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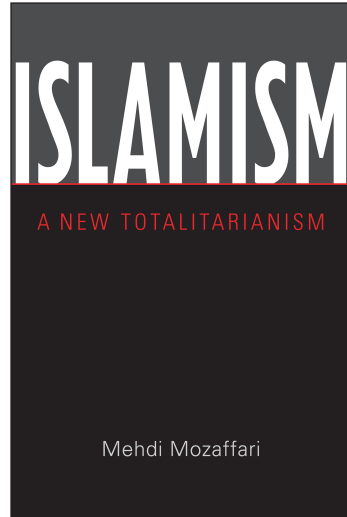
Islamism: A New Totalitarianism

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	7
1 Why Is the Study of Islamism Important?	11
2 Ideological Roots of Islamism	29
3 The Rise and Evolution of Islamism in Light of European Totalitarianism	61
4 Shia Radicalization	117
5 Globalization and Revival of the Islamic Civilization	147
6 Islamism and Freedom of Expression	169
7 Islamism and the Problematic of “Amity” and “Enmity”	217
8 Islamism and World Order	245
9 Islamism: A New Totalitarianism	267
10 Conclusion	283
<i>Notes</i>	288
<i>Glossary</i>	319
<i>Bibliography</i>	323
<i>Index of Proper Names</i>	340
<i>About the Book</i>	345

Chapter 1

Why Is the Study of Islamism Important?

“None of the evils which totalitarianism claims to remedy is worse than totalitarianism itself.”

Albert Camus¹

Once, Jacques Delors, the former president of the EU Commission, defined the European Union as a UPO (an Unidentified Political Object). By this definition, he, of course wanted to emphasize the particularity and the uniqueness of the EU as a new and unprecedented political and economic construction. The UPO metaphor may also be applied to Islamism, as an URO (an Unidentified Religious Object). This book has the ambition to unveil this URO.

It is almost certain that the label of “Islamism” was used for the first time by French writers at the end of the 17th century. *Le Petit Robert* gives 1697 as the first reference for this word.² The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire was one of the first writers to use the term: “this religion is called *islamism*.”³ In a work from 1838, Tocqueville found the “root of *islamism* in Judaism.”⁴ Caussin de Perceval, Comte de Gobineau, Ernest Renan, and Baron Bernard Carra de Vaux equally made use of the term, the latter characterizing “Islamism” as a “spent religion.”

The above-mentioned writers use “Islamism” as part of the title of their respective works, either of a book or a chapter. Caussin de Perceval placed it in the title of his book *Essai sur l’histoire des Arabes avant l’Islamisme, pendant l’époque de Mahomet* (3 vols, 1847-9). This title leaves no doubt that, in the mind of the author, “Islamism” means “Islam,” e.g., the religion founded by Muhammad. Comte de Gobineau devoted Chapter II of his book on *Religions et philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale* to the study of *l’Islamisme persan*. He

considers Islamism to be a camouflaged mixture of religions that existed prior to Islam. After this very short remark, Gobineau continues his fascinating analysis of Iranian and Central Asian societies although he does not concern himself to engage in further analysis of “Islamism.” It is very clear that Gobineau uses the term “Islamism” only in the sense of “Islam,” without any specific political or ideological connotations. Some years later, Ernest Renan, a compatriot of Gobineau, used the term “Islamism,” especially at a conference held at the Sorbonne (Paris) on March 29, 1883. This conference became very famous, and still is, because of its highly polemical aspect. At that time, an enigmatic Muslim thinker named Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was agitating in Egypt, Persia, and Ottoman Turkey. He sojourned in Paris and engaged in a lively debate concerning the position of Islam towards modernity and science. It is in this context that Renan gave his speech on *Islamisme et la Science*. Renan, in perfect accordance with the intellectual context of his epoch, used “Islamism” as a parallel to “*Christianisme*” (the equivalent of “Christianity” in English). By “Islamism,” Renan simply means “Islam,” since he uses “Islam” and “Islamism” as interchangeable terms.

