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Review Article: The Politics of 'Islam' – A Second Look

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The term 'fundamentalism' has been in use since the 1920s, originating as a description of Protestant sects opposed to 'modernism' within Christianity, and in particular to Darwinian theories of evolution. Yet it is the more recent rise of fundamentalist movements, over the past two decades, specifically in a range of Islamic countries, but accompanied by the emergence of comparable movements elsewhere (Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist), that has generated a wide-ranging response, in both academic and policy circles.[1] Some of this response has been exaggerated, both as to the novelty of these movements and as to their probable or actual political import: there have been movements of a 'return' to religious texts before, in all the major Western religions, as there have been movements that have served to combine religious with political goals. In the literature on Muslim societies, it has become conventional to distinguish 'Islamic' from 'Islamist' movements, the former denoting any religiously oriented trend, the latter the specific Islamic variant of fundamentalism.[2] These latter, and cognate trends elsewhere, constitute a major and in some respects new factor in the domestic and international politics of much of the world. They are, moreover, movements that show no sign of going away: in the Islamic world, fundamentalists are in power in Iran and the Sudan; they threaten to come to power in Algeria and Egypt, and perhaps elsewhere; and they have in the Refah (welfare) Party made significant gains in secularist Turkey; in Israel and the United States there are resilient fundamentalist currents; in India, the mass mobilizations of the Hindu fundamentalists have altered the political landscape and promise too to make a serious bid for power.

As with nationalist movements, fundamentalists are keen to proclaim their originality *vis-à-vis* other contemporary political currents and their derivation from timeless, perennial sources of legitimation; and, as with nationalism, it is pertinent to point out the similarities between them and the

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[1] For comparative analyses see Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, eds, *Fundamentalisms and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[2] As will become evident (fn. 5 below) there are some problems with applying the term 'fundamentalist' to Muslim movements. Nikki Keddie has argued that the term 'Islamist' is probably the most accurate, distinguishing belief ('Islamic') from 'movements to increase Islam's role in society and politics, usually with the goal of an Islamic state'; see 'The Islamist Movement in Tunisia', *Maghreb Review*, 11 (1986), 26–39, p. 26.

recent, often contingent and arbitrary, factors that have led to their growth. It is, in this sense, not difficult to identify what these movements have in common and how indeed, not just within the same religion but across religious barriers, they learn from, and imitate, each other. What defines contemporary fundamentalism is not on its own the call for a return to the literal reading of a holy text, but the combination of this appeal with an intervention in the political system, a mobilization of populations and the building of an organization for the taking, and retention, of political power.[3] This political project, along with intolerance, is something that these movements do have in common. Yet while there are important reasons, of analysis and of political attitude, to stress the features these movements have in common, there are also important differences: Christianity and Islam have a long record of state power and imperial expansion, whereas Judaism does not; Judaism, Islam and Hinduism are much more concerned with the regulation of social behaviour, and diet, than is Christianity; Islamic and Hindu fundamentalists thrive in societies with an intense experience of foreign domination. Whatever their differences, however, the fundamentalist trend poses challenges to states and to international politics: Iran, and now Algeria, are major international preoccupations.

These trends also challenge social science: first, in demanding an explanation as to the causes and character of its spread; secondly, in requiring a response to what appear to be unpredicted developments, that challenge conventional expectations on modernity, progress, increasing secularization, and political convergence. As much as with the rise of nationalism, it may be that the expectations of the past decades on how societies, developed or developing, are changing will prove to be wrong – the world is neither as globalized or as disenchanted as was expected; but it may also be that, beneath the appearance of rupture and of a 'return' to something past, other, more contemporary and recognizable, processes are at work. If the rise of Islamic as of other fundamentalism can be seen as a challenge to our conception of modernity, it can also be argued that this same 'iron cage', the constraints of contemporary industrial and political life, has shaped and will, in the end, determine this phenomenon.

RESPONSES TO THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

The literature generated on the Islamic fundamentalist movement, and the issues around which debate proceeded, were to a considerable extent stimulated by the success of the Iranian revolution of 1979. The analyses produced in this initial phase could, broadly, be divided into two currents, what one may term the 'essentialists' and the 'contingencists': in several respects, this parallels the debate on nationalism between Antony Smith, with his emphasis on an enduring

[3] For analyses that stress the similarities see Giles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Contemporary Fundamentalism – Judaism, Christianity, Islam', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 47 (Summer 1988), 27–39.

ethnic 'sub-stratum' and Ernest Gellner, who stresses the 'modernity' of nationalism. The former included both proponents of true 'Islam' itself, and those in the West who, with greater or lesser justice, have been termed 'orientalists', that is, those who argued that the Islamic world was dominated by a set of relatively enduring and unchanging processes and meanings, to be understood through the texts of Islam itself and the language it generated.[4] For both these groups, the Islamists and the orientalists, the rise of the Islamist movement raised very few methodological or analytical questions, since it merely revealed the 'true' character of these countries. Indeed, it is remarkable that in the mass of literature produced since the late 1970s on the Islamic upsurge very few are from these schools – precisely because, within this framework, there is very little new to explain.

Against this approach, there emerged a substantial body of literature that denied any essence to 'Islam', whether defined by believers or social scientists, and instead looked at these Islamist movements as products of late twentieth-century society. If this latter literature were to be summarized, then at least three strands would be contained in it.[5] First, much of this writing on Islamist movements stressed not their invocation of 'tradition', or of a return to the past, but their contemporaneity and modernity: they were responses to problems experienced in these societies in the contemporary world – corrupt states, mass unemployment, chaotic urbanization, a sense of external domination, spurious democratic systems. The very programmes the fundamentalists offered and the ideas they propounded were, for all their Koranic and religious form, similar to those of other Third World radical and populist movements, emphasizing such themes as oppression and liberation, corruption and authenticity, elite and mass.[6] There are significant differences between classical populism and

[4] A good example of this approach is Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1988). The debate between 'orientalists' and their critics has generated much hot air and has in the main avoided the question of how social scientists actually analyse these societies. By far the best critique of the 'orientalists' is Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: University of Washington Press, 1991). For my own attempt to disentangle this debate see ' "Orientalism" and its critics', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20 (1993), 145–63.

