REVIEW ESSAY

Postmodernity and the Emergence of Islamist Movements

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AHMED, AKBAR. Postmodernism and Islam, Predicament and Promise. Routledge, London [etc.] 1992. x, 294 pp. $15.95.
GELLNER, ERNEST. Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion. Routledge, London [etc.] 1992. ix, 108 pp. $13.95.
Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity. Ed. by Akbar Ahmed and Hastings Donnan. Routledge, London [etc.] 1994. xiv, 242 pp. $16.95.
TURNER, BRYAN S. Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism. Routledge, London [etc.] 1994. xii, 228 pp. $16.95.

In the early 1980s, a commonplace understanding conceived the Iranian revolution and the subsequent rise of Islamist movements as a "war against modernity".[2] In this view, the Iranian revolution served as the indisputable evidence of the reactionary recoil to rapid modernization. The roots of the "Muslim rage" were traced back to medieval Islam and its inherent staticism.[3] The Islamic Republic's repressive social, political and cultural platform was understood to confirm Orientalist assumptions of the unchanging nature of Islam and its contemporary proponents.

The spread of Islamist social movements in Pakistan, the Sudan, Algeria, Egypt and elsewhere did little to belie these assumptions. The angry marginalized bearded men and veiled women were depicted as symbols of the Muslim world's obsession with returning to the early glorious days of medieval Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini's condemnation of Salman Rushdie left nothing opaque about the "true nature" of these movements. However, such an understanding of Islamist movements merely substitutes the green peril of Islam for the red threat of communism.[4] It does not elucidate the intellectual and structural complexities within which these movements have emerged.

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[1] I would like to thank Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi for her editorial assistance.
[2] Bernard Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage", *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990).
[3] W.M. Watts, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London and New York, 1988); Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage"; Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford, 1993).
[4] As an example of facile reconstruction of the American enemy in the post-Cold War era, on 30 October 1995 Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House of Representatives, told a Jewish group in Georgia that "we have to make Iran a real project. I think we have to recognize that Iran in the next 20 years is the most dangerous country in the world" (*The Washington Post*, 10 November).

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Alternatively, other scholars have argued that Islamists' rearticulation of the Islamic text does not signify a trend that ushers in a return to the medieval Islamic period. In this view, Islamist movements are considered modern phenomena, that is, they are not a *reaction to* but a *consequence of* modern restructuring of Islamic societies.[5]

These characterizations of Islamist movements as pre- or anti-modern or modern are based on an uncritical reliance on Western conceptions of history. The debate on the social and intellectual origins of the new Islamist movements needs to be positioned as part of the general critique of Western universalism. Rather than a *reaction to* or a *consequence of* modernity, the new Islamist movements represent the possibility of an *alternative* modernity. This shifts the discussion from reference to a singular modernity to plural modernities, a proposal which can be conceptualized as "postmodern".

The books reviewed in this essay variously attempt to analyze Islamic "fundamentalism" with reference to postmodernist social theories. As is the case with most postmodernist literature, the first problem of reviewing these books is the question of defining postmodernism and postmodernity. Although several possible definitions are offered by Akbar Ahmed and Bryan Turner, postmodernism remains an ambiguous notion. Often its meaning is clouded by academic jargon which hinders a better understanding of reality rather than facilitating it. This ambiguity is not coincidental. Postmodernism defies fixed interpretation. Whereas in Akbar Ahmed's *Postmodernism and Islam*, postmodernism draws its emancipatory power from its ambiguity, in his *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion*, Ernest Gellner lambasts it as a mere relativist ideology of defeatism.

To overcome the problem of definition, I have divided this review into three parts, each of which presents a constituting factor in the emergence of contemporary Islamist movements.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE END OF THE KEYNESIAN WELFARE STATE

Many commentators ignore the distinction between postmodernism as a cultural and intellectual production, and postmodernity as a social condition within which such production emanates. In his *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism*, Bryan Turner remarks, whereas postmodernism is

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[5] Ibrahim Abu Lughod, "Retreat from the Secular Path? Islamic Dilemmas of Arab Politics", *The Review of Politics*, 28 (1966), pp. 447–476; Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London and New York, 1991); John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat, Myth or Reality* (New York and Oxford, 1992); Michael Fischer, "Islam and the Revolt of the Petit Bourgeoisie", *Daedalus* (Winter 1982), pp. 101–125; Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA, 1994); John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder, CO, 1994); Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State* (London, 1989).

