

An Introduction to

ISLAM

IN THE 21ST CENTURY



Edited by
Aminah Beverly McCloud
Scott W. Hibbard
and Laith Saud

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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Brief Contents

Notes on Contributors	xv
Acknowledgments	xviii
Part I Overview: Islam: Image and Reality	1
1 Introduction <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	3
2 The Historical Context <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	13
3 Religious Structures: <i>Tawhīd</i> <i>Laith Saud</i>	31
4 Islamic Beliefs: The Development of Islamic Ideas <i>Laith Saud</i>	51
5 Islamic Political Theology <i>Laith Saud</i>	81
Part II Islam and the Modern World	109
6 Islam and the State: Part I <i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	111
7 Islam and the State: Part II <i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	135
8 Muslims as Minorities in the West <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	157
Part III Regional Studies	171
9 Islam in Africa <i>Babacar Mbengue</i>	173
10 Islam in South Asia <i>Saeed A. Khan</i>	203

11	Islam in Central Asia <i>Maria Louw</i>	217
12	Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	233
13	Muslim Histories in Latin America and the Caribbean <i>John Tofik Karam</i>	249
	Part IV Islam in a Globalized World	269
14	The Ecology of Teaching about Islam and Muslims in the 21st Century <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	271
15	Terrorism, Islamophobia, and the Media <i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	285
	Conclusion: Image and Reality Reconsidered <i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	309
	Index	315

Contents

Notes on Contributors	xv
Acknowledgments	xviii
Part I Overview: Islam: Image and Reality	1
1 Introduction	3
<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	
Introduction	3
Image and Reality	4
Organization of the Text	7
Discussion Questions	12
Sidebars	
1.1 Sources for population information	5
1.2 Countries with the largest Muslim populations	5
2 The Historical Context	13
<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	
Introduction	14
Pre-Islamic Arabia: Culture, Commerce, and Contexts	15
The Early Caliphates and the Spread of Islam	17
The Umayyad Dynasty	21
The Abbasid Dynasty	22
The Medieval Empires	23
Iran: The Mongol, Timurid, and Safavid Empires	24
Anatolia: The Seljuk and Ottoman Empires	26
India and South Asia	27
European Colonialism and Its Legacy	28
Discussion Questions	29
Suggested Further Reading	29
Sidebars	
2.1 Ibn Khaldun	15
2.2 Zoroastrianism	16

2.3	<i>Shanameh</i>	24
2.4	Crusades and Mongols	24
2.5	Spain: Al-Andalus	27
3	Religious Structures: <i>Tawhīd</i>	31
	<i>Laith Saud</i>	
	Introduction	31
	<i>Tawhīd</i> : The Organizing Principle of Islamic Thought	32
	Introducing Basic Islamic Beliefs and Texts	34
	Rethinking Islam: The Message, the Messenger, and God	36
	The Qur'an: The Recitation	41
	Revelation	42
	Ethics and Law	45
	The Qur'an and the Five Pillars	47
	Discussion Questions	50
	Suggested Further Reading	50
4	Islamic Beliefs: The Development of Islamic Ideas	51
	<i>Laith Saud</i>	
	Introduction	51
	The <i>sunna</i> of the Prophet	52
	Malik ibn Anas	53
	The Development of Islamic Jurisprudence, <i>Kalam</i> , and Philosophy	54
	Imam Abu Hanifa	55
	The Islamic Epistemological Spectrum	56
	Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii	58
	Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the Mihna	59
	Politics, Theology, and Mutazilite <i>kalam</i>	61
	The Islamic Philosophical Tradition	63
	The Asharite Response	70
	Averroes, the Return of Aristotle, and the Gnostics	73
	Ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Khaldun	75
	Conclusion	78
	Discussion Questions	79
	Suggested Further Reading	79
5	Islamic Political Theology	81
	<i>Laith Saud</i>	
	Introduction	82
	Islamic Political Theology and the Qur'an	82
	The Origins of Islamic Political Theology	85
	The Shi'at 'Ali and the Kharijites	87
	Modern Traditionalist Sunnism	88
	Shi'ism	90
	The Imamate	93

