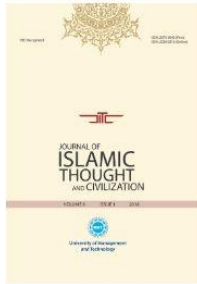


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Contending Visions of Contemporary Islamic Reassertion

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Abstract

The understanding of contemporary Islamic activism has become one of the most important challenges for international academia since the 1980s. Late 1970s and early 1980s, witnessed a chain of unexpected but significant happenings in the heart of the Muslim world, - which brought Islamic activism at the centre of academia world over. Islamic revolution of Iran, the assassination of Egyptian President Sadat of Egypt, initiation of the the process of Islamization in Pakistan, Islamist resistance to USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, and occupation of the Holy Mosque of Mecca by Muslim extremists were among some of those unprecedented incidents. the end of Cold War, the appearance of Al-Qaeda at the world stage, the unfortunate occurrence 9/11 and the consequent initiation of of the war of terror to eliminate terrorism exacerbated this situation. The invasion of Afghanistan but no end in sight to wind up. This invasion despite tremendous efforts to explain and understand the causes, goals, effects and future direction of this rupture, furthure intensified the gravity of the situation .Many questions remain unanswered and much work is needed to develop theory which can be generalized to make satisfactory predictions about this particular scenario. The purpose of this paper is to look into the theoretical approaches adopted for the study of this phenomenon, the trajectories of these approaches, their current status and future prospects.

Keywords: Islamic activism, academia, theoretical approaches, trajectories, current status, future prospects

Introduction

During cold war (1950-1980), the world was divided into two poles of influence, one led by USA and the other by USSR. Though, there were more than 50 sovereign Muslim states in the world but they played only a marginal role in world politics. The ruling elites of these countries were aligned with either one of the two above mentioned superpowers, depending on their own narrow interests, mostly that of strengthening their hold on power gained illegitimately. Although in all these countries, there were protest movements (Nationalist, Communist and Islamic), demanding change in the system of governance since their independence from the colonial powers in the 5th and 6th decade of the 20th century, however, ruling elites were seemed to be in full control. It seemed that the synthesis of modernization and secularization had got hold of this part of the world and all Muslim countries were in transition toward their ultimate goal of modernization

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as per the western model.¹ Islam was declared defenseless against the western civilization.²

In late 1970s, an unprecedented upheaval shook the globe and started a chain of unprecedented happenings which have not stopped still. Pakistan witnessed a popular movement started by Islamists, nationalists and modernists jointly by the name of “Tehrik Nizame Mustafa” in 1977, which resulted into the toppling of the government of Bhutto and the initiation of the process of Islamization by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq. In 1979, the armed forces of USSR entered Afghanistan and a local resistance movement led by young Islamists began against this foreign intrusion.

The same year, some fundamentalists seized the control of the holy mosque in Mecca as a sign of resentment against the rule of the House of Saud. The most significant was the fall of the Shah of Iran as a result of an anti-monarchy movement in which almost all segments of the population including students, labor, women, secular as well religious, lower as well as middle classes and minorities participated but were led by the radical clergy.³ Islamic revolution of Iran, which was considered a symbol of modernization and bastion of stability according to international political pundits, took western world by surprise and forced the general public as well as experts of political science and sociology into a re-evaluation of their theories and constructs concerning the role of religion in the modern world.⁴ Turkey also started to witness the growth of the Islamist project at the same time.

The first Islamist party by the name of National Order Party (NOP) was established in 1971 and after its closure by the ruling elite, Islamists again reorganized themselves by forming National Salvation Party (NSP) in 1972. NSP, on the basis of its electoral performance, became a ruling partner of all the three Turkish governments during 1970s which increased Islamists’ influence in Turkish establishment as well as society at large. These unexpected setbacks to the project of secularization in both “Modernization Models” forced the political scientists and sociologists to revisit their understandings of Muslim societies. According to one learned scholar, from 1970s onward, entire forests have been used to produce paper for publishing literature on Islam and Islamism amid the ongoing debates. The focus remains on how to interpret and explain the phenomenon of continuing importance of Islam in Muslim countries. More specifically, this literature aims to explain the ability of Islamic movements to win support of the populace and mobilize a huge number of people denouncing secularism and demanding the creation of an Islamic society and state.⁵

¹Gilles Kepel and Anthony F. Roberts, *Jihād: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: Tauris, 2014), 5.

²Daniel Lerner, Lucille W Pevsner and David Riesman, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 45.

³Asef Bayat, “Islamism and Social Movement Theory,” *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 904, doi: 10.1080/01436590500089240.

⁴Richard T Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland, *Religious Resurgence* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987), vii.

⁵Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 214.

