

# THE STUDY OF ISLAMIC CULTURE AND POLITICS: An Overview and Assessment

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■ **Abstract** Among the four major world cultural traditions—Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity—Islam appears to have the most pervasive role in contemporary politics. The vast and varied spectrum of the scholarly works that have addressed this distinctive phenomenon started with a tradition that presumed a conflict between Islam and political modernity, while noting the centrality and universality of the faith for Muslims. This conception runs contrary to the admission of the reality of secular politics in historical Islam. If there is, on the contrary, a congruity between Islam and modernity, one still needs to provide an account of the specificity of Muslim politics. Addressing this issue, another tradition stressed that because of its very survival into the modern era, the great Islamic tradition can play a significant role in political modernization and nation building. While this argument may be true in the cases of the historical experiences of a number of Islamic countries in the early twentieth century, it is not consistent with the overly transnational and other worldly objectives of radical Islamism of late. A third tradition opted for the analysis of the macro social processes in order to account for the rise of political Islam, while a fourth focused on the micro processes of the objectification of religion and the fragmentation of religious authority to explain Muslim politics. These explanations, however, would be incomplete without a serious assessment of the role of the rentier economy in the rise of Muslim exceptionalism. Following a critical assessment of the extant literature, this essay makes several suggestions for future research.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite limited interests in Islam and the dynamics of Muslim societies among American sociologists, the theoretical and historical debates in Islamic studies have revolved, on a higher level of abstraction, around some of the same fundamental issues that concern sociologists: the status of rational analysis in Quranic exegesis, the Islamic conception of sovereignty and the nature of the state in Islamic countries, law and order, crime and punishment, the status of women, and war and peace. In the same manner that sociologists are interested in advancing scientific knowledge of the relationship between religion and society in general,

practitioners in the area of Islamic studies are preoccupied with uncovering the way Islam and its broader social context are related. Given these parallel concerns, theoretical development in sociology can contribute to the explanation of Muslim societies, while empirical research in the area of Islamic studies is certainly one way of assessing the adequacy of sociological theories.

Yet sociologists remained aloof from the benefit of Islamic studies for the development of their discipline. Until the upsurge of interests in the social scientific studies of Islam in recent decades, serious sociological analysis of Islam remained confined to the seminal works of Weber on religion. Likewise, practitioners in Islamic studies were detached from theoretical developments in sociology. Change in this area was shaped by several disparate paradigms and historical concerns. The first may be traced to the debate, around the turn of the nineteenth century, between the romantics and the rationalists on the Western colonial problem of how to tackle the culture of indigenous peoples. This was followed by the rise of the discipline of Islamic studies, which focused on the detailed translation, description, and analysis of Islamic text, Islamic history, and the languages of diverse Islamic nations. Owing to the efforts of the Islamicists, a third and distinctly Muslim perspective was introduced to the Western academic community. This was based upon attempts of Muslim scholars to address the disjunction between Islamic law and the practical experience of their societies; this effort culminated in Ibn Khaldun's path-breaking historiography. Finally, the past several decades have seen an upsurge of interest in the social scientific studies of Islamic countries. These studies revolved around the constituting features of Muslim politics and the social origins of Islamic fundamentalism.

Significant in these perspectives are issues linked to the relationship between Islamic culture and politics and the specificity of the political institutions in Islamic countries. What is the relationship between religion and politics in Islamic countries? What are the connections between Islam and oriental despotism? How are Islam and liberal democracy related? Are there conflicts between rational rule-making and religious teaching? In what way does Islam inform politics and shape political action? What are the determinants of Islamic fundamentalism? In critically assessing how diverse perspectives answer some or all these questions, this review essay addresses several interrelated issues: (a) Islam and political modernity—the degree to which Islam and the rational rule-making are compatible and an account of the relationship between Islam and politics; (b) the specificity of Muslim politics—the relationship between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism and the connection between social processes and religious movements; (c) rentierism versus Islamism—an alternative explanation of the specificity of Muslim politics. This article also makes suggestions for future research.

## ISLAM AND POLITICAL MODERNITY

The answer to the question of Islam's relation to modernity depends also on what constitutes the defining feature of modernity itself. The legacy of the nineteenth-century conception of modern life that shaped much of Islamicists' views in the

twentieth century presumed a conflict between Islam and rational rule-making. This conception, however, cannot be reconciled with the historical developments in the Islamic political theory, most notably with Ibn Khaldun's historiography. The latter, while accepting the reality of secular politics, signified as early as the fourteenth century that within Islamic cultural tradition the principle of rational analysis can be applied to resolve the problem of political order.

## The Romantic School of William Jones Versus the Rationalism of James Mill

By the late seventeenth century, the three empires—the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals—that sheltered almost the entire Islamic world were on a course of decline while at the same time they were experiencing massive challenges from Europe. This decline and European intrusion were most pronounced in Mughal India where the state faced forms of crisis variously labeled by historians as the Jagirdari crisis (Chandra 1982, Habib 1963) or a political crisis (Richards 1990), and multifaceted crises reflecting commercialization, group formations, and political change (Baylay 1988). Rapid disintegration of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century provided an ample opportunity for the East India Company to begin its phase of rapid imperial expansion; by the turn of the nineteenth century the country had become the Company state. From the nineteenth century on, other major Islamic countries also came under European colonial rule—Dutch dominated Indonesia, British Egypt, French Algeria and later Syria, and French and Spanish Morocco. Naturally, with conquest came the question of how to rule a people whose culture was quite different from that of the European.

In Great Britain, this question generated heated debates among the proponents of two schools of thought. The romantics led by people like William Jones and colleagues argued that the East should be judged by its own standards and studied for its own sake, not to serve any Western propagandistic purpose (Forbes 1951, p. 22). For Jones, Asia was “the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the production of human genius. . .” (cited in Lincoln 1999, pp. 82–83). As for India, he believed that a historical narrative could be recovered from its legendary and mythological material (Majeed 1990, p. 209, David 1996). His most important project was a digest of the Hindu and Islamic laws compiled by the learned of the native lawyers to form a basis for legal decision (Jones 1970, p. 794). The downfall of the romantics before the onslaught of the rationalists and the evangelicals (see *The Calcutta Review* 1845, 1852, 1855; Sprenger 1851, Watson 1908, Watson 1898, Richter 1908, 1910, Forster 1829) early in the nineteenth century brought to a standstill a promising intellectual project.

One may appreciate the significance of Jones's approach in its glaring contrast with the uniformitarianism of the rationalist school of James Mill. Mill subscribed to an evolutionary view of human civilization, whose criteria he drew from “conjectural” history, the Benthamite principles of utility, and the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment. Millar (1781) was quoted as the authority for the test of

civilization provided by the status of women. “The condition of the women,” said Mill (1848, p. 309), “is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manners of nations. Among the rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted.” The utilitarian principles of exactness and completeness, laissez-faire economics, the Newtonian conception of natural law, deistic religion, the idea of progress as the organizing principle of a universal history—all were used to judge Indian society. For Mill, the organizing principle of history was the scale of nations. Conjecturing the place of Indians on the scale being low, he condemned “every single aspect of their way of life as barbarous, not only their science, but their philosophy, their art and their manners” (Forbes 1951, p. 29).

