

STATES DO NOT GO TO HEAVEN

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency
in International Relations

MESHARI ALRUWAIH



**States Do Not Go to Heaven: Towards a Theory of
Islamic Agency in International Relations**

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix

1

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency	1
The Superstructure of <i>Istikhhlāf</i> : Allah, Man, and Earth	4
Endowment: “Making of a <i>Khalīfah</i> ”	12
Embedment: Earth as a “Field of <i>Istikhhlāf</i> ”	17
From Embedment to Embodiment: The <i>Khalīfah</i> “in Action”	26
Conclusion	34

2

The <i>Khalīfah</i> is Not Allowed In: The Ontological Barriers to Islamic Agency in International Relations	36
‘Member of the International Society’ as a Social Role	37
From the Modern Individual to the Modern International Society	41
IR Theory: ‘Only the Modern Individual is Allowed In’	47
Conclusion	52

3

The <i>Khalīfah</i> in International Relations	53
Opening the Gates of International Relations to the <i>Khalīfah</i>	54
On the Road to the International Level: Bringing in the <i>Khalīfah</i>	59
Islamic Community: Teaching <i>Istikhhlāf</i>	60
The State Level: The Moral Test of Activating the Causal Powers of the State	63

The International Level: The <i>Khalifah</i> Meets The Individual... It's Not Personal...It's Structural	65
<i>Conclusion</i>	70
<i>Notes</i>	73

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Foreword

States Do Not Go to Heaven: Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations compares and contrasts, according to the author, Islamic worldviews and Western theoretical perspectives on international relations. Alruwaih suggests that a combination of the two could lead to a mutually beneficial redefinition of contemporary international relations utilizing Western theoretical tools and incorporating an Islamic perspective. Particular focus is given to the Islamic concept of *Istikhlāf* as an ontological and normative foundation.

Where dates are cited according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) they are labelled AH. Otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and labelled CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered contemporary.

Since its establishment in 1981, the IIIT has continued to serve as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts, based on Islamic vision, values and principles. The Institute's programs of research, and seminars and conferences, during the last thirty years, have resulted in the publication of more than four hundred titles in both English, Arabic and other major languages.

We would like to express our thanks to the author for his cooperation and to the editorial and production team at the IIIT London Office, and all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this work.

IIIT London Office
August 2013

[O MEN!] We have now bestowed upon you from on high a divine writ containing all that you ought to bear in mind, will you not, then, use your reason?

(Qur'an: 21:10)

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Introduction

This book is a result of my Masters dissertation, which was awarded a distinction from Durham University. While I chose to keep the title, overall framework, and main arguments intact, the opportunity to publish my work through the International Institute of Islamic Thought necessitates taking into account a change in audiences, the implications of which effect contextualization, direction, and embedment of those arguments. Writing necessarily involves an inner conversation, one that keeps reminding the author of his overall aims, lifetime intellectual projects, and reward structures. In this case, it's a conversation that reminds one that he is a servant of Allah (SWT),* a Muslim knowledge seeker, and subsequently should have the satisfaction of Allah structuring his rewards both in this life and the after, only that he happens to be interested in international phenomena and "teased" by the explanatory elegance of modern social sciences and the theoretical debates within western International Relations Theory.

Depending on the type of audiences, this inner conversation might come to be explicit in defining the frameworks and forming the context of the research project, or alternatively, remains silenced in the background.

The essential arguments in this book were thought of and written within western academic settings and under the supervision of western scholars, which meant that I had to keep this conversation an inner one. That said, I must endorse the "open" intellectual atmosphere at the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University where my MA supervisor professor Patrick Stirk and my current PhD supervisors, professor John Williams, and professor Jim Piscatori have shown nothing but respect, interest, and curiosity;

* (SWT) – *Subhānahu wa Ta'ālā*: May He be praised and may His transcendence be affirmed. Said when referring to God.

Introduction

allowing my work to comfortably take a “first person” perspective despite the institutional and disciplinary limitations.

