

Muslim Cultural Entrepreneurs and the Democracy Debate

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Although there are few points of consensus in modern social science, the incompatibility of Islam and democracy is a candidate for one of them. Many Western scholars, only a few of whom have any particular expertise in Islam or the Middle East operate from the implicit, if not explicit assumption that Muslims have one creed (Islam), and thereby one culture, and they collectively share a disdain for modernity and reject democracy as a formula of governance. According to Samuel Huntington, "Islam...has not been hospitable to democracy."³ Daniel Pipes claims Muslims are not inclined to engage in participatory politics: "[N]early all Muslim subjects kept away from politics and became actively engaged only when they had a chance to apply the law or battle non-Muslims."⁴ Bernard Lewis argues that Muslims' "dominant political tradition has long been that of command and obedience, and far from weakening it, modern times have actually witnessed its intensification."⁵ Such representatives of what Yahya Sadowski calls the "New Orientalism" reflect the conventional wisdom of both the social sciences and policy-makers in the West.⁶

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³ Samuel P. Huntington, 'Will More Countries Become Democratic?,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 99 (1984), p.99.

⁴ Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 144.

⁵ Bernard Lewis, 'Islam and Liberal Democracy,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, (February 1993), pp. 54-55.

⁶ Yahya Sadowski, 'The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate,' *Middle East Report*, 193 (1993), pp. 14-21

This article challenges such characterizations of both Islam and Muslims. Indeed, for a religion that encompasses considerable portions of two continents (and with many countries in other parts of the world hosting sizable minorities), and that claims 1.2 billion racially and linguistically diverse adherents, an assumption of homogeneity is not defensible. The assumption is rooted in a view that Muslims are culturally homogeneous because they share the "same values legitimating social practices" that are inherently un-democratic.⁷

An understanding of the term "culture" that allows such diversity to be considered insignificant in favor of certain imagined truths shared by all is decidedly unhelpful. David Laitin has argued that groups of people belong to similar political cultures not because they have common values, but because they share "points of concern that are debated".⁸ The fact that people with similar political cultures are concerned with similar questions and challenges should not be equated with their endorsement of similar answers or responses to these challenges. For instance, US citizens share concerns about such issues as abortion and affirmative action that are not necessarily important in other settings, yet there is hardly anything like consensus on what policy should be on these issues.

Muslims in general are preoccupied with the question of what form of legitimate government they can accept to be Islamic, or at least does not conflict with Islamic teachings. To be more specific, the general Muslim approach to the question of governance and democracy is to ask whether elements of democracy can be understood as Islamic (ordained by Islamic teachings), non-Islamic (not originating in, but acceptable to Islam) or un-Islamic (against Islam and thus unacceptable). Muslims share the concern over the relationship between creed and structure, but differ sharply in their reading of compatibility.

⁷ Aaron Wildavsky, 'Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation,' *American Political Science Review*, 81 (1987), pp. 3-21.

⁸ David D Laitin and Aaron Wildavsky, 'Political Culture and Political Preferences,' *The American Political Science Review*, 82, 2 (1988), pp. 589-597.

We do not contend that ordinary Muslims frequently muse on the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Rather, most Muslims turn to a certain class of intellectuals and *ulama* (religious scholars) for guidance. These elites act as cultural entrepreneurs who shape the cultural, and therefore intellectual, repertoire along which ordinary Muslims locate themselves. That is to say the intellectual debates that take place among these cultural entrepreneurs articulate a finite set of visions that ordinary Muslims make their own. These repertoires, as Charles Tilly has argued, are "learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice."⁹

This article sets out to explore the range of thought among Islamic cultural entrepreneurs. It will argue that contrary to (new) Orientalist assumptions, Muslim intellectuals and *ulama* are engaged in protracted and highly contentious disputes on how to respond to the challenge of democracy. Broadly speaking, the positions fall into three categories: traditionalists, modernists and secularists. The traditionalists in turn are split into those who advocate violence and those whose methods are non-violent. Similarly, secularists are internally diverse. They may be liberals or autocrats.

We first examine the class of people who play the crucial role of articulating and delimiting schools of thought. We then offer a tri-partite typology (to be subdivided later) of these cultural entrepreneurs into "traditionalist," "modernist" and "secularist" schools. Next we look at how the different schools generally interpret contributions in thought from non-Islamic sources. A short section follows that explores important differences within two of the schools, the traditionalists and the secularists. Finally, we reflect on the Orientalist assumptions that guide so much thinking about politics in the Islamic world. Our understanding of the extent of Islam is that it goes far beyond the Arab world. The scholarly

⁹ Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 42.

tradition in Islam extends to South Asia and Central Africa, as well as elsewhere. Our survey of Muslim intellectual thought, therefore, is not confined to Arab intellectuals and scholars, although they predominate.

Intellectuals and *Ulama*

There are two types of cultural entrepreneurs in terms of their educational backgrounds: intellectuals and the *ulama*. Intellectuals often have a largely non-religious education. Most of their influence comes from publishing books, writing magazine and newspaper articles, and appearing on television and radio shows. Their non-religious education does not necessarily mean that they are secularists, although some of them are. Most intellectuals publish their books and articles in state-owned or independent institutions to the degree that governments tolerate their ways of thinking. In other cases governments ban intellectuals' publications, but they often become "best sellers" in the uncontrolled market of ideas. Finding such publications either in their original languages or translated versions is not challenging in either the Middle East or in the West, as they are distributed prolifically.

Some intellectuals have a favorable attitude toward Islam as a source of political ideology and use their intellectual capacities to draw lessons from the *ulama*. Usually Islamic intellectuals are referred to as *mufakereen Islameen* [Islamic thinkers] to differentiate them from the *ulama* who can issue *fatwas* [religious opinions]. Islamic thinkers are less bounded by Islamic authenticity or reliance on sacred texts, and they tend to be more comfortable with ideas that originate from non-Muslim sources. Some governments consider Islamic intellectuals to be less dangerous politically than the *ulama* who can issue *fatwas* that delegitimize regimes and rulers. Islamic thinkers are (invariably) men of opinions not of intellectual authority. Thus, their intellectual contributions commonly are found in books, magazines and newspapers and less on official television and radio. The general population

does not view them as religious authorities equivalent to the *ulama*; rather, most Muslims perceive Islamic thinkers as good people with good intentions and testable opinions.

Fatwas are issued mainly by the *ulama* whose education took place entirely or partly in Islamic institutions. The *ulama* may be divided into two groups in accordance with their dependence on government institutions: Those who constitute *al-Islam al-rasmi* [official Islam]; and those who constitute *al-Islam al-sha'bi* [popular Islam].¹⁰ This distinction is significant in terms of the sources on which one can rely to learn about their political attitudes. Since governments in most Muslim countries consider *al-Islam al-rasmi ulama* to be moderates, one easily can read or listen to their views in the official publications and media outlets. However, authorities usually prohibit *al-Islam/al-sha'bi ulama* from giving public speeches or appearing on state television and radio stations. Nevertheless, the public generally can access their ideas through audio tapes, books, and small pamphlets that are available in most mosques but are kept out of sight of government agents, especially in those countries where freedom of expression is limited and it is a felony to disseminate ideas not approved by official censors. In fact, the research for this article relies in part on approximately sixty such publications about Islam and politics.

Traditionalists, Modernists and Secularists

Ideologically, Muslim intellectuals and scholars adopt three different readings of Islam's response to modern challenges including democracy. These three ideological readings can be given the following labels: traditionalist, modernist and secularist. Traditionalists seek what they perceive to be an *Islamic* government that is necessarily contradictory to what most contemporary academicians and students of politics label as democracy. Modernists, conversely, search for a modern, democratic government that is

¹⁰ James A. Bill & Robert Springborg, *Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 2000), p. 55.

compatible with Islam, or what they usually call Islamic democracy. This state is different from the ancient state established by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in its format and procedure yet identical to it in its goals and framework. Secularists do not worry about how compatible their ideal system is with Islamic labels since they believe that Islam—or any religion—can be used, when necessary, to justify any form of government.

These different attitudes toward democracy are a function of the different views on the relationship between Islam and human intellect in general. Thus, it is important to note that traditionalists and modernists are Islamists who share similar assumptions and doctrines regarding the role of Islam in politics. For both schools of thought, Islam is both religion and state. When encountering the term "political Islam," Islamists would respond by stating that "Islam cannot but be political."¹¹ Secularists, who may be pious Muslims or disbelievers, perceive Islam as a relationship between God and the believer, not between God and the government. This is why they disagree with Islamists.¹² Sociologically, they are influenced strongly by a non-religious education that they often obtained outside the Muslim world or

¹¹ Mohamed S. al-'Aawa, *On the Political System of the Islamic State* (Cairo: Dar-Alshorouk, 1989); Mohamed al-Ghazali, *Islam and Political Dictatorship* (Cairo: Dar Al-Kotob al-Islamia, ND); M al-Khalidi, *Criticism of Democratic System (Naqdh Al-Nizzam Al-Democratie)* (Beruit: Dar Al-Jeel, 1984); Salman Bin Fahd al-'Oda, *The End of History*, Al-Salafyoon, 2000; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *On the Fiqh of the Islamic State* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2001); Fahmi Howaidi, *Citizens Not Dhimmies: The Status of Non-Muslims in Muslims' Society* (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouq, 1985); Mohamed Khatami, 'An Interview on CNN,' (January 7, 1998); Mawdudi, *Islam Facing Modern Challenges* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1980); Mohamed Said No'amani, 'The Feasability of Dialogue among Cultures,' (al-Jazeera.net, 2002); Sayyid Qutb, *The Future Is for This Religion* (Gary, Ind.: International Islamic Federalism of Student Organization, 1970).