This perspective provided the intellectual justification for the Westernizing policies of colonial administrators,<sup>1</sup> and impacted the development of modern ideologies in the Islamic world (Hourani 1983, Moaddel 2001a,b). In the twentieth century, its secularist premise had the greatest impact on historical thinking about Islam and modern politics. For example, in his analysis of cultural change in Egypt in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Safran (1961) presumed Islam’s incompatibility with liberal politics. For him, the commitment of Egyptian cultural elite to rationalism was necessary for the success of the country’s liberal experiment (1919–1939). When these intellectuals abandoned this principle in favor of the Islamic subject, a crisis of orientation ensued. While Safran generated interesting debates on the causes of Egypt’s cultural turn in the late 1930s (Smith 1973, 1983, Gershoni & Jankowski 1995, Gershoni 1999), none of the commentators questioned the central assumption regarding the incongruity of Islam and rationalism or entertained the idea that the rise of radical Islamism in this period, far from being a reflection of Egyptians’ Islamic identity, was produced in reaction to the overly secularist outlook of the country’s intellectual leaders (Moaddel 2002).

## The Islamicists’ Perspective

There is an affinity between the proponents of the rationalist-Westernizing model of political modernity and the Islamicists. If the former used the European experience as the scale of a universal history to judge the political experience of historical

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<sup>1</sup>Convinced of the incompatibility of Islam and modern life, Hunter (1871, p. 136) claimed that “no young man, whether Hindu or Muhammadan, passes through our Anglo-Indian schools without learning to disbelieve the faith of his fathers. The luxuriant religions of Asia shriveled into dry sticks when brought into contact with the icy realities of Western Science.” Likewise, Cromer was convinced that the educated Egyptians remained Muslims no more; they were “demoslemised Moslems and invertebrate Europeans” (Cromer 1908, p. 228). And “in passing through the European educational mill, the young Egyptian Moslem loses his Islamism, or, at all events, he loses the best part of it” (p. 230, see also Milner 1892, p. 5). A similar point of view underpinned the French assimilationist policies in Algeria (see Ruedy 1992).

Islam, the Islamicists attempted to uncover certain features in Islamic tradition that in their view hindered the development of a modern political order. Nevertheless, despite the secularist bias they share with the rationalist-Westernizers, the Islamicists' have made important contributions by offering explicit propositions regarding the Islamic origins of the political institutions, authoritarianism, the failure of democratic polity, public political orientations, and political extremism in Islamic countries.<sup>2</sup>

**ISLAM AND POLITICS: CONSERVATISM VERSUS REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM** The Islamicists widely argued that the Islamic theories of government strongly tilted toward conservatism and abstention from revolutionary action. This is so because the political language of Islam contains no precept to rebel against a bad government. Instead classical Islam teaches the duty to resist an impious ruler. This doctrine, however, is inadequate because, in the first place, it is unclear "how the lawfulness or sinfulness of a command was to be tested; in the second place no legal procedure or apparatus was ever devised or set up for enforcing the law against the ruler" (Lewis 1972, p. 33). Further, the circumstances prevailing in Islamic countries—such as the threat of tribal conflicts and chaos—prompted the theorists to stress the need for the ruler's effective power to maintain order and to justify obedience to him. This appreciation of order in turn helped to strengthen traditionalism in all aspects of life—religion, politics, literature, and thought. As a result, political thought received less attention than dogmatic theory (Lambton 1963, pp. 95–96; von Grunebaum 1954, pp. 343–44). The shift in the conception of the ruler from being a patriarch (i.e., the shepherd analogy) in classical theory to that of an autocrat in the medieval Islam, paralleled a shift in the basis of government from right religion to justice. "Kingship," said Nizam al-Mulk, the all-powerful vizier of the Abbasid caliph, "remains with the unbeliever but not with injustice" (cited in Lambton 1963, p. 104).

How then does one account for the rise of Islamic revolutionary movements in the second part of the twentieth century? For Lewis (1993c, pp. 133–54), these movements were rooted in the universal belief in the unity of church and state and that Islam formed the central element in Muslim identity. Lewis then went on to state that various Islamic movements in the modern period from pan-Islamism of Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz in the 1870s, the rise of Egyptian Muslim Brothers in the 1930s, to the Iranian Revolution of 1977–1979 were manifestations of this universality and centrality.

**ISLAM AND AUTHORITARIANISM** The connection between Islamic culture and authoritarianism are established through the legitimizing power of such a patriarchal conception of leadership as *za'im* (leader) and *za'ama* (leadership). Although *za'im*

<sup>2</sup>This category also includes the historians who advanced historical claims on Islam and politics. Comments on the adequacy of these claims are not meant to imply judgments on their entire scholarly contributions.

in Arabic refers to the charismatic political leader, the earliest use of the term indicated that it was not a compliment (Lewis 1988, pp. 59–60). When a certain Imam of the Yemen called himself “commander of the faithful,” he was addressed in the protocol of the Mamluk chancery of Egypt as the “za’im of the faithful.” In other words, “he thinks he is, but we know better.” But in the modern period, the term was used in a positive sense as Egyptian Nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil was called *al-za’im al-amin*, “the faithful leader,” and President Qasim of Iraq, called himself *al-za’im al-awhad*, “the unique leader” (Lewis 1988, p. 60). For Sharabi (1963, p. 590) also, *za’im* is a type of leadership claimed by Arab leaders to legitimize the power they had seized through a military coup, when “the unknown successful leader of a coup d’etat emerges at first as a genuine *za’im*, that is, as a savior, a hero, a symbol of national honor and freedom, and in possession of all power in the state.” Likewise, Vatikiotis (1973, p. 310) considered *za’im* and *za’ama* as part of a preexisting Islamic cultural tradition, giving credence to authoritarian leaderships in post-coup Egypt and post-revolutionary Algeria.

For Lapidus (1992), on the other hand, modern authoritarianism is rooted in the second golden age of historical Islam highlighted by the rise of Islamic empires. Under these empires, classical Islamic theory of sovereignty retreated to provide a space for a secular theory of patrimonialism, where “power is not an expression of the total society but the prerogative of certain individuals or groups,” and where “the exercise of political power was organized through networks of clients and retainers” (p. 17). This historical legacy of authoritarianism and clientalist patrimonialism has continued into the modern period as, for example, “many features of Turkish republic and the Ataturk program may be derived from the patrimonial premises of the Ottoman empire” (p. 23).

**ISLAM AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY** While various features of Islamic tradition are employed to explain the rise of authoritarian regimes, the failure of democracy in the Muslim world is attributed to Islam’s conceptual inadequacy in the area of individual rights. Lewis (1993b) argued that Western democracy is rooted in Roman law of the legal person—a corporate entity with certain rights and obligations. While Christianity “was forced to recognize the authority of Roman law” (Gibb 1947, p. 85), in Islam, in contrast, there is no such recognition, hence, no legislative function. And without legislative function, there is no need for legislative institutions nor for any principle of representation (Lewis 1993b).

