Islamism *Sui Generis*
Probing the West's Construction of the 'Islamist Threat'

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Acknowledgements

This project has been both surprisingly challenging and rewarding. Sifting through the issues and the literature proved to be one of the most difficult tasks I've embarked on in my academic career, and so I must thank my thesis advisor for shining a metaphorical flashlight before me. The vast majority, if not all, of the thoughts, ideas, and methods employed in this paper are not my own. They have been borrowed from great minds ahead of me whom I have been lucky enough to inherit and learn from. Thank you.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been renewed popular and academic interest in the interaction between the state and religion, particularly in the case of Islam. The growth of Islamism has presented a challenging and interesting case, carrying particular weight in its implications for public policy. World leaders, academics, and laypeople are all asking: what is Islamism, why does it seem to be growing, and how do we deal with it?

As to be expected, these questions and the theories posed in response are both the products and agents of particular worldviews, influenced integrally by their particular intellectual context and history. This paper will explore a handful of the most prominent and influential answers supplied–and intellectual biases therein–by shining light on the web of assumptions that make up the primary framework for these understandings. I will argue that the interpretations of Islamism available today are flawed precisely because they have roots in particular concepts of social participation and progression of history that do not have emic significance. When deconstructed, it is evident that these intellectual frameworks for interpreting Islamism as a modern religiosity are uniquely 'Western.' Modernization theory in its manifold manifestations is a particular approach to understanding the world and, as such, serves specific political and civilizational motives.

This paper will focus on the case of post-September 11th scholarship on Islamism, providing one lens through which scholars might interrogate how the Western worldview has informed the way the academe understands—and, thus, also constructs—this Islamic phenomenon. The goal of this paper is not to present an alternative explanation of Islamism, nor is it to refute any of the meta-theses that are the subject of this exploration. Instead, I hope to use these scholarly interpretations as a primary source, uncovering—and perhaps, challenging—their latent assumptions. After all, many of the most interesting socio-historical phenomena are manifest in what is *not* said by the sources, but instead in what the authors take for granted. As I will demonstrate, these twenty-first century 'Orientalists' and social scientists, like their predecessors, "fulfill all the expectations created for them by their national traditions, by the politics of their nations, by the internal history of their national 'schools' of Orientalism" (Said, Orientalism, pg.264). The challenge is to understand how has this been demonstrated through the understandings of contemporary Islamism presented by today's scholars.

The significance of this project is immediately clear when one considers the drastic impacts of both bold public policy measures (domestic and foreign) taken in recent years guided by this scholarship. And, also, the cancerous growth of Islamophobia based on these general understandings. Not only is it important to find holistic answers to these questions for the sake of intellectual integrity, but also for the pragmatic pursuit of peace.

Research Question

How has modernization theory influenced and constructed contemporary academic understandings of Islamism?

Setting the Stage

To begin this exploration, it is important to define and situate several key terms and processes. All three, modernization theory, its subset: secularization theory, and Orientalism are part of "power-knowledge regime" through which the Western social sciences maintain supposedly universal paradigms for understanding social life globally (Cooper and Packard, 1997, pg.3). Making sense of these concepts and their histories is essential to approaching an understanding of the influence of modernization theory in contemporary explanations of Islamism.

<u>Modernization Theory</u>

One of the great contributions of the European Enlightenment was the introduction of the concept of 'modernization' to the intellectual vocabulary of its origin and audience: the vaguely self-circumscribed 'West'.[1] Over two hundred years later, "throughout the twentieth century, secularization, bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanization"—as the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations—have comprised "*the* master model for sociological inquiry" (Inglehart and Norris, 2004, pg.3). This model also goes by the name, modernization theory. Not only as a template used throughout contemporary sociology, this theory has also played an unquestionably influential role in all of the social sciences and humanities disciplines poised to produce scholarship about Islamic history and phenomena today. The implications of this simply cannot be ignored.

This paper will define modernization theory as *any application of a linear model of historical progress that presents the 'modern' as its end point*. The Great Transformation, as it is also referred, is fundamentally characterized by the assumption that human societies (or civilizations) are on an evolutionary path from simple to complex—medieval to modern— and that this transition is marked and measured by certain key historical patterns (Hadden, 1986, pg.587). The entire concept of modernization is a basic tautology capable of reflexively validating itself; it is both the means and the ends. In order to achieve modernization, one must effectuate modernization (Cooper and Packard, 1997, pg.3).

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[1] As defined almost solely in fundamental opposition the East, the subject of investigation.

This brand of positivism had its first articulation in eighteenth century Europe—with ideological roots that go back much farther—bringing with it a set of historically couched intellectual biases and frameworks for understanding religious phenomena. The importance of this history is that because of the evolution of the discipline of Orientalism itself, much of today's social science and area studies explorations of the Middle East and of Islam have taken these ideological roots for granted. Enlightenment biases, then, pervade contemporary discourse without requisite scrutiny. From Daniel Lerner to Ernest Gellner to Ronald Ingelhart, unapologetic assertions of modernization theory have made waves in contemporary scholarship. As attempts to qualify or rearticulate the modernization theory of their intellectual forbearers, this literature actively attempts to explain away or appropriate the growing evidence in contemporary society that challenges such a simplistic model. However, these scholars are not alone in their application of the tenets of modernization—and secularization—theory. Their work is accompanied by the burgeoning—mostly political science—post-September 11th scholarship focused on a version of Islam that is to be feared and brought under control: Islamism. Here, the assumptions of modernization theory were employed in a slightly more subtle way.

The Enlightenment is described in history books as having ushered in the triumph of Reason. The setting is significantly more complicated, however. For one, this setting also saw the birth of a new way of understanding the procession of human history: modernization. This emergence of Modernization Theory has been described in terms of the "selective systemization" of the idea of progress. Kamali explains that this led to the "periodization" of history within the minds and imaginations of Enlightenment thinkers. Human, social, and civilizational history was conceptualized in terms of discrete, identifiable chapters; the progress from one to the next was now thought of as moving along on a predictable trajectory. As evidence, we can see in the thinking of Marx, Hegel, Spencer, Weber, Durkheim and colleagues a marked proclivity to think in terms of epochs and dichotomies—the legacy of which this paper is interested in investigating (Kamali, 2006, pg.6).

Additionally, the Enlightenment witnessed the growing "otherization" of different societies—in particular, the 'East'—that were defined by specific, knowable, corresponding geographies. Orientalism was born. In dialogue, these two strands built "discursive traditions by which discourses and imagined ideal-types" became "the reality of societies"

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(Kamali, 2006, pg.2). In other words, the story told by Modernization Theory became a narrative by which the difference between the East and the West crystallized and was explained. The Occident and the Orient became ideal-types for the civilizational categories prescribed by Modernization theory, informing and concretizing its presumptions.

Over time and with the rapid "development" of Europe, the universalization of the Enlightenment became what Kamali terms "Euroversalism." The uniqueness of the West became simultaneously explained and justified by its successes at the project of modernization. In this way, modernization became a synonym for 'Westernization.' By the nineteenth century, Western imagination conceived of the rest of the world as an extension of the West; an outlook that was fairly constant through the twentieth century (Kamali, 2006, pg.6; pg.28).

Some historiographers trace the beginnings of Modernization Theory back to Aristotle, who carefully articulated the idea of a natural, linear pattern of growth. However, as stated before, the real codification of Modernization Theory happened only fairly recently; the early nineteenth century, in fact. With France and Britain experiencing wholesale reform in the wake of revolution, secularization and industrialization were taking the stage in the Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. The notion that human progress can be understood and controlled emerged. Within a few decades, the ideas of scientific racism entered the scene and gained widespread acceptance and popularity at the height of the New Imperialism period. These new 'scientific' theories helped to erase any guilt in the colonial, imperial endeavors.

In reconciling these two—universalism and imperialism—social scientists emerged with theories posing the universal laws that govern human societies. Scholars like Georg Hegel and Auguste Comte, at the very beginnings of Western social science formation, were involved in the expression of a new unilinealism that saw human societies on a spectrum of progression. By the late nineteenth century, German social scientists argued the "iron necessity" of this notion. From Karl Marx and Max Weber to Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim, a subtle optimism accompanied this interpretation of the world. All of these men saw, at the end of their imagined historical trajectory, a gloriously modern end.

