Political Islam: Asking the Wrong Questions?

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Abstract: The empirical literature on political Islam is fairly rich and getting better. But theoretical interpretations of this data are still quite primitive. This gap is a product of Orientalist traditions that "essentialize" Islamic movements, a resulting lack of appreciation for their global diversity, and the inevitable politicization of the subject matter. This essay not only seeks to identify the most important studies in the field but to show how they suggest a typology, chronology, and problematic that might lead to more fruitful analysis in the future.

Key Words: Islam, al-Qaeda, fundamentalism, terrorism

Publication Notes: (1) I have used a left apostrophe (`) to indicate the Arabic letter `ayn, which is usually indicated in published texts by a small, raised letter "c." (2) Several distinct Islamic movements have taken the same name: "The Islamic Group" or al-jama`a al-islamiyya. This name, however, is transcribed differently in different languages: al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya (Arabic), Jami`at-i Islami (Pushtun), Jama`at-i Islami (Urdu), and Jama`a Islamiyya (Malay/Bahasa Indonesia).

The men who destroyed the World Trade Center on 9/11 were not political clones who subscribed to a single ideology. Muhammad Atta, whose "Hamburg Cell" actually executed the attacks, grew up in a white-collar Egyptian household; held ardently to a Sufi-influenced version of Islam; and lived much of his life in Europe. Yet he hated the West, believing that it supported genocide against Muslims in Bosnia and Chechnya. Usama bin Ladin, who organized the attacks, came from a wealthy family in insular Saudi Arabia; was a pious follower of a sectarian, anti-Sufi brand of Islam (Salafism); and never really worked outside the Muslim world. His primary objective seems to have been to drive United States troops out of the Middle East, particularly away from the Islamic holy places in Saudi Arabia. Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, who dreamed up the skyjacking attack, came from a working class Baluchi (Pakistani) family in Kuwait; was never a pious Muslim of any variety; and had lived everywhere from North Carolina to the Philippines. His great obsession was the Palestine question and he hoped to punish America for supporting Israel (Blanchard 2005, Marlin 2004).

It is doubtful that these men could have agreed upon an answer to the question that has obsessed the West since 2001: "Why do they hate us?" Their objectives overlapped but they were never identical. Al-Qaeda, the organization that brought them together, was not a disciplined political party that maintained internal ideological homogeneity. Rather, it was a network that pooled the funds and talents of diverse *jihadi* Muslims, shopping around for opportunities where they might agree to work together against common enemies (Burke 2004). If it is not easy to generalize about the motives and characteristics of the two dozen men who organized one single atrocity, imagine how

difficult it must be to make broad inferences about the millions of Muslims who participate in other forms of political Islam.

Yet studies of political Islam usually try to do precisely this: to make homogenous claims about how religion affects the lives of more than a billion individuals who live everywhere from the jungles of Surinam to the steppes of Mongolia and whose political activity is channeled through regimes as different as the Emirate of Sharja and the French Republic. Despite this diversity, scholars have felt free to make sweeping claims such as Islam encourages war. Or peace. It is deeply authoritarian. Or compatible with democracy. It promotes fatalism and quiescence. Or it requires activism and revolution. It is irrational and obstructs modernization. Or it resembles "the Protestant ethic" and lays the foundations for modernity.

The contradictory nature of these claims suggests that there is something fundamentally wrong with the way scholars try to generalize about Islam.

THE DIVERSITY DEBATE

Studies of political Islam commonly begin from two faulty assumptions which guarantee that whatever questions are asked will generate misleading answers. The first assumption is that Muslims around the world share a common, relatively homogenous body of doctrine on a wide array of religious, social, and political matters. The second is that this doctrine is actually the primary determinant of Muslim behavior. These assumptions inform recent works, such as Samuel Huntington's famous "clash of civilizations" doctrine (Huntington 1995). But Huntington and his peers are building on the older work of Orientalist scholars who explicitly claimed that the evolution of the

Muslim world was primarily determined by its common culture and that this culture derives from single source: the text of the Holy Qur'an (Lockman 2004).

Orientalism was already challenged in the 1960s by a number of scholars, particularly anthropologists (Geertz 1971, Gilsenan 1983), who noted that while orthodox, literate, urban Islam might share similar doctrines, "folk Islam" in the villages tended to be heterodox and heterogeneous. Their critique was popularized by Edward Said in his famous study <u>Orientalism</u> and other works (Said 1978). Said argued that

> …after Muhammad's preaching and career, the faith spread into hundreds of different regions and cultures, from China and India in the east to Morocco in the West, to Europe in the north, and to Africa in the south. Each region and people who came under its sway developed its own kind of Islam. Thus, Islam is a world of many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures, and countries. A vast world of 1.2 billion people stretched out over every continent, north and south, including now the Americas, it can't adequately be apprehended or understood simply as "Islam." (Said 2002)

He concluded that serious scholarship should not begin from a presumed unity of Islamic civilization, but should "talk about different kinds of Islam, at different moments, for different people, in different fields." Serious studies should begin by focusing on specific groups of Muslims in defined periods, and be very cautious about making universal claims about Muslims elsewhere. There may be certain traits that are shared by Muslims and not by other populations, but they are not obvious and they need to be discovered rather than just posited (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996).

Sadly, Said's methodological contribution was overshadowed by his only loosely related claim that the Orientalists had been, sometimes unconsciously but often deliberately, studying Islam in order to advance Western imperialism. The whole debate over Orientalism quickly degenerated into a quarrel over who was pro-Arab and who was pro-Israeli or whatever. The truth was that even Muslim scholars who viewed themselves as opponents of imperialism often practiced methodological Orientalism. Some overstated the homogeneity of the Muslim world in order to foster a sense of unity among their co-religionists and to rebuild a single *umma,* the moral and political community, comprising all Muslims (Mandaville 2001). Others, particularly those from the classical Islamic heartland (Turkey, Iran, and the Arab world) simply knew little about the practice of Islam elsewhere and assumed that their own traditions were orthodox and universal. But the classical heartland contains less than a third of the world's Muslims: more than half live in south and Southeast Asia, where traditions are quite different.