a form of thought or trend within the humanities and the social sciences, postmodernity is a social condition of late capitalism (p. 16). In making such a distinction, Turner criticizes Ernest Gellner and Akbar Ahmed for restricting their critique of postmodernism to intellectual circles and cultural production respectively. In the introduction to *Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity*, Ahmed, with his co-editor Hastings Donnan, emphasizes the distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. He remarks:

While postmodernism – seen as a term that characterizes a "series of broadly aesthetic projects" – is probably unknown to all but a small band of artists and intellectuals, postmodernity – "as a social, political, and cultural configuration" – affects everybody to varying degrees, Muslims included. (Ahmed and Donnan, p. 12)

Although Ahmed and Donnan and other contributors to this volume mention the social and political configuration of postmodernity, none describes precisely what this configuration entails. The three essays in this book which address state politics and the politics of Islamist movements, Judith Nagata on Malaysia; Fred Halliday on Iran and Tunisia; and Abubaker Bagader on Islamic movements in the Arab world, are written from a modernist perspective. Ultimately, Ahmed is concerned with the cultural implications of globalization and not the overarching socio-economic reconfiguration of society. On this point, Turner contends that while "globalization is an extension of the emergence of world economic systems [. . .] sociologists [as well as anthropologists] are more concerned with cultural globalization" (p. 9).

The most prominent feature of the condition of postmodernity is the decline of social Keynesianism. This decline, which has been variously defined as "disorganized capitalism"[6] or "risk society",[7] is characterized by the abandonment of welfare capitalism, the political attack on the legitimacy of social security, and the globalization of neo-liberal deregulationism. Turner outlines this debate in a chapter entitled "From Regulation to Risk". There he concludes, à la Weber, that under the condition of modernity everyday life has been increasingly regulated by a combination of legislative acts and the state administrative power. He argues that the rationalization of everyday life creates conditions "whereby risk, uncertainty and violence might be minimized". However, he echoes Ulrich Beck's view that the "uncertainties of deregulated economy have produced incalculable levels of risk for modern individuals" (Turner, p. 182).

The globalization of capital, the establishment of a new international division of labor and the end of welfare capitalism interpolate a new social

[6] Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics* (Cambridge, 1985); Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1987).
[7] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society* (London, 1992).

space for the emergence of Islamist movements. First, economic neo-liberalism and the dramatic abandonment of the welfare state, manifested in the Structural Adjustment Program of the World Bank and the IMF, creates a space for non-governmental organizations to step into the breach by providing social services for the poor. Second, more generally, the globalization of capital undermines the modern construction of nation-states.

In *Postmodernism and Islam*, Ahmed proposes that in its anti-nation-state character, "ethno-religious revivalism is both cause and effect of postmodernism" (p. 13). The defeat and humiliation of the Arabs in 1967, the victory of India over Pakistan in 1971, and the suppression of the Bangladesh freedom movement exemplify the evident bankruptcy of the post-colonial states. He asserts that this explains the revivalist assert-iveness in challenging "the modernist concept of large state structures, whether capitalist or communist" (p. 14). Ahmed contends that Muslim movements suggest a "qualitatively different kind of socio-political response to state tyranny from that in the past. It is different in its total rejection of central authority, of the meta-ideology of the nation, indeed of the nation-state; in its re-formulation of local identity" (p. 141). Thus, on the one hand, Islam recognizes local identities, and on the other hand, it promulgates a universal message of Muslimhood and personal dignity that undermines the legitimacy of the modernist categories of statehood and citizenship. Ahmed's goal is to contextualize "local versions of Islam within global structures" (Ahmed and Donnan, p. 5).

In contrast to Ahmed's enthrallment with questions of culture and iden-tity, Turner emphasizes the material basis of globalization. To identify its characteristics, he traces the movement of capital, and the establishment of the new international division of labor. Whereas Ahmed asserts that the diminished role of the nation-state is distinctively postmodern, Turner contends that the modified significance of the nation-state was long anticipated by the theorists of modernity and the Marxian idea of the destructive power of capital. In its break with the limitations, narrowness and provincialism of tradition, he argues, "modernization is the triumph of global over local culture" (p. 136). In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels claimed that capitalism

produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of his wants on the whole world, thus destroying the formal natural exclusiveness of separate nations. (cited in Turner, p. 139)

Ahmed and Donnan acknowledge that the transformations of the world economy and the globalization of markets and labor under late capitalism have resulted in enormous numbers of people moving around the globe in search of work (p. 5). They stress, however, that the economic content of international contact should not be emphasized "at the expense of the

cultural flows which were obviously also taking place alongside of the material exchange" (p. 3).

