

# Secularity, Sociology, and the Contemporary History of Islam

*James McDougall*

In March 2015, the influential American periodical *The Atlantic* published a widely discussed article entitled “What ISIS Really Wants.” In opposition to what he called “a well-intentioned but dishonest campaign to deny the Islamic State’s medieval religious nature,” the reporter Graeme Wood argued on the basis of interviews with ISIS apologists in Britain and Australia that Daesh “is Islamic. *Very* Islamic. ... The religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”<sup>1</sup> Refutations poured in; errors of fact and interpretation in the piece were pointed out, and a heated online discussion ensued.<sup>2</sup> The article had its merits, notably in pointing to Daesh’s millenarian and apocalyptic ideology as a serious belief system rather than merely a form of psychopathology. It also had its shortcomings, in particular accepting a handful of fringe sectarian statements by very unrepresentative spokesmen, with decidedly non-mainstream interpretations of

This article was originally published in French as “Laïcité, sociologie et histoire contemporaine de l’islam,” *Annales HSS* 73, no. 2 (2018): 411–39.

1. Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>. Daesh is the name by which the group became known in the Middle East, an acronym of the Arabic *al-dawla’l-islamiyya fi ’l-’iraq wa’l-sham*, “the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.”

2. Juan Cole, “Today’s Top 7 Myths about Daesh/ISIL,” *Informed Comment*, February 17, 2015, <http://www.juancole.com/2015/02/todays-about-daesh.html>; Sohaira Siddiqui, “Beyond Authenticity: ISIS and the Islamic Legal Tradition,” *Jadaliyya*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/31825/Beyond-Authenticity-ISIS-and-the-Islamic-Legal-Tradition>.

Islamic law and eschatology, as “very Islamic.” But its more fundamental significance lay in the way that it exemplified the centrality of a set of very simplistic arguments, underpinning the debate to which it sought to contribute, that have themselves been doctrinal rather than analytical. Instead of contextualizing the contemporaneity and historicity of a particularly extreme form of Islamism, seeking to understand the conditions of its emergence and the nature of its historical relationship to a larger Islamic tradition, such arguments have focused simply on whether or not it “is Islamic,” as if the authenticity of its credentials were the main point at issue and appeal to the tradition itself were enough to settle the matter. And as the introduction to Wood’s article made clear, his claim for the “genuinely religious” and “medieval” nature of Daesh was set in opposition to what he saw as the only other possibility, “that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns,” who had bizarrely chosen to pursue those concerns, not through some form of “modern secular” politics, but by falsely “wearing medieval religious disguise.”<sup>3</sup> Wood’s question, in short, rested on the assumption that modern politics is a necessarily secular business, and that to be genuinely religious is to be “medieval.” That such an assumption is patently false—in respect of modern American politics, let alone those of the Middle East—has not prevented it from undergirding a great deal of discussion, not only about the pseudo-caliphate of the so-called Islamic State, but about the contemporary history of Islam more broadly.

The *Atlantic* article exemplified a much wider trend. Between the Danish cartoons controversy of 2005–2006 and the January 2015 murders at *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, depictions of an unbridgeable rift between an expansive, globalized Islam, on the one hand, and an embattled, but still presumably globalizing, secular public sphere, on the other, returned to prominence both as a staple of media commentary and in the declarations of public intellectuals across Europe and North America. In France, for example, the same perceptions dominated yet another iteration of the long-running *question du foulard* in the “burkini affair” of the summer of 2016. Such arguments have been structured by an image not only of extremist Islamist politics, but of the whole Islamic tradition as a total cultural system, seemingly antithetical to an implicit, equally totalizing notion of secularism as a universalizing norm, now under threat. Islam is routinely characterized in such arguments, as Ernest Gellner put it in a widely influential essay published in 1991, as “secularization-resistant.” “No secularization has taken place,” he wrote with an unusual absence of nuance, “in the world of Islam.”<sup>4</sup>

## Contemporary Islam and Twentieth-Century Sociology

This routine rhetorical opposition of Islam and the secular sphere remains deeply embedded in both political and scholarly accounts of the contemporary history of Islam and its place in the modern world. Espoused by Islamists as much as

3. Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” n. 2.

4. Ernest Gellner, “Islam and Marxism: Some Comparisons,” *International Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1991): 1–6.

by neo-Orientalists, such arguments equate modern society, whether celebrated as progress or vilified as corruption, with an idealized understanding of the history of “the West” (meaning Western Europe and North America, plus some of their settler-colonial offshoots). In such accounts, the modern world is defined by a secular public sphere, constituted by atomized individuals who act according to instrumental rationality. The “world of Islam” is seen as standing outside that history, as a closed system with a self-contained, “communitarian” history defined by its own, immutable religious norms, and unaffected by the social processes that produced modernity in the West (except, for Islamists, to the extent that they have brought “corruption,” and for neo-Orientalists, to the extent that Islam has “failed” to meet their “challenge”). The relationship between the two, therefore, is necessarily a “clash.” The “crisis of Islam” is said to stem from the Muslim world’s inability to transition, as other parts of the globe apparently have done, from a “traditional society” to a properly modern condition.<sup>5</sup>

Such arguments about Islam have retained their currency despite several decades of scholarship in both the modern history of Muslim-majority societies and the sociology of religion that ought to have consigned them to the archive of antiquated ideas. Before the onset of the “global war on terror” in 2001, historians had demonstrated the vacuity of totalizing accounts of Islam as a self-enclosed, religiously defined civilizational system.<sup>6</sup> Sociologists of religion, for their part, had dismantled previously dominant accounts of secularization, understood to mean the withering away of religion, as a progressively linear process central to the modern history of “the West.”<sup>7</sup> And, for good measure, the new global historians had done

5. The most succinct and influential formulation of this widespread argument remains Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Random House, 2003). Lewis had long advanced such a view, which gained a massive public and policymaking audience after September 11, 2001.

6. In particular, the whole interdisciplinary field of modern Middle Eastern studies—across history, political science, sociology, and anthropology (and most notably in English, French, and German)—constituted itself, in an important respect and from the late 1970s onward, as a movement of emancipation from both the academic institutions and the intellectual tutelage of an older Orientalism, which focused on earlier periods and tended to read the modern history of Muslim-majority societies through the lens of normative ideas about the classical period. This development was already underway before the publication in 1978 of Edward W. Said’s polemical study *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); an important early statement remains Roger Owen’s excoriating review of the 1970 *Cambridge History of Islam*: E. R. J. Owen, “Studying Islamic History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 2 (1973): 287–98. For an institutional and intellectual history of this question, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

7. See, for example, Roberto Cipriani, “Sécularisation ou retour du sacré?” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 52, no. 2 (1981): 141–50, an acerbic comment on the state of the field that already offered a critical history of the concept of secularization and its problems. Jean Baubérot, “Religion diffuse et sécularisation,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 56, no. 2 (1983): 195–98, comments on British sociologist Robert Towler’s idea of “diffused religion.” Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political*

away with the old, nineteenth-century imperial idea (revived in the 1990s by post-Cold War enthusiasts of neoliberal globalization) of world history as a single, all-enfolding process, culminating in a globalized modernity imagined simply as the extension of “the West,” as a social and economic system, across the world. Given the media market and the political context in Europe and the United States since 2001, the reversion to the older, mid-twentieth-century vision of Islamic exceptionalism versus normative secular modernity is hardly surprising. But it throws into sharp relief the urgent need both for a critical intellectual history of the twentieth-century sociology of religion, especially with regard to the secularization thesis as an analytical frame and the secular sphere as an object of inquiry, and for a contemporary global history of Islam that might render its object of inquiry in ways other than those premised on such older and inadequate assumptions.

In a sense, Gellner was right: the ideal-typical scheme of secularization imagined by the earlier twentieth-century sociology of modernization did not occur in Muslim-majority societies. But it arguably never occurred quite as that sociology imagined it should anywhere else, either: not across most of Asia and Africa, not, despite Soviet state atheism, in Russia, certainly not in the United States, but also only partially in much of Europe. Even in Western Europe, despite declining individual observance, a vocal public politics of “Christian identity” would return to prominence—including in France—in the late twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> In those parts of

*History of Religion* [1985], trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), analyzed the “exit from religion” as central to modern political philosophy, but also as enabling the continuity of religious belief in democratic societies. Significant interventions in English include José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Rodney Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.,” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–73; Derek Peterson and Darren Walhof, eds., *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Christopher Deacy and Elisabeth Arweck, eds., *Exploring Religion and the Sacred in a Media Age* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds., *Religion and the Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Craig Calhoun, “Rethinking Secularism,” *The Hedgehog Review* 12, no. 3, 2010, [http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR\\_article\\_2010\\_Fall\\_Calhoun.php](http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/THR_article_2010_Fall_Calhoun.php). On Islam specifically, see Dale F. Eickelman and John W. Anderson, eds., *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Dale F. Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, eds., *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Nadine Picaudou, *L’islam entre religion et idéologie. Essai sur la modernité musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010); Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists? Jama‘at-e-Islami and Jama‘at-ud-Da‘wa in Urban Pakistan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and work by Kemal Karpat, Cemil Aydin, Karen Barkey, and Nurullah Ardic on law, the state, and religion in the late Ottoman Empire.

