

The limits of tolerance: Islam as counter-hegemony?

TONY EVANS*

Abstract. Following recent acts of terrorism in many parts of the world, Islam has become an object of fear. While the threat of violence is undoubtedly an element that inspires this fear, Islam's counter-hegemonic threat is not limited to violence alone. Given its 1.2 billion following, Islam also offers a challenge to the central values that describe the dominant neo-liberal world order, particularly those values that legitimate the global political economy. Although tolerance is an important value in liberal thought, tolerance cannot be exercised where counter-hegemonic threats include challenges to the central tenets of liberalism. This article argues that the current fear of Islam is motivated by just such a challenge. By looking at four central concepts where liberal and Islamic thought diverge – reason and revelation, private property, rights and duties, and government and state – this article seeks to gain a more nuanced insight into current attitudes towards Islam and the fear of counter-hegemony.

Tony Evans is Professor of Global Politics at the University of Southampton. He has published widely in the field of human rights, global governance and law. His current research looks at opposition to human rights discourses. This research will be published by Lynne Rienner at the end of 2010.

Introduction

Following the terrorist attacks in New York, Bali, London and several other locations, the advanced capitalist economies have come to regard militant Islam as the single most important threat to achieving a 'civilized' global order that promises democracy, human rights, and ever greater levels of economic prosperity.¹ Movement towards achieving these 'civilizing' goals is built upon an economic logic that valorises competition within a single global market. In contrast to views associated with Orientalism, which stress backwardness, an inclination to laziness, a lack of 'reason', and a level of immaturity that demands constant paternal care, the dominant neo-liberal order emphasises the virtues of liberty, individualism, tolerance, science, and progress. While 'people like us' are educated, creative, and

* This article was written during the author's tenure of a Leverhulme Trust Fellowship. The author would like to thank the Trust for its generosity. The author would also like to thank Annie Taylor, Katherine Brown, John Glenn, Siba Grovogui, and two anonymous reviews for their comments on an earlier draft. An earlier version was presented at the ISA Annual Conference, Chicago, 2007.

¹ For an example of American attitudes towards Islam published before 9/11 see, Fawaz A. Gerges, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 26:2 (1997), pp. 68–80. See also, Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies*, Report by the RAND Corporation 2003.

forward looking, ‘people over there’ are hidebound by cultural and religious traditions that breed intolerance, ignorance, and suppression.² In contrast to Enlightenment values that helped create some notion of Western superiority, Muslims are cast as the ‘other’:³ that category of people possessing no sense of reason and therefore in need of constant guidance and correction. Seen from this view, the so-called ‘War on Terror’ is a reaction to ‘alien’ ways of thinking, knowing, and acting that are understood as impeding social forces associated with economic globalisation. Although rhetoric and policy retain a focus on action against militant Islam, the argument presented here is that Islam’s potential for counter-hegemony provides the political context for that action.

Given this contextualisation, Islam can be seen as an ‘offspring of modernity’: as a move to a place newly created rather than a retreat to a tradition.⁴ Adopting this approach acknowledges the dialectic materialist character of globalisation, which Marxists have long argued provides the engine for change.⁵ The recent politicisation of Islam, from both within and outside Muslim society, is thus a consequence of an emergent global political economy that is intolerant of divergent socio-political alternatives created by its own movement.⁶ What emerges from this is a new politics of identity, difference, and exclusion, which finds expression in the re-articulation of core traditions, providing discontented groups with a place to register their grievances.⁷ As Butko has noted, Islamic counter-hegemonic movements focus upon uniting the people behind an alternative world view that challenges modernisation and its social consequences.⁸

It does not follow from these preliminary remarks that groups closest to the centre of economic globalisation will unflinchingly react to all and any resistance to the ambitions of global capital. Many instances of resistance have little appeal beyond their immediate locale, and those that achieve a wider audience are often inspired by disparate motivations, as the ‘Battle in Seattle’ demonstrated.⁹ What makes Islam exceptional in the eyes of the neo-liberal order is its vast membership, its potential as a global mass movement, and its distinctive and complex tradition

² Makau Mutua, *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

³ For a critique of the assumed superiority of the West see Sophie Bessis, *Western Supremacy: triumph of an idea?*, trans. Patrick Camille (London: Zed Books, 2003). Also, Thomas C. Patterson, *Inventing Western Civilization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

⁴ Aziz Al-Azmeh, ‘Postmodern Obscurantism and ‘The Muslim Question’, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 5 (2003), pp. 20–47.

⁵ Malcolm D. Brown, ‘An Ethnographic Reflection on Muslim-Christian Dialogue in the North of France: The Context of *Laïcité*’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 13 (2002), pp. 5–23.

⁶ Peter Mandaville, *Transitional Muslim Politics* (London: Routledge, 2001). To sustain this view, intellectual and political authority engaged in the politics of globalisation posits a monolithic Islam, opposed in every respect to the values that describe some equally monolithic version of the ‘West’.

⁷ Nancy Fraser, ‘From Redistribution to Recognition: Dilemmas of Justice in a “Post-Socialist” Age’, *New Left Review*, 212 (1995b), pp. 68–93; Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking Recognition’, *New Left Review* (May–June 2000), pp. 107–20.

⁸ T. Butko, ‘Revelation and Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31:1 (2004), pp. 41–62.

⁹ For an analysis of the ‘Battle in Seattle’ see, for example, J. A. L. Alves, ‘The Declaration of Human Rights in Postmodernity’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22:2 (2000), pp. 478–500. M. Chossudovsky, ‘World Trade Organisation (WTO): An illegal organisation that violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ [Electronic Version] (1999); E. Paine, *The Road to the Global Compact*, Global Policy Forum Report (2000).

of religious belief, political ideology, social norms, world outlook, and philosophical method. Taken together, these characteristics appear to challenge all the central values upon which the project for the global expansion of neo-liberalism is built. Describing Islam as a unique global movement, dedicated to defending its followers from further cultural and spiritual encroachment, and by any means at its disposal, gives it the appearance of a counter-hegemonic force capable of mounting a successful challenge to the global neo-liberal order.¹⁰

The assertion that Islam is dedicated to changing Western values has become a common-place theme in European and North American society. In this regard, Islam is presented as a monolithic, proselytising creed dedicated to undermining, overturning, and eventually replacing the values that have sustained capital growth on a global scale. This was recognised by Edward Said, who asserted that the fear of Islam had increased since the publication of his seminal book, *Orientalism*, arguing that ‘it is still considered a threat, something that must be walled out’, a place for ‘terrorists and fanatics.’¹¹ A more recent expression of this fear was seen when talk-show host Dennis Prager asserted that the first Muslim member of Congress (Keith Ellison: D-Minn) threatens to ‘imperil’ America simply because he intended to be sworn in on the Qur’an, not the Bible.¹²

This fear does not, of course, acknowledge the wide theological and cultural differences between Islamic communities. Apart from the most obvious split between Sunnis and Shiites, cultural filters have seen the emergence of Islam in many forms: Persian, Arab, South-East Asian, African and Middle-Eastern, each with its own agenda, attitudes to radicalism, and social practices. Just as there are many forms of Christianity, so too there are many forms of Islam. No matter the reality, the image of Islam in European and North American population’s looms large as a single movement, dedicated to spreading its religious and cultural order throughout the world.

It is not the purpose of this article to examine the claims and counter-claims of Islam and its opponents in an effort to explicate the ‘true’ interpretation of the scriptures and religious texts. Nor is it concerned with drawing out the differences and similarities between different cultural instances of Islam. Rather, the article is concerned to examine the underlying causes of the ‘fear’ of Islam currently found in Western society. As Andrew O’Hagan has observed ‘Islamophobia is one of the big questions of our day’, presenting a problem that is most often answered ‘with ignorance or with common hysteria, and almost never with fresh thinking.’ Accordingly, he argues that the damage this brings to bear on our own society is ‘making a monster where it shouldn’t exist, a monster made from the mania of our own fear?’¹³ It is the underlying cause for creating this ‘monster’ that this article seeks to address.¹⁴

¹⁰ The history of Islam indicates that the globalisation of the faith has long been a goal for Muslims. This is a theme regularly explored by Islamic scholars. For a good introduction to this theme see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought: The Basic Concepts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).