[5] I would give as examples of this Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State* (London: Routledge, 1989); Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Roots of Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1981); Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990); Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power* (London: Faber, 1982); Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988); Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi, eds, *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993). In another perceptive and wide-ranging survey, Nazih Ayubi, in *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991) has, while writing *within* the 'contingentist' framework, sought to examine the specific cogency of cultural and doctrinal elements in Islamism.

[6] For discussion of the ideology of the Iranian revolution see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); and Paul Vieille and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le Discours populaire de la revolution iranienne*, two vols (Paris: Contemporanéité, 1990). My one disagreement with Abrahamian is that, while he argues that the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'populist' are incompatible,

fundamentalism, not least the former's secular, often anti-clerical, character, its invocation of the working class, and the role played within it by the armed forces: but there is also substantial thematic and social overlap. The widespread rejection of democracy and of ideas of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, albeit phrased in Islamic terms, are a reflection of this common condition. The Iranian revolution and its aftermath have been accompanied by the emergence of a new vocabulary of politics, either redefining and reviving old words, or creating new ones.[7] In his analysis of Arabic and other Islamist discourses, Aziz al-Azmeh shows how its category of the state is derived from the Jacobin model.[8] Secondly, for all the appearance of a single, pan-Islamic current, and the reality of co-operation and inspiration linking these movements, the Islamists varied considerably between countries, depending on the religious, political and social character of each: thus, in some (for example, Iran) the leadership was clerical, whilst in others it was lay (North Africa); in Iran the movement was almost wholly urban, in neighbouring Afghanistan it was rural (albeit under leadership of urban intellectuals or notables). Thirdly, the literature stressed that the rise of the Islamist movements was not just a return to some 'true' or 'authentic' tradition, but a response, at the level of peoples as much as intellectuals, to the perceived failures of the post-independence regimes, whose corruption and inefficiency, and pure arrogance, had alienated the populations over whom they ruled: this was true in the Algeria of the FLN and the Libya of Qaddafi as in post-Nasserist Egypt and the Shah's Iran.[9]

The rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the Palestinian territories has been based on hostility to the perceived inefficiency and corruption of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which, although not in power, had behaved with many of the characteristics of a nationalist regime; that of Refah in Turkey is against the Kemalist state. What defines these movements as 'political' is, therefore, not just the context in which they arise and the language they use, but their goals and the means they used to achieve that goal: the goal is political power, control of the state and the maintenance of that control. The means have been an éminently secular set of options, from general strikes and mass demonstrations (as in Iran), to guerrilla war (Afghanistan), assassination (Egypt, Algeria), infiltration of the armed forces

(F'note continued)

I would prefer to suggest that the Iranian case was precisely one in which these two elements overlapped, and that there are certain respects in which the Iranian movement conflicted with the Latin American populist model.

[7] The alternatives are well represented by two of the most common terms of derogation in Khomeini's Iran – *taghuti*, or worshipper of idols, a term resuscitated from the Koran, and *kravati*, or person who wears a tie from the modern French *cravate*. For an interesting discussion of the promotion and codification of new political terms in the Iranian revolution, see Suroosh Irfani, 'Iran and the ECO: Towards a New Discourse', *Strategic Studies* (The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Pakistan), 15, no. 2 (Winter 1992), 80–94.

[8] Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, p. 31.

[9] See Ayubi, chap. 10, on political *and* cultural reactions to the modern state.

(Egypt), and the extension of alternative social services (Lebanon, Algeria). Even where hitherto religious forms of activity have been used – the mass prayer meeting, the gathering of Muslims at Mecca for the *hajj* – this has been for political purposes. It is, therefore, as aspirants to political power, and as exercisers of it, that the Islamist movements merit particular attention.

In the light of developments both political and academic, it may now be possible to look again at the rise of Islamism and examine in more detail some of the issues raised in this first reaction. In what follows, four such issues and the literature pertaining to them will be examined: the international dimensions of the Islamist movements, or 'Islamic threat'; the record of Islamist movements in power; the changing character of Islamist movements themselves; the framework of social science work on Islamic societies.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Since the 1970s, the theme of an international 'Islamic Threat' has become prominent in political discussion in the West. The first re-emergence of this stereotype was a result of the broader repercussions of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the subsequent strengthening of Islamist movements elsewhere. The components of this international 'threat' are known to all: embassies and their occupants seized, terrorist attacks on planes and civilians, rhetoric about chopping off the hands of 'imperialism', the growth in Europe of the coercive veiling of women. To these themes of the early part of the 1980s has now been added a new one: the claim, voiced by some within the Islamic world, that with the fall of communism it is 'Islam' which will provide the major challenge to the West, and a more long-lasting and tenacious one at that.

There are several evident problems with this picture, much as it is espoused by elements on both sides of the supposed 'Islam–West' divide. The first is that, even if one concedes that they aspire to challenge the West, it greatly overstates the strength of the Islamic countries, in military, political or economic terms. Militarily there has been no serious strategic threat from the Islamic world since the Turks were turned back at Lepanto (1517) and Vienna (1683). Politically, Islam is quite different from communism in that it is not able to mobilize support from significant sections of the population in Western societies: the presence of around 6 million Muslims in western Europe, a result of migration since the Second World War, may pose a range of social and economic problems, but is hardly a threat to the 260 million other people who live in these countries. The Islamic and Islamist movements active in western Europe, in themselves fragmented, are concerned more with religious issues within the community, or with political developments in the Middle East and South Asia, than with affecting the political character of western Europe: the two most explosive issues of recent years, the *Satanic Verses* affair in Britain, and the dispute over *foulards*, or headscarves, in France, were not directed at non-Muslim society but were perceived by Muslims as responses to hostility towards Muslim

communities from the non-Muslim world.[10] Moreover, while the Islamists are not short of their own rhetoric of denunciation and demagogy, much of the language and practice of confrontation comes not from the Islamists at all but from those opposed to them, or who find in them a convenient scapegoat – be it Orthodox Christians in Serbia and Greece, or right-wing parties in France, Germany, Holland or Denmark. The 'threat' is often a projection of the aggression of non-Muslims. This theme is well explored in the work of German scholars, where the concept of 'hostile image' (German *Feindbild*) is used to examine the composite image of the threatening Islamic world in Western society, combining revived historic themes (Muslim 'expansion', enmity to Christianity, etc.) with contemporary issues (oil, hostages, terrorism, administrative and commercial corruption).[11]