Muhammad al-Baqir and Jafar as-Sadiq	93
Branches within Shi'ism	95
Zaydis	95
Isma'ilis	96
Response to Esoterics: Toward a Consolidation of Sunnism and Shi'ism	98
The Sustainer of the Faith: Nasir al-Din and His Influence	99
Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Wrong: The Sultan– <i>Sharia</i> Synthesis of Ibn Taymiyya	101
Premodern and Modern Developments Built on Classical Legacies	102
Sayyid Qutb and Jāhaliyaa at-Thani	103
Ayatollah R. Khomeini: Revolutionary and Imam	105
Mulla Sadra and Illuminationist Philosophy	105
Political Theology Summarized	107
Discussion Questions	107
Suggested Further Reading	107
Sidebar	
5.1 Major distinctions between Sunni and Shi'i Islam	94
Part II Islam and the Modern World	109
6 Islam and the State: Part I	111
<i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	
Introduction	112
The Historical Context	113
The End of Empire and the Rise of Nation-States	113
Religion and State-Led Secularization	115
Cases	119
Turkey	119
Secular Arab Nationalism in Egypt	122
Secular Nationalism in Iraq, Syria, and North Africa	124
Secularism in South Asia	126
Conclusion	130
Discussion Questions	132
Suggested Further Reading	132
Sidebars	
6.1 Westernization or modernization?	117
6.2 Kemalism	120
6.3 Arab Cold War: The ideological division between Gulf monarchies and Arab socialist states	124
7 Islam and the State: Part II	135
<i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	
Introduction	136
The Theoretical and Historical Context	137

The Traditionalist State	141
The Critique of the Islamist Vision	143
Cases	145
Saudi Arabia	145
Iran	147
Pakistan/Afghanistan	149
Conclusion	154
Discussion Questions	155
Suggested Further Reading	156
Sidebars	
7.1 The Mahdist revolt in the Sudan	138
7.2 Hasan al-Banna	139
7.3 Mawlana Mawdudi	140
7.4 Khomeini and the Velayat e-faqih	148
7.5 Human rights and minorities in Iran	149
7.6 Hudud punishments	152
7.7 The Civil War in Sudan	153
8 Muslims as Minorities in the West	157
<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	
Introduction	157
The United Kingdom and the United States	159
Religious Expression	162
Education	163
Masajid-Building and Political Participation	164
France and Germany	165
Education	167
Masajid-Building and Political Participation	168
Conclusion	169
Discussion Questions	169
Suggested Further Reading	170
Sidebars	
8.1 East and West	159
8.2 The European Union	160
8.3 The great powers	161
8.4 <i>Laïcité</i>	166
Part III Regional Studies	171
9 Islam in Africa	173
<i>Babacar Mbengue</i>	
Introduction	174
Islam in Africa: A Kaleidoscopic Debut	176
Islam in Africa in the Era of the Great Sudano-Sahelian States	178
Takrur, Ghana, and the Rise of the Almoravids	179

	Mali and the Mansa	180
	Songhay and the Issue of Syncretism	181
	Sufism in Africa	184
	Movements of Islamic Reform in Africa through the Jihad:	
	The Fulani Thread	188
	Islam in Africa: The Colonial Paradox	191
	Islam in Postcolonial Africa: Between Reform and Continuity	196
	Islam in Africa and the “War on Terror”	198
	Conclusion	200
	Discussion Questions	201
	Suggested Further Reading	201
	Sidebars	
	9.1 The Sahel	177
	9.2 The Kharijites	178
	9.3 Maliki	178
	9.4 The Almoravid Empire	180
	9.5 Mansa Musa	180
	9.6 The Muridiya	195
10	Islam in South Asia	203
	<i>Saeed A. Khan</i>	
	Introduction	203
	History	204
	Islamic Movements in South Asia	207
	Political Islam in South Asia	211
	Gender and Islam in South Asia	213
	Conclusion	214
	Discussion Questions	215
	Suggested Further Reading	216
	Sidebars	
	10.1 The shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti	204
	10.2 The Taj Mahal	206
	10.3 Pir and Murid	209
	10.4 Shi‘a	210
11	Islam in Central Asia	217
	<i>Maria Louw</i>	
	Introduction	217
	The Early Years of Independence	219
	State Policies: From Soviet Aggressive Secularism to Emergent	
	Ambiguous Secularisms	222
	Negotiating Good Muslimness	227
	Future Prospects	230
	Discussion Questions	231
	Suggested Further Reading	232