“Islam” and “Islamic” have become the most frequently used terms by Western Islamologists, orientalists, and political scientists. This replacement is very clear indeed among a huge number of Western writers of various disciplines, from Max Weber (d.1920), Ignaz Goldziher (d.1921), Oswald Spengler (d.1936), Arnold Toynbee (d.1975), Henri Laoust (d.1976), Fernand Braudel (d.1985), Claude Cahen (d.1991), William Montgomery Watt (d.2006), Ann K.S. Lambton (d.2008), Samuel Huntington (d.2008), and Francis Fukuyama (b.1952). We do not find the word “Islamism” in the index of their works. Prior to the Islamist revolution in Iran in 1978-79, the terms “Islamism” and “Islamists” were also practically absent from the vocabulary of newspaper reporters.

The change in the vocabulary happened with the outbreak of the Islamist Revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, who preached a political Islam and established the first

“*Islamist* government” in the 20th century. This religious revolution made it essential to find a new vocabulary in order to outline the specificity of this new phenomenon. Suddenly, the world witnessed a multitude of various terms and formal rules destined to grasp the “novelty” of the new era in the history of Islam. By way of example, frequently used terms were “Islamic fundamentalism,” “radical Islam,” “Islamic revival,” and “political Islam.” These terms, which appeared in the titles of numerous books and multiple articles, were clear and ambivalent at one and the same time. They indicated that this kind of “Islam” is quite different from other versions of “Islam.” But what precisely does this “new” form of “Islam” contain? The ambiguity remains almost complete. Surely, it has become evident that this particular form of Islam was (more) political, often violent, and extremely critical towards the West, and, last but not least, determined in its hostility towards established regimes in the Muslim world. Nevertheless, this list determining the main characteristics of “Islamic fundamentalism,” “political Islam,” “Islamic radicalism,” or “radical Islamism” does not bring about a clear conceptualization of the phenomenon.

We had to wait until the tragic events of 9/11 to witness the rise of the need for conceptual clarification. It is a fact that since 9/11, the use of the word “Islamism” has increased among politicians and journalists worldwide. It is equally observable that scholars have progressively focused their attention on the ideological contents of Islamism.

As opposed to the 19th century definition, “Islamism” is no longer an emulation of “*Christianisme*,” but rather a new and independent concept.

But how do Muslim authors designate themselves and their co-religionists? In Arabic, Muslim/Muslims are called *Muslim* (singular masculine), *Muslima* (singular feminine), *Muslimûn* (plural masculine), or *Muslimât* (plural feminine). The Koran uses the terms *Muslimûn* along with *Mu'minûn* (Believers), never *Islamiyyûn*. Islamic classical works generally respect Koranic terminology. Theologians from the four prevailing schools (Hanafi, Mâliki, Shafii,

and Hanbali) use *Muslimûn* and *Muslim*, not *Islamiyyûn*. The same can be seen in the works of great medieval historians, jurists, and thinkers such as Ibn Ishâq (d. 768), Ibn Hishâm (d. 833), Bukhari (d. 870), Farabi (d. 950), Masudi (d. 958), Mawardi (d. 1058), Avicenna (d. 1037), Ghazali (d. 1111), Averröes (d. 1198), and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). The same tradition is observed and followed in modern times among Muslim authors of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. This trend is observed with authors such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), the founder of the Wahhabi sect; Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897); Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905); and Rashid Rida (d. 1935). Continuing forward, we observe that Muslim leaders, who played a crucial role in the 20th century, did not use “Islamism” in their extensive works. In his famous work *Rasâ’il* [Tracts], Hassan al-Banna (d. 1948) frequently used the terms “Muslims” and “Muslim Brothers,” especially when addressing his own disciples. When he investigated “Islam,” he sporadically used the term “*Islam al-shâmil*” (self-sustained Islam) or “*Islam al-Hanif*” (True Islam). Neither the zealous ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), nor Mawdudi (d. 1979), an eminent Islamist leader of Southwest Asia, used the term “Islamism.” A last example would be Ayatollah Khomeini (d.1989), who brought political Islam from theory into reality. Although a Shia, he used the same terms as the Sunnis, i.e., *Muslimîn* or *Musalmanân* (the Persian version of Muslims).