¹¹ *International Herald Tribune* (11 March 1996). See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, Routledge, 1976) and Kegan Paul.

¹² See, among other reports of this instance, {<http://mediamatters.org/items/200612060001>}.

¹³ Andrew O’Hagan, ‘Fear is Ruining Our Chance of Peace’, *The Daily Telegraph* (8 April 2008).

¹⁴ Recent research conducted at Cardiff University has shown that a fear of Islam is prevalent in the UK, citing both the fear of terrorism and the challenge to social values as the main reasons. See the

The article begins with a brief discussion of tolerance, which is often presented as a core principle of the neo-liberal global order. It argues that tolerance is practiced only to the extent that counter-hegemonic challenges do not threaten to move from expressions of discontent to actively promoting alternative futures. In the case of Islam, this point is reached when Islam appears to mount a challenge to core values that sustain the neo-liberal order. It then moves to discuss four core values over which neo-liberal and Islamic thought diverges: reason and revelation, property, rights and duties, and government and the state. Through these discussions the article demonstrates that the fear of Islam is deeply rooted in the challenge it appears to represent to the dominant neo-liberal global order.

Counter-hegemony and the limits of tolerance

Recent literature has emphasised the disciplinary mode of social organisation, which functions largely without need of coercion and on a global scale. Its purpose is to imbue the individual with particular ways of thinking, thus instilling modes of social consciousness that make social action both predictable and in the service of particular interests. Discipline is learned in the day-to-day complex of social life, for example, through institutional training received in the family, the school, the university, the church, and the workplace, where notions of correct and incorrect behaviour and thought are clearly delimited. The epithet ‘common sense’ is achieved when a particular mode of thought or conduct is unquestioningly accepted as normal and natural.¹⁵ ‘Common sense’ represents a category of rules that are rarely articulated explicitly in legal statute or constitutional form but nonetheless provide the foundation for generating and maintaining norms, and processes of ‘normalization’, that legitimate law and constitutional limits. In this sense, discipline operates without ‘compulsion, but nevertheless, [exerts] a collective pressure and [obtains] results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting.’¹⁶

From the perspective of ‘common sense’ as disciplinary social order, power is not located within governments or particular factions, classes, institutions, or cadres, but is instead exercised in the actions of everyday life. In contrast to past eras, where the exercise of power was associated with readily identifiable agents, who operated irregularly and intermittently, discipline in the age of globalisation operates continuously, without conscious agency, and with a global reach. The distinctive characteristic of disciplinary ‘common sense’ is that it replaces violence and the threat of violence with more temperate modes of action associated with

Guardian (4 July 2008). The outrage expressed following the speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s in February 2008, in which he expressed the view that it was ‘inevitable’ that some *shari’a* law would be accepted in the UK, and the subsequent speech by the most senior Judge in the UK, Lord Phillips, expressing similar views, gives some indication that the fear of value change is central to the populations thought on Islam. See, the *Guardian* (7 July 2008).

¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, ‘Selections from the Prison Notebooks’ edited by Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

visibility through surveillance.¹⁷ This is not to argue that the use of violence will play an ever diminishing role within the contemporary world order. There will still be times when discipline breaks down, where the excluded and potentially disruptive threaten peace and civility. Should the institutions of global governance fail to pacify such groups, by providing ‘poor relief’, the military and police are used as ‘riot control’. In this way, threats to the emerging structures of the global order are minimised by mollifying or oppressing ‘chaos in the bottom layer.’¹⁸

Critics of neo-liberal notions of power have argued that the institutionalisation and valorisation of a particular set of values, for instance those concerning property rights and concepts of freedom, obscures and conceals the processes of domination that lie beneath normal social practice.¹⁹ Gill, for example, has referred to the most prominent discipline within the current global order as ‘market discipline’, which stresses economic growth and development, deregulation, the free market, the privatisation of public services, individual freedoms, and minimum government.²⁰ Market discipline describes a set of normative relationships with a global reach, supported by discourses of truth, and widely accepted as ‘common sense’. These relationships are manifest at both the domestic and global level, for example, in national and international economic planning, market-based solutions for environmental degradation, the move to privatise social welfare provision, and the move to privatise life itself, seen in the scramble to patent the genes of both human and non-human life forms. Surveillance is undertaken by international and regional agencies, for example, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Each of these is understood as the authentic voice of market discipline and each exercises systems of surveillance and data collection on a global and regional scale, designed to detect any deviations from ‘normal’ socio-economic practice.

It is common to find proponents of market discipline arguing that the new ‘politics of recognition demands new expressions of sensitivity to difference and new possibilities for expanding the range of permissible disagreements.’²¹ This is the virtue of tolerance, which is a fundamental principle of social pluralism. However, market discipline does not extend tolerance to all groups, ideas and values. Instead, tolerance is extended only to those who accept the general purposes of market discipline by adopting its values and following the ‘correct’ procedures for realising the ‘good life’. Those who attempt to challenge the general principles of the dominant economic, social and political order are tolerated only in so far as they ‘do not seek to make the transition from word to deed, from speech to action.’²² This is the condition of ‘repressive tolerance’, which Marcuse argues is little more

¹⁷ Nancy Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions’, in Barry Smart (ed.), *Michel Foucault (2): Critical Assessment* (London: Routledge, 1995a), pp. 133–48.

¹⁸ Robert Cox, ‘Democracy in hard times: economic globalization and the limits to liberal democracy’, in Anthony McGrew (ed.), *The Transformation of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 49–75.

¹⁹ Duncan Ivison, ‘The Disciplinary Moment: Foucault, Law and the Reinscription of Rights’, Jeremy Moss (ed.), *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 129–48.

²⁰ Stephen Gill, ‘Globalization, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism’, in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 24 (1995), pp. 399–423.

²¹ Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

²² Herbert Marcuse, ‘Repressive Tolerance’, in R. P. Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Tolerance* (Boscon: Beacon Press, 1969).

than a 'market-place of ideas' in which notions of the 'good life' compete for attention within the confines of a particular version of social order, currently that described by market discipline.²³

Within this social order, the role of civil society is to defend the social and economic norms associated with the global marketplace. Normalisation demands that the 'individual who enters these civil spaces is expected to adopt a certain stance towards his or her own person and towards others.'²⁴ Those who cannot or will not embrace the values embodied in civil society are treated as ignorant, ill-informed beings, lacking the moral capacity to engage fully in decisions about their own interests.²⁵ Tolerance and civility are therefore concerned with the preservation and management of a particular form of civil society, a narrowing of the political agenda and the exclusion of actors whose voices appear as a threat. In neo-liberal societies, tolerance is practised by legitimating a set of civil liberties and freedoms that are granted to all citizens, regardless of 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'.²⁶ Against this expression of formal equality and tolerance, however, is the actual practice of tolerance, which cannot be divorced from power relations, relations that determine what will or will not be tolerated. For Marcuse, in the face of repressive tolerance and inequality 'the idea of available alternatives evaporates into an utterly utopian dimension' because the dominant world order is characterised by 'indoctrination', 'manipulation' and 'extraneous authority'.²⁷

Summed up succinctly by Marcuse, progress towards tolerance is 'perhaps more than before asserted by violence and suppression on a global scale', when tolerance is extended to 'policies, conditions, and modes of behaviour which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery'.²⁸ Tolerance may therefore perform the task of 'closure' by excluding alternatives that threaten the existing order, for example, by defining legitimate rights claims as a legal problem rather than one best understood within the context of the global political economy or by treating resistance to market discipline as perpetrated by 'evil doers' rather than as a consequences of the prevailing socio-economic global order.²⁹ From this perspective, Islam offers an example of the perceived failure to embrace market discipline as 'common sense', and therefore a counter-hegemonic threat to the global capitalist project. Following Antonio Gramsci, to the extent that consensus and 'common sense' prevails so too does hegemony.³⁰

Thus, hegemony provides a form of latent coercion sufficient to ensure conformity of action in most people most of the time. The material success of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mustapha Kamel Pasha and David L. Blaney, 'Elusive Paradise: The Promise and Perils of Global Civil Society', *Alternatives*, 23 (1998), pp. 417–540.