¹² Mohamed S. al-Ashmawi, *Against Islamic Extremism : The Writings of Muhammad Sa`Id Al-Ashmawy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998); Ref'at al-Sa'eed, *Al-'Alamnya Bayyeen Al-Islam Wa Al-Ta'slouw (Secularism between Islam and Fake Islmization), Ketab Al-Ahali* (Cairo: Al-Tagou' Party in Egypt, 2001); Ahmad Baghdadi, *Renovation of the Religious Thought* (Damascus: Al Mada Publishing Company, 1999); Ahamad Abdelmo'eti Heggazi, 'From Real World to the Text and Not Vice Versa,' *Al-Ahram*, (February 6, 2002); Mohamed Khalaf Allah, *The Qura'anic Foundations of Progress* (Cairo: Ketab al-Ahali, 1984); Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1992).

from translated materials, and they act as intellectual competitors to the semi-closed religious stratum of *ulama* who "for generations had monopolized learning and intellectual activity."¹³

Not surprisingly, typical traditionalists tend to regard most secularists as not being genuine Muslims.

Cultural Exchange with Non-Muslims

Since democratic processes and secular institutions that had become typical in the non-Soviet West by the mid-twentieth century did not begin to emerge in the Muslim world until much later, it is crucial to understand how the three patterns of thought perceive their relationship with contemporary Western political norms and institutions. For example, cultural exchange and the possibility of civilizational cross-pollination with non-Muslims is an issue that has widened the intellectual gap among traditionalists, modernists, and secularists in most Muslim countries. To traditionalists, there is no need for cultural exchange or cross-civilizational discourses. Modernists and secularists, in contrast, are open to cultural exchange. The attitudes of each group are discussed below.

Traditionalists' Reading of Non-Muslims' Civilizational Contributions

Typical traditionalists gain their credibility among devout Muslims through strict deduction from sacred texts and their knowledge of the interpretations of the faith's early leaders:

[A]nything not established in Islam should not be followed, as this will lead to castigation... Islam is complete and perfect, and we derive our total lifestyle from Islam that Allah has completed for us, we cannot add nor eliminate any teachings from this completed religion as the Prophet said: "nothing of what would bring you closer to jannah (paradise) and further away from hellfire but I have clarified for you."¹⁴

This quote captures some of the epistemological underpinnings of typical traditionalist attitudes. Islam is complete regarding the issues of religion, spirituality and

¹³Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 121.

¹⁴ Ahmad Musa Jibril, *Celebrating the Holidays of the Infidels* (2003), available from <http://www.alsalafyoon.com/EnglishPosts/HolidayInfidel.htm>.

world affairs. The more Muslims do sound deductions, the closer they are to the right path of Islam. The fear of innovation is clear. If something is not stated in the *Qur'an*, the *sunna* [practice] of the Prophet Muhammad, and the *ijma'* [consensus] of the early companions and *ulama*, contemporary *ulama* only can deduce its verdict through *qiyas* [analogical reasoning] based on the aforementioned sources. This approach means that traditionalists are anti-modern in many respects. For them, importing political solutions from non-Muslims defies God's claim in the *Qur'an* that He has perfected religion and society for Muslims.¹⁵

Typically, traditionalists believe that through the text of the *Qur'an* and the exemplary life of Prophet Muhammad, God left Muslims with no need for further investigation regarding most important issues, including governance, which is part of '*aqeeda* [creed]. When Muslims diverge from their '*aqeeda* and follow the path of wrongdoers, they move into a state of *jahilliyya* [the state of ignorance before Islam].¹⁶ Thus, according to Ghazi Enaya when one says "Islamic democracy," one belittles Islam by deeming it in need of corrections and modifications from others.¹⁷ The attempt to create such a democracy goes against the teachings of Islam, according to traditionalists. Thus, not only democracy but also liberalism, socialism, and nationalism cannot be justified in Islam, either as means or as value systems because it is forbidden for Muslims to imitate disbelievers.¹⁸

Traditionalists often quote a *hadith* [authenticated saying] of Prophet Muhammad in which he warns Muslims against imitating non-believers: "He is not one of us, he who imitates others. Do not imitate either the Jews or the Christians."¹⁹ This *hadith*, among others, has been taken by traditionalists to be part of *al-wala' wa al-bara'a* [allegiance to Muslims

¹⁵ The *Qur'an*, Chapter 5, verse 3

¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Signposts* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989), p. 42.

¹⁷ Ghazi Enaya, *Jahelayat Al-Demokrateya* [The bankruptcy/apostasy of democracy] (Amman: Dar Zahran Lenashr wa al-Tawzee, 1999), p. 12.

¹⁸ Abo Bakr al-Gazza'eri, *Who Is Responsible for the Loss of Islam* (Cairo: Maktabet al-Kolleyat al-Azhareya, 1984), p. 12.

¹⁹ Reported by Imams Termithy & Abu-Dawd. Damascus: Dar al-Shab, 1978.

and disloyalty to non-Muslims].²⁰ According to typical traditionalists, imitating non-Muslims (such as adopting democracy) always has been part of a conspiracy to "destroy Islam and annihilate its people" by making Muslims "roll in Western civilization away from Muhammad and his book," following the path of Turkey, which adopted a "civil constitution instead of its sharia-based system of government."²¹ Ayman Al-Zawahri argues that, "Whoever labels himself as a Muslim democrat or a Muslim who calls for democracy is like saying he is a Jewish Muslim or a Christian Muslim."²² By enticing ordinary Muslims to legislate for themselves, they challenge Islam's essence: "No God but Allah" means no legislator but God.²³

Traditionalists are often hostile to intellectualism, pluralism and any sectarian divisions within Islam, and they do not tolerate rational thinking or *ijtihad* [independent reasoning].²⁴ For secularists in particular, the worst example of traditionalism is represented by the Wahabi *ulama*, who follow the teachings of the eighteenth century theologian Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahab. The later rejected any interpretation of Islamic law and called for following the sacred texts literally. Contemporary Wahabi scholars not only reject the notion of cultural exchange with non-Muslims but even refuse to "interpret the divine law from a historical, contextual perspective and treat the vast majority of Islamic history as a

²⁰ Abu Is'haq Al-Howaini, *Al-Wala' Wa Al-Bara'a* [Alliance and clearance] (Islamway.com, 1998); Ayman al-Zawahri, 'Alliance and Disloyalty,' *al-Quds al-Arabi*, (December 25, 2002).

²¹ Galal al-'Alem, *Kaddat Al-Gharb Yakoloon: Damero Al-Islam and Abeedo Ahlaho* [Leaders of the West say: Destroy Islam, annihilate its people] (Tripoli, Lebanon: Transcript, 1975), pp. 48-49.

²² Ayman al-Zawahri, *Al-Hassad Al-Mor: Al-Ekhwān Al-Moslmoon Fi Seteen 'Amah* [The bitter harvest of the Muslim Brotherhood in sixty years](NA: NA, NA) (Unpublished pamphlet).

²³ Abdel Azeez al-Badry, *Islam's Verdict on Socialism* (Al-Madeena Al-Monawara, Saudi Arabia: Al-Maktabba Al-'elmyya, 1983), p. 150; Qutb, *Signposts*, p. 16.

²⁴ Abdel Latif 'Arabeyat, *Contemporary Political Islamic Fiqh* (Duha: Jazeera.net, 1998).

corruption of the true and authentic Islam."²⁵ In fact, typical Wahabis do not consider themselves as one "school of thought within Islam, but [as] Islam."²⁶

Modernists' Reading of Non-Muslims' Civilizational Contributions

Typically, modernist Islamists do not extend *a priori* their definition of the "un-Islamic" to include non-Islamic sources and civilizations. Rather, they tend to believe that a Muslim can learn whatever is good for him/herself and society regardless of its origins.²⁷ Typical modernists do not perceive *al-wala' wa al-bara'a* creed [allegiance to Muslims and disloyalty to non-Muslims] as part of *sharia* [Islamic law]. On the contrary, it is part of *fiqh* [jurisprudence] that may not be valid for contemporary Muslims. Even if Muslims abide by this creed, it should not be an obstacle to learning from other civilizations.²⁸ Modernists believe that whatever achieves justice and fairness among people, even if it is not mentioned explicitly in the *sharia*, is part of it, because *sharia* in its origin and purpose is based on the welfare of people in this life, as well as in the hereafter. Modernists usually quote a famous saying by the medieval scholar al-Jawziyah:

Everything that may divert people from justice to injustice, from mercy to its opposite, from what is good to what is evil, from wisdom to foolishness is not part of *sharia* even if [somebody has] associated it with *sharia* through [false] interpretation.²⁹

Following the same logic, modernists often quote the early praxis of the Prophet and his companions who learned a lot of worldly inventions from the Egyptians, Persians, and Romans as long as their practices did not contradict clear-cut "do" and "do not do" provisions of the holy texts. This group of Islamist scholars, intellectuals and activists usually quotes an

²⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl, 'Islam: Images, Politics and Paradox,' *Middle East Report*, 221 (Winter 2001), Available from: http://www.merip.org/mer/mer221/221_abu_el_fadl.html

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ All'al Fasi, *Defending Sharia* (Rabat: Muassasat 'Allal al-Fasi, 1972), p. 44.

²⁸ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Relationship with Non-Muslims* (al-Jazeera.net, 2003 Available from: <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/shareea/articles/2003/6/6-25-1.htm>

²⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *A'lam Al-Muwaqqi'in* (Cairo: NA,1969), part 3, p.1.

unauthenticated *hadith*: "Wisdom is the wandering goal of the believer. Wherever he finds it, he will be the first to follow it."³⁰ Thus, if Muslims refute Darwinism, Marxism or the contributions of Sigmund Freud and Emanuel Kant, this is not because everything they said was wrong. Some of what they said may be useful and thus deserves to be studied.³¹ Mohamed al-Ghazali best exemplified this modernist thinking: "I am Muslim. I may like to eat an Arab grilled fat sheep or a European simple boiled dish. No problem as long as I mention the name of God and eat from what is in front of me according to Islamic teachings."³² He also refused a nominal Islamic constitution prepared by Taqyy al-Din al-Nabhani since it did not have enough legal guarantees to ensure *shura* [mutual consultation], political freedoms, and public interests. He praised the 1923 Egyptian constitution that mainly was imported from the West as practically more Islamic than most of the so-called Islamic constitutions.³³

Thus, a mature Muslim can read un-Islamic and non-Islamic philosophies and pick and choose what is compatible with his/her ethics and creed.³⁴ Muslims should not refute the wisdom that may exist in the books of the "people of falsehood."³⁵ In fact, some modernists maintain that most of what Muslims learn from others mainly is what others previously had learned from Muslims.³⁶ However, this learning cannot violate or contradict what they perceive to be the fundamentals of Islam. That is why they may accept Western technologies

³⁰ Though scholars of *hadith* do not consider it authentic, many Muslims believe it is.