However, a number of Muslim authors have actually used “Islamism” (*Islamiyyûn*). The Sudanese Hassan al-Turabi (d. 2016), when discussing different factions among Muslims in his book *Al-Islam wal Hukm* [Islam and Government], used *Islamiyyûn* to designate, “political Muslims for whom Islam is the solution, Islam is religion and government and Islam is the Constitution and the law.”⁵ Some (Muslim) lay authors increasingly use *Islamiyyûn*; for example, the Tunisian Salwa al-Sharafi.⁶ We find a thorough analysis of Islamism in Larbi Sadiki’s book, where he presented a critical analysis of Islamist discourse and ideas, although not as an independent study, but as an appendix to the main issue of his book

(democracy).⁷ Aziz al-Azmeh, the author of *Islams and Modernities*, labels contemporary Islamic movements “political Islamism” and not, for instance, “Islamic fundamentalism.”⁸

In my view, Islamism is, first and foremost, an ideology, and as such it should be treated and studied as we do with other political doctrines and ideologies like Marxism, fascism, and liberalism. We need to study its origins, its development from being a set of ideas and beliefs to an agglomeration of different movements and even to its transformation into a political regime. Islamism has this particularity as a religiously based ideology. It is of crucial importance to search for Islamism’s Islamic sources of inspiration and emulation. Such studies will guide us to a universe very different from those that inspired the secular ideologies. When we face a new concept like Islamism, which plays a prominent part in world affairs, we need to take it seriously if we want to grasp its substance, its message, and its place among other concepts. We remember the serious error that the French philosopher Michel Foucault committed when misreading the message of the Islamist revolution in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. Foucault, who is acknowledged as the father of discourse analysis, dramatically failed to understand this religiously inspired revolution and became confused. This was due to Foucault’s lack of sufficient knowledge about Islam, and Islamic symbols, discourse, rituals, dogma, and so on. He obviously considered Islamism to be a concept almost without history, without genealogy, and without a specific life. Foucault does not represent a unique case. A not negligible portion of Western left-wing intellectuals expressed sympathy for Islamists and supported them because they wrongly perceived the Islamist anti-American discourse as an authentic “anti-imperialist” trend, while Islamism itself represents an imperialist doctrine. Here, the misreading is again the consequence of a misinterpretation of Islamist discourse due to a superficial knowledge of the constitutive elements of Islamism. Besides the conceptual aspects, there are some real and factual factors that make a closer examination of Islamism appropriate, and even necessary.

Large Muslim communities are living in non-Muslim countries: India, China, Russia, and countries in the Western hemisphere. Muslim reactions to living in non-Muslim societies vary from claims of autonomy and independence to complaints of discrimination. In Europe, the struggle to introduce sharia law into the secular and democratically based laws has created great tension and has rendered the process of full integration into European societies somewhat difficult. Despite the importance of Islamism in today's world, it has not yet been studied appropriately or sufficiently. There are a number of reasons for this situation.

Firstly, Islamism represents, in origin, a non-Western concept akin to the Western *Verständnis*. The Western-dominated discourses are liberal, Christian, and Marxist in their various sub-divisions. Not only do Western scholars of philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities possess a deep knowledge of these schools, they have themselves elaborated them and are constantly contributing to their critical development. This is why we have such comprehensive materials assembled on Stalinism, Nazism, and fascism, which have been studied in great detail. On Islamism, however, we do not find such extensive material as for other totalitarian ideologies. Currently, Western political scientists, sociologists, and philosophers are rarely familiar with Islamic theology, Islamic history, and Islamic political theories. This lack of knowledge is obviously a handicap when it comes to grasping the very essence of Islamism.

Second, Western Islamologists are traditionally known for their deep knowledge of Islam and their excellent contribution to enhancing the values of the Islamic heritage. Being a specialist in Islam is, however, only one component of being qualified to do research on Islamism, which also requires a good knowledge of political science in general. This part is often lacking in contemporary Islamologists.

