

**Deconstructing the IR Meta-Narrative:  
Creating Space for Theorizing on Political Islam**

*In order to preserve in political science the freedom of spirit to which we have become accustomed in mathematics, I have been careful not to ridicule human behaviour, neither to deplore nor condemn, but to understand.*

-Benedict de Spinoza<sup>1</sup>

**Chapter One**

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In the summer of 1993, the controversial Harvard scholar, Samuel Huntington, published an essay in *Foreign Affairs* entitled “The Clash of Civilizations” that was intended as a rebuttal to rival State Department theorist, Francis Fukuyama's “end-of-history” thesis. In this essay, Huntington argues that while the defeat of the Soviet Union had ended all ideological disputes, it did not signify the end of history, since culture, rather than politics or economics, would, in the future, have the greatest impact on world affairs. “The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to argue that the principal clash will be between Western and non-Western civilisations, paying specific attention to what he sees as the fundamental disagreements, actual or potential, between what he calls the West, on the one hand, and the Islamic and Confucian civilisations on the other.

In the book of the same title that followed this now renowned/notorious article, Huntington lists several events which took place in 1993 that he believes illustrate the danger posed to the world order by the growing fault lines between these civilisations. While several of the events that Huntington lists as fitting within his “civilizational paradigm” are not directly related to the Muslim world,<sup>3</sup> in his final analysis, he makes clear that of all the possible global war scenarios, the most probable would “come about from the escalation of a fault line war between groups from different civilizations, most likely involving Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other.”

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the introduction to Giles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam*, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> These events include: “the refocusing in parallel fashion of Russian and NATO military planners on ‘the threat from the South’”; “the voting, apparently almost entirely along civilizational lines that gave the 2000 Olympics to Sydney rather than Beijing”; “the breaking of the moratorium and the testing of a nuclear weapon by China, despite vigorous U.S. protests, and North Korea’s refusal to participate further in talks on its own nuclear weapons program”. Huntington, 1996, p. 38; *Ibid.*, p. 312

While the accuracy and relevance of Huntington's theories is debatable (see Chapter Two for my own critique), his success at bringing the discussion of culture and religion from the margins of political science scholarship to the mainstream is undisputable. Above all, his impact can be seen in the literature on political Islam.<sup>4</sup> One need only browse through the indexes of books written on the subject over the last decade to realize the extent of his impact; rare is the author who does not refer to Huntington to either fervently refute or defend his thesis. Although one could look at the proliferation of books and articles, in part due to the debate catalyzed by Huntington, seeking to explain the origins and increasing popularity of political Islam in the Muslim world as a positive development in terms of bringing the West closer to understanding this potentially regional, if not world, altering development, and thus averting the allegedly imminent 'clash of civilizations', unfortunately, celebration must be muted, as a good portion of this literature is equally guilty of stoking the 'clash' flames, though often inadvertently. In this chapter, I will argue that the explanatory and dialogue-fostering potential of much of this work is limited by its adherence to the "modern rationalist" perspective, which assumes that Islamism "is a reflex reaction to certain political or socio-economic circumstances" that generally arise as a result of the impact of globalization, outside intervention, or internal 'modernization' processes.<sup>5</sup> Although I will focus here on the modern rationalist perspective, which is dominant in mainstream analyses of political Islam, I do not deny the increasingly significant body of work on the subject that has been written from a variety of alternative perspectives, many of which will be considered in second chapter of this thesis, as well as in the conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of the term *political Islam* (which I will use throughout interchangeably with *Islamism*), I employ in this thesis is similar to that employed by Bobby Sayyid's definition of the "Islamist" movement: those political movements which place their Muslim identity at the centre of their political practice, which use the "language of Islamic metaphors to think through their political destinies", and which see "in Islam their political future." Sayyid, 1997, p. 17. To this definition I would also add the political nature of these movements which generally use "political rather than violent means and characteristically organise themselves as political parties" International Crisis Group, Middle East/North Africa Report #37, 2 March 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Euben, 1999: 23. The analysis in this thesis is heavily influenced not only by Euben's definition of this term, but by also by her approach to understanding political Islam in general. From this point on, I will use the term without quotation marks.

<sup>6</sup> Included amongst the authors whose work I will consider in the final chapter are those who view political Islam as a modern political phenomenon and who argue that, even if the *raison d'être* of Islamist movements is to limit the impact of certain elements of what they view as an overly westernized modernity on their societies, they are not inherently anti-modern. Many of these authors argue that Islamism should therefore be viewed within the same theoretical framework as other modern political movements from across the world, e.g.: (Burke, 2000); (Esposito, 1992); (Zubaida, 1989); (Tibi, 1998), (Eisensdtadt, 2000); (Halliday, 2000, 2002); (Rajendram, 2002); (Juergensmeyer, 1993); (Benannani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003:35); (Wedeen, 2003); (Kepel, 2000); and (Fuller, 1999), and those who view Islamism as a post modern movement, and who hold that even if the writings, proclamations and actions of Islamist leaders/movements take place within a modern context and employ modern notions and concepts, one cannot overlook their underlying message and intent, which has to do with a rejection of not only certain aspects of modernity such as secularism, but rejection of the entire Enlightenment derived foundation on which modernity rests, e.g. (Sayyid, 1997) and (Euben, 1997)

In modern rationalist analyses, the language of Islam is seen as little more than a ruse for political actors who instrumentalize their religion as a means of mobilizing support for their otherwise political, or worldly agendas. In other words, “[t]he role of Islam is strictly secondary and mystifying. Islam is seen as a mere vocabulary through which legitimacy and representation are mediated.”<sup>7</sup> This methodological approach was commendably developed in large part as an antidote to the orientalist analyses that have characterized much of the western literature on Islam and the Muslim world for the past several centuries, as described in the introduction; however, because of the epistemological roots it shares with its more traditional orientalist counterpart, it has been unable to escape the logic of ‘othering’, though in the modern rationalist methodology, more attention is paid to the “temporal” and “ethical”, as opposed to the “spatial”, dimensions of the ‘other’.<sup>8</sup> Although most scholars today no longer find it acceptable to explain Islamist movements, or the culture/ ‘civilization’ from which they derive, as completely incomparable with political movements originating in the West, and hence incapable of being grasped through the same analytical tools used to understand and explain western political phenomena, it is still deemed acceptable to view Islamist movements as “temporally”, in so far as they are viewed as less evolved than their western, secular counterparts, and “ethically”, in so far as they reject Enlightenment-derived notions of rights and freedom, distinct and unequal.<sup>9</sup>

Before examining in further depth the actual impact of the modern rationalist paradigm on the discourse of political Islam, as well as the relationship of this discourse to an aggressive U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis political Islam, it is important to first examine the possible explanations for why mainstream IR analyses often seem unwilling, or incapable of theorizing about political Islam as more than a mere independent variable, amongst many, capable of explaining what are deemed more substantial issues, such as security, conflict, and social, economic and political development (or lack of) in the Muslim world, rather than as a dependent variable itself in need of explaining/understanding. Through this examination, it will become clear why the modern rationalist approach to political Islam is dominant, both in mainstream IR, and in western thought, in general.

The discipline of IR, like that of the other disciplines comprising the social sciences, and natural sciences, for that matter, is a product of the world within which it has developed. It is for this reason that one needs to trace the roots of the discipline, as well as of the concepts on which it is based, in order to fully comprehend the methodologies and subject matter chosen (or not chosen) by academics within the discipline, as well as the effects these may have on the actual practice of international relations, by their impact on the construction and formulation of foreign policy priorities. More specifically, in this

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<sup>7</sup> Sayyid, 1997, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Said’s Orientalism, the book, theory, and methodology, will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter. For now, a brief definition of the term should suffice: it is the discourse through which the colonial Other is represented/created by the West as subordinate, thus providing an intellectual foundation for material domination of the ‘Orient’.

<sup>9</sup> As Lene Hansen has noted, often discourses do not involve a construction of the Other as completely superior to Self, rather the construction of this distinction is generally a more nuanced enterprise, involving the use of “spatial, temporal and ethical constructions” to distinguish Self from Other. Hansen, 2006, pp. 46-51.

thesis, it will be argued that the types of aggressive policies adopted vis-à-vis political Islam and in relation to the U.S. sponsored ‘war on terror’, can only be fully understood once the discipline’s “own sociology of knowledge” is uncovered.<sup>10</sup>

It is in an effort to thoroughly examine the discipline's “own sociology of knowledge” that I will explore the various narratives, or versions of history used to describe some of the central concepts from which IR theory is derived. As Cynthia Weber has pointed out, “IR Theory is a site of cultural practice in which conscious and unconscious ideologies are circulated through stories that *appear* to be true.” (Weber, 2001: 6) By exploring the various narratives/stories that form the basis of IR theory, I hope to expose some of mainstream IR’s central assumptions as they relate to the way in which Islamist movements are viewed (if considered at all) by the discipline. The three IR narratives I will focus on in this chapter are: 1) the narrative of the state, based on the particular historical development of the European state; and 2) the narrative of modernity, based on Europe’s economic, political and social development and, 3) the narrative of the Enlightenment, and the various concepts and methodologies associated with it. All these narratives relate to the epistemology of IR, in the sense that they have influenced “what kinds of things” exist in the discipline, e.g., the principles by which one may distinguish that which is true from that which is not.<sup>11</sup> The uncritical acceptance of its epistemological roots in eurocentric, rationalist, Enlightenment-based thought has, in turn, influenced the ontology of mainstream IR, making it difficult to understand and empathize with the worldviews of people, groups, and movements, etc., which adhere to different ontological foundations. As Vendulka Kubáľková argues in “it is infeasible to discuss religion in IR without appreciating that the difference in religious and secular thought is ontological, i.e., in what in each of them ‘counts for real.’”<sup>12</sup>

In order to avoid accusations of constructing a ‘red herring’ with what might appear to be an oversimplification of the mainstream narratives, and in an effort to bring much needed nuance to the argument, each narrative will be followed by a summary of the various critiques that have been levelled at them from within the western social sciences themselves. Each of these sections will in turn be followed by a summary of some of the Islamic challenges to the mainstream narratives, pointing out similarities and differences between the latter two in an effort to engage the two genres of critical thought. As Euben argues, the fact that many of these critiques overlap in areas “suggests that, in a colonial and postcolonial world in particular, questions that define political theory have ceased to be, if they ever solely were, Western.”<sup>13</sup> The point of this chapter is not to detract from the very vibrant and plural tradition of critical thought that has developed within the IR discipline over the past 20 years, but rather to add to that tradition by pointing out an additional way the mainstream narrative, which still maintains a powerful sway over the study of relations between the states and peoples of the world, can be challenged. And, as David Campbell has argued in regards to challenging various elements of the mainstream IR narratives, although challenges to various elements of the mainstream IR narratives do

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<sup>10</sup> Halliday, 1994

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 1996

<sup>12</sup> Kubáľková, 2000: 683

<sup>13</sup> Euben, 1999: 123

“not involve writing the ‘true’ and ‘correct’ historical narrative to replace that which is in error”, they do attempt to “establish the space for a retheorization of foreign policy via the problematization” of these traditional narratives.<sup>14</sup>

I will argue in this chapter that, together, the mainstream narratives constitute what Bobby Sayyid describes as a “meta-narrative” for the discipline (one that is similar to the meta-narratives employed in the various other disciplines comprising the social sciences). As Sayyid explains, a meta-narrative is a narrative which not only refers to other narratives, but is the “narrative by which other narratives are adjudicated... [T]he meta-narrative establishes itself as such by the exercising of power as a discourse capable of judging others...[U]ltimately, a meta-narrative is a construction of domination, a ‘regime of truth.’” (Sayyid, 1997: 118) Through examining the potential challenge of Islam(ism) to the discipline’s meta-narrative, I will examine its limits in judging and understanding narratives that exist outside of its own narrow jurisdiction. Though I am aware that the uncritical use of such terms as the ‘Muslim world’ and the ‘West’, both of which are constructed concepts with varying degrees of correspondence to any tangible reality, can be conceived as a problematic starting place for this sort of inquiry, their use in this context is to examine the dominant worldviews commonly associated with each, rather than to approximate some ‘objective’ reality, a usage which I believe helps to overcome rather than add to essentialist views of both.<sup>15</sup> I am also aware of the possible critiques that can be levelled at my analysis for using Islam as the alternative narrative with which to expose the limits of the mainstream IR meta-narrative in analyzing developments in the Middle East, considering the various other vibrant narratives that have developed out of the region, which is the focus of this thesis, including Arab nationalism, socialism, and various liberal, secular ideologies. In my defence, I would argue that Islam continues to serve as the ‘master-signifier’<sup>16</sup> for a majority in the Muslim world and as “a central criterion of reference, despite the inroads made by secularism, westernization and, more recently, globalization.”<sup>17</sup> Islam is also the only one of these narratives to pose an epistemological and ontological, as well as strategic, threat to the West, both at present and throughout the West’s long and complicated relationship with the Muslim world.