With the advent of World War I, much of this academic optimism quieted. However, across the Atlantic Ocean, the optimism of Modernization Theory led to a reformed commitment of the Western world to engage with the East based on this intellectual

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foundation. Around the turn of the century, America became more and more interested in this civilizing mission— intentionally distancing themselves from the colonizing mission of Europe—as evidenced by the policies of President William McKinley, Woodrow Wilson, and the Rockefeller Foundation. In the academe, this was buttressed by the work of men like Talcott Parsons—and later, Marion Levy—in sociology and Robert Redfield in anthropology whose work was influential well into the 1960s.

Continuing through the second half of the twentieth century, Modernization Theory through 'Development Doctrine' supplied the framework through which the United States understood its responsibilities to the rest of the 'underdeveloped' world. In tandem, there was a revival of the discussion within the academe around Modernization Theory (Kamali, 2006, pg.7). By the nineteen sixties and seventies, European and American social science scholarship—at least those statements that were being taken seriously by foreign policy makers—was in tacit agreement that modernization theory was not only viable, but accurate, universal, and applicable[2].

However, starting with the Iranian Revolution, events of the recent past put the theory under increased scrutiny. Interestingly, the emergence of various religious movements across the globe prompted a reevaluation of one of the theory's key assumptions: secularization. Additionally, it prompted various rearticulations, reformulations, and reassertions of the theory as a whole. It became clear that if Modernization Theory were going to survive intact into the twenty-first century, some significant caveats would have to be defined.

A confluence of political interests cemented the Middle East and Islam as the academe's primary case study. Gilles Kepel writes in his introduction to *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*:

In the 1970s, at a time when the decay of religion in the private sphere appeared to be an irreversible trend of modern life, the sudden expansion of political groups proclaiming the Islamic state, swearing by the Koran alone, calling for Jihad, and drawing their activists from the world's great cities was an event that cast into doubt a host of previous certainties

(Kepel, 2002, pg.5)

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[2] Daniel Lerner's *Passing of Traditional Societies* stands as the hallmark of this development.

To paraphrase, twenty-first century Islamic political activity caused a crisis for the paradigm of modernization theory. Islamism was, and still is, anomalous to the accepted 'universal' model of societal progress toward the secular, capitalist, democratic eschaton. As to be expected, the contemporary 'American Orientalists' (mostly political scientists[3]) were called upon by the government and by the popular media to shed light on the paradox. The experts were "called in."

The assorted explanations they provided all privileged different facets of Islamism as a social phenomenon. For some, the explanation lied in the fact that Islamism had little to do with Islam, *per se,* but more to do with fascism. For others, they could resolve the startling peculiarity of Islamism's place in a 'modern' world by defining its actors as "no more than born-again medieval fanatics." Still others, who looked close enough to see its populist agenda, made sense of Islamism by interpreting it as the Middle East's version of socialism. Further, there were also those who saw in Islamism a type of conservatism that fit squarely into the Western political ideological vocabulary. And finally, there were also those who "began to view Islamism as the authentic creed of modern Muslims—and to see in it perhaps the outline of an Islamic civilization within the multicultural world of the coming twenty-first century" (Kepel, 2001, pg.5).

Brushing aside the startling diversity of these responses, what is almost immediately clear, is that all of these explanations came out of the systematic isolation and promotion of one or two characteristics—real or imagined—of the Islamist movements they explored as case examples. No explanation managed to explain Islamism on its own terms, holistically. As such, each represents the struggle of Western scholarship to accommodate Islamism within the framework of its core assumptions, namely those of modernization theory. Islamism is the square peg and modernization theory is the round hole. Political Islam did not, and still does not, often fit neatly within Western spectrums of ideology, socio-political behavior, or epistemology.

Admittedly, the rough historiographical classification advanced in this paper is imperfect. It is merely a useful tool for understanding some of the myriad trains of thought

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[3] While sociologists and anthropologists have contributed substantially to the debate around secularization theory, surprisingly few have contributed to the project of understanding Islamism in particular. The theoretical models and employed have largely been those of political science.

concerned with the subject of Islamism today. Like all ideas, these various ideological categories are fluid and flexible. Virtually all of the scholars that will be discussed straddle the boundaries between two or more classifications. In the end, the primary goal of this categorization is to allow for the presentation of one description of the state of turn-of-the-twenty-first century Orientalism.

It is not intended to be prescriptive. It is simply a reaffirmation of Grace Janzen's argument that Weber's dream of a neutral, objective, universal stance is pure fiction (Kamali, 2006, pg.29). By investigating the application of the presuppositions of Modernization Theory in today's scholarship on Islamism, it is clear that the social science tools for understanding and explaining this phenomenon have been profoundly shaped by their distinct Eurocentric legacy. Whatever arbitrary classification this paper lumps these authors into, they share in the "creation of an imaginary 'Western' world" whose experiences have been mistakenly universalized. Their "understandings" are no more than "socio-culturally embedded constructs of themselves and 'the Others'" (Kamali, 2006, pg.29). Modernization theory serves many of the same purposes today as it always has. At risk of parroting Glock and Hammond's thesis in *Beyond the Classics?*, little has changed.

Secularization Theory

The notion that a rationalist worldview would eventually supplant religion[4] predates Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. However, for all intents and purposes, this work can be viewed as the magnum opus of the thesis. By locating the origins of secularization theory and situating this idea historically, we can begin to understand and trace the evolution of the concept, up until today.

"The seminal social thinkers of the nineteenth century—Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—all believed that religion would gradually face in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society." They were not alone. This idea—that as societies and civilizations progress, they simultaneously secularize—was a key piece of the larger Enlightenment hypothesis regarding the linear evolution of human history. Since then, "the death of

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[4] Loosely defined in this case as a way of interpreting the world that relies on faith in the supernatural and/or superstitious dogma.

religion" has been the "conventional wisdom" across Western academia (Inglehart and Norris, 2004, pg.3). All of the social sciences are part of the legacy of the Enlightenment (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985, pg.1). As such, it is important not to forget that Secularization Theory "is very much a product of the social and cultural milieu from which it emerged" (Hadden, 1986, pg.607). In that regard, it is no exception to the rule.

To approach a more detailed definition of the concept I will borrow from Talal Asad. He explains that,

The secularization thesis in its entirety has always been at once descriptive and normative. In his impressive book on the subject, Jose Casanova points to three elements in that thesis, all of which have been taken – at least since Weber – to be essential to the development of modernity: (1) the increasing structural differentiation of social spaces resulting in the separation of religion from politics, economy, science, and so on; (2) the privatization of religion within its own sphere; and (3) the declining social significance of religious belief, commitment, and institutions (Asad, 1999, p.178).

As the hypothesis became widely accepted, the secularization of a society became a primary marker for progress toward the 'modern' societal target. Secularization can be thus understood to be "a general orienting concept that causally links the decline of religion with the process of modernization" (Hadden, 1986, pg.598). It was assumed that any society, peoples, or civilization that had not yet achieved a decline in the significance of religion and/or the separation of church and state could not be regarded as modern. In the same regard, to be modern required the 'achievement' of the secular model—as defined primarily by eighteenth and nineteenth century European intellectuals.

It is important to recognize that this thesis has changed over time and across space, acquiring layered connotations and serving different motives. When the secularization thesis is referenced in this paper, then, it is not referring the static manifestation of its original hypothesis. Instead, what is being explored is the dynamic history of the hypothesis

with roots firmly planted in its particular 'original' formulation. Luckily, we can largely trace the evolution of this idea and the cluster of associations surrounding it[5].

One example is the Enlightenment association of religion with irrationality. This, in conjunction with the widespread deification of reason, led to a significant degree of antagonism against religion. The secularization thesis fit harmoniously into Modernization Theory, and never escaped from the "silent prescriptive assertion" that the decline and eventual disappearance of religion was a "good" thing. In this way, in today's scholarship we still see a "deep and abiding antagonism to religious belief" that quietly pervades the study of Islamism, specifically through the employment of the concept of secularization (Hadden, 1986, pg.588). The explanations provided by the academic community fail to escape the subtle yet pervasive anti-religious acrimony precisely as an inheritance of the models and presumptions of the Enlightenment (Asad, 1999, pg. 182).