Third, the dominance of a reductionist approach to Islamism represents another serious obstacle to understanding Islamism. In this approach, Islamism is reduced to terrorism alone; and terror-

ism is summed up as groups like al-Qaida and now ISIS. This is the method that Western governments have adopted since the attacks of September 11. President George W. Bush launched the “War on Terror” as his government policy, and billions and billions of dollars have since been spent by European and North American countries to combat terrorism. The choice of this method certainly was not free of political calculation. The overwhelming majority of people are against terrorism and would, therefore, support the government’s anti-terrorism package and policy. This policy also has had a beneficial side effect, in terms of avoiding any noticeable references to the ideology or religious frameworks that lie behind terrorist actions (and are publicly claimed by the terrorists themselves). It is a fact that, since President Barack H. Obama entered office, the US discourse has been deliberately disconnected from any reference to Islamism. When President Bush said that the terrorists had kidnapped Islam, no voice was raised in the Muslim countries in support of his statement. However, when the same president put his finger on the ideology behind terrorism by calling the perpetrators “Islamic fascists” (August 2006), almost the entire world stood up accusing him of being an “enemy of Islam and Muslims.” Perhaps due to this experience, President Obama opted for a different policy, carefully avoiding any references to Islam, Muslims, and Islamism in relation to terrorism. He has been content to merely use laconic terms like “extremists” or “terrorists.” It was only after the horrible execution of some US and Western journalists by ISIS that President Obama made some allusion, albeit in a very cautious way, to Islamism.

Aside from the above-mentioned factors, Western social scientists generally consider the era of totalitarianism as belonging to the past, i.e., the first half of the 20th century. Therefore, they have difficulty conceiving of the possibility of the rise of a new form of totalitarianism. The confusion among many Western scholars and observers about the very definition of Islamism is a good example of this phenomenon. Michel Foucault’s historic misjudgment of the Islamist revolution in Iran was not the only instance of a Western

intellectual or scholar misreading the emergence of a new totalitarianism as a political regime. Almost the entire left wing in Europe and the United States made the same mistake along with him. As we shall see later, those who were reluctant to conceive of this revolution as a liberating one had difficulty with its inclusion into an appropriate category.

Furthermore, the Holocaust syndrome should be mentioned, which is used consciously or unconsciously to draw a parallel between the tragic situation of the Jews under the Nazi regime and the situation of the Muslims in Europe. Therefore, many public debaters and opinion makers hesitate to consider Islamism to be a genuine concept, which is independent of the treatment that Muslim minorities in Europe are subjected to. Political correctness has its price. The price may sometimes result in misreading the picture or failing to see the facts. All these elements demonstrate the difficulty of studying Islamism. At the same time, they indicate the urgency of undertaking such a study in a balanced manner, which is what I intend to do.

Finally, we should take notice of the series of events in North Africa and the Middle East, generally known as the Arab Spring, which started in December 2010 and is still ongoing in various degrees and differing forms in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. In all these countries, we are witnessing a remarkable advance of Islamists under different labels and names such as the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Nahda, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS. Despite many unclear points, there is no doubt about the crucial importance of Islamist movements in this region. The question is whether this new development is a prelude to the rise of a new Islamism or is instead the same trend and a *déjà-vu* event. This issue will be discussed later in this book.

I will try to examine the specificities of Islamism with regard to totalitarianism. Which elements are common to both Islamism and classical totalitarianism, and which elements are specific to Islamism alone? To explore this question, I first have to draw a general picture of the elements that characterize a genuine totali-

tarian regime. Once we have this picture, I apply it to Islamism such as it exists in the real world. In this way, I will be able to draw a conclusion about similarities and differences between the classical and the new totalitarianism.

Methodology and Personal Remarks

The main idea, and the principal motivation and objective of any academic research, is to create new knowledge or to revise existing knowledge. To create new works of art and open new windows towards our understanding of the world, nature, and us as human beings are the goals of researchers in different disciplines. Understanding/*Verständnis* is a researcher's first step in this direction, whatever the researcher's motivation might be: serving a specific goal, a specific political regime, an ideology, a religion, or other objectives. In this sense, producing new knowledge, new art, new music should be considered as a value in itself. In the humanities and social sciences, the question of objectivity is of paramount importance. Without going through a long and endless debate on this issue, it is evident that the objectivity of a work has to be assessed according to Karl Popper's falsification theorem: verification of the authenticity of data, facts, and events.

