occupation army. On the other hand, it also appears that its main strength lies in its organization, committed cadres, supporters and members, which are lacking in almost every other political party in Bangladesh.

In sum, the importance of this volume lies in the materials painstakingly collected and collated by the author for the benefit of scholars and curious readers. He could have possibly given better appraisals and analyses. Nevertheless, this is an important addition to the corpus of literature on Islam in Bangladeshi society and politics. Both scholars and students will find it useful as not much has been written on Islam in contemporary Bangladesh. Anyone interested in knowing more than what one finds in newspapers and bazaar gossips in Bangladesh about the state of Bangladeshi society and politics, Islamic resurgence and militancy would find this volume useful and refreshing.

Taj Hashmi


There has been no dearth of studies in Western scholarship on Islam trying to decode the mystery known as ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. The voluminous amount of publications on the topic leaves one with the sense that nothing possibly novel and, equally importantly, interesting can be introduced at this point. Bobby S. Sayyid’s *A Fundamental Fear* dispels this idea by intervening in the debate in an exciting and provocative fashion.

This *tour de force* addresses nearly all facets of the debate about Islamism and the Western response to it. Although a significant portion of the book is devoted to the author’s own critical ideas, the book does engage the traditional repertoire of recent scholarship dealing with the rise of Islamism. Sayyid provides a comprehensive introduction to the major themes and arguments of the literature on contemporary revivalist trends within the House of Islam. But the author’s most powerful stroke lies in his deployment of discourse analysis on the ‘Islamism debate’ in order to show how the political revival of
Islam presents a marked challenge to the hegemonic role that ‘the West’ has played politically, culturally, and intellectually — a challenge to the previously dominant Western ‘geo-culture,’ to use the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein’s term.

Sayyid refuses to entertain the term ‘fundamentalism’ as a description of Islamic revival because, as he argues, it privileges the secular, post-Enlightenment position of an inherent division between politics, truth, and religion. As he states, “the term fundamentalism signals bad analysis of bad politics” (p. 16). Islamism — rather Islam itself — must be understood, according to the author, as intrinsically political (although not always manifestly so) that aims at the “establishment of an Islamic order necessitating intervention in public affairs” (p. 17). Hence, it evokes the ‘fundamental fear’ from a West that is best understood not merely as a geographical entity, but rather a hegemonic project that brooks no alternative social vision to the one it has constructed around its own sacred cows such as secularism, the market, and the nation-state. The entire narrative of the book revolves essentially around deconstructing Western explanations of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and exposing them as reflecting the Western fear of an Islamic alternative.

A major point of Sayyid’s argument is that the literature on Islamism has assumed, for the most part, either an orientalist or an anti-orientalist vantage point. The author contends that neither of these approaches is sufficient for a thorough appreciation of the phenomenon. While a rejection of the age-old pastime of classical and neo-orientalists of transmogrifying Islam into an “essentialist caricature” is certainly in order, the anti-orientalist position of descriptive and discrete ‘islams’ that bear no relation to each other, nor have any identifiable connection to a larger Islamic political-discursive tradition must also be questioned. The latter method that relies almost exclusively on materialist explanations tends to miss the significance of the symbolic and normative character of the phenomena (see pp. 36–40).

What such ideological perspectives have failed to grasp is why political activism and reactions to the post-colonial predicament in the Muslim world have taken the form of a recurrent Islamic protest. One of the core theses of the book is that the rise of Islamism cannot be adequately explained simply by the failure of secularizing ideologies such as Kemalism — a topic with which the author deals at considerable length (see pp. 52–83). Sayyid correctly challenges the validity of the existing analyses. He states that the typical writings on Islamism are inadequate because they leave the primary question unanswered, i.e. why Islamism? The usual causal explanations — forced urbanization, cultural and economic dispossession, social polarization, political authoritarianism — do not offer a compelling case as to why Islamism
arises in some countries versus varieties of liberal, secular, or nationalist responses in others (see, pp. 18–22).