Addressing what I believe would mainly be Muslim postgraduate students in international relations requires making this conversation public since it’s one that we all seem to share. This public conversation has been maintained and sustained by the International Institute of Islamic Thought for decades now under the label of “Islamization of Knowledge.” In particular, Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman’s *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations*,¹ and *International Relations in Islam*² project, edited by Dr. Nadia Mustapha, are cornerstones in publicizing and institutionalizing this aspiration of individual Muslim International Relations researchers to embed their research activities in their belief systems. This book builds on these works in order to place itself in the chain of knowledge accumulation on developing an Islamic perspective on contemporary international relations. In light of this, I humbly hope that this book will contribute to the consolidation of the Islamization of knowledge of international relations in three ways: First, through embedding efforts in Islamization of knowledge of contemporary international relations in a relational structure between traditional Islamic Fiqh related to Muslims–non–Muslims relations (*siyar*) on the one hand, and understanding the properties, nature, and policy needs of Islamic actors in contemporary international politics on the other hand. Second, through heavier involvement with western International Relations theoretical frameworks, such involvement should not be viewed, strictly, as culturally based critique, but more importantly as an effort to assess the possibility of borrowing from those frameworks to better, theoretically, express Islamic action in international politics, while preserving its legal and normative bases. Third, this book goes beyond most attempts in this direction by actually utilizing explanatory tools and frameworks from western social and International Relations theory in order to better express and operationalize Islamic actors in world politics. This takes the efforts of the Islamization of knowledge on international relations from general outlines and ideas to the specificities and technicality of implementing those ideas.

Introduction

The first aim of formulating a contemporary Islamic perspective on international relations on the landscape of competing discourse in the Muslim world, should be based on an assessment of the relevancy of those discourses to the understanding of the nature, properties, and hence the needs of Islamic actors in international politics. Aside from our approach, there are two main competing discourses on Islamic involvement in contemporary international politics, one is normative/and legalistically produced and reproduced by traditional Muslim scholars, while the other is realist/secular sustained by mainly political analysts drawing on more than anything, strategic and security studies. In between the two well-intentioned Islamic actors and foreign policy-makers seem to be unsatisfied with the partial image each has to offer. Where the former has taken the shape of disconnected fatwas and rulings that lack an appreciation of the structural constraints/resources to moral actions at macro social arrangements like those of the modern international society, the latter, only “see” structures in their most deterministic materialist worldly sense of the concept, subsequently following the realist assumption that there can never be a space for moral action in international relations, and hence leading to a focus on a narrow range of day-to-day strategic moves. This approach, which is based on purely realist assumptions, does not, and cannot, serve as a convenient departure point for capturing the involvement of Islamic actors in international politics. At least in my view, an Islamic actor is a moral actor by definition. No matter how thick the Islamic symbolic and discursive cover, if an actor is not moral it’s not Islamic. In other words, the label “Islamic” does not do the trick!

For this reason my inclinations lie with the traditional Islamic based normative/legal approach. This approach, while lacking in a theoretical understanding of contemporary international relations and (the much needed) methodological techniques to sustain a research program on the subject matter, preserves the essence of Islamic agency, and equally important is that it ensures that whatever explanatory tools we utilize in our research are governed by Islamic knowledge sources: Qur’an and Sunnah. Consequently, what this approach needs is a theoretical framework that can contribute to approaching Islamic action

Introduction

in international relations in a balanced way, emphasizing agential moral accountability on one hand, and structural constraints and resources on the other.

As mentioned above, this is not the first attempt to energize Islamic thought on international relations. Rather, it builds on variety of such attempts that provide direction and wisdom to my humble attempt in this study. In particular, AbuSulayman's discussion emphasizing the space-time dimension in reforming Islamic methodology in international relations is very helpful in making the argument for the need of a "map" of contemporary international relations if we are to theorize Islamic moral action in international politics. Although time and space are always connected in sustaining reality, AbuSulayman's discussion analytically focuses on the time factor. In here, I want to focus on space. For space implies organization, arrangements, putting "entities" together, resultant relationships between those entities and the emerging patterns of interaction among them. An accurate understanding of space becomes more important when we are faced with macro social arrangements where our actions, even in their collective sense, become the subject of multiple causal forces that stem from the structures and mechanisms that make up such arrangements.

