CHAPTER 3: ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter commences with the history of the relationship between the world of Islam and the West. The once dominant and powerful Islamic civilisation became increasingly subject to Western influence and this development eventually culminated in Muslim states becoming colonies of the West. Attention is paid to how Muslims perceive and explain their loss of global political and intellectual influence, as well as to several other causes which may have contributed to the decline of the Islamic world. This discussion is then taken further in order to illustrate how the contemporary relationship between the world of Islam and the West is perceived by commentators from both sides, what the shortcomings and dangers of these views are and what needs to be done in order to improve relations. The aim is to link the historical discussion of the interaction between the West and Muslim states to the present and to deal with how Muslims view their history and their relationship with the West, but also how the West has viewed and treated Muslims.

Next, the effects of the imposition of secularist and nationalist ideologies on the newly independent Muslim states are discussed. The secularisation process promoted by the post-independence regimes throughout the Muslim world has not resulted in development, but instead in the transplantation of alien Western institutions, laws and procedures that have eroded the traditional system of Islam and have created a serious identity crisis which Muslims all over the world suffer. In addition, many Muslim states are characterised by economic and political instability.

The focus then turns to Islamic revivalism, a phenomenon which is characterised by Muslim populations’ increased interest in Islam as a political system, and, simultaneously, Muslim governments’ realisation that invoking Islamic symbols and values in political programmes, though not necessarily intending to establish an Islamic system, is a promising way of gaining popular support. Islam is thus closely linked to both political aspirations of the future (the establishment of an Islamic system) and political necessities of the present (ensuring support for current regimes). This is followed by a discussion of four categories of revivalists: Islamic fundamentalists, Islamic traditionalists, Islamic modernists and Islamic pragmatists in order to clarify differences between the different forms of Islamic political thought. Particular attention is paid to Islamic fundamentalists, as it is Islamic fundamentalism that is dealt with in the following chapters.
when it comes to analysing the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa.

3.2 WESTERN HEGEMONY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

3.2.1 The rise of the West

The Muslim world’s and impressive history of territorial and intellectual expansion, spanned more than 1000 years. Fuller (2003: 1) cites the Israeli scholar Kramer:

In the year 1000, the Middle East was the crucible of world civilisation. One could not lay claim to true learning if one did not know Arabic... An Islamic empire, established by conquest four centuries earlier, had spawned an Islamic civilisation, maintained by the free will of the world’s most creative and enterprising spirits... [T]here could be no doubt that the dynasties of Islam represented the political, military, and economic superpowers of the day... The supremely urbane civilisation cultivated genius. Had there been Nobel prizes in 1000, they would have gone almost exclusively to Moslems.

By the ninth century, the world of Islam had attained impressive proportions, ranging from the Indus River in the east to the Atlas Mountains in the west. Christian Europe saw the consistent infiltration of Islam into its territories: The Muslim world held Spain, Southern France, a part of Italy, as well as the islands of Crete, Corsica, Sicily and Sardinia. The Islamic world also led the world in science, art, mathematics and military might. Both intellectually and politically, its supremacy was at this point unequalled (Husain 1995: 158).

No other culture in the history of the world equals Islamic civilisation in terms of the duration of its extensive influence and the geographically diverse and vast region of the world it covered. As Fuller (2003: 2) puts it: “This civilisation formed the heart of the world order far longer than Western civilisation has, and over a far broader region.” Fuller’s statement merits a closer look at what lay behind this prolonged achievement of Islamic civilisation. For many Muslims it is unnecessary to speculate about the reasons for their predecessors’ success. Islamic civilisation created an enduring system of belief, governance and social order, incorporating a substantial variety of regions, cultures and peoples, because of the strength of Islam which lies in the fact that it is the message of God as revealed to the last of His prophets: Muhammad. Islam, as religion, thus becomes important in Muslim history as a source of “deep sustenance, support, and
guidance” and its spiritual inspiration and related vision of societal organisation can be seen as a reason for its permanent acceptance by such a diversity of cultures and peoples over such a long period of time. In fact, rarely in history has any Muslim culture been supplanted by another religious culture. To sum up then, even Westerners, however they may view Islam, cannot ignore the fact that it, in both a political and social sense, has prevailed over a greater part of the world, for a longer period of time and has included more diverse cultures than any other religion. This impressive historical record suggests that Islamic civilisation represents a powerful cultural force, capable of meeting the social, ethical and moral needs of diverse cultures for long periods of time under differing historical and regional conditions (Fuller 2003: 2-4).

However, despite their impressive record of dominance in several important spheres, Muslims were unprepared for a shift in the balance of power and creativity away from them, something that started around the 15th century. “The rise of the West is unparalleled in world history”, Armstrong states (2000: 141). For centuries the countries north of the Alps had been viewed as backward. By the 12th and 13th centuries these European countries had more or less caught up with the dominant cultures of the time, and by the 16th century a process of major transformation and development had begun that would result in the West’s domination of the rest of the world. This unique developmental achievement would even surpass the position the Islamic empire held during the ninth century (Armstrong 2000: 141).

At the beginning of the 18th century several parts of the Islamic world had become subjected to the impact of the economic and military challenge of an emerging modernising West. A key development that took place was a reversal in the power relationship between the Islamic world and the West. Whereas the former had held an offensive, expansive position vis-à-vis the West, it was now forced to take on a defensive posture. Islam’s dominant role in world history was replaced by that of Christian Europe, which “as experiencing a prolonged period of outstanding creativity which was to prove historically decisive for all the world” (Esposito 1991: 42).

3.2.2 Colonisation of the Islamic world

European modernisation would impact seriously on the Islamic world. The constant progress made by the modernised states and their industrialised economies, in both Europe and progressively also its American colonies, meant that there would have to be continual expansion in order to tap new markets, as those in the
home countries had been saturated. A process of colonisation began, with the aim of drawing agrarian societies into Europe’s commercial network (Armstrong 2000: 143). By the late 19th and early 20th centuries European colonialist penetration of the Islamic world extended from Morocco to Indonesia⁶. A military and economic presence often resulted in foreign political domination or rule: the French in North, West and Equatorial Africa, as well as the Levant (now Lebanon and Syria); the British in Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, the Arabian Gulf and the Indian subcontinent; the Dutch in South-East Asia. Even where Muslims retained self-rule, as in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, they were nonetheless forced into a defensive posture against Western political and economic expansionism (Esposito 1991: 42).

European interest in the Middle East was until the 20th century mainly strategic. Throughout the 19th century the “Eastern question” had involved Russia and Britain competing for influence in the region and control over communications at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The end of World War One saw a dramatic shift of focus in terms of the “Eastern question”. An important development was the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire: its heartland became Turkey, while its former Arab dominions were divided into seven separate states or colonial entities. Two of these new entities (Lebanon and Syria) were now ruled by France, three (Iraq, Jordan and Palestine) by Britain, and two (Saudi Arabia and North Yemen) became independent Arab monarchies (Halliday 1996: 23). According to Armstrong (2000: 148) this was seen as an outrage or, more strongly, as a betrayal, as the European powers had promised independence to the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Another factor that contributed strongly to the Muslims’ feeling that they had been betrayed was the Arab provinces’ support for the Allies in the First World War against the Ottoman Empire which had sided with Germany.

Halliday (1996: 23) explains that with the division of the Ottoman Empire, a redefinition of the strategic rivalry in the region took place. Just prior to World War One substantial quantities of oil had been discovered in and near the Persian Gulf, which meant that the Middle East, which had thus far been of geo-strategic importance, now took on an intrinsic economic significance. Also Western Europe would increasingly have to deal with rival powers in the form of the US, which had entered the Middle Eastern arena for the first time (in the early stages mainly in the form of oil companies) and Communist Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

⁶ More specifically: France established itself as a colonial power in Algeria (1830), Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912); Italy in Libya (1911) and Britain in Egypt (1882), Sudan (1898), in South Arabia (1839) and in the string of coastal Persian gulf states (late nineteenth century to 1914) (Halliday 1995: 22-23).
As the Middle East took on more and more significance, one Muslim country after another came under Western control. The colonised countries consequently provided raw materials for export to the European states which had colonised them, and would receive cheap manufactured Western goods in return, usually ruining the prospects of a successful local industry (Husain 1995: 158). Modernisation along Western lines would also take place; financial and commercial life would be transformed to conform to a Western system, and at least some of the “natives” needed to familiarise themselves with the modern ideas and ethos that they had now become permanently exposed to (Armstrong 2000: 144). Husain (1995: 158) also mentions the introduction of Western secular education and explains how the indigenous elite, simultaneously impressed and antagonised by European power, both emulated and cooperated with their colonial masters. Embracing Westernisation and secularisation, they internalised Western attitudes, lifestyles and ideologies and were thus poised to take power following independence.

The introduction of modernisation in the Muslim world is dealt with by Esposito (1991: 43) who discusses how the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1808-39) and his vassal in Egypt Muhammad (Mehmet) Ali (1805-49) tried to emulate the West in the 19th century. It is interesting to note that these leaders went to great lengths to reform their societies along Western lines, even though, at this stage, their territories were not yet under colonial rule. This underlines their fervent desire to selectively adopt modern developments in the hope that this would result in material improvements. It is important to note here that early 19th-century modernisation efforts were not extended to all areas of society, but had their primary impact on the military-bureaucratic institutions of the state. Change was adopted by the state and implemented by a small political elite, which was responding to the external threat of European expansionism and not to internal, societal pressures for social change. Watt (1968: 116) adds an interesting point in that he says that often, but in especially in the case of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, “a show was made of taking over European institutions in order to impress on European statesmen that Islamic countries were rapidly transforming themselves into ‘modern’ states.”

This initial piecemeal modernisation introduced by Mahmud II was later developed and systematised by his son Abdulmejid through an ambitious series of reforms known collectively as the Tanzimat (reorganisations). State-supported, modern, European-inspired institutions soon challenged their Islamic counterparts: new secular schools were established to train not only the military but a new bureaucratic
corps; land reforms were introduced, as well as new legal codes and courts to regulate civil, commercial and penal affairs. A significant characteristic of these reforms was the increasing secularisation that the Islamic state was becoming subject to: religion was separated from the institutions and functions of the state. Ultimately, however, the effects of modern reforms, both in the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere in the Muslim world, did not filter through to all sections of the local populations. The Islamic basis of Muslim states had been altered by a progressive secularisation of society, in which the ideology, law and institutions of the state were no longer of an Islamic nature but were indebted to imported models from the West. This resulted in a bifurcation of Muslim society, which was evident in both its educational, as well as its legal system. The coexistence of traditional religious and modern secular schools, each with its own constituency, trained two classes with divergent perceptions: a Westernised elite minority and a more traditional, Islamically oriented majority (Esposito 1991: 44-46).

Armstrong (2000: 145) makes a similar point. She argues that the process of Westernisation was not embraced by the entire populations of agrarian colonies, who, instead, experienced it as “invasive, disturbing and alien”. Modernisation took place only superficially, as, what had taken Europe three centuries to develop, had to be achieved at top speed in the colonies. Whereas all classes of European society had had the opportunity to deal with modern ideas, usually only the upper classes in the colonies would receive a Western education and come to terms with the dynamics of modernity. A division thus took place in society, between those who had had the opportunity to embrace modernisation and those who had been left behind to continue functioning according to an agrarian way of life (this can be seen to include not only long-established modes of production, but also a traditional way of thinking and adherence to a fixed set of cultural practices). Those who had been excluded from the modernisation process suddenly had to deal with seeing their country become totally alien to them; suddenly they were ruled according to secular foreign law codes, which hitherto they had been unfamiliar with.

It is here where it becomes necessary to consider the impact that such drastic changes had on the populations of Muslim countries. What had been the causes for the decline of the world of Islam? How would Muslims react to these; how would they explain them? What would be the impact of modernisation and the introduction of modern secular institutions on the political, economic and social conditions in Muslim states and how has this impacted on conditions in these states today? Most importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, what would be the impact of modernisation on Islamic political thinkers, specifically
fundamentalist thinkers? All of these questions are pertinent and need to be addressed in order to set the scene for a thorough and successful analysis of the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa, which is what the next chapters deal with.

Muslims started posing several questions about what it was that had led to the decline of the Islamic world and why it is that Western civilisation that had once lagged so far behind the world of Islam had managed to not only take over but also dominate it. These questions are not only of relevance to the period immediately following the West’s infiltration of the Islamic world (as has been discussed so far), but are also important in light of the West’s ever-increasing cultural, economic and political hegemony today, as personified by the US and its values, and Islamic thinkers’ and activists’ reactions to this (as is dealt with in detail later on). For a number of Islamic thinkers the moral and spiritual decline of Muslim societies is the primary source of the problem. Fuller (2003: 4) elaborates on this statement and the additional complex issues that it raises:

What is it that Islam provided that has been lost? Precisely what element of a straying from Islam was most responsible for that subsequent decline? Lack of rightly guided – that is good – leadership? Poor governance? Withering of just societies? Loss of moral values by the masses of the population? Weakness stemming from loss of direction? Even if these failures are acknowledged, specifically what mistakes were committed? Does it simply boil down to non-observance of the Sharia (Islamic law)? Or a broader loss of faith (Iman)?

The above gives some insight into an Islamic perspective on the decline of the world of Islam. The crucial role of Islam in peoples’ political, social and spiritual environment is central to an understanding of such a perspective. If Muslims saw the success and strength of Islam as the reason for the dominance of Islamic civilisation in the past, in terms of both Islam’s religious and social capacity, it follows that a decline in Islamic civilisation would be linked to a view that Muslims have somehow strayed from the path of Islam. As Fuller (2003: 2) puts it: “Thus many Muslims attribute the past achievements and durability of Islamic civilisation to the very message and implementation of Islam itself. Logically then, any apparent straying from the faith may be perceived as a direct source of decline and failure.” It is important to take into consideration this particular viewpoint, as one may posit the argument that if the strength and influence of Islam went hand in hand with the successes of Islamic civilisation in the past from the point of view of Muslims, a revival of Islamic values may be necessary to re-invigorate the position of Muslim countries (vis-à-vis the West) in the world today. The precepts of Islamic political thinkers with a range of differing ideas and proposals on the subject are discussed in detail later on.
Fuller (2003: 5-7) also posits a few other significant causal factors, other than moral and spiritual decline, that may be viewed as reasons for the loss of power of the Islamic world. The first of these factors is what he refers to as “the death of Islamic intellectual vigour and curiosity”, which resulted in a decline of creative thinking in the fields of Islamic theology, philosophy, science and technology. This also meant that gradually it became forbidden to critically scrutinise Islam’s own texts and sources of authority, as had been possible in earlier centuries. The stagnation of Muslim intellectual vigour became evident in the collapse of Muslim sciences and even a general passivity toward later scientific and technological development in the West, until it became impossible to ignore the increasing importance and challenge of Western civilisation. Even in the face of the West’s challenge, most Muslim reformers primarily saw the West as the origin and producer of technology, without coming to grips with other crucial elements of Western civilisation, such as democracy and liberal values, that made it all function. Noorani (2002: 33) makes an interesting point: “Muslims would do well to reflect why Europe, which had borrowed a lot from them, forged ahead, while Muslim states stagnated.” It is also important to note that historically the intellectual stagnation experienced by the world of Islam preceded Western colonialism and thus made resistance to it very difficult. The fact that the Muslim world, which had once been at the forefront of intellectual and scientific achievements, stagnated and soon lagged far behind the West partially explains not only why Islamic civilisation decreased in importance, but also why it was unable to meet the challenges of the West, namely colonialism and modernisation.

In terms of external factors, Fuller (2003: 5) also argues that recently in Muslim history it has been colonialism which has been a factor in impeding the development of Muslim states across the world. As already discussed earlier, traditional institutions were replaced by secular alternatives, which, however, did not always successfully take hold in Muslim societies. Muslim states are still concerned with external domination today, even if it no longer takes the form of control and domination by the colonial powers.

Another factor that can be linked to the decline of the Muslim world is environmental degradation. Diamond (in Fuller 2003: 6) argues that over the centuries the Fertile Crescent increasingly started showing signs of deforestation, dessication, as well as a decreased availability of animal and natural resources. The argument goes that although Western Europe contributed little to world civilisation until the late Middle Ages, its fertile land and emerging creative and intellectual vigour led to the eventual emergence of a new and powerful West. European civilisation was founded to a substantial extent on the successes and knowledge of past societies, such as those of the Islamic world, whose environments were no longer as productive. It also
has to be taken into consideration that Europe was rich in coal, hydropower, timber and iron ore at the time of the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which were essential for the industrialisation process and crucial for Western political and economic development, to take hold. The Middle East, on the other hand, was marked by a growing aridity, and was at this point in time not aware of its considerable oil riches which would only be discovered later on under European colonial control.

A number of factors thus contributed to the weakening of the Muslim world’s dominant position in the world. In the eyes of Muslims these may predominantly take the form of a straying from the path of Islam, which had for centuries been closely linked to the political and intellectual successes of Islamic civilisation. In addition, a number of other causes, both internal and external, seem to have played a role in making the Islamic world more vulnerable to penetration and ultimately colonisation by the West. It now becomes important to give a detailed analysis of the feelings that Muslims harboured towards the West and vice-versa and how these attitudes impact on the relationship between the Muslim world and the West today.

As a result of the colonisation process, the Islamic world was quickly and permanently reduced (like virtually all of the developing world) to a dependent bloc by the Western European powers. The colonists openly showed hostility towards Muslims, as they, being so focused on their modern ethos, were appalled by what they perceived as the backwardness, inefficiency and corruption of Muslim society (Armstrong 2000: 146). Noorani (2002: 29) cites Minou Reeves’ work *Muhammad in Europe* on the hostile attitude of European colonists toward Islam. Reeves (in Noorani 2002: 29) describes this as follows:

> On his arrival in Jerusalem [1917] General Allenby made a historic remark which indicated that the long-standing animosity between Christendom and Islam was not over and that the crusading mentality was still alive. Speaking in public, he announced that the crusades were now finally completed [because of Britain’s successful occupation of Palestine]. And three years later in 1920, when French troops occupied Damascus, their commander marched up to Saladin’s tomb in the Great Mosque and cried: “*Nous revenons, Saladin*” (We are back, Saladin). The deep-seated contempt for Islam had long displayed itself amongst the French colonialists as a sense of vindictiveness towards the Muslim populations of the former Ottoman Empire.

Another example which illustrates the colonists hostility towards the inhabitants of the Muslim countries they occupied is the opinion of British Foreign Secretary A.J. Balfour on the subject of British occupation of Palestine: “The four Great Powers are *committed* to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires
and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit the ancient land”. This statement needs to be considered in light of the fact that there were only 60,000 Jews in Palestine at the time, as opposed to the 750,000 Muslims, mostly Arabs, who lived there. Reeves takes Western colonial dictates and Zionism as being the factors that triggered the modern conflict between Muslims and Jews. In this way Islam was radicalised and severed from its “mother-faiths” Judaism and Christianity, as had happened in the Medieval Ages.

