Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam

THOMAS J. BUTKO*

ABSTRACT This article seeks to conceptualise the contemporary phenomenon of ‘political Islam’, or Islamic fundamentalism as it is usually classified in the West. This paper takes the view that those movements that utilise the ideology of political Islam are not primarily religious groups concerned with issues of doctrine and faith, but political organisations utilising Islam as a ‘revolutionary’ ideology to attack, criticise, and de-legitimise the ruling elites and the power structure on which their authority and legitimacy is based. Since the one-party authoritarian state is the norm in most of the Middle East, only Islam has been able to provide the marginalised, alienated, and disgruntled masses with an oppositional force capable of articulating their specific grievances and general displeasure with these regimes. A Gramscian framework helps to demonstrate that these organisations classified as ‘political Islam’, and promulgated by the core Islamic scholars of the twentieth century, are authentic counter-hegemonic movements focussed on the overthrow of these despotic regimes and the acquisition of political, economic, and social power.

Introduction

In the wake of recent events, such as the September 11th bombing of the Twin Towers in New York City, a flood of analysts and commentators have sought to conceptualise the phenomenon of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’. This article seeks to examine ‘political Islam’ through a Gramscian framework by focusing on these movements’, utilisation of Islam as an instrument of political protest to de-legitimise the hegemonic or status quo powers at both the domestic and international levels. In applying Gramsci to the phenomenon of political Islam it will be demonstrated that they share a common conviction in the overriding need to accurately analyse and comprehend the process through which revolutionary activity can occur. Thus, the consummate aim is to construct an active counter-hegemonic force with the sole and ultimate objective of overthrowing the current elites and the present political, economic, and social structure. According to Gramsci, this is to be accomplished by creating a revolutionary movement based on a coherent ideology, unified organisation, and long-term

* University of Alberta, Department of Political Science, 10–16 HM Tory Building, Edmonton, Alberta Canada T6G 2H4

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strategy. This framework can then be applied to the works of the principal modern Islamic theorists of the twentieth century—Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), Abu al- Ala Mawdudi (d. 1979), and Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989).

A Gramscian theoretical framework helps to demonstrate that the contemporary Islamic theorists, most specifically, seek to project Islam as a revolutionary ideological system through which to construct a unified and disciplined organisation. Consequently, they intend to extend its appeal through a deliberate and concerted strategy that aims to challenge and overthrow the current secularised regimes (i.e., hegemonic forces) and to substitute in its place a fundamentally new and unique political and social system. By constructing a viable counter-hegemonic force (i.e., a political organisation erected upon religious foundations) capable of overthrowing the dominant powers, they desire not only the seizure of political power, but also to establish a genuine revolutionary movement through the creation a new society, a new morality and, most fundamentally, a new type of man. Hence, it is through the application of a Gramscian analysis that the practical and theoretical components of the contemporary phenomenon of ‘political Islam’ can be more accurately understood.

The Significance: A Counter-hegemonic Force

The works of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci have been studied in great depth over the last fifty years in various attempts to extrapolate his true worth to the study of political science. Whether in terms of his Marxist strain, ideal liberalism, or historicism, Gramsci’s writings have been utilised by theorists and practitioners on all sides of the political debate.1 Such Gramscian terms as ‘hegemony’, ‘war of position’, ‘historic bloc’, and ‘organic intellectuals’ have become common lexicon in the contemporary study of political science.

This study will focus primarily on Gramsci’s importance in terms of constructing a counter-hegemonic—or revolutionary—force. Consequently, his contribution to the discourse of political Islam involves his ability to situate and construct the proper environment through which revolutionary activity can occur. In terms of Gramsci’s works, it is clear that the construction of such a force is the sole objective of all his writings.

In applying Gramsci’s framework to the principal contemporary Islamic theorists, there is a clear similarity in aims and tactics. Most specifically, there is common belief in the need to overthrow the ruling elites and to destroy the socio-political order on which their power and legitimacy is based. In other words, all aspired to construct a revolutionary organization (i.e., counter-hegemonic bloc) capable of capturing state power. According to Youssef Choueiri:

Qutb, al-Mawdudi, and Khomeini articulated a new Islamic theory and established the contemporary discourse of a variety of Islamic political organizations. To them, change

1 While there are numerous examples, one of the more interesting developments in the application of Gramsci has been within the realm of international relations and, more specifically, international political economy. For some examples see Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy, America’s Quest for Supremacy and the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), Stephen Gill, American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Mark Rupert, Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
had to be total, comprehensive, and revolutionary. They saw no possibility of coexistence between Islam and other political and social systems.²

Conceptualisation of Society and State

In Gramsci’s multi-layered analysis of society, he aims to provide a more concise understanding of the various elements which influence the individual and, consequently, prevent he or she from achieving what he deems as one’s ‘true consciousness’. Central to his conceptualisation of society and societal actors is that each individual is fundamentally influenced by the ideas of the ruling ‘Hegemon’. In most cases, this influence is felt unconsciously through the hegemon’s projection of ‘common sense’.³ Consequently, it is through the promotion of a certain ‘common sense’ conception of the world that the hegemon prevents the masses from realising their true consciousness and, hence, their own fundamental interests.⁴ Therefore, the common sense ideas of the hegemon—used to acquire the ‘consent’⁵ of the masses to its rule—are nothing more than the narrow and selfish interests of the elites superimposed on the general interests of the people. As a result, the masses accept the morality, the customs, and the institutionalised rules of behaviour disseminated throughout society as absolute truths that cannot or should not be questioned.⁶

In refuting these supposed ‘universal truths’. Gramsci argues that ‘common sense’ is neither a universal given nor an unquestioned truth. Instead, Gramsci argues ‘that common sense is an ambiguous, contradictory, and multiform concept, and that to refer to common sense as a conformation of truth is nonsense’⁷. It is at this stage Gramsci argues that only by exposing these supposed ‘universal truths’, and assisting the individual in rejecting this so-called ‘common sense’ (i.e., objective) conception of the world reproduced by the hegemon, can the individual assume the first step in the creation of an alternative hegemon, a new way of thinking free from the constraints of the ruling class.