Another example is that of the binary proclivity of Enlightenment theorists. As discussed earlier, marked "periodization" and "otherization" of the European intellectual imagination led to the birth of Modernization Theory and its application as a tool of Western chauvinism (Kamali, 2006, pg.6). In a related way, Secularization Theory can be understood as a product of the bipolar apportioning of society into sacred and profane, private and public, church and state. These invented dichotomies continue to allege universal explanatory power in today's investigations of Islamism, even in the face of evidence that would suggest otherwise.[6]

In 1959, C. Write Mills notably and poetically wrote:

Once the world was filled with the sacred—in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due

[5] For a more detailed history (as situated within the history of the evolution of Modernization theory) see:
- (Asad, 1999, pg.185-6)
- (Hadden, 1986, pg.589)
- (Lenski, 1961, *The Religious Factor*)
- (Hammond, 1985: *The Sacred in a Secular Age*)

[6] "In the West secularization is seen as a prerequisite for democratization, but in the Middle East it is mostly associated with dictatorship, from the Shah of Iran to President Ben Ali in Tunisia" (Roy: 2004, pg.3)

course, the sacred shall disappear altogether, except, possibly, in the private realm (Mills: 1959, pg.32-33).

As his statement underscores, this idea of the inevitable decline in traditional significance of religion within modern societies is as alive today as it was during the Age of Enlightenment. We will see that the secularization thesis—as a part of pervasive presumptions about the evolution of civilizations—has played a key role in shaping our understandings of contemporary religious fundamentalism, Islamism in particular (Hadden, 1986, p.588). Many, if not all, prominent Western academic explanations of this phenomenon tip their hats to secularization theory—either posing it as a disproving example or working it in as a nuanced manifestation supporting the hypothesis.

Orientalism

Generally, Orientalism is the study of the Orient and the institutions that have developed in support of that study. However, as Edward Said has explained in detail, it is much more than just that. Orientalism has been a dramatically pervasive ideological construct that has not only influenced, but also built, understandings of the East through the eyes of the West. "Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice." At the same time, it is also "that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies" available to anyone, including scholars, attempting to understand, explore, or explain the East. Central to this concept is that, although the dynamic of the relationship between East and West have changed over time, "the line between East and West has made a certain constant impression upon Europe," and thus, the entirety of the self-proclaimed West has come into existence and persisted over time (Said, 1987, pg.73).

In order to more fully understand this concept, Said provides an explication of the four principal Orientalist dogmas:

one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a 'classical' Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn

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from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically 'objective.' A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible) (Said, 1978, pg.301)

Bundled up in this ideological strand is the perception of a "learned mistrust" of the East, by the West. As expected, this is primarily the product of a particular history that has, in equal measure, informed and shaped the evolution of Orientalism over time. The notion and nature of distinct and incompatible "civilizations," East and West, has changed in some significant and interesting ways as the "necessity" for their "estrangement" has transmuted throughout history (Said, 1978).

How did this begin? Well, the presumption of the capacity for universalization of theories can be traced found in everything from Hugo to Auerbach. Supplemented by the notion of ideal types and growing beliefs about ontological differences between societies and people, Orientalism blossomed. Additionally, informed by notions bundled up with Modernization Theory, "the West [saw] in Islam the distorted mirror of its own past" (Sayyid, 1997, pg.4). By the late nineteenth century, Orientalist scholarship was presenting a fairly static, panoramic 'vision' of the Orient (Said, 1978, pg.259).

Challenging this—because of increasing immediacy and interaction with the Orient—grew the constant pressures of narrative and specificity. This 'vision' became harder and harder to maintain in light of observed realities[7]. In order to reconcile this tension, Orientalist needed to come to terms with the idea that the Orient, then, could and did *change* over time and across space. The new impetus was to come up with a model for explaining this history that fit within the established conception of the world and aligned with widely accepted assumptions about the East. Unconsciously, Orientalists chose Modernization Theory. Modernization Theory met the conceptual needs of the Orientalist project (Said, 1987, pg.259; pg.255).

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[7] Said refers to this as the tension between 'manifest' and 'latent' Orientalism.

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With its import to America, the discipline of Orientalism—the task of exploring, understanding, and explaining the Orient—became the combined charge of Area Studies programs, social sciences, and humanities together. Almost by coincidence, the most influential of the group were the studies and opinions published by social scientists, whose relationship to state institutions of power were already established. Unsurprisingly, "still, the notion of a type—Oriental, Islamic, Arab, or whatever—endures and is nourished by similar kinds of abstractions or paradigms or types as they emerge out of the modern social sciences" (Said, 1978, pg.260).

If Orientalist study owes a great deal to modernization theory, perhaps the field of political science owes even more. This is particularly interesting and significant in light of the recent shifts in 'American Islamic Orientalism.' Now, political science is viewed as a legitimate methodological science for understanding the Islamic world. It's a preferred launching point of investigation. Lest we forget, however, that the methodology of political science has a particular history as well. No matter how much theorizing scholars are tempted to do, theories are theories, nothing more. And, as such, they are much more useful as descriptive tools rather than prescriptive ones. Theories about the way the world's societies fundamentally work are created in a certain place and time in history and serve a particular function vis-à-vis the imperial endeavor. Blindly applying these theories today is at best, problematic.

Islamism is:

In this paper, Islamism can be defined as the combined dialogue and a cluster of activities working to place Islam at the center of political order. "Islamism can range from the assertion of a Muslim subjectivity to a full-blooded attempt to reconstruct society on Islamic principles." As a "political discourse," it is akin to ideologies like socialism or liberalism, containing within it a diversity of dispositions and perspectives, but primarily focused on the reorientation of society through politics (Sayyid, 2003, pg.17). It is upon this loose definition, we see several interpretations and explanations of Islamism today.

It is also important to note, before going further, the multiplicity and conflation of terms associated with the topic at hand. Parallel to the increased attention to Islamism and Islamic phenomena in general, has been a proliferation of related terminology—some useful, and others value-laden and pejorative. In the course of all this, Islamism has been linked to and confused with Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic militancy, jihadism, orthodox and conservative Islam, Wahabism, Salafism, extremism, and many more. While in some cases these labels are used consistently and in a way that increases the reader's level of understanding with regard to the subject matter, these categories have frequently worked to muddy and confound the discourse—the affects of which range from mildly annoying semantic errors to the malignant perpetuation of misunderstanding and fear. Therefore, the importance of diction and continuity cannot be stressed enough.[8] This paper will discuss Islamism.

So, what and why is Islamism?

<u>Reactionary force against modernity</u>

Karen Armstrong has famously observed that, "religious fundamentalism represents a widespread rebellion against the hegemony of secularist modernity." She notes that "wherever a modern, Western-style society has been established, a religious counterculture has developed alongside it in conscious rebellion" (Armstrong, 2004, p.1). While Armstrong is not an academic and she is not an Orientalist, the logic she employs describes, rather poetically, a strand of reasoning that has been used to interpret Islamism as a primarily reactionary phenomenon.

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[8] I apologize for not being more careful myself.

Like many scholars, she understands Islamism as a *conscious rebellion*, self-consciously reacting to and acting against, the secular realities of modern societies. She sees the inevitable historical march toward modernity and its standard benchmarks as the catalyst for the growth in fundamentalist religion, Islam in particular. This interpretation understands Islamism as a reaction to modernity itself, essentially characterized by secularism and rationality. As such, this picture understands Islamism as a fundamental rejection of the inevitable separation between church and state. The stated goals of political Islam are interpreted simplistically as the medieval proclivity toward the conflation of sacred and secular. For these reasons, Islamists are imagined to be fundamentally irrational, if not actively antagonistic toward and allergic to modern rationality. Additionally, assertions have even been made about Islamism being a reaction to bureaucratization and urbanization as well (Sayyid, 1997, pg.14).