Westerners assumed that European culture had always been progressive, but lacked the historical perspective to see that all that was “wrong” with Muslim society was that it was pre-modern and agrarian, exactly what Western Europe had been a few centuries earlier. The colonists also often assumed that Westerners were inherently and racially superior to “orientals” and expressed this contemptuous notion in a variety of ways. As is to be expected, this treatment of the Muslim populations by their Western European colonisers had serious consequences. Western people are often at a loss to understand the hostility and anger that many Muslims feel for the Western culture, a culture which Westerners associate with liberation and empowerment. This very same culture is, however, associated with very different ideas by the Muslim populations on which it was forcefully imposed (Armstrong 2000: 146). Thus, while for Western Europeans and US citizens industrialisation and its related developments resulted in a betterment of economic conditions and political liberties overall, for Muslim people the imposition of secular Western political and economic institutions on their Islamic culture was seen as a threat to religion, morality, tradition. It also did not, as is seen later on, bring political and economic empowerment to Muslim states as the local elites had hoped. This was because, as was the case with most former colonies, colonial powers would not allow for the colonised countries to become too developed under colonial rule; the idea was to benefit from them, not create potential competitors.

The Muslim response is not bizarre or eccentric when seen in light of the fact that because the Islamic world was so widespread and strategically placed, it was the first to be subjected, in a determined and systematic way, to the colonisation process in the Middle East, India, Arabia, Malaya and a significant part of Africa. The Muslim reaction to the modernisation process imposed by the West was the paradigmic reaction shown by other colonised populations too (Armstrong 2000: 146).

3.2.3 “Islam” and the “West”

Here it becomes necessary to critically examine how the relationship between the West and the Muslim world is viewed by writers and thinkers from both sides and also how these perceptions impact on the
general public in Europe, the US and Muslim countries respectively, in order to link the historical discussion of the interaction between the West and the Muslim world, which has taken place so far, to the present. Such a discussion is also important because it sets the scene for the section on Islamic revivalism to follow, pointing to some important elements that characterise the relationship between the West and the Muslim world.

Halliday (2002: 14) states that whether the discussion has been about relations between Muslim states and non-Muslim countries, or relations between non-Muslims and Muslims within Western countries, the tendency on both sides (with some exceptions) has been one of alarmism and simplification. A simplification by Westerners of Muslims involves many obvious issues: terrorism (thereby assuming that most Muslims are terrorists or most terrorists are Muslims); the degree of aggressiveness found in the Muslim world; the extent to which Muslims are responsible for this and the unwillingness of Muslims to allow for diversity, debate and respect for human rights. The sensationalist media in the West expounds such ideas, as do writers who are aware of the current anxieties of the reading public: Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” thesis (which has been dealt with in the second chapter of this dissertation) is a case in point. Muslim simplification of Westerners involves, on the one hand, a stereotyping of the West, on the other, the assertion of a unitary identity for all Muslims, and of a unitary interpretation of text and culture. Fuller (2003: 146) adds to the list of Western grievances: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Israel’s security, oil and strategic instability. Western imperialism, an American-dominated hegemonic world order, Western interventionism, US indifference to democracy in the Arab world and indiscriminate US support for Israel are items added to the list of Muslim grievances.

Western denigration of Islam goes back centuries and is closely linked to the threat which Western Europe saw in the erstwhile dominance and superiority of Islamic civilisation for hundreds of years. Reeves (in Noorani 2002: 30) points out how “over the course of no less than 13 centuries a stubbornly biased and consistently negative outlook had persisted, permeating deep levels of European consciousness… Churchmen, historians, orientalists, biographers, philosophers, dramatists, poets and politicians alike had sought to attribute to Islam and especially to Muhammad fanatical and disreputable, even demonic characteristics”. As was pointed out earlier already, this attitude was carried over to the period of colonialisation by the West of the Islamic world, which Western European leaders and officials generally saw as a continuation of the Crusades (a series of seven had been launched against Muslim rulers from 1095
to 1270), a rightful assertion of Western prowess *vis-à-vis* the Islamic world. Though the persistently derogatory view of Islam has to some degree been tempered by more balanced pictures of Muhammad and his religion which have begun to appear in Western writings, entrenched in the minds of many Westerners are images of a radical, anti-Western and violent Islam that bears the characteristics of age-old prejudices.

Furthermore, there are several problems with the notion that “Islam” is the enemy of the West. As Halliday (1996: 107) puts it, the image of an “Islamic threat” presupposes that those people who are “Islamic”, in some general religious and cultural sense, adhere to beliefs and policies that are strictly described as “Islamist” or “fundamentalist”. This also suggests that most Muslims seek to impose a political programme, supposedly derived from their religion, on their societies. The fact that most Muslims are not supporters of fundamentalist movements is obscured, and the conditions under which some Muslims do turn to fundamentalism are overlooked. Thus, everything is far too simplistically ascribed to Islam and its general influence. As with other political myths the fact that certain ideas about them are propagated gives them a distinct reality – “for those they are designed to mobilise, but also for those against whom they are directed” (Halliday 1996: 107).

Noorani (2002: 36) elaborates on this point by referring to instances where reputed Western scholars of Islam, as opposed to the sensationalist media or public opinion, have equated everything that has to do with the Muslim world with “Islam”. He quotes Said’s view on this issue (in Noorani 2002: 36) in the latter’s *Covering Islam*:

Why is it that a whole range of political, cultural, social, and even economic events has often seemed reducible in so Pavlovian a way to “Islam”? What is it about “Islam” that provokes so quick and unrestrained a response? In what way do “Islam” and the Islamic world differ for Westerners from, say, the rest of the Third World and, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union?

One author who deserves special notice in terms of projecting the stereotypical image of Islam and Muslims as menacing militant fundamentalists is Lewis, a British writer who has dealt with the subject matter of the Arabs and Islam for over half a century and has become a renowned academic in both Britain, and more recently, the US. His essay “The Roots of Muslim Rage” is according to Noorani (2002: 38) “a crude polemic devoid of historical truth, rational argument, or human wisdom”, which “attempts to characterise Muslims as one terrifyingly collective person enraged at an outside world that has disturbed his almost primeval calm and unchallenged rule”. This is dangerous as it presents the essentially peaceful and tolerant
Islamic faith as a “subversive”, “dangerous” phenomenon out to seek revenge against Western domination and all Muslims as equally “enraged” at having been exposed to the modern world and not being able to deal with it. To once more emphasise this point: Säid noted that in the works he studied “Islam” was not only dealt with inaccurately, but there was also an abundance of “expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial, hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility”. All of this was present in what is generally presumed to be a fair, balanced and responsible coverage of Islam (Noorani 2002: 39).

Another reason why conflating “Islam” with all the issues and problems in Muslim countries is problematic is because although a substantial percentage of the grievances voiced by Muslims in any society may relate directly to religious matters (on issues such as the school curriculum, dress and diet), much of what is presented as the Islamic critique of the West has little or nothing to do with religion. Support for Palestine, denunciations of Western hegemony in the oil market, solidarity with Iraq, opposition to Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, denunciations of cultural imperialism and protests at double standards on human rights are all part of “Muslim” protests against the West, but are not necessarily religious in content, or specific to the Muslim world. The Chinese condemnation of Western human rights interference, on the grounds that it violates sovereignty, mirrors the Iranian one (Halliday 2002: 25). Again then, reducing issues in Muslim countries that somehow involve the West to a predominantly religious-inspired, fanatical “Islamic threat” obscures the existence of concrete political, economic and social grievances that Muslims may have. If all Muslim complaints against the practices of Western governments are classed as religion-inspired, it becomes much easier for the latter to (pretend to) be ignorant of why many Muslims find Western policies in the Middle East upsetting.

Also, the analysis within the West of attitudes toward Islam and Islamic tradition cannot be divorced from what is going on within Muslim societies themselves. It is crucial not to deny those Muslims who are suffering human rights abuses at the hands of other Muslims the right to protest. (The victims may range from political prisoners to trade unionists, journalists and women, as well as members of those ethnic groups within Muslim countries who are denied recognition and group rights.) “Islamophobia”, Halliday (2002: 26) argues, can easily be used to silence critics of national states and elites, because from this premise there can only be one Muslim voice, which would preclude the possibility of Muslims protesting against the practices of other Muslims.
On the other side of the coin, it is also important to consider the dangers of overly simplified views that some Muslims hold of the West, what Fuller (2003: 149) terms the *jihadist* view of the West and which ties in closely with the radicalist branch of the Islamic fundamentalist contribution to Islamic revivalism which is discussed in later on. The modern *jihadist* ideology reinterprets the concept of *jihad* against unbelief as central, indeed essential to the practice of Islam. (It is important to note that *jihad* is divided into greater and lesser variants. The former comprises a greater struggle within oneself against evil impulses that must be overcome to lead a pious life, while the latter represents the defence of the Muslim community against non-Muslims, or an external war against unbelief (*kufr*) under various conditions.) The *jihadist* ideology places a great deal of emphasis on lesser *jihad* and also seeks the reestablishment of a unified *umma*. The division of the *umma* into states that has taken place directly contravenes the intent of Islam and is hence illegitimate. In this view, according to Fuller, the struggle between Islam and the West is viewed as implacable; it genuinely embraces the concept “clash of civilisations” and rejects all efforts at compromise and reconciliation as being no more than attempts to compromise, divide and weaken Islam.

Halliday (1996: 110) supports this statement by citing Khomeini, Ghannouchi (exiled from Tunisia), al-Turabi (in Sudan) and al-Madani (in Algeria) as examples of Islamic fundamentalists who make use of much the same themes that are found in anti-Islamic propaganda in the West. These include a rejection of Western values of secularism, democracy, the rule of civil law, equality between men and women, and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Ironically enough, certain Muslims in their rhetoric willingly reinforce the stereotypes some Western writers are so quick to enforce on the Islamic world. The idea of a perennial conflict with the “West”, which could revive with the end of the Cold War, is not only an invention of European or American demagogues. In fact, some Muslims, at the end of the Cold War, affirmed that they would indeed replace Bolshevism as the major challenge to the West and that they would do so more effectively, because their challenge is inspired by God. In January 1989 Ayatollah Khomeini wrote an open letter to the USSR’s leader Gorbachev, urging him to abandon materialism and engage in a serious study of Islam.

Similarly, the idea that there exists a “historically determined, essential “Islam””, which is supposedly able to account for all that Muslims say, do, and should say and should do” is not only a Western invention”. Ultimately then, myths and stereotypes about Islam do not only originate from Western fear and prejudice, but are also strongly propagated by certain Muslims.
An issue which is crucial to the understanding of why many Muslims feel resentment and anger toward the West is, as Fuller (2003: 152) puts it, “the problem of the creation of Israel”. It is important to keep in mind the political sensitivity surrounding the subject and that any discussion of the realities of the situation could easily be read as a subtle argument against the existence of Israel. Fuller acknowledges the right of all people to a homeland, but also argues that this recognition does not preclude the necessity for a thorough examination of the question of Israel and how this has impacted on Muslim perceptions of the West. For Muslims the creation of Israel was exceptional and extraordinary: never before in modern times had Europeans (European Jews) consciously created an ideology, then a permanent colony and finally established an independent Western-style state on territory with primarily non-European inhabitants. (Similar cases like that of South Africa go back several hundred years). The impact of the creation of Israel was not only limited to a single event, but has ultimately resulted in the most prevalent and ongoing international conflict since the Second World War. Also, this was not merely a matter of a state having been established by Europeans on lands under Muslim rule. The new Israeli state, in defending itself against immediate Arab attack, kept enlarging its territory, in the process driving out large numbers of Palestinians from their homes, thereby creating a substantial refugee problem which most Arab states have done little to alleviate.

Fuller (2003: 153) sums up the situation as follows:

In simplest terms, the Arab world has not let this aspect of the colonial period fade into past memory; Israel for most Arabs is a living symbol and product of the British colonial order that facilitated the creation of Israel while Arab states were still under colonial control. The continued existence of the Palestinian question as an open wound helps maintain anti-Western views at a higher and fresher level than any other political issue in the world, continuously humiliating Arabs in their military impotence and their sense that the Palestinians have been deprived of basic justice.

While an eventual peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict would remove some of Muslim grievances towards the Jews, such a possibility seems far removed at present. An additional factor which makes the question of Israel a major cause for Muslim anger at the West is the considerable power of the pro-Israeli lobby and the Christian right in US politics, which heightens paranoia among Muslims about Israel’s ability to influence or manipulate all US policy toward the region.
Fuller (2003: 156-159) also mentions other factors which are contributing toward an anti-Western and, more specifically, anti-American feeling in the Muslim countries. One of these is the essential role that the Middle East plays in supplying the US (and other countries) with oil. The US uses this to justify its military presence in the Middle East (with the aim of facilitating its broader strategic purposes) under the pretext of "safeguarding the free flow of oil". The result has been long-term regional hostility – the military presence in Saudi Arabia was, for example, the immediate cause of Osama bin Laden’s resentment toward the US.

Another problematic issue is that of terrorism, which will remain a constant source of tension between the US and the Muslim world for the foreseeable future, especially as the US led “War Against Terrorism” strengthens anti-American sentiments among Muslim populations, possibly leading to further acts of terrorism.

What has become evident from the discussion above is that the relationship between the Muslim world and the West is problematic not only in terms of perceptions from quarters on both sides, but also in terms of the causes for the tensions and animosity between the two sides. Halliday (1996: 131) argues that in practice Western Europe would have to develop a two-sided, balanced policy towards issues enclosed in the term “Islam”. There needs to be a greater awareness and condemnation of racist attitudes and general ethnic-religious prejudice that Muslim immigrants in Western European societies and the inhabitants of Muslim countries are often subjected to. Furthermore, it should be recognised that Western Europe has often permitted and indulged the oppression of Islamic peoples, whether in Palestine or Bosnia. Over and above these changes in behaviour it becomes essential for the West to develop a long-term policy of economic interaction with Muslim countries in order to help them develop.

Halliday (1996: 129) also explains in more detail the challenges that face economic and social development. The capital generated by the flow of oil revenues, if channelled along productive lines, could be of great benefit. What is problematic is that many Islamic countries have a record of diverting economic resources, however generated, into consumption or the purchase of arms for various forms of "security". Also, many of these countries have social and economic structures that undermine economic development. An example is the rise of export-oriented industrialisation which has led no Middle Eastern country (with the exceptions of Turkey and Tunisia) to greater economic development. In fact, if oil revenues are factored out, the economic record of Muslim states is one of the poorest in the world, matched only by parts of Africa. Muslim states also do not offer the same attractions to potential investors when compared to South-East
Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The lesson that the Islamic world thus needs to learn is that in order for it to be successfully integrated into the wider non-Islamic four-fifths of the world, it will have to engage in economic competition, as opposed to a recourse to competition for military supremacy.

Fuller (2003: 163) adds another perspective. He argues that Muslims need to believe that their states have an important role to play in “some greater global process” rather than be the victims or objects of its whims. US unilateralism, which Fuller views as a major part of the problem, would have to be addressed, as otherwise a continuing sense of Muslim “world impotence” may very well lead to increasing violence and terrorism that would exacerbate an already serious gap. An example of an issue that needs particular attention is the Israel-Palestine situation, which requires the US making a serious effort to bring forth a just settlement, something which up to now has not been the case. He suggests that in this respect it would be necessary for the US to engage not only with friendly pro-US autocrats, but to also direct their attention at Muslim social leaders who enjoy widespread respect within their society even though, or possibly because, they are outside the ruling circles of those societies. Democratisation is also of crucial importance. Again, the US is well positioned to play an important part here but has so far been quite unwilling to do so for fear of the election of anti-US voices. Democratisation would involve far more than merely free and fair elections. It would mean for example more open societies to break the “totalitarian hold of the state over the life of its citizens”. It also involves encouragement of freedom of speech, media, association and the rule the law. At the level of Muslim state society and economy there is a great deal the US could do – education being a key field that needs development and where the US has already had much experience in its work through AID (Agency for International Development). The curricula could be broadened and high quality state-sponsored or private secular education (now often poor or limited) could be supported. This is of course a highly sensitive cultural area in which unpopular broader US regional policies can lead to a high degree of defensiveness among Muslim educators although they know that a problem exists. The US would be wise to work on these projects through other Western countries or international institutions that carry far less baggage.

Now that the relationship between the Muslim world and the West has been dealt with to some extent, it becomes important to move on to the conditions that prevail in Islamic states and the extent to which these have been effected by the failure of secularist ideologies which were largely implemented after the Muslim countries gained independence. In this way the basis will be laid for a thorough discussion of Islamic revivalism, which deals with the multifaceted responses from Muslims to the growing influence from the
Western world and the related modernisation they became exposed to. For the purposes of this dissertation it is essential to come to a balanced, well-rounded understanding of the different strands of Islamic political thought (to counter the notion that a hate-filled, revenge-seeking anti-Western world view characterises all of Islamic revivalism) and, most importantly, to thoroughly examine what is termed as Islamic fundamentalism. This in turn will set the scene for the analysis of the ideologies of the Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa which follows in subsequent chapters.

3.2.4 The failure of secular ideologies

After the final dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire had taken place and the Caliphate had been abolished, disappointed Muslims ended up with one tyrant replacing another. Even the Western-favouring elite in the colonies became increasingly disappointed with the colonial rulers and despaired of their own stagnation. Anti-colonial sentiment started spreading throughout the Muslim world. After the Second World War had taken place, the West, which had been exhausted both spiritually and economically, started with the process of decolonisation, hoping to detach itself from its “increasingly troublesome and strife-filled colonial possessions” (Husain 1995: 159). The idea of nationalism proved useful in the anti-colonialism struggle, as the colonialist powers found it difficult to object against the Muslim colonies’ right to “national self-determination”, especially in the post World War Two context. Once independence was attained, however, nationalism gave little guidance for how the respective newly-independent Muslim states were to consequently develop (Watt 1968: 117).

Instead of promoting the unity Muslim post-independence leaders had hoped for, nationalism further divided the Muslim world. In the interests of realpolitik, Muslim leaders often placed the interests of their own states before those of the umma and failed to come to the aid of fellow Muslims in other parts of the world: the starving populations of Ethiopia and Somalia, for example (Husain 1995: 161). The question of nationalism also proved problematic in the sense that it was difficult to suddenly create a national spirit, as some of the new states had been created in such a way, that tension among their citizens was inevitable. Sudan, for example, was made up of a predominantly Christian southern part, with the north being Muslim. A common Sudanese nationalism was therefore difficult to conceive, especially as Muslims had been used to define their identity in religious terms. In other states, such as Syria, Egypt or Iraq, nationalism would be followed by the elite, but not by the more conservative masses. In Iran, the Pahlavis’ nationalism was directly hostile
to Islam, as it tried to cut the country’s links with Shiism and, instead, based itself on the ancient Persian culture of the pre-Islamic period (Armstrong 2000: 159-160).

Nationalism and secularism coincided in the Western ideology of secular nationalism, usually with a socialist tinge to it, that most Third World states, including Muslim states, adopted after gaining independence. Although the first generation of independent leaders had often tactically co-operated with religious forces during the national liberation struggle, they were themselves heavily influenced by Western values, many of them having been schooled in the Western metropole. The Western model of state building thus formed the basis for the newly independent states. Unfortunately, however, independence in most cases failed to solve many of the key national problems, creating new ones instead, which were characterised by the authoritarianism, incompetence, corruption and internal strife of the new regimes. These new regimes, generally based on secular nationalism, invariably looked to the transformative and even coercive power of the state for fulfilment of their agenda. The abstract all-European state, not the people, thus became the symbol and representative of the nation (Fuller 2003: 69-70). The aim of post-independence regimes was thus to transform the predominantly rural, traditional and, as they saw it, “backward” Muslim world into modern urban nation states by pursuing modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation initiatives (Husain 1995: 160). From the above it becomes evident that the Muslim leaders in the immediate post-independence era approached the process of governing their newly formed Muslim countries from a Western perspective. This, of course, would prove problematic, as the Western colonial regimes and their policies had been unpopular, so that carrying on in the same vein was bound to eventually cause instability.

