IRSH 50 (2005), pp. 279–291 DOI: 10.1017/S0020859005001963

REVIEW ESSAY

Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement

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Few subjects have attracted as much attention as the Islamist movement but have been so little understood. Is it a reactionary movement in revolt against "modernity", because it "is desperate to hold out and turn back the hands of time", as Brigadier-General Mark Kimmitt, spokesman for the American troops in Iraq, recently remarked on the resistance in Falluja?[1] Or is it a movement that takes the sources of the Islam literally, as Orientalists believe? Or is it, as some sociologists argue, the result of relative deprivation? Common to these explanations is their stress on crisis and the irrational character of the movement. Although there have been several brilliant insights into the dynamics of the Islamist movement during past years,[2] and there are several precursors of social movement theory (SMT),[3] as well as many studies that have borrowed from SMT,[4] four new studies make a coordinated attempt to open the way for a more systematic way of applying SMT to the Islamist movement.[5] Based on the long

1. *The Guardian*, 1 April 2004. See also Roel Meijer, "'Defending our Honour': Authenticity and the Framing of Resistance in the Iraqi Town of Falluja", *Etnofoor*, (forthcoming)
2. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London, 2002), and Olivier Roy, *L'islam mondialisé* (Paris, 2002).
3. See for instance, the insightful and stimulating work by Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York, 2000), and Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* (New York, 1997). The contribution to Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), by Glenn E. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement", pp. 112–139, has the same approach.
4. For instance, this is the case for Miriem Viergès, "Genesis of Mobilization: The Young Activists of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front", in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 292–305; and Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (London [etc.], 1996), and, more recently, Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London, 2004).
5. I will review the anthology *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, which includes several contributions of the most prominent researchers on the subject. The other three studies are: Carry Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political*

tradition of SMT in the United States and Europe, founded by, among others, Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow, and brought to Europe by Hans-Peter Kriesi and Bert Klandermans, these studies have taken up the challenge of applying the enriching insights of SMT to a non-Western context and to one of the most important contemporary social movements.[6] The question is, how successful are they? In answering this question, I will first give an outline of their programme, review their more extensive studies, and than compare them with other studies on the subject.

MANIFESTO

The anthology, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, should be read as a manifesto. The editor of the study, Quintan Wiktorowicz, presents the SMT programme as "a unifying framework and agenda that can provide effective modes of inquiry to further boundaries of research on Islamic activism" (p. 4). He states that most studies on the Islamist movement have been inadequate because they were based on psychological causes of mass mobilization and concentrated on "structural strains" that produce "social anomie", "despair", and "anxiety". These "illnesses" were deemed to be the result of rapid socio-economic transformations, rural–urban migration, and the subsequent clash between the traditional values of the village and the anonymity of the modern city. Another version of strain theory ascribes the rise of the Islamist movement to the growing influence of an aggressive Western culture in the Middle East, while a third source of alienation and social frustration is attributed to lack of democracy.

The curt answer to these theories, following Doug McAdam, is that grievances are ubiquitous but social movements are not. To be sure, most of the upholders of social movement theory recognize that psychological and political strains and frustration play a role in the rise of the Islamist movement. But they argue that these factors in themselves are unable to explain the emergence and dynamics of the Islamist movement. These are based on factors such as the successful mobilization and organization of a following. To underscore their point, Wiktorowicz and others point out that most members of Islamist social movements are not "dysfunctional" individuals who are "seeking psychological comfort". In fact, in most cases

Change in Egypt (New York, 2002); Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* (Albany, NY, 2001); and Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder, CO [etc.], 2003).

6. For an overview of the results of four decades of social movement theory see, Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1998), and Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, 2001).

they are well-educated, highly motivated individuals who act in their own interests (p. 9).

It is in the analysis of the dynamics of the movement that SMT provides its most promising prospects. The major advantage of SMT is that it is one of the few theoretical constructs that takes the Islamist movement seriously. Influenced by rational choice theory – although not everyone is happy with it, on account of its focus on the individual instead of the group,[7] and self-interest instead of persuasion[8] – SMT emphasizes the rational character of the Islamist movement. One of its major tasks is to demonstrate that the Islamist movement takes strategic decisions and adapts its programme and ideology to changing circumstances.