Since 1970s these movements have been named under different terminologies but the frequently used term is “Political Islam” or “Islamism.” After almost four decades and innumerable deliberations, matter is still not settled and there are compelling arguments and suggestions that due to diverse and heterogeneous nature of Islamic activism, the term “Political Islam” does not represent and encompass the similarities, agreements, colliding approaches and differences within diverging Islamic organizations and parties.⁶ Purpose of this article is to look briefly into the contending visions of different theoretical approaches adopted for Study of contemporary Islamic activism since 1970s. Criticism and suggestions for improvement from different learned scholars also added.

In the beginning, western scholars tried to assure that it was a temporary phenomenon and may die down soon, perhaps as soon as petro dollars of Arab countries were exhausted and financing of Islamists dried up.⁷ It was predicted that Islamic Republic of Iran will fail sooner than later to meet the high aspirations of youth and the lower middle class. American financing of Afghan resistance was considered a major cause of rise in jihaādi culture among Muslim youth and was destined to vanish with the closure of that financing.

By early 1990s, it was declared that political Islam had failed.⁸ This thesis still resonates among some scholars.⁹ Few years later, it was claimed that due to historical and ideological failures, Islamists were transcending their ideals of the establishment of Islamic societies and by realizing the irrationality of their utopian goals were entering into a phase of post-Islamism, looking for accommodation within existing secular set-ups.¹⁰ Turkish AKP and Iranian reformists were said to be the examples of this trajectory of Islamism.¹¹ Conferences and seminars were held to trace post-Islamism in Muslim countries worldwide.¹²

However, the so called model of post-Islamism, that is, AKP Turkey is severely criticized by scholars and is now blamed as a double-face actor.¹³ Since 2011, after getting rid of authoritarian Kemalism, weakening of unbridled military and neutralizing of judiciary through constitutional changes, AKP has begun to veer to the right on

⁶John L. Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim, and Naser Ghobadzadeh, *The Politics of Islamism Diverging Visions and Trajectories* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 269.

⁷Gilles Kepel, *Jihād: A Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

⁸Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁹Tarek Osman, “Failing of Political Islam,” *Cairo Review of Global Affairs* 19 (2015): 42, <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/failings-of-political-islam/>

¹⁰Asef Bayat, “The Coming of a Post-Islamist Society,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 9 (1996), doi:10.1080/10669929608720091

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Many Faces of Political Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹³Ihsan Yilmaz, Greg Barton and James Barry, “The Decline and Resurgence of Turkish Islamism: The Story of Tayyip Erdoğan’S AKP,” *Citizenship and Globalisation Research Papers* 1, no. 1 (2017), doi:10.1515/jcgs-2017-0005.48

religious issues by adopting a policy of soft Islamism.¹⁴ Arab spring of 2011-12 transpired the mobilization power and influence of the Islamic movements in Muslim societies. One doesn't have to agree with Islamists, but in the light of the rapidly changing scenario in the Muslim world, there is no denial of an urgent need to understand them.¹⁵

Many old, amended and new theories have been developed to study, explain and understand this phenomenon. Future trends of Islamic movements, predicted on the basis of certain theoretical underpinnings and detailed analysis of the prevailing situation, have been found deficit when reviewed later in the light of changed realities.¹⁶ Following is an overview of change witnessed during last few decades in this field.

2. Main Theoretical Approaches to Study of Phenomenon of Islamic Reassertion

Western world for centuries has based its social and political theories on clear separation of sacred and profane. The assertions of Islamic movements that Islam is the solution of the problems of contemporary societies collides with this long held belief. Hence, they consider it conservative, outdated and obsolete. Modernization theory, one of the most popular theories among western scholars, was based on the construct that traditions and religions are the real culprits impeding the progress and development of underdeveloped societies.¹⁷ It was claimed that historically, the world was filled with sacred in all dimensions (thought, practice and institutions). However, the forces of modernization loosened its dominance and inevitably it was to disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.¹⁸ Till date, this theory resonates in most of the approaches toward the study of Islamism. Hence, it is useful to look into its background briefly.

2.1. Modernization/ Secularization Theory

The origin of modernization theory is as old as that of sociology itself. All the legends in the field of sociology (Weber, Durkheim and Marx) believed and furthered one or the other version of this theory. The belief that as society modernizes religion will decline was at the heart of western social sciences. Weber believed that modernization was based on the rise of scientific knowledge and application of rational standards in life and since religion and tradition cannot reconcile with this concept, hence they are bound to disappear with progress in modernization. Durkheim thought that religions bound societies together, especially small groups in traditional societies, where they met face to face and celebrated the sacred. With modernization and shifting of population to urban centres these bonds would break, people would individualize and religion would

¹⁴Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle over Islam Is Reshaping the World* (New York: Saint Martins Griffin, 2017), 159.

¹⁵Shadi Hamid and William F. McCants, *Rethinking Political Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13.

¹⁶Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Many Faces of Political Islam*.

¹⁷Husnul Amin, *Post-Islamism: Pakistan in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization* (Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research and Dialogue, 2016), 18.

¹⁸C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 32-33.

disappear in the process. Marx thought that people observe religion to cope with oppressions and difficulties faced by them prevalent in their societies, hence religion was doomed to die as soon as state based on communist principles was established.