³¹ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Our Culture between Extroversion and Introversion* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2000), p. 41.

³² Mohamed al-Ghazali, *Muslims' Halal Choices* (Qatar National Radio, 1985).

³³ Mohamed al-Ghazali, *Constitution of Unity among Muslims* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 1997), p. 156.

³⁴ Ali Shariati and Farhang Rajaei, *What Is to Be Done: The Enlightened Thinkers and an Islamic Renaissance* (Houston, Tex.: Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986).

³⁵ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Our Nation between Two Centuries* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2000), p. 45.

³⁶ al-Ghazali, *Constitution of Unity among Muslims* (NA: NA, 1997), p. 29; and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 34

and institutions but not beliefs such as the separation of mosque and state.³⁷ The latter idea contradicts the oneness of religion and state in Islam and assumes conflict between them; a conflict can be between two separate parties but cannot exist in a unitary polity.³⁸ Some modernists even give the right of *ijtihad* to all Muslims, who have the right to choose among the (differing) *ijtihads* of *ulama*.³⁹ To sum up the approach of modernists, they aim at advocating "modernization without encouraging servility to the West and discouraging confidence in one's own cultural resources."⁴⁰

Secularists' Reading of Non-Muslims' Civilizational Contributions

Secularists start from the assumption that Muslims need to follow the paths of the most successful to outdo them, exactly as the West did by learning from ancient Muslims and others. The Islamists' slogans about the peculiar and idiosyncratic nature of Muslims are obstacles to rather than catalysts of development and modernization. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the fall of almost all Muslim territories under the rule of European colonial powers were not a coincidence or isolated events. Rather, these events ensued because Muslims stopped developing new ideas in response to new challenges, and they clung to old ways until they found Napoleon occupying Egypt in 1798. Since then it has been clear that the gap between Muslims' power and the flourishing Western democracies is

³⁷ 'Arabeyat, *Contemporary Political Islamic Fiqh* (1998), p. 19

³⁸ Rachid al-Ghannouchi, *Interview at Jazeera.net* (June 28, 2003).

³⁹ Hassan al-Turabi, *Politics and Governance* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 2003); 'Arabeyat, *Contemporary Political Islamic Fiqh* (1998), p. 41

⁴⁰ Nikki R. Keddie, 'Intellectuals in the Modern Middle East: A Brief Historical Consideration,' *Daedalus*, 44 (1972), p. 9.

growing.⁴¹ Some secularists blame the failure of attempts to catch up with the West in part on the absence of a worldview that respects other civilizations and learns from them.⁴²

Some secularists even believe that it is not possible to import Western materialist products and outcomes without understanding and adopting the system of beliefs and ideologies behind them. In a clear criticism of modernists, secularists do not see how it is possible to "import from the West what is compatible with our values and leave the rest."⁴³ In fact, they contend that interaction and learning from other civilizations cannot succeed without emancipation from the power of the "holy" interpretations and traditions that come as a package with the sacred texts.⁴⁴ Thus, Muslims must not imprison themselves in the old books of the past while the world around them advances in all fields. Secularists consider the adoption of ideas and institutions from other civilizations to be a very important sign of the perseverance of Muslims and their capacity to make up for what they missed. This is important, because as one secularist has noted, Arabs have translated some 10,000 books into Arabic since Caliph al-Ma'moun (1000 years ago) while Spain translates into Spanish the same number in one year.⁴⁵

To some secularists, Western philosophers such as Karl Marx, Emanuel Kant, John Locke, Machiavelli, Voltaire, James Madison and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are more acceptable sources of knowledge and virtue than most of the ancient scholars of Islam because of the capacity of the Western thinkers to set free the human mind from the chains of

⁴¹ Sadek. J. al-'Azm, *Critique of Religious Thought* (Beirut: 1969), p.69; and Farag Fouda, *A Dialogue on Secularism* (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr for Research and Studies, 1993), p.6.

⁴² Murad Wahba, *The Virus of Retardation* (Cairo: Al-Haya'a al-Massreyya Lil-Ketab, 1998), p.41.

⁴³ Turki Al-Hamad, *Culture Facing the Challenges of Change* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 1993), p. 82.

⁴⁴ Mohamed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, ed. and trans. by Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview, 1994), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Abdullah Bagabeer, 'Cultural Indicators,' *al-Sharq al-Awssat*, (22 June 2003).

the church and mosque.⁴⁶ However, Mohamed Arkoun argues that the gaps that both Islamists and orientalists create between Islamic and Western civilizations and intellectual heritages are artificial, because both civilizations are built on religious beliefs and commitments. There will be no salvation for Muslims, he continues, without acknowledging their influence on the West and internalizing the influence of the West on them.⁴⁷

Many secularists consider the contemporary intellectual and political dilemma facing Muslims is similar to that encountered in the West during the Middle Ages, with all its implications. Thus they see little difference between the Catholic pope and his priests trying to preserve political power and the Islamists' attempts to gain and preserve power. Secularists believe this is the reason why traditionalists attack any attempt to liberate women, build modern education systems, or create a modern civil society. Furthermore, because traditionalists refuse to relinquish their custody over the public mind, they call any criticism of their authority some type of "intellectual invasion" coming from the West.⁴⁸

Violence

The use of violence by some Islamist political groups has been problematic for traditionalists because all violent Islamists are traditionalists, although not all traditionalists approve of violence to achieve political ends.⁴⁹ Among traditionalists who condone violence, some infer from the holy texts and their interpretations that there are valid reasons to wage violence against their fellow Muslims. The difference between traditionalists who condone

⁴⁶ Iqbal Barakah, 'Democracy and Freedom of Women,' *al-Ahram*, (12 June 2002).

⁴⁷ Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, p.4.

⁴⁸ Atef al-'Iraqi, 'Ethical Values between Scientific Progress and the Achievements of Civilization,' *al-Ahram*, (29 December 2002).

⁴⁹ This refers to violence directed at governments and societies in the Muslim world. Muslims in general – regardless of their ideological preferences – may support violent resistance against invaders or, as is often the case, Israel. See further Abdelmohsen al-'Abeykan, 'Suicide Operations,' *al-Sharq al-Awssat*, (6 July 2003).

violence and those who do not lies in which Qur'anic verses they choose to articulate the concept of jihad; at issue between them is the verse of the sword:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.⁵⁰

Some traditionalists believe that this verse, among others, encourages sincere believers to wage a violent jihad against all infidels, including their rulers who replace the *sharia* of God with Western laws and falsify the sovereignty of Allah.⁵¹ However, other traditionalists agree with modernist Islamists that this verse is an exception to general principles mentioned elsewhere in the *Qur'an* that equate jihad with defense and require justice and kindness as the path for co-existence.⁵² They employ very strict criteria to justify the use of violence against their rulers, such as the prohibition of prayers, denial of the authenticity of a verse or *hadith* and/or public renunciation of God's verdicts and their replacement with others.⁵³

Pluralism

If violence is an issue that divides traditionalists, it is the notion of pluralism that is divisive among secularists. The equation of political pluralism with a democratic government has been a persistent theme in the writings of secular intellectuals in the Middle East for about 100 years. In fact, the ideas of a group that may be called "liberal secularists" are close

⁵⁰ The *Qur'an*, Chapter 9, verse 5. There is disagreement about which verse is actually the verse of the sword. Yet most likely it is the quoted verse or this one (from the same chapter of Surat al-Tawba: "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued." (The *Qur'an*, Chapter 9, verse 29).

⁵¹ Abu Ebbada al-Ansari, *Sovereignty of Allah in the Writings of Abdullah Azzam* (Bshawar, Pakistan: Markez al-Shaheed Azzam, 1988); Mohamed Farag, *The Absent Obligation* (Cairo: NA, 1995), p. 41; Mawdudi, *Concepts of Islam Regarding Religion and State* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1977), p.83; and Qutb, *Signposts*, p.25.

⁵² The *Qur'an*, Chapter 49/13; Abdelaziz Ibn Baaz, *The Obligation of Enjoining the Good and Forebidding the Evil* (Riyadh: Dar al-Essma, 1992), p. 3.

⁵³ Mohamed Othaimeen, *Fatawa* [Audio tape # 53] (binothaimeen.com, 1998).

to the Western concept of liberal democracy, and liberal secularists believe that all citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, should enjoy the same basic human and political rights.⁵⁴ However, liberal secularists have not comprised the majority of secularists historically. Many politically active secularists, while paying lip-service to democratic ideals, have supported authoritarian governments in practice. Such political leaders may be called “autocratic secularists.” In their opposition to and even fear of Islamists (both traditionalists and modernists), they have demonstrated more aptitude for suppressing dissent than respect for democratic principles and procedures. To justify their autocratic policies, they equate all Islamists with images of long-bearded fascist fanatics who are determined to establish totalitarian theocracies if they come to power. If there are differences among Islamists, secular autocrats argue, they are merely differences in degree.⁵⁵

Secular autocratic discourse is associated with most intellectuals who earn their living through glorifying and defending rulers in Muslim countries.⁵⁶ Most regimes have learned how to play the game of autocratic tactical liberalization through the measures of "state-monitored political openness to promote reforms that appear pluralistic but function to preserve autocracy."⁵⁷ These regimes are highly skillful at controlling "elections, manipulating divide-and-rule tactics, state interference in civil society organizations, and the

⁵⁴ Ali Abul Khair, ‘Political Islam and Democracy’, *al-Wafd* (2 February 2003).