²⁵ Barry Hindess, 'Power and Rationality: The Western Conception of Political Community', *Alternatives*, 17 (1992), pp. 149–63.

²⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2.

²⁷ Herbert Marcuse 'Repressive Tolerance', in R. P. Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Tolerance* (Boseon: Beacon Press, 1969).

²⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁹ President George W. Bush was fond of using the phrase 'evil-doers' in speeches following the events of 9/11.

³⁰ Antonio Gramsci, 'Selections from the Prison Notebooks', edited by Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996).

hegemony built across Europe, North America and some parts of Asia has encouraged neo-liberals to press less developed states to adopt certain elements of the hegemonic model as a means for creating a single, integrated world economy.³¹ To achieve this goal demands a passive revolution within less developed states that legitimises new ways of thinking and acting, ways that are appropriate for engaging with the hegemonic order. However, lacking the economic and social evolution experienced in the advanced global economy, the effort to achieve rapid integration through inserting certain elements of the hegemonic order into existing social and cultural practices is often perceived as a threat to traditional notions of identity. Both Cox and Mittelman, for example, argue that the new socio-economic context of globalisation demands that a proportion of production in less developed states is shifted to export goods as the means to gaining a foothold in global markets. While this may produce greater opportunities for some groups to enter the wage-earning economy (for example, women), it also disadvantages others who must bear the cost of higher levels of unemployment and social deprivation. Furthermore, the shift in production also bring changes in social relations, challenging existing values and social norms that often clash with the values inherent in Islam.³²

Consequently, many Islamic leaders and intellectuals have sought to project Islam as a revolutionary vehicle, a vehicle that unifies and disciplines the masses whose lives are touched by the attempt to insert the norms and values of global hegemony. As Youssef Choueiri has observed, thinkers like Qutb, al-Mawdudi, and Khomeini all sought to articulate a new political theory based upon religious foundations that secured a contemporary Islamic discourse for government. For them, 'change had to be total, comprehensive, and revolutionary' because they saw 'no possibility of coexistence between Islam and other political and social systems.'³³ It is important to note here that the attempt to construct a viable counter-hegemonic movement capable of driving back the values associated with neo-liberalism was most often directed at national governments engaged in programmes of modernisation rather than at those at the centre of the global hegemonic project. More will be said on this later.

Tolerance, fear and Islamic political economy

Of the many alternatives to the tenets of the neo-liberal global order offered by Islam, four will be discussed here: the consequences that flow from the distinction between reason and revelation; the role of property within the political economy;

³¹ Robert W. Cox, 'Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: An essay on method', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Cox argues that the tradition of International Relations, which seeks to express world order as the relations between states, has masked the exercise of power in its historically social class form.

³² R. W. Cox, 'Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: An essay in method' in S. Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 49–66; J. H. Mittelman and C. B. N. Chin, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2000).

³³ Quoted in T. Butko, 'Revelations or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31:1 (2004), pp. 41–62.

universal human rights as individual claims; and the role of the legitimate government and state. It is worth reiterating here that the purpose of this analysis is to gain an insight into the West's fear of Islam and not to offer a detailed critical view of the subtly, complexity, and alternatives that Islamic thought offers in its counter-hegemonic movement.

Reason and revelation

The distinction between reason and revelation as philosophical method is key to understanding Islamic political economy.³⁴ This is so because, as Gramsci argues, modes of thinking and knowing are integral to creating and maintaining hegemony. While the Enlightenment tradition seeks philosophical 'truth' through the application of reason, Islam seeks 'truth' through revelation.³⁵ Following from the Islamic premise that the earthly realm is God's creation, all human capacities and capabilities are God given, constituting a 'divine sovereignty' which demands religious devotion. The revealed word of God, which the Prophet recorded in the Qur'an fourteen centuries ago, sets down moral truths as a guide for building a just social order within which all Muslims can find both material and spiritual security. These truths include the duty of the individual, the family, and the wider Muslim community (*ummah*) to participate in creating and sustaining social relations for realising God's design.³⁶ In this sense, revelation serves to bridge the divide between the earthly and the heavenly realms, where the former is characterised as the day-to-day struggle for survival and the satisfaction of physiological and material needs, and the latter as a transcendent realm beyond earthly desires, which satisfies psychological and spiritual needs.

From the perspective of revelation, it follows that any attempt to separate the physiological and material from the psychological and spiritual aspects of human existence, which is central to Enlightenment thought, must be rejected. Qutb, for example, explains this rejection through his critique of Thomas Hobbes, who he claims emphasises reason and the acquisition of knowledge at the expense of revelation. In Qutb's reading of Hobbes, knowledge of the natural world opens the possibility of imagining a future where the failure to satisfy natural appetites is less likely. Reason therefore offers the potential to satisfy physiological needs through the exploitation of nature to generate surpluses.³⁷ However, the state of nature determines that others may attempt to satisfy their own physiological needs

³⁴ Antony Black, 'Classical Islam and Medieval Europe: A comparison of Political Philosophies and Culture', *Political Studies*, 41(1993), pp. 58–69.

³⁵ The term 'reason' is not used here in the Orientalist sense, which contrasts Western rationality and its application to science, philosophy and social organisation with non-Western irrationality and ignorance. Instead, 'reason' and revelation are understood here as equally valid modes of rationality, each dedicated to discovering truths about the natural world and humankind's place within it. The will of God revealed through Islamic theology is as rational for Muslims as the empirical world revealed through scientific method is for western thought.

³⁶ Ali Mohammadi, 'The culture and politics of human rights in the context of Islam', in Ali Mohammadi (ed.), *Islam and Encountering Globalization* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 111–30.

³⁷ Of course, neo-liberal political economy does not satisfy the material needs of all. Rather, it meets the needs of those who possess the purchasing power. It cannot therefore be claimed that neo-liberalism provides security in the broad sense of the term, which includes economic security.

through appropriation. Hobbes therefore proposes a social contract where citizens surrender some liberty to a 'leviathan' in exchange for security defined by rights over property. Accordingly, Qutb argues that the role of the secular state is limited to the physiological needs of citizens.³⁸ Socio-psychological needs remain a private matter of faith and religious devotion, a sphere of social life in which the state has little interest and, therefore, no legitimate claim to interfere.³⁹ Thus, Qutb claims that Hobbes explicitly rejects the need for the state to engage with issues of religious belief and instead focuses upon the material world.⁴⁰

For these reasons, the secularist turn found in most advanced capitalist economies, which separates the state's duty from duties associated with religious observance, and which assigns religion to the private world, is rejected by Islamic scholars. For Islam, the social world must be investigated as a 'unity between worship and work, ideology or creed and behaviour, spirituality and materiality, economic symbolic value, the world and immortality, heaven and earth.'⁴¹ In Islamic thought, the development of distinctive disciplines in economics, international relations, politics, philosophy, sociology, law, and theology – each with its own language, methodology, and normative context, brings only confusion, partial truths and conflict. While Enlightenment thought encouraged a methodology that seeks 'truth' through an examination of every facet of society in isolation, Islam adopts a holistic approach; an 'Islamic spirit' that is realised only when the individual's consciousness is awakened by submission to the will of God.⁴² In short, many Islamic scholars argue that the Enlightenment project to abandon holistic thought, its preference for a methodology that focuses upon the parts rather than the whole, and its rejection of God as the source of 'truth', creates a social order that fails to satisfy either the physiological or psychological needs of humankind.⁴³ For many proponents of Islam, the schism between physiological and psychological needs is the major cause of decadence found in developed neo-liberal states, where the instances of family breakdown, drugs, violent crime, and social dislocation threaten the collapse of social order.