Ahmed and Donnan argue that in the postmodern world, *diaspora* plays a determining role in the national politics of Muslim countries, both in the form of intellectual productions by scholars like Ahmed himself, and in the form of the cultural hybridity of migrant labor. Thus, in light of these extra-national dynamics, globalization makes the static and arbitrary boundaries of modern nation-states irrelevant. Moreover, Turner remarks,

globalization brings into question the autonomy and sovereignty of nation-states, and thereby relativises conventional conceptions and conditions of citizenship participation and motivation [. . .] If this represents a major shift away from primary loyalties to nation, or state, or party, what will be the nature of political commitment within the global context? How will local and global loyalties be reconciled or combined? (p. 112)

The answer to these questions, according to Ahmed, lies in Islamic fundamentalism's two-edged commitment to local cultures and to a universal Muslim identity, for example, as it is manifested in the Kashmiri independence movement (p. 150).

Although the globalization of deregulationism and the abandonment of the welfare state have had the most visible effect on the everyday lives of Muslim peoples, it is troubling that none of these books investigate the impact of economic neo-liberalism on the rise of Islamist movements. While Ahmed and Donnan are concerned with the creation of diasporic space, they neglect the space *within* the national boundaries created by the absence of state-sponsored social welfare programs.

The Open Door Economic Policy, the *Infitah*, initiated by President Sadat and the IMF in Egypt in the mid-1970s, is an illuminating example of the attack on the Keynesian welfare state through a proposed abandonment of goods and currency subsidies. Many authors have linked the rise of the popularity of Islamist groups in Egypt in the 1980s to their timely intervention in providing social services (such as clinics, schools, banks) to constituents whose livelihood was threatened by the Structural Adjustment Program.[8] In these books, the absence of a linkage between the diasporic experience of globalization and the local experiences of the poor within Muslim states is sorely missed. Even Turner, who criticizes Ahmed and Gellner for not paying enough attention to the everyday life of the general population, does not acknowledge the social services provided by Islamist groups to the people whose security was compromised in the newly established risk society.

[8] Gouda Abdel-Khalek, "Looking Outside, or Turning Northwest? On the Meaning and External Dimension of Egypt's Infitah 1971–1980", *Social Problems*, 28 (1981), pp. 394–408; Ali E. Dessouki, "Policy Making in Egypt: A Case Study of the Open Door Economic Policy", *ibid,.* pp. 410–416; Raymond William Baker, "Sadat's Open Door: Opposition from Within", *ibid.*, pp. 378–384.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THE WORLD CULTURE

New technologies such as satellite dishes and personal electronics have created a new world market which, in their flexibility in organization and style of commodity production, differ from modern uniform mass production. The new technologies of mass communication and net-working, transport, and information "bring the remotest parts of the world within easy reach" (Ahmed and Donnan, p. 1). It has intensified commodification, or in Habermas's phrase "the colonization of the life-world", by making capitalist goods and ideas more accessible than ever before. Although in most parts of the "South" people are unable to consume these commodities, their conception of their everyday lives is affected by the images by means of which these commodities are promoted. Turner observes that "[postmodernity] brings about social change in everyday life through the hedonistic consumption of commod-ities in which, even in the everyday world, there is a profound sense of the simulation and inauthentication of cultures via the endless produc-tion of global commodities" (p. 17).

Postmodern technologies and fast-traveling images contribute to the emergence of the new Islamist movements in two ways. First, the postmodern consumption of images and commodities has made the cultural and political dominance of the West more tangible than ever. And second, paradoxically, the new communication technologies are utilized for the distribution of a global Islamic message, and for the construction of a uniform and universal Muslim tradition.

As Turner points out (pp. 92-93), central to the Islamists' critique of the policy of *Infitah* was an argument against the cultural consequences of an open door policy which could undermine Egyptian social norms and way of life. This is a theme that was prominent in the political rhetoric of the Iranian revolution. Recognizing the challenge to the unity of the Muslim lifeworld presented by a proliferation of lifestyles embodied by consumerism, Islamists fear that the desire for participation in consumer culture is "the basis for the fragmentation of religious belief and values". Turner contends that "consumerism offers or promises a range of possible lifestyles which compete with, and in many respects, contradict the uni-form lifestyle demanded by Islamic fundamentalism" (p. 90).