⁵⁵ This was the argument Tunisian president Zein Abdin Ben Ali made to decapitate the Islamist opposition Nahda [Renaissance] party after winning the elections of 1993 with 99.91 percent of the vote; see further Stephen King, *Liberalization against Democracy: the Local Politics of Economic Reform in Tunisia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2003). Mostafa Faki, The head of the Foreign Relations Committee, Egypt’s parliament said: "If you open the door for genuine democracy, you have the chance that fundamentalists will come to power. What will the Americans do with them?"; see Mostafa Faki Interview with Anthony Shadid, Restrictive Arab Nations Feel Pressure from Within, *Washington Post*, 27 February 2003.

⁵⁶ John Waterbury, ‘Democracy without Democrats?’, in *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salama (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

⁵⁷ Marina Ottaway, et al., ‘Democratic Mirage in the Middle East,’ *Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief*, 20 (Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), p.4.

obstruction of meaningful political party systems, [and] these regimes have created deeply entrenched systems that are surprisingly effective at resisting democratic change."⁵⁸

According to autocratic secularists, Muslims are not ready for democracy; illiteracy, tribalism, apathy, emotionalism, and nostalgia are not conducive preconditions.⁵⁹ Some examples may seem to support the autocratic argument. The Lebanese democratic experience ended up in a severe civil war.⁶⁰ The democratic political opening in Egypt in the 1980s led to massive violent fundamentalism.⁶¹ The rebellion against Siyad Berri in Somalia ended up with chaotic state breakdown.⁶² Free elections in Algeria led the country into civil war with tens of thousands of deaths and casualties.⁶³ Hafez al-Assad's autocratic policies managed to break the vicious cycle of coup d'états by systematic removal of his opponents for "the interest of Syrians and all the Arab umma."⁶⁴ Autocratic discourse is clear as well in the importance of other tasks such as defending national integrity and security.⁶⁵

In democratic countries, the majority forms the government, whereas in Muslim countries the schism is severe and the majority is apathetic and irrational. That is why the autocrat has to create and shape the majority around his persona. Muslim autocratic rulers attempt to accomplish this task by mobilizing symbols, pictures, and slogans and the annihilation of possible opponents.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ I. William Zartman, *Political Elites in Arab North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt* (New York: Longman, 1982), p. 34.

⁶⁰ Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*, 4th, new American ed. (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), p. 19.

⁶¹ Hosni Mubarak, *Speeches, President Mubarak : G-15* (Cairo: Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Information, State Information Service, 1992), p. 23.

⁶² James Schofield, *Silent over Africa: Stories of War and Genocide* (Sydney, Australia/New York: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 113.

⁶³ Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998*, The Ceri Series in Comparative Politics and International Studies (New York: Columbia University Press in association with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, 2000), p. 18.

⁶⁴ Hafez Assad and Mustafa Talas, *That Is What Assad Said*, (Dimashq: Talas, 1990), p. 82.

⁶⁵ Saddam Hussein, *President Hussein Interviewed by Kuwaiti Press on Gulf War, February 20, 1988* (Baghdad: Dar al-Mamun for Translation and Pub., 1988), p. 16.

Liberal secularists disagree. Liberal secularists argue that limits on the right of participation is disallowed. That is why their main target of criticism is not Islamists in opposition but the autocratic rulers, whether Islamists or secularists. The following quote reflects the main argument of liberal secularists:

For decades after independence, most populist autocrats had suspended democracy until national liberation; until Palestine had been liberated; until we have economic development; until we have true social justice, and so on. As it turns out now, after fifty years of depriving ourselves of democracy, we find ourselves with none of these things! And we are no closer to democracy... We must not continue to allow ourselves to be manipulated by these false messiahs... Now we know better than to fall for the despots' delaying tactics.⁶⁶

Liberal secularists perceive ruling non-democratic regimes as a more dangerous and immediate challenge than Islamists.⁶⁷ From their perspective, the appeal to Islamists comes from the fact that they do not have current failures in most societies.⁶⁸ The more they reach power and fail to convert their demagogic slogans into practical solutions, the more Muslims will refrain from electing them.⁶⁹ Failures of Islamists in Sudan, Iran, and Indonesia among other places will prove that politics is not about slogans and symbols but about running trains, building bridges, delivering public services, fighting diseases and eliminating illiteracy.⁷⁰ With those kinds of problems, how many times Islamists pray a day will not be the main factor in determining their re-election.

⁶⁶ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East Today*. (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, 2003).

⁶⁷ Hussain Abdelrazeq, *Forum on Democracy in the Arab World* (Jazeera.net, 2001 [cited 30 June 2003]), available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/opinions/articles/2001/11/11-29-6.htm>.

⁶⁸ Elya Hariq, *Democracy and the Challenges of Modernity between the East and the West* (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2001), p. 39.

⁶⁹ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *The Crisis of Democracy in the Arab World*, (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-'Arabiyah, 1984), p. 23.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Liberal secularists have the weakest voice in the Muslim world, and they seem to be the least in number too.⁷¹ They can not offer the baksheesh (free services) that autocratic rulers can.⁷² They do not have the legacy of the past and claims of Islamic *assala* [authenticity] that Islamists have. These factors have contributed to the failure of their program so far. "How can you have democratic institutions if you have few democrats?"⁷³

Table 1 sums up the discussion of the typology of the foregoing intellectual map. The three schools face common challenges and concerns, although they respond to them differently, including to the challenge of democracy itself (as will be discussed below). The table displays all five categories of intellectuals and *ulama*. Each school presents itself as the genuine representative of Islam and speaker in its name. Traditionalist Islamists limit what is acceptable by Islam to what has been accepted anciently by *sharia* and consensually condoned by the *al-salaf al-saleh* (the pious predecessors). To them *sharia* never can be silent even if it is necessary to resort to *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). Preserving the identity of this *umma* (nation) requires traditionalists to keep both *sharia* and traditional *fiqh* (jurisprudence) immune against skeptical minds who want to corrupt the ideal legacy of the past. That is why they would argue against any *bed'a* (man-made innovation) or violation of consensus among the *ulama*. The greatest threat to this pure Islamic tradition of respecting the legacy of *al-salaf al-saleh* is coming from external sources of values, norms and ideas, most notably from the West. They consider democracy to be an alien un/anti-Islamic system of government that replaces the will of God with the will of the masses.

⁷¹ Ghassan Salamah, *Democracy without Democrats? : The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), p.9.

⁷² Bahgat Korany, 'Democracy, Islam, and the Study of Middle Eastern Politics, Arab Democratization: A Poor Cousin?,' *Political Science and Politics*, 27, 3 (1994), p. 512.

⁷³ Fawaz Gerges, Quoted in Margot Patterson, 'Islam on the Defensive,' *National Catholic Reporter* (14 December 2001).

Table 1: Schools of Intellectuals and Scholars

	Traditionalist Islamists	Modernist Islamists	Secularist Muslims	
1) For something to be Islamic, it should...	...be consensually accepted by <i>sharia</i> and <i>ulama</i>not contradict the <i>sharia</i>	...be in the interest of society regardless of holy texts	
2) Silence of <i>Sharia</i> is...	...not possible.	...opportunity for <i>ijtihad</i> /independent reasoning.	...a sign of the indeterminacy of <i>sharia</i> .	
3) Zones immune to skepticism are...	... <i>Sharia</i> and <i>fiqh</i> <i>Sharia</i>none.	
4) Violation of consensus among <i>ulama</i>destroys the unity and uniqueness of the <i>umma</i>is dangerous but possible.	...is necessary to eliminate traditional consensus.	
5) Cultural exchange with non-Muslims is...	...imitation and innovation.	...a search for wisdom.	...better than blind imitation of ancestors	
6) Democracy is...	...anti/un-Islamic.	...Islamic/ Islamizable.	...necessary (liberals).	...impractical (secularists).

Modernists respond to the issues differently. They accept new ideas, mechanisms and values as far as they do not contradict authentic and well-established *sharia*. They would accept that God deliberately left Muslims with some legislative vacuums that may be filled by the human mind performing *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) within the boundaries of Islamic *sharia*. Well-established and clear-cut verses in the *Qur'an* and the *hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet) are the only zones that are immune to skeptical scrutiny. The scholars of the past and *al-salaf al-saleh* performed *ijtihad* to respond to the new challenges that they faced. Now it is time for modern and contemporary Muslims to have their share in this process. Modernists find nothing in the Islamic authentic sources that hinder them from communicating with and learning from non-Muslims as far as they do not infringe upon authentic Islamic principles. To modernists, most aspects of democracy are compatible with Islam.

Secularists find in the holy texts little of relevance with respect to how to run modern societies. Holy texts are excellent sources of *aqeeda* (creed) and ethics but not politics and

economics. Numerous and sometimes contradictory interpretations and inferences based upon the very same verses or sayings of the Prophet indicate that most of these texts have no single meaning until the human mind imposes its understanding on them. The silence of *sharia* regarding many issues is another sign that God wants the human intellect to function and flourish. To them all texts and issues are subject to human scrutiny with no immune zones. By thinking about solutions for problems of governance, Muslims will replace their obsolete and impractical perception of the world with more contemporary science-based concepts. Cultural exchange with other civilizations is a must in this regard.

Four Readings of Democracy

No one single group can claim absolute triumph in this intellectual contest in the Muslim world.⁷⁴ In fact, it still is escalating on different fronts and over different issues. Let us examine how the groups differ on the issue of democracy.

First: *Shura* and/versus Democracy

The most common concept that comes to the Muslim mind when asked about Islamic governance is *shura*, governance based upon decision by consultation and deliberation. Traditionalists consider *shura* to be the proper alternative to un-Islamic *democracy*. *Shura* is an Islamic principle that requires Muslims to consult each other on important matters as it is ordained in the Qur'anic chapter of *al-Shura*.

Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance. (The *Qur'an*, Chapter 42, verse 32)

When it comes to the application of *shura*, traditionalists travel back in history to *al-salaf al-saleh* of Islam to infer from their writings how *shura* was and should be applied. The first lesson is that all issues that already are determined by the Qur'an, *sunna* (the praxis of

⁷⁴ In this section all traditionalists will be treated as a single group since they differ only with regard to means.

the Prophet Muhammad) and *ijma'* (consensus) are not the subject of consultation. To traditionalists, *shura* is the antithesis of democracy, and they use every possible argument to demonstrate the contradiction between the two.

Ali Belhaj, the second person in the Islamic Front of Algeria said: "I disbelieve in dictatorship as much as I disbelieve in democracy. Democracy is *shirk* (polytheism)."⁷⁵ Ayman al-Zawahri clearly adopts a similar position when he considers democracy to be "a new religion to allow God-like men to legislate for themselves... versus the religion of God that gave the right of legislation to God and God alone."⁷⁶ Thus, democracy is inherently un-Islamic since it gives individuals the right to legislate regarding everything, including issues that God already has stated in His own words. "When God decides, there is no place for consultation."⁷⁷ Even the issues that are not addressed in Holy Scriptures should not be subject to debates by commoners. This deliberation should be limited to the *Ahl-alhal wa-a'lakd* (men of decision-making) because they are pious and knowledgeable to exercise *ijtihad* and draw verdicts by *qiyas*.⁷⁸ Even if the ruler consults, he is not forced to act according to the decision of the majority. According to typical traditionalists, the ruler is responsible before God more than he is responsible before people. The relevant Qur'anic verse says:

...and ask for (God's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him) (Chapter 3, verse 3).

⁷⁵Salah Eldeen al-Gorshy, 'Deepening Democracy: A New Mission Ahead of Islamic Thought,' *Al'Arabi*, 456 (1997).

⁷⁶ al-Zawahri, *The Bitter Harvest of Muslim Brotherhood*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ Mohamed Motwali al-Sharawi, *Al-Shura and Legislation in Islam* (Cairo: Dar Thabet, 1980), p. 39; and Mawdudi, *Concepts of Islam Regarding Religion and State*, p. 72.

⁷⁸Mohamed Ali Taskheeri, interview, 'The Reality of Al-Wali Al-Faqih in Iran' (aljazeera.net, 1999 [cited 2 July 2, 2003]), Available from:

<http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/interview/articles/2002/1/1-16-4.htm>.

Traditionalists argue that in this verse God addresses the Prophet Muhammad to consult with and listen to his companions and then to make up his mind and trust only God.⁷⁹

Traditionalists state that the Prophet and his early companions consulted just to gather opinions and information to take enlightened decisions with no commitment to abide by the decision of the majority.⁸⁰

King Fahd (d. 2005) of Saudi Arabia wore the hat of a traditionalist when he commented on the incompatibility of democracy and Islam:

The democratic system prevalent in the world is not appropriate in this region...The election system has no place in the Islamic creed, which calls for a government of advice and consultation and for the shepherd's openness to his flock, and holds the ruler fully responsible before his people.⁸¹

Imam Shirazi of Iran argues that Islam cannot allow the unqualified to govern and rule either with the approval of the masses, as in democracies, or against their will as in aristocracies. This is simply un-Islamic. Islam's way is to keep God as the only legislator and to allow people to apply God's laws (meaning *sharia*). Abiding by God's imperatives is understood as counter to dictatorship.⁸²

Modernists disagree. They argue that typical traditionalists draw a false analogy between Muslims' golden era and contemporary circumstances.⁸³ Modernists believe that *shura* is not only obligatory but that the result of *shura* is binding.⁸⁴ They even extend the frame of candidate consultations to include all Muslims regardless of gender or knowledge

⁷⁹The most recent application of non-binding *shura* was the Taliban's system of government; there were several *shura* councils, but none of them could enforce their decisions on Mulla Omar. See Mawlai Hafez Allah Haqqani, *Taliban from the Dream of Mulla to Leadership of the Believers* (Islamabad: Center for Political Research, 1997), p. 35.

⁸⁰ Abdullateef Mushtaheri, 'Their Decision Is by Consultation' (Islamway.com, 1993).

⁸¹ King Fahd, 'Interview,' *Mideast Mirror* (30 March 1992), p. 18.

⁸² Imam Shirazi, 'Wilayat al al-faqih,' *Annabaa*, 57 (May 2001), p. 41.

⁸³ Mohamed Sa'eed al-Bouti, *Salafism: A Blessed Era Not an Islamic Doctrine* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), p. 42.

⁸⁴ al-Gorshy, 'Deepening Democracy,' p. 23.

based on the fact that the *ulama*, though knowledgeable about religion, are limited in their understanding non-religious worldly affairs.⁸⁵

Modernists use the term *Ahl-alhal wa-a'lakd*⁸⁶ as well, but these people are to be representatives publicly elected by the whole *umma*, including non-Muslims.⁸⁷ Unlike traditionalists who have many reservations regarding *bed'a*, modernists believe that Western democratic institutions are the best mechanisms for implementing *shura* in Muslim societies.⁸⁸

Liberal secularists perceive *shura* as a characteristic of good governance that predated Islam in Arabia and later was ordained by Islam.⁸⁹ A democratic regime of government with separation of powers and checks and balances would be the ideal *shura*-based system of government.⁹⁰ In contrast, autocratic secularists do not trust the masses and reduce *shura* to deliberation among their aides since *shura* is not obligatory or binding. If there are people to be consulted, they are mostly appointed or at best elected among a pre-determined set of loyal politicians.⁹¹ Autocrats in this sense are elitists who distrust the masses' capacity to understand democracy. A former Jordanian prime minister argues:

Democracy is an evolving being, gets born and grows up. It is never created

⁸⁵ Kamal Abo al-Magd, *Dialogue Not Confrontation: Studies on Islam and Modern Times* (Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouq, 1988); and al-Ghazali, *Islam and Political Dictatorship*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Kotob al-Islamia, Nd), p. 37.

⁸⁶ al-Gorshy, 'Deepening Democracy,' p. 25

⁸⁷ Tariq Bishri, *Al-Hiwar Al-Islami Al-Almani* [The Secular - Islamic Dialogue] (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 1996), p. 53.

⁸⁸ Mahfouz Nehnah, *The Desired Algeria* [in Arabic] (Algiers: Dar Annaba', 1999), p. 54.

⁸⁹ Tareq Heggi, 'The Tough Choice between Two Models of Civilization Interacting' [in Arabic], *al-Ahram*, (19 October 2002), p. 51.

⁹⁰ Abd al-Karim Sourush, Mahmoud Sadri, and Ahmad Sadri, *Reason, Freedom, & Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 44.

⁹¹ Fred Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 39; and Elya Hariq, *Al-Democratiyya wa Tahdeyat Al-Hadatha* [Democracy and the challenges of modernity between the East and the West] (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2001), p.91.

all at once. Whoever asks for something pre-maturely, one will be punished by not getting it. The baby that is born bigger than its natural size either will die; the mother will die or both will die.⁹²

Mubarak of Egypt was quoted saying that “we are providing doses of democracy in proportion to our ability to absorb them.”⁹³ Table 2 sums up the core differences among the different schools of intellectuals and *ulama*.

Table 2: Breakdown of Democratic Values and Institutions – Shura (Consultation/Deliberation)

Shura	Islamist		Secularist	
	Traditionalist	Modernists	Liberals	Autocrats
1) Is it mandatory?	Imperative by Islam	Imperative by Islam and practical reasons	Imperative for practical reasons	No
2) Is it binding?	No	Yes	Yes	No
3) Is it institutionalizable?	Maybe	Yes	Yes	No
3) Is it open to the commons?	No.	Yes	Yes	No.
4) Who functions as consultants?	Ahl-Alhal wa-Al'akd	Elected representatives with given restrictions	Elected representatives	Appointees

Second: Democratic Institutions and Process

Inclusiveness is another point of divergence. Typical traditionalists would disenfranchise non-Muslims, Muslims from other sects and women from any voice in running the affairs of society. Since a non-Muslim or a woman cannot lead Muslims in prayer, they are not allowed the right to decide for the whole *umma*. The oft-quoted statement

⁹² Abdelraouf al-Rawabda., *Al-Democratiyya fi al-Watan al-Arabi* [Forum on democracy in the Arab World] Jazeer.net, 2001 [cited 30 June 2003]. Available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/opinions/articles/2001/11/11-29-6.htm>.

⁹³ Quoted in Maye Kassem, 1999. *In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt* (London: Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 54.

by traditionalists from Ibn al-Qayyim' is that "a woman for her husband is like a slave for his master."⁹⁴ Women intellectually and physically are suited to be the queens of their homes with no political rights whatsoever.⁹⁵ The situation is little different for non-Muslims.⁹⁶ Although safe in Muslim lands, they do not have the same political rights as do Muslims.⁹⁷ Equal participation would mean allowing infidels and innovators to have *sultan* (authority) over believers.⁹⁸

Modernists disagree. Nobody can close a door left open by the Prophet. Predecessors of today's modernists from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Rifaah Rafi al-Tahtawi of Egypt, Khayr al-Din Tunisi of Tunisia, Abdul rahman al-Kawakebi of Syria, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani of Iran, and Mohamed Abduh of Egypt, called upon Muslims to learn these non-Islamic discoveries and inventions from Europe.⁹⁹ Modernists today argue that if there is anything not Islamic by origin but necessary to establish Islamic goals such as justice, it can be imported and Islamized.

⁹⁴ Salman al-Oda, *Snapshots on Women's Contemporary Lives* (Islamway.com, 1994); Abdelaziz Ibn Baaz, *Issues of the Muslim Women* [Arabic Audio-12 Tapes](Islamway.com, 1981).

