

Indiana Series in Middle East Studies
Mark Tessler, general editor

Islamic Activism

*A Social Movement
Theory Approach*

Edited by Quintan Wiktorowicz

 **INDIANA**
University Press

Bloomington & Indianapolis

2004

Conclusion

Social Movement Theory and Islamic Studies

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Over the past generation, the fields of social movement theory and Islamic studies have followed parallel trajectories, with few glances across the chasm that has separated them. This volume helps to bridge that chasm, offering insights from Islamic movements to contribute to social movement theory, and insights from social movement theory to assist the study of Islamic movements.

Parallels

In the 1970s, social movement theory and Islamic studies underwent parallel paradigmatic revolutions: social movement theory shunted aside collective behavior, and Islamic studies turned against Orientalism. The previously dominant perspectives, largely unchallenged for generations, shared a variety of features in common. Both had their origins in the entry of the masses into the political calculations of Western elites. In the case of collective behavior, the era of mass democracy spurred Gustave Le Bon, Robert E. Park, and other founders of the field to examine the mysteries of the new political actors. In the case of Orientalism, the era of imperialism spurred William Jones, Ernest Renan, and other major figures to explore the religion, culture, and history of the newly colonized peoples. Both fields adopted similar approaches to their subjects, emphasizing the grip that social forces had over them, although these forces were inverted in the two fields: the weight of tradition was said to bear down on Muslims, and the lack of tradition was said to make crowds susceptible to contagion. The subjects in both fields were often treated as irrational and in need of salvation through the gaze of the (presumably rational) scholar.¹

Self-doubt appeared in collective behavior and Orientalism about the same time in the 1960s. Already in the 1950s, Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, authors of the authoritative textbook on collective behavior, criticized the field's "often biased descriptions" and "the tendency to single out for study only those collective phenomena of which the observer disapproves" (1957, 12, 16)—but their goal in making these criticisms was to improve the field by making it more "scientific" and "objective." Similarly, Carl Couch (1968) urged the field to distance itself from derogatory stereotypes that littered earlier works. In Islamic studies, Anouar Abdel-Malek charged that the end of the colonial era had set Orientalism "in crisis." The field's institutionalization "dates essentially from the period of colonial establishment," with academic societies founded in Batavia in 1781, Paris in 1822, London in 1834, and the United States in 1842 (Abdel-Malek 1963, 104). Orientalist scholarship was "profoundly permeated" by the state's need "to gather intelligence information in the area to be occupied, to penetrate the consciousness of the people in order to better assure its enslavement to the European powers," with the result that "the scientific value of arduous work" was often "compromise[d]" (106). Now that the colonized regions had won their independence, Abdel-Malek concluded, Orientalism "had to be thought anew" (112; see also Hourani 1967; Issawi 1981). Similarly, A. L. Tibawi argued, "Gone are the days when Orientalists used to write largely for the benefit of other Orientalists." They have a large and growing readership in the Muslim world, and in "their present mood, after repeated polemic and missionary onslaughts against their faith, and prolonged Western political and cultural domination of their lands, the Muslims are more prone to take offense than ever before" (Tibawi 1963, 191–92). These critiques were offered from within the fold, explicitly cast as attempts to improve collective behavior and Orientalism, not to dismiss them.

By the 1970s, though, the fields of Orientalism and collective behavior were having difficulty reproducing themselves. The second edition of Turner and Killian's collective behavior textbook, published in 1972, vehemently rejected the pejorative biases in the field. At the same time, a series of works—Oberschall (1973), Gamson (1975), Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly (1975), McCarthy and Zald (1977), and Tilly (1978) being among the most influential—launched a direct assault on the premises of collective behavior. In Islamic studies, the 29th International Congress of Orientalists, held in Paris on the 100th anniversary of the first such meeting, voted to remove Orientalism from its name, replacing it with "Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa" (*Le XXIXe Congrès* 1975, 67). A series of works—Laroui (1973), Coury (1975), Naraghi (1977), el-Zein (1977), Djait (1985), Turner (1978), Tibawi (1979), and most famously Said (1978)—rejected Orientalist premises. In the United States, Orientalism was displaced almost completely by Middle East "area studies," whose flagship organization (the Middle East Studies Association of North