Perhaps the most important corrective to the image of a menacing Islamic world involves getting away from the certainties of both Islamic and non-Islamic images and breaking up, or disaggregating, the picture of a single Muslim society and polity – in other words, providing an alternative, contingent and varied analysis of what is involved in these Islamist movements. Several of the authors in the Hippler–Lueg volume do this: Reinhard Schulze and Azmi Bishara trace the evolution of Islamist thinking, both contingently, in relation to the political and social changes in Muslim countries over the past century, and critically, by showing how confected and 'modern' much supposedly traditional thinking is. Thus the central Islamist concept of *al-hakimiyya*, or (Islamic) governance, was an Ottoman invention of, at the earliest, the eighteenth century and was introduced into Islamist thinking by the twentieth-century thinkers al-Maududi and Seyyid Qutb;[12] the invocation of *shari'a* law as a traditional legal system to which Muslims should return disguises the fact that in the Koran itself there is hardly any jurisprudence, at most eighty out of the book's 6,000 verses being concerned with legal questions.[13]

In a parallel disaggregation, John Esposito, an American expert on the politics of the Islamic world, has set out to counter this myth, and to disentangle its various components.[14] He examines how, within a range of Islamic countries,

[10] Jorgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992). This judicious book is part of the excellent series, *Islamic Surveys*, put out by Edinburgh which also includes Heinz Halm's *Shiism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991). For an earlier study of Muslims in France, see Giles Keppel, *Les Banlieues de l'Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1987). For one British case see my *Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992).

[11] Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg, eds, *Feinbild Islam* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 1993). An English translation is being prepared for publication with Pluto Press in 1995.

[12] Bishara in Hippler and Lueg, *Feinbild*, pp. 104–10. Ayubi (*Political Islam*, p. 3) suggests *al-hakimiyya* originates with the early Islamic breakaway Kharijite sect.

[13] Bishara in Hippler and Lueg, *Feinbild*, p. 114. As Bishara points out, this is in marked contrast to the Judaic *Halakha*, which does contain a very detailed set of legal prescriptions. On *shari'a*, see also Olivier Roy, *L'echec de l'Islam politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 240; and al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, pp. 10–14, 24–5, 93–4. An English translation of Roy's book has been published by I. B. Tauris as *The Failure of Political Islam*.

[14] John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat, Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

political movements and social movements of religious revival have emerged in the modern age, in response to foreign domination and influence. Thinkers and politicians have tried to produce a model of an alternative society to that of the West, drawing on the resources of Islamic history, theology and idiom. If there is nothing uniquely Islamic about this – such have been the responses throughout the world dominated by the major Western powers – this phenomenon of revival and assertion is also extremely varied within the Muslim countries. There is no more one 'Islam' or Islamic movement, than there is one 'Christianity', a point well illustrated from the field of international relations. If it is not conventional to talk of the US nuclear arsenal as the 'Judaeo-Christian bomb', then there is little reason to talk of the weapons of, say, Pakistan, Iran or Libya as the 'Islamic bomb'. In the Gulf Crisis of 1990–91 much was said about Saddam as incarnating the Islamic threat: yet he himself is an eminently secular leader, who has suppressed the independent clergy inside Iraq, and draws his ideological inspiration from European fascism and a little Leninism. His dispute with Kuwait was not about Allah, but about more secular matters: oil, debt, frontiers, prestige. This is a point that is also well illustrated in the study by James Piscatori of responses in the Islamic world to the Gulf War itself:[15] these varied from support, often for quite secular reasons, to abstention or opposition by religious groups, whose mentors in either Iran or Saudi Arabia gave clear guidance that Saddam was not to be supported. One interesting, if not particularly significant, example of this was the self-appointed promoter of the 'Muslim Parliament' in Britain, Kalim Saddiqi: quick to voice opinions on other matters, he was curiously silent during the Gulf War. The secular might suspect some connection between this and his ideological patrons in Tehran.

A number of recent books on international relations exemplify this approach, at once comparative and contingent. Avi Shlaim's *War and Peace in the Middle East* is a critical historical survey of Western policy in this region during the twentieth century, showing how it has shaped local states and inter-state conflict: the 'Islamic' factor has little place in the story.[16] Bassam Tibi's study of the international situation from the June War of 1967 to the war over Kuwait makes much of regional political culture, but sees this as much in authoritarian and patriarchal terms as in anything specific to its religion.[17] Farhang Rajaee's edited study of the Iran–Iraq war, the major consequence of the Islamic revolution in Iran and one often presented in timeless ahistorical terms (Sunnis versus Shi-ites, Arabs – even Babylonians – versus Persians) brings out the modern, secular interests that led to and sustained this, the second longest inter-state

[15] James Piscatori, ed., *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991). See also my 'The Fractured *Umma*: Islamist Movements, Social Upheaval and the Gulf War', *Oxford International Review*, 2, no. 3 (summer 1991), 28–32.

[16] Avi Shlaim, *War and Peace in the Middle East: A Critique of American Policy* (New York: Viking, 1994).