8. The secularization paradigm has nonetheless maintained a tenacious presence in some of the sociological and philosophical literature loath to divest itself of this dominant frame of reference, though sometimes modifying it considerably. See, for example, Karel Dobbelaere, “The Meaning and Scope of Secularization,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the*

Europe and, most visibly, the United States where *institutional* secularization, that is, the state's religious neutrality, has long been constitutionally safeguarded (a move usually made, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to protect religion from political interference rather than the other way around), such principles have come under attack from religiously motivated campaigns by civil society organizations and voters on the Christian right.

We might say, in fact, that the essentially secular modernity of the West has been just as ideal-typical, and indeed as mythical, as the essentially religious failure-of-modernity in the Islamic world. The secular sphere as a domain of religious freedom—and as freedom from religion—in Europe or the Americas was never the inevitable product of social progress. It was the creation of particular social and political struggles in those societies, struggles that continue today over reproductive rights, freedom of sexuality and sexual orientation, rights to family life and marriage, immigration, community cohesion, and “national identity.” Earlier twentieth-century sociology had rather simpler expectations. Weaker theories of “objective” or “institutional” secularization predicted the continued decline of the organized authority of public religions and the confinement of religion to a separate, privatized sphere. Stronger variants of “subjective” secularization additionally foresaw the withering away even of individual religiosity in the face of scientific understanding. Both, to different degrees, have patently failed to materialize as universal features of contemporary history. It is high time, then, that such idealized conceptions ceased being used to define an alleged exceptionalism to a norm that has never existed.

This does not mean, however, that we should abandon secularity or “the secular” and simply revert to an understanding of religion as pervasive and determining. But we do need to rethink what *secularity* has really meant for religion. The older sociology of *secularization* was perhaps primarily an expression of Euro-American *secularism*—an ideological belief in the necessity and inevitability of “exiting” religion in modernity. Both the ideology of secularism and the sociology of secularization were aspects of the broader, mid-twentieth-century modernization theory of which Gellner and others were such great exponents. Modernization theory, despite its revival after the Cold War and its lingering grip in some scholarly and much popular literature, has long outlived its usefulness. In place of that long-obsolete frame of reference, we need other ways of apprehending the reality of religion's *secularity*—by which I mean the long-term embeddedness of religion, as a social fact, in its social context—without the doctrine of secularism or the

*Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 599–615; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). Such studies almost never address societies outside of (mainly northwestern) Europe, and within them consider mainly the Christian (or post-Christian, or Christian by cultural heritage) majority. The implication is usually that only a handful of societies had become “modern” in this sense by the end of the twentieth century, raising the question of the concept's real utility, at least for any non-Eurocentric conception of history.

prophecy of secularization.<sup>9</sup> As regards Islam, we might focus on how Muslim-majority societies, and Muslim communities in mainly non-Muslim societies, have been profoundly affected by, indeed immersed in, the complex social world of secularity produced by the world-historical, material forces of capital, empire, the market, and the state—the modern world created by the division of labor on a global scale, functional specialization, and the emergence of distinct fields, or domains, of social life, interrelated but relatively autonomous from one another, which that sociology originally set out to describe. “Secularity” in this sense has not meant the death of religion, nor simply its evacuation from the public sphere and its confinement in private conscience. It has, instead, entailed the multiplication, diversification, and diffusion of everyday social sites and meanings in which religion, like other cultural products of modern social practice, is imagined, enacted, and brought into being.

This essay, drawing on a range of recent literature and on a small selection of twentieth-century writings in Islamic thought, proposes a broad reframing of the twentieth-century history of Islam and the secular sphere in these terms. It is intended as a think piece or “position paper,” a review of the question and a proposal for future directions that might be followed, rather than a fully empirical investigation, which would require a much longer study. I lay out a broad sketch of the principal characteristics of the twentieth-century history of Islam, and discuss the inadequacy of concepts drawn from mid-twentieth-century sociology for apprehending its development. Especially important here is the tension between, on the one hand, reformist calls for unity and the conciliation of older divisions in the faith around a shared norm, which dominated Islamic reformist thought in the first half of the century, and, on the other, the increasing fragmentation of authority, a growing intolerance of internal diversity, and the politicization of sectarian divides that came to the fore from the late 1970s onward. While these trends developed in tandem and both remain pertinent today, I suggest that the changing predominance of the latter over the former, on either side of the watershed marked (but not solely caused) by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, is a central feature of Islam’s contemporary history.

I also consider the emergence, at variance with or cross-cutting the long-established, internal sectarian or religio-legal diversity of the tradition, of a new “variety of variation” within Islam: a proliferation of the forms and meanings of

9. The inheritance of Euro-American intellectual history makes itself felt, of course, in the etymologies of our own analytical vocabulary: “secularity” in its original meanings denotes one side of a distinction between religious and “non-religious” spheres, anticipating the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas of secularization in social behavior as well as in freedom of thought, as emancipation from the religious through the expansion of a secular sphere imagined as having emerged from, and eventually eclipsing, the religious. That “the religious” in this account exists prior to and outside of secularity betrays the religious (or religiously nonconformist) origins of all such thinking. Redefining secularity as *encompassing* the religious is less to restate secularization theory than to suggest, on the contrary, that it began from the false premise of allowing primacy, and logical priority, to religion.



being Muslim that, I suggest, functional specialization, the global market, the politics of anticolonialism, and the processes of nation-state formation—bureaucratization, commodification, proletarianization, mass education, and mass politics—together have brought into being. An enormous literature, focused on case studies from different parts of the Muslim-majority world and the Muslim diaspora in the West, now exists to document these new forms and meanings in modern societies, but neither historians nor social scientists writing about Islam in global terms have yet really come to terms with the implications of their diversity. In conclusion, I consider some of the ways in which recent work in the sociology of religion, rethinking “secularization” as a dominant frame of analysis and focusing instead on different “regimes of secularity” and the forms of religious thought and practice they have enabled, or sought to contain, can contribute to more adequate conceptualizations of contemporary Islamic history than those that have often been dominant, in scholarship as well as in the public sphere.

## Unity, Diversity, and a Shared/Disputed Norm

From the end of the nineteenth century until the third quarter of the twentieth, the older forms of variation within Islam—sects, schools of law, gnostic teaching and ritual, vernacular folk practices—tended toward a blurring of their differences. At least in terms of their social and political salience, and also to some degree in terms of the sharpness of the doctrinal, ritual, and institutional boundaries between them, the branches of Islam whose diversification stemmed first from the religious-political history of the Middle East in the eighth to tenth centuries, and then from the expansion of the faith into many different cultural zones over the later medieval and early modern periods, were moving toward mutual accommodation, if not convergence around a single shared norm. The dominant theme of contemporary Islamic history as seen from the mid-twentieth century was *iṣlāḥ*, “reform” or “putting aright.” This was an explicitly transnational, universalizing project to overcome, or at least to reconcile, all of Islam’s older forms of diversity. Under the impact of economic peripheralization and political colonization, from the late nineteenth century such diversity had come, in many parts of the Muslim ecumene, to be equated with disunity and vulnerability.<sup>10</sup> The primary goal of much Muslim activism, across Asia and Africa and from the 1880s through to the decolonizations of the 1950s, was to overcome a heritage that was now, quite suddenly, seen—under

10. This is especially true of South Asia and the Middle East. There are some important exceptions, notably in West Africa, where the advance of Islamization circa 1880–1940 was driven by Sufi brotherhoods that sometimes (if only after periods of repression) formed effective working relationships with colonial administrations. See David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000); Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

the influence of European narratives of Islamic history as well as under the guns of European rule—as one of “centuries of ... cultural decadence and the ... stagnation of Muslim thought.”<sup>11</sup> This was a radical revision of self-perceptions held only a generation previously, and was itself a form of intergenerational and inter-group symbolic violence unleashed within Muslim-majority societies.<sup>12</sup>

From the 1920s through the 1970s, the older forms of variation within what Muslims understood to be Islam were thus being reduced both through the efforts of reformers and by impersonal socioeconomic and political factors—urbanization, wage labor, communication networks and the printed press, schooling and literacy, territorial integration under bureaucratic states, and the centralization of authority over religious doctrine and practice through national ministries of religious affairs.<sup>13</sup> If in 1961 the transnational Muslim intellectual Muhammad Asad (1900–1992) could call for a single codification of the “true sharia” as a collaborative work of scholars from each of the *fiqh* (legal) traditions, such an idea was imaginable only as the culmination of the convergence of different schools of law (*madhāhib*) in a putatively common understanding of sharia that had been propounded by Islamic modernists since the 1880s. It was also imaginable because a new, transnational, interconnected Muslim community organized into a family of separate “Islamic” states could be seen to require it. (It is worth noting, in passing, that Asad’s own biography—from his birth in 1900 as Leopold Weiss to a Jewish family in Austro-Hungarian Ukraine, to his conversion in 1926 and the intellectual career that took him from Morocco to Saudi Arabia and from India to Europe—is itself an illustration of the rapidly developing social and political forces at work in the transformations of Islam and Islamic thought in this period.)