Predominant characteristics of these newly independent Muslim states were poverty and political fragility. In the midst of Cold War politics, those Muslim states who needed aid and were hostile to atheist communism became allies of the anti-socialist, anti-communist Western bloc. A much smaller number of Muslim states looked to the socialist camp, whereas the rest became non-aligned. This created dependence on foreign aid, drew the Muslim world into geopolitical conflicts and also divided its leaders on a national and ideological basis (Husain 1995: 159-160). Thus, despite the colonial era having ended, dependence both on political ideas and economic aid persisted. Much like in other former colonies, outside the Muslim world, the post independence period initiated an era of unresolved political and economic crises, which in several cases contributed to political instability or even civil unrest.
Within a few decades the credibility and legitimacy of the post-independence governments had waned considerably. Even though some Muslim countries did experience rapid economic growth, this did not significantly benefit the impoverished majority, as any economic gains have almost exclusively been to the advantage of the wealthy elite. Muslim leaders merely adopted Western ideology and industry rather than adapting it to the particular needs of their respective populations. Similarly, the modernisation process, which took place very rapidly, did not allow for sufficient economic, political and social development to take place⁷ (Husain 1995: 161).

A significant post-independence promise which Muslim leaders failed to keep was that of implementing liberal parliamentary democracy. Instead, most regimes in the Muslim world are authoritarian and dictatorial, some to the extent of their countries' former colonial regimes (Husain 1995: 161). One of the reasons for the failure of parliamentary democracy was the presence of a patron-client system in most newly independent Islamic states, which not only undermined the functioning of democratic institutions and processes, but also resulted in political and socio-economic inequality. Here follows a description of the functioning of a patron-client network. Most Islamic countries adopted democracy in the form of liberal constitutions and parliamentary systems of government, after having achieved full or partial independence. This democracy, however, was not based on the emergence of a strong middle class, nor did it result from pressures exerted by trade unions and the peasantry. Instead, liberalism in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Indonesia was run by the upper classes consisting of, amongst others, large merchants, absentee landlords, urban lawyers and civil servants tied to commercial interests. As a result, a system of patronage prevailed where the majority of the population was treated as an anonymous conglomeration of clients. A system of patronage is characterised by a vast network of power exerted by political bosses, who pay little attention to what constitutions or liberal laws have to say and thereby implicitly also violate the existence of citizens' legally protected rights. This means that the civil service, as well as the economy and organs of the state, are reduced to mere extensions of informal power bases found in urban quarters and village communities, as well as at regional level. The client is drawn towards the patron and hopes to receive

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⁷ Development, as opposed to modernisation, includes the relative welfare of a state’s population. In the West, development was able to take place as modernisation has benefited a growing middle class. In the Muslim world, however, only the elite has benefited economically, whereas the masses still languish in underdevelopment. Political development refers to the formation of political institutions to improve popular participation in government and allow for political competitors. Political development also signifies the capacity of government to both sustain and adapt to the pressures of modernisation and to direct the course and rate of economic, social and political change. Modernisation has undermined and overwhelmed existing political institutions in most Muslim countries, and though political development is usually expected to go hand in hand with Western secularisation, the latter is often labelled as the major cause of underdevelopment (Husain 1995: 163-164).
certain favours, like being admitted to an educational institution, being appointed at a city firm or bank or getting a loan from a financial company. In return the patron demands unswerving loyalty, electoral support and gratitude. This results in a relationship of inequality and insidious coercion, where the client is continuously expected to offer renewable services in return for benefits and rewards whose realisation depends on the whims and moods of the patron (Choueiri 1997: 47-48).

As the liberal regimes failed to tackle the political, economic, cultural and defensive problems Islamic societies were faced with, parliamentary democracy crumbled as a vehicle for national development. A system gradually emerged where various parties, associations, clubs and professional institutions were formed which started espousing the new ideologies of socialism and nationalism. They hoped that these would bring the solutions parliamentary democracy, partly as a result of the debilitating patron-client network it was restricted by, had not been able to provide. These parties had clear social and economic programmes and, interestingly, drew a large percentage of their membership from the armed forces which had risen in importance during this crucial period between 1919 and 1950 (Choueiri 1997: 49-50).

As already explained above, however, these ideologies also failed to bring development and progress to Muslim states. Muslim leaders never made good their post-independence promise of genuine independence and sovereignty either. Modernisation reinforced dependency on the West, rather than breaking it (Husain 1995: 161). Armstrong (2000: 145) raises an important point in this regard. She mentions the fact that Western societies had also found it difficult to adjust to the modernisation process. For almost 400 they had been characterised by revolutions, reigns of terror, wars of religion, genocide, the destruction of the environment, substantial social upheavals, exploitation in the factories, spiritual malaise and profound anomie in the urban areas. These “side-effects” of modernity characterise developing countries today, culminating in an extremely difficult passage to modernity for them. Though this is what Western and developing states have in common, namely difficulties on the way to modernising their societies, there is a fundamental difference in the “spirit of modernity” that took hold in the West, as opposed to the one characterising developing states. Whereas in Europe and America modernisation went hand in hand with innovation and autonomy, in the developing world modernity has meant a loss of independence and national autonomy. Instead of adopting a culture of innovation and technology, developing countries can only modernise by imitating the West, which by this stage is so far advanced that catching up with it is a near impossibility. Also, since the modernising process has not been the same, it is unlikely that the final product of modernity will look the same in developing countries as it does in the West.

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It is perhaps relevant to elaborate on these points. The loss of independence and national autonomy was a result of the colonisation process. Entire populations became subjugated to foreign rule and were instructed to modernise, whilst being restructured according to, what was to them, an alien political system. What is important to remember here, and what has already been touched on, is that these colonies were never meant to develop to such an extent to challenge the colonisers politically or economically. They were established merely as suppliers of raw materials and consumers of goods that the industries in the colonising states were no longer able to sell to their already saturated markets. Hence a relationship of both political and economic dependency developed, with the “mother countries” taking good care that the colonies only developed to such an extent as would serve the industrialised world’s purposes. From this then follows the inability of the colonies’ industries to develop a culture of innovation, partly because of being centuries behind the Western process of modernisation, but also because of facing competition in the form of cheap imports from the colonising states’ industries. This becomes evident when looking at some development figures in Muslim countries in terms of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) which is calculated every year for each country, as discussed in Ahsan (2002: 183-185). HDI is an aggregate value of life expectancy, adult literacy, mean years of schooling and per capita income. The findings for the Muslim countries are not encouraging. According to the Human Development Report 1998 as many as 40 out of 50 Muslim countries had a lower value of HDI compared to the world’s average. The report also shows that the four countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Sierra Leone) which were at the bottom of the list of 174 countries belong to the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). The World Bank’s statistics indicate that out of 50 Muslims countries, 24 were in placed in the “low income” category, 13 in the “lower middle income” category and seven were counted as “upper middle income” countries. Only five small Muslim states (Brunei, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) fell into the category of “high income” countries. It is estimated that dependency on foreign loans in disproportionately high in Muslim countries and the proportion of debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is nearly double that of developing countries in general. This indicator highlights how vulnerable Muslim countries are with regard to the interest rate and exchange rate mechanisms, especially in a globalising world of narrow economic linkages. The above demonstrates how the past development experience of Muslim countries has failed to inaugurate a new era of substantial growth and social welfare.

The secularisation process promoted by the post-independence regimes throughout the Muslim world has thus not resulted in development, but instead in the transplantation of alien Western institutions, laws and
procedures that have eroded the traditional system of Islam and have created a serious identity crisis which Muslims all over the world suffer. One of the reasons for this crisis is the inherent clash between the umma and nationalism. The term umma refers to “the nation or brotherhood of Muslims”. This means that all Muslims are “brothers and sisters”, regardless of history, region, culture, colour, language or socio-economic and political status. A Muslim’s identity in terms of the umma thus goes much further than the boundaries of a single state and is based on religious affiliation. Nationalism on the other hand attempts to engender solidarity amongst different groups living within the territorial boundaries of a single state. The problem comes in with the demand that both the notions of umma and nationalism exact from Muslims: both demand the prime loyalty of their followers, as both are linked to people’s sense of group identity and loyalty due to shared heritage (Husain 1995: 166). Muslims thus face a dilemma. To whom they should profess loyalty to in terms of their identity: their state, based on the call for nationalism, or the global religious community of Muslims, based on the precept of the umma? This would naturally be a difficult and confusing decision to make as both the concepts umma and nationalism demand 100 percent dedication from those who adhere to either. Favouring loyalty towards the umma over one’s country would mean compromising a sense of belonging to a specific nationality and sharing this with one’s fellow citizens, whereas choosing to be loyal in a nationalistic sense would mean compromising one’s spiritual and religious identity.

A point that ties in here is the perceived conflict between ethnicity and Islam in the Middle East, which Voll (1982: 280) elaborates on. The Middle Eastern countries have often been described as a mosaic of peoples and cultures where the smaller units maintain special identities while being integrated into a larger social framework, the state. Because of the universal implications and aspirations of the Islamic message, Islam is often considered as an opponent of ethnicity, though Voll argues that the relationship is more complex than that. For most major ethnic groups in the Islamic world, religion is one of the key features in the definition of a special ethnic identity. In this way, no Kurd, Malay, Azeri, Turk or member of any of the many groups would envisage a definition of their special identity that would exclude Islam. A conflict does not take place between Islam and ethnic loyalty, but rather between the latter and differing identifications and interpretations of Islam, as expressed by different rulers. When Kurds were opposing the Khomeini regime in Iran, this was because they were opposing a particular form and interpretation of Islam, not Islam as a whole. They remained vigorously Islamic at the same time and their faith continued to play an important role in the assertion of their special ethnic identity. Islam thus forms a very important part of Muslims’ identity, no matter which ethnic group they belong to, or, to take it one step further, which state they live in. Such a strong religious identity would explain the disenchantment Muslims felt at the lack of delivery of the post-
independence rulers and their nationalist agenda. It would also explain why Muslims would consequently turn to Islam: in the hope that this would provide solutions to problems of development that the secularist ideology had failed to resolve. As Voll (1982: 282) puts it: “What [many] Muslims want[ed] [was] a faith and programmes that [did] not sacrifice their fundamental Islamic identity to a secularising modernisation nor adhere to old forms so that an authentic modernisation [was] impossible.” A balance between the two is what has been searched for especially by Islamic modernists in the context of Islamic revivalism which is discussed in detail below.

In conclusion then, Islam’s glorious political and cultural past was reversed by European colonial rule, yet political independence had also not significantly improved political and socio-economic conditions in Muslim countries. European colonialism was replaced by American neo-colonialism, which manifests itself in America’s foreign policies, military presence and multinational companies. Also, as already touched on above, political leaders have failed to establish a legitimate, effective public order and to effectively address the profound socio-economic inequalities in terms of wealth and class in most Muslim countries. For the religiously oriented the problem had always been evident: a departure from the path of Islam would have to be doomed to failure. The disillusionment with the post-independence era proved most unsettling for those Western-oriented elites and intellectuals who had embraced the West both as an ally and a model for modern development and whose loyalty was increasingly facing challenges such as the establishment of Israel, continued massive American economic and military aid for Israel, support for regimes like that of the shah of Iran, as well as the failures of Muslim governments. The complete and decisive nature of the Arab defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967 shattered faith and confidence in the West and Arab nationalism. This defeat was the most vivid confirmation, in Muslim eyes and before the world, of their political and military impotence (Esposito 1991: 154-155).

As Westernisation and secularisation have disappointed, Islam as a solution has become increasingly attractive to the Muslim masses, while Islam revivalism has become the focus of opposition to regimes in Muslim states: “The self-criticism and disillusionment with the West has been accompanied by an increased emphasis on the need for greater self-reliance, a desire to reclaim one’s past and to root individual and national self-identity more indigenously, to find pride and strength in an Islamic past and cultural tradition that had once been a dominant world civilisation” is how Esposito (1991: 155) puts it. Many Muslim leaders have been well aware of the increasing popularity of Islam and have made use of Islamic rhetoric and
symbolism in domestic and foreign policy to bolster wavering support. This has backfired somewhat as Islamic revivalism has been legitimised, secularisation programmes have been undermined and many Muslim leaders are perceived as hypocrites and opportunists not to be trusted, rather than as the devout “born-again Muslims” they present themselves as (Husain 1995: 162).

The year 1973 proved decisive in that Muslims believed that their fortunes were finally changing. The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and the Arab oil boycott became major sources of Muslim pride. For Arabs, the ability and success of the Egyptian forces in the 1973 October war against Israel were all decisive even if the final victory was thwarted by massive American assistance to Israel. The war and the “victory” were both placed in an Islamic context, as Islamic symbols and slogans were emphasised. For many the “victory”, coupled with the oil boycott’s demonstration of Arab economic power, instilled a new sense of pride and meant a renewed commitment to their Islamic identity. The return of power and wealth, which had been lost during the colonial period, seemed a sign from God and a revival of Islamic ascendency (Esposito 1991: 155).

3.3 ISLAMIC REVIVALISM

3.3.1 A discussion of Islamic revivalism

The global revival of Islamic revivalism (also known as political Islam) is easily detectable in the modern world. At times it is reactionary, at times revolutionary or even reformist. Always, however, it is prominent and has become an influential force in international relations, which the West cannot afford to ignore, to discount or to misunderstand. The media and certain governments’ sensationalist approach to the most radical, militant and reactionary aspects of Islamic revivalism, usually represented by its fundamentalist branch, has led to the demonisation of Islamic revivalism as a whole, though it also contains forms that are not essentially adverse to the West. The West seems to equate political Islam with an inherently anti-Western fundamentalism and narrow-minded fanaticism that must be contained, neutralised and, if possible, eradicated. While all fundamentalists are necessarily concerned with the revival of Islam, not all thinkers concerned with this revival are fundamentalists. (Husain 1995: 1).
An Islamic revival can be defined as “the reawakening of interest in Islamic symbols, ideas and ideals subsequent to a period of relative dormancy”. Dessouki (in Husain 1995: 4) defines Islamic resurgence as:

An increasing political activism in the name of Islam by governments and opposition groups alike...Islamic groups have assumed a more assertive posture and projected themselves in many Arab and Islamic countries as contenders for public allegiance and political loyalty...Thus, Islamic resurgence refers to the increasing prominence and politicisation of Islamic ideologies and symbols in Muslim societies and in the public life of Muslim individuals.

Two elements of these definitions can be elaborated on. Firstly, it is important to understand the narrow link between Islam and politics. A way of explaining this link would be by understanding Islam as “a comprehensive scheme for ordering human life”, while politics is “an indispensable instrument to secure universal compliance with that scheme”. Religion as a mere spiritual influence on its followers is therefore not sufficient; it is necessary to realise the precepts of religion in everyday political life. This does not mean that all political attitudes and institutions in Muslim states have had religious sanctions; often the reverse has been true. For the greater part of Islamic history, Muslim leaders have merely observed the Sharia to the extent that it would legitimise their power in the eyes of the faithful. Another way in which the link between Islam and politics becomes obvious is in the definition of politics as “the art of living and working with others”. Four of the five pillars of Islam: prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage contribute substantially towards promoting group solidarity amongst its followers. Also, when looking at politics as “a struggle for power”, it becomes clear that Islam can be linked to this definition too. It is never content with merely exposing its ideals, but constantly seeks to implement them. Power is an essential means to achieve this. Thus, if Muslims live under a regime that is hostile to Islam, they should work to overthrow it, only accepting a government that is devoted or at least favourable to Islam. This ties in with what Muslims view as the most important of their set of “collective duties”: “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil”.

Finally, if politics is considered in terms of the questions “Who should rule?” and “Why should we obey the

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8 In this dissertation, the term “Islamic revival” is explored as a gradual response to Western influences in the Islamic world, starting with the writings of Islamic political thinkers in the late eighteenth century. Although Islamic revivalists have perhaps had a particularly striking impact on the world in the last few decades, one needs to see this as part of the historic development of an Islamic awareness and response to the West. One also has to take into account that Islamic resurgence is maybe all the more pertinent today, as the improved communication and technology systems, which developed as part of the globalisation process, have facilitated the spread of ideas and the ability to influence and communicate with other. If one wants to gain a through understanding of political Islam and, specifically, for the purposes of this dissertation, fundamentalism, it is not feasible to only focus on the last thirty years of Islamic resurgence and ignore the important foundations that were laid in the decades before.
rulers?" it is clear that Muslims would have to pose these questions constantly, especially when subjugated to alien rulers, as has often been the case during the past four centuries (Enayat 1982: 1-2).

From the points made above, one would expect Muslims to be both politically active and assertive. This, for most of their history, has not been the case, however, as Muslims have seldom benefited from the freedoms of speech, assembly and action under their often repressive regimes. There is also a methodological reason why independent political thought was hampered for many centuries. Traditionally, politics was rarely studied in isolation from other disciplines. Problems such as the nature of the state, the varieties of government, the qualifications and limitations of the rulers and the rights of the ruled were all usually discussed within the framework of jurisprudence and theology, all within the unassailability of the Sharia. Only as European military, political, economic and cultural encroachments started infiltrating the Muslim world, did Muslim elites start writing separate works which dealt specifically with Islam’s political side (Enayat 1982: 2-3). This then illustrates a second element in the definitions of Islamic revival or resurgence given by Husain (1995) above, that of “the reawakening of interest in Islamic symbols, ideas and ideals subsequent to a period of relative dormancy”. It is thus important to realise that a part of the powerful influence of Islamic revivalist movements lies in the fact that they came in response to disturbing changes that had taken place in the Islamic world, as a result of the ever-increasing Western presence.

Manifestations of the Islamic revival include an increasing public interest in and support for an Islamic system. This has been accompanied by the formation of grass roots or populist Islamic movements involving certain segments of Muslim populations and students and government-sponsored Islamic programmes that reassert religion as a primary ideological force. These programmes are introduced for a variety of reasons ranging from the government’s sincere religious beliefs, to a need to acquire funds from rich Muslim countries (Husain 1995: 4).

The overall tendency thus seems to point to Muslim populations’ increased interest in Islam as a political system, and, simultaneously, Muslim governments’ realisation that invoking Islamic symbols and values in political programmes, though not necessarily intending to establish an Islamic system, is a promising way of gaining popular support. Islam is thus closely linked to both political aspirations of the future (the establishment of an Islamic system) and political necessities of the present (ensuring support for current regimes).
Since the 1970s, the Islamic revival has shown five additional prominent features. Firstly, Islam has spread from homes, masjids (mosques) and madrasahs (Islamic schools) into the mainstream of the socio-cultural, legal, economic and political spheres of modern day Muslim states. The majority of Islamic revivalists (except the Islamic pragmatists) have stressed the observance of the five faraidh or pillars of Islam: shahdah (belief in one god), salat (prayer rituals), saum (Ramadan fasting), zakat (giving alms to the poor) and haj (making a religious pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina). They have also focused on modesty in dress for all, the hijab (veil) for women and, wherever possible, the segregation of the sexes. The Islamic fundamentalists, traditionalists and modernists within these movements have pressured their respective governments to ban alcohol, gambling, nightclubs, prostitution, pornography and other corrupting influences. They have also demanded the formulation of an Islamic constitution and the implementation of the Sharia, the comprehensive and divine Islamic law, which includes severe penalties for a broad range of crimes. As noted before, governments, in response to these trends, have often made a point of displaying their Islamic credentials by, for example, constructing and funding more mosques and madrasahs (Islamic schools). An increased number of Muslims of all walks of life have also attended Friday prayer services and made the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (Husain 1995: 10). As Esposito (1991: 155) puts it, there has been an increasing need to “return to Islam” in order to restore a lost identity, moral purpose and character. The discussion above also ties in with the belief that religion is integral to politics and society because Islam is both religion and government.