[17] Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East, 1967–91* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

conflict of the twentieth century.[18] As for its successor conflict, the war over Kuwait in 1990–91, this had very little religious content or impact, as already noted in regard to the study by Piscatori. One can search through the copious literature on this conflict to find any substantive 'Islamic' element, beyond demagogy on both Arab sides, in the causes, course or outcome of the war. The Iraqi state, and its policy throughout the conflict, can be much better explained in terms of secular and comparative concepts than in any 'Islamic' terms.[19]

THE ISLAMISTS IN POWER

For anyone wanting an introduction to the broader international dimensions, Esposito's is an excellent account. He takes one into the mental world of the Islamist thinkers, and highlights some of the nonsense produced by politicians in the West, for reasons of strategic alarmism, or anti-migrant opportunism, in recent years. His book contains a rich critique of the monolithic view of Islam, and an effective challenge to stereotypes. Esposito is also good on the earlier history of prejudice against Muslims – in the speeches of Martin Luther and the early fathers of Croatian nationalism, amongst others.

If critique of the stereotype of an 'Islamic threat' clarifies international issues, it is, however, less satisfactory in providing the basis on which to evaluate these movements themselves, not as a *threat to the West*, but as *a threat to Muslims*, or, more generally, as an analysis of what kind of social and political system the Islamists aspire to construct and, when they come to power, do construct. As the summaries of their thought make clear, the leading ideologues of Islamism are a miserable bunch – ill-informed, prejudiced, rambling, patriarchal demagogues. The diatribes of Seyyid Qutb, the Egyptian Islamist, against the West as the land of 'ignorance,' or *jahiliyya*, are tawdry nonsense. In the cases where they have come to power – the Iran of Khomeini, the Sudan of Turabi – the Islamists have established reigns of terror against secular and democratic forces, against women and against ethnic minorities who resist the chauvinism of the dominant Islamist groups.

In this perspective, the events of the past ten to fifteen years enable us to shift beyond the study of how Islamist movements arise to the study of what they do when they are in power. The most evident example of this is Iran, but the Sudan provides a second example, as do the experiences of local administration by Islamic groups in parts of Lebanon, Algeria and indeed Egypt. Two broad developments are interesting here. One is the degree to which, in practice, Islamist movements have been able to move into the area of welfare and local administration, offering a model of egalitarian and relatively honest administration that contrasts with that of the secular central state, absent and

[18] Farhang Rajaee, *The Iran–Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

[19] Amongst the multitude of books on the crisis, the following are amongst the most informative and judicious: Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990–1991: Diplomacy and*

simultaneously corrupt: the example of the Cairo earthquake of 1992 in which it was the unofficial Islamist groups, not the central state, which provided shelter and medical assistance to the victims is one telling case. In Lebanon and elsewhere, not least Palestine, the success of the Islamists has been in offering basic social services: medical assistance, education, low-priced or free basic goods and, very importantly, an alternative legal system. Even in the case of Palestine, where the PLO/al-Fath had not been in power, it was, by dint of being a government-in-waiting and one that was influenced by prevailing patterns elsewhere in the Middle East, affected by having some of the reputation for corruption and inefficiency of established states; its competitor, Hamas, benefited accordingly. The movements are often flexible, and, as has been shown in states like Jordan, capable of making tactical adjustments to the state.

Once in possession of state power, however, the Islamists have shown that they were in many respects less adaptable: within three years of returning to Iran, Khomeini had crushed his opponents and imposed a dictatorial reign. As in his earlier ideology so in his constitution and system of government there was a contingent combination, this time in the service of a revolutionary state: Islamic concepts, based on the sovereignty of Allah, were enunciated parallel to a modern political structure, based on elections and parliamentary government, of Western derivation. The degree of accommodation to contemporary reality is revealed in one very interesting theoretical development towards the end of his life, where Khomeini evolved a theory of what may be called 'Islamic *raison d'état*'; a theory of how, if the interest of the state so required, all other prescriptions, based on religion, could be overruled.[20] If, as will be examined later, the Iranian revolution did produce a distinctive state, in many other respects – subjugation of ethnic minorities, mobilization of patriotism to fight a foreign invader, espousal of internationalism based on the interests of the revolutionary state – Iran pursued policies very similar to other revolutions.[21]

(Footnote continued)
War in the New World Order (London: Faber and Faber, 1993); Ken Matthews, *The Gulf Conflict and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1993); John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *The Origins of the Kuwait Conflict and the International Response* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991). There is also nothing specifically 'Islamic' in the accounts of the conflict by Muslim writers, for example, Ghazi Alghosaibi, *The Gulf Crisis: An Attempt to Understand* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993). My own reflections are 'The Gulf War of 1991 – Implications for International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 20 (1994), 109–30.

[20] I have discussed this at greater length in 'The Politics of Islamic Fundamentalism: Iran, Tunisia and the Challenge to the Secular State' in Akbar Ahmad and Hastings Donnan, eds, *Islam in the Age of Post-Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 91–113. See also Johannes Reissner, 'Der Imam und die Verfassung', *Orient*, 29 (1988), 213–36.

[21] On the combination of nationalism and internationalism, see Fred Halliday, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution', in Nikki Keddie and Ian Cole, eds, *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 88–107.

The early history of the post-revolutionary regime, and the eminently secular mechanisms of its consolidation have been well documented in Shaul Bakhash's *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, the best narrative account of the revolution and its aftermath.[22] The subsequent history is well discussed in the study of another Iranian writer, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini*.[23] The regime was able to survive the twin challenges of the late 1980s – accepting a compromise peace with Iran that nullified the sacrifices of the past eight years, and effecting a smooth transition to the post-Khomeini system. The Islamic Republic has developed a system of managed pluralism, evident in the variety of political forces present in the press and parliament, but all within a framework controlled by the revolutionary regime itself. In particular, a new revolutionary elite, based on but not exclusively composed of the clergy, has consolidated its position. Addressing the question of how distinctive the Iranian model is and how religion functions within this post-revolutionary regime, Ehteshami sees religion as providing a distinctive ideological legitimation for the regime's political controls and for the sacrifices it has demanded of the people: in this perspective, it is distinct from, but functionally parallel to, other contemporary revolutionary ideologies. Examining three aspects of the Islamic Republic – foreign relations, economic policy, political system – Ehteshami shows how similar post-revolutionary Iran has been to other modern regimes. For all that the *mullahs* claim to have introduced a different model their Republic is more conventional and, hence, intelligible than a study of rhetoric alone would suggest.