The reformist movement also emphasized a muting of the divisions between ritual practices and sectarian identities that in earlier centuries had sometimes been

11. Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 97.

12. The hegemony of the reformist narrative within twentieth-century accounts of Islam means that this dimension of the movement’s intellectual and social history has not been fully explored. See, however, James McDougall, “État, société et culture chez les intellectuels de l’*islām* maghrébin (Algérie et Tunisie, c. 1890–1940), ou la réforme comme apprentissage de l’arriération,” in *Réforme de l’État et réformismes au Maghreb, XIX<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Odile Moreau (Paris: L’Harmattan/Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain, 2009), 281–306. Among the influences on Muslim thinkers in this vein were European and American writers including Gustave Le Bon, Arnold Toynbee, and James Henry Breasted.

13. In the 1990s, it became common to associate these changes with a “Muslim Reformation,” seeing the democratization of religious authority and the objectification of religiosity itself as evidence of a “rationalizing” of religion in distinctly modernist and Weberian terms. See Dale F. Eickelman, “Inside the Islamic Reformation,” *Wilson Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1998): 80–89; Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and the critique by Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism*, 10–16. My point here is to emphasize that such factors have not brought unidirectional change in the ways presupposed by classical sociology, but rather much more fragmented and unpredictable forms of thought and practice that cannot simply be plotted on a modernist timeline of progress/regression.



very sharp. Minority Ibadis and majority Sunnis of the Maliki school in North Africa, for example, inherited a history of religious conflict, rival state-formation, persecution, and mutual anathematization that went back to the tenth century and that had not been forgotten by the mid-nineteenth. By the mid-1940s, they had largely ceased to see themselves as belonging to distinct groups in religious terms. They came together to study at the Sadiki College or the Zaytuna mosque-university in Tunis, at al-Azhar or the teacher-training college Dār al-ʿUlūm in Cairo; they read the same newspapers and became active in the same networks of social reform, education, and anticolonial politics. What they now had in common vastly outweighed the historical, ritual, and doctrinal differences that had divided them a millennium before. No longer would Sunnis be “unbelievers” for Ibadis, no longer were Ibadis “heretics” to Maliki ulama. Differences of doctrine and ritual were relegated to secondary importance: ideas about reform that focused on combating “superstition” and “ignorance,” promoting education, literacy, and social activism, united the emerging generation across sectarian lines.<sup>14</sup> Even in theological terms, for a time between the 1940s and the 1970s, a degree of convergence and accommodation could be observed between Iranian Shiism and (non-Wahhabi) mainstream Sunnism in the Arab Middle East.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, this move toward unity did not usually mean uniformity. It even permeated the thought of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), the Egypt-based Syrian writer and activist whose periodical *al-Manār* is often seen as one of the founding vehicles of political Islamism, and whose work was crucial in bringing Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism, hitherto a fringe sectarianism, into the Sunni mainstream in the interwar years. Riḍā’s own vision of an ideal Islamic state was one whose caliph would be, not the enforcer of a single orthopraxy, but the spiritual head of all Muslims across sectarian divides, recognizing their diversity as legitimate *ikhtilāf* (diversity of opinion between learned

14. Author’s interview with Slimane Chikh, Algiers, July 2008. From a family of Ibadi scholars, Chikh, later rector of the University of Algiers and several times a government minister, was a student in Tunis in the 1950s; his father, the poet and militant Muḍī Zakarya, had also studied there in the 1920s. On Ibadi Islam in the Mzab and its wider context over this period, see Augustin Jomier, *Islam, réformisme et colonisation. Une histoire de l’ibadisme en Algérie (1882–1962)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2020). On transnational Ibadism and Arab nationalism, see Amal N. Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism: Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s–1930s)* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

15. Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the Twentieth Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shiʿi and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 41–51. Enayat refers in particular to the work of the shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1893–1963), who led al-Azhar from 1958 to 1963, and the *dār al-taqrīb al-madhāhib*, the “Organisation for the Conciliation of the Schools,” created in Cairo in 1947. On Shaltūt, see Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). The political conjuncture of Nasserism with Shii dissent against the Shah between the early 1960s, when the Iranian regime tilted toward Israel and embarked on the “White Revolution,” and the Islamic Revolution of 1978–1979, also facilitated this brief inter-sectarian fraternity.

authorities) as well as guaranteeing a very classical conception of protection and tolerance to non-Muslim religious communities, to whom nothing would be forbidden that their own religion allowed so long as it did no harm to others.<sup>16</sup>

While the drive to unity and reform at one level implied an accommodation of distinctions between legitimately diverse opinions, however, it also contained an imperative to “recover” the common ground at the root of the tradition from which, over time and less legitimately, such diversity was seen to have sprung. An exclusivist sense of the “true” Islam as single, indivisible, and unalterable since the time of the Prophet and his Companions, the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* or “pious ancestors,” thus grew simultaneously with the reformist movement to dominate imaginaries of how Islam had once been, and how it ought to be again.<sup>17</sup> In one respect, this was merely the latest reactivation of a pattern of periodic “renewal” (*tajdid*), a revivalist impulse to return to putative origins common to all religious traditions, and which had cycled through Islamic history for centuries. The Wahhabi movement in eighteenth-century central Arabia was only one prominent example among others. Similar dynamics, likewise combined with the state-building movements of ambitious politico-military entrepreneurs, had occurred across West Africa from the late seventeenth century through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth.

Two things, however, were new about twentieth-century reformism, both of them products of the late nineteenth century’s imperializing globalization. The first was its intimate connection with European modes of thought, and the way these shaped views of Islamic history and Muslim society not only as having spiritually deviated over time from “the way of the *salaf*” but as having become “civilizationally” backward, degenerate and in decline. The second was the newly rapid,

16. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 81–82.

17. The reforming modernism of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, beginning in the 1880s, has often been conflated with the purist reformism of this salafi school. Henri Lauzière has shown that the earliest generation of reformers, often referred to as founders of a broader *salafīyya* movement, did not use this term to describe themselves, although later Muslim as well as non-Muslim writers often affixed it to them. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the term *salafi* was used broadly by reformers who saw themselves as combining the recovery of a true, original Islam with a pragmatic rather than a rigorist orientation to rational interpretation and social “progress” (like the Moroccan Muḥammad ‘Allāl al-Fāsī, d. 1974), as well as by others who tended toward rigorist orthopraxy and a rejection of progressive rationalism and interpretative latitude (like the Moroccan Muḥammad Taqī al-Dīn al-Hilālī, d. 1987). It is not clear, however, that Lauzière’s own categorical distinction between “modernist” and “purist” salafis, “two conceptions of salafism” that he sees as having emerged by the end of the 1950s, maps neatly onto distinct schools of thought in this period. Those whom Lauzière calls “modernist salafis” might be more simply termed “*islāhīsts*” or “reformists” (*muṣliḥūn*), to use the term they often applied to themselves, as opposed to his “purist salafis,” followers of the rigorist school of orthopraxy closer to Wahhabism in outlook. See Henri Lauzière, “The Construction of *Salafīyya*: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 369–89; Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Lauzière, “What We Mean versus What They Meant by ‘Salafi’: A Reply to Frank Griffel,” *Die Welt der Islams* 56 (2016): 89–96.

transregional communicative network of global capital and empire that made it possible not only to imagine but to communicate and enact a vision of a single “true” Islam on a global scale. Scholars, pilgrims, workers, and traders had always traveled and exchanged ideas, goods, and their labor on varying scales across the vast Islamic ecumene, but now unprecedented numbers could do so, and more quickly. More people moved further, and at previously unimaginable speed. News and ideas circulated over greater distances and more frequently, and were more widely intelligible to larger audiences.<sup>18</sup> Correspondingly, local differences and specificities became more visible; local centers of learning and piety in the mountains or the desert became, for the first time and in their own self-perceptions, out-of-the-way backwaters, places less of knowledge than of backwardness, and thus susceptible to being “reformed.”