In their conceptualisation of society’s role within the overall revolutionary

³ According to Thomas Nemeth, Gramsci’s conception of ‘common sense’ can be best understood as the unquestioned acceptance of the customs, morals, and beliefs of everyday society. Thomas Nemeth, Gramsci’s Philosophy: A Critical Study (Brighton Sassex: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 75–76. Also see p. 134. While Gramsci’s views regarding ‘common sense’ may contain subtle differences from Marx’s more class-based arguments of ‘false consciousness’, Michael Walzer believes common sense is Gramsci’s version of false consciousness. Michael Walzer, ‘The Ambiguous Legacy of Antonio Gramsci’ Dissent 35 (Fall 1988), p. 446.
⁷ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 423.
process, the principal Islamic theorists also recognize that the individual—his beliefs and his actions—must constitute the essential foundation of any revolutionary organisation able to promote its own alternative conception of the world (i.e., a new ‘common sense’). Similar to Gramsci, they do not conceive an individual’s human nature as fixed and unchanging,8 but as malleable and open to influence by the dominant forces of society. Khurram Murad states that according to Mawdudi: ‘Man is not, by nature, corrupt, depraved, or sinful ... he is equally capable of being good or bad, moral or immoral’.9

In addition to this ‘relativist’ conception of human nature, Mawdudi focuses on what can be termed an ‘elitist’ approach to societal formation. In other words, the social order must be interpreted as flowing from the top down.10 Thus, according to Choueiri:

To Mawdudi the question of leadership takes priority over all other political issues, for the leaders of a society decide its general development and value system ... a pious and God-fearing political elite is bound to impart its virtues to various sectors of the population.11

As a result, it is the leaders and the most educated members of a society (i.e., the elites) that will determine the general orientation and beliefs of the masses. In much the same hegemonic (i.e., ‘common sense’) terminology as Gramsci, Mawdudi argues that

it is clear that mankind can hardly resist moving along the road shown by those who lead, if only by virtue of the fact that leaders control all the resources, hold the reigns of power and possess the means of shaping and moulding minds and behaviour. They have the power to influence individuals as well as social systems and moral values.12

When Mawdudi’s views on the determining role the elites perform in shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and morals of the masses are combined with his ‘relativist’ conception of human nature, Mawdudi’s position is almost identical to Gramsci’s perspective regarding the central role of ‘common sense’ in formulating the individual’s relationship vis-à-vis the dominant forces of society.

The other principal segment of society which Gramsci examines is the group, or what he terms ‘集体 man’. It is obvious that for any revolutionary movement to be successful it must be able to garner extensive support throughout society. Consequently, if a change in individual consciousness represents Gramsci’s first stage in personal liberation from the ‘common sense’ world of the hegemon, for this novel world conception to be most effective, various individuals must necessarily unite in the formation of a larger group, concordant

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8 For Gramsci’s views on human nature see Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 355.
12 Mawdudi, The Islamic Movement, p. 77.
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in their ultimate aims and sharing in this new perception or world-view. According to Gramsci:

An historical act can only be performed by ‘collective man’ and this presupposes the attainment of a ‘cultural—social unity’ through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world.13

In terms of the greater revolutionary process, since Gramsci seeks to garner the support of all those individuals who are disenchanted with the current socio-economic structure and desire its overthrow, it is a commonality or similarity in experience—a shared perception of repression, exclusion, and marginalisation—which coalesces the members of a counter-hegemonic bloc regardless of a common or shared economic condition.14

The Islamic theorists also realise that for a revolutionary movement to be successful it must gain the support of a significant segment of society and address the concerns of that ‘group of individuals’ most inclined to back a new counter-hegemonic bloc. Like Gramsci, the Islamists do not seek to define ‘the group’ specifically in economic terms (i.e., class-based); instead they argue that many relevant factors influence an individual’s decision to support a counter-hegemonic bloc that cannot be reduced solely to economics. Consequently, the discourse of political Islam seeks to unify individuals on the level of ideas and a common world perception, not necessarily by economic status or on the basis of material deprivation. With rapid modernisation and, in many cases, failed economic development, many individuals in the Muslim world are searching for greater meaning in life, brought about by increased feelings of ‘spiritual’ inadequacy. Consequently, recent attempts at industrialisation have only assisted in exacerbating the malaise created by the failures to construct a modern capitalist society. In the end, it is this vacuum—both economic and spiritual—that the contemporary Islamic movements hope to fill.15

After examining the role of the individual and the ‘collective’ group within the revolutionary struggle, Gramsci focuses on the ‘State’. In his analysis of the State, the State is no longer viewed as a single, monolithic entity. Instead, it is composed of two separate, but interdependent components. Most succinctly, Gramsci asserts ‘that State = political society + civil society, in other words, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion’.6 Or as he states elsewhere as ‘dictatorship + hegemony’.7 In both cases, he alludes to a hegemony based on ideas that manufactures consent within civil society, while the political element

13 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 349.
14 In fact, it was Gramsci’s willingness to define groups beyond narrow economics (i.e., the proletariat) that differentiated his works from many of his fellow Marxists. As Gramsci argues in his examination of the various moments or ‘relations of forces’ within society: ‘A third [and final] moment is that in which one becomes aware that one’s own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too’. Ibid., p. 181.
16 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 263.
17 Ibid., p. 239.
is a dictatorship that is prepared to employ force and coercion, if necessary, to maintain its rule. On the one hand, political society corresponds to certain coercive instruments of the State, such as the military and police. On the other hand, civil society involves private organisations or groups that assist the hegemon in the dissemination of those ideas that help to preserve its dominance. Consequently, while the State and civil society are intricately interconnected by a set of common aims and shared beliefs, their distinctive nature leads Gramsci to argue that it is only by initially winning over the consent of civil society that an attempt can then be made to seize State power.

As a central tenet of Marxist theory, Gramsci demonstrates that hegemonic control is contingent on the relationship that exists between the structure (economic base) and the superstructure (ideology of the ruling class). Clearly, both the structure and the superstructure are part of a dialectic in which economic factors (the forces of production) and cultural forces (the realm of ideas) reinforce one another and combine to form an ‘organic relationship’ known as the ‘historic bloc’. The sole purpose of this relationship is to preserve and protect the hegemon’s control over the subjugated masses.

However, in contrast to traditional Marxists, Gramsci argues that it is the superstructure, rather than the structure, that determines the context and extent of the hegemon’s supremacy within society. Gramsci assumes this position to refute the Marxist belief that the superstructure is solely dependent on the structure, in essence, that economics is everything. According to Gramsci:

The claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism.

