

ISLAM AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEANING

Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse

Edited by
William R. Roff

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Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF MUSLIM DISCOURSE

Edited by WILLIAM R. ROFF

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Preface

Earlier versions of most of the chapters in this book, together with some not appearing here, were prepared for a meeting held in New York City in May, 1984, sponsored by the Joint Committees on South Asia and on Southeast Asia of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. We should like to thank these committees for their hospitality and the committee on South Asia for its support of two earlier meetings in 1979 and 1983 which similarly set out to explore the 'indigenous conceptual systems' of Muslims.

A particular debt of gratitude is owed to David L. Szanton, of the Social Science Research Council's staff, whose intellectual contribution was quite as large as his administrative.

W.R.R.

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Note on Transliteration

Any book that draws on materials in six major Islamic languages — Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali, Malay, and Hausa, with some additional cognates such as Yoruba and Javanese — faces considerable problems of transliteration. The system employed here, with as much consistency as possible, has been to use for Arabic that given in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1972: Vol. 2, 182-84), with other letters added to represent non-Arabic sounds in Persian, Urdu and Malay. Diacritics have been omitted, except in the Glossary, where they are given in full.

Arabic-derived terms occurring in languages other than Arabic are spelled in the way common in those languages (*mallam* rather than *mu'allam*, for example). So are personal (and some proper) names, which are given in locally preferred rather than artificially Arabicized forms (Usuman dan Fodio, and Abdurrahman, for example, rather than 'Uthman ibn Fudi, and 'Abd al-Rahman).

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Editor's Introduction

The essays in this book seek to address one central question: How may we understand the nature, impulse, and dynamic of Muslim social and political action? More specifically, what are the relationships, direct or dialectical, between the prescriptions and requirements of Islamic belief, socially reproduced (of 'being Muslim', in short), and the economic, political, and social circumstances of the lives of actual Muslims? In trying to answer this question, the essays have as a shared premiss the assumption that 'what Muslims say' — and therefore the analysis of Muslim discourse about such matters — must have a central role in the enquiry.

In introducing the collection, however, which ranges very widely, from Nigeria and North Africa to Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and Indonesia, and from the eighteenth century to the present, it might be as well to ask first a prior question. Why *should* we expect Muslims in such diverse contexts and from such different backgrounds to behave in ways shaped in any important, commonly identifiable fashion by an understanding of what it means to 'be Muslim', rather than, for example, by their shared peripheral relationship to the world capitalist order, by the demographics of rapid population increase, urban growth, and underemployment, or by statism and the rebirth-pangs of the post-colonial era? There can be little dispute that significant elements of a shared religious culture are in fact a feature of the social lives of Muslims from Dahomey to Doha and Dacca — among them, for example, a sacred text and set of symbols, a vocabulary of moral suasion, the practical knowledge associated with Islamic educational and juridical institutions, and the sodalities of the Sufi orders. It is therefore reasonable to enquire how elements of this shared culture, reproduced and given meaning anew in local terms from the Nejd to Nigeria, shape responses to (and are themselves shaped by) the harsh or subtle facts of political and economic life. How are the real or supposed imperatives of 'being Muslim' understood, and in what terms and by whom, and with what social implications are they expressed, conveyed, urged, argued, and acted upon?

Not all the contributors to this book would necessarily answer, or indeed address, these questions in the same way (and none, it must be emphasized, assumes a reified, essentialist 'Islam', divorced from real Muslims). What does distinguish them is a common recognition of the need to explore the reflexive relationships between Islamic

beliefs, ideas, ideologies, institutional forms, and prescriptive roles, socially reproduced by given groups of Muslims, and the political, economic, and other salient conditions under which these and other specifically situated Muslims live. It is this attempt to understand how Muslim 'discourses' about their lives are constituted, through the linking of symbolic or cultural analysis of what is said and done with analysis of the material and other conditions in which the saying and doing occur, that we intend when we refer to the 'political economy of meaning'. As Eickelman notes, in the essay that begins the book, an adequate political economy of meaning must rest on a proper balance between attention to the communication and development of complex systems of knowledge and practice, and the ways in which these systems inform and are informed by configurations of political domination and economic relations. Our primary aim has been to strive for and so far as possible to exemplify this balance, or at the very least to draw attention to the need for it and to the means of attaining it.