These globalizing factors, therefore, had more than simply homogenizing effects. The nineteenth-century language of “civilization” provided reassurance, at least that a “golden age” had existed in the past and could be recovered if only present degeneracy could be overcome. But at the same time, it introduced durably debilitating and divisive anxieties about the place of Islam and of Muslims in the world that was coming into being.<sup>19</sup> The reach and rapidity of global communications exacerbated differences of access to them; as contact and connection took on new meanings, so too did locality and remoteness.<sup>20</sup> The new imaginary of a pristine and recoverable Islam was articulated explicitly against all the forms of variation that had constituted Islam and rooted it in particular times and localities since its formative period. And yet, in all the places it was articulated, it became locally available for appropriation in particular social and cultural struggles over religious authority. It was put to work in local politics and social relations, even as it delegitimized specifically “local” ways of doing things relative to a newly,

18. Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, eds., *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); James L. Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

19. The influence of Gustave Le Bon’s (racist and anti-Semitic) *La civilisation des arabes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1884), which lauded an Arab-Islamic golden age before the Arab world’s “racial” decline, deserves attention here. For the importance of François Guizot, *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe depuis la chute de l’Empire romain jusqu’à la Révolution française* (Paris: Pichon et Didier, 1828) on later nineteenth-century Muslim thinkers, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 114–15.

20. For an exploration of the multiple ways in which such communications could be received and used, see Arthur Asseraf, *Electric News in Colonial Algeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). On the “countertempos” produced by communication and transport technology in Egypt, see On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). For a more general argument about the contradictory effects of space and speed in narratives and experiences of modernity, see James McDougall, “Modernity in ‘Antique Lands’: Perspectives from the Western Mediterranean,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60, no. 1/2 (2017): 1–17.

globally legitimate transcendent norm.<sup>21</sup> The Sufi orders whose practices had structured most Muslims' ritual life and learning across Africa and Central and South Asia for centuries were now seen as "illegitimate innovations" (*bid'a*). The schools of law were responsible for cultural stagnation, "blind imitation" (*taqlid*), and intellectual decline. Diverse sources of authority and ways of accessing the sacred were said to have weakened the community, purveying "ignorance" in place of revelation, and in some cases compromising themselves by working under and with the foreign domination of colonial states. A new type of Islamic social activist, engaged in journalism and politics, in small enterprise and in educational and charity work, emerged to challenge both Sufi shaykhs and classically trained jurists for social and religious authority over, and through, the definition of the faith. In the place of accommodation around a shared norm grew competition to monopolize it.

The reformers' theological emphasis on *tawhīd*, the affirmation of the indivisible unicity of God, along with its sociopolitical complement, *ittiḥād* or *wahda*, the "unity" of believers against foreign aggression and internal division, was predominant in this trend of thought throughout the twentieth century. Again, this was not a new theme. The Islamic tradition was foundationally, rigorously monotheistic and *tawhīd* had always been a central theme of Muslim thought and practice (including practices, like the mystical Sufi search for the believer's *fanā fi'l-tawhīd*, "self-annihilation in the unicity of God," that would become heretical for some reformers). Until the end of the 1970s, it still often seemed that there was more in such notions to unite believers than to divide them. The same emphasis was visible across the Sunni/Shia divide. The *jahanbini-ye tawhīdī* ("monotheistic worldview") theorized by Iranian Shii revolutionary 'Alī Shari'atī (1933–1977) marked an orientation toward life and the world as well as an acceptance of revealed truth that would provide the moral force of the *movahhed*, the monotheistic believer as active political agent.<sup>22</sup> For the foundational Egyptian Sunni reformer Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), the centrality of *tawhīd* in Islam, if properly understood—that is, when freed from the divisions and heresies accumulated over the centuries since the Prophet—meant the absence of any mediation between God and humanity. *Tawhīd* thus conceived would liberate man "from bondage to another like him, giving him the rights of a free man equal to other free men" and making him a freely acting, rational subject.<sup>23</sup> The translation of the

21. Jomier, *Islam, réformisme et colonisation*; James McDougall, "La mosquée et le cimetière. Espaces du sacré et pouvoir symbolique à Constantine en 1936," *Insaniyat. Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales* 39/40 (2008): 79–96; Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a contemporary case, see Magnus Marsden, *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

22. Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979), 82–87; Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 199 and 289–91.

23. Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Risālat al-tawhīd* (1925; 15th ed., Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1952), 180.

reformist emphasis on *tawhīd* into the sociopolitical sphere produced the concept of a “*tawhīdī* order” (*nezam-i tawhīdī*), which for Iranian revolutionaries meant a utopian “classless society.” In the Sunni-majority Arab world, implicitly complementing the more secular-political slogans of *ittiḥād* or *waḥda*, it gave anticolonial nationalism—however temporal its nation-building programs and however economic and developmental, rather than religious and behavioral, its prescriptions for social wellbeing—an infusion of powerful, religiously encoded community discipline. Though often overlooked at the time, this was a significant element even in predominantly secular political movements, at their height in the late 1950s, such as Nasserism or the Algerian Revolution.<sup>24</sup>

From around 1919 into the 1960s, across the Muslim-majority societies of Asia and Africa the same fears for the unity of community and homeland, threatened by malign external forces—imperialism, capitalism, and Zionism—animated anxiety for the faith as well as finding expression in anticolonial nationalisms. Political scientists have often written as though Islamism emerged as a political ideology in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority areas only in the 1970s, and as the successor to a prior and unrelated generation of failed secular nationalisms: as reaction after revolution. But in fact, from the late nineteenth century, and especially from the end of the First World War, the same concerns were expressed simultaneously, and often conjointly, in the cross-confessional forms of Arab nationalism,<sup>25</sup> in other ethnocultural nationalisms whose community was implicitly if not explicitly Muslim (even when the state was a vigorously secularizing one such as Turkey), and in avowedly religious movements whose programs at times coincided

24. Gamal ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s antipathy to the Muslim Brotherhood and their vision of social remoralization after 1952 is well known, as is the clear distinction between religion and politics in his own thinking and political program: James Jankowski, *Nasser’s Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 35–37. But however marginal and formulaic religious references were in Nasser’s thinking and speeches, for his audience, his rhetoric drew part of its power from the invocation of an Egyptian national community whose unity of strength and purpose was routinely set under God—as, for example, in the famous speech announcing the nationalization of the Suez Canal: “We aim with strength, determination, and faith, trusting God and ourselves, relying on God and on our determination, on God and on our strength, to achieve the goals of this revolution” (speech given in Alexandria, July 26, 1956). In Algeria, anticolonial nationalism prior to 1954 combined a political culture influenced by the context of the French Republic with identification of the nation as a fundamentally Muslim community. The revolutionary FLN (National Liberation Front) in 1954–1962 and its one-party state from 1962 to 1989 sought to subordinate and instrumentalize, but also endorsed and officialized, a doctrine of national identity that identified Arabism with Islam. See Luc-Willy Deheuvels, *Islam et pensée contemporaine en Algérie. La revue “al-Aṣāla,” 1971–1981* (Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1991); Charlotte Courreye, *L’Algérie des Oulémas: Une histoire de l’Algérie contemporaine, 1931–1991* (Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 2020).

25. On Arab nationalisms, see James McDougall, “The Emergence of Nationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle Eastern and North African History*, ed. Amal Ghazal and Jens Hanssen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199672530.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199672530>.

with or contributed to programs of national liberation.<sup>26</sup> Thus, from its foundation in 1928, the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt was an anticolonial nationalist movement, expressly involved in attacks on the British in the Suez Canal Zone in the early 1950s, as much as it was a force for the “remoralization” of Egyptian society. Islamic reformism as an educational and moralizing movement in Morocco and Algeria was intimately bound up in the politics of anticolonial nationalism. The radical Iranian writer Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923–1969) was a left-leaning social critic and a member of the Iranian Communist (Tudeh) Party who saw economic exploitation as part and parcel of the larger, cultural and intellectual “plague from the West” he called *Gharbzadegi* (“West-stricken-ness,” or “Occidentosis”). This idea of specifically cultural alienation was adopted after his death in 1969 by Ruhollah Khomeini and other revolutionary clerics.<sup>27</sup> For all these movements, if to different degrees, foreign dominance meant not only material dispossession and political subordination but also moral and cultural decay.