In fact, Gramsci argues that: ‘Everything is political, even philosophy … and the only “philosophy” is history in action, that is life itself.’

In their examination of the State, the contemporary Islamic theorists also conceive of the modern State as a hegemonic formation by focusing on its ability to construct an organic link between state apparatus and civil society. Sayyid

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18 In terms of private organisations or groups, Hartley writes of those institutions and areas dealing with the political, religious, fraternal, and recreational. William J. Hartley, ‘Hegemony and Cultural Politics: The Praxis of Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks’, Socialism and Democracy, 5 (Fall/Winter 1987), p. 38. More specifically, Mark Rupert mentions certain ‘private’ institutions and organisations such as political parties, trade unions, and the media. Rupert, Producing Hegemony, pp. 27–28.

19 It is because of this belief that Gramsci argues: ‘A social group can, and indeed must, already ‘lead’ (i.e., be hegemonic) before winning governmental power.’ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 47.

20 While Gramsci interpretation of the economic structure is quite clear, two prominent examples Gramsci utilises in terms of arguing for the importance of the superstructure are the educational and judicial systems. Both systems not only provide a ‘punitive’ element, but each also assist in a more important ‘moral’ function through their creation of ‘a certain type of civilisation and of citizen …’ Ibid., pp. 246–247.


23 Ibid., p. 357.
Qutb allots the most attention to studying this type of hegemonic formation, primarily because of all the writers examined here Nasser in Egypt had been the most successful in constructing a true hegemonic force.\(^{24}\) In *Milestones*, Qutb is clear on the symbiotic relationship that existed between the State and civil society in his time, and the power such a relationship allowed the hegemon to possess.

It [the hegemon] always takes on the form of a living movement in a society which has its own leadership, its own concepts, and values, and its own traditions, habits, and feelings. It is an organized society and there is close cooperation between its individuals, and it is always ready to defend its existence consciously or unconsciously. It crushes all elements which seem dangerous to its personality.\(^ {25}\)

However, as Gramsci astutely recognises, the ability of the hegemon to exert monopolistic control over such coercive instruments as the army and police is subordinate to its ability to dominate both the content of education and the environment of intellectual development. In other words, consent is more essential for hegemonic supremacy than brute force and, thus, power and domination are sought not only by controlling what people do but, more importantly, by how people think. Clearly, the ability of the Nasserist State to control important facets of civil society—family, education, and even leisure time\(^ {26}\)—enabled it to tighten its grip on the people. In the end, by acquiring the explicit consent of the masses, Nasser was able to achieve legitimacy and support for his own policies, while granted the opportunity to shape ‘the consciousness of … succeeding generations of Egyptians’.\(^ {27}\) In other words, such consent permitted him to create a new ‘common sense’ conception of the world which, in reality, reflected the material interests of the dominant forces within his own regime.

Of course, as is true of all of Gramsci’s writings, his extensive examination of the State’s formation serves primarily as a guide to concrete and practical revolutionary activity by providing a framework to assist in furthering the objectives of the counter-hegemonic movement. Thus, Gramsci stresses that the primary reason to examine the link that exists between the structure and the superstructure is to determine the exact moment when the two have deviated to a sufficient extent to permit the counter-hegemon its opportunity to strike. It is the analysis and awareness of this divergence—between structure and superstructure—and the ability to anticipate its occurrence, that constitutes the true worth in understanding the symbiotic relationship that exists between these two forces. Therefore, according to Gramsci:

> It is the problem of the relations between structure and superstructure which must be actively posed and resolved if the forces which are active in the history of a particular period are to be correctly analysed, and the relation between them determined.\(^ {28}\)

\(^{24}\) Sayyid Qutb was eventually hanged by the Nasser regime for treason in 1966.

\(^{25}\) Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Mother Mosque Foundation, N.D.), p. 46. Such views also proximate very closely to Gramsci’s ideas on ‘passive revolution’ and the willingness of the hegemonic power to prevent challenges to its power by decapitating (i.e., coopting) all potential threats to its position. See Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 207–210.

\(^{26}\) See Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 82.


\(^{28}\) Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 177.
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It is when this break between structure and superstructure occurs, when the ideas and beliefs used to garner the support and consent of the masses seem void and meaningless, that the counter-hegemonic force—if one is present—is allotted its best and perhaps only opportunity to supplant the current hegemon.29

In their analysis of the State, like Gramsci, the Islamists realise that an appreciation of the hegemonic composition of the State has a more practical purpose in the construction of the revolutionary movement. Thus, their conceptualisation of the State is also primarily valued for its role in instructing and educating the supporters of the counter-hegemonic force, while exposing the ‘evilness’ of the regime and the surrounding jāhilīyya society.30 Like Gramsci, Qutb’s attempts to ‘know thine enemy’ and study its power structure is predicated on the need to understand its fundamental strengths and weaknesses.31 Consequently, while Qutb rejects the values and practices of the current hegemon, he realizes that only a complete understanding of its foundations will allow the Islamists to seek its eventual destruction—through both word and deed.

[A] Muslim can study all the opinions and thoughts of the jahili writers, not from the point of view of constructing his own beliefs and concepts, but for the purpose of knowing the deviations adopted by Jāhilīyya so he may know how to correct these man-made deviations in the light of true Islamic belief and rebut them according to the sound principles of Islamic teaching.32

For it is only after such ‘deviations’ have been analysed, and the differences in the structure and superstructure acknowledged, that the counter-hegemon can begin a gradual infiltration of civil society through a dissemination of a new and dynamic world-view.33

Construction of the Counter-hegemon: Ideology

After having conceptualised the role societal and state forces perform within the revolutionary process, Gramsci establishes the components necessary to construct a successful counter-hegemonic force. A primary requirement is to create a coherent and attractive ideology with the potential for mass adhesion and support. Thus, the most important measure of a successful revolutionary