Islamism is the subject of this book. It is a complex phenomenon. The particular complexity of Islamism lies in its close connotation with a specific religion, namely Islam. Other totalitarian ideologies are free from this particular complexity. Nazism, communism, and fascism do not evoke an attachment to any religion. Therefore, my project was faced with a double complexity: the usual complexity that is specific to academic research and the complexity of the very nature of its subject.

More precisely, the evocation of "Islam" in relation to "Islamism" immediately creates an ontological problematic, rendering the subject of the study more complex. Everything related to religion risks becoming mythical, in one way or another, and may

ignite sensitivity and suspicion. To somehow demystify it, we are entitled to ask questions such as: What is Islam? Which Islam? How can I find the true Islam, and where? We would be able to answer these questions if we knew what a “standard Islam” looked like. This is not the case. No such thing as a “standard Islam” exists that can serve as a measuring tool. There is of course the Muslim declaration of faith (*shahadatayn*), the two affirmations of the uniqueness of God and the prophecy of Muhammad. Even on this both fundamental and basic principle, however, there is no consensus among Muslims. The Shia believers add a third element of assertion that “Ali is the Friend of God” (*Alian Wali Allah*). If we go further, and take the five pillars of Islam as the standard, we observe that this is also disputed. For the (genuine) Sunni, the five pillars are: 1) the *Shahadatayn* (mentioned above); 2) *Salat*: performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times a day; 3) *Zakat*: paying an alms (or charity) tax to benefit the poor and the needy; 4) *Sawm*: fasting during the month of Ramadan; and 5) *Hajj*: pilgrimage to Mecca. To this, the Shia add the principle of *Adl* (God’s justice) and some other Muslims believe that jihad, launching war in the name of Islam, is also one of the pillars of Islam. Now, even if we suppose that the majority of Muslims more or less agree on the essentials, this can only be the minimum. The next question is about political power, the question of the caliphate, the imamate, as well as numerous important issues related to the regulation of relations between Muslims and non-Muslim individuals, communities, and nations. There is no consensus at all on these issues.

In Islam, there exists no equivalent to an institution like the Vatican and no authority equivalent to the Pope who is able to codify an official Islam like the Holy See does for Catholicism. Even the Sheikh of the most respected and learned Islamic institution, the University of al-Azhar in Egypt, has no authority like papal authority. There is of course the Koran, the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, and a history more than 14 centuries long. The Koran, which was codified 30 years after Muhammad’s death, however, has been

subjected to multiple and various, and even contradictory, interpretations. The Sunna is very disputable, indeed. Therefore, it is impossible to define Islam in a way that will be acceptable to the majority of Muslims. Thus, Islam becomes a mental construction rather than a tangible, definable entity. It is divided between innumerable sects, rituals, and theological schools. Each one proclaims to represent the “true” Islam. Moreover, at this moment in history, Muslims are in a real war against each other as never before. Alternatively, I could construct an Islam based on my own interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna; a self-made Islam. In this case, I would have done nothing but add yet another version of Islam to the innumerable versions that already exist. For this reason, I had to leave this path. Instead, I searched to find more solid ground elsewhere as the base for my theoretical and analytical edifice. I arrived at the conclusion that the concept of “Islamism,” rather than “Islam,” possesses the required qualifications that I was looking for. I decided, as the point of departure, precisely to avoid the mythical aspect of the phenomenon, to consider Islamism as a profane subject and not as a religious one. Once this was established, the search for its “religious” sources of inspiration and attachment followed. In other words, I will not explain Islamism by way of religious arguments; nor do I intend to undertake the task of verifying if Islamism is in accordance with Islam or not. Bassam Tibi, a Muslim scholar with an international reputation and the author of a number of valuable works on Islam and Islamism, has defined the following mission for himself: “First, I hope to defend Islam against Islamism ... and second, I hope to contribute to the bridging of the divides between the civilization of the West and of Islam.”⁹ I do not recognize such a mission for myself, i.e., defending or offending Islam.