America, founded in 1966) was later replicated throughout Western Europe (for ideologically polar, yet strikingly similar reviews of this transition, see Hajjar and Niva 1997; Kramer 2001). The field of Middle East studies viewed Orientalism as a noble relic: "The orientalists have achieved immense works of scholarship, and their attainments stand like the monuments of the ancients which induce awe in us even though our technology far exceeds theirs. . . . We are nearly all agreed now that we wish to study Islamic civilization as related to the living societies of the Middle East today. This goal leads us beyond the possibilities of Orientalism" (Binder 1976, 9–10).

Both paradigmatic revolutions were the work, in large part, of the subjects of study who had entered Western academia. In the United States, the long march of youthful activists through the universities (Jacoby 1987) was linked with a sea change in the study of social protest (Lofland 1993, 53), most concretely by Morris and Herring (1987, 182–84), who interviewed theorists about their experience with the movements of the 1960s. "When you are participating, you inevitably look at it from the standpoint of participants," said one social movement theorist. The collective behavior school struck him as "slightly insulting" and as "denigrating the motives of participants." "Since many social scientists sided with the activists and were debating issues of strategy and tactics, the irrationalist assumptions of the collective behavior approach seemed outmoded," wrote another social movement theorist who participated in the paradigm shift (Zald 1992, 331). Orientalism, too, was most vehemently attacked by "Orientals" whose training and careers had brought them to Western universities, where they found the dominant approach to be mismatched with their own experiences and values. In the words of one defender of Orientalism: "The accuser in this trial, needless to say, is now the East itself, which from a passive object of history and study has revived as a subject, which seeks with profound travail its own soul and does not recognize it in its past or present in the mirror of European orientalist investigation" (Gabrieli 1965, 130).²

The shift from object to subject was central to the substance of both paradigmatic changes. In both collective behavior and Orientalism, the people being studied were deemed largely unaware of the forces governing their lives. In collective behavior this view expressed itself through analogies with herds of animals—most famously in Herbert Blumer (1939)—or natural processes like wildfires and avalanches—most famously in Elias Canetti (1963). In Orientalism this view took the form of blanket statements about Muslims' lack of interest in Islamic studies, such as Ernest Renan's comment in 1862 that "Islam is the complete negation of Europe; . . . Islam is the disdain of science, the suppression of civil society; it is the appalling simplicity of the Semitic spirit, restricting the human mind, closing it to all delicate ideas, to all refined sentiment, to all rational research, in order to keep it facing an eternal tautology: God is God" (quoted in Kurzman 1998, 3). Renan's successor at

the Collège de France, Jacques Berques, suggested in 1957 that “in this period the Arabs neglect their own past, and stammer their noble language. Contemporary orientalism was born from this vacancy. The exploration, the resurrection of such moral treasures was the chance of the erudite Christian, who as well as the Christian of the Bank concurrently revived the wasted space and filled the warehouses” (quoted in Abdel-Malek 1963, 131). This supposed “vacancy” was the product of what Tavakoli-Targhi (1996) has called “Orientalism’s genesis amnesia”: the willful forgetting of Orientalists’ dependence, especially in the early years, on the historical and philological work of their Muslim teachers.

The new perspectives, by contrast, emphasized the subjects’ knowledge. For social movement theory, this expressed itself in rational-actor models, with protesters treated as cost-benefit calculators and utility maximizers with the same level of sophistication as anybody else. The application of resources to collective ends, the response of protesters to the opening of political opportunities, and the development of persuasive ideological frames—major themes in the new approach—all expressed this view of the subject as knowledgeably strategic. Islamic studies did not elaborate a new consensus as self-consciously as social movement theory did. Yet post-Orientalist work shared social movement theory’s respect for the perspective of the subject. It treated Islamic interpretation as an act of piety, meaning-making, and strategic advancement.

