a loud minority may be considerable. This is for instance mirrored in the almost constant and, in relation to actual numbers and risk assessments, highly exaggerated threat perception of terrorism among US citizens. Despite early articulate and well-founded warnings that "fears of the omnipotent terrorist (…) may have been overblown" (Mueller 2006, 8), no significant changes in threat perceptions seem to have occurred since the early years of the "global war on terror" (Krause et al. 2022).[24]

<A> Moving beyond the image of rejectionism: Islamists between recognising and resisting global order <A>

In light of this diagnosis, my book further contributes to a developing a more differentiated view on Islamism, specifically from a perspective on its relationship to the Western world order. While no such study exists to date, the rich scholarship on non-state actors in the MENA and on Islamism offers very fertile ground for building a nuanced study on Islamists and the world order. In IR, non-state actors are still underrepresented when it comes to studying their external

[23] «Nous sommes en guerre» contre «l'idéologie islamiste», affirme Gérald Darmanin, Le Figaro 30.10.2020, https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/terrorisme-nous-sommes-en-guerre-contre-l-ideologie-islamiste-affirme-gerald-darmanin-20201030; accessed 07.08.2021.

[24] Whether this will change with the Russian war on Ukraine in 2022 and a potential readjustment of global threat perceptions remains to be seen.

behaviour beyond the resort to violence or potential threat from a security perspective. As May Darwich (2021b, 2) has recently suggested with regard to armed non-state actors (ANSAs), their "actorness and foreign relations (should be established) as a new area of inquiry for foreign policy analysis". Indeed, ANSAs have so far mainly been dealt with primarily with a view to their violent behaviour in the context of civil wars. In the last ten years, however, the study of ANSA's order-building has become a vivid field of inquiry. One important debate investigates the phenomenon of rebel governance and is meanwhile established at the core of conflict studies (Loyle et al. 2021; Malthaner and Malešević 2022; Pfeifer and Schwab 2022). What is so far underrepresented in this debate, however, is how ANSAs establish external relations during war and peace time to influence (global) politics through non-violent means. Exceptions are studies of rebel diplomacy (Coggins 2015; Huang 2016) and, more broadly, the study of ANSAs' struggle for recognition (Geis, Clément, and Pfeifer 2021). ANSAs address international, even global audiences (Clément, Geis, and Pfeifer 2021; Pfeifer 2021; Sienknecht 2021) and are embedded in global normative structures (Hensell and Schlichte 2021). The study of rebels as coproducers of order, as well as the new and cautious attention for ANSAs and their actorness in international relations, are two fields to which this study makes a contribution.

The third is the academic debate on Islamism. It is mainly rooted in the area studies and rarely overlaps with the other two fields (exceptions are Cook and Maher 2023; Darwich 2021a; Stein 2021). As has been argued in the context of the area studies controversy (Valbjørn 2017; Bank and Busse 2021), IR only produces limited theory-oriented knowledge on the MENA and is often reluctant to readdress its theoretical assumptions.[25] It also tends to narrowly focus on militant Islamists, which reinforces the false impression that political Islam is associated with violence. Conversely, the study of Islamism is often confined to national and regional contexts rather than positioning it in the study of international or global politics (exceptions are Dionigi 2014; Adraoui 2018; Darwich 2021b, 2021a). One core debate in the field revolves around the meaning of Islamism, its distinction from conceptual neighbours and the questioning of dichotomies that structure inquiries. Among such binaries is the distinction between state and non-state politics where the former is associated with secular rule and the latter with religious opposition (Cesari 2014). Already in the 1990s, some authors suggested that Islam was used as "the language of politics in the Muslim world" (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 12) by both rulers and opponents. The more common view, however, conceptualises political Islam a politicisation and

[25] To explore Islamic contributions to the field of IR and challenge the Eurocentrism of the discipline is the goal of the *International Relations and Islamic Studies Research Cohort* (Co-IRIS) which was founded in 2013. They connect their intellectual project to an agenda of broader presence of Islamic approaches to IR in publications, conferences and workshops. See, for example, Abdelkader, Adiong, and Mauriello (2016); Adiong, Mauriello, and Abdelkader (2018).