Empirical studies have shown time and again that most of the traits that Muslims have in common are the ones they share with the rest of humanity. A recent study by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris compared surveys of attitudes in 11 Muslim majority countries during 1995 and 2000 with identical surveys in 69 other non-Muslim countries (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). These surveys showed that with respect to questions of political culture and values, Muslims did not differ significantly from Christians and other populations. Indeed, Muslims tended to show slightly more enthusiasm for democracy than Christians. The one significant difference was with respect to gender questions, where the majority of Muslims shared the same illiberal attitudes found among a minority of Christians. Even in this area, Muslim attitudes appeared to derive more

from social circumstances that from Islamic dogma: gender attitudes in more literate and industrialized Muslim countries such as Turkey tended to be distinctly more liberal than those in less developed ones such as Bangladesh.

Working from the same data, Yilmaz Esmer provided an even more nuanced portrait of the cultural similarities among Muslim countries and between them and non-Muslim countries (Esmer 2003). He did this partly by examining a more detailed set of norms (including attitudes toward hard work and social trust, not just democracy) and by comparing Muslim and non-Muslim populations within the same country (for example, Muslim vs. Orthodox Albanians). His conclusion: "It seems that one cannot speak about a clear and distinct Islamic cultural zone if one is concerned with values related to Protestant Ethic, social capital or democratic culture. But it makes sense to refer to an Islamic civilization within the context of religiosity, treatment of women, and sexual tolerance (or rather the lack thereof)."

If, at the global level, Muslims do not appear strikingly different from the heirs of other religious traditions, at the local level they differ from each other in manifold ways that the Orientalist approach has tended to neglect or occlude. Most obviously, there is the difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims (although even this is more pronounced in cities than in villages). Sunni thinkers, being part of the political and numerical majority, are more comfortable with writing their ethical edicts into public law and participating in quotidian politics. For the Shia, in contrast, individual clerics, rather than formal legal canons, are the primary arbiters of private and political morality (Cole J and Keddie R 1986).

The urban-rural divide among Muslims may actually be more important than doctrinal differences. Urban Muslims tend to be more literate and connected by long-distance trade networks than their country cousins, so they rely more upon the classical texts of the faith and have preserved greater homogeneity from one place to the next. Rural Muslims, in contrast, tend to be not only more heterodox but more heterogeneous, relying more upon local holy men for interpretations of the faith and developing idiosyncratic practices in different places (Zaman 2002 and Keddie 1972)

Since the Nineteenth Century, a third differentiation among Muslims has become increasingly potent: the development of discrete "national" versions of the faith. There have long been regional differences between places like Morocco, where exclusivist traditions prevailed, and Indonesia, where many Muslims were enthusiastically syncretic (Eickelman 1975 and Geertz 1976). But this tendency was exaggerated when the overthrow of the Ottoman and Mughal empires delivered political power to new nationalist elites. Turkish Islam, battered by a Kemalist elite that was actively hostile to traditional religion, wound up evolving in a very different direction from Islam in Egypt, where Arab nationalists sought to co-opt religion as part of the Arab cultural heritage (Yavuz 2003 and Ayubi 1993). The collapse of the old empires severed many of the transnational networks through which the Ulema had communicated and the new nationalist states imposed central control over the education of the Ulema and the management of mosques.

But perhaps the most profound, yet least understood, difference among Muslims emerged over the last two centuries with the rise of mass Islamic movements. These come in two distinct and rival varieties. Some of the largest and most widespread are

"pietistic" movements which feel that the promotion of Islam must advance by inculcating faith in individuals, rather than through the creation of an Islamic state. Some of the more influential of these pietist movements are

- The Tijaniyya Sufi order and its offshoots, which have huge followings across Africa, from Morocco and Egypt to Senegal and the Sudan (Abun-Nasr 1965, Paden 1973);

- The television ministries of Egyptian clerics such as Sheikh Sha`arawi and (increasingly) of lay preachers such as Amr Khalid, which have won them following in the Levant and the Gulf (Tammam and Haenni, 2003);

- The Fethullahis, a Turkish offshoot of the Naqshibandi Sufi order, whose media empire and schooling system now extends into Central Asia and the Balkans (Yavuz 2003);

- The Cedid, a modernist Islamic educational movement established by Russian Tatars in the 19th Century, which has gained a wide following across the former Soviet Union, particularly in Central Asia (Khalid 1998);

- The Tablighi Jamaat, the epitome of and, with twenty million followers, the largest single pietist movement, which began as an effort to revitalize the faith among rural Indians and now has branches from Malaysia to Trinidad (Masud 2000).

These pietist movements are largely ignored in the West, precisely because they are apolitical. They do not make revolutions or coups or breed terrorists. When scholars claim that "Islam is a religion of *jihad*" they are not thinking of (or perhaps even aware of) the pietists; they are focusing on the other opposing wing of the Islamic mass movements: political Islam.

A TYPOLOGY OF ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Political Islam consists of a broad array of mass movements in the Muslim world which share a conviction that political power is an essential instrument for constructing a God-fearing society. They believe that Muslims can only fulfill their religious obligations when public law sanctions and encourages pious behavior. To this end, the majority of these movements work to take control of state power, whether by propaganda, plebiscite, or putsch.

But political Islam, like other varieties, takes very different forms at distinct places and times. Other than the Qur'an itself, which provides inspiration but no unambiguous program for action, its proponents have never adhered a single text or theory. Unlike the socialists of the Nineteenth Century, its advocates have never affiliated to a single "international" and, unlike the communists of the Twentieth Century; its branches have never been supervised by a single Comintern. If its members share any common trait, it is that they all seem to fear alternative, competing interpretations of political Islam—which, for them, smack of heresy—even more than they fear non-Islamic political groups. It should not be surprising, then, that when Islamic movements engage in violence it is usually fratricidal and targets other Muslims (Sadowski 1998).

To grasp the diversity of political Islam, it is useful to begin with a typology. The best available is one constructed by the French scholar Olivier Roy back in the 1980s when he was wandering around the mountains of Afghanistan, examining the difficulties that different groups of *Mujahidin* had in cooperating together against the invading Russians. Roy discovered that these groups not only varied in terms of sect and ethnic

background, but that they also differed in the organizational forms they preferred and the social constituencies they recruited from (Roy 1990). The main sub-forms of political Islam that he identified were:

● *Traditionalist*: These groups tend to conflate Islam with local cultural practice, and to accept the political authority of local notables, saints, and holy families. Precisely because their focus is so parochial, they do not easily amalgamate into national groupings, much less attain international recognition. Perhaps the most famous traditionalist group today is the cult of the monarchy in Morocco, in which various groups of Sufis and clerics unite in support of the religious and secular authority of the king in Rabat (Hammoudi 1997). Traditionalists affiliate through a host of different organizational forms—tribes, patronage networks, and Sufi brotherhoods—but their preferred institutions are highly personalistic (Eickelman 1985, Gellner and Waterbury 1977). As other versions of political Islam have become increasingly common in the cities, traditionalist movements have been increasingly confined to rural areas, recruiting their supporters among peasants, mountaineers, and tribesmen.