In both fields, the new perspectives treated their subjects as fundamentally similar to the observers. In answer to Ralph Coury’s sarcastic query—mocking Orientalists for allegedly wondering, “Why can’t they be more like us?” (Coury 1975)—both fields began emphasizing similarities and downplaying differences. The subjects did not always reciprocate. Some social movement activists were displeased to be cast as cost-benefit calculators, preferring instead the activist identity of self-sacrificing hero or martyr (e.g., Jasper 1997, chapter 8). In the same vein, some Muslims preferred the Orientalist image of Islam to the post-Orientalist image, viewing their religion as monolithic and unchanging, austere and authoritarian—not socially constructed and potentially liberal (Tibi 1990).

The collective behavior school more or less politely incorporated the new approach. The third edition of Turner and Killian’s textbook on collective behavior couched crowd processes within a structural analysis of political opportunities and resource mobilization. The final chapter of the book, which in previous editions had examined the effects of collective behavior on social structures, reversed this formulation in the third edition to examine “the conditions of social structure that are most conducive to collective behavior” (Turner and Killian 1987, 388). Similarly, Neil Smelser, author of a major work on collective behavior (Smelser 1962) that is rarely cited in social movement theory—even the portions that discussed political opportunities (under

the rubric of “social control”), a topic of central interest to the new approach—simply combined collective behavior and social movement theories in his introductory sociology textbooks, with the implication that they are complements, not competitors (Smelser 1991, 365–86). In later work, Smelser allowed himself to express regret at the dismissal of the collective behavior school by social movement scholar-partisans who failed to appreciate the reforms he had tried to achieve in the field, and who attributed bias—“real or imagined”—to scholars such as himself who had tried to “maintain a posture of neutrality and dispassion” (Smelser 1997, 41–44).

Orientalism died a harder death. Bernard Lewis, the dean of American Orientalism, fulminated angrily against the new turn in Islamic studies. Said’s famous book *Orientalism* was so wrongheaded that it struck him as “one of those alternative universes beloved of science fiction writers.” In the paradigm shift that followed, “the term ‘Orientalism’ has been emptied of its previous content and given an entirely new one—that of unsympathetic or hostile treatment of Oriental peoples. For that matter, even the terms ‘unsympathetic’ and ‘hostile’ have been redefined to mean not supportive of currently fashionable creeds or causes” (Lewis 1993, 109, 100). Among the fashionable creeds that Lewis objected to was the “taboo” against “generalizations about ethnic, racial or religious groups”: “We live in an age when ethnic generalizations of any kind are tantamount to blasphemy—or rather have supplanted blasphemy as the ultimate unspeakable offense, in the most literal sense of that word” (Lewis 2000, 3–4; see also Lewis 2002). Other Orientalists, while less irate, were also troubled by the attack on Orientalism, which involved “a certain danger,” “was a bit Stalinist,” and “had some unfortunate consequences,” according to scholars of the earlier generation interviewed in a recent collection of life stories (Gallagher 1994, 41, 124, 144; see also the autobiographies in Naff 1993).

If Orientalists refused to go quietly into the dark night, anti-Orientalists began to turn on one another. Not long after the publication of *Orientalism*, supporters of Said’s approach began to use it against Said himself, beginning perhaps with Al-‘Azam’s (1981) charge that Said essentialized the West much in the same way that Orientalism essentialized the Orient. The post-Orientalist field has no name aside from the geographically delimited area studies moniker “Middle East Studies,” while the older term “Orientalist” is now wielded as an epithet. I have sat in academic meetings where competing scholars have insulted one another’s perspectives as “Orientalist,” just as leftists often call one another “reactionaries.”

