Introduction

Islamists believe that their political ideology and activism are Islamic.1 Islamic politics carries the sense that there is an Islamic way of going about applying Islam to political affairs, and that this way is morally and politically superior to other forms of rule because it is a divinely inspired system. This paper questions the claimed authenticity and absence of ambiguity in such claims. It argues that there is more to the term "Islamic" than those properties claimed by the proponents of this idea. It probes certain hermeneutic and religio-historical assumptions in the Islamic tradition, following two different and (roughly) independent aspects: the first questions conventional assumptions about Scripture and the assumed links between Scripture, authority and Islamic authenticity. The second accepts conventional beliefs and shows that even from this angle, there does not exist a consensus or a uniform position on how to go about Islamic political rule.

In probing what is conventionally assumed to be "Islamic" in relation to political rule, it is not intended to deny the significance of the "Islamic" category in Islamic politics' or for that matter

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1 [1] The Islamists are the proponents of Islamism, a political current that attributes ideological dimension to the religion of Islam. It has claimed a monopoly over Islam by professing to be faithful to God's revealed law in the Qur'an and His messenger Muhammad's teachings as illustrated in the Hadith.
to create/impose yet another arbitrary category in its place. Rather, the purpose is to open a space within which one is able to question and debate the various conventional divisions and qualifiers. To put it differently, when pointing out that the invoked \textit{Islamic}' is imbued by political considerations, it is intended to highlight that there is more to the term \textit{Islamic}' than the purity of the \textit{Islamic}' that is assumed to be self-evidently established in Scripture, as the Islamists claim. In other words, the category \textit{Islamic}' is encompassing of heterogeneous elements, even similar to the variety encompassed by the \textit{un-Islamic}' category.

\textbf{The Ambiguity of Labeling}

While this paper does not go into surveying the different and numerous positions adopted by those who advocate Islamic politics, it should be noted that the use of \textit{Islamic}' as a category in politics is not limited to those who are ideologically committed to Islam. It is also expediently invoked by a number of secular Muslim and non-Muslim political leaders when it is in their interest to do so. Following the events of 11 September 2001, for example, the President of the United States (US) George W Bush visited the Islamic Centre of Washington, D.C., to show that the US does not equate Islam with terrorism. In his remarks, Bush said that \textit{[t]hese acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith}, that \textit{[t]he face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace}'.

Like the Islamists who invoke certain verses in the Qur'\textit{n} to justify their views and actions, Bush recited a verse from the Qur'\textit{n}, which said \textit{[i]n the long run, evil in the extreme will be the end of those who do evil. For that they rejected the signs of Allah and held them up to ridicule}'. In doing so, Bush at the same time defined Islam in a way that is pleasing to the ears, implied that true Muslims share the same interests and values as those preached by the US and even managed to
please Arabists by noting that the English translation is not as eloquent as the original Arabic'.2

In such discourses, certain political views or practices are at times qualified as either Islamic' or un-Islamic'/ not true to the Islamic faith'. When the latter is used, it logically follows that the meaning of the term Islamic' is unambiguous and one is consequently invited to infer or construct the existence of this Islamic' simply by contrasting it with the un-Islamic'. In the case of Bush's remarks, one can deduce that Islam stands for the same principles as those preached by the US, and accordingly even the concept of evil' that Bush often invokes in his rhetoric is consistent with the teachings of the Qur' an.

A similar use of Islam but for a different end can even be discerned in the political dynamics of the Islamists, Bush's opponents. In different places, for instance, despite its saturated language with scriptural references, the rise of Islamism can be attributed to other than religious concerns, ranging from a reaction to authoritarianism, sowing the seeds for civil society, to using Islam as a platform parameter for party politics.3

One should not always then take the Islamists' discourse at its face value when it claims that applying Islam is the sole motive behind their movements' ideologies.


and activism. Considering its different and contradictory uses, it is complex to identify what is ‘Islamic’ or for that matter ‘un-Islamic’.

**Islamic Politics**

The Islamist ideologues Abū al-Alāʾ al-Mawdūd (1903-1979), the founder of the Islamic movement in India then in Pakistan, and Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966), from Egypt, are notable figures who have formulated the contemporary intellectual basis for the idea of an Islamic state governed according to Islamic ways and principles. They have both been influential figures amongst Islamist movements, and they both have a teleological orientation in relation to Islam believing that an Islamic state is a result of a natural historical development.

Mawdūd believes that an Islamic state (dawla islāmiyya) is characterised by having an intellectual basis necessitated by a unifying humanistic vision, and void of any divisive tendencies. Another crucial characteristic of such an Islamic state is its divinely ordained caliphate. This, according to Mawdūd, encompasses the understanding of God's complete sovereignty (hikimiyya Allah) that, in turn, is realised into the community of Muslims embracing the view that the earth

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6 [6] Fred Halliday notes that the notion of Hikimiyya is an eighteenth century Ottoman invention, and that Mawdūd and Qutb are the first to introduce it into Islamist thinking. See
and the management of its affairs belong to God alone, and He is solely responsible for order, rule and legislation therein.7 [7] Such a caliphate, he argues, can only come about either by virtue of a caliph who is the messenger of God or by way of a man who follows the prophet Muhammad in everything he brought forth in law and legislation from what has been revealed to him from God.8 [8]

The way towards such an Islamic state is through an Islamic transformation of its institutions somewhat along Platonic style reforms in society. Mawdød explains that this transformation entails the development of an intellectual movement that instils Islamic values amongst all members of society, by educating and ultimately graduating learned men, with an Islamic intellectual imprint, in the various vocational and scholarly domains.9 [9] The clearest and most reliable blueprint/model available to serve as a guide for this Islamic transformation, Mawdød continues, is the manner the prophet Muhammad himself went about achieving an Islamic state. The Islamic convocation led by Muhammad, Mawdød notes, saw just a few Muslims overcome numerous obstacles in the path of God and in their pursuit of truth, and over a period of thirteen years, referred to in the Islamic calendar as commencing with the hijra (emigration), were able to establish an Islamic state in Medina.10 [10]

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8 [8] Ibid.