Similar conclusions are reached in studies of other societies in which 'Islam' is said to provide a guiding, and distinctive, model. In Pakistan, 'Islam' has been used as an instrument for the consolidation of a military regime, and, more broadly, of a nationalistic sentiment *vis-à-vis* India. The military regime of the 1980s used the Islamist grouping, the Jama'at-i Islami, to counter its secular and nationalist opponents, but this was in the service of eminently secular and universal goals, not part of a distinctive social or political project. In Saudi Arabia, 'Islam', in its Wahhabite form, has been the dominant ideology ever since the state was constituted in the 1920s: but here too what may seem to be a unique society turns out to be a tribal oligarchy, enhanced in recent decades with massive oil revenues, and pursuing conventional political goals, at home and abroad. What is distinctive about Saudi Arabia has been not so much its ideological, let alone, moral character as the combination of a recently established nomadic regime with the enormous, unearned wealth that oil has

[22] Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1985).

[23] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995). Some have queried the validity of the term 'second republic' on the grounds that it overstates the discontinuity between the Khomeini and post-Khomeini periods; but the case for using the term is certainly defensible, given the important constitutional changes that followed Khomeini's death, with the formation of a presidential system.

provided.[24] Saudi Arabia is not a democracy, and it is therefore difficult to assess the causes or impact of political changes that can be observed from outside: but it would seem, at the least, plausible that the changes in regime policy – for example, on political representation, on oil output, on foreign policy questions – respond to very real pressures on it. It is trying, with calculation, to respond to these in order to protect its own hold on power and wealth, if also to protect the Holy Places of Islam. A study of Saudi policy with regard to the international media – press, satellite, news agencies – might reveal at least as much of the material and the political as of the spiritual in these ventures.

Representatives of Islamist states and movements make much of the apparent Western hostility to their religion and aspirations, yet many of the most critical studies come from within their own societies. Thus, in his introduction to *The Pakistan Experience* Asghar Khan writes of how the Muslim world is dominated by the struggle against obscurantism: 'This battle against ignorance and exploitation, which most of the Muslim World has yet to win, is made more complicated by the exploitation of religion by vested interests; monarchs, *mullahs*, dictators, usurpers and opportunists'.[25] A critical account of the course of the Iranian regime is given in Fariba Adelkhah and others in *Thermidor en Iran*.[26] In addition to the widespread human rights violations, the authors point out how the regime has introduced its own, peculiar and new dogmatic interpretation of religion and has created, or better re-created, a state with many of the features of the previous, royal and secular, regime. Thus it relies on a managed system of distribution of oil revenues and on corruption to maintain political control even as it pursues Persian nationalism within (*vis-à-vis* the 50 per cent of the population who are not Persians) and without. As they themselves put it, this regime is distinctive in comparison with other modern revolutionary regimes in that it is 'authoritarian, but not totalitarian', meaning that there is a greater degree of diversity – of opinions, political trends, economic activities – than in other modern revolutionary states. However, what is perhaps the greatest failing of this regime, again in contrast to other revolutionary states, is the lack of any economic programme: the concept of *iqtisad-i tauhidi* – so-called Islamic or 'unitary' economics – proclaimed at the time of the revolution has turned out to be a combination of statist incompetence and populist platitudes. The obsessive and cruel concern with matters of dress and social conduct contrasts with the lack of ideas, and indeed interest, with regard to economics.

In another, more cultural and long-term, perspective, these failures are

[24] Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1993). Those interested in the particular timbre of Saudi life could do worse than read Hilary Mantel's novel, *Eight Months on Gazza Street* (London: Penguin, 1993).

[25] Asghar Khan, *The Pakistan Experience* (London: Zed Press, 1985), p. 4.

[26] Fariba Adelkhah, Jean-François Bayart and Olivier Roy, *Thermidor en Iran* (Paris: Espace International, 1993).

examined in an engaging polemic by the Iranian writer Darius Shayegan.[27] Shayegan speaks with the voice of the Iranian intelligentsia that Khomeini with his cultural revolution sought above all to silence. He evokes, on the one hand, the rich and irreverent literary and political culture of Iran, pre-Islamic and Islamic, to pour scorn on Khomeini's pretensions; he identifies the problem, on the other hand, as a result of a cultural and intellectual failure, but also puts the Islamic revolution in a much broader context of comparative intellectual thought, comparing it unfavourably to what has happened in India and the Far East, and deploying a range of Western writers, from Thomas Kuhn to Michel Foucault, to highlight the cultural and intellectual blockages present in Islamic culture. He sees the rise of fundamentalism as 'a funeral procession of petrified dreams wandering off to lose itself in the sands of the desert'. Shayegan's verdict is telling:

> The real danger of Islamization lies not in its excesses, its random changes of direction, its blind groping, its utter obsolescence, but in the fact that, being incapable of setting up a structured historical order, it produces chaos; and this favours the more subversive and sinister elements who loiter in the corridors of powers waiting for their time to come. Absolutely anything can emerge from this Pandora's box: the most improbable and appalling monsters in the political menagerie, from Gaddafi to Pol Pot via the whole spectrum of crazed visionaries. For the cult of revolution becomes an end in itself, sets up its own demonology. Islam is blundering through adventures which are wholly foreign to its meaning and purpose. It has already injured itself badly, for in trying to rise above history it has become one of history's by-products, just another ideological blind alley.[28]

THE 'NEW' ISLAMISM

This raises the question of how, even within the past few years, the social character of these movements may have changed.