29 A good example in the case of the Muslim world is Egypt and the discrediting of Nasser’s ideology of National Socialism in the aftermath of their crushing defeat at the hands of Israel during the Six-Day War of June 1967. Of course, in this case, Nasser had crushed all opposition to his regime, especially in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, no potential counter-hegemonic force was present to take advantage of the breakdown in the regime’s superstructure.
30 Jāhilīyya is literally translated as the ‘land of ignorance’ and refers to the period before the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Qutb’s unique use of the word and his application of this concept against his own society forms a key component of his revolutionary strategy. In its contemporary context, Qutb’s perceives modern society as a jāhilīyya society (i.e., non-Muslim) because it is not ruled according to the divine laws of God (i.e., sharia). Consequently, such a society is open to conquest (i.e., to be overthrown) by Islamic forces. See Qutb, Milestones, for a more detailed discussion, especially pp. 80–84, 130–32.
31 As Gramsci states, the true value of examining the inner workings and nature of the State is so that the counter-hegemonic bloc can identify ‘the exact limits of its adversary,’ and ‘know the lines of least resistance’. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 273 and 144.
32 Qutb, Milestones, p. 110.
33 Obviously, for the Islamic theorists it is Islam as a political ideology that constitutes the new superstructure vis-à-vis the antiquated and godless belief systems of the secular regimes (e.g., Nasser’s National Socialism, Ba’athism, or some variant of Capitalism/Liberal democracy).
ideology is the extent to which this ideology can act to ‘to cement and unify’ the ‘entire social bloc’ in its confrontation with the dominant hegemonic group. In fact, in Gramsci’s conceptualisation of ideology, its role as an instrument in unifying the masses—through preparation and education—remains its central function. Consequently, Gramsci is not interested in creating an ideology per se (i.e., a set of practical programmes and reforms projecting a concrete image of what form or shape society and the State will assume in the future) but, instead, he focuses on the role of ideology as a tool to unify divergent interests. Of course, these aforementioned statements are not meant to infer that the content of a specific ideology is irrelevant. The ideology and the beliefs must connect with a significant portion of the masses, though this is usually accomplished in a very general manner through an articulation of grievances and attacks on the ruling power.

In terms of the construction of a counter-hegemonic force, the core Islamic theorists conceive the role of ideology in a very similar manner. On a practical level, Islam is employed as a political ideology to unify a disparate group of individuals who are primarily unified through their opposition to the current elites and desire for its overthrow. All of Islam’s core ‘ideological’ pronouncements—universalism, brotherhood, equality, justice, and freedom—seek to preserve a degree of homogeneity and unity of action between a diverse group of individuals. While the Islamists provide an ideology that espouses ideas of social justice by applying the same concepts utilised by other ideologies, such as Marxism and Liberalism, in most cases, these terms remain ‘rallying slogans’ for the alienated and marginalised members of society and specific programs and policies are rarely defined or fully explained. In his book, Social Justice In Islam, Sayyid Qutb employs these very concepts, in a general sense, to define the foundations of his future Islamic state.

In the final resort it [the Islamic State] is concerned with the observance of the religious law, with the care of society in every respect, with the establishment of justice and equality in society, and with the allotment of wealth according to the principles which are accepted by Islam.

In addition to its role as a unifier of divergent interests, Gramsci understands that an effective ideology must also promote a type of critical self-awareness (i.e., change of consciousness) within the individual. For the Islamists, it is clear that accepting Islam as a political ideology, and rejecting the secularism of modern

34 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 328.
35 If one of the primary roles of a revolutionary ideology is to garner as much support as possible, specific policies or programmes would simply discourage those individuals who may otherwise back the counter-hegemonic force. This is why these movements are more interested in critiquing the current regime rather than in providing detailed solutions.
36 This is why Gramsci argues that ‘mass adhesion or non-adhesion to an ideology is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity of modes of thinking’. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 341. In the case of ‘political Islam’, clearly one of the main factors accounting for its success as opposed to other potential counter-hegemonic ideologies, is the fact that the Islamic discourse and its symbols and imagery already resonate with most Muslims who were raised and socialised on these beliefs.
39 James Joll, Gramsci (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p. 108. Gramsci himself uses the example of France prior to the French Revolution where concrete action was first preceded by revolutionary thought. In other words, the bourgeoisie state was preceded by bourgeoisie consciousness. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 79.
Muslim society that has attempted to contain Islam to the private realm, constitutes a fundamental change in orientation for the majority of Muslims. While this change in consciousness bears similarities to Marxist arguments regarding the ‘false consciousness’ of the working class and Gramsci’s usage of ‘common sense’, for Islamic writers such as Mawdudi and Qutb, this new understanding involves the need for one to emancipate him or her self from one’s ‘secular’ environment and become more aware of God and one’s duty towards Him. Perhaps ‘God consciousness’, or the term Mawdudi employs, ‘taqwa’, is a more accurate description.

Of course, a genuinely ‘revolutionary’ ideology must be able to provide the counter-hegemon with a truly alternative conception of the world. In other words, according to Gramsci, a counter-hegemonic ideology must be able to bring ‘into being a new form of State’, ‘construct a new intellectual and moral order’, and ‘create a new type of society’. In addition, as Gramsci asserts, the actual world-view and the type of State projected by the revolutionary bloc must be primarily conceived through its opposition to the ruling hegemon. In that sense, to be successful an ideology must include a separate and absolute conception of the world free from the contaminating influences of the ruling hegemon and be ‘sufficient unto itself, that it contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world …’.

According to Gramsci, in the most succinct sense:

\[\text{A theory is ‘revolutionary’ precisely to the extent that it is an element of conscious separation and distinction into two camps and is a peak inaccessible to the enemy camp … The philosophy of the praxis [Marxism] has no need of support from alien sources.}\]

If the role of a legitimately ‘revolutionary’ ideology is to seek a total and separate world conception by providing a clear and distinct counter-discourse to the dominant ideology, a central feature of Islam, as a political ideology, is that it is conceived as both self-sufficient and autonomous in its ability to address and rectify all the contemporary problems confronted by modern Muslim societies. In fact, Hasan al-Banna, as the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasised the holistic nature of Islam and established it as a core component of his organisation’s platform and, in the process, transformed his movement from solely a religious organisation into a political movement with clear socio-economic aims. In terms of this totality, Hasan al-Banna writes ‘we believe that Islam is an all-embracing concept which regulates every aspect of life, adjudicat-

\[\text{Mawdudi. The Islamic Movement, pp. 116–118, and Qutb, Social Justice In Islam, p. 44.}\]

\[\text{Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 388.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 462.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 462.}\]

\[\text{According to Nazih Ayubi, this is exactly what Qutb sought to do through his espousal of Islam as a revolutionary political ideology vis-à-vis the Nasserist State. ‘The counter-ideology of the Islamic movement confronts the language of rationality and development espoused by the territorial bureaucratic state with a language of piety and authenticity.’ As a result: ‘[T]he Qutbian discourse ... achieved its full ideological structure in its capacity as a counter-discourse to the Nasserist project.’ Ayubi, political Islam, pp. 123–124, and 140.}\]