⁹⁵ Fo'ad Abdelkarim, 'Social Globalization of Woman and Family,' *Al Bayan*, 170 (2002), p. 29.

⁹⁶ Safar al-Hawali, *Ahkam Ahl Al-Dhimma* [Rules of protected ones], Arabic audio tapes (Islamway.net, 1994).

⁹⁷ Abdullah Gabreen, *Verdicts of Ahl Al-Dhimma*, Arabic audio tapes (Islamway.com, 1989).

⁹⁸ Salman bin Hamad al-Oda, *How Did the Mongols Invade the Homeland of Islam?* [in Arabic] (al-Riyadh: Dar Teeba, 1997), p. 16.

⁹⁹ Jamal al-Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Jamiyat al-Urwah al-Wuthqa., *Al-Urwah Al-Wuthqa, Wa-Al-Thawrah Al-Tahririyah Al-Kubra*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Arab, 1957), p. 52; Khaldun Sati Husry, *Three Reformers: A Study in Modern Arab Political Thought*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), p. 62; Mohamed Omara, *The Legacy of Islam and the Scrutiny of Human Reasoning* (Cairo: Dar Al-Wehda, 1980); Rifaah Rafi Tahtawi and Anwar Luqa, *L'or De Paris : Relation De Voyage, 1826-1831, La Bibliothèque Arabe. Collection Les Classiques* (Paris: Sindbad, 1988), p. 62; and Khayr al-Din Tunisi & Munsif Shannufi, *Aqwam Al-Masalik Fi Marifat Ahwal Al-Mamalik, Tahqiq Al-Nusus. Akhbar Wa-Amsar* (Qartaj: al-Muassasah al-Wataniyah lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Tahqiq wa-al-Dirasat, Bayt al-Hikmah, 1991), p. 93.

Prior to the nineteenth century there was no place in Islamic writings for revolutionary ideas such as voting, elected bodies, or institutionalization of the very Islamic concepts such as conditional *bay'a* (swearing of allegiance), accountability or peaceful alternation of power. Though they did not lack the theoretical/philosophical or textual/religious support for these ideas, Islamic experts, both Muslims and non-Muslims, barely find any traces of these ideas in medieval Islam.¹⁰⁰ The ready explanation was the closed door of *ijtihad*. Yet the problem seems to be as political as it was religious. Traditionalists prioritize the value of unity around one ruler, even if despotic, over other values, including limiting the power of this ruler himself. Voting, factions and majority rule on worldly issues would have institutionalized differences and created *fitnah* (internal divisions) while Muslims are asked to be united: "Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving Clear Signs: for them is a dreadful Penalty." (The *Qur'an*, Chapter 3, verse 105)

Modernists argue that they read the world as it is. To them, the *fitnahs* are already there and Muslims already are divided over religious and non-religious issues alike. Thus it is better to institutionalize these differences in the format of political associations and parties where the representatives of each *madhab* (religious tradition) can negotiate and compromise.¹⁰¹ The concept of *ijtihad* opens the discussion of ideas such as voting, political parties, elected representatives, and the rights of non-Muslims and women. Political participation is open to every citizen regardless of religion or gender, although devout

¹⁰⁰ Ali Abd al-Raziq, *Islam and the Bases of Government* (Cairo: 1925), pp. 12-16; Charles Kurzman, 'Liberal Islam: Prospects and Challenges,' *MERIA*, 3, 3 (1999); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958), p. 19; and Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), pp. 23-31.

¹⁰¹ al-Ghazali, *Constitution of Unity among Muslims*, pp. 23-24; al-Qaradawi, *On the Fiqh of the Islamic State* pp. 41-42; and Fahmi Howaidi, *Confirming the Truth* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 1999), p. 73.

Muslims, both men and women, are required in particular to be more participatory since it is part of their religion to enjoin the good and forbid the evil and not to conceal testimony if they can express it in voting.¹⁰²

Some traditionalists consider referenda to be the closest form in modern history to the early praxis of Islam regarding the way of selecting a ruler. The most knowledgeable among Muslims, the *Ahl-alhal wa-a'lakd*, would nominate one person to be the caliph and the rest of the *umma* would swear conditional allegiance to him,¹⁰³ although absence of agreement often led to civil war. Modernists, in contrast, are more open to competitive elections.¹⁰⁴ Al-Qaradawi was reported to have praised Israel for having free and fair elections in contrast to the infamous 99.9 percent garnered by many Muslim rulers in bogus elections. Given what they see as historical manipulation of the *Ahl-alhal wa-a'lakd*, modernists have come to support public voting. They do not perceive it as an un-Islamic, Western idea,¹⁰⁵ but rather the culmination of the effort of thousands of years to limit and check rulers. Conceding that voting is non-Islamic in origin, they argue that it can be Islamized since it is a necessary mechanism against acts of dictatorship highly condemned by Islam. Some modernists even argue that majority rule is an Islamic principle, claiming that the sayings of the Prophet support voting and majority rule. For instance, they cite the Prophet Muhammad's *hadiths* to his companions Abu Bakr and Omar: "If you agree upon something, I will never disagree

¹⁰² al-'Aawa, *On the Political System of the Islamic State*, p.11 and 36-38; al-Qaradawi, *On the Fiqh*, p. 44; and Mohamed Khatami, *Religion and Thought in the Trap of Dictatorship* [Arabic trans. of Persian] (Cairo: Maktabet al-Shorouq, 2001), p. 73.

¹⁰³ Sufi Hasan Abu Talib, *Application of Islamic Shari'a in Arab States* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahdah al-Arabiyah, 1986), p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ Mohamed. A. al-Gabri, *On the Future of Arab Culture* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Center for the Study of Arab Unity, 1987), p. 25; Rachid al-Ghannouchi, *Rights of Citizenship: The Status of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State* [in Arabic] (Tunisia: Dar-alsahwa, 1988), p. 8; al-Ghazali, *Constitution of Unity among Muslims*, p.92; al-Qaradawi, *Our Culture between Extroversion and Introversion*, p. 118

¹⁰⁵ See al-Qaradawi, *On the Fiqh*, p. 27; Mohamed Omara, *Is Islam the Solution? Why and How?* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 1998), p. 92.

with you;" "The devil is remoter from the two and he is closer to the one;" and "the *umma* cannot agree upon wrongdoing." Even when the second caliph, Omar ibn al-Khatib, left six companions of the Prophet to decide the next ruler, he told them to count among themselves and to follow the group that had the greatest number out of the six.

However, modernists face a moral and religious dilemma when they are asked about the possibility of allowing communist, socialist and liberal parties in Muslim countries. They usually give very indecisive responses to this dilemma because these parties in general are un-Islamic. Unlike traditionalists, typical modernists try to be more inclusive of these imported ideologies because they have supporters in the Muslim world. Modernists in general do not want their commitment to democracy to be conditional. To them, Muslims should be given the right to choose among all these parties whether they have Islamic labels or not. But typical modernists interpret the existence of these parties and associations negatively since their presence signifies a search for imported solutions. Yet if Islamists fail as rulers, there is nothing in Islam that gives them the right to prevent non-Islamic parties from coming to power.¹⁰⁶

Secularists in general do not trust Islamists in this regard. Modernists share with traditionalists their refusal of associations that clearly and offensively challenge the immune zone of Islamic teachings such as the existence of God or the Prophethood of Muhammad. Thus, atheist associations are absolutely unacceptable to both types of Islamists. Secularists argue that modernists and traditionalists have arbitrary criteria for what is acceptable and not

¹⁰⁶ Howaidi, *Confirming the Truth*, p.92; Anwar Ibrahim, 'The Umma and Tomorrow's World,' *Futures*, 23, 3 (1991), pp-23-28; Khatami, 'An Interview on Cnn,' Available from: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1998/iran/> ; Omara, *The Legacy of Islam*, p. 16.

acceptable. In fact, secularists see modernists as equivalent to traditionalists but with modern rhetoric.¹⁰⁷

Liberal secularists do not differentiate among citizens based on religion. They even argue against using a box for religion on personal identification cards in Muslim countries. To typical liberals, there should be no *a priori* conditions on formation of parties or associations.¹⁰⁸ In addition, public elections of rulers in multi-candidate campaigns are a must for them.¹⁰⁹

Autocratic secularists do not have one concrete vision regarding the inclusion of non-Muslims and women into the political process. For instance, Muammar Qaddafi of Libya appears to be more open to women's equal rights than Kuwaiti Islamists. The Kuwaiti Islamists have no objection to the idea of an elected and representative parliament, yet they disqualify women. Qaddafi, who endorses women's rights in public office, stands against public elections and equates representation to travesty and deception. To limit the possibility of multiple sources of legitimacy, most typical autocrats rely on referenda instead of elections. However, elections and referenda do not suggest greater tolerance of competitors. Muslim autocrats do not accept bargaining and clearly refuse pressures from any group or sect of society. They simply see concessions as signs of weakness and danger.¹¹⁰ Thus, there

¹⁰⁷ Ali Harb, 'Does Islamization of Sciences Take Us to Totalitarian Islam?' [interview in Arabic], *al-Sharq al-Awssat*, (22 June 2003); Hariq, *Democracy and the Challenges of Modernity between the East and the West*, pp. 78-79; Ahamad Abdelmo'eti Heggazi, 'Renewing the Religious Discourse ... Yes and Yes' *al-Ahram* (23 January 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Said El-Naggar, *Misr Wa-Tahaddiyat Al-'Asr* [Egypt and Modern Challenges] (Cairo: Jam'iyat al-Nida al-Jadid, 1993), p.69; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, et al., *Dawr Wasail Al-Ilam Al-'Arabiyyah Fi Da'm Thaqafat Al-Mujtama Al-Madani : Halqat Niqashiyah* [The Role of Mass Media in Promoting Civil Society](Cairo: Markaz Ibn Khaldun lil-Dirasat al-Inmaiyyah, 1997), p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Sa'd Abu al-Su'ud, *Khawatir-- 'an Al-Dimuqratiyyah, Kitab Hizb Al-Wafd Al-Jadid Bi-Al-Iskandariyyah* [Thoughts on Democracy by the New Wafd Party] (al-Iskandariyyah: Hizb al-Wafd al-Jadid bi-al-Iskandariyyah, 1995), p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Hassan II, 'Discours et Interviews de Sm Hassan II' (Rabat: Ministère d'Etat chargé de l'information, 1999), p. 43; Anwar Sadat, *Speeches and Interviews by President Mohamed*

should be no institution, public square or sport stadium without their personal photos and statues and run by their own appointees. These appointees should perceive themselves as extensions of the autocrat's authority. Political parties, if allowed, are expected to be loyal to the regime and respect the autocratic authority either through joining a coalition with the ruling party (e.g., in Syria) or by posing no threat to the dominance of the autocrat.¹¹¹

