

**GLOBALIZATION
AND ISLAMISM
BEYOND FUNDAMENTALISM**

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK



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INTRODUCTION

Islam, Islamism, and Globalization



As the world prepared to welcome the year 2010, the Swiss went to the polls and approved a curious law: banning the building of new Islamic minarets in Switzerland.¹ Legendary for its liberalism and tolerance, and made up of many ethnic, cultural, and religious communities, the Swiss vote surprised many and shocked Muslims. Stoked by the fears of a creeping Islamization of their country, the Swiss signed onto a categorically prohibitive measure. They said that the minarets are symbols of a repressive mind-set, a backward religion, and a foreign culture. It is a mind-set that oppresses women and has no place in their European country. Paradoxically, to some people, the outright ban on minarets appeared to mirror the very intolerance the Swiss contended they were voting against. Ironically, not long before the Swiss referendum banning minarets as symbols of a religion that subjugated women, a prominent woman architect in Turkey had been recognized for a



brilliant modern mosque she had designed in full, from the minaret to the mimber (pulpit).²

Around the time that the mosque in Turkey opened and the Swiss voted in favor of the ban, in Germany a presumably more “tolerant” attitude decided against a total ban in favor of limiting only the height of new minarets. In April 2010, the Belgian federal parliament voted to ban full or partial veil in public spaces. Among the countries that vehemently protested these sorts of measures, Saudi Arabia has been on the forefront. The Saudis, however, have never liked to be reminded that Saudi Arabia forbids the building of any houses of worship other than mosques. More recently, in France, the president, the Parlement, and the French population debated whether or not to ban “Islamic” attire in the country and settled for a partial ban (in government offices and schools) on what is called the full burka, which covers all but the eyes of women. The reasoning: Islamist extremist ideals, symbolized by the attire, clash with the founding “ideals of the French Republic.” Again, the world followed with some amazement this strange debate on whether certain religions or religious practices ought to be banned or constrained. However, France was not the first country in Europe to have this debate. That distinction belongs to Turkey, an Islamic country, where Islamic attire, specifically the headscarf, has long been constitutionally banned in government offices and schools. Astonishingly, Turkey has had an Islam-friendly, if not an Islamist, party in power since 2002, which has been unwilling or incapable of removing the ban.

These strikingly confusing if not outright contradictory stories reveal more about the politicization of Islam than about Islam as a transcendental vision. While worldly politics overwhelms unsuspecting citizens’ minds, actual religion, Islam in this case and Christianity in others, is pushed into the realm of pure polemics. Only its caricatures are allowed to circulate in the public arena. Conflicts with any religious connotations turn into crises, and crises into catastrophic divides or chasms between peoples and cultures.

Tensions between the West and Islam, at an all-time high since the September 11 attacks in the United States, represent such a chasm, indeed a catastrophic distrust, between the West and the Islamic world. The caricatures of both the West and Islam, obtained in oppositional historiographies, fuel the tensions. Actual histories, in contrast, reveal

profound connections and confluences across Islamic and Western civilizations. This globalism of old demands recognition, not only to give a fuller account of the prevalent tensions, but also to highlight the pluralist legacies of earlier encounters still found across Islamic communities. Beyond the Wahhabist Islam that is deployed to caricature Islamic experiences are Arabic and non-Arabic Islamic traditions that remain in step with their times. In that respect, Turkish and Indonesian Islams are especially exemplary and demand greater attention.

Wahhabist Islam, an extremist orientation inspired by ideas of the eighteenth-century fundamentalist Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), was first organized into a political movement in the Arabian Peninsula during the nineteenth century by the Saudi clan. In the twentieth century, following Saudi Arabia's founding, it has been exported around the Islamic world, thanks largely to Saudi financing, with the West casting a blind eye to its spread due to Cold War geopolitical interests such as access to Middle Eastern oil and containment of Soviet "Communist" expansion. Wahhabism has become a template for (and has fueled the rise of) hard-line Islamist movements in the Arab world and beyond, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen.

Wahhabist Islam commands worldwide attention through fear and terror. In contrast, Turkish and Indonesian Islams, which temper religiosity with modern democratic and secular imperatives of globality, receive little notice. This book taps into this nexus of tension born of the Wahhabi movement on one hand and the promise of a pluralist religiosity in places like Turkey and Indonesia on the other. The contrasts are striking. The Wahhabi ideology suppresses rich Arab Islamic histories in favor of its purist revivalist dogma, and rejects any and all achievements of Western civilization. It is governed by categorical prohibitions, terminations, and exclusions in political community. In Turkey and Indonesia, however, Western liberal ideals are generally understood not as alien trajectories to be rejected but as political ideals to be filtered through nominal Islamic sensibilities.

As two non-Arab and unorthodox Islamic countries, Turkey and Indonesia have been central to Islamic histories over the last century. Two modern ideologies—*Kemalism* in Turkey and the *Pancasila* national ideology in Indonesia—imposed on these countries reorganized the political "opportunity structures" for Turkish and Indonesian Islamist movements, thus conditioning the peculiar unorthodox forms



they acquired. These ideologies limited religion's role in politics while at the same time they fostered specific religious sensibilities in everyday life in order to support the state. This book examines these multiple legacies in Turkey and Indonesia as it interrelates them with globalization's transnational forces.

Within this nexus, the book develops as a study of the relation and distinction between Islam as a religion and Islamism as an ideology. It argues that contrary to prevailing discourses in both the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds, Islam as a historical religious force was characteristically more pluralistic and flexible than the contemporary Islamist movements allow it to be. The history of what can be characterized as Islam's cosmopolitanism has not been lost, but instead obscured. This book takes a new look at the cosmopolitan traditions in Islam and puts them in critical conversation with contemporary pluralist and globalist orientations. As twentieth-century Islam is being oriented into a series of resurgent Islamist political and cultural movements in the twenty-first century, this study moves beyond the West's convenient caricatures of the East—Near, Far, and Middle—and Islam's suspicions of the West and instead sheds light on the pluralist encounters that have folded the West and Islam together in the past and continue to do so under the conditions of contemporary globalization.