9 [9] Ibid., p. 17.

10 [10] Ibid., pp. 28-45.
the hijra, Muhammad lived and managed the affairs of Medina for ten years, and during this period, Mawdûd argues, Islamic thinking matured and moved from the realm of ideas to the comprehensive organisation of a polity. This organising encompassed administrative, intellectual, judicial, economic, financial and social affairs, and it also included the development of foreign policies and the devising of appropriate plans for times of peace as well as war.11

Sayyid Qutb, whose ideas were influenced by Mawdûd was to become an influential thinker, in his own right, to most Islamist movements,12 also speaks of Islamic politics and advocates the establishment of an Islamic state. He views Islam as a totality (kull) and devises plans towards building an Islamic society (mujtama′ islâm).13 Borrowing the words of Lamin Sanneh, Qutb's vision is one that imputes territoriality to religious orthodoxy',14 a territoriality of a cosmic magnitude. Echoing Mawdûd, Qutb draws on Muhammad's leadership as a model for the conduct of Islamic


12 [12] On Qutb's influence, see Ahmad S. Moussalli, Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992, pp. 14-5, and on Qutb being influenced by Mawdûd, see p. 36. Also, Qutb refers in his books to Mawdûd's writings, for example his Ma′lîm fî al-Tarîq, Cairo: Dar al-Sharq, 1970, p. 47.


politics. Qutb's version, however, is more proactive than that of Mawdod in that he places more stress on the view that the intellectual foundation of an Islamic state is interlinked with political activism directed towards achieving the desired intellectual goal. In this sense, there are two connected components to Qutb's understanding of Islam, the first is related to the ethical foundation for the community of believers as laid down by Muhammad, and the second is related to the socio-political duties that stem and flow from this ethical foundation.

The two components together are meant to explain the 'Islamic' in Qutb's political vision, and both components take shape in theory and practice as they respond to the 'un-Islamic' society (tajammu jhil) around him. The intellectual foundation that stands as a criterion for what is Islamic is belief in the divinity of God alone (ulhiyyat Allah wah(dah), his lordship (rub biyyatahu), guardianship (qiwma), governership (khimiyya), dominion (sultn) and his revealed law (shara).15 [15] The next step in this islamisation, according to Qutb, entails that those who testify that God is one and Muhammad is His messenger, renounce completely their prior commitment to the 'un-Islamic' society, which they come from, and devote their loyalty to the new organic and dynamic Islamic movement and its leadership.16 [16]

This new Islamic grouping, however, is not meant to co-exist alongside non-Islamic groupings, according to Qutb. The new grouping should endeavour to organise itself in a manner that enables it to struggle against (mukfah(a), resist (muqwama) and ultimately eliminate (izla) the 'un-Islamic'


16 [16] Ibid.
Such, Qutb believes, was the way Muhammad went about his Islamic convocation, and the same should serve as a guide for a truly Islamic society to come into existence once again. Qutb is therefore implying that Islam has not existed in its pure form for many centuries, an implication that also suggests he is taxing the world around him as un-Islamic, even including those places or states professing to be Islamic.

Although Mawdūd and Qutb are the most articulate contemporary examples of those who invoke the universality of Islamic politics, their ideas are not new. In fact, they echo the views of the medieval jurist Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), whose work is often drawn upon in Islamist discourse. Ibn Taymiyya’s Islamic cosmology stems from the premise that people (khalq) are the servants of God, and rulers (wulṭ) act as the agents (nuwwāb) of God over his servants, and they also act as proxis (wukal’) for the servants unto themselves. Considering the importance of such a task, only the very best is worthy of this sovereignty (wilaya). Ibn Taymiyya is also explicit that it is enjoined upon

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17 [17] Ibid., p. 51

18 [18] Ibid.

19 [19] The book in which Qutb develops his views about the way towards achieving Islamic politics and universalising is, Maṣlim fī al-T(arq), a book which served as the basis for the Egyptian government’s charges against the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin) on the grounds of advocating terrorism and sedition, see Moussalli, op. cit., p. 42.

a Muslim to struggle (jihad) in the cause of God,21 until there is not opposition against the message of God and until religion be wholly God's'.22

Another type of discourse draws on more ambiguous qualifiers to designate Muslims and their relationship to Islam. Daniel Pipes for instance, director of the Middle East Forum in Philadelphia, speaks of the majority of Muslims as being moderate'. Pipes argues that although moderate Muslims' are currently weak and intimidated', once the West does the heavy lifting', they can emerge as a force in their own right', ultimately holding the key to the defeat of a militant Islam' that appeals only to about 10 to 15% of Muslims.23 Using similar terminology, though from a different perspective, a commentator on Islam in Southeast Asia, Imtiyaz Yusuf, draws a distinction between Islamic politics in Southeast Asia and that in the Middle East. Yusuf argues that Islamic political trends in Southeast Asia are a far cry from the Islamic fundamentalist/extremist political tendencies witnessed in the Middle Eastern Muslim countries'. The reason for such differences, Yusuf argues, is due to the different character of the political history' of these two regions.24

contemporary Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb, see Emmanuel Sivan, Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 101-2.

21 [21] Ibid., p. 140.

22 [22] Qur'an 8: 39. Ibn Taymiyya frequently cites this verse to justify his call, Ibid., p. 31, 105.


24 [24] Imtiyaz Yusuf (from the College of Islamic Studies- Prince of Songkhla University), Islamic politics in region are tolerant', Bangkok Post, Letters to the Editor, 8 June 1999,
views that range in tone from the apologetic to the polemical, and in many respects they are at times equally damaging, at the intellectual as well as the policy-making levels.

As is to be argued in this paper, Islamic politics' is not a category of analysis that designates specific and unambiguous values. The study by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori on Muslim Politics is relevant here. They note that Muslim politics involves the competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols and control of the institutions',25 [25] noting in particular that invoking symbols is an important constituting element in politics that can be used as an instrument of persuasion as well as coercion'.26 [26] In this light, the symbols that Mawd as and Qutb are driving at reflect an essentialist understanding of Islam, one that equates authenticity with a doctrine of fixed body of beliefs to be put to practice. Other thinkers have also played on the rubric of symbols to give legitimacy to their own views.