Although from the perspective of Enlightenment thought, Hobbes' rationale and ambitious programme offers an optimistic view of human progress, viewed

³⁸ Ronald A. T. Judy, 'Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-waqi'i*, or New Realist Science', *Boundary* 2, 31 (2004), pp. 113–49.

³⁹ J. Plamentaz (ed.), *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan* (London: Fontana, William Collins, 1969).

⁴⁰ Secularism does not imply that a society lacks religious conviction, as is seen in the US, with its millions of 'born-again' Christians. Instead, secularism implies the separation of religious beliefs from the political, social, and economic decision-making. For example, Article 1 of the US Bill of rights states categorically that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.' Article IV of the US constitution states that 'no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States', explicitly forbids the adoption of a state religion and the practice of religion in schools.

⁴¹ Qutb quoted in Ronald A. T. Judy, 'Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-waqi'i*, or New Realist Science', *boundary* 2, 31 (2004), pp. 113–49.

⁴² Mohmood Monshipouri, 'Islamic Thinking and the Internationalization of Human Rights', *The Muslim World* LXXXIV (1994), pp. 217–39.

⁴³ This is not to argue that a clear division can be made between the freedoms claimed by the individual and those claimed by the community. Indeed, Enlightenment thinkers were concerned with investigating questions of how the individual can be free within community. However, the liberal focus on the individual is widely accepted. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983).

from Islam it offers the prospect of a socio-economic order that fails to deliver spiritual and moral guidance. By contrast, the Islamic version of the social contract is said to actively assert a normative foundation that seeks to go beyond the mere satisfaction of physiological need by extending that satisfaction to the psychological, spiritual and moral needs of the whole community. As Judy explains, it is a contract that seeks to awaken the individual's consciousness to Allah's guidance on the nature of the universe and humankind's place within it. Any claim to knowledge that fails to accept the 'truth' of Allah's guidance, or otherwise pre-empts the possibility of engaging that 'truth', is seen by Islamic scholarship as the very definition of ignorance (*Jahiliya*).⁴⁴ Consequently, the struggle to gain a greater knowledge of the material world alone must fail if it produces a disconnected and temporal form of knowledge that cannot provide the foundations for creating forms of community based upon social justice and a stable moral order.

The opposition between knowledge as reason and knowledge as revelation provides the foundation for many disagreements between a neo-liberal and Islamic political economy. As Hoogvelt has noted, it is an ontological difference theorised in a self-serving contrast of identity and progress, where capital is cast in the role of economic dynamo 'because it [is] universal, rational, pluralist and secular', while the 'Orient [is] economically stagnant because it [is] particularistic, traditional, despotic, wallowing in religious obscurantism, and therefore stagnant.'⁴⁵ While neo-liberals focus on the satisfaction of material needs, personal security, and secular forms of government and society, Islam emphasises both material and spiritual needs, security for the community, and forms of earthly government that fulfil Allah's moral vision for humankind. For Islam, a philosophy that rejects revelation can lead only to social formations full of decadence, moral decay, illegitimate laws, and corrupt government. Marshalling the values that spring from revelation in order to mount a counter-hegemonic movement is therefore a central concern for Islam.

The distinction between knowledge and truth derived from the application of reason and that derived from revelation brings consequences for values associated with the political economy. Most centrally, Islam's notion of property differs from that held by neo-liberal societies in ways that challenge the foundations upon which the global capitalist project is built. It is to this that we now turn.

Property

Islam's understanding of property begins by recognising that 'God gave dominion over all the assets of the world, including the sun and moon, the sea, animals, the firmament.'⁴⁶ However, from the earliest days of Islam these principles were not unconditional. In the decade following the death of the Prophet, for example, Abu Dharr argued that any wealth created beyond the needs of subsistence, including

⁴⁴ Ronald A. T. Judy, 'Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-waqi'i*, or New Realist Science', *boundary 2*, 31 (2004), pp. 113–49.

⁴⁵ Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

wealth created through the exploitation of labour and nature, should be used to fulfil the command of God, which was to further the spiritual and material wellbeing of the *ummah*. In fulfilment of this duty, it was prerequisite for those engaged in any form of wealth creation to acknowledge a duty to provide for those unable to secure the basic necessities of subsistence through the application of their own skills and talents.⁴⁷ To reinforce this limitation on wealth, the starving and destitute were permitted to take whatever was needed to sustain life, without fear of punishment. *Zakat*, the duty to give charity, is one aspect of this restriction on wealth and property.⁴⁸

A more recent manifestation of Islamic principles relating to property was articulated by Habubullah Peyman, following the Iranian revolution of 1979. Peyman argued that there is no prohibition on the ownership of private property. Nor does the Qur'an denounce the inequalities that derive from an unequal distribution of wealth, the ownership of the means of production or the pursuit of profit and the use of wage labour. However, since all material assets are a gift from God to the Muslim world, resources must be made available to any Muslim who wants to apply his or her creative labour to those resources.⁴⁹ This is the Islamic doctrine of 'peoples ownership', which in line with John Locke, begins by asserting that one has legitimate ownership only over the goods produced by ones own labour. Unlike Locke, however, property rights under Islam are limited by a 'sufficiency principle', which ordains that property rights are restricted to satisfying ones own needs, and those of one's family. Muslims therefore have a duty to freely redistribute excess wealth beyond their own needs to those who are unable to provide for themselves through their own endeavours. Crucially, since labour is the only legitimate means for creating wealth, receiving wages and a share of profits, there is no legitimacy in a share-holding corporation, where the exploitation of labour is separated from rights to take profits.⁵⁰

Against a background of growing resentment over conspicuous wealth, accumulation, the increasing gap between rich and poor, an awareness of structural exclusion on a global scale, and the erosion of time-honoured approaches to social welfare as the market demands cuts or the abolition of transfer payments, Muslim societies often reject neo-liberal principles of property and turn instead to those offered by Islam. In some cases, this has opened the space for Muslim socialists to promote the economic principles expressed in the Qur'an. In the 1970s, for example, Ali Shariati wrote extensively on an Islamicised version of historical materialism, which sought to offer a radical reading of Shi'ism. According to Shariati, the central teachings of Islam offer the oppressed, the poor, and the excluded the means to achieve emancipation from further class conflict. Most significantly, and of particular concern for the capitalist global economy, Shariati argued that the abolition of all institutions associated with property would lead to

⁴⁷ Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (London: Alan Lane, 1974).

⁴⁸ *Zakat* is usually calculated at a minimum of 2.5 per cent of wealth, not income. While this may be achievable during times of growth and prosperity, in times of depression it may strain any economy. A general fall in profits makes *zakat* less sustainable at a time when there is growing unemployment.

⁴⁹ Suhruh Behdad, 'Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1995), pp. 193–217.

⁵⁰ Nikhil Aziz, 'Human Rights Debate in an Era of Globalization: Hegemony of Discourse', in Peter Van Ness (ed.), *Debating Human Rights: Critical Essays from the United States and Asia* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 32–55.

a more just and classless society.⁵¹ These arguments found a sympathetic ear in the People's Mujahedine and other Muslim organisations dedicated to promoting a political economy that generated further movement towards achieving a particular kind of social order, which they claimed was revealed in the sacred texts.⁵²

For many interpretations of Islam, therefore, wealth creation is not concerned solely with investment, profit maximisation and personal aggrandisement. Indeed, under Islamic economics, the duty to use surplus wealth for the good of the *ummah* demands that investment and production activity include social utility calculations before proceeding. This could, for example, include the goal of full employment, environmental protection, health provision, poverty alleviation, social welfare, and social housing.⁵³ The aim of profit maximisation is not, therefore, concerned solely with increasing personal wealth, although this is not prohibited, but must also be concerned with increasing the wellbeing of the *ummah*. In short, and by definition, legitimate economic activity is concerned with both wealth creation *and* social justice. Accordingly, 'before entering the market place and being exposed to the price filter, consumers are expected to pass their claims through the moral filter'.⁵⁴ This reflective process is intended to sift out socially harmful investment and production activities and to act as a guide for consumer choice. Thus, according to the Islamic view of property, the moral and price filters satisfy both spiritual and material needs within a socio-economic order that seeks to satisfy the physiological and psychological needs of the community.