This theory was based on an imagined evolutionary pattern of non-western societies comparable to that of the western world, bound up with the development of nation-state. Although it was not quite said but remained implicit behind this theory that eventually everyone would become secular as it was an unstoppable and inescapable change that every society was to go through sooner or later.

It was a kind of an irrefutable prophecy that the way European society was changing was the standardized pattern of social evolution.¹⁹ No nation could remain traditional and backward. Moreover, to be modern, citizens of every nation had to accept and emulate the methods and ideas of the West where people had successfully modernized by rejecting tradition and backwardness.²⁰ The original secularization thesis asserted that reason would eventually replace belief. Its revised version retains its claim of ultimate de-sacralisation of public sphere, but concedes that reason may not necessarily replace religion in people's private life.²¹

Socio-political scientists were confronted by a formidable challenge during 1960s and 1970s, when after a considerable time period of passivity, religion as an inspiring force re-appeared on the world stage in the shape of Islamic revivalist movements. The study of this unexpected phenomenon, which challenged all the basic concepts and theories of socio-political changes, became the most urgent need of the hour.²² The stage theory of secularization was severely criticized and questioned.²³ Some modified approaches to cater for the altered scenario were developed which are categorized and labelled based on their central themes. Although these theories many a time blur the boundaries which identify these categories, however, this categorization is quite useful to understand the prevalent thinking.

2. 2. Contemporary Approaches

Adopted by western scholars to study Islamic revivalism in the Muslim world can be mainly categorized as essentialist and materialist. Essentialists considered this phenomenon as an expression of civilizational/ cultural essence or reaction of tradition against modernity, while materialists interpreted it as a mediated response to the supposedly more fundamental (political and economic) processes.²⁴ These categories have been further subcategorized into Essentialist, Contextualist, Marxist, Historical-institutional and Social Movement Theory (SMT).

¹⁹“The Secularization Thesis,” *The Religious Studies Project*, April 10, 2016, accessed May 04, 2018, <https://religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/podcast-linda-woodhead-on-the-secularisation-thesis/>

²⁰Hemant Shah, *The Production of Modernization: Daniel Lerner, Mass Media, and the Passing of Traditional Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 4.

²¹Cihan Tuğal, “Islamism in Turkey: Beyond Instrument and Meaning,” *Economy and Society* 31, no. 1 (2002): 108, doi: 10.1080/03085140120109268.

²²Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 214.

²³*Ibid.*, 15-18.

²⁴Cihan Tuğal, “Islamism in Turkey,” 85.



2.2.1. Essentialist Approach

This approach assumes that all the Muslim societies are dominated by an unchanging and rigid set of process and meanings, which can only be understood through the understanding of text of Islam itself and language generated by it.²⁵ They try to understand the character of Islamic movements from 'Islam' which they presume as a rigid and a unique doctrine.²⁶ Views of the weberian elitist theory, concerning the process of change in the social norms of society, resonate in all the strands of this approach. Weber believed that the activities of groups derive from the particular belief system they adhere, hence the fundamental role in the change is attributed to the ideas and symbols of the belief system of the activists.²⁷

Lewis argues that factors behind the effective mobilization of Muslim masses by Islamists are the familiar themes, slogans and symbols used by them of that of Islam, hence familiar and effective to criticize what is wrong and program, to set them right.²⁸ Huntington distributes the world into blocks, based on their cultures and civilizations, considering them as monolithic units and advises Americans to stick to their western identity and accept that their civilization is unique not universal, because of failure of modernization process in non-western societies.²⁹ Absence of certain core values such as, separation of religion and politics, social pluralism, rule of law, democratic institutions, recognition of basic human rights and civil liberties in the these societies, are blamed for their backwardness.³⁰

Essentialists rule out partnership of Islamists in search for a democratic peace in 21st century, considering Islamism as totalitarian ideology, using Islam as a political ideology creating deep civilizational rivalry between Muslims and non-Muslims.³¹ Their explanations see Islamic phenomenon as an emanation of historically continuous cultural essence of Muslim peoples, and Quest of Islamic state, a political expression of this historical continuity and essential cultural affinity of Islam.³²

Fundamentalist Islam is considered, a radical as well as a Utopian movement which is by default aggressively against democracy and westernization and also anti-Semitic. They advise their governments to keep Islamists from seizing power, as once they capture it, they will hold on firmly.³³ Islamism is said having certain inherent cultural³⁴ characteristics which are impediment to change and without changes in that

²⁵Fred Halliday, "The Politics of 'Islam' - A Second Look," *British Journal of Political Science* (1995): 399-417. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/194261>.

²⁶Asef Bayat, *Islamism and Social Movement Theory*, 899.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 896.

²⁸Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, January 28 (2009): 116.

²⁹Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 20, 21.

³⁰Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Policy*, March 1 (2003): 62.

³¹Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), vii-ix.