This chapter will conclude by arguing that it is a result of mainstream IR’s meta-narrative, and of its ability to exclude and judge the worldviews of movements that exist outside of its own narrow ‘spatial’, ‘temporal’, and ‘ethical’ boundaries, that Islamist movements, and their potential to affect and be affected by international relations, are

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell, 1992: p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> For a good summary of the critical perspectives on ‘Western’ identity, in particular vis-à-vis its relationship with its Muslim Other, see Zachary Lockman, pp. 8-38. For a similarly critical view of the Islam/ ‘Muslim world’ see Said 1978 and Sayyid 1997.

<sup>16</sup> As for the term ‘master signifier’, Said explains that despite the fact that there are discourses in which Islam is merely one element, amongst many, which can be construed as forming the “structure” of the “chains of signification”, nonetheless, “in a totalized universe of meaning we find a multiplicity of nodal points operating to structure the chains of signification, but among them we find one specific signifier- the master signifier- which functions at the level of the totality (that is, it retroactively constitutes that universe of meaning as a unified totality).” In the ‘Muslim world’, or those states where a significant majority of the population consider themselves Muslim, that master signifier is Islam. Sayyid, 1997, pg. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Maha Azzam, “Islamism revisited,” *International Affairs* (82:6 (2006) 1119-1132.

either marginalized, or largely misunderstood, not only within the academic discourse, but within the wider political and popular discourse on political Islam as well. It is only once this meta-narrative is deconstructed, that Islamism, in all of its complexity, can be understood, not only in terms of the larger picture - of what Islamic movements share in common with other political movements across the world that have also been influenced by the major social and economic processes that have transformed the world over the last several centuries, but also in the ways in which they are different, though not inferior, because of the specific religious, cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts in which they developed.

### **The Mainstream Narrative of the Sovereign State**

While the roots of the modern state system can be found in antiquity (e.g. the Greek city-states (800 BC-168 BC)), the narrative of the state, as told within IR, is that the modern state system is a European construct that emerged in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, achieved maturity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, culminating with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. For those seeking to trace the birth of the “liberal, constitutional sovereign state” though, the date and event evoked are, 1789 and the French Revolution, when the notion that a state’s sovereignty was achieved only with the consent and support of ‘the people’ was first elaborated by the French *philosophes*, “who, according to Thomas Paine, “excoriated the Westphalian states for their egotistical power struggles that sustained the domestic rule of the parasitic ‘plundering classes.’”<sup>18</sup>

Despite minor disagreements over the exact origins and timing of this development, Brown argues that there is a general consensus within IR that several factors played a role in the creation of the modern state system, including: the birth of capitalism and changes in the process of production; modern science and technology (specifically weapons technology and improvements in ship design); and the emergence of the Protestant religions and the concomitant break-up of the universal church.<sup>19</sup> In his article “Reformulating International Relations Theory: African Insights and Challenges,” Assis Malaquias points out a fourth factor, namely that the “development of the modern European state coincided with tendencies to create unifying cultures around a dominant language.”<sup>20</sup> Karen Armstrong contends that it is for this reason that the birth of the modern European state entailed a religious cleansing of sorts that would enable the new state to consolidate and justify its power as being the legitimate representation of one specific group of people. She traces the first modern European State to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Inquisition and the subsequent Counter-Reformation.<sup>21</sup> Together, these factors combined to fuse the nation and the state into a single political entity: the nation-state. A crucial feature of the newfound European state was its success in inducing the population within its borders to transfer loyalty from the metaphysical nation to the physical state.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bickerton, Cunliffe and Gourevitch, 2007: 9

<sup>19</sup> Brown, 1997: 70

<sup>20</sup> (Malaquias, 2001: 13

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, 2004

<sup>22</sup> Malaquias, 2001

Another important component of the mainstream IR narrative of the development of the modern, sovereign nation-state, was its secular nature, where it is assumed that during this period, the state came “to be constituted by a secularized eschatology in which one form of social organization and identity (the church) completely gives way to another (the state) at a readily identifiable juncture (the Peace of Westphalia).”<sup>23</sup> According to this narrative, it was the elimination of God (and his representatives on earth via the institutions of the Church) from the realm of socio-political affairs that cleared the way for a truly sovereign politics, one that “involves both material capacity in its institutionalized forms, such as the public power of the state, *and* the subjective will of every citizen,” as opposed to the “divine power” that preceded it.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Western Social Science Critiques of the Narrative of the Sovereign State*

Despite its centrality within IR, there has been a growing tendency within the discipline to challenge the mainstream narrative of the state and its concomitant theory of sovereignty. These challenges range from the less confrontational ‘historical sociological’ approaches, which “like realism...give prominence to the state”, though believe the state itself must be a ground of inquiry rather than taken as a given, where consideration is given to the “context, socio-economic and international, in which it [the state] is located and reproduced,”<sup>25</sup> to the more radical critical studies which start from the premise nation-states are “unavoidably paradoxical entities that do not possess prediscursive, stable identities.”<sup>26</sup> As the editors of “Politics Without Sovereignty, A Critique of Contemporary International Relations,” have recently pointed out, this criticism includes both empirical studies that claim to prove the increasing irrelevance of the sovereign nation-state as conceived by the mainstream narrative and normative ones that advocate an end to state sovereignty as we know it for various “moral and political” reasons.<sup>27</sup>

David Campbell, for example, found it necessary to begin his critical study of U.S. foreign policy and the “politics of identity” by first deconstructing the mainstream IR narrative of the modern nation-state. In regards to the post-Westphalian secularization of the state he points out that historical sociological studies of the origins of the modern, Western state have concluded “that there was neither a clean nor a clear break between the social formations of Christendom and subsequent sovereign communities,” a fact that was significant in post-Westphalian state construction and “ordering of identity

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<sup>23</sup> Campbell, 1998: p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Bickerton, Cunliffe and Gourevitch, 2007: 10-11

<sup>25</sup> Halliday, 2005: pps. 35 and 43.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, 1998: p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Although the editors discuss these trends, they do so disparagingly, as the stated purpose of the book is to “argue that the current movement against state sovereignty participates in the degradation of political agency at both the domestic and international levels. The case against sovereignty is generally cast as a way of opening up our political possibility, and to sever the relationship between the exercise of power and new possibilities for organizing the world. But its substance is to limit our sense of political possibility, and to sever the relationship between the exercise of power and political responsibility.” Bickerton, Cunliffe and Gourevitch, 2007: 1

difference.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, he argues against a facile understanding of the history of the modern nation-state according to which the states to emerge from the Peace of Westphalia were uniform in substance or form, as they ranged from the “despotically powerful French monarch, through the infrastructurally more organized English constitutional monarch (albeit consumed by civil war in the period), to the weak confederacy that was the mosaic of German petty states. Each of these forms has to be distinguished among themselves, from others existing earlier (such as the federated cities of the Hanseatic League or the maritime empire of Venice), and in contrast to the considerably more intensive form of the modern state. Moreover, the development of these diverse state forms was a multifaceted process that was neither linear nor progressive.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the critical inquiries into the origins of the narrative of the western sovereign nation-state, many scholars today, both from the critical and liberal ends of the IR spectrum, have questioned their adequacy as concepts capable of explaining economic and political relations in the globalized, post-modern world that we inhabit today. Most prominent amongst these critiques have been Susan Strange’s *The Retreat of the State* (1997), which argues that “the rise of global financial networks, multinational corporations, regional trading blocs and expansion of the world economy has rendered the nation-state obsolete”; David Held’s (2003) *Violence, Law and Justice in a Global Age*, in which he similarly predicts the final days of the nation-state, though focusing on the “internationalization of communication and culture”; the liberal Robert Keohane, who believes “that the indivisible and inalienable right of sovereignty has been transformed into something that can be traded away”; and, Stephen Krasner, who argues that “sovereignty has always been a kind of ‘organized hypocrisy’, in which formal sovereign status fails to correspond with actual respect for sovereignty.”<sup>30</sup>

Taking a different perspective on similar developments, Campbell argues with urgency that the present state of affairs is:

more than just a result of interdependence, the proliferation of threats, or the overflowing of domestic issues onto the world stage (the conventional response). This is an irruption of contingencies that renders all established containers problematic. This irruption does not simply involve the movement of problems from one domain to the other, but rather the rendering asunder of those domains and their entailments. It makes little sense to speak of politics occurring in terms of a distinct “inside” or “outside” (such as a “Third World” that is spatially beyond our borders and temporally backward)...<sup>31</sup>

For critical IR thinkers like David Campbell, the problematization of the mainstream narrative of the development of the sovereign nation-state necessarily has normative

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<sup>28</sup> Campbell, 1998: p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> Bickerton, Cunliffe and Gourevitch, 2007: 4-7

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, 1998: p. 18.

implications: if not historically accurate, then what purpose does it serve, he asks. For Campbell, the importance of this narrative is to justify the ontological status of the state and normalize the “inside” “outside” distinctions on which it is predicated and which are inherent to the realist understanding of the anarchical nature of the international realm, and hence the type of power politics that are necessary to secure a state’s survival in it. To challenge this narrative thus means to show that the state actually has “no essence, no ontological status that exists prior to and is served by either police or war. Instead, ‘the state’ is ‘the mobile effect of a multiple regime of governmentality,’ of which the practices of police, war, and foreign policy/Foreign Policy are all a part.”<sup>32</sup> Other critical/post-modern IR theorists such as Andrew Linklater and Richard Ashley have also questioned the role of the sovereign nation state in maintaining the status quo and have instead argued for “post-national” conceptions of citizenship that seek to overcome not only the types of conflict and suffering inherent in the realist-conceived and constructed international system, but the very (inter-subjective) identities and relationships that make them inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these various challenges to the narrative of the state that have developed within the discipline, several assumptions of the state (e.g. that states are the dominant actors in the system, that their sovereignty is derived from the support and will of the ‘people’, that they are “exogenously constituted,” that they define security in ‘self-interested’ terms, etc.)<sup>34</sup> still dominate mainstream IR analyses. That this is so is a testament to a wide acceptance within IR of the eurocentric version of the origins of the state from which the generally accepted definition of the state employed by IR scholars is derived. This definition, which Halliday terms “national-territorial totality,” is “replete with legal and value assumptions (i.e. that states are equal, that they control their territory, that they coincide with nations, that they represent their peoples)”, all of which render problematic its use as a universal concept with the potential to accurately explain all relations between states across the globe.<sup>35</sup> Though the limitations of realism, including its “neglect of ideology and belief systems, minimisation of factors internal to states and societies, inadequate attention to economics, and...[its] view of inter-state relations marked by timeless, recurrent, patterns,” have been widely acknowledged by scholars in the field, the theory still holds sway for those lured by its ability to offer seemingly objective and parsimonious explanations of international relations.<sup>36</sup>

### *Islamic/Islamist Critiques of the Narrative of the Sovereign State*

If adherence to the mainstream narrative of the state may still be justifiable when assessing international relations of states whose development paralleled that of the Westphalian states, an assertion that, as demonstrated above, has come under increasing attack by more critical strains within IR, its uncritical use in most other instances is even

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<sup>32</sup> Campbell, 1998: 202.