But even by the 1920s and 1930s, the articulation of *tawhīd* in reformist doctrines began to have divisive as well as unifying effects. The concomitant castigation of *mushrikūn*, “those who associate partners with God,” began to be used to delegitimize Sufi orders, accused of saint veneration and of showing undue reverence, for example, to the tombs of *awliyāʾ* (“those near to God”), saintly men and women of the past embedded, both literally and metaphorically, in local landscapes and social relations.<sup>28</sup> It was also in the 1920s, via the teachings of Riḍā—and largely due to his admiration for the then-exceptional political independence of the emergent Saudi state—that the radically austere and hitherto heterodox Wahhabi formulation of *tawhīd* first entered the Sunni mainstream. In 1818, when it was crushed by Egyptian troops acting for the Ottoman sultan, the first Saudi-Wahhabi movement had been merely a provincial, sectarian dissension in the eyes of scholars and statesmen in Cairo and Istanbul. A century later, Wahhabism suddenly became a center of power in its own right. From a “rebellious” sectarian puritanism, it became the official creed of an independent state that already

26. Turkish nationalism under the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) and the early republic, despite the later *laiklik* of Kemalism, strongly identified “Turkish” national belonging with Islam. This was a trend shaped by the conjuncture of demographic with political pressure, from the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 that brought an influx of Muslim refugees into Anatolia, through the Armenian genocide, to later “population exchanges” with Greece in the 1920s. Kemalist secularism sought to deny public authority to religion, but implicitly endorsed an ethnoreligious definition of Turkish national community. The return to prominence of Turkish Islamist politics, from the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) to the AKP (Justice and Development Party), is a much less radical departure from Turkey’s earlier twentieth-century history than might have been supposed by observers who took the Kemalist republic as a triumph of secularist “modernization.”

27. Jalal Āl-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi: Weststruckness* [1962], trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1997).

28. For a Maghrebi example, see Mubārak al-Mīlī, *Risālat al-shirk wa maḡāhirihi* (Algiers, 1937).



exercised considerable symbolic attraction from the 1920s onward, and which from the 1970s enjoyed the wealth to promote its influence on an international scale.

Obsessively concerned with orthopraxy, Wahhabism was also militant in its rejection of all other schools and practices, including the whole Shii tradition, as un-Islamic. The ground was thus laid by Wahhabi anti-Shiism for the later revival of sectarian radicalization, which would be adopted and carried to its extreme by Osama bin Laden's al-Qa'ida and subsequently, inflamed by the sectarian political cleavages of post-Ba'athist Iraq, by Daesh. This specifically Sunni militancy would be met, conversely, by the revolutionizing of Shiism as a political force under the influence, especially, of Sharī'atī and Khomeini. Religious activism could be imagined as mutually inspiring across sectarian lines as late as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which coincided with the Arabian and Pakistani Sunni *sahwa* ("revival") movements and the doctrines emanating from the radicalized Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the death of Sayyid Quṭb in 1966. But Shii and Sunni radicalisms quickly came into conflict after 1979, coinciding not only with the geopolitical antagonism of Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively, but also with those countries' contrasting stances vis-à-vis the United States and Israel, and their conflicting regional interests in the Gulf, in Lebanon in the 1980s, in Afghanistan in the 1990s, in Iraq after 2003, and in Syria and Yemen from 2011. After the eclipse of Nasserism and the tilt of Middle Eastern geopolitics toward the Gulf in the 1970s, this antagonism became not only central to the Middle East, but influential in Africa, the Indian Ocean world, South Asia, and Southeast Asia too. Sectarian difference did not produce political conflict between or within states in and of itself, as the familiar narrative of a regional politics doomed to "primordial conflict" along ethnic or sectarian lines would have it. Rather, the alignments of inter-state conflicts, from the 1970s onward, repoliticized a sectarianism that had very recently been losing its political as well as its religious salience.

## Islam in Politics, and Elsewhere

A similar dynamic, contingent on twentieth-century geopolitics and shifting categories of thought rather than an impulse inherent to a timeless Islamic tradition, lay behind the importance that would come to be invested over the course of the century in the institution of the Sunni caliphate and the ideal of an "Islamic state." The late-Ottoman caliphate, despite the rediscovery and energetic promotion of the caliphal title by Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), had held merely symbolic significance for most Muslims worldwide. Despite colonial rulers' anxieties about "pan-Islamism," the figure of the caliph gained very little traction in inspiring revolt among Muslims in French Africa, Egypt, British India, or Dutch Southeast Asia during the First World War. Nonetheless, its abolition by newly Republican Turkey in 1924 struck a symbolic chord that provoked an outcry from North Africa to South Asia and suddenly reanimated the institution's global significance. The Egyptian liberal reformer 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq (1888–1966) welcomed the end of the caliphate as returning Islam to its proper, uniquely prophetic vocation as

“a message, not a government; a religion, not a state.”<sup>29</sup> But he misjudged the significance that the caliphate’s disappearance, in the globalizing, anticolonial context of the 1920s, would confer upon it and upon the idea of a specifically Islamic sovereignty. Subsequent aspirations to reinstate some form of universal Muslim sovereignty would endow the idea of reestablishing the caliphate with an impossibly utopian significance, fastening upon it as a symbol of autonomy and strength that might prove the panacea for all Muslims’ contemporary ills, whether moral or material.<sup>30</sup>

‘Abd al-Rāziq made his case much more through classical expository arguments than by adopting the “Western knowledge” that his opponents accused him of propounding. For him, decoupling the ethics of revelation from the conceits of worldly power meant returning to a truer Islam. Other, liberal-constitutionalist prescriptions for Muslim revival and the establishment of a “truly Islamic” way of life that were developing at the same time, especially in South Asia around the movement for Pakistan, equally eschewed any “conservative” program for the “maintenance of all traditional forms.” They too saw the quest for an Islamic order as making “a new start,” reinterpreting the sources of the tradition afresh and in a way entirely emancipated from “historical precedent.” But unlike ‘Abd al-Rāziq, they would insist, with his near-contemporary Asad, the architect of Pakistan’s unimplemented constitution, that the “mixing of religion with politics” was a genuine, indeed an indispensable, “postulate of Islam,” since a truly Islamic life could not be led outside of a truly Islamic community, which could only be guaranteed by a truly Islamic state.<sup>31</sup>

Asad recognized that, at the end of the 1950s, there was still much diversity to overcome in the creation of such a state. As he wrote, “views as to what Islam aims at and how a Muslim should behave in social and political matters are certainly not the same with, say, a Sunni faqīh of the Ḥanafī school, a ‘Twelver’ Shī‘ī, or a Ṣūfī—not to mention many lesser schools of thought.”<sup>32</sup> For Asad, who repeatedly invoked the Prophetic saying, *ikhtilāf ‘ulamā ummatī rahma* (“differences of opinion among the learned of my community are a sign of divine grace”), a parliamentary legislature elected by universal suffrage was the appropriate way, in accordance with “the exigencies of the present age,” to resolve such differences. Only thus might a properly instituted Islamic government identify, by a majority of suitably qualified opinion, how to regulate those many areas of life that were left unlegislated for by the relatively few explicitly law-bearing texts of the Quran and Sunna. However, even more clearly than the allegedly “secularizing” propositions of ‘Abd

29. Ali Abdel Razek, *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power* [1925], trans. Maryam Loufti (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

30. On reimaginings of the caliphate, see Reza Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate? A History of the Struggle for Global Islamic Union, 1924 to the Present* (London: Hurst, 2013); Madawi Al-Rasheed, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin, eds., *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts* (London: Hurst, 2013); Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

31. Asad, *The Principles of State and Government*.

32. Ibid., 100.

al-Rāziq, and in a quite different way, Asad's ideas were formulated in a context that posed particular challenges to the unity he most intently pursued.

It is not only that this liberal and pluralistic thinker, as a major midcentury theorist of the Islamic state, would later be considered within the same intellectual universe as the decidedly less liberal and pluralistic Abu 'l-A'lā Mawdūdī (1903–1979), the founder in 1941 of the Pakistani Islamist movement Jamaat-i Islami. For Mawdūdī, there could be no legitimate dispute over identification of the “good,” and no need for individual liberties in an Islamic state which, by definition, would repress only what was contrary to Islam and therefore, by definition, evil.<sup>33</sup> The potential slippage from Asad's enlightened Islamic state to Mawdūdī's totalitarian one is clearly important. But more significant still, for our purposes, is the implicit recognition of functionally differentiated domains of social life in the structure of Asad's argument, and its centrality to later, less subtle, visions. In the 1920s, 'Abd al-Rāziq had written in an idiom of hermeneutic scholarship situated squarely within the classical traditions of juristic argumentation. He saw the primacy of religion over politics not in terms of separate domains across which social actors might move, but as a matter of different classes and competencies of persons, of different vocations. 'Abd al-Rāziq thus thought in much the same way as the classical ulama whose aphorisms on the corrupting influence of the court and the virtue of keeping one's distance from it formed part of a centuries-old body of Sunni common sense. Their scholastic tradition had notably expended great effort on discussing who could properly determine the “good,” and by what means and in what circumstances it should be enforced.<sup>34</sup> For 'Abd al-Rāziq, Muhammad was not a state-builder, but a Prophet. To confuse the former role with the latter was gravely to misapprehend, and demean, the uniqueness of the Prophetic vocation. 'Abd al-Rāziq's separation of religion from politics was less a modern (and “un-Islamic”) expression of secularism than a restatement of what he thought of as a much older truth of the faith that only unwarrantedly ambitious political maneuvering—the revival of caliphal claims by Abdülhamid II, and the rivalries of would-be successors, notably Egypt's King Fārūq, to the now-defunct Ottoman title—had recently obscured. Like eighteenth-century Christian nonconformists, 'Abd al-Rāziq saw the distinction of religion from politics not as restricting religion and emancipating politics but as preserving religion from worldly ambition and corruption. Asad, in contrast, not forty years later, wrote in the context of emerging, sovereign national states increasingly dominated by technical specialisms that tended to sideline the specific competence of men of religion. He saw the protection of a properly Muslim life as possible only if the political and the religious spheres were brought back together and able to inform one another. For Asad, a liberal-constitutional system, permitting the debate and confrontation of different