³²Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), ix.

³³Daniel Pipes, "There Are No Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Iran," *The National Interest*, September 22 (1995): 56.

³⁴Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic*, August 25, 2015, 59.

cultural thinking, these societies would remain deficient to adopt democratic changes.³⁵ Discourse of Islamists is depicted as a rooted in the historic rivalry among Muslim and Christian Europe, since the time of crusades and Islam's rejection and prejudice against Judeo-Christian heritage.³⁶ Claiming no separation of religion and politics, they cannot renounce their ideological agenda in favor of pragmatism and democracy.³⁷ Any attempt to graft the western social and political ideas and models on the alien socio-cultural formations of Islam is doomed to fail.³⁸

Islam is considered as a religion lost in the age and time of its revelation, unable to adapt to the requirements of the changed world of today.³⁹ Muslim societies and activities are assumed to be directed, by an ahistorical, acontextual Islamic essence.⁴⁰ All the towering essentialists, such as Bernard Lewis, Sivan, Daniel Pipes as well as Bassam Tibi, approach Islam and Muslim societies through modernization theory and based on the failure of secularization in Muslim societies as expected by them, results in to their declaration that it is all due to a monolithic and inflexible Islam.⁴¹

Considering Islamic activism as dangerous, irrational and countercultural movement, is only due to the fact that it does not conform to modern secular presuppositions. It also poses a threat to interests of Muslim secular regimes, and multinational corporations involved in this part of the world. Otherwise, these movements have attracted the educated and professional sectors of Muslim societies and many of their leaders are graduates of major universities. They are very modern, and modernization has been a major factor in resurgence of Islam in Muslim societies.⁴² *Ennahda's* voluntary abandonment of government demonstrated that, fears of "one man, one vote, and one time" was unfounded. Even in Egypt, democratic process was not put to end by Islamists but a strange alliance of military leaders, secularists and *Salfists*.⁴³

2.2.2. Contextualist Approach

This approach tried to fill the gap, created by Essentialists' literal/ textual reading of Islam. Difference between Essentialists and Contextualists is, that former, mainly historians and philologists, mostly bring with them the bag of ethnocentric and raciest basis, and consciously formulate arguments about Islam as a religious system by studying Islamic Texts while the later one, studies people who happen to be Muslim to formulate

³⁵Bassam Tibi, "Islamism and Democracy: On the Compatibility of Institutional Islamism and the Political Culture of Democracy," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 2 (2009): 147, doi: 10.1080/14690760903192073.

³⁶Bernard Lewis "The Root of Muslim Rage," 60.

³⁷Olivier Roy, "Political Islam after the Arab Spring: Between Jihād and Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/ Dec 2017): 130.

³⁸Ghulam Sarwar, (Reviewed Works), "Islam, the People and the state by Sami Zubaida," *Pakistan Horizon* 43 no. 2 (1990): 166.

³⁹Bernard, Lewis, "What Went Wrong," *Atlantic Monthly* 289 (1) (2002a): 43-45.

⁴⁰S. Sayyid and Hamid Dabashi, *A Fundamental Fear: Euro centrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

⁴¹Hasnul Amin, "From Islamism to Post-Islamism," Repub. Eur. Nl, Last modified 2010, <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/19340/HusnulAminPhDThesispdf.pdf>, 37.

⁴²John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8 - 9.

⁴³Olivier Roy, *Political Islam after the Arab Spring*, 131.

their argument.⁴⁴ They stress contingencies in the study of Islamism and reject the Essentialists' portraying of monolithic and fixed Islam. This approach has three different strands. First one is the deprivation theory which assumes that Islamism attracts the people left behind in socio-economic struggle. The second strand stresses that Islamic organizations have different characteristics and goals in spite of apparent similarities. Third strand considers that lack of democracies and attraction of Islamic movements is not due to monolithic Islam but due to the particular pattern of state formation.⁴⁵

Creetz's *Islam Observed*, broke with the Essentialists/orientalist traditional approach based on dichotomy i.e., we-others. He carried out his study of Islam based on actual living of Islamic societies and not on Islamic scriptures. His findings showed that essentialists treatment of Islamic Movements as monolithic was not supported by the study of lived Islam and found that based on the context, Islamists have devised different strategies for pursuing the struggle for the real. In one of such approach, they absolutely separate the matters related with science and religion and did not involve metaphysics for scientific and secular matters. In the other approach they interpret science in a manner that proves, what is already spelled out in religion, instead of an independent and impartial inquiry.⁴⁶

There is a relation between a particular Muslim society and the symbols it uses, to objectify its values, norms, and notions of significant action. There is, then, a productive side to interpretations of Islam that bears some relation to the society, and not only to individual interpreters.⁴⁷ Gilles Kepel suggest that Islamist movements embraced; the poverty-stricken, recently urbanized younger generation of the cities, God-fearing bourgeoisie, decedents' of traditional mercantile families who were thrust aside, after decolonization, and highly educated professionals who rapidly became rich due to getting opportunity of well paid jobs in Gulf States but felt deprived due to being out of traditional circle of political power.