Borrowing again from Eickelman and Piscatori, the relationship between doctrine and practice is problematic in that it assumes a fixity and universality of doctrines that if implemented should lead to a particular desired outcome. As Eickelman and Piscatori note, such a formula does not take into account the principle that Islamic principles must be constantly reinterpreted' over time and space to meet social circumstances giving rise to various interpretations of a given doctrine, as has


26 [26] Ibid., p. 11.
been the case over the centuries.27 This line of argument is related to Qutb's discourse about his \textit{islamisation enterprise}. For instance, while he uses Muhammad's convocation in Medina as a clear model to follow for his project, he either fails to account for, or deliberately ignores the fact that Muhammad did allow for compromises in the course of his Islamic convocation. In other words, it is not that the doctrine is fixed, but rather the flexibility of the doctrine is such that it is deployed in the service of what is conceived of as something fixed.

It is also helpful for our purposes in this paper to take into account the qualifications George Hourani applied in his studies of the origins of Islamic theology and philosophy. Hourani rightly draws attention to the difficulties associated with qualifying as \textit{Islamic} anything that comes down to us through what he terms an \textit{Islamic filter}.28 Hourani's qualification highlights two different implications for our enquiry: On the one hand, it serves as a reminder that ideas are rarely novel, that they can be borrowed, assimilated and appropriated, leading sometimes to the

\footnotesize{27 \cite{Ibid.}, pp. 16-7. For a comprehensive review of the politics of Islam and related scholarly works on the subject, see Halliday, \textit{op. cit.}}

dissipation of their earlier origin(s). Accordingly and from this angle, the wholesale application of such categories as 'Islamic' is not inappropriate, and hence may disqualify the very basis and the usefulness of our undertaking. On the other hand, Hourani's distinction underlines the relevance of the source/origin, especially when a given argument claims its legitimacy and authenticity by grounding itself in a clearly defined and available source. Accordingly and from this angle, the importance of categories does not cease but the investigation of their definitions and their claims to authenticity becomes all the more relevant and legitimate.

**Religion and Authority**

Any discussion pertaining to political rule in Islam needs to take account of the notion of authority. Further and in this respect, one has to approach such a study with the view that Islam, like other religious traditions, does not seek to legitimate its authority on the basis of reasoning or verifiable experiences. This is not to suggest that secular traditions do so, however, in the case of religious traditions, the


30 [30] Outwardly secular traditions may indeed be imbued by religious considerations. Dwight B. Billings and Shaunna L. Scott note that even though American political authority is justified largely on nonreligious normative grounds [..], there is little doubt that religious activism currently influences the legitimacy of certain policies, the shape of constituencies and coalitions, levels of participation, cultural climates, and the social definitions of public and private spheres in the United States', *Religion and Political Legitimation*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 20, 1994, p. 178. Worth also noting here the influence of the Catholic Church in France. For recent
notion of authority is legitimated on assumed spiritual grounds of a higher/superior order than existential ones, yet with implications that permeate the existential setting. That is to say that the religious/theological ground is not limited to the spiritual sphere, instead, it forms a body of explanatory knowledge, believed to originate from a divine source, and hence carries authoritative instructions in various existential spheres.

Religious authority, as John Hunwick notes, is \textit{an assumed authority} by those who claim to have \textit{special access} to "divine" authority and to be acting as agents for it.\footnote{John Hunwick, \textit{Secular Power and Religious Authority in Muslim Society: The Case of Songhay}, \textit{Journal of African History}, vol. 37, 1996, p. 176.} The agents, in turn, can assume a considerable capacity to provide directives and guidance, and order people to act in various spheres of life according to the religious scripture of any particular religious tradition or their interpretation/manipulation of it. While this notion of \textit{special access} does not, \textit{in principle}, apply to all religions or religious denominations, and it need not even apply to Islam, those who are perceived to

\footnote{Entente cordiale entre l'Eglise catholique et l'Etat', \textit{Le Monde}, 26/02/02, \url{http://www.lemonde.fr/article/0,5987,3232--264367-00.html}; a related example of French secularism and its implication on Islamic communities in France is the debate relating to the wearing of the veil by Muslim females to school. John Esposito terms the attitude of the French state as \textit{militant secular fundamentalism}, see his \textit{Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century}, in John Esposito \& Azzam Tamimi (eds), \textit{Islam and Secularism in the Middle East}, London: Hurst \& Company, 2000.}
know more about religions by virtue of a religious office they hold, tend to enjoy, in different degrees, such a special access'.

The dynamics governing theological principles are not unequivocal. It can be argued that the descending pattern that the theological claims, i.e., departing from a divine origin down to an existential setting, is but a façade for an ascending pattern. In other words, the theological finds its formulation based on earthly rather than heavenly considerations, is transmitted via earthly mediums and is expressed by mortals. Abdul Hamid el-Zein, for example, proposes to approach terms such as Islam, religion or history not as entities with meaning inherent in them, but rather as articulations of structural relations',32 the latter in this case providing the parameters within which the former can legitimate its authority. Thus structural relations' reflect the broader make up of society, in its intellectual and socio-political composition. Zein's starting and ending points then remove the notion of the religious from the divine sphere, and accordingly, religion becomes an arbitrary category which as a unified and bounded form has no necessary existence', and whereby Islam as an analytical category dissolves as well'.33

Zein's argument notwithstanding, especially as one that privileges anthropological considerations over generalised constructs, theological articulations are generally the formulations of élites, who are often outside the common structural relations' sphere. This tends to result in a form of theological intellection that does not always take into account the concerns that stem from


33 [33] Ibid., p. 252.
structural relations'. Yet because these lites, by virtue of their religious positions claim to have special access' to divine authority, their theological formulations, even when removed from or inconsistent with existing structural relations', are perceived to be legitimate. In fact were we to follow Zein's argument that categories such as religion' get formed and undergo changes according to the architecture of structural relations', we would expect to find minimum conflict between the two. This is to say that Zein underestimates the impact and in turn the authority, even if arbitrary, of entities such as religion' or Islam' in the extent to which they provide a certain conditioning and a source of legitimacy to structural relations'. This latter aspect of religious entities finds its potency then in the composition and the delivery of its message.