There is still another way that Islamic cultural tradition constrained the development of democratic polity. It may be argued that the varying conceptions of humans upheld in Christianity and Islam could have been a factor that contributed to the rise of democracy in the West and the persistence of authoritarianism in the Islamic world. “Christian political thinkers began from the premises that man was a disobedient sinner and that the Almighty detested the stench of anarchy” (Perry 1989, p. 8). Given man’s essentially evil character, these thinkers devised a formula to tame a political ruler. As Madison & Hamilton (1911, p. 264) stated, “if men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men,

neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” This pessimistic view of human nature in fact may have led to the development of democratic political institutions as thinkers like Madison devised the system of checks and balances to keep the rulers from misrule. In the Islamic tradition, on the other hand, there is an optimistic view of humans, which, it may be postulated, ensured the extension of the system of patriarchy in the Islamic world into the modern era. For there was no need to question the power of the patriarch, who is in essence a do-gooder. In classical Islamic political theory, the emphasis is to find and install the rightful caliph. After he is installed, following his order is binding to all Muslims.

One may question this interpretation, for Islam not only recommended rebelling against an impious leader, but also provided a conceptual foundation for the development of democracy. Such concepts as *shura* (consultative body), *ijma* (consensus), and *masliha* (utility) pointed to an affinity between Islam and democracy. The problem in Islamic sociopolitical theory is then the absence of an adequate test of “Islamicity” (Gragg 1957). Or as Kerr (1966, p. 10) further elaborated, the doctrine of Caliphate failed to provide a procedure of identifying, choosing, installing, and if necessary, deposing, the caliph. Nor did the doctrine of jurisprudence offer the means of officially ascertaining the consensus on a given point of law. This lack of procedural rules in Islam, not abstract theological ideas about individual rights and responsibilities, is thus considered the source of the Muslim inability to replace an authoritarian ruler and to arrive at a parliamentary democracy.

Through a life-time of scholarship, the mastering of languages, translation of the works of prominent Muslim scholars into Western languages, a systematic analysis of the developments in Islamic theories of government and jurisprudence, and a detailed description of the changes in the relationship between the state and religious institutions, the Islamicists have made invaluable contributions to the understanding of Islam and politics. Nevertheless, their explanatory models have serious methodological problems. In the absence of a systematic historical comparison, it is not convincing to argue that such features of Muslim societies as patrimonialism, political despotism, or the weakness of democracy are a consequence of certain features of Islamic cultures, which are extracted from Islamic text in an essentialist and reductive method. And, when Islam is compared with the West (e.g., Lewis 1993b), this comparison is unsystematic without due attention to variations among Islamic countries, control cases, alternative explanations, or the effect of other historical variables. Further, the causal connection between Islamic cultural tradition and historical outcomes is almost always made subjectively, based on the Islamicists’ own secondary interpretation of the religious principle. This point is particularly evident in Lewis’s (1988) analysis of political terminology, which is premised on the belief that the religious origins of words would determine political thinking to a special degree, and assuming that Islamic culture constituted a single, all-encompassing, and enduring totality (see Halliday 1996, p. 204). Likewise, Sharabi’s and Vatikiotis’ reference to claimant (*za’ama*) to explain the rise of authoritarianism does not account for the effects of such other

factors as the role of deteriorating economic conditions, economic inequalities, conflicts between the ruling elite and political groups, the rise of nationalist, socialist, and anti-Western ideologies, and the socioeconomic background of military officers as the contextual factors contributing to the involvement of the military in politics. Finally, while the Islamicists displayed a commendable skill in their thick description of various aspects of Islamic theology and intellectual history, their assertions about Muslims were often replete with vague generalization and ethnic stereotyping. Claims that Muslims are averse to “the thought-processes of rationalization” (Gibb 1947, p. 7), and that Orientals’ lack a sense of law (Macdonald 1965), may serve little scholarly purpose.

### Said’s Critique of Orientalism

Said went beyond these shortcomings by rejecting Western scholarship on Islam as an ideological project, closely connected to various aspects of Western political, economic, and cultural domination of the Orient. This project was shaped, as it were, in different periods of encounter between Islam and the West, by the European fear of the expansion of Islam between the seventh and fourteenth centuries (Said 1977, p. 59); by the Christian propaganda warfare against Islam in the Middle Ages when Islam was portrayed as a misguided form of Christianity and Muhammad as an imposter (pp. 61–62); by the codification of Islam in d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque orientale*, where Islam was placed in the profane history while Judaism and Christianity in the sacred (pp. 64–71); by Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, where Muhammad was condemned to the eighth circle of Hell (p. 68); by Anquetil’s translation of Avesta (p. 76); by Jones’ works on the languages and cultures of the Orient (p. 77); and by the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon following his invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), whose agencies of domination and dissemination included the Institut d’Égypte and *Description de l’Égypte* (pp. 81–87). This tradition continued unabated in the works of modern writers such as Renan, Goldziher, Macdonald, von Grunebaum, Gibb, and Lewis (Said 1977, p. 105), with the difference that modern Orientalism derived from secularizing elements in eighteenth-century Europe (Said 1977, p. 120). To show the unchanging character of Orientalism, Said pointed to Gibb’s reductive and negative generalizations of Islam, Grunebaum’s presumption about Islam as a unitary phenomenon, incapable of development, self-knowledge, or objectivity (Said 1977, pp. 298–99), and Lewis’s portrayal of Islam as an “anti-Semitic ideology” and the Arab as “a neurotic sexual being” (Said 1977, pp. 312–18).

Although the criticisms of mainstream scholarly work on Islam were published as early as the 1960s [Abdel-Malek 1963, Turner 1978, Rodinson 1979 (1972)], the publication of *Orientalism* generated considerable debate in the field of Islamic studies (Lewis 1993c, Turner 1989, Ahmad 1992, Halliday 1996). Among the shortcomings of *Orientalism* noted by its critics, one raised by Halliday (1996, p. 211) is particularly noteworthy, that is, because ideas are produced within the context of domination, it cannot be concluded that they are invalid. In fact, the



Orientalists' allegedly unfavorable evaluation of Islam notwithstanding, the central misgiving about the Saidian critical project is that Said left unanswered the very historical issues in relation to which the Orientalist discourse was formulated. One may have no doubt about Cromer's colonial mission in Egypt, to give one clear instance where knowledge and power were intertwined. But can one summarily dismiss his criticisms of nineteenth-century Egypt for its religious intolerance, "barbaric" penal law, degradation of women, and despotic political institutions (1908, pp. 135–63)?

## Ibn Khaldun's Concept of *Asabiyya* and the Theory of Dynastic Life-Cycle

A crucial element in the Saidian broadside that is worthy of further assessment is his description of the Orientalists' secular bias regarding the incompatibility of the principles of rational analysis and those of the *shari'a*. Is a non-Western cultural tradition such as Islam capable of developing its own secular-rational reasoning to arrive at self-knowledge? Is "Islamic" sociology possible? Ibn Khaldun's scholarship provides a ground to entertain these questions.