In the end, one of Gramsci’s most unique contributions to the revolutionary process is to demonstrate that ideas do have an independence and force all of their own and that they have the power to actively intervene to create the new type of culture and morality sought by the revolutionary movement. By intervening practically and concretely in the real world, ideas are transformed into an autonomous force able to change the conceptions and beliefs held by a significant segment of the population as truth. As Joll argues: ‘... he [Gramsci] went further than any other Marxist thinker in recognising the importance ... and the force of ideas in producing historical change ...’. Ideas influence events, man’s will can impact history and, in the end, perhaps Gramsci’s greatest consideration is not just ‘the problem of how to establish a new State’, but ‘the problem of how to intervene in a concrete reality in order to bring about [this] certain aim’.

Organisation

The second essential component necessary for the conceptualisation and construction of a counter-hegemonic bloc is a unified and coherent organisational structure. Gramsci bases his views of the ideal revolutionary organisation on the political party, or what he deems the ‘Modern Prince’. It is through the ‘Modern Prince’ that Gramsci is able to assimilate the theoretical with the practical as the party functions ‘both as a political educator and as an umbrella organisation coordinating a national movement’. Inasmuch as Gramsci allows ideology the role of disseminating the counter-hegemon’s theoretical conception of the ‘new moral order’, it is the political party that must become the concrete expression of such a goal.

In terms of the general structure of the revolutionary movement, there are three integral components to Gramsci’s conceptualisation of the modern political party: the ‘principal cohesive’, ‘intermediate’, and ‘mass’ elements. These three levels correspond to those components typical of all political organisations—the leadership, the vanguard, and the individual members. In addition, Gramsci stresses that each level is required to interact and actively participate in the political struggle, while emphasising certain individual and group characteristics that must be present between the leadership and the masses, and among the individual members themselves, if the counter-hegemonic force is to expand and eventually seize political power.

When analysing the problematic of political organisation, like most ‘theorists’, Gramsci recognises the crucial, even determining, role to be performed by the leadership of the revolutionary movement. According to Gramsci: ‘The first element is that there really do exist rulers and the ruled—the entire science and

48 Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci’s Politics*, p. 103.
art of politics are based on this primordial, and ... irreducible fact.51 While Gramsci stresses that it is essential for the leadership to be able to comprehend the concrete environment and to react with the appropriate strategy,52 the true value of such leadership may be determined more by the intangibles it can provide, like the moral strength the leadership can inspire in its followers through the sheer weight of its character. According to Gramsci:

The question [of political leadership] becomes even more complex and difficult in wars of position, fought by huge masses who are only able to endure the immense muscular, nervous, and physical strain with the aid of great reserves of moral strength. Only a very skilful political leadership, capable of taking into account the deep aspirations and feelings of those human masses, can prevent disintegration and defeat.53

In that sense, this abstract quality of leadership becomes more important than certain tangible characteristics in instilling a belief in the masses about the truth and worth of their cause and a willingness to sacrifice everything—even their lives—for the movement’s ultimate objectives.

In terms of the overall organisational structure of the contemporary Islamic movement, like Gramsci, the principal Islamic theorists focus on leadership as the single most important criterion in determining the cohesiveness and, hence, potential success of their ‘revolutionary’ movements. It is not surprising that three of the four individuals examined here were not only theorists, but were also leaders of their own respective political organisations (e.g., Al-Banna, Mawdudi, and Khomeini). As the founder of the original twentieth century Islamic movement, Hasan al-Banna was regarded as the prototypical modern leader, both charismatic in character and competent in adapting the Islamic movement to its circumstances.54 In terms of al-Banna’s own position as the authoritarian centre of power and undisputed leader of the Brotherhood, Christina Harris argues that

Hasan al-Banna was the Brotherhood in the early stages of its development. He gave his Brethren (Ikhwan) their group characteristics as well as their program; he inspired them with his ardour and his sincerity; and his magnetic personality attracted an ever swelling stream of adherents to the movement.55

Al-Banna’s value to the Brotherhood is perhaps no more apparent than the fact that since his assassination in 1949 no other leader has been able to unite the Brotherhood nor duplicate his success in terms of either popular support or political influence.56

Ayatollah Khomeini, the one individual examined here who actually achieved political power, also emphasises the defining role of leadership in shaping not just the revolutionary struggle, but also the eventual Islamic nation. In fact, in the construction of an authentic Islamic order Khomeini argues that such a state is rooted most firmly, not in the actual institutions of the state (i.e., haria), but

51 Ibid., p. 144.
52 Ibid., p. 195.
53 Ibid., p. 88.
56 Rubin, Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics, p. 12.
in the moral attributes and characteristics (i.e., the intangibles) of its leadership.\(^{57}\)

In the case of Iran, Khomeini’s concept of the ‘guardianship of the jurisconsult’ was central to his notion that an Islamic regime was essentially the embodiment of those individuals ‘considered to be solely qualified to act as the ultimate rulers or arbitrators of that political order’.\(^{58}\)

The second core component of any revolutionary organisation is the vanguard of the party. In other words, for a counter-hegemonic force to be successful there must be present a small ‘inner circle’ of individuals who are willing to lead the movement in all facets of its ideological teachings, organisational structure, and strategic planning. While the strategic role of the vanguard within the Marxist tradition is well established,\(^{59}\) contemporary Islamic theorists also focus on the importance of an inner circle in the Islamic struggle. For his part, Mawdudi addresses the moral qualities and personal attributes necessary for those particular (i.e., ‘special’) individuals who seek to assume a more prominent role in the development of the Islamic movement.\(^{60}\) Meanwhile, according to Mitchell, al-Banna’s vanguard or inner circle is ‘a group of the most dedicated and active members, on whom could be placed the primary burden of serving God and the message’\(^{61}\). Yet, it is Sayyid Qutb, in his book *Milestones*,\(^{62}\) who most succinctly examines the essential role the vanguard must perform in terms of the overall revolutionary struggle.