Secondly, there has been widespread discussion and debate of Islamic issues in the mass media, which has led to the publication of many books and articles on Islamic theology, history, jurisprudence, culture and civilisation. Various attempts have also been made to reformulate and revise Islamic theory and practice to be relevant to the contemporary era. Islamic modernists, especially, have been concerned with this through ijima (consensus) and ijtihad (independent reasoning and judgement). Ijima involves the ulama (learned theologians) and Islamic experts of various schools of thought making important information available to the public so that an enlightened consensus can result from informed public opinion. Ijtihad requires mujtahids (ulama who practise ijtihad) to provide relevant solutions to contemporary problems (Husain 1995: 10). Modernist efforts to reconcile Islam and modernity are discussed in more extensive detail later on.

Thirdly, there has been an emphasis on Islam’s focus on socio-economic equality and justice, because of the considerable socio-economic disparity between the affluent elite and the impoverished masses in Muslim
countries (Husain 1995: 10). This may well have been in reaction to the political and economic mismanagement of many regimes in Muslim countries, which has been a major contributing factor to the current desperate situation of large parts of Muslim populations all over the world.

Fourthly, while the relevance of the religious (Islamic) approach to solving contemporary problems has been asserted, Islamic revivalists have also criticised the dominant materialist values from the West. The inappropriateness of transplanted, imported Western models of political, social and economic development has been recognised. There has also been a need to get rid of Western political and cultural domination, which fosters secularism, materialism spiritual bankruptcy (Esposito 1991: 155). Secularism, for example, has been denounced by Islamic fundamentalists and traditionalists as “un-Islamic”, because it relegates God to the private sphere of people’s lives and, by implication, excludes him from the state’s political, economic and socio-cultural spheres. Where many revivalists have been keen to accept modern scientific methods and technology from the outside world, they adamantly reject whatever may be “un-Islamic” or harmful to the umma (Husain 1995: 10). As has been touched on earlier, Islam and politics are inextricably linked and relegating Islam to the private sphere as no more than a spiritual influence for people has often been unpopular with Muslim populations. Atatürk, the ruler of Turkey, for example, took the secularist experiment to an extreme, compared with other Arab states. He closed down all the madrasahs, suppressed the Sufi orders and made it compulsory for men and women to wear modern Western clothes. This did not mean that Islam in Turkey disappeared; it merely went underground (Armstrong 2000: 158).

Finally, Islamic revivalist movements have had strong anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist undercurrents. They have called for an end to dependence on the West (and, during the Cold War, the communist/socialist bloc) and instead champion the development of a united Islamic bloc of fraternal Muslim states, which could become an influential force in international affairs to the benefit of the umma (Husain 1995: 11). This idea is similar to that of South-South co-operation (between the world’s developing states) in the face of political and economic dominance by the industrialised states. Strength in numbers is meant to make up for a lack of political or economic clout in the global arena. The extent to which such co-operative efforts will enable developing states, both within and outside the Muslim world, to make industrialised countries listen to their demands remains to be seen.
3.3.2. Islamic revivalism and globalisation

In every sphere of life the 20th century has brought rapid changes to the world, especially the globalisation processes which have meant that the degree of interdependence and interconnection within the world economy has increased dramatically (Ahsan 2002: 178). The universal spread of Islamic revivalism in the contemporary era can best be understood in the context of globalisation and related concepts such as “transnational relations” and “global interdependence”. Nye and Keohane (in Husain 1995: 13) define transnational relations as “the movements of tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or an intergovernmental organisation”. Some of the many participants in transnational relations are the non-governmental, religio-political organisations that operate across the international boundaries of a number of countries. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, was founded in Egypt in 1928 and in due course established branches in several Arab countries, including Syria, Jordan and Sudan – a distinct transnational characteristic. It was also reported to have received financial assistance from the regimes of Saudi Arabia and Libya during the 1970s.

Another interesting point is that although, according to Ahsan (2002: 179), many sociologists have put forward the notion that religion in the contemporary Western world has become increasingly privatised and that as a result of the process of secularisation in the modern world traditional religion is primarily an individual rather than a collective matter, this has not been the case “in the East”. He quotes Pasha and Samatar (in Ahsan 2002: 179) as arguing that here the situation is different,

The insertion of a new Islamic consciousness into the daily political life of many Muslim societies is increasingly becoming an uncontested fact. In countries like Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan [pre September 11], state power has been captured by Islamic movements. For others, such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey, there is deadly intensity with high stakes as numerous civil associations define themselves as Islamic and, as a result, violently challenge the legitimacy of political authority. Even in less contested countries (e.g. Morocco, Pakistan, Indonesia), Islamic consciousness assumes a more prominent place in the articulation and making of political life.

Thus Islamic revivalism seems to counter the Western notion, strongly influenced by globalisation and its related values that give prime importance to the individual, that religion should be relegated to the private sphere. Instead there has been an increased focus on the return of religion to public life in order to
compensate for the perceived spiritual and moral decline that secularisation has effected in Muslim countries.

The revolution in mass communications has meant that news of any major adversity, defeat or victory experienced by Muslims anywhere in the world is broadcast through the mass media and is grieved or celebrated respectively by Muslims worldwide the very same day. Events that have caused the *umma* worldwide to grieve were, for example, Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982 and the genocide of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs and Croats in the former Yugoslavia in 1992. On the other hand, moments of ecstasy were the periodic summit meetings of Muslim leaders and Ayatollah Khomeini’s triumphant return to Iran in February 1979 (Husain 1995: 21). Globalisation has thus meant that the effect of Islamic revivalism has been widespread and that links between Muslims all over the world have become very strong, which may well ensure its continued potency and influence in the future.

Now that Islamic revivalism has been discussed in detail, it becomes necessary to define what an Islamic “revivalist” is. Husain (1995: 11) defines such a person as “anyone who has contributed significantly to the revival of Islam.” This means that Islamic revivalists, in their perception of “true” Islam, will often, if not always, promote the creation of an “Islamic state” by teaching, preaching, and/or writing. Sometimes, in extreme cases, they will even resort to force. Four broad categories make up the Islamic revival, which, it is important to understand, is not a monolithic movement under a single leadership: Islamic fundamentalists, Islamic traditionalists, Islamic modernists and Islamic pragmatists. This classification scheme, like any other, is not perfect, but does assist in giving idea of the different forms Islamic revivalism incorporates. Fuller’s (2003: 47) categorisation of Islamist thought fits in here too. He defines an Islamist as “anyone who believes that Islam has something important to say about how political and social life should be constituted and who attempts to implement that interpretation in some way”. Both religious and secular movements differ in terms of the extent to which they accept or reject violence, the urgency with which they insist that change must come, the degree to which they are politically engaged within the system, the institutions they build and operate from, their preference for either an elite or a mass structure, their ideological or pragmatic nature, their degree of flexibility in attaining goals, and the degree of transparency and democracy in their internal proceedings. Fuller, like Husain, concedes that in any classification of Islamist movements one

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9 For the sake of keeping the terminology constant that is to be used throughout this dissertation, use is made of the term “Islamic” when it comes to describing fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists and pragmatists, even though Husain (1995), from whose work this particular categorisation is drawn, uses the term “Muslim”.
needs to be aware that terms will overlap or even be imprecise. The general idea of such a classification should be to suggest something of the range of schools and ideas evolved, especially at the two ends of the spectrum – fundamentalist and liberal (modernist) Islam.

3.4 ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Islamic fundamentalists form the first category of Islamic revivalists. As discussed in Chapter two of this dissertation, the term “fundamentalism” signifies conservative movements among most of the world’s major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. Fundamentalists of all faiths have certain characteristics in common: authoritarianism, a messianic spirit, the subordination of secular politics to their religious beliefs, a belief in the infallibility of holy scripture, a belief in supernatural, charismatic leadership and enforced moralism. Taken together, these characteristics form a political vision which fundamentalists hope to achieve through, possibly aggressive, political action. Islamic fundamentalists advocate rigid adherence to the fundamentals of their faith, as literally interpreted from the Quran and the Sunna, and campaign to impose the Sharia on society to purge those influences they feel detract from or demean the fundamentals of Islam. This means that most fundamentalists crusade against prostitution, pornography, the selling or use of alcohol and drugs, gambling, Western music, singing, dancing, wearing ornaments of gold and silver, palm reading, astrology, fortune-telling, fatalism and superstition (Husain 1995: 45).

Fuller (2003: 48) adds to this that Islamic fundamentalists usually seek to establish an Islamic state, though, as will be seen in the discussions below, the exact form of such a state (beyond the acceptance of Islamic law) is not at all clear. Most fundamentalists eschew violence, although some very radical ones employ it. They also place a great deal of emphasis on the law as an essential component of Islam, leading to an overwhelming emphasis on jurisprudence, usually narrowly conceived. A high degree of social conservatism is also pursued. On the other hand, fundamentalists are also selective in those features of Islam that they seek to emphasise as part of their political agenda and tend to be closely associated with fundamentalism’s strictest form, Wahhabism, as discussed below, which claims to embody the faith of the founding fathers of the Islamic community. Thus the fundamentalists place “emphasis on the Arabic language as the language of revelation, the illegitimacy of local political institutions (as usurpers of God’ sovereignty), the authority of the (fundamentalists) as the sole qualified interpreters of Islam, sometimes drastic expression of personal piety, and the revival of practices from the early period of Islam.” Another important characteristic of Islamic fundamentalism is the stark interpretation of what constitutes being a valid Muslim. In radical Wahhabi thinking, for instance, acceptance of 99 percent of Islamic teachings but deliberate rejection of one
percent constitutes unbelief. This stringency of interpretation contrasts with Islam which states that one Muslim may not judge the validity of the private belief of another Muslim, as this judgement remains the right and duty of God alone.

In order to see how the characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism have manifested themselves within the Islamic revival, the lives and thought of some of the most important Islamic fundamentalist figures are now discussed. Husain (1995: 45) sees them as “revolutionaries”.

3.4.1 Muhammad ibn Abd al–Wahhab

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92) was the son of a learned jurist and theologian and was educated in Mecca and Medina in Hanafi and Shafi’i law. He became disillusioned by the moral laxity and spiritual malaise of the times and therefore set out to reform his society and to return it to the practice of the Prophet, calling upon the people to abandon various popular religious beliefs and practices that he compared to pre-Islamic Arabian practice – the period of ignorance. In particular he attacked the, what he perceived as, superstitious and idolatrous practices of Sufism which he labelled “innovations” or unwarranted deviations from true Islam. He also called for a literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunna, the general idea being that Muslims must return to the pure Islam of the first generation of Muslims (Esposito 1991: 36).

What are the predominant features of Wahhabism? Like expected of fundamentalist movements, it aims to purify Islam by returning to the fundamentals of religion – the Qur’an and the Sunna (an additional, important source detailing Islamic faith and practice). A very strict line of thinking is followed in its attempts to reconstruct society and government on the basis of divine tawhid (oneness of God) and the doctrine of al-Salaf al-Salih (good ancestors). What is important here is the reluctance of the ancestors to engage in philosophical or intellectual argumentation. Instead, they adhere rigidly to the basic texts without any major effort to reinterpret the principles of Islam. They focus more on the spiritual and ethical aspects of Islam, while leaving political matters to politicians and traditional elites (Moussalli 1999: 113). Interestingly enough, this rigid adherence to the Qur’an does allow Muslims to interpret the Qur’an according to their own knowledge of Islam, rather than according to the interpretation of an alim (religious scholar). A certain amount of freedom in the form of the right to an individual interpretation of the text thus seems a strange contrast to the overwhelmingly puritanical spirit of the remainder of the doctrine. The adherence to tahwid is, according to Husain (1995: 46), carried so far as to denounce all ceremonies, rituals and customary traditions that were absent during the classical period of Islam, considering them to be additions that defile
the purity of the faith and contribute to the decline of Islam and of Muslim societies. Wahhabism, as already mentioned above, requires adherence to the actual words of the Quran and the Sunna, while denouncing Sufism, mysticism, fatalism and other superstitions. The idea is thus to return to the simplicity, austerity, purity and piety of Islam’s classical period. This includes praying five times a day, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and waging jihad against infidels, which to Wahhabis include not only non-Muslims, but also Muslims who do not rigorously adhere to their faith. Wahhabis also demand strict and scrupulous adherence to the Sharia and, by implication, its severe punishments for crime and transgressions. What do they prohibit? The consumption of alcohol, smoking, singing, listening to music, dancing, wearing silk, wearing ornaments of gold and silver, drawing and painting animate objects, palm reading, astrology, fortune-telling, and all forms of divination.

From the above description, it becomes clear how Wahhabism conforms to fundamentalist characteristics. What is obvious (perhaps to the extreme) is the veneration of Islam’s classical period, to the extent that everything that came or developed afterwards is rejected, and the need for a very literal interpretation of its classical texts.

A reason for Wahhabism’s admiration and imitation of early Islam may be that the two, when one looks at their early histories, have a great deal in common. Both denounce the evils of injustice, corruption, tribalism, adultery, idolatry and indifference to the suffering of widows and orphans. Monotheism and the brotherhood of all Muslims, regardless of their situation in life, are also promoted by both. Wahhabism and Islam under the Prophet both expanded to the detriment of unbelievers, and both movements created an energetic and united political front. The major difference was the fact that Wahhabis fought holy wars not only against admitted unbelievers, but also against “wayward” Muslims. Al-Wahhab also, in contrast to the Prophet, was only a spiritual leader; political affairs were under the auspices of ibn Saud (Husain 1995: 47). Al Wahhab respected tradition but rejected an uncritical following of past authority. All postprophetic tradition, including Islamic law, were subjected to selective criticism since the law itself had taken on un-Islamic customary practices. The starting point was thus to return again to a purified Islam (Esposito 1991: 36).

Al-Wahhab joined forces with a local tribal chief Muhammad ibn Saud and from this alliance the so-called Wahhabi movement was born. Soon the tribes of Arabia were subdued and united in the name of Islamic egalitarianism. Just as Muhammad in Mecca had cleansed the Kaba of the tribal gods, so al-Wahhab insisted on the prohibition of popular religious practices which he felt symbolised idolatry, for example saint
worship, pilgrimage to sacred tombs and devotional rituals. Because many of these practices were attributed to Sufism, this was suppressed; its shrines, tombs and sacred objects were destroyed, ironically enough even the tombs of Muhammad and his early companions which were labelled idolatrous shrines. Wahhabi forces also destroyed Karbala, a major Shiite pilgrimage site in Iraq, which housed the tomb of Hussein. These actions have never been forgotten by Shii Muslims and have contributed to their negative attitude towards the Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia (Esposito 1991: 36). The Ottoman sultan reacted to the destruction of tombs, mausoleums and shrines by the Wahhabis by persuading his governor in Egypt, Muhammad Ali, to stop them. After eight years of war (1811-1818), the Wahhabis were overwhelmed and sent back to central Arabia. A hundred years later, though, Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Saud succeeded in imposing Wahhabism throughout the Arabian peninsula. The greatest impacts of al-Wahhab and the Wahhabi movement have been both the reintroduction of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arabian peninsula, as well as the spreading influence of Wahhabism to India, North Africa and throughout the Muslim world (Husain 1995: 47-48).

3.4.2 Muhammad Ahmad Abdallah al-Mahdi

Muhammad Ahmad Abdallah al-Mahdi (1843-1885) is known for the launch of the Mahdiyyah movement in the Sudan. It was formed in response to social decay, political oppression and economic decline and culminated in the establishment of a puritanical Islamic state that would inspire Muslims throughout the world. The Mahdi, as al-Mahdi was known, was revered as a knowledgeable, pious and ascetic Sufi and was also perceived as a principled mujaddid (renewer of the faith). He openly accused the Turco-Egyptian regime of corruption, injustice, hedonism and disbelief (Husain 1995: 51).

Unlike Wahhabism, the Mahdi did not wish to eradicate Sufism, which, because of its openness and flexibility regarding indigenous African beliefs and practices had often been criticised for “opening the door to idolatrous superstition and an attitude of passive withdrawal which resulted from an otherworldly orientation”. Instead, the idea was to reform Sufism in order to bring it more in line with Islamic law and place the emphasis on this-worldly activist Islam, rather then the otherworldly mysticism it originally represented. The socio-political dimension of Islam was reintroduced as African Islamic movements, one of these being that of the Mahdi, led by Sufi brotherhoods, fought to establish Islamic states. Prayer and political action thus joined forces in the earthly pursuit of God’s will (Esposito 1991: 38).
Like al-Wahhab the Mahdi also united his followers against fellow Muslims, in this case the Turks – Ottoman Egyptian rulers, whom he declared infidels. He blamed the corruption of Sudanese society on the adoption of foreign (Turko-Egyptian and local non-Islamic) influences and practices: prostitution, gambling, tobacco, alcohol and music. As a solution the Mahdi strove for the establishment of a theocratic state, which would re-create the ideal, early Islamic community/state. Like other reformers, the Mahdi thus called for a purification of Islamic belief and practice, as this had been corrupted by alien, un-Islamic customs and beliefs (Esposito 1991: 40). What distinguished the Mahdi from other Islamic fundamentalists, however, is the fact that he did not advocate the exercise of *ijtihad*, though he himself exercised it. Instead, he claimed direct inspiration from God and Muhammad in the interpretation of the *Quran* and the *Sunna* (Husain 1995: 51).

In 1885 the Mahdist movement successfully defeated the Sudan’s Egyptian occupiers. The Mahdi became the undisputed ruler of Sudan, now a theocratic state ruled by Mahdist religious ideology. He died a few months later. His successor, Abdullahi al-Ta’ashi was disposed in 1898, when Anglo-Egyptian armies took back control of the Sudan (Husain 1995: 52).

Though not many Muslims knew the Mahdi’s writings or his idea of an Islamic state, he still commanded a lot of inspiration and respect in his impressive expulsion of Anglo-Egyptian colonialists and the establishment of a sovereign Islamic state (however temporary this may have been). He thus influenced various anti-colonialist Islamic revivalist movements in several parts of the world (Husain 1995: 52).

Wahhabism and Mahdism contributed to the legacy for twentieth-century Islam in terms of both their ideology and their methodology:

Firstly, they brought into sharp focus the weakened and disorganised condition of the community. Secondly, both a diagnosis and a cure was provided for this precarious state of affairs: a return to Islam. Thirdly, they stressed the belief that Islamic monotheism meant the unity and totality of God’s will for both the individual Muslim and the Islamic community. Fourthly, Islamic reform meant that it was necessary to critically look at tradition, rather than just to blindly accept it. The corpus of Islamic law, for example, included non-Islamic historical accretions. Fifthly, they stressed that in order to restore true Islam, it would be necessary to allow for personal interpretation that was based on the sole authoritative foundations of Islam – the *Quran* and prophetic practice as found in the early community. Finally, the belief was emphasised that the socio-moral revival of Islamic society would require political action. This would necessitate *jihad*, exerting moral self-
discipline to realise God’s will, and when necessary, engaging in military combat or warfare to achieve the same end (Esposito 1991: 40-41). A discussion now follows of Muslim fundamentalist thinkers in the 20th century in order to show the extent to which they were influenced by the themes of Wahhabism and Mahdism.