Hedonistic consumption, according to Ahmed, "is the ontological basis of [the postmodern] society; the phrase, 'I shop, therefore I am,' is the philosophic summation of this existence" (p. 245). The image of a "good life" transferred by the globalized media puts the mosque and the mall at odds. He comments acidly, "in the present postmodernist era, the mall for the Americans is the contemporary equivalent of the mosque. It acts as a social focus, and people go to it faithfully, daily, for renewal and compan-ionship" (Ahmed, p. 208).

Most Islamic countries have yet to develop a substantial middle class that is able to consume highly-priced postmodern commodities. Nevertheless, images of the bourgeois way of life – with its emphasis on leisure, gratification and hedonism – presented by the globalized media, transform and condition the everyday lives of millions of Muslims. Thus, the new technologies of communication, information, and commodity production represent for Islamic religious leaders a new form of colonial penetration (Turner, p. 91).

Postmodern technologies commodify the sacred and the profane. However, ironically, thanks to the new global systems of communication, the mission of the eighteenth-century Wahhabi movement to homogenize Islamic traditions into a single universal system has never been closer to reality. Never before in the history of Islamic societies were the Muslim *ummah* (the global community of Muslims) mobilized to defend an Islamic tradition in the way that it has been in the last twenty years. The unprecedented number of pilgrims to Mecca, the spread of the "message of Islam" by cassette tapes and electronic mail is "reinforcing the concept of Islam as a global system". John Esposito observed that "the message of Islam is not simply available from a preacher at a local mosque. Sermons and religious education from leading preachers and writers can be transmitted to every city and village" (cited in Turner, p. 90).

The Rushdie affair proved how rapidly under the postmodern condition a tradition can be invented and become an inseparable part of Muslim identity. Rushdie's use of the hitherto obscure concept of "Mahound", a pejorative reference to Prophet Mohammad in medieval Europe, apparently offended Muslims around the world. The postmodern means of communication gave "Mahound" the status of popular knowledge. It was taken out of Western antiquarian quarters, and put on the streets of Bradford, Tehran, Islamabad, Kuala Lumpur and many other cities. The Rushdie affair shows how it is now possible to invent centuries-old traditions and cultures with which masses feel deeply connected in a matter of days.

Ahmed and Donnan view the Rushdie affair, along with the Iranian revolution and the Gulf War, as one of the main events that have "transformed and shaken the Muslim world". In their view,

The processes of globalization have influenced traditional cultures and in such a dramatic way that they have raised issues for Muslims which can no longer be ignored. Muslims are forced to engage with these issues and to formulate a response to them. The response has not been slow in coming, but so far it has been a response more based in anger and passion as we saw in the Rushdie affair. (p. 17)

Globalization in the view of Ahmed and Donnan and some of the contributors to their volume, most notably Anita Weiss in her essay "Challenges

for Muslim Women in a Postmodern World", is a force which represents rapid change and radical transformation of traditionally sanctioned social relations. Inevitably, such a bifurcation of external forces of change versus internal commitments to balance and stability is based on century-old modernist assumptions on the static nature of "traditional society". According to Ahmed and Donnan, the postmodern age

emphasizes noise, movement and speed. Traditional religions emphasize quiet, balance and discourage change. There are thus intrinsic points of conflict [. . .] people are genuinely worried that their culture and traditions which have held for [a] thousand years will now be changed and even be in danger of being wiped out. (p. 13)

The idea of a thousand-year-old tradition which is now in danger of extinction is not a particularly postmodern one. It is a centerpiece of modernist ideology that there is a stable distinction between the traditional community as unchanging and static, and the rational or modern society as changing and fluid. Although postmodernism provides the conceptual resources to elucidate cultural authenticity beyond the static antinomies of modernity, Ahmed remains faithful to the essentialist dichotomy of traditional (Islamic/Oriental) versus (post)modern (decadent/Western).

Gustav Thaiss's contribution to Ahmed and Donnan's collection, "Contested Meanings and the Politics of Authenticity: The 'Hosay' in Trinidad", is a study which problematizes such essentialist approaches to the notions of culture and authenticity. Thaiss describes the creolization of a Shi'it ritual in Trinidad and shows how a ceremony of commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hossein is transformed in Trinidad "into a 'fête' or a festival with carnival-like ambiance second only to the main carnival in popularity in the festival schedule of Trinidad" (p. 39). Thaiss illustrates how various religious and ethnic groups participate in the "Hosay" and "give it idiosyncratic meanings" (p. 55). By doing so, he argues, they claim the ritual as their own.