33. Sayyid Abu-'l-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, ed. Khurshid Ahmad (Karachi: Jamaat-e-Islami Publications, 1955); A'lā-Mawdūdī, *Let Us Be Muslims [Khuṭbāt]*, trans. Khurram Murad (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1985).

34. Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

views and accountable to the people, was the way to work out what a “properly Muslim life” would mean in practice for modern Muslim societies.

Mawdūdī, on the contrary, would write with the impatient certainty of the utopian ideologue, asserting the triumph of will over inconvenient doubts, collapsing the political and the religious entirely into one another. As another influential Islamist cleric, the Egyptian-born Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (b. 1926), would later assert, in the “Islamic society” he sought to create, “there is no separation ... between knowledge and morality, art and morality, economics and morality, politics and morality, or between war and morality.”<sup>35</sup> For Mawdūdī and Qaradāwī, law is subsumed entirely into revelation, and, conversely, “sin” entirely into “crime”; for Qaradāwī, as Muhammad Qasim Zaman points out, in the imagined Islamic state as guarantor of the public good (*maṣlaḥa*), “moral infractions should be subject to penal regulation.”<sup>36</sup> In such contemporary Islamist formulations, religion and politics are conflated as an all-encompassing scheme of life—nothing outside religion, but equally nothing outside the state. This, as has often been recognized, is not a restatement of older ideas, but a profoundly novel conception both of the nature of Islam and of “properly Muslim” government. ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s preservation of religion from politics echoed a much earlier, in fact very traditional, conception of the relationship of religion to worldly affairs. Asad’s measured “mixing of religion with politics” implicitly recognized the differentiated categories created by the functional specialization of modern life. “Religion,” for him, sits in a separate sphere, and its legitimate role in informing and enframing other, secular spheres—the constitutional structure of political life and societal regulation—needed to be defended. Mawdūdī and Qaradāwī recognize the functional complexity of modern society too. But for them, it is all-corrupting, and the goal of their project of an “Islamic” society is to abolish it.

Similarly, Asad intuitively employs a clear categorical distinction between “religion” and “science,” asserting that nineteenth-century scientific positivism had failed to provide a basis for individual human behavior or social organization because “the problems of ethics and morality are not within the scope of science. They are, on the other hand, entirely within the scope of religion.”<sup>37</sup> Earlier generations of Islamic scholars might have seen the various branches of *‘ilm* (knowledge, science) as crowned by *‘ulūm al-dīn* (the religious sciences of Prophetic tradition, exegesis, and jurisprudence), much as their Christian counterparts considered theology “the Queen of the sciences.” Mawdūdī, for his part, would have subordinated the nature and purposes of scientific inquiry to an Islamized ideological agenda, much as Soviet censors in the 1940s denied the validity of so-called bourgeois theories in genetics. For Asad, on the other hand, science cannot supplant religion, but neither

35. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, *Malami’ al-mujtama’ al-islami alladhi nanshaduhu* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1996), quoted in Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “The ‘Ulama of Contemporary Islam and Their Conceptions of the Common Good,” in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Armando Salvatore (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 145.

36. Ibid.

37. Asad, *The Principles of State and Government*, 9.

does the higher religious truth to which he subscribes subsume or limit the scope of science, which has its own parallel, autonomous space. Each field is distinct; each has its own proper *function*. As his son, the anthropologist Talal Asad, would later observe, secularity in the modern sense “presupposes new concepts of ‘religion,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘politics,’ and new imperatives associated with them.”<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Asad, writing in the mid-twentieth century and without needing consciously to highlight the fact, conveyed this separating-out of the social world into distinct spheres (including that of “religion”), a separation of which Mawdūdī’s simultaneously developing ideas were a product even as they were also a defensive reaction against it. From this perspective, Mawdūdī’s thought, not ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s, was the novel product of twentieth-century secularity. ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s approach echoes a mental universe not yet divided into such neat boxes. Asad’s grapples directly with the proper relationship between them for the reconstruction of an Islamic life in democracy. Mawdūdī’s, like that of Qaradāwī and other Islamists, collapses them into one another to posit a total “Islamic order,” one whose prerogatives are imagined to go well beyond anything known to any pre-twentieth-century Muslim society, including any actually existing premodern “Islamic state.”

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the re-articulation of Islam would increasingly come to be shaped by this diversification of the social spheres in which it took place. The search for unity had already been accompanied and eventually, after the 1970s, overtaken by accentuated division in the world of Islam. At the same time, the status of religion relative to other spheres of life was being reevaluated, as social life itself became more complex and as the political map in which Muslim societies were located was repeatedly redrawn. By the mid-twentieth century, and however unevenly across Muslim-majority societies—most intensely perhaps in Cairo, Karachi, or Beirut, much less obviously in rural Afghanistan, Senegal, or the Sahara, but to some degree, and in conflicting ways, everywhere—the effects of the division of labor, machine technology, long-distance communication, commerce, and mobility as well as state-formation had produced a variety of distinctively new sites and styles in which Islam could be expressed, beyond the old diversity of schools of law or varieties of ritual practice—beyond, indeed, a circumscribed “religious field” alone. Even as the drive for reform and unification had tended toward both a narrowing of the differences and an accentuation of the struggles between those older-established forms of Islamic diversity, under the pressure of world-historical forces a proliferation of new Islamic forms—a new “variety of variation” within Islam—was emerging.

This new variety of variation within the tradition has included the individualization of Islam: its circumscription in individual conscience as a privatized, personalized, and familial faith and ritual practice for many, probably many millions, of its adherents. For these believers, other social spheres—of economic, cultural, and political life—can and should remain demarcated in daily practice and social

38. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

interaction from the claims of those who espouse “Islamic” norms in all such areas. This basic division, indeed, has become the fault line across Muslim communities between proselytizers of “Islamic revival” and their many coreligionists whom the revivalists or political Islamists consider to be only “nominal” Muslims. This fracture first came to prominence, perhaps, in the 1950s, when the latter formed the overwhelming majority of Muslims worldwide—when Egypt’s President Gamal ‘Abd al-Nāṣir was able to joke in public, to general hilarity, about the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood who wanted him to impose the veil on all Egyptian women, despite the Brother’s inability to impose it on his own student daughter.<sup>39</sup> Its salience has increased through the 1980s and up to the present, as the balance of forces has substantially shifted and the personal observance of conservative behavioral norms become widely generalized.

But at the same time, the “revivalists” have not themselves been able to limit the meaning of Islam to their own codes of orthopraxy. They have not even always agreed among themselves as to what these should be. Instead, Islamic meaning—that is, what self-identifying Muslims consider to be Islamic—has also proliferated, becoming diffused in a much broader repertoire of symbols and behaviors.<sup>40</sup> Islam has become a cultural system of meaning and collective belonging, a form of cultural identity expressing ethical choices in consumption and individual expression in self-fashioning. It has become a marker of adherence to a group, to that group’s claims to minority rights and to its place among others in a multicultural environment, where it seeks its own place in equality with other, alternative and equally legitimate, groups. And, concomitantly with its individualization as a private faith, it has also been mobilized by social actors as a public religion. For some, this means seeking the betterment of society from the bottom up, through preaching, education, and welfare work, aiming at the peaceful “remoralization” of a corrupt and unjust world. This is often seen, especially by those tendencies that are the most rigorously conservative in their approach to orthopraxy and observance, such as the contemporary Egyptian salafi movement, as politically quietist or accommodationist. For others, it means claiming the mantle of Islam in a contest for state power, as a political ideology to frame programs of lawmaking and “remoralization” from the top down. For others still, it has become the fantasized, utopian cause of millenarian, apocalyptic movements that imagine themselves as bringing about an end-time of retributive divine justice by waging war on all “enemies of God”

39. The excerpt from the speech in which ‘Abd al-Nāṣir made the joke, in the course of relating his 1953 effort to reach agreement with the Brotherhood “correctly and reasonably,” was recently widely shared and discussed online, for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX4RK8bj2W0> (accessed March 2019, since removed). He was, of course, discrediting the movement that his police was then brutally repressing. But the filmed audience reaction, as well as the manner in which he recounts the anecdote, are revealing. For a good, short discussion by Egyptian blogger Issandr El Amrani, see “Nasser, the Muslim Brothers and the Veil,” <https://arabist.net/blog/2012/10/30/nasser-the-muslim-brothers-and-the-veil.html> (October 30, 2012).