It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of *Jahiliyyah* which has encompassed the entire world. During its course, it should keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing *Jahiliyyah* and should also keep some ties with it.\(^{63}\)

While the role of the ‘vanguard’ is more closely associated with Qutb than Mawdudi or al-Banna, it is clear that all three share the view that a ‘coalition of committed individuals’ is necessary in forming the core and the ‘vital organic cell’ of the Islamic movement,\(^{64}\) since without such a dedicated group the *jâhiliyya* society will never be confronted, let alone destroyed.

The final organisational component of the revolutionary movement Gramsci stresses is the ‘mass’, or the individual element. In fact, it is the necessity of having the individual members of the organisation actively participate in the revolutionary struggle that differentiated Gramsci most significantly from many of his predecessors within both the Marxist movement and his own Socialist/Communist Party in Italy. Gramsci stresses the inherent value of each and every individual by declaring that since ‘all men are philosophers’,\(^{65}\) they should be

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\(^{57}\) Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp. 146–147. Also see Hamid Enayat, ‘Iran: Khumanyi’s Concept of the Guardianship of the Jurisconsult’, in James P. Piscatori, (ed.) *Islam in the Political Process* (Cambridge; New York: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1983), p. 165. Such a view is almost identical to Mawdudi’s, who argues for the determining role of the leadership in shaping the values and morals of its followers. (See above)

\(^{58}\) Enayat, ‘Iran’, p. 160.

\(^{59}\) For the best explanation of the role of the vanguard within Marxist thought and the contemporary communist movement see Vladimir Lenin’s writings on this issue.

\(^{60}\) See Mawdudi, *The Islamic Movement*, pp. 72 and 95.


\(^{62}\) In fact, *Milestones*, or as it is also known *Signposts*, was specifically written as a guide to this vanguard in its battle to destroy the current *jâhiliyya* society.

\(^{63}\) Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 12.

\(^{64}\) Haddad, ‘Sayyid Qutb’, p. 87.

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considered ‘intellectuals’ in the grander sense. Thus, it is only through the active participation of the individual members of the party and the concrete interaction between the leadership and the masses that the type of environment conducive to revolutionary activity will be created. In the end, an increased level of mass preparation is central to the revolutionary process since Gramsci believes that: ‘The [entire] problem [of revolutionary construction] was to reconstruct a hegemonic apparatus for these formerly passive and apolitical elements.’

Like Gramsci, the Islamists focus on the centrality of the individual in the counter-hegemonic struggle. In fact, at its heart Islam is an individualistic religion that requires self-dedication and discipline in terms of many of its core practices (e.g., five daily prayers). For Mawdudi, the individual remains the essential foundation of the movement and, thus, the success of the organisation is necessarily rooted in individual commitment, conduct, and character, and the willingness of individual members of the movement to translate Islam from simply a religion (i.e., as it is conceived in the West) into a total and complete way of life.

While the formal structure of the movement is essential to Gramsci’s formulation of a successful counter-hegemonic bloc, he also advocates those more traditional characteristics and qualities sought by all political organisations. Thus, Gramsci understands the importance of attributes such as discipline and obedience to the leadership of the movement. In that sense, Gramsci argues ‘that obedience must be automatic’ and ‘must be unquestioning’.

Each of the Islamic theorists examined here also comprehend the importance of those qualities and characteristics emphasised by Gramsci. Consequently, a primary requirement is an unswerving obedience towards the leadership and complete discipline in terms of the greater movement, forming what al-Banna refers to as a ‘social contract’ (aqd ijtimā’i) between the ruler and the ruled.

On the issue of obedience to the movement’s leadership, al-Banna is unequivocal: ‘Listen and obey your leaders both in duress and comfort, in good times and bad, for this is the token of your conviction and the bonds of solidarity among you.’ Yet, like Gramsci, al-Banna also realises that individuals cannot be coerced into giving obedience, but that such adherence must be granted freely and willingly. Of course, in the case of al-Banna, it was his own leadership qualities and personal charisma that allowed him to consistently receive the unquestioning support of his followers.

66 Ibid., p. 229. In fact, according to Joll, the novel aspect of Gramsci’s thought is his attempt ‘to find a new form of revolutionary organisation which would combine effective leadership with real participation by rank and file’ Joll, Gramsci, p. 10.

67 See Kalim Bahadur, The Jama’at-i-Islami of Pakistan: Political Thought and Political Action (New Delhi: Chetena, 1977), pp. 29 and 141. In terms of this totality, Mawdudi’s ideas regarding taqwa or God consciousness have already been examined. Thus, according to Mawdudi: ‘This state of [Islamic] consciousness does not appear in any particular sphere; instead, it manifests itself in an individual’s whole way of thinking and in all his actions.’ Mawdudi, The Islamic Movement, p. 117. (Emphasis added).

68 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 145.


70 Al-Banna, Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna, p. 37. Qutb also emphasises the need for complete obedience on the part of the ruled at various points in his writings. For some examples see Qutb, Social Justice in Islam, p. 93 and Qutb, Milestones, pp. 20, 21, and 48.

71 For some examples in terms of Gramsci’s writings, see Joll, Gramsci, p. 64 and Nemeth, Gramsci’s Philosopher, p. 16.

72 Mitchell, The Society of Muslim Brothers, p. 302.
However, while obedience and discipline are important, in Gramsci’s opinion, even more crucial are individual traits such as loyalty, faith, and a firm conviction in the ultimate aims of the movement. In fact, for Gramsci: ‘The most important element is undoubtedly one whose character is determined not by reason, but by faith.’

As a political ideology rooted in religious belief it is not surprising that the Islamists also emphasise the determining role of faith and conviction towards the leadership in general and, consequently, the ultimate objectives of the movement. Al-Banna is very clear on the need for individual Brethren to have credence in one’s ideology and a deep-seated conviction in one’s religion and its goals, while Mawdudi argues that only a solid and unquestioning faith can provide the foundations for a truly Islamic system. Yet, once more, it is Qutb who most succinctly summarises the crucial role to be performed by a resolute faith and absolute belief in the ‘truth’ of one’s conviction. According to Qutb: ‘The superiority of faith is not a mere single act of will nor a passing euphoria nor a momentary passion, but is a sense of superiority based on the permanent truth centred in the very nature of existence.’