Advocates of SMT argue that it does this in three ways. Firstly, basing their argument on resource mobilization theory (RMT), the contributors to the anthology argue that the Islamist movement, like all other social movements, organizes the mobilization of resources through communication channels, the division of labour, and the financing of the movement. It initiates these activities with the goal of "maximiz[ing] its impact and efficaciousness" (p. 10). Three fields of resource mobilization structure are in theory available to the Islamist movement: (1) the formal political mobilizing structure of political parties and legal institutions; (2) the legal environment of civil society in the form of NGOs, medical clinics, charity societies, schools, and especially professional organizations; and (3) the informal sector of social networks and personal ties.

Which of these fields of resource mobilization are mobilized depends to a great extent on their ability to take advantage of the existing opportunity structures and their overcoming of constraints, the second concept the authors have adopted from SMT. Like RMT, this concept emphasizes the logical and rational character of the movement by contextualizing it and regarding it as an active agent that makes strategic choices based on the opportunities it encounters and creates and the constraints it comes up against and overcomes. As Wiktorowicz argues, the Islamist movement does not operate in a vacuum, but belongs to "a broader social milieu and context characterized by shifting and fluid configurations of enablements and constraints that structure movements dynamics" (p. 13). Its success depends on the "political space" it creates, which in turn depends on its level of access to political institutions and decision-making, the degree of receptivity of the established elite to challenger groups, the capacity of the movement to find allies, and the level of state repression.

From the collected evidence, "access" appears to be much more difficult in the Middle East than the West, on which the model of social movement theory is based. The crucial difference from Western social movements,

7. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement", pp. 114–115.
8. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, p. 206.

which the manifesto stresses, is that Islamist movements are not only confronted by repressive authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states, they are usually also opposed by a unified and closed elite that does not allow movements to organize themselves as political parties or be overtly active in civil society. For this reason, Islamist movements in general mostly operate on the periphery and semi-periphery of society, finding first of all refuge in the informal sector, to a lesser extent in civil society, and rarely in the "centre" – parliamentary politics.

Framing is the third theoretical notion derived from SMT that figures prominently in the manifesto. This is not surprising, as the Islamist movement is considered a "new social movement", that primarily focuses on creating meaning and identity. Following Robert Benford and David Snow,[9] frames are defined as "schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in the world 'out there'" (p. 15). Frames diagnose a condition, provide solutions to problems, and motivate and support collective action. They are successful when they achieve "frame resonance", i.e. find sufficient response that will transform mobilization potential into actual mobilization. Thus, in accordance with their constructivist approach, social movement theorists argue that ideas and frames are not rigid God-given principles, even if they are based on sacred scripture. Rather, they are flexible and adaptable to changing political and socioeconomic circumstances. How they are formed, adjusted and achieve "frame resonance", Wiktorowicz argues, does not only depend on their relation with indigenous cultural symbols, language, and identities but also on the reputation of the individual or group responsible for articulating the frame. The authority of the spokesperson uttering the words is as important as the content. Ideology must therefore always be balanced by factors such as the political and cultural environment and resource mobilization and leadership.

APPLICATION

The authors of the four studies have worked with these theoretical constructs in different ways and applied them to different subjects. Carry Rosefsky Wickham has focused on the peaceful "Islamic outreach" to the educated lower middle classes in Egypt. She is also one of the most careful researchers in trying to find a balance between the three elements of SMT: resource mobilization theory, opportunities and constraints, and frames. In general, she is successful in avoiding the traps of subsuming one to the other and reductionism.

Her main contention concerning the political environment in Egypt is

9. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000), pp. 611–639.

that the reform of the authoritarian state during the regimes of Presidents Sadat (1970–1981) and Mubarak (1981–now) failed in the attempt to establish new ways of relating to its citizens. Whereas "restricted pluralism", the blocking of political access, alienated the lower middle classes politically, the incapacity of the regime to create jobs led to economic deprivation. Alienation was therefore, as Rosefsky Wickham argues, not the result of a reaction to "'modernity' writ large", as strain analysts would have it, but the result of specific political developments and situations (p. 75). The major achievement of the Islamist movement was to turn these disadvantages of "opportunities and constraints" to its favour.