This internal development is the subject of Olivier Roy's important study of the 'crisis' of political Islam.[29] Roy, author of an earlier and more sympathetic work on the opposition movements in Afghanistan, sets out here a critique of the 'neofundamentalists' who have come to dominate the movements in Iran, Afghanistan and North Africa. He argues that the crisis of political Islam reflects several trends: that in contrast to the earlier generation of leaders, who were versed in Islamic learning and law, the new leadership are political opportunists, using bits of tradition for their own purposes; that they lack any coherent view of how to reorganize society in the late twentieth century, not least in the field of economics; and that, increasingly, Islamist movements are being taken over

[27] Darius Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*, translated by John Howe (London: Al Saqi, 1992).

[28] Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia*, p. 99.

[29] Roy, *L'echec de l'Islam politique*.

by groups of armed young men who impose their will, and interpretations, on other Muslims. Islamism was a movement, a fragile synthesis of Islam and modernity, which in the end failed to take root.

Roy terms the new militants a 'lumpenintelligentsia', half-educated and resentful youth, whose work is now evident in Algeria, in the assassination of secular intellectuals, and the street violence against women. The tactics employed by the Islamists in Algeria, and increasingly in Egypt, are in sharp contrast to those employed during the Iranian revolution where, despite the mobilization of millions of people, attacks on individuals were almost unknown. An example of this cruelty is the practice of the Algerian Islamists in attacking women who take buses, on the grounds that they should not take public transport until it is segregated. Roy is excellent in showing how far Khomeini's ideology, far from being distinct from other Third World ideologies, is a variant of the populism and radicalism of the 1950s and 1960s and has no more hope than those beliefs of resolving the problems of the societies in which they emerge. One can, however, wonder how far Roy's 'failure' is something subsequent to an earlier more admirable phase, and how much it has merely brought out factors within Islamism that were always there: at times he reads like some former supporter of the Bolshevik revolution lamenting a 'degeneration' that may have been inscribed in the earlier history.

Yet he himself at times recognizes that the roots of the problem lie in the rejection by classical Islam of critical or independent thought. Part of Roy's indictment is directed against Iran and the manipulation of the Islamist movements in other countries by the Islamic Republic: but it is hardly original for a revolution to manage its links with other revolutionaries in this way. At the same time, and despite such manipulations, revolutions continue to enjoy sympathy abroad and, even when not directly involved, to inspire others by their force of example. This was true of Russia and, later, China; and despite Roy's doubts on the extent of Iranian influence, is also true of Iran: the rise of Hamas amongst the Palestinians and of the FIS and al-Nahda in North Africa has nothing to do with there being Shi'ites in these countries, and little to do with Iranian material influence. In addition to links through Lebanon, it has much to do with the respect which an intransigent and militant rejection of the West inspires in these peoples, and with the growth, especially during the 1980s, of hostility to the corrupt, 'modernizing', post-colonial state.[30]

If Roy's overall thesis is valid, namely that a new, tougher and less traditional leadership has emerged, then it marks a significant revision of the terms in which much earlier study of Islamist movements was phrased. In the classic formulation of Ernest Gellner's *Muslim Society*, Islam had two traditions – a

[30] On the North African cases, see François Burgat, *L'Islamisme au Maghreb (Tunisie, Algerie, Libya, Maroc)* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1988); and M. al-Ahnaf, Bernard Botiveau, Franck Frégosi, *L'Algerie par les islamistes* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1991). The latter gives a graphic illustration of the terrifying intellectual vacuity of the Algerian Islamist outlook.

'high' literate or scholarly one, and a 'low' popular or folk one.[31] Islamism, or as he characteristically termed it, 'Che Khomeinism', represented a movement by the high leadership, such as Khomeini, mobilizing and controlling the believers, and at the expense of popular Islam: it could, therefore, favour a modernizing state. According to Gellner, Weberian expectations about the need for secularization have, therefore, been proved wrong.

Challenging as it is, however, it is difficult to accept Gellner's argument in either its original or later forms. The initial problem with Gellner's account is that it is based on an extrapolation to the Middle East as a whole of a specific, North African history. It also overstates the compatibility of the scholarly tradition with modernity: the interest of the defenders of the 'high' tradition in opposing modernity, and in particular rational, individualist and open thinking, is obscured. Moreover the more recent evolution of mass fundamentalism, itself a reflection of the failures of the 'high', has led to a three-way split, between the 'high', 'low' and now 'lumpen' variants of Islamism, the latter involving the rejection of both the popular sentiments of the 'low' and the learning and traditional sense of political calculation and juridical authority of the 'high'. One can, indeed, rescue Weber by reference to the Islamic experience: secularization has, despite appearances, gone further than Gellner implies: yet, when it has not, there has been stagnation, a point Gellner recognizes albeit inadequately in regard to the economy.[32]

ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE EASTERN SOCIETY

In contrast to the literature surveyed so far, which approaches Islamic societies and their politics in terms of religion and Islamist movements, there is another body of work that seeks, first, to provide a general understanding of how these societies work, and then proceeds to locate the particular, contingent role of religious belief and organization within it. In essence, the answer to the question of 'Islam' which these studies provide is first to analyse the society in question and then to discuss particular Islamic phenomena. In a more contemporary vein, a number of important general studies of Arab society have recently been produced which exemplify this overall approach. Hisham Sharabi's *Neopatriarchy* is one of the most perceptive, and critical, books to be published on Arab society for a long time:[33] combining insights from Marx and Freud he develops a concept of 'neopatriarchy' as an alternative to modernity, a form of behaviour with social, political and psychological dimensions common to Arab society and both embodying and confirming its paralysis. While critical of the false solutions

[31] Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). His main themes are repeated in *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6–22. Gellner might also have difficulty with the link he establishes between the 'low' tradition and mysticism, since Khomeini was an exponent of *irfan*, Shi'ite mysticism.

[32] Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, p. 21.