In constructing a viable counter-hegemonic bloc, for Gramsci, the eventual success or failure of such an organisation will be determined, most specifically, by the degree of homogeneity or unity that can be preserved within the movement. Yet, such unity is not to be characterised solely by the sharing of similar aims through an identical ideology and a common communal structure, but is to be expressed as an ‘organic unity’.

Hence the conclusion that in building a party, it is necessary to give it a ‘monolithic character’ rather than base it on secondary questions; therefore painstaking care that there should be homogeneity between the leadership and the rank and file, between the leaders and the mass following.

Consequently, it is this absolute need for organic unity which supersedes all other issues relating to the organisational framework of a movement. Gramsci best summarises his view of the ideal revolutionary movement when he states

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74 While Gramsci uses the example of the Jacobins during the French Revolution as his ideal in this regard, Joll draws a comparison between Gramsci’s conception of the ideal revolutionary movement and the actual achievements of the Roman Catholic Church. According to Joll, one of the reasons Gramsci admired and, hence, sought to emulate the church was his desire to create ‘a faith which would influence every aspect of the life of its adherents’. Joll, Gramsci, p. 26.

75 Al-Banna, Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna, p. 33.

76 Mawdudi, The Islamic Movement, pp. 79–80 and 111.

77 Qutb, Milestones, p. 141.

78 It is interesting to note that like the Islamists, Gramsci equates ‘faith’ as synonymous with ‘truth’. However, as previously noted, in Gramsci’s case he does not use religion as the basis of faith but, instead, political ideology and the example of the Jacobins during the French Revolution where ‘[t]hey were convinced of the absolute truth of their slogans about equality, fraternity and liberty ...’ Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 78.

79 For some examples see Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, pp. 180, 186, 188, 217, and 418.

80 Ibid., p. 158.
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that ‘it [the proper organisation] requires an organic unity between theory and practice, between intellectual strata and popular masses, between rulers and ruled’. 81 In the end, it could be asserted that this statement represents Gramsci’s conception of the entire revolutionary process.

In describing the holistic nature of the Islamic organisation and, more specifically, the ideal association sought between the rulers and the ruled, the Islamists also conceptualise such a relationship within an organic analogy. According to Qutb, only if the leadership and the individual members of a particular movement can create an organic whole which creates ‘harmony between its individuals and activities’, 82 and which is ‘an active, organic, and vital ... representation of ... the Muslim community [i.e., the ummah]’, 83 can such a movement achieve its revolutionary potential. Mawdudi employs an organic analogy to help demonstrate the type of ideal relationship that should be sought between the leaders and led of the Islamic movement.

And just as even though the tree may spread in all directions, all its leaves and branches remain firmly attached to the roots and derive substance from them and it is always the seed and the root which determine the nature and form of the tree, similar in the case of Islam. 84

Hence, if the seed (Islam) is planted and creates strong roots of leadership, the branches and its leaves (individual members) cannot avoid being nourished and, thus, spreading the word and message of Islam throughout the entire world. 85

Strategy

The final component in Gramsci’s construction of a counter-hegemonic bloc is the need for a well-developed strategy. Gramsci is very clear that any successful strategy must be active, interventionist, and long-term. For Gramsci, the need for such a strategy is synonymous with the fact that the revolutionary movement has ‘to be directed towards goals which are concrete and rational’. 86 It was necessary for Gramsci to stress such a view since his activist approach stood in stark contrast to a majority within his own party’s leadership. In their opinion, since a proletarian revolution was inevitable—based on Marx’s three laws of capitalism and the ever-increasing size of the working class—a policy of active, intimate, and long-term interaction with the masses was unnecessary.

The ‘war of position’ is probably the most identifiably concept vis-à-vis Gramsci’s writings on the appropriate counter-hegemonic strategy. In terms of his overall conceptualisation of the ‘war of position’, Gramsci himself ponders: ‘[I]s it possible to plough without first manuring the land?’ 87 Gramsci recognises that preparing the ground for revolutionary activity is a necessary requirement

81 Ibid., p. 190.
82 Qutb, Milestones, p. 103.
83 Ibid., p. 37.
85 In fact, according to the Islamic thinkers organic analogies pertaining to this type of relationship are presented throughout the Quran. Some examples include: Sūras 2:262, 14:27, and 48:30.
86 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 130.
since, as he argues, ‘every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas …’. As Femia asserts:

[D]iffusion and acceptance of radical ideas about man and society, the creation of a proletarian counter-hegemony, is a pre-condition for revolution. Without prior success in what Gramsci calls the war of position on the cultural front, a seizure of state power would only prove transitory if not disastrous.

To Gramsci, the paramount aim in a ‘war of position’ is to infiltrate civil society through the dissemination of new ideas and, in the process, to intellectually and culturally prepare the ground for the revolutionary movement’s assault on hegemonic dominance. Consequently, it is only by demonstrating to society in general that its conception of the world is superior to the ‘common sense’ view of the current hegemon that such a force can ‘win over’ the masses to the counter-hegemon’s cause.

In terms of the Islamists’ conception of the proper strategy necessary to defeat the dominant powers, like Gramsci, they understand that only an active, deliberate, and long-term approach will be successful, based on a program of educating or, perhaps more accurately, re-educating the masses in the true ways of Islam. This belief in the need to first re-establish the core principles of Islam within the individual has been a cornerstone of the twentieth century Islamic movement since Hasan al-Banna. Consequently, all the Islamists examined here share the view that there must be an extended period of preparation and education and the dissemination of the Islamic message (i.e., ‘Islamisation’) prior to engaging in a frontal attack, or a ‘war of movement’, against the ruling hegemon. Employing the example of the Prophet’s own ‘Meccan’ experience in which Muhammad spent thirteen years indoctrinating his followers in the principles of Islam before attempting any direct action against the ruling Quraysh, Mawdudi states: ‘Hearts will be won before bodies are conquered.’ Qutb concurs with this view when he asserts: ‘Our aim is to first change ourselves so that we may later change the society.’