Sayyid draws upon the linguistic-philosophical approach of the French linguist Saussure to demonstrate that Islam acts as a ‘master signifier’ that poses a threat to the West precisely because of its stubborn insistence of not simply being one of many equal components of a Muslim’s identity, alongside, say, ethnicity or nationality, but in fact being the primary and most meaningful one (see pp. 41–46). The chapters which then conclude the book provide a fresh perspective on the well-trodden debate over Islam and the West, and include a discussion at length on Sami Zubaida’s analytical framework for studying Khomeini and his relationship to the question of modernity. The discussion here attempts to derive analytical tools from discourses of modernity and postmodernity — which in turn carve out the intellectual spaces that can engender a more profound appreciation of the interconnectedness of Islamism and the Western hegemonic project (see, pp. 88–105).

In each chapter, the author affirms the linkage between the “reactivation” of Islam and the policies and approaches of those regimes and forces in the Muslim world that attempt to relegate Islam to a subordinate position in the lives of Muslim masses, both private and public. Indeed, it was precisely the act of destroying the carefully crafted paradigm of a Muslim ummah under the real or imagined leadership of an Islamic polity — the Caliphate — that provided a potent rallying cry for political Islam. Sayyid then examines Khomeinism and how this phenomenon symbolized the real and symbolic antithesis of the broad ideology of Kemalism. Khomeini wrote and spoke in a language and style that refused to engage the West through the discursive prism the latter had developed and then imposed on others, and thus represented a genuine Islamic, or at least, more authentically indigenous response to Western political and ideological domination. According to Sayyid, post-Khomeini Islamism has to be centrally situated as a persistent refusal to accede to the universality of the Western project, and therefore a threat to the Eurocentric conceptualization of everything from politics and economics to science and religion (see, pp. 113–115).

Perhaps the most novel point that the book makes is that the success of Islamism’s own grand narrative and truth claims is “only possible in a world in which there is suspicion of western meta-discourse” (p. 118). Here, Sayyid contends that both the Western postmodern and the non-Western postcolonial critiques of ‘metanarratives’ have contributed to the “decentring” of the West, a momentous development that creates the space for Islamism’s ideological efficacy. The radical questioning of the notion that the historically and
culturally-specific formulations and trajectories of the Western social imaginary are necessarily applicable to, and beneficial for, the world’s social majorities that lay principally outside of the West is precisely the prerequisite — indeed the *sine qua non* — of the legitimization of alternative, counter-hegemonic histories and narratives. Only in the present situation wherein the epistemological and ontological claims of the West have begun to experience self-doubt on a large-scale, and only where Adorno’s and the Frankfurt School’s indictment of Western Enlightenment, modernity, and rationality as the leading culprits for the problems of mankind and civilization has finally been taken seriously, can a “reactivated Islam” achieve the centrality in the world system that it does. In this context, Islamism is able to assert itself as a powerful contender for the loyalties of a significant portion of the world identifying with meaningful resistance to injustice and the desire of a more egalitarian world order.

Sayyid’s book is undoubtedly thought-provoking and replete with new insights. One hopes that both the stubborn, cliché-laden orientalists as well as the materialist anti-orientalists will read it and benefit from its enormous erudition and much-needed correctives to the scholarship that currently exists. *A Fundamental Fear* will also serve as an eye-opener for the ‘Westoxicated,’ so-called Muslim liberals who have long taken the universality of the Western notions of modernity, secularism, rationality, and nation-state for granted and have defined the fundamental problematique of their societies in terms of “what went wrong” with Islam or Muslims.

Junaid Ahmad

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The various models of integration of Muslims immigrants into Western societies have become something of a burning topic since the recent dramatic events in France. In this timely, rich and detailed book, Jocelyne Cesari examines with great authority the possibility of “Muslim immigration to Europe and North America as the foundational moment of a new