Islamic Scriptures and Authority: an Unconventional Perspective

Using John Wansbrough's classification, one may identify three bodies of data common to the monotheist traditions, and upon which these traditions base their legitimacy: (1) a historical theophany' (i.e., a divine manifestation in history); (2) an existential task'; and (3) an agent as recipient for (1) and executor for (2)'.

34 [34] John Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 50. It should be noted here that, in his work, Wansbrough is applying methodologies used for historical biblical and gospel collection of sources, and his methods have been contested by some scholars. For a discussion related to Wansbrough's thesis, see A. Rippin, The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects', Bulletin (British Society of Middle Eastern Studies), vol. 10, issue 1, 1983, pp. 43-6. F. E. Peters, The Quest of the Historical Muhammad', International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 23,
Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. This revelation, in turn, gives Muhammad, the messenger/agent of God, an existential task to carry out. All of this is to be documented in the Islamic Scriptures. The primary source of authority is the Qur’ān, which functions as God’s revelations, and the secondary source of authority is the Hadith, which comprises the collected sayings of Muhammad, documenting his encounter with his existential task. Wansbrough correctly observes that in the works of Muslims as well as those of Orientalists, authority in Islam is often equated with Scripture,35 and whenever such an equation is made, little is said regarding the canonisation of the text of the Qur’ān, which is historically a contested process.

This canonisation is of significance especially given the authoritative power Scripture is assigned by virtue of being, according to observing Muslims and to the Qur’ān, a pristine book (kitāb) that there is no doubt in’ (lā ṭaybah),36 and that it contains the word of God, hence the seemingly unassailable claims for its authenticity,37 for the inimitability (i‘jāz) of its language, the immutability of its authority, and the eternal relevance of the message it carries. Two aspects are of immediate pertinence to this discussion: (a) the process by which the verbal revelations become the


received and written text of the mus&h&af, the Qur’ɨn; and (b) the degree to which one can assert that the final recension of the Qur’ɨn includes the totality of the fragments on which the verbal revelations to Muhammad were later written by those who memorised them (huffɨz). Early sources suggest that these issues were on the minds of early Muslim scholars who were involved in the canonisation and codification process of Scripture.38 [38] The fact that such issues were raised by the earliest generation of concerned scholars is relevant for our discussion, even though it is now enjoined upon believers not to contest such matters.

An examination of each of these two aspects clarifies the fragility of assumed links and formulae such as Scripture’ = Islamic’ + authority’ \( \neq \) authenticity’. In relation to (a) the process of putting into writing the verbal revelations: Muhammad is said to have received from God - via the angel Gabriel over a period of twenty-two years - verbal revelations, which he, in turn, recited to his companions, who, in turn, wrote them down or memorised them, some of which were even written down after the death of Muhammad.39 [39] This aspect raises a question about the human memory (i.e., prone to error) of those who memorised (huffɨz) the verses. In this respect, the received text of the Qur’ɨn could be considered prone to human errors similar to those Muslims raise in relation to other Scriptures, especially to the New


For while Muslims argue that the Qur’an is but a continuation and fulfilment of the Old and New Testaments, the Judeo-Christian Scriptures do not claim to contain or consist of the authentic and complete words of God the same way the Qur’an does. According to general conventional beliefs, the Qur’an is revealed from God, whereas the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in their current forms are written by prophets or disciples. Therefore, Muslims argue, due to the human involvement in and so interference with (i.e., imperfection and corruption) them, the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are not faithful to the word of God in the same way as is the directly revealed Qur’an (munzal) from God.

As for (b) the canonisation of the mus’h’af: the text of the Qur’an as we have it today and is accepted by Muslims is according to traditional accounts that compiled and codified during the reign of Uthman, the third caliph. Yet contrary to assertions by Muslims about its completeness, the collection of revelations comprised in the Qur’an was far from undisputed when it was first presented to the earliest Muslim community. For while the Qur’an is now regarded as the first source of authority followed by the Hadith (or Sunna), early sources report different views. Slogans such as “the Sunna is the judge of the Qur’an’ or “the Qur’an has greater need of the Sunna for its elucidation than the


42 [42] Qur’an (6): 114; (4): 15. The latter verse in fact suggests that the people of the Book (ahl al-kitab), i.e., the Jews and the Christians, hid some of God's revelations.
Sunna has of the Qur’an, are but an indication of the complexities surrounding the canonisation of the text as well as the strong influence Sunna reports (i.e., human reports) had in the early period of Islam.43

There is an additional complication, this time in connection to the Sunna. The soundness (ṣ)īḥ(ḥ)at of the collections of Ḥadīth(s) has itself been opened to question. Not all Ḥadīth reports are considered as ṣound’ (ṣāḥīḥ ‘). To qualify as such, they need to be traced directly to Muhammad via a chain of transmission known as isnād. It was not until the reign of ʿUmar II (717-20) that the process of isnād became strongly emphasised in adjudicating the ṣound’ sayings of Muhammad as distinct from the ṣunsound’. Consequently, not just the reports about Muhammad’s sayings and deeds fell under ṣound’ Hadīth but many of the opinions of Muhammad’s companions were ṣraised to the level’ of prophetic tradition.44

An earlier collection of the qur’anic revelations had existed before that of ʿUthmān. It was based on the fragments assembled by Zaid b. Thabit following the command of Abū Bakr, the first caliph.45


successor Umar who then bequeathed them on his death to his daughter Hafsa', one of Muhammad's wives.46 Early sources suggest that it took some time before the Uthman text came to be universally accepted. Among the reasons for this reluctance by the community of believers were questions raised concerning the fragments used in the collection and the extent to which these fragments were faithful to the Ab Bakr-Umar collection. Other reasons for this reluctance may be attributed to the fact that Uthman's reign was marked by corruption, nepotism and political discord,47 a matter that may have also played a part in some Muslims' minds.