Rosefsky Wickham describes how economic liberalization, the inflow of Gulf money, and Mubarak's partial political accommodation of the non-violent Islamist movement during the first half of the 1980s, allowed it to create enough political and social space to find new niches in which it could mobilize its following. Due to its flexibility and decentralized nature (p. 105), the state could do little but acquiesce in the establishment of an independent "Islamic parallel sector" in the form of Islamic banking and establishment of schools, social services, and personal networks centred on the mosques. Meanwhile, its leaders and members settled in the new neighbourhoods on the fringes of Cairo. It was precisely the lack of well-established institutions of communal self-help that allowed the Islamists to put down roots in these neighbourhoods. Once established on the margins of society, the movement was able to mobilize its following to capture the "semi-periphery", i.e. civil society, by winning the elections of the professional associations at the beginning of the 1990s. At this point the state stepped in. Afraid that the next step would be that it lost control of the "centre", the state clamped down on the Muslim Brotherhood and arrested its "middle generation" during the elections of 1995.

Rosefsky Wickham's analysis of the mobilization of the Islamist movement on the periphery and its assault from there on the semi-periphery constitutes the crux of her research and is its most fascinating and challenging part. It is here that SMT makes a difference and provides new instruments to tackle the question of why and how the Islamist movement emerged and has been so successful. Her answer is that success was predicted on the achievement of the leadership in finding "frame resonance". Criticizing deprivation theorists, she argues that "Islamist mobilizers in Egypt did not simply exploit the frustrations of unemployed and underemployed youth. The key to understanding their success is to realize that they engaged in a massive ideological project to capture the hearts and minds of potential recruits" (p. 120). She argues convincingly that a new ethic of "civic obligation", promoting participation in the public sphere, regardless of its benefits and costs, was at the heart of Islamist success in mobilizing its following. In accordance with the constructivist nature of framing, she argues that the established cultural traditions and

Islamic doctrines were adapted to new purposes by shifting the outreach to ordinary Muslims (instead of non-Muslims) and giving them a new activist interpretation of proper Muslim conduct.

A central element in the new doctrine was the reinterpretation of the practice of the *da'wa*, "call", or outreach, as a *fard 'ayn*, a duty incumbent on every Muslim to participate in the Islamic reform of society. "Indeed," she argues,

> [...] with its emphasis on collective adherence to a God-given moral code and collective responsibility for the public welfare, the *da'wa* projected a vision of Islamic rule that stood out as a striking reverse image of the status quo. Against the perceived reality of state elites preoccupied with self-enrichment and removed from popular needs and concerns, the *da'wa* conveyed the image of a leadership animated by its religious duty to safeguard the well-being of the Islamic *umma*. (p. 160)

Elaborating on the method of *da'wa*, Rosefsky Wickham states that Islamic outreach was a peaceful and personal, gradualist means of establishing an Islamic society. *Da'wa fardiyya* (personal *da'wa*), she argues, was first propagated among relatives, neighbours, and peers before it was directed to strangers through general *da'wa* (*da'wa 'amma*), which was accomplished through lectures, lessons, and the media: books, newspapers, and tapes. Rosefsky Wickham is, however, careful not to ascribe the success of the movement to ideology as such. It hinged, she states, on conditions external to the message itself.

Pulling all the strings of her analysis together at the end of her study, she states that success depended on: (1) its close "fit" with the life experiences and beliefs of those graduates targeted for recruitment; (2) the credibility and effectiveness of its agents and modes of transmission; and (3) its reinforcement through intensive small-group solidarity. "Frame resonance" is therefore predicted on the special linkages which leaders forged and sustained with potential recruits. It was their incorporation into personal networks and the gradual evolution of individual members from lower-risk forms of activism to higher-risk forms that accounted for the movement's success. The frame of moral obligation supported this trend. She argues convincingly that the "crisis of morals" perceived to be at the root of the country's malaise was also at the basis of the moral regeneration programme of the Islamist frame (p. 159).

Quinton Wiktorowicz's monograph, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan* further elaborates on the specific opportunity structure in Jordan. Interestingly, in contrast to the enthusiastic and optimistic researchers of the civil-society school who greeted the liberal reforms in Jordan in the early 1990s with enthusiasm, Wiktorowicz is much more pessimistic, and argues that the "democratization from above" has further enhanced state

control of social movement organizations (SMOs). Rather than enhancing the participation of Jordanians in politics it has led to widespread depoliticization.

In order to achieve this goal, the state has developed a "series of bureaucratic techniques to observe, register, record, and monitor all forms of collective action in the kingdom", leading to a bureaucratic "management of collective action" that "channels movements in particular directions by setting boundaries for permissible actions" (p. 13). Accordingly, all Islamic forms of space in Jordan are controlled and regulated, including mosques, NGOs, and Friday sermons (*khutba's*), with the purpose of preventing them from criticizing the government and mobilizing an opposition. To implement this policy, which Wiktorowicz compares to Foucaultian "surveillance", imams are government trained, appointed, and monitored; Zakat committees are considered a "cover for government control"; while Ramadan is "ritualized and personalized" (p. 20). As it is possible to exercise control to a far greater degree in a relatively small country such as Jordan than in Egypt, not only is access to the parliamentary "centre", as a forum for the social movement to develop, blocked to a greater degree but the restrictions on civil society are also far greater.