Ibn Khaldun's sociological analysis of historical change is a secular outcome of the efforts of Islamic theologians-cum-political theorists to resolve anomalous situations facing the Islamic conception of politics. The problem that motivated Ibn Khaldun and his prominent Muslim antecedents was the tension in Islamic social thought between "ideal and actuality, the spiritual and the temporal, virtue and power, God's command and man's behavior" (Kerr 1966, p. 1). This tension was most apparent in the Islamic theory of sovereignty—*Khilafa* (caliphate). After the first four caliphs, labeled by the honorific title of the *Rashidun* (exemplars of the ideal Muslim rulers), the balance of power increasingly shifted in favor of the Kurdish, Turkish, or Caucasian military elite, whose actions were dictated by the exigencies of political power rather than the *shari'a*. The question facing Muslim thinkers was how to reconcile these elite's claim to sovereignty with the requirements of the highest office in Islam (Cromer 1908, pp. 135–63). The revisions made to Islamic political theory first by al-Mawardi (991–1031), then by al-Ghazali (1058–1111), down to Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and Ibn Khaldun (1333–1406) progressively amounted to the acceptance of the reality of secular politics—the differentiation between religious and political leadership (Gibb 1937, Rosenthal 1958, Hourani 1983).

When thinkers as diverse as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldun declared that the caliphate after the death of the fourth caliph had ceased to exist and the sovereignty exercised by the Umayyads (661–750) and the Abbasids (750–1258) had never been more than a "royalty" (*Encyclopedia of Islam* 1960, p. 945), they admitted the existence of a political reality in the Islamic land whose governing principles were something other than the *shari'a*. These thinkers, however, did not recommend rebelling against the ruler. Instead, they attempted to uncover the sociological principles governing his actions in order to reconcile religion and the secular law

of politics. It is thus from appreciating the dynamic of Islamic culture giving rise to a secular analysis that it may be possible to detect the orientalizing nature of the Islamicists' account of the Muslim theologians' attitude toward the existing polity. Contrary to the Islamicists' claims, it is not that these theologians were attempting to make concession to political expediency and thus became appreciative of the status quo. It is rather because they were facing different kinds of intellectual as well as practical problems—striving to find a formula to overcome the destructive power of tribal warlords and the vanities of paganism. On the reality of Oriental despotism, Ibn Khaldun was certainly in agreement with the Islamicists as is evident from his disapproval of royal authority as a form of social organization that “requires superiority and force, which expresses the wrathfulness and animality (of human nature)” (Ibn Khaldun 1967, p. 385).

Ibn Khaldun's political sociology addressed the problem of political order. He was aware of the destructiveness of the bedouin tribes and the contradiction between their natural disposition and urban civilization. He was also cognizant of the bedouins' ability to found states. He formulated a cyclical theory of dynastic change to explain the process of the rise, consolidation, expansion, and eventual demise of royal authority. He coined the concept *asabiyya* as a type of group solidarity based on blood or strong bond of mutual affections among the members of the group, which make them willing to fight and die for one another. This solidarity is the key element in the bedouins' military prowess and driving force that enabled them to overcome city-dwellers and establish royal authority. Once the state is set up, the ruler creates a new system of power relations and governmental structures, which creates a period of political stability, a necessary condition for the expansion of division of labor and the flourishing of civilization. With contentment and luxury, however, a period of decline begins, the *asabiyya* of soldiers weakens, the ruler's extravagances lead to heavier taxes, divisions within the dynasty occur, and urban civilization eventually vanishes. In the end, the old dynasty is replaced by a new one, which draws power from a new group. Such is the natural life span of dynasties. For Ibn Khaldun, however, an enduring state was possible only through the introduction of religion to create a new bond of unity to fill the void created by the decline of the *asabiyya* and weakening of the link between the ruler and ruled at the later stage of the natural life span (Hourani 1983, pp. 22–24).

In this manner, the *shari'a* once more would become the organizing principles of society. Ibn Khaldun's path-breaking *Muqaddima* (An Introduction to History) in three impressive volumes was thus an intellectual exercise to resolve the practical and theological problems facing his faith. His historical project, however, went beyond religious reasoning and produced a secular scientific approach to the study of social life. This work furnished a conceptual framework and a set of ideas and propositions about the geographic and climatic conditions of human civilization, bedouins' social characteristics, the succession of and the differences in group solidarity between the bedouins and sedentary people, the principles of economic growth and transformation, royal authorities, the caliphate, and jurisprudence (Ibn Khaldun 1967).

The rediscovery of Ibn Khaldun in the nineteenth century generated considerable interest among historians and social scientists. Among recent works that addressed various aspects of Ibn Khaldun's perspective, one may cite an assessment of its contribution to historiography (Lacoste 1984) and to economic thought (Soofi 1995), the relevance of Ibn Khaldun's insights for addressing the problem of economic development in Arab countries (Weiss 1995), a comparison of Toynbee with Ibn Khaldun (Irwin 1997), and exposition of Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought (Baali 1988, Faghirzadeh 1982). There are also a few works that applied Ibn Khaldun's framework to studying Islamic culture and politics. For example, Wittek (1938, pp. 40–46; see also Anderson 1979, p. 363), echoing Ibn Khaldun's theory of dynastic change, presented an account of the rise of the Ottoman empire in the formation of a structural harmony between the two contradictory principles of nomadic fraternity and urban civilization. Likewise, Gellner (1981) made reference to Ibn Khaldun in describing cohesion and identity in the Maghreb, and Ottaway & Ottaway (1970, p. 282) referred to the concept of *asabiyya* in their discussion of the rise of personal power in Algeria.

A more critical and systematic application of Ibn Khaldun's approach to analyze the culture and politics of contemporary Islamic societies is noticeably absent. The existing works are either full of eulogistic statements about the works and the genius of Ibn Khaldun or consist simply of a superficial application of his theory that fails to encompass the impressive feat of his sociological-historical project.

## THE SPECIFICITY OF MUSLIM POLITICS

If one discards the view that Islamic culture and modern politics were incompatible, one still needs to explain the persistence of the political role of Islam in modern life. One line of argument advanced by recent proponents of the secularization theory pointed to Muslim societies' lower level of economic development compared to that of the West (Hunter 1998), and to the prophecy that as they are modernized, new forms of cultural expressions and new types of social conflict, not too different from those already experienced in the advanced industrial democracies, will emerge, and Islam will be "domiciled with the sphere of interiority" (Tibi 1990, p. 139). In addition, this argument attributes the discord between Islamic countries and the West to geopolitical factors and colonialism not to the decline of secular ideologies in Islamic countries (Milton-Edwards 1996, Hunter 1998). Gellner (1981) did not believe the secularization theory to be fully applicable to all Muslim societies. In certain cases, modernization may entail a conflict with religion, e.g., Kemalism in Turkey, while in other cases Muslim reformism and nationalism may go hand in hand. Citing Mardin (1977), he argued that "nationalism and modernist political movements may be anti-religious if previously religion has been closely tied to the old order" (Gellner 1981, pp. 58). In general, he argued, because among the four major world civilizations—Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam—"only Islam survives as a serious faith pervading both a folk and a Great

Tradition” (p. 4), Islam maintains the potential to play a significant role in political modernization. Its tradition of religious scholars and laws constitutes a source and symbol of nationhood. Thus “in Islam, purification/modernization on the one hand, and the re-affirmation of a putative old *local* identity on the other, can be done in one and the same language and set of symbols” (p. 5; see also Carroll 1986, Juergensmeyer 1993).