In this light, the question becomes one of "do we have a map of structures and mechanisms of contemporary international relations?" or alternatively "does our traditional map of dividing the world into *Dār al-Salām*, *Dār al-ʿAhd* and *Dār al-Ḥarb* give us an accurate image of the context of Islamic moral action in today's world?" More specifically, once the normative and legal principle is derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, do we follow suit, collectively as Muslim Knowledge seekers, with an effort to understand how these normative/legal principles can be maintained by Islamic agents under the structures of contemporary international relations? More importantly, do we have an understanding of who the Islamic agent that is morally accountable before Allah and Muslims for sustaining an Islamic moral action is? Is it the Muslim *Ummah*? The Islamic state? Or the individual Muslim human agents who assume the roles of political leaders and government officials? If it is the latter, then why the insistence on the "as if"

Introduction

treatment? That is, “as if” the Islamic state existed and “as if” the Islamic state acted. In this case we keep referring to one entity: “the Islamic state” while what we really mean is the Muslim human agents who assume the roles of political leaders and state officials. On the other hand, if we really mean that the Islamic state is our moral reference point that carries out Islamic normative and legal principles then how do we expect “the state” a corporate entity to be morally accountable?

Some of these questions are clearly beyond the arguments in this book; they do however help in setting the context and direction of the discussions in subsequent chapters. In particular, they are helpful in positioning the project of Islamization of knowledge on international relations in between Islamic legal and normative principles on the one hand and the purely secular strategic discourse on the other, promising more relevant and suitable outcomes for the needs of Islamic agents in contemporary international politics.

This set the stage for the second contribution of this book, which is heavier involvement with western IR theory. This involvement is not an aim in itself. Rather, it’s a necessary stage in enhancing an Islamic perspective on international relations. The lack of contemporary Islamic-based answers to the set of questions represented above necessitates the borrowing of explanatory frameworks in order to enhance our capacities to better apply our normative and legal solutions to international politics. Going along with the “map” metaphor, western theories of international relations are better viewed as such. But while the most used visual maps capture political borders, International Relations theories are maps that capture the social arrangements of the international life, each claiming to represent a more accurate and coherent image of structures and patters of interactions in contemporary international relations. Theories are also like maps in that both are abstractions and simplifications of the complexity of the real world. Accordingly, they only capture entities, processes, and relationships that are thought to be more important in explaining and understanding international relations. In this light, some focus on material capabilities and the resulting balance of power between state-based actors, while

Introduction

others focus on the shared culture that gives meanings to actions of international actors, and others still focus on international institutions and organizations and their role in governing interaction among states. Our task as Muslim international relations researchers is to assess the explanatory powers of those theories in light of their capacity to better express our worldviews and moral actions in international relations.

It is important to understand that there is nothing inevitable about those theories. They are man-made tools just like the real world social arrangements that they are utilized to capture. As a matter of fact, western international relations theories are among the least settled and “confident” among western social sciences. In this sense, we can be as playful and creative as possible as long as we do so on sound ontological grounds. Once we have a grand Islamic ontology in place and normative and legal principles derived from Islamic sources (the Qur’an and Sunnah), we can assess those theories on our “own ground.”

Given the lack of confidence in western theoretical frameworks by its own practitioners,³ most mature debates in the discipline are still sustained at the ontological and meta-theoretical levels. For some Islamic observers this might seem like a “turn off.” On the contrary, I believe that this is an opportunity that we should not miss. I believe that after centuries of development of western secular social sciences and their domination of academic institutions and research programs in many parts of the Muslim world, we, as Muslim international relations researchers, are lucky to operate in a discipline where we can still argue about ontology; where we can still argue about the nature of entities, processes, and structures in the social world and hence about the nature of the social arrangements of international relations.