Other critical approaches to the Qur'an and Hadith have also raised some questions in relation to the completeness and hence the authority of these texts. Wansbrough proposes that the Qur'an is the result of the work of more than one generation,48 and that it contains separate logia collections which had for some time prior to their final redaction been in liturgical and homiletic (of the sermon variety) use in one or several related communities.49 Somewhat related to Wansbrough's thesis is Joseph Schacht's claim that the bulk of early Islamic jurisprudence was not based on the Qur'an.

46 Cited in Burton, p. 119.


48 John Wansbrough, Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 44.

49 Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu, p. 57.
He further argues that the extent of reliance on sound Ḥadīth is questionable. In this, there is a significant departure from mainstream Islamic position that grounds the Islamic legal code in the foundation texts. As far as isnād goes, he argues, the evidence of legal traditions carries us back to about the year 100 A.H. only', 50 [50] that is not back in time enough for them to be directly founded on the sayings of Muhammad. He thus states that the traditions from the Prophet do not form, together with the Koran, the original basis of Muhammadan law, but an innovation began at a time when some of its foundations already existed.'51 [51]

Drawing on the works of Schacht, Christopher Melchert explains that there existed two rival groups in the field of jurisprudence during the eighth and early ninth century, the traditionist-jurisprudents (fujāhِ  as$h'ِb al-ḥadīth) and the rationalistic-jurisprudents (as$h'ِb al-ra'y).52 [52]

The former was characterised by a wholesale acceptance of hadīth reports without critical evaluation of


their contents, even when these contained contradictory information.53 [53] As for the latter, they did use hadith reports but as a way of supporting their own speculations.54 [54] Melchert argues that the influence of the traditionist-jurisprudents did not completely disappear, but notes that the rationalistic-jurisprudents of the Mālikī, Shāfi`ī, and Hanafī came to form the mainstream group in Islamic law at the late eighth century, and as of early ninth century, the traditionalist-jurisprudents became more flexible in their approach. They sought to join the mainstream either as traditionists when appropriate or as practicing jurisprudents.55 [55]

The result, Melchert argues, is a legal system based on revelation but also penetrable at multiple levels, affording the widest scope for intellectual play. Melchert's conclusion is telling of the variety of what would now be regarded as unorthodox' views of the early Muslim community that were suppressed at the time. He notes that the systematisation of the legal system came at the expense of the purity and power of simply letting hadith speak for itself; also, .., a certain frankness about the importance of local tradition and personal speculation in the development of Islamic law.56 [56]

These issues have been contested by various scholars from within and outside the Islamic tradition, and it is unlikely that a conclusive answer can be reached. To the misfortune of historians of the Islamic tradition, as Francis Peters points out, Islam, [..], had no immediate need of a Gospel and so

53 [53] Ibid., p. 388.

54 [54] Ibid., p. 389.

55 [55] Ibid., p. 384.

56 [56] Ibid., p. 406.
chose carefully to preserve what it understood were the words of God rather than the deeds of the man who was His Messenger or the history of the place in which he lived'.57 [57] The purpose here, however, is not to solve the difficulties or mystery surrounding these foundation texts, but simply to review the authority assigned to them in light of such historical and contemporary doubts about its completeness which may never be satisfactorily resolved. The relevant points to which this probing is directed are similar to the conclusion of Melchert and well summed up by Thomas Michel:

That this [contested] material was reported without embarrassment by earlier generations of Muslim scholars is an indication of the fact [that] for the first centuries of Islam, the authentic Qur'an was that preserved in human memory rather than on the pages of a book. A characteristic of oral cultures is that memory is the criterion by which written texts are judged and verified. If what is written agrees with what has been memorized, it can be considered correct. In literary cultures, the process is reversed. An actor who has just memorized a Shakespearean soliloquy checks his memory against the script.58 [58]

**Islamic Scriptures and Authority: a Conventional Perspective**


In his introduction to 'Alabdul-Raziq’s *Islam and Principles of Rule*, Muhammad Amra notes that the nature of political authority has always been, continues to be and will always remain, the most dangerous issue in Islamic political thought.59 In this book, Raziq argues that religion and society have no need for the caliphate political structure (*khilafa*) (also referred to as *Imamate-imama*),60 and such a structure has no basis in the principal authoritative sources of Islamic law relied upon in Islam, i.e., Qur’an, Hadith/Sunna, consensus (*ijm*) and analogy (*qiyas*).61 Accordingly, he concludes, such a system is alien to Islam.

Not only did Raziq reject the caliphate as a legitimate Islamic institution, hence departing from mainstream Islamic views and beliefs on that matter, but he went so far as to argue that the horrific events that mark the history of the caliphate, involving the various figures who occupied the office of caliph, including the Orthodox Caliphs (i.e., Ab Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Al) testify as to how extrinsic to Islam the institution is:

If it weren’t for fear that we may digress from the topic, we would have presented the reader the history of the caliphate up to our time so that he may be aware of (*li-yara*) the marks of coercion (*qahr*) and domination (*galaba*) in every episode of its sequence and so that he be mindful (*li-yatabayyana*) that that which is called a Throne does not get

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60 [60] Raziq, Book I, Section 3, parag. 17 (p. 146).

61 [61] Raziq, Book I, Section 1, parags 4-7, (pp. 132-6).
raised except over the heads of [ordinary] people (*bashar*) and does not rest except on top of their necks. [So that he may also be mindful] that that which is called Crown does not have a life of its own except that which it takes from the life of [ordinary] people; that it has no power except that which it seizes from their power; and that it has no majesty and no honour except those which it snatches from their majesty and honour.62 [62]

From a broader political perspective, Röziq's views are not intended to run a *contra* political line from a religio-intellectual position. By negating the system of caliphate, Röziq is not negating systems of government, he is simply rejecting a system that assigns itself primacy and legitimacy over other systems by claiming to be in a special and unique sense Islamic. He does not see a problem, for instance, if jurists were to treat the system of caliphate as a system rival to those postulated by political scientists, and as such stands alongside other political systems. The reason why the jurists' case for a caliphate lacks cogency, he argues, is because it is based on the assumption that the Caliphate is a political system of a unique genre.63 [63]