40. William R. Roff, ed., *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).



and seeking self-realization in martyrdom. The same movements—most notably the Muslim Brotherhood—have at different times in their history, and in different places, espoused each of these possibilities, depending on external circumstances and on the state of their own internal politics.

These different roles, or aspects, of religious meaning are not new in themselves. In earlier centuries, Islam was always and simultaneously private belief and public practice, cultural system, political law, and eschatology—never, in fact, a total system regulating all aspects of life, but a “total discourse”<sup>41</sup> about the “good” life, beyond which, for the believer, lay nothing lawful. What is new is that in the twentieth century these aspects of the tradition were separated out, *objectified* as alternative and competing forms, in differentiated and relatively autonomous (though interacting) social fields or spaces of subjectivity—culture, society, polity, economy; collective action, community-formation, and self-realization.<sup>42</sup> They have been, metaphorically or actually, *commodified* in a market of religious goods in which individual members of the Muslim community and those who seek to speak for it competitively position themselves. While drawing on reimagined genealogies that seek to anchor them in the history of the tradition, whether in ecstatic Sufi brotherhoods or ascetic Hanbali theology, these contemporary forms of Islam have been imagined and practiced in quite new ways, both in the internalized faith and personal dispositions of believers, and in the many and different outward, collective forms that the faith has taken as both the means and the meaning of purposive social action.<sup>43</sup>

Importantly, these different levels of religious meaning, from the individual to the universalizing, are not simply mutually exclusive alternatives. When the online propaganda of Daesh, the most extreme of Islamist movements, sought adherents to its so-called caliphate among young Muslims in the West, it appealed by tapping into their very individual, ethical sense of duty as Muslims. Its “call” was to the conscience of those who had stood by while other Muslims suffered, spurring them to fulfill that duty by contributing to a “truly Muslim” sovereign polity. At the same time, the “Islamic State” project sought to stamp out diversity of interpretation and individual conscience (even, and especially, in the tiniest details of ritual practice and personal behavior) and to abolish any boundary

41. Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

42. I am taking some liberties here in employing Pierre Bourdieu’s terms very loosely; while his system of “fields” describes a static, self-reproducing system of social hierarchy and symbolic power, I use the same imagery to designate a more dynamic, emergent system, with the field metaphor serving to describe a “moment” rather than an equilibrium. Bourdieu’s own account of the specifically religious field better describes what I have characterized as the pre-twentieth-century “total discourse” of Islam than the more diversified system I suggest has emerged in the past century: Pierre Bourdieu, “Genèse et structure du champ religieux,” *Revue française de sociologie* 12, no. 3 (1971): 295–334.

43. For explorations of some of these variations, both political and non-political, see Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

between “the religious” and other spheres of life. But this attempt to create a total “Islamic order” was only possible because the social world which it sought to revolutionize, whether in the Syrian and Iraqi towns it occupied or among the individual foreign fighters who joined it, was in fact constituted by such boundaries—by the functional specialization, the differentiated fields of action, and the individualized autonomy characteristic of modern society and selfhood. It was doomed to fail, before American drones and Russian bombers began to pulverize it, because in place of that actually existing world it sought to conjure a “return” to a total Islamic society that has never historically existed. The fantasy it sought to bring into being has only ever been an imagined Islam that is itself the product, not of Islam’s own premodern history, but of its reinvention as a utopian project, which is one aspect among others of Islam’s contemporary history. The deliberately medievalizing theatrical aesthetics cultivated by Daesh (the black robes of ‘Abu Bakr al-Baghdādī, the claim to be introducing a gold currency) only served to underline this fact, as did its deliberately atrocious horror show of “medieval” violence (its enslavements and filmed beheadings).

The explanation of these developments, then, is not to be found in a self-contained, separable history of “Islamic civilization” facing an internal crisis in opposition to the rest of the world’s transition to modernity. That narrative is itself only a reiteration of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European conceits. What demands attention, instead, are the ways in which contemporary Islam has been shaped by the larger patterns of contemporary global history (including, for example, where Daesh is concerned, the global histories of Fascism). Anxieties about revival and unity have dominated modern Islamic thought in both religious and sociopolitical terms since the late nineteenth century. They have run alongside both the fragmentation, competition, and aggravated sectarianism of the social movements that make up so-called “political Islam”—Islam as ideology, organization, and action in the political field—and the enormously proliferating and individualized styles of consumption that today make up what we might call “market Islam”: Islam as praxis that, like almost everything else in the contemporary world under global capital, is a commodified product, a lifestyle, and an identity, in the economic field.<sup>44</sup> It is in these new forms, shaped and located squarely in what José

44. For a slightly different exploration of the idea of “market Islam,” focused on the affinity between Saudi-promoted styles of conservatism and neoliberal consumerism, see Patrick Haenni, *L’islam de marché. L’autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2005). For detailed case studies of what I am calling “market Islam” in different contexts, see Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Daromir Rudnykyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Olivier Roy and Amel Boubekeur, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Islamists? Salafis, Heavy Metal Muslims, and the Lure of Consumerist Islam* (London: Hurst, 2012); Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).

Casanova called the “primary secular spheres” of the market and the state, that Islam has come to be embodied over the course of the past century.<sup>45</sup>

Despite its being freighted with twentieth-century assumptions that have often made it more an ideological than an analytical category, and despite the misuse to which this has frequently been put, we thus cannot dispense with the “secular sphere” as an analytical tool in making sense of this history. But developing a more adequate account of these evolutions involves rethinking concepts of secularization and the secular along the lines of scholarship in anthropology, global history, the sociology of religion, and the history of political thought, that since the early 1990s has taken the critique of the “classical” secularization thesis, as a subspecies of modernization theory, as its point of departure. Such scholarship has advanced far more subtle arguments about how we might, rather than simply abandoning secularity or “the secular” as analytical categories denoting certain social processes or a certain domain of social life, refine and redeploy them. Much can be gained from the application of such rethinking to the historical sociology of Islam.

## Social Facts in “Secular Spheres”

The global history of Islam since the late nineteenth century has been shaped by an apparent paradox between its two most significant features. The first of these consisted of persistent calls and programs for Muslim revival, reform, and unity across the world, tending toward a unification or transcendence of the older forms of variation within the tradition. For centuries, these had been embodied in the major sectarian groupings of Sunnis and Shia, the smaller sects of Ibadis, Isma‘ilis, and Zaydis, the several schools of law (*madhāhib*) with their distinct traditions of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the Sufi *ṭuruq* (“ways” to God, or brotherhoods), and the vernacular, everyday forms of Islamic belief and practice that were embedded in local life and ritual across Muslim societies in southeastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Increasingly identified from around the 1880s with an alleged history of stagnation, degeneracy, and decline—a history that was imagined by Muslim thinkers and European Orientalists alike and in tandem<sup>46</sup>—this centuries-old internal diversity of the faith came to be seen as having allowed Muslims to fall prey to European imperialism. Reducing such diversity to a single, strengthened, recovered, and “true” Islam was the order of the day. This tendency reached its peak in the mid-twentieth century, between 1940 and 1979, but it continues to animate conceptions of both the history and the future of Islam today.

Conversely but simultaneously, the second tendency has been an increasing fragmentation of structures of authority within the tradition, a proliferation of the meanings attributed to it and of the forms of practice taken to embody it, and

45. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

46. Michael F. Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

a renewed acuity of sectarian conflict within it. These countervailing tendencies developed over the same period, but came to the fore after 1979 and have accelerated rapidly since September 11, 2001, the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the fragmentation of the Syrian civil war since 2011, and the related rise in extremist and sectarian violence across the world, from the United States to Indonesia via Europe, Saharan Africa, and South Asia. This second tendency has not only been about fractious politics and sectarian violence within religious communities as such. The fragmentation and proliferation of new forms of Islam have also, and especially, accompanied the crises of the postcolonial nation-state and the neoliberalism, consumerism, digital communications, and individualism of the post-Cold War era, as well as its highly unstable geopolitics.