As is apparent from the outset, these explanations act as affirmative assertions that modernity is a singular phenomenon with a cluster of essential attributes. It additionally implies a linear evolutionary process toward a particular end, made primarily identifiable by these component attributes. Finally, this interpretation relies on a certain implicit presupposition that change, modernization, is hard. Experience of the rapidly changing world around us leads to the expectation that such dramatic global situations necessarily elicit ardent responses. In this case, Islamism is interpreted as being one such response (Berger; Almond).

Whether modernization theory is valid or not has little bearing on the fact that, as mentioned earlier, it is important to recognize its historical roots in the Enlightenment period and the biases therein (specifically, a refusal to see religion as legitimate). No explanation of Islamism can be complete without the disclosure of its core assumptions, especially those as controversial as modernization theory. Above all else, these arguments suffer from a significant lack of self-conscious transparency that denies them the ability to be accountable for their ideological conclusions.

Against The West

Another manifestation of this thesis is that Islamism is a symbolic and cultural backlash against the encroachment of the West and the ascendency of Western values and

mores. In this way, Islamism is understood as a refusal of what is perceived to be the imperial, sinful, and abhorrent culture of the West.[9]

Reacting to the remarkable explosion of scholarship on the subject, Brian Farmer maintains that Islamism "merits the attention" of scholarly inquiry precisely because of "its recent emergence as the primary challenge to the primacy of the Western democratic capitalist model" (Farmer, 2007, pg.1). The very impetus for his exploration of the phenomenon is an important assumption of regarding the nature and significance of Islamism. The launching point for his discussion is the presumption that Islamism is, essentially, the most modern manifestation of the inherent opposition between West and East. To Farmer, Islamism is mode the by which the inbuilt Eastern opposition to 'the way *we* do things' is played out in the twenty-first century.

Other scholars have noted that, in the case of Islamism, "the reaffirmation of Islam…means the repudiation of European and American influence upon local society, politics, and morals" (McNeill in Marty and Appleby, 1991, pg.569). The global cultural hegemony of the West has created a situation where a strong and public pronouncement of Islam is essentially a pronouncement of the validity of the 'Other.' Islamism is interpreted, then, as a refusal of Western cultural hegemony, as a brand of anti-Westernism.

There are also interpretations where Islamism is explained as essentially anti-democratic, anti-capitalistic, "Islamo-fascism." Islamism is given agency as a directed resistance to "Western values of the free market, democracy, and freedom of choice" (Ingersoll et al., 2001, pg.270). In order to explain this reaction, these scholars opt not to investigate the claims of Western cultural imperialism. Instead, they scoffingly note that "Islamists also object to the Western attempts to impose new cultural values…such as democracy, for example, on Islamic societies," as if the West has reached out to share with these 'Islamic societies' the ticket to liberty and modernity and, ungraciously, Islamists have spurned the gift (Farmer, 2007, pg.9). All this is explained by a blanket characterization of Islamists as opposing the abstract theories of democracy and capitalism as "un-Islamic and decadent violations of the transcendent moral order" reified by Islam (Farmer, 2007, pg.11). Fitting squarely with already familiar stereotypes of Muslim religious irrationality and

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[9] See also Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, Chapter 1: Culture Talk; or, How Not to Talk about Islam and Politics.

zealotry, this explanation seeks traction precisely through its latent utilization of Modernization Theory.

This conceptualization of Islamism seems best captured, however, through Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis. He writes,

"It should by now be clear that we are facing a model and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide importance of both" (Huntington as cited in Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.5).

Here, the new world order plays into the structuring of twenty-first century identities based on religio-cultural blocs. It is from and between these blocs, then, that modern conflict is predicted to occur.

Huntington observes that the overarching trend of Islam in the 1980s and 1990s has been anti-Western sentiment. He then attributes the majority of this to the negative images of the West held by the world's Muslims, ranging from arrogance to godlessness (Huntington, 1996, pg.213). His characterization serves to evoke an emotional self-defense in the Western reader. If there was no fundamental opposition or antagonism between East and West before, it is now well within the range of his/her intellectual imagination.[10]

While I wholeheartedly disagree with Huntington's dangerous argument, that case has already been made. Scholars far more articulate and well versed than I have presented numerous and thorough counter-arguments, primarily pointing out how this interpretation relies entirely on essentialism (Roy, 2007, p. 52). Huntington's thesis is both 'factually' inaccurate and epistemologically flawed. There is no clash of civilizations, but instead, a network of competing ideological constructions that inform the actions of individuals living across the globe. Therefore, the goal of this work is not to participate in the debate over his argument's validity, but to shed light on facets of the discussion that have been largely

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[10] It would be particularly interesting to explore the sociological reasons this particular understanding is so readily accepted and internalized in comparison to the others.

overlooked or taken for granted, particularly those that have to do with Modernization Theory.

In challenging the 'Clash Thesis,' as it has been called, Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells highlight two important and problematic "binary categorizations" at work. Firstly, they challenge "the suggestion[s] that Muslims who resist Western power…are irrational." They call out the "logic of opposition between the rational West and the irrational East" that permeates scholarship "from Samuel Huntington to Francis Fukuyama" today just as it did during the Enlightenment (Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg. 5). Secondly, they cite the imaginary binary "between the modern world and the medieval" as it is employed in Huntington's work (Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.30). The authors go on to successfully refute these binary logics and present a convincing case against the saliency of these assumptions. However, while the authors successfully unravel both of these dichotomies, they fall short of exploring their common roots. These binaries are, in essence, two sides of the same coin. They have a common historical origin and hold a significant place in the larger Western worldview. Qureshi and Sells make the first step by uncovering these silent and, likely, unselfconscious assumptions, yet fail to probe their larger significance.

In another response to Huntington, Edward Said has pointed out that this conceptualization owes, further, two central tenets to Bernard Lewis. Firstly, "the notion that civilizations are monolithic and homogenous" (Said, *The Clash of Definitions* in Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.71). Simply, the notion of clashing civilizations supposes the very existence of world civilizations with mutually exclusive and diametrically oppositional histories and beliefs. As such, these distinct civilizations—in order to 1) exist, and 2) pose opposition to one another—must be assumed to have fairly clear boundaries geographically and ideologically within which the lived experience and world view of every individual 'citizen' share some inherent similarity. "To Huntington, what he calls 'civilizational identity' is a stable and undisturbed thing" (Said in Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.79). That notion is simply preposterous.

Further, Huntington has clearly inherited the assumption of an innate duality between "us" and "them," particularly between the West and the East (Said in Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.71). It is clear that The Clash Thesis is by definition a "willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West" (Said, 1978, pg.201). As if this doesn't problematize his argument sufficiently, Huntington has inherited a great deal more than these two pillars of Orientalism.

Namely, he has inherited an assumption about the linear progression of human history and the part the East plays in that particular historiography. Perhaps unselfconsciously, he has fully adopted the idea that civilizational history demonstrates a logical evolution from medieval to modern, barbaric to civilized, irrationally religious to rationally secular (i.e. the model of Modernization Theory). Huntington's opposition of these developmental poles aligns relatively seamlessly with the opposition of West and East. As his direct intellectual predecessor, this conflation is made clear through the reasons given by Bernard Lewis for his understanding of the Orient. Lewis writes "that Islam has never modernized, that it never separated between church and state, that it has been incapable of understanding other civilizations" (Said in Qureshi and Sells, 2003, pg.71). Clearly, Huntington has failed to challenge the assumptions of Modernization Theory, much less abandon them in search of something more applicable.

The real danger in the 'clash of civilizations' hypothesis is that what it lacks in descriptive power, it makes up in prescriptive power. The assumption of modernization theory as utilized in scholarship explaining the Islamic threat points to the part that Western academia has played in the construction and actualization of Huntington's abstracted conflict, one that is launched beyond "issues, policies, and the governments that pursue them" (Lewis, 1990, pg.60). Huntington's argument takes on particular weight because it is from these conclusions that the pragmatic consequences of such conceptual biases play out on the lives of real people. At some point, no longer is the discussion an interesting thought-project; to the contrary, it is a tangible actuality affecting the shape and tone of international relations. The thesis' significance in the parallel realms of foreign policy and public opinion cannot be exaggerated.