Although the Moslem Brotherhood is usually regarded as the main oppositional power, the Salafi movement is, according to Wiktorowicz, the real embodiment of the Jordanian social movement. Based on its oppositional literalist Islamic programme that rejects the legitimacy of the state because it accepts innovation (*bid'a*), it is the only movement that refuses to be trapped in the government system of regulation and surveillance. As one Salafi scholar stated it: "Organized work is frightening because it often means you give up some principles" (p. 132). Instead of betraying its programme by accepting the government's control, the Salafi movement mobilizes its following through informal "personal, face-to-face interactions where they communicate, recruit, educate, and facilitate the movement's goals of transforming society through religious education" (p. 133). Banned from official mosques, Salafis gather in houses, while decentralization and lack of a single leadership in the movement makes it more difficult for the government to control it.

Mohammed Hafez's book on rebellious Muslims, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* complements the other three studies by focusing on the violent movement and its mechanisms. Hafez's motivation for writing the book is the complaint that "what is missing is a sustained theoretical treatment of Islamist rebellion and an attempt at explanation of it, in a comparative perspective" (p. 3). He uses a political-process approach and argues that researchers should not ask *why* a movement rises up in revolt, but that they should pose the more appropriate question "*how is the process?*" by which a movement becomes rebellious (p. 21). In accordance with general SMT, he holds that it is the

researchers' task to focus on the ways that "individuals will have to mobilize resources, recruit committed activists, and establish organizational structures that can withstand repression" (p. 17), all of which are ignored by socioeconomic and psychological "strain-theory" approaches.

Hafez's main – and perhaps most controversial – contention is that political exclusionary states are solely responsible for the bloodshed that has taken place in the Islamic world during the past decades: "The key to explaining their militancy [of the members of the Islamist movement] is not economic stagnation or excessive secularization, but the lack of meaningful access to state institutions" (p. 18). It is state repression that is at the root of Islamist rebellions. This approach is reflected in the organization of the book.

In the first chapter the author analyses the political environment of political exclusion and lack of system accessibility that has led to the emergence of rebellious Islamist movements. In the next chapter, he analyses the results of repression, arguing that "[I]slamist rebellions are often defensive reactions to overly repressive regimes that misapply their repression in ways that radicalize, rather than deter movement activists and supporters" (p. 71). Here, he convincingly argues that timing and targeting of repression by the state are crucial elements that determine if a movement will rise up in revolt. Whereas, on the one hand, pre-emptive repression, according to Hafez, is effective because it does not allow a movement to organize itself, mobilize its resources, and acquire a coherent frame, on the other hand, reactive repression provokes movements to revolt because their members have been allowed to organize themselves, and have in the meantime built an infrastructure that they are not willing to lose. Another crucial determinant is the nature of repression. Selective repression, which distinguishes between moderate and radicals, is much more effective than indiscriminate repression. The last form of repression leaves no other option but to revolt, and will alienate broad sections of the population which are loosely associated with the movement.

In the two examples he has studied in depth, Algeria and Egypt, reactive repression in combination with indiscriminate repression has led to the emergence of the most violent forms of organizations that are exclusive, uniform, and isolated, and which uphold the most extreme ideologies that support "protracted" struggles. The ensuing vicious circle of violence tends to deepen the social and ideological isolation of the group further, leading to what Donatella Della Porta, a specialist in the history of the Red Brigades in Italy in the 1970s, calls "spirals of encapsulation" (p. 111). During this process, group members lose touch with reality as "[g]roup pressures are especially magnified for the underground group, so that the group is the only source of confirmation, and, in the face of external danger and pursuit, the only source of reality" (p. 112).