Listening to argument, then, and examining it as carefully as possible in context, is the principal intent of the essays presented here. What links them one with another (beyond the fact that they all deal with Muslims actively engaged in persuading Muslims) is less a theoretical perspective, despite our concern with the analysis of discourse, than a methodological and interpretative one. The essence of this perspective — contextual location of what Muslims say, with context denoting the archival repertoire of idea and sentiment available from within the Islamic tradition as well as actual socio-political circumstance — has already been indicated. Though what we mean by a 'discourse', namely the contextual written and spoken practice of given Muslims, has something in common with the current interest in the construction and deconstruction of discourses evidenced in many of the human and social sciences, we are more concerned to practise interpretation than to elaborate theory. It is sometimes argued that theory must precede practice, but if, as Paul Valéry is said to have remarked (and as much of Michel Foucault's writing implies), all theory is autobiography, it would be as curious to expect the practice of interpretation to be preceded by a theory of interpretation as to expect the lived life to be preceded by the examined life. The two must, indeed, proceed hand in hand, or perhaps more exactly dialectically, each informing and being informed by the other. It is recognition of this dialectical relationship between theory and action that prompts us, whatever our various individual 'theoretical' starting points, to turn our interpretative attention to the dialectic between prescription and circumstance in the lives of Muslim

social actors, and to the discourses which reflect this dialectic.

The essays have been arranged in three sections, each reflecting a different emphasis or approach. The first four, on 'The Political Economy of Religious Culture', are concerned for the most part to raise the methodological and interpretative questions that confront us when contemplating the rhetoric of Muslim social and political action. Two of these essays deal, as it happens, with societies represented elsewhere in the book, Indonesia and Nigeria. Though something might have been gained by adopting an area rubric, and placing all the essays dealing with particular countries together, this would have worked against our main purpose, which has precisely not been to produce yet another volume of area studies but to focus in a comparative way on certain kinds of discourse and the circumstances of their production. This intention is made more explicit in the second section of the book, 'Muslim Social Thought and the State', which contains four essays reflecting situations — in Iran, Pakistan, the Maghreb, and Southeast Asia — in which the state may be perceived as the prime determinant of the dominant discourse in society, to which all alternative groups must necessarily respond. In the final section of the book, 'Change and the Individual Voice', the essays look at how individual Muslims may respond to change in political and economic circumstances, how they may seek to bring change and its management into congruence with their Islamic beliefs, and how they speak of this to other Muslims.

In the first section, Eickelman's discussion of 'changing interpretations of Islamic movements' starts by noting the way in which Western social science, with a prevailing view of 'religion' as a separable and separate domain of social thought and action increasingly irrelevant to the public life of modern and modernising societies, has been forced to come to grips with much evidence to the contrary — quite generally, but not least among Muslims. Though a recognition, in principle, of the interconnectedness of religious systems and their material and social contexts has re-emerged, the complex relationships between political economy and systems of knowledge and belief have more often been assumed than explored. Eickelman suggests, however, that certain shifts in disciplinary emphasis in the past two decades, notably among and between anthropologists and social historians, have helped to redirect analytical attention to how cultures and systems of meaning are reproduced, to the social and practical contexts in which knowledge is made available for reproduction, and to the varieties and levels of Muslim expression and discourse that result. He notes three significant focuses of attention characterizing such

enquiries, all strongly present in the essays offered here; the historical specificity of change, the social scale of the community in which change occurs, and the internal social divisions reflected in the discourses that mark that change. It is the resulting debate within Muslim societies, he suggests, that, in conjunction with political and economic change, creates a continuous dialectic of self-renewal and social transformation.