In spite of having different ambitions and worldviews, they felt attraction and echo of their frustration in the political ideals of Islamism, such as making of social justice, removal of economically and morally corrupt and bankrupt regimes and establishment of a utopian Islamic state etc.⁴⁸ Islamic activism is attributed to revival of traditional beliefs and an provision of outlet for the frustration of difficult situations created due to movement of rural population to cities in search of jobs in industries as well explosion of population growth during last few decades.⁴⁹ It is claimed that the Islamists of yesterday were product of social, political, economic and cultural

⁴⁴D. M. Varisco, Clifford Geertz, "Islam Observed Again," in *Islam Obscured: Contemporary Anthropology of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁴⁵M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18 - 19.

⁴⁶Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 109.

⁴⁷Michael M. J. Fischer, "Islam and the Revolt of the Petit Bourgeoisie," *Daedalus* 111, no. 1, *Religion* (Winter, 1982): 101-125.

⁴⁸Kepel, *Jihād: The Trail of Political Islam*, 6.

⁴⁹Ziad Munson, "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood," *The Sociological Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2001): 490 - 491, doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2001.tb01777.x.

circumstances of their time.⁵⁰ Contextualists claim that the policies and practices of Islamist movements are driven less by ideology than by events, and see such groups as reactive and adaptive.⁵¹

They believe that main aim of the Islamists is to survive as a coherent organization and political actors, hence they seek to adapt to circumstances and country-specific norms. Their religious rhetoric is just a way to express unique identity and articulate grievances, especially against the West.⁵² However, by doing so, they ignore the importance of ideas and vision of Islamists for a different type of world than that of present which they blame as based on hegemonic narrative of the West.⁵³

2.2.3. Marxist-Materialist Approach

Marxist- Materialist Approach to study of Islamic movements give paramount importance to prevalent material and economic factors in the Muslim societies. The context as per their narrative is class struggle in Muslim societies. Classic Marxist approach believed that Islamic Movements were to take care of the class interest of those who hold power and authority in Muslim societies.⁵⁴ Some of the scholars holding this approach although recognized religion as a source in mobilizing of social protest but with certain reservations and restricting its relevance to non-modern societies. However, situation changed in due course from the classical orthodox to neo-Marxist revisionist one.

Once upon a time religion was considered; as an exploitation tool for dominant classes, depoliticizing agent in the social life and was expected that it will fade away. However, with the passage of time it has been recognized as a potential mobilizing force, but still it is assumed that Islamism is irrational and because of its insistence on morality it cannot succeed in solving the problems of masses demanding solution.⁵⁵ Based on the Gramscian framework, some of the scholars classify Islamic Movements as an authentic counter-hegemonic organizations' who have successfully appropriated Islamic symbols, discourse and language to express the socio-economic grievances of the alienated, marginalized and disgruntled masses of their countries. They present Islam as a revolutionary ideology asking for struggle against the prevailing un-Islamic and illegitimate regimes and power structures.⁵⁶

Rise of Islamic movements in later part of 20th century are attributed to contemporary political and economic developments and, failure of secular nationalism, Stalinist left, as well as of incumbent regimes in resolution of the economic crises. Through the establishment of vast welfare networks, Islamist have offered the deprived sections of their societies, solution to their problems based on Islamic solidarities. Close relations with these middle and lower middle classes have provided them the opportunity

⁵⁰Tarek Osman, "Failing of Political Islam," 46.

⁵¹Hasnul Amin, *From Islamism to Post-Islamism*, 40.

⁵²Olivier Roy, *Political Islam after the Arab Spring*, 129-130.

⁵³Roxanne L Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23.

⁵⁴Hasnul Amin, *From Islamism to Post-Islamism*, 41.

⁵⁵Tugal, "Islamism in Turkey," 85.

⁵⁶Thomas J. Butko, "Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2004), doi.10.1080/1353019042000203430.



to build support for their narrative and recruit supporters to advance their cause. In due course of time these strategies have helped Islamism to propel onto the world stage.⁵⁷ Absence of viable left in these societies to respond to anti-imperialist sentiments has enabled Islamists to benefit from their anger.⁵⁸

This approach attributes to the strain produced by modernization and westernization of Muslim societies for pushing the traditional classes to the Islamic Groups.⁵⁹ Islamism is depicted to continue expanding its influence unless the left is able to develop more organizational strength to confront socioeconomic problems of middle and lower middle classes.⁶⁰ Religious inspired social protests and religious images of justice, witnessed in last few years seem to be taking over territory traditionally claimed by various leftism.⁶¹ It is basically a short coming of neo-Marxist revisionist approach which considers political Islam as a movement of lower deprived classes of third world and religion acts as mere a mobilization tool. It neglects the role of Islam as a meaning system.⁶²

This approach reduces Islamic activism just a substitute for older, secular nationalism and populism of the developing countries.⁶³ Considering Islamism just a reaction to poverty and need, of poor of societies, is neglecting the fact that most of the Islamists are from educated intelligentsia and middle class. Especially Gulf States prove that reactionary behavior and affluence are not mutually exclusive.