As the "anti-system ideological frames" of rebellious movements permit

"moral disengagement", they lead to denial of the neutrality of citizens. As a result, all confrontations are regarded as part of a cosmic struggle in which reform and reconciliation is ruled out and there is no option but to wage an all-out war against the rulers and the corrupt system. In the Islamist case, the anti-system frame adopts the form of accusing the other of being infidel (*takfir*), which is expressed in slogans as those of GIA: "No dialogue, no ceasefire, no reconciliation, and no security and guarantee with the apostate regime" (p. 169). Hafez's contribution on Algeria to the anthology *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach*, and the contribution with Wiktorowicz on Egyptian Islamist violence further elaborates on these issues.[10]

CONTRIBUTION

The introduction of social movement theory to the Middle East, and its application to the Islamist movement, undoubtedly represents a positive development in that it represents one of the most consistent attempts to devise a more neutral, objective set of theoretical tools to analyse the movement as a dynamic movement without focusing on Islam as the determinant factor. It thus avoids the pitfalls of stereotyping and essentializing that so often mars research on the Islamist movement.[11]

These advantages are especially underlined if SMT is compared with civil society theories, the predominant theoretical construct let loose on the Middle East in the 1980s. By providing a programme of systematic comparative analysis with other social movements in the world it avoids the sterile, ahistorical debate on civil society and the implied potential for democracy in the region.[12] Not only have researchers who apply civil society theory ignored the largest and most important existent social movement, because it was, according to them, not sufficiently committed to "democracy", and did not uphold the basic tenets of "civility", but they also neglected it because the informal sector in which it was primarily active was regarded as irrelevant. The informal sector was assumed not to be able to contribute to the enhancement of the formal structure of civil

10. Mohammed M. Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria", in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, pp. 37–60, and *idem*, with Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement", in *ibid.*, pp. 61–88.

11. See also the insightful contribution made by Charles Kurzman in the "Conclusion" to Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, on the late adoption of social movement theory by researchers working on the Islamist movement.

12. See for the most extensive collection of articles on the concept of civil society, Augustus Richard Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1995), with contributions by Augustus Richard Norton "Introduction", pp. 1–26; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World", pp. 27–54; and Mustapha Kamil al-Sayyid, "A Civil Society in Egypt?", pp. 269–293.

society and the struggle against the authoritarian state. The basic flaw of civil society theory was that it never seemed to solve the paradox that a real civil society must both be independent of the state while at the same time needing the state to provide the legal environment in which its institutions can flourish.[13] In hindsight, it appears that civil society theory was based on a far too optimistic assumption. Researchers' focus on the concept of civil society was as much based on the hope that state power would be curbed and controlled by civil society in the 1980s than by the actual emergence and power of this mediating layer of independent institutions.

SMT does not rule out the emergence of democracy in the Middle East, but it focuses on the organizational mechanisms of how Islamist movements react to authoritarian regimes. Whether the movement is democratic or not is intrinsically irrelevant. In this sense SMT, although a research programme that also derives from the West, is far less morally committed to a certain political model, and is politically unbiased and therefore more open and flexible than civil society theories, which are imbued with Western liberal political values and goals. By looking again at social and personal networks, as other contributors have done in the SMT, such as Diane Singerman,[14] Janine Clark,[15] Benjamin Smith,[16] and Jillian Schwedler,[17] the anthology *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Approach* has refocused attention on crucial social relations. Its stress on the informal nature of the social movements makes an important contribution to international research on social movements, as the research on Western social movements is usually more focused on formal social movement organizations (SMOs).

By taking the Islamist movement seriously and considering it a rational movement, SMT also moves away from the facile conclusions that (mostly) French researchers have drawn. Against their mantra that the Islamist movement has "failed" to achieve its goals because it does not have a political programme,[18] Rosefsly Wickham and others, like Salwa

13. Michael Walzer, "The Concept of Civil Society", in *idem* (ed.) *Toward a Global Civil Society* (Providence, RI [etc.], 1995), pp. 7–27.

14. See for instance Diane Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements", in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, pp. 143–163, and *idem*, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (cv Princeton, NJ, 1995).

15. Janine A. Clark, "Islamist Women in Yemen: Informal Nodes of Activism", in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, pp. 164–184.

16. Benjamin Smith, "Action with and without Islam: Mobilizing the Bazaar in Iran", in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, pp. 185–204.

17. Jillian Schwedler, "The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transitional Polity", in Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, pp. 205–228.

18. Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (tr. Carol Volk) (Cambridge, MA, 1994); and Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*.

Ismail,[19] argue convincingly that the programme of "civic obligation" that the Islamist movement upholds is in fact a hidden political agenda. That it is not overt is not simply due to a lack of political content in the ideology of the movement, but must be ascribed to the repressive political climate in which the movement operates. The spread of the notion of "collective responsibility for public welfare" is a rational response in a depoliticized repressive environment. Only after gaining political access can more direct political issues be addressed.