In my own essay, 'Islamic movements: one or many?', I have emphasized the need to understand, within this debate, 'the intelligibility of Islamic imperatives for Muslims', and adopted an explicitly comparative approach. Arguing that Islamic precepts ('being Muslim') supply a major, sometimes determinative, part of the perceived objective conditions which direct or constrain social action, I examine the implications of such an assumption in the light of four of the so-called '*Wahhabi*' movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in Central Arabia, West Sumatra, Bengal, and northern Nigeria. Though it may be concluded that simplistic evocations of 'Wahhabism' dissolve upon close inspection, and with them the implied claims they make to a special sort of *a priori* inherent universalism, they draw fresh attention, in virtue of the very specificity of the discourses that accompanied these social perturbations, to the ways in which Muslims may find meaning in, or create it from, a commonly shared, Islamically supplied, repertoire of imperatives to personal and social action.

The remaining two essays in this section, by Hefner and Lubeck, though similarly concerned to develop general interpretative arguments, do so in the contrasting circumstances of two closely observed contemporary societies — the highlands of central Java, and northern Nigeria. Hefner's paper is one of three in this volume dealing with Indonesians, each of which examines a different level of experience and social action within the world's most populous Muslim state. What it means to be, or become, or become more of, a Muslim in the remote villages of the previously non-Muslim highland Tengger, in the hot-house political life of the capital's Islamic youth movements, or in the perceptions of a single, thoughtful intellectual, produces distinctively different kinds of discourse. While at the local level, as Hefner shows, being or becoming a Muslim may acquire a new salience as a result of political and economic change, the problems of being a politically and personally committed Muslim in a Jakarta dominated by a statist regime unsympathetic to Islamic aspirations, and in an increasingly secular modern Indonesia, produces, as we shall see in the essays by Hassan and Johns, somewhat different

kinds of argument and debate.

Hefner's discussion of the particular situation of the *Buda* people in Besuki, in addition to making a significant contribution to studies of 'Islamization' in Indonesia, raises important general questions concerning the nature of 'traditional' and 'world' religious systems, and the conversion or intensification process that leads people from the former to the latter. In studying this kind of transition, he suggests, we need to take into account the cultural content of the religious discourses of both systems in relation to the scale, political and economic organization, and cultural diversity of the communities to which each appeals, and seek to discover how social and ideational realities cohere to form manageable systems of meaning.

The increasing failure to provide shared meanings for one particular segment of Muslim society in northern Nigeria — certain of the *gardawa* or peripatetic Qur'anic students and their *mallam* (teachers) — and the expression of their resulting discontent in the violent protest movement, known as 'Yan Tatsine, is the subject of Lubeck's paper. Arguing that ideas take form as social movements only when social and material conditions are present to sustain, recruit, and reproduce materially and ideologically the required support, he outlines the transformations of the Nigerian economy and state from the Sokoto period to the present. Islamic and Qur'anic networks that had functioned to integrate rural and urban areas, and to provide a meaningful existence to their participants, were restructured somewhat during the colonial-capitalist and early independence years, but remained an integral feature of northern Nigerian social life until the petroleum boom of the 1970s. The boom led to rapid urban-industrial growth and huge disparities of wealth, produced levels of corruption that severely damaged the social fabric, disrupted the balance of rural-urban relations, and contributed to a sharp increase in the power of the state. Full understanding of the 'Yan Tatsine reaction to these developments is possible, Lubeck suggests, only if one gives due weight to both the structural features of change and their cultural dimensions as expressed in the Islamic discourse of the most militant followers of the movement, the marginalized *gardawa*.

Implicit in several of the essays in the first section is the importance of the state as a primary determinant of Islamic discourses, either directly or by reaction. The second section of the book takes up this issue more explicitly. It contains four essays, which may conveniently be thought of in pairs, though they have overlapping concerns. In the first two, based on contemporary Iran and Pakistan, the ability of the authoritarian 'Islamic' state to establish the dominant terms of

discourse is discussed, together with some of the consequences of this. In the second two, which relate to North Africa and Southeast Asia, primary attention is given to the 'Islamist' discourses (to use the now widely accepted French term) of social groups which are in certain ways at odds with state power, or forced to come to terms with it.

The revolution in Iran in 1979 has come to represent, for many in the world at large, the apparent political potency of aroused Islamic sentiment, and, as many of the papers in this volume testify (Vatin's on the Maghreb, for example, or Christelow's on Nigeria) it has indeed been a source of inspiration and enthusiasm for other Muslim communities. Arjomand's essay, 'Revolution in Shi'ism', however, demonstrates very clearly the specificity and particularity of the Iranian experience. As his title suggests, the revolution may be perceived as at least as much a revolution in Shi'i argument about the sovereignty of the *ulama* (*vilayat-e faqih*) as a revolution in the social order, though indeed the two are not wholly separable. The implications of this dual revolution, for society and Islamic institutions alike, remain to be worked out.