<sup>33</sup> Bickerton, Cunliffe and Gourevitch, 2007: 4

<sup>34</sup> Wendt, 1994, p. 77. Wendt argues that while “neorealists and neoliberals may disagree about the extent to which states are motivated by relative versus absolute gains...both groups take the self-interested state as the starting point for theory.”

<sup>35</sup> Halliday, 1994: 78)

<sup>36</sup> Kubáľková, 2000: 675

more problematic. Scholars that focus on the international relations of non-western parts of the world, for example, have argued that the European state differs fundamentally from the post-colonial state in its origins and subsequent development; therefore, they find the mainstream narrative of the western sovereign state inadequate as a means of explaining developments in these regions. Similar to critical western IR tradition discussed above, these analyses also start by problematizing the narrative of the origins of the state, though they tend to focus on its inability to explain the particular development of non-western states as opposed to challenging its empirical accuracy in the context of a globalized world. For example, from an African perspective of state development, it is argued that whereas the European state emerged from a process that included the secularisation of politics, the industrial revolution and the development of capitalism, and the moulding of nation identities through cultural and linguistic homogenisation, the African states “did not emerge as a result of a long period of social, economic, political, scientific, and religious development determined by Africans,” but rather are a result of “colonial imposition created to serve Western, not African, interests”.<sup>37</sup>

In critiquing the use of the eurocentric narrative and definition of the sovereign nation-state to explain the post-colonial situation in Africa, most academics focus on the arbitrary/illegitimate nature of the territorial African state, and the subsequent persistence of ethnonationalism as a reaction to excessive and unwelcome centralizing and/or homogenizing tendencies of the state.<sup>38</sup> There are also concerns raised about the legitimacy of African leaders and the problems this poses for IR theorists interested in utilizing an objective, rationalist concept of ‘national interest’ (as, for example, defined by Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations*). John F. Clark in his essay, “Africa’s International Relations in the Post-Cold War Era,” that the concept of national interest fails patently in Africa, for at least two reasons. First, African states were largely defined territorially by Europe and are thus comprised of people belonging to different ethnicities (or clans) who do not conceive of themselves as a nation. As a result, the leaders of these states are just as likely to pursue sub-national, or, I would add, transnational (e.g. ethnic or religious) interests as they are state-wide interests. Second, underlying the notion that leaders will pursue the interests of their populations is the assumption that they understand and feel accountable to these populations. “However, in colonial and post-colonial Africa, many heads of state have felt little or no obligation to their populations, and have shown that they are just as likely to pursue the interests of their foreign sponsors as that of their own citizens.”<sup>39</sup> Although the same could be said about many non-African states, the colonial history and neo-colonial present renders the African state more prone to both a diminished negative and positive sovereignty.

While their colonial history explains some of the overlapping characteristics marking the development of several Muslim states with that of their African counterparts (not to mention the fact that several of these African states are Muslim as well), it could be argued that the development of the Muslim state, or those states comprised of peoples formerly belonging to the caliphate system that developed in the aftermath of the Prophet

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<sup>37</sup> Malaquias, 2001: 13

<sup>38</sup> Malaquias, 2001, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Clark, 2001, p. 92.

Mohammed's death, differs from the European state in two additional ways: the people of these states have traditionally felt a greater allegiance to the larger, transnational community (*ummah*), which was delineated by the borders of religion (Islam) rather than by physical borders, language and ethnicity; and Muslim states, because of their unique historical development and epistemological and ontological realities, have not secularized in the same manner and to the same extent as their European counterparts.<sup>40</sup> Both of these factors also affect the Islamic critique of sovereignty, a concept, as discussed above, that has been challenged extensively within western social sciences as well, albeit from a different perspective. While most western critiques of the concept of sovereignty associated with the mainstream narrative of the state focus on its inability to accurately describe the current status of the state in a post-modern world where territorial boundaries are increasingly irrelevant, the Islamic critique believes the state has never actually been a sovereign entity as it is only God who is sovereign, and people merely represent His will on earth. As Bobby Sayyid argues, its for this reason that "Islamists explicitly reject nationalism, declaring that 'an Islamic state' is not a nationalistic state because ultimate allegiance is owed to God and thereby to the community of all believers - the *ummah*. One can never stop at any national frontier and say the nation is absolute, an ultimate end in itself."<sup>41</sup> According to this argument, citizens of the Muslim world, prior to the abolishment of the Turkish Caliphate, may have formed families, clans, communities, regions and allegiances, which were themselves delineated by physical boundaries, "but their 'countries' of origin did not imply their nationality".<sup>42</sup>

Even for the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century 'Islamic modernists', who actively sought out innovative means of resisting an increasingly powerful Europe as it encroached upon Islam's weakening borders, some of which involved mimicking the methods and tools of their western counterparts, the idea of dividing up the ailing Ottoman empire into separate nation-states was greeted with scepticism. Muhammad 'Abduh, the most famous of these modernist philosophers who came the closest to advocating acceptance of the nation-state as an organizing principle capable of resisting the numerous threats emanating from Europe, saw the division of the *ummah* into separate nation-states as a last resort, and one that should be mitigated by strict adherence by the newly formed states to the central precepts of Islam. It was for this reason that 'Abduh referred to the state in terms reminiscent of the Caliphate, e.g. as '*al-khliafat al-Islamiyyah*, or *hukumat al-khilafah* (government of the Caliphate), in order to stress what he believed was the necessary continuity between the former and the latter.<sup>43</sup> As Enayat has pointed out, 'Abduh "acknowledged the difficulties the Muslim world would confront in restoring a truly just (in the eyes of Allah) Caliphate, [and] argued that the only alternative was the nearest arrangement to it: the Islamic State. Yet even in recognizing this, 'Abduh argued cogently against the Muslims' adoption of foreign, mainly Western, laws and

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<sup>40</sup> Despite the proliferation of historical accounts that are dismissive of the role played by the caliphate in unifying the Muslim world throughout Islam's history, Sayyid argues that one should not ignore the fact that "from the death of the Prophet until 3 March 1924, there was always a caliph," and that the caliph ensured the recognition of Islam as a 'master signifier' for Muslims. Sayyid, 1997, pp. 55-56.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> Nassib, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Enayat, 2005.

institutions.”<sup>44</sup> Though many in the Muslim world came to support the idea of the nation-state as a necessary tool to resist European imperialism, the recognition that there was a “basic contradiction between nationalism as a time-bound set of principles related to the qualities of and needs of a particular group of human beings, and Islam as an eternal, universalist message, drawing no distinction between its adherents except on the criterion of their piety,” meant this support was tenuous and therefore capable of being reversed.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, there remained hope among many of the advocates of this strategy that it was merely a first phase in the struggle to regain a sovereign, and territorially succinct Muslim *ummah*, and that the “liberation of the respective country or administrative zone was a further step in the direction of one all-embracing Islamic entity.”<sup>46</sup>

Even the leaders of what came to be known as the Arab Revolt, the group of Arab tribes who fought on the side of the British against the Ottoman Empire in World War I, in the hopes of attaining some sort of territorial independence for their peoples independent of the increasingly defunct Ottoman Empire, saw their long-term and overriding goal as eventually returning to the distinct Islamic system of rule: the Caliphate. In the words of the Nuri al-Said, “comrade-in-arms” of the leader of the Revolt, Hussein ibn Ali of the Hashemite family, who later would serve several terms as prime-minister of mandate Iraq:

All Arabs and particularly those of the Near and Middle East have deep down in their hearts the feeling that they are “members of one another.” The “nationalism” springs from the Muslim feeling of brotherhood enjoined on them by the Prophet Muhammad in his last public speech. It differs therefore from a great deal of European nationalism and patriotism. Although Arabs are naturally attached to their native land their nationalism is not confined by boundaries. It is an aspiration to restore the great tolerant civilization of the early Caliphate.<sup>47</sup>

Although Sayyid acknowledges, as well, that the nation-state came to be seen as both a means (via nationalism) and an end (the liberated state) of the majority of anti-colonial movements in the Muslim world, he argues that the fact that this approach was adopted was in large part due to the abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish leader, Mustafa Kemal, in 1924, and the subsequent hegemonic dispersal of his “apologist” discourse.<sup>48</sup> This discourse sought to situate the Muslim world’s history and present achievements within the West’s “tradition of progressive history,” by adopting western terminology and concepts to explain political, sociological, and economic developments in a way that

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<sup>44</sup> Enayat, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> Enayat, 2005, p. 114.

<sup>46</sup> Nusse, 1998, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> General Nuri al-Said, 1943: p. 8; Quoted in Karsh, 2006: p. 130.

<sup>48</sup> Sayyid avoids criticisms of oversimplifying Kemalism and overstating its importance to the Muslim world with this disclaimer: “I have chosen not to focus on providing a detailed analysis of Kemalism’s actual status in the various historical and political contexts- which I am well aware would demonstrate significant variations- since the purpose here is not to furnish a detailed and exhaustive analysis of Kemalism but to establish Kemalism as a means of reading a wider Muslim political context. Sayyid, 1997, p. 33.

could prove their legitimacy and value to the West.<sup>49</sup> According to Sayyid, Kemal's historic decision to abolish the caliphate was made in light of the decline of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent success of the European nations, and his belief that Turkey's only chance for survival lay in the pursuit of its own national interests, and the consequent rejection of the idea of a universal Muslim state. "The great reforming bureaucrats like Rashid Pasha, Ali Pasah and Midhad Pasha, and the Sultan Abdulhamid II were motivated by a desire to make the Ottoman Empire compete successfully in the predatory international climate of the nineteenth century, where the great European powers hovered above the 'sick man of Europe,' waiting for it to fall."<sup>50</sup>

By abandoning the caliphate in favour of a modern nation-state, in essence, Kemal was abandoning the *ummah* and joining the Westphalian/European nation-state system. With the abolition of the caliphate and the implementation of a 'modernizing'/westernizing program, the most powerful Muslim state in the world created a path that would be difficult for other leaders of the Muslim world not to follow. Subsequent developments within the post-colonial regimes of the Muslim world are a testament to the pressure, both internal and external, which existed at that time to conform to the Kemalist/modernist project.<sup>51</sup> However, despite the best efforts of the Kemalist leaders to displace Islam as the 'master signifier' for the citizens of their newly independent nation-states, their acts had the paradoxical effect of politicizing Islam "[b]y removing it from the centre of their constructions of political order...[and instead] unsettling it and disseminating it into the general culture where it became available for reinscription."<sup>52</sup> In this sense, one can see the rise in the 1970s of the counter-hegemonic discourse of Islamism as an attempt to reassert Islam, as opposed to national identity, as the 'master signifier' for the Muslim world and, as demonstrated by the discourse and ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Islamist revolution in Iran and ideological influence to a large portion of the Islamist movements that followed, to replace Kemalism with its own set of meta-narratives capable of "restor[ing] the precious symbolic continuity interrupted by the irruption of Western categories."<sup>53</sup> One of the central components of this attempt to "decentre the West" was the perceived need for the Muslim world to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Sayyid argues that the post-colonial Kemalist regimes could be described as implementing one of two strategies: 1) the Pahlavist strategy, in which Islam is "displaced as a master signifier and its displacement reinscribed in terms of its being an 'alien imperialist ideology'". The aim of this strategy is to evoke the population's pre-Islamic history as a means of portraying Islam as an interruption- a distortion of the 'true' identity of the society in question. According to Sayyid, this strategy was employed in Iran by Mohammed Reza, in Egypt by Gamal Abdul Nasser, in Iraq by the Baathist regime; and 2) "the quasi-caliph strategy, in which Islam is included in the political order but is articulated with state power, through the institution of what could be called a pseudo-caliphate." This strategy was practiced by King Hussein of Jordan, King Hassan of Morocco, and the successive Saudi rulers. According to Sayyid these attempts "to reproduce a situation in which Islam is closely tied to the state remains within the discourse of Kemalism, since the nation is still used as the nodal point of the political order." Sayyid, 1997, p. 107.

