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Islam and Secular Modernity under Western Eyes:  
A Genealogy of a Constitutive Relationship

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**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE**  
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## **Abstract**

This paper considers the theoretical operations involved in sustaining secular modernity within the realm of social theory. It seeks to understand how the secular operates as an epistemological formation. We examine a set of arguments, considering them as sites of the (discursive) formation of secular modernity. Our inquiry is centred on Islam as a case-study. Its particular position as a double constitutive outsider to social theory, both in terms of a religious as well as a non-Western other, enables us to unpack hegemonic narratives that are constitutive for secular modernity. We examine two scholarly debates that touch upon a question of compatibility between Islam and modernity. In a first section of the paper we look at the sociological debate on the use of a Western concept of secularisation in relation to Islam, and in a second section we addresses a more recent cross-religious concept of ‘fundamentalism’ as a widely used and popular way to frame realities and developments deemed incompatible with modernity.

## **Keywords**

Modernity, Islam, secularization, fundamentalism, Orientalism.



## **Introduction\***

What kinds of theoretical operations are involved in sustaining secular modernity? Such an inquiry into the making of the secular is situated in a recent line of critical thought about secularism informed and shaped by the work of Talal Asad. Asad proposes an anthropology of secularism, or an investigation into how we have come to think of the secular in the ways that we do. Secularism, in Asad's characterization, is an enactment by which a political medium (the representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender and religion. In other words, secularism is understood as transcendent mediation – the transcending of different identities considered to be 'particular' (class, gender, religion) and the replacing of conflicting perspectives by a unifying experience aimed at creating a 'universal' subject (Asad 2003: 5). This understanding situates secularism at the heart of the making of both modernity and the modern nation-state, and in that light it does not come as a surprise that in the wake of elaborately reported crises of modernity and of the nation-state, the secular is interrogated in a similar vein.

This paper is to be situated in this line of inquiry, as an attempt at understanding how the secular operates as an epistemological formation. Our terrain of investigation into the making of the secular is confined to the field of social theory. The historical project of secular modernity is produced through a set of material and discursive practices of which the fields of science and knowledge production form an integral part (Foucault 1980). We consider the terrain of scholarship, in other words, as our main site of investigation for this occasion, as we seek to trace some of the operations that sustain the secular character of modernity within the realm of social theory accounting for modernity's formation. Clearly it is not our aim to discuss those large bodies of scholarship in an exhaustive way. Rather, we seek to highlight a number of arguments in which we recognize instances of the reproduction of secular modernity in analytical tools, concepts and ways of framing that circulate within social theory. While our examples are eclectic and drawn from a broad range of contemporary social theory, we also recognize that these dynamics of reproduction are engrained in the disciplinary origins of sociological thought. The emergence of Sociology as a discipline was urged by the need to account for the social transformations that were making societies into modern ones. The new sociological accounts, however, did not only bear witness to the process of modernisation, but were also profoundly part of its making. The discipline of Sociology thus became an important site of the production of descriptions and definitions of what is modern, and what is not. Sociology provided modernity, we could argue, with one specific set of identity narratives.

Our exploration of how the architecture of social theory is marked by narratives of modern identity is informed by a poststructuralist impulse of looking at the 'constitutive outsides' of hegemonic understandings of secular modernity. Shifting the attention to the constitutive outsides of established patterns of thought is a historically contextualized exercise: questions about how to account for the formation of the modern world surfaced once more with great intensity in the very moment when the promises and vicissitudes of modernity were questioned (Hall 1992: 3). By now we can rely on a wide range of critical theory engaging with modernity's crises through situating the 'othering' mechanisms that are part and parcel of the project of modernity at the centre of their thinking (e.g. Derrida 1976; Said 1978; Foucault 1980; Spivak 1988). The rise of a theoretical interest in modernity's crises and 'scattered hegemonies' (Grewal & Kaplan 1994) is indeed related to, and often accounted for in terms of, a 'return' of (critical attention to) modernity's others and margins (Braidotti 2002).

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\* An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the 6th Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, 16-20 March 2005 in Montecatini Terme, as part of the workshop *Shifting Fields and the Production of Knowledge: Geographies, Disciplines, Objects, Power* directed by Eberhard Kienle & Seteney Shami, and co-organised and co-financed by the Social Science Research Council, New York. We are grateful for the intellectual engagement with our paper from the workshop coordinators, the workshop participants and an anonymous reader.

Two ‘constitutive outsides’ are particularly relevant for our present investigation into hegemonic understandings of secular modernity and its reproduction, i.e. the terrain of religion and that of the non-West. With respect to the first, we are reminded that a contemporary notion of religion is indeed a modern invention (see Asad 1993, and also Masuzawa 2005 for the notion of ‘world religion’). While a critical genealogy of this constitution of religion as a modern concept falls beyond the scope of this paper, for our argument we want to underline the following dynamic. The modern constitution of religion is embedded within a binary opposition between the modern and the non-modern, to which religion is tied up in profound ways. In other words, as much as the constitution of the modern crucially depends on an understanding of what is ‘non-modern’, religion became a crucial site in defining what the modern is not. This in fact makes religion a crucial component in modernity’s identity; religion has indeed been one of the principles by which modernity has tried to recognize itself and specify its difference (Jameson 1991: 386; Asad 2003: 14). The centrality of religion in the making of the modern is reflected in early and early authoritative sociological accounts which, it has been noted before, gravitate around the position of religion (from Comte’s conception of society as evolving from a theological, through a metaphysic into a positivist phase in which religion would die, to Durkheim’s framework of a functional reorganization of society in which religion would lose its central cohesive role, and the connection Weber establishes between Protestantism and modern capitalism in his account of the disenchantment of the world). This centrality of religion in understanding modern society is sustained and continued through theories of secularisation, which still provide the main paradigm for the sociological study of religion in contemporary societies.

Another binary opposition crucial to the making and understanding of modernity is the West vs. the non-West. Postcolonial scholarship elaborates how ‘the Rest’, as a constitutive outside, was critical for the formation of western modernity: without the Rest – or its own internal ‘others’ – the West would not have been able to recognize and represent itself as the summit of human history (Hall 1992: 314). Critical genealogies affirming structural interdependencies in the formation of modernity interrupt the possibility of ‘internalist’ accounts of Western modernity, in which modernity is explained as the result of an unfolding of processes originating in the West. Much sociological thinking about modern society, it is argued (e.g. Hall 1992; Sayyid 1997), draws precisely on such internalist accounts, with the subsequent profound conflation of the notion of ‘modern’ with that of ‘the West’. Hence the language, theoretical models and hidden assumptions of modern sociology itself are one of the places where a discourse on the West versus the Rest has its effects (Hall 1992:318).

If our inquiry into the secular modern within social theory mainly focuses, as the title of this paper suggest, on Islam, it is precisely because of where Islam, as an object of study in modern social theory, is conceptually located: on the intersection of these two binary oppositions that shape hegemonic narratives of secular modernity. Islam is situated as a ‘constitutive outsider’ to modernity not only as a religious formation, but also as a phenomenon located outside of the West. Thus Islam as an object of social theory provides a discursive terrain where questions of belonging or entitlement to modernity gain a particular intensity. Debates on whether or not Islam and secular modernity are compatible, and whether or not it is possible to modernise Islam, illustrate the point.

In this paper we try to trace how such binary oppositions, and the way they intersect, continue to operate at the heart of social theory with respect to the study of Islam. We will do so by examining two scholarly debates that touch upon a question of compatibility between Islam and modernity in different ways. In a first section of the paper we look at the sociological debate on the use of a Western concept of secularisation in relation to Islam, to illustrate how two seemingly contradictory positions rely on similar essentialist representations of secular modernity. The second section addresses a more recent cross-religious concept of ‘fundamentalism’ as a widely used and popular way to frame realities and developments deemed incompatible with modernity.

## 1 The Essentialisation of Secularisation

Secularisation operates as the main mode or modality of describing and ascribing meaning to religious phenomena in a context of modernity. While the process of secularisation has been understood and conceptualised in a number of different ways, a theoretical framework with great sociological purchase in accounting for the changing significance and forms of religion in modern societies, is that of functional differentiation.<sup>1</sup> This framework holds that the reorganisation of modern life according to functional lines affected religion to the extent that it lost its overarching character – of ‘the sacred canopy’ – and became a subsystem, an autonomous sphere, ‘just’ like any other subsystem (Berger 1967). Secularisation is thus not understood as an autonomous process, but rather as a *consequence* of the process of modernity’s differentiation, as its *effect* on the religious system (Dobbelaere 1999, 2002). To the extent that functional differentiation is understood as part and parcel of the process of modernisation, secularisation is thus granted a certain universality. Modernisation, in other words, is believed to inevitably involve a differentiation process which also will lead to the secularisation of societies.

When the modernisation of Muslim societies is under scrutiny, it is most often precisely around the issue of secularisation that doubts and questions are articulated. Doubts and questions that have led several scholars to question the universality of secularisation as part of a generic process of modernisation, and notably the anthropologist Ernest Gellner who argues in *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (1992) against the universal premises of modernism and secularism. Pointing at the renewed vitality of Islamic movements in Muslim societies, Gellner considers that the secularisation paradigm is countered by Islam. This is due, according to Gellner, to both substantial and doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity, as well as postcolonial developments in the Arab world where a ‘high Islam’ – a puritan, knowledgeable and orthodox form of Islam – has challenged Western variants of modernity (Gellner 1992). A much more ambivalent response to the perceived challenge of Islam to secularisation theories is found in the work of the Syrian philosopher Sadiq Al Azm. Islam, like any other religion, he argues, resists secularisation from a doctrinal point of view, yet Islam and Muslim societies, as a social and historical reality, are secularising and have been secularising for a substantial while now due to the challenges of ‘secular’ modernity (Al-Azm 2004). While both scholars seem to agree on a doctrinal incompatibility between Islam and modernity, they relate different sociological consequences to this observation.

Yet it is not our purpose to tackle this question of the doctrinal (in)compatibility between Islam and modernity (Arkoun 1984; Abu Zayd 1993; Mernissi 1992). Rather, we are interested in a specific debate that addresses the epistemological implication of this question, and that questions the *universal premises of (Western) secularisation as analytical tool*.

While there’s a longer awareness of the euro-centric nature of social scientific disciplines (Turner 1974), the interrogation of universal premises gained a new intensity with both deconstructivist and post-modern approaches and the development of post-colonial studies. Deconstructivist theoretical traditions render specific assumptions of scientific narratives visible, and situate them as particular *truth regimes* which (re)produce power relations (Foucault 1991). Post-colonial scholarship unpacks both the Western-centric (and androcentric) character of science and knowledge production (Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1988; Nandy 1995). These critical perspectives and lines of questioning have also lead a number of Muslim scholars to reconstruct an alternative Islamic scholarship grounded in Islamic epistemological assumptions.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Olivier Tschannen’s *Les théories de la sécularisation* (1992) figures as one of the most compelling studies of the constitution and utilisation of this paradigm within the Sociology of Religion. Three main elements, he argues, lie at the core of this paradigm: differentiation, rationalisation and mundanisation (1992: 63). José Casanova (1994) also situates the differentiation thesis at the core of the secularisation paradigm.

2 Scholars such as Ismael Al Faruqi, Sayyid Hussein Nasr or Sayyid Muhammad Al Attas, just to mention some who have attempted to reconstruct social sciences from Islamic epistemological assumptions. For two different evaluations of this point of departure, see Ziadi (2006) and Abaza (2002).

In the disciplinary field of Sociology of Religion, the question whether or not Islam counters secularisation is rearticulated as a *methodological interrogation* of the transposability of secularisation as an *analytical concept* to the study of Islam (Dassetto 1996; Hamès, 1999; Charnay, 1978). This of course fuels once more the never-ending debate on how to conceive of secularisation. Besides the already mentioned functional differentiation, a number of different understandings of secularisation have been elaborated, such as religious individualisation, compartmentalisation, privatisation, religious decline, religious bricolage and de-institutionalisation, to name but a few (Dobbelaere 1999; Luckmann 1967). Yet beyond the usual divisions on the matter of definition, several authors have challenged the use of secularisation as an *analytical tool* with respect to Islam, as the concept is so marked by its development in a Western and Christian context. This section explores this call for a specific *sociology of Islam* voiced by several sociologists of religion over the past decades (Charnay 1978; Pace 1995, 1998; Spickard 1998, 2001; Dassetto 1996). Such a call was met with resistance by other sociologists, and in the second section we proceed to discuss the work of one author who has been very critical of this argument (Babes 1997, 2000). Both positions, however, rely on a problematic naturalisation of secularism, we argue in the last section, as they take (Western) secular modernity as the analytical template in the observation of Islam.

### **1.1 In need of a Sociology of Islam**

The line of argumentation that take the use of Western analytical tools for observing non-Western phenomena to do injustice to the phenomena observed, emphasises that particular premises on which Western social sciences draw fail to reflect different epistemologies operating in non-Western societies, and in this case Muslim societies. This point of departure leads some scholars to argue for an alternative approach in the study of Islam, albeit that the argument and its implications are played out in different ways. Two analytical distinctions of what puts Islam at odds with the Western and Christian grounds of secularisation theories are usually mobilised to sustain this position.

First, the *absence of a central authority within Islam* seems to pose an important challenge to the study of Islam by Western scholarship. As Enzo Pace argues, the different schisms, ideological orientations and juridical schools within Islam seriously complicate the debate about secularisation. Indeed, when we speak of the secularisation of Islam, which Islam are we referring to (Pace 1998: 165; 1996: 110-111)? A crucial tenet of the secularisation thesis is the de-institutionalisation and fragmentation of religious structures in a modern context (Dobbelaere 1999; Luckmann 1967). Secularisation in this sense presupposes an identifiable source of authority and an institutionalisation of religion, which indeed is often taken as a pre-condition for the modernisation process. Weber already saw the routinisation of charismatic authority as a prelude to the disenchantment and rationalisation process.<sup>3</sup> The ‘becoming worldly’ of religious structures, and their specialisation in specific ‘religious matters’ affects “the relation of the individual to the sacred cosmos and the sacred order in general” (Luckmann 1967: 80) and subsequently results in society’s secularisation. Islamic realities, it is however argued, tend to be *much more diffuse*, not only on the level of religious authority, but equally with respect to the realm of practice (also related to the relative absence of institutionalised religious authority). Dassetto furthermore argues that there is a sustained failure within Islam to establish a legitimate and concrete institution. This reverses the problem of the sociologist of religion, he argues; at stake is no longer O’Dea’s ‘dilemma of institutionalisation’, but rather a dilemma of non-institutionalisation (Dassetto 1996: 86).

A second distinction that informs this line of argument emphasises the *all-encompassing and political role* of Islam in Muslim societies. While some scholars situate this primarily as sociological difference (Dassetto 1996), others consider it as an essential epistemological feature of Muslim societies and Islamic knowledge (Charnay 1978; Berque 1978; Pace 1998). Several sociologists,

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3 On the dilemmas and paradoxes of religious institutionalisation see O’Dea (1961).

beginning with Max Weber, have indeed ascribed a political essence to Islam that sets it apart from Christian traditions (in Turner 1974; Carré 1986). The notion of a political, and therefore ‘this worldly’ essence sits uncomfortably with the Christian roots of the secularisation paradigm, and in particular the strong influence of the Pauline tradition (Luckmann 1967: 118; Tschannen 1992: 128). Islam, Weber argues, is not a religion of salvation (1964: 266; 1986: 9), in contrast to Christian visions on the relationship between the world and the hereafter. Jesus’ teachings on an ‘absolute indifference to the world’, the relative unimportance of ‘Ceasar’s ownings’ for mankind, and the emphasis on praying to God and preparing for what will come have highlighted the difference between ‘other worldly’ from ‘this worldly’ matters (Weber 1964: 273). Precisely this differentiation is taken as what enabled the rationalization of the relationship between human beings and different social orders, which consequently lead to a relative autonomy of different spheres and the ‘Entzauberung’ of the world (Weber 1986: 11).

In his *Sociologie religieuse de l’islam* (1978), Jean-Paul Charnay argues for a specific sociology of Islam on the grounds of Islam’s all encompassing character both in a sociological and theological sense. Islam does not only deal with transcendental questions, but equally addresses immanent and ‘this worldly’ matters in a substantially different way than Christian traditions do (1978: 79). Jacques Berque, in his turn, dismisses altogether the pertinence of a distinction between transcendence and immanence within Islam (1978: 304). Pace, finally, suggests that this ubiquity of the religious system leads to a particular ‘cognitive system’ where the distinction between a religious and socio-political sphere is unknown (1998: 166). Islamic societies can therefore not be understood without taking into account the convergence of religious and political memberships. Pace goes on to question the possibility of organising sociological surveys on religious experiences in Muslims societies, as Islam is seen as an intrinsic part of daily life to the extent that the possibility of a self-reflexive stand is limited (1998: 167).

In their quest for a Sociology of Religion capable of taking Islam’s differences or specificities into account, these and other scholars have mobilised different strategies, ranging from building an alternative framework all together, i.e. a *Sociology of Islam*, to incorporating alleged differences and specificities into a ‘universal’ sociological approach. The elaborations of an alternative framework often make recourse to Muslim scholars, who are taken as representatives of the ‘Muslim’ perspective. Most noteworthy is the reference to Ibn Khaldūn (Charnay 1978; Spickard 2001; Monteil 1978; Hamès 1998). This 14<sup>th</sup> century Arab-Berber scholar could easily be considered as one of the first sociologists ‘avant-la-lettre’, who addressed issues such as urbanisation, social belonging and ethnicity. The concept of ‘*assabiyya* – group-feeling – is of particular importance here, as it played a central role in Ibn Khaldūn’s analysis of the operation of social cohesion and identification (Spickard 2001). It has also been used by scholars like James Spickard as a crucial reference in locating essential and contrasting differences between Muslim societies and a Weberian tradition of Western sociology where the main social actor is the rational individualised *self* (Spickard 1998: 177).

Other scholars aim to appropriate and incorporate Islamic accounts and perspectives when developing more general sociological analytical frameworks. Jean-Paul Charnay’s work is a good example in this respect, as it seeks a middle-way between Islamic metaphysics (of observing everything through a religious lens) and a sociological requirement of accounting for the material conditions of people’s behaviour. His analysis of Muslims’ failure to abide by religious prescriptions illustrates his approach. While a failure to diligently pray five times a day on the appropriate times might appear as a sign of declining religious practice to Western eyes, Charnay argues that it looks quite differently when taking Islamic theological categories into account. Thus what might appear as a sign of increasing secularisation and religious fragmentation finds in fact a legitimization in Islamic theology, which takes into account the fact that Mu’mins (believers) aren’t always in the possibility of practising their religion adequately due to circumstances such as work, travel, and so on – known as *darūra*. A theologically legitimized flexibility in religious practice, in other words, could easily, if interpreted in a ‘Western’ way, be erroneously analysed as a decrease of religion (1978: 311). The

work of Felice Dassetto provides another example of a socio-anthropological approach seeking to take the specificity of Islam as a point of departure. In *La construction de l'Islam européen* (1996) he introduces the concept of *Muslimité* as a way to conceptualise both the centrality of the Shahada and the ‘primary relationships’ within Muslim societies and communities (1996: 94).

### **1.2 What is Islam?**

The scholars we briefly discussed in the previous section call for more reflexivity in the analysis of ‘different’ religious traditions such as Islam. They rely on various kinds of strategies to deal with this Islamic ‘specificity’: from a better adaptation of existing Western analytical tools to Islamic realities to a rejection of those tools all together. These various approaches converge, however, in the notion of Islam as a ‘different’ religion and contain an argument for the need to account for Islam’s otherness.

Some scholars have rejected this call of ‘specifying’ social sciences or developing an Islamic Sociology (of Religion) to observe Muslim society and religious practices. A representative of this position within the Sociology of Religion is Leila Babès. We take her work as exemplary here as she is, to our knowledge, one of the few sociologists who explicitly addressed and criticised the calls for taking Islamic ‘specificities’ into account within the sociological endeavour (Babes 1997, 2001).<sup>4</sup> While she acknowledges the ethnocentric character of Western sociological scholarship, Babès rejects the alleged ‘specificities’ we reviewed above, and brands them as symptomatic for an Orientalist gaze on Muslim societies.

Babès starts by criticising the argument that Islam acts as a *totalising religion* – an argument she considers to be more of the product of scholars’ mind-sets than the result of empirical investigation. She traces and situates the belief of an encompassing Islam in a particular theology that approaches Islam as ‘din-dawla’ (religion of the state). This theology finds its roots in the reformation-movement between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1997: 33). One of the main challenges for Muslim scholars in that period of colonisation, such as Al-Afghani, Abduh, Rida and Al-Bannah, was precisely the quest for an ‘*authentic*’ – read non-colonised – form of political and social organisation, in which Islam appears as an appealing alternative (Ramadan 1999). By situating the idea of Islam as a total religion within a specific theological tradition, Babès manages to dismiss its essentialist and universalist pretension. She strengthens her argument by highlighting older Islamic accounts that deal with this relationship between political and religious authority, and that acknowledge and argue for a separation between both spheres (Babès 1997: 179)<sup>5</sup>. The idea that Islam figures as ‘*din-al-dawla*’ is therefore primarily framed as a product of Islamic Reformist thinking.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout her argument, Babès seeks to identify spheres of compatibility between Western scholarship and Muslim tradition. The subsequent arguments she offers are therefore in support of such compatibility. Essential to (Weberian) secularisation theory, as we already mentioned, is the consideration of the Christian Pauline tradition as a theological root for the process of secularisation. Babès refutes this claim of Christian exclusivity (and therefore simultaneous Oriental difference) by drawing a parallel with the distinction within Islamic theology between the ‘*law*’ and the ‘*spirit of the law*’. Babès furthermore puts emphasis on the concept of *Niyya* (pure intention) – a highly valued virtuous characteristic within Islamic theology that serves to distinguish between the Mu’mín

4 A similar critique can be found in the work of Stauth & Abaza (1998), yet their critique is addressed to Western and Muslim scholarship underlining Islamic specificities. They depict such approaches as ‘going native’, and criticise the Orientalist representations underpinning these positions and the apologetic stand towards Islamist movements. As we focus on the sociological secularisation debate, we take Babès as a main anchor point in our analysis.

5 She refers to Ibn Khaldûn’s writing on of the first four Caliphs as leaders described as having an aversion to the exercise of power (see also Carré 1986: 144).

6 For an overview, genesis and discussion of this debate see Salvatore (1997).

(believer) and the Munafiq.<sup>7</sup> This strengthens her argument that the Quran favours faith over practice, with faith conceptualised here as the pure *individual* relationship of the Mu'min (believer) to God (Babès 1997, 2000)<sup>8</sup>. With regard to the argument on *authority*, Babès insists that the absence of 'official' representatives by no means implies an absence of 'officious' religious authorities (1997: 36). Islamic scholars, renowned institutions and the heritage of Islamic jurisprudence can easily be considered as important sources of authority in the daily practices of Muslims, she maintains.

These observations are mobilized to counter the argument that the concept of secularisation and individualisation hold little validity in relation to Muslim societies. While Babès acknowledges the Western bias of the social sciences, she rejects a call for a specific approach to Islam. Instead, she insists on the need for scholars to be more self-reflexive, and argues for a critical use of existing concepts and their reformulation and re-articulation in the light of new developments, which could lead to a '*universal sociology*'. Only through *comparative work* can differences and similarities be distinguished, she maintains (1997: 176). At this point, we note, her arguments seem to converge in a remarkable way with those of Charnay (1978) or Dassetto (1996) whom she explicitly criticises. The main challenge according to Babès consists of taking a double approach in the study of Islam: inscribing Islam fully within the field of Sociology of Religion while at the same time unveiling and addressing the ethnocentrism of established concepts in that field: "[It] is not a new sociology which should be invented," she argues, "but rather the sociology" (1997: 39 – our translation). How this should be done concretely, however, remains largely unaddressed.

### **1.3 The debate on Islam 'and' secularisation: the essentialisation of both terms**

The previous sections explored two different perspectives and lines of argument on the Islamisation of Sociology of Religion debate. Both positions recognise that classic analytical tools are too 'Western', but they differ in their considerations of how to address the Western bias revolving around the 'otherness' of Islam. While the first position we discussed is marked by a tendency to emphasize Islam's 'otherness', Babès describes this call as "stubbornness to perceive Islam as an alien phenomenon", which in her eyes illustrates "a refusal to treat it [Islam] as a national fact?" (1997: 40 – our translation). Only through the integration of Islam into the 'regular' fields of study and through its treatment as a 'normal' object of study, will Islam become an integral part of Western (and French) society, which seems to be Babès' ultimate purpose.

What strikes us in analysing these different positions is their convergence in an *essentialist* conception of Islam. The line of argument discussed in the first section reproduces an essentialist logic, as Islam's specificities are taken to reflect a different societal structure and epistemology. Yet Babès line of argument is equally problematic to the extent that it fixes a different notion of Islam as authentic. In her insistence on the compatibility of Islamic realities with Western analytical frameworks she perhaps de-orientalises Islam, but she simultaneously *occidentalises* it. In both perspectives Islam is positioned as an *exogenous phenomenon* that can or cannot be adapted to the established frameworks and assumptions of Western scholarship.

Moreover, in both cases *theological elements* play an important role in the making of a sociological argument. When Babès turns to Ibn Khaldûn to argue that Islam recognises a differentiation between religious and political power, she insists on a particular interpretation and presents it as the 'real' Islam. This move subsequently allows her to dismiss alternative interpretations of Islam as the manifestation of a 'radicalisation', which only occurred in the last two centuries, and therefore not

7 A Munafiq or hypocrite refers to someone who is Muslim by name and proclamation but does not carry faith in his or her hearth. Verses 8 to 23 of the Surat Baqarah strongly warn against the Munafiqin who are described as fools, with a disease in their heart, who make mischief.

8 In stating so, she argues against Dassetto's concept of Muslîmité, as she emphasises that being a Muslim should not necessarily be seen in relation to the community.

'authentic' to Islam – a gesture we deem inadequate in the light of producing reliable accounts of (the differences within) Islamic realities. Babès not only fails to avoid this Orientalist logic, she also reproduces it by relying on precisely the same modes of representation of the Other, i.e. the use of a particular text to illustrate the essence of Islam. The main difference between her occidentalisation of Islam and its orientalisation is the mode in which the relationship between the Other and the Self is cast. While authors like Pace (1998) insist on the differences and contradictions between the Other and the Self (positing a negative relationship of essential difference), authors like Babès emphasize the similarities and universality (positing a relationship of similarity or essential sameness). In both cases however, the Self embodies the norm that remains unexplored and unquestioned.

Here the epistemological debates on universality and the question of how to account for 'otherness' and difference to a great extent converge in and revolve around a notion of 'authenticity'. Authenticity is linked either to (a relativist understanding of) *difference*, which translates into incommensurability, or to *sameness* (locating difference on the surface). We argue for a dislocation of the discussion from these grounds of authenticity, and seek to include *the frames used to observe and analyse the object of study* into the debate. Our argument relies on a constructivist approach, which acknowledges that science and scholarship not only observe their object of study, but also construct it (Latour 1987). Beyond false universalism or paralysing relativism, the challenge consists in recognising the positions from where one thinks, speaks and writes, and being self-reflective about the assumptions that inform one's position (cf. Haraway 1991)<sup>9</sup>.

Consequently more reflection is needed on this *invisible Self* that ground and stabilise the sociological frameworks we've been looking at, i.e. reflection on the hegemonic analytical concepts used to observe the Other (in this case Islam). The lack of self-reflexivity in relation to the concept of secularisation is indeed striking. Much of the literature on Islam and secularisation seems to suggest that the notion of secularisation is widely accepted, uniformly defined and knows little diversity in its approaches and definitions. What strikes us as a lack of reflexivity in fact figures, we suggest, as a naturalisation of secular assumptions in the conceptualisation of Western societies.

A quick glance at the scholarship on secularisation, however, reveals, as we have hinted to above, that the secularisation paradigm is neither hegemonic nor uncontested. It might be worthwhile to recapitulate some of the major critiques of the secularisation paradigm from within the sub-discipline of Sociology of Religion. The secularisation thesis, some have argued, presupposes a *Golden Age*, a period of generalised Christian faith which subsequently become affected by the modernising process (Stark 1999; Swatos & Christiano 1999; Lyon 1985; Hadden 1987; Glasner 1974). The work of historians such as Le Bras, Thomas or Delumeau demonstrates that the idea of a Golden Age is more of a romantic representation of long gone days, than an accurate and factual description of a past history (Gorski 2000: 144-145). Various contemporary tendencies of religious vitality and political mobilisation of religious movements, furthermore, suggest a lack of empirical evidence for a general decrease of religion (Stark 1999; Hadden 1987). While this does not need to imply a dismissal of the notion of secularisation all together,<sup>10</sup> it has prompted most secularisation theorists to do away with one or several articulations of secularisation theory, notably and primary the '*religious decline thesis*' (Dobbelaere 1999; Casanova 1994). Religious decline is to be understood as only one of the various possible consequences of secularisation, and sociologists like David Martin (1978) have since early on illustrated differences in interactions between religion and modernity between various Western countries. It would be "deeply misleading," as Wittrock (2000: 57-58) puts it, "to describe the formation of modernity as involving a uniform process of secularization." Authors like Casanova

9 In 'Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective' Haraway pleads for a redefinition of the notion of 'objectivity' in terms of situated knowledges, which is about acknowledging or locating the position from where one speaks, and how this positioning also constructs the object of study (Haraway 1991: 191).

10 Authors like Stark and Hadden, who consider the concept of secularisation as an element of the modernist project, remain in the minority within this literature.

(1994) have also convincingly argued against the '*privatisation thesis*' implied in the secularisation paradigm, as he makes reference to the role religion still or increasingly plays in the public organisation of society all around the world. The challenge, he argues, is to identify and distinguish the different elements that got articulated into the 'container concept' of secularisation, in order to study each of the presumed processes and dynamics on their own terms. A last theoretical issue to point out in this context is the *definition of religion*. This remains one of the oldest problems within Sociology of Religion, a remarkable fact which Hervieu-Léger has connected to the paradoxical relationship of the discipline to its object of study: "before becoming an object of study next to others, religion was the opponent" (Hervieu-Léger 1987: 13; see also Wilson 1985). Confronted with the insolubility of this issue, some scholars, starting with Max Weber, have consequently adopted an '*epistemological retreat*' vis-à-vis the notion of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1987), thus accepting the 'fate' of an essential disagreement concerning, and evasiveness of, the object of study (Casanova 1994: 26; Hervieu-Léger 1987: 24; Chaves 1994: 749)<sup>11</sup>. Others have adopted a pragmatic approach in this respect, arguing for the necessity of having a workable definition (in Hamilton 1995: 12).

When the debate shifts to 'Islam and secularisation', such critiques, which revisit and re-articulate the paradigm of secularisation from within Sociology of Religion, are hardly taken into account, as the different positions we laid out in the previous section illustrate. This failure is tied up, we believe, with a mechanism of *reproduction of a crucial binary within the logic of Orientalism*, i.e. a logic in which a Western Self is presented as the main carrier of a (particular) modernisation project and in which religion subsequently serves as marker of difference with respect to such a project. Recognizing the constitution as well as the internal diversity and multiplicity of this Self, and the unstable status of the secularisation paradigm in the West, would provide a number of tools to undermine the crude binary of the (secular) Self versus the (religious) Other.

## 2 The Spectre of Fundamentalism

The first part of this paper addresses a set of arguments, disciplinary-wise embedded within Sociology of Religion, on the relevance of the secularisation paradigm to Islam., with the purpose of exploring what such arguments reveal about the 'architecture' of sociological accounts of secularisation. Our exploration traced an Orientalist logic, as we observed how sociological discussions of secularisation of the past two or three decades, rendering the understanding of secularisation more complex, and raising a number of fundamental methodological and epistemological questions, remain relatively separated from a sociological study of Islam. While in general the secularization paradigm is increasingly questioned, with respect to Islam, on the contrary, a reification of the paradigm seems to take place. Thus secularisation theories operate as a marker of identity in consolidating difference between a modern secular self and an Islamic other. In other words, more than *bearing witness* to a logic of incommensurability between modernity and Islam, sociological debates on religion and Islam function as *one of the sites of the production* of such incommensurability. As our discussion proceeds, we leave the field of Sociology of Religion and debates about secularisation behind, and turn our attention, in the second part of this paper, to a notion that has come to figure prominently in social and political theory (and common-sense) commentaries on the role of religion in contemporary societies, and around which body of interdisciplinary, cross-religious and cross-cultural scholarship has developed, i.e. (religious) fundamentalism.

This notion of fundamentalism is a relative new one. Susan Harding (2000) situates its emergence in the 1980s and 1990s, when a great number of scholarly panels, meetings and publications visited and revisited questions of secularisation, religion and modernity, as well as the revival of historical fundamentalism (within the Protestant tradition) and religious orthodoxy in different national and

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<sup>11</sup> Hervieu-Léger describes how the French scholar Henri Desroche discouraged his students to explore this question and recommended them to make use of the conventional definition of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1987: 24).

religious contexts. Early examples of this scholarship include Caplan (1987), Lawrence (1989), Kepel (1991) and Saghal & Davis (1991), while the encyclopaedic *The Fundamentalism Project* (1991-1995), an ambitious effort funded by the McArthur Foundation, firmly consolidated the cross-religious use of the term.

The cross-religious perspective of this body of scholarship is urged by the sense of a conjuncture that Gilles Kepel captured in the expression '*la revanche de Dieu*'. Different manifestations of religious revival since the end of the 1970s, in various religious traditions, are mobilized to sketch a broader picture: the Iranian Revolution, the emergence of the Moral Majority in the United States, the appointment of Karol Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II in the Catholic Church, and so on. These observations come with the recognition that such instances of religious revival tend to defy existing social scientific frameworks on the relationship between religion and modernity, and notably the paradigm of secularisation, and that new concepts and frameworks are needed in order to account for these developments. The term fundamentalism figures in this respect, albeit that there is little consensus on its definition. Yet there seems to be a shared sense that, as the editors of *The Fundamentalism Project* state, an over-arching concept is needed "to make sense of a set of global phenomena which urgently bid to be understood. However diverse the expressions are, they present themselves as movements which demand comparison even as they deserve fair separate treatment so that their special integrities will appear in bold relief" (Marty & Appleby 1991: viii).

A first section on this relatively new use of fundamentalism looks at how the concept is set up in a cross-religious mode, and once more we explore the limits of established social theory in relation to Islam. In a second section we seek to trace the contours of a new modality of Orientalism through a discussion of what that notion of fundamentalism does in social and political theory.

## **2.1 The Making of a Key-term**

The emergence of a body of scholarship concerned with cross-religious fundamentalism is related to transformations of religion in relation to the public sphere – transformations that interpellate secularisation theories and that both shape and reflect shifting geo-political conditions. These transformations are documented with examples from different religious traditions, yet with little doubt the Islamic Revolution in Iran provides the most marked and haunting instance of a new articulation between religion and politics. It is the revolution in Iran and the subsequent visibility, in particular in the aftermath of the Cold War, of what is often called 'political Islam', that has indeed triggered the scholarly interest in 'fundamentalism' (Juergensmeyer 1993; Zemni 2000).

Edward Said (1993) has qualified 'fundamentalism' as a key-term in international discourse since the 1980s, i.e. a figure of "an international or transnational imaginary made up of foreign devils", as it became indispensable for the analysis of political conflicts. Fundamentalism turned into a privileged term for purposes of 'othering': it invokes a fearful image that signifies moral power and approval for those who use the term, and moral defensiveness and criminalisation for whomever it designates. Opposing the abnormality and extremism embedded in fundamentalism, in Said's words, implies upholding the "moderation, rationality, executive centrality of a vaguely designated 'Western' ethos" through a dynamic that imbues 'us' with a righteous anger and classifies 'others' as enemies who are bent on destroying 'our' civilisation and way of life (Said 1993).

It has of course been noted before that the emergence of fundamentalism as a key-term, and the othering it performs, bears a particular relationship to Islam. Fundamentalism is tied to Islam in a double bind. On the one hand the term is simply "a code, sometimes subliminal, sometimes explicit, for Islam" (Ahmed 1992: 15). Fundamentalism is a prominent focus of the imagery through which Islam is presented to the Western public (Caplan 1987). Thus Islam tends to be equated with Islamism and fundamentalism, and "little distinction is made among Islamic traditionalists, neo-traditionalists, radical and militant Islam, while liberal and reformist currents in Islam are ignored" (Pieterse 1994). At the same time, Islamic fundamentalism has become a metaphor for fundamentalism in general,

Sayyid argues. Fundamentalism, in other words, is made flesh by drawing upon Islamic examples (Sayyid 1997).

We do not merely seek to punctuate the particular tie of fundamentalism to Islam; we are also interested in exploring how this generic use of the term, while mobilising a particular religious tradition, works. For this purpose, we begin with how the meaning of the term is consolidated on a linguistic level, through looking at the ‘fundamentalism’ entry in the 1990 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary:

Fundamentalism: **1** strict maintenance of traditional Protestant beliefs such as the inerrancy of the Scripture and literal acceptance of the creeds as fundamentals of Christianity. **2** strict maintenance of ancient or fundamental doctrines of any religion, *esp.* Islam. [italics are ours]

Compared to its original meaning,<sup>12</sup> the signification of the term in the 1990 edition is marked by a double displacement. Firstly, a shift occurs from the original meaning of the term describing a phenomenon within the (North American) Protestant tradition to a cross-religious understanding, referring to certain modes of religiosity within ‘any religion’. Secondly, *within* that generic meaning a shift from ‘any religion’ to ‘especially Islam’ takes place. The chain of the displacement signification looks like this: *Protestantism* → *any religion* → *especially Islam*.

The shift from the original meaning of fundamentalism within a (North American) Protestant tradition to a generic term raises methodological questions. If the notion of fundamentalism emerged within North American Protestantism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then its use in a different historical setting for a very broad set of phenomena exceeding both the geo-political context of North America and the religious tradition of Protestantism begs for a careful assessment of how such transpositions are made. Many scholars using a generic notion of fundamentalism go through some length discussing the problems and inadequacies of the term. In this way, they seek to establish distance vis-à-vis its new hegemonic meaning, denouncing for instance the ‘instant comparison’ of the media (Lawrence 1989).<sup>13</sup> Yet this critical point of departure vis-à-vis a hegemonic meaning of fundamentalism does not lead to a general rejection of the term within the scholarship; thus scholarship on religious fundamentalism continues to rely on the notion that is simultaneously problematised and refashioned. This does, however, not necessarily lead to better or more reliable accounts: social scientists first carefully strip fundamentalism of its popular prejudices, Pieterse (1994) writes, but subsequently tend to resume them.

The problem indeed lies not in the propositions to recraft the concept – propositions that more concretely insist on the need to empty the term of its particular (Protestant culture- and tradition-specific) elements. Instead, Sayyid (1997: 16) argues, the problem with fundamentalism is “that it is a category which can only be sustained by avoiding a radical re-contextualization. The re-contextualization that the advocates of an analytical fundamentalism seek is that of transcending the origins of the term in Protestant Christian circles. That is a rather limited re-contextualization. What is not re-contextualized is the historical site which establishes the western cultural practices as the template by which the world is described, policed and mastered.”

Sayyid draws attention to the unacknowledged and unrecognised *sites of enunciation*, i.e. the fact that questions of Western identity – notably the framework and discourse of the liberal-secular Enlightenment project – tend to be taken as the unquestioned norm from and through which a generic notion of fundamentalism is articulated. This tendency is fuelled by a mechanism of translating

12 The term entered the OED in the 1930s according to Maitland (1992) or the 1950s according to Giddens (1994), referring to a religious phenomenon within North American Protestantism.

13 These methodological considerations have been called into question from a concern with cultural relativism. Why is it, Moghissi asks, that “anyone who writes about “fundamentalism” ends up writing about why this originally Protestant term is inappropriate to Islam”? But a legitimate concern with cultural relativism does not settle questions of conceptual and methodological validity.

questions of Western identity, which intersect with ‘fundamentalist’ revivals in various and complex ways, into a religious vs. secular opposition (Sayyid, 1997). Sayyid calls this a process of *domestication*, in which the challenge or threat of Islamism to Western paradigms is translated within the terms of an opposition between the religious and the secular that seems more familiar and more containable to a Western audience. Thus a generic term of fundamentalism functions both through a particular implicit reference to Islam (which is what gives the term its resonance) as well as a strategy to try to contain Islam within a framework which is recognisable for the West and which neutralises some of the possible threats. The point is illustrated by the striking absence of any particular reference to Islam in the introduction to *The Fundamentalism Project* while the whole project, as Said (1997) argues, “was started precisely with Islam in mind.”

Returning to the shifts in signification consolidated by the OED definition, we can argue that the suggested chain of displacement actually covers up a different one. The shift from Protestantism to any religion to a particular association with Islam suggests an analytically (chrono/ logically) *first* operation in which fundamentalism gained cross-religious significance, and a *subsequent* one in which a particular relation to Islam was established. We would argue that it is more adequate to turn the suggested sequence around: the (historical) meaning of fundamentalism was chrono/ logically first extended to Islam, from which subsequently a generic comparative understanding was derived. The chain of displacement, in other words, looks like this: *Protestantism* → *especially Islam* → *any religion*. And it is the *particular* use of fundamentalism for Islam that has inaugurated a *general* cross-religious signification of the notion. Without a rigorous reconceptualization, along the lines Sayyid’s suggestion of taking into account the place of enunciation, the current use of fundamentalism remains at once marked by a historically particular ‘template’ of Protestantism (for instance a particular hermeneutics of reading the scriptures) which is universalised, and a particular connection to Islam through a mode of othering. Between these two particularities, a generic sense of fundamentalism, to be mobilised for ‘any religion’, seems extremely volatile and unstable, and without much analytical marrow. Fundamentalism has come to denote little more than absolutism and zealotry, Harding (2000) writes, and if the movements now dubbed fundamentalism have anything in common, she argues, it is their capacity to alarm the managers and agents of the secular nation-state. The notion of a fundamentalist Islam, Talal Asad (1993: 208) adds, “is a product of lazy thinking, and one that also happens to be convenient to many policy makers (and would-be policy advisers) in Western government.”

Harding’s analysis of North American Born Again Christian revival in fact does offer an alternative way of conceptualizing what occurs under the label of ‘fundamentalism’. Harding shows how fundamentalism was consolidated as a ‘constitutive other’ in the story of the ‘becoming modern’ of North American society – a constitutive other which was part and parcel of modern society as modern society could have not been produced without it. The (Born Again) Evangelical revival from the 1970s onwards implied the end of (historical) fundamentalism’s collaboration with secular modernity, through breaking up the modern secular contract which puts fundamentalism in a (self-endorsed) marginality vis-à-vis the public sphere and claiming a more central position with respect to modernity. Along this line of analysis, we could argue that within the framework of Western modernity so-called fundamentalist revivals signal *a renegotiation of the definition of modernity*, and in particular a questioning of its supposedly secular character. In a more global perspective, this religious-secular dynamic is intersected by various post-colonial renegotiations of the definition of modernity, and in particular its supposedly Western character.

## **2.2 Orientalism reloaded**

In the previous section we have argued that scholarly rearticulations of a notion of fundamentalism into a supposedly analytical and generic term continue to be marked by a Western universalism (conceptually) and a particular association to Islam (substantially). But we do not only mean to say that the new cross-religious notion of fundamentalism is marked by an Orientalist logic, nor that

fundamentalism nowadays is a privileged trope of Orientalism. We also consider that we are dealing with a new *modality* of Orientalism. In order to discern this refashioned Orientalist logic, we will briefly discuss two uses of a generic notion of fundamentalism, not in the body of cross-religious fundamentalism scholarship on which we focused before, but in more general (and wider read) social and political theory.

Our first example is Anthony Giddens' work *Beyond Left and Right* (1994), where he asks useful questions about how the modern political coordinates of 'left' and 'right' have shifted in relation to our understandings of 'modern versus traditional' and 'radical versus conservative', and elaborates on the phenomenon of fundamentalism in this context. Giddens situates the rise of fundamentalism against the backdrop of the emergence of post-traditional society in the process of globalisation. In a post-traditional order tradition does not disappear, he argues, but its status fundamentally changes. Fundamentalism in this context refers to the *defence of tradition, in a traditional way*, but in response to novel circumstances of global communication, in which such traditional mode of defence has widely been called into question. Hence, fundamentalism stands in sharp contrast to postmodern fragmentation and the context of postmodernism, in which supposedly nothing is sacred (Giddens 1994: 253).

A crucial characteristic of this "defence of tradition in a traditional way" involves the refusal of dialogue. Thus fundamentalism figures as the opposite of dialogic democracy, as a rejection of a model of truth linked to the dialogical engagement of ideas in a public arena, in the context of a world where different traditions are brought into regular contact as never before.

The opposition between dialogue and violence structures Giddens' framework, and in this opposition fundamentalism is aligned with violence. In this process, the 'rational self' of modernity gets refashioned as a 'pluralist, tolerant and dialogical self' under postmodern conditions.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, violence gets evacuated from the side of (western) modernity/postmodernity and safely allocated to side of 'the fundamentalists'.<sup>15</sup> The binary opposition between dialogue and violence/fundamentalism thus becomes beautifully tautological – everything which is not dialogue is fundamentalism, and vice versa. The notion of fundamentalism from this perspective is a *metaphor* of 'othering', far removed from the realities of the wide range of individuals, theologies and movements that are ascribed with the label.<sup>16</sup>

For our second example we turn to the way in which fundamentalism figures in Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Empire* (2000), i.e. as a symptom of the historical passage from the old paradigm of modern sovereignty towards the new paradigm of imperial sovereignty. The passage away from the first mode of modernity is reflected in the destabilisation of the nation-state and the end of colonialism. This passage is marked by the production of *difference*, in the form of postmodernist and postcolonial theories (which, Hardt and Negri argue, have been outflanked by late capitalism which is also anti-foundational and anti-essentialist), and the production of *truth*, in the form of various fundamentalisms.

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14 While Giddens is careful to distinguish his position from a Habermasian notion of communicative action, by emphasizing that communication is not to be taken as an assumed state of affairs, to a certain extent it seems that he refashions parts of Habermas' theory of communication along the lines of more 'postmodern' theoretical sensitivities.

15 Evacuating violence from modernity amounts to quite a tour de force, one which has often been performed in the theorization of modernity. Against this tradition and modern self-understanding, Grewal and Kaplan, from a feminist and post-colonial point of departure, harshly criticize feminist compliance with modernity and its violence. "Our critiques of certain forms of feminist emerge from their willing participation in modernity with all its colonial discourses and hegemonic First World formations that wittingly or unwittingly lead to the oppression and exploitation of many women." Grewal and Kaplan (1994: 2).

16 Violence does not coincide with those movements known as 'fundamentalist' in a double way: it reaches well beyond such movements on the one hand, and only a small minority of all movements considered 'fundamentalist' consider using violence and armed struggle as an option.

While acknowledging that fundamentalism is a “poor and confused category that groups together widely disparate phenomena,” Hardt and Negri proceed to conceptualise fundamentalists’ strategies as powerful refusals of the contemporary historical passage in course (i.e. the passage to Empire). Postmodernism and fundamentalism have not only arisen in the same historical conjuncture, but are also a response to the same situation. The anti-modern thrust running through various fundamentalisms should therefore not be confused with a desire to recreate a pre-modern world, but instead needs to be recognised as a postmodern phenomenon, i.e. partaking in the anti-modernism of postmodernity. “A striking geographical distribution” marks the differentiation between fundamentalism and postmodernism, which the authors relate to different positioning in the process of globalization. While postmodern discourses that inhabit the fragmentation of modernity’s crises appeal to the ‘winners’ in the process of globalisation, fundamentalist discourses appeal primarily to the ‘losers’ of that process (2000: 146-150).

Hardt and Negri’s account ties fundamentalism to truth, purity, identity, stasis, while difference is linked to pluralism, difference, hybridity and mobility. This dichotomy informs ‘postmodern’ subjectivities; it helps to suggest (and establish) that ‘we’ manage to deal with fragmentation, movement and crisis, while ‘they’ – always ‘the others’ – desperately need ontological security. Once more fundamentalism functions as a metaphor. Matters of truth, authority and purity indeed emerge in different ways within so-called fundamentalist articulations, but so do questions of difference, hybridity and mobility. A more critical project would indeed seek to trace how matters of truth, authority, difference and hybridity are played out, both in religious formations and in secular liberal ones. The a priori allocation of truth and authority to the side of fundamentalists, in contradistinction to difference, hybridity and mobility, points to a dominant and desirable construction of a ‘self’ in an age of globalization, rather than a rigorous and reliable investigation of (changes in) religious affiliations in an age of globalisation.

In these two brief examples, fundamentalism clearly functions according to an othering logic that we already noted. By now we indeed know *what* the notion of fundamentalism does – it others those to whom the label gets attached – but we seek to articulate *how* it does that. As mentioned before, we believe we are dealing with a new modality of Orientalism. A classic Orientalist logic was primarily moored in a distinction between ‘rational (self) versus irrational (other)’: a sharp distinction between rationality and secularity on the one hand, and irrationality and religion on the other is central to Orientalist representations (van der Veer 1995). In the Orientalist logic inscribed in the current hegemonic use of the key-term fundamentalism, we note that the emphasis shifts to a distinction between ‘pluralist/tolerant (self) versus fundamentalist (other)’.

We do not mean to suggest that the latter logic replaces the former; in fact both logics work well together. Nor do we mean to suggest that the pluralist/tolerant vs. fundamentalist logic is entirely new. Yet we do observe its increasing importance. This is particularly the case within public debates where ‘compatibility concerns’ with respect to Islam in relation to Western modern societies are increasingly focused on the terrain of democracy, a terrain to which the pluralism/tolerance (i.e. democratic) versus fundamentalism (i.e. a threat to democracy) binary is crucial. In other words, we observe how a long legacy of debates on whether or not Islam can be a full member of the family of modernity is increasingly played out in the discursive terrain of Islam’s perceived incompatibility with democracy and pluralism or, in other words, Islam’s privileged association with fundamentalism.

This re-articulation of a classic Orientalist ‘irrational’ other with a more contemporary Orientalist ‘fundamentalist’ other needs to be read, we believe, in conjunction the shifting identities of a modern (Western) self. We refer to what Inderpal Grewal and Karen Caplan (1994) call the ‘scattered hegemonies’ of modernity, or the effects of mobile capital and multiple subjectivities that gave rationality as a crucial feature of the modern self a critical blow. In other words, the pluralist/tolerant (democratic) versus fundamentalist (anti-democratic) binary could indeed be considered as a ‘postmodern’ refashioning of an older Orientalist logic largely tied up to the value of rationality.

## Conclusion: different trajectories of modernity?

We traced a number of operations that sustain secular modernity within different bodies of social theory scholarship, through considering two concepts crucial in accounting for religion in contemporary society – secularisation and (cross-religious) fundamentalism – and exploring how they are used in relation to (the study of) Islam. We observed a lack of self-reflexivity within sociological conceptual frameworks and concepts, which in fact render those theories into sites of the production of an Islamic other. In Sociology of Religion debates on ‘Islam and secularisation’ we see how Islam is positioned as ‘different’ in relation to established sociological frameworks, whether through an emphasis on its (essential) otherness but also in the rejection of this otherness and the impulse to integrate Islamic realities within sociological thinking. In both cases Islam remains positioned as an exogenous phenomena in relation to the established frameworks and assumptions of Western sociology, and what remains unexplored and unquestioned are the analytical concepts used to observe this ‘other’. Debates on ‘Islam and secularisation’, we argue, are marked by a reification and homogenization of the concept of secularisation, and remain cut off from scholarship that engages critically with the secularisation paradigm. Our investigation into the contemporary (cross-religious) concept of fundamentalism shows that the generic use of fundamentalism is grounded in a particular association with Islam and continually reproduces this association. Yet fundamentalism is not merely a contemporary privileged and popular trope of Orientalism, we argue, it also involves a refashioning of it modality, as a more classic orientalist logic in terms of rationality (vs. the ‘irrational other’) is superseded by a ‘post-modern’ logic in terms of pluralism, tolerance and democracy (versus the ‘fundamentalist other’).

At the outset of this paper we anchored this critical exercise in what we identified as two constitutive outsides of hegemonic modernity, i.e. the realm of religion on the one hand, and the realm of the ‘non-West’ on the other. Exploring sociological arguments and social theory from that perspective, offers an insight in the node of articulation of secularisation, modernisation and the West within established frameworks (such as secularisation theories), and the refashioning of this kernel in the more recent reliance on the concept of fundamentalism.

We wish to conclude by underlining the necessity of recognising paradigms of secularisation and modernity as discursive traditions that need to be historicised, situated and located (Asad 1986). The question remains, how? More recently, the challenge was formulated in terms of a need to re-thinking modernity in its internal and external complexities, different compositions, articulations and translations, and to search for theoretical and analytical frameworks that are able to acknowledge and account for the multiplicity in the formations of modernity. With respect to secularisation, this implies a deconstruction of the secularisation thesis in order to assess adequately the different articulations between modernity and religion, consequently describing modernity’s different trajectories. With respect to the relationship between modernity and the West, this requires taking serious the postcolonial critiques that recognise established definitions of modernity as narratives about (the exceptionality of) the West (Sayyid, 1997). Processes of globalisation and deep structural interdependencies marking the current conjuncture urge us to realise that established (and Western) patterns of modernity are not the only ‘authentic’ modernities, Eisenstadt (2000) writes. A concept proposed to do this work, is that of ‘multiple modernities’.

‘Multiple modernities’ offers a critique of a uniform and linear definition of modernisation and refutes the idea of *one* modernity project.<sup>17</sup> It emphasises that modernisation should be considered as a

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<sup>17</sup> A good overview of the multiple modernities debate can be found in the winter edition of *Daedalus* on *Multiple Modernities*, published in 2000, vol. 129, nr. 1, edited by Shmuel Eisenstadt. The concept of ‘multiple modernity’ is proposed as an alternative in taking account of the varieties of definitions and articulations of the modernisation process. ‘Multiple modernities’ enables a perspective that emphasises “borrowing, blending, and cross-fertilization rather than on the logic of exclusionary divergence, binary oppositions (between traditionalists and moderns), or the clash of civilizations (between Islam and the West).” (Göle, 2000)

fundamental reflexivity on the social organisation of society, and that this reflexivity knows different forms and translation in different contexts. The challenge for sociological thinking and scholarship is therefore not to seek for a unifying definition of what modernity is, but rather to describe, explore, define and identify the different manifestations and articulations of modernity. While such an approach provides real possibilities to rethink the knot of modernity, secularisation and westernisation, and loosen or de-link the ties that usually keep the knot together, many questions remain. Can this kind of de-linking begin to account for the profound interdependences and intimacies between those terms in the first place; in other words, would we even be able to think, and to recognise, what say modernity without secularisation looks like? Or secularisation without westernisation, for that matter? Doesn't a multiple modernities approach still continue to rely on a scheme of what constitutes modernity? And if not, necessarily, does not that make modernity an all encompassing and totalising concept? Is it still possible to think, and to recognise, social and political projects that ontologically break with modernity, as some authors claims Islamism does? And what about the performative force of the concept of modernity itself? How is its mythical status, allowing for a distinction between those who are 'in' and those who are not, reproduced in an account of its multiplicity? And how does the emphasis on multiplicity relate to the celebratory accounts of pluralism we discussed earlier, and the exclusions they are tied up to? The concept of modernity is in need of more inclusive and plural understandings, yes, but it is equally in need of more elaborate accounts of the symbolic and material operations of this powerful concept and the subjectivities – of 'selves' and 'others' – that it shapes.<sup>18</sup>

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18 Bruno Latour's *We have never been Modern* (1993) and Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) are probably two of the best known critical interventions of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century unpacking modernity and its operation as a particular project.

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