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

Chapter 1 locates Islam and Islamism globally and historically within broad areas of tensions, where contemporary Islam is articulated and activated in numerous Islamist movements shaping various political and cultural globalizations. The chapter introduces, defines, and arranges theoretical and conceptual claims in relation to Islam and globalization, treating them both as historical processes and ideological projects. The chapter commences with the historically prevalent Arab Islamist orientations, with particular emphasis on the Wahhabi movement. It argues that even as the Wahhabi ideology has been ascendant in the Arab Islamic world, it has not eclipsed the pluralist and syncretic Arab Islamic experiences of the past and the present. The Arab Islamic legacy continues to resonate in numerous Islamic orientations and traditions. Now more than ever, it is also deeply shaped by them under conditions of intense globalization. Pluralism and syncretism as

evidenced in Turkey and Indonesia are perfect examples. They reflect the promises as well as the tensions at work in this interactive Islamic globalism. The chapter focuses on this juncture embedded in the debates on political, economic, and cultural globalization. It draws from the debates eclectically rather than paradigmatically in order to tease out their relevance to Islam and Islamism in global commonspaces.

Expanding on the tensions articulated in the first chapter, chapters 2 and 3 give depth and intensity to the dynamic, rationalist, and transformative histories of Islam based on the premise that those histories are not fictitious but obscured. The Turkish thinker and sociologist Cemil Meric's musings on history guide this return to Islamic historiography. Meric regards rationalism (understood as the work of the human critical faculty) as inherent in the "original Islamic worldview." The thoughts of key Islamic thinkers across the centuries bring such histories to light and enable a study of Islam along temporal, geographical, and sectarian differences. Given the vast and rich Islamic histories, the purpose in these two closely related chapters is to sketch (1) how Islamic pluralist trajectories have animated broad Islamic histories in enduring fashion and (2) how Islamic histories have always interacted and fused with European histories in both conflict and cooperation. The present age of globalization represents not a termination of this nexus but its evolution.

Chapter 4 argues that Turkey is politically and culturally perhaps the most dynamic country in which Islam's past and present are engaged in a critical conversation in light of contemporary globalization. As the inheritor of the Seljuk and Ottoman Islams, Turkey possesses a uniquely rich Islamic legacy and a long-standing relationship with Islam. Turks, who are ethnically non-Arabs, have nearly always occupied a supreme position within Islam. However, Islam in Turkey is made exemplary by secularism, introduced into the Turkish political arena in the late 1920s as the official state policy of the Turkish Republic. Within this secularist legal framework, Turkish Islam has been confounded by a deep popular religiosity, on the one hand, and an intense institutional secularism on the other. After more than seventy years, the uneasy balance shifted in favor of political religiosity in the 1990s mostly around the AKP (Justice and Development Party), which reformulated the core Islamist ideology. "Globalization," stated Prime Minister Recep Erdogan, "is a self-evident planetary commonality; as a



common journey, humankind is set on the planetary ship.”³ An inexorable and dynamic cauldron, it presents challenges and opportunities alike. I aim to profile this dynamic cauldron in this chapter.

Chapter 5 focuses on Indonesia as a similarly unorthodox Islamic experience. Like Turkey, Indonesia is pregnant with changes regarding Islam’s role in the country. Historically, Indonesia figures as an example of the syncretic reflexes of historical Islams that are suppressed and/or marginalized in much of the Arab Islamic experiences of late. Of the many factors responsible for such syncretism is Islam’s historical harmony with Indonesia’s archipelagic cultural lifestyles. In Indonesia Islam has always lived in the shadow of a powerful Javanese culture, existing as its supplement rather than forging a metaphysical supremacy over it. Introduced to the Indonesian archipelago relatively peacefully, Islam acquired flexible qualities in light of archipelagic cultural differences. This necessary negotiation of island geography limited orthodox Islam’s ability to make deep inroads. Only on Java, except for Aceh, did Islam acquire historical depth and power, and only by being subsumed within the dominant Javanese culture. While this balance remains intact, it is under pressure vis-à-vis the rising tide of Wahhabist Islamic movements.

Still, traditional Islamist movements such as the Nahdathul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah continue to dominate in Indonesia. These movements have remarkably moderate positions regarding the interplay of the sacred and the secular in regulating public spaces. In this sense, moderate Indonesian Muslims, not unlike their counterparts in Turkey, appear willing to think Islam anew under global conditions. Like Turkey’s Muslims, for Indonesian Muslims, globalization looms not as a choice to be made but as a reality to be negotiated, accommodated, and appropriated. Islam constitutes a foundational filter through which the global shifts are translated into a national arena.

The final chapter concentrates on the future of Islamism in a globalized world. It contends that the global commonspheres are more definitive of human experiences than they are exceptional to them in ways that clearly implicate and reveal the interdependencies. Political Islamisms have to fit into this interconnectedness instead of aiming to terminate it or stop it at the borders. It is at this juncture of inevitable globalism that critical Islamic capacities beyond fundamentalist ideologies can energize and relate their pluralist histories to the global world. It is true that nowadays, fundamentalist Islamism has injected an

extraordinary, if terrifying, energy into the political philosophy of modernity, which remains the prevailing measure of the world. It is also true that in response, pluralist Islam armed with enduring progressive visions is mobilized in the global commonspheres of the world.

A double process of “vanishing-as-emerging,” involving fundamentalist Islamism and the Orientalist West, is discernible. The first act vanishes the “diffusionist” conceits of the Euro-West into history, finally accounting for its debts to Islam. The second act vanishes fundamentalist Islamism into the realm of metaphysics, where it becomes one normative compass among many others. Neither negates the political and cultural orientations credited to Europe or Islam. Neither rejects European modernity or Islam as a counterplot. Vanishing should be understood as withdrawing from universal and essentialist animosities, where contemporary conditions of globalization reveal common traces of differences. While it is the last chapter, the sixth chapter is in many ways a beginning for exploring and re-sounding the common traces of differences that might reveal the West as surprisingly “Islamic” and Islam as tantalizingly “Western.” It anticipates the coming of a post-fundamentalist age.