Tradition is constantly reproduced and syncretized. Modernism confines tradition to static and clannish practices, but in reality traditions are highly variable and altering in content. As Michael Gilsenan remarked, "[tradition] changes, though all who use it do so to mark out truths and principles as essentially unchanging. In the name of tradition many traditions are born and come into opposition with others".[9] For example, in the Rushdie affair, the global systems of communication did not evoke a thousand-year-old tradition among Muslims, because such a tradition never existed before. Rather, the new technologies of mass communication enabled some Muslims to invent a tradition and declare its authentic antiquity.

[9] Michael Gilsenan, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 15.

CRITIQUE OF MODERNIST UNIVERSALISM

David Harvey and Scott Lash divided the postmodernist critique of modernist universalism into three parts:[10]

1 Whereas modernity was based on the belief in the absolute truth of linear progress, postmodernism considers heterogeneity and differences as the sources of a multidirectional progress.

2 Whereas modernity was based upon rational planning to establish a universal social order, postmodernism is based on the legitimacy of fragmentation, indeterminacy and the distrust of universal or totalizing discourses.

3 Whereas the condition of modernity was made possible by the standardization of production and disciplinization of knowledge, postmodernism is based on the emergence of concern in ethics, politics and anthropology for the validity and dignity of the other.

Overall, postmodernism rejects the universal applicability of modernist socio-political concepts.

Ahmed situates the Islamist challenge to Western political and conceptual hegemony as a rejection of modernist totalizing discourses. In his view, since postmodernism promises respect for heterogeneity and concern for the validity of the other, it encourages Muslims to revert to their traditional values and to reject modernism (p. 32). Ahmed posits that there could be an alliance between Islam and postmodernism for they oppose the "instrumental rationalism" of both capitalism and communism. He speculates that "fundamentalism is the attempt to resolve how to live in a world of radical doubts" (p. 13). For Ahmed, however, the specter of this radical doubt only haunts the West.

As Turner asserts, Ahmed's attempt to situate Islam as a postmodern critique of modernity fails for he "does not fully face up to the critical implications of postmodernism for traditional Islam" (Turner, p. 12). In Ahmed's thesis, it remains unfathomed how the divine and transcendent message of Islam may be communicated within a postmodernist discourse in which religion is deconstructed into fairy tales and mere symbolism. If Ahmed's claim is true that fundamentalism is "the attempt to live in a world of radical doubts", then Turner's thesis that "fundamentalism is [. . .] the cultural defense of modernity against postmodernity" (p. 78) seems closer to reality.

Whereas Akbar Ahmed conceives fundamentalism within the fragmented global culture, Ernest Gellner firmly argues against such a conception. In the introduction to his book, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Gellner maintains that the underlying assertion of fundamentalism is that

[10] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge and Oxford, 1989); Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London, 1990).

"a given faith is to be upheld firmly in its full and literal form, free of compromise, softening, re-interpretation or diminution" (p. 2). Gellner formulates his description of fundamentalism in contradistinction to two other contemporary world-views: postmodern relativism and Enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism. These three positions are "roughly equidistant from each other" (p. 1).

Gellner venerates fundamentalism, both in its Enlightenment rationalist – of which he is a self-described adherent – and religious forms, for their firm denial of relativism. Enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism, he remarks, is committed to the view that "there *is* external, objective, culture-transcending knowledge: there *is* indeed 'knowledge beyond culture' " (p. 75). On the other hand, religious fundamentalists, he asserts,

deserve our respect, both as fellow recognizers of the uniqueness of truth, who avoid the facile self-deception of universal relativism, and as our intellectual ancestors [. . .] Without serious, not to say obsessional monotheism and unitarianism, the rational naturalism of the Enlightenment might well never have seen the light of the day. (p. 95)

Like Ahmed, Gellner regards fundamentalism as a response to post-modernist anti-transcendentalism. They both defend transcendence, the source of which for Ahmed is the true "essence" of Islam, and for Gellner is transcultural and transhistorical forms of knowledge liberated from its dependence on social conditions (pp. 57, 82).

In Gellner's view, postmodernism is a reincarnation of age-old relativism. He dismisses it as a "fad which owes its appeal to its seeming novelty and genuine obscurity, and it will pass soon enough, as such fashions do" (p. 71). Its deconstructionism, Gellner contends, hints at a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, particularly in anthropology, the discipline to which Gellner limits the scope of his enquiry (p. 40). Postmodernism, he asserts, like relativism "*does* entail nihilism" (p. 49). Relativism is simply a self-refuting position which is "not viable as a social or political attitude. For one thing, it offends against the very cultures whose equality it wishes to establish by 'hermeneutics' " (p. 71).