● *Fundamentalist*: These groups share a mission that can be both revolutionary and reactionary: they seek to purge Islam of local or non-Muslim practices that may have crept in over the centuries and to return it to the pure practice of the faith that prevailed during the life of the Prophet. They thus make heavy use of the *hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet and his companions, which describe life in the first Islamic state (although, since dozens of compilations of *hadith* exist, various fundamentalist movements offer quite different pictures of that state). Fundamentalists believe that only carefully-trained clerics, the Ulema, can properly interpret the Qur'an and *hadith*, and they tend to accord

this caste privileged authority both in their leadership and in their plans for an Islamic state. They can organize around a variety of vehicles (Sufi orders, again, often being important), but given their clerical bent perhaps their most natural instrument is the Islamic college, known as a *madrassa* among Sunnis or a *hawza* among Shia (Del Castillo 2001, and Nakkash 2003). It was the graduates of such colleges who led the Islamic revolution in Iran and who legitimated the monarchy in Saudi Arabia. (Akhavi 1980, Yassini 1985).

The traditional recruiting ground of the fundamentalists has been among urban elites and the traditional middle classes (*bazaaris*, see Fischer 1980). Indeed, during much of the Twentieth Century fundamentalism served to reinforce the authority of these literate elites against displaced peasants and other groups that had begun to crowd into the cities. But in the 1980s, the spread of *madrassas* gave rise to a new generation of clerics recruited from the urban poor, espousing a rival—rough and vulgar—variant of fundamentalism. Olivier Roy has dubbed this tendency, which gave rise to the Taliban in Afghanistan, *neo-fundamentalism* (Roy 1994, Rashid 2000).

The fundamentalists made one great contribution to the arsenal of political Islam. At some point in the Eighteenth Century, adherents of the Naqshibandi Sufi order discovered an organizational technique that has been dubbed "the Muhammadan paradigm" (*at-tariqa al-muhammadiyya*). So that followers could fully appreciate Islam as it was experienced during the life of the Prophet, they formed small groups that sought to replicate the general stages of his career: exposure to the corrupt practices of non-Islamic society (*jahiliyya*), retreat into a pure community where each member reinforces the piety of others (*hijra*), and finally a return to the wider world with the discipline and

power necessary to propagate Islam (*fath*). Although this technique for promoting religiosity by retreating into small, self-policing groups was invented by fundamentalists, it proved so fruitful that it is now widely practiced by all of the Islamic movements (Buehler A 1998, Ruthven M 1986).

● *Islamist*: This version of political Islam emerged in response to the perceived shortcomings of fundamentalism. Traditionally-trained clerics often worked on the state payroll and were thus easily co-opted by secular authorities. Worse, their education left them ill-equipped to deal with modern issues such as economics and sociology, and unable to defend Islam from the challenge of new ideas sweeping in from the West. Islamists insisted that lay Muslims, people with experience of the world and not just of the holy texts, also have a voice in the interpretation of the faith and the construction of its political institutions. They originally formed among groups that had intense exposure to modern ideas and who had spent time in the West: university students, officers, engineers, doctors. Although it even won over a few clerics, Islamism was largely "political Islam for technocrats."

The Islamists, with their cosmopolitan backgrounds, introduced various tools they had borrowed from the West into their organizational arsenal. Ideologically, they drew upon anti-modernist philosophies that embodied Western dissatisfaction with the consequences of industrialization and positivism: Spengler, Althusser, and Feyerabend supplied some of their favorite texts (Ahmed 1992, Majid 2000). They re-articulated Islam as a modern ideology in which control of a totalistic Islamic state would permit the transformation of society in a manner that promoted not only piety but progress. Recruiting from the same intellectual groups through which Marxism penetrated the

Muslim world—and often doing jail time in the same prisons as persecuted communists—they quickly learned the advantages of organizing into parties of disciplined cadres, organized into discrete cells, that could work to lay the foundations for revolution among wider groups. This idea that Islamists should focus upon building "vanguard" parties (*tali`a*) was propounded by two figures at opposite ends of the Muslim world, who created two of its most effective movements: Sayyid Qutb, who led the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Abul-A`la Mawdudi, who established the Jama`at-i Islami in India and Pakistan (Mousalli 1993, Nasr 1994). Although never quite as prominent as it was in the Sunni world, Islamism also penetrated the Shia community through the Liberation Party of Iran and its offshoots, including the Mojahedin-i Khalq (Chehabi 1990, Abrahamian 1989, Rahnema 2000).

This typology does not exhaust the variety of modern Islamic politics, it just describes the major forms that have sustained stand-alone mass movements. There are also, for example, large numbers of Islamic *modernists* who believe that the state must represent all citizens, not just Muslims, and that application of religious law (Sharia) should be largely a private matter. This viewpoint is particularly common in countries where orthodox Muslims do not form a majority, such as India and Indonesia. (Modernism is not the same thing as pietism, which is agnostic with respect to the form of the state.) But modernists have not, except in Iran and Indonesia, formed their own mass movements. Instead, modernists have tended to affiliate themselves with other political groups, sometimes affiliating with fundamentalist or Islamist movements but most often attaching themselves to nationalist groups (Kurzman 1998).

THE ISLAMIC REFORMATION

In fact, for a full century before 1975 the majority of politically active Muslims tended to join nationalist rather than Islamic movements. Then, over the course of a single decade, the appeal of nationalism seemed to collapse and the allure of Islamic movements exploded. By 1985 many nationalist parties and the regimes they had established were on the defensive, battered by electoral challenges or even armed insurrections by political Islam.

Why did this happen? Certainly one major factor was the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran which established a fundamentalist regime (although the insurrection against the Shah had originally been made with a coalition with nationalists, Marxists, and Islamists (Abrahamian 19933). The Iranian example of an Islamic regime that could take and hold power, despite an array of challenges that included a full-scale foreign invasion, inspired Muslims around the globe. Though the Iranian paradigm encouraged the resurgence, it did not trigger it. By 1979 Islamic movements already formed the largest political parties in Egypt and Indonesia, and were mounting insurrections in Syria and Afghanistan.