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<sup>53</sup> Burgat, p. 50. For more on the impact of the Iranian Islamist revolution on budding Islamist movements see: Fawaz A. Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Harcourt Inc., 2007); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaida's Road to 9/11* (Allen Lane, 2007); as well as Sayyid and Burgat.

return to the *ummah* as an organizing principle, both religiously and politically and as a replacement to the imposed nation-state.<sup>54</sup>

Sayyid's reading of the ideological origins of contemporary Islamist movements is confirmed by the autobiographical stories of former Arab nationalists-turned Islamists recounted in Francois Burgat's book, *Face to Face with Political Islam*. In this book, Burgat argues that Islam never ceased to serve as a central "reference" point in the worldviews of the majority of those involved in the anti-colonial/nationalist movements, even if this was not made explicit by the leaders of these movements. Furthermore, Burgat explains the proliferation of Islamist movements in the period following independence as the result of activists coming to terms with the fact that the version of nationalism their leaders had adopted, e.g. secular and heavily influenced by western ideas and experiences, failed to adequately reflect their own religious and cultural identities. In the words of one prominent Egyptian intellectual and former nationalist activist-turned Islamist, Tariq al-Bishri, there was no need for explicitly Islamist movements during the anti-colonial struggles because "the nationalism of Mustafa Kamal was expressed in the language of Islam and not the language of secularism."<sup>55</sup> After the independence struggles had been won though, it became clear that the leaders had adopted "Western references" and "values of modernity" that were disconnected from their religious and cultural contexts. On the other hand, the Islamist movements "invited society to return to the values that had previously dominated it and to Islam as a source of legitimacy and social regulation."<sup>56</sup>

Jacqueline Kaye and Fouzi Slisli argue similarly that that western liberal accounts of the anti-colonial struggles of the Muslim world often undermined or completely ignored the fact that they were "distinctly Islamic in character", providing the examples of "Emir Abdelkader in Algeria; the Mahdi (Muhammed Ahmad), in Sudan; Islam's role in India's liberation struggle;[and] various Islamic anti-colonial movements in Ghana and Nigeria" to substantiate their argument.<sup>57</sup> Pointing out as well the feeling of betrayal felt by those nationalists for whom religion played a central role in defining and motivating the anti-colonial struggles at the encroachment of secularism via post-colonial nationalist regimes, Maha Azzam argues that "for the Islamists, it is secularism, not religion, that is the deviation from the norm. Thus, what is viewed as a 'return to the fundamentals of religion' is seen by many as a return to the norm," a perspective also shared by renowned Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University Seyyed Hossein Nasr.<sup>58</sup>

According to Sayyid, notions of nation and secularism are western imports that invaded the Muslim world via Kemal. This belief was shared by many of the second generation of Muslim reformers, like Hassan al-Banna', Navyab Safavi and Sayyid Qutb, who unequivocally opposed all strains of nationalism, including linguistic, ethnic and liberal,

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<sup>54</sup> Sayyid, 1997, p. 118.

<sup>55</sup> Burgat, 2005, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>57</sup> Jacqueline Kaye and Fouzi Slisli, "A liberal logic: reply to Fred Halliday", *Opendemocracy.com* (8-12-06)

<sup>58</sup> Maha Azzam, Islamism revisited, *International Affairs* (82:6; 2006) 1119-1132; Hossein Nasr, 1999: p. 239/

and argued that their predecessors were mistaken in believing that nationalism, and the division of the Muslim world into separate, autonomous nation-states, was the only means of resisting foreign domination. This new generation of Islamist philosophers and activists believed that “Islam possesses enough ideological and emotional resources to galvanise the masses in the cause of independence,” where independence signifies not freedom from domination of one nation or another, but rather the independence of the “global ‘abode of Islam’- though this time called, not the traditional term *dar al-Islam* (the ‘abode of Islam’), but the newly-coined *al-watan al-Islami* (the ‘Islamic homeland’).”<sup>59</sup>

The Tunisian Islamist political activist, Sheikh Rachid Ghannouchi, argues similarly to Sayyid, that the secular state is an ideological western import; however, in his telling of the story, it has been imposed on predominately Muslim North Africa by native leaders seeking to maintain their privileged relations with the former colonizers, and thus maintain their authority and wealth within the country (again, an argument similar to the one made by Africanists regarding representation). For Ghannouchi, the secular state in North Africa “has been no more than a tool delegated, as if by design, by the former colonizer to an elite that has been entrusted to take care of the colonizer’s interests and to reproduce its relations and values.”<sup>60</sup> Murtaza Garia argues along similar lines in his article, that secular nationalism is an ideology that has been propagated in Muslim countries via local elites who “have had their training and education in countries which have taken good care that they return home as ‘authentic’ nationalists to operate by proxy for their masters.”<sup>61</sup> Hossein Nasr, concurs with this perspective, pointing out the schism that opened between the post-colonial rulers and the people they ruled as the former, “although native, possessed a mental perspective akin to the worldview of the West and distinct from the prevailing beliefs and *Weltanschauung* of the vast majority of those over whom they ruled in the name of independence and nationalism.”<sup>62</sup>

Even for academics like Fred Halliday, who reject those analyses which seek to understand Islamist movements solely through the analysis of written or spoken pronouncements of leading clerics and activists and religious texts, with disregard for context and recognition of the manifold instrumentalizations of religious rhetoric for political ends, there is an acceptance that the western concept of nation- state is seen as alien to the history and religious traditions of the Muslim world. For Example, in his book *The Middle East in International Relations*, Halliday points out that rejection of “nationalist categories of fragmentation” has its basis in several Quranic passages, for example: “it states that all believers are brethren (49:10) and attributes sovereignty over land to God not to man (38:65-6).” And even though, according to Halliday, many modern Islamists may have merely instrumentalized the Quran in rhetorical manoeuvres to mobilize the masses, history shows that Islamist groups have, in fact, “acted transnationally: they have inspired each other by ideology and by example, and ‘struggling’ jihadi Muslims have gone from one country to another to participate in the

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<sup>59</sup> Enayat, 2005, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> Tamimi, 2001: 115

<sup>61</sup> Garia, “Nationalism in the Light of the Qur’an and the Sunnah,” 1986: 27

<sup>62</sup> Hossein Nassr, 2002: 238

struggle;” many have even been members of organizations that incorporate groups in more than one country. The Muslim Brotherhood, *al-Ikwhan al-Muslimin*, for example, which was founded in Egypt in 1928, became the ideological and organizational model for successive branches in several Arab countries that persist today, including, Palestine and Jordan. The participation of young men from all over the Muslim world in the various conflicts over the years that have entailed a real or perceived Jihad against non-Muslim encroachment on Muslim peoples/lands (e.g. the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupiers or the conflicts in Bosnia and Chechnya) is further evidence of this trend. “That there is an ‘Islamist transnationalism’ is therefore, unquestionable: it has existed in some form through history, was reconstructed by Schulze’s ‘Islamic public’ in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has found a third form in the era of mass migration and the Internet from the 1980s onwards.”<sup>63</sup>

In her article, “Towards an International Political Theology,” Kubáľková argues that mainstream IR analyses view religion as “a private affair of individuals, a domestic issue of states, or it is liminal; in any event, it eludes the territorial boundaries characteristic of state-centric IR studies.”<sup>64</sup> In the preceding section I hope to have explained why this is the case by demonstrating how the narrative of the sovereign state, as told within mainstream IR, precludes consideration of some of the defining elements of states which have developed along non-western trajectories, in particular Muslim-majority states, and the subsequent effects their specific developmental paths may have on political developments in these states. That this is the case is evidenced by facile statements that continue to be made in regards to the agenda of Islamist movements that seek to overcome what they see as artificial borders separating the Muslim ummah (as well as in regards to their secular Arab nationalists counterparts who have similarly rejected what they deem are the arbitrarily drawn borders unnecessarily separating the brothers and sisters of the Arab nation) by lamenting the failure of these movements to just accept “the natural course and develop into modern-day state nationalism” and ‘get on with it’.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Mainstream Narrative of Modernity**

Having discussed how mainstream IR’s state-centric nature and its particular definition of the modern sovereign state limits discussion of the origins and relevance of political Islam in the world today, I hope to have exposed how the narrative of a specific historic event, namely the rise of the western nation-state, came to assume a universal meaning. Mainstream IR’s eurocentric narrative of the state is very much linked to another widely accepted narrative, namely that which describes the history of ‘modernity’. As Joe Migdal has pointed out, the state’s very existence “was part and parcel of the great transformation bringing modernity...”<sup>66</sup>

Similar to the IR narrative on the origins of the state, the discipline’s narrative of ‘modernity’ can be traced back to 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. And, as was the case with the

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<sup>63</sup> Halliday, 2005: 241

<sup>64</sup> Kubáľková, 2000: 676

<sup>65</sup> Karsh, 2006: p. 7

<sup>66</sup> Migdal, 1997, p. 209

state, while there is some disagreement on the exact timing and origins of this development, the concept of modernity retains its hold upon scholars because there is at least implicit agreement about so many of its features, one of which is the development of the modern state. As Richard Falk explains in *Religion and Politics*, this concept is generally associated with:

the ascendancy of reason, science, and statist forms of political organization as they emerged in Europe during the 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, culminating in the triumph of industrial capitalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, finally, complemented by the October Revolution in Russia that brought state socialism into the world. Implicit in the dynamic of modernism was its globalisation by way of colonialist extension and capitalist expansion.<sup>67</sup>

Taking these historical events into consideration, the “stages of growth” theory that came to form the foundation of much sociological thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, combined Weber’s polar conception of traditional versus modern and Comte’s theory of evolution.<sup>68</sup> According to this theory, all societies were alike at the “traditional” stage and eventually they would all pass through the same set of changes that led the West to the “modern” stage. The understanding was that all nation-states, despite their disparate cultures, histories and collective visions for the future, were destined to become modern states, if only they kept to the “right” path. That path consisted specifically of the application of technology to control nature as a means of increasing per capita growth, secularisation of the government, and institution of government policies that would increase capital accumulation and investment as well as foster entrepreneurship. In essence, the path to modernization included the death of subsistence agriculture, communal living and God (at least on the public scene) and the subsequent birth of industry, advanced technology, monetary wealth and the individual. Those societies that did not adhere to this path “were judged deficient because they allegedly lacked many of the features and institutions which modern European societies seemed to possess and which had supposedly enabled Europeans to achieve progress, knowledge, wealth and power.”<sup>69</sup>

The political orientations of adherents to this narrative of modernization run the gamut from conservative to progressive, left to right (although for the progressive/left adherents, the process of modernization is not seen as the final “stage,” but rather as a prerequisite for arrival at the final stage). Despite the seemingly obvious differences in their “worldviews” or concepts of the good life, the political theorists who have subscribed to this theory, either explicitly or implicitly, have accepted a eurocentric understanding of what it means to be modern. According to Ali Mazrui, this understanding of modernity has its roots in Darwin’s theory of evolution. Drawing the connection between Darwin’s theory of stages of evolution and the stages of growth concept employed by modernization theory, Mazrui writes:

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<sup>67</sup> This quote is taken from Roxanne Euben’s *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*. Euben, 1999, p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Klarén, 1986

<sup>69</sup> Lockman, 2004: 87

In its earliest forms, social Darwinism had a strong and perhaps biological basis. Differing stages in the evolution of human societies were sometimes attributed to biological distinction among peoples. This was the influence of Charles Darwin on racism in Europe. The ideological repercussions were indeed long-term.<sup>70</sup>

Darwin's influence in the realm of politics proved particularly dangerous because of the potential for adherents of the 'stages' theory to use the notion of positive evolution *a posteriori* to explain why some civilizations are more advanced than others, and subsequently why some are more capable of ruling others. The history of modern Europe is replete with examples of the usage of the "survival of the fittest" concept to justify the brutal rule of a fully "evolved" society over one composed of less "fit" members. Europe's imperialist expansion throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the expansionist agenda of the Third Reich, for example, were justified in this light. Despite its dark history, social Darwinism managed to seep into the mainstream of several disciplines within the social sciences, including IR. Noting the influence of the German right on the discipline in its early stages, and disputing the common belief that IR emerged out of the English speaking world, Halliday argues that "many of the central themes of realism appear as (domesticated) descendents of the militaristic and racist Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."<sup>71</sup>

As I have already noted, conservatives and fascists were not the only ones to adhere to this version of modernization. As Mazrui points out, Karl Marx was, in fact, an enthusiastic supporter of Darwin's theories, albeit for different reasons, so much so that the 19<sup>th</sup> century political philosopher wanted to dedicate the first volume of *Das Kapital* to Charles Darwin (Darwin, incidentally, declined the honour).<sup>72</sup> The deterministic nature of historical materialism is a testament to Social Darwinism's influence on Marx. As with other adherents of modernization theory, both past and present, Marx viewed tradition, including culture and religion, variously as obstacles to a better future and reactions to oppression or uncertainty. In the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, for example, Marx argued that people are likely to cling to their ancestor's culture at a time when revolution seems imminent, in an attempt to protect themselves from the unknown:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of the world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mazrui, 1997, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> Halliday, 1994:11

<sup>72</sup> Mazrui, 1997

<sup>73</sup> Marx, 1978

According to this narrative, the only path to modernity is the one which leaves “dead generations” behind. Despite the diversity in ends pursued by the various people/parties that have subscribed to the modernization theory, that they all share the belief that religion, tradition and culture are liminal to the understanding, or creation of any modern or modernizing society, and that those societies for whom religion, tradition and culture still matter, are insignificant to the understanding of the modern world.