An attempt to express these principles is seen in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The preamble states that the purpose of the economy is to make provision for the material needs of the population, which is not an end in itself but a means for attaining the 'ultimate goal' of living by Islamic principles and norms. This is contrasted to the prevailing global orthodoxy, and 'materialist schools of thought', where the economy is seen as an end in itself, 'so that it comes to be a subversive and corrupting factor in the course of man's development.'

From this viewpoint, the economic programme of Islam consists of providing the means needed for the emergence of the various creative capacities of the human being. Accordingly, it is the duty of the Islamic government to furnish all citizens with equal and appropriate opportunities, to provide them with work, and to satisfy their essential needs, so that the course of their progress may be assured.⁵⁵

From the perspective of Islamic economics, the efficient allocation of resources does not exclude the possibility of private property or self-serving activity to create wealth. However, the well-being of all members of the *ummah* is the central purpose of economic activity, and this cannot be achieved in an environment that fails to promote socio-economic justice. While the market does contribute to the efficient allocation of resources, competition within markets alone does not meet the moral standards expected to achieve Islamic socio-economic justice. In contrast

⁵¹ For a brief outline of Ali Shariati's work see Suhruh Behdad, 'Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (1995), pp. 193–217.

⁵² Of course, the sacred texts of all religions have always been open to particular interpretations. The case of the Mujahedine is no different in this respect.

⁵³ Karen Pfeifer, 'Political Islam: Essays from the Middle East Report', *Report by the Middle East Research and Information Project* (1997).

⁵⁴ M. Umer Chapra, 'Islamic Economics: What Is It and How It Developed', in *Economic History Net*, edited by Economic History Association: Economic History Association (2006).

⁵⁵ The Constitution of the Republic of Iran can be found at {http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir00000_.html}.

to the 'culturally approved behaviour model for a neo-liberal market society based on private property and competition', which remains the dominant order in the global economy, Islamic economics rejects the rational economic actor model in favour of one that gives central place to social welfare and justice.⁵⁶

Consequently, although the individual does have a duty to strive to create wealth, when this choice is made it cannot be realised other than within the context of the *ummah*. Without the stability and predictability provided by the rules and norms that describe the *ummah*, the avaricious individual must lead an isolated, atomised, egotistic existence separated from the community. To engage in economic activity merely to generate wealth dedicated to one's own enjoyment, personal aggrandisement or the craven satisfaction of a lust for power as sanctioned by the global neo-liberal order, is to exploit the *ummah* in ways that are morally repugnant. It is this that motivates Islam's claims for ethical superiority over neo-liberal hegemony, as practiced under conditions of globalisation. Furthermore, the spiritual dimension in Islam's economic thought, and the existence of a moral community whose boundaries do not coincide with the state and the modern state system, provides an alternative image of globalisation that is unacceptable to neo-liberalism and its proponents.

The rights of the individual

Following from the contrasting tradition of property rights in Islam, as opposed to that under neo-liberalism, is the role of universal human rights as the rights of the individual. The success of human rights associated with market discipline can be seen in claims that in 'virtually all regions of the world [...] there is broad acceptance of the triad of human rights, free markets and democracy as desirable, attainable policy objectives.'⁵⁷ Of course, the rights referred to here assume a particular conception of rights, defined as the freedom of the individual to invest time, capital, and resources in processes of production and exchange.⁵⁸ They are the rights that are said to release the creative potential of humankind in the pursuit of wealth, benefiting all sections of society through the 'trickle-down' mechanism.

However, while it may be possible to claim that all peoples throughout the world do now, as a matter of fact, embrace the concept of human rights, there can be no certainty that the particular conception of human rights associated with market discipline has achieved universal acceptance. Indeed, as Pasha and Blaney argue, the effort to promote particular notions of civility, by proclaiming the 'truth' and 'universality' of a particular conception of human rights or democracy, may add to the 'sense of grievance that motivates a politics that transgresses civility.'⁵⁹ This sense of grievance is at the root of Islam's objections to the current dominant

⁵⁶ Karen Pfeifer, 'Political Islam: Essays from the Middle East Report', *Report by the Middle East Research and Information Project* (1997).

⁵⁷ M. Conley and D. Livermore, 'Human Rights, Development and Democracy', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* XIX (1996), pp. 19–26.

⁵⁸ Mary A. Tetrault, 'Regimes and Liberal World Order', *Alternatives*, 13 (1988), pp. 5–26.

⁵⁹ Mustapha Kamel Pasha and David L. Blaney, 'Elusive Paradise: The Promise and Perils of Global Civil Society', *Alternatives*, 23 (1998), pp. 417–540.

discourse of human rights. As many Islamic scholars argue, while the dominant human rights discourse emphasises rights and the individual, Islam favours duties and community.

Islam claims to have no difficulty in entering a discourse of universal human rights.⁶⁰ As noted above, Islamic thought looks to revelation as the foundation on which to build its moral framework, including notions of universal human rights. Accordingly, since God created humankind, and rights are an attribute of humankind, rights are God given and therefore attract the utmost respect. This revelation inspired Islamic scholars to create a discourse of rights in the early days of the *ummah*. Although these scholarly works spring from different branches of Islam and from different cultural traditions, Mayer argues that it is still possible to identify dominant human rights themes throughout Islamic thought.⁶¹ In particular, she cites the work of al-Farabi in the tenth century and Ibn Rushd (Averroës) in the twelfth century, who Mayer's claims come closest to acknowledging the application of reason in pursuit of rights, truth, and justice.⁶² However, these earlier discourses on justice and rights served only to reinforce the prevailing view that justice should be garnered from divine revelation found in the Qur'an and *Shari'a* law, which embody God's wisdom and will.

Following the conclusion reached in these historic debates has encouraged many religious leaders to argue that the Islamic system of ethics and rights is not in need of further revision.⁶³ Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, asserted that rights established through reason (natural rights) were a fiction, and that believers should therefore submit to the word of God, where the limits of justice and rights were securely rooted.⁶⁴ More recently, in a Friday sermon delivered in the Holy Mosque, Mecca, Sheik Salih Bin Abdullah Bin Humied argued that the debates on rights and justice conducted many centuries ago represented the first instance of a rights regime in world history. Muslims should therefore be confident in entering the contemporary global human rights discourse because 'it was Muslims who exported the principles of Human Rights to other nations, then these rights [were] re-exported to us, as if they were a new human revealing that we have never know before, just like rainwater that falls from the sky, stays in the ground, to reappear afterwards, as a strong spring or a running well.'⁶⁵ However, while Islamic scholars often acknowledge the concept of human rights as a significant global issue, such

⁶⁰ Norani Othman, 'Grounding Human Rights Arguments in Non-Western Culture: Shari'a and the Citizenship Rights of Women in a Modern Islamic State', in Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (eds), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 169–92.

⁶¹ Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (London: Pinter, 1995).

⁶² Ernst cites the *Niche for Lamp* of al-Khatib alTabrizi (d. 1337) as another useful and widely drawn upon source that functions as a source of ethical behaviour. See Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (London: University of Carolina Press, 2003).

⁶³ The 10th Century *Ijtihad* saw an agreement that all important interpretations of the Qur'an and the hadith were settled and that no further argumentation would be countenanced. See, Monshipouri, 1998).