The attempt in this book to develop a framework to better express Islamic agency in international relations should be viewed in this light. It does not stop at constructing an Islamic ontology and deriving Islamic normative and legal principles and then leaving real world Islamic agents, of course in their human sense, wondering about how to apply these principles to their day-to-day operations and actions in international relations. Nor does it allow those agents off the Islamic moral hook, at least in theory, as in the case by the dominant strategic

Introduction

secular discourse in the region. That said, it is important to mention that this book does not offer a policymaking guide to Islamic agents, nor is it a book of normative and legal Islamic principles on international relations, rather, it is an attempt to develop a framework of Islamic agency in international relations as a “constrained/enabled moral action,” one that specifies the sources of moral accountability on the one hand, and causal constraints and resources on the other when approaching research problems that are concerned with Islamic based actions in international relations. In this sense, this is a work for academics and researchers not for policymakers as most discussions in this book will be sustained at the ontological level and not the substantive or even the theoretical levels. Engagement with western IR theory at this level is not an intellectual luxury that we can afford to overlook. Rather, it is a necessary effort to “reclaim reality,” where we can argue at the level of worldviews, nature of the social world, social action, and structures. It is at this level that we can argue about the nature of state action as a corporate entity and the resultant possibilities of moral action in international relations, the explanatory role of social structures of international systems, and the role of human agency within. Only then can we assess the convenience of western IR theories to our purposes in our own ground, otherwise, if the discussions commence at the substantive, or even the theoretical levels then we are most likely to leave behind all that which is “Islamic.”

Despite the unstable philosophical ground that western IR theory is based on, if the Muslim researcher follows its assumptions uncritically, then his/her intellectual effort is more likely to result in reproducing and even unintentionally guarding a very culturally specific understanding of international relations that in many ways might be at odds with his/her own worldviews and belief systems.

The third aim of this book is to construct and propose a framework for Islamic agency in international relations; a long overdue effort that has already been taken in the Islamization of other disciplines, most prominently, Economics and Finance. Within international relations, we still operate at the level of generality, both in terms of theory and methodology. This study is an attempt to go one step further and

Introduction

engage with the technicalities of “putting together” an Islamic “working” framework that can be utilized to approach Islamic action within international relations. Such effort involves a careful selection of literature from both sides, the Islamic and the western, and then constructing one coherent image that can capture the dynamics of international relations and preserve Islamic ontological and normative principles.

Thus far I have been using terms like “ontology,” agency, structure, etc. rather casually. The reason for that is my assumption that postgraduate students are already familiar with these terms. A quick review, however, might help. Ontology is a key word in western social sciences, and increasingly in international relations literature, it refers to a set of answers to questions like, “what is the world made of?”, “what are the nature and properties of entities to be studied?” It refers to “what should we know about the world?” rather than “how should we know it (Epistemology)?” In international relations theory ontological questions have focused around the nature and properties of the structure of international systems; is it purely material? Does it have a social/ideational layer? Do those social dimensions of structures have affects on the behavior, interests, and identity of actors/agents? In the agential side, ontological debates have focused on the nature and properties of agents; are states really agents? Is there such a thing as a corporate agent capable of intentional action? The “trick” however, is that those ontological debates of international relations cannot be answered solely at the level of the “reality of international relations.” Instead, they require answers to questions at yet deeper levels that touch upon the nature and purpose of the social/material world, the nature and purpose of human beings and their interaction. Accordingly, the starting point for an Islamic framework for explaining/understanding any social arrangements should naturally be Islamic, that is, ontology should be Islamic. In other words, involvement with and borrowing from western IR and social theory should start after, not before, we have an Islamic ontology in place.

My choice in this book is to utilize the Islamic notion of *istikhlāf*⁴ as an Islamic ontology, as a convenient point of departure to theorize

Introduction

about Islamic agency in international relations. This choice is not “strange” to efforts associated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought, where many authors have stressed its importance to build a general framework for theorizing in different disciplines. Although the added value of its use in this book is one of articulating it as a “superstructure” linking the human agent, as a *khalīfah*, and earth as a field of *istikhlāf* to Allah as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