2.2.4. Historical-Institutional Approach

This approach challenges the ‘essentialists’ and materialists’ views of Islamic politics and explains the Islamic phenomenon in politics as a product of particular political and socio-economic conjuncture. It insists that contemporary Islamic activism was a modern ideology and could only be understood in terms of prevailing socio-political conditions.⁶⁴ Resentment among the masses due to unemployment, fraud, population explosion and bankruptcy of education in these countries has been channeled to Islamic politics for historical reasons.

In Iran in late 1970s, in spite of long spell of harsh suppressing measures, the secular intellectual could not respond effectively due to lack of political organization, experience and clear political objectives. Whereas strong network of clergy and their

⁵⁷Deepa Kumar, “Political Islam: A Marxist Analysis,” *International Socialist Review*, Issue 76 (March 2011).

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Munson, “Islamic Mobilization,” 491.

⁶⁰Eric Davis, Religion against the State: A Political Economy of Religious Radicalism in Egypt and Israel, In R. Antoun and M. Hegland (Eds.) *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 164.

⁶¹Tugal, “Islamism in Turkey,” 87.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Mary Elain Hegland, “Religious Resurgence in Today’s World: Refuge from Dislocation or Enablement for Change,” in R. Antoun and M. Hegland, eds., *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity and Judaism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

⁶⁴Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on the Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1980), ix.

students (Khomeini's associates and supporters) with clear strategy aided by a populist and radical rhetoric, hegemonized the multitude of forces eager for revolutionary transformation. This political conjuncture raised khomeinist Islam to the leading position in the revolution, although there was no intrinsic link which tied that type of ideology to those particular social classes.⁶⁵ Islamists discourse has opted the models of modern western political ideas.

To understand it one must refer to: the concepts of modern political ideas concerned with the "nation state" as well as the concept of "nation"; Governments based on constitutions; need of social justice and system of checks and balance through separation of power among government organs, which have been adopted by Islamists.⁶⁶ Even if Islamists criticize that all political models adopted by Muslim countries are import from the alien culture of west they cannot deny that all of their political ideas, models of organizations are heavily inspired and influenced by the western concept of nation and nation state.⁶⁷

Contention that *shari'ah* constitute the rule of law, must not ignore the essential institutional underpinning of this notion in the modern context: evolved institutions, codes and procedures of legal enactment with checks and balances.⁶⁸ Guiding principles of Iranian revolution as well as Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e-faqih* were ideological constructions relating to the imamate and special role of clerics in the absence of Imam, which was departure and quite unprecedented, from the traditional *shiite* thoughts which distinguished, clearly, between state and religious community.

This departure, which made *Faqih* into a prince and denounced monarchy, got its credibility in the context of modern nation state, which the Muslim people will choose to be ruled by Islam and by the "Just *Faqih*," (embodiment of Islamic knowledge to the dispensation of justice).⁶⁹ Similarly constant tension between the ideas of Islamic republic in accordance with the *shari'ah's* Principles and pressing contingencies of modern society, economy and state, was ultimately sorted out by Khomeini's ruling declaring state as heir of Prophet (SAW) and as such authorized to abrogate any provision of *shari'ah*, if it is in the interest of the Islamic community.⁷⁰

The difference in histories of the development of the modern state in Iran and Egypt, and the modes of institutionalization of religion in relation to the state, in these countries explains the contrasting approaches of Islamists of Iran and Egypt,⁷¹ and refutes the essentialists' approach, who see contemporary Islamic activism as a monolithic

⁶⁵Sami Zubaida, "Islam," 80-81; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for The Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 106-114.

⁶⁶Shahrough Akhavi, Review of *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on the Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*, by Sami Zubaida," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (Aug., 1995): 355

⁶⁷Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, ix.

⁶⁸Sami Zubaida, *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 15.

⁶⁹Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, x.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, xi, xii.

⁷¹Sami Zubaida, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt and Iran," in *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, (Ed.) Lionel Caplan (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 48.

Muslim response to modernity.⁷² Islamism being a modern ideology, quite unlike historical precedents, has not reversed the modernity, instead has carried it in different directions, not determined by cultural essences but by contingent histories.⁷³ Although this approach is stronger than other materialist approaches as it brings into focus the history as conjuncture rather than universal development, but its neglecting of Islam's attraction in populace makes it weak in explaining the legitimacy created by politics of religion in the region.