⁶⁴ For a recent commentary on Khomeini's conception of freedom see, Susan Siavoshi, 'Ayatollah Khomeini and the Contemporary Debate on Freedom', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18:1 (2007), pp. 14–42.

⁶⁵ Sheik Salih Bin Abdullah Bin Humied, 'Friday Sermon in the Holy Mosque – Human Rights (Mecca, 2000).

that it is now 'ugly and abominable to stand against human rights',⁶⁶ the conception, construal, and elucidation of human rights is very different from that found in the dominant neo-liberal global discourse.⁶⁷

The priority given to the needs of the *ummah* over those of the individual, in contrast the priority given to the individual in neo-liberal thought, has already been mentioned above. Contrary to the claims of the human rights associated with market discipline, Islam claims to unleash the creative potential of humankind, not as isolated individuals freely exploiting labour and the natural world, but within the social context of the *ummah*. Community and exploitation are incompatible.⁶⁸ Since the full expression of human capability and capacity requires the prior satisfaction of both material and spiritual needs, which can be achieved only when social order is maintained, claims of individual rights and freedoms make no sense.⁶⁹

Given the social context of the *ummah* for economic activity, the interests of the individual are inextricably fused with those of the community. It is therefore thought legitimate to curtail individual freedoms when the security of the *ummah* and the collective interests of its members are threatened. These interests, which include the maintenance of minimum levels of welfare, housing, education, and medical care, take priority over the rights of the individual to secure self-serving accumulation.⁷⁰ Any state based upon the precepts of Islam may therefore limit the rights of the individual, including the exercise of property rights, when sustaining such a claim might harm the community. The duty of the Islamic state is to establish and maintain the principles, norms and values of Islamic society, not to ensure the rights of individuals in pursuit of personal wealth. States that claim a constitutional affinity with Islam, but fail in their duty to fully implement policies directed at protecting and promoting Islamic values, and populations that fail to hold such states to task, are apostate.⁷¹ In short, while market discipline is expressed in the language of individual rights, the language of Islam is duties to and within the *ummah*.

The long tradition of emphasising duties over rights in Islam asserts a hierarchical social order ordained by God, which remains stable only when each accepts his or her social role. Soroush expresses this neatly when he asserts that a 'knowledge of duties is as marginal to modern law as that of rights is to traditional religious law.'⁷² Indeed, many Islamic scholars cite the 'cult of individualism' as a primary cause of social instability, which is said to generate arrogant, haughty, and inflated attitudes about self-worth and personal capabilities, attitudes that are

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Azzam Tamimi, 'Islam and Human Rights', *Institute of Islamic Political Thought* (2001).

⁶⁸ Kees van der Pijl, 'Transnational Class Formation and State Forms', in Stephen Gill and James Mittelman (eds), *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 105–33.

⁶⁹ Ronald A. T. Judy, 'Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-waqi'i*, or New Realist Science', *boundary* 2, 31 (2004), pp. 113–49.

⁷⁰ Suhruh Behdad, 'Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27(1995), pp. 193–217.

⁷¹ Ronald A. T. Judy, 'Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-waqi'i*, or New Realist Science', *boundary* 2, 31 (2004), pp. 113–49.

⁷² A. Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam*, trans. M. Sadri and A. Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 62.

presented as deserving greater rewards than the rest of the community.⁷³ This was perceived many centuries ago when Ibn Khaldun argued that the ‘cult of individualism’ creates a miserable, unhappy, destabilised, and unfulfilling life that must be rejected in favour of duties to Allah and the *ummah*. There is no place for the individual in the sense suggested by the state of nature and natural rights, which provides the foundations for the dominant conception of human rights. Rather, individualism is seen as a disturber of the collective harmony and is therefore abhorrent.⁷⁴ For Islam, by accepting one’s social lot, and not behaving as though one is above the fray, all members of the community achieve contented and rewarding lives. Freedom is therefore realised by accepting Allah’s order and by each member of the community fulfilling his or her duty to God and the *ummah*.⁷⁵

The contrast here between Islam’s approach to right and that now widely accepted as universal is clear. For Islam, a neo-liberal claim that there is only one legitimate conception of rights demonstrates to many Islamic scholars a level of ignorance that makes any global discourse on rights impossible. Why, some scholars ask, should Islam accept the truth of a Declaration of human rights when Islam has had no voice in its construction?⁷⁶ Islamic scholars and commentators therefore argue that in view of Islam’s historic validation of human rights, there is an urgent need for the world to acknowledge deficiencies in the current human rights regime and to work towards finding a closer fit with Islam, rather than persist in claiming that Islam must be modernised to fit with human rights.⁷⁷ Given the context of economic globalisation, the failure to accept the need for processes that enable a constant reassessment of dominant values and norms adds to feelings of discontent. As Pasha and Blaney put it,

[w]e need only gesture to the contested status of human rights within world politics, to debates about the nature of democracy, or to disputes about who can speak for nature [...] in order to suggest that consensus is mostly lacking. Or we might point to the contested status of the very idea of a cosmopolitan view of justice. Or we might simply ask: how does one know, short of [...] global democracy [...] that a consensus exists? In other words, advocates of [global civil society] are quite premature in declaring the existence of a global common good where the deliberative process that could establish such a result are not in place.⁷⁸

⁷³ For a recent exposition on individualism, see Tibor R. Machan, *Classical individualism: the supreme importance of each human being* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁷⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic books, 1991).

⁷⁵ Khaldun notes that slavery is a permitted commercial transaction, a tradition which according to Lewis was accepted until very recently. See I. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rozenhal, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967); B. Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

⁷⁶ A. Mohammadi, ‘The culture and politics of human rights in the context of Islam’, in A. Mohammadi (ed.), *Islam and Encountering Globalization* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 111–30. This is not entirely true. The Universal Declaration was drafted at a time when Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were members of the UN. However, the Saudi representative on the Commission for Human Rights was a Lebanese Christian, and the overwhelming majority of member states were Christian. See also, Mohamed Berween, ‘International Bills of Human Rights: An Islamic Critique’, *International Journal of Human Rights*, 7 (2003), pp. 129–42; Tony Evans, *US Hegemony and the Project of Universal Human Rights* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

⁷⁷ Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 2003).

⁷⁸ Mustaph Kamel Pasha and David L. Blaney, ‘Elusive Paradise: The Promise and Perils of Global Civil Society’, *Alternatives*, 23 (1998), pp. 417–540.

In other words, the more vigorously global civil society promotes market discipline and its associated human rights values, the greater the resistance, creating a 'periodic and irresolvable problem of policing the non-civil in civil society.'⁷⁹ Those who adhere to the norms of 'civility' and aspire to the ends promoted by market discipline are included, while those who offend against the 'normal', either through critique, reflective alternatives, direct action or a stubborn refusal to participate, are excluded, including the poor found in many Muslim societies. Disapproval may be registered by the agencies of global civil society in a number of ways, for example, by including aid conditions that emasculate government decision-making powers, by threatening intervention, by simply labelling alternative voices as 'mad'⁸⁰ or by asserting that the excluded do not possess the moral capacity to engage fully in decision-making processes about their own best interests.⁸¹

Many Islamic scholars therefore reject the current human rights regime because it describes only one kind of person, valorises the individual over the community, does not pay sufficient attention to the religious and spiritual nature of human existence, and relies too exclusively on legal rather than social processes for promoting and protecting human rights. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration, for example, on freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is often seen by Muslims as a form of rampant individualism that threatens to legitimate polytheism and a return to pre-Islamic society.⁸² For these reasons, Soroush argues that while Islam must engage with the secularising pressures that accompany the move to modernisation, it is necessary to 'confront' a Universal Declaration that is 'oblivious to religion and the rights of the creator.' Moreover, the demand that all states must now accept liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of government creates tension and conflict between secularist modernisers and religious traditionalists who remain suspicious that the 'invitation to democratization of the religious government will ineluctably eviscerate any religious content.'⁸³

Again, Humied's Friday sermon on human rights is instructive here. In this Humied asserts that the market discipline conception of human rights is little more than a shabby arm of imperialism, a political tool in the campaign to convert the world to a soulless, utilitarian belief system that has no room for God and spirituality. Accordingly, 'human existence will never enjoy rectitude' if people are deprived of the rights proclaimed by the Prophet and the reformers, who fought for establishing and fixing these rights.