3.4.3 Hassan al-Banna

Hasan al-Banna (1906-49), as a young Egyptian schoolteacher, brought the ideas of the Muslim intellectuals to the masses, by forming the Society of Muslim Brothers. The ideology of this movement spread throughout the Middle East and was the only one that could appeal to all sectors of society (Armstrong 2000: 155). The reason for the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood was al-Banna and his colleagues’ (at the public elementary school in Ismailiya) outrage at the inequality that existed between the privileged foreigners as opposed to the exploited Egyptian workers. As the leader of this fundamentalist movement, al-Banna declared that Egyptian poverty, powerlessness and lack of dignity was the result of the government’s neglect of Islamic values and culture and the fact that it had opted for the Western alternative instead. Al-Banna believed that Islam was the answer to all of Egypt’s, and all of mankind’s ills (Husain 1995: 53). Unlike Islamic modernists, however, who looked to the West and provided an Islamic rationale for the appropriation of Western learning (as is elaborated on later on in this chapter), al-Banna emphasised the perfection and comprehensiveness of Islam and the fact that is was therefore self-sufficient. Like al-Wahhab and the Mahdi, al-Banna called for a return to the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet as the primary sources for the reestablishment of an Islamic system of government. Al-Banna also differed from the general tendency of the ulama to rely on their medieval formulations of Islam. Again, in line with al-Wahhab and the Mahdi, al-Banna called for Muslims to return to their historical origins, namely the formative period of Islamic history where Muslims were ruled by the Prophet and, following him, the first caliphs of Islam (Esposito 1991: 133).

Although the Muslim Brotherhood’s message was mostly concerned with the establishment of an “Islamic order”, there is little doubt that the establishment of an Islamic state was a major component of that order, as in al-Banna’s understanding, Islam and politics are narrowly linked. Before the establishment of an Islamic state could take place, however, the people’s moral sphere would have to be developed. Al-Banna is quoted as saying (in Ayubi 1991: 132) that “the formation of nations, the education of people, and the realisation of hopes and principles, requires of the nation that strives for them or at least the group that calls for them, a tremendous psychological power”. What ties in here is the notion of adherence to a clear Islamic
methodology, which, al-Banna believed, would be able to address issues ranging from the family, to nationalism, internationalism, socialism, capitalism, Bolshevism, war, the distribution of wealth, relations between the producer and the consumer, as well as other social and political concerns. Thus, initially, the more immediate task would lie with reforming souls and enlightening minds. Government would follow in due course and would suggest a corporate type of system, characterised by a one-party state, inspired by Islamic ethics and grounded in a just “moral” economy. Moussalli (1999: 109) elaborates on this by stating that, according to al-Banna, Islam aims at setting up a “good nation with a message of unity and sacrifice”. This would also involve establishing a just Islamic government, without tyranny or authoritarianism, designed to serve the Muslim people. A government like this would help to establish a virtuous society.

A Muslim society, if following Islamic precepts and values, would thus ready itself for the formation of an Islamic state with an Islamic government and contribute to the latter’s efficient and “moral” functioning. Simultaneously, the Islamic state, once established, would reinforce the moral and scrupulous behaviour of Muslims, by embodying all that is good and honourable about Islam.

What would an Islamic state, as envisioned by al-Banna and the Muslim brothers look like? He called for a constitution based on the Quran, the Sunna, and the traditions of the first four rightly guided caliphs. Furthermore, secular laws would be abolished and, instead, the Sharia would be imposed as the state’s official law. Related practices would include the collection and distribution of zakat among the needy, the prohibition of usury and monopolies; the enforcement of daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan, the segregation of the sexes; the banning of prostitution, gambling, alcohol and nightclubs and, finally, the prohibition of all customs, dress, languages, books, magazines, plays, movies and songs not conforming to Islamic principles. While not wholly opposed to Egyptian nationalism and pan-Arabism, ideologies popular in Egypt at the time, he saw these only as a first step to his overriding aim: the realisation of Muslim unity. In addition, al-Banna was no lover of Western liberal democracy. Instead, he insisted, the Sharia should be used to answer all questions that might arise with regard to law and justice (Husain 1995: 53).

Though al-Banna’s concept of an Islamic state was never realised in Egypt, he nonetheless managed to realise his ideology in various ways. A social or political effort (jihad), rather than a mere reassertion of religious doctrine, which is frequently the way that Christians respond to the challenge of modernity, was initiated to combat the socio-economic disparities in Egyptian society. Al-Banna’s aims were based on the idea that religion could not be confined to the private sphere. The Society of Muslim Brothers tried to interpret the Quran to meet the spirit of modernisation, to unify Islamic nations, raise the standard of living,
achieve a higher level of social justice, fight against illiteracy and poverty and to liberate Muslim territories from foreign domination. Social initiatives included, apart from training the Brothers and Sisters in the rituals of prayer and *Quranic* living, the construction of schools, a modern scout movement and night schools for workers. In addition, clinics and hospitals were built in the rural areas and factories were opened where Muslims received higher salaries, and better health and vacation benefits than in the state sector. They were also taught how to defend their workers’ rights, by learning modern labour laws (Armstrong 2000: 155-156).

The secular government of Egypt’s King Farouk, unsettled by the political activism and growing popularity of al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, started cracking down on the organisation. The Muslim Brotherhood had tried to operate like a legitimate political party in order to change Egypt within the legal confines of the political system. However, government corruption, cheating at the polls and the persecution of Muslim Brothers convinced al-Banna that revolutionary struggle would be necessary to effect Egypt’s transformation into an Islamic state. Islamic militants thus took to urban guerrilla warfare, which led to the government banning the Muslim Brotherhood in 1948. As a retaliatory measure, the Muslim brothers assassinated Egypt’s Prime Minister Muhammad Nuqrashti. The government, as a response, assassinated al-Banna on 12 February 1949. This, however did not put an end to their activities. Despite frequent government crackdowns on the Muslim Brotherhood, it remains intact and is still a potent force for Islamic revivalist change in Egypt (Husain 1995: 54).

Here it is perhaps relevant to refer to the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood in order to see whether its ideas have changed over the past decades and if so, how. According to Sullivan and Abed-Kotob (1999: 65) the Muslim Brotherhood still believes in efforts focused on applying the Islamic *Sharia* to Egypt’s social and political system with the major goal being the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Islamic jurisprudence. Even though this goal is alien, and perhaps even threatening, to Western political thought, it is significant to note that the *contemporary* Brotherhood’s vision of an Islamic state encompasses other, less alien objectives. These are, firstly, the imposition of democratic ideals such as liberty, representation and accountability, and, secondly, the pursuit of socio-economic justice. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood has become totally focused on constitutional channels in order to institute the changes they envision. Although the government has attempted to curb access to both parliament and professional associations, it is worth observing that the Brethren still continue their efforts to gain constitutional access to the political system. Very critical here is the official policy of the Muslim Brotherhood which absolutely renounces
violence as a strategy. *Jihad*, for example, is not interpreted by them as an armed struggle against the state, which is often what Westerners assume, but rather it is a personal and collective struggle employing social justice, mercy and communication so that an Islamic state will be built from the individual upward.

It is true, however, that although the Muslim Brotherhood itself is non-violent, acts of violence have been committed either by individual members or groups whose membership may have originated from the Muslim Brotherhood. The reason for this, according to the Brotherhood, is its inability to control its followers as a result of the restrictive policies of the state and the latter’s perpetual refusal to recognise it, which leads to a lack of opportunities for members, especially the youth, to have general meetings and debates in order to clarify misunderstandings and direct their frustrations and complaints via legitimate channels of political action (Sullivan & Abed-Kotob 1999: 61). Sullivan and Abed-Koto (1999: 66-67) thus argue that the Muslim Brotherhood, as a group advocating a policy of non-violence and a commitment to pluralism and constitutionalism should be allowed to function as a legitimate outlet for the grievances of the Egyptian masses and thereby mitigate the growth of support for the radicals. By bringing the Muslim Brotherhood into the folds of governmental representation, the state will have given those segments of the population which demand Islamist representation a legitimate alternative to the use of violence.

It thus becomes evident that the Muslim Brotherhood has adapted the stringently fundamentalist prescriptions for the functioning of an Islamic state to an alternative, which includes liberal-democratic elements. What is worrisome is the repression of an organisation which in outlook is moderate and willing to embrace constitutional channels in order to play a part in the political process and include its views, which reflect the opinions of a large percentage of the Egyptian population, in the governing of the country. This may be attributed to the government, as well as Western countries’ fear of an Islamic-oriented party at the head of a democratic government, an attitude which provokes militant groups to further acts of violence as they term the government as anti-Islamic. This is a phenomenon that is examined in more detail in the following chapters.

### 3.4.4 Sayyid Abul a’la Mawdudi

One of the early fundamentalist ideologues was Mawdudi (1903-1979), who also founded the *Jamaat-i Islami* in Pakistan. He perceived the “mighty power of the West” as preparing to “crush” Islam. Muslims, he argued, would therefore have to band together and fight the encroaching secularism to ensure the survival of their religion and culture. Mawdudi defied the whole secularist ethos and called for an Islamic liberation
theology, a universal *jihad*. Just as the Prophet had fought *jahiliyyah* (the “ignorance” and barbarism of the pre-Islamic period), it was now up to Muslims to fight the *jahiliyyah* of the West. He even made *jihad* into one of the five Pillars of Islam, an innovation which he justified on the grounds of the threat that was presently facing Islam. Thus, the stress and fear of cultural and religious destruction had led to the development of a more extreme and potentially violent distortion of the Islamic faith (Armstrong 2000: 168).

Mawdudi perceived Westernisation as a great flood about to sweep away the Muslim world into oblivion. In order to warn Muslims against this danger, he therefore started writing about this threat with two particular aims in mind. The first was to expose the nature of *jahiliyyah* and all the “evil it contains” especially in its Western form. The second was to present the Islamic way of life in a reasoned, argued, demonstrated and systematic fashion. In practical terms, this was to involve criticism of Western civilisation, an examination of the various schools of Muslim thought and their shortcomings. Also included would be detailed discussions of certain basic issues in Islamic theology, such as *aqaid* (beliefs) and *imaniyat* (faiths), Islam’s understanding of the nature of man, as well as the fundamental principles of the civilisation it aims to create (Adams 1983: 101).

After World War One, Mawdudi participated in the *Khilafat* movement, which aimed to save the Ottoman Empire and the *Khilafat* from Western influences, as well as in the *Hijrat* Movement, which urged Muslims to migrate from the *dar al-harb* (abode of war) in India to the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) in Afghanistan, which was governed by Muslims instead of British colonialists and Hindus. Mawdudi was initially opposed to the idea of the formation of Pakistan as an independent Muslim homeland on the Indian subcontinent. He perceived this as an initiative of un-Islamic Westernised secularists who were aiming to mislead the Muslims of South Asia with the equally un-Islamic ideology of nationalism. Once Pakistan had been founded, however, Mawdudi settled there and began a tireless effort to transform the country into an Islamic state (Husain 1995: 55).

Mawdudi’s programme of reform was based on a particular vision that he held of Islam, one that emphasises the social dimension of faith. This is embodied by the relationship between God and man being one of submission and sovereignty, which would be attained by applying divine rules to a social context. From this it follows that submission to God necessitates the establishment of an Islamic order that embodies the spirit of *tawhid*. The Islamic state then constitutes an important condition of actualising the faith. This means that
religion is not only concerned with knowledge about God, but also with organising its adherents and inspiring them to act (Ismail 2003: 587).

Mawdudi saw Islam’s ultimate goal as being the creation of a world state where there would be no more racial and national prejudices and where mankind would enjoy genuine civil rights. Like all Islamic fundamentalists, however, Mawdudi opposed the notion of Western democracy and the idea that power rests with the people. Sovereignty, according to him, belongs to God alone. Mawdudi proved important for Islamic fundamentalism as his publications and political activities would provide an intellectual foundation, as well as a clear understanding of the functioning of an Islamic state. His legacy has also been perpetuated by the Jamaat-i Islami, which is dedicated to the formation of an Islamic state based on Mawdudi’s model (Husain 1995: 55-56).

3.4.5 Sayyid Qutb

The real founder of Islamic fundamentalism in the Sunni world, however, was Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), who was influenced by Mawdudi to a great extent. Qutb had not originally been opposed to the West and had even joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953 with hopes of giving Western democracy an Islamic dimension so as to avoid the drawbacks of a wholly secularist ideology. In 1956, however, Qutb was imprisoned by al-Nasser for being a member of the Brotherhood, and while in a concentration camp, he became convinced of the incompatibility of religious people and secularists in the same society. He saw al-Nasser’s policies of torture and execution of Islamists with the aim of casting religion into a marginal role in Egypt as being synonymous with jahiliyyah, which he defined as “the barbarism that was for ever and for all time the enemy of faith” and which Muslims were therefore bound to fight to the death. Qutb went a step further than Mawdudi, not only limiting use of the term jahiliyyah to non-Muslim societies, but stating that Muslim societies were prone to the same phenomenon. Even though a ruler like al-Nasser outwardly professed Islam, his behaviour and policies proved that he was really an apostate and that Muslims had the duty to overthrow such a government, just as the Prophet Muhammad had forced the pagan establishment of Mecca into submission (Armstrong 2000: 169).

The violent secularism of al-Nasser had led Qutb to espouse a form of Islam that was true neither to the Quran nor the Prophet’s life. Qutb told Muslims to do as the Prophet had done: to separate themselves from mainstream society and fight a violent jihad. Muhammad had however finally achieved victory through a policy of non-violence; and the Quran is adamantly opposed to force and coercion in religious matters, and
is, instead, in fact, in favour of toleration and inclusion. Qutb insisted that it would only be possible to apply
tolerance, as preached by the Qur'an, after the political victory of Islam had taken place and a true Muslim
state had been established. This can possibly be attributed to the deep-seated fear that is at the core of

Qutb’s prominence seems to be a generally accepted fact amongst scholars of Muslim fundamentalism.
Euben (1999: 54-55) quotes Haddad as claiming that “few Muslim thinkers have had as significant an
impact on the reformulation of contemporary Islamic thought as has Sayyid Qutb”. This view is
supplemented by, amongst others, Akhavi and Amin (in Euben 1999: 54-55), both of whom argue that
Qutb’s influence on contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups has far surpassed that of Aytollah Khomeini. Though Qutb’s writings have to be understood in the context of those of earlier Muslim thinkers,
such as al-Banna and, more specifically, Mawdudi, whose work many of his precepts are based on, there are
three essential areas in which he has added new dimensions to the Islamic debate: the legitimacy of
authority, the nature and necessity of political activism and the characteristics of the just community.

Qutb (in Euben 1999: 57) defined modern jahiliyya as a conscious usurpation of God’s authority, linked
essentially to the other ills presented by modernity:

> We are today immersed in jahiliyya, a jahiliyya like that of early Islam, but perhaps deeper, darker
> [azlam, more unjust]. Everything around us expresses jahiliyya: people’s ideas, their beliefs, habits,
> traditions, culture, art, literature, rules and laws. Even all that we have come to consider Islamic
culture, Islamic sources, philosophy and thought are jahili constructs. This is why Islamic values
have not taken root in our souls, why the Islamic worldview [tsawwar] remains obscured in our
minds, why no generation has arisen among us equal to the calibre of the first Islamic generation.

The essence of jahiliyya is thus a refusal to submit to God’s sovereignty when it comes to belief, worship and
law, by denying his existence, restricting his authority and diluting his sovereignty with “false gods”.
Instead, humans claim the right to create values and legislate rules for collective behaviour, which
undermines and negates God’s power and authority (Euben 1999: 57). As has already been stated, it is
important to notice that Qutb’s notion of jahiliyya differs from that of Mawdudi, who first resurrected the
concept, in that not only non-Muslim societies are “infected” by it. The world of Islam also shows distinct
signs of jahiliyya and drastic measures are required to reverse this situation. Before discussing the ways in
which jahiliyya is to be combated, it is important to examine the “just” community that Qutb envisaged, as
well as clarifying what he understood under political authority.
Qutb emphasised that the *Quran* is the only source which can answer questions pertaining to political authority and the “just” community. Because faith consists of belief in the unity (*taḥwīd*) and sole authority of God, any compromise to man-made authority becomes simply unacceptable, illegitimate and indistinguishable from tyranny. If God is the sole sovereign of an Islamic society, the *Sharia* is its sole legal system. As the *Sharia* covers all aspects of life, the citizens of an Islamic state are moral by virtue of being members of it and by adhering to it simultaneously adhere to God’s will (Euben 1999: 61-62). As is stated in Ismail (2003: 588), an important consequence of the above is that every Muslim becomes a juridical subject: one who obeys God’s law. This underlines the narrow link between Islam and politics. Institutions like the government and the law are not merely limited to the domain of secularism, but, in the context of God as the sovereign of the state, extend into the divine.

Furthermore, Qutb’s “just community” is based on the freedom and equality of each one of its members. Freedom can be understood both in the “from” and “to” senses. On the one hand, the notion of freedom implies being free from obedience to tyrannical rule. Qutb defined tyranny as the absence of restraint on the part of the sovereign, which he saw as an intrinsic characteristic of human sovereignty. On the other hand, the right to freedom also implies the freedom to submit to membership of God’s community and to thereby become fully human. Equality is not to be understood in terms of Locke’s conception of everyone’s natural right to life, liberty and property, but rather means that everyone is equal, because everyone is equally subject to God’s law. Economic and social equality can be added to this. Qutb argued that once sovereignty is established in its proper scope, social justice, equality and freedom will be the natural result (Euben 1999: 61-64).

In terms of political action, what is central to Qutb’s view of the realisation of an Islamic way of life, is the concept of ‘*aqidah* (doctrine). This is not merely to be understood as a set of beliefs and values, but as a mode of being and of realising the individual’s liberation from subjugation to other human beings. ‘*Aqidah* is a dynamic way of relating to the world and asserting one’s submission to God, with the result of achieving both emancipation and freedom. It should be noted, however, that this emancipatory and evolutionary vision of the text does not quite correspond with Qutb’s notion of scripturalism which states that the meanings of texts are fixed and inherent. By asserting ‘*aqidah*, he opted to bypass the body of interpretations that existed in the tradition and instead provided his own “inspired” reading of the *Quran*. He also sought to develop an interactive method of reading (Islamic envisioning). Though this may make Qutb look like an enlightened interpreter, it similarly “opens the way to claims based on visionary access to truth” (Ismail 2003: 589).
'Aqidah includes all aspects of an individual’s life and is particularly important in the realm of politics. Qutb argued not merely for a renewal or (re)affirmation of faith, but wanted Muslims to actively participate in the realisation of the Islamic way on earth. So, Qutb stated that God’s will alone establishes the fate of the umma, but that it is necessary for human beings to coordinate their activities with those of divinity. The first important step is an inner struggle to overcome worldly temptations, whereafter Muslims are able to start changing the world they live in. It is important to remember here, however, that this struggle, both in its internal and external form, does not guarantee rewards either in this life or in the afterlife. This should not be the primary concern of Muslims in the first place. They should rather focus on striving to destroy jahiliyya wherever it may be visible in the world, by means of jihad. This operates on two levels. The first involves the ideological, where tactics are employed in the realm of ideas and beliefs, whereas the second is the practical level: the realm of the sword. Both types of effort aim to remove the political, social and economic obstacles to the establishment of an Islamic community. Qutb justified violence by referring to sections from the Prophet’s life, as well as the Quran, but also by stating that this form of opposition becomes necessary to fight the nature and mechanisms of power in the secular state (Euben 1999: 73-75).