Once we have an Islamic ontology based on *istikhlāf*, where human agency is constituted as vicegerency of Allah on earth, an engagement with western literature will be undertaken in order to assess convenient tools that can best capture the experience of the *khalīfah* in the social world. As mentioned, a direct involvement with western IR theoretical frameworks is not encouraged at this stage, in other words, a “conversation” between *istikhlāf* and western IR frameworks like Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and Constructivism is not fruitful at this time. Rather, what is needed is an engagement with the foundations that underlie those theories, such as: positivism, anti-positivism, and post-positivism. While positivism and anti-positivism are clearly “hostile” to faith-based knowledge, post-positivism is more open to engagement with religion as a foundation for knowledge and theoretical activities. In particular, Critical Realism as a philosophical foundation captures the bulk of the post-positivist movement. Unlike positivist and anti-positivist foundations, however, Critical Realism does not support particular international relations theories. Rather, it is better viewed as an ontological intervention that insists on correcting and reshuffling the ontological landscape underlying the theoretical frameworks of western IR theory according to an ontology of depth and stratification that goes beyond the material observed world, yet does not treat reality as a “social construct” that is not independent from the thoughts and ideas of actors. It asks, and proposes answers to, a number of important questions, including the content and effect of structures, the nature and properties of agents, and insists on a reality beyond the observed material world and the human capacity to know it.

Introduction

Within western international relations theory two prominent contemporary figures stand out as leaders in basing their work on critical realist foundations, namely: Alexander Wendt, and Colin Wight. Both draw on a number of critical realist scholars, most important of whom is Roy Bhaskar. It is Wight who seems to be more “faithful” in following Bhaskar’s guidelines for social theory. In any case, the two critical realist figures have produced important works that re-shaped the ontological landscape of western IR theory. From structures to agency, their works have opened new venues of re-thinking the nature and properties of each, and subsequently the agent-structure debate in the discipline has matured and benefited from such works. For our purposes, both Wendt and Wight have widened the range of tools that an Islamic framework can utilize in developing Islamic based solutions for action international relations. While the works of the two theorists are appreciated, this book will draw more heavily on Wight’s work especially on his book *Agents, Structures, and International Relations*.⁵ In some sections of this book, the framework of Islamic agency that is being developed might even appear as a straightforward application of Wight’s work. I do not necessarily see any problems with this. It happens that Colin Wight offers well-articulated notions of “reality” that although not grounded in Islamic understanding, are not hostile to it, and can even be considered “friendly” and “ready” to be utilized by Islamic theoretical activities. In some cases, Wight’s ontological investigations seem “to be designed” for expressing faith-based agents. Although I doubt that this was his intention, still, this should not stop Muslim IR researchers from acknowledging, appreciating, and making use of such contributions. As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters critical realist notions will be utilized to express the social dimension of *istikhlāf* which necessarily require sharper social analysis and investigation than the tools of contemporary Islamic thought can provide for. The Islamic bases of this work, however, will be ensured and preserved by an unswerving insistence on Islamic ontological and normative principles. Once we have these in place the discussion will move to the technical side where critical realism and other tools from western social and IR theory can make their contribution.

Introduction

Accordingly chapter two of this work will set the stage as one of *istikhlāf*. The aim will be one of reclaiming the earth as a field of *istikhlāf*, and human agency as vicegerency of Allah. This will be achieved by articulating the constitutive relationships that endow both with their correspondent nature and properties as a superstructure of *istikhlāf*, where each is linked to Allah in a relationship of endowment, while human agency as vicegerency is linked to earth in a relationship of embedment. Once we have this superstructure of *istikhlāf* in place, the relationship of embedment will be further expressed as one of linking roles; the role of *khalīfah* and worldly social roles, and linking endowment and embedment in one coherent account agency underlined by the role of *khalīfah*. This will be achieved by drawing on Roy Bhaskar's notion of social roles as a "point of contact" with social structure which gives human action an access to structural resources/ constraints without scarifying intentionality and freedom of subjectivity. Both will be demonstrated to be essential in operationalizing the role of *khalīfah* under social arrangements. This chapter will also provide an account of structure that reflects the mission of *istikhlāf* (*tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, *ʿumrān*) where each of these pillars will find a structural layer to draw from (relational, inter-subjective, material). The end product of chapter two will be to present a general Islamic view of agency as "endowed, embodied, intentional action" operationalizable under a context of embedment that features relational, inter-subjective, and material structural conditions of production.