[33] Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

of the revolutionary and nationalist movements, he is equally critical of the fundamentalists whose authoritarian and masculinist ideology he sees as another variant of neopatriarchy. Sharabi shares with Bassam Tibi and Darius Shayegan an emphasis on the inhibiting role of culture, and a view of how external domination, in various forms, has contributed to the creation of this *malaise* in Middle Eastern society: but he is also critical of Arab political and intellectual leaders, and astringent about the prospects for an improvement. In both analysis and tone he breaks with the polarities of the imperialist/anti-imperialist debate that has dominated, and warped, so much discussion of this region and produces a model of independent analysis.[34] In a work of comparable range, and reflective depth, another Palestinian academic based in the United States, Halim Barakat, has produced a powerful account of the modern Arab world, combing social, cultural, psychological and political analysis.[35] Like Sharabi, Barakat has shared, in earlier times, hopes for the secular and later religious radical movements: but his conclusion is now clear, that religion cannot provide the basis for a transformation of Arab society. Reforming intellectuals abstract the concepts of Islam from the context in which they originated and had meaning, they seek to create a new form of power; in the end, they have neither a vision nor a programme for the future.[36]

The approach and range of these two works by Palestinian intellectuals is matched in that of two Western writers who have provided studies of the contemporary politics and society of the Arab world. Roger Owen has attempted a general, accessible overview of the region's politics and in this he is more than successful, providing comprehensive analysis of the Arab states and the three non-Arab ones – Iran, Turkey, Israel.[37] In common with others, he provides an explanation of the Islamist upsurge that is sensitive to its political and ideological peculiarities, but which sets it in a comparative, and social, context. His discussion of the Islamic Republic of Iran is particularly interesting, focusing on such issues as the role of the leader and its pluralism, in contrast to any specifically theological form. But Owen's book, building on the pioneering example of his earlier studies in economic history,[38] also constitutes a theoretical critique of other, more 'orientalist' approaches: he advocates:

[34] An example of how difficult it is to write in this vein is to be found in the reception, in the Arab world and much of the academic world of the West, of the writings of the Iraqi author Kanan Makiya: his first book, *The Republic of Fear* (London: Hutchinson/Radius, 1988; published under the pseudonym 'Samir al-Khalil') and his later *Cruelty and Silence* (London: Century/Hutchinson, 1993) developed cogent critiques of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and of those Arab intellectuals who colluded with it. A torrent of abuse and accusations of treachery have followed.

[35] Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (London: University of California Press, 1993).

[36] Barakat, *The Arab World*, pp. 146–7.

[37] Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[38] In particular, *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800–1914*, rev'd paperback edn (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993).

beginning from a perspective that sees the Middle East first and foremost as part of the Third, or non-European, World, and subject to most of the same universal historical processes, from colonial rule, through the era of planning and development to the present era of a much more eclectic pattern of political and economic management.[39]

Comparison is, in work of this kind, the most effective break with regional or theological determinism: matching the discussion of economic processes in his earlier work, Owen here focuses on the formation of the state in the Middle East and the manner in which a succession of influences – colonialism, nationalism, revolution, oil, inter-state confrontation – have shaped these political systems. Within all this, religious tradition, and religiously inspired thinkers and movements, play a role, but not a determinant or monist one.

The most ambitious and persuasive of these reassessments is Simon Bromley's *Rethinking Middle East Politics*.[40] Its strengths are several: a general history of the region from the time of the Muslim conquests, a set of distinct studies of state formation and social development in the major countries of the region (Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran), an overview of the impact of imperialism and of subsequent international factors on the region, a set of measured, sober assessments of future developments. This analysis, based on a wide reading of the best secondary sources, is combined with a careful, decisive but not intrusive application of concepts in social theory, which both organize the empirical material and give the book its added interest.

Bromley's discussion of Weber and Gellner, and his decipherment of the role of 'Islam' in shaping the modern Middle East, are commanding, while his analysis of the role of external factors, far from conceptions of an omnipotent and diabolical imperialism, again cuts through many an argument. But in contrast to so many who rest on the laurels of their critique, he produces his positive construction, an alternative explanation of state formation, of the differences between these societies, and of the interaction of the local states with external forces. Perhaps the greatest strength of Bromley's work is that it provides by far the most persuasive account yet of the difficulties of creating democracy in the Middle East.[41] He identifies two competing interpretations: one, an essentialist approach, argues for the incompatibility of 'Islam' with democracy; the other, a critical approach, blames the lack of democracy on Western influence and intervention and, by extension, on the authoritarian regimes prompted by the conflict with Israel. Bromley's analysis shows why both of these are inadequate, lacking either historical depth or sociological precision.

Drawing on a critique of Max Weber and a reassessment of Karl Marx,

[39] Owen, *State, Power and Politics*, p. xiii.

[40] Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics, State Formation and Development*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

[41] For two other perceptive discussions see Ghassan Salamé, ed., *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), and Helen Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* (Milton Keynes, Bucks: Open University Press, 1993).

Bromley argues that it is impossible to understand the Middle East in terms of models that distinguish it from the West: such understanding is not to be achieved by asking why the Middle East or other parts of the Third World 'failed' to develop as the West did, because it is the 'West' itself, and in particular the separation of the economy from the state, that requires explanation.[42] What is needed, Bromley argues, is an analysis that leaves open the relation of the state to economics, and hence to civil society as a whole, and which draws up a series of empirically based, historical and comparative studies of societies as they came into contact with 'modernity': the latter, predominantly in the form of Western imperialism, had a major impact on the region, at once devastating and formative, but cannot be presented with a unique effectiveness, separate from the political and social forces operating within the societies of the region. Bromley gives several reasons for the weakness of democracy in the region inherent in the political system of its constituent states and rejects conventional explanations in terms of ideology: 'the relative absence of democracy in the Middle East has little to do with the region's Islamic culture and much to do with its particular pattern of state formation'.[43]

There are questions which this study leaves open, not least the precise ways in which ideology, in religious or secular form, serves to legitimate, or challenge, established states: it is one thing to say that it is shaped and used by social forces – 'more an effect than a cause' in Bromley's words – another to say that it has no autonomous impact at all. But, as this book shows so clearly, any resolution of this question will involve a clarification of the role of political culture in theoretical and comparative terms, before any particular answers with regard to the Middle East can be produced. It would be difficult to overstate the theoretical range, and analytic insight, of Simon Bromley's book, one of the most original to be published on the Middle East, or indeed any part of the Third World, in recent years, and at the same time a stimulating contribution to social theory.