Although all the chapters aim to articulate the tensions permeating contemporary Islamic communities around the world, I have never intended the book to have full answers for all possible questions. Further, I certainly do not claim to have given a full history of Islam and Islamism, Arab or non-Arab, nor was that my intention to begin with. If anything, several years of reading in Islamic histories have affirmed my sense of how rich Islamic histories are in politics, philosophy, and arts and sciences and how so very little of those histories are critically studied, let alone sufficiently told and situated within the global history. For this, various parties, Islamic and Western, are responsible. Consequently, for all their global reach and impact in civilizational histories, past and present, Islamic histories have not been sufficiently appreciated, let alone internalized in popular ways as Western histories have been hammered into minds as second nature. While the World consumes the West as the standard or the measure of modernity, it merely cannibalizes its other histories as sundry addenda to the master history. These other histories, including Islamic variations, deserve fuller inventories. I can only hope that this book contributes to such inventories.



I am aware that there is an inherent risk of reifying an Islamic essence in this sort of discourse. So I have tried to avoid enabling or supporting representations that accord Islam or Muslims a singularly distinct or universal essence. I have invoked Arab, Turkish, or Persian Muslims in the same spirit as representing distinct historical-cultural traditions rather than absolute and immutable differences. They have all sprung from the same source. Yet they have evolved uniquely, in ways that their differences matter politically. Therefore, in developing an argument that goes beyond simply opposing literalist, prohibitive, and fundamentalist Islam, I have attempted to make this work provoke new thought on Islamic political ontologies. The remarkable robustness of Islamic history has made the task easy. At the same time, the political urgency of developing a rigorous and radical historiography to bring to light diverse Islamic histories has become even clearer. Once in full view, Islamic histories reveal Islam's democratic political characteristics (historically intrinsic to Islam and not foreign to it). They also reveal the incredible narrowness of vision and even ignorance cultivated across the Islamic world about Islam and Islamic histories. The current intellectual challenges that characterize contemporary Islamic societies ought to be seen as the result of the ways in which Islam has been politically appropriated and exploited rather than as the inevitable consequences of Islam's nature. The "genius" of Islam lies not in an unrelenting prohibitive nature but in its overall pluralist outlook in sociocultural matters and its spirit of openness regarding the world around it. Islam is certainly not an all-permissive socio-religious system, but it is also far from being the all-prohibitive ideology it has been turned into in the hands of religious and political ideologues and economic opportunists. Deliberative and emancipatory qualities are as socioculturally essential to Islamic histories as the boundaries definitive of sanctified Islamic outlook. Lest one might be criticized for unduly attributing cosmopolitan characteristics to Islam, one can only point to Islamic histories for evidence, which are clamoring for greater attention. In recovering rich Islamic histories, this work contemplates a future in which Islam recedes into a broader conception of "the political," affirming the political in all its democratic or participatory possibilities.

OF STYLES AND SUBSTANCE ACROSS CHAPTERS

The book has been shaped by my differentiated access to and familiarity with Turkey and Indonesia. As readers will notice, Indonesia's chapter appears different in style and substance from the Turkish chapter. The chapter on Indonesia relies on firsthand experiences and observations, including interviews conducted with Indonesian political and religious leaders, scholars, and people. While my interest in Indonesia and Islam developed in the post-Suharto era, in contrast, my attraction to politics and religion in Turkey has been constant by virtue of being a native of Turkey. Whereas discussing Turkey has come "naturally" based on the "native" knowledge cultivated over the years, the Indonesia phase of my research demanded a more active engagement, resulting in a discussion immersed in personal observations and formal and informal interviews. In the chapter on Turkey, my customary access to Turkey and Islam situated me both within and without the sites and subjects of my interests. Having lived abroad for two decades, my position concerning Turkey is unique in that I am embedded in the subject matter, but I am not immersed in its daily iterations. As I grew up in Turkey, however, Islam always comprised the sociocultural backdrop to my life, though it was also qualified by disparate influences such as Turkish state secularism, the embrace of Sunni Islam, the dissonance of the Alevi-Bektasi culture, and their similarly complex articulations in the political arena.

I understand fully that as much as my experiences may have allowed new and unique insights, they may have also limited the nature and import of those very insights. I can certainly imagine some limits, while at the same time there may be others I cannot see. Despite this, if, in the end, the ideas and observations in this book provoke few flights of new thoughts or old thoughts in new permutations—considered and inventoried—I will be content.

CHAPTER 1

ISLAMIC GLOBALISM UNVEILED



On any given day, conversations across the world may invoke Islam simultaneously as a religion of peace, war, love, hatred, greatness, and repression. Yet, it is in the prevailing “Western” discourse about Islam that one finds the most remarkable consistency and unity. In rich and diverse media in the vast Western political and cultural universe, Islam is characterized with uncanny consistency as an archaic and repressive force. Islam appears to inhabit modernity’s outlying margins among peoples pushed into a dark and indistinct zone between advanced modernity and historical abyss.

Islam, both its people and the religion itself, appears strange to “Western” people, for more often than not, it is catapulted into visibility through monstrous events perpetrated in its name. Deprived of its manifold histories, Islam figures as an exception to modernity. What



TEXTBOX 1.1. PILLARS OF ISLAM

PILLARS OF ISLAM AS A FAITH

- Belief in Angels
- Belief in revealed books
- Belief in the messengers
- Belief in the resurrection
- Belief in the predestination

PILLARS OF ISLAM AS PRACTICE FOR MUSLIMS

- To testify that there is only one God (Allah) and that Muhammad is his messenger
- To offer the five compulsory prayers daily (Salat)
- To pay the obligatory charity (Zekat)
- To perform pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)
- To fast during Ramadan

Source: Adapted from Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

is remarkable is that this effect is achieved through simple representations that are large in volume but limited in content. While much has been said and written about Islam as a religion fueling *anti*-modernity, little has been stated to highlight Islam's historical worldviews. The political, philosophical, cultural, and economic "universes" cultivated in and through Islam remain hidden in obscurity.