The Chasm

The two traditions exchanged few glances as the parallel trajectories of social movement theory and Islamic studies unfurled on two sides of a chasm.³ This

chasm is strange for at least two reasons. First, a number of major social scientists of this period had academic roots in the Islamic world, conducting formative empirical work on Muslim societies and later speaking to Western social theory in its broadest reaches, including Pierre Bourdieu (France), who studied Algeria; Ernest Gellner (Britain), who studied North Africa; and Clifford Geertz (United States), who studied Indonesia and Morocco. Yet the influence of these scholars in Western social science seems to have been dissociated from their fieldwork in Islamic lands. Second, just at the moment when the new paradigms were consolidating their positions, the Iranian Revolution brought Islamic social movements to international prominence, spawning a large academic literature and Western policy interest. Yet neither Bourdieu et al. nor the Iranian Revolution prompted a commingling of social movement studies and Islamic studies.

Leading figures in social movement studies have acknowledged in recent years that a “core democracy bias” may have limited the scope conditions of the theory, since so few studies were conducted on movements outside of North America and Western Europe (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, xiii; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1997, 143). A further bias may be implicated in the tendency of social movement scholars to study movements with which they sympathize, a pattern that would seem to be linked with the field’s biographical roots in the social movements of the 1960s. There are a handful of exceptions, including studies of the religious right in North America. Yet social movement theory has largely been generated in conversation with movements that scholars support. It may be harder to apply contemporary social movement approaches—the rationality of protesters, for example—to protesters who appear to be, and claim to be, so different from the secular, Western, liberal-left norms that social movement theorists generally espouse. The absence of Islamic movements was particularly egregious in one book on world-system theory and the study of anti-systemic movements, which managed to overlook Islamic movements almost entirely—though these were arguably the most active anti-systemic movements in the world, then and now (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989).⁴

Yet on the few occasions when social movement theorists did glance across the chasm at Islamic movements, they did so to emphasize difference, focusing on Islamic ideas and critiquing social movement theory for ignoring ideology (e.g., Snow and Marshall 1984). The most famous instance involved sociologist Theda Skocpol, whose book on *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) dismissed the importance of revolutionaries in favor of structural explanations, particularly state collapse. In a reversal several years later, Skocpol (1982) argued that her theory did not apply to the Iranian Revolution, where ideology and purposive action played a larger role than in the revolutions she had studied (France, Russia, and China). It was only in the 1990s that the Iranian Revolution was incorporated into the broader field of social movement

studies (see essays in Foran 1997; Goldstone, Gurr, and Moshiri 1991; Smith 1996).

From the other direction, too, Iran specialists were slow to join contemporary social movement discourse. They turned instead to older approaches, if they looked across the chasm at all. Some adopted “relative deprivation” approaches (protest ensues when rising expectations are dashed) (among others, Saikal 1980, 187; Keddie 1983, 589–91; Benard and Khalilzad 1984, 53–58). Others went ever further back to the “natural history” approach to revolution, citing Crane Brinton’s (1965) schematic outline of the stages of revolution, which was first published in the 1930s (among others, Fischer 1980, 189; Bill 1982, 30; Sick 1985, 187). Said Arjomand (1988, 110) preferred “old-fashioned [Emile] Durkheim” and his theory of normative disorientation from the turn of the twentieth century.

A new generation of Iran specialists, entering graduate school after the revolution, effected a rapprochement. In the decade after 1979, three dozen doctoral dissertations were produced in North America on the Iranian Revolution, many of them drawing on the most recent approaches in social movement theory. This second wave of studies on the Iranian Revolution began to draw on and contribute to social movement studies (among others, Moshiri 1985; Milani 1988; Moaddel 1992, 1993; Kurzman 1994, 1996).