This eurocentric narrative of modernity had a particularly negative effect on the study and understanding of Muslim societies, whose continuing adherence to religion, communalism and traditional customs made them antithetical to the modern western mindset, which, it was believed, was vital for the establishment of thriving and dynamic political and economic systems. In looking at the impact of this understanding of modernity on analysis of political systems in the Muslim world by one of the first proponents of the narrative, who was also no doubt influenced by contemporary Orientalist theories of the ‘Muslim mind’ that were *de riguer* at the time, Lockman explains how:

Weber used the term “sultanism” to characterize the political systems of these [Muslim] patrimonial states, whose rulers he saw as rapacious and arbitrary despots unencumbered by any effective limits on their power over their subjects. As a result Islamic societies failed to develop institutions and centers of power independent of the state, including a vigorous urban middle class, autonomous cities or a system of rational law (as opposed to the sacred law of Islam), leading to stagnation and social decay.<sup>74</sup>

Weber’s analysis of the roots of what he saw as the backwardness and corrosion at the heart of the Muslim world were, like Marx’s views “on Asian societies in general” based on a “powerful tradition in European thought,” which included everyone from “Renaissance political thinkers to Montesquieu to Hegel to James Mill and John Stuart Mill and beyond, ” and which came to tautologically define European superiority in relation to that which it was not, namely despotic, arbitrary and traditional, the attributes imputed to ‘Oriental’ political systems by these thinkers.<sup>75</sup> As Lockman points out, “this way of contrasting Islamic societies to an idealized model of European history and society provided a basis for depicting the former as culturally or racially defective.”<sup>76</sup>

### *Western Social Science Critiques of the Narrative of Modernity*

While it is not within the scope or intent of this chapter to address all of the various methodological and theoretical social science strains that fall under the broad ‘postmodern’ label, in this section, I will summarize some of the principal components of the postmodern critique of the notion of ‘modernity’, in so far as they can offer an insight into the theoretical limitations of mainstream IR theory when it comes to analysing religious politics, in general, and political Islam, in particular.

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<sup>74</sup> Lockman, 2004: p. 87

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 87

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 87

Analyzing the work of various academics that have described political Islam as a postmodern movement<sup>77</sup>, Sayyid first elaborates on the common eurocentric understanding of modernity critiqued by these authors, which parallels the narrative described above. Modernity, Sayyid writes, “can be described as a discourse which formed and consolidated Europe.”<sup>78</sup> Sayyid goes on to explain how the postmodern movement saw Europe’s consolidation as contingent on its colonial/imperial power, and thus was sceptical of all discourse, which it saw as facilitating that consolidation. If modernity, one of the narratives that comprised this discourse, was in part responsible for the physical, intellectual and spiritual oppression of the colonised, postmodernity was the movement which sought to decolonise, or liberate those whose voices had previously been suppressed. Robert Young, in fact, traces the origins of the post-modern movement to the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence, when a number of French intellectuals, who were either from French Algeria or empathised with the Algerian people (i.e. Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard), sought to understand the anti-colonial struggle in theoretical terms.<sup>79</sup>

The basis of their critique of Europe’s narrative of modernity was its simplistic view of human history as an ongoing process in constant progression towards perfection of the human ideal, a view based on its underlying belief in history as a unilinear process.<sup>80</sup> To conceive of history as such requires:

the existence of a centre around which events are gathered and ordered. We think of history as ordered around the year zero of the birth of Christ, and more specifically, as a serial train of events in the life of people from the ‘centre,’ the West, the place of civilization, outside of which are the primitives and the developing countries.<sup>81</sup>

For those who subscribe to this narrative of modernity, the West’s privileged status as ‘developed’ is necessarily reliant on its antithesis - ‘underdevelopment’. In other words, the West would not be modern if it had no touchstone ‘other’ against which it could measure its own progress. The West relies on definitions of what it considers not modern, or “primitive,” in order to define itself as modern. According to Gianni Vattimo, the only way to develop an unbiased understanding of history is by first dispelling the myths around which History, as interpreted by a particular group of historians representing the particular interests and prejudices of the group to which they belonged, has been written. Young described this process as the ‘de-centering of the West,’ a process in which the intimate relationship between modernity and the West becomes untangled.<sup>82</sup> Once this ‘de-centering’ takes place, space is opened up in which different narratives of history and

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<sup>77</sup> The literature discussed by Sayyid in this section will be considered, along with other writers who have viewed political Islam as a postmodern movement, in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

<sup>78</sup> Sayyid, 1997, p. 107

<sup>79</sup> Sayyid, 1997

<sup>80</sup> Sayyid, 1997, p. 108.

<sup>81</sup> Gianni Vattimo quoted in Bobby Sayyid’s, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>82</sup> Sayyid, 1997, p. 109.

understandings of what it means to be modern can be articulated. For Lyotard this process entails overcoming the “totalizing instincts of the modern, and seeking the dissolution of all grand narratives, particularly those which claim a universal end,” regardless of how noble the purported end, such as “freedom,” might be. In calling for a “war” on modern narratives, “including those of progress, universality and ‘enlightenment’” post-modernists often call for the “embrace of the particular over totality.”<sup>83</sup>

Arnold Toynbee argued along similar lines regarding the need to dispel the illusions on which the modernity narrative is based, in particular in relation to the study of the “East”:

But apart from illusion due to the world-wide success of the Western civilisation in the material sphere, the misconception of ‘the unity of history’—involving the assumption that there is only one river of civilisation, our own, that all others are either tributary to it or else lost in the desert sands—may be traced to three roots: the egocentric illusion, the illusion of the ‘unchanging East’, and the illusion of progress as a movement that proceeds in a straight line.<sup>84</sup>

For post-modernists like David Campbell, who look at the impact of the modernity narrative on the foreign policy practices of western states, its deconstruction is vital not only for the purpose of opening up space for a more pluralistic account of history, but also for its real world implications, in particular in relations to the possibility of instituting a more peaceful world order. This belief is based on the idea that aggressive foreign policies are often the result of an existential need of states that are lacking an “ontological” basis for existence to continually construct and reinforce their identities via the discovery of external threats that often do not exist objectively, at least not to the extent that they are portrayed by these governments. According to Campbell, this pathology can be traced back to the proverbial “death of God” in the modern period, when all foundations for human existence and for the particular organization and regulation of society that marked the modern period were eliminated with nothing left to replace them. As a result, this period was one marked by anxiety and ambiguity as the need “for external guarantees” persisted while there ceased to be the “ontological preconditions” necessary to sustain them. According to Connolly, “modernity is thus an epoch of secret insistence jeopardized by its own legacy of truthfulness and honesty: its bearers demand that every hidden faith be exposed, but faith is necessary to ground the superiority of modern life.”<sup>85</sup> In place of the faith and certainty previously provided by Christendom, the modern western state “requires discourses of ‘danger’ to provide a new theology of truth about who and what ‘we’ are by highlighting who or what ‘we’ are not, and what ‘we’ have to fear.” For Campbell then the process of deconstructing this narrative of modernity and the role it plays in constructing and maintaining national identity is part and parcel of exposing dichotomous understandings of the

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<sup>83</sup> Gane, 2004: 84.

<sup>84</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 1965: p.55. Quoted in Davutoglu, 2002, p. 172.

<sup>85</sup> Connolly, *Political theory and Modernity*, p. 11, quoted in Campbell, 1992: 48

insider/outsider, us/them distinctions that underpin the type of aggressive foreign policy that “give rise to a boundary rather than acting as a bridge.”<sup>86</sup>

### *Islamic/Islamist Critique of the Mainstream Narrative of Modernity*

Similar to the post-modern critiques of the narrative of modernity based on a eurocentric and unilinear reading of history, many scholars and activists have chosen deconstruction of the narrative, and subsequent ‘de-centering’ of the west, as a starting point for elaborating an alternative, Islamic worldview. According to Ahmet Davutoglu, “the idea of unilinear historical progress,” which begins with Ancient Greece and ends with the Modern Age with no stops in non-European territory along the way, has been used to “identify the history of mankind with the history of Europe,” by excluding the contributions of other civilisations that do not fit within the “existing hegemonic paradigm of Western civilization.”<sup>87</sup> Yet though the Islamic critique of modernity shares some methodological tools in common with its post-modern counterpart, and there has even been recognition amongst some Islamic scholars of the importance of the “spaces” opened up by postmodernism to religion, there is an anxiety amongst proponents of the former regarding what they see as the seemingly opposed ends sought by the respective projects. This uncertainty is expressed by Hossein Nasr when he writes: “the very relativization of values and cultural norms preached by post-modernism, while seeking to destroy sacred traditions and trivializing them and also superficially accepting certain of their tenets, allows at the same time a certain ‘space’ to be created within which religions, whether they be Judaism, Christianity or Islam or for that matter Hinduism and Buddhism can be practiced to some extent. But of course such “spaces” are not allowed to cover the whole living space of the post-modern world and therefore conflicts are bound to arise in certain domains...”<sup>88</sup> Yet still Hossein Nasr believes that the Islamic understanding of modernity shares more in common with postmodernism than it does with the mainstream narrative as discussed above. When it comes to “questions such as the relation of religion to politics, the nature of knowledge, the source of ethics, the relation of private ethics to public life, the rapport between religion and science (including the social and human sciences) and many other issues which are of concern to post-modern philosophers,” Hossein Nasr argues that there is “every possibility of dialogue and discourse,” between postmodernists and Muslims, some of which he believes has already taken place.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to challenging the validity of the chronology, the historical events chosen (and not chosen) to comprise the modernity narrative, and the function it has played in creating, maintaining and justifying unequal power relations between the western and non-western worlds at various points in modern history, Muslim critiques often challenge the notion of progress on which it is based. Whereas adherence to tradition, custom, and zealous belief in religion were often seen as obstacles to progress, and as forces inhibiting the development of modern man and society in the West, in Islam, on the contrary, there is a belief “that the ethical ideal and perfectibility are reflected in the

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<sup>86</sup> Campbell, 1992: 51

<sup>87</sup> Davutoglu in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 2002: 202