Underlying and sustaining this paradox over the same period, the central development in the contemporary history of Islam has been the emergence of what I have called a new “variety of variation” in the forms that it takes. Secularity has not, despite the expectations of classical sociology, meant the confinement of religion to the private sphere and the reduction of its political and social significance. (Again, it is worth emphasizing that this has not occurred in most of the non-Muslim world either, although its absence has routinely been lamented as a specifically Muslim “failing” by latter-day modernization theorists.) In fact, quite the reverse has occurred. Precisely because of, and through, the effects of global “secularity,” there has been a distinctively, qualitatively new proliferation of possible meanings and expressions of Islam. This new variety of the forms that Islam can take for individuals and communities is expressed in a dizzying diversity of ways and on a whole range of scales: in individual worldviews, self-understanding, and embodied ritual practice, in community solidarity and belonging, in global digital communications, in anti-racist struggles for human rights, or in apocalyptic visions of martyrdom. These new expressions of “how to be Muslim” both rearticulate and cut across the older, more established range of variations within the tradition: Sunni and Shia, Sufi and salafi, “Arab,” “South Asian,” “African,” or, indeed, “Western.” Such forms are located in all the various, distinct but interacting fields of modern social life, from the self-conscious dress of the middle-class fashionista in Dakar, Delhi, or Dubai to the utopian millenarianism and apocalyptic self-realization of the Daesh-inspired suicide bomber in Paris, Brussels, or Baghdad.

*The Atlantic’s* deceptively simple questions—“Is it Islamic? How Islamic is it?”—thus entirely missed the point. “What Islam is” has itself become a symbolic stake in competitive claim-making across a range of social spheres of unprecedented diversity, its definition neither bounded by the relatively stable range of sects and schools that persisted from the late medieval period into the 1900s, nor summed up in the consensus that earlier twentieth-century reformers hoped to achieve by the reconciliation and unification of the tradition’s differing currents. Instead, Islam since the mid-twentieth century has become encoded and embodied in a wide variety of divergent, often opposing practices and positions across all the different domains of life that modernity, in the “secular” spheres of mass politics and the market, has brought into being. The recent acuity of competition

between these positions, and the intolerance of diversity that marks some of them, is itself, too, a product of these processes.

Distinguishing between studies of secularism that place it within a “conceptual genealogy,” in philosophy or political science, and those that see it as a “political dilemma” in anthropology or history, John Bowen has argued that we need to be suspicious of theories that privilege the emergence of “the secular” as a single world-historical, universalizing process, just as we need to beware of its seductively intuitive power as a rhetorical figure—that is, of the effects in scholarship of secularism as an ideology. We should instead, he writes, pay attention to “specific regimes of secularism,” or to what Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones have called the “multiple forms of secularity” that emerge in particular practices of governance—different “projects of encompassment” of the religious dimensions of life by competition for, or the exercise of, social authority and political power in particular cases.<sup>47</sup> It is this approach, focusing on particular practices in specific places at precise moments, rather than on an abstract principle supposedly instantiated progressively on a global scale, that according to Bowen “bears most fruit for students of history and society.”<sup>48</sup>

Such an approach dispenses with older and still tenacious views that have seen contemporary Islamic history as an exceptional and “deviant” case on the basis of a supposedly general pattern, a pattern based in fact on a now largely discredited view of “Western” history. It prompts us instead to think about “the interplay between religion and the political imagination under modern conditions,” in a comparative framework in which Islam, but also Hinduism, Shinto, Catholicism, and Evangelical Christianity, among other things, might all be considered afresh.<sup>49</sup> In these terms, particular “forms of secularity” can be seen to have impacted very substantially on those worlds of Islam in which Gellner and others were unable to discern any “secularization,” and indeed to have shaped the meanings that Islam itself has come to carry. The social, political, and economic forces that an older sociology expected to constitute the material basis of “disenchantment” and the secularization of society have profoundly shaped Muslim-majority societies too, albeit very unevenly, since the end of the eighteenth century. These forces have effected a differentiation and specialization of social spheres, the proliferation of specialisms, and the growth of their relative autonomy from one another: the division of labor, its commodification and that of its products, the adoption of machine technologies, the marketization of social relations, the construction of the modern bureaucratic state, and the competitive geopolitics of international relations.

While never universal—in the sense of “flattening out” social and cultural differences in the same way everywhere—such processes have indeed been global, and globalizing. To a great extent, their rapid and uneven emergence, and their

47. John R. Bowen, “Secularism: Conceptual Genealogy or Political Dilemma?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 3 (2010): 680–94; Katznelson and Stedman Jones, *Religion and the Political Imagination*, 2.

48. Bowen, “Secularism,” 682.

49. Katznelson and Stedman Jones, *Religion and the Political Imagination*, 5.

profound and uneven effects, are what makes it possible to conceive of a modern “global” history at all. It is therefore all the more important to distinguish these processes from what they have often been ideologically conflated with in European history, namely the autonomization or emancipation of polity, economy, culture, and the public sphere from a rump of “the religious,” relegated to its own domain in the “privatized” personal conscience, and perhaps destined to disappear even from that. It ought to be uncontroversial now to separate an appreciation of the actual effects and unevenly global reach of functional specialization and the different regimes of *secularity* that it produced from the confusions introduced into sociological and historical accounts of such processes by *secularism* as a universalizing ideological project and its expectation of *secularization* as an aspect of universalizing modernity. In the case of Islam, these processes have brought a differentiation and proliferation of religion, not its confinement and reduction. In an important way, rather than medieval holdouts against the modern world (even when consciously “medievalizing” in their actors’ self-perceptions, their rhetoric, or their aesthetics), contemporary forms of Islam are simply another manifestation of the superabundance of new things that capitalism and the modern state have brought into being to fill up the modern world, to fill out and provide meaning to the lives of modern people.

The contemporary global history of Islam, then, has to look for its objects of analysis well beyond a demarcated realm of “the religious,” in a much wider marketplace of culture, society, and politics, not because Islam is “secularization resistant” but because Islam has been so powerfully transformed by its objectification and commodification across the differentiated spheres of social life that the market and the state, the modern world’s “primary secular spheres,” have brought into being. More broadly dominant perceptions of an unrelenting global struggle between secular freedoms and an anti-modernism said to be “very Islamic” are obviously understandable in the wake of the murders at *Charlie Hebdo* and other attacks in Copenhagen, Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, New York, Nice, Baghdad, Bali, Mumbai, Manchester, and London, atrocities by al-Qa’ida in the Maghreb or Yemen, and the horrific spectacles of “Islamic State” in Syria and Iraq. But such perceptions are deeply unhelpful in understanding any of this. To consider the history of Islam and the secular sphere more appropriately is to do nothing more than direct attention to the practical, material conditions of modern life—the “temporal”—that determine the conditions under and the spaces in which modern Islam exists. The “religious,” conceived as a distinct domain of personal or social life, is neither autonomous from the temporal nor wholly separable from it. It is neither determining as a total system of meaning nor subordinated to worldly power as a dependent function of instrumental reason. Rather, religion as a social fact both pervades, to a greater or lesser extent in different circumstances, the newly differentiated spheres of modern social life, and is itself reshaped by and in them in a proliferation of new forms. In the end, this is only to restate Karl Marx’s famous observation that it is the material conditions of life that determine consciousness, and not the other way around.

Among the more remarkable effects of this has been the late twentieth-century prevalence of the Islamist political ideology of Islam as a total sociopolitical



“solution,” as *dīn wa-dawla* (religion and state, inextricably), a distinctively new idea, centered since the 1920s on an idealized conception of the caliphate that had itself become imaginable in these terms only since the adoption of a pan-Islamic foreign policy posture by the late Ottoman Empire under Abdülhamid II. As Sami Zubaida has pointed out, Islamism’s novel vision of religio-social unity emerged in reaction against the *fait accompli* of institutional specialization in socioeconomic and political life, combined with the spread of European imperialism and nation-state formation, since the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> But it was also itself a product of that very differentiation of social fields, part of a set of world-historical processes of which imperialism and the nation, too, were only another facet. Visions of the “totality” of Islam in these terms do not constitute a heroic rediscovery of the enchanted, authentic world before the corruptions of Western secularization, nor do they indicate its anachronistic persistence. They have been both an anxious reaction to and a product of global historical processes whose outcomes in fact have been very different from those that narratives of secularization long anticipated in theory. Adherents of such narratives will fail to understand the contemporary history of Islam, and that of the world that non-Muslims share with it, for as long as they anachronistically cling to them.

*James McDougall*  
*Trinity College, Oxford*  
 james.mcdougall@history.ox.ac.uk



50. Sami Zubaida, “Islam and Secularization,” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 33, no. 3 (2005): 438–48.