instrumentalisation of Islam by Islamist actors who use religion as a tool of opposition against the allegedly or self-proclaimed secular state. Such a framing was also used by rulers who felt threatened by the mass protests in the course of Arab uprisings and tried to delegitimise the opposition (Pfeifer 2017). But studies show that Arab states, rather than abstaining from interventions in the religious sphere or maintaining a "neutral" secular posture, had established a hegemonic status of Islam as part of their nation-building project in the 20th century. They nationalised religious institutions and personnel, religious doctrine was taught in public schools. They legally discriminated against other religions in the public sector and restrained certain freedoms and rights by referencing religious doctrine (Cesari 2014, 3-18). Recently, the sharp distinction between state and non-state actors has been questioned on a more general level. Authors in the field have argued that non-state actors should be viewed as coproducers of regional order and partners in state hegemonic strategies (Stein 2021). Others demonstrated that core concepts in Islam are mobilised by, and contested between, state and non-state actors alike (Piscatori and Saikal 2019). Finally, some proposed to understand Islamism not as label that can be attached to a certain kind of actors but more broadly as a discourse. Islamism, then, is "an articulatory practice whose characterisation lies in its ability to hegemonise the whole discursive horizon by turning 'Islam' into the master signifier of the Muslim communities" (Mura 2015, 25).

A second core debate in the study of Islamism concerns the question how to classify different actors and their evolvement over time. As a key author in the field, Olivier Roy defines Islamism rather narrowly as "the explicit recasting of Islam as a political ideology (…) and a stress on the need to control and build an 'Islamic state'" (Roy 2012a, 19-20). It is this Islamist project of transforming society through the state that Roy diagnosed as having failed in the early 1990s: "The Islamic revolution, the Islamic state, the Islamic economy are myths" (Roy 1994, 27), he stated. But this "collapse of Islamism as a political ideology" (Roy 2013b, 16) did not imply that Islamist movements would disappear. Rather, Roy predicted two developments. On the one hand, some Islamist actors would opt for a trajectory of transformation into a conservative party (along the Turkish AKP model). They would become post-Islamist. On the other hand, he expected Islamists would be further challenged by the rise of neofundamentalism "that stressed a strict return to purely religious norms" (Roy 2013b, 16). Salafists, including its quietist, political and violent versions, belong to this trend (Wiktorowicz 2006). Put most simply, Salafism is a "philosophical outlook which seeks to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam" or which "believes in progression through regression" (Maher 2016, 7). Salafists may use different methods, including violent ones. If they resort to violence, they are called Salafi jihadists. The most widely known representatives of Salafism are two Salafi jihadist groups, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Both are what

Fawaz Gerges (2016, 24) calls a marriage between ultraconservative Wahhabism ("Saudi Salafism") and radical jihadism as developed in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s by Sayyid Qutb and his disciples. Whereas al-Qaeda was an "underground, transnational, borderless organization", ISIS additionally "managed to blend in with local Sunni communities" (Gerges 2016, 223) and made establishing statehood its core strategy. Another important innovation of this second generation of Salafi jihadism was the reorganisation of enemy images. ISIS put them in a hierarchical order based on a sectarian logic, with the Syrian regime and Shiites ending up at the top and becoming ISIS' primary enemies (Hegghammer 2014). All this proved as a comparative advantage over al-Qaeda.

The violence and visibility of Salafi jihadism overshadowed other forms in which political Islam appeared and articulated itself. Militant vs. non-militant advanced to become the key distinction in the academic debate (Volpi and Stein 2015, 279-280). It was connected to the question of whether (some) Islamists could play a conducive role in processes of democratisation and, if so, how. As a consequence, the terms radical vs. moderate were *en vogue* in the 2000s and the inclusion-moderation hypothesis gained prominence among scholars (critically: Schwedler 2011). It suggested that Islamists who were made part of the democratic game would deradicalise and be socialised into the political system. Many criticisms were addressed to the concept of "radical Islam" (Kazmi 2021), the radical-moderate distinction, its normative value in autocratic contexts, as well as the empirical validity of the inclusion-moderation thesis (Cavatorta and Merone 2013; Netterstrøm 2015). A key problem with the label "radical" was that it no longer allowed to distinguish between such diametrically opposed actors as Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah (Schwedler 2011). It simultaneously obscured ideological similarities between militant and non-militant Salafists. To solve some of the issues and escape the focus on (non-) violence and (non-) moderation, Frédéric Volpi and Ewan Stein (2015) propose to separate statist from non-statist Islamists. The latter are Salafist groups that used to avoid formal politics and have thus often enjoyed the toleration by the authoritarian regimes. Some of them advocate violence for ideological reasons rather than in reaction to state repression. In contrast, statist Islamists practice "institutionalized participation in the politics of the nation state" (Volpi and Stein 2015, 282) and do not seek to overturn the existing social order. They are usually representative of a middle class and (came to) follow a reformist discourse which appealed to the lower middle class. In their respective authoritarian context, they decided to participate in the system at some point, even though times of (illiberal) participation altered with harsh repression. Over time, they gave up on certain claims, such as the goal of establishing Islamic statehood.