This “Muslim exceptionalism” (Hefner 1998, p. 90) is consistent with the experience of such Islamic countries as Iran, where the ulama actively participated in the Constitutional Revolution (Hairi 1977), and Algeria, where the reformist movement formed a crucial component of the liberation struggle against the French (Gellner 1981, pp. 161–69, Ruedy 1992). The predominant tendency of the Islamic movements in the second half of the twentieth century, however, hardly fits this nationalist model. These movements are largely oriented toward the destruction of the existing nation-state and the formation of a transnational Islamic order. The ideological objectives of these movements are less to do with the safety of the commonwealth and more with the communion of the soul with God and eternal salvation. Two lines of research have offered alternative explanations of these still emerging yet distinctive Islamic political movements. The first focuses on the analysis of Islamic fundamentalism and tries to uncover the nature of the social processes underpinning this particular form of religious activism. The other, spearheaded by anthropologists, turns away from the Islamists’ reductive text-based and monolithic conception of the Islamic movement in order to uncover the role of Islam in everyday interaction of Muslims in diverse settings.

## The Social Processes Theories of Islamic Fundamentalism

Shift in the focus of analysis from Islamic text and culture to social context presumes that the determinants of Islamic fundamentalism lie in the processes outside religion. To uncover the key features of these processes has become the concern of a growing number of social scientists in order to explain this major yet unexpected political and cultural turn in many Islamic countries in recent decades. Their efforts generated a large number of studies under the rubrics of Islamic revivalism, resurgence, fundamentalism, radicalism, reassertion, and radical Islamism. Despite their large number, these studies are characterized by a low level of theoretical integration and parsimony. The list of explanatory variables used remained extensive and included almost every possible factor that could be construed as plausible in the unfolding saga of radical Islamism: economic crisis, social dislocation and marginality, authoritarianism, Westernization and cultural invasion, defeat in wars (Arab-Israeli war in 1967, in particular), crisis of national identity, quest for national authenticity, legitimation crisis, crisis of secularism, and the unity of religion and politics in Islam. Among the diversity of studies, however, three clusters of views are discernible. The first are those that stress such factors as economic crisis, expansion of social inequality, and authoritarianism. These are *crisis theories*. The second group consists of those that note the emergence of a cultural duality or two

conflicting systems of authority in Islamic countries as their point of departure. These studies are referred to as *cultural duality theories*. The first group considers Islamic fundamentalism a *social* movement in Islamic countries, the second group takes the historical development of the Islamic oppositional movement seriously and emphasizes its *religious* dimension (Burke 1988, pp. 18–19). The third group consists of those that focus on the state culture/ideology and religious outcomes. These are grouped as *state culture theories*.

**CRISIS THEORIES** Islamic fundamentalism is seen as a response to various forms of economic, political, and cultural crisis. For Dekmejian (1985, pp. 27–32, 161), the crisis that engulfed Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Persian Gulf countries was a profound social crisis—one that is at once a crisis of identity, legitimacy, rulership, culture, economic development, and military credibility. Likewise, Deeb (1992, pp. 52–55) stressed the multifaceted nature of the crisis leading to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip and the West Bank: political stagnation, economic stagnation, deteriorating security conditions, persuasiveness of Western culture, and the perception that the secular states were antagonistic to Islam. Reference to serious economic problems is also a crucial part of Anderson's (1997) explanation of Islamic fundamentalism in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, and of Vanderwalle's (1997) in Algeria. The former, however, placed a greater stress on government authoritarianism and exclusionary policies that prompted the fundamentalists to resort to violence, while the latter emphasized the rentier nature of the state. For Esposito (1997) economic difficulties combined with geopolitical interests were the contributing factors to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Persian Gulf regions.

Margulies & Yildizoglu (1997) focused on the effects of crisis on class politics and the realignment of class forces in Turkey. In their view, rapid industrialization and rural-urban migration, rising waves of workers struggle, and growing peasant militancy produced the economic crisis of the late 1960s. The latter in turn caused changes in the existing class forces. The interests of big business that were closely linked with foreign capital began to clash with the interests of small and medium provincial capital. This process paralleled a change in party politics as the Justice Party gradually became the party of big business and consequently lost the support of other constituencies, giving rise to a number of smaller parties. One of these, the National Order Party (later the National Salvation Party, NSP) emerged as the first party in many decades to espouse political Islam. The party's electoral bases were among artisans, small traders, and low income groups from the rural areas (Margulies & Yildizoglu 1997, pp. 147–48). These and similar studies (Esposito 1984, pp. 152–55, Esposito et al. 1991, Hunter 1988, pp. 282–83, Munson 1988, p. 119, Youssef 1985, Voll 1992, Faksh 1997, Ibrahim 1980) have now become part of the conventional explanations that have seen the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as the response to Western cultural invasion, economic infiltration, and political domination of the region and the ensuing socioeconomic crisis and arbitrary rule.

The state's exclusionary policies and economic difficulties are factors in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, the connection between economic

crisis and Islamic fundamentalism is not always correct. For example, none of the periods that marked the rise of Islamic fundamentalism—the growth of the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt in the late 1920s and 1930s, the opposition of the ulama to the state and the rise of Islamic activism in Iran in the 1960s and the 1970s, and radical Islamism in Algeria, Jordan, and Syria in the 1960s and 1970s—can be characterized as that of profound economic crisis. On the contrary, many of the countries that experienced revolutionary Islamic movements, Iran in particular, were also experiencing considerable economic development. Second, these studies do not explain how the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism was produced. References to such diffused factors as Westernization and quest for national identity are too vague to provide an adequate explanation of the rise of this movement. For if that were the case, one would have naturally expected the rise of Islamic fundamentalism instead of Islamic modernism to emerge in nineteenth-century Egypt and India, which were under direct colonial domination (Moaddel 2001a). Further, the social composition of the leaders and the activists of the Islamic movement in Pakistan, Jordan, and Turkey were drawn overwhelmingly from “the new middle class” (Mitchell 1969, Mutlu 1996, Ahmad 1991, Moaddel 2002), and religious commitment of Muslims in Java was positively correlated with education and occupational prestige (Tamney 1979, 1980). These facts cast doubt on the notion that fundamentalism was simply a reaction of poor sections of the population to the problems of modernization. Finally, there are too many variables in these analyses—no well-specified model of determination of the connection among the explanatory variables within their historical context.

**CULTURAL DUALITY THEORIES** The studies in this group have overcome some of the shortcomings of crisis theories. Focusing on the rise of Islamic revolutionary movements in Iran, they began by noting the existence of two parallel structures of domination—the state and the organizational hierarchy of the Shi’i ulama (Akhavi 1980, Arjomand 1984a,b, 1986, Dabashi 1993). Akhavi (1980) provided a detailed account of the changing clergy-state relationship in the twentieth century. The state’s intrusions into the ulama’s socioeconomic and cultural prerogatives caused the ulama to engage in oppositional activities leading to the revolution of 1977–1979. Keddie (1972), while advancing a similar line of argument, emphasized the institutional autonomy of the Shi’i ulama, in contrast to their Sunni counterparts, as a crucial source of their power. Along the same line but with a more detailed analytical subtlety, Arjomand (1984a) first traced the historical development of the institution of the ulama—or what he called hierocracy—from the state of heteronomy and subordination to the state following the Safavids’ declaration of Shi’ism as Iran’s national religion in 1501 to the consolidation of power and institutional autonomy around the turn of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the social dislocation and moral disturbances produced by the state-initiated-and directed modernization, on the one hand, and the state’s encroachments upon the ulama’s socioeconomic and cultural privileges resulted in the confrontation

between the hierarchy and the state. Within this context the distinctive phenomenon of “revolutionary traditionalism,” that is, “a general movement for the defense of Islam against Western influence,” emerged (Arjomand 1984b, pp. 197; 1986, pp. 397–99, 406).