Metcalf, writing about 'Islamic arguments in contemporary Pakistan', is likewise concerned with a state that is undertaking wholesale 'islamization' of society, though in this instance through the agency of a military autocracy rather than a scholarly hierarchy. Tracing the development of views about the proper relationship between 'Islam and the state' from the foundation of Pakistan as 'a homeland for Muslims' in 1946 to the proclamation of the *nizam-i mustafa* ('system of the Prophet') by the Zia regime in 1977, she notes the relatively indirect role played throughout by *ulama*. Notwithstanding this, the ideas of the Jama'at-i Islam (an organization now formally banned, with all other political parties) and its founder Maududi underlie much of the activity of the present regime, which uses the institutions and resources of the state to alter or enact statute law to express the *shari'a*, and to promote social criticism of 'non-Muslim' life styles. The official discourse that results, with its twin emphases on the enactment of positive law and the state-sponsored islamization of social life, has resulted in, among other things, considerable argument about the position of women in society. Using this argument, and its various protagonists, as a lens through which to examine the larger process, Metcalf concludes that while islamization 'from the top down' plays a manifest role in preserving existing structures of society and maintaining an authoritarian regime in power, the ideology accompanying it is intensely appealing to certain segments of the population and must be understood in its own terms.

Social criticism of a kind familiar in both Iran and Pakistan — in particular, expressed discontent with Western-inspired forms in public and private life — is a marked feature of the Islamist movements discussed by Vatin, in his essay 'Seduction and sedition: Islamic polemical discourses in the Maghreb'. Quoting Maxime Rodinson's remark that it is hard to see the difference between those who seek power in order to apply Islam and those who use Islam to accede to power, Vatin examines two 'traditional-type' movements, one in contemporary Morocco and the other in Tunisia, which criticize the state and its social role while seeking to offer alternative visions of the ideal Islamic society, and then compares these with other, more 'progressive' movements there and in Algeria. In an essay of great richness of texture, in its account of the discourses recorded and the social bases of the groups espousing them, Vatin argues that the 'delegitimization' of the post-colonial state, as a result of its inability in the course of modernization to satisfy either the material or the moral demands of a large number of its members, has led both to state attempts to appropriate Islamic symbols and institutions in order to regain control over civil society, and to a wide range of Islamist claims to knowledge of competing systems that would better serve God and the needs of the Islamic *umma*. The result, in Vatin's terms, is an extensive interpenetration of the domains of religious and political discourse that reflects real divisions within Maghrebi society but has yet to provide any satisfactory reworking of the image of 'the Islamic city'.

Though the contest may not be as sharp in the major Islamic societies of Southeast Asia, it none the less lies at the heart of the politics described by Hassan, in his essay on 'The response of Muslim youth organizations to political change: *HMI* in Indonesia and *ABIM* in Malaysia'. Despite many elements of a shared indigenous culture and a not altogether dissimilar colonial past, the Indonesian and Malaysian states have adopted strikingly different attitudes to recent Islamic and islamizing movements. The authoritarian military regime in Indonesia, a country in which 90 per cent of the population of 165 million declares itself to be Muslim, has since the early 1970s sought to depoliticize Islam and elevate to ideological primacy the statist doctrine known as Pančasila. Malaysia, a parliamentary democracy with a very large non-Muslim minority (nearly half of the population of 15 million), has during the same period sought for the most part to accommodate, and increasingly to co-opt, the rather broad range of movements that respond to the *da'wa* (call) of Islamic revitalization. In Indonesia, Hassan notes, the response of the important group

of young Muslim intellectuals, HMI, has moved from initial acceptance of the secular modernizing state, combined with personal commitment to a 'renewed' (and modernized) Islamic faith, to a more holistic (and potentially more political) view of Islam as a complete way of life that must make demands upon the state apparatus. In Malaysia, by contrast, the corresponding shift in stance and discourse exemplified by the ABIM youth movement has been in the opposite direction relative to the state, from a largely rejectionist da'wa to a more pragmatic effort to attain the substance of social reform in Islamic directions, with the state itself (and the Malay nationalism that underlies it) seemingly prepared to accommodate such pressures and to adopt Islamic symbols and forms of discourse.