	Sidebars	
	11.1 Naqshbandiyya	225
	11.2 Wali	226
	11.3 Baraka	226
12	Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia	233
	<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	
	Introduction	233
	The Colonial Encounter	235
	Indonesia in the 20th Century	237
	Politics and Economics	237
	Culture	239
	Indonesia in the 21st Century	241
	Malaysia	242
	History	242
	Women, Islam, and Transnational Movements	244
	Conclusion	246
	Discussion Questions	247
	Suggested Further Reading	248
	Sidebar	
	12.1 Islam in Indonesia	234
13	Muslim Histories in Latin America and the Caribbean	249
	<i>John Tofik Karam</i>	
	Introduction	249
	Shadows of al-Andalus in the Spanish Colonial Order	252
	African Rebellion and Refuge in a Slavocrat Society	254
	From Muharram to Hosay in Caribbean Creolization	257
	Institutionalizing Islam in an Emergent Civil Society	259
	Conversion (or Reversion) at a Time of Counter-Terrorism	262
	Conclusion	264
	Discussion Questions	264
	Suggested Further Reading	264
	Sidebars	
	13.1 <i>Reconquista</i>	250
	13.2 Mudéjar	254
	Part IV Islam in a Globalized World	269
14	The Ecology of Teaching about Islam and Muslims in the 21st Century	271
	<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud</i>	
	Introduction	271
	Who Teaches? An Ecosystem on the Brink	273

Sentiments since 9/11	275
Debates: How to Describe Islam	277
Debates: Questions of Violence	280
Discussion Questions	283
Suggested Further Reading	284
Sidebars	
14.1 Why explain the Muslim world?	273
14.2 Standard definitions	277
15 Terrorism, Islamophobia, and the Media	285
<i>Scott W. Hibbard</i>	
Introduction	286
Religion and the Question of Violence	287
The Afghan War and the Rise of Transnational Militancy	293
Understanding the War on Terror	297
Terrorism, Islamophobia, and the Media	300
Conclusion	306
Discussion Questions	307
Suggested Further Reading	308
Sidebars	
15.1 Terrorism	288
15.2 The Algerian Civil War	292
15.3 Former militants renounce violence	293
15.4 The Afghan War: The 1980s	295
15.5 Terrorism 1995–1996	297
15.6 Bin Laden’s 1998 fatwa	299
15.7 Socio-economic basis of popular support for the Islamist movement	302
15.8 Robert Spencer and Pam Geller	303
15.9 Commentary on 9/11	304
Conclusion: Image and Reality Reconsidered	309
<i>Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud</i>	
Islamic Thought and Practice	310
Islam’s Regional Differences	311
Islam in the 21st Century	313
Suggested Further Reading	314
Index	315

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Diaspora: From Theory to Reality (edited by Marianne David and Javier Muñoz-Basols, 2011); *Negotiating Boundaries? Identities, Sexualities, Diversities* (edited by Clare Beckett, Owen Heathcote, and Marie Macey 2007); the *Encyclopedia of Islam in the United States* (edited by Jocelyn Cesari, 2007); and the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Culture* (edited by Suad Joseph, 2007). He is also on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*.