In this book, I concentrate on such statist Islamists. More specifically, I am interested in those Islamists are part of the incumbent regime and therefore exposed to, and in need to position

themselves vis-à-vis, the Western world order (see chapter 3). For purely practical reasons, such actors do not have the "luxury" of taking a simple position of violent rejection as do Salafi jihadists like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The latter are indeed "irreconcilably estranged from the state, regarding it as a heretical and artificial unit, (…) (and reject) constitutional politics (and) the international system" (Maher 2016, 11). But the *politics of rejection* is an unwarranted reduction of a whole spectrum of theoretically possible and empirically observable positions Islamists hold vis-à-vis the global order. I argue that statist Islamists *recognise* norms and conceptions of, and *seek recognition* for their identity *within*, this order (Clément, Geis, and Pfeifer 2021). Yet, Islamists also *resist* some practices and principles and aim at transforming the world order from *within*. They do not, however, reject the order as a whole – such a dissident position cannot be taken as long as an actor does not position itself outside the very order (Deitelhoff and Daase 2021, 128-129).[26]

These three ideal types of world order politics – rejection, resistance, recognition – are in principle unspecific to Islamist actors and could be applied in the analysis of any other actor. Empirical cases will not match one ideal type perfectly. For incumbent, statist Islamists, it can be expected that they range somewhere between the two poles of recognition and resistance. Groups also change their stance over time, for example leaving rejectionism behind or moving from a more resistant to a more recognisant position or vice versa. World order politics of one and the same actor vary over time, due to changes in their identity and their domestic context, but also within what has so far simply been called the "Western world order". This term will be explained, disaggregated and deessentialised in chapter 2 – similar to the work of de- and reconstruction of "Islamism" in this chapter. Here, it could be shown that one should not simply assume that all Islamists are dangerous, anti-democratic, anti-liberal – and oppose the Western world order. I propose a more nuanced repertoire of positions that Islamists can take. Combining practices of recognition and resistance, transformation, adaptation and partial transgression of the Western discursive space can be expected from Islamist world order discourse. Simple rejectionism is an implausible position to take for the statist Islamists under study here. After all, incumbent Islamists rule in a world which is actually shaped by Western hegemony. They cannot fully escape the order and the discourse from which it emerges and on which it is built. But this does not mean that Islamists are left with the choice of either succumbing to this order or rejecting it either. Structure should not be over-estimated. Rather, they are somewhat complicit in producing, reproducing, transforming this very order. This means that they have agency and a whole repertoire of violent and non-violent

[26] I deviate from Daase's and Deitelhoff's (2021) in the use of the resistance terminology insofar as I understand rejectionism, or what they call dissidence, not as a form of resistance but rather as a position toward the world order in its own right.

means at their disposal. Islamists of the sort in which this book is interested do not simply hold divine *sovereignty* against the Westphalian state system. They do not base their *legitimacy* claims in simplistic notions of totalitarian polities, caliphates or imamates, nor flatly reject democracy. And they also have complex, responsive and worldly normative aspirations or *teloi* rather than projecting these ambitions to the afterlife. Islamist world order discourse is more complex. It is a modern and pluralist discourse (E.S. Hurd 2007) in which problems and their solutions are discussed in and for the here and now – including conceptions of global order. *Sovereignty*, *legitimacy* and *teloi* are also anything but unequivocal and uncontested with the Western world order discourse, as the next chapter will show.