Third: Civil and Political Rights

Traditionalist Islamists have a clear argument against personal freedoms and basic rights. For them rights are not fundamental or basic; they are given by God and thus limited by God's imperatives as stated in the *Qur'an* and by the practices of the Prophet. To traditionalists, basic rights and freedoms are themselves the core of illegitimacy of democracy. They understand democracy to be the replacement of the will of God with the will of fallible people who legislate for themselves; God has not legislated for them.¹¹² It is for this reason the associate democracy with the materialistic system of capitalism and atheism, which entitle them to un-Islamic freedoms (e.g., same sex marriage, gambling, cursing the prophets and distorting their messages).¹¹³ Democracy is unjust since it allows humans to be

Anwar El Sadat on the Occasion of His Visit to Jerusalem (Cairo: Ministry of Information, State Information Service, 1978), p. 32; and Muhammad Abd al-Jabb ar Sallam, *Democracy in Yemen* (Yemen: N.P, 1996), p. 18.

¹¹¹ Alan George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (New York: Zed Books, 2003), p.14; A. B. S. Jafri, *The Political Parties of Pakistan* (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 2002), p.41; Ian Marsh, Jean Blondel, and Takashi Inoguchi, *Democracy, Governance, and Economic Performance: East and Southeast Asia, The Changing Nature of Democracy* (Tokyo and New York: United Nations University Press, 1999), p. 31; A. A. Ujo, *Understanding Political Parties in Nigeria* (Kaduna, Nigeria: Klamidas Books, 2000), p. 79.

¹¹² Abdel Qader Tash, *The Crisis of Civilization and the Islamic Alternative* (Detroit: Publication of Muslim Arab Students in North America, 1980), p. 9.

¹¹³ A. Le Cahtelier, Moheb Al-Khateeb, and Musa'ed Al-Yaffi, *The Assault on the Muslim World* [in French and Arabic], (Riyadh: Al-Dar al-Saudi, 1980), p. 13.

their own gods by legislating for themselves what is *halal* (acceptable) and what is *haram* (taboo).¹¹⁴

Muslims are given the right to express their points of view as long as they do not create *fitnahs*. Public opposition absolutely is forbidden; however, an individual can raise injustices to judges or scholars who can defend rights without creating *fitnahs*. Rulers can be advised by the *Ahl-alhal wa-a'lakd* but not challenged by them. Traditionalists' readings of these basic freedoms are not always consistent; and they also recognize that commoners' right to question rulers is an authentic, well-established Islamic right despite the fear of *fitnahs*. This is finessed in traditionalist thinking by the belief that the leaders whose actions reflect obedience to "God's book and His Prophet's straight path" (as opposed to free thinking and innovations not in accordance with the holy texts) are not subject to questioning by ignorant commoners.¹¹⁵ The personal freedoms of democracies are excessively un-Islamic and immoral. Democracy permits adultery, alcohol and drug consumption, homosexuality, atheism and the like. Thus "Islam created for Muslims rights to enjoy within shari'a but not unbounded freedoms."¹¹⁶ Al-Zawahri among others often quotes the following verse to argue against democracy-based legislation: "What! Have they partners (in godhead), who have established for them some religion without the permission of God?" (The *Qur'an*, Chapter 42, verse 21).¹¹⁷

Pro and anti-violence traditionalists differ on the issue of public opposition to rulers. Pro-violent traditionalists acknowledge the imperative of obedience to the ruler. But they

¹¹⁴ Hafez Saleh, *Democracy in the Lenses of Islam* (Beruit: Dar al- Nahda al-Islameya, 1992), p. 78.

¹¹⁵ Abdelrahman Abdelkhaleq, *Al-Hokm Beghayer Ma Anzal Allah (Arabic Audio: Ruling against the Verdict of Allah)* (Islamway.com, 1997, accessed on 17 March 2003); Naser al-Maged, *Haqqat Al-Bed'a Wa Dhawbetha (Arabic: The Truth on Innovation and Its Boundaries)* (Islamtoday.net, 2002, accessed on 20 April 2003).

¹¹⁶ al-Badry, *Islam's Verdict on Socialism* (NA: NA, 1983). A printed pamphlet.

¹¹⁷ al-Zawahri, *The Bitter Harverst of Muslim Brotherhood*, pp. 8-10.

focus on limiting this obedience to those whom they perceive to be pious rulers.¹¹⁸ The

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

It is obligatory upon a Muslim that he should listen (to the ruler appointed over him) and obey him whether he likes it or not, except that he is ordered to do a sinful thing. *If he is ordered to do a sinful act, a Muslim should neither listen to him nor should he obey his orders.* (Hadith number 3423 in *Sahih Muslim*, emphasis added)

Pro-violence traditionalists emphasize the italicized sentence of the *hadith*, whereas anti-violent traditionalists focus more on the first sentence. The fear of *fitnah* is a clear concern among pacifist traditionalists.¹¹⁹ They usually quote other *hadiths* to refute public opposition to rulers since it habituates people to dissent and disobedience.¹²⁰

The Messenger of God said: If one sees something from his Amir [leader] that he dislikes, he should be patient, for if he separates from the main body of the Muslims even for the length of a hand-span and then died, he would die the death of one belonging to the days of *jahilliyya* (disbelief). (Hadith number 3438 in *Sahih Muslim*).

This *hadith* (among others) reflects the fear of *fitnahs* and loss of Muslims' identity by imitating un-Islamic and fallible systems of government.¹²¹ By relying on these *hadiths*, traditionalists rely on deduction to refute a pragmatic reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Additionally, traditionalists have their own reading of freedom of religion. The *Qur'an* explicitly states, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Chapter 2, verse 256). To traditionalists, nobody can be forced into Islam, yet once a person voluntarily has become a Muslim, he/she should be forced to practice Islam and all related practices and customs.¹²² For instance, all women should wear *hijab* and once the call to prayer is raised, all stores, restaurants and businesses should close. Whoever does not pray should be compelled to pray. A typical example in this regard is the men of *amr belma'roof wah al-nahai* 'an al-monkar

¹¹⁸ Nasser al-Albani et al., *Fitnat Al-Takfeer* [in Arabic] (Riadh: Ibn Khozaymma, 1997).

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Sa'd al-Burayq, *Hooq Wolat Al-Amr* [The rights of rulers (Audio tape)] (Islamweb.net, 1993, accessed on 17 March 2003).

¹²¹ Ibn Baaz, *The Obligation of Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil* (NA: NA: 1992). A printed pamphlet.

¹²² al-Sharawi, *Al-Shura and Legislation in Islam* [in Arabic], p. 24.

(those who enjoin the good and forbid the bad) in Saudi Arabia who hit with sticks Muslims who listen to the call to prayers but ignore it.

Typical modernist Islamists have a different reading regarding basic human and political rights. There is more space for freedom of expression for scholars and non-scholars alike as long as they do not infringe upon the immune zone of *sharia*. Modernists base their support for freedoms of expression and association on a different reading of the famous argument made by traditionalists that Islam is a complete religion and rarely needs the human mind to reason beyond the deductive application of its teachings. They harbor no doubt that Islam is a complete religion as the *Qur'an* states. Yet when it comes to worldly affairs, the *Qur'an* asks Muslims to go and ask the learned ones: "If you do not know, ask the knowledgeable [among you]" (The *Qur'an*, Chapter 16, verse 43). Thus, according to typical modernists, Islam is complete since it provides Muslims with all the answers they need regarding their spiritual affairs and lets them search inductively for the appropriate answers regarding their worldly affairs within the boundaries of what is *halal*.¹²³

However, the real tension between traditionalists and modernists goes deeper to two other questions that stem from the previous verse: First, where to locate political freedoms and politics in general? Are they worldly affairs or religious affairs? Second, who are the knowledgeable whom Muslims can consult on worldly affairs if there is agreement on politics as worldly affairs?

Typical traditionalists do not see politics apart from religious faith since God and the Prophet explicitly addressed it.¹²⁴ A famous quote by al-Zawahri states:

The issues of governance contrary to Islamic *sharia*, democracy and loyalty to non-Muslims, are not matters of minutiae that are subject to jurisprudential differences

¹²³ Muhammad Iqbal, *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Kapur Art Print. Works, 1930), p. 82.

¹²⁴ al-Ansari, *Sovereignty of Allah in the Writings of Abdullah Azzam* ((Bshawar, Pakistan: Markez al-Shaheed Azzam, 1988), p. 33.

[among scholars]; rather they are germane to the principles of faith and the core of Islamic creed which is monotheism.