Atavistic habit

A second, related reading of Islamism sees it largely as an atavistic phenomenon. In this way, the rhetoric used by fundamentalist Islamists is taken at face value, leading to the conclusion that the phenomenon contains within it a characteristic negative perception of time. Often, this is illustrated by the stated aspiration to reclaim state power in order to revert society to some Golden Age of Islam, as it was under the Prophet and the first four

Caliphs[11]. The alleged conservatism of Islamism paired with the observation of modern exegetical beliefs—the assertion that today's society is again is a state of *jahiliyya*, in particular—have led many scholars to acknowledge at least one facet of Islamism as atavistic in nature (Almond, 2003, pg.96; Lawrence, 1989, pg.106-119).

Among the frequent observations found in scholarship on Islamism are those citing that Islamists are deeply concerned with the re-islamization of society with a focus on family dynamics. While their religious zeal is noted, it is observed as being foremost concerned with a religion of the past. "The religion they focus on is the Islam of the seventh century, the family relations they focus on are those of traditional Islam, and the history they emphasize is Islamic history" (Farmer, 2007, pg.12). Glossing over the problems in terminology and category, it is clear that this author pinpoints a supposed uniquely Muslim proclivity toward tradition and history. One does not even have to problematize the generalizations[12] made in this statement to take note of the clear argument that Islamism is, by nature, backward-looking; as if at the heart of Islamist ideology was some perverse sociopolitical nostalgia.

This interpretation can be challenged on the grounds that it mistakenly takes the rhetoric of the movement for face value, positing the answers given by Islamists to new Western interrogation as sufficient holistic understandings. This interpretation relies on the observations that, in this 'modern' age, many Muslims have begun "to narrate their personal identities and the destiny of their communities by referring to a language derived from what they understood to be their Islamic heritage" (Sayyid, 1997, pg.2). It then digests this observation at face value, failing to probe it any deeper. While both social sciences and humanities seem primed to 'read between the lines' in certain cases, the statements made by the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, for example, often go uninterrogated as primary sources. When Islamists make claims about their focused interest in restoring the Golden Age of Islam, their statements fit into the rigid binary model held in the imaginations of Western social scientists. Islamists readily fall into the backwards bin. Rarely do these social scientists explore the instrumental power wielded by Islamists seeking legitimacy through

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[11] "Islamists view the Islamic past as glorious and hearken back" to the golden age of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Farmer, 2007: pg.26).
[12] It is never specified what exactly are the family relations of "traditional Islam," what is "traditional Islam," etc.

claims to the scriptural past and imagined history of the communities within which they operate.

Another limitation of this framework—within the context of Islam—is explained by Edward Said under the concept of a '*textual* attitude.' He explains that as a reaction to the encounter of something foreign, there is the temptation to resort to the *text* to tell us what the religion is about. Especially in the case of fundamentalism, which claims vocally to be 'true,' 'pure,' or 'uncorrupted,' there is an inclination to unquestioningly accept this interpretation, mistaking the rhetoric of religious texts, Islamist literature, and vocal ideologues for the sociology of the religion (Said, 2003, pg.92-93). The same proclivity to "return to the sources" as the site of legitimacy is a shared habit of both Orientalists and Islamists.

Additionally, this interpretation is challenged by the acceptance of—or perhaps, the realization that—Islamism is a uniquely modern phenomenon. As Roy conjectures, modern Islamism can be seen as an almost unparalled modern religiosity, simultaneously emerging from and sustaining global, twenty-first century realities. In this case, it would be logically impossible for Islamism to be primarily and fundamentally regressive[13].

Perhaps most importantly, however, this interpretation of Islamism again relies on, and seeks to hold up, the assumptions of Modernization Theory. When Islamism is reduced to the expression of some fundamental atavistic Muslim habit, it 1) assumes that Islam is prescriptive of some sort of essential culture or all-encompassing worldview, and 2) describes Islam along the same pejorative lines upon which modernization theory was originally constructed. Farmer's caricature of Islamism is the picture of an irrational obsession to return society back to some "mythical, better, vanished time." His assessment of the Islamist's view of history as resembling "mythical epic" is not only culturally insensitive, but is employed to reassert the notion that Islamists—and by extrapolation, the entire Muslim world—have a propensity toward puerility and irrationality (Farmer, 2007, pg.26).

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[13] It is widely understood that Islamists have not been shy to embrace modern technologies. When confronted with the reality that many Islamists have, in fact, adopted and exploited communications technologies almost wholesale, he chalks it up to the characteristic "hypocrisy among Islamists" (Farmer, 2006, pg.69). I am wholly unconvinced.

<u>Extreme conservatism</u>

A fourth reading of Islamism considers it a radically conservative, anti-progressive movement. Here, Islamism represents a bastion against social change. It is, therefore, understood not simply a reaction to, but also a resistance toward the realities of modernization. In this way, the phenomenon in question is interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the liberalization of societies as they evolve toward secular, rational, modernity (Lawrence, 1989, p. 27; Antoun, 2001, pg.117-119).

As an extension of his earlier caricature, Farmer asserts that because Islamism can be defined as "an extremist form of traditional conservative ideology," it can be best understood "not as an inherent theory, but as a positional ideology" (Farmer, 2007, pg.8). In this case, its situational opposite is progress toward rational, secular modernity and the liberal values and institutions that come bundled with it. Through this model, Islamism, like all conservative ideologies, has emerged with the intention to remind society of the value of and necessity in certain existing social institutions, precisely at the point in time when those foundations are perceived as being under threat (Huntington, 1957, pg.455). As such, Islamism is explained as a type of communal anxiety that refuses to "recognize that society and its institutions may continually change, develop, evolve, or improve" (Farmer, 2007, pg.9). This interpretation of Islamism sees it anchored firmly in the traditions and imagined history of an underdeveloped civilization.

A particularly illustrative example can be found in Brian Farmer's paraphrasing of Lewis. He writes, "Bernard Lewis (1982, pg.222-223) explains that innovation *[a translation of the Arabic term which carries significantly different connotations than the English equivalent]*, in the Muslim tradition (as could be expected from any traditional conservative ideological perspective), is generally 'assumed to be bad unless it can be shown to be good.'" He goes on to deduce that "Islamists therefore" wholly reject "all reason and critical thinking outside the Koran" (Farmer, 2007, pg.68). Through a combination of faulty logic, the conflation of terminology, the exploitation of stereotypes, and a limited understanding of both Arabic language and Islamic tradition Farmer is able to uphold the assumptions of both Orientalism and Modernization Theory. The picture of Islamism he paints is not only located in the medieval, but oriented toward it and mired in it.

Farmer cites the works of both Lewis and Huff in his unapologetic assertion that "Islamic history has been one of rejection" of both the technologies and knowledge developed

by the West (Farmer, 2007, pg.69). Temporarily suspending the assumption that centuries of diverse history spanning across the globe can be singularly categorized as rejectionist, the rejection that he seems to be referring to is one of modernization. Perhaps this observation is as much the product of both gross overgeneralizations as it is a striking inability to see in Islamic history anything that does not reaffirm preexisting conclusions about the shape of human history and the place of the Muslim world within it.

The limits of this understanding are clearer when one examines the assumptions that underpin it and the contemporary social realities that refute them. This interpretation of Islamism sees it as static, not possessing within it the seeds of social change. This view assumes political Islam to be fundamentally fixed.   However, while many Islamists stress social conservatism, the rise of political Islam shines as a glaring example of the intimate relationship between Islamism and social change (Cohen, 2000, pg.166). In a very real way, Islamism has social and political change at its very core; the ultimate goal is to 'Islamize' society. In this way, one might posit reform, not anti-progressivism, as the central characteristic of Islamism (Berger, 1999, pg.104-106).