Chapter three will take this general framework to the specific realm of international relations. Acknowledging the ontological distance between the human/individual flavor of the Islamic account of agency and the macro-structure of international relations, the chapter will start by applying the framework at the corporate/collective level by articulating the social role of "member of international society" as a point of contact filled or embodied by Islamic collective action through the institutional platform of the modern state. This exercise will illustrate that the relational, inter-subjective, and material structural conditions of production of contemporary international relations are not in tune with the mission of *istikhlāf* both in theory and practice. Drawing on

Introduction

Christian Rues-Smit's work on the origins of the modern international society,⁶ the chapter will reveal the institutions of which reflect micro-level meanings and assumptions about human nature, needs, and purpose, channeled through, and reproduced by, a hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of the state centered around satisfying those needs.

The chapter will then move on to explore the dynamics through which states, as intermediate social forms reproduce those micro-level meanings at the macro-level of international relations. In this light, it will propose that a more ontologically committed approach is needed concerning the issue of state agency. The focus will be on relocating agency to human agents not the states in order to break up this cycle of reproduction of meanings between the "modern individual" and "modern international society." This will not only reveal the sort of constraints on Islamic action in international relations but will also logically lead to better express the Islamic view of agency as "endowed, embodied, intentional action" defined by the role of *khalifah*, since by this stage we have a human agent who can be assigned moral responsibility before Allah only embedded in the structure of the state, embodying a social role of political leader, and enjoying "real" intentionality, not fictional. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the difficulty of achieving such an ontological landscape where human agents can be "spotted." Specific issues will be tackled. First, the widespread assumption of "state personification" in western IR theory, and second, the "levels-of-analysis" as supposedly a tool for methodological bracketing what is instead being treated as an ontological map for the discipline.

Chapter four will introduce Colin Wight's reconfigured version of the levels of analysis, which insists on the presence of human action on all levels of analysis including the international level. On this reconfigured version, a map of the path of the "*khalifah*" will be charted where the state level will no longer serve as "home" to ontological barriers to Islamic views and meanings, but rather as a "level of being" and a "point of contact" to the international level. As a context of embedment, the state structures will be articulated as providing a particular set

Introduction

of conditions of productions that enable/constrain the intentional action of Islamic agents. The chapter will conclude with an attempt to sharpen the application of the Islamic view of agency as “endowed, embodied, intentional action” to Islamic agency in international relations by insisting that such view translates into, or mirrors, a structurally constrained/enabled moral action.

The study will conclude with brief discussions on further lines of inquiry that can stem from this work including institutional engineering/design according to the mission of *istikhlāf* (*tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, *‘umrān*), and the relationship of this to sustaining a moral dimension to Islamic agency in international relations according to the role of *khalīfah*.

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“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

This chapter proposes *istikhlāf* (vicegerency) as an Islamic ontological foundation that can host a theory of Islamic agency. In this context, the chapter will endeavor to reclaim the reality of an Islamic ontology of *istikhlāf*, by reclaiming the constitution of both human agency and “earth” to Allah as the Creator and Endower of the properties and nature of both, the latter as a “field of *istikhlāf*” (field of vicegerency) and the former as *khalīfah* (vicegerent). This ontology will provide an image where Islamic agents are not “strangers” to man-made social arrangements but are rather embedded agents within an Islamic ontological landscape. By the end of this chapter, religion, specifically Islam, should not appear as an intervening variable that may, or may not, contribute to explaining agents’ behavior, or at best, as an institution among many in the modern world. Rather, it should appear as constitutive of reality, which sets the stage for the view in subsequent chapters where the modern international society appears as one social arrangement among many. By reclaiming reality to Islamic ontology, and placing the burden of conformity to man-made social arrangements including the modern international society, decisions regarding the properties and nature of agency, structures, and their relationship are to be taken according to Islamic ontology, that is, prior to embedment within international relations and not after. These points are discussed in this chapter.