Al-Zawahri used this argument to criticize the somewhat modernist Muslim Brotherhood (mainly in Egypt) since they:

support the rulers of Egypt, the constitution, democracy, besides their refusal of jihad against the disbelieving government, their acquiescence of secularist parties, their participation in elections and their acceptance of un-Islamic laws and legislation in Egypt and the Muslim world.¹²⁵

Modernists consider that the principle of an Islamic state governed by *sharia* is beyond questioning but the structural and institutional aspects of this state are subject to human scrutiny. A typical Iraqi modernist, Sheikh Ahmad al-Qubaissi, came under severe criticism from traditionalists in an open discussion of the issues of governance and creed in Islam on *al-Jazeera* broadcast network in 2002. Al-Qubaissi, building a counter argument against the traditionalist vision, contended that Islam has two types of sources: constant and variable. "The constant aspects form the creed and rituals. The variables are man-innovated mechanisms to apply the creed." When it comes to politics, al-Qubassi contended that "Islam does not have a specific form of government." This means that any government that applies *sharia* is Islamic whether it is republican, monarchic, caliphatic or anything else. Part of *sharia* is to guarantee people their freedoms and rights.¹²⁶

The second question pertains to who are the knowledgeable. Modernists have a less elitist vision compared with traditionalists. For example, Hassan al-Turbi thinks that *ijma'* is not only the *ijma'* of scholars but also the *ijma'* of the *umma*. Thus a referendum can constitute *ijma'*.¹²⁷ The public has the right to gather, to air their voices, and publicly to challenge and question authorities within *sharia*, democratic laws and regulations.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ al-Zawahri, *The Bitter Harvest of Muslim Brotherhood*, p. 4

¹²⁶ Ahmad al-Qubaissi, "Ijtihad in the Modern Age" [in Arabic] (*al-Jazeera.net*, 2002, accessed in 23 December 2002).

¹²⁷ al-Turabi, *Politics and Governance* (2003), p. 13

¹²⁸ Howaidi, *Confirming the Truth* (1999), p. 23.

Freedom of religion goes beyond refraining from forcing non-Muslims into Islam to abstaining from forcing Muslims to practice Islam. The role of Muslims is to remind and advise each other unless there is a crime, which should be punished according to Islam's penal code.¹²⁹ Thus, liberal secularists are like their counterparts in the West when it comes to the basic freedoms. A truly democratic state does not limit the freedoms of its citizens beyond democratic rules and laws. That is why liberal secularists think that conservative understandings of Islam or religion in general can be an obstacle to one's right freely and equally to express his/her views, publicly to convene, and openly to oppose the policies of their governments.¹³⁰

Autocratic secularists are close to liberal secularists regarding freedom of religion but differ with them regarding other freedoms. Justifications are common; Mahathir Mohamed of Malaysia stated: "We are weak nations and need strong governments."¹³¹ Al-Qadhafi of Libya was blunter when he likened the masses to "sheep with no opinion" controlled and directed by the rulers.¹³² Autocrats restrict the freedom of expression and association to certain levels and issues in order to avoid demands that cannot be met at reasonable cost. However, some autocratic regimes are more liberal than others. Liberal autocrats allow nominal opposition parties, some level of freedom of expression and association, and some level of loyal public opposition and demonstrations. The use of the word "loyal" is purposeful in this regard. Some opposition groups and parties are considered loyal because they proffer no real alternative source of legitimacy. They may be critical of a particular policy or official but accept the ruler's authority as a given. This kind of opposition is highly tolerated by

¹²⁹ Khatami, *Religion and Thought in the Trap of Dictatorship*, p. 44.

¹³⁰ El-Naggar, *Misr Wa-Tahaddiyat Al-'Asr* (1993), p. 16.

¹³¹ Amir Taheri, "Two Successful Models of Islamic Governance" (in Arabic), *al-Sharq al-Awssat*, (May 5, 2003).

¹³² Muammar Qaddafi, "Libya and the Arab Summit" [in Arabic] (al-Jazeera.net, 2002, accessed in 23 December 2003), available from http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/special_interview/articles/2002/3/3-29-2.htm.

autocrats to give a democratic façade necessary for global prestige. Disloyal opposition is met with violence or exile. Most Arab countries and most Muslim countries have disloyal opposition figures in jail or exile.¹³³ In some cases, the subtleties of democracy are lost on Muslim rulers. Sa'ad El-Din Ibrahim, a proponent of civil society in Egypt, relates how he mentioned the concept of civil society in the presence of President Hosni Mubarak. The latter retorted by grilling Ibrahim on what he had against military personnel.¹³⁴

Autocrats argue that now is not the right time for opposition. It is the time of war against the enemy, whether it is Israel, the United States or anyone else.

The great majority of our countries have no freedom, democracy, human rights, accountability, checks, transparency or rule of law thanks to Israel ... [that] efficiently provided us with a good excuse for all our failures and wrongdoings.¹³⁵

With slogans such as "no voice should rise over the voice of the battles" all liberals and modernists were deprived of their basic political rights.

Table 3 summarizes the different attitudes of the intellectual schools.

¹³³ Monsef Marzouki, "Arabic Regimes" (al-Jazeera.net, 2002 [cited 2002]), available from http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/op_direction/articles/2002/4/4-14-1.htm; 'Ashour Shames, *Taqueem Al-Mo'aradha Al-Arabeya Fil-Kharej* [Evaluation of Arab opposition in exile] (al-Jazeera.net, 2002 [accessed 11 January 2003]), available from <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/opinions/articles/2002/2/2-17-3.htm>.

¹³⁴ Mohamed. A. al-Gabri, *Democracy in Arab Political Thought* [in Arabic] (al-Jazeera.net, 2000, accessed in 23 December 2003]), available from http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/guest_issue/articles/2000/12/12-12-1.htm.

¹³⁵ Jihad al-Khazen, 'Eyes and Ears,' *Al-Hayat* (16 January 2003).

Table 3: Breakdown of Democratic Values and Institutions –
Civil and Political Rights

	Islamist		Secularist	
	Traditionalist	Modernists	Liberals	Autocrats
1) Freedom of expression and association	Highly restricted	Limited	Extended	(Highly) restricted
2) Public Opposition	Fitnah/internal divisions	Legitimate as far as it is "loyal"	Acceptable	Highly Restricted
3) Religious Freedom and/or No compulsion in religion	No force into Islam but force Muslims to practice	No force into Islam or to practice Islam except for Islamic penal codes.	No forced religion	No forced religion

Conclusion

This analysis sheds some light on how figures as diverse as Saddam Hussein, the highly autocratic ruler of Iraq; Ayman al-Zawahri, a top al-Qaeda leader; Mohamed Khatami, the liberal president of Iran; and Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian woman lawyer who won the 2003 Noble Prize for Peace, all share the same religious heritage. The Islam that unites Muslims divides them as well. Muslims are not monolithic in their reading or interpretation of Islam; rather, they have a plurality of readings and interpretations. Ideologically we have differentiated among five categories of intellectuals and *ulama*: Islamist pro-violence traditionalists, Islamist non-violent traditionalists, modernist Islamists, liberal secularists and autocratic secularists. These schools of intellectuals and *ulama* contest who speaks in the name of Islam and who is its genuine representative.

Traditionalists perceive any ideal or institution that is not mentioned explicitly in Islamic teachings to be un-Islamic and thus reject it. Democracy is no exception. Some traditionalists justify resorting to violence against their societies and governments on grounds that the latter tolerate or encourage lifestyles equivalent to *jahilliyya*. Modernist Islamists, although they share with traditionalists their reading of Islam as a source of Islamic ideology, differ fundamentally from them on their perception of alien ideals and institutions related to

democracy. They accept new ideas, mechanisms and values insofar as they do not contradict what they understand as authentic and well-established *sharia* and Islamic tradition.

Modernists find nothing in Islam's authentic sources that hinder them from communicating with and learning from non-Muslims insofar as they do not infringe upon Islamic principles. To modernists, most aspects of democracy are compatible with Islam, and they are comfortable with the term "Islamic democracy."

Secularists do not consider much of value in the holy texts regarding how Muslims should govern modern societies. Holy texts are sources of creed and ethics but not politics and economics. To support their position, secularists often quote different and contradictory interpretations of the same verses of the *Qur'an*. Thus, they conclude that most of the verses and holy texts have no one unique meaning until humans color them with their own understandings. Human interpretation is not sacred and, therefore Islamists are not infallible. Some secularists are liberals; others are autocrats. Liberals tend to think of democracy as good and possible. Autocrats think that democracy is not possible in their respective countries without giving Islamists (or other opponents) an opportunity to establish theological states. By examining three constituent elements of democracy as a system of government, we differentiated among different schools of Muslim intellectuals and *ulama*. Traditionalists prefer *shura* to any "alien", un-Islamic processes. However, they understand it in an elitist vision that limits it to the most pious among Muslims but without necessarily binding rulers. Traditionalists perceive most democratic mechanisms and institutions as *bed'a* that should be avoided. Traditionalists, likewise, limit political and civil freedoms to what is accepted clearly by Islam.

Modernists disagree. *Shura* is the Islamic principle that can be applied through new democratic mechanisms such as voting, elections, majority rule, universal participation, and checks and balances as far as these do not contradict *sharia*. Both Muslims and non-Muslims

in Muslim societies have inalienable rights to choose their religion, express their point of view, and associate as long as none of these rights conflict with Islamic *sharia*.

Liberal secularists agree with the modernist position in many respects but are dubious about the content of *sharia*, and, especially, disagree over who has the right to make that determination. To them, the state should have nothing to do with religion or political views. Their goal is to establish a Western model of democracy in Muslim countries. Secularist autocrats consider *shura* to be impractical and unsuitable for their societies. Strong leadership, autocrats argue, is essential. Questioning, checking and removing leaders would weaken the state and may end up destabilizing society.

In sum, Islamic thought regarding politics and (in particular) democracy is no less diverse than any other culturally or religiously informed view of the matter. The cultural entrepreneurs – the intellectuals and ulama – who interpret Islam for the masses are hardly of one mind. Distinctions are not subtle, nor are they a matter of degree; significant qualitative differences separate them into widely divergent camps. Orientalist assumptions about a specific Islamic interpretation of democracy or that resort to generalizations about the compatibility of Islam and democracy rely either on a single interpretation or on the fact that most Islamic societies (and virtually all Arab ones) are not very democratic. Our examination of Islamic intellectual and scholarly thought suggests that such assumptions do not have the predictive power their adherents advocate.

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