Qutb’s ideology thus centres around the fact that society should be under the jurisdiction of God, rather than human beings who are prone to turn it into one of jahiliyya, especially given the influences of Westernisation. To achieve this ideal, an Islamic state governed by the sovereignty of God and the Sharia, jahiliyya needs to first be fought on an ideological and practical level, by making use of jihad. Though the notion of adhering to the sovereignty of God, instead of the sovereignty of human beings, seems a fair enough aim in an age of increasing spiritual paucity, it is interesting to ponder about the realisation of such a society. Human beings as rulers, as Qutb pointed out on numerous occasions, are prone to “tyrannise” their populations, by not being able to restrain their power. How then, given this “weakness”, would it be possible to realise an ideal Islamic state?

Interestingly enough, Qutb insisted that there cannot be a specific theory of an Islamic state because, although the Islamic community develops in accordance with an unchanging worldview, this worldview nonetheless allows for variation in application, depending on differing circumstances and needs. He argued that only once a society had submitted to God’s law, could the development of a system of rules and regulations become possible. Furthermore, Qutb refused to go into the debate of what an Islamic state should look like on the grounds that it would be degrading to Islam to insist that it should be cast in the same terms as man-made theories of sovereignty. The only, rather vague, allusions as to what the political institutions of
an Islamic state would possibly look like, are located not in Qutb’s major work *Signposts along the Road*, but in one of his earlier works *Social Justice in Islam* (in Euben 1999: 80-81). As all human activity is regulated by divine law, government is no longer the source of legislation but merely of administration. So, the purpose of government is simply to enforce pre-existing rules and regulations, which, when clear, are “beyond human question and interpretation”. These include rules related to prayer and worship, prohibitions against usury, monopolies, gambling, drinking and prostitution, punishment of thieves by cutting off their hands, excommunication of rapists and public stoning to death of adulterers. As opposed to a democratic system, there is no political contract. The responsibility of the ruler to the rules and vice versa is mediated by adherence to Islamic law: as long as its rules are scrupulously implemented, the ruler is doing the ruled a great service. The ruler, who is only a representative of God and adheres entirely to the Sharia, thus has no claims to hereditary succession, special privileges or elevated status. The only case in which he has some freedom is where there are no guiding precedents. Here he is allowed to act in the public interest, yet again, only if his actions can be justified in terms of the Quran and the Sharia. When it comes to economic and social spheres, the Islamic government is expected to act only in the interest of the community. Thus, for example, while people are allowed to own property, the government has the right to claim and redistribute this, if this will benefit the community. Similarly, provision is to be made for the establishment of minimum wages, social security and the provision of free medical care and education – all in the interests of the community too (Euben 1999: 80-81).

In terms of the social sphere of an Islamic state, the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Qutb was a member and which was heavily influenced by his ideas, believed that the family lies at the heart of Muslim society. The role of women was of special concern to them. Women were viewed as equal to men before God, but different. This meant that because they believed men to be generally endowed with superior mental ability and emotional stability, men exercise political and social leadership and are responsible for women and the family, while women’s primary sphere of activity is home and family. In terms of education then, the Muslim Brotherhood termed separate education for the sexes preferable to coeducation, as women should be trained in their roles as wives and mothers. Women may have careers in engineering, medicine and law, where necessary; but special care must be given to a woman’s dignity and modesty and should not impact negatively on her prime duty as a mother and wife (Esposito 1991: 142).

For the Muslim Brotherhood economic reform was essential, both to ensure Islamic social justice and to repel the forces of imperialism. The idea was that an Islamic economic order was to be established, which
would be based neither on unfettered individualism nor state socialism, but on Islam’s integration of the material and spiritual aspects of life. As with the political sphere of life, God is the point of origin and all wealth and power belongs to Him. This means that Muslims do not enjoy an absolute, unfettered right of ownership and wealth as this belongs to God alone. Certain means of acquiring wealth, such as usury and gambling, are prohibited, as are hoarding and monopolising natural resources. Although the Muslim Brotherhood acknowledged that there would be differences in wealth based on personal initiative, hard work and an individual’s natural skills and talents, Muslims still have the social obligation to assist fellow Muslims who are in need. Zakat, wealth tax on capital and on profits, is not simply a discretionary charitable act, but is based on the right of the poor to assistance from their more fortunate co-believers. Thus the Muslim Brotherhood maintained that Islam provided its own distinctive approach and basis for a social revolution that would bring about true social equality (Esposito 1991: 143).

One of the main problems that comes to mind when one looks at the political, economic and social elements of Qutb’s suggested structure for an Islamic state discussed above, is how easily such a system could be abused. There seem to be no guarantees for a government not to, for example, appropriate property for its own benefit under the guise of having done so in order to benefit the poor. Though the idea of social welfare initiatives sounds promising, their realisation would necessitate substantial economic resources, a percentage of which may be provided by the zakat, but again the question arises – could a government be trusted not to use this tax for self-enrichment purposes? All in all, Qutb’s arguments, for all their insistence that prescribing rules for a system based on divine rules is an audacity, seem meagre and unconvincing.

Qutb’s modern day significance lies in the fact that he has influenced the rationale and ideological foundation of many Islamic radicals. Although not all Islamic fundamentalists can be classified as radical, all Islamic radicals are fundamentalists. This means that they, like fundamentalists, accept narrow, literal interpretations of Islam, though most go a step further in either promoting utopian visions of a pan-Islamic state or in advocating violent action. Islamic radicalism only occupies a small segment of the Islamist intellectual and political spectrum, but is very important due to its militancy and the violence, which can include major acts of terrorism, a still smaller group of activists is willing to carry out. For this reason radicals naturally attract a great deal of attention from both the states they operate in, as well as the international order (Fuller 2003: 52).

A major ideological principle of the radicals is the concept of jihad as a “sixth pillar” of Islam. This thesis urges Muslims to undertake direct jihad (either violent or non-violent) against its enemies in order to strive
for the creation of a unified umma. Sometimes the struggle is directly against the impure Muslim state and sometimes the US is declared the enemy of the Muslims. Islamic Jihad in Egypt initially fought strictly against the Egyptian state, whereas Osama bin Laden saw the US as the root source of the survival of the corrupt Saudi state. Radicals believe that failure to fight a jihad and to thereby strengthen the Muslim world is the primary reason for Muslim weakness today. It is important to stress the fact that not all transnational Islamist movements are necessarily violent or radically pan-Islamic in their rejection of existing states. Some like the Muslim Brotherhood, as already discussed above, and its South Asian sister organisation Jama’at-i Islami are represented in a variety of Muslim countries, yet are mainstream among Islamists and do not practise violence. (An exception is Hamas in Palestine, which has its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood and is engaged in a national liberation struggle against foreign non-Muslim occupation, in which case violence is widely perceived by all Muslims as justified) (Fuller 2003: 53).

3.4.6 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Before focusing on the political thought of Khomeini, it is important to point out that he, as opposed to the fundamentalists discussed so far, was an adherent to Shi’ism. A brief discussion of the differences and commonalities between Shi’ism and Sunnism is necessary to understand his doctrine more fully.

a) Shi’ism and Sunnism – how they differ and what they have in common

The Muslim world is divided into several sects of which there are two principal groups: the Sunnis and the Shi’a. The Sunni sect is the larger of the two and makes up 85 percent of the umma, whereas the minority Shi’a make up the remaining 15 percent (Husain 1995: 7). The Shi’as distinguish themselves from the Sunnis in that they firmly believe that the Prophet designated his son-in-law and cousin Ali to be his successor. Their belief in Ali’s rightful succession is not only based on his personal qualities; they also assert that it is inconceivable, given God’s justice and benevolence towards human beings, that he should have left the question of leadership undecided. Linked to this is the idea that only a sound and thorough knowledge of the true meaning of the Quran and the Prophetic Tradition would enable the young Muslim community to prosper – Ali, and after him his eleven male descendants, would have this knowledge, as he had been close to the Prophet. The Sunnis, on the other hand, believed that the Prophet had deliberately left the question of succession open in order to let the community decide by itself who would be the most competent person to assume its leadership (Enayat 1982: 5). Ali did eventually become Islam’s fourth caliph, but was preceded by Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. Thus, while Sunnis acknowledge and admire the first four “rightly guided”
or “pious” caliphs, Shi’ahs usually reject the legitimacy of Ali’s three predecessors and all his successors. It is this difference in belief which has proved a major obstacle to Shi’ah and Sunni reconciliation and reunification (Husain 1995: 7).

In addition, Sunnis insist that the Prophet Muhammad was illiterate and a normal human being, chosen by God to reveal his message (as recorded in the *Quran*). The Shi’ahs, on the other hand, revere the Prophet as literate, infallible and semi-divine, because he possessed the *Nur-iElahi* (divine light), like all of God’s prophets. The Shi’ahs also argue that semi-divine attributes were passed down the Prophet’s line of descendants through his daughter Fatimah and her husband Imam Ali. The Sunnis disagree with this notion (Husain 1995: 8). Enayat (1982: 35) elaborates on the Sunni criticisms of the Shi’ahs by referring to the work of Ibn Taymiyyah, *The Way of the Prophetic Tradition in the Critique of the Theology of the Qadari Shi’ism* (1328). In this book Taymiyyah elaborates on the Sunni opposition to the Shi’i view that Ali and his descendants inherited *ilm* from the Prophet, a special branch of knowledge, which would allow them to perceive the “branches” or subsidiary rules of religion. This ties in with what has been said above about the Shi’ah’s belief in the semi-divine and infallible qualities of the Prophet and his descendants. Taymiyyah argues that at the time of the Prophet’s death only his son-in-law Ali would have been of an appropriate age to acquire sophisticated religious knowledge from the prophet. Ali’s sons were still minors at the time. This means that Ali’s descendants could only have inherited the same knowledge in one of two ways, either by receiving it from their elders (in which case any Muslim could have received it from the same source), or through revelation – an impossibility, as this is a privilege exclusive to the prophets. Shi’ahs claim that Ali’s descendants attained the knowledge by means of diligence and hard work. The Sunni response is that there were many Sunni Muslims who were just as diligent and hard-working and that some of them were even more knowledgeable than Ali’s descendants.

Another one of Taymiyyah’s major criticisms against Shi’ism is his condemnation of the latter’s institution of the *Imamat*, which stipulates the divine right of Ali and his male descendants to lead the *umma*. In terms of political theory the *imam* is conceived as an autocratic ruler who owed nothing to election by the people, but was given the *Imamat* by the “designation” (*māst*) of his predecessor and can thus be viewed as having a kind of “divine right”, which also included the right to rule over all Muslims (Watt 1968: 113). According to Husain (1995: 8), the Twelver Shi’ah sect is closely linked to this institution. Adherents believe that the twelfth apostolic *Imam* who disappeared in A.D. 873 will reappear as the *Mahdi* (the divinely guided or messianic saviour) and that his return will usher in a golden age of Islamic justice, equality and unity of the
Taymiyyah does not agree with the Shi’i claim that the Imamat is one of the pillars of religion, especially as the Mahdi’s disappearance has rendered him “useless” and unable to be of service to Muslims. The centuries long absence of the Imam and the anticipation of his return has brought nothing but false hopes, sedition and corrupt practices among certain groups of Muslims. He also criticises the fact that Shi’ahs expect Muslims to obey a hidden Imam whom no-one can hear, see or communicate with and argues that the Imamat in this way is attempting to create a regime which is impossible to achieve (Enayat 1982: 35).

It is thus clear that the Sunnis and Shi’ahs fervently disagree when it comes to the question of the succession of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi’ahs base a large part of their doctrine on their belief that Ali was singled out as the Prophet’s rightful successor and thus attribute extraordinary qualities to Muhammad, Ali and his line of descendants. Similarly, according to Enayat (1982: 24), the anticipated return of the Mahdi has inspired the Shi’ahs to believe that Muslim history is moving towards, rather than away from (as is the Sunni’s view), an ideal state. The Sunnis, on the other hand, have a more mundane view of Muslim history. They attribute no “special” qualities to Ali and his descendants, nor do most of them believe in or await the return of the Mahdi. The idea of Muslims being ruled by earthly rulers without specific spiritual sanctioning is thus what sets Sunnis apart from Shi’ahs, who believe that only those whose right to rule has been spiritually pre-ordained should be allowed to rule.

There are other differences between the Sunnis and Shi’ahs, which will now be briefly discussed. When it comes to the realm of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Sunnis adhere to four schools or rites (the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi’i sects), whereas Shi’ahs have only one major madhab (sect), which was codified by the sixth Shi’ah Imam, Ja’far al-Sadiq (died A.D. 765). Shi’ahs promote the exercise of ijtihad (independent reasoning and judgement) by experienced mujtahids (learned theologians or ulama entitled to exercise ijtihad), and reject the Sunni concept of qiyas (deduction by analogy) as the fourth source of Islamic law after the Quran, Sunna and ijima (consensus). Differences also exist between the Sunnis and Shiahs when it comes to the laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance and the practice of daily liturgical prayers and other religious traditions. Twelver Shi’ahs, for example, take very seriously the deaths of Hussein ibn Ali (Prophet Muhammad’s grandson) and his followers, who became martyrs on the battlefield of Karbala when they were killed by the Ummayad Caliph Yazid’s army. Whereas Sunni Muslims merely revere Hussein and lament his martyrdom, the Twelver Shi’ahs engage in mourning processions, ma’atam (breasts-beating) and self-flagellation to commemorate Hussein’s tragic death and demonstrate their regret for not
having rescued Hussein and his clan from martyrdom. The reason behind this elaborate and masochistic display is the Twelver Shi‘ahs belief in its unforgettable instructional impact on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. They also believe that Hussein will act as intercessor on their behalf on the Day of Judgement and will help them enter into heaven. Sunnis, in their more realistic guise, do not approve of the “inappropriate” cult that has been created around the personalities of Hussein and his father Ali (Husain 1995: 8-9).

As a final point in this discussion of Sunnis and Shiah’s, it has to be pointed out that despite differences between the adherents of these two sects, as well as the adherents of the four Sunni sects, all Muslims nonetheless agree that they have a lot in common. They share the most fundamental religious beliefs and the devout Muslims of the respective sects also agree that Islam provides answers and guidance, even in the political sphere. This explains why Muslims of all sects are sharing in the Islamic revival (Husain 1995:9).

In the face of a perceived Western threat to Islam, it makes sense that all Muslims should unite. This unity becomes obvious when one looks at the significant (though contested, as will be seen below) impact that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has had on the Arab fundamentalist movements, Sunni and Shi‘ah, throughout the Muslim world.

b) Khomeini’s fundamentalism

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-89) engaged in reading a revolutionary message into Islamic traditions. This tendency was also characteristic of a number of other Shi‘i and Sunni thinkers. Khomeini sought a resolution to the problem posed by the absence of the Mahdi. Rather than leave government to corrupt rulers like the Shah, Khomeini saw it as necessary to invest the means to rule in the jurist. This was an innovation in the sense that the jurist would not only be an expert in religious law, but would act as a designate of God and the Imams in both religious and political affairs. A single jurist, possessing the necessary knowledge and moral rectitude, would therefore rise to the position of “supreme jurist”, holding authority over the people. In practice, under Khomeini, the supreme jurist acquired absolutist powers (Ismail 2003: 592-593). As Ayubi (1991: 151) puts it, the logical conclusion of Khomeini’s theory of the guardianship of the supreme jurist is that this guardianship will be absolute, even if it is in conflict with the Sharia’s stipulations. The government (not the Sharia) is thus supreme, similarly it is the state (not the ideology) that determines how people are to lead their lives.
Although the supreme jurist’s rulership is defined and justified by religious values and necessities, its absolutist nature lends itself to a possible abuse of power. Though this may be seen as a way of realising God’s sovereignty in the confines of an Islamic state, it may be equally dangerous to give too much power to one single interpreter of God’s will, who may be prone to abuse it.

Another aspect of Khomeini’s rulership by a single jurist is the role of the ulama and more specific the mujtahids (experts in the interpretation of Islamic law) who are given sole rights to interpret the law by the Usuli school (established in the mid-eighteenth century and dominant since the mid-nineteenth century). Prominent mujtahids have the task of providing believers with interpretations relating to basic practice. They would, of course, be subservient to the supreme jurist (Ismail 2003: 592-593). Khomeini’s views that the clergy should have a right to participate in the political process and to govern are espoused in the lectures which he delivered in 1971 in his dars-i kharej (the highest level of classes in the seminary system) which were published as Islamic Government: Guardianship by the Clergy. Here he argues (in Fischer 1983: 157) that although a textual demonstration from the hadith literature is not conclusive, the supervision of politics by religious scholars is logically self-evident from the nature of Islam. He supports this claim by referring to the examples of the Prophet and the imams and to the joint consideration of a series of hadith, none of which individually is unambiguous, but which, taken together, present a clear stand on the issue. He blames the tendency to question the political supervision of religious clerics on “the Jews and the imperialists” who suggested otherwise, thereby propagating the view that religion and politics should be separated, that Islam is not a comprehensive system of social regulation covering every possible topic, that it demands no specific form of government, and that while Islam may have a few ethical principles, it is mainly concerned with ritual purity.

Ayubi (1991: 146) argues that what is unique about Khomeini’s doctrine is that it consists of old, dormant ideas which have been revived. What are the features of Khomeini’s unique mixture of the modern and the traditional? Khomeini’s doctrine states that the large income received from the various financial levies required by Islam should not only be used to “feed the poor or support people with blessed ancestry (sadah)”. Rather, the money should be used to effectively run an Islamic state with the requirement that the supreme jurist would have to be its head of government. The “logic of Islam” dictates this. It is important to note that by shifting the emphasis from the Sharia to the supreme jurist, the latter would be able to define any act of rulership he pleases as Islamic. This also ultimately means that the emphasis is on the political: religious and secular concepts and practices are blended in such a way that an Islamic legitimacy could still
be claimed to the way in which the state is being governed. For example, under Khomeini, although public sovereignty was embodied in the parliament, the latter’s legislative powers were subject to approval of the supreme jurist and his council of Guardians (Ayubi 1991: 150-151). Here we thus have a combination of a secular concept, that of public sovereignty, with a religious concept, that of a supreme jurist. The latter’s religiosity derives from the fact that he rules as a result of his religious knowledge, and in his capacity as a representative of God and the Imams.

c) The impact of Khomeini’s doctrine on Islamic political thought

The success of the Iranian revolution was very well received in the Arab world, as it represented a defeat of the unpopular Shah and a victory over Western hegemony at the same time. It also proved that an Islamic revolution was realisable and not just a far-fetched dream. Though the popularity of Khomeini’s regime waned as there were increasing accounts of a reign of terror in Iran, and also as a result of the continuing Iran-Iraq war, some of the Iranian religio-political terminology continues to influence the writings and parlance of Islamic thinkers in the Arab world today (Ayubi 1991: 152).

Though the Iranian revolution and Khomeini’s doctrine effected something of a Sunni and Shi’ah rapprochement on the political and popular level, its impact on Sunni Islamic intellectual thought is more controversial. Ayubi (1991: 153) attributes this to Sunnis trying to deduce the Islamic State from the Sharia, where Shi’ahs base the legitimacy of the state as a “political phenomenon”, “a continuation and escalation of the work that the Prophet had started at a certain stage of the life of humanity”.