The "Islamic resurgence" of the 1980s built upon a broad array of trends, including:

● *Political factors*: By 1975 it was already clear that nationalist regimes in the Muslim world had failed to create an inclusive sense of national unity. They had not been able to fulfill inter-state national unity projects (such as pan-Arab aspirations or retaining the Bengalis within Pakistan) and large groups—Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia, Dinka in the Sudan, Berbers in Algeria, etc.—felt excluded from the political community. Worse, nationalist regimes had not even made

adequate provision for national security, leaving Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia open to defeat or invasion by foreign powers. The fatal error of many nationalist regimes lay in their failure to deliver elementary services to their citizens: education, health, infrastructure, and civil order. Even poor states may provide some sense of justice to their citizens, but the nationalist regimes had become increasingly corrupt and aloof, ruled by inbred elites.

● *Economic factors*: Of course, the most important service that nationalist regimes had promised their supporters was economic development. But the populist policies (price controls, nationalization, state investment in heavy industry) initially pursued by most nationalists benefited only a minority while alienating large sections of the population, including the merchants and shopkeepers who formed the backbone of many Islamic movements. During the 1970s, the global rise of oil prices pumped more money into the economies of countries from Algeria to Indonesia, and (through workers remittances) from Morocco to Pakistan. Yet petrodollars also fueled a rise of inflation, an appreciation of the currency, and lavish opportunities for graft and corruption. In the 1980s, when oil prices collapsed, states had to cut their subsidies and public employment programs, and the gross domestic product in many Muslim countries fell by half. Azerbaijanis, for example, had to endure not only the drop of oil prices but also the economic crisis which attended the collapse of the Soviet Union (which also affected Muslim states across Central Asia) and even came under pressure during the 1997 Asian economic crisis (which devastated Indonesia and caused massive dislocations as far away as Turkey).

● *Cultural factors*: Although nationalist regimes may not have delivered economic development, they did preside over an epochal growth of urbanization and the bloating of Cairo, Istanbul, Karachi, and Djakarta into megalopoli with populations of over ten million. Urbanization, in turn, triggered a host of cultural changes. Heterodox Muslims coming from the countryside began to interact with established urban elites, usually in a way that expanded the constituency of literate, orthodox versions of Islam. Both pietist and fundamentalist groups played a prominent role in this transformation. Cities were also where Muslims came into increasing contact with the non-Muslim world—through cinemas and television, tourism and shopping malls (Adelkhah 2000, Verkaaik 2004). The share of their societies that could afford to connect to the world via satellite television, internet, and international travel steadily grew (Roy 2004, Henry and Springborg 2001, Sageman 2004). This altered consumption patterns and, more importantly, raised disturbing questions about traditional sexual expectations.

These factors encouraged an explosion in the numbers and powers of the Islamic movements (Kepel 2003). However, they were not what gave them birth. The Islamic resurgence of the 1980s was only the latest round in a series of oscillating advances and retreats by political Islam. These cycles go back at least two hundred years.

The precise origins of modern Islamic movements are obscure. Current research suggests that they may derive from intellectual ferment that reached fruition in India at the beginning of the Eighteenth Centur The Mughal emperor Akbar (d. 1605) had attempted to merge Islam and Hinduism into a single state religion. In reaction against this, a succession of Muslim scholars, from Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) to Shah Wali Ullah (d. 1762), sought to not only defend the uniqueness of Islam but to purge it of Hindu

influences. In a number of ways this program resembled the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Like Protestants, the reformers sought to purify Islam of traditions (such as the cult of saints) that had crept into it and to return it to the original form described in the holy texts; they called into question the official readings of those texts and opened up the question of who should be authorized to interpret them in the future; and they even translated the texts into the vernacular (Shah Wali Ullah made the first widely-used translation of the Qur'an into Farsi) so that believers could discover for themselves the true bases of faith (Rizvi 1980 and Hermansen 1995). These Muslim Puritans organized the first Islamic fundamentalist movements and, like the early Protestants, triggered centuries of political and social unrest (Voll 1994).

The Islamic reformation spread from India to other parts of the Muslim world partly through the migration of Ulema and other scholars (Shah Wali Ullah moved to Mecca and his disciples dominated *hadith* studies there), and partly through the reorganization of the Sufi movement. The Eighteenth Century saw the embrace of reformist ideas by existing Sufi orders such as the Naqshibandiyya and the Qadiriyya, and also a proliferation of activist "neo-Sufi" orders such as the Idrisis (Somalia and Yemen), the Khalidis (Kurdistan), the Sanusis (Libya), and the Salafis (Indonesia) that became very powerful. Curiously, the new fundamentalist program also inspired a highly influential anti-Sufi movement: the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia (Delong-bas 2004). Similar ferment spread among Shia clerics (Bayat 1982).

During the 19th century, the new Islamic movements extended their appeal, particularly on the fringes of the Muslim world where they led the resistance to European colonialism. But in the center, within the Ottoman, Qajar, and Mughal empires, the

challenge they raised to traditional Islamic authority was seen as a threat. Traditional Muslim states answered this with two tactics: co-optation and control. Sultans and Shahs began to suppress key Sufi orders by promoting the authority of orthodox clerics and expanding their control over those clerics by putting religious endowments (*awqaf*), schools (*madrassas*), and mosques under the jurisdiction of central government ministries (Moaddel 2002).

The new nationalist movements that toppled traditional empires at the beginning of the Twentieth Century preserved or expanded the programs for controlling the Islamic movements. Nationalists enjoyed a number of advantages over the Islamic movements: they were energetic modernizers who appeared to offer a more effective means for combatting colonialism; and their ideology left ample room for the participation of non-Muslims or heterodox Muslims, giving them potentially larger constituencies. In Turkey during the 1920s, these advantages allowed the militantly atheist Kemalists to confront and destroy the Islamic movements in all their variations (Navaro-Yashin 2002). But the relationship of nationalism to political Islam was not normally so confrontational. Arab, Iranian, and Indonesian nationalists proclaimed Islam a critical part of their cultural heritage, and Islamic activists in these countries often redirected their energies to support of the nationalist program (Cleveland 1985).

The Islamic movements only began to make a comeback in the 1930s—under the "new management" of the Islamists. The first Islamist movement was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna; but in 1937 Abul-A`la Mawdudi organized a similar group in India that evolved into the Jama`at-i Islami (Mitchell 1993, Nasr 1996). Islamist groups mobilized lay communities that were less

susceptible to state pressure than clerics, they espoused a transnational Islamic ideology that many found more satisfying than nationalism, and their doctrine and tactics were as modern as anything that fundamentalists, nationalists, or colonial powers could deploy against them. They quickly established disciplined branches in multiple countries.