Moreover it fails to explain satisfactorily that, why the Islamists could not be tainted by the regimes at the same scale as their nationalists and socialist counterparts.⁷⁴ Moreover this approach considers Islamism just an instrument utilized, once conditions for emergence of populism are established but ignores its active role in shaping of the populism. Its interpretation of the populism of Islamists as that of down-trodden elements of society, also misses dominant presence of educated and middle classes, in these movements.⁷⁵

2.2.5. Historical Master-Narratives Approach

As per this approach beliefs in the unity of religion and politics is, "the Islamic imperative,"⁷⁶ which functions as the basic motivating force, for Muslims concerning state and government. It is assessment guide, of judging their governments, whether or not mandated by God.⁷⁷ According to this approach early period of the Islamic community embodied the unity of religion and politics. Religion provided the worldview which formed the framework of meaning for both individual and collective life.

This shared view became a basic principal, translated into public commitment to the Islamic laws. Engagement in restorative and corrective activities in all the Muslim societies, in variety of contexts, gets motivation from commitment to *shari'ah* and model of the early community. This commitment acted as an inspiring force for pre-modern revivalist movements which was a response to socio-moral decline and western colonialism. Following the same pattern in their world view the contemporary Islamic movements have built on, and broadened this legacy.⁷⁸ This approach rejects the view that Islamic activism is expression of social, economic or nationalist interest and argues that it is continuation of the basic themes, though expressed in new ways. Lying of religious motivation behind the revival and the important role of the past are two basic themes of this approach.

2.2.6. Social Movement Theory Approach

Charles Tilly defines social movements as one form of contentious politics. Based on this approach, social movements are considered to carry on political struggle to create collective challenges, for attainment of common goal and, are based on social

⁷²Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, xiv.

⁷³*Ibid.*, xxii.

⁷⁴Tugal, "Islamism in Turkey," 88.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁶John Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 4.

⁷⁷Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 4.

⁷⁸John Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 30-32.

solidarities. These movements manage to sustain their interaction with the opposite camp of elites, opponents and authorities to attain their goal.⁷⁹ Quintan Wiktorowicz argues that similarly, Islamic revivalism movements also mobilise their contentions politically, to support Muslim causes.⁸⁰

As Social movements not only contend against a prevailing governing setup and its institutions based on injustice but also parallel engage in mobilizing popular support for their narrative, the Islamists along with their claim that, Islam presents solution to all of the contemporary problems endeavour to mobilize consensus around their narrative. This point 'leads researcher into social movement theory to understand the Islamists' activism.⁸¹ It enables researchers to analyse Islamic movements, taking into account the external opportunities, constraints and framing issues in consideration, rather than dichotomist approach such as modern/ anti-modern, religious/ secular etc.⁸² Social Movement Theory (SMT) digs down to understand the causes behind rise and development of social movements by looking at the political opportunity structures, those produce and help individual as well as group responses.⁸³

This approach consider Islamic activists, not as fanatics, different from those of western activists, but rather similarly rational actors, responding to the situation rationally and initiating the movements in the similar way as others, around the globe.⁸⁴ Use of social movement theory approach is especially very useful to understand those organizations, which are diverse and non-monolithic. For the understanding and analysis of individual political actors as well as national and international movements, the four fundamental variables of SMT are very useful.⁸⁵ This model suggests that decline in repressive measures of state, opening of windows for political access, increasing differences among elites and influential allies of government, contribute significantly in the success of SMO.⁸⁶

Scholars are optimistic that the application of social movement theory to diverse activism of Islamists ultimately produce credible empirical basis for rethinking the way, social activism of Islamists is conceptualised by scholars now a days.⁸⁷ Merely depending on the discourse will not suffice, rather the contexts, structures and practices have to be taken into account. Off course, it is a great challenge.⁸⁸ Detailed study of practices of

⁷⁹Suzanne Staggenborg, *Social Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4-5.

⁸⁰Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*, 2.

⁸¹Assef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 6.

⁸²HasanulAmin, "Islamism to Post-Islamism," 43.

⁸³Garbi Schmidt, Review of *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, by Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Contemporary Sociology* 34, no. 4, (July 2005): 401.

⁸⁴Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004), 298.

⁸⁵Michael V. Samarov, "A Social Movement Theory: Analysis of Islamist Totalitarianism," Dtic.Mil, Last modified 2018, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a504756.pdf>.

⁸⁶Munson, "Islamic Mobilization," 494.

⁸⁷Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *The World Quarterly* 26, no. 6, (2005), 893.