Reductionist attitudes about Islam are now not only normal but also expected. The most far-reaching effect of this has been the reduction of the political and cultural universes of Islam to an Islam defined primarily by Arab experiences in history. Further still, Arab Islam is increasingly viewed through the precepts and practices of the Wahhabi creed originating in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century, which is followed by a negligible fraction of all Muslims around the world. Islam



has thus come to be confined to Arab experiences, and Arab Islam has been reduced to a reactionary Wahhabi doctrine of literalism. In this way, not only does the tremendous richness of Arab Islamic histories disappear behind the austere facade of Wahhabism, but also the diversity and pluralism across the Muslim world are obscured.

It is not only “Western” historiography that produces this diminished idea of Islam. Muslims themselves are unable or unwilling to produce and circulate knowledge that shapes contemporary views about their faith. This confluence is instrumental in conditioning how Islam is harnessed to political projects in majority-Muslim countries and the world at large. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, critiques of Wahhabi Islam have been widely expressed, yet very little has been said about the rise of Wahhabi power in the political-economic scramble for the Middle East, beginning in World War I and continuing throughout the Cold War era. This has been a calculated mode of discourse. Anchored both in willful Orientalist historiography and the will to despotism of the “Orient’s” modern rulers, it is a mode of inquiry that obscures the political relations through which Europe and the United States actively participated in and shaped Islam’s transformation in the Middle East and beyond. In particular, it conceals the role of the United States since the 1950s in catapulting the repressive and violent Wahhabi interpretation of Islam into a global, and increasingly hegemonic, salience. Above all, at the ideological level, it obscures the enduring power of Orientalism as a structure of domination and control.¹

ORIENTALISM AS A CULTURAL IDEOLOGY AND A HISTORICAL METHOD

As a cultural and political ideology, Orientalism emerged in the wake of European colonial expansions in the East and Far East in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Colonial expansions had necessitated the knowledge of the lands and peoples to be colonized. However, the knowledge needed had to serve the colonial vision, not complicate or challenge it on grounds of morality or justice. The knowledge needed was the knowledge delivered, which became Orientalism—a civilizational attitude that represented the Orient, primarily the Islamic Orient, as being in the throes of superstition and barbarism and thus designated the “West” as the civilizing savior. Politicians’ decisions,



capitalists' enterprises, and scholars' treaties, working in unison, operationalized Orientalism, anticipating and legitimizing Europe's colonial projects. In many cases, individuals such as T. E. Lawrence or the celebrated French Arabist Louis Massignon (1855–1922) embodied all three roles. Massignon, renowned for his authority in Arab Islamic studies, also worked for the French Foreign Ministry, just as Lawrence (1888–1935) served the British Crown with distinction and in the process became the legendary Lawrence of Arabia.

The Orientalist designs that followed invented hierarchies across peoples and places in civilizational terms and enforced them through violence and law. Orientalism articulated Europe as the enlightened center of the world, situating the East—Near, Far, and Middle—in relation as clamoring for Europe's light. In this way, Orientalism justified Europe's colonial projects in the Middle East and Asia, bestowing local despotisms with political and practical legitimacy. The Orientalists' claim that traditionalism and authoritarianism represented the Orient's true character and needed reforming in Western light ironically resulted in their validation. In the end, although uneven, the relationship proved symbiotic, supporting imperial interests and buttressing the ruling regimes.

The symbiotic relationship still endures and is seldom questioned in mainstream histories. Most historical inquiries into Islam remain dominated by historiographical and sociological modes that fail to reach beyond "good and evil" formulas anchored in Orientalist paradigms. In "Western" historiography, Islamic histories only appear on the far side of an indistinct haze and are perceived as having little relevance to the *modern thought of humanity*. On the other hand, Islamic historiographies remain captive to the imperatives of the universally repressive state traditions within Islamic societies, particularly in the modern Arab Middle East. They continue to produce romanticized "*ahistories*" that reduce the past to an extra-historical existence, subject to neither time nor geography. The absence of a textured historiography in modern Muslim polities, coupled with the partisan approach prevalent in Western popular historiography, fuels the complicity between "Western" Orientalism and Islamic fundamentalism. This complicity effectively disallows or discourages any sustained and open historical inquiry into contemporary Islamic communities that critically summons the past and the present into the conversation. Unable to invoke



and activate continuity beyond a linear chronology, the extant mode of writing history in Islamic communities treats the past ahistorically—either romantically in exaltation or archeologically as something already lost to history. What thus arises is doctrinal continuity without historical memory, lacking any political sense of geography or philosophical sense of history. The Qur’an, for example, stripped of its rich legacy of civilizational experiences from Baghdad to Andalusia, is effectively politicized, subordinating the sacred to worldly interests.

Against this background, contemporary Orientalists, such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, can hardly be blamed for issuing broad pronouncements about an entire religion based on selective observations.² In this sense, scholarly Orientalists are not unlike religious literalists in their mode of knowledge production. Each employs the Qur’anic and prophetic traditions in order to suggest a particular essence for Islam. Each summons episodes and events in history, not contingently but programmatically, in order to advance a particular political line. Islam thus appears energized as a pure and potentially destructive ideology. Stripped of any mystery or sacredness, it is both antihistorical and antigeographical. Here then arises the paramount challenge in comprehending and communicating Islam’s rich and textured histories.