This becomes clear when comparing Qutb and Khomeini’s doctrines with regard to which functions they envision for the rulers of an Islamic state. Qutb is clear about the ruler merely being an administrator of the Sharia, with none of the privileges the leader of a state may usually have. Only when there is no legal precedent in the Sharia is he allowed to make a decision, based on the welfare of the umma. Khomeini, on the other hand, gives his ruler carte blanche as the unrefuted representative of God and the Imams on earth. With such opposing views on how a ruler is meant to govern an Islamic community, it is not surprising that Sunni political thinkers have been ambivalent towards Khomeini’s doctrine.

‘Imara (in ayubi 1991: 154), an Egyptian Islamic political writer, regards the political thought of the Iranian revolution as “pioneering”. He has a few reservations though. Firstly, he finds Khomeini uncritically faithful to the idea of the Imamat, which Sunnis in general criticise for its attaching a divine rather than human
character to political authority. Secondly, he accuses Khomeini of putting “revolutionary values and progressive objectives into an old and conservative, even a reactionary, container”. (This is an interesting adaptation of the view, mentioned earlier, that Khomeini’s doctrine is a “marriage” of tradition and innovation, and that he reawakened dormant ideas to apply them to the context of the Iranian revolution).

Thirdly, ‘Imara is critical of the concept of rule by the supreme jurist and considers this a non-Islamic innovation with strong anti-democratic implications. Finally, he questions its validity for Islam in general, seeing it as only relevant to Iranian Shi’ahs.

Huwaidi (in Ayubi 1991: 155), another Islamic Egyptian writer, is somewhat more sympathetic towards Khomeini and his doctrine. In Huwaidi’s view, Khomeini’s main achievement is that he brought to the fore the fact that it was imperative for Shi’ahs to implement an Islamic government without delay, rather than to shelve this indefinitely while waiting for the hidden Imam to reappear. In general, Huwaidi is appreciative of the general religious and political significance of the Iranian revolution and Khomeini’s doctrine, though he is equally aware of its specifically Shi’i and Khomeinist elements and hence the limitations of its application to Muslim states with a Sunni majority.

Thus it can be concluded that though Sunni Muslims appreciate the significance that the Iranian revolution has had for the world of Islam, there are problems and shortcomings in absorbing Khomeini’s thought into Sunni political doctrine. As was explained above, this is mostly as a result of Sunni and Shi’i thinkers having different expectations of how much authority and power a ruler is allowed to have.

Overall, one can argue that Khomeini’s main theoretical contribution was to offer an innovative, if not completely novel, approach to the Shi’i practice of boycotting government on the basis of waiting for the hidden Imam to re-appear. His impact is all the more substantial, as his theory of an Islamic state was realised (though, arguably, with limited success). Despite this, Khomeini’s concept of the guardianship of the jurisconsult remains controversial, especially in the Sunni world. This could mean that Shi’i and Sunni radical movements may have to pursue their own revolutionary paths – in isolation from each other (Ayubi 1991: 155).
3.4.7 Some of the major themes running through Islamic fundamentalist thought

a) God’s sovereignty

This concept goes beyond the mere affirmation of God’s existence. The aim is to assert his authority in the daily life of his creatures and servants. The universe is thus judged to be a single organic unity - this unity mirrors the absolute oneness of God (Choueiri 1996: 22). Husain (1995: 64) elaborates on the importance that tahwid, the oneness of God, holds for fundamentalists. Many Sunni fundamentalist, for example, he states, denounce any agent mediating between man and God as shirk (ascribing partners to God as sharers of his divinity). In their view, such an intermediary undermines and compromises the principle of tahwid. Some of the practices that such puritanical Muslims would undermine are the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad, Imams, saints, martyrs and pirs (spiritual guides) and the sacrifice of animals, sanctification of water, lighting of candles, donation of money or distribution of food in honour of those venerated with the expectation of special favours. Wahhabism, as discussed above, is the practical application of the strict, puritanical adherence to tahwid.

Islam, then is a harmonious cosmic order, where similar messages are handed down to a chain of Prophets ranging from Adam to Muhammad. Without God’s guidance, jahiliyya becomes the state humankind is forced to exist in. The jahiliyya of today is even worse than that preceding the arrival of Islam, as it is characterised by a general lack of spirituality, which turns humans into “brutish animals.” Islam provides a solution in the sense that it represents knowledge. Whereas human reason is limited by space and time, divine revelation is universal and absolute. Ultimately, God’s attributes – divinity, lordship, omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience – are dependent on both Islamic theology and Greek philosophy. Though there seems to be an inherent paradox here, namely the combination of the religious with the political. The reasoning behind this combination becomes clear when one looks at contemporary Islamic thought which holds “the sound instinct of man to be essentially religious”. Thus, the contradiction is eliminated by means of redefining religion to encompass all aspects of life, particularly that of political organisation (Choueiri 1996: 23-24).
b) **Nationalism and the Islamic state**

As Lady Bracknell states in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*: “Those two things rarely go together”. (She, of course, not being well acquainted with anything much beyond Victorian societal gossip, does not use it in the same context). As is seen above, Islamic fundamentalists ascribe to the notion of God’s sovereignty, as well as his oneness. This implies reinstating Islam as a political system (something which has already been touched on above, in the discussion of specifically Mawdudi, Qutb and Khomeini’s desire to establish an Islamic state). The idea of an Islamic state, governed by the *Sharia*, however, does not correspond to that of a secular state, where rulers implement their own laws and consider religion a spiritual affair or national heritage. Nationalism (and implicitly the idea of a secular state) is thus rejected by fundamentalists as pagan. Another shortcoming that fundamentalists see when it comes to nationalism is that it bases itself on notions of race, colour and language, whereas Islam unites people on the basis of belief and overlooks all other differences (Choueiri 1996: 26).

Husain (1995: 76) elaborates on Mawdudi’s vehement opposition to secular nationalism which the latter saw as the enemy of “Islamic universalism”. Mawdudi believed that the alien, secular and territorial nature of nationalism would divide and weaken the *ummah* by allowing national interests to prevail over global Islamic interests.

Islamic fundamentalists, specifically Qutb, have also spoken out virulently against secular pan-Arabism. Qutb pointed out, for example, that Arabs did not succeed in “conquering kingdoms and destroying thrones” until they started overlooking, for the first time in their history, their Arab identity and started seeing themselves as Muslims. He therefore rejected Arab nationalism on the basis that Arabs had nothing concrete to pride themselves on. God had chosen Arabia as the destiny of his final message, not because the inhabitants there were Arabs, but because it was more likely that the message would take root there, given Arabia’s absence of state structures and political coercion (Choueiri 1996: 27).

Thus it becomes clear that nationalism is rejected by Islamic fundamentalists on the basis that loyalty based on ethnicity, race or language, counteracts the uniting qualities of Islam as a religion which overlooks these differences.
If secular nationalism is unacceptable to Islamic fundamentalists, the alternative is the creation of an Islamic state. Ideas relating to this have already been discussed to some extent, though it is worth summarising some of the underlying trends here. Fundamentalists reject the church/state dichotomy, as they believe that a government without the ethical foundation of Islam is unjust and easily corrupted. There seems to be little agreement among Sunni theorists about what an Islamic state should look like. Two major groups of theorists can be distinguished. The first believes that the Sharia provides a wide scope of adaptability to changing historical and social contexts. For these theorists, then, a state model is Islamic as long as it achieves the supreme Islamic values and adheres to certain general Islamic principles. In this case it does not matter what the specific character of such a state would be, nor are the specific systems, institutions and offices of importance. As long as the Sharia’s ultimate purposes, namely justice, liberty for all, equality, mutual consultation and government accountability are realised, it is acceptable to employ human reason to decide the precise form of the state, provided that the techniques that are adopted to run the state do not incorporate any un-Islamic values (Taji Fakouri 1996: 36).

Another group of theorists has a more rigid definition of the Sharia as “a comprehensive set of norms and values regulating human life down to the smallest detail”. This definition implies that there is a more or less rigidly defined archetypal Islamic state form that any modern state that claims to be Islamic must adhere to. This rigidly defined kind of Islamic state should not only strive to achieve the Sharia’s general principles, but it should also adhere in its systems and institutions to forms precisely defined by the Sharia itself. This then articulates an ultra-conservative ethos, which has as its aim a total separation from Western state theories (Taji-Farouki 1996: 37).

Thus it is clear that there is little agreement about the structure and functioning of an “ideal” Islamic state. Overall, the adherence to the Sharia, either in a very strictly or in a less prescriptive manner seems to underline what Sunni theorists have to say about the concept of an Islamic state. The Shi’i understanding, as was discussed under Khomeini’s thought, tends more towards the power of the supreme jurist, and, implicitly then, suggests a move away from the Sharia.

An example of an attempted realisation of an Islamic state in practice has been the Islamic reforms that General Zia-ul-Haq instituted in Pakistan after he came to power in 1977. A few days after becoming Pakistan’s ruler, Zia-ul-Haq introduced a number of Sharia-based punishments, including public flogging.
for murder, rape, theft, drinking of alcohol, fornication, prostitution, adultery, bearing false witness and destroying government property in demonstrations and riots. This was meant to intimidate the opposition and instil fear of God in the society’s criminal and disruptive elements. Other reforms, affecting the women (they were told to dress modestly and cover their heads) and education (it had to comply with Islamic standards of morality and ethics), for example, followed (Husain 1995: 71).

Then, in 1978, Zia-ul-Haq started dedicating himself officially to the Islamic transformation of Pakistan. His ultimate goal was to make the Sharia the basis of all law in Pakistan. In February 1979 special Shariat benches were established, which were the equivalent of law courts and would decide cases on the basis of the Sharia. Each Shariat bench consisted of five judges who were advised by competent ulama in matters of classical Islamic law. Another function of the Shariat benches was to allow cases to be brought forward by any citizen to question the degree to which a law was Islamic or not. This was a big step toward granting supremacy to the Sharia over the secular Anglo-Saxon law inherited from the British. Though these reforms did not quite live up to the comprehensive Islamic system that Zia-ul-Haq had wanted to implement, they nonetheless formed part of his effort to incorporate Islam more fully into Pakistan’s daily life through a series of sociocultural, judicial, economic and political reforms (Husain 1995: 71).

George (1996: 72) points out an obstacle to the realisation of Islamic statehood that is often overlooked by Islamic fundamentalists. This is the fact that the international state system is the embodiment of perfect secularisation. Within Muslim states, fundamentalists aim to implement the Sharia, thereby replacing the secular legal system. On the international level, however, states are corporate, legal personalities and are therefore expected to conform completely to the international system’s purely secularist principles. All religion has been eliminated, which means that the other states in the world would not look kindly on states run by the Sharia, a legal order based on divine law. The creation of an Islamic state is for the moment then a sheer impossibility, as the Islamic system and the secular are mutually exclusive. Therefore the problem of establishing an internal Islamic order in a Muslim state is augmented, as the only option would be to replace the present world order with an alternative Islamic one – pax Islamica.

Though apparently there have been relatively few reactions by Islamic fundamentalists to the secularisation of the modern international order, Khomeini came up with some ideas on the concept of the pax Islamica. This new order, according to Khomeini, would only begin in its full and final form on the Mahdi’s return to
earth. Until then, the world is locked in a bitter and nearly interminable struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. Though this, on a superficial reading, seems equivalent to the traditional Islamic division of the world into *dar-al-harb* and *dar-al-Islam*, Khomeini does not equate the oppressed with Muslims only. Equally, the oppressors are not only unbelievers. Instead, the oppressors, in Khomeini’s view, are the world’s political and economic exploiters, who can range from the rich upper classes or regimes in Muslim states to Western states exploiting the developing world and its populations. Similarly, the category of the oppressed does not only refer to economically and politically suppressed Muslims, but includes all of the Third World (as it was still referred to in Khomeini’s time). Oppression, then, also carries an element of exploitation, and so, the term includes political oppression, socio-economic deprivation and exploitation and finally those circumstances that limit an individual’s cultural and educational development. What does this struggle look like and what are the chances of the *pax Islamica* being realised? Khomeini talks of an ostensibly peaceful revolutionary struggle (though there should be at least an element of doubt about this). Although the conversion to the envisaged Islamic order would then apparently not take place according to the *Sharia’s* provisions for warfare and truce, in other words, an armed *jihad*, it is nonetheless to be expected that, once established, the order would be structured according to purely Islamic laws and principles. It is, however, highly questionable whether such an overthrow could take place, especially given the West’s economic and military dominance of the world. Thus, an Islamic world order, regulated exclusively by Islamic laws and principles does not seem feasible for the moment (George 1996: 83).

From the above discussion it thus becomes clear that nationalism (and implicitly secularism) and the notion of an Islamic state are incompatible. Whereas nationalism differentiates between people on the basis of characteristics such as colour or language, Islam treats all Muslims as equals. Governments in secular states enforce “man-made” laws, whereas an Islamic state would adhere to the notion of God’s sovereignty and would implement this by making the *Sharia* its legal code. This inherent tension between secularism and the realisation of an Islamic state is then also evident when one looks at the purely secular character of the international system of states. The only way in which Islamic states could fully exist, would be if an Islamic world order, based on Islamic laws and principles, were to come into existence. For the moment, the realisation of such an order seems to be an impossibility.
c) **The five faraidh and ijtihad**

Islamic fundamentalists zealously promote the obligatory practice of the five *faraidh* (pillars of Islam), namely *shahadah* (confession of the faith), *salat* (ritual prayers), *sawm* (fasting during Ramdan), *zakat* (payment of alms to the poor) and *haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina) (Husain 1995: 72). Qutb focused on the specific features of Islam as a political system, namely its focus on social solidarity, mutual obligations and security. The religious tax, known as *zakat*, has the aim of eliminating poverty and economic misery, making the Islamic economic system an *enlightened* form of capitalism. Similarly, Mawdudi saw *zakat* as a way of eradicating extravagance in spending, hoarding and accumulation (Choueiri 1996: 25).

Another characteristic of Islamic fundamentalists is their adherence to the dynamic notion of *ijtihad* and their rejection of the dogma of *taqlid*. While *taqlid* entails blind and unquestioning adherence to the legal rulings (of one or more schools of Islamic jurisprudence), *ijtihad* involves Muslims striving to exert themselves intellectually in order to draw independent conclusions and judgements on legal and other issues with the assistance of the *Quran* and the *Sunna* (Husain 1995: 73).

Most Muslims wholeheartedly agree with Shah Waliullah (1702-1762), a Muslim fundamentalist and one of the greatest Islamic revivalists on the Indian subcontinent, who argued that the major cause for Muslim rule in the world was that traditionalists had stopped using *ijtihad*, and instead chose to adhere to *taqlid* (Husain 1995: 74).

*d) Leadership and jihad*

Contemporary Islamic fundamentalist thought gives a pivotal function to political struggle and power. Qutb, Khomeini and Mawdudi all placed a great deal of emphasis on the question of leadership. Where Qutb called for the emergence of “a Muslim vanguard”, composed of resolute individuals and turning itself into a “living organism”, Khomeini focused on recruiting a corps of young clerics and students who would dedicate their lives to political action. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, representatives of religion would have a permanent role, whereas the jurist would have absolute powers. Mawdudi saw the question of leadership as more important than all other political issues. His aim was to have a pious God-fearing elite in power, which would impart its virtues to various sectors of the population. In order to achieve this, a well-organised, self-
disciplined, hardened group that relied on faith and material power would have to be formed to overcome the enemies of Islam. Mawdudi’s idea, later adopted by Qutb, was to form an “International Revolutionary Party” to wage *jihad* against tyrannical governments to bring about an Islamic revolution (Choueiri 1996: 27-29).

Muslims would have to treat the world as having been plunged into a constant state of war, made up of two distinct spheres *dar-al harb* and *dar-al Islam*. The first includes every country in which the legal judgements of Islam are applied; as long as the leaders in those countries are Muslim and adhere to Islamic law and principles, conversion is not required. The second sphere refers to those countries where Islamic law is not applied, irrespective of what rulers or inhabitants may claim. In the *dar-al Islam*, property, life and the public order are sacred and will be protected according to Islamic law. Similarly, full employment would be guaranteed and financial help given to disadvantaged members. Anyone who violates the public order would be treated as a criminal deserving the severest punishment. The *dar-al harb*, on the other hand, would be treated as an open territory, Muslims would be free to conquer. Its inviolability would not be guaranteed, unless it signed a treaty with the *dar-al Islam* for a brief and prescribed period. Qutb was well aware of the fact that this dichotomy has become obsolete in the contemporary world as no Islamic government exists anywhere in the world. Consequently, the entire world has become a Land of War for any true Muslim. In terms of *jihad*, this would have to be waged on a spiritual, financial and military level, though the highest and most honourable aspect would be engaging in military *jihad* (Choueiri 1996: 30-31).

Khomeini, as has already been discussed earlier, was not as precise as Qutb or Mawdudi about his definition of a *jihad*. He simply contended that political authority in Islam belonged to the jurists and that all other forms of government were therefore illegitimate. He believed that this straightforward message would create its own momentum and mobilise millions so that eventually the Shah and the two Satanic powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, would falter (Choueiri 1996: 31-32). This theory proved to be realistic, as the Islamic revolution in Iran did succeed in overthrowing the Shah’s regime.

Radical and fundamentalist views in both intellectual and practical terms fail to come to terms with contemporary thought and offer few solutions for the problems faced by Muslims. Though they inevitably face marginalisation among Muslim communities that seek genuine workable answers to their problems, this does not mean that in the interim their ideas may not appeal to embittered and frustrated Muslims. Thus,
these views could become the vehicle for their grievances and expression of political impotence, eventually leading to potentially serious violence. Some conservatives argue that it is their duty to struggle against the liberal formulations of Islam that reformists and many Westerners propose, insisting that the only way for Islam and the *umma* to prosper is if they closely adhere to the fundamentals of Islam and oppose the modernist, secularising and globalising trends of the world that are designed to weaken Islam. Furthermore, they ask whether it is appropriate for religion to strive to conform to the realities of contemporary Western societies, if those societies are perceived to be morally degenerate or failing (Fuller 2003: 53-54).

Now that some of the key Islamic fundamentalists have been mentioned and the characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism have been discussed in detail, it becomes necessary to look at the other categories of Islamic revivalists.

### 3.5 ISLAMIC TRADITIONALISTS

#### 3.5.1 Some of the major themes running through Islamic traditionalist thought

Islamic traditionalists form the second category of Islamic revivalists. They are often drawn from the ranks of the devout and learned *ulama* and are therefore typically Islamic scholars. It is incorrect to equate traditionalists with fundamentalists, merely because both are religiously conservative and disapproving of the West. To do so would be to misunderstand and misrepresent Islam and Islamic revivalism (Husain 1995: 80).