Röziq's book was published in 1925, just one year after Mustafa Kamal Ataturk abolished the Ottoman Caliphate, hence putting an end to the institution in the Islamic world. It is significant that this abrogation of the caliphate is the principal direct cause behind the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, the movement that continues to form the ideological basis of most Islamist movements in the Islamic world. Röziq's book caused an intellectual and a political uproar, especially in view of the political circumstances


63 [63] Röziq, Book I, Section 3, parag 15 (pp. 145-6).
that surrounded the timing of its publication.64 [64] Rziq, who was a religious scholar (lim) of al-Azhar University, was put on trial by a committee made up of al-Azhar scholars, who unanimously decreed, among other things, that he be removed from al-Azhar and be denied permission to hold any public office.65 [65]

As pointed out, Rziq was a religious scholar of al-Azhar and, in his introduction to the book, he stresses his profession of the Islamic faith. In presenting a critique of the system of caliphate and in questioning the assumed Islamic bases of Islamic political rule, Rziq is certainly not the first Muslim (nor was he the last) to do so. In fact, his work shows that he was familiar with the ideas of some other, much earlier, Muslims who opposed the system of caliphate on religious and not secular grounds. Relying on the work of the historian Ibn Khaldun, Rziq mentions for example the views of the Mu'tazilite theologian Al-As'am and some members of the Kharijite (khawarij - seceders') movement who did

64 [64] Another factor contributing to the controversy resulting from Rziq's book was the political situation in Egypt, the birthplace of the author and the place of publication. For in addition to presenting a strong critique of the system of Caliphate, the book also criticises the nature of kingship and cites contemporary examples of kingship corruption, see Book I, section 3, parag 12 (p. 143). In Egypt in 1925, King Fouad dissolved (6th March) the House of Representative which had seen the opposition party, Hizb al-Wafd, winning the majority of seats in Parliament (24th February), hence acting against the Constitution of 1923. It is further believed that Britain at the time was supporting the push by the religious scholars (ulam) to nominate King Fouad as the Caliph, given his close ties with Britain. See Amra's introduction, Ibid, pp. 11-8.

not approve of the conduct of the Caliph Al\textsuperscript{1} and went on so far as to assassinate him, and who argued that there was no need to appoint an Imam if the community of believers acted justly and in accordance with religious law.66 [66]

The history of the Islamic tradition suggests that intellectual and political forms of dissent are part of the same conventional fabric of the tradition. Strong and noteworthy dissent goes back even to the very formative period of Islam when it became the main religion of a community (\textit{umma}). As early as the seventh century, that is, not long after the death of Muhammad, Muslims began to question the conduct of ruling Muslim leaders and caliphs. Some later went as far as denying the need for an Islamic state, a political attitude some scholars have qualified as tantamount to the belief in anarchy.67 [67]

66 [66] R\textsuperscript{2}ziq is here relying on and quoting the work of Ibn Khaldun, \textit{al-Muqaddima}, see \textit{Ibid.}, p. 131. Worth noting here that a number of prominent nineteenth century Muslims made explicit calls to the Ottoman Sultan, \textbullet\textcircled{A}bd al-\textbullet\textcircled{A}z\textbullet\textcircled{z}, for a separation between state and religious affairs. The Egyptian Mustafa F\textbullet\textcircled{d}il Pasha (1830-75) warning that unless it limits itself to the spiritual realm, religion would \textbullet\textcircled{b}ring [] about its own demise as it undermines all else'. Cited in Said Bensaid Alaoui, \textbullet\textcircled{M}uslim Opposition Thinkers in the Nineteenth Century', in Charles E. Butterworth and I. William Zartman (eds), \textit{Between the State and Islam}, Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre (and Cambridge University Press), 2001, p. 94.

67 [67] Patricia Crone, \textbullet\textcircled{A} Statement by the Najdiyya Kharijites on the dispensability of the Imamate', \textit{Studia Islamica}, lxxxviii, 1998, pp.55-76. It was perhaps Charles Pellat who coined the term \textbullet\textcircled{a}narchists', see his \textbullet\textcircled{L}'imamat dans la doctrine de Ghiz', \textit{Etudes sur l'histoire socio-
It is not insignificant how these pious Muslims came to believe that it was possible to dispense with an Islamic state while at the same time maintaining their profession in the Islamic faith. The historical and hermeneutical contexts surrounding and leading to the rise of these groups are important for the understanding and appreciation of their political views. The historical context, it should be added, is itself worthy of (unconventional) analysis reflecting somewhat inevitable and mutual tension between Islamic principles and political practice.

The events that followed the murder of the third caliph Uthman (656 AD) had a politico-theological impact from which the Islamic community has not recovered. Al, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, whose supporters believed he should have been the immediate successor of Muhammad, principally on the grounds of kinship, was recognised as Caliph in 656 AD. Al's apparent reluctance to punish those responsible for insurgencies and ultimately Uthman's murder resulted in rebellions and insubordinations by many among the community of Muslims, most notable amongst them was Muawiya the son of Abul Sufyân, the leader of the Umayyad clan who before accepting Islam had led the Meccans against Muhammad. Muawiya who became the governor of Syria and kinsman of Uthman, refused to pledge allegiance to Al.

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The differences between ﬆAl and Mu/documentation error wiya led to military confrontations that culminated in the battle of Siffin (June-July 657). It was during this battle that ﬆAl succumbed to accepting Mu/documentation error wiya's proposal for arbitration (tah'ḵm). The details of this arbitration are complex and vary according to different accounts and sources.70 What seems clear though is that the Qur'̣n was used as a justification for those on both sides who wanted to accept arbitration to bring an end to the combat as well as for those on ﬆAl's side who wanted to persist in the fight and went on to secede from ﬆAl's camp (the Khawrij) and not long after to assassinate him. The Kharijites' central doctrine, born out of this episode, was that God alone should be the judge in all matters (la h'ukma illa lillah).71 ﬆAl, they believed, permitted human judgement to settle

70 [70] Some sources relate that some followers of Mu/documentation error wiya marched out to ﬆAl's side with copies of the Qur'̣n by which they wanted to resolve the dispute, i.e., whether ﬆUthmān was justly or unjustly killed. In the latter case, Mu/documentation error wiya would get the right to seek vengeance and be appointed as successor. Arbitration went in Mu/documentation error wiya's favour, but this story does not explain the later Kharijites' position, for their central argument was grounded in the Qur'̣n. For a discussion on this issue, see Hichem Djaltet, La Grande Discorde: Religion et Politique dans L'Islam des Origines, Gallimard: Editions Gallimard, 1989, pp. 240-59, see also the following chapter Le recours l'arbitrage et la naissance du Kharijisme'.