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

That said, it is important to mention that once an Islamic ontology has been outlined through the notion of *istikhlāf* there won't be any need for "invention" of Islamic explanatory tools to further develop Islamic concepts and solutions for agent-structure relationships. Instead this effort will draw from western social and IR theoretical tools, which fits the theme of this project as one of mutual borrowing that preserves Islamic ontological and normative principles while making use of western social and IR theoretical tools to express them. The "end product" of this chapter will be an Islamic view of agency as "endowed, embodied, intentional action," essentially Colin Wight's notion of agency as embodied intentional action, attached to the endowed nature of agency. Yet, as will be demonstrated in subsequent discussions, this attachment hides a whole ontological package behind it that redefines reality according to an Islamic belief system. An important point to realize is that this chapter does not offer a conceptualization of Islamic agency, as the "Islamization" of agency can only be captured, tested, and assessed in a process of socialization under man-made social arrangements. Rather, the chapter offers an Islamic view of agency; in other words, it offers a "structure of agency" in terms of its elements and constitution according to the Islamic ontology of *istikhlāf*. The advantage of the use of the Islamic notion of *istikhlāf* in social investigation and research is its capacity to maintain the link between human agency to Allah, while operating under social structures, thus transcending the secular/religious divide that borders western social sciences on the one hand, and energizing Islamic based understanding of human action on the other.

In this light section one will introduce, explain, and articulate the notion of *istikhlāf* as a superstructure. *Istikhlāf* draws the overall image, linking human agency and earth in a constitutive relationship of endowment to Allah, and the relationship of embedment between human agency and "earth" as one between two "already" constituted elements in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. This section explicates the structure that constitutes the human agent as *khalīfah*, such a constituted role however is the result of two relationships: Endowment and embedment. The former with Allah where human agency is endowed

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

with the necessary capacities to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*, which will be presented as involving three pillars (*tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān*), and the latter with “earth” as a material and social place constituted as the field of *istikhlāf*.

The second section of this chapter looks at those endowed capacities and insists on their presence as properties of agency prior to socialization. Drawing on Islamic resources and western notions of agency, namely Spivak’s notion of “accountable reason” as an essence of agency, freedom of subjectivity, intentionality, the power to do, and accountability will be captured as necessary elements of agency, only re-directed and “re-sorted” to fit the relationship of endowment. At this stage the Islamic view will appear as “endowed, intentional action” awaiting attachment of a notion of embedment in order to reflect the social dimension of the *khalīfah*.

Section three does just that, although based on Islamic ontological criteria that flattens “earth” as a field of *istikhlāf* endowed with the necessary conditions of production for performing the mission of *istikhlāf*. This will require a conceptualization of structure that does not hinder the effort of “re-inserting” the relationship of embedment between human agents and earth in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, which will be achieved through Wight’s proposal of conceptualization of social structures as the relations between Bhaskar’s four planes of social activity (material interaction, inter-subjectivity, social relations, and subjectivity).

The last section of this will attempt to bring the Islamic view of agency as “endowed, embodied, intentional action” into action through Bhaskar’s transformational model of social activity that will be demonstrated as offering an acceptable agent-structure solution that allows the “*khalīfah*” to act with awareness of both its endowed and embodied dimensions. The section ends with a view of agency that satisfies Islamic ontological principle by allowing a space for agential awareness of their position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf* and hence their accountability before Allah on the one hand, and yet, socially-intelligible enough to embody any social role, and hence grant access

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

to socialization and material interaction under any man-made social arrangement.

The Superstructure of *Istikhlaḥ*: Allah,⁷ Man, and Earth

Behold the Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent (khalīfah) on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood, whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not."
(Qur'an: 2:30)

The above Qur'anic verse provides humanity with a description of the essence of their agency and their most basic role as vicegerents of Allah on earth. That is, their biological make up, cognition, and other human capacities must fall into this description. Of course this is not how agency, even when referring to human agency, is captured in western IR theory where human nature in the biological/material sense, and reflexivity in a cognitive/learning sense falls into a vacuum. On the contrary, the verse demonstrates that those capacities fall into an already constituted role. Yet to understand the properties of such a role, vicegerency must be understood as a relationship: a one-way constitutive relationship. Understood as a relationship, vicegerency or *istikhlaḥ* essentially means authorization for an action on behalf of someone else. More specifically, vicegerency must involve the following: Authorization for an action, a given mission to be performed, guidelines to perform the mission, and accountability for the quality of performing it. Given that human agents are creations of Allah they were endowed with the necessary capacities to undertake the mission of *istikhlaḥ*. In this light, we can derive from the verse that human agents are vicegerents of Allah in virtue of their relationship to Allah that constitutes them as such and that agency is always endowed.