But nationalist movements continued to dominate the Muslim world until the 1970s when their shortcomings catalyzed the Islamic resurgence. This unfolded in two distinct phases. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Islamist movements were most prominent: the Muslim Brotherhood staged revolts or launched coups in Syria, Egypt, Palestine (Hamas), and the Sudan; the Jami`at-i Islami and the Hizb-i Islami led the revolt against the Soviets in Afghanistan; and the Mojahedin-i Khalq provided the shock troops for the revolution in Iran. But as these movements were suppressed, fundamentalist movements pressed to the fore: Khomeini and his disciples in Iran, Hizbullah in Lebanon, the Groupe Islamique Arme in Algeria, the Naqshibandis and the Qadiris in Chechnya and the Philippines. Finally, in the 1990s, a series of neo-fundamentalist movements edged aside their more established rivals: the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Salafis in Saudi Arabia and the Yemen, the Ahl-i Hadith and its offshoots in Pakistan and Kashmir, and the Lashkar Jihad in Indonesia (Roy & Abu-Zahab 2004, Rana 2004).

The Islamic resurgence led to a dizzying array of political conflicts, affecting virtually every Muslim society. Yet Islamic parties actually took power in only five countries: in Iran and Afghanistan by revolution, in Sudan and Pakistan through military coups, and in Turkey by means of the ballot box. Everywhere else, insurgencies were suppressed or contained. The nationalist movements still retained broad (if less

enthusiastic) social support in many Muslim countries and controlled the state, giving them enormous advantage during internal conflicts even when opposed by well-organized Muslim movements.

SOCIAL POWER IN WEAK STATES

Political Islam is, interestingly, organized primarily through social movements rather than political parties. This is partly a result of the rarity of democracy in the Muslim world: elite salons and mass mobilization parties of the sort familiar in the West (Duverger 1954) are only legal in Turkey, Kuwait, Pakistan, and Indonesia. When Islamic movements do organize parties, therefore, they often build networks of cells on the Russian revolutionary model. Yet even these are rarely the main basis of their power. Only Hizbullah (Lebanon) has developed a central command council that allows these cells to operate in a disciplined, centralized, quasi-Leninist fashion (Hamzeh 2004, Harik 2004). This lack of cohesion is one of the reasons Islamic movements often lose struggles with state authorities, although it is also one of the features that allows them to endure long periods of repression.

The great majority of Muslims who are associated with the Islamic movements experience them primarily as social rather than political organizations. Indeed, many Islamic activists believe that transforming society is a necessary first step in the quest for political power. The influential Sudanese Islamist Hassan al-Turabi has argued that if Muslims reorganize society properly, they can let the state "wither away" into a vestigial role (Hamdi 1998). The Islamic movements have invested enormous energy into the construction of "social networks" that include employment agencies, food banks and charities, schools and nurseries, savings clubs and financial institutions, student and

professional associations, and even sports clubs and cultural gatherings. They have also worked to gain a foothold in more traditional social solidarities: tribes, family associations, castes, guilds, village councils and, of course, mosques (Fandy 2001, Simone 1994, Wickham 2002, Wiktorowicz 2004).

Through these agencies, the Islamic movements have attracted support from large groups which may not be particularly pious, much less attracted by complex political doctrines, but who simply need the services that the movements supply. The Islamic movements appeal particularly to individuals who need the services that religious groups deliver with particular effectiveness. Like "faith-based" organizations in the United States and elsewhere, the Islamic movements offer unique solutions for someone grappling with alcoholism or drugs, trying to claw their way up from poverty by starting a small business, striving to hold a family together after the death of a breadwinner, or for communities coping with crime and corruption (Wuthnow 2004). The "Muhammadan paradigm" of small groups whose members that pool their resources and provide intimate moral support, functions as well as any "twelve-step program" ever devised.

This does not mean that the Islamic movements are just another example of "strong religion" like the evangelical movement in the United States (Almond 2003, Riesebrodt 1993). In industrial societies, local groups or "civil society" may provide services which supplement or compliment those of the state. But in the Muslim world the state is usually weak and illegitimate: it may deploy an elaborate military and police apparatus, but it is often incapable of enforcing taxation or the laws, and inept at providing for the health, education, and economic development of its citizens. The Islamic movements with their social networks work to replace the state rather than to

supplement it. Their services not only build grateful constituencies, they function to further de-legitimate the state (Gellner 1994).

The social networks of the Islamic movements are only superficially similar to civil society in the West (Carapico 1998, Schwedler 1995). True, at the local level they build up trust and "social capital," while at the level of the state they provide pressures that militate against authoritarianism. But the Islamic movements do not seek to make the state more responsive to society; they strive to insulate society from the state and weaken the latter. Even the networks of trust created by the Islamic movements appear to be distinctive. Since their membership includes only Muslims, and since they often build on the foundations of traditional parochial groups (tribes and guilds), the trust they engender is often highly localized. Plagued by the sectarianism that afflicts religious and revolutionary groups alike, the "trust" engendered by a local social network often fails to extend to the larger Islamic movement, much less to society as a whole (contrast this with the Congress Party networks in India described by Varshney 2002).

THE PROBLEMS OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

This pattern of organization is responsible for what Muslims themselves consider to be some of the most serious problems of the Islamic movements. For example, in all varieties of political Islam, existing state borders, usually delineated by colonial powers, are considered to be illegitimate. Many Islamic activists insist that the entire Muslim world forms a single political community that should be united into a single state. One of their central complaints against secular nationalism has been that it failed to efface the borders that divided the Arab world, much less those that divided Arabs from Turks or Tajiks.

Yet the Islamic movements have been no more successful in this regard. Only a handful of Islamic movements (Tablighi Jamaat, the Muslim Brotherhood) have even created transnational networks, and these have involved only tiny numbers of people. No Islamic regime has merged with any other state. Instead, the parochial organization of the Islamic movements seems to have accentuated divisions between one group of Muslims and another: between Sunni and Shia, between Sharia literalists and Sufi inclusivists, and between adherents of different interpretations of political Islam.