Beyond arguments of its saliency, however, there are important ties between the conclusions of this explanation of Islamism and the assumptions of Modernization Theory. With regard to the fate of Islamism and the Muslim world in the coming centuries, Farmer is relatively pessimistic. Firstly, he conjectures the eventual failure of Islamism on the grounds that it will likely collapse "for the same reasons that Christian theocracy failed in the seventeenth century" (Farmer, 2007, pg.216). In his understanding, Islamism is bound to fail because, as history has taught us, there is a fundamental untenability and impracticability in the conflation of religious and secular authority[14]. It doesn't take a high-powered microscope, or even a critical analysis, to see the blatant assumptions of Modernization Theory at play. The assumption is that there is one path of historical progression, along which the West is furthest ahead, that can be used as a yardstick for the rest of the world's civilizations. The untenability and impracticability of theocracy in the West is used as an indicator of the universal truth in theocracy's unsustainability. Farmer is simply waiting on the Muslim world to mirror the West (Farmer, 2007, pg.215-218).

Further, Farmer insists that Islamism as conservatism has a negative view of the state of nature, supporting the idea that society needs constraints and partial to the notion

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[14] …as the West figured out post-Westphalia.

of a transcendent moral order (Farmer, 2007, pg.10-11). In other words, Islamism as conservatism is pro-religion and, therefore, regressive. By squeezing Islamism into the familiar American political spectrum, he is able to label Islamism in a way that, again, squarely fits the framework of Modernization Theory and allows for Islamism to be easily cast into religious, irrational, backward, medieval bin.

These assumptions are almost as obvious to Farmer as the Muslim world's desperate need for "a true Muslim 'Enlightenment' that breaks the bonds of dogmatic zealotry, crazed conservatism, and intellectual backwardness, and opens up the realm of Islam to new ideas and the kind of free thinking that has existed in the West since the Enlightenment" (Farmer, 2007, pg.216). To crudely paraphrase, Farmer prescribes that Muslim world is in need of some good, old-fashioned progress. Continuing his previous line of logic, Farmer prescribes for the Muslim world the next logical historical evolutionary marker in Modernization Theory: Enlightenment.

What is, perhaps, even more striking is Farmer's stated skepticism that Islam is capable of such a progressive step toward modernity. He posits the usual handful of essential characteristics of Islam that will likely contribute to the sustained retardation of the entire Muslim world. The first dangerous assumption is that there exist identifiable "essential characteristics" across Islamic 'civilization,' more specifically, defined along religious terms. The second is that these characteristics are responsible for putting the brakes on this civilization's development.

Farmer's clear supposition is that the Islamism is a symptom—perhaps the birth pangs—of the Muslim world's Great Transformation along the same civilizational trajectory that the West has both dreamt up, and lived out, in the last two centuries. In the words of Edward Said, Farmer chooses to see the Muslim world as "an imitation of the West," explaining Islamism primarily in direct comparison to its "counterparts in the West" (Said, 1978, pg.321; Farmer, 2007, pg.26). This stance pervades the entire work[15].

Farmer's work digests the phenomenon of Islamism—and the entirety of Islamic political and religious history—through the vocabulary and theoretical framework most readily available to him, that of Western political science scholarship. What is not so transparent is that these models have a long and controversial history. Modernization

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[15] For example, he maintains that we can understand Islamism's "traditional conservatism" through a comparison with the Westboro Baptist Church and the Red Scare of 1919 (Farmer, 2007, pg.23, 32).

Theory has more than a few ideological skeletons in its closet, yet Farmer does not think twice about employing its assumptions. Simply, he does not recognize them as being culturally or "civilizationally" specific. To Farmer, the assumptions of Modernization Theory are undisputed and universally relevant. There is one road to a singular modernity.

<u>Exploitation of modernity</u>

The final interpretation I will briefly explore in this paper is the understanding that Islamism is a 'bulldozer for modernity.' This understanding seems to be a nuanced hybrid of several other interpretations, posing a conceptual response to both the first and fourth understandings presented above. It largely understands fundamentalist Islam to serve a liberalizing function, as it undermines and uproots traditional Islamic social and political institutions. This 'indigenous exploitation of modernity' is therefore almost aggressively modern and progressive by definition (Fukuyama, 1992)[16]. Further, scholars like Olivier Roy note that most Islamists view many of the realities of modernity to be "opportunit[ies], not loss[es]" (Roy, 2004, pg.29). He notes that uniquely modern realities like radical individualization and deterritorialization are fundamental to the Islamist project, not to mention the exploitation of modern communication technologies. In a globalized world, Islamists, like any and all other political actors, are no longer anchored to community and geography in the same ways they had been before (Roy, 2004, pg.38). It is unsurprising, then, that these new global conditions give rise to forms of Islamic political behavior that take advantage—and even promote—these new realities.

Pessimistically, however, Roy argues that "the use of the concept of civil society by Islamists…leads to the delinking of religion and state politics" (Roy, 2004, pg.91). To this ends, Islamists have not and will not accomplish their goals "not only due to the inaccuracy of their conceptual framework, but also to the way their own political praxis and experiences have changed their perception of politics" (Roy, 2004, pg.61). Essentially, Roy is arguing that because Islamists have inadvertently participated in the rooting of the nation-state model in the Middle East, they cannot possibly succeed in actualizing their ideologized

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[16] Other examples of similar theses include Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities,* Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam, Globalized Islam,* and Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*

alternative. Islamist movements "have been secularized by the very process of politicization. Political logic won over religious [logic], instead of promoting it" (Roy, 2004, pg.61).

The major shortfall of this conceptualization lies in the fact that it completely discredits the religious aspect of Islamism. In this, it demonstrates the proclivity to dismiss religion that has been carried along with the assumptions of Modernization Theory. This understanding sees the religious element of Islamist behavior to be primarily a remnant of historical and cultural history that will simply fall away after social reform is achieved. In a sense, the religious nature of the phenomenon is seen as simply rhetorical. While Roy's interpretation is a useful intellectual endeavor, as it forces one to think about Islamism in new ways, it seems to make the polar opposite error as Huntington's essentialism. Also, if we are to accept Islamism as a uniquely modern religiosity, tailored for the realities of modern society, then there is no reason to expect the religious façade of Islamism as a social movement to fade away.

Facet of global religious resurgence?

Running across many of the aforementioned explanations of Islamism—the last in particular—is the assumption that Islamism is a vocal segment of a "rise in religious ideology across the globe" (Farmer, pg.1). This, then, provides for a brief exposition of the discussion around this supposed postmodern increase in global religiosity. I will argue that, perhaps, identifying an actual global resurgence of Islam is negligibly significant to an understanding of Islamism; the most crucial are the perceptions and assumptions of this rise in Islamic religiosity. The efflorescence of scholarship on Islamism not in response to a worldwide increase in Islam, but rather, in response to the "anxiety" created by this suggestion (Sayyid, 1997, pg.3).

For scholars like Farmer, one of the key assumptions at work is that "the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a revival of the role of religious political ideology on the global political stage." This assumption is so central, in fact, that this is the very first sentence of his *Understanding Radical Islam*. He is not alone, however. The first sentence of Bobby Sayyid's *A Fundamental Fear* frames his critique of 'mainstream' explanations of Islamism within the context of a global Islamic resurgence as well (Sayyid, 1997, pg.1). The questions these scholars are asking, from Farmer to Sayyid,

are predicated on the assumption that Islamism is a phenomenon worth scholastic attention primarily as an important facet of some global religious resurgence. Islamism represents a challenging case in the larger project of understanding the eventual secularization of the world. In other words, for many, the idea of an Islamic resurgence "signals the return of all that puts into question the idea of the progressive liberation of humanity" (Sayyid, 1997, pg.4).

To expand on Sayyid's observation, however, anxiety created around the idea of Islamism is not only in response to a direct challenge of Western political and cultural hegemony. Islamism challenges the assumption that only in the West are individuals truly free to be thoroughly modern. As a representative of the persistence, if not reassertion, of religion (especially in the socio-political sphere) in the twenty-first century, Islamism problematizes the Secularization hypothesis. Cleverly, defenders of the hypothesis simply use Islamism as and indicator of the failure of the modernization process, making Western secularism a necessary condition of modernity and employing Modernization Theory to further label the Muslim world as civilizationally backward.