The three essays in the final section of the book shift the focus somewhat, from states and movements to individual actors, and to some of the ways in which individual Muslims — preachers and propagandists, judges and journalists — have sought from within the Islamic tradition to argue the need for change and renewal.

Gaffney, in 'Authority and the mosque in Upper Egypt: the Islamic preacher as image and actor', places at the center of his essay the social arena which is a locus for a major part of all Islamic discourses, the mosque of general assembly. Taking as his starting point two contrasting preachers — a traditional, Azhar-trained scholar in a long-established, state-funded mosque associated with the *baraka* (blessing) of a notable saint, and a layman in an independent mosque founded and supported by a local social welfare association — he examines the construction of their respective Friday *khutbas* (sermons). Each employs a common, indeed shared, flexible repertory of symbols invested with meaning at different levels of social and cultural reference. In their separate ways, and with contrasting rhetorical styles, they unite, says Gaffney, 'communities of ritual' with 'communities of action', representing in their persons an exemplary unity of image and actor, at once the symbolic articulators of fixed and sacred ideas and, by virtue of their own mundane roles in society, models for ordinary conduct in a changing human world. Their efficacy as leaders depends, Gaffney suggests, on their capacity to maintain the dialectic inherent in and crucial to this double role.

Allan Christelow, writing about the northern Nigeria whose underclass has already been described in Lubeck's discussion of the 'Yan Tatsine movement, supplies a careful delineation of three individual spokesmen for different Islamic tendencies among the elite. To give voice to their views and to address the Nigerian umma all three employ the modern media, especially the weekend press and the radio. They

are Abubakar Mahmud Gumi, a proponent of various kinds of *status quo*, whose background is the mosque and a 'Wahhabi-like' moral reform movement, but who is above all a noted radio speaker in Hausa (reminding us of the Moroccan identification, referred to in Eickelman's essay, of 'radio Islam' with 'official Islam'); Ibraheem Sulaiman, a lecturer in administration at Ahmadu Bello University, an ex-student leader who still writes, in English, for a mainly student audience, promoting an Islamic ideology for the nation as a whole; and Abdulmalik Bappa Mahmud, chief *qadi* (judge) in one of the state courts, who writes in both Hausa and English on the relevance of Islam for law and authority. What is noteworthy about all three men is that in the circumstances of Nigeria's secular state and multi-cultural political life (with Muslims a bare majority, as in Malaysia), Islamic discourses, insofar as they enter the national arena, do so not through formal, well-organized movements or parties, but in the voice of individuals, dependent as individuals upon private employment, contributions from followers, and the interest (and state tolerance) of the media.

The strongly individual voice presented by Johns, in his essay 'An Islamic system or Islamic values? Nucleus of a debate in contemporary Indonesia', finds expression in an extraordinary document that has become the center of much debate and controversy in Indonesia since its publication in 1981. It is the diary of a young, Western-educated journalist, a deeply committed Muslim, and one-time leading member of Hassan's HMI, Ahmad Wahib. In the last years of his life (he died in a traffic accident in 1973, aged 30 or 31), Wahib recorded in detail and at length his reflections on a wide range of questions concerning Islam, the individual, and society in present-day Indonesia. In the diary we see him struggling with problems relating to the authority of the ulama to translate the message of the Qur'an to others, the proper responsibilities of the Muslim intellectual to self and society, the relationship of freedom of thought to transcendently revealed truth, and that of 'private' to 'public' Islamic belief and practice, and the relative force of the Qur'anic utterance and the example of the Prophet Muhammad for behavioral imperatives. These internal discussions are seen to exist not *in vacuo* but in the immediate context of the issues of the day, of politics and culture, economic modernization, student life, the idea of the Islamic State, and the coexistence within Indonesia of other religious traditions. Few of Wahib's speculations, Johns says, are especially new, or unfamiliar in other Muslim contexts, though they are expressed in a fresh and often moving way. What they do testify to, however, as does the energy of the very mixed reception given to the diary, ranging from enthusiasm to anger,

is the way in which an individual voice may seem to speak to the present situation of countless Indonesian Muslims.