The verse does not stop here; the phrase "on earth" specifies the context of performing the mission of *istikhlaḥ*, that is on earth, which could be described as a "field of *istikhlaḥ*." This brings to light another one-way constitutive relationship, this time between Allah and earth,

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

where Allah created earth and made it a suitable context of embedment for the *khalīfah* to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*. According to Islamic beliefs, Allah endowed earth with the necessary resources to enable human agents as *khulafā'* (plural) to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*.

What we have now is two constitutive relationships, the first between Allah and human agency, which constitutes each and every human agent with the role of a vicegerent or *khalīfah* of Allah, endowed with the needed capacities to undertake the role. The second relationship is between Allah and earth, where earth is constituted as a field of *istikhlāf* endowed with the necessary resources to “welcome” the mission of *istikhlāf*. If these two relationships are defined by endowment, then a third relationship which links human agency to earth, the *khalīfah* and the field of *istikhlāf*, is one defined by embedment. Thus, from the phrase: “I will create a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth,” a relational superstructure can be derived, where human agency is endowed in virtue of its relationship with Allah, and embedded in virtue of its relationship with the totality of its field of *istikhlāf*.

The advantage of utilizing *istikhlāf* and articulating it as a superstructure becomes clearer at this conjecture. A relational superstructure of *istikhlāf* insists on linking human agency to Allah in a relationship of authorization and accountability, while at the same time insisting on linking human agency to its worldly structures through embedment. Accordingly, on the one hand, the conceptualization of Islamic agency cannot be delinked from Allah since this link is what constitutes the essence of this agency, whilst on the other hand, such conceptualization cannot be delinked from operationalization under worldly structural resources and constraints that are needed to express its embedded nature as constituted by its position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. In this context, one can argue that Islamic traditional views on agency focus on the endowed nature and ignore embedment as evident from the lack of structural theorization in Islamic literature. Western views focus on embedment and cut all links between social agency and Allah at the “borders” of the social world including endowment of human capacities and the subsequent moral responsibility and accountability

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

before Allah. Instead, the superstructure of *istikhlāf* ensures that Islamic agency always comes endowed and embedded. The label “superstructure,” however, is inspired by Honderitch’s definition of the “superstructure of known truth” which is the product of, or rests on, indubitable beliefs.⁸ A belief in this Qur’anic verse is indubitable to Muslims, and the superstructure of *istikhlāf* is then an Islamic superstructure of known truth that in turn allows further propositions about knowledge of different social arrangements to be inferred.

The fact remains, however, that none of us are born with a sign on one’s forehead that reads “*khalīfah* of Allah on earth,” rather we are born in already constructed social arrangements populated with social and institutional facts that may, or may not, feature meanings and norms of *istikhlāf*, even implicitly, in the sense of acting with a sense of moral responsibility before Allah. Of course this could be seen to hinder the attempt to express the role of *khalīfah* as constitutive of human agency. Yet, understanding the relationship of endowment between Allah and human agents as one of authorization and accountability requires the presence of certain endowed capacities, most important of which is freedom of subjectivity, without which authorization and accountability that underline the mission of *istikhlāf* become redundant. In this case, a *khalīfah* is always a “free” agent, who can accept or reject, submit or rebel against the requirements of this role, yet, he/she will always be a *khalīfah*. The freedom is to be a “good” or “bad”, “submissive” or “rebellious” *khalīfah*. It is not a coincidence then that the literal meaning of Islam is “submission,” which taken in this context can only mean the voluntarily and “free” submission to the requirements of the role of *khalīfah*.

The Qur’an makes this freedom of choice a clear principle in the following verse: “*Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error...*”⁹ Moreover, submission to the requirements of the role of a *khalīfah*, can only mean that a Muslim is one who acknowledges the source of his/her agency as endowed and authorized by Allah and submits to the guidelines given by Allah to live a pure and successful life on earth, whilst acknowledging his/her accountability before Allah for his/her actions.

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

As demonstrated by the embedded nature