Don't you see that hundreds of millions of human beings are forced to blaspheme God, receive an education that disdains religion, and causes damage to sacred things. All over the world, there is a gloomy imperialistic and fanatic colonization that steals food and creeds, poisons the thought, and seeks to divert the attention of nations from their beliefs. The world is looking forward to a Declaration of Human Rights, in which the sound mind

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ James Keeley, James, 'Towards a Foucauldian Analysis of International Regimes', *International Organization*, 44 (1990), pp. 83–105.

⁸¹ Barry Hindess, 'Power and Rationality: The Western Conception of Political Community', *Alternatives*, 17 (1992), pp. 149–63.

⁸² Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Persius Publishing, 1992).

⁸³ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

agrees with the Divine Revelation. When such a Declaration is formulated, it can be supported and respected.⁸⁴

While the concept of human rights many have gained greater credence within global politics during the last six decades, the neo-liberal conception of rights is far from universally endorsed. Islam's alternative notion of human rights, which emphasises duty and community, therefore represents a potential counter-hegemonic threat to cherished beliefs associated with the globalising neo-liberal world order.

Government and the state

A further distinction between neo-liberalism and Islam, and one that is central to achieving agreement on the form of institutions necessary for maintaining current forms of economic globalisation, is Islam's approach to government and state. According to Islamic principles, the role of government is to 'construe the phenomena of God's sovereignty because God's will is embodied in His legislation', which takes priority over the will and orders of all social or political institutions, including the democratic will of the people.⁸⁵

The clearest expression of this is seen in the application of *shari'a* law, which must be obeyed not because it is the command of the state, but because of its authority as the voice of God. While at first take this seems alien to mature liberal democracies built upon the rule of law, Vaezi insists that in all ideologies and belief systems, including liberalism and socialism, one finds a constitution that proscribes the actions of governments who violate the fundamental beliefs and abiding principles that describe the social and cultural context in which political institutions are embedded.⁸⁶ Democratically elected governments, for example, cannot legitimately undertake actions or make decisions that breach fundamental democratic values, even though the majority may support such actions or decisions. In this respect, many scholars argue that the Islamic state is no different from the democratic state, for no majority can overthrow any of the principles and values of Islam.

Accordingly, the starting point for looking at all social, political and economic issues, including human rights, democracy, legitimate trade, and foreign policy, is to recognise God's sovereignty. In contrast to the modern secular state, where material and physiological needs provide the focus for government, and where the moral and ethical authority of religion is not formally enshrined within a constitution, the purpose of the Islamic state is to act as the guardian of religious values. In contrast to contemporary global politics, which emphasise rights and democracy, Islam emphasises the duties of the ruler and the ruled as ordained by God. The state may enact laws and create institutions for regulating the actions of citizens in social, economic and political affairs, but these remain subject to the

⁸⁴ Sheik Salih Bin Abdullah Bin Humied, 'Friday Sermon in the Holy Mosque – Human Rights' (Mecca, 2000).

⁸⁵ Ahmad Vaezi, *Shia Political Thought* (London: Islamic Centre of England, 2004).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

guiding norms and laws found in the Qur'an and *Shari'a* law. As noted previously, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is presented as an attempt to operationalise this principle.⁸⁷

Consequently, it is common to find Islamic scholars arguing that the preferred model of democracy that supports market discipline, particularly the notion of majority rule, is 'absolutely incompatible with Islam.'⁸⁸ According to Ahmed Vaezi, when the liberal democratic state abandons the authority of God, relocates moral questions in the private sphere beyond the limits of government, and seeks legitimation through democracy, society has experienced social and moral decay, typified by 'welfare induced sloth'.⁸⁹ In place of procedural democracy, which seeks legitimation through periodic elections, it is the duty of all Muslims to remain permanently and fully vigilant to ensure that government does not transgress the core principles of Islam. In the current world order, this includes guarding against the importation of values that may be antithetical to Islam.

The duty of the states leader is to see that God's justice is done, not to create a version of justice constructed through reason and rights. The Prophet's message was religious, concerning spiritual guidance, not a message from God on the correct form of government a society should adopt. This message describes a community of the faithful, not a state, its duties and responsibilities. The spiritual and moral health of the *ummah* is central, rather than the rights of the individual. For these reasons many scholars argue that in contrast to values found in secular societies, where the legitimate actions of government are limited by outlawing any interference in the spiritual, private, moral and social world of the individual and the family, under Islam these are the very issues that are in need of guidance.⁹⁰

Given the impetus for change brought by the forces of economic globalisation, changes that touch the lives of all people, governments in states where Islam is the dominant belief system are caught between competing demands. Those who make these demands are often categorised as 'modernizers', 'reformers', and 'neofundamentalists'. While 'modernizers' pursue the goal of full integration within the global political economy, 'reformers' and 'neofundamentalists' present a challenge to the neo-liberal order.

'Modernizers' seek to reform and rationalise Islam in an attempt to bring it in line with neo-liberal thought and the needs of economic globalisation. This is a call for engaging fully in the processes of globalisation by accepting the norms, values, and conditionalities of neo-liberalism, as promoted by the WTO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the regional economic *fora*. It is also a call to develop a modern secular state capable of developing an efficient administrative role for promoting global capital.⁹¹ For this group, modernisation is the 'process of progressive complexity and differentiation of institutions and spheres of life', which is characteristic of globalisation, the expansion of the neo-liberal global economy, and the further incursion of market discipline. Secularisation is

⁸⁷ See the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran at: {http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir00000_.html}.

⁸⁸ Ahmad Vaezi, *Shia Political Thought*.

⁸⁹ Diane K. Mauzy, 'The Human Rights and 'Asian Values' Debate in Southeast Asia: Trying to Clarify the Key Issues', *Pacific Review*, 10 (1997), pp. 201–36.

⁹⁰ Ahmad Vaezi, *Shia Political Thought*.

⁹¹ Robert Cox, 'Democracy in hard times: economic globalization and the limits to liberal democracy', in Anthony McGrew (ed.), *The Transformation of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 49–75.

recognised as an instance of modernisation, which differentiates religion from economic and political institutions and the church from culture and conscience.⁹² It connotes much more than a simple shift of social and political responsibilities from church to state, but also includes psycho-cultural aspects that see traditional cultural practices and mores penetrated by the new values of modernity. The shift from a theocratic society to a secularised society is seen by some modernisers as an inevitable consequence of economic globalisation, where religious values lose authority as a guide for social action. Consequently, modernisers argue that neither the material nor the spiritual needs of the *ummah* can be satisfied by looking to an Islam developed many centuries ago. Instead, modernisers argue that the tensions between the values that describe the new global political economy and those of Islam can be resolved only by constructing a new theology for the twenty-first century and beyond. For ‘modernizers’, such a theology must come to terms with the reality of economic globalisation and its social consequences, including the secular state and form of government.

The ‘reformers’ also look to develop a state and form of government that engages with economic globalisation. However, while ‘modernizers’ call for the separation of church and state ‘reformers’ seek a synthesis of Islam and the dominant global political economy, in an attempt to ‘Islamize’ some aspects of modernity. In this way ‘reformers’ recognise the duty of all cultures to contextualise cherished traditions and values within the emerging, globalised social, economic, and political order. Soroush, who was an important intellectual influence during the early years of the new Islamic Republic of Iran, argues that the only realistic way to overcome existing social and economic deprivations is to engage with economic globalisation. However, for Soroush such an engagement does not imply an inevitable corruption of Islam. Indeed, he argues that globalisation offers an opportunity to provide the space for greater levels of reflection upon the moral and spiritual world, a process, he notes, that has already begun in the developed world, as signified by feminism, postmodernism, and environmentalism. The Islamic state’s engagement with economic globalisation therefore offers an opportunity to overcome social deprivations while also contributing to reflections on the vices characteristic of the global political economy from an Islamic perspective.⁹³ In this way, the state fulfils two roles, first, by improving the social conditions of the people and, second, by playing a facilitating role in new ethical and moral discourses with Islam.