These works represent a major step forward in understanding the dynamic of the relationships between Shi’ism and the state in the Iranian context, and by one remove, between religions and regimes. They, however, fail to explain adequately the popularization of the religious opposition beyond the traditional section of the population to include the members of the educated middle classes and modern intellectuals. This weakness is particularly evident in Dabashi’s (1993) otherwise comprehensive description of the works of Islamic revolutionary ideologues. Only in a very short passage does Dabashi hint of the significance of the state in the formation of the Islamic revolutionary discourse.

**STATE CULTURE THEORIES** This approach is similar to that of cultural duality theories, with the principal difference that the duality between the state and religion is not presumed given but is rather produced as the Islamic discourse is shaped in oppositional relations to state ideology and cultural policies. Roberts (1988, pp. 567–70), for example, related the rise of radical Islamism in Algeria to a shift in the state’s cultural and economic policies of catering to Muslim conservatism from Boumediene’s coup in 1965 until 1970 to the launching of new initiatives under the rubrics of *revolution culturelle* and *revolution socialiste* in the early 1970s. This left-turn, which included the implementation of a wide-ranging program of radical social reforms, stimulated the rise of the Islamic opposition. While the 1965–1971 period saw public property expanding at the expense of foreign capital alone, the “agrarian revolution” promulgated in November 1971 involved the nationalization of large estates of Muslim landowners and the establishment of a collective farm sector. This measure alienated an important section of Algerian public opinion from the regime, and the opposition began to attack the regime’s socialist ideology in Islamic terms. This left turn also resulted in the regime’s closer relationship with communist and socialist countries, which in turn increased its vulnerability to the opposition propaganda that the regime was governed by alien ideologies. Finally, the state’s new policies entailed mobilization of the younger generation to defend the nation not against external enemies but against internal enemies of the *revolution socialiste*. The regime thus helped develop and legitimize a critical attitude among the youth toward the existing bases of authority.

Likewise, Kepel (1993, pp. 26–67) related the radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers (MB) and the extremist ideas of Sayyid Qutb to the rise of authoritarianism following the military coup of 1952. The assassination of MB founder Hassan al-Banna during the pre-coup period, the victims of the 1954 hangings, the appalling conditions of Tura prison in Cairo, where most of the leaders of the MB were held, and the extensive use of physical and psychological torture—all made deep impressions on the thinking of the Brothers, most notably

that of Sayyid Qutb, one of the most celebrated ideologues of the post-coup Islamic movement. “Sayyid Qutb was horrified by the barbarism of the camp guards, by the inhumanity with which they had let the wounded die. Various witnesses report that it was then that he lost his last remaining illusions as to the Muslim character of the Nassir regime” (Kepel 1993, p. 28). Kepel’s contention is highly plausible because the general orientation of the Brothers in the 1930s and 1940s was that of political moderation and interest in parliamentary politics. An extremist trend in the movement grew as the Brothers were excluded from political participation before and more so after the coup (Mitchell 1969). On a broader cultural level, Esposito (2000) and a group of contributors to this edited volume (Esposito & Tamimi 2000) pointed to a cultural conflict between secularism and Islam as the key context for the rise of Islamic opposition. Esposito used the term “militant secular fundamentalism” to denote a movement that had gone beyond the idea of the separation of religion and politics to take “an anti-religious and anticlerical belief” (Esposito 2000, p. 9). Moaddel (2002) analyzed the relationship between religion and state in Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria to explain what he considered Jordanian exceptionalism—the peaceful coexistence between the Hashemite Kingdom and the Jordanian MB. For him, state ideology was the key variable explaining the variations in the discourse and orientations of the Islamic movements in these countries. He contends that the rise of secular ideological state in Egypt, Iran, and Syria politicized the process of culture production, providing a favorable context for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The Jordanian MB remained moderate because of the non-ideological nature of the regime. Further, the democratization process launched by late King Hussein in 1989 favored the secularization of the Jordanian Islamic movement.

## The Anthropology of Political Islam

The broader social context operationalized in terms of such variables as changes in class relations, class politics, the rise of the new middle class professionals, the emergence of a cultural duality, and most significantly the structure and policies of the state may account for cross-national variations and similarities in the Islamic movements. Nevertheless, these variables, by themselves, do not account for the specificity of the Islamic movement within its sociohistorical setting, and they tend to overlook the microprocesses at work in the generation of Muslim politics. Anthropologists have attempted to fill this void by noting the vast regional and temporal variations in Islamic rituals and symbols, each case constituting an “ordered universe” whose order is revealed by comparing (Geertz 1968, pp. 54). For them, these space- and time-bound microprocesses may be discovered by focusing on the structure of the religious system within the network of myth, ritual, and magic (Zein 1974, pp. xix, xxi). Contrary to the Islamicists who fixed their gaze on abstract religious ideas and the proponents of the social processes models who stressed macro-variables, the proponents of these approaches attempted to demonstrate how religious rituals in their specific context, for example, legitimize the pattern of social exchange and political structure of patron-client relationship



(Reeves 1990) or, alternatively, provide an effective means for political mobilization (Fischer 1980, Ashraf & Banuazizi 1985, Mardin 1989).

For Eickelman & Piscatori (1996, pp. ix), while texts and doctrine are of secondary importance in explaining the nature of Muslim politics, the key question is how the politics of Islam play out in the daily lives of Muslims. In their views, what makes political actions and choices recognizably Muslim is the way Islam provides the symbols in terms of which diverse Muslim groups defined their identity as Muslims. These authors identify two processes as fundamental to the shaping of Muslim politics. One is objectification whereby Islam becomes the object of interest for a large number of people as they become conscious of their religion and raise questions about its nature, significance, and import in affecting their daily conduct. These objective questions are modern queries that shaped the discourse and practice of Muslims in all walks of life (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996, p. 38). The other is the fragmentation of authority in Muslim politics. The ulama are no longer the sole interpreters of Islam. The Sufi leaders, engineers, professors of education, medical doctors, army and militia leaders—all vie for the intellectual control of Islam (p. 131).