Indeed, relations between different Muslim communities have grown dramatically worse since the 1990s. Neo-fundamentalist groups such as the Salafis (Wahhabis who reject the authority of the traditional Saudi clerics, Wiktorowicz 2001) in Algeria and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Jami`at-i Ulema-i Islam in Pakistan and the Jaysh-i Muhammad in Kashmir are strikingly less tolerant than older Islamic movements. These organizations share three frightening characteristics. First, they uphold the doctrine of *takfir* according to which any Muslim who fails in his or her religious duties may be denounced as an unbeliever. Second, they subscribe to some version of an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory according to which Jewish-controlled economic institutions, the United States government, local Muslim regimes, and impious Muslims are all working together to subvert Islam. Finally, they are violently anti-Shia, refusing to acknowledge that the Shia are even Muslims and calling for their violent suppression.

The growth of this neo-fundamentalist "inquisition" was partly a spontaneous response of certain Sunni groups to the rising prominence of the Shia after the successes of the revolution in Iran and of Hizbullah in Lebanon. But these movements were also deliberately armed and cultivated by the governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, who

viewed them as tools in a regional struggle for influence against Tehran. But they have increasingly spun out of control. The same neo-fundamentalists that have targeted the Shia minority in Pakistan and the Hazara in Afghanistan are the ones that now strike against the Shia-dominated security forces in Iraq and seek to topple the Saudi government.

Shia Islamic movements have counter-mobilized against the neo-fundamentalists but, beyond raising their own militias, they are not well equipped to address this problem. Because they are not organized as parties, the Islamic movements have little practical experience at negotiating with non-members, at forming coalitions, sharing power, or even amalgamating demands. Despite their claim that *al-islam huwa al-hall* ("Islam is the solution"), the Islamic movements lack the skill to address many of the problems states routinely face. This raises a second question for members of the Islamic movements: they have learned to thrive in opposition, but how would they handle the new responsibilities that would face them if they ever came to power?

Some analysts have noted that the Islamic movements have failed to develop a coherent program for dealing with the large-scale problems that confront Muslim societies (Roy 1994). Their economic policies, for example, differ little from the variety of populism that prevailed in the region (even among secular regimes) in the 1960s: a version of state capitalism in which price controls and consumer subsidies are supposed to combine with state control of finance and heavy industry to produce both equity and growth. This approach has not produced satisfactory results, even when applied by pious regimes with popular support, such as the Islamic republic of Iran (Nomani & Rahnema 1994).

But this is not actually the type of problem that worries Islamic activists. Those who study economic policy know that, since faith in the Washington consensus collapsed with the Thai baht in 1997, few experts believe that there is any magic recipe for economic growth, and that the Muslim countries, like everyone else, will have to grope their way toward development through a process of experimentation (Kuczynski 2003). Instead, the primary worry of Islamic activists is that, if they take power, the techniques which have served them so well at the local level will simply not work when applied to the larger problems that confront the state. Can Islamic movements that developed to help people evade state impositions also learn to help collect taxes or impose the draft? When the Islamist Tayyip Erdogan was mayor of Istanbul in the early 1990s, he had real success in using the information that Islamic networks supplied to curb corruption in the provision of municipal services and public contracting. However, when he became prime minister of Turkey in 2000, he had little success pursuing the same strategy. Corruption at the national level—involving transnational criminal mafias allied with elements of the political elite and protected by the state security services—proved much more obdurate.

DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

As the Islamic movements come closer to taking and exercising state power, one particular concern is whether they will promote or reverse democratic trends in regional politics. Some scholars have argued that Islam is "essentially" incompatible with democracy (Kedourie 1994, Berman 2003). They claim that Islam requires a totalitarian submission to God and obedience to legitimate political authorities. And in fact, some Islamic movements (particularly the Salafis) are ardently authoritarian, seeking to return to the earliest form of Islamic government: the autocratic Caliphate.

But on this issue, as on so many others, there is enormous diversity in Islam. All Muslims agree that the Sharia was originally designed to place limits on the power of rulers, guaranteeing citizens many rights and liberties (Peletz 2002, Hooker 2003). Some passages of the Qur'an require that politicians consult regularly with their followers, and the majority of Islamic movements are actually led by representative councils rather than by autocrats. An elaborate body of doctrine insisting that Islam requires some form of democracy has already developed (Esposito 2001, Hefner 2004).

In the last few decades, these democratic tendencies have been reinforced by the practical experience of the Islamic movements. As their popular support has expanded grown, Islamic activists have come to see that the ballot box might offer a short cut to power. There is an element of opportunism in this: one U.S. government official complained that political Islam viewed democracy as a matter of "one man, one vote, one time." But the logic of democracy has tended to temper and restrain this opportunism: even where the leadership of the Islamic movements is not deeply committed to democracy, they are learning that aspirations for freedom are very widespread in the Muslim world and that if they want to retain public support they need to play by democratic rules. Thus, not only the AK party in Turkey but Hizbullah in Lebanon, the Islamic Constitutional Movement in Kuwait (a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood), and the Jama`at-i Islami in Pakistan have consistent records of democratic practice. Indeed, in Indonesia the major Islamic movements (the Muhammadiyya and the Nahdat ul-Ulema) have become key pillars of the democratic regime (Hefner 2000, Bowen 2003).

Iran offers an excellent example of the prospects and perils that confront democratization in the Muslim world. Although Ayatullah Khomeini could easily have

ruled as a "benign" dictator, he and his followers actually constructed an electoral form of government that allowed the diverse subtrends of the Islamic movements to compete for a voice. Iran had fair and regular elections (untainted by the military interventions that plague Turkey) for twenty years after the revolution. In 2000, the 15 Khordad reform movement swept to power on a liberal platform: the reformers had learned during their years in opposition that democracy requires not just balloting but a wide array of civil liberties. Conservative clerics, their authority threatened by these reforms, then began using their control of the judiciary to proscribe reformist candidates from future elections. But this was not enough to terminate Iran's democratic experiment: the struggle to expand, consolidate, and define Iranian democracy goes on today, with all the participants in the debate claiming the support of Islam for their position (Moslem M 2002, Jahanbaksh F 2001).

So far experience suggests that if the social foundations for democracy are well developed, the Islamic movements may be quite happy to build on them. The problem is that in the Muslim world these foundations are still relatively weak: even the most dedicated democrats, Islamic or secular, will have trouble building free institutions in societies where people trust their tribe more than their state (Schatz 2004). Fifty years ago Seymour Martin Lipset outlined three broad conditions that disposed a society to democratization: literacy, economic development, and the growth of a large middle class (Lipset 1959). These conditions are still missing in many Muslim societies.