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Part I

Overview

Islam: Image and Reality

Introduction

AMINAH BEVERLY McCLOUD, SCOTT W. HIBBARD,
AND LAITH SAUD

Outline

Introduction	3
Image and Reality	4
Organization of the Text	7
Discussion Questions	12
Sidebars	
1.1 Sources for population information	5
1.2 Countries with the largest Muslim populations	5

Introduction

This text provides an introduction to Islam that begins its inquiry with the social and political realities that inform 21st-century Islamic practice. It is consciously global in perspective, and seeks to capture the diversity of Islam as it manifests in different regions and countries. The book also examines the different interpretations and debates that characterize the tradition, both yesterday and today. Like other textbooks, it addresses what are traditionally seen as the historical contexts in which Islam emerged, and the core elements of the tradition. However, the book seeks to move beyond these basic topics, and address issues that are not typically covered, such as the ideas and practices of Islam in different regions and countries, the phenomenon of militancy, Islamophobia, and the teaching of Islam in the West, among other issues.

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The central theme of this book is that the image of Islam (particularly in the West) is very different from the lived reality of over a billion adherents around the globe. While Islam is often imagined as a static and monolithic tradition, the reality is quite different. Like other world religions, it is fluid, dynamic, and characterized by enormous diversity. By examining trends in different countries and regions – Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the United States and Europe – we hope to give a more accurate depiction of Islam as a living religion.

The authors undertook this project because they believed that there is a need for a more contemporary and holistic introduction to Islam, one that captures not simply the past but also the present. Particularly given the misinformed and often misleading characterization of the Islamic tradition that appears in the mass media (and by the ever increasing number of “experts” that have emerged since the events of 9/11), such a textbook will be an important contribution to public understanding and to university-level education. The text begins with an examination of Islamic history, the central elements of the tradition, and long-standing debates. It also highlights key patterns within Islamic history that shed light upon the origins and evolution of current movements and thought. We subsequently move on to more contemporary issues and examine a plethora of countries and thinkers in order to put those issues in context.

An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century also addresses controversial issues directly. The text examines topics including political violence and “terrorism,” anti-Western sentiments, and Islamophobia. We examine these issues as realities in the contemporary world, and we inquire why they exist and look at the underlying causes that give rise to such phenomena. In doing so, we reject the common tendency to explain such issues as simply matters of culture or tradition. Rather, we look to history, patterns of political economy, and the evolution of particular ideologies to help us understand such trends. We also seek to explore contemporary forms of globalization (economic, cultural, and political), and the nature of trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific Muslim responses to such trends. The world is changing everywhere, not least the Muslim world. Finally, we are particularly interested in what is different, if anything, in both the understanding and the articulation of Islam in the post-9/11 environment for Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the world.

Image and Reality

The image of Islam in the West is rooted in centuries of misperceptions. The vision that emerges from the early European experience with different Muslim powers is one defined by antagonism and conflict. This is a part of what fueled the Christian Crusades between the 11th and 15th centuries, but was also apparent in later periods of European development, which was similarly informed by the opposition to an external, Turkish, or Muslim “other.” Throughout this early history, the Islamic world was perceived as hostile to the Christian West, and that this political rivalry was rooted in religious differences. The characterization of

Islam by the so-called Orientalist writers of the Colonial period “essentialized” the tradition – that is, identified certain characteristics of the Islamic tradition as embodying the “essence” of the religion. This constructed essence included such things as unquestioned belief, an emphasis upon the community at the expense of the individual, and an innate inclination to oppress women. This essence was perceived to be not only definitive, but unchanging.

Such assumptions are fundamentally incorrect, but, nonetheless, continue to influence popular perceptions of Islam in the modern world. Much of the Islamophobia of the post-9/11 era has seized on these ideas, and portrays Islam (and Muslims) as hostile to Western values. This hostility is seen, moreover, as being rooted in the realm of religion and ideology. The inherent bias in this characterization of Islam is evident in any number of ways, and has frequently had the effect of subjecting Muslim citizens in the West to discrimination and abuse. The portrayal of young Arabs and Muslims in the popular media and the denigration of Islam by Western politicians and public figures all contribute to a public perception of Islam as monolithic, unchanging, and largely hostile to the Enlightenment norms which inform Western civilization.