Symbolic politics and contests over the definition of symbols are most evident in the politics of veiling, where conflict with state authority, the debate on the proper form of dress for women, and the dispute over the Islamic conception of women's public presence intersect. As a result of this contest, veiling is transformed from a private inconsequential act to a public symbol, to a political act as it challenges state authority, to a *Muslim* act as it relates to a widely shared Islamic tradition of ideas and practice—all elevating veiling to an integral part of the identity of Muslim activists (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996, pp. 4, 99). Recent feminist literature, however, considers the question of veiling symptomatic of the centrality of the gender issue in Muslim politics. It is a sign of self-definition and implied Western criticism in the contemporary Islamic movement. The relations of Muslim activists to Western modernity “take shapes and acquire sense through women's bodies and women's voices” (Gole 1996, p. 4). In a similar fashion, Kandiyoti (1991), Moghadam (1994), and Taraki (1996) argued that gender had become a political issue when Islamic groups expressed their disapproval of Western culture by characterizing westernized women as a symbol of the moral decay of western civilization. Badran (1995, pp. 22–24), on the other hand, argues that as a cultural practice and as a symbol, the veil means different things to different political groups: for feminists, it has been a gender issue; for colonialists, an obstacle to their westernization efforts; for nationalist men, a national issue, and for conservative men, an Islamic issue. For other feminist writers, the real issue is power and control (Lazreg 1994) that underpinned the Islamic fundamentalists “obsession with women” and their sexuality (Messaoudi 1998, pp. 108–9).<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup>For more discussions of Islam and gender relations, see Ahmed (1992), Abu Lughod (1998), Karam (1998), Abdel Kader (1987), Zuhur (1992), Paidar (1995), and Moaddel (1998). A more comprehensive discussion of the extant work on Islam, gender, and power certainly deserves a separate assessment.

examples demonstrate how objectification of religion and fragmentation of religious authority provided the immediate social context within which Islam shaped and informed the political behavior of Muslims.

When combined with a macro-social processes model, the objectification and fragmentation provides a more complete explanation of Muslim politics. On a general level, objectification simply implies a process whereby people become conscious of their own culture, including religion, and fragmentation points to the emergence of competing claims over cultural authority. Thus these two processes, by themselves, do not explain the politicization of religion. If under certain circumstances objectification and fragmentation would give rise to Islamic activism, it is because the monolithic cultural order, imposed from above by the secular ideological and intrusive state, politicized religion and provided a favorable context for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. This interpretation is reinforced by considering the process of cultural change in post-revolutionary Iran, where a monolithic religious discourse is imposed from above, and where the process of objectification and fragmentation, far from politicizing religion, has given rise to some sort of civic Islamic movement and secularization of religion (Moaddel 2001).

## RENTIERISM VERSUS ISLAM: POLITICS UNDER THE RENTIER STATE

Any sociological study of the relationship between Islamic culture and politics would be inadequate without considering other sociohistorical variables that may account for the specificity of politics in Islamic countries. This is true given that a significant trend in recent historiography of Islamic countries has concluded that “in most Muslim-ruled politics throughout most of history, the nature of ritual practice, codes of law, spiritual orientation, or whatever has been irrelevant to the state” (Metcalf 1995, p. 956). In reference to contemporary political issues, another trend either implicitly or explicitly presumed that there was nothing distinctive about Islamic countries that indicated a serious departure from the historical patterns experienced by other countries. Accordingly, diverse political developments in many of these countries conform to the pattern of “Third World passage” from colonialism to independence (Owen 2000, p. 239), to the dictates of the dynamics of the world capitalist economy (Foran 1993, Mardin 1973, Wallerstein 1980), to the general logic of collective action, class coalition, and political conflict (Parsa 2000), and to the historical model of European imperial policy and the functional utility of absolutism in meeting the demands of state formation (Anderson 1991). These efforts, however, tended to overlook the political specificity of Islamic countries: the predominance of patrimonialism, absolutism, authoritarianism, and the fact that many of these countries have thus far remained impervious to the worldwide democratic transition in the last two decades (O’Donnell et al. 1986, Linz & Lipset 1988). If Islam is irrelevant to the political structures of Islamic countries, then how can one explain their specific features?

The rentier state model advanced a compelling analysis of this specificity, attempting to supercede that of the Islamicists. Far from being an outcome of Islamic culture or the historical legacy of Islam, this model focuses on the effect of enormous petrodollars on the structure and functions of the state in Islamic countries. First used by Mahdavi (1970, pp. 428–67) in reference to Iran, the concept of the rentier state, or the rentier economy, applies to a country's reliance on substantial external rent in the form of the sale of oil, transit charges (Suez Canal), or tourism. This economy is believed to have far-reaching political, social, and cultural consequences. First, only a small fraction of the population is directly involved in the creation of wealth. As a result, modern social organizations associated with productive activities were developed only to a limited extent. Second, the work-reward nexus is no longer the central feature of economic transactions where wealth is the end result of the individual involvement in a long, risky, and organized production process. Wealth is rather accidental, a windfall gain, or situational, where citizenship becomes a source of economic benefit. To acquire wealth requires different types of subjective orientation, which Beblawi (1987, p. 52) called "rentier mentality" and "rentier ethics." Non-economic criteria such as proximity to the ruling elite and citizenship became the key determinants of income. Rentierism thus reinforced the state's tribal origins, as it regenerated the tribal hierarchy consisting of varying layers of beneficiaries with the ruling elite on top, in an effective position of buying loyalty through their redistributive power. As the state is not dependent on taxation, there is far less demand for political participation (pp. 53–59).

Brynen (1992) and Luciani (1988) focused on the authoritarian consequences of rentierism. In their view, since the state revenues are dependent on the international market, rather than domestic production, the ruling elite are much less constrained by the interests of domestic groups and social classes. Rentier politics, as a result, is different from the situation where the state's appropriation of societal resources through taxation spurs the population to seek a greater voice in the allocation of state expenditures. The state-society relationship is of a different sort in a rentier economy. It is premised on the state's providing welfare for its people and the people keeping aloof from political participation. "Indeed, if anything, the slogan of the American Revolution—"no taxation without representation"—is reversed: in a rentier state, state-society relations seem predicated on the principle of "no taxation, no representation" (Brynen 1992, p. 75, Luciani 1988, p. 463). Political change may occur when the web of patrimonial domination is disturbed by the crisis of rentierism. This change may contribute to the democratization of the state (e.g., for Jordan, see Brynen 1992), political violence (e.g., for Algeria, see Ruedy 1992), or revolution (e.g., for Iran, see Skocpol 1982).

The rentier state model thus provides a serious alternative to Islam-centered models of politics summarized in this essay. Nevertheless, the proponents of rentier state model still need to demonstrate how rentierism contributed to such phenomena as rentier mentality, patrimonial solidity, tribalism, and the failure of democratic change. To fully test the rentier model, it is necessary (*a*) to use the

methodology of network analysis to determine the hierarchy of the chain of dependency (ties of friendship, who knows who, family ties, and tribal affiliations), how decisions are made, and how the available resources (i.e., rent) are distributed among various clienteles; (b) to carry out an attitudinal survey to measure the prevalence of rentier mentality and rentier ethics; and (c) to apply comparative historical methods to assess and explain the differences in political structure between the rentier and nonrentier states.

## CONCLUSIONS: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The studies summarized and assessed were diverse not only in terms of their propositions and claims about the nature of Islamic culture and its connection to politics but also in terms of the methodology and the kind of empirical evidence their practitioners bring to bear in support of their claims. Undoubtedly, further research is needed to overcome the conflicting views and to transcend the current state of knowledge. To this end, several methodological issues and an agenda for research need to be addressed. First, one must clarify the different conceptualizations of Islam used in various perspectives and how this difference has led researchers to identify varying mechanisms in terms of which Islam shaped the political behavior of Muslims. Next, it is necessary to clearly spell out the relationship between theory and data in each of the perspectives. Does an analysis of Islamic texts provide the right kind of data to understand Muslim political attitudes and political behavior? For what kind of analysis are the text-based data useful? Are sundry economic and political data pertaining to various forms of crisis collected at the level of nation-state adequate to explain the individuals' propensity to join the Islamic fundamentalist movement? Finally, considerations must be given to the use of aggregated social survey data to capture the value orientations of the Islamic public toward various sociopolitical issues. What are the determinants of religiosity among Muslims? Of national identity? Of attitudes toward democracy, the military, authoritarian leadership, the government's role in the economy, and political parties?