This does not mean, as some have claimed, that the prospects for democracy in the Muslim world are bleak. It is true that democracy is exceedingly rare in the Arab world, which many Westerners tend to conflate with the Muslim world as a whole. But

less than twenty percent of Muslims are Arabs and if we look at trends outside of the Arab world—particularly in Asia, where have of the world's Muslims live—the incidence of democracy is not markedly less than it is for the developing countries as a whole (Stepan 2003). Even in the Arab world itself (and in some of the new Muslim states of Central Asia) the primary obstacle to democratization seems to be not some enduring cultural obstacles but oil.

The one really original idea to emerge from studies of the Muslim world in recent years is the theory of the "rentier state," which explains why countries with large petrodollar revenues tend to remain authoritarian (Luciani 1990, Crystal 1990, Karl 1997, Ross 2001)). Where states enjoy large and regular revenues (rents) from oil, gas, and other resources, they do not need to rely upon taxes from their citizens. And where citizens are untaxed (and, if anything, are dependent upon subsidies and jobs supplied by the central government) they are in a very weak position to demand representative government. This tendency appears to be strong not just among Muslims or Arabs but in Russia and Angola or in any country where democracy is not already well institutionalized before the petrodollars begin to flow (Bayulgen 2005).

Fortunately for the Arabs (although not for the world economy), the value of their oil production is likely to decline markedly over the next twenty years as their reservoirs are exhausted and the world begins to shift to alternative sources of energy (Simmons 2005, Roberts 2004). This sea change may improve the economic foundations for democracy since oil (through the "Dutch disease" or the "resource curse"; Auty 1993, Kim 2003) tends to inhibit economic development. If the Islamic movements are still

paramount at that time, we will get to see a fairer test of how they respond to opportunities for democratization.

POLITICAL ISLAM AND TERRORISM

The sudden growth of interest in the democratization of the Muslim world since the September 11 catastrophe and derives from the hope that in a democratic society Muslims would be less inclined to resort to terrorism. Many Westerners, reeling from the attacks in New York, London, and Madrid, believe that Islam makes its followers more warlike than the adherents of other religions. No less an authority than Samuel Huntington has claimed precisely this, arguing that "in the early 1990s Muslims were engaged in more inter-group violence than non-Muslims, and that two-thirds to three-quarters of inter-civilizational wars were between Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam's borders are bloody, and so are its innards" (Huntington 1995).

Yet Huntington reached this conclusion using only data for the years 1992 and 1993, which were far from typical. This was the period immediately following the "Leninist extinction" of 1989, when several non-Muslim conflicts (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola) came to an end and the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union fueled a host of new ones—many of them involving Muslims: Bosnia, Kosovo, Azerbaijan, and Tajikstan. If Huntington had used data for a period ten years earlier or later his picture would have been more balanced. If he had used data for a period thirty years earlier, when Europe was struggling to hold onto its overseas colonies, the West would have appeared more violent than Islam. Indeed, the war and conflict databases maintained by international relations experts suggest that during the two centuries prior to World War Two and the nuclear stalemate that emerged around 1950, the vast majority

of wars involved Western powers. Does this mean—as some scholars have suggested (RI Moore 1991, Nirnberg 1998)—that Christians are more prone to violence than followers of other civilizations?

Indeed, the statistics of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center suggest that Muslims are involved in about 19 percent of terrorist attacks annually—just what you would expect relative to their share of the global population (Sevastopulo 2005). Detailed studies of Muslim terrorists suggest that the links between religion and their tactics are extremely weak. Many are not particularly pious: most of the 9-11 terrorists spent the weeks before the attack drinking and whoring (McDermott 2005). We have particularly good studies of Palestinian suicide bombers, and these suggest that their character is essentially the same as that of non-Muslim terrorists (Victor 2003, Davis, 2003). First, they are not crazy or irrational: they are men (or women) who believe in a cause and think that their tactics are a necessary means for advancing that cause—they are "good soldiers" whose mindset is not significantly different from that of the crews that piloted nuclear bombers during the Cold War. (Strategic bombing was, in fact, considered a form of terrorism until World War Two; Lindqvist 2003). Second, terrorists fit no single social profile. Some, particularly the foot soldiers who actually conduct the attacks, come from lower class backgrounds and are relatively uneducated. But others, especially the managers who plan the attacks, are highly educated and raised in conditions of privilege (Hudson 2002, Burke 2004).

The doctrines of terrorists do tend to share certain common features: they make absolute claims to the truth, demand blind obedience, idealize one particular period of history, they claim that their ends justify any means, and they deploy a formal concept of

holy war (Kimball 2003, Stern 2003). But these doctrines do not cause people to be

terrorists; rather, potential terrorists seem to select or construct these types of doctrines,

even when they are aware of alternative, contradictory positions. Muslim suicide

bombers are aware that the overwhelming majority of Muslim clerics have condemned

their tactics.

Most Islamic movements, in fact, do not advocate or practice terrorism, and

terrorists form a miniscule element within the politically active Muslim population. This

does not mean that Muslim terrorism is a minor problem: a very small number of men or

women can cause a massive amount of terror. However, terrorism among Muslims

appears to be concentrated in three distinct domains, each of which has its particular

rationale and traits.

Protracted suicide-bombing campaigns have been supported by some large

Islamic movements: Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the Salafis in Iraq.

They have also won popular approval among large numbers of Muslims, even those not

directly involved in the conflict (Pew 2005). Most Muslims would—rightly or

wrongly—reject the idea that these are terrorist actions. The bombings are directed

against foreigners, Israelis or Americans, whom many Muslims feel have lost their status

as non-combatants because they are occupying another country. There is nothing

particularly Islamic about this attitude: Vietnamese, Tamils in Sri Lanka, and secular

Algerian nationalists have made precisely the same claims and employed similar tactics

(Pape 2005).

A different type of terrorism has emerged in conflicts between Muslim groups.

Smaller, extremist Muslim organizations have used bombs and machine guns to kill large

numbers of Muslims that they consider to be unbelievers or apostates: the Groupe Islamique Arme massacred supporters of the secular government in Algeria, the Sipah-i Sahaba Pakistan have systematically attacked their country's Shia minority, as did the Taliban in their campaigns against the Hazara, and the various Salafi groups in Iraq have increasingly redirected their attacks from American troops to Shia gatherings. Neo-fundamentalist movements seem particularly inclined toward this type of terror. The objective and strategy behind these pogroms is quite different from assaults on foreign occupiers: they are more akin to the type of ethnic cleansing that plagued Bosnia and Rwanda (Kalyvas 2005).