The larger conclusion still remains, however, that we can only fully explain the efflorescence of scholarly interest in Islamism by citing the challenge its proponents declare against the West, culturally and politically. Contemporary Orientalism is interested in Islamism because of the tension it creates around the assumptions of Modernization Theory, particularly the secularization hypothesis. The threat of Islamism is, perhaps, greatest to the ways in which Western scholarship domesticates the progress of human history.

Religion?

"The concept of 'religion' is the product of the culturally specific discursive processes of Christian history in the West" and was "forged in the crucible" of its particular European historical experience with strong roots in the Enlightenment (King, pg.40). It is in this understanding that the category of religion enters into the discussion at hand. In what ways has Modernization Theory come to life in contemporary scholarship on Islamism through the exploitation of this unselfconsciously narrow, or 'civilizationally specific,' definition of religion?

To answer this question, first, the particular relationship between Islamism and Islam in these various explanations needs to be more clearly understood. If the recognition

of global religious revival is to have any explanatory power, or any significance for the case of Islamism, then we must agree to certain assumptions regarding the particularly religious and Muslim nature of Islamist phenomenon.

All this is predicated on the understanding that a universal definition of religion is impossible. Not only because each case highlighted brings with it a specific cultural and historical context, but "the definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes" (Asad, as paraphrased in Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, 1992, pg.7). This is not to say that the project is lost, nor that scholars need to approach some sort of consensus regarding a definition of Islam. It is simply to assert that we cannot continue to take for granted our definitions of religion, especially in the case of Islam. Scholars must make both their working definitions and the conclusions drawn from them as explicit as possible. Only then is the reader adequately enabled to think critically about the conclusions made. To deny transparency of these issues is to perpetuate the cultural imperialism alive through the inheritance of our scholastic history.

Interestingly, the jury seems to be out as to whether Islamism has anything, really, to do with Islam or religion in general. Opinions range from understandings of Islamism that assume that there are essential attributes of Islam that serve as the starting point for Islamist ideology and activity, to understandings that see Islam as a hollow veneer over the "real" political motivators behind Islamism. At the heart of virtually all of the myriad interpretations are both a distinct definition of 'religion' and a distinct definition of Islam. The first mistake of most of the scholarship on Islamism is to take these definitions for granted. The categories have been so abused, that to outline each of the permutations would be a thesis in and of itself. Therefore, I will simply attempt to highlight several key interpretations, illustrating how the particular definitions of religion and Islam have provided a space within which the assumptions of modernization theory have been employed.

Many scholars, particularly social scientists, have participated in what Bobby Sayyid refers to as a 'hauntology' of Islam whereby Muslims "don't really exist." Their identity, at best, is secondary. As such, there is a good deal of scholarship that tends to dismiss Islam as a determinant or relevant factor in Islamist behavior. When explored, the scholarship tends to work on the assumption that there are people of the East who happen to be Muslim, "but there are no Muslims. The possibility of a Muslim subjectivity is undermined by notions of class and ethnicity, kinship and caste or tribe and clan." In this context, Muslim identity is

hollow. It does not have the capacity to shape or influence the sociopolitical behavior of individuals or groups. Islam is a primitive vocabulary, an instrument, a vehicle for real driving factors (Sayyid, 1997, pg.1).

Interpretations and explanations of Islamism as articulations of Third World nationalism or as a facet of a growing fundamentalist phenomenon dismiss Islam *sui generis*. For these scholars, Islamism is, then, the expression of "countless political, economic, and social frustrations" through the religious veneer of Islam (Kepel, 2001, pg.15). To use Kepel as an example, Islamism is explained as a "political blueprint." Like communism, it is a socio-economic model and political ideology around which popular movements across the globe have coalesced. Islamism's initial success was in its emergence as the legitimate vehicle for the expression of real sociopolitical discontent throughout much of the Muslim world. Its failure was due to the movements' blanket inability to deliver the Islamic "utopia" it envisioned and, thus, sustain widespread faith in the project's "workability" (Kepel, 2001, pg.366). In this version of the story, Islamism—as you may have noticed—has very little to do with Islam as a religion, *really*.

To probe further, Kepel defines religion as a "way of life," malleable and defined through the lived experience of its adherents (Kepel, 2001, pg.373). It does not have the capacity to prescribe, or even influence, the way one sees and experiences the world. It is the way in which one sees and experiences the world—economically, politically, and socially—that influence, and perhaps prescribe, the nature of a religion. Lumped into that category, Islam, "like any other religion," has the innate capacity to take the "shape and form" of any socio-political model. In a sense, Kepel dismisses Islam as an irrelevant, non-determinative factor.

By making this move, his explanation of Islamism can easily end with the conclusion that "today, as Muslim societies emerge from the Islamist era, it is through openness to the world and to democracy that they will construct their future. There is no longer any real alternative" (Kepel, 2001, pg.373). Islamism is no longer an anomaly to the assumptions Modernization Theory. In communism's footprints, it fits into the meta-historical narrative like all other failed socio-political experiments. The assumption of civilizational evolution toward the eventual triumph of democracy is maintained and upheld.

Kepel is not the only scholar who engages the question of how much Islamism has to do with Islam as a religion. Another popular answer to this particular question explains Islamism as simply the exploitation of Islam as a social institution and political apparatus.

John Hunwick presents a fairly straightforward exposition of this particular model for understanding the relationship between secular and religion authority in Muslim societies. With an unapologetic broad brush, he cites a "constant tension in the Muslim world between the realities of secular power and the idealism of those who claim religious authority, which has tended to find its most powerful expression in moments of economic and social disruption—the current period of 'Islamic re-assertion' being a clear case in point." He argues that religious authorities have long acted as "lightning rods for popular discontent" in Muslim societies. Through co-optation or suppression in various forms[17], secular authorities throughout history have found ways to deal with popular discontent articulated and expressed through the Muslim religious authorities and organizations. In this view, these societies are understood through a model within which religious authority provides the primary platform from which the voice of the everyman can challenge secular state authority (Hunwick, 1996, pg.176). Contemporary Islamism, then, is the modern manifestation of this 'Eastern' socio-political paradigm.

Further, much of the scholarship on Islamism employs the observation that religion "seems to have a tendency to be very easily drawn upon as a source of imagery and language in the discourse of a conflict and to become melded together with secular motivations" (Marsh, 2007, pg.811). Marsh, in particular, presents a hybrid tri-fold model for explaining the role of Islam. He writes that religion plays a part on three levels: cognitive, societal, and international. Additionally, he notes, "the relative importance of religion varies greatly at each level" (Marsh, 2007, pg.824). This schema allows one to recognize the individual, psychological saliency of Islam, the communal significance of Islamic tradition, shared history, and culture, and finally, the abstracted geo-political influences that all inform the relationship between the Islam and the secular authority.

While Hunwick and others explicitly instrumentalize religion and Islam to understand their subject, even other scholars less self-consciously rely on this model. In whatever shape or form, the idea that religion is a hollow vocabulary for expressing social, economic, and political realities is nothing new. The idea has roots in the Enlightenment, just as other ideas about fundamental opposition between the Occident and Orient, the triumph of reason, the irrationality of religion, and the linear progression of history. Their conflation was as real then as it is now. Restated, the assumption of the hollowness of

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[17] Further, Hunwick outlines five various forms that this relationship can take: 1)

religion made by today's scholars—employed to explain Islamism as an essentially socio-political phenomenon—is made possible by Enlightenment conclusions regarding the nature of religion and is informed by Modernization Theory.

Other scholars make the opposite move. To paraphrase Shale Horowitz, there is a long list of "characteristics of Islamic political doctrine"—outlined in von Grunebaum's *Classical Islam,* Inayat's *Modern Islamic Political Thought,* Karsh's *Islamic Imperialism* and Lewis's *The Middle East*—that have been used to understand and explain the phenomenon of Islamism (Horowitz, 2007, pg.914). These authors work under the assumptions that Islam has "certain relatively constant ideological, political, and geopolitical characteristics…[whose] political impact and importance has varied dramatically over time" (Horowitz, 2007, pg.915). Each in their own way, these scholars point to essential features and characteristics Islam as a religious tradition that have purportedly direct implications for Muslim political activity and, therefore, explain Islamism. As such, these scholars assert that Islam does indeed have a great deal to do with Islamism. Islam is responsible for Islamism.