71 [71] See Abigail al-Hasan ﬆAl Ben Isma’il al-Ashar, Maqāl al-Islamiyya wa-Ikhtilaf al-Musallān, in H. Ritter (ed.), Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963, I, p. 191. On this doctrine and on who might have been the first to utter it, see the edited collection of primary
the conflict instead of following God's commandment in the Qur'an that decrees that if a party of believers deviates from God's way by oppressing other believers then one should fight that party until it returns to the straight path and submits to God (49.9). [72] This recourse to the Qur'an introduced a problematic element to the role of Islam in politics, the politico-theological implications of which are to be discussed below.

The warring episode between Muawiya and Al, supposedly fought by each side ostensibly in the name of best Islamic practices, was very much a contest for power. One may even argue that there was nothing uniquely Islamic in this contest. This is clear from the following account of events leading up to it. In his *The Succession to Muhammad*, Wilfred Madelung discusses reports about secret pre-arbitration negotiations between Muawiya and Al. Jarb al-Abd Allah al-Bajali (Uthman's governor of Hamadan who pledged allegiance to Al upon the latter's request), [73] the messenger entrusted to give Al a warning in a written message from Muawiya to hand over the murderers of Uthman was also entrusted to convey a secret verbal compromise to Al. [74]


[73] [73] Madelung, p. 193.

[74] [74] Ibid., p. 203.
While in the written letter, Muawiya resorts to a framework of accepted Islamic practices to set out his demands and to justify his refusal to pledge allegiance (mubâya) to him,75 his secret verbal message is no more than a pragmatically/politically devised plan. Muawiya tells Jarir to convey to 'Al that he would be prepared to recognise him as caliph on the condition that 'Al conceded Syria and Egypt and their revenues to him in Damascus and further agrees that Muawiya would not be bound to pledge allegiance to 'Al's successor.76

This offer was never made public and 'Al in any case refused it. There is no point in speculating about the possible course of Islamic history had it been made public. Suffice to say that this episode, the impact of which had a central significance on the course of Islamic theology and political history, is a clear instance of political and expedient motives being argued in 'Islamic' terms. What requires less speculation is that the new political regime that was born with Muawiya marks, as some commentators argue, a kind of rupture (qat'a) from the ancien regime of the Orthodox caliphs. This rupture is marked by a change to the norm of political rule in Islam from khilafa to mulk,77 that is to say a shift of emphasis to mulk, in the sense of political power, away from khilafa, in the sense of

75 [75] Letter cited in Madelung, p. 205. In his letter, for instance, Muawiya invokes the importance of the previous three orthodox caliphs, the notion of shura among the Muslims', and that he admits 'Al's nobility in Islam and [his] close kinship with the Messenger of God'.

76 [76] Ibid, p. 203.

following in the footsteps of the *khalaf* (predecessor), which stressed continuity with the practices of the prophet. This is not to suggest that political power was absent prior to Muhammad ibn Al-Wiya,78 but as Muhammad ibn Bir notes, during the reigns of the Orthodox Caliphs, religion was regarded as the foundation of political activity, a perception that kept politics in a subordinate position to Islam.79

Muhammad ibn Wiya's discourse, on the other hand, while not denouncing the ancien regime of the Orthodox caliphs, explicitly signals new guidelines for the different political approach he intends to pursue. Instead of following in the footsteps of Abu Bakr, Umar or even Uthman, he proposes a "political covenant" (*aqd siyasi*)80 and declares that his victory is a victory for those who administer and run the system of state administration (i.e., public servants) over those who are preoccupied with religious innovation (*ijtihād*) yet ignorant of it.81 One may also remark that this emphasis on the political is also reflected in the writings of commentators and historians. Even Sunni writers, while not questioning the piety of Al-Abbas and his religious standing, did question, and some

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78 [78] Jibir for instance cites reports by Muhammad (by Ibn al-Athir), which authenticity is contested, to the effect that from its beginning, the Muhammadian convocation had an explicit political project intent on thwarting the Persian and Roman empires and subsequently taking over their wealth, pp. 57-60.


indeed indicated disappointment in his political leadership. Such apologetic lines, even if they were intended to cater for a biased political audience, are nevertheless an indication of the general preferred approach stemming from the mood of the majority in favour of Muawiya's stand.

It is important to reiterate here a point made earlier in this paper regarding the relationship between religion and politics, and in this case between the 'Islamic' and politics. It should not be inferred from the various points and details discussed thus far that there exists one set of criteria for religion and another for politics and that a clear divide separates the two. One may rightly mount an argument that conceptions of religion and politics cannot be disentangled. This paper is not intended to argue against such a notion, instead it is seeking to problematise the notion that a pure and an essentialist concept of the 'Islamic' exists. That is to say that the 'Islamic' is not void of political power dynamics, be it for noble or ignoble purposes. To ignore this would amount to accepting that the conversion to Christianity of the Roman emperor Constantine was purely a religious act!

The Kharijites, a minority group, left yet another theological mark that puts into question claims regarding the applicability of Islam as a uniform and unambiguous body of beliefs to political practice.

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83 [83] Djat argues that Al's political leadership was not as weak as most commentators make it out to be, pp. 237-8.