Both the ‘modernizers’ and ‘reformers’ are opposed by what Hoogvelt refers to as ‘neofundamentalists’, religious leaders who see globalisation as an irredeemably corrupting process that should be rejected by all and any available means.⁹⁴ ‘Neofundamentalists’ therefore reject all attempts to engage with the contemporary world of market discipline.⁹⁵ For ‘neofundamentalists’, the move to embrace modernisation may permit some groups to gain access to technological, scientific and industrial goods and services that increase material wellbeing, but this cannot

⁹² Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam*. Introduction by the editors and translators, Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, xvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), ch. 9.

⁹⁵ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam*.

be achieved without also embracing the social values hostile to Islam. Instead, in the face of calls by some groups to accelerate the state's drive towards modernisation, 'neofundamentalists' call for a 'return to the past', and the re-establishment of *shari'a* law and Islamic social traditions. While it is often assumed that the advanced economies offer the most obvious target for 'neofundamentalist' opposition, this group see the main culprit as 'quasi-Islamic'. Governments who collude with interests associated with economic globalisation, and thus promote market disciplinary values and 'infidel ways'.⁹⁶ For example, Arkoun argues that 'Islam has given humanity an ideal code for living a fulfilled and moral life, which confers honour and dignity on humanity and eliminate(s) exploitation, oppression, and injustice.' Since God is the author of laws designed to protect the moral identity of the *ummah*, 'no leader, no government, no assembly or any other authority' can legitimately violate the social and moral foundations of Islam.⁹⁷

Seen in this light, 'neofundamentalists' argue that economic globalisation has encouraged Islam to take a wrong turn. Governments in Islamic states may display all the ritual that is expected of Islam, but their association with developed states suggests that they are apostates who have abrogated the Holy Law by embracing foreign values, customs, and laws.⁹⁸ The removal of such leaders is therefore a legitimate and essential precursor to re-capturing an 'authentic' Muslim society. As Mernissi points out, historically, leaders who fail to fulfil the duty to govern through God's law have been assassinated.⁹⁹ While 'neofundamentalists' often express anti-Western rhetoric, pointing to the corrosive effect that Western values have on Islam, the elimination of existing leaders remains central. Noting this, Bernard Lewis points to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979, and the assassination of President Sadat of Egypt in 1981, acts that are seen by 'neofundamentalists' as a necessary process of 'inner cleansing', before establishing a true Islamic state under *shari'a* law.¹⁰⁰ Crucially for neo-liberal perceptions, responsibility for achieving a return to the past, and a spirit of Islamic unity within the Muslim world, is not solely the responsibility of the citizens of any particular Muslim state, but that of the global *ummah* as a whole. For 'neofundamentalists', the state and the modern state system takes second place to the *ummah*.

Caught between reason and revelation, modernisation and tradition, governments have often sought a solution by claiming a correspondence between God's word and their own actions and policies in an attempt to appease both religious and material demands. However, the outcome of this approach is no less divisive. Moves to modernise by adopting the norms and values of market discipline often lead to a small minority of citizens achieving higher levels of income while the majority continue to suffer further economic and social deprivations.¹⁰¹ The failure to achieve a measure of economic development that includes the majority has often

⁹⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

⁹⁷ Quoted in Ali Mohammadi, 'The culture and politics of human rights in the context of Islam', in Ali Mohammadi (ed.), *Islam and Encountering Globalization* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 111–30.

⁹⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

⁹⁹ Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Persius Publishing, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ For example, see UNDP, *Human Development Report–2000*.

left an educated, ambitious, expectant, and younger generation with a heightened awareness of the material advantages brought by economic globalisation, unable to find jobs.¹⁰² Fearing that they may have been ‘forgotten by their own people, who have found another identity and are involved in other networks, especially those very strong ones that create profit on an international scale’, the majority seek comfort and consolation elsewhere.¹⁰³ For these people, the failure of many governments to make socio-economic progress that brings improvements to ordinary people’s lives leaves Islam as one of the few sites of solace and empowerment.¹⁰⁴

In short, any policy aimed at state led modernisation risks confrontation with religious leaders of an intensity that threatens social unrest, revolution, and the demise of any attempt to engage with the neo-liberal global political economy. However, the dilemma for government is that by appeasing the demands of religious leaders and devout followers, and refusing to engage fully in the global neo-liberal economic agenda, the prospect for fulfilling the material needs and aspirations of the people vanishes, raising the spectre of further antagonisms, social unrest, and political instability.¹⁰⁵ In either case the uncertainties and instabilities that are generated frustrates the neo-liberal project for ever greater integration within the global political economy.

Conclusion

This article set out to show that the fear of Islam currently experienced in neo-liberal society is not caused solely by the fear of violence. Instead, it was suggested that fear is caused by the potential for Islam to offer a counter-hegemonic threat to neo-liberalism. With reference to Marcuse’s concept of ‘repressive tolerance’, and Gramsci’s idea of counter-hegemony, it was argued that neo-liberal tolerance could not be extended to values perceived as a threat to the dominant global order. To explicate this conclusion, four core sets of values were examined over which clear differences exist between neo-liberal and Islamic approaches to the political economy: reason and revelation, property, human rights, and state and government. The conclusions drawn from these discussions suggests that while the fear of violence perpetrated by radical Islamic fundamentalist groups remains the most visible cause of current fears, the threat of counter-hegemony offers a more nuanced understanding.

The distinction between adopting reason or revelation as the foundation for thinking and knowing engenders divergent ways for conceptualising social values, political organisation, and an ethical economic system. While private property within the neo-liberal order focuses on the freedom of the individual to create and accumulate wealth for personal use, Islam offers an alternative ethical path through

¹⁰² Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development*.

¹⁰³ Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Persius Publishing, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm D. Brown, ‘An Ethnographic Reflection on Muslim-Christian Dialogue in the North of France: The Context of *Laïcité*’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 13 (2002), pp. 5–23.

¹⁰⁵ Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*.

a 'sufficiency principle' that limits accumulation to satisfying the needs of oneself and one's family. Any surplus beyond this principle should be used to further the wellbeing of the community. Moreover, since production takes place within a social setting, it is a requirement that producers go beyond calculations of profit and efficiency and to satisfy ethical and moral questions about the contribution a particular production makes to the community.

A further distinction that suggests Islam offers a counter-hegemonic force is seen in the field of human rights. The formulation of human rights within the current global order places the individual at its centre, contrasting with Islam's claims to place duty and the rights of the community above the rights of the individual. Approaches to the state and government also highlight the distinctive claims of Islam to offer an alternative way of thinking and knowing, and therefore a potential counter-hegemonic movement. For neo-liberal society, mass participation in periodic elections has become the legitimising factor for political power, power that rests with the duly elected government. Islam's alternative to this argues that the role of government is to enact laws and develop policies that further the spiritual aims of the community. It is therefore the duty for all Muslim citizens to remain fully engaged with social and political decision-making processes at all times, and to ensure that government's act in accordance with the values and principles expressed in the Qur'an and other religious texts.

Taken together, these distinctions between alternative value systems do appear to represent a Gramscian counter-hegemonic threat to the dominant neo-liberal global order. The discussion here has been concerned with the construction of that threat and the fear that it might inspire. It has not been concerned to examine the real potential for 1.2 billion Muslims, representing a myriad of cultural manifestations of Islam, to act collectively as a counter-hegemonic bloc. Such an approach would require a further article.