<sup>88</sup> Hossein Nasr, 2002: p. 258

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pps. 257-258

continuity of the eternal tradition from the past through the present to the future.” The secular notion of progress, on the other hand, “justifies the break between past and present and glorifies the future.”<sup>90</sup> Hossein Nasr explains that the roots of this difference lie in the Islamic belief in the perfection of the life of the Prophet Muhammad as a man and believer, a view, which is also extended to his contemporaries. In viewing this era as “the best generation of Muslims”, it follows that every subsequent generation has moved further from that perfection, in its societal practices and lifestyle. According to Hossein Nasr, this view, that “the best generation of Muslims are those who are his [the Prophet’s] contemporaries, then the generation after, than the following generation until the end of time, is sufficient to nullify, from the Islamic point of view, the idea of linear evolution of man and progress in human history.”<sup>91</sup>

Samer Akkach concurs with Hossein Nasr’s distinction between the secular western and Islamic conceptions of progress, arguing that if one were to compare the Arab and Turkish scholars, scientists, and bureaucrats from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the 19<sup>th</sup> century to their European counterparts, one would find a very different approach towards inherited wisdom of the past. Whereas in the West “the remarkable success achieved in the field of science...in the seventeenth century prompted an unprecedented emphasis on the autonomy of human reason and a rejection of the habitual reliance on religious sources and the authority of tradition..” Muslim intellectuals during this period “dismissed only the unenlightened approaches of their immediate predecessors, while romanticizing the achievements of the earlier periods of the Prophet and the golden era.”<sup>92</sup> As there was no definitive break with tradition in the Muslim experience, “the intellectual zone separating the modern from the pre-modern has since remained blurred.”<sup>93</sup>

For Davutoglu, the main differences between secular western and Muslim notions of progress, and, subsequently, what constitutes modernity, hinges on their distinct ‘time-consciousnesses’. Western time-consciousness, as described by Johann Galtung, consists of the belief in time where “social processes are unidirectional, with progress from low to high and so forth, but also with crisis to be overcome, possibly ending well, with a positive *Endzustand* (state of end).” In Islam,

time can not be conceived by serial and categorically separated periodisation; rather it can be conceived by the continuity of social processes, which may also have a circular character. There is a constancy related to the basic characteristics of *Haqq* (Truth) and *Batil* (Falsehood), so there is always the possibility of a positive and negative *Endzustand* (state of end) which is the examination of human being in the world. Additionally there should be a positive *Anfangzustand* (state of beginning) as well as the intention of a positive *Endzustand* (state of end).<sup>94</sup>

This fundamental difference in time-consciousness can explain, for example, how a prominent Islamist such as Sayyid Qutb could have compared a country like Egypt in the

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<sup>90</sup> Davutoglu in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 2002: p. 197

<sup>91</sup> Hossein Nasr, 202: 213

<sup>92</sup> Akkach, 2007: pps. 4-5

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Davutoglu, *Civilisational Transformation and the Muslim World*, 1994: pp.65-70.

1950s, despite its material, technological and scientific advancements during that era, to the pre-Islamic period in Arabia, referred to in the Qur'an as *Jahiliyya*. While westerners may have considered the increasing secularisation, use of advanced technology, changing societal relationships and adoption of western dress in Egypt during this period as a sign that the country, and possibly the Arab world in general, had finally achieved a certain level of 'modernity', and hence progress, for a deeply religious person like Qutb, all of this represented a further step away from the perfection of the period of Muhammad, and hence was no different from the period before the religion had been revealed to the Prophet. For Qutb, "the only civilized community...is the moral one; real freedom is moral freedom, and true justice is Islamic justice."<sup>95</sup>

Despite the growing number of western academics who question the substance and function of the mainstream narrative of modernity, some of whom have been discussed above, its narrative's impact on the social sciences, as well as on the practice of politics across the world, is almost etched in stone. These notions have affected the treatment, or lack thereof, of religious movements in several ways. Adherence to the modernity narrative has, for example, led academics to either overlook the subject of religion and religious political movements entirely, because they are seen either as left-over remnants of a traditional society, likely to disappear soon or,<sup>96</sup> when taken into consideration, to view them within the narrow framework set by the narrative.<sup>97</sup>

Another example of the way in which the modernity narrative has influenced the dismissal of religion and religious movements can be seen in structuralist analyses which often utilize 'dependency,' 'neo-Marxist,' or 'underdevelopment' theories/paradigms. In these analyses, in which national economies are seen as structural elements within a global capitalist system, characterized by asymmetric, interdependent relationships, (and in which the international system, rather than the nation, serves as the unit of analysis), the impact of domestic factors, including religion and religious movements, on politics is generally marginalized.<sup>98</sup> As with the narrative of the nation-state, serious analysis of non-western phenomena is hindered when a eurocentric understanding of modernity becomes so embedded within the discipline that it influences the subconscious level of thought, and is thus taken as *the* truth, rather than *a truth* among many.

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<sup>95</sup> Euben, 1999: p. 58.

<sup>96</sup> An example of the former, which is largely outdated and rarely explicitly expressed in any serious study of developing nations, was most succinctly stated by John Kautsky, in *The Political Consequences of Modernization*, published in 1972. In this book, he explained that although deeply religious sentiment may still exist within developing nations, he is centrally concerned with [political] conflict: "I shall not deal with communal conflicts based on religious, ethnic, or linguistic difference...I ignore them...because they originated before, and to some extent continue to exist apart from, the impact of modernization on politics." Kautsky quoted by Jeff Haynes in, *Religion in Third World Politics*. Haynes, 1993, p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> This is despite the fact that the roots of the narrative itself are located within a specific religious framework - one which the narrative claims to refute. John Gray convincingly argues this point in his book "Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern," in which he underlines the similarities between Marxism and neo-liberalism, namely their shared belief that there is one way of life that is ideal for all of mankind and that history has been characterized by an ongoing struggle to achieve this ideal. Gray argues that these ideologies have "inherited from Christianity the belief that history is working to a finale in which all are saved." Gray, 2003, p. 104.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

## The Mainstream Narrative of the Enlightenment

Intimately connected to the narrative of modernity and notions of progress inherent within it, is the narrative of the Enlightenment, whose impact on the various disciplines comprising the social sciences is vast, and similarly covers the left/right political spectrum. While neorealists cling to its concept of rationality, critical theorists (at least those influenced by Marx, Kant and Hegel) are enticed by its promise of emancipation.<sup>99</sup> In this section, I will trace the origins of this narrative and the influence of its underlying assumptions, including a very narrow and eurocentric understanding of rationality, as well as an evangelical belief in the power of science to understand and improve all aspects of life, have had on the study of international relations in general, and political Islam in particular.

As the impact of modernization was felt most strongly across the northwestern corner of Europe, it was there, according to the narrative, that the intellectual response to the phenomenon first developed. According to Ernest Gellner, this response, or what has come to be known as the ‘Enlightenment’:

strove to understand the economic and social success of the first modern societies, and make possible their emulation, and so proposed a secular version of a salvation religion, a naturalist doctrine of universally valid salvation, in which reason and nature replaced revelation. It did so because it perceived the role of new, secular knowledge in the new social order.<sup>100</sup>

While religion promised salvation of the soul, the Enlightenment could offer salvation of the mind. Through reason, man could free himself from “superstition and the forces of ignorance, and, more directly, from political tyranny, and, perhaps, the tyranny of material necessity.”<sup>101</sup>

It is in light of this pursuit of the advancement of secular knowledge that the development of ‘scientific’ methodologies should be seen. According to Kubáľková, it was during this period, in which the “celebration of reason unleashed a tremendous range of intellectual activities previously restricted by the medieval acceptance of God’s revelation as the truth,” that the fateful separation between science and philosophy, two previously synonymous fields of study, took place.<sup>102</sup> In response to the growing importance placed on the various fields comprising the discipline of ‘Science’<sup>103</sup> and the subsequent loss of prestige of philosophy, August Comte, one of the ‘founding fathers’ of positivism, introduced the idea of the “social sciences,” a new field of study which would apply the fundamentals of the “natural sciences” to philosophy and the study of politics. John Gray

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<sup>99</sup> Brown, 1997, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> Gellner, 1992, p. 90.

<sup>101</sup> Brown, 1997, p. 57.

<sup>102</sup> Kubáľková, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>103</sup> According to Kubáľková, these disciplines included: astronomy, chemistry and physics. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

provides a comprehensive description of positivism, pointing out three central tenets of the “catechism”:

First, history is driven by the power of science; growing knowledge and new technology are the ultimate determinants of change in human society. Second, science will enable natural scarcity to be overcome; once that has been achieved, the immemorial evils of poverty and war will be banished forever. Third, progress in science and progress in ethics and politics go together; as scientific knowledge advances and becomes more systematically organised, human values will increasingly converge.<sup>104</sup>

With its universal scope and deterministic nature, positivism promised to replace religion in providing the answers, or at least the methods to find those answers, to humanity’s age-old questions about life. Those who employed positivist methods believed in the existence of objective facts, and “above all in the possibility of explaining the said facts by means of an objective and testable theory, not itself essentially linked to any one culture, observer or mood.”<sup>105</sup> According to the Enlightenment narrative, with modernity and the advent of scientific methods of social inquiry, traditional man was transformed into rational man, which meant his knowledge was derived through analytic deduction as opposed to revelation. In its universalism and determinism, positivism, repudiated the validity of revelation, and sought to “supersede clear fallacies taught by religious authorities...”<sup>106</sup> Positivism had a great impact on the development of the social sciences throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influencing scholars as diverse as Marx, Engels, and Durkheim. Its continued influence on the various disciplines comprising the social sciences, in particular IR, can be seen today insofar as academics continue to “search for the same kinds of laws and regularities in the international world as they assume characterise the natural world.”<sup>107</sup>

### *A Western Critique of the Mainstream Narrative of the Enlightenment*

The narrative of Enlightenment, along with its positivist methodology, has profoundly affected the social sciences in general, and IR in particular, in numerous ways, most importantly through its uncritical acceptance of naturalism, the central concept on which positivism is based, its reliance on a subjective understanding of rationality, based on the Enlightenment experience, and, its adherence to the belief in the possibility of purely objective scholarship. Before examining the Islamic challenges to this narrative, I will first consider the long and diverse history of intellectual resistance to the Enlightenment narrative in general, and regarding these points specifically, as it has developed over the last several centuries within western political thought.

Perhaps the most contentious element of the Enlightenment narrative has been its reliance on a reductionist account of the allegedly smooth and complete transition that was made

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<sup>104</sup> Gray, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>105</sup> Gellner, 1992: 25.