Their withdrawal/secession', as their name conveys, highlights the anarchist disposition that some of them later developed.85 [85] It should be noted here that such an anarchist disposition was also common among the early Muhammadite theologians (often characterised as the 'rationalists') but it was not common to all Kharijites.86 [86] For believing Muslims, anarchists or not, the period during which Muhammad was the leader of the Islamic community in Medina (622-632) represents the ideal form of governance or political rule. The khawarij, extend this period of ideal rule to include the reigning period of the first two Orthodox Caliphs,87 [87] while most other groups extend this period further to include the rule of the four Orthodox Caliphs, that is up to the year 661 when Ali accepted Muhammad's arbitration and handed him the leadership of the Islamic community.

In other words, as Patricia Crone notes, the Islamic equivalent of Western anarchism's 'state of nature' premise is the exact opposite of what it entails. The Western position is based on the assumption that an ideal age existed in the remote past during which society functioned without a state, while the Islamic position premises its view on a clearly defined historical period that was marked by a fusion of society and good/perfect governance without a formal state apparatus.88 [88] Crone describes these

85 [85] Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Salim Ibn Khakwân*, chapter 5 'The Khârijites'.


Muslim anarchists as regretful anarchists',\textsuperscript{89} in the sense that they were not anti-state per se. However, they believed that the institution of the Imamate had turned into an institution of tyranny headed by kings/tyrants under the pretext of exercising a religious trust (\textit{am\textasciitilde na}) in a religious post that a continuation of such a pattern seemed inevitable - though doubtful hopes were expressed by some. It was best, they deduced, not to have an imamate or appoint an Imam at all.\textsuperscript{90} The most notable and explicit group among the anarchists to advocate such a view is the Najad\~t, but it seems that the Mu\textasciitilde tazilite theologian al-As\&ammm might have been the leading theorist considering that his name is not only mentioned by heresiographers but also by later authoritative writers, like the jurist al-M\textasciitilde ward\~t, on the subject of imamate.\textsuperscript{91} The heresiographer al-Shahrast\~n writes that:

The Najad\~t from among the Kh\textasciitilde rijites and number of the Qadariyya such as Ab\~b Bakr al-Asamm and Hish\~m al-Fuwat\~t say that the imamate does not have the obligatory legal character that would make the community liable to censure and punishment if it chose to live without it. Rather, it is based on the manner in which people deal with one another (\textit{mu\textasciitilde mal\textasciitilde t al-\textasciitilde n\textasciitilde s}). If they acted justly and


\textsuperscript{90} [90] \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 11-9. On similar views and reactions see Charles Pellat, \textit{L'imamat dans la doctrine de G\textasciitilde hiz'}, pp. 23-52 et \textit{Dj\textasciitilde hiz et les Kh\textasciitilde ridjites'} (reprint from \textit{Folia Orientalia, XII, Varsovie, 1970}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 195-209.

\textsuperscript{91} [91] Abu-l-Hasan Al\~bin Muhammad bin Hab\~b al-Basr\~b al-Baghd\~d\~t al-M\textasciitilde ward\~t, \textit{Kit\textasciitilde b al-Ahk\textasciitilde m al-Sult\textasciitilde niiyya}, Beirut: D\textasciitilde r al-Fikr, n.d., p. 5.
cooperated and helped one another in piety and fear of God, and if all legally obligated persons occupied themselves with their duties and obligations, then they could manage without the imam, and without following him.92 [92]

It should be emphasised that by grounding the imamate in the sphere of social and human development, the anarchists are not being entirely faithful to the words of Scripture, and as Mawdudi notes it is enjoined upon believers in the Qur’an to obey their rulers.93 [93] In addition to challenging the case for the applicability and sustainability of Islamic political rule from an Islamic' point of view, the anarchists' case is also an illustration of the very thin borderlines between what may be considered as the religious and a-religious, and that within these two distinct categories there exist intellectual strands with very similar patterns. Indicative of such similarities is the way the contemporary Islamist writings of Mawdudi and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) and Qutb, especially when writing on the governorship of God (kiyamah) echo those of the Khabirites on God being the judge of all matters (la hukma illa lillah).

While historically a realisation of the anarchist position did not go beyond the theoretical writings of a few, it survived enough in the mainstream tradition to raise tensions between Islamic political rule and matters related to justice. Mawdudi, considered as the authority on the subject of imamate, draws on the Qur’an (Q4.59) and Hadith to support the case for the view that the imamate is obligatory. It is in this sense that Mawdudi writes [t]he imamate is in place, as a


93 [93] See also the discussion by Majid Khadduri, The Islamic Conception of Justice, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, pp. 3-5.
It did not escape M\textsuperscript{ward}'s Arabic is difficult to translate, the literal meaning of \textit{worldly affairs}' (\textit{siy\textsuperscript{sat} al-duny}) for example may also be rendered as \textit{worldly politics}', but perhaps may not give the intended meaning of the author?

Commenting on M\textsuperscript{ward}'s theory of the Caliphate, H. A. R. Gibb notes that the jurists had to justify the caliphate system and that M\textsuperscript{ward}'s work on the subject is not \textit{an objective exposition of an established theory, it is in reality an apologia or adaptation inspired and shaped by circumstances of his own time}', see his \textquoteright Some Considerations on the Sunni Theory of the Caliphate', \textit{Archives d'Histoire du Droit Oriental}, vol. III, 1939, pp. 401-10.

In the Islamic tradition, political rule is not limited to a determined set of criteria nor for that matter are rulers meant to conform to a particular Islamic code of conduct. The assortment of literature on these topics is an indication of the different and differing views with which one is confronted when searching for an Islamic' in Islamic politics. Paradoxical as it may seem, if one were to be open minded about the variety of different and contradictory views on Islamic politics, one could go so far as to suggest that it would not be un-Islamic to have non-Islamic political rule. Further, it would not be a generalisation if one were to argue that Islamic politics is used at times as a technical term to obscure the religious problems that may arise from the politics of Islam, an approach that out of expedience applies the religion of Islam to support or oppose the politics of the state/movement and its ideology. To claim, however, that there is nothing Islamic' about Islamic politics would amount to an intellectual and perhaps an ideological assertion of a different but nevertheless problematic kind. Such a claim would also raise yet another normative debate that puts into question the assumed religiousness of religions. In other words, there is no clear answer to the question posed in the title to this paper, but then again ambiguity is not alien to Islam.