Fuller (2003: 47) argues that traditionalists basically accept Islam as it has evolved historically in each local culture. This also means accepting pre-Islamic influences in the daily practice of faith, as long as these are not openly anti-Islamic in character. Strictly speaking, traditionalists cannot be considered Islamists in that they have no specific agenda of political change and generally accept existing political authority as a reality of life. As Voll points out, the traditionalists seek to “hold the lid down on too rapid change” and present a force of conservation and preservation, as well as a form of cultural and community coherence and continuity in times of turmoil. This does not mean, however, that political involvement is totally out of the question. When necessary, traditionalists will play their part in keeping Islam alive.
Below follows a brief discussion of some of the major characteristics of Muslim traditionalists

a) **Medieval Islamic traditions**

Whereas fundamentalists oppose and suppress the traditions and practices of periods subsequent to that of classical Islam and label them “un-Islamic”, traditionalists conserve and preserve the Islamic beliefs, customs and traditions practiced both during the classical period of Islam and in subsequent Islamic periods. Traditionalists believe that it is important that Muslims do not only see Islam as “a set of abstract and utopian principles”, but that they view it as a comprehensive and living belief system that interacts with historical and cultural traditions. If one weakens traditions, they argue, one also suppresses a popular form of devotion of the Muslim majority. “Folk Islam” or “popular Islam”, in the form of Sufism, mysticism and numerous local and regional customs and traditions, then, is tolerated by traditionalists as a healthy expression of religion. They see anything traditional as appropriate to Islam (Husain 1995: 80-83).

b) **General apolitical pacifism**

Another difference between fundamentalists and traditionalists is their attitude towards political action. When fundamentalists are not in power, they often play the part of an aggressive opposition. Traditionalists, however, do not like political activism and generally see themselves as detached, apolitical scholars, teachers and preachers. Because of this non-violent and apolitical attitude, it is often the case that traditionalists are co-opted by Muslim regimes to support the status quo. There is no guarantee, however, that traditionalists will keep quiet during times of political upheaval. An example is the Islamic Revolution in Iran, where the traditionalist ulama joined the anti-Shah opposition, which eventually toppled the Pahlavi regime (Husain 1995: 84).

c) **Taqlid**

As opposed to fundamentalists, most Sunni traditionalists reject *ijtiad* (which encourages independent thought in legal matters) and accept the dogma of *taqlid* (unquestioning conformity to prior legal rulings). The reason for this is that traditionalists believe that *ijtiad* is a form of attack on traditional values and practices and therefore undermines Islam (Husain 1995: 90).
d) **Fatalism**

Traditionalists, like all Muslims, believe that God is omnipotent, omnipresent, just and merciful. A person is no more than an *abd* (obedient servant) of God and God retains absolute sovereignty over his creation. His commands are always just and right and all determinations of rights and wrong are embodied in the *Quran*. In taking these beliefs to the logical extreme, many traditionalists believe that people do not have the right to take a stand against God’s will. Rather, they have to submit to it fully – hence their fatalistic attitude. Fundamentalists do not agree with this notion. They believe that God expects people to fight injustice, thus laying the foundation for *jihad*, *ijtihad* and political and social activism. While fundamentalists also adhere to the ultimate authority of God, they do believe that God gave people free will – the right to choose between right and wrong, belief and disbelief. It is important to realise, however, that when Islam is being attacked or when a strong Islamic revival is in progress, traditionalists will not stand idly by, but will protect and defend the *ummah* from aggression (Husain 1995: 91-93).

e) **Anti-modernisation**

Traditionalists, though extremely well-versed in Islamic law and history, are often naive, if not ignorant, when it comes to modern natural and social sciences. Should they be exposed to modern scientific theories, they will automatically accept or reject these on the basis of how they correspond to the *Quran* and the *Sunna*. Traditionalists are also generally unaware of the complexities, institutions and processes of modern governments and international relations in an interdependent world. They do not perceive this as a shortcoming, though. Rather, they are convinced that Islam is the perfect religion and that it contains all truths that are necessary to help resolve the internal crises and external threats facing Muslim societies throughout the world (Husain 1995: 93).

Despite other differences with the fundamentalists, traditionalists are strongly opposed to modernisation, secularisation and Westernisation, all of which they see as the equivalent of the *dar al-harb*, and a serious threat to the very foundations of Islam. This explains the demands for an educational system focusing predominantly, if not exclusively, on Islamic disciplines. In the legal sphere, traditionalists and fundamentalists both demand an Islamic constitution based on the *Quran*, *Sharia* and *Sunna*, while when it
comes to economic matters, the institution of Islamic taxes is strictly advocated. Socially, among other
demands, the segregation of the sexes is promoted, and related to this, women are enjoined to adopt purdah
(veiling and segregation) (Husain 1995: 94).

Traditionalist then are reluctant to adapt Islam to the contemporary era, as they feel that Islam cannot and
should never change, as it has been founded on God’s comprehensive and immutable words and laws. They
also disagree with Muslims who condemn them for their stagnant approach, as they believe that the decline
of the Muslim world should not be blamed on the immutability of the traditionalists, but has to do with the
fact the Muslims have not steadfastly followed their religion (Husain 1995: 94).

3.6 ISLAMIC MODERNISTS

3.6.1 Some of the major themes running through Islamic modernist thought

As opposed to traditionalism and fundamentalism, modernists sincerely try to reconcile differences between
traditional religious doctrine and secular scientific rationalism, between unquestioning faith and reasoned
logic and between the continuity of Islamic tradition and modernity (Husain 1995: 95). As Ismail (2003:
579-580) elaborates, Islamic modernists at the turn of the twentieth century were also very much concerned
with the problem of civilisational stagnation and wished to articulate a renaissance project in reaction to the
encounter with the West in the modern period. The key questions involved here were the causes of
deterioration and backwardness of Muslim communities, as well as which conditions were necessary for
achieving progress. This culminated in an attempt to reconcile Islam and modernity.

a) *Ittihad* and reform of Islamic thought and practice

Modernists, like fundamentalists, strongly disagree with the Sunni traditionalist belief in the dogma of *taqlid*
(unquestioning conformity to prior legal rulings). The modernists believe that the primary reason for the
decline of the Islamic culture and power has been the result of the inhibition of independent, creative and
critical thought, as well as the lack of vigorous discussion of Islamic laws and issues. This boils down to a
belief that dynamic change in Islam is not only possible, but, more importantly, desirable. Therefore,
according to most modernists, Islamic laws should be carefully revised in order to have sufficient flexibility
and adaptability to incorporate modern political, social, economic, cultural and legal conditions (Husain 1995: 95-96).

Related to the modernist view of a need to adapt Islamic laws and practices to modern conditions is the desire of modernists to bring together the West and the East, both scientifically and religiously. According to Moussalli (1999: 33), the modernists should be credited for their open-mindedness and for Islamising essential concepts such as democracy and pluralism. He argues that the revival of the intellectual atmosphere in the modern world is due to the efforts of the modernists and their underlying belief that Islam and the West are compatible.

Fuller (2003: 54) elaborates on this point. A modernist and pluralist Islamist approach accepts the near-universal values of democracy, human rights, pluralism and vibrant civil society as fully compatible with Islam and inherent in Islam’s own original multiculturalism. The problem was that it was impossible for these values to emerge in the Muslim world while the theological and power structures were in the hands of authoritarian regimes that interpreted Islamic law to their own benefit. The primary goal of Islamic modernists is to reinterpret texts to create a modern understanding of Islam compatible with most contemporary political values based on the importance of advocating intellectual freedom. While liberal or modernist Muslims ideally aim to generate new political ideas out of the Islamic framework itself, they do recognise that Western experience is worthy of close examination since it already has a solid body of political thinking developed over the centuries, which is accompanied by an equally rich body of pragmatic experience in its institutional application. In addition, they argue that this body of thought and experience addresses many of those problems that Muslims themselves are grappling with and that there is no reason why Muslims cannot combine Western and Islamic thought in order to find Islamic pathways to the same goals that they admire in Western governance.

Another key element for Islamic modernist thought is the concern that modernisation would have to be internalised in Muslim states and that it would not be enough to merely import certain elements, such as technology, for example, and discard the rest, such as democratic political institutions. The Egyptian scholar Mudammad Abdu (1849-1905) was a deep thinker with a more moderate approach. He believed that education, not revolution was the approach the Muslim world should be taking. Although Abdu had been devastated by the British occupation of Egypt, he loved Europe and was quite at ease with Europeans, as
well as Western science and philosophy. He had great respect for the political, legal and educational institutions of the modern West, but did not believe that it would be possible to merely import and implant these in a deeply religious country such as Egypt, where modernisation had been too rapid and had excluded the majority of the population. Instead, he thought that it would be necessary to graft modern constitutional and legal innovations on to traditional Islamic ideas the people could understand. The Islamic principle of shura (consultation), for example, could help Muslims understand the meaning the democracy. Similarly there was a need for educational reform. Madrasah students should study modern science to help Muslims enter the new world in an Islamic context that they would understand. This would however also mean that the Sharia would need to be brought up to date; both Abdu and his contemporary Rashid Rida (1865-1935) were aware of the complexity of this process. Rida was alarmed by the fact that Arab intellectuals and pundits were becoming increasingly secular, sometimes scorning Islam as they believed that is was holding back the Muslim people. This kind of thinking, Rida believed, could only weaken the umma and make it even more vulnerable to the West. Rida was one of the first Muslims to call for the forming of a fully modernised, but fully Islamic state, based on the reformed Sharia. He wanted to establish a college where students would combine Western subjects, such as international law, sociology, world history, the scientific study of religion and modern science with traditional study areas such as fiqh. He believed that this would ensure the development of Islamic jurisprudence in a truly modern context, combining the traditions of East and West, and make the Sharia, an agrarian law code, compatible with the new type of society that had evolved in the West (Armstrong 2000: 153-154).

As opposed to the traditionalists, modernists are not ignorant of Western political and scientific theories. Rather, they are keen to embrace those ideas which they believe could be beneficial to the progress and prosperity of Muslim societies. Modernists imaginatively bring together Islamic and Western ideas and have produced a reasonable and relevant reinterpretation of Islamic thought, characterised by cosmopolitan, liberal and realistic perspectives. They also believe that a tolerance for diversity and a willingness to adjust rapidly to a changing environment contributes to the emancipation of individual Muslims and to the progress of Muslim societies (Husain 1995: 109-110).

Something which closely ties in with the need for the progress if Muslim societies is the modernist aim to reconcile the differences between the Sunnis and Shi’ahs. Sayyid Jamal ad-din Al-Afghani (1838-1897), one of the most well-known Islamic modernists, spent his entire adult life advocating pan-Islamism and trying to
minimise the differences between Sunnis and Shi’ahs, while stressing what they had in common. Similarly Ali Shariati (1933-1977) did his most to promote the *umma* and advocate the reconciliation and acceptance of various schools of Islamic *fiqh* to promote unity. He especially emphasised that both the Sunnis and Shi’ahs have valid arguments when it comes to the question of the Prophet’s succession (Husain 1999: 112-113).

### 3.7 ISLAMIC PRAGMATISTS

#### 3.7.1 Some of the major themes running through Islamic pragmatist thought

What is particular about Islamic pragmatists is the fact that most of them were originally secularists, but by manipulating Islamic symbols and rhetoric, willingly or unwillingly unleashed Islamic revivals both at home and or abroad (Husain 1995: 114). They usually hold positions of leadership in the influential institutions of their country and are wealthy and powerful. They are also well-represented in the mass media, educational institutions, the business community, among landlords and in a variety of professions. Pragmatists keep up to date with events happening in their country and in the world, and make up the most assertive and vocal segment of their societies (Husain 1995: 123). The four most prominent pragmatists, according to Husain (1995) are Muhammad ali Jinnah (1875-1948), the founding leader of Pakistan, Zulfikar ali Bhutto, another important Pakistani politician, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat (1918-1981), an Egyptian president, and Saddam Hussein (1937-), Iraq’s former leader.

a) **Nonreligious Muslims and secular politicians**

The Islamic pragmatists, Muhammad ali Jinnah, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Saddam Hussein, can all be characterised as non-practicing Muslims, who subscribe to nothing more than a few basic ethical, moral and spiritual principles they derive from Islam, such as equality, justice, liberty, freedom, honesty, integrity, brotherhood, tolerance and peace. Devout Muslims disagree with this and label the pragmatists “wayward souls”, or even “unbelievers”. It is usually only in moments of personal crisis, or when they find it necessary to conform to social or political pressure that pragmatists would return to a faithful observance of religious practices (Husain 1995: 114-115).
Something that ties in with a disregard for traditional Islamic religious practices is the pragmatists’ knowledge and admiration of Western intellectual thought. Instead of viewing classical and medieval Islamic doctrines and practices as what Islam should aspire to, they see these as anachronistic, reactionary and impractical when seen in the contemporary context. They thus wish to modernise their societies along the lines of Western societies and believe that secularisation is not only inevitable but also desirable (Husain 1995: 115).

b) **Separation of religion and politics, yet shrewd promotion of Islamic policies and programmes**

Islamic pragmatists emphasise that it is necessary that there should be a separation between religion and politics in an Islamic society. They are opposed to the ulama being anything more than a provider of religious guidance to the affairs of the state and are very wary of the formation of any privileged class (including a priestly one) that might foster elitism and encourage inequalities. The pragmatists’ final view then is that the ulama have no right to enforce their viewpoint when it comes to economic, political, technical, international and non-Islamic legal matters (Husain 1995: 121). Esposito (1991: 275) argues that another reason why pragmatists prefer to limit Islam to the private sphere of life is because they view appeals to Islam in politics as retrogressive or inappropriate to modern and social realities

Ironically, however, despite their secularist worldview and their firm belief that religion should be strictly private, Islamic pragmatists have often found it both useful and necessary to promote and implement Islamic programmes and policies in order to capture the support of the Muslim masses. This they do with the aim of enhancing their legitimacy, integrating and uniting their fragmented societies, and, finally, mobilising their people (Husain 1995: 123).

Ultimately, however, despite the fact that the Islamic symbolism and rhetoric used by the Islamic pragmatists has spurned an Islamic revival in their respective countries, they have not received the support of Islamic groups, who have denounced them as “un-Islamic” hypocrites (Husain 1995: 148).

To illustrate some of the above characteristics of Islamic pragmatists the case of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat will now be discussed. Sadat, who came to power in 1970, unlike Islamic pragmatists in general, had a reputation for personal piety and appropriated the title “The Believer-President”. This he used to his
advantage as in his own way he was continuing Nasser’s (his predecessor) use of Islam to enhance his political legitimacy. For example, he increased Islamic programming in the media and Islamic courses in schools and universities. In Cairo, a city with approximately 40,000 mosques, the government built an additional 1,000 mosques. Also, importantly, the bastion of “official Islam”, al-Azhar University, became an object of special financial support, undertaking an expansion programme that included new buildings and satellite provincial campuses. Sadat’s control of religion was enhanced by the creation of the position of deputy premier for Religious Affairs and of the Ministry of Religious Endowments and al-Azhar Affairs, which administered religious endowments, paid salaries for some religious functionaries and, in time, tried to control the topic and content of mosque sermons (Esposito 1991: 213). Sadat then, by the late 1970s, had established a close relationship with Egypt’s religious establishment, working together rather than alienating this influential sector of society, but still being careful to retain control over its decisions and actions.

By 1974, however, the Sadat government began to feel the strains of politicising religion, in terms of, for example, the debate over the implementation of the Sharia and the antigovernment activities of Islamic militants. The government’s extensive use of Islam had not brought with it greater control of Islamic issues and organisations. It had in fact led to more discussion and agitation for an increased application of Islam in state and society, something the Sadat government was not able to deal with effectively. Drawn-out discussions in the National Assembly about the feasibility of making the Sharia the law of the land, which the Muslim Brotherhood and younger Islamic militant organisations saw as the first and essential step in establishing an Islamic state in Egypt, showed no results, as the government refused to go this far in terms of its Islamisation strategy. From 1977 onward Islamic criticism and opposition to the Sadat government grew, as the president’s appeal to religion and support to Islamic organisations began to backfire when they started to take on a life of their own. They increasingly asserted their independence and pressed for substantive Islamic changes, while at the same time they condemned what they judged an opportunistic control and use of Islam by the Sadat government. In response the Sadat government became more and more autocratic, and finally, in September 1981, arrested and imprisoned Muslim Brothers and other members of militant Islamic organisations, university professors, political opposition leaders, Muslim preachers, journalists and writers. In total approximately 1,500 people were detained and both secular political and Islamic opposition publications were banned. Similar to the Shah in Iran, Sadat combined autocratic rule with an identification of Egypt with his personality and will, leading to even greater popular discontent and opposition among
moderate Egyptians. All of this culminated in the assassination of Sadat on 6 October 1981 (Esposito 1991: 215-222).

This chapter, then, has dealt with the question of the Western influence on the Islamic world and the different kinds of Islamic political thought that have been formulated in response to this, specifically within the context of the Islamic revival. The aim has been to go into fundamentalist thought in particular in order to provide a background for the study of the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, Sudan and South Africa which the coming chapters deal with.

3.8 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE

Chapter three deals with Islamic worldviews in the context of historical events and developments. Islamic civilisation, which had for many years been dominant and powerful, increasingly became subject to the economic and military challenges posed by the West, which also eventually culminated in the colonisation of the world of Islam. The colonisation process resulted in Islamic countries being exploited economically and only partial modernisation and education along Western lines taking place (thereby excluding the majority of the local population). Over the years, many Muslims have viewed the decline of the world of Islam, which also includes intellectual stagnation and environmental degradation, as somehow being linked to a straying from the path of Islam. This particular view has also fed into the way in which Muslims view the West and vice-versa. The tendency here seems to be one of alarmism and simplification, where the “Other” is all too easily reduced to the enemy. Instead, it is necessary to cultivate greater awareness of difference and to condemn racist attitudes.

The post-independence imposition of secular and nationalist ideologies has not brought with it development, but has instead resulted in increased authoritarianism, incompetence and corruption on the part of secular regimes. These ideologies have meant a high rate of poverty and political fragility in Islamic countries; they have also eroded the traditional system of Islam and have created a serious identity crisis. In response to these developments, an Islamic revivalist movement has emerged, which may be defined as the reawakening of interest in Islamic symbols, ideas and ideals after a period of relative dormancy. This goes hand in hand with an increased interest in Islam as a political system and political leaders’ use of Islamic symbols and values as a way of gaining popular support. Globalisation has also meant that Islamic revivalism is felt and experienced throughout the Islamic world.
In terms of Islamic revivalism, four categories of Islamic thinkers can be identified. The first is those of Islamic fundamentalists, who accord great importance to God’s sovereignty in daily life, see Islam as incompatible with nationalism and the secular state, advocate the five pillars of Islam and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), have distinct ideas on the ideal form of leadership in an Islamic state and believe in waging *jihād* against those who threaten or oppose Islam. Such views propose no real solutions to the problems faced by Muslim states, but instead have become a vehicle of expression for embittered Muslims. The second category of Islamic thinkers comprises those of Islamic traditionalists who represent a force of conservation and preservation of Islamic traditions in modern times. They believe in *taqlīd* (unquestioning conformity to prior legal rulings), have a fatalistic attitude towards life (in that one should never oppose or question God’s will) and can be described as largely apolitical and anti-modern. Islamic modernists, who make up the third category, on the other hand, try to reconcile the differences between traditional religious doctrine and secular scientific rationalism, thereby aiming to revise Islamic laws so as to allow these to fit into modern life. Their primary goal is to reinterpret Islamic texts in order to create a modern understanding of Islam compatible with most contemporary political values based on the importance of advocating intellectual freedom. The fourth category of Islamic thinkers consists of Islamic pragmatists, who, though only marginally religious, nonetheless manipulate Islamic symbols and rhetoric in order to capture the support of the Muslim masses. They have, however, not been entirely successful in this endeavour, as they are often condemned by their populations for their hypocrisy and lack of devoutness.