As I mentioned above, Islam is not only an elusive and ambivalent concept, it is also the subject of intense wrangling and division among Muslims themselves. This is not the case, however, with Islamism. As we will see through this book, consensus exists among Islamists themselves, as well as among researchers on Islamism

about the contents and the main characteristics of Islamism. This consensus facilitates the formulation of a comprehensive definition of Islamism in a way that will lead to a “conceptual consensus.” By “conceptual consensus,” I mean the convergence of all, or at least a majority, of authoritative opinions among leading Muslim figures who are known as Islamists. The existence of a conceptual consensus on the Islamist (as distinct from Islamic) creed among Islamists does not exclude their mutual antagonism and hostility. This is a political and tactical issue, not a conceptual one.

Having thus eliminated my own reading and interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna as valid primary sources, I chose to found my research on two other pillars that are tangible and verifiable: first, on Islamists’ own interpretations of Islam, or more precisely, how they define “Islam,” and second, on history.

This exercise requires a discourse analysis. So I have analyzed the discourses of the heads of Islamist movements, including Shia and Sunni veterans and leading figures like Hassan al-Banna, Abul Ala-al Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama Bin Laden, as well as ISIS leaders. The common discourse that emerges from this exercise reveals that, despite the sectarian, political, cultural, geographic, and linguistic variations of the authors, they are all expressing essentially the same thing. Therefore, at this stage, we obtain a qualified Islamist definition of Islam, as expressed by the most prominent Islamist authorities throughout eight decades. This assumption leads me to formulate the following definition of Islamism: Islamism is a religiously inspired ideology based on a totalitarian interpretation of Islam, whose ultimate objective is the conquest of the world by all means. This definition is based on two necessary criteria for a valid definition: exclusiveness and inclusiveness. It does not contain any element alien to the Islamist discourse, and it embraces all relevant elements contained in the Islamist discourse.

After having formulated this definition of Islamism, I must briefly mention the importance of the use of history in the analysis of Islamism. History does not say everything, but it says a lot. His-

tory is, in a sense, the realization of theory in practice. The realization of a theory, a philosophy, and a religion is never identical with the founding message. History shows us different variations and fluctuations of the founding message in different periods of its life. History is useful when it is organized; otherwise it is only an incoherent mass of crude material. In this respect, I find Fernand Braudel's method an appropriate way to work. Braudel makes a useful distinction between three categories of events in history: *événementiel*, *conjoncturel*, and the *longue durée*.¹⁰ I have tried to apply this, in my own way. For example, in analyzing the "Ideological Roots of Islamism," I went through the history in search of early actions and discourses similar to contemporary Islamism. This led me to the 7th century A.D. When I studied the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood, I placed it in the context of the post-WWI society and the fall of empires in Europe. When I dealt with the evolution of Islamism, I made a periodization, mentioning the characteristics of each period, which is both informative and instructive.

Now, it is time for a few words about the author's personal history. There are some subjects, often dramatic and even tragic ones, that the researcher, due to life coincidences, has been implicated in or subjected to, willy-nilly. In such cases, the researcher has a duty to inform readers, one way or another, about his "extraordinary" relationship (in the literal sense of the word) to the topic of his study. If the author has been the victim of a war, a revolution, or a terrorist action, and he intends to study the same war, revolution, or terrorist action, it is clear to me that he cannot deal with the subject in the same way as another researcher who has no similar personal relationship with the subject of study. This kind of relationship between the author and the subject of a study will have an impact on the choice of angle, the construction of priorities between factors, and sympathy or antipathy to actors, places, and events. The life-story of some celebrated authors are known to the public; that is not so in my case. The personal destiny of the German philosopher and political scientist Hannah Arendt certainly affected her

choice of research on totalitarianism. With the rise of Nazism in her native country, she had to leave Germany for the United States of America, where she became a US citizen. It is not so much a question of changing country or citizenship, which a lot of people do every day. In cases similar to Arendt's, the situation is quite another, changing country and citizenship unwillingly. It is a transformation of identity, or at least an important part of the identity, the world-view, the view of human beings. Why and how do your friends, neighbors, and even members of your family become your enemies overnight? And how do you come to consider them as "collaborators" and "traitors?" My point here is that a researcher who has not had a similar experience with a totalitarian regime would probably deal differently with totalitarianism than Hannah Arendt.