Finally, the least common form of terrorism among Muslims is precisely one that concerns Westerners most: the global jihad in which small groups of Muslims, not affiliated with any large Islamic movement, volunteer to conduct attacks in Washington, Nairobi, or other locations far outside the Muslim world. Ironically, the very marginality of these movements makes them more difficult to combat. Although officials often give them names (al-Qaeda in the Middle East or Jama`a Islamiyya in Southeast Asia) that suggest the existence of formal organizations, these terrorists really work through informal networks, raising funds and acquiring weapons from diverse sources, acting independently and without central leadership. They do not enjoy sustained support from the larger Muslim population, at least partly because their objectives remain unclear.

Because these different forms of terrorism have distinct social foundations, strategies for curbing (or promoting) them need to take different forms. Suicide bombings against foreign occupiers enjoy wide public support and can best be terminated by political process that addresses the underlying grievances. Global jihad, on the other

hand, is a marginal, underground movement that requires no public support: even regime change is not going to seriously curb it. It must be fought through police actions, systematically hunting down its adherents and collapsing their cells.

WHY DO THEY HATE US?

Much of the literature on Islam since 9-11 has actually obscured the differences between these strains of terror by implying that all but a few Muslims are fundamentally hostile to Western civilization as a whole. No question produced so much hand-wringing after 9-11 as "Why do they hate us?" But this question reflects two false premises. First, the assumption (again) that all or most Muslims behave the same way. Second, the assumption that that Western values, institutions, and practices produce a deep-seated revulsion among Muslims. Nothing could be further from the truth. Most Muslims admire Western technology, industry, education, egalitarianism, and liberty. They send their children to study in the West and, given the chance, are quite happy to emigrate there (Zogby 2002). There are features of Western society that they do not admire, but these are typically the same ones that Westerners (particularly conservatives) denounce: the decline of the family and leisure, high rates of illegitimate births and crime, greed and crass materialism.

Most Muslims do not view the West as something that must be accepted or rejected *in toto*; rather they see it as a kind of smorgasbord from which they can select attractive bits while leaving others. Muslims everywhere display an eagerness to learn, borrow, and emulate features of modern society. Many Westerners tend to ignore or dismiss this activity, seeing it as incompatible with the antipathy that Muslims display for other aspects of the West. But there is no contradiction. Europeans themselves borrow

Indian cuisine, Chinese prints, Japanese gizmos, and Buddhist philosophy without embracing other parts of Asian cultures. Cultural exchange is not like riding a roller coaster, where once you have started you have to stay for the entire course (Economist, 2005).

In any case, even the unattractive features of the West do not lead Muslims to "hate" it: the decline of the family in the West is something most Muslims would want to avoid repeating, but it usually generates pity rather than rage. The only features of Western societies that engender real anger among Muslims are its foreign policies—and even here the fury is directed at particular states rather than at Western civilization per se (Defense Science Board, 2004). Chechens and Afghans hate the Russians. Moroccans and Algerians despise the French. The Indonesians loathe tourists. More Muslims rage against the United States than any other country—because Washington has a longer global reach and intervenes in the Muslim world more often. Yet even those Muslims who denounce the United States do not all do so for the same reasons. Hamas in Palestine, Hizbullah in Lebanon, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt hate America for its support of Israel; Saudi and Kuwaiti militants hate Washington for its support of their ruling dynasties (while their loyalist cousins may respect it for the same reason); Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims may denounce the USA for its role in the 1997 Asian currency crisis. Islamic militants are the first to recognize the difficulties this presents for trying to unite with their brethren in other countries: many do not feel hatred toward Western countries and those that do cannot agree upon a common focus.

SOME LESSONS

Meaningful generalizations about a subject can only be made after completing a broad survey of its particulars. Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, political scientists were able to propose some interesting—if not really conclusive—theories about how revolutions occurred because they could build upon excellent studies of particular revolts in the American colonies, in France, and in Russia. But the study of political Islam is not yet ripe for this kind of induction: the ratio of noise to signal in the existing literature is still too high. We actually have better studies of the 1979 revolution in Iran than we do of the Islamic movements that participated in it (Kazemi 1980, Arjomand 1989, Foran 1994).

Useful studies of political Islam can be written, despite the forbidding obstacles that curb research on the subject, only if scholars avoid the pitfalls and prejudices that have been sketched in this essay. The following facts, in particular, need to be kept in mind:

- Muslims societies tend to be at least as diverse as they are similar;

- There is a large gap between Islamic doctrine and Muslim practice;

- The aspirations of Muslims do not differ markedly from those of other cultures, although the means they deploy to pursue them may (this is just an instance of the famous "fundamental attribution error," see Reed 1993);

- Despite the criticisms made during the Enlightenment, religion neither prevents people from behaving rationally nor from innovating;

- The great struggles that Muslims are caught up in are structured by history but not determined by it: their outcomes may still be uncertain.

These are not facts that apply to Islam and Muslims uniquely: if you substitute Hindu, Jew, or Christian for Muslim in these statements, they remain true. It is precisely the growing respect for these facts by students of political religion in the West, and particularly of the religious right in the United States, that has led to an explosion of new and more valuable studies (Wilcox 2000, Ammerman 1987).

But in the study of political Islam most energy is still squandered trying to answer questions like "What went wrong [with Islam]?" or "Why do they hate us?" (Lewis 2002, Lewis 1990). These questions are akin to the famous barb "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?": no matter what answer is given, it will be misleading.

There is small but growing body of studies of political Islam that have been more fruitfully constructed. We have made reference to the excellent works by Hefner, Roy, Yavuz, and Wictorowicz. When studies of this caliber become standard in the field, whole new horizons will open up. Global comparisons of "fundamentalist" movements, such as the pioneering but premature work of Marty and Appleby (Marty and Appleby 1991, also see Ellens 2003) will become much more fruitful. Political scientists will be able to ask more sophisticated questions about the Muslim world, such as "Does the market theory of religion—which suggests religiosity increases as sects proliferate— explain the Islamic resurgence of the 1980s?" Finally, we will gain a richer understanding of what developments in political Islam are really special. Current studies hint that the basic form of the Islamic movements, with their elaborate social networks and their ambivalence about the state, may form a whole new branch on the tree of political evolution.

Maybe, once the guns fall silent and the polemics stop flaring, we can find out for sure.

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