HOW THE WEST OUTSHONE ISLAM! WRITING POOR HISTORIOGRAPHIES FROM RICH HISTORIES

“Western” historiography has been unwilling and Islamic historiography has been unable to represent Islamic historical worldviews in sufficient depth and detail. While the West has self-consciously developed modernist histories around a global “chain of references extending from Plato to NATO,”³ Western material and cultural hegemony has rendered Islamic historiography dormant, contributing to the rise of conservative and often violent political and cultural forces within Muslim communities. In the final analysis, it is not the lack of diversity and range in Islamic histories that explains why Islam and Muslims seem inexorably stuck between advanced modernity and a historical abyss. Rather, it is the ways in which the “West” and Muslim worlds perceive and treat those histories that are definitive of how Islam appears today. There are therefore historical and political consequences to seeing modern or contemporary Islam through this or that version without



contextualizing the underlying symbiotic relations between Islam and the West. The ascent of Saudi-Wahhabi Islam within the Arab Islamic universe is singularly instructive in demonstrating the consequences.

Emblematic of the symbiosis between Western colonial and state-centric Arab postcolonial interests, no development has been more crucial to the status of political Islam in the Arab world than the consolidation of Saudi-Wahhabi power in the twentieth century following World War I. From the 1920s onward, the convergence of the West's political and economic interests around Saudi fundamentalism not only conditioned Arab nationalist horizons but also narrowed Arab Islamist political imagination. At the nationalist front, autocratic rulers hijacked national agendas into ever illiberal and repressive regimes while Arab Islamist imagination was steadily channeled into symbolic and formalist ideologies. The likes of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Hafiz Esad in Syria, and Saddam Hussein in Iraq represented despotism cloaked as secular Arab nationalism, as Wahhabist ideals ruled a state in Saudi Arabia and inspired Muslim brotherhood as a militant supra-state movement.

However, in the years following World War II, Arab nationalism failed to deliver on the rhetoric of political liberation and economic development. Waiting for opportune times, in the 1960s and 1970s Islamists—Wahhabists and the Muslim brotherhood—weighed in, aided ideologically and logistically by the West, to expand the reach of their austere and revivalist Islam. The Wahhabist ideology fed on a simple calculus of a “return” to an “original” Islam. Decades of militant Wahhabist activism, augmented in depth and breadth by an equally militant, albeit clandestine, U.S. support throughout the Cold War, led the Wahhabi orientation to become the main register of popular Islam in much of the Arab world. Arab Islam has come to be seen increasingly through the Wahhabi filter, such that over time Wahhabi ideals appeared to stand for or represent Arab Islamic ideals.

This existential slippage is significant because of the paramount place Arabs hold in Islam's past. Historically, Arab Islam has been treated and emulated as the original and authentic source. Islam was first revealed to Arabs some 1,500 years ago in Arabic and through an Arab prophet, Muhammad. Islamic traditions were and remain steeped in Arabic language and culture and the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, is still recited in Arabic around the world. Further, it is Arab Islam that



made Islam into a world religion, along the way conveying Arab history as Islam's master history. In real and symbolic ways Arab experiences have been anchors for Muslims around the world. Wahhabi Islam capitalizes on this historic relation.

As Islam is interpreted and relayed from within the Arab cultural and religious universes, the dominant Wahhabi ideals reverberate through Islamic communities around the planet. They resonate broadly as Muslim and Arab ideals, not as sectarian Wahhabist indoctrination. They thus act as aspirational guideposts, helping to condition the questions asked and the answers given on Islam as a religion and as a political and social regulative regime. In this way, Wahhabi ideals echo extensively in the mainstream Islamic world. Dichotomous in worldview and literalist in praxis, they foment tensions between competing Islamic interpretations within the Muslim world as well as between Islamic and Western worlds. The power of their ideas slips easily into ideas about power, attracting and energizing masses along proto-Wahhabist orientations. Revivalism, literalism, and fundamentalism acquire transnational legitimacy across Islamic societies, becoming *idées-fixes*—ideas that dominate—while sectarian and ethnic differences are treated as grounds for struggle, where ideas form and explode into the world as movements.

Not surprisingly, when we examine the way that the Arab world and Islam presently appear on the world stage, it is largely through internecine convulsions and violent international eruptions energized by struggles within the orbit of Wahhabi politics. These convulsions and eruptions, however, fuel the uniformist historical, cultural, and aesthetic reflexes supporting the West/Islam divide. Even as they invoke a defense of Islam, they ironically energize the modern Orientalism they claim to reject.

Observers sympathetic to the political-economic “otherness” of majority-Islamic countries argue that the repressive and literalist Wahhabi strand of Islam is a reaction of Islamic communities worldwide who feel besieged by “Western” modernity and capitalism anchored in a Judeo-Christian metaphysics. These observers maintain that much of the Islamic world perceives globalization through capitalism as a Western Judeo-Christian project, a discrete and conditional modernity operating on terms not only alien to Islamic ways of being in the world, but also curtailing Muslims' autonomous capacity for generating Islamic



“worldviews.” Cast in this light, globalization, more than capitalism, appears as an arrow-like process piercing through Islamic communities, impoverishing them materially and spiritually, and subordinating them politically. As reactions, fundamentalist orientations emerge. For these observers, Western modernity ultimately authors radical political Islam.

Undoubtedly, these claims are not without merit. Yet they are a story partially told, one in need of cautionary interventions. In *Globalism: The New Market Ideology*, Manfred B. Steger⁴ distinguishes between globalization as an ongoing material process and globalism as an ideology that strives to capture, organize, and order globalization’s trajectory. Globalization and globalism cannot be reduced to one another but instead must be apprehended dynamically in relation to each other. Central to Steger’s insight is a nuanced historical sociology that refuses reductionism and easy resolutions.

Viewed in such light, Islam figures as a material and sociological process, while “Islamism” emerges as an ideology that regiments political and cultural agencies in majority-Islamic countries. Similarly, the Wahhabi dominance in Saudi Arabia and beyond is revealed to be a result of the nineteenth-century “Islamism” contemporaneous with European modernity’s advent in the Arab world as the regulative ideology of European imperialism—an advent marked by Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt in 1798. This historic encounter commenced a new era with powerful ramifications defining our present times.