I belong to the category of researchers who have, unwillingly, been the victims of great turbulence that has dramatically affected their lives. At the age of 39, I escaped from the Islamist revolution of 1979 in Iran, leaving behind my country, my birthplace, my belongings, my career at Tehran University, my friends, my family, and especially my books! I was among the few who were against this revolution, without having been a supporter of the shah's regime. Therefore, it cannot be denied that my particular interest in studying Islamism is motivated by the thirst to understand this phenomenon that so drastically changed my life, as well as the lives of all Iranians, and even the general situation in the Middle East, with an important impact on world politics. Being influenced by dramatic events is understandable and even inescapable, and probably causes individual or collective trauma. Therefore, it is crucial that the affected researcher is aware of his situation, and he chooses between writing a personal diary of the events in which he has been implicated, voluntarily or not, or engages himself in a genuine study of the phenomenon. This means that a sober, genuine research process requires a permanent internal struggle on the part of the researcher. When the research process is launched, it must follow its own logic, independent of the researcher's exis-

tential situation. I think that researchers like Franz Neumann, the author of *Behemoth* (1942); Sigmund Neumann, the author of *Permanent Revolution – Totalitarianism in the Age of International Civil War* (1942); Hannah Arendt, the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951); and Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, the authors of *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) are among the authors who, despite their own experiences, produced honest works, respecting the genuine process of research. In my modest capacity, I have tried to follow the same path that was trodden by these authors. I would like to understand this Islamism that changed my life, my career, and forced me to leave my country, perhaps forever. What is this Islamism that thousands and thousands of people are ready to give their lives for? What are the ideological and historical origins of Islamism? What do Islamists want? Why are Islamists so determined to change the world order?

These are some of the questions that I have tried to answer in this book. Throughout my studies in Islamism, I have tried not to let my personal history lead the research. Not only for the sake of respect for the general rules governing academic research, but also, and foremost, for my own sake. I assume that the best way to discover the true identity of a phenomenon that has harmed you is not through rancor and bitterness. This will be attainable by distancing yourself enough from your feelings and trying to consider the phenomenon as a “normal” subject of investigation. Readers who are already informed about my attachment with the subject of study may themselves detect where I have possibly been partial and where I may have been tendentious. In any event, this has been my guideline when writing this book: to be honest with the presentation of theses, arguments, data, and events. I learned this approach from Maxime Rodinson, a veteran in the field of the sociology of Islam in France. When I started gathering data for my doctoral thesis, I met him at his home and asked him, “How can I attain objectivity in my investigation?” He looked at me and said with a smile, “My dear friend, there is no absolute objectivity in social science!” This answer came as a shock. I replied, somewhat dis-

oriented, "How can we do a qualified study? What are the criteria for such a study?" Rodinson answered, "Don't cheat! I mean that the researcher has to present all arguments and argue why he has chosen this specific argument or thesis rather the others." This was certainly a valuable lesson for a young researcher like me. From that time, throughout my academic career, I have always tried to follow this golden rule.