The essays in this book, taken together, illustrate a broad spectrum of Muslim discourse and practice, and help us to consider how we may best 'read' such discourse in context, and understand and interpret the social and political action that accompanies it. They help to make us aware of some of the ways in which Muslims, as acceptors of the shari'a, perceive the human condition and its particularities, and find meaning in or give meaning to the Islamic precepts by which they see themselves as enjoined.

William R. Roff

Part One

**The Political Economy
of Religious Culture**

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Changing Interpretations of Islamic Movements

Dale F. Eickelman

The Iranian revolution signalled a major turning point in understanding Islam among both scholars and believers. Until 1979, many scholars dismissed Islamic intellectuals and leaders as elderly men without replacements in younger generations, and regarded popular Islamic movements as incapable of generating sustained support for specific political goals. This view was shared by some of the elite of Muslim countries, who considered Islam as a political force to be a receding phenomenon. Turkey, Indonesia, the Soviet Union, India, and even Iran were variously cited as indicators of the trend toward the relegation of religion to a compartmentalized, private sphere. Only exceptionally did studies break with the prevailing assumption of Islam's declining political significance (e.g., Kessler, 1978) or admit the possibility of new forms of Islamic leadership emerging, as had often occurred in earlier eras (e.g., Hammoudi, 1981)

In particular, the notion of religion receding as a political force was accepted both by many members of the Western-educated technocratic elite throughout the Muslim world and by scholars accepting the common assumptions of modernization theory prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. Local setbacks notwithstanding, religion was seen as a force to be invoked in the preamble to constitutions or on formal occasions, rather than as a politically significant element of ideology, practice, and organization.

Political trends in Egypt have often been regarded as a bell-wether for the Arab Muslim world. Thus, Egypt's experience was thought to exemplify the prevailing assumption of the political decline of religious movements. The massive reaction among Egyptian Muslims and Copts to reports of the apparition of the Virgin Mary over a Coptic church in a Cairo suburb in April 1968, certified as authentic by the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt and All Africa (Nelson, 1974: 253-66),

suggests the continuing depth of religious sentiment, with political implications ranging well beyond the limits of state control. None the less, the disappearance in 1954 of the Muslim Brotherhood as a formal political force in Egypt was until recent years cited as an example of religion's declining significance. The Brotherhood, possibly Egypt's one genuine twentieth-century mass political movement, never fully recovered from the crippling wave of mass arrests and imprisonment instigated by Nasser.

Whenever religious interpretations, organizations, or practices are officially repressed or held in disfavor, official estimates of susceptibility to their message or goals must be regarded with extreme caution. For this reason, it is often easier to know the religious attitudes of earlier eras than those of the present. As Kepel (1985) observes, the arrest of suspected Muslim Brothers in the 1950s created an oppressive environment, which was ideal for instigating more radical religious interpretations and for recruiting a younger generation of radicalized militants unwilling to compromise with the existing state authorities. The prisons and prison camps became vivid metaphors for the moral bankruptcy of existing government. *Jahil* is a Qur'anic term evoking the state of ignorance, violence, and self-interest which existed prior to the revelation of the Qur'an and which continues to hamper realization of a full Islamic community. Islamic 'militants' and many other Muslims consider existing state organizations 'barbaric' (*jahili*) because they do not govern in accordance with Islamic principles.

The tactics of Sadat's assassins, who justified themselves by asserting the jahili nature of Sadat's rule, may have had limited popular support. But the existence of six mosques in Egypt independent of government control for every authorized one as of 1981 (Ansari, 1984: 129) suggests the extent to which Islam is considered to be both a vehicle for expression and a potential organizing force for significant elements of the population. The formal separation of religion and politics has not fared well outside of elite circles.