<sup>106</sup> Tamara Sonn, 2001: 219.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, 1996.

during this period from a religious to a scientific/rational worldview, which is inherent in its understanding of positivism. Crucial to this conceptualization of positivism is the belief that the study of the social world is amenable to the same scientific methodologies used to study the natural world, as the two worlds do not fundamentally differ. Implicit in this belief, often referred to as naturalism, is the notion that man, because he can know society as he knows nature, has a certain power over his own destiny. Although this unquestioning reliance on scientific methods as a means of understanding the world was ubiquitous in intellectual quarters in the West by the middle of the eighteenth century, there were, from the beginning, those who were sceptical of the potential impact this morally foundationless worldview would have on future societies. As Rousseau put it in a classic passage that illustrates his anxiety regarding the destructive individualism that he believed would inevitably result from general acceptance of this worldview:

It is reason that engenders vanity, and reflection that reinforces it; it is what turns man back upon himself; it is what separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him. It is Philosophy that isolates him; it is by means of Philosophy that he secretly says at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe...nothing is as gentle as [man in his primitive state] when placed by Nature at equal distance from the stupidity of the brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man...The example of the Savages...[confirms] that all subsequent progress has been so many steps in appearance towards the perfection of the individual, and, in effect the decrepitude of the species.<sup>108</sup>

While Rousseau's comments on the perils of an Enlightenment-influenced world were based on an idealization of 'primitive' man rather than a fear of future devoid of God, they show that these developments were not always as smooth or widespread as some religious and post-modern critics of the Enlightenment have assumed. Decades earlier, another great, though less renowned French thinker, the mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) expressed a similar malaise regarding the future of an enlightened world where man is left to his own devices to contemplate and answer the most pressing questions concerning his existence on earth, including "who put him there, what he has to do, [and] what will become of him when he dies."<sup>109</sup> This scepticism of a future where vital metaphysical questions are left unanswered left Pascal feeling "moved to terror, like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost with no means of escape."<sup>110</sup>

According to the contemporary political philosopher John Gray, even the "catechism" of positivism itself was not as removed as it claimed from the religious cosmology it was presumed to have replaced. For example, this idea that all societies across the globe would converge in a common rejection of tradition and religion and instead adopt "rational, scientific and experimental modes of thought", was not at all a modern conception, but rather had its roots in Christianity and shared with monotheism, in general a belief in redemption for all of humanity. This shared belief can be traced back

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Euben, 2003, p. 60.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Armstrong, 2004, p. 74.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

to positivism's inheritance of a Christian perspective of history according to Gray, although its adherents suppressed "Christianity's saving insight that human nature is ineradicably flawed- they announced that by the use of technology humanity could make a new world." He goes on to argue that when adherents to this school of thought "suggested in the third and final stage of history that there would be no politics, only rational administration, they imagined they were being scientific; but the belief that science can enable humanity to transcend its historic conflicts and create a universal civilisation is not a product of empirical inquiry. It is a remnant of monotheism."<sup>111</sup> Indeed, many adherents of Enlightenment thought were themselves deeply religious individuals. Immanuel Kant, for one, was adamant about grounding the emancipatory talk of the period in religious foundations. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), for example, Kant argued that "moral law was inscribed within each human being, which, like the grandeur of the heavens, filled him with awe and wonder," and that ultimately it was the potential of an afterlife that led people to act morally.<sup>112</sup>

Other liberal thinkers like David Hume and Bertrand Russell were also aware of what they saw as the limits of pure reason, in particular in its ability to understand metaphysical questions, which they believed "exceed[ed] the boundaries of rationality altogether."<sup>113</sup> Perhaps the most well-known sceptic of the inherent good of rampant rationality was Max Weber, who pondered the impact of a tyrannical science dominating all elements of human life to the peril of ethics and moral values. In the conclusion to one of his most renowned works, the *Protestant Ethic*, Weber questioned the ability of science to unequivocally "engender human 'progress' or the qualitative advancement of life. He argued instead that modern culture is characterized by sterility and passionlessness: 'for of the "last men" of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved."'<sup>114</sup> Yet unlike Nietzsche and the post-modernists influenced by him, Weber did not call for the "abandonment of the scientific vocation," which he viewed as utopian - an impossible return to the "infancy of thought." Rather, he called for the continued use of "science to help tackle the practical and technical problems of our day," which should be tempered though by "responsible value-judgements."<sup>115</sup>

It was Weber's belief in the limits of instrumental reason to comprehend the intricacies of social life that came to influence what is today known as the hermeneutical tradition of the western social sciences. As discussed in his *Economy and Society*, Weber developed two distinct concepts to differentiate between the positivist methods used in the natural sciences that sought out causal explanations to explain natural phenomena (*Erklaren*) and the interpretive methods used to understand social behaviour based on a the acknowledgement that this type of behaviour is "oriented by and to the behaviour of

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 105

<sup>112</sup> Armstrong, 2004, p. 74.

<sup>113</sup> Soroush, 2000: 136.

<sup>114</sup> Weber, 1992, 182, quoted in Gane, 2004: p. 62.

<sup>115</sup> Gane, 62 and 154.

others, ” an assertion that “leads directly to the central hermeneutic theme that action must always be understood from within.”<sup>116</sup>

In advocating a hermeneutic approach, Weber also challenged the notion of rationality on which the positivist understanding of human action is based. Instead of defining rationality according to some supposedly objective standards derived from scientific inquiry, Weber argued instead that an actor’s rationality should be defined by his/her ability to choose the most effective means to achieve his/her ends. This understanding of ‘instrumental rationality’ had “nothing to say about either the source or the rationality of the agent’s goal,” as long as the action taken could be shown to further the actor’s ends it would be seen as a “rational” action.<sup>117</sup> The job of the social scientist seeking to understand the reasons for an actor’s particular action would therefore be to first examine and understand the operative rules underpinning the context in which the action **was** taken. Various critical thinkers within IR today, including cognitivists, poststructuralists, standpoint and postmodern feminists, continue to be influenced by Weber’s belief that rational action can only be understood within a “framework of shared meanings -- rules and collective values.”<sup>118</sup> As Wendt explains, these varied approaches all “share a concern with the basic ‘sociological’ issue bracketed by rationalists - namely, the issue of identity- and interest-formation.”<sup>119</sup>

There are also numerous contemporary philosophers who share a similar fear of the impending disenchantment of the world that would result from its over-rationalization as expressed by some of the classical sceptic political philosophers like Weber and Nietzsche, who found the “spectre of domination in the promise of emancipation itself.” Alasdair MacIntyre and Chris Taylor, for example, worry that nihilism is an inevitable result of the loss of moral and philosophical foundations in the West. Echoing Weber’s apprehensions regarding the tyranny of scientific reason, MacIntyre writes about the rule-obsessed societies that have developed as a means to mitigate the inevitable moral anarchy that results in a society with no theological or teleological foundations. Without these foundations, society’s leaders can provide no compelling reason for its members to live moral lives, as there are no objective or scientifically quantifiable criteria to define morality. Seemingly arbitrary rules are thus constructed to define limits for individuals who have no moral compass to otherwise direct them through life’s various obstacles. Yet these rules are liable to constant challenge as they are drawn “without appeal to impersonal and unassailable criteria...”<sup>120</sup>

For MacIntyre, the fundamental error made by followers of the Enlightenment is their rejection of the Aristotelian moral tradition in which the authority of laws and virtues is grounded “in a conception of the good that is itself meaningful only within the context of specifiable practices and traditions.” Similar to MacIntyre, as well as the Islamist critique of modernity, Taylor traces many of contemporary western society’s ills to the

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<sup>116</sup> Hollis and Smith, 1990: p. 72.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 74

<sup>118</sup> Wendt, 1992: p. 392

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 392

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Euben, 2003, p. 71.

Enlightenment's "rejection both of the established social hierarchy and of transcendent moral criteria," which he feels has "eclipsed a universally recognizable hierarchy of ends and thus enabled the emergence and eventual dominance of moral subjectivism and an atomistic pursuit of self-realization."<sup>121</sup>

In addition to the scepticism, and even hostility, expressed towards the Enlightenment narrative's uncritical acceptance of positivism and a supposedly objective understanding of rationality, there has also been a healthy dose of cynicism in relation to the narrative's adherence to the notion of objective scholarship, in which "a theory could be articulated, understood, assessed, without any reference to its author and his social identity."<sup>122</sup> It is this belief, referred to by Christopher Lloyd as the theory and observation distinction, that allowed academics the freedom to research without having to acknowledge their place within the historically specific context in which their research was conducted.<sup>123</sup> This weakness of positivism, recognized early on by Weber when he wrote "No science is absolutely free from presuppositions, and no science can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these presuppositions" came to form the crux of the post-structuralist critique.<sup>124</sup> In particular, post-structuralist/post-modern philosophers drew attention to what they saw as the co-constitutive relationship that exists between power and knowledge, as well the various interrelations connecting texts and meanings. Poststructuralists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida all shared in common their rejection of totalizing, essentialist, and foundationalist concepts. Edward Said, the political activist and renown scholar of Comparative Literature, best known for his use of Foucauldian theory and methodology in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, in which he examines the nature of the co-constitutive relationship that developed throughout the colonial period between western identity and power and the West's policies towards, and views of, the colonized 'Orient'/ 'East', provides a succinct explanation of Foucault's concept of discourse:

A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual...is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge, but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of the given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.<sup>125</sup>

For Foucault, the notion that human beings are "autonomous and rational and possess our own distinctive 'self'" was itself a construct derived from the Enlightenment narrative

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<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Euben, 2003, p. 72.

<sup>122</sup> Gellner, p. 25

<sup>123</sup> This distinction is one of the four main features of logical positivism which Lloyd summarizes in his book: *The Structures of History*. Lloyd, 1993, pp. 72-3.

<sup>124</sup> Weber, 1970: p. 153, quoted in Gane, 2004: 57.

<sup>125</sup> Said, 1974, p. 94

and the discourse it produced, as opposed to some objective understanding of human existence or history.<sup>126</sup>

Within IR, the greatest critics of positivism's belief in objective truth are found within constructivist, critical theory and the 'post' movements, all of which have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Foucault. For example, mainstream constructivists, otherwise known as "soft constructivists,"<sup>127</sup> believe there is a "fundamental difference between 'brute facts' about the world, which remain true, independent of human action, and 'social facts' which depend for their existence on socially established conventions."<sup>128</sup> Constructivists are most concerned when the distinction between these two types of facts becomes blurred, because it is then that the social fact's contingency is forgotten and the fact thus becomes more susceptible to manipulation. Constructivism, though, is often considered one of the least radical of the critical IR theories because of its rejection of the post-structuralist "conception of identity as relationally constituted."<sup>129</sup> In its belief that states have pre-social identities, constructivism also can be accused of reifying the state, albeit in an attempt to counter the reified logic of anarchy. As Weber explains, "by insisting on the state as the author/decision-maker of all tales—constructivism misses the opportunity to deliver on another of its promises, to restore a focus on process and practice in international politics."<sup>130</sup>

Similar to constructivists, critical theorists (greatly influenced by Marx, Kant and Gramsci, as well as those belonging to the historical-hermeneutic tradition, such as Gadamer and Wittgenstein) also believe that all knowledge is socially constructed, except they add to the mix the Foucauldian notion of power, by arguing that constructed knowledge is often used as a means of furthering the interests of one person/group at the expense of another. What is commonly referred to as the "emancipatory" element of their agenda relates to this understanding of knowledge and to the belief that human beings are capable of overcoming situations of oppression (both political and material) by revealing and understanding those situations via the application of reason.

### *Islamic Critiques of the Mainstream Enlightenment Narrative*

As in the case of the mainstream narratives of the state and modernity, in the case of the critiques of the Enlightenment narrative there is much common ground - between critical voices within the western social sciences and Islamic challenges. John Gray has even gone so far as to argue that the "intellectual roots" of the Islamic challenge can be found in the European "Counter-Enlightenment," as it was in this late eighteenth/early nineteenth century movement that philosophers like J.G. Hamman and Soren Kierkegaard rejected the secular notion of reason and defended religious faith in terms of subjective

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<sup>126</sup> Lockman, 2004: 185.

<sup>127</sup> In her article "Towards an International Political Theology," Vendulka Kubálková, quotes Steve Smith in arguing that mainstream or "soft" constructivism (i.e. Alexander Wendt, Peter Katzenstein, etc.) has hijacked the agenda of constructivists by assuming "an unthreatening role of an adjunct explanation for those things that the positivist mainstream finds difficult to explain." Kubálková, 2000, p. 677

<sup>128</sup> Brown, 1997, p. 52.

<sup>129</sup> Hansen, 2006, p. 24.

<sup>130</sup> Weber, 2001, p. 78.

experience. J.G. Herder, for example, “rejected the Enlightenment ideal of a universal civilisation, believing there are many cultures, each in some ways unique.”<sup>131</sup> Though this sequence of events is highly questionable, considering that many of the central issues raised by the Counter-Enlightenment, in particular regarding the nature of the relationship of science and philosophy to divine revelation, had already been considered and debated by Islamic scholars some several centuries before, for example by prominent 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century Islamic philosophers such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Bajjah (Avempace) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the point he makes regarding the similarities in critiques is nonetheless valid.