By refuting postmodernism as a specimen of transhistorical relativism, Gellner neglects the fact that the relativizing effect of postmodernism is not a mere cognitive problem and did not originate in academic circles, but, as Turner points out, it is the consequence of "the relativization of belief via commodities, travel, tourism and the impact of global TV" on the general population (p. 17).

The common theme in these four books is the fact that there is a relationship between postmodernity and the emergence of Islamist movements in the 1980s. In *Orientalism, Postmodernism, and Globalism* Bryan Turner links the fragmentation of the lifeworld brought about by the spread of a diversified global system of consumption, to the rise of fundamentalist

movements. Fundamentalism, he asserts, can be interpreted as a response to modernization and to postmodernity since it "is a process of de-differentiation" (p. 84). Although postmodernism appreciates heterogeneity and rejects modernist instrumental rationality, Turner insists, for its "commitment to ideas of universal rationalism", fundamentalism cannot be considered a postmodern critique of modernity.

Turner's study, however, is weakened by his uncritical employment of the concept of religious fundamentalism. First, the notion of fundamentalism suggests a homogenous movement based on religious orthodoxy. It neglects the local manifestations and cultural differentiation within these movements. Second, although he is concerned with the socio-economic aspects of globalism, he describes fundamentalism as a reaction to the culture, and not the politics and the economics of consumerism.

In his *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* Akbar Ahmed situates Islam within the general critique of Western universalism. The relevance of postmodernism to Islam, according to Ahmed, is two-fold. On the one hand, the postmodern appreciation of socio-cultural heterogeneity creates a space for the acceptance of Islam in the West. And on the other hand, postmodernist theory can fully acknowledge the diversity and complexity of Islamic cultures and dispel the notion that there ever was – or is – one unified monolithic Muslim Society.

For Ahmed, the promise *and* the predicament of postmodernism is diversification. While he praises postmodernity's differentiation, he, paradoxically, castigates Western culture for its obsession with sex and vulgar consumerism and for its moral bankruptcy. He commends postmodernity for its heterogeneity, but mourns the loss of "whatever little respect [has] remained for authority", resulting from either the feminist assault on the "male authority" or the legitimacy crises of the state (p. 244). Ultimately, Ahmed's version of postmodernism amounts to another moral condemnation of the decadence of the West against which Muslims should be warned.

In Ernest Gellner's view, urbanization, centralization of political power, incorporation in a wider market and labor migration are the material bases for the fundamentalist response which "recommended neither emulation of the West, nor idealization of some folk virtue and wisdom. It commended a *return* to, or more rigorous observance of, *High* Islam" (p. 20). It is the normative, legalistic and canonical Islam of the clergy and not the localized, nomadic, *Folk* Islam of the Sufi which inspires fundamentalist movements.[11] Thus, postmodernist relativism is principally incongruent with fundamentalism's commitment to transcendental truth. With his stout rationalism, Gellner extols this commitment, but he reiterates his objection to the content of this conviction (p. 96).

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[11] For a critique of Gellner's bifurcation of Islam into High and Folk see Sami Zubaida, "Is There a Muslim Society?", *Economy and Society*, 24 (1995).

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The articles in *Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity*, co-edited by Ahmed and Donnan, are collected to give some sense of "how Muslims have been inescapably touched by postmodernity, as well as insight into how and why they have responded as they have" (p. 12). In their introduction, Ahmed and Donnan state that the goal of their book is to move beyond Said's critique of Orientalism and to look at Muslim societies as "local, as indigenous not as the other, the exotic or the oriental". We are indeed in a post-Saidian era of Islamic studies and need positively to define and contextualize "local versions of Islam within global structures" (p. 5).

With the exception of Gustav Thaiss's and Martin Stokes's articles, other contributions to this volume do not go far beyond, as Fred Halliday himself declared, the modernist categories of analysis (p. 91). The primary focus of this book is how the external forces of change have reshaped and transformed Muslim societies. The authors assume change as an externality to Muslim societies and that traditions and authorities are never challenged from within. Muslim societies are perceived as islands of balance and tranquillity until the forces of change arrive (i.e. modernity or postmodernity). The establishment of nation-states, modern education, labor migration and the participation of women in the public sphere, it is claimed, have reorganized "traditional" Muslim social relations and cultural practices. But if this is all this book has to offer, I encourage the reader to revisit Daniel Lerner's 1958 classic *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernization in the Middle East.*