CRITIQUE

However, besides distinct advantages, SMT also evokes critique. Although, in general, SMT does give its three constituent factors enough room, and especially allows enough space to analyse ideas through the concept of framing, it can lead to a form of functionalism by looking at ideas only insofar they have a bearing on the social movement. In this manner, all those ideas and ideological constructs that do not directly impinge on the movement or are not immediately reflected in its frames are deemed irrelevant. One will therefore look in vain for a genealogy of the concept of *jihad*, because it is regarded as a constructivist concept that is contextually formed and bounded. This leads to strange results. For instance, in the work of Hafez, anti-system ideas like *takfir* are extensively analysed, but in the end they are deemed irrelevant to explanations of the rebellions of Islamist movements, for although they might have anti-system content this is not the reason for Islamist uprisings. Rather, it is the repression of the state that activates these anti-system frames. Although it is certainly true that Middle Eastern states are authoritarian and repressive, and Hafez gives an interesting explanation of the form and depth of recent rebellions in especially Egypt and Algeria, one wonders if the Islamist movement only acts upon its violent doctrines once it has been repressed. This puts the blame too much on the political system and gives too little credit to the independent influence of the violent content of the ideology.[20]

On another level, the critique by SMT of incorporating an analysis of the social backgrounds of the members of social movements raises questions. Here again the critique of the prevailing analyses of strain theories as describing social movements as the result of an "illness" is relevant, but one wonders if SMT has not gone too far. Shifting the question from *how* Islamist movements organize themselves to *why* they

19. Salwa Ismail, "The Paradox of Islamist Politics", *Middle East Report*, 221 (Winter 2001), pp. 34–39.

20. Excellent examples demonstrating the flexible and adaptability of ideologies and "frames" are analysed in Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement"; and Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, as well as Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*.

emerge is an interesting change in perspective. It, however, still leaves the question of why they rebelled and especially *who* they are, unanswered. Clearly if one has less to lose, one is more inclined towards rebellion, although, as the social movement theorists correctly state, this does not answer the question of why economic deprivation does not lead to revolt more often.

To be sure, this neglect of social background is not always strictly adhered to, as is the case in Rosefsky Wickham's study, when she analyses the plight of the lower middle classes. She does not, however, incorporate in her analyses social tensions that might exist between different sections of the moderate Islamist movement, as for instance between the "middle generation" of Islamic activists, who have become successful and wealthy doctors and engineers belonging to the upper middle classes, and the lower middle classes whom they lead. Similarly, Wiktorowicz points out the differences in social background between the moderate non-violent Salafis and the violent *jihadi* Salafis, but he does not further elaborate on the consequences (p. 127). His claim that "[T]hese more socially conscious members are the potential recruits of the Salafi movement" (p. 136), remains therefore unclear. In this respect, Gilles Kepel's work, though perhaps too schematic, has a more convincing perspective because he analyses the internal differences within the Islamist movement and puts the blame for its failure to attain power there. It is not just the repressive nature of the state, which in general is too schematically regarded as an monolithic opponent by the upholders of SMT, that is at fault.[21]

Finally, there is also another important element lacking in SMT, which is the neglect of such pervasive social phenomena in the Middle East as the patronage system and its manifestations, patriarchy and clientalism.[22] If SMT correctly stresses the importance of informal personal networks, it seems strange that in the Middle East, where patronage and its vertical relations of dependency and patron–client relationship have been such conspicuous aspects of society, they are largely ignored in the application of SMT to Islamist movements. The two elements do not necessary exclude each other, and when combined can explain many of the aspects of social movements that now remain unclear. The emergence of exclusivist and isolated organizations, for instance, that Hafez describes as the outcome of repression, could very well be the result of the ubiquitous patron–client relations that the oppositional groups have also adopted. Why should the opposition not mirror the political culture in the rest of society? Similarly, the vertical and segmented patronage system might also explain Wiktorowicz's divisions within the Salafi movement. It is more

21. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam.*

22. For a recent overview, see Sami Zubaida, "Islam and the Politics of Community and Citizenship", *Middle East Report*, 221 (Winter 2001), pp. 20–27.

likely that they are the result of patron–client relations than the inability to establish formal organizations. As with so many other stimulating and innovative theoretical constructs, social movement theory as applied to the Islamist movement is at times unnecessarily radical in its rejection of its precursors.