Similar to the western critiques expressed by classical and contemporary philosophers alike, at the heart of the Islamic critique of the Enlightenment narrative is a rejection of the view that the social world can be understood using the same tools used to comprehend the natural world, in other words, naturalism. Like Kant, Hume and Russell, Muslims scholars and activists who have expressed anxiety regarding the spectre of tyrannical rationalism, have not denied the importance of reason itself, but rather have criticized its unbridled use to answer metaphysical questions deemed to be beyond its scope. As Qutb put it: “‘reason’ isn’t rejected, disregarded or banished from learning through revelation and understanding what it receives; it comprehends what is necessary as well as surrendering to what is beyond its scope.”<sup>132</sup> In defence of reason, at least when employed properly, Qutb even goes so far as to argue that “this development [of our mind] is connected to man’s duty on Earth as Allah’s vice-regent, and [vice-regency] requires that the creation of man’s mind is according to this design because it is the most suitable one for performance of this role. Man will advance in grasping the laws of matter and exploiting them at the same time that he advances in the knowledge of various aspects of ‘man’s reality’, moving beyond what he had known before.”<sup>133</sup> Yet even with the material advances that this use of his mind is guaranteed to produce, ‘man’ must recognize that there are some questions regarding “the secret of life and death and of his soul,” which “will remain hidden, beyond the scope of his reason.”<sup>134</sup>

Even the earlier Muslim modernists, who rejected the simplistic opposition of science and rationality to religion, believed that there were some realms of human existence that positivist methods simply could not penetrate. Modernists, such as the Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abduh, urged followers to employ their critical faculties whenever possible within the confines of Islamic law; he also cautioned rationalists to recognize the limits of scientific inquiry, specifically in areas governed by the metaphysical and spiritual. ‘Abduh insisted that attempts to penetrate these realms are both futile and perilous:

As for speculation about the essence of the creator, on the one hand, it is an attempt to probe that which is forbidden to human reason; on the other hand, the pursuit of His essence is beyond the grasp of human faculties. These pursuits are foolish and dangerous, foolish because they are a search

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<sup>131</sup> Gray, 2003, p. 25

<sup>132</sup> Qutb, *The Islamic Conception and its Characteristics*, p. 20-21, quoted in Euben, 1999, 71.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-64.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-62.

for that which is unattainable, dangerous because it amounts to a strike against faith in that it is an attempt to define that which cannot be defined, and an attempt to limit that which has no limits.<sup>135</sup>

According to Davutoglu, it is the central role rationality (within limits) has played in Islam since its inception that distinguishes the development of Islam as an institutionalized religion from its Christian counterpart, in particular in relation to the absence of a clergy within (Sunni) Islam. The principle cause of this difference has to do with the method in which the divine revelation was collected and transformed into text, which, in Islam, entailed “rational epistemological analysis.”<sup>136</sup> Explaining why this is the case, Davutoglu writes:

Objective testimonies of the companions of the Prophet were the sole criterion in establishing the canonical text of the divine message. In even more systemised fashion, objective testimony was the basis for the collection and classification of *hadith*, the second legitimate source of religion.<sup>137</sup>

Later, the same rational approach that was needed to collect and transform the divine revelation into text, was needed by followers to actually interpret the meaning of the divine text. It this “human, and therefore subjective, dimension of interpretation” that “prevented the formation of a church organization monopolising judgement.”<sup>138</sup>

It was the uniqueness of Islam amongst the monotheistic religions to inculcate the importance of reason amongst its followers that many Muslim scholars believe made them so well-suited for the material advances promised in the modern period. According to ‘Abduh:

Islam reproaches leaders of religions for simply following in the footsteps of their forebears, and for their adherence to the plans of their ancestors... Thus it liberates the power of reason from its fetters, releasing it from enslavement to blind imitation of tradition. Islam has restored reason to its kingdom, a kingdom in which it reigns with judiciousness and wisdom, deferring to God alone and conforming to His sacred law. There are no limits to the possible pursuits within its domain, and no end to the extent of the explorations possible under its banner.<sup>139</sup>

Yet similar to the anxiety expressed by contemporary western political philosophers, like MacIntyre and Taylor, regarding the inevitable encroachment of nihilism where moral and philosophical foundations have been eroded, the Islamic critique also expresses anxiety towards a world that has been “spiritually damaged” as a result of the “separation

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Abduh, *Theology of Unity*, 1966:18-32, quoted in Euben, 1999: p. 108.

<sup>136</sup> Davutoglu, 2002: p.184.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Abduh, *Theology of Unity*, 1966:18-32, quoted in Euben, 1999: p. 108.

of knowledge from the scared.”<sup>140</sup> Though Hossein Nasr recognizes that there is no “universally accepted” response to the westernization and secularization of knowledge in the Muslim world, especially now that it feels increasingly under threat by a “politically, economically and militarily superior” region of the world that many feel they can only confront through mimicry, he concludes somewhat optimistically that there will be more convergence in opinion once the extent of the damage caused by the belief that knowledge could be pursued without consideration of religious limits or implications is fully understood. Most pressing amongst those issues facing the Muslim world are the ethical implications of modern technologies such as those posed by genetic engineering, which he describes as “the intrusion of modern medicine into the very fabric of human life,” as well as the “rapid deterioration of the environment” caused by the ‘modern’, industrialized world, all problems with which he believes the rest of the world is also struggling to come to grips. For Hossein Nasr the ultimate solution to the spiritual and material damage caused by this creeping nihilism is to go back to the basics of Islam and seek out “an ethics based upon the Islamic religion and not simply a rationalistic philosophy which would create an ethics that would have no efficacy amongst the vast majority of Muslims.”<sup>141</sup>

Though it is perhaps true that one can find a certain synergy between the Islamic and post-modern responses to the narratives of modernity and the Enlightenment, and the “disenchantment” of the world they have brought about, there is a fundamental difference in their respective solutions to the perceived problems, one which any serious analysis of political Islam must take into consideration, which is Islam’s ultimate belief in absolute truth and its subsequent rejection of individualistic subjectivism. Using the metaphor of the mosque to explain the implications of this belief, Hossein Nasr writes:

The most central architectural symbol of Islam, the mosque, is a building with a space in which all elements of subjectivism have been eliminated. It is an objective determination of the Truth, a crystal through which radiates the light of the Spirit. The spiritual ideal of Islam itself is to transform the soul of the Muslim, like a mosque, into a crystal reflecting the Divine Light.<sup>142</sup>

Despite the fairly consistent presence in western philosophical traditions and society of scepticism towards the central tenets of Enlightenment thought and their (in)ability to respond to the metaphysical needs of human beings, a seemingly positive development for the study of political movements guided by a desire to “re-enchant” the world through closer adherence to the foundations of their religion, one cannot overlook the enduring impact that the theories and methods derived from the Enlightenment have had on the foundations of contemporary western political thought. As Hansen points out, in western social sciences, this impact is manifested in “rationalism”, the belief that “social science theories should generate falsifiable hypotheses about the relationship between dependent and independent variables,” an approach to scholarship that, by its very nature, excludes consideration of subject matter that is incapable of being reduced to a tangible variable,

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<sup>140</sup> Hossein Nasr, 2002: pps. 52; 241.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>142</sup> Hossien Nassr, 2002: p. 216.

such as religious beliefs, which are often reduced in these analyses to material variables that are more easily explainable.<sup>143</sup> Halliday also touches on this issue when he laments the use of “inflatedly ‘scientific’ methodologies,” which he believes “have served to preclude other forms of discussions within the discipline, notably on the role of values [and I would add religion], and the linkage between domestic and international politics.”<sup>144</sup> Hence much of the scholarship on political Islam views these movements as using religion as a means of rallying support for movements otherwise focused on more worldly issues such as foreign occupation, poverty and/or political alienation.

Another manifestation of this tendency can be seen in the persistence of rationalist approaches to study political Islam based on a Weberian notion of “instrumental rationality,” which has the paradoxical effect of viewing Islamist movements as rational in the sense they may use effective means to attain their ends, though irrational to the extent that their religious, political, social and economic agenda is incompatible with western assumptions of what constitutes legitimate ends. From this perspective, the mainstream analyses of political Islam “portray the Islamic fundamentalist as the paradigmatic irrational rational actor.”<sup>145</sup> Kubáľková argues that by treating religious organisations as acting in accordance with rational choice theory, social scientists, in particular those belonging to American IR, have misunderstood the “strength of passion which may imbue religious organisation and the various ways in which this passion may compensate for a lack of material capability, the latter being another pillar of the American IR thought.” Pointing out the challenge which belief poses to rational choice theory, Kubáľková writes: “At the most fundamental levels of a believer's existence, it means following the dictates (not choices) of conscience, for conscience has no choice but to follow belief.”<sup>146</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Consideration of the issues raised in this chapter is vital to the process of “de-centering” the West and to the subsequent creation of a theoretical space within IR in which religion and religious movements can be seriously considered. Perhaps more importantly, such consideration is vital to the search for a space within the practice of international relations in which the potential for dialogue and understanding between ‘civilizations’ can replace an otherwise inevitable ‘clash.’ Like the critical theorists and others influenced by Foucault, I am convinced of the existence of an intimate relationship between power and knowledge - a relationship that reaches its zenith once theory is no longer theory, but rather is accepted as ‘common sense.’ When this happens, “theories become incredibly powerful since they delineate not simply what can be known but also what it is sensible to talk about or suggest. Those who swim outside these safe waters risk more than simply the judgement that their theories are wrong; their entire ethical or moral stance may be

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<sup>143</sup> Hansen, 2006, p.9.

<sup>144</sup> Halliday, 1994, p. 21.

<sup>145</sup> Euben, 1999: p. 24.

<sup>146</sup> Kubáľková, 2000, p. 685

ridiculed or seen as dangerous just because their theoretical assumptions are deemed unrealistic.”<sup>147</sup>

In *Orientalism* Said took on the task of unmasking what he saw as the insidious relationship that has existed between the academic and political worlds since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with regard to study of the “Orient”/ “East.” Using post-positivist methodologies, such as what he terms “strategic location” and “strategic formation,” Said set out to study not only the ways in which particular Orientalist scholars have, through their work, *essentialized*, or manipulated and distorted, and in this way exercised a form of control over the lives and cultures of the peoples/civilizations of the Orient, but also the ways in which, together, these authors created a body of self-referential work that was more than the sum total of its parts - it formed a powerful discourse with the power to facilitate the initiation and maintenance of the imperial agenda of the “West”/ “Occident.”<sup>148</sup> The analysis of the meta-narrative of IR and its impact on the discourse of political Islam that I have developed in this chapter can be seen in terms of the “power intellectual” component of Said’s definition of discourse, in which he argues that discourse is not merely an example of political power “in the raw,” but rather “is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power,” including “power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences),” and “power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).”<sup>149</sup> The latter two components of the discourse and their interaction with the former, “power intellectual,” will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

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The most dangerous aspect of Orientalist discourse, according to Said, is precisely the fact that it is not an example of raw political power, but rather of a more nuanced power, disguised as objective research, or common sense, thus capable of affecting not only the oppressed, but entire generations of citizens of the western empires, who had no choice but to accept these versions of the truth because nothing else existed within their cognitive reach that could challenge them. Just as Orientalism was capable of controlling the research, and types of research permitted within the various fields engaged in the study of the Orient, the meta-narrative of traditional IR (comprised of theories of the state, modernity and the Enlightenment), as explained in this chapter, has limited, in many ways, the study of Islamist movements.

For those in the West seeking to move behind facile analyses of Islamist movements restricted either by Orientalist prejudices or modern rationalist over-simplifications, the first step must be to critically assess the epistemological and ontological foundations of their own theories and methodologies, and the analytical limits that these may pose when it comes to understanding the worldview of movements that are constructed on different foundations. This process does not, however, require the recognition of *absolute difference*, separating those (Other) movements whose origins lie outside the orbit of

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<sup>147</sup> Smith, 1996.

<sup>148</sup> Said defines as “Orientalist” anyone who “teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient, whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist”. Said, 1979, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Said, 1978, p. 12

western 'modernity' from their western counterparts (Self), but rather just the acknowledgement of *difference*, which cannot be fully comprehended or accommodated if viewed only from a place of judgment and control.