For Gramsci, once the ground has been sufficiently prepared, through the diffusion of new ideas and the education of ones’ followers, it is necessary to create a counter-hegemonic movement total and complete in its dialectic opposition to the prevailing hegemon. Gramsci recognises that only by separating the revolutionary movement from, and by counterpoising it to, the dominant powers within society, can the counter-hegemon then exhibit its distinct nature vis-à-vis the prevailing mode of thought in society at that time. In that sense, the
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revolutionary bloc becomes what Gramsci terms a ‘counter-weight to another
collection of the world’,95 and only when the antithesis posits itself as ‘the
radical antagonist of the thesis’ can the tendency toward ‘its [the hegemon’s]complete destruction’96 occur.

It is perhaps in his use of the dialectic that Gramsci most closely approximates
the traditional Marxist perspective regarding the expansion of the revolutionary
movement and, thus, the development of history itself.97 In terms of both theory
and practice, it is clear to Gramsci that history does not evolve through a linear
and progressive process but, instead, through a confrontation of opposites.98
Consequently, it is through his use of the dialectic that Gramsci argues that the
counter-hegemonic bloc must ‘in both its organisation and in its moral val-
ues … free itself completely from the … world’.99 Therefore, it becomes the
primary role of the revolutionary movement not simply to modify the current
reality through a series of reforms, but to completely destroy all remnants of the
hegemon, especially the hegemonic projection of ‘common sense’.100

In much the same vein, the main Islamist writers argue that once the masses
have been sufficiently (re)educated in the principles of Islam, the next step is the
active creation (i.e., separation) of two dialectically opposed forces. It is
imperative that these two blocs be both total in their opposition and universal in
their confrontation, for only a counter-hegemonic bloc presenting a truly alterna-
tive conception of the world, separate and independent from its opponents, can
eventually embark on a strategy of jihad.101 In terms of constructing this
movement in complete and total opposition to the current socio-political order,
Emmanuel Sivan is the most succinct.

The counter-society must be capable of being self-enclosed in order to avoid fragmen-
tation or abdication. It must prevent alien influences from penetrating it, yet remain
sufficiently open and aggressive to draw from the outside whatever it cannot produce. It
must pursue the dream of ultimately being a majority. It struggles to demolish the old
society while at the same time hoping to become the heir to that society.102

Consequently, the aim of this movement must be to consciously separate itself from
the current social order, while simultaneously attempting to destroy it
entirely.103

The final component in Gramsci’s long-term strategy involves judging the

96 Fiori, Antonio Gramsci, p. 240.
97 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 435.
98 See Nemeth, Gramsci’s Philosophy, p. 148.
99 Joll, Gramsci, p. 54.
100 See Fiori, Antonio Gramsci, p. 244, and Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution, pp. 151–152. According to
Gramsci, this is where ‘common sense’ is to be transformed into ‘good sense’. Gramsci, Selections from the
Prison Notebooks, pp. 325–326.
101 Youssef M. Choueiri, Islamic Fundamentalism (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), p. 135. Of course, the
Islamic theorists cite the hijrah, or Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina in 622, as signalling the
model for Muslims to follow in their separation from their Pagan brethren.
102 Sivan, Radical Islam, p. 85.
103 Haddad, ‘Sayyid Qutb’, p. 89. Some Islamic movements, such as Al-Takfir wa al-Hijrah in Egypt, took this
separation literally and actually attempted to physically separate themselves from what they deemed as pagan
or jāhil society. See Ismael and Ismael, Government and Politics in Islam, pp. 116–117. As for Gilles Kepel,
he argues Qutb meant that any separation should consist of a mental withdrawal by true Muslims from those
who have disregarded their creed and not an actual physical separation per se. Gilles Kepel, Muslim Extremism
precise moment when the ‘war of position’ has reached its climax and must necessarily be transformed into a ‘war of movement’. As Gramsci emphasises, there will occur a time when the war of position ‘passes over to siege warfare …’


105 Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 239.

106 Pellicani, Gramsci, p. 33.

107 Sivan, Radical Islam, p. 70.

108 Mawdudi, The Islamic Movement, p. 79.

109 I think a strong parallel can be drawn between the Islamists’ view of jihad and the debate that has continued within Marxist thought over the proper strategy for attaining their goal of a communist/socialist (i.e., more egalitarian) state. In other words, while the ends have been generally agreed upon, the means towards that end have created most of the divisions within Marxism.

Waging a Holy war [jihad] is a revolutionary measure, and is indispensable for a far-reaching ideological revolution. It is not confined to fighting in the battlefield. It is fighting on all fronts and using all tactics, wisdom, and strategy worth applying.¹¹¹

In the end, jihad, like Gramsci’s interpretation of the revolutionary process, must be conceived in its totality, where the ‘war of position and the war of movement are not two separate moments but [are] part of a single, dialectical process’,¹² whose ultimate objective is the overthrow of the current hegemon and the installation of a fundamentally new social, economic, and political order.¹¹³

**Conclusion**

By utilising a Gramscian theoretical framework it has been argued that the contemporary phenomenon of political Islam, or ‘Islamic Fundamentalism’ as it is commonly noted in the West, should be conceived primarily as counter-hegemonic movements seeking political power through revolutionary means and not strictly as religious organisations and zealots solely concerned with issues of morality, doctrine, and faith. In addition, in spite of events such as September 11th, their focus remains primarily on the domestic sphere, not on the international level as a global challenger for hegemonic supremacy. Gramsci’s analysis of the individual, society and the State, in addition to his attempts to construct a revolutionary movement through the promulgation of a counter-hegemonic ideology, unified organisation, and long-term strategy, help provide a framework through which contemporary Islamic movements can be conceptualised. In the end, all these movements are essentially revolutionary organisations interested in the acquisition of state power for its own sake. Consequently, it is only by achieving political power that they can create a fundamentally new socio-economic order based on a new type of culture, morality, and man, while allotted the opportunity to enjoy the spoils of power from which they and their supporters feel they have long been excluded.

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¹¹³ Like Gramsci, the Islamists view the actual conduct of the ‘war of movement’ (i.e., jihad) as flexible in its application, understanding the necessity in adapting to the realities of battle. As a result, the concept of jihad is dynamic, evolving over time to take into consideration the increased/decreased strength of the Muslim forces and their changing relationship vis-à-vis the ruling powers.


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