⁸⁸Asef Bayat, "Islamism," 905 - 906.

residents of one district of Istanbul shows that to understand properly, one has to handle the identity works of social movements and their relation to the political realm simultaneously, as a parts of a larger hegemonic project. It is problematic to classify these movements as state-oriented or society-oriented.⁸⁹ The mobilization strategy of Islamist movement in Turkey, based on transformation of everyday practices, is novel concept in social movement working. Although new SMT have some tools to analyse such new developments but those are insufficient.⁹⁰

3. Critique and Recommendations

As noted above, political scientists, sociologists and academics are struggling hard to make sense of complexities of Islamic activism. Moten thinks that, the issue with these theories and explanations drawn from western rationalist discourse and worldview is, that, influence of belief in transcendent authority on the actions of Islamists is not accounted for. Islam insists that politics and ethics are inseparably linked with each other and politics must be a governed by ethics.⁹¹ Western political science, its methodology and its epistemology is built on the belief that natural science has limitless power. Its assumptions and conceptions are based on historical experiences in social and cultural fields of western world, which was materialistic and secular in its essence, hence fail to apprehend the dynamics of Islamic movements.⁹²

Euben criticizes those scholars who consider Islamic activism as a reaction of Muslim youth to the deplorable socioeconomic conditions and political circumstances of the Muslim world. According to her, mistake being committed, is the neglect of alternate system of Islamic ideas and contending vision for the world advanced by Islamist ideologues.⁹³ Cihan recommends to combine the material understandings with that of cultural in order to interpret Islamic revivalism adequately. He argues that it must be understood as a multivalent religious and-moral populism which is potentially explosive articulation of different class and religious interests.⁹⁴ Munson suggests that, the existing understanding of the role of ideas in Islamic movements need to be carried out deeply by expansion of focus on the understanding of the relationship between mobilization and repression. It must include the study of processes within organizations which enable them to withstand the repressive efforts of the regimes.⁹⁵

It has been noted that the present studies on Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, fail to explain, how MB was able to mobilize so many Egyptians in 1930s, 1940s and 1950s?⁹⁶ Ideology need to be considered more systematically as its effects on the social

⁸⁹Cihan Tuğal, "Transforming Everyday Life: Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Theory and Society* 38, no. 5 (2009): 423, doi: 10.1007/s11186-009-9091-7.

⁹⁰Tugal, "Transforming Everyday Life," 452- 453.

⁹¹Moten, *Political Science*, 44.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 23.

⁹⁴Cihan Tugal, "Islamism in Turkey: Beyond Instrument and Meaning," *Economy and Society* 3, No. 1, (February 2002): 86.

⁹⁵Ziad Munson, "Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Brotherhood," *The Sociological Society* 42, no. 4 (2001): 488.

⁹⁶Ibid., 490.



movements are more pervasive than current theory allow.⁹⁷ Instead of espousal of apocalyptic notions of a clash of civilizations or of a cultural invasion, solution lies in rational interaction between western and Muslim intellectuals as well as societies.⁹⁸ Pointing toward Islamic exceptionalism, it is said that, in Europe church lost its fight against secularism because it lacked a coherent conception of law, governance and state building.

A political and politicized Islam may succeed where political Christianity failed, as Christianity's political posture was unsustainable due to Jesus's "prophetic" model, the legacy of earlier Christian's community, the nature and role of Christian scripture and the absence of any divinely mandated governance. To the extent Muslim world seems violent is a product of, rather than a precursor to, modernization.⁹⁹ Triumphantist explanations of end of the cold war has been criticized and is suggested that instead of initiating another cold war, the consequences of which cannot be predicted, it must be understood that religious revivalism is an international phenomenon, not limited to Islam only. It draws attention to the problems of liberal democracy needing correction, in the same fashion as Marxism-Leninism drew attention to the shortcomings of unbridled capitalism. That very cogent theoretical critique, supported the creation of welfare state, and advanced efforts to address the inequalities of the global economic system.¹⁰⁰

4. Conclusion

Overview of contending visions of Islamic resurgence, dawns that studies of Islamic revivalism has developed appreciably during last few decades. Essentialist view has lost considerable ground to more realistic approaches based on the context and new social movement theories. Instead of dwelling on the culturist characteristics of the actors, researchers are going through "thick description" of diversified Muslim societies and sometime apparently conflicting strands of thought within Islamic movements. Instead of undue stress on otherness, confliction and clash theories, there are suggestions to look into the convergence strands. Islamists does not reject modernity and in many a situation they are acting as vanguard of modernity. Most of the scholars have come to realization, that dreaming to divorce religion from the public sphere in Muslim societies is unrealistic if not impossible. Exceptionalism of Islamic thought in certain aspects along with many similarities need due accommodation.

There are recommendations that Islamic revivalism must be viewed a critique of prevailing world order and vying for an alternate based on sacred principles, with a claim to fill the void in human life created of excesses of materialistic views and consumerism. Islamists are not isolated in this view as many of the voices in the West echo the similar grievances toward unbridled Western liberalism. It is hoped that focus of studies of Islamic resurgence will be shifted from confliction, clash, prejudice and otherness to convergence, commonalities, positivity, search of common grounds, such as social justice, equitable distribution of wealth and coexistence with differing worldviews.

⁹⁷Ibid., 507.

⁹⁸Valla Vakili, "Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdul Karim Saroush," accessed May 4, 2018, <https://www.bing.com/cr>.

⁹⁹Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism*, 65-67.

¹⁰⁰Michael E. Salla, "Political Islam and the West: A New Cold War or Convergence?" *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1997): 740, doi: 10.1080/01436599714731.



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