For nearly a millennium prior to this invasion, Islam had been Europe’s alter ego. The “Islam” that Europe first encountered and endured during the first 800 years was a self-confident Islam, not only materially and militarily but also civilizationally. Early Islam regarded itself as a supreme and final way of life. Paradoxically, this supreme confidence cultivated an existential openness, a practical receptiveness to wisdom past and present. The Islamic universe absorbed the Hellenistic and Persian traditions, harnessing them for great leaps in sciences and philosophy from the eighth through the fifteenth centuries, when Islam grew into a hegemonic force. All the same, Christian Europe and Islamic world folded into each other through a crisscrossing transversality.

However, the balance of power organizing these relations began to shift with Europe’s “discovery” of the Americas and the rise of extractive protocapitalist enterprises that fueled Europe’s “take-off,”



commenced the Renaissance, and culminated in worldwide modern industrial and capitalist expansion some 400 years later. As Edward Said aptly observed, when Napoleon landed in Egypt with an army of both soldiers and scientists, the moment marked an Orientalist emergence.⁵ Although less appreciated historically, it also marked a certain rupture in Islamic confidence, effectively, inaugurating an era of relentless pressures on all forms of openness and pluralism in Islamic geographies. What roughly manifested the triumph of modernity as the dominant affirmative measure for much of Europe translated into a crisis of Islamic cosmopolitanism in the Muslim world.

The Europe that emerged in the wake of the decline of Islamic powers proved supremely confident of its modernity, that is, its own measures of order and progress, and quickly aligned the Islamic world with Europe's needs and desires. Subsequently, Europe's dynamic instincts, now fully energized, erupted into the world's midst as a colonialist territorial expansion—a transversal explosion into the world. That the European transversality was more “arrow-like” than circular, piercing through the world for Europe's welfare is a story already well told. In Muslim memories of this era, what looms significant is that encounters with Europe reduced Muslims to one of European modernity's subordinated and dominated “others.” Although historically critical in the development of Europe, Islam was deemed “Oriental” along with other peoples and worldviews and became a “part that had no part” in the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Modernity. These were all credited to Europe as Europe's own authentic and autonomous projects.

Under duress, Islamic cosmopolitanism nevertheless endured, preserving the traces of its contributions to Europe's modernity in arts and sciences. The works of Muslim luminaries from Avicenna to Averroes recalled not only the rich multicultural societies Islamic political sensibilities enabled, but also the interminable civilizational confluence of the Islamic Orient and Christian Europe, or the West. Paradoxically, as in the past, so in the present Western and Muslim worlds, this unity is instead articulated in civilizational ruptures or chasms. While the West is often fixated on denying Islam's cosmopolitan and pluralist histories, Muslims seldom recognize their own alienation from the infinite dynamism and openness evidenced in historical Islam. Both remain haunted by incomplete histories, which militate in multiple trajectories.



COSMOPOLITAN ISLAM REDUX

Against this background I want to argue that what early modernity arrested through colonial globalization late modernity currently appears to be releasing as compelling political potentiality, expressed on the one hand as a repressive and intolerant fundamentalist political orientation and on the other as deliberative if still metaphysically inspired political and economic Islamic sensibility. Late modernity is seen as having unleashed Islamic energies from their modern prison-house. While it is clear that Wahhabism embodies the most reactionary and regressive tendencies, what we know much less about are the ways in which Wahhabism fails to represent the full universe of Islamist orientations under conditions of intense global interplay. New globalization is therefore a key to seeing Islam historically anew.

However, globalization is a qualified historical condition defined by new modes of production as well as destruction, not by limitless expansion or an unfettered implosion of ideas, information, and investments across borders and societies. Global flows and networks do not supplant the modern, territorial, and nation-statist forms of identity and exchange. Nor are religions simply pushed to the side as epiphenomenal or unimportant. In reality, Islam, along with other religions, can be said to enjoy a steady expansion from religious into secular civil and political realms. Along with exhilarations in other globally conditioned areas, such as trade and commerce, religions, including Islam, are being transformed—deepened and intensified—without fundamentally casting away the ideas, relations, and subjectivities anchoring the international state-system. Not surprisingly, once regarded as an impossibility because Islam forbids charging interest, Islamic banking has now become mainstream thanks to creative solutions. Islamic identities, too, are dynamically interacting with the flows and networks of new globalism. Flows and networks are channels through which identities are formed and circulated, within countries as well as through them, into the political, economic, cultural, and religious common spaces of the world. They are transnational yet geographically experienced, interlinking national polities through novel technologies without negating the relevance or influence of nationalism. Therefore, I comprehend all that follows in this book under the rubric of Islam as globally developing Islams.



I situate this book in two contemporary variants of Islam—Turkish and Indonesian—in which these global connections, that is, “transversalist” and “syncretic” experiences in Islam, are clear and manifest. Following Edouard Glissant, I understand “transversality” as deep historical relations, extending in multiple directions linking people and places together without collapsing them into one another or treating them as territorially contained and determined.⁶ As Glissant suggests, a multitude of relations travels through and shapes local, regional, and national landscapes into what he calls the “commonsplaces” of the world. Commonsplaces emerge through functional integration without rendering insubstantial the differences that support local or national character. Global capitalism creates such spaces of transversality, as do religions such as Islam and Christianity. The global “commons” of the environment imposes such transversality in time and space. Even the pandemics of yesteryear and the present demonstrate the power of transversal forces that exceed the forces of territorial containment and control. All the while transversality accommodates and cultivates difference and diversity.

I construe “syncretism” as a mode of openness to difference and diversity that produces a coherence of intentions in the commonsplaces of the world. In that sense, syncretism is not a result of simple coincidences, but an orientation cultivated in political life through tensions and confluence across ideals. The Turkish and the Indonesian experiences of Islam, more than others, demonstrate these dynamics historically and in the present.