One example is the supposition that Islam inherently places an "ideological emphasis on the religious community's exclusive national identity and purpose." For Horowitz, a classic political scientist, this prompts an exploration of the role of Islam in the global project of "reconciling territorial sovereignty and national self-determination," the creation of the post-Westphalian nation-state (Horowitz, 2007, pg.915). Applied to his other assumptions about the eventual triumph of the nation-state, this definition of Islam leads him to the conclusion that Islamism can be best explained as the post-Communism ideological vehicle for ethnic conflict. When Horowitz investigates the question, "how does Islam—and its essential, universal attributes—complicate the new world order?," he is already employing Modernization Theory. The definition of religion and the characterization of Islam that he employs allow him to situate Islamism within his existing modernization matrix.

At the end of all of this, it is worth noting that tweezing apart the comingling and mutually informing threads of politics and religion can be difficult, if not impossible. Any attempt to isolate the different factors, as part of understanding which part of an Islamist movement is religiously informed and which part is socio-economically or politically motivated, is largely fruitless. There is also a degree of pragmatic irrelevance. Often, the

significance of the various elements is ignited through their interplay. The act of compartmentalizing facets of the situation betrays the reality of their interdependence, and therefore, fundamentally leads away from a better understanding the conflict. Nevertheless, any understanding of Islamism must come to terms with its own working definitions of both religion and Islam, making clear the specific role they are attributed to playing in any explanation of the phenomenon as a whole.

Conclusions

In recent years, Western social science seems to have been so preoccupied with the challenge of creating theoretical models to explain Islamism that it has forgotten to—or, perhaps, have had little incentive to—justify many of the fundamental assumptions that hold up these arguments. This is not to say that this preoccupation invalidates these assumptions, but rather, that it demonstrates and participates in a larger, less-understood historical situation. Borrowing from Masoud Kamali, Islamism has been presented along the lines of "a conflict between the modern, democratic and secularized civilization of the 'Western world' and the traditional, non-democratic and religious 'Islamic world'…Such a critical standpoint often forgets the complicity of the social sciences in the creation of an image of human societies based on a primordial separation and…established tradition of a single modernity" (Kamali, 2006, pg.viii).

Early modern Orientalism, with Modernization Theory, emerged in the particular intellectual landscape of nineteenth century Europe. As such, it was in dialogue with and absorbed many of the ideas that, as history has proved, have left a distinct imprint on the world[18]. This web of ideas—including but not limited to, racial hierarchy, linear progression of history, irrationality of religion, triumph of reason, civilization, otherness of the Orient— crystallized into dichotomies that continue to be employed today in scholarship about the Middle East and about Islam (the confluence of which is another thesis in and of itself). Therefore, to pinpoint the application of these bipolar models of civilized and uncivilized, rational and irrational, modern and medieval, progressive and backward, indicate the fundamental assumptions of Modernization Theory alive and at work in today's scholarship on Islamism. Additionally, the relationship between these ideas and global political structure was inherited by the disciplines of Western social science from their particular historical context. These "binary typologies" were created in part to serve and justify imperialism. Simultaneously participating in the projects of contemporary Orientalism and American cultural, economic, and political hegemony, they often serve the same function today.

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[18] One example is that of scientific racism. As Said points out, "theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves…with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality" (Said, 1978, pg.206).

As such, this exploration of the assumptions at the heart of contemporary explanations of Islamism has demonstrated that today's scholarship has inherited the intellectual vocabulary of its predecessors. Consequently, it is informed by these aforementioned particular concepts and ideas. Restated, the models available for understanding Islamic phenomenon of the twenty-first century have been constrained by the parochialisms of the past. Therefore, the very assumptions that hold up these interpretations are dangerously unsuitable for universal application. Further, the continued unqualified supposition of Modernization Theory and its intellectual relatives actively reifies and perpetuates this scholarship's grim conclusions.

Echoing Said's sentiment, the most important conclusion alluded to in this paper has been that the application of Modernization Theory has played, and continues to play, a key role in the Orientalist project. I do not hope to have drawn any conclusions about the accuracy of Modernization Theory or the theses about Islamism that it has informed. Instead, I hope to have highlighted the theory's astonishingly influential role in today's investigations, understandings, and explanations of Islamism. I hope to have presented an interpretation of the way in which these representations, like most, operate "for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (Said, 1978, pg.237). The case of contemporary Islamism has provided an opportunity to uncover the core assumptions of Modernization Theory employed by Western social scientists exploring and theorizing about the Middle East and about Islam.

A deep investment in Western imperialism continues to be the project's main catalyst. Therefore, to understand these ideas as products of particular histories and worldviews allows us to critically think about the ways in which our explanations of the East participate in Western imperialism. Importantly, we know that "any comprehensive vision [like Modernization Theory] is fundamentally conservative, and we have noted how in the history of ideas about the Near Orient in the West these ideas have maintained themselves regardless of any evidence disputing them. (Indeed, we can argue that these ideas produce evidence that proves their validity) (Said, 1978, pg.239). These arguments are built to reinforce themselves. Thus, to confront imperialism we must not only point out its injustice (the fact that its assumptions are inaccurate), but also locate and understand its tools.

To what degree, then, does the rampant and continued application of Modernization Theory in understanding Islamism participate in its own validation? To what degree do

claims of fundamentally opposed civilizations with bloody borders function to make themselves a reality?

Huntington himself observes that "growing Muslim anti-Westernism has been paralleled by expanding concern with the 'Islamic threat" (Huntington, 1996, pg.215). Qureshi and Sell's critique of the "Construction of the Muslim Enemy" hints at the reality that Orientalism and Islamism are two faces of the same coin. They operate under the same sets of assumptions, participating in a dialogue that creates its own bloody borders. Perhaps, unchallenged assumptions regarding the universality of Western social science theory are as problematic for the Middle East today as they were over two hundred years ago. The illusory abstraction of the academe from the subjects of its investigation has blurred any possible understanding of Islamism. As modern anthropology has taught us, the scholar is fundamentally a participant in the object of his inquiry. The same has always been true about Orientalism and continues to be true with regard to contemporary Western social science explorations of Islamist phenomena.

I maintain that in order to understand Islamism, we must challenge both Orientalist and Islamist assumptions of this intellectual distance. Under careful scrutiny, we will likely find that the histories of both are fundamentally interrelated. As long as there has been a dialogue about the Orient, there have been participants on either side of the imaginary line of division. The creation of 'civilizations' involves human actors in dialogue over centuries. To buy into these categories limits our both ability to truly understand history and to create alternative futures.

What has hopefully been demonstrated is that the 'clash of civilizations' debate is, in essence, also the secularization debate. "Their definition of fundamentalism is only made possible by accepting that the site of their interventions is a universal space—where normality reigns—and that fundamentalism marks that practices which disrupt the normal" (Sayyid, 1997, pg.15). The question of inherently oppositional civilizations and the question of the progressive secularization of humanity are both questions regarding the universality of Modernization Theory, the persistence of which continues to turn scholars into instruments, "special agents," of Western power (Said, 1978, pg.223).

In terms of today's dialogue between the constructed East and West, what seems to be in question for the Islamic world is the fundamental validity of a Muslim worldview. The West has demanded an explanation of, and a justification for, the paradigm through which Muslims interpret the world—assuming, of course, that there is some monolithic conception

of the world most significantly informed by Islam itself and, therefore, shared by all the world's Muslims. On the other hand, what is in question for the Western academe responding to the aforementioned call is simply the accuracy and explanatory power of the arguments and interpretations they have produced. The worldview that frames these productions has received significantly less attention. We have very little explanation of, or justification for, the paradigm through which the West interprets the world (and especially, the East). While the exposition of this historical situation is best left to greats like Edward Said, this paper is an attempt to explain, and a call to justify, one important element of the Western worldview as it is frequently employed in understanding the Orient; namely, Modernization Theory.

"We can accept the proposition that liberal humanism, of which Orientalism has historically been one department, retards the process of enlarged and enlarging meaning through which true understanding can be attained"

Said, *Orientalism*, pg.254

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