It took another decade for this rapprochement to diffuse beyond Iran. Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s foundational article on the Islamist movement in Egypt made no mention of contemporary social movement theory, though it drew parallel conclusions, critiquing earlier social-psychological explanations for presuming that protesters “must be alienated, marginal, anomic, or must possess some other abnormal characteristic” (Ibrahim 1980, 440). Later studies paralleled the social movement focus on the institutional bases of protest (Eickelman 1987) and framing (Burke 1986, 1988, citing the “moral economy” literature), while ignoring social movement studies. Only at the turn of the millennium did scholars studying Islamic movements outside Iran begin to look across the chasm at contemporary social movement theory. Four colloquia were held on this theme in 1999–2000—one each at the University of California at Santa Cruz, New York University, the University of Lausanne, and the Middle East Studies Association meeting in Orlando, Florida—and a number of publications emerged (among others, Vergès 1997; Lubeck 2000; Wiktorowicz 2001, 2003; Wickham 2002; Bennani-Chraïbi and Filleule 2002; Clark 2003; and the chapters in this volume).

Contributions

In this section, I wish to propose several contributions that the study of Islamic movements may offer social movement studies, with a focus on the relationship of the observer and the observed. First, post-Orientalist discourse

involves a level of reflexivity that other social movement scholars can generally avoid, a "rigorous self-examination that would do a puritan proud, or a strictly observant Sufi" (Krämer 2000, 6). The critique of Orientalism means a critique of Western treatment of Muslims, both politically (colonialism, imperialism, neo-imperialism) and cognitively (derogatory, essentializing, stereotyping). At the same time, studies of Islamic movements are themselves written from a Western standpoint, even when the authors are Muslims—that is, they only "count" as "studies of Islamic movements" if they have the trappings of Western academic discourse, which includes a commitment to the Western project of understanding social movements. This double position, Western and anti-Western, generates anxieties that are frequently near the surface. As Edmund Burke notes, it is "perilous to advance an explication of the so-called Islamic revival without reproducing the concerns of the ambient political culture of our own society, with its deeply grounded fears and phantasms about Islam. The discourse on the Other, especially the Muslim Other, is politically saturated" (Burke 1988, 18). Many scholars worry that their contribution to the understanding of Islamic movements will be misunderstood—or worse, understood—by a hostile audience that includes policymakers who see all Islamic movements as an undifferentiated threat that needs to be undermined. Specialists on Islamic movements seem to be more routinely consulted by U.S. and other governmental officials than specialists on other sorts of social movements. (I have no data on this, but such stories are prevalent at Middle East Studies Association conferences and only occasionally mentioned at American Sociological Association meetings.) If studies of Islamic movements are not intended to contribute to the project of "knowing thine enemy," then what is their purpose? Whatever each scholar's answer to this question may be, the question itself generates more reflexivity than in other studies of social movements.

Second, these studies frequently acknowledge the difficult combination of likeness and difference that complicates the relationship of the observer and the observed. Value congruence cannot be assumed, since the observers of Islamic movements rarely share the full set of goals that the movements aspire to achieve, such as the adoption of certain behaviors as markers of piety (as they interpret it) or the implementation of an Islamic state (as they envision it). The field holds itself in tension, unable to deny the obvious cultural differences between Islamic activists and Western scholars, yet unwilling to claim irreducible difference for fear of falling into Orientalist patterns. Between these poles, emphases could vary, with some observers, such as Paul Rabinow (1977, 162), emphasizing difference: "Different webs of significance separated us [his subjects and himself], but these webs were now at least partially intertwined. But a dialogue was only possible when we recognized differences, when we remained critically loyal to the symbols which our

ditions had given us." Others, such as Gregory Starrett (1998, 246–47), emphasized similarity: "If we treat Islamism as a pathology, the result of the faulty operation of modern institutions rather than of the potentials and contradictions inherent within them, we can continue to believe that our own personal, religious and political convictions are, by contrast, consistent, coherent, and grounded in truth and reason, rather than desperate practical refuges always on the verge of crisis and change." A series of post-Orientalist works have looked beyond Islamic exceptionalism to examine common patterns in Islam and other faith traditions, such as Talal Asad's (1993) study of the emergence of modern religion in Islam and Christianity; Roxanne Euben's (1999) juxtaposition of Islamic and Christian critiques of modernity; and several projects that place Islamic fundamentalist movements in the context of other fundamentalist movements (Marty and Appleby 1991–1995; Juergensmeyer 1993; Lawrence 1995). In this volume, many of the chapters emphasize the similarities between Islamic and other social movements. Whatever the emphasis, the issue is never neatly resolved.