Both Turkey and Indonesia have rich and textured histories in which Islam has been a central locus of enunciation of political-religious formations. Turkey sits atop the legacy of the Turco-Islamic Ottoman Empire. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world today, and is not only non-Arab ethnically but also is geographically peripheral to orthodox Islamic histories centered on the Middle East. Despite their historical-cultural differences, however, these countries played significant roles in Islam’s modern history as both non-Arab and nonorthodox experiences.

The Turkish Ottoman sultans were the supreme religious authority over much of the Islamic world as Khalifs from 1518 until the abolition of the Caliphate by the Republic of Turkey in the 1920s. In that capacity, the Turks not only played a central role in Islamic politics, but over



the centuries also internalized this primacy as a definitive sociocultural element of Turkish identity, ultimately crystallizing it as a “Turk-Islam Synthesis.” This sense of primacy continues to permeate Turkish popular culture and political imagination, which perceives Turkish Islam as exceptional and avant-garde. Similarly, Indonesian Islam created an archipelago-centric Islamic identity, confronting and accommodating, first, Western colonialism and, subsequently, the modern secularist and nationalist Pancasila ideology of postindependence Indonesia.

Feared and welcomed around the world, Turkish and Indonesian Islams fuel exemplary unorthodox orientations. They are feared because they intensify and deepen religiosity in politics, and they are welcomed because they temper religiosity with secular imperatives of globalism. It is this nexus of tension and promise that will interest us in this book, where historical and contemporary political experiences converge into a distinctive politics articulated into global commonspaces rather than remaining anchored in purely religious dogma. Authentic and articulate, Turkish and Indonesian experiences stand in clear contrast to the Wahhabi ideology, which turned Arab Islam into an inarticulate rejection of history. Governed by prohibitions, terminations, and exclusion in political community, in the Saudi-Wahhabi version, Arab Islam has been forced to categorically refute its rich histories in line with a deeply fundamentalist desire for a singular measure. In the Turkish and Indonesian versions, Islam appears a lot more flexible, neither fully internalizing nor completely rejecting the civilizational claims made by the “West.”

NEITHER ORIENTALISM NOR FUNDAMENTALISM

To the West, no matter the version, Islam appears as a counter-hegemonic political field of thought, imagination, conduct, and policy. From the standpoint of liberal, more-or-less secular democracies, the very idea of political Islam is alarming. Recent experiences in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia fuel the fears regarding intolerant, repressive, and “totalitarian” Islamism. Yet, Islamic ideals do not dictate that Muslims refute democratic and pluralist orientations as alien to their religion. In fact, as will be shown in this book, plurality and syncretism have always been elements in the Islamic political imagination, as have the tendencies to control or limit them in Islam’s name.



Still, Islam's position in the broader world lies not in the easy claim that it might support an alternative order of one kind or another, but in the possibility that, even through the fears it induces, it might help expand the critical spaces for thinking differently about the world's dominant organizing principles and regulative ideals.

Ironically this critical role is being crystallized vis-à-vis the extremism of the contemporary Islamist fundamentalist movements. For all their complaints concerning how Islam is misrepresented or misunderstood historically, these extremist movements rely on heavily censored knowledge of Islamic histories. Rich and cosmopolitan Islamic histories are the primary victims of their censorship. Fortunately, given the high stakes politically, the more the fundamentalists attempt to sterilize Islamic histories, the more the concerned Muslims push back in order to shine light on Islam's pluralist, progressive, and syncretic histories. Liberal Islam Network in Indonesia, for example, attests to this dynamic. Previously largely ignored in Islamic societies and obscured or denied in the Western imagination, these histories are slow in emergence and still heavily challenged. Yet they still emerge.

More than simple counterweights to fundamentalist movements, these histories also expose a striking parallel between the contemporary Islamist fundamentalist movements and the dominant logic of modern ideologies. Simply stated, viewed in light of the full length and breadth of Islamic histories, contemporary Islamic fundamentalisms are revealed more and more to be and to function as modern ideologies. They mimic or imitate modern ideologies even as they assail them under a religious cloak. Their desire to shape the world in their image only closely mirrors in logic, if not in intent, the sundry ideologies modernity has anchored, from nationalism to capitalism to socialism.

Reflecting an unwavering commitment to a uniform ideological vision of Islam, such a fundamentalist Islam forces all the diverse social, aesthetic, and cultural experiences feeding Islam through a filter preoccupied with the facade of things rather than substance. Signs and symbols pass as content and limit normative or moral possibilities. Captured within the dominant late-modern political model, the majority of the fundamentalist movements imitate the ideological modernity they claim to challenge. Simply put, if in the capitalist moral economy the right and the ability to follow the latest fashion in clothing or technology parades as the core freedom, for the fundamentalist movements,



a few rules about the dress code in the Qur'an stand for the ultimate ideal of Islam. Women's headwear or men's beards become the focal point of politics, overriding all other normative political and economic struggles. Nothing else matters as much, neither the abiding Qur'anic interest in social and economic justice nor the Prophet's insistent calls to knowledge wherever the source.

Largely unchallenged within the Islamic thought world, the net effect of this form of Islamic politics in the last half century has been the suppression of historical Islamic diversity in ideas. Yet, however tentatively, the more this form of Islamism is tested and challenged, the more imminent is the relief of the pluralist and progressive histories of which the present Islamisms have only a truncated resonance—truncated not because they summarize or abbreviate these histories but because they marginalize and minimize them. Put plainly, these fundamentalist Islamisms appear more and more as “awful” stories based on “dreadful” historiographies. Under relief, Islamic histories appear in a different light, showing Islamic life-worlds to be fundamentally more about openings, interactions, translations, and transgressions than about exclusions, terminations, stoppages, and prohibitions in human life.