The lived reality of Islam is quite different from this stereotype, and is as varied as humanity itself. Significant Muslim populations can be found in countries across the planet. 1.54 billion Muslims in the world live on every continent as majorities and minorities. While historically centered in the Middle East and North Africa, today the largest populations are found in Asia (see Map 1.1).

This geographical diversity reflects cultural and theological differentiation as well. The practices and beliefs that are prevalent in Indonesia or Western Africa differ in significant ways from the distinctive practices of Saudi Arabia, for example. Similarly, the internal theological debates of today reflect

Sidebar 1.1 Sources for population information

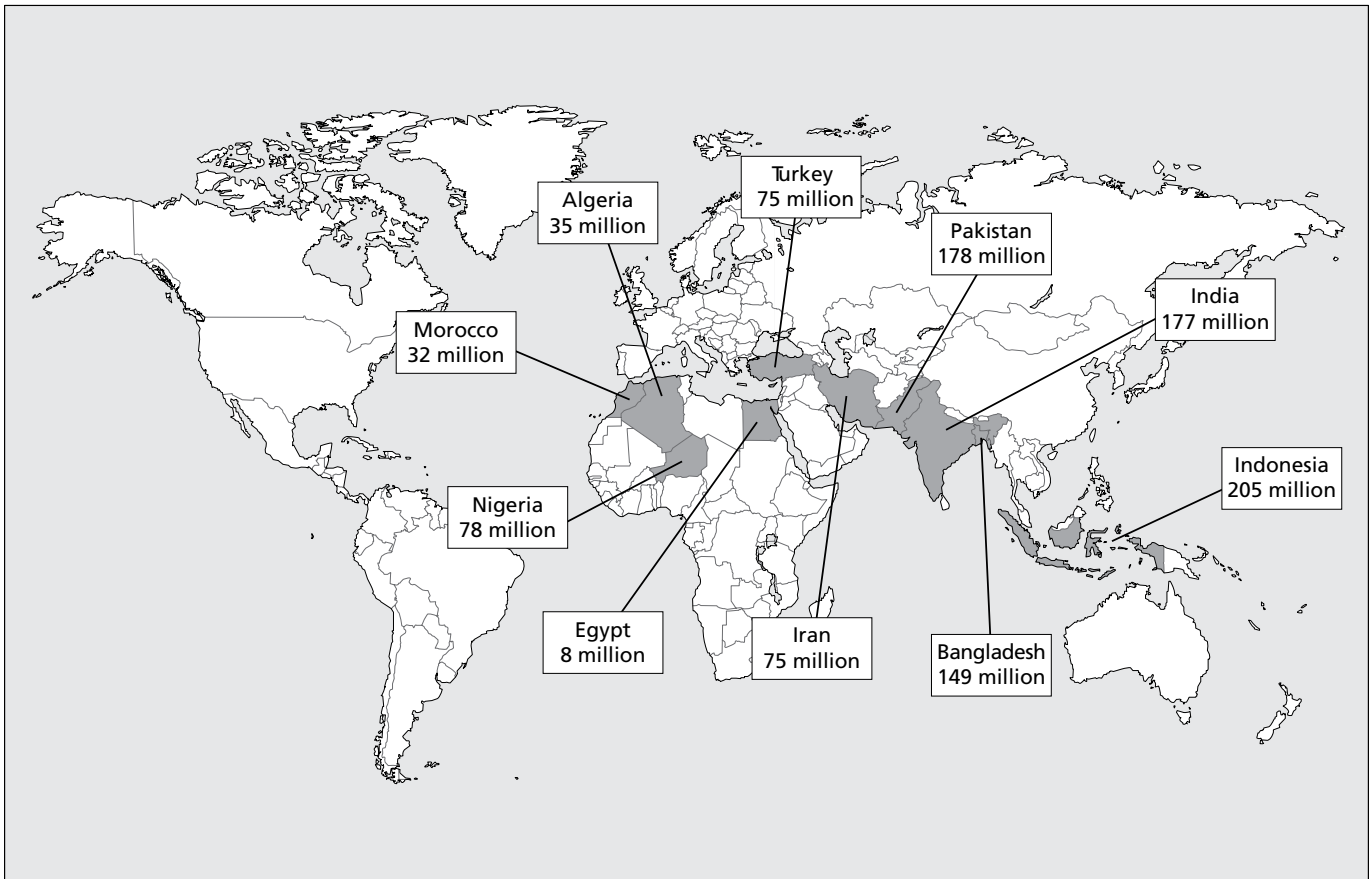
Reliable sources for population information are:

- US Census Bureau, International Data Base (December 2008);
- CIA Online World Factbook (April 2009);
- Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (October 2009).

Sidebar 1.2 Countries with the largest Muslim populations

According to statistics produced by the Pew Research Center, the list of countries with the largest Muslim populations is as follows (*Mapping The Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Muslim Population*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 2009; at <http://www.pewforum.org/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>, accessed September 22, 2012):

Indonesia: 203 million
 Pakistan: 174 million
 India: 161 million
 Bangladesh: 145 million
 Egypt: 79 million
 Nigeria: 78 million
 Iran: 74 million
 Turkey: 74 million
 Algeria: 34 million
 Morocco: 32 million
 Iraq: 30 million
 Sudan: 30 million
 Afghanistan: 28 million
 Ethiopia: 28 million
 Uzbekistan: 26 million
 Saudi Arabia: 25 million
 Yemen: 23 million
 China: 22 million
 Syria: 20 million
 Russia: 16 million.



Map 1.1 2010 population estimates from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Source: *Mapping The Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, October 2009: 3 (at <http://www.pewforum.org/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>, accessed September 22, 2012).

long-standing differences within the Islamic tradition over interpretation. These debates have multiplied in the postcolonial period as different communities negotiate modernity and come to grips with a rapidly changing world. These trends have become even more relevant in the post-Cold War era, which has been characterized by a high degree of economic and political globalization. Even if there are certain principles to which all Muslims adhere – such as recognition of the underlying unity of God (in Arabic, *tawhīd*) – interpreting the meaning and implications of these principles, and applying them in a lived reality, remains a source of ongoing discussion and debate. Rather than representing a monolithic unity, then, these different approaches to understanding God’s Will represent a spectrum of thought, one that is characterized by diversity, not homogeneity.

From the Muslim intellectual perspective, there are several key philosophical issues – particularly the relationship between knowledge and authority, and the related matter of defining legitimate authority – that continue to provide the structure of 21st-century conversations. In this text, clarifying these debates and discussions takes precedence over any reiteration of Islamic history which readers can find elsewhere. The following chapters expand upon these ideas.

Organization of the Text

Part I provides an overview of the basic structures and debates within Islam. It begins with a historical chapter (Chapter 2), which provides an introduction to the context in which Islam first emerged, and how the early political structures developed. This includes a brief overview of the historical eras which formed the early Islamic period; the history of the Prophet Muhammad, the rise of the early caliphates, the expansion of Islam, and subsequent dynasties. This chapter will also examine the “Gunpowder Empires,” and the rise of European colonialism and its legacies.

The three chapters that follow discuss the structures, tenets, debates, and sects of the Islamic tradition with the concept of a “spectrum of belief” organized around a central belief in God. Chapter 3 will introduce the reader to fundamental elements of the Islamic worldview that have structured the discourses within the religious tradition both in the past and in the present. A key organizing belief in the Islamic tradition is *tawhīd*, the underlying unity of God and all creation. Chapter 3 examines this concept, and how it has informed all aspects of Islamic civilization. This chapter also examines the influence of the life of the Prophet Muhammad upon the evolution of the faith, and provides an overview of the basic beliefs and texts of the Islamic tradition, as well as a discussion of the five Pillars of Islam.