Third, studies of Islamic movements cannot presume that the people they study will respond to macro structures in the same way that Western researchers would. The problematic value congruence between researcher and researched means that political opportunities, mobilization structures, and other factors common to social movement studies cannot be translated automatically from one context to another. A response that seems commonsensical to the observer—say, reducing one's exposure to risk as repression increases—may not seem commonsensical to the activist. This is not to suggest that the usual tools of social movement studies are useless, or that Islamic activists are all irrational or seeking martyrdom. The upshot, rather, is that such matters are open for empirical research. Value congruence can hide this from view by making the subjects' preference structures seem transparent. Researchers who identify with their subjects can look straight through their eyes to focus on shifts in macro structures. In Islamic studies, the eyes of the subjects and the researchers don't line up, so the subject's perspective must be addressed.

The subject's perspective is thus frequently a topic of analysis in this volume. Some essays ask to what extent Islamist activists respond to cues such as shifts in the political economy (Fred Lawson, Benjamin Smith); some examine Islamists' understandings of political opportunities and their moves to make the most of the spaces available to them (Mohammad Hafez, Hakan Yavuz); some study the calculations that shape the decision to engage in violence (Mohammad Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, Glenn Robinson), construct networks and alliances (Jillian Schwedler, Diane Singerman), or engage cultural contexts for movement purposes (Gwenn Okruhlik, Carrie Wickham). Most of these studies offer a punch line of universalism. Islamic

activists, in these accounts, are not wild-eyed fanatics with preference structures that are completely different from those of Western activists, but rather rational actors who respond to stimuli and create social movements much in the same way as others around the world. Still, these studies cannot, and do not, assume universalism. The extent to which Islamic activists conform to the theoretical expectations of social movement studies is an empirical matter.

Such empiricism is often difficult to come by. Islamic activists have been driven underground in many Muslim societies by authoritarian states, supported by the governments of the United States and Western Europe. These activists are frequently hostile to Western analysts, sometimes for their generally secular worldview, more often because they are suspected of serving the interests of their governments. The contributors to this volume are among the few academics who have actually interviewed Islamic activists and observed their meetings. This sort of research takes considerable fieldwork skills, which may be why it is not performed more frequently. Yet the payoff is irreplaceable. By interacting with Islamic activists, we begin to become familiar with their perspectives. By learning their perspectives, we may understand how they engage and restructure the institutions around them. Through this understanding, we may bridge the chasm that has separated Islamic studies and social movement theory.

Notes

1. The origins of the collective behavior school have been studied in detail by historians (Barrows 1981; McClelland 1989; Nye 1975). Orientalism, by contrast, has not yet been subjected to the same sort of scrutiny; its historians have tended to be its polemical critics.

2. The top leaders in this revolt were not so much subjects as supporters who identified with the subjects: young professors (such as Gamson, Oberschall, and Tilly) rather than student activists, Arab Christians (such as Abdel-Malek and Said) rather than Muslims. This situation might be considered "curious" (Lewis 1993, 106), but—if we liken paradigmatic revolutions to the political uprisings studied in social movement theory—the mobilization of allies within the "polity" (in this case, academia) may be considered a crucial aspect of the revolt's success.

3. A similar chasm exists between the fields of history and Islamic studies (Tucker 1990, 210; Gelvin 2001).

4. Other world-systems approaches, I should note, took somewhat greater notice of Islamic movements. Boswell (1989), for example, included three chapters on the Iranian Revolution, and a 1999 collection of world-systems approaches to *The Future of Global Conflict* noted that "a revitalized Islamic fundamentalist model could, on ideological grounds, be a basis for a potential future counter-core. But this is not likely to be a serious challenger to capitalist neo-liberalism for global hegemony" (Bornschiefer and Chase-Dunn 1999, 7).

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