In many parts of the Muslim world, Islamic political activism is in part encouraged by what is perceived as the practical realization of Islamic rule in Iran. As a consequence, both voices of opposition and established authorities now seek to co-opt the popular slogans of Islamic militancy. In an effort to co-opt the left in the 1970s, the Moroccan monarch's 'Revolution of the King and the People' emulated the former Shah's 'Revolution of the Shah and the People'. In Morocco it is now the language of militant Muslims that is co-opted in an effort to enhance monarchic authority (Tozy, 1984: 413;

Eickelman, in press).

At the near antipodes of the Muslim world, early interpretations of Indonesia's post-1966 'New Order' suggested that the political elite sought to depoliticize Islam and promote instead the *Pančasila*, the official, pan-religious national ideology (McVey, 1983; 199). More recent analysis (Hefner, 1985a; cf. Geertz 1972: 81-84) suggests a more complex political process in which the 'New Order' seeks to encompass a multitude of shifting local-level coalitions and ideological orientations. The government party, GOLKAR, has managed to embrace Islamic symbols in such a manner as to sustain a guided dialogue between a variety of 'local' cultures and the nation state. The government seeks to communicate the message that religion is an important component of national development, and that local understandings of the process of development are important considerations. Hence there have been quiet but pervasive programs for upgrading the quality and training of village preachers, with parallel developments in Javanese Hindu communities (Hefner 1985b; 239-65). By allowing for such local participation and the fusion of religious symbols, especially Islamic ones, with national goals, the Indonesian government may be changing the local political balance by creating a more uniform Islamic community. For the moment, Indonesia appears to provide an example of the successful fusion of state development programs with a variety of local religious understandings.

The Indonesian case notwithstanding, many analyses of 'resurgent' Islamic movements suggest a deep Western bias against any valid role for religion in contemporary politics. As Piscatori (1983: 1) writes, Muslims are thought to become 'politically active out of an excess of zeal rather than with clearly defined goals'. Islam is associated with fanatical opposition, aimless revolution, anti-Westernism and anti-modernism, so that the widespread evidence of interpretations of Islam and Islamic movements facilitating major social transformations is downplayed or ignored. Many Muslims none the less consider that Islam should play a central and pervasive role in politics and economics. For this reason alone, Islamic ideas and practices assume a major significance.

TOWARD A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ISLAM

Islamic doctrine, tradition, and practice have been elaborated, understood, and transmitted to successive generations and new

communities in different historical, political, and economic contexts throughout the world. Recognition of these transformations has become, at least in principle, a familiar part of the intellectual landscape. In practice, however, most studies assume, rather than explore, the complex, multi-dimensional relationships between political economy, on the one hand, and belief systems, on the other (Kessler, 1978: 20; cf. Eickelman, 1982: 6-8). A 'political economy of meaning' (Eickelman, 1979) contrives to achieve a balance between concern with the communication and development of complex belief systems and how these systems shape and in turn are shaped by configurations of political domination and economic relations among groups and classes in societies of different levels of complexity. In itself, this goal is not unique. Indeed, it is one of the central concerns of classical social thought. None the less, advocates of the political economy approach have often remained primarily at the level of theoretical exposition or implicit assumption. The elaboration of such concepts in the context of specific comparative studies has become common only in the last few years.

Of course, studies of Islam form part of broader intellectual currents and consequently reflect wider debates. In recent years there has been a shift away from emphasis upon an almost exclusive concern with symbolic forms, often devoid of a clear representation of economic and political activities, toward discerning how systems of meaning are transmitted and reproduced. Ortner (1984; see also Cohn, 1981) argues that the reintroduction into anthropology of a political economy approach in the 1960s contributed to the discipline's belated 'rediscovery' of history after a long interval of prior neglect. Anthropologists interested in political economy have for the most part concerned themselves with larger regional processes, instead of the highly localized studies of an earlier era in which broad economic and political trends were evoked only peripherally. Since the 1960s there has been a growing effort to link these trends with their consequences for particular social groups and classes, effects which are also traced over time (e.g., Hopkins, 1983). On the negative side, self-identified studies of political economy by anthropologists have tended to emphasize economic factors above all others, in part perhaps to compensate for their earlier neglect. They have also tended to present a highly capitalism-centered view of the world. But these shortcomings are not inherent in the approach. 'Meanings' not founded in Western notions of politics and economics motivate people and have major consequences for social and political action. A renewed attention to the political economy of meaning seeks to alter the prior disregard

of how understandings of Islam shape political and economic perceptions and activity.

PREDECESSORS

The development of a political economy of meaning in the study of religious tradition and discourse has distinguished antecedents in some respects, although in others it constitutes a significantly new point of departure. Ernest Troeltsch (1976 [orig. 1911]), for example, characterized the history of Christianity as one of progressive shifts between compromise and non-compromise with the social world: the delineation of 'intrinsic' sociological ideas of Christianity, the influence of Christian doctrine upon the social world, what he termed the 'reflex' influence of these conditions upon the ideas of Christianity themselves, and the 'inner' reality of religion (Troeltsch, 1976: 34). Despite his insistence upon the 'briefest possible presentation' (1976: 25), the fact that his study is over a thousand pages in length suggests the challenge of elaborating sociological hypotheses richly informed by attention to social history. Troeltsch's magisterial study admittedly left vague many key concepts (e.g., Christianity's 'inner' reality), but it none the less constituted, together with the earlier work of W. Robertson Smith (1956 [orig. 1889]), a pioneering effort to link the development of religious concepts with social and economic conditions.

In the last two decades, studies with a more sharply delineated historical compass have begun to offer a more precise understanding of how religious identities and concepts are differently elaborated within varied social classes and categories, and often change their significance when taken up by novel contexts or new groups. Merad (1967) shows the intimate and necessary interrelationship between the reformist ideology and its carriers in Algeria during the 1920s and 1930s, the resistance to the reformist movement from rural notables and the heads of religious orders, and the importance of understanding the prevailing assumptions of Islamic belief and practice to which the reformists were opposed. An indirect consequence of Algerian reformism was to disseminate a rationalist conception of Islam which inadvertently set religious doctrines and practice apart from other aspects of social life. More recent studies have dealt with such diverse topics as changing interpretations of Islam in local contexts (Eickelman, 1976), support for reformist thought (Metcalf, 1982), and the changing implications of conversion to Islam according to

period, social category, and context (Bulliet, 1979).

The study of a world religion as it has been realized in various times and places implies what from some perspectives is obvious: the ideologies and practices associated with it are elaborated, understood, and subsequently reproduced in particular places and at particular moments. Even eternal truths are necessarily revealed in a specific language and setting. Revelation 'in Arabic, that ye may be understood' (Qur'an, 12: 2) has significantly different implications for a seventh-century Arabian merchant, a nineteenth-century Bengali peasant, a Turkish *Gastarbeiter* in Bonn, and a twentieth-century Malaysian university student.

The main challenge for the study of Islam is to describe how its universalistic or abstract principles have been realized in various social and historical contexts without representing Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand or as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other. To this end, the prevalent earlier conceptual dichotomy of 'great' and 'little' traditions can retrospectively be viewed as a significant first step. As initially employed in the late 1940s, this conceptualization contained an historical component and was used to explore the possible relationships between religious traditions, as known through the texts and exegeses of a cultural elite on the one hand, and the religious expressions and interpretations prevalent in village of 'folk' contexts, on the other. Unlike the earlier doctrine of 'survivals', which presumed that folk traditions were vestiges of earlier civilizations and less permeable to change than 'high culture', the notion of great/little tradition made no gratuitous assumptions concerning the historical precedence of some civilizational elements over others. Yet as ordinarily reported, great and little traditions were more often juxtaposed than used as the basis for analysing their complex interrelationships. Literate traditions were taken to be closer to orthodoxy, and 'local' ones were variously assumed to be misinterpretations of the 'vulgar' or even 'pre-Islamic' vestiges, rather than indications of the key points at which the Islamic tradition is continuously undergoing an internal dialectic of adaptation and self-renewal.

For Marshall Hodgson, one of the most sensitive interpreters of the Islamic tradition of the 1950s and 1960s, there was an awareness of the capacity for self-renewal within the Islamic tradition at all levels. His explicit concern was with 'high' culture in the 'primary milieu of Islam', which to him was constantly renewed and transformed by the dialogues of successive generations of intellectuals who grasped the formative ideals of their civilization. Unlike