An issue that is central to the pedagogy (i.e. educational philosophy) of this text is that the Islamic worldview must be rendered in its full diversity and complexity. This idea is very much reflected in Chapter 4, which focuses on the evolution of Islamic doctrines, beliefs, and practices. This includes the development of Islamic

law, *kalam* (dialectical theology), philosophy, ethics, and social theory. A central feature of this chapter is its elaboration on the spectrum of thought that has defined the tradition, and the tension between those who rely on tradition to guide their interpretation of the religion and those who rely on human reason to interpret Islam. It is important to remember that these aspects of the religion developed through a process of dialogue and debate; this is a community discourse and not a product of one particular religious hierarchy. These dialogues and debates, moreover, continue to this day.

In Chapter 5 we explore the fundamental features of what are commonly referred to as “Islamic sects.” A number of particular “spiritual types,” to use the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, have emerged within the tradition, which include Sunnism, Shi’ism, and the diversity therein. This chapter will examine these types via their theological and philosophical contributions to the Islamic discourse. One of the important contributions of this chapter is that it allows readers to better understand the modern implications of these debates, which are more fully discussed in subsequent chapters.

Part II examines Islam in a modern political context. This includes a discussion of the ongoing debate about the proper relationship between Islam and political authority. Although it is commonly argued that there is no distinction between religion and state in the Islamic tradition, the reality has always been otherwise. While the Prophet Muhammad embodied both religious and political authority, the relationship between the two remained unclear during the reign of the immediate successors to the Prophet. Subsequent trends in Islamic history, moreover, saw the emergence of a separation of function – and even competition – between religious authorities and their political counterparts. At issue in this ongoing competition is, on the one hand, the role of religious authorities in regulating the affairs of state, and, on the other, the danger to Islamic tradition of its overt manipulation by political leaders. An additional issue involves the reassertions of the demands for a caliphate (the single embodiment of both religious and political authority). These debates are not unique to the Islamic tradition, nor are there settled answers within Islam regarding the proper role of religion in government. Rather, in the contemporary period, the reality is defined by ongoing debates about the role of religion in the modern state.

Chapter 6 examines these issues in the context of societies that established secular political structures in the early and mid-20th century. The most influential – and extreme – example of the secular trend is Turkey, whose modern founder, Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, sought to orient a newly recreated Turkey toward Europe, not the Arab Middle East. The secular political structure in Turkey marked a sharp break from the Ottoman past. Turkey was not the only case, however. Pre-revolutionary Iran (1906–1979), Nasser’s Egypt, the Arab nationalist states of Syria and Iraq, among others, were all consciously secular. At the heart of this movement was a twofold belief. On the one hand, the effort to modernize entailed a demphasis (or elimination) of religion, or at least its relegation to the margins of public life. These debates also have their origins in the philosophical debates of

Chapter 3, as religious structures were profoundly changed by choices made with regard to the role of religion in government. There was, however, a second feature as well: the diversity within various societies – particularly in Asia – required a greater degree of official neutrality in matters of religion. Hence, Arab Christians, South Asian Hindus, and Chinese Christians living as minorities in places such as Indonesia or India demanded a more religiously neutral political authority. This sets the stage for our later examinations.

Chapter 7 looks at states that took very different approaches to these issues, and linked religious authority to state authority in various ways. Here we review the underlying rationale – the assumption that Islam is both a religion and a state (*din wa dawla*) – and how this relationship has manifested in practice. The most well-known examples of this close affiliation of religion and state power are in Iran (which has a self-consciously theocratic political structure) and Saudi Arabia (a *sharia*-inclined state where religious officials do not actually rule). However, there are numerous other examples (and precedents), such as those found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan (both during the 19th century Mahdist regime and under the current government). We also examine religious opposition groups that have argued for a more central role for religion in government. Sometimes religion is an opposition discourse, and sometimes it is invoked in support of the modern state. Regardless of whether religion is tied to a particular regime or to the political opposition, the arguments for a more overt role of religion in governance are similar: God is the ultimate source of sovereignty, and the Qur'an ought to provide the basis for legislation, law, and public order.