THE CHALLENGES OF METHOD

As the discussion of these works indicates, the analysis of the Islamist movements and of the societies in which they flourish raises not just questions of political analysis, but also of method. To the long-established debates on method – 'historical' or 'scientific' – this region has added its own, that between the 'orientalists' and their critics. These have now been joined by a third, that associated with the critique of enlightenment rationality and with postmodernism. It may come as no surprise to discover that there are many

[42] For one recent exploration of the earlier history of state and economy in Iran, see Abbas Vali, *Pre-capitalist Iran: A Theoretical History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993). Critical of theories of both the Asiatic mode of production and feudalism, Vali, through specification of a particular concept of 'Iranian feudalism', seeks to develop a new understanding of Iran between the Sassanian empire and the land reform of 1962.

[43] Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics, State Formation and Development*, p. 169.

working in, and on, the region who have reacted enthusiastically to this new theoretical option: it appears to be a way of escaping from the constrictions of a knowledge associated with imperial domination, it offers a means of conveying the subjectivity and passion of Islamist movements themselves, and it offers, to the Islamists and their sympathizers, a modular system of ideas from which they can pick individual concepts without embracing a complete, and potentially alien, conceptual system. While some authors seem to be responding favourably to this possibility,[44] others, veterans of other illusions and frustrated emancipations, have a more cautious view. Thus, Sharabi:

> My feeling is that while the intellectual world of late capitalism perhaps can accommodate without much damage the aestheticism and scepticism of a Foucault or a Derrida, the intellectuals of the post-colonial periphery, including the Arab world, can ill afford the risks of philosophical and anti-theoretic scepticism; and even were they to take this risk, it would – probably – only lead them to political paralysis.[45]

The question of modernity and Islamism can be posed in at least two ways, derivative of the two meanings of modernity itself, namely as a system of rationalist thought, broadly derived from the enlightenment, and as a system of social organization, produced by the industrial revolution. It is certainly easy to see how the rise of Islamist movements can be considered as a rejection of modernity in this first, intellectual and philosophical sense, in that Islamism explicitly renounces some of the core tenets of that inheritance – secularism, individualism, tolerance, democracy, gender equality, among them. Many Islamists would claim this, as would many of their opponents, such as Shayegan, and as would, for their own purposes, postmodernists outside the Islamic world keen to identify movements that reinforce their claims on discursive pluralism and deconstruction. Yet even this argument can be questioned. If the rise of Islamism is proof of the end of modernity as a philosophical system, then the least one can say is that there are many other things that have happened in this century and indeed before which would qualify for such a role – extreme movements of the secular and racist right, and the mystique of social engineering on the left among them. Moreover, while the Islamists and their opponents claim that their ideology is anti-enlightenment and rejects modernity, the analysis of their ideas discussed above suggests that the verdict is far more mixed, that, in some sense, Islamism is a mixture, a hybrid, of modernity and anti-modernity. For all the latter that is present, there is also a recognition, a necessary incorporation, of ideas that are very much within the political spectrum of the enlightenment tradition. As with nationalisms, the framework of apparent

[44] Akbar Ahmad, *Islam and Post-Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1991) is one such attempt to reconcile the theoretical claims of postmodernism with the actual diversity and fluidity of culture and identity in the Muslim world. See, also, Akbar Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, eds, *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1994). My own 'modernist' contribution to this volume discusses Iran and Tunisia.

[45] *Neopatriarchy*, p. x.

rejection, in favour of irrationalism and particularism, contains a set of propositions that are both universal and derived from modernity. This is not to subscribe to Gellner's view of an acceptable compatibility between 'high' Islam and modernity, let alone his denial of secularization: rather it shows how far, *despite* religious inhibitions, modernity and secularization have their impact.

If this is so of the relation to modernity as an intellectual system, it is arguably even more so with regard to modernity as a social system. Theorists of modernity, be they Marx and Weber, stressed the degree to which this system, or condition, constrained collective options, whether of nations, state or classes, even as it generated myths of escape and defiance. The past century or so has seen plenty of such myths, which have mobilized large numbers of people in projects that have, in one way or another, been contained and undermined by the constraints of a more powerful modernity. The same fate would appear, with all its variants, to be awaiting Islamism. Like other movements of mobilization and protest, of left or right, Islamism has drawn on very real tensions within the societies it influences and will, beyond what it has already achieved, be able to establish states that reflect its ideology. Yet it is in several respects incapable of escaping from modernity, even as it rails against it: in terms of technology, economics, the acquisition and retention of power, and, as we have seen, ideology itself, it has no choice but to use the instruments which are there, even as it is itself incapable of generating an autonomous, or alternative, policy in these regards. Suppressed as these may now be by the conformities of protest and revolution, there are strong currents in these societies which seek not greater difference, or return to an imagined past, but incorporation into the world of industrialization, consumerism and greater individual freedom. The tension between the hybrid challenge to modernity, evident in the official policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the desire of the population for security, freedom and greater wealth (good old enlightenment goals) is clear enough. If those wishes are not allowed to come into the open, it is in part because the Islamic state has available to it instruments and practices of an eminently secular and modern kind to suppress them.

Islamism will not easily be contained, either in the societies where it has come to power or in those where, expressing the very real frustrations of populations, it is gaining ground. In the end, however, the Islamist movements may be forced to concede to the world outside or, in defiance of the criteria that their own populations articulate, to prolong their stay in power at even greater cost, only to succumb later.