It is also important to emphasize that in my opinion I possess sufficient, professional qualifications to deal with Islamism. From the time of my childhood, I inevitably became familiar with Islam. I was born in a city with the strange name of Mashhad, now the second-largest city in Iran and also the most important holy city in the country. Mashhad means the "place of martyrdom." It is a very ancient city (Tus) in Khorasan (the place of sunrise). The city of Tus became Mashhad when Ali ibn Mousa al-Reza (or, al-Rida), an Arab descendent of the Bani Hashim aristocracy, arrived from the city of Medina (in today's Saudi Arabia) en route to the city of Merv (in today's Afghanistan), where he was expected to be proclaimed Crown Prince and designated the successor of the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mamun. Al-Reza died in 818 A.D. in Nowghan, a locality in Tus. His sudden death aroused suspicion. Some people accused the Caliph al-Mamun of being behind the "poisoning" plot of al-Reza. When he was buried there, the city changed its name and became Mashhad. The strong religious character of the city leaves nothing, and nobody, indifferent. Even the lives of children are affected. Parallel to my civil school education, my brother forced me to go two to three evenings a week to a religious school where I learned the elementary Arabic language and followed some Koranic studies. My time as a teenager coincided with the national movement for the nationalization of the oil industry, which ended with the fall of Muhammad Mosaddeq, the prime minister and the leader of this movement, in a CIA-orchestrated coup d'état in 1953. Like many young people of my generation, I became a follower of Mosaddeq, while at the same time practicing my religious rituals.

Close to the circle around the Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truths (Kanun-e Nashr-e Haghayegh-e Eslami), under the leadership of Muhammad Taghi Shariati, the father of the famous Ali Shariati, who is now celebrated as being the ideological architect of the Islamist revolution in 1979, I became a friend of the latter. At Tehran University, where I studied law and political science, I became an active member of the pro-Mosaddeq movement Jebh-e Melli (National Front). In Paris in 1963, where I arrived in the spring, I was elected as a representative of the Confederation of Iranian Students (France) to the London World Students' Congress. At the same time, and parallel to my studies at Sciences-Po, Langues-O, and the Faculty of Law, I was responsible for the Jebh-e Melli in France, as well as the representative of Mehdi Bazargan's party. Bazargan became Khomeini's first prime minister in 1979, many years after I had left him and his circles. During the last years of Ali Shariati's sojourn in Paris, I was his close friend and collaborator as an ad hoc editor of the anti-shah publication *Iran-Azad* (Free Iran). All through these years, I remained a practicing Muslim until 1966, when I finished my dissertation, *The Political Role of the Ulama in Iran*. This dissertation was supervised by Professor Maurice Duverger, one of the leading figures in political science and political parties at the time. It is worth noting that one of the chapters of this dissertation had the following title: "The Shah and Khomeini: Face to Face!" It must be remembered that, back then, there were only few specialists on Islam who were aware of an ayatollah with this name, and nobody, including myself, could predict that this confrontation would become a reality thirteen years later. The work on my doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne coincided with the student unrest in 1968. Like many other students, I took part in demonstrations and in the related activities of this amazing historic event. This was indeed one of the best and most enriching periods of my life. My thesis was about the Shia concept of power. Shia political theory was an unusual subject, considering the context of the time, when Marxism was the absolutely dominant doctrine at French universities. It was the heyday of Jean-Paul

Sartre and the decline of his liberal rival, Raymond Aron, whose classroom was ransacked by students. At that time, studying the role of religion, in particular Islam, was considered non-attractive and even “ridiculous” within the discipline of political science. After four years’ work, I defended my thesis on 11 February 1971. I obtained the degree of doctor d’Etat in political science with the grade of “très bien.” It is worth noting that my thesis came out prior to Ayatollah Khomeini’s book *Islamic Government*, which was published in Nejef (in Iraq) in the summer of the same year. My reason for mentioning all these events is that, due to my research on Shia Islam, I became secular and anti-clerical with the consequence, among others, that I left the pro-Shia circles to which I had belonged. It is not necessary to mention all the misery that a dissident has to live with. Those who have been in the same situation know the high price that has to be paid for defection. However, history proved me right. I am among the few educated Iranian people who did not support the Islamist revolution without being, at the same time, a supporter of the shah’s regime. Those who adhered to Khomeini, left or right wing, probably did not have the same knowledge that I had acquired through my research on Islam and the Shia, in particular. They expected an ayatollah to bring democracy to Iran! Only a few leaders, like Shapour Bakhtiar, a secular democrat and a patriot, had the courage to stand up against religious and political obscurantism. He paid the price for his courage with his life. This book is dedicated to his memory.