It is important to recognize that the distinction between “Islamic states” (or what we will refer to as “traditionalist states”) and “secular states” is not always sharp or clearly defined. Secular governments regularly invoke religion as a basis of popular support even if they remain largely neutral in theological matters. More to the point, however, is that the debates over the proper interpretation of religion in public life, and the proper relationship between religious and state authority, are never resolved in a permanent manner, in much the same way as the underlying philosophical debates endure. These issues remain a source of continuing debate and periodically recur in the context of modern politics. Our discussion of religious and political authority and their often contentious dynamics leads us to a discussion of political violence as one means of promoting a narrow religious vision by a vocal minority. To these conversations are added the reactions, both within the Islamic community and from outside.

Chapter 8 examines the question of Muslim minorities living in the West. At issue are the various challenges associated with integrating into Western society while retaining one's cultural and religious heritage. On the one hand, there is an understandable resistance among Muslim minorities to assimilate into a largely secular culture, while on the other, there is an often visceral opposition within majority communities to tolerate in a non-discriminatory manner minority populations in their midst. This is not a new challenge, but is an enduring feature of human history. What makes the issue of Muslim minorities living in the West

so unique in the 21st century is the high level of emigration that has transpired since the end of World War II. The resulting diversity within Western societies has created numerous issues for both the host populations and the migrant communities. This chapter examines these challenges in four countries with the largest Muslim communities – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany – and the different ways in which each have sought to deal with the minorities in their midst.

Part III focuses on regional examinations. The next four chapters offer a survey of Muslims in different regions and continents. These regions were selected, in large measure, by their significant history and size of Muslim populations. They were also selected to provide a glimpse into the diversity of Islam culture and traditions. Chapter 9 begins this exploration in Africa. It looks at the penetration, expansion, and assimilation of Islam on the African continent, with a particular focus on the regions south of the Sahara desert. This review sheds light on the diversity of the religious experience, the historical context and, ultimately, the emergence of powerful Muslim states. The chapter also looks at the development of important movements of Islamic reform during the colonial and postcolonial eras. This helps to shed light on both the past and present traits of Islam in Africa, often neglected in the study of Islam as a global phenomenon.

Chapter 10 looks at Islam within the countries of South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Out of the roughly 1.6 billion who live on the subcontinent, nearly a third are Muslim. This gives the subcontinent one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Like the other regions in Asia, Islam first arrived via commercial traders in the 8th century, though its influence became most pronounced in later centuries, particularly with the rise of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century. While the Mughals were eclipsed by British colonial rule in the mid-19th century, Islam has nonetheless remained a powerful cultural and political force in the region. It has given rise to a variety of political movements, and various South Asian thinkers have greatly influenced popular understandings of Islam throughout the world. The South Asian experience of Islam has also been characterized by a great deal of diversity. This is due, in part, to the historical circumstances, and the fact that India's Muslims are a minority population, while across the border, Islam is the official state religion in Pakistan. In short, Islamic thought and practice shape the lives of millions of people throughout the region, though this occurs in a variety of diverse ways.

In Chapter 11 we explore Islam in the much understudied regions of the former Soviet Republics. This area is home to more than 50 million Muslims. Scholars have previously only focused on the non-Muslim peoples, presuming that Islam had been relegated to extinction by decades of policies of eradication. This chapter provides a look at the Islamic revival present in the region.

The focus of Chapter 12 turns our attention to the experience of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia is, of course, the nation with the largest Muslim population on the planet, and would be of interest for that reason alone. But it is also of interest because of its democratic governing structures, its pluralist vision