### Islam: Shared Beliefs Versus Shared Discourse

Two different conceptions of Islam have informed the analyses of the Islamic political movement. One is a consensus-based or subjectivist conception of Islam—a set of beliefs about society and government shared by Muslim activists. For example, Ahmad considered Islamic fundamentalism as “inspired by the belief that Islam, as a complete way of life encompassing both religion and politics, is capable of offering a viable alternative to the prevalent secular ideologies of capitalism and socialism and that it is destined to play an important role in the remaking of the contemporary world” (1991, p. 507; see also Lewis 1993c, p. 133; Arjomand 1986; Algar 1969). This belief combined with the activists' emotional attachment to the cause of the movement is taught to create a potent sociopolitical force. The unity and solidity of the Islamic movement is thus internal; it is a part of

the psychological function of Islam in creating a strong bond of attachments among Muslims. This conception, however, becomes problematic in a case like the Iranian Revolution in which different political groups with conflicting understandings of Islam are involved.

An alternative conception considered Islam as a discourse, a set of shared conceptual frameworks, rituals, and symbols. Islam, in this view, has an objective presence in the language drawn from the general Islamic teachings but shaped by the specific sociopolitical context, and in a series of ritualistic practices and figurative behaviors that can be observed in the Islamic movements. Far from being a set of shared beliefs, political Islam became a potent revolutionary force precisely because it meant different things to different people, a conception parallel to that of Furet (1981). Islamic political unity is a function of factors external to Islam, e.g., the ideology of the secular state (Moaddel 1993).

Both conceptions are relevant for understanding the political behavior of Muslims—the first may capture the individuals' emotional attachments, while the latter may provide an account of how Islam constituted an all-inclusive language for people with different backgrounds. They also provide alternative propositions and hypotheses regarding the connection between Islam and political extremism. For example, we may be able to test whether it is the structure of the Islamic discourse or, alternatively, the emotional commitment of Muslim activists to the cause of the movement that explains political extremism. A comparative analysis of diverse Islamic movements in different Islamic countries may provide a clue.

## Value Orientation of the Islamic Public

Virtually all the existing claims on Muslim political attitudes are based on either analytical deduction from the Islamic texts, the published works by Muslim cultural elite, data on the Islamic movements and events, or oral history. However, inferences drawn from these sources regarding the attitudes and value orientations of the Islamic public may have the problems of validity, generalizability, memory loss, and incompleteness.

A scientific social survey is naturally a most effective way of collecting data in Islamic countries (e.g., Peacock 1978, Palmer et al. 1982). In the past, social surveys were hampered by governmental restrictions on research and a lack of funding. In recent years, however, political stability and the increasing awareness among the ruling elite of the practical benefits of such surveys has resulted in a noticeable easing of restrictions. In many Islamic countries, centers for strategic studies with political polling units are currently established. It is now possible to carry out full-scale national attitudinal surveys in virtually all Islamic countries, if funds are available. An example of recent efforts is a comparative national survey in Egypt, Iran, and Jordan. These surveys included many items from the World Value Survey questionnaire in addition to new items specifically designed for Islamic countries (Moaddel 2001b). Using this questionnaire, similar surveys are also being carried out in Algeria, Indonesia, Morocco, and Pakistan. These surveys

provide invaluable aggregated data about, among other issues, the degree of the religiosity of the Islamic public, their attitude toward the role of religion in politics, gender relations and gender roles, the significance of religion in the formation of their identity, the relationship between religion and democracy, religious tolerance, and the relationship between religion and pluralism.

## Text Versus Context

The Islamicists' tendency to explain Muslim political behavior and concrete political institutions in terms of the analysis of Islamic text is hardly defensible. Yet textual analysis provides indispensable evidence for assessing which economic, political, or ideological categories predominate in the Islamic cultural traditions. In what way could these categories shape Muslim political attitudes? Is there adequate discursive space in the Islamic thought to promote intellectual reflections and innovation?

Textual analysis may proceed at three levels. The first involves a systematic comparison of Islamic texts with an ideal typical conception of rationalization and political modernization. Currently, scholars' interpretations differ widely. People like McDonald, Gibb, and Lewis cited above point to a conflict, while others to compatibility between Islam and rationalism (Torrey 1892, Rodinson 1974, Gran 1979). The differences among scholars may be due to their methodologies, to the nature of the text they used to base their judgment, or to the differences in their subjectivist interpretations. Lewis (1988) was preoccupied with the meanings of words, and Gibb (1947, p. 15) blamed the "atomism of the Arab mind" [not necessarily Islam], which, "whether in relation to the outer world or in relation to the processes of thought, cannot throw off its intense feeling for the separateness and individuality of the concrete events" (p. 7; see also von Grunebaum 1964). Torrey (1892), on the other hand, counted the number and frequency of trade-related words in the Quran to conclude that in the Islamic theology the relationship between God and humans is commercial in nature and conforms to the language of trade.

The second level requires a systematic comparative analysis of the Islamic texts with those of Western or other cultural traditions. This exercise may be useful in assessing the status of, for example, the economic category in the Islamic thought in light of the centrality of this category in Western tradition (Dumont 1977). Or one may be able to determine the degree to which the rationalization of economic thought and activity in Islam, or lack thereof, affected the relative significance of the economic vis-à-vis the ideological. It may be possible to assess the degree to which Islamic culture departed or conformed to what may be considered the triumph of the economic over the ideological in Western context, which is believed to have signified "a calming of the ideological impulse, allowing its creative expression but swiftly clipping its excesses, which in turn aided the foundation of a civil society" (Seneviratne 1999, p. 15).

The third level entails a comparative analysis of the Islamic texts with non-Islamic narrative and legendary material in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other

indigenous languages. Narrative texts contained useful data for sociological analysis (Franzosi 1998), and the cultural traditions of Islamic countries are replete with vast resources of poetry, parables, stories, and religious/nonreligious mythologies. These resources convey invaluable information on how meanings are constructed, people's subjectivity is formed, the conceptions of "us versus others" take shape, and the nationalist, ethnic, or religious identity is constituted. Are there differences between the religious narrative and nonreligious narratives in terms of the structure of meaning they carry?

In sum, several analytical levels are involved in the study of Islamic culture—diversity in Muslim histories versus the formality of the Islamic text, Islam as a beliefs system versus Islam as a discourse, the political behavior and the views of Muslim political leaders versus cross-national variation in the world views of the Islamic publics. Recognizing that each level often explains only a particular aspect of Muslim politics would certainly prevent the occurrence of what might be termed an ecological fallacy (e.g., using text-based knowledge to explain Muslim political behavior) and so enrich the discipline of Islamic studies.

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