Islam's formative era reflects such dynamic tendencies as having shaped its geographical expansion and ideological diffusion. This era is typically described in the word *fatun*, meaning “opening” in Arabic. In Islamic and Orientalist accounts, however, the word has increasingly signified “conquest” as capture and pure domination. In actuality, the Islamic conquests had a complex and mutually interactive impact on the conquered territories. Undoubtedly, Muslims, too, saw the world as an object of control and appropriation. In this sense, they were not unlike other invaders or conquerors. Yet, unlike many other conquerors before and after the advent of Islamic conquests, Muslims were never driven by a systematic elimination of the existential differences they encountered. The conquest certainly meant an opportunity through which Muslim rulers could expand their rule and influence. At the same time, it also meant an “opening” through which places and peoples were politically, culturally, and economically interlinked in new ways. It is tempting to explain Islam's lightning expansion in the first two hundred years as an “arrowlike” penetration of the societies and communities.⁷ However, Islam's spectacular advancement from a tribal



movement to a world religion within one hundred years of its birth can be better understood in its cultivation of a pluralist politics—an Islamic humanism—that shaped early Islamic attitudes and attracted multitudes to its milieu. Through this humanist ethos, not only did Muslims regard as valuable the Hellenic, Roman, Persian, and Indian civilizations but they also incorporated them into Islamic civilizational efforts. This receptive attitude, with its complexities and contradictions, is a better key to understanding past and present Islamic polities. The Prophet of Islam himself set the example by calling on Muslims “to strive for knowledge and wisdom if it is in China.”

My point is not to attribute, anachronistically, an extraordinary “liberal” acumen to Islamic history. Rather, it is to suggest that unlike the orthodox Islamic and Western Orientalist accounts that characterize Islamic worldviews as a narrow religious ideology of survival at minimum and domination when possible, Muslims channeled their energy and resources into experimentation, learning, and transformation as much as into efforts to constrain human creativity and imagination. More often than not, change was cultivated, not feared or outright rejected in the Islamic imagination.

Then, in this historical sense, “conserving” Islam or being a “conservative” Muslim demands the internalization of the spirit of openness Islam promoted for centuries. For this reason, too, a concern about the fundamentals of Islam has to register the dynamic orientations and attitudes that drove Islamic policy and conduct through much of Islam’s emergence as a world religion. The contemporary Islamic fixation with limitations and prohibitions appears at odds with Islamic histories. It is far from reflecting the totality of Islamic histories, especially the Islamic humanism manifested in myriad forms throughout history.

Obscurantism, no matter the reason, does more harm than good to Islam and Muslims in the ever-globalized world. Even if the contemporary reactionary attitudes are due largely to the current political and economic duress experienced in Islamic societies, the duress cannot be a justification for repressive dogmatic politics. Peripheral to modernity and subordinated to the West, most contemporary Islamic societies do indeed make for easy grounds for organizing communities along the logic of interminable or irreconcilable civilizational differences. In fact, many Orientalists and Islamic fundamentalists alike desire or wish for the actualization of such a prophecy so as to be able to speak



of diametrically opposed civilizations and their inevitable clashes. Yet, this reasoning highlights only the reactionary tendencies as the locus or center of Islamic/ist experiences and struggles. More alarmingly, it predestines the Islamist norm, either moderate or fundamentalist, as the only form of governance Muslims can be expected to have.

If anything, a return to history, to which many fundamentalist Muslims aspire, reveals Islam as a collection of particular universes shaped through transversal spaces, and Muslims as a kaleidoscope of people who were discoverers and innovators as often as they may have been destroyers, and, as such, essentially all too human. More than anything else, this book revolves around this argument about the humanism that Muslims have articulated and advanced in history. Several caveats inform the argument.

LIMITS AND CAVEATS

First, this book is not a total history of Islam and Islamism. The book starts with the view that such a project, let alone a claim, is not only entirely unsustainable but also simply futile. Cognizant of this, instead, this book is about how Islamic histories are problematized, that is, deployed to function in the present. Insofar as histories mean “articulated connections” across events and moments, the histories of Islam locate Islam in the world, at once abstractly as an idea and concretely as a practice. They accord it a transhistorical perspective, identity, and intentionality, even as they claim to be historically situated and contingent. Political through and through, they ultimately condition the possible questions that can be asked and the answers that can be given about Islam in time and place.

Second, the book neither assumes nor seeks Islam’s distinct or universal essence. Instead, it points to the practices and intentionalities that are deeply imbricated in the development of Islamic identities but also are presently construed as essentially antithetical to Islam. Islamic traditions have always appealed to critical human faculties in comprehending the world; yet this trait is now seen as anathema in mainstream Islam where a broad prohibitionism predicated on narrow formalism has become the currency.

Third, the book does not pretend to offer a full account of the tensions born in Islam’s interactions with global capitalism and the



modern world but rather argues that Islam finds expression in this world both as a participant and a challenger. Fourth, the purpose of this work is not to rehabilitate something called pluralist Islam, offered to the Islamic world as a form or a trajectory in political governance. Rather the purpose is to develop an argument that goes beyond simply opposing literalist, prohibitive, and fundamentalist Islam. It counters the future of majority-Muslim countries as places where governance is inextricably linked with and defined by religiosity. Lately, in political discourse in the West, it has become fashionable to offer “moderate” Islam as the preferred future for many majority Islamic communities. This discourse focuses on “moderating” Islam. Paradoxically, however, this focus narrows the political horizon to variations within Islamist existence, ultimately privileging political Islamism as the only future. Trying to “moderate” Islamism, these discourses instead end up fueling fundamentalism’s ascendancy as the primary organizing ideal socially and politically. Islamist theology, different only in temperament from Islamic theocracy, is offered as liberation.

In the end, this way of thinking reinforces the fundamentalist characteristics of the very Islamist limits to political-economic life-worlds. There are, however, multiple and plural political projects in which Islam would be but *one* of many sources of negotiation of the future, neither the sole beginning nor the inevitable ending. That Islamic populations are supposedly destined to a religious future appears to function as another form of Orientalism, one that cannot see in Muslims an agency sufficient for the complexities of their age and that negates any democratic and participatory potentialities in Islamic societies.