CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the theoretical framework behind the political analysis of the respective ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa, which is the subject of this dissertation. The chapter starts off with a broad discussion of the concept Islamic fundamentalism. This particular section deals with the characteristics associated with Islamic fundamentalism, why the term Islamic fundamentalism is controversial and ends with a discussion of Islamic fundamentalism in practice.

From here the focus shifts to a critique of modern rationalism, detailing the latter's historical development and describing its characteristics. This is followed by a critical evaluation of several rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism which are discussed below under the following headings: “Islamic fundamentalism as a reaction against modernity”, “Islamic fundamentalism as the only alternative political channel”, “Islamic fundamentalism: backward and irrational” and “Islamic fundamentalists – irrational rational actors”. Here it is shown how these rationalist interpretations provide incomplete explanations of Islamic fundamentalism, partly because of neglecting the ideas and worldviews influencing Islamic fundamentalists.

Next, there is a discussion of postmodernism and anti-foundationalism in particular. This section starts off with an analysis of the consequences that the predominance of rationalism has had on the contemporary world, followed by a discussion of the postmodernist reaction to rationalism. Afterwards the focus shifts to an account of the problems presented to the analysis of political events rich in foundationalist activity. These problems are exemplified in Fukuyama (1989) and Huntington's (1996) interpretations of the contemporary world, as they pay little attention to the presence of foundationalism in contemporary political practice.

Finally, the dialogic model of interpretation as espoused by Euben (1999) in her work Enemy in the mirror: Islamic fundamentalism and the limits of modern rationalism, a work of comparative political theory, to be used as the theoretical basis for this dissertation, is explained and use thereof justified.
2.2 ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM – DISCUSSIONS AND DEFINITIONS

2.2.1 When and why do fundamentalist movements form?

The key concept in this dissertation is Islamic fundamentalism. The dialogic model of interpretation to be used as the theoretical framework is based on an approach of intercultural communication, as is explained in detail below, where the aim is not to come to a final, universal version of the truth, but rather to reach a deeper, richer understanding of the matter at hand. For this reason, an equally open-ended approach is followed when looking at the concept Islamic fundamentalism. The aim is not to come to a final definition, but rather to explore the ways in which the concept has been defined and used by others. This forms the basis for the examination of the respective ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa. The study is thus not entered into with a single fixed definition of Islamic fundamentalism that the respective ideologies would have to conform to, but rather a range of possibilities is at hand. In this section, then, there is a general discussion of the concept Islamic fundamentalism, and a justification for the use of this particular term (as opposed to alternatives such as re-Islamisation) is also presented.

According to Armstrong (2000: 164-165) the Western media often creates the impression that “the embattled and occasionally violent form of religiosity known as fundamentalism” is a purely Islamic phenomenon. This, however, is not the case. Fundamentalism has surfaced in every major faith in response to the problems and crises of modernity. Although every form of fundamentalism develops independently and has its own symbols and enthusiasms, all fundamentalisms nonetheless seem to belong to the same family. What is interesting to note is that fundamentalist movements are not knee-jerk reactions which arise as soon as modernity is introduced into a society. Rather, fundamentalism only emerges when the modernisation process is already considerably underway. At first there is usually an attempt by religious people to reform their traditions so as to reconcile these with modernity. When this does not work, however, some people resort to more extreme methods. This is how fundamentalist movements arise. Of the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, Islam was the last to develop a fundamentalist strain. This happened in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Fundamentalist movements in all faiths have certain characteristics in common. All are deeply disappointed and disenchanted with the implementation of modernity, which has not delivered everything that it originally
promised. They are all also afraid that the secular establishment is determined to wipe them out (Armstrong 2000: 165). Another important and more recent trend which further explains the rise of fundamentalism is globalisation, which has brought with it an increasingly fragmented world. Though the system of states has been expanded to cover the entire world, a “universal” outlook, based on Western norms and values, has not been simultaneously exported to non-Western cultures. Islamic fundamentalists view states as “imported solutions” and hence comes their mission to contest and, ideally, replace them (Tibi 1998: 6-7).

Fundamentalism thus arises as the modernisation process takes root in society and people, noticeably in developing countries, become increasingly disillusioned with what the state initially promised, but, in many cases, has failed to deliver. This is aggravated by the globalisation process, which has, despite creating a more interconnected world, resulted in a larger gap between the world’s developed and developing countries. At the same time, populations all over the world, but especially in non-Western countries, feel that their traditions and cultures are being threatened by the “so-called” universalist liberal worldview, which is increasingly infiltrating their societies. This happens in the form of an export of Western culture, in the form of music and consumer products, amongst other things. Another way in which the West influences developing countries is by means of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) which often force them to adopt typically Western economic policies. With the threatened erosion of local tradition, culture and language comes the added threat of the undermining (and possible destruction) of religious establishments and practices. A move away from religion seems to be the trend in several Western states. France is a prime example with its policy of laïcité, which involves a strict separation between the religious and secular spheres of life. The United States (US), on the other hand, is an exception to this trend, as can be seen in leaders’ use of Christian rhetoric when publicly addressing political issues, as is shown later on.

2.2.2 The essence of fundamentalism - protesting modernity and secularism

Fundamentalists look back at the “golden age”, the time before the imposition of modernity. This does not, however, mean a return to the Middle Ages (Armstrong 2000: 165). Choueiri (1997: 64) describes this complicated relationship with the past. He talks of a “nostalgic yearning for past glories and bygone achievements” and says that a reactivation of the past is necessary in order to realise a futuristic vision, propelled by the problems and shortcomings of the present: “the historical golden age is used as a
springboard for accomplishing a leap into a new world, while the present exerts its influence in illuminating both the past and the future”.

Fundamentalist movements are also characterised by the fact that they are all intrinsically modern and could not have emerged at any other time than our own. They are all also distinctly innovative, as well as often radical in their re-interpretation of religion. The general trend seems to be that wherever modernity takes root, a fundamentalist movement will spring up in reaction to it. Often, fundamentalists express their discontent with modern development by overemphasising the elements in their own tradition which refute certain modernist elements. So, for example, all fundamentalist movements, even those in the US, are highly critical of democracy and secularism (Armstrong 2000: 165-166).

Fundamentalists also nearly always feel as if the liberal or modernising establishment is attacking them and as a consequence of this their views and behaviour become more extreme. The more severe the secularist attack on religion becomes, the greater the fundamentalist reaction. Fundamentalism thus reveals a rift in society between those in favour of secularist culture and those who feel threatened by it. As time goes by, there is seldom any rapprochement between the two camps. Rather they become increasingly unable to understand each other (Armstrong 2000: 166).

How does fundamentalism “evolve”? Initially it begins as an internal dispute, where fundamentalists oppose liberalisers or secularists in their own state or culture. So, initially, Islamic fundamentalists, for example, often oppose their own fellow citizens or fellow Muslims who are more accepting of modernity. From there it is usual for many fundamentalists to withdraw from the mainstream culture and to create “an enclave of pure faith”. Afterwards there will sometimes be an offensive with the aim of bringing the mainstream back to the right path and re-sacralising and re-enchanting the world. Because all fundamentalists see themselves with their backs against the wall, they feel that they need to fight in order to overcome the odds that the secular establishment has stacked against them. This frame of mind therefore leads some fundamentalists, on rare occasions, to resort to terrorism. The majority, however, try to revive their faith in more conventional and lawful ways (Armstrong 2000: 167).

As is seen later on, in Euben’s (1999) discussion of fundamentalism, there are strong political undertones to fundamentalists’ attempts to revive their faith. This, it can be argued, goes hand in hand with the origin of
fundamentalism in response to modernity and the perceived threat which secularism poses to religion. Any struggle to re-enchant society and go back to the fundamentals of one’s religion would necessarily have to be political to combat an inherently political institution: the secular state.

Tibi (1998: 3) takes Armstrong’s argument, which deals with fundamentalists’ protest against the secular state one step further. He focuses on Islamic fundamentalism, specifically, and sees it as a “powerful challenge to the existing order of the international system of secular states”, thus taking the protest against secularism from a local to a global level. Also, because the secular state is Western in origin, Islamic fundamentalism is, at the same time, a “revolt against the West”. Tibi thus starts his definition at the point where fundamentalists have, according to Armstrong, passed the stage of protest or revolt against fellow citizens or believers who have a more positive view of modernity, and where they have moved on to identifying an external threat, in the case of Islamic fundamentalism: the West.

How do leaders in the world of Islam view Islamic fundamentalism and what are their suggestions for dealing with it? Here it is interesting to look at the way in which a prominent Muslim leader, the late king Hassan II of Morocco (in Tibi 1998: 4), viewed fundamentalism. He saw the fundamentalist challenge not as the next challenge to the West to replace communism, as former North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Secretary-General Willy Claes perceived it, but rather as a political challenge. This is also the reason why it cannot be countered with ordinary war technology, “I do not think NATO was created to fight fundamentalism, but to fight Soviet guns and missiles...Anyway, if fundamentalism is to be engaged in battle, it would not be done with tanks. Fundamentalists don’t have armoured divisions, they have no Scud missiles, and not an atomic weapon”.

This is a rather controversial statement given the accusations of the US government against Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi government allegedly being a producer of Weapons of Mass Destruction and similar allegations that have been levied against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nonetheless, considering the mode of attack of September 11th or the recent attacks in Istanbul, for example, it is a valid point that fundamentalists, when they do resort to violence, do so in ways other than direct and open warfare.

The Moroccan king (in Tibi 1998: 4-5) was also of the opinion that fundamentalism is not a religious renaissance, “on the day that I see a fundamentalist who preaches religion for the love of God then I’ll say,
fine, let’s listen. But so far I haven’t heard that…” To him, then, fundamentalism is a behavioural question, a psychology that cannot be fought with armadas, but [only] with other ideas”. The view here is thus of Islamic fundamentalism as a political phenomenon that needs to be “fought” on the level of a convincing set of ideas, rather than conventional arms. The Moroccan king also makes a point of separating Islamic fundamentalism from Islam as such, moving the focus from the religious to the political, as Euben has done.

Fundamentalists have been successful in the sense that they have managed to make religion one of the central focus areas of international affairs again. In the Islamic world this has certainly been the case since the mid – 1970s. On the other hand, however, the desperation and fear that fuel fundamentalists also tend to distort religious tradition and to accentuate its more violent aspects. This often diverts attention from those who preach toleration and reconciliation (Armstrong 2000: 167).

In applying Armstrong’s argument to the Islamic world, Tibi (1998: 2) is once again relevant here as he argues that in their attempts to replace the discredited Western system of secular states, Islamic fundamentalists can “engineer frightening levels of terrorism and otherwise throw streets into turmoil…”, thus resorting to violence in order to achieve their ends. This does not mean that they will be successful in overthrowing the current world order. They are too fragmented to do so. However, these movements are able to create disorder within their own countries (and in other countries, through terrorist activities), which can be sufficient to, in the long run, create disorder on a regional and global scale: a new world disorder.

2.2.3. Fundamentalism – a term fraught with controversy

Muslims generally object to use of the term fundamentalism. They point out that it was coined by American Protestants as “a badge of pride” and that it does not have a useful translation into Arabic. The term that corresponds to such a translation most closely is Usul, which refers to the fundamental principles of Islamic jurisprudence. As all Muslims agree on these, they could all therefore be said to subscribe to usuliyyah (fundamentalism), which, of course, adds confusion to the use of the concept. There have been arguments that the specifically Western origin of the term fundamentalism, together with the negative connotations attached to it by both academics and journalists who oppose the phenomenon, make it a term that “almost guarantees misunderstanding”. Esposito (in Euben 1999: 17), for example, argues that “it tells us everything and yet, at the same time, nothing.” He sees it as illogical that a term derived from Western origins should be
able to describe fundamentalist-related incidents in all faiths across the world. For this and other reasons, several pre-eminent authors on the subject of fundamentalism avoid use of the term altogether. Kepel (in Euben 1999: 17) talks of “movements of re-Judaising”, “re-Christianisation” and “re-Islamisation”. When writing on Islamic activism in 1985, Kepel preferred the term “Muslim extremism”, while Sivan (in Euben 1999: 17) opted for “radical Islam”. Other authors have made use of alternatives ranging from intégrisme, to “revivalism” to “Islamism”.

Juergensmeyer (1993: 4-6) is another writer who objects to the use of the term fundamentalism for three reasons. Firstly, he sees it as pejorative, saying that it is “less descriptive than it is accusatory”, reflecting a negative attitude towards people more than describing them. Secondly, “fundamentalism is an imprecise category for making comparisons across cultures”. Thirdly, he argues that the term fundamentalism does not have any political connotations. “To call someone a fundamentalist suggests that he or she is motivated solely by religious beliefs rather than by broad concerns about the nature of society and the world.” Instead, Juergensmeyer proposes the concept religious nationalism for the study of people who combine their religious perspectives with a broad prescription of their nation’s political and social destiny.

Tibi (1998: 12-15) repudiates Juergensmeyer’s objections against the term fundamentalism. He makes mention of the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences which nullified all three of Juergensmeyer’s claims. Firstly, he argues that it is necessary to free the concept fundamentalism of its loose and sensational use, but that, at the same time, it is exactly the politicisation of religion which fundamentalism addresses. (By implication, thus, the term can still be used for the purposes of examining how religion is politicised, but needs to be used with the understanding that it is not employed in a pejorative sense.) Secondly, as part of the Fundamentalism Project, area-studies experts engaged in a comparative study of fundamentalisms in all major world religions, which, according to Tibi (1998: 13), shows that the concept fundamentalism is the right framework for “making comparisons across cultures”. Finally, fundamentalism does not address religious beliefs, but, rather, is concerned with propagating a socio-political worldview: a broad concern about the nature of state, society and world politics, though this may be articulated in the form of religious symbols.

So far then, Tibi’s reasoning as to why the term fundamentalism is useful. What do other writers, in favour of the term, have to say about it? Euben (1999: 17) sees it as a useful heuristic device. She looks at the term
“fundamentalism” and from it evokes the literal meaning of the word: fundamentals, origin, foundations. Fundamentalism thus refers to contemporary religio-political movements which try to go back to the scriptural foundations of the community and try to excavate and reinterpret these foundations in order to apply them to the contemporary social and political world. This ties in with Armstrong’s discussion of fundamentalism as an attempt to re-invigorate those religious principles and traditions which are threatened by erosion through the increasing influence and power of secularism and modernity. Tibi (1998: 13) adds another dimension. He does not see fundamentalism as an expression of religious revival, but, rather, as a pronouncement of a new order where fundamentalists want to replace existing structures with a comprehensive system which emanates from religious principles and which embraces law, polity, society, economy and culture – fundamentalism therefore has within it a totalitarian impulse. Euben and Armstrong’s point of view may seem in conflict with Tibi’s at first glance, but all Tibi really does is to emphasise the attempt to impose a completely new order in order to replace the existing one. Both points of view, however, stress the use of religious principles in order to do so.

Furthermore, Euben (1999: 19) posits that there are three elements to the term fundamentalism. Firstly, it is political in nature. Salvation is only possible by participating in the institutions of the world, albeit in opposition to them (Euben 1999: 17). Tibi (1998: 2) supports this view, saying that fundamentalism (though he makes particular reference to Islamic fundamentalism) is a political ideology and, as he emphasises time and time again, “not the religion [Islam] so cynically linked with that ideology”. Islamic fundamentalism is an ideology which is not the cause of the current crisis in the world, but both an expression of it and a response to it. It does not, however, present a solution, but, rather, is one of the pillars of an emerging new world disorder. Clearly then, the term fundamentalism, and Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, refers to a political more than a religious phenomenon.

Secondly, fundamentalists tend to reject the authority of past commentaries on their sacred foundational texts, be they the Torah, the New Testament or the Quran. Instead they claim to adhere to what the text “really says” (though this is an act of interpretation itself), stating that the text’s authority is guaranteed by its divine author and is therefore beyond contestation (Euben 1999: 18). Hoveyda (1998: 126) quotes Appleby as saying:

For the fundamentalist, the sacred text is a blueprint for socio-political action as well as a guide to spiritual life...In fact, the supernatural character of revelation is particularly important to the
fundamentalist sense of identity in that it connotes a way of knowing and a source of truth superior to those of the secular scientist or philosopher. Belief in things unseen is considered unreliable in secular pursuits; fundamentalists make it the central tenet of their identity; what is not in line with the sacred book is sacrilegious.

Belief in the uncontested authority of the sacred text makes fundamentalists subject only to divine authority and allows them to determine once and for all how all “true” Muslims, Jews and Christians are to authentically live in a community (Euben 1999: 18). Roy (1994: 85) talks of fideism, a reliance on faith and a belief that everything that Islam says is true and rational, which characterises neofundamentalism (his term for the phenomenon of fundamentalism) instead of intellectual research.

Thus we see a tendency where sacred texts are interpreted in terms of what they “obviously” say, which, ironically enough, still means that the reader interprets them in a way that suits him or her. This particular interpretation is then credited as true, rational and the only way of reading the text. This could be problematic if, for example, an Islamic fundamentalist and an “ordinary” Muslim were to differ on their respective interpretations of the Quran. Who is right? Most likely those with greater political power would be able to enforce their views on the rest of society, views, as is seen later on when the practices of the former Taliban regime of Afghanistan are discussed, at times violate the precepts and principles of the Quran.

Thirdly, fundamentalism is characterised by its complex relationship with modernity. To repeat Armstrong’s arguments above, fundamentalism arises as a result of the modernisation process having taken root in a society and the perception by fundamentalists that secularism is threatening to wipe out religion. What is key to this relationship between fundamentalism and modernity, however, is that modernity is necessary for fundamentalism to arise. Fundamentalism is a uniquely modern phenomenon and as Lapidus states “may be understood as a reaction against modernity, but more profoundly (fundamentalists) are also an expression of modernity”. Rather than merely “reacting to modernity”, one can argue that “fundamentalism is profoundly critical of as well as constituted by assumptions regarding the requirements of modernity and modern politics” (Euben 1999: 18).
2.2.4 Islamic fundamentalism in practice

The former Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which came to power in 1994 (and was deposed after the US-led invasion into Afghanistan following the September 11th attacks in 2001) was determined to return to their interpretation of the “original vision of Islam”. The government was ruled by the ulama and practices such as the veiling of women, strict censorship and Islamic punishments such as stoning and mutilation were reintroduced (Armstrong 2000: 170). Roy (1994: 82) talks of similar practices, if less extreme, enforced by Islamic neofundamentalists in general, underlining their obsession with the corrupting effects and influences of Western culture. “Compromise with the West is forbidden: neckties, laughter, the use of Western forms of salutation, handshakes, applause.” This “Puritanism” is also characterised by the rejection of all distraction, such as music or theatre, as well as the desire to eradicate places of pleasure and leisure such as cafés, video and dance clubs, cinemas and certain sport clubs. Pleasure is only legitimate as long as it neither transgresses the Sharia nor the superior goals of man (Roy 1994: 80).

It is important to point out, however, that the Taliban was in many ways violating crucial Islamic principles. An example was the discrimination of the Taliban, mostly members of the Pashtun tribe, against non-Pashtuns. This goes against the principles of both the Prophet and the Quran. The Quran also clearly forbids the harsh treatment of minority groups and the Taliban’s discrimination against women, equally, does not conform either to the precepts of the Prophet or the first umma. The Taliban are typically fundamentalist when it comes to their highly selective vision of religion, which “perverts the faith” and turns it into the opposite direction of that for which it was intended. Like (some of the) fundamentalists of all major faiths, (some) Muslim fundamentalists, in their struggle to survive, make religion a tool of oppression and even of violence (Armstrong 2000: 170-171).

Most Sunni fundamentalists have, however, not been as extreme as the Taliban. An example is the fundamentalist movements that were formed in the 1970s and 1980s to bring religion back into their societies. The feeling was that Muslims had failed, especially under secularist policies, to be true to their religion. While fundamentalists could see that secularism and democracy had been very successful in the West, these practices had only benefited an elite in the Islamic world and had done nothing for ordinary Muslims. Throughout the Islamic world then, students and factory workers started changing their immediate environment by, for example, setting up welfare societies with an Islamic orientation to demonstrate that
Islam worked better for people than secularist governments did. Activities like these can be seen as attempts to give back to Islam some of the importance that secularist society had taken away from it (Armstrong 2000: 171).

The return to Islamic dress follows the same principle. When people are forced to dress in Islamic style against their will, as was the case with the Taliban, this is likely to create quite a virulent reaction against such coercion. However, many Muslim women see veiling as a symbolic return to the pre-colonial period, before the destructive influences of modernity on their society. This does not mean that they are stuck in time. For some women who come from a rural background and enter urban life for the first time, Islamic dress provides continuity and makes their encounter with modernity less traumatic. In joining the modern world on their own terms, they assert their identity. Veiling can be interpreted as a subtle critique of modernity as well. As opposed to Western culture, where people flaunt their youth or attempt to appear young by means of wearing revealing clothing and dressing elegantly, the shrouded Islamic body is a symbol of transcendence. Divinity is of greater importance than life on earth, and the uniformity of dress abolishes differences in class. A sense of community, rather than the Western notion of individuality, is thus emphasised (Armstrong 2000: 172).

People have often used religion as a way of making modern ideas and enthusiasms comprehensible. An example is when during the 1960s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini managed to initiate and lead a revolution that would overthrow the powerful regime of Muhammad Reza Shah in Iran. Khomeini identified the Shah with a typically unjust ruler in Shii Islam: Yazid, the Umayyad caliph who had been responsible for the death of Husain at Kabala. He successfully called on Muslims to fight such tyranny. They responded because this call fitted in with their deepest traditions. (A call to protest with a socialist motivation would, most likely, have fallen on deaf ears). Khomeini managed to offer a Shii alternative to the secular nationalism of the Shah and seemed to the Iranian people more and more like one of the imams:

Like all the imams, he had been attacked, imprisoned and almost killed by an unjust ruler; like some of the imams, he was forced into exile and deprived of what was his own; like Ali and Husain, he had bravely opposed injustice and stood up for true Islamic values; like all the imams, he was known to be a practising mystic; like Husain, whose son was killed at Kerbala, Khomeini’s son Mustafa was killed by the Shah’s agents (Armstrong 2000: 173).
In this instance religion proved to be so powerful a force that it brought down the Pahlavi state, which had seemed the most stable and powerful in the Middle East.

Hoveyda (1998: 56) points out another reason why Islamic fundamentalist leaders can be hugely successful when it comes to influencing Muslim populations. He attributes this success to the basic “fundamentalist” character of contemporary Islam. An example of this is the fact that, according to Hoveyda, Muslims see their faith as predestined to rule the entire planet and generally would respond more than willingly to slogans such as “Islam is in danger”, which has been used by Khomeini in Iran and other fundamentalist leaders elsewhere in the world.

Hoveyda’s argument should perhaps be juxtaposed with similar calls which have been made by leaders in other countries. President George W. Bush’s call for a “war on terrorism”, which garnered substantial support from Americans in the aftermath of September 11th, is a case in point. Similarly, Americans, and Westeners in general, also tend to believe in the superiority of liberal democracy and Western values, so that the phenomenon of believing in one’s culture is by no means unique to Islam.

Having discussed an instance of a controversially re-interpreted form of Islamic practice in Afghanistan, instances of less drastic Islamic fundamentalist practice in Islamic societies and ways in which religion can be used to further political campaigns, it now becomes appropriate to look at how the Islamic world drifted towards neofundamentalism, as Roy (1994: 75) terms it, during the 1980s. He focuses particularly on the process of re-Islamisation from below, militants promoting the return of the individual to Islam and says that with their pro-Sharia campaign, they “resemble the traditional fundamentalist mullahs from whom they are now distinguished only by their intellectual origins, professional insertion in modern society and involvement in politics.” What becomes clear here, once more, is the link between fundamentalism and politics, clearly defining it as a political activity.

Another particular characteristic of neo-fundamentalism, which Roy (1994: 76) refers to, is the tendency to deeply penetrate into society, before starting to question the state. A practice that has been retained from the Islamist movement is to address all of society, with neofundamentalists’ actions extending to all levels: canvassing preachers, organizers of various associations, union or grassroots organisers. As a group they aim to influence society, not the state and their aim is to do so by means of social action at grassroots level.
Roy (1994: 85) also points out neofundamentalists' aversion to science and technology and their critique of its "perverse effects", a characteristic which goes hand in hand with a retreat from modernity, rather than its adoption. Tibi (1998: 24) makes the distinction between cultural modernity and institutional modernity that is useful here. Cultural modernity refers to an attitude where an individual is defined as "an individual of free will, capable of determining his/her own destiny and changing the social and natural environment." This thus very much fits in with the rational view of humankind, which is discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. Institutional modernity, on the other hand, takes "science and technology as its instrumental achievements." Often, Tibi argues, it is the institutional modernity which takes root in non-Western civilisations, without the concomitant acceptance of cultural modernity. This can explain what may perhaps seem a paradoxical phenomenon: why those Islamic fundamentalists who turn to violence in their fight against modernity and secularism use the essentially modern tools of technology and science.

The attempt in this section of the chapter has been to provide a detailed discussion of fundamentalism, in general, and Islamic fundamentalism, in particular. Various different points of view have been incorporated to allow for a broad interpretation of the concept Islamic fundamentalism and to include several of the elements which authors associate with it. The discussion now moves to a critique of modern rationalism and, more specifically, modern rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism.

2.3 MODERN RATIONALISM – A CRITIQUE

2.3.1 The development of rationalism

Approaches to explaining Islamic fundamentalism are numerous, including modernisation theory, structural-functionalism, class analysis and rational actor theory. While this suggests a diversity that may be able to deliver insightful analyses when it comes to Islamic fundamentalism, Euben (1999: 20) argues that instead these approaches agree on Islamic fundamentalism as being "reactive, defensive and nativistic, its appeal a function of its efficacy as a conduit for the fury, fear, insecurity, and alienation that are the concomitants of trying socio-economic conditions and political circumstances in the modern world". Additional elements, when looking at these descriptions of Islamic fundamentalism, include frustration at the failed attempts at modernity in the Middle Eastern region and the resultant emergence of a particular class with specific
reactionary, conservative ideological tendencies. These tendencies would be the result of a failure of leftist regimes and “alien” ideologies imposed on the Middle East, as well as due to a lack of alternative channels for political expression because of state repression.

From this point of view Islamic fundamentalism is thus reduced to a mere “reaction” against a variety of problems facing Middle Eastern countries, ranging from socio-economic disparities to political repression of Islamic groups to the failure of regimes adopting leftist or other ideologies. Furthermore, this “reaction” is made out to be something negative. Instead of potentially being able to solve the problems mentioned above by presenting a viable alternative, Islamic fundamentalism is presented as backward and conservative.

Euben (1999: 21) attributes this agreement to the result of the intellectual inheritance of the discourse of modern rationalism. Here the language of science, objectivity and universality is exhibited, but at the same time political life is interpreted by means of placing the notions of rationality and irrationality opposite each other. The Western world at specific moments in its history came to celebrate reason “as the means by which to know and thus master the world; as the opposite of the authority of religion, tradition, habit and faith”. At the same time the increasing role of instrumental rationality, when it comes to all aspects of human life, is seen as constitutive of “modernity”. Taylor (in Gray 1995: 160) describes the modern conception of “reason” as follows. He refers to

The picture of an agent who in perceiving the world takes in “bits” of information from his or her surroundings, and then “processes” them in some fashion, in order to emerge with the “picture” of the world he or she has; who then acts on the basis of this picture to fulfil his or her goals, through a “calculus” of means and ends.

Everything that an individual does can thus be put down to a matter of acting in order to achieve one’s aims. In this way he/she is depicted as almost robotic, a calculating entity who carefully and strategically weighs up options against each other and chooses the best possible one to facilitate goal achievement.

There are various “rationalisms” in the history of Western thought, but most important here is the “progress of reason”, articulated in the European Enlightenment and 19th century theories of rationalisation, which first linked the expansion of rationality to the progress of Western culture and later the advance of all civilisation (Euben 1999: 21). How, when and why did this particular rationalism emerge? Throughout the
Middle Ages, knowledge, metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics and economics had all been held together by theology. This changed, however, when nationalistic and intellectual forces increasingly began to challenge the Church’s authority during the Reformation between the 15th and 17th centuries. Because the Church was unable to successfully cope with this challenge, another method of discovering knowledge had to be found. Thus the focus shifted to the autonomy of the individual. Temple (in Hallowell & Porter 1997: 285-286) describes this development:

But if the Church and its system were repudiated, what could take its place? If a man’s thought and purposes were no longer to take their start from the only tradition available, where could they begin? And the only possible answer was “with himself.” If a man was not going to start as a member of a system, accepting that system and his own place in it, then he must start with his isolated self. Of course he would submit to the authority of conscience, but it would be his conscience. He would submit to the Voice of God as he heard it, but it would be as he heard it. So the modern movement was bound to be a movement of individualism. We owe to it the distinctive blessings of modern life, but also its distinctive ills.

The primary characteristic of modern philosophy is thus a focus on the individual as the source or medium of authority (Hallowell & Porter 1997: 287). According to this modernisation narrative, then, what facilitated modernisation was “the retreat of an authoritative transcendental order from the public realm” and at the same time “the eclipse of the epistemological, historical and political certainties such an order was thought to have sustained”. The only way for rationality to become a dominant force in public life was if the “divine order “ was no longer in the forefront (Euben 1999: 21).

Another important element underlying this rationalist tradition is the superiority accorded to science. As the status of the individual gained in significance during the Renaissance period, science, at the same time, promised to, ultimately, penetrate the mysteries of life and provide humans with the necessary tools to assert their independence. It was hoped that science would “unleash the power that would make us [humans] masters and possessors of nature” (Hallowell & Porter 1997: 294).

This focus on science has had effects in terms of, firstly, the intellectual tradition and, secondly, when it comes to how human beings view and treat the natural environment. To clarify the first point it is important to look at the tradition of analytic philosophy, which is closely linked to the Enlightenment project. Here the methods employed in the natural sciences are crucial in accounts of what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. One of the consequences of attaching importance to natural-scientific methods as a
regulative ideal for rational enquiry is that analytical philosophy does not encompass received traditions of enquiry, whether derived from religions or political traditions like Marxism or nationalism. Like for the Enlightenment project, the focus is thus on the individual, and traditional sources of authority, such as the metaphysical, are discredited (Kelly 2000: 226-227):

Using canons of reason and justification derived from the natural sciences, the analytical tradition either undermines moral reasons and authority altogether, or else provides alternative explanations of moral claims in naturalistic terms, identifying them for example as emotive ejaculations or irreducible desires or preferences (Kelly 2000: 229).

In terms of the scientific focus’s impact on the intellectual rationalist tradition, any actions which are not easily explained through natural sciences method enquiry and are based on metaphysical or traditional influences are thus discarded as simply emotional or irrational. This closely ties in with rationalist explanations of Islamic fundamentalism, which are discussed later on.

In order to illustrate how the focus on science impacts on how human beings view and treat the natural environment, it is important to look at Gray’s (1995: 158) conception of modernity. One of the primary tenets of the modernist worldview is an understanding of science as “the supremely privileged form of knowledge”, enabling humans not only to understand the natural world, but also to master and control it. The conception of the natural world as “an object of human exploitation and of humankind as the master of nature” forms a vital part of the modern worldview and of Westernisation more specifically. By implication this same conception has also been passed “lastingly and destructively” onto non-Western cultures through the spread of Western culture and values. Though it is difficult to pin down this development historically, it is closely linked to the Christian conception of the unique status of human beings as “loci of infinite worth”. Ultimately then, as part of the modernist worldview, the natural world needs human beings in order to have some value and “the proper relations of humans with the natural world are relations of domination and exploitation”.

In terms of this second point, the effect of according such importance to science has in fact been to penetrate the mysteries of life and has allowed human beings to “possess” nature, just as it was hoped during the Renaissance era. The side effect of dominating nature, however, has meant an ever-greater destruction of it, as well as a spread of this destructiveness to traditionally non-Western societies.
It is this attitude, one of "reason" and "science" being superior to "metaphysics" and "tradition" which underlies rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism. Instead of delving into the ideology of Islamic fundamentalists from a point of view open to insights and new understanding, Islamic fundamentalism is conceived as different and opposite to rationality, in other words, as irrational, from the onset.

Ultimately it is necessary to understand rationalist interpretations as both "expressing" Western conceptions of "truth, political fears and cultural unease", while at the same time describing what fundamentalism "really is". This argument is partially based on ideas expressed by Foucault, who states that discourses considered to be scientific are constituted and expressed in rules and institutions that control and centralise knowledge, while at the same time discarding other, competing sets of knowledge as inadequate. Certain sets of knowledge are thus classified as "inferior" by those who have the monopoly on interpreting the world in a certain way. Another contributor to the argument above is Said. He states that Orientalism, rather than being a "valuable and truthful discourse about the Orient itself", is a European "production" of the Orient by an Orientalist who claims to stand outside the Orient. The object of study, in this case the Orient, is thus manufactured by, as well as reflected in the scholarly endeavour of Orientalism (Euben 1999: 22-23). The point made here by Euben is thus that rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism, while claiming to be objective, with the analyst being "removed" from the subject, in reality incorporate the prejudices and fears the analyst may feel towards Islamic fundamentalism while giving a so-called "neutral" description of its nature. Such descriptions can thus be rather one-sided accounts.

Another problem with rationalist accounts of Islamic fundamentalism is that they assume it to be a mere "reflex reaction" to certain political or socio-economic circumstances. This implies that it would thus not be necessary to pay much attention to "a fundamentalist system of ideas as a substantive vision of the world". The focus is thus not on how Islamic fundamentalist actions are the result of a "system of meanings", but "a scientific study of correlations among urbanisation, expanding of education, commercialisation, industrialisation, and alienation that 'produce' Islamic revival". What is therefore considered of primary importance is the function that religion plays in society, not the substance of ideas underlying it. Islamic fundamentalism is presented as irrational in this way, as it is seen both as a "by-product" of and a "reaction against modernity", specifically against the "rationalisation of society, economy and politics". What is interesting in this view, however, is that, while Islamic fundamentalism opposes changes taking place as a
result of modernisation, it is at the same time regressive: “The refuge of the antidemocratic, the frustrated, the antirational, irrational or at the very least archaic, fundamentalism thus represents the regrettable but ultimately transient birth pangs of a culture entering the modern world”. The Islamic fundamentalist is portrayed as the “irrational rational actor”: rational enough to turn toward an ideology that presents an alternative to the Western route of modernisation, but irrational in the sense that this ideology is not progressive, but instead carries “pathological reactionary sentiment”. What is suggested, furthermore, is that such a view of Islamic fundamentalism not only neglects the importance of Islamic fundamentalist ideas, but, worse than this, misrepresents and distorts them (Euben 1999: 24).

What becomes important now is to examine some examples of above-mentioned rationalist approaches, in order to illustrate to which extent Islamic fundamentalism is portrayed as a reactionary reflex reaction against modernity and Islamic fundamentalists as irrational rational actors.

### 2.3.2 Islamic fundamentalism as a reaction against modernity

In his 1958 work, *The passing of traditional society*, Lerner (in Euben 1999: 26) analyses modernisation in the Middle East. What does political modernisation entail? Firstly, the state is ruled by a single, secular, national political authority, replacing various authorities that may have preceded it. Secondly, modernisation means that new political functions are differentiated and that specialised structures are developed to perform those functions. Thirdly, political modernisation entails increased participation in politics by social groups throughout society. What thus distinguishes modern politics from antecedent politics is rationalised authority, differentiated structure and mass participation. Lerner sees modernisation as the introduction of a “rationalist and positivist” spirit which Middle Eastern societies need so that they are no longer locked in “an increasingly unstable paralysis born of tensions endemic to late-developing traditional societies”. Early fundamentalist movements are depicted as reacting against and providing an obstacle to the process of modernisation. The perceived situation is one of inherent tensions between the entrenched power of the traditional patterns of governance – hierarchical, patriarchal and patrimonial – and the rising expectations of a class which is increasingly better educated and expects to somehow benefit from the process of modernisation, yet at the same time faces rising unemployment.
Instead of leading the modernisation process, this over-educated, under-employed class moves towards the “extremes of political action, attracted toward the instruments of propaganda, agitation and violence, by which they hope to disrupt the settled order and to speed their way toward a more satisfying way of life”. The focus is not at all on Islamic fundamentalist ideas, but, instead, these are perceived as simultaneously expressing and obscuring what is the real source of the problem: modernisation and disenfranchisement taking place simultaneously, rapid urbanisation among limited resources, improved and extended education going hand in hand with rising unemployment, increased literacy within an exclusionary regime and rising expectations of the populace, though living in the context of grim socio-economic prospects. The functional side of Islamic fundamentalism is thus represented here in terms of its effectiveness as a channel for material discontent. At the same time it also represents the last flare-up of archaic impulses at the moment that the transition to modernity takes place (Euben 1999: 26-27).

What is clear from the above interpretation of Islamic fundamentalism is the distinct labelling of it as reactionary and unable to benefit from modernisation for various reasons. By implication it almost seems that the Middle East is inferior to the West in that an anti-modern reaction is shown: protest against modernisation rather than an embrace of it. Also, this interpretation may be labelled somewhat superficial, as the ideas underlying Islamic fundamentalism are cast aside in favour of the “real causes” for the “revolt against modernisation”. It thus becomes evident how this interpretation supports Western notions of “superiority” toward a less-developed “Other”, while at the same time supposedly giving an objective description of Islamic fundamentalism.

2.3.3 Islamic fundamentalism as the only alternative political channel

In Sivan’s (1985) Radical Islam, Islamic fundamentalism is seen as a reaction against modernity, as a result of the failure of a series of liberal, socialist and nationalist regimes to cope with the social and economic difficulties currently facing several Middle Eastern states.

Radical Islam is primarily a history of ideas, but Sivan also depicts the strength of Islamic fundamentalism as a reflection of the failure of leftist intellectuals and progressive regimes to offer a successful alternative to what fundamentalists have to offer. Furthermore, Islamic fundamentalism helps its supporters associate with the familiarity that traditional Islamic beliefs hold for them, rather than embracing “foreign” belief structures.
such as socialism or liberalism (Euben 1999: 29). A related concern expressed by fundamentalists, according to Sivan (1985: 10), is the “open-door” policy of the 1970’s, opening up the Middle East to Western investment. This would, firstly, integrate the Islamic world into the system of multinationals, which is totally alien to Muslim concepts of interest, insurance and taxation. Hence, this would risk the latter’s complete eradication and virtually eliminate any chances of reintroduction. Secondly, investment implicitly would bring with it a large foreign contingent and the need to cater for these foreigners would be likely to corrupt those who work with them as well as the nouveaux riches wanting to emulate them. Thirdly, in addition to whatever moral defects consumerism may hold, one of the biggest problems associated with it is “creating new needs and raising expectations that the economy cannot deliver”.

This is especially relevant in a global system of relative deprivation where the “have-nots” are only too aware of their relation in status to the world’s “haves”. One sees this trend not only on a global level (developing countries perceiving their financial shortcomings vis-à-vis developed countries), but also on a local level. The result, as Sivan points out, is the destruction of local traditions and culture, increased emulation of Western mindsets, values and practices by the Middle Eastern upper class and increased needs and expectations by all, which a modernising economy most likely will not be able to deliver. This points out the difficulty of dealing with modernisation, not only in terms of the undoubted danger it would present to traditional Islamic values (hence the fundamentalists’ need to challenge it), but also in terms of the populace’s increased expectations inherent in an “opening up” to Western influences, yet at the same time, the state not being able to fulfil these.

Euben (1999: 29) mentions that similar interpretations have appeared in several influential articles published in the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies in the 1980s. Four reasons can thus be found for the appeal of Islamic fundamentalist ideas: failures of leftist regimes, unavailability of alternative political channels, Islam as an indigenous ideology and Islam fulfilling a “de-alienating” function rival political movements cannot match. Ultimately, however, these explanations, although moving away from defining Islamic fundamentalism as nothing more than a “reflex” reaction to modernity, are still based on the importance of modernisation and its related developments presenting challenges to Middle Eastern regimes, who consequently are unable to cope. Again, thus, there is not sufficient focus on the importance of the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism, on the contrary, these are all but ignored.
2.3.4 Islamic fundamentalism: backward and irrational

An example can now be given of an account which is typical of depicting Islamic fundamentalism as backward, irrational and the enemy of the West. Norval (2001) in his book *Triumph of disorder: Islamic fundamentalism, the new face of war* deals with the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to the West. Norval (2001: 38) talks of the world entering a period of “warfare between ethnic, cultural and nationalistic groups”, where “religious attitudes, beliefs and fanaticism of the warring groups will play a larger role in the motivation of armed conflicts than it has since the counter-reformation three-hundred years ago”. He attributes the popularity of Islam to “most people in the world (not being) pacifists” and therefore people in many parts of the world finding Islam attractive, “because it is prepared to fight”. Throughout the book, an image is created of Islamic fundamentalism being the unquestionable enemy of the West, an enemy to be feared and hated. This can be seen in the way in which Islamic fundamentalists “view the enemy”.

According to Norval (2001: 33):

> The enemy must then, in some way, be dehumanised, degraded to less than full human status. The infidel – those who aren’t Muslims – fit the bill for the militant Islamic fundamentalist. In the minds of the radical fundamentalist, if one isn’t enlightened enough to see the righteousness of Islam, that person is a subhuman being. The infidel is pictured as evil and loathsome, deserving to be killed as an enemy of God.

What becomes clear from this account is the tendency of rationalist approaches of Islamic fundamentalism to depict this as inferior, irrational and almost insanely incomprehensible when pitted against the rational secular logic of the West. This presents a picture of Islamic fundamentalism which is bound to fill Western readers with fear and hatred, not making Islamic fundamentalist ideas any more comprehensible, but rather making them seem threatening and irrevocably different. Having looked at the shortcomings of three different “views” of Islamic fundamentalism, the discussion now turns to rational actor model interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism.

2.3.5 Islamic fundamentalists – irrational rational actors

Rational Choice Political Theory (RCPT) has only recently begun to focus on religious action, and fundamentalist action in particular, but it is still worth mentioning, as it aims to explain all political action. Becker (in Euben 1999: 31) assumes that people engage in maximising behaviour, which Monroe (in Euben
1999: 31) breaks down into seven assumptions: “(1) actors pursue goals; (2) these goals reflect the actor’s perceived self-interest; (3) behaviour results from conscious choice; (4) the individual is the basic unit of analysis; (5) actors have preference orderings that are consistent and stable; (6) if given options, actors choose the alternative with the highest expected utility; (7) actors possess extensive information on both the available alternatives and the likely consequences of their choices”. Hechter (1997: 148) argues that the hallmark of rational action lies in its instrumentality. People are rational to the extent that they pursue the most efficient means they have available to attain their most preferred ends. These ends can be either material or non-material. People, on the other hand, are irrational when they pursue a course of action regardless of its consequences. It is irrational to “value for its own sake some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success”. Thus, as long as people have a specific aim in mind when making choices to pursue particular courses of action, they can be characterised as rational.

Islamic fundamentalism can then be analysed by filling in the blanks. The goals of Islamic fundamentalists could be defined as a need for belonging or security, making membership itself a self-interested goal. Different from the approaches discussed above, dealing with fundamentalism as a revolt against modernity or the most ideologically “comfortable” alternative to failed regimes in the Middle East, RCPT focuses on the intrinsic appeal of fundamentalism. Yet, this appeal does not rest on the moral power of fundamentalist worldviews, but merely on the “advantages” they seem to hold for people. So, even martyrdom can be construed as rational self-interested behaviour, as the result it leads to, namely salvation, is worth the self-sacrifice.

Most peculiar about the RCPT model is the insistence that all behaviour can be explained simply by classifying each action as rational behaviour and thus making it “intelligible to market logic”. What does not make sense here, as Diesing (in Euben 1999: 31-32) states, is to pose an economic question such as “How much is salvation worth to you?” This is what you would have to ask to understand Islamic fundamentalism in terms of the market logic espoused by RCPT. The problem here is that an adherence to the divine and actions associated with it is reduced to a set of economically justifiable actions, where every action can ultimately be labelled “rational” as a result of the actor achieving his or her ultimate goal, for example salvation. Neitz and Mueser (1997: 107) suggest a useful revision of the concept of rationality. They argue that rationality should rather be seen as part of a sense-making activity and should be more concerned with
the processes people use to arrive at their choices, which are tied to their attempts to understand who they are and where they are, than with, as is posited by rational choice theorists, outcomes. This is evidently a shift in focus and arguably fits in more closely with Euben’s call to examine Islamic fundamentalist worldviews and ideologies, rather than merely looking at an ends/means kind of analysis.

Much of the RCPT literature which pertains to religion looks at issues such as how much time is allocated in religious participation, the calculus by which one religion is chosen over another and the economic position of fundamentalists (Euben 1999: 32). Interpretive accounts of participants’ behaviour are thus also usually overlooked and rather the focus is on the attributed needs and benefits that would make such behaviour conducive to market logic. An example would be Azzi and Ehrenberg referring to an “afterlife consumption” (Euben 1999: 32). This statement suggests that what is “invested” during one’s lifetime, in terms of contributions to religious organisations, time spent worshipping, volunteering for religious-related projects and so on, will ultimately “pay off” in an afterlife, where one is to reap the rewards of one’s religious efforts on earth. Therefore adherents to a particular faith put in a certain effort with the expectation that this will benefit them somehow in the afterlife.

There is still another dimension to RCPT’s view of fundamentalists. Monroe (in Euben 1999: 32), for example, suggests that RCPT tends to depict fundamentalists as “risk averse” and too immature and unintelligent to cope with the stresses that modernisation and secularisation entail. What RCPT interpretations seem to portray in addition to all actions being reducible to “market logic” is that fundamentalism is a form of “escapism” from the realities of a modernising world, a retreat into what is security-and comfort-inspiring: the divine. As is clear from the examples given above, fundamentalists’ behaviour can be construed as rational through the use of RCPT, but only after fundamentalists have been imbued with certain characteristics, which one could possibly call weaknesses of character, such as “insecurity, immaturity, or intolerance of risk” (Euben 1999: 33).

Hechter (1997: 150) points out some difficulties when it comes to applying RCPT to religion. Firstly, he raises doubts about the viability of talking about “religious markets”, which Iannaccone (1997: 27) widely makes use. Iannaccone argues that just as in other markets, where sellers have to market their goods in order to ensure a steady supply of buyers, religions “have little choice but to abandon inefficient modes of production and unpopular products in favour of more attractive and profitable alternatives”. Hechter
questions this equation of an economic marketplace with a market where different religions vie for people’s support, and ultimately souls, and poses the question of how markets can ever arise for inscrutable goods, those goods of which it is impossible to determine the value. How would “consumers” choose between different churches (or, to some extent, even religions), all of which claim to “produce” the same goods — salvation? Another problem is that the promised product itself is intangible. This means that “the accuracy of many promises made by a priest cannot be checked readily, since they often refer to events taking place in the hereafter.”

Secondly, Hechter (1997: 151) points out that rational choice models work with the assumption that religious goods are highly substitutable. To some extent this is true – goods offered by religious groups seem to be close substitutes for goods offered by political and social groups, such as welfare, entertainment, prestige and relief from loneliness. Hechter’s problem is, however, that rational choice models provide little insight into how substitutable the various goods are that are produced by different religions. What kind of goods, for example, does Islam offer as opposed to Catholicism, and would someone convert from the one to the other because he or she can attain greater instrumental benefits by doing so?

One’s allegiance to a religion is on average stickier than loyalty to a particular brand of coffee. Disputes over religion are far more likely to breed violence than disputes over health care initiatives; people are more wont to give up their lives for their religion than for their firm. All told, religious commitments are sometimes far more intense and salient than secular social communities (Hechter 1997: 151).

These questions thus deal with what one religion offers as opposed to others and why and when people would turn to another religion. The focus is also on what it is that makes religious commitments so much more intense than, for example, economic, and, at times, even nationalistic or political commitments. In the context of Islamic fundamentalism an approach that deals with more than “market logic”, but also focuses on the ideas and worldviews that influence adherents of Islamic fundamentalism, would be crucial to determine why specific acts are committed and with what aim in mind.

Thirdly, Hechter (1997: 152) identifies the tendency of many rational choice models to assume that people’s values are “both stable over time and homogeneous across individuals” as problematic. Hechter views this assumption as limiting. Rather, more attention should be paid to people’s values and beliefs, in order to understand their religious behaviour. It becomes clear from Hechter’s criticism that it is imperative that an
attempt be made to closely examine people’s values and beliefs, especially as far as religion is concerned, rather than assume that these remain constant over time and are the same for different individuals.

To elaborate on the arguments above, Brennan’s (1997: 89) discussion of Rational Choice Political Theory (RCPT) and the viability in its application to political processes is briefly dealt with. RCPT deals with applying the analytic methods and techniques of modern economics to the study of political processes in order to, firstly, make political science one aspect of a single over-arching social theory and secondly, to provide a “rational basis for the normative assessment of political arrangements in the context of the economist’s theory of the state”.

Brennan (1997: 106) refers to four particular critiques of RCPT and its ability to adequately interpret political processes. The first is the “universalist” critique, which states that RCPT is aimed at 19th- and 20th-century Western political practice and is thus not amenable to different cultures or political systems in other historical periods. Brennan (1997: 167) sees it as unlikely that RCPT analysts would “think that actors’ own theories about the nature of what they were doing in participating in politics (that is, what we identify as politics) would be of fundamental explanatory power - ...”

The “universalist” critique usefully adds on the critique of RCPT above. It can be considered problematic to apply theories developed in a Western context to other cultures, specifically the world of Islam. This has already become evident in the tendency of rational choice theorists to put down all behaviour of fundamentalists to so-called “market logic”, a term originating in Western political systems with little reference to those predominantly adhering to traditional Islamic beliefs. As also becomes clear from Brennan’s statement about RCPT analysts not attributing much explanatory power to actors’ own interpretations of their participation in politics is the problem of a neglect of Islamic fundamentalist ideas. Actions are thus explained in terms of the “benefits” (from the point of view of market logic) that actors are thought to attain through their actions, with no attention being paid to the ideas underlying these actions.

The second critique is “imperialist”, and charges RCPT with looking at political processes excessively through an economic lens and with appealing too much to market analogies. Brennan (1997: 107) concedes that rational choice models need to be applied in several ways to apply to politics. This critique ties in with what has been argued above, namely that “market logic” is used to explain the actions of fundamentalists.
The third is the “exclusivist” critique, which claims that RCPT sees rational choice theory as the only “proper way” of doing political analysis. Brennan (1997: 107) explains that RCPT will eliminate one of two rival explanations of a social phenomenon, as according to RCPT it will be impossible for both to be correct. If, however, there are two different, yet compatible explanations, RCPT will do its best to accommodate both. This seems fair enough, provided that accounts different from Western ways of reasoning are not automatically rejected on the basis of their difference.

The fourth critique is called “heterogeneous”, which refers to actors responding to the same apparent stimulus in directly opposite ways. An example would be an increased police presence in some cases leading to an increase in criminal activity on the streets, while in others the level of criminal activity decreases. Brennan (1997: 108) here argues that allowance needs to made for a tolerably rich motivational structure in rational choice analysis and that within that structure there needs to be room for some motivational heterogeneity. This comment ties in with the need to look beyond “benefit maximising” motifs when it comes to Islamic fundamentalism, but to, more importantly, study Islamic fundamentalist ideas as well.

RCPT thus has considerable shortcomings when applied to the study of religion and Islamic fundamentalism in particular. There needs to be a move away from merely reducing fundamentalists’ behaviour and actions to “market logic” and, rather, the focus needs to be broadened to incorporate the Islamic fundamentalist ideas and worldviews which influence them. Now that modern rationalism has been discussed in detail and several rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism have been touched on, the discussion turns to the postmodernist reaction to both modernity and rationalism. Particular attention is paid to one of the key elements of postmodernism, namely anti-foundationalism, and the problems this, according to Euben, poses for political theory when it attempts to explain the increasing prevalence of foundationalist practice in contemporary political life.

2.4 POSTMODERNISM AND ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM – A DISCUSSION

2.4.1 Some consequences of rationalism’s influence on society

As has been seen in the discussion above, a key characteristic of the Enlightenment project is that it adheres to an “extreme form of rationalism.” Moral practices, conventional norms of behaviour and traditional
claims of authority and knowledge are all justified by means of applying impartial reason to judge them. Reason is able to arbitrate claims to truth, authority and justification once rid of its traditional and conventional fetters. There are however thinkers, ranging from Kant through to contemporary communitarians and anti-foundationals who argue against this concept. This is because reason cannot be separated from its cultural context. Enlightenment rationality is therefore only one particular form of enquiry, “in which the canons of natural scientific explanation are raised to an absolute authority as criteria of knowledge”. The problem here is that when searching for foundations thinkers end up “exposing the groundlessness of the Enlightenment’s own canons of truth, reasonableness and justification”.

Enlightenment rationality is simply groundless and represents only one historical version of the attempts of human beings to render their existence transparent. The consequence is nihilism, a loss in religious and moral values (Kelly 2000: 230-231). The problem thus clearly is one of where rationalism, which only presents one particular way of perceiving life, claims absolute superiority over alternative viewpoints and enforces itself on both Western and non-Western societies.

Gray (1995) elaborates on one of the consequences of rationalism’s influence when he states that “within Western cultures, the Enlightenment project of promoting autonomous human reason and of according to science a privileged status in relation to all other forms of understanding has successfully eroded and destroyed local and traditional forms of moral and social knowledge…” Gray links this to the irrecoverable displacement of traditional “foundational” and “primordial” forms of knowledge and understanding, such as humanism, the Christian tradition and the logocentrism of Greek philosophy (Gray 1995: 145-146). This tendency of an erosion of traditional ways of life has also spread to many of those non-Western cultures or polities which have been under the influence of the Enlightenment project. The reaction has been the rise of “counter-projects of re-enchantment of the world, via fundamentalist religion or a reversion to pre-modern forms of thought or community”, which is exactly what this dissertation is concerned with. Gray suggests an attempt to find a middle ground by combining modernity and tradition. Where traditional cultural forms are still practised and adhered to, it is sensible to aim to “nurture” them, to shelter them from modern technologies which would destroy them and to develop new technologies which serve human needs while preserving traditional communities and cultural forms (Gray 1995: 146).

Another consequence of rationalism’s influence is the tendency, perceived both by Gray and MacIntyre (in Kelly 2000: 231), that nihilism is spilling over into the wider public sphere. MacIntyre, for example, talks
about the "emotivist culture of protest" as a consequence of Enlightenment modes of thinking. Public debate, for him, becomes a form of protest, where participants merely express their preferences and emotions. They are no longer able to engage in debates about fundamental values, for example, because these are beyond the scope of "philosophy or rational deliberation". This ties in with the above section where rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism were examined. The suggestion is that behaviour or values with a divine influence do not conform to rationalist enquiry and can thus easily be misunderstood and condemned both by (rationalist) political theorists and, according to MacIntyre, the general public in societies which are exposed to a rationalist way of thinking.

The last consequence of the rationalist influence to be discussed here is the erosion of metaphysical faith, especially when linked to modern science. The metaphysical faith, which science is originally based on, has ceased to be available to human beings, as a result of Christianity fading more and more in Western culture. Science is thus responsible for a disenchantment of the world and the view of science remains as nothing more than "that of human nature whose goal is to control nature". Nietzsche (in Gray 1995: 166) feels that Western culture, through adopting a "radically experimental methodology of science" has displaced all transcendental faiths, including that which animated science itself. There is no longer the idea of an absolute point of view on things. The consequence has been emptying the world of metaphysical meaning and importance. In this view, therefore, human beings, especially in societies no longer according any importance to religion, have to face a meaningless existence, in which science has taken a decisive step backwards from its initial purpose of uncovering nature's mysteries to controlling and destroying it. As Gray (1995: 166) puts it, all that remains is "the expansion of human productive powers through the technological domination of the world".

The paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves now, in which Westernisation has become in one decisive respect nearly universal at just the historical moment when the hollowing out of Western civilisation by nihilism is virtually complete, and in which non-Occidental cultures are asserting themselves against the West while accepting its legacy of a nihilist relationship with technology and the earth is one which no form of Western thought that is traditional or reactionary in its orientation can begin to grasp (Gray 1995: 178-179).

Now that some of the negative consequences that the rationalist influence has had on contemporary society have been discussed, it becomes important to look at the postmodernist reaction against it.
2.4.2 The postmodernist reaction to modern rationalism

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the concept postmodernism became a principal topic of discussion in philosophy, cultural analysis and social and political theory. One of the cornerstones of the postmodern tradition is the delegitimation of “grand narratives” as espoused by Lyotard (in Dews 2003: 343-344) in *La condition postmoderne*. Lyotard argues that the “grand schemata of historical progress and social development” which stems from the Enlightenment had at the end of the 20th century lost all credibility. Universal stories of modern advancement are now being received with a considerable measure of distrust following the “political horrors and moral catastrophes” of the 20th century. Modern scientific knowledge has also contributed to this tendency, as, instead of being regarded as the tool to discover the universe’s mysteries and help humankind assert its independence as during the Renaissance era, it is now self-avowedly characterised as “provisional and instrumental”. Lyotard also argues against the notion of “the progressive triumph of liberal democracy” and refers to it as merely another “grand narrative”. The future, he argues, would have to be characterised by more modest local narratives, which abandon the idea of a generally shared consensus.

Foucault (in Dews 2003: 352), influenced by Nietzsche (1844-1900), produced a body of work representative of all of the fundamental postmodern influences. Two of the lessons learnt from Nietzsche are the following. The first is to distrust the “immediate evidence of experience on which phenomenology relies”. It is more important here to look at the background structures, the structures that underlie what appear to be intuitively obvious meanings. The second is to distrust “all notions of development, direction and purpose in the analysis of social and historical processes”. More generally speaking, Nietzsche’s influence on Foucault was an encouragement for the latter to treat the heritage of the Enlightenment era with suspicion and to realise the damage caused by the “rationalisation and instrumentalisation of the modern world”.

Postmodernism is thus concerned with a critical approach toward modern rationalism, the influences it has had on the modern world and the way in which dominant rationalist narratives relate both historical and contemporary developments.

The dominant themes that characterise the postmodernist movement are:
1. Anti-foundationalism: “a conviction that moral norms and political principles cannot be given an ultimate metaphysical grounding, and that all knowledge claims are relative to linguistic, social and historical contexts” (Dews 2003: 352).

2. The critique of the “subject”: “a rejection of the notion that human beings can be essentially defined as rational, reflective subjects of experience and as consciously self-determining agents or initiators of action, a notion assumed to be central to the modern philosophical tradition.” Instead, subjectivity is viewed as “divided, internally conflictual, and shaped by the opaque workings of unconscious desire” (Dews 2003: 352). This ties in with the critique, mentioned above, of interpreting Islamic fundamentalists as “irrational rational actors” who engage in rationalising, calculating behaviour, for example martyrdom, in order to achieve a specific goal, for example salvation. As can be seen from Euben’s discussion of this particular interpretation of Islamic fundamentalism, for example, their behaviour is more complicated and cannot merely be reduced to such a simplistic “means-end” scenario. External influences, such as ideology, arguably also play a part in impacting on actors’ behaviour and may, to some extent, shape the actors “unconscious desire”, as suggested by Dews above.

3. Acknowledgement of difference, and the claims of the “Other”: “a conviction that universalistic moral and political discourse inevitably rides roughshod over cultural, ethnic, gender and other differences between human beings, excluding or marginalising subordinate groups and dissident voices. From this perspective, Enlightenment rationalism and universalism appear as a metaphysically disguised Eurocentrism” (Dews 2003: 352). A proponent of this theme is Connolly (in Dews 2003: 359). He focuses on the exclusionary features of political and social identities: “Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty”. The problem then is that groups that are politically marginalised and excluded can only achieve equality by being recognised for their distinct identity. This identity, however, is marked by intrinsically constraining or repressive features, which makes it difficult for these groups to assert their identities and achieve equality. Even if they manage to do so their achievement is undermined, because they are perceived as inherently inferior to politically dominant groups. At the same time, however, Connolly does not suggest that the liberal project of acknowledging difference
and individuality should be abandoned. Rather, he suggests adopting an “alternative militant liberalism” based on a “multifarious politicisation of difference”.

2.4.3 Why anti-foundationalism is problematic

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework of this dissertation is based on the dialogic model of interpretation, as espoused by Euben. When considering the dominant themes of postmodernism, as listed above, the second and the third fit into what Euben has to say about rationalism quite well (i.e. refusing to accept individuals as rational, reflective subjects of experience and acknowledging the claims of the “Other”). It is with the first postmodernist theme, anti-foundationalism, that Euben has a problem. What are some of the main ideas behind anti-foundationalism and why does Euben perceive it as problematic?

To repeat Dews (2003: 352) definition of anti-foundationalism; it is a “a conviction that moral norms and political principles cannot be given an ultimate metaphysical grounding, and that all knowledge claims are relative to linguistic, social and historical contexts.” This implies a refusal to accept that it is necessary for human beings or the political rules or institutions according to which they function to believe in or be inspired by a metaphysical or divine entity. Another important element here is that a critique of metaphysical foundationalism does not imply any specific difficulties for liberal democratic values, nor does it provide any deep challenges to contemporary society (Dews 2003: 358).

Rorty (in Dews 2003: 358), a well known proponent of anti-foundationalism, argues that the search for an ultimate truth should be abandoned in favour of an open-ended conversation between divergent points of view. He also argues that the knowledge that our beliefs (including moral and political) lack metaphysical foundations does not imply that we should despair. “Since reason, truth and justice simply are what a given community defines them as being, since there is no more ultimate court of appeal, we have no reason to abandon the beliefs of the community to which we already belong”. This means, for example, that the principles of liberal democracy remain both valid and possibly even superior to the principles of other traditions for those who propagate them. The problem here is not one of justifying liberal democracy, or any other form of government for that matter. What is problematic, however, is that one particular set of values, i.e. those of liberal democracy, can, by means of denying the existence of metaphysical foundations as a basis to our moral and political beliefs, be seen as superior to other political forms. If one “point of view” is accorded superior status to others then this undermines Rorty’s idea of “an open-ended conversation
between divergent points of view”. What also needs to be taken into account here is the history of domination of both Western accounts of history and the imposition of Western ways of life on originally non-Western cultures. Related to this is the destruction of local traditions and culture, as well as environmental destruction through the introduction of modern technology.

To soften the criticism of Rorty, it is necessary to mention that he seems to have in mind an evolved, progressive form of liberalism. He states that a post-modern liberalism would not see the lack of foundations as a deficit; indeed the search for foundations means a lack of self-confidence on the part of liberal cultures. Rorty (in Gray 1995: 170-171) summarises his project as the attempt:

To reformulate the hopes of liberal society in a nonrationalist and nonuniversalist way – one which furthers their realisation better than older descriptions of them do...in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, whether in the form of the divinised world or a divinised self...The process of de-divinisation...would, ideally, culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings.

What problem does Euben have with anti-foundationalism? She argues that this particular theme of postmodernism refers to the perception that it is no longer necessary for a well-ordered society to strive toward a “metaphysical conception of the good”. This is especially the case in post-Enlightenment theoretical discourse, where arguments in favour of metaphysical foundations are considered anachronistic. Generally there seems to be a feeling of “unease” among certain theorists when it comes to the concept of transcendent foundations. Thus, taking into consideration that certain strands of contemporary political theory are characterised by what could be termed an anti-foundationalist approach, there exists the problem of “how to construct a just society without the transcendent foundations thought to have previously sustained it” (Euben 1999: 3-4).

This development is ironic in the sense that while political theory tries to explain community in terms of no longer experiencing a need for metaphysical truths, this attempt takes place in a world where political practice is increasingly being driven by foundationalist certainties and where efforts are constantly made to “remake political, cultural and economic power in accordance with these”. One example of how political actors are driven anew by foundationalism in the Western world is a meeting of former US Vice President
Dan Quayle with religious-right activists in Florida, where he pledged allegiance to “the Christian flag, and to the Saviour, for whose Kingdom it stands, one Saviour, crucified, risen and coming again, with life and liberty for all who believe” (Euben 1999: 4). This seems to contradict Rorty’s idea that liberal democracy’s moral and political values are no longer based on metaphysical foundations. Though this may be the case for most West European states, the US can be viewed as an exception as, according to Gray (1995: 145), it remains strong both in terms of fundamentalist religion and fundamentalist affirmations of the Enlightenment project. The crucial point here is that given the US’s dominant political and military position in the world, it would be rather short-sighted to overlook its adherence to foundationalist claims, when it comes to how it justifies itself both politically and morally.

Other examples of the overriding presence of foundationalism dealing with the world of Islam, include the Islamic governments of Iran and Sudan, the American embassy bombings and the establishment of a shadow system of medical clinics and banks by Islamic groups in Egypt (Euben 1999: 3). The events of September 11th provide an additional example, as well as the refusal afterwards of Afghanistan’s Taliban regime to succumb to Western states’ pressure and hand over Osama bin Laden, the suspected mastermind behind the attacks. What is also important here is the importance that fundamentalists, in general, and Islamic fundamentalists, in particular, attach to the literal interpretation of sacred texts. As was discussed earlier in the chapter under the section of Islamic fundamentalism, previous interpretations of holy texts, such as the Qur'an, are rejected in favour of what the text “really” says. This also implies introducing religious practices, as found in the Qur'an, to everyday life. In the context of Islamic fundamentalism it is important to remember that sometimes interpretations of the Qur'an are distorted to suit the political agendas of leaders. An example is the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which, as mentioned earlier, discriminated against non-Pashtuns. In other instances more moderate attempts have been made to resacralise ordinary life. An example here is setting up facilities for people to pray at places of work. Clearly thus foundationalism plays an important part in everyday life in the Islamic world.

This, then is the problem which an anti-foundationalist method of enquiry is faced with. Even more disquieting is the fact that it is classed as one of the three themes of postmodernism, which implies that it plays a major part in contemporary political theory. Here it becomes necessary to look at some interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism which have disregarded the importance of foundations and to point out their shortcomings.
2.4.4 Fukuyama’s "end of history" thesis – Western triumphalism without any substantial challenges?

An example of how approaches that do not pay attention to foundations have failed to explain political events in the contemporary world is Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis. This claims that “the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism” (Fukuyama 1989: 3) has taken place and that humankind has reached the endpoint of its “ideological evolution” which means “the universalization of Western liberal democracy is the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989: 4).

Although liberal democracy for the moment only dominates the ideological world, Fukuyama (1989: 4) argues that there are “powerful reasons for believing that it will govern the material world in the long run”. How does Fukuyama see the role of Islamic fundamentalism in the contemporary world? With the neutralisation of fascist and communist challenges to liberal democracy, religion is left as one of its remaining challengers (the other being nationalism), in particular the revival of religious fundamentalism within the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions. This is the result of the broad unhappiness of the “impersonality and spiritual vacuity” associated with liberal consumerist societies. Fukuyama consequently quotes Islam as the only religion offering a political alternative to liberalism and communism in the contemporary world in the form of a theocratic state. This he follows by saying, however, that the doctrine has little appeal for non-Muslims and that “it is hard to believe that the movement will take on any universal significance” (Fukuyama 1989: 14).

Fukuyama ends off his essay by arguing that in a “posthistorical” world, nationalist, ethnic and religious-political conflicts and ideologies still exist, but will ultimately be worn out together with the actors “still stuck in history” responsible for them. The end of history is described as a very sad time, which will mean that “the struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination and idealism will be replaced by economic

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3 Liberalism is characterised by a commitment to the concepts of equality, liberty, individuality and rationality. This involves that everyone should have the right to an equal opportunity in life within the context of an extensive amount of individual liberty, including religious and economic freedom. The rationality element comes in where views in the public domain have to be open to critical scrutiny to test and affirm their validity (Bellamy 1994: 24-25).
calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands” (Fukuyama 1989: 18).

Despite Fukuyama’s optimism, it has become clear that the contemporary world does not show the predominance of Western liberalism without any challenges to it, but that, instead, there is an abundance of people and movements who are very much opposed to it (Euben 1999: 5). This statement of Euben’s could be criticised in so far as Fukuyama does make provision for possible conflict between those states “still in history and those at the end of history” (Fukuyama 1989: 18). He does thus not dismiss the possibility of opposition to liberal democracy, but questions the viability of the challenges posed by religion and nationalism now that fascism and communism have become defunct. Nonetheless, Euben (1999: 4) raises a valid point when she labels as problematic Fukuyama’s support of Western triumphalism and his related omission of important distinctions between, for example, Islam, Islamic fundamentalist ideas and Islamic fundamentalist militarism. Islam, for example, refers to the religion as a whole and is not to be confused with the political ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. The militaristic aspect of Islamic fundamentalism comes in where violence is used by some Islamic fundamentalists to achieve specific goals.

It is important to recognise Fukuyama as part of a broader grouping of post Cold War writers, who represent, according to Barber (1995: 35), the paradigm of Western triumphalism. This view emerged at the end of the Cold War, when US President George Bush proclaimed that the ideas and ideals of “the free world” had triumphed over those of the “evil empire”. The Western Triumphantist approach, more generally, is based on the following assumptions:

1. International behaviour is mainly determined by the internal nature of the states that make up the international system;

2. Liberal democracy has proved that it is superior to other forms of government and has successfully defeated the challenges of authoritarian regimes, for example fascism and communism;

4 Other writers representative of this stream are Welsh of the University of Cape Town, who states that even if one does not accept Fukuyama entirely, one can still recognise the current situation that liberal democracy is not faced by any serious ideological challengers. In future, he argues, debates will mostly centre on the institutional embodiments of liberal democratic principles, what restraints should be placed on market forces and how comprehensive welfare systems should be. Strobe Talbott, wrote in 1995, as adviser to President Clinton, that “democracy brings prosperity to its peoples and peace to his neighbours” (Barber 1999: 37).
The economic, social, political and cultural foundations on which liberal democracy is built, offer the individual and the community, as a whole, greater freedom, security and prosperity;

Liberal democracies compete, but do not fight each other. This is because they realise that cooperation is more profitable than conflict;

Internal barriers keep some states and societies from adopting liberal democracy; and

Although liberal democracies are not aggressive, they have to defend their interests against other types of states.

One can ultimately argue that Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis is not able to explain political practice characterised by a foundationalist nature, as in his view Islamic fundamentalism is merely dismissed as most likely not being able to take on any “universal significance”. Though it has to be taken into account that Fukuyama wrote this essay in 1989, before any of the recent political saliency of Islamic fundamentalism had emerged, it is clear that the notion that religion, in this case Islamic fundamentalism, only poses a limited challenge which will be ultimately defeated, is a rather simplistic one which does not explain the “daring, courage, imagination and idealism” which Islamic fundamentalist ideas currently seem to inspire in a large number of adherents. This is despite Fukuyama’s argument that these qualities are meant to be progressively replaced by “economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands”, inherent in the triumph of liberal democracy.

The lack of ability to account for or explain the foundationalist nature of political practice can be extended to the Western triumphalism approach as a whole. When looking at its general characteristics it becomes evident that the main focus is on the superiority of liberal democracy when compared to other forms of government and it is implied that those states who do not readily embrace it must be faced with certain “internal barriers” that keep them from doing so. Finally, there is an implicit justification for liberal democracies to “defend their interests” against “other” states, using force, if necessary. The US’s recent attack on Iraq, despite being fraught with controversy, may, in this view, be construed as such a “defense".
The tendency to want to “globalise” liberalism as espoused by neo-liberal internationalists (a variant of liberalism identified by Dunne (in Baylis and Smith 1997) virtually identical to the “Western Triumphalism” described above) can be criticised in various ways.

Firstly, neo-liberal theorists, like Fukuyama and one of the main proponents of the Democratic Peace theory, Doyle⁵, are complacent about the extent to which their own society may be characterised as liberal and are prone to overestimate the number of stable liberal democracies in the world. In reality this number is rather limited – only about 24 out of 180 states in the world are liberal democracies, according to Halliday (in Dunne 1997: 156).

Secondly, the defeat of Stalinist-type communism does not mean that liberalism has triumphed over all other ideologies. Social democracy remains important in Northern Europe and non-liberal constitutionalism is a dominant factor in Asia, for example (Dunne 1997: 156). With relevance to this chapter and the dissertation as a whole, one can also mention the increasing popularity of Islamic fundamentalism. In the context of September 11th, “The War on Terrorism” and the continuing unrest linked to Islamic fundamentalist activity; it is evident that liberal democracy has not unequivocally triumphed. As Bellamy (1994: 45) puts it, “(liberals) ignore the significant pockets of dissent from liberal values by nationalist and religious groups…” He also mentions the “liberal incomprehension at the continued appeal of fundamentalist religion”, as liberals apparently overestimate the possibility of fundamentalist views being encompassed into a common framework with liberalism.

Thirdly, Western states have done little to counter the point of view (shared by increasing sections of their own populations) that spreading liberal values is merely a convenient way for promoting Western firms’ commercial interests (Dunne 1997: 156). This underlines the idea of the liberal doctrine being marketed as “superior”, as the “best” possible form of government; but, at the same time, this doctrine being used to mask the related exploitation of local populations, the destruction of the natural environment in the countries in which these Western firms invest and the progressive erosion of local traditions and culture. This

⁵ Doyle is one of the main proponents of the Democratic Peace thesis, which claims that liberal states do not go to war with other liberal states. This does, however, not mean that they no longer engage in conflict with non-democratic states. Doyle had an important influence on Neo-Liberal Internationalists, Fukuyama in particular (Russett, Layne, Spiro & Doyle 1995: 164 – 184).
argument ties in with what has been mentioned in the discussion of the postmodernist reaction to rationalism earlier. With the ever-widening gap between the world’s rich and poor, Bellamy’s (1994: 45) argument that liberalists in favour of spreading liberal democracy overlook “the continuing sources of social tension from deprivation and inequalities arising from a number of structural factors both within and between states” fits in here. This can be related to both the divide between elites living in luxury and their deprived populations in developing countries, as well as the North-South divide.

The final, rather ironic development linked to the spread of economic liberalism and good governance is that this inevitably comes into conflict with the norms of sovereignty and self-determination and more importantly interferes with the relationship between governments and their populations. The result is anything but conducive to modern liberal forms of representative democracy (Dunne 1997: 156).

What these criticisms against the “globalisation” of liberalism suggest, is how this ideology claims to be the inevitable result that all of the world’s cultures will end up with. There seems to be a kind of arrogance here. Difficulties are merely overlooked or swept aside with assumptions that what has worked so well for little more than 24 states in the world, must necessarily be the ideal solution for the rest. Not to be forgotten is the political drive behind exporting the world hegemon’s ideology and, of course, its economic and, lately especially apparent, security interests. Ultimately, however, the Western triumphalism or neo-liberal institutional approach does little to clarify the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in an era when liberalism is meant to have triumphed, and, if not yet completely so, is definitely meant to be on its way to an unquestionable victory.

2.4.5 Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” - The West vs. the Rest

Huntington’s thesis (in Euben 1999: 5) describes Islamic militancy as a clash between “the West and the Rest”, presenting the final evolutionary stage of international conflict. He defines the West in terms of a commitment to “individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state” and argues that often, opposing identities and movements are pitted against it. These can be labelled as “agents of disorder” – “an expression of particularisms and differences over universality and equality”. Huntington argues “this is no less than a clash
of civilisations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian, heritage, our secular present, and the world-wide expansion of both”.

Huntington sums up the reasons for the “clash” between Islam and the West as follows: “The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the US Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West.” (Huntington 1996: 217-218). Huntington’s thesis, according to Euben (1999: 6), captures the prevailing mood in the West, one where Islamic fundamentalism is presented as “the threat to the New World Order”, having replaced the “Red Menace” of Cold War discourse.

What Huntington (1996: 215) depicts as well is the growing Western concern with the “Islamic threat” that has paralleled growing Muslim anti-Westernism. He argues that Islam is seen as a source of nuclear proliferation, terrorism and (when it comes to Europe) unwanted migrants. Also, both Western publics and their leaders share these concerns. He quotes an example which says that 61 percent of a 1994 sample of 35 000 Americans interested in foreign policy said “yes” when asked if the “Islamic revival” posed a threat to US interests in the Middle East. Only 28 percent answered “no” to the question. In the same year when asked to identify critical threats to the United States, 72 percent of the public and 61 percent of foreign policy leaders mentioned “nuclear proliferation”, while 69 percent of the public and 33 percent of leaders said that “international terrorism” was a threat – two issues which Huntington says are widely associated with Islam. Similar concerns were expressed by other Western political leaders, with the secretary general of NATO declaring in 1995 that Islamic fundamentalism was “at least as dangerous as communism” had been to the West and a “very senior member of the Clinton administration” pointing to Islam as the global rival of the West.

Here it becomes important to look at more recent statistics on the matter, especially in the aftermath of September 11th. According to a poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States in 2002, the US public has undergone some major changes in terms of
rising international awareness, concern and activism. In a post September 11\textsuperscript{th} environment, the percentage of members of the US public which sees international terrorism and related “threats” as critical to US vital interests has understandably increased. So, for example, 91\% of Americans view “International terrorism” as a critical threat (as opposed to 84\% in 1998). “Chemical and biological weapons”, arguably linked to Islamic fundamentalism in the public eye, rank second as a critical threat with 86\%, as opposed to 76\% in 1998. In terms of military force to combat terrorism, 87\% (up from 74\% in 1998) favour US air strikes to take out terrorist training camps, 84\% favour ground troops (57\% in 1998) doing the same. (It is important to realise here, however, that 88\% of Americans also support “working through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism and to make sure UN members enforce them”. There is thus not only support for a violent solution to the problem of international terrorism) (Harris Interactive 2002).

Finally, and of crucial importance to this dissertation, is how the American public perceives Islam. According to the poll, there is an increased wariness of Islam. After September 11\textsuperscript{th} 61\% view Islamic fundamentalism as a critical threat to the US’s vital interests (up from 38\% in 1998). 76\% of Americans also feel that after September 11\textsuperscript{th} it has become necessary to restrict the immigration of Muslims and Arabs into the US, while 21\% of Americans view the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks as representative of “the true teachings of Islam “ to a great degree”, 18\% “to some degree”, 17\% “not very much” and 40\% “not at all”. Despite this increasing distrust of Muslims and Arabs, and possibly Islam in general, a large majority of the US public rejects the idea of the “clash of civilisations”. Only 27\% believe that Muslim religious, social and political traditions are incompatible with Western ways and that a conflict between the two civilisations is inevitable. 66\% believe that common ground can be found between the Islamic and Western world and that violent conflict is therefore not inevitable (Harris Interactive 2002). Thus, while Huntington’s statistics are to some extent repeated here, with a substantial percentage of Americans expressing distrust of Islam, a fear of Muslim and Arab migrants and most obviously international terrorism, it is important to note that Huntington’s pessimistic predictions of a clash between Islam and the West are only supported by 27\% of Americans.

Fuller (2003: 145) argues that Huntington’s writings on the “clash of civilisations” identify culture or civilisation as “a key source of future international friction in the coming century”. The key flaw in this thesis, according to Fuller, is that Huntington confuses the vehicle of conflict with the source of conflict. As he puts it,
All societies prefer to ennoble their conflicts through justification at the highest level of moral cause. Thus, few will go to war in the name of capturing territory, destroying a rival, exacting revenging [sic], gaining geopolitical hegemony, or seizing economic assets. Instead, war is waged in the name of Christian values, the proletarian revolution, the master race, the war to end all wars, the free world, the forces of history, manifest destiny, or whatever. The banner raised is not really the actual cause of conflict; it rather springs from quite concrete issues, grievances that are more susceptible to solution that lofty abstract concepts about “clashes of civilisations”.

To find abstract explanations for the causes of conflicts like “clashes of civilisations”, and “Islam versus the West” and “they hate our values” is in a sense a way of conveniently shifting responsibility to primordial forces beyond one’s control. If one cannot take responsibility for a conflict for the reasons implicit in the “clash of civilisations” thesis, this effectively means that the United States would not need to engage in any measure of self-examination of its own responsibilities. Fuller (2003: 146) opposes this notion and argues that in order to understand and deal with sources of conflict it becomes necessary to examine real, concrete, grounded and workable issues on both sides, including psychological legacies. The idea of delving deeply into causes of conflicts, specifically situational factors such as economic and political conditions coupled with ideology, ties in with the dialogic model of interpretation which is be introduced in detail later on in this chapter.

What is striking about Huntington’s arguments in his discussion on “Islam and the West” (1996: 209-218) is the reciprocal distrust the West and the Islamic world bear each other, each being characterised as the “Other” respectively and therefore not open to either mutual understanding or co-operation: “So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilisations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries” (Huntington 1966: 212). This thus evidently presents somewhat of an opposition to Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis where Islamic fundamentalism is depicted as a sort of irritation to Western liberal democracy, not presenting any concrete challenge to it and ultimately doomed to failure. Huntington perceives the “clash” between “Islam and the West” as both inevitable and, more importantly, dangerously so. Again, as with Fukuyama, there is insufficient focus on the foundationalist ideas underlying Islam fundamentalism, with “Islam and the West” merely being pitted against each other as extreme opposites.
The question that now needs to be asked is what these two theses have in common. Euben (1999: 7) says that neither of the two discusses the status of the truth nor the tension between politics and metaphysical conceptions of the good, but that both are attempts at depicting the world “as it is and will be” in a persuasive and realistic way. Fukuyama does so with a certain optimism, fuelled by a belief in the triumph of Western liberal democracy, while Huntington’s is a rather more pessimistic account, based on the inevitable occurrence of conflict between “Islam and the West”. The one takes the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism too lightly, while the other focuses primarily on the inevitable fault line predisposing “Islam and the West” to a conflictual relationship. Euben argues that finally they seem to be “unable to encounter the content of import of such political practices (an example being fundamentalism) in a meaningful way”. This thus ties up with the point raised earlier, where it is stated that contemporary anti-fundamentalist political theory is not able to explain the increasing importance of fundamentalism in contemporary political practice. Another characteristic of both these theses is the idea of religio-political movements being pitted against the West in a relationship of the “particularistic, irrational and archaic” in relation to the “universalistic, rational and modern”. Ultimately political Islam is defined as a “menace” and a threat to “modern, legitimate politics” that needs to be overcome.

The scene has thus been set to explain and justify use of the dialogic model of interpretation, as espoused by Euben. Shortcomings of rationalist approaches to Islamic fundamentalism have been pointed out and the problems of accounts that do not pay attention to the fundamentalist character of contemporary political practice have been explained as well. The need to focus on the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups is central to the dialogic model of interpretation and will now be explained.

2.5 A DIALOGIC MODEL OF INTERPRETATION

2.5.1 Explanation and justification

As argued in detail earlier on, rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism have severe limitations, specifically in terms of their neglect of the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalists. A dialogic model of interpretation is useful in providing a “better” understanding of fundamentalism. Rationalist interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism can help provide an idea of the socio-economic and political conditions prevalent in the case studies which are examined, Algeria, Sudan and South Africa, but more importantly, as is
explained, it is also necessary to look in detail at the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in these states, in order to come to a deeper, less condemnatory understanding of Islamic fundamentalism.

Euben (1999: 36) refers to Heidegger and Gadamer specifically when mentioning the tradition behind the dialogic model of interpretation, though it involves numerous other debates within and about hermeneutics as well. Gadamer (in Euben 1999: 36) argues that language is the basic premise of human existence and that an interpreter will therefore see all objects of interpretation from the point of view of his or her own worldview, beliefs, norms and practices. The notion of a neutral observer or “a point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object” is thus abandoned. This at the same time involves a move away from a positivist epistemology that sees understanding as discovering “the final and objective truth”. Instead, understanding would be the result of a dialogue between two horizons of meaning, neither of which is able to claim a monopoly on what “the truth” consists of. The idea here is to have all participants, in this case the analyst and Islamic fundamentalist groups, enter into a dialogue. The analyst would not “claim” to be in the right from the outset, but, rather, would be open to new interpretations and insights that could be gained through mutual participation in this dialogue.

Habermas (in Dews 2003: 360-361), another postmodernist who could be added here, proposes “communicative reason” instead of pursuing a “totalising critique of reason”. This implies not limiting rationality to “a drive for instrumental calculation and control”, but also making room for the ability of human beings to “raise, respond to and assess validity claims”, for example claims to truth raised in linguistic communication. This ability needs to include identifying oneself with or putting oneself in the place of the interlocutor or “Other”. It is by developing this ability that reflective subjectivity emerges. The idea of communicative reason overrides the assumption that reason is inevitably dominating and exclusionary, because the “rational goal of achieving consensus” depends exactly on recognising what the “Other” claims as potentially more valid than what you yourself claim. Again, thus, the idea prevails of not forming a preconceived notion of the “Other”, based on the idea of the superiority of rationalist enquiry, but of attempting to identify oneself with the “Other” in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of what the “Other” has to say.

Levinas (in Dews 2003: 362-363) argues that our ethical relation to the “Other” implies a sense of boundless responsibility. Simple, naked being for Levinas constitutes the *il y a* (or “there is”) as anonymous, neutral,
oppressive and horrifying. The only way to escape this claustrophobic pressure of being, is by interacting with the “Other”. Only here is it possible to catch a glimpse of the divine. This potential perception of divinity does not, however, mean an embrace of metaphysical foundations or “the elusive trace of the divine [which] is disclosed through our ethical response to the human Other”. Although there is a suggestion of anti-foundationalism here, which, for Euben poses serious problems to enquiry into contemporary political events, because (as explained earlier) many are in fact characterised by a strong foundationalism, what Levinas stresses in particular is the importance of interacting with the “Other” to overcome the “horrifying” reality of mere existence.

What is important here as well, is that the conditions of the dialogue – the participants, the traditions to which they belong, the prejudices, which they bring to the conversation – form part of the claims that are brought forward and mediated. Understanding is thus not seeing things from an external “objective” point of view, but involves a “fusion of horizons”. Gadamer argues that the hermeneutic orientation involves the analyst being “a partner in dialogue with others in the past and present”, discarding a monopoly on truth and at the same time enjoining an openness to other meanings (Euben 1999: 36).

Another characteristic associated with the dialogic model of interpretation is that the analyst needs to acknowledge his or her own prejudices so that “disparate understandings” can ultimately be transformed into “mutually intelligible meanings”. This requires the analyst to be willing to enter into a transformative process where one’s own status and that of the other are continuously renegotiated. This would discard the idea of different cultural practices as locked away in separate boxes of meaning and at the same time challenge the possibility that there is “a transcendent position from which to see the one-to-one correspondence of truth to linguistically naked facts in the world”. A key related idea here as well is that of the “inexhaustibility” of the meaning of texts (Euben 1999: 37).

Very important, as can be seen from the argument above, is thus the idea of acknowledging one’s prejudices, but doing this with the aim of incorporating what the other participant in the dialogue has to say. Prejudices are thus not necessarily limiting, as they can potentially help one continuously adapt one’s point of view as the dialogue progresses. Using the dialogic model of interpretation thus counters the temptation of separating different cultures and their related idea-structures so as to keep them unintelligible to each other, and that of imposing a single, Western-inspired version of the truth on an interpretation of Islamic fundamentalism.
Habermas (in Euben 1999: 39-41), in a critical discussion of Gadamer’s dialogic model of understanding, which reduces social inquiry to a dialogic explication of meaning, points out that one also needs to take into account the ways in which language can distort and conceal, but also express the social, political and economic conditions of life. Language can thus also function as a medium of domination and social power. Furthermore, according to Habermas, what is important, is that the dialogic model of interpretation makes possible both evaluation and critique. The dialogic model of interpretation thus, in this way, does not endanger objectivity, but rather challenges a particular positivist standard of objectivity, which advocates a final, transcendent notion of the truth. What one finds when employing the dialogic model of interpretation is a standard of compatibility that exists between the interpreter and the understandings of the participants. This includes the possibility of being distanced sufficiently from the participants’ own meanings to allow room for critique of how they understand their own ideas and, more specifically, for the possibility that participants can misunderstand or misrepresent aspects of their own behaviour.

It is this element of the dialogic model of interpretation that prevents it from being too uncritical and accepting about what the participants have to say about their own ideas. This would, in a way, present the opposite of a Western rationalist-inspired condemnation of Islamic fundamentalism, as there would be a somewhat too unconditional acceptance of the ideas of Islamic fundamentalists.

A final cautionary note is necessary when discussing the dialogic model of interpretation. Euben (1999: 41) states that these “dialogues” across cultures often take place under conditions which are characterised by substantial levels of inequality – between “centre” and “periphery”, for example. This is exacerbated by the fact that modernisation and globalisation, processes originating in the West, often confront peripheral or post-colonial states not with greater parity, but with higher levels of inequality. One thus needs to attend to the “cultural, economic, and political inequalities that shape the conditions and terms of the dialogue” when entering into cross-cultural conversation. The dialogic model of interpretation is not invulnerable to the inequalities of power of the participants, but is useful in the sense that it is open to and aware of these. “If it is imperative to seek understanding, and to seek the best understanding possible, we are paradoxically perhaps, best served by methods attentive to the finitude of our capacity to understand complex matrixes of meaning in part constituted by systematic inequalities of power”.

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The dialogic model of interpretation makes it possible to differentiate between “better” and “worse” interpretations. “Better” interpretations involve the possibility of attaining a “fusion of horizons” which would make room for the fundamentalists to voice their opinions as well. Instead of advocating a final, objective, positivist-inspired notion of the truth, “better” interpretations would be aware of their own conditionality and open to distortions that may be the result of substantial inequality in the postcolonial world. Finally, “better” interpretations focus on an explanation of the subject’s meanings, while still allowing the interpreter to distance him or herself from the subjects to such an extent so as to be able to criticise their accounts of their own experiences (Euben 1999: 44-45).

Having established the usefulness of the dialogic model of interpretation in analysing the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalists, it now becomes important to point out how rationalist interpretations may prove useful when using the dialogic model of interpretation, despite the criticisms levelled against them above.

Firstly, rationalist analyses are useful in that they express the power of a dominant discourse by assuming that there is an objective reality outside the subject of Islamic fundamentalism. From here the concept can be both described and at the same time infused with certain characteristics (for example, “irrationality” or “backwardness”) and thus, in a way, created. Secondly, rationalist analyses of Islamic fundamentalism are useful in that they help illustrate the socio-economic conditions which may lead to the emergence of discontent and disaffection, often accompanying the growth of revolutionary movements. Modernisation, urbanisation, industrialisation, rising unemployment, yet increased levels of illiteracy at the same time do partially explain the “urge to challenge prevailing conditions and the powers and processes that produced them”. It is crucial to understand, however, that merely painting a picture of the political, economic and social conditions in Middle Eastern countries is not sufficient to explain why Islamic fundamentalists are drawn to a fundamentalist ideas rather than any other set of ideas (Euben 1999: 47).

The dialogic model of interpretation is adopted in the political analysis of the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa. Reasons for use of this model have been given above. The aim is to move away from rationalist approaches to Islamic fundamentalism, which tend to reduce Islamic fundamentalism to a reflex reaction against modernity and place it in irrational opposition to the rational West. Rather, this dissertation attempts to come to a “better” understanding of Islamic fundamentalism in the states which are examined by means of analysing the ideologies underlying Islamic
fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa, but also by means of incorporating some of the useful elements of rationalist analysis, for example taking into account structural factors: political, cultural and socio-economic conditions. Structural factors are significant in terms of their impact on the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa. This implies predominant use of the dialogic model of interpretation, but without disregarding what rationalist analyses of Islamic fundamentalism can contribute.

2.5.2 Practical implementation of the dialogic model of interpretation – some ideas

In terms of practical implementation considerations, Gray (1995) proposes some ideas. He argues that a more modest, but also more hopeful prospect than revolts against modernity (eg Nazism or religious fundamentalism), would be political forms arising in truly post-Enlightenment cultures to shelter and express diversity. This would imply allowing different cultures, worldviews and ways of life to co-exist in peace and harmony (Gray 1995: 155). It is important here to give up certain conceptions of morality, science and religion (not as a vessel for a particular way of life, but rather as the bearer of truths possessing universal authority). The same goes for the humanist conception of humankind as a privileged site of truth (Gray 1995: 155). This ties in with the dialogic model of interpretation in the sense that this approach would necessitate co-operation between different cultural groups and, more importantly, for Western societies to renounce any claims to superiority. This is a rather idealistic notion, however and far from realisation.

Gray (1995: 156) elaborates on the above idea by saying that liberal states need to learn how to live with non-liberal states. In the same way, liberal and non-liberal cultural forms need to start co-existing peacefully and harmoniously. Nothing in liberal practice is “central, foundational or indispensable” and liberal life contains nothing that is fixed or exempt from questioning. Liberal policies and projects such as the policy of global free trade embodied in the Global Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) project need to be reconsidered and rejected because they attempt to dissolve “distinctive ways of life” in the context of “the all-consuming commensurability and homogeneity of the global market”. Again this is rather optimistic, considering the fact that it is the world’s industrialising states who set up the GATT agreement in the first place. It is highly questionable whether they would be willing to give up the benefits they are gaining through these agreements, for example additional markets for their surplus goods, in favour of allowing different cultures to live together in harmony and preventing their traditional ways of life from being
destroyed. Gray’s (1995: 180) optimism becomes apparent in his argument that the universalising project of Western cultures must be surrendered and replaced by a willingness to share the earth with cultures which are distinctly different from the Western one. The aim here is not to achieve absolute sameness, but an expression of openness to cultural difference.

A similarly idealistic suggestion comes from Iranian president Mohammad Khatami and his proposal for a “Dialogue among Civilisations.” He refers to “necessity and significance of dialogue” and what is necessary to facilitate this: “rejection of force, promotion of understanding cultural, economic and political fields, and strengthening of the foundations of liberty, justice and human rights.” Also, “if humanity at the threshold of the new century and millennium devotes all efforts to institutionalise dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding, it would leave an invaluable legacy for the benefit of future generations” (Khatami 2001: 18). He elaborates on this by talking about the need to “bring hearts together” and the necessity for “minds to be brought closer together”. In order to achieve this, it is necessary for the “great thinkers of the world to make a special effort to understand the main concepts in the thoughts of others and then to communicate these to their own people” (Khatami 2001: 26).

The overly idealistic and optimistic nature of these suggestion is all too clear. Wonderful as it sounds to bring people’s hearts and minds together, there is little evidence in the world that such efforts are currently being made or will be made in the short to long term. How does President Khatami envisage this “dialogue among civilisations?” Some of the suggestions he makes is to introduce reform into the United Nations Security Council, combat terrorism (which he identifies as a particular prerogative for the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran), rid the world of “the nightmare of nuclear war and weapons of mass destruction” and halt the “systematic devouring of nature”, instead preserving the environment, which, “as the common natural heritage of [hu]mankind, constituted the most important priority of the coming century” (Khatami 2001: 18-21). He also suggests the formation of a World Culture, which ought not to overlook the characteristics and requirements of native local cultures and, more importantly, should not aim to impose itself on them (Khatami 2001: 32). This is different from the Western culture which is penetrating more and more traditionally non-Western cultures, but, despite substantial attempts to the contrary, is not succeeding in making its norms and values part of these cultures, as is pointed out earlier in the chapter. Another important point raised by President Khatami (2001: 33) is the possibility of aiming at “meta-historical discourse”, which would attempt to illuminate such eternal human questions as the ultimate meaning of life
and death, or goodness and evil. “Without a discussion of fundamentals, and by simply confining dialogue to superficial issues” not much progress would be made.

When superficial issues masquerade as “real”, “urgent” and “essential”, and no agreement - or at least mutual understanding – concerning what is truly fundamental is obtained among partners to dialogue, misunderstanding and confusion are proliferated at the cost of empathy and compassion.

This, of course, underlines one of Euben’s main prerogatives, as is pointed out earlier, the criticism of anti-foundationalism and the need to make room for a model that will be able to deal with increasingly foundationalist political practice as found in contemporary life. The fact remains, however, that important and relevant as such a “dialogue of civilisations” may be to promote peace, it will be difficult to realise and will require more than large amounts of idealism to achieve.

Having justified the use of the dialogic model of interpretation, it becomes necessary to situate influential Islamic fundamentalist worldviews in the global historical context from which they have arisen and to afterwards describe them, because of their influence on the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa. In this way, a more complete picture will emerge of the difficulties facing Muslim populations in the contemporary world as a whole, as well as those in the states to be discussed.

2.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER TWO

Chapter two deals with the theoretical framework behind the dissertation. A broad discussion of Islamic fundamentalism is entered into in order to provide a range of possible understandings of the concept. Fundamentalisms, including Islamic fundamentalism, have arisen alongside the development of modernity in all major faiths, and show similar characteristics across the world’s major religions. These include a disenchantment with modernity, which has not delivered what was expected of it, as well as a certain degree of fear that the secular establishment wants to wipe out religion. While there is no doubt that the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism is a force to be reckoned with, use of the term itself is controversial and disputed. Nonetheless, according to Euben (1999), it is the best term to use. Also, she argues that it is relatively clear-cut as it has a political, rather than exclusively religious, dimension, claims to have the authoritative reading of what the Quran really says, and has developed alongside, rather than merely in reaction to, modernity. Islamic fundamentalism has also taken on many forms in practice, including the
notoriously dictatorial Taliban regime in Afghanistan, but also less radical Islamic fundamentalist initiatives at socio-economic upliftment in Islamic countries.

When wanting to justify the dialogic model of interpretation, it first becomes important to criticise rival ways of approaching the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism. While rationalist analyses may certainly prove helpful in terms of looking at structural (political, social and economic) factors in Islamic societies, they nonetheless lack the crucially important focus on Islamic fundamentalist ideas, which distinguishes the dialogic model of interpretation. In addition, rationalist analysts often claim to be neutral and to stand outside the situation they wish to examine, thereby ultimately producing rather one-sided accounts and reducing Islamic fundamentalism to no more than an irrational reflex reaction and by-product to modernity. Postmodernism has provided a critical challenge to rationalism, in terms of criticising the existence of a monopoly on the truth, but at the same time shows the shortcoming of not according enough importance to the foundationalism or need to strive for a higher metaphysical good in society that characterises many Islamic societies.

The dialogic model of interpretation aims to combine the advantages that rationalist analyses hold with the postmodern rejection of a single, universalist version of the truth. The idea is that the analyst enter into the situation he/she aims to analyse and to engage in dialogue with the participants involved, rather than claim to stand outside it. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of criticising the participants’ ideological justifications. There have been suggestions about how to realise the dialogic model of interpretation, in terms of fostering understanding and co-operation between world’s different countries. While these are noble and certainly worth striving for, they are nonetheless highly idealistic and probably unattainable in the short term.