The Power of Words: A Study of the Origins and Employment of the Terms إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي in Modern Arabic Political Discourse

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Abstract

This study discusses the coinage and uses of the terms إسلامي , إسلاموي, and إسلامجي in modern Arabic political discourse. It aims to show that the construction and employment of these terms is connected to specific 'developments' in Arabic language and in modern Arab history, and that these 'developments' cannot be separated from the Western impact on Arabic thought and modern Islam. The study strives to uncover the logic behind the construction of each term in relation to the other terms and to certain developments in modern Arabic discourse. It also shows the important role translation, as a linguistic process and a conceptual exportation of notions and concepts, plays in shaping the coinage and uses of these terms. The study illustrates how these terms have been used by Arab secularists to criticize Islamists as being closed-minded, plainly politicized and extremist. The coinage and usage of these terms aims not only to create an "other" who is not like us (i.e., not like mainstream Muslims who are seen as 'modernist' and 'peaceful'), criticize and verbally and politically attack Islamists, but also to respond to certain 'concerns' in the Arab World and the West about this ideology.

Keywords: إسلامي , إسلاموي, إسلامجي, denotation, connotation, translation.

Introduction

The struggle between Islamists and secular Arabs during the last three decades has been explored from different points of view in the literature (Euben (1999); Lahoud (2005) and Tibi (2012)), but the focus on how language has been used in this struggle is not given due attention. Some exceptions are Martin (2003) and Rhibi (2017). Anyone aware of the ongoing conflict between these two groups, especially on social media platforms, would simply notice how they have exploited language to strengthen their social and political position at the expense of the other group.

An example of the ongoing struggle between these two groups and the manipulation of language to strengthen their social and political position at the expense of the other group concerns the terms or 'labels' that have been used to refer to politically and ideologically Muslim activists, which some scholars have studied focusing almost completely on other languages, mainly English and French (Martin (2003); Ihsan Yilmaz (2009); John Jenkins (2020); Daniel Varisco (2010); and Hasan Hanafi (2010)), among others. These studies are normative or prescriptive in nature, discussing whether we should maintain or drop terms or 'labels' such as "Islamiste" (French, Islamiste), but, overall, fail short of providing an adequate understanding of the history, usage and purposes of these terms or 'labels'.

This study examines the coinage and the various uses of the terms (labels) إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي in the context of the ongoing political and intellectual struggle between Arab secularists and Islamists in modern Arab history. It aims to "perform genealogies of their usage, or map them in space and time" (Harcourt, 2020, 364). To put it in other words, it tries to understand these 'labels' adequately, define them according to those who have used them in actual practice. The study sheds light on the history of these coinages in modern Arabic, exploring how they have been used to generate rhetoric (pragmatic) effects in this discourse.

The study highlights the important role translation plays in constructing and shaping the meaning and use of these terms, and the necessity of exploring them taking into consideration the socio-cultural and historical conditions in which they were produced, used, and received. The study aspires to show the important role 'translation', as a linguistic process and as 'a conceptual' conversion of ideas and concepts between different systems of thought, plays in shaping the invention and employment of these terms in modern political Arabic discourse.

It is argued in this research that the analysis of these terms helps us understand certain 'changes' and 'developments' in modern Arabic thought and deepens our understanding of the increasing tensions between Islamists and their opponents in the Arab World. This sort of analysis becomes important when we realise that "the current intellectual climate in both Europe and the Arab world is characterized by what might be termed a war of ideas (between Islamism and secularism, liberalism and neo-conservatism) where printed texts play an important role." (Høigilt, 2011, p 1).

The study gives a deeper account of the coinage and use of the Arabic terms إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي in modern Arabic political discourse, something that has not, to the best of my knowledge, been given due attention. It tells the story of the emergence and uses of these terms from a linguistic and socio-cultural perspective in modern Arabic discourse. It also shows that these three terms are not isolated terms but rather are significantly related to each other and to the history to which they belong.

Literature Review

Each word in language has a basic or dictionary meaning (denotation) and additional meanings. The word 'scientism', for example, denotes a belief in science as the only sound knowledge available to human beings. The denotation or the semantic core of any given word represents "the point of reference for all members of a certain culture" and "includes the elements that determine the overall meaning of the representation." (Corbetta *et al*, 229, p 626). But words may also have additional meanings. In some contexts, the word 'scientism' may trigger in our mind a certain group of people, say the logical positivists or the new atheists, or the meaning of being 'dogmatic'. This sort of meaning is called secondary or associative meaning. Moreover, the word 'scientism' itself can be used in certain contexts to reflect language users' positive or negative attitude toward the concept or the object signified by this word. Some linguists call this sort of meaning 'connotation' (Nørgaard, Rocío *et al*, 2010, pp 79-80), while others call it "attitudinal meaning" (Wales, 2011, p 36). According to Wales, specific linguistic tools or constructions in a certain discourse may express more than "factual information" as they can sometimes generate feelings and attitudes (*ibid*). Words' additional or secondary meanings "guarantee the evolution of the representation since they may change in relation to the context and to transformations of the object, leaving the core mostly untouched" (Corbetta et al, *ibid*). Additional meaning results from the textual and situational environment in which a given word is used, and is closely related to language users' attitudes, emotions and positions toward words

and their referents. These additional meanings should be analysed as an important part of words' meaning, especially when they are used in a given discourse to achieve stylistic or pragmatic purposes (i.e., generate specific effects on the recipient).

There is another type of meaning which is worth mentioning in this review. Some words, for example, may in certain contexts have connotation in terms of the degree of 'formality' they have. This 'additional meaning' is sometimes referred to as 'stylistic meaning' (Almanna, 2016, p 161). This meaning is secondary as it does not change the semantic core of a word; however, it carries with it important information about the user of the word, the addressee, the situation, and the context.

When a word is used to refer to a group of people, especially when this word is given to them by another group, this word is generally called 'label'. This is the case for example with words such as 'the left' or the 'right' in politics. The label or labels you give to yourself or to 'others', is not just a 'label', because it might have, in certain situations, very important consequences, especially in the language of politics. As Alan Beard (2000) pointed out:

> Where you stand - the label which you attach to yourself, or the label that is attached
> to you, or both - is very significant in politics. In addition to being convenient forms
> of quick reference for journalists and commentators, labels often say a great deal
> about the ideological values of those who use them. They are badges of belonging for
> politicians when they use them to describe themselves, but can carry either positive or
> negative connotations when used about them by others. (p 7)

In some cases, language-users may intentionally use unusual or irregular linguistic coinages to create a 'label' with additional meanings and connotations and then use it to generate specific effects on people, especially in politics. They invest in the rhetoric function of language (i.e., the form of the message) to achieve pragmatic functions such as criticizing their opponents or even 'stigmatizing' them, using specific words or 'labels'. One example of this in modern Arabic is the coinage حماسستان (an irregular coinage created by adding the suffix-s*tān* (originally taken from the word أفغانستان (Afghanistan)) to the word حماس (an acronym for the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Gaza Strip). This coined 'label' was intentionally made by some Arabs to implicitly criticize this movement by making a connection between it and the extremist regime of Taliban of Afghanistan.

Political labels are closely related to those who created and used them as well as to socio-cultural and historical context in which they were produced and used, hence the importance to analyze them in terms of three levels of meaning, the exegetical, the operational and the positional aspects of meaning. Johnson, (1984/2013), building on Turner (1969/1994), pointed out that exegetical level covers the user's understanding of a certain term, the operational level concerns itself with finding who is using the term, how, and in what context, and the positional level involves the analysis of the meaning of a certain term in terms of its relations to other terms in a specific discourse. These three levels of meaning provide us with a 'holistic' analysis of terms, placing words' meaning in a broader socio-political, cultural and historical context, and taking into account not only the various 'uses' of political terms, but also their reception.

Words, as we use them, "have an effect on the world" we live in and can be used "as an index of oppositional stances and/or as a means by which conflict is played out" to the extension that language itself may become "the main bone of contention (i.e., the object of the conflict itself)". (Jim O'Driscoll, 2019, p 332). These "oppositional stances" can be generated by the selection of specific words or expression by one group to 'label' and 'criticize' the other group. For "no discourse is 'neutral', 'transparent' or 'innocent' as "linguistic manipulations or choices are interpreted as ideologically motivated" (Wales, *ibid*, p 210). Annabelle Mooney and Betsy Evans (1999/2015) explain how one can express, implicitly, an argument or an attitude toward others by choosing only one word in their discourse:

> It's important to study language because *language matters*. For example, the choice of words to describe a person or event can reveal the attitude of the person writing or speaking. One such example concerns US CIA contractor Edward Snowden, who, in 2013, released classified material relating to British and American surveillance programmes. How he was described in the subsequent media coverage is instructive. Those who saw his actions as bravely exposing secret and harmful state actions call him a 'whistle-blower' or 'patriot'. Those who argue that he was bound to protect the confidentiality of this material label him a 'traitor'. This example shows how one word can serve as a shorthand for a whole argument about and position on Snowden's actions. Paying attention to these choices is part of having a critical awareness of language. (p 2, italic original)

Uncovering the relationships between specific uses of language as they are normally used and the additional meaning created by them in specific contexts is the backbone of the linguistic approach of this study. In such an analysis we focus on language, or precisely a certain use of language, trying to compare the meaning of a certain word in terms of its denotation, associative meaning, and connotation. This sort of analysis, which is commonly relegated to Pragmatics, is understood as being a study of the relations between those words and their linguistic and extra-linguistic environment in a certain discourse.

Moreover, the meaning of certain words is not detached from ideology and politics, hence the importance of uncovering how they have been used and manipulated by a certain group to achieve political and ideological purposes (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010. p 8). This is the core meaning of Critical Discourse Analysis which is broadly defined as the "analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse" itself (Fairclough (1995/2012, p 4). Thus, whereas linguistic analysis, some would say stylistic analysis, can provide us with useful tools on how language is used to persuade or impact others, Critical Discourse Analysis helps us see how "the texts that surround us" may sometimes influence our political and social outlooks (Lesley Jeffries and Dan McIntyre, 2010, p 8). It also enables us to understand how those linguistic tools are themselves constituted, at least partially, by power and power relations (Fairclough (*ibid*).

Data and Research Method

The data of this study consists of the Arabic words or terms إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي . The terms إسلامي and إسلاموي belong to Standard Arabic and will be examined against materials taken from academic and non-academic (journalistic) texts, whereas the word إسلامجي belongs to the language of the social media and will be examined against materials taken from Twitter, the most common platform for social and intellectual discussions in the Arab World these days.

In this article, the words إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي in Modern Arabic are introduced and semantically and pragmatically analysed as they are used in the language of Arab secularists and Islamists. These three words are new coinages in Arabic, generated by the suffix-*ī*, the suffix-*awi* and the suffix-*gi* respectively. The denotation and connotation of these words are analysed with reference to the exegetical, the operational and the positional aspects of meaning discussed previously in section (2) of this study.

The study examines the invention as well as the use of these terms in modern written Arabic discourses, situating them not only in the context of the conflict between secularists and Islamists in the last three decades in the Arab World, but also in a broader context that takes into account the Western effect on these terms. Each term of these three terms cannot be defined independently from each other: we can only arrive at an understanding of each one of them by analysing the relations between them. In addition, a better understanding of these terms can be achieved, it is argued, by relating them to specific socio-political and historical context in the history of Arabs in modern times.

I take this study to be a qualitative analysis of a limited data of language using various tools from Pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis and Translation Studies. The result of this analysis would be some insights into other materials or terms pertaining to the discourse of Arab secularists and non-believers.

This study is a single case study organized around research questions. The case study is not taken to be a sample of a whole but a case that is complete and interesting in its own merit. A case study, it is argued, is part of a population that we are interested in, in our case the analysis of the terms إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي, but it need not be taken to be a representation of the whole. The findings of any single case can be used to consider or explore other similar cases in similar contexts, but they are not carried out with the assumption that they will enable us to generalize the results to the larger group of which the case forms a part (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013, 208).

Although the method adopted in exploring these terms is mainly descriptive and explanatory, it permits a limited place for evaluating statements or discourses made on the cultivation and use of these terms in modern Arabic political discourse.

The Coinage of Relative Adjectives in Arabic

Arabic is broadly divided into a standard form and a variety of dialects. The standard Arabic, which is used in formal situations, written or spoken, in the Arab World, is highly respected and "guarded" (regulated by linguistic authorities), compared to Arabic dialects which are informal, but nonetheless "intimate" (Fasold, 1984, in Ibrahim, 2009, p 14). Modern Standard Arabic is the language of writing and formal education per excellence, whereas Arabic dialects are the language of everyday (oral) communication. However, in modern Arabic, one can also speak safely about a variety of Arabic which is a mixture of both, standard and colloquial Arabic, especially on social media, where one may observe "random switching back and forth

between these two varieties", and it seems that this style is "an intentional choice and can be seen as an attempt by the writer to bring himself/herself closer to the reader by tapping into the "folksy" resonance of the everyday speech" (Wales, *ibid*, p 382). Although colloquial Arabic is less respected, less prestigious, and viewed with much negativity compared to the standard language, it is like any vernacular has "an important role in marking 'social solidarity' among speakers" (Wales, *ibid*, p 435).

Suffixation is an important mechanism of deriving new words in languages, and Arabic is no exception. In modern Standard Arabic, suffixation has become highly important in creating new words to meet the extensive borrowing from other languages, especially English and French. One important suffix is the *iyy-suffix* which is used to create relative adjectives (in Arabic, *ism mansoob*). The attachment of the relative adjective suffix (*nisba*) yields a singular adjective, which can be construed as a noun. Those adjectives "indicate the belonging or relationship to something or somebody" and they are "extremely productive and may even replace the genitive" (Fischer, 2011, p 17). The creation of new words in Arabic on the basis of this suffix is done "freely" and used to "cope with the demands of science, technology, media and modern life generally" (Holes, 2004, p 160). Some examples of this are the following words in Arabic: تاريخي (historic/historical); إنساني (human/humanitarian) and سردي (narrative).

Converting a noun, participle, or even an adjective into a relative adjective through suffixation of the derivational morpheme *-iyy* (feminine *-iyya*) is an important derivational process in Modern Standard Arabic and is actively used to coin new terms. The words used as stems for the *nisba* suffix can be Arabic or foreign, singular or plural. (Ryding, 2005, p 261). Examples of this are the words حداثي (modernist) and عقلاني (rationalist). In some cases, the suffix-*awi* is used in Arabic in such words as علوي (Alawite) and مثنوي (dualist). In some cases both suffixes are used for the same base or root. Thus, Arabs today would distinguish between علمي (scientist) and علموي (a believer in scientism). In this and similar cases, the suffix-*awi* has negative connotation.

In contrast, relative adjectives in colloquial Arabic are created often by borrowing already coined relative adjectives in Modern Standard Arabic or by using the *gi-suffix*. The latter suffix was borrowed into colloquial Arabic originally from Turkish to denote people of professions (eg. قهوجي , an owner or worker at popular cafe), or habituate (أفيونجي, 'opium addict'). Janet Watson is right to observe that In Egyptian colloquial Egypt, the Turkish suffix-*gi* "is used predominantly to produce a noun of profession or habitude" (Watsen, 193).

But using it to refer to 'agents' with specific features is also common such as in سكرجي (addict to alcohol) and دعوجي (someone who is a frequent complainer) in Iraqi Arabic (Masliah, 1996, p 297). However, in the last few decades it is not difficult to note that this suffix went through important change after being used to denote "abstract concepts", especially political ones such as in the words وطنجي (fanatic patriot) and قومجي (fanatic nationalist).

In the following three sections, three suffixed words in modern Arabic are introduced and critically analysed. These suffixed words are إسلامجي and إسلاموي , إسلامي respectively. The following sections aim to show how Arab secularists tried to use these terms to construct certain images of their opponents in the context of the increasing conflicts and tensions between the two groups in the society in the last three decades, and how the use of those 'words' reveals something important about the political and historical context in which they were produced, used and received. In addition, it is argued that this context itself reveals something about the coinage, history and use of those words.

The Word إسلامي

The word إسلامي is an adjective word in Arabic used to refer to things which are described broadly as 'Islamic' (e.g., Islamic philosophy or Islamic art), and rarely used in classical Arabic or even in modern Arabic before the second half of the 20th century to refer to persons or movements. The term إسلامي started to be used in Arabic as a reference to Islamic activists and Islamic movements only in the 20th century, with the rise of Islamic movements in the Arab World, especially in Egypt (see on this Esposito, 1992, pp 17-18). During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the West was seen as an intellectual challenge, but after 1950, especially in the 1970s and forward, things started to change and the West started to be seen as an 'occupier' and as a 'political challenge' for the very essence of Islamic order and law (Tadros, 2014, pp 2-3). Within this context, the term إسلامي started to be used as an alternative comprehensive worldview to what was seen as non-Islamic, that is to Western ideologies (nationalist and communist ideologies) in the Arab World. This "rich, comprehensive understanding inherent in this adjectival form of Islam is the sin qua non of the Islamist and Islamism" (Tyler, 2008, p 97). Noah Feldman (2003) succinctly explains how the adjective 'Islamic' started to be cultivated with this new sense in the work of those Islamists and the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan Al-banna:

> Banna also popularized the use of the word *Islamic* as an adjective. In Arabic, the name
> of the religion is Islam, and the people who subscribe to its beliefs are Muslims.

> Though Arabic abounds in adjectives made from nouns, there was little need for the adjective *Islamic*. Banna helped change that by insisting on a description of Islam as a comprehensive worldview that, compared to Western worldviews, was "Islamic," with its own distinctive message and way of life. The adjectival form reflected a new way of thinking, in which Islamism supplanted Islam. *Islamists* are therefore not just Muslims but people who see Islam as a comprehensive political, spiritual, and personal worldview defined in opposition to all that is non-Islamic (p 97, italic original).

It is this semantic expansion of the word إسلامي (Islamic), with its new 'politicized' and 'ideologized' sense, that will lead to the use of the word إسلامي to refer to those Muslims and these 'Islamic' movements. It is believed that this new use of the word started to be more visible after the Iranian revolution in 1978 (see on this Mozaffari, 2007, pp 19-20). John Esposito (2011) is right when he said that Islam for those 'Islamists' "is not only a religion but an ideology promoting the creation of an "Islamic state" or an Islamically informed social order" (p 186). This explains why the word مسلم (Muslim) was used almost solely as a description for Muslims before this significant change in the history of Arabs. The change was semantic as well as socio-cultural and historical. In other words, the 'politicization' and 'ideologization' of Islam changed significantly the 'semantic' of this word and the adjective derived from it, that is إسلامي. This significant change reveals the impact of the West on modern Arabic political discourse and on the vey meaning of the words 'Islam' and 'Islamic'.

In Western languages, the words *islamiste* and Islamist, with their political dimensions, started also to be used at approximately the same time of the use of the adjective إسلامي in modern Arabic political discourse. Those Muslim activists "eschew the term", but "they self-define simply as 'Islamic' – or talk of their involvement in an 'Islamic Movement'" despite the fact that many of them in published materials describe themselves even as 'Islamists' (Jenkins, *ibid*, pp 9-10).

The term إسلامي as a description of political Islamists was not received without criticism by Islamists even though they themselves used it frequently and sometimes with a tone of pride. From the very beginning, it appeared that the term إسلامي is a double-edged sword, for although the word marks the emergence of a new movement which claims to 'revive' Islam as a system of thought and ideology and can therefore be used as a 'label' to "dramatize a cause and attract supporters", it also separates them from other Muslims who cares little about converting the society and the state according to a certain 'literal' and 'political' interpretation of Islam.

This explains why the Algerian Islamic leader *Abbasi Madani* protested against a title of a book on Islamists in Algeria saying to the author of that book: "In your book, you must first of all change the title! Why 'Islamism'? It is Islam that is at work in Algeria, nothing but Islam. We are Muslims!"(quoted in Martin, *ibid*, p 274). What we have here is a strong resistance by a prominent Islamist to change Islamists' "own linguistic behaviour" (their adherence to be called 'Muslims' rather than 'Islamists'), and this is understandable given the fact that people would not easily change the way they use language (Mooney and Evans, *ibid*: 39). However, this is not only about a linguistic behaviour but also about ideology. This use of language is embedded in the ideology of the Islamists because it assumes that there is a direct relationship between 'Islam' and 'Islamism'. Being described as 'Islamists' does not seem to accord with the ideology of those Islamists because, unlike the word 'Muslim', the word 'Islamist' is not politically neutral. Moreover, those activists are aware of the fact that because "of their emphasis on religion, and the connotation the merging of religion and politics has in Western history with violence and intolerance", modernists in the West are "prone to view Islamism as violent and anti-pluralistic" (Gunning, 2000, p 18). This is something that Islamists would vehemently resist.

The term إسلامي was not even accepted by some liberal and secular Arabs who preferred to label their opponents using other terms such as the terms إسلامي أصولي (Islamic fundamentalists). For them, the term إسلامي is still capture some "true essence of the Muslim religion" and should thus be avoided (Bennoune, Karima, 1994, p 37). This explains, perhaps, why some secular and liberal Arabs coined the Arabic term إسلاموي to refer to those politically Muslim activists. To this new coined term we now turn.

The Word إسلاموي

It is not clear when the term إسلاموي emerged in modern Arabic, but there is linguistic evidence which suggests it began to be used at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century by a number of writers who wrote in French or at least had good knowledge of it (see for example, Salama, (1980) and Al-hadrami (1984). At this time we notice the word *islamiste* used in French in academic writings to refer to fundamentalist Muslims in several books (for example, Mongin and Roy, (1987); Christina L'Homme, 1988). Mongin and Roy (1987) defined the term this way: "we use the term Islamist in a now classic sense to designate groups that intend to derive from Islam a political project capable of competing with the great political ideologies of the West" (1987, p 52, my translation).

The French term then "crossed into English" and "since September 11, 2001, it may even have established itself as the preferred American usage. (Martin, *ibid*, p 6). This coincided with the increasing visibility of 'Islamic' movements in the West in the late 1980s when an "increasing numbers of Islamists found themselves exiled from the Arab world" and started to "developed strategies to further their aims within Western society" (Jenkins, 2020, p 8).

The Arabic word إسلاموي was likely coined at that time to match the French word *islamiste*. The impact of translation, and thus the Western and French background, on the coinage and use of the term إسلاموي is clear in the work of some Arab researchers in the 1990s and in the first decade of this century. In a book published in Arabic in 1995 and titled الحركات الإسلامية: إرهاب أم إرهاب مضاد (Islamic movements: terrorism or anti-terrorism), an Egyptian writer, refers to the new Arabic term and relates it to the distinction made by some authors in French between *islamique* as a general adjective of things related to Islam as a religion and *islamiste* as an adjective of a group of Muslims who have turned Islam into a political project and ideology (Abu al-wafa, 1995, p 95). In similar lines, the prominent French-Algerian historian Muhammed Arkoun pointed out that he intentionally used the word إسلاموي to match the French word *Islamiste* which should be distinguished from the more general adjective islamique, clarifying that this new term, in both French and Arabic, aims to register the difference between a religion and an exclusive and extreme ideology. Those Muslims, Arkoun argues, will not be happy with the new term as they may feel that it may deprive them from mobilizing the 'symbolic capital' of Islam which they specify for themselves, excluding the rest of Muslims (1995, p 12). He goes on saying that the word إسلامي (Islamic) should only be used to refer to any flexible and inclusive Islamic attitude toward 'Islam'. (*ibid*). The impact of translation is noticed by another writer who pointed out that the word إسلاموي refers to a political body and is not derived from Islam but rather from Islamism (Al-Hamad, 2007, p 23). The semantic origin of this derivation of the word 'islamiste' is explained by Volk (2015), who pointed out that the word *Islamist* is "an adjective derived from Islamism, Islamist describes a person with a political agenda that they identify with the Muslim faith. Not all Muslims are Islamists" (p 12, bold font original). It could be safely said that behand this new coined term and the definition given to it by those scholars lies the assumption that we should not confuse 'Islamism' with 'Islam'.

The new term started to be more visible on the hand of some Arab writers and translators who published extensive materials in a well-known journal known as *Al-firk Al-arabi Al-mu'aser* (Contemporary Arab Thought) which was, and still is, published in France.

Those writers were fond of using a new innovative Arabic style and neologisms. Most of those writers were from France, Morocco, Syria and Lebanon, and have therefore a close relationship with French culture. They are known in modern Arabic thought for inventing and using a huge number of new words which we classify today as relative adjectives, especially in the field of philosophy and linguistics. Some of these neologisms are: علموية (rationalism) عقلانوية (scientism) and نسبوي (relativistic), among many other terms.

It is within this 'linguistic' and 'cultural' context that we can place the new coined term إسلاموي and *Islamiste* (Islamist in English). Because those Arabs were probably dissatisfied with the term إسلامي , with its inclusive and positive connotations in Arabic, they coined this name, that is إسلاموي as an equivalent term for the French term. The new French word, *islamiste*, was thus in the background of this new coined term in Arabic. The Arabic term إسلاموي restricted the denotation of the term إسلامي by narrowing its description, applying it to those "Muslims who ideologise Islam and see it as a political project", but the problem remains about the legitimacy of using the term for Muslims "who simply see life as a divine test and try to follow religion's basic tenets that demand social activism" (Yilmaz, *ibid*, p 72). Yet, for other researchers the term should cover both definitions (Badran, 2001, pp 47-48).

By the passage of time, and especially in the last two decades, the word إسلاموي and its English counterpart *Islamist* started to have plainly negative connotations in the West, especially in France where "the discourse on Islam" since 2000 became associated with immigration and terrorism" (Firmonasari, 2020, p 135). Firmonasari pointed out that the word 'Islamist' is used in this political discourse to "describe radical Islam, the perpetrators of terrorism, and the immigrants who are considered affiliated with radical Islam" (*ibid*, p 143). The word gained even more negative tone very recently when Emanuel Macron, the French president made an obvious relationship, after the beheading of a French teacher by an emigrant Tunisian, between 'terrorist Islamists' and 'separatists'.

The addition of the suffix وي to the word إسلام in the word إسلاموي is striking because it plainly goes against Arabic morphology (see section 4 in this study). The letter و which is added before the ي indicates that there is something 'deviant' or 'problematic' about the word itself (and consequently the concept and the persons designated by it). Through coining this term using irregular morphological suffix (through breaking the rule), it seems that the Arab writers who coined the word tried to 'break' the relationship between politically and ideologically Muslim activists and Islam.

In other words, the use of this new term seems to indicate that those who call themselves Islamists are considered as 'alien' to Islam as the word إسلاموي is 'alien' to the morphology of Arabic. This, in turn, indicates that the new coined term إسلاموي is highly 'politicised', and was intentionally coined to throw more doubt on the political, ideological and fanatic agendas of some Muslims.

The coinage of this word was conducted in the end of the 1980s, but the word will become common only in the last two decades. The reason for this is perhaps the existence and use in Arabic of other terms which can achieve the same negative function of this word such the terms إسلامي متطرف (extreme Islamist) or أصولي متطرف (extreme fundamentalist). The latter terms are even to be preferred from a polemic point of view as they carry, with the addition of adjective متطرف (extreme), a plainly criticising tone against 'Islamists' compared to the word إسلاموي which may still seem to some Arabs a little vague and, perhaps, 'foreign' in its origin and coinage. The Arabic terms or 'labels' just mentioned have counterpart terms in the West, and one doubt that even these terms themselves are Arabic 'translations' from English and French. But when terms are translated, they are often translated carrying with them the concepts and beliefs surrounding them in the source language, especially when this language is culturally superior to the target language.

The use of a neologism like إسلاموي with its denotation of Muslims who seemingly belong to Islam but in fact using it for political reasons is in harmony with the intellectual atmosphere in the Arab World during the last phase of the 20th century, as many Arab intellectuals "decided to fight back against the rising tide of both oppositional political Islam and the Islamic-conservative turn of the nationalist regimes by adopting a discourse of political secularism" (Elsässer, 2021, p 3). And there is no better weapon to fight back this discourse than the weapon of doubting the very essence of their relationship to Islam itself. This comes in line with the same argument that some Western writers used against those who objected to the term islamiste or Islamist:

> The question of what to call 'Islamism' matters precisely because the proper identification of the phenomenon is the first step towards a meaningful response. And because the challenge posed by Islamism is at a fundamental level an ideological one, the words and concepts used to discuss it take on particular significance. (Jenkins, *ibid*, p 11).

In this context, it is more important than ever that language has meaning and clarity. We cannot counter Islamism, if we cannot identify it; and we cannot identify it if we lack the terms by which to understand it. Ideas matter – and so do words. In 'Islamism', we have a legitimate conceptual tool for understanding the most serious ideological challenge faced by the country today. It is time to reaffirm its validity and proceed with the much more serious business of developing our response. (*ibid*, p 12).

Writers such as Jenkins made it clear that what they were aspiring for is a clear distinction between "Islam as a remarkable civilisational enterprise, lived faith, moral compass and code of ethics" and Islamism as a political ideology which "seeks to reorder individual lives, societies and states on the basis of a particular and selective interpretation of revelation and in accordance with what it understands as "the divine will". (*ibid*, p 14).

However, with the passage of time and the increasing awareness of the 'militant' and 'violent' aspects of 'Islamism' in the West and in the Middle East, especially after the incidents in France, the word 'Islamist' started to acquire more negative connotations. Writing in 2020, the Syrian writer Usama Al-azmi noticed that: "Today, when it [the term Islamist] used in English it usually conjures up terrifying images of masked gunmen on the streets of European capitals killing innocent civilians in the name of Islam". (p 1)

The implicit assumption in the term إسلاموي amounts to suggesting, in Arab political discourse, that if the term were to be taken for granted as a given then it would not be debatable as a linguistic invention coined by the opponents of Islamists. If we can make everyone accept that there is a group of people who should carry this new label, with its negative connotation, then people can be more easily persuaded that it is something that must be dismissed.

However, one should also say that the new term has not passed without criticism from Islamists and, to some extent, by non-Islamists in the Arab World. For Islamists, the new word is a derogatory term which is used to 'stigmatise' a group of Muslims and look down on them (Muawd, 2021, p 1). For non-Islamists the word is perhaps not clear enough in meaning, outside the circle of academic or expert writers.

The word إسلاموي did not displace the word إسلامي even in scholarship. In Arabic, the use of these two words along with other terms or descriptions such as إسلاميون متطرفون and إسلاميون أصوليون are still commonly used in the language. Let alone other 'labels' such as Islamic Brotherhood or *Salfists* and *Wahhabits*.

However, examining the use of the word on the database of *Taibah University*, the term إسلاموي appears in more than 400 academic texts (books and articles). The number of the texts which has this term on Google exceeds 4000 texts, most of which are texts from journalistic resources. The term appears extensively after 2011, probably with the intensified tension of the situation in the Arab World following the Arab Spring and the rise of the terrorist group *Da'ish* (*the Islamic State of Iraq and Bilad Al-shaam*). In those texts, the word is used in its broader sense as an umbrella for all Muslims who hold and support a political (and/or a terrorist) agendas.

Interesting is the fact that the term is sometimes used as if it was synonymous with the term إسلامي, ignoring its plainly 'negative' connotation in Arabic. It seems that this new coined term, with its irregular morphological pattern, appeals to some Arab writers. However, the use of the word إسلاموي (Islamist) without linguistic or conceptual controls, as is happening now in Arab thought, will inevitably lead to confusion of communication between language users, and will hider any fruitful discussion about the term's meaning and use.

However, the intensive conflict between secular Arabs and Islamists did not stop here but continued and paved the way for a new coined 'label' for Islamists, but this time on the hand of some activists on social media. The next section discusses this new coined term.

The Term إسلامجي

As explained in section (2) of this study, in colloquial Arabic, relative adjectives are created often by borrowing already coined relative adjectives in Modern Standard Arabic or by using the *gi-suffix*. The latter suffix was borrowed into colloquial Arabic originally from Turkish to denote people of professions. But using it to refer to 'agents' with specific features is also common such as in سكرجي (addict to alcohol) and دعوجي (someone who is frequent complainer). However, in the last few decades it is not difficult to note that this suffix underwent important change when it was used to denote "abstract concepts", especially political ones such as in the words وطنجي (extreme patriot) and قومجي (extreme nationalist).

The presence of the discourse of political Islam and jihadism has intensified in the last two decades, especially after the 9/11 Attack and the killing of the staff at the Charlie Hebdo magazine office in France. In the Arab World, the fighting against terrorist movements, and the militant conflict between Islamic groups and the authoritarian states, especially in Egypt and Syria, has also added fuel to the fire. This must have intensified and mobilized a "secular" reaction against radical Islamic groups in the Arab World as well as in other places in the world, notably France (Firmonasari et al, *ibid*, p 135).

Not only this, those developments have also brought into existence in the Arab World "a broader trend of self-declared non-believers" and "atheists" (Elsässer, *ibid*). This new trend of thought and intellectual activism adapted social media platforms and Youtube after being neglected and "humiliated" by the formal mainstream of media, especially in Egypt (*ibid*, pp 3-4). This trend cannot be understood fully without connecting it with the New Atheist Movement in the West which started few decades earlier and which launched a radical (and sometime very violent) criticism of religion. This movement adopted a clear-cut language in criticising religion and supported it by an obvious resort to scientism and materialism. In criticising religion and radical religious groups in Arab countries, Arab non-believers on social media platforms often use strong words and expressions against them such as "Islamic fascism" and "Islamic terrorists", "adding rhetorical flourish" to their discourse against their opponents (*ibid*, p 5). The causes behind the flourish of this movement are various and complex, but one important thing that should be noted is the decisive role social media has played in creating and spreading this discourse. As Elsässer, correctly, stated:

> [..] there is no doubt that the apparent spread of freethinking and non-belief at this particular point in history has been made possible to a large extent by advances in media technology. Only the rapid spread of social media in the Arab world and the increasing availability of low-budget broadcasting technology have enabled a new generation of Arab non-believers to move beyond the limits of book-reading intellectual circles and beyond the hostile environment of the mainstream media and begin to address—in some cases apparently with considerable success—a wider Arabic-speaking public (*ibid*, p 15).

It is within this context that the word إسلامجي was coined and used in modern Arabic. It appears probably for the first time in a blog by a secular satirist from Egypt named Ahmed Hassan Sabra, in 2012, who warned against turning the Arab Spring into an 'Islamic winter'. It is clear and obvious from the language of this blogger that he is specifically targeting extremist Salafists. The word then appeared in other similar writings on the platforms of social media such as Twitter. The context shows clearly that the coinage and use of this word is better seen in the context of the heated discussion between secular, liberal and atheist Arabs, on one hand, and Islamists and their supporters, on the other hand, during the Arab Spring over the ideal way to find a way from the crisis that the Arab countries have been struggling with since the 1950s.

The term became more intensified with the tension and the heated discussions between Islamists and New Arab atheists who dominated no small part of social media and became more concerned about the political aspects of their belief, as atheists or non-religious. One of these atheists explain this reaction this way

> any Arab atheists weren't political at first. But it seems there is just no way around it. […] "But when people's faith is political, my lack of it is just as political, by definition," […] "As long as unbelievers are persecuted, as long as religion encroaches on people's private lives, I can't reject it purely as a private matter." (quoted in Ahmed Benchemsi, 2015, p 30).

The word إسلامجي in colloquial Arabic is the counterpart (or one would say even the indirect translation) of the word إسلاموي in Standard Arabic. But how it came into existence? It is very difficult to answer this question, but it seems to me that it can be understood if we take into account another word, that is the word بلطجي *baltaji* (originally meaning a man carrying an axe but then used to refer to a thug). This word acquired an interesting meaning during the Arab Spring uprisings, starting to be used extensively by activists, mainstream media and social media platforms to refer to the thugs who were hired by the ruling party or the security services to attack political opposition (see Gannam, 2012). The word acquired a political connotation during the Arab Spring, first in Egypt and then in the rest of the Arab countries which went through similar uprisings. The word has become on every tongue in the Arab World and was semantically expanded to refer to anyone supporting the violent suppression of the protesters regardless of whether they are working for the security agencies or are just politically and verbally supporting the authoritative regimes on media or social platforms. It seems to me that the extensive use of this word motivated (unconsciously) some activists and some liberal and secular Arabs to coin the word إسلامجي to refer to radical violent Muslims.

The derogatory connotation of the word إسلامجي comes, if my hypothesis is correct, from its relationship with the word بلطجي and also from the fact that the suffix-*gi* is used in colloquial Arabic mainly for 'professions', as mentioned previously, and applying it to describe Islamists indicates that those Islamists don't truly belong to 'Islam' but exploit it (they take it as their profession to get political and ideological support). Moreover, imposing a colloquial 'syllable' on a 'sacred' word such as *Islam* whose meaning and history is rooted in Standard Arabic carries with it a more negative connotation.

The connection between this new word, with its Turkish tone, cannot be separated from the implicit association some Arabs make between radical Islamists after the rise of the Arab Spring and the ruling party of Turkey, and specifically the Turkish president Taib Ragab Erdogan. I think this association cannot be entirely excluded. The reference to Erdogan as إسلامجي is not uncommon on Twitter. Some of these tweets were amongst the 'first' coinage of the term in Arabic and go back at least to 2013:
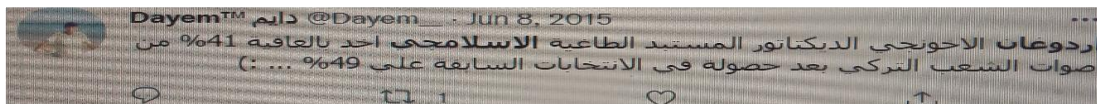

Figure 1: Erdogan, the Ikhwangi, the dictator, the Islamgi scarcely got 41% of the votes of his people compared to 49% in previous election…(my translation).
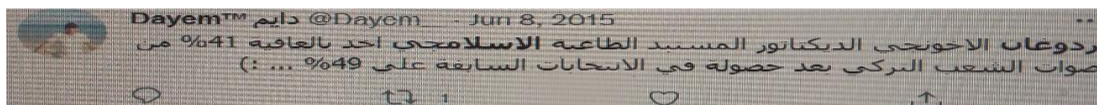

Figure 2: Erdogan, the ikhwangi [the one who belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood], the dictator Islamgi [Islamist] scarcely get 41% of the votes of Turks compared to 49% in the last election. (my translation, italic mine).
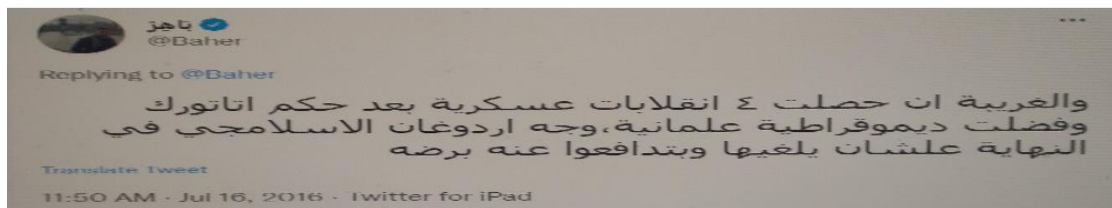

Figure 3: It is unusual that there has been four military coups during Ataturk ruling, but [Turkey] continued to be democratic and secular. Now Erdogan, the Islamgi, came to end [the democracy and secularity] of Turkey, and you defend him (my translation).

It can be said, then, that the suffix in the word إسلامجي has been translated, conceptually and metaphorically speaking, into colloquial Arabic by some Arab activists on social media who took advantage of the "degenerate" or "low value" of the Turkish suffix *-gi* in colloquial Arabic and created the word إسلامجي using this suffix as a label for radical Muslims to promote their conception, criticism and attitudes toward this group.

But translation never converts meaning intact, and it is always conducted to often serve certain functions and values in the target language. The word إسلامجي lacks the 'standard' and 'academic' register of its counterpart in Standard Arabic, that is the term إسلاموي, yet it has gained additional meanings. the most important of these additional meanings is the 'Turkish' association now attributed to Islamists and the strong pejorative tone of the word.

The coinage of this term in Arabic, alongside its equivalent term إسلاموي in Standard Arabic, indicates, it seems to me, that liberal and secular Arabs are still in a position of power. They have succeeded in labelling their opponents using terms which are wholly rejected by them, benefiting from their strong position in modern Arab thought as the leading group of 'modernity' and 'Enlightenment'. Let alone the increasing criticism of radical Islamists in the West, which has consolidated secular and liberal Arabs' power of labelling Islamists, the 'other' in their discourse.

Conclusion

Secular and liberal Arabs have intentionally coined and used the words إسلاموي and إسلامجي to differentiate, on one hand, between Islam and Islamic concepts or groups which can be safely described as 'Islamic, and politically and ideologically motivated Muslims, on the other hand. They have used these two words to 'label' Islamists and to criticize their ideology as being closed-minded, plainly political and extremist. The two words not only were coined to restrict the denotation of those who truly can be identified as 'Islamic', but also to belittle 'Islamists', as these words have been tarnished through combining it with other words which have obvious negative connotations such as extremist, radical, and terrorist. The coinage of the words إسلاموي and إسلامجي in particular involves creating an "other" who is not like us (i.e., not like mainstream Muslims). The use of the two words, with their exclusive meaning and negative connotations, serves to "position" "Islamists' in relation to others in the society who are seen as 'modernist' and 'peaceful'. It positions them, according to this analysis, in a relationship of power. In other words, the new coined words in modern Arabic political discourse are used not only to describe, but also to criticize and verbally and politically attack the 'labelled' group.

The study has shown the importance of examining the meaning and functions of the terms إسلامي, إسلاموي and إسلامجي in relation to the context, the historical phase and the social groups that expressed and received them. It has revealed their logical or semantic connection and order as parts of a certain discourse.

The study has also shown the importance of 'translation', as a linguistic process and as a conceptual process, in the construction and use of these coinages. Western 'labels' for Islamists and the concepts and notions surrounding these labels were in the background of the coinage and employment of the terms إسلاموي and إسلامجي. Even the adjective إسلامي was not far from this effect. The study has shown that the latter words, as coinages and as part of political discourse, cannot be separated from international politics and 'globalization' in which translation plays an important role. The study has revealed a sort of 'logic' behind the coinage and use of these Arabic terms in relation to certain 'changes' and 'developments' in modern Arabic and in modern Arab history and thought.

However, this research is restricted in its data and scope. More research is still needed to shed more light on the various 'uses' of these terms in modern Arabic discourse. The study focuses on describing and explaining the coinage and uses of these terms but did not tell us much about whether these terms should be re-defined, maintained or even dismissed.

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أثر الكلمة... بحث في جذور المصطلحات: إسلامي، وإسلاموي، وإسلامجي، وتوظيفاتها

في الخطاب السياسي العربي المعاصر

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ملخص

يناقش هذا البحث الاستخدامات المختلفة لثلاثة مصطلحات عربية، هي "إسلامي"، و"إسلاموي"، و"إسلامجي"، في الخطاب السياسي العربي الحديث، مبرزا سياق صك هذه الكلمات، والظروف التي صاحبت توظيفاتها السياسية والأيديولوجية في الفكر العربي الحديث. ويكشف البحث الصلة بين هذه المصطلحات، وكيف أفضى واحدها إلى الآخر، وعلاقتها بجملة من "التغيرات" و"التحولات" التي طرأت على اللغة العربية والتاريخ العربي الحديث. كما يبرز وجود صلة وثيقة بين هذه المصطلحات ومعانيها، وبين الفكر الغربي المعاصر، والدور المهم الذي تلعبه الترجمة ـ بوصفها عملية لغوية، وعملية مفهومية لنقل المفاهيم والأفكار ـ في نشأة هذه المصطلحات، وفي معانيها، وفي سياق توظيفها في الخطاب السياسي العربي الحديث.

وقد بينت الدراسة أنّ العلمانيين العرب قد صكوا هذه المصطلحات الثلاثة، واستعملوها، ليس لفهم ظاهرة الإسلام السياسي فحسب، بل لخلق "آخر" مختلف عن سواد المجتمع، ذي الغالبية المسلمة، غير المؤدلجة، والمسالمة، موظفين الدلالات "الحجاجية" و "السلبية"، المرتبطة بهذه المصطلحات؛ لمهاجمة الإسلاميين لفظيا وسياسيا، ومعبرين ـ من خلالها ـ عن جملة "مخاوف،" ارتبطت بمشروع الإسلام السياسي في العالم العربي، وفي الغرب.

الكلمات الدالة: إسلامي، إسلاموي، إسلامجي، المعنى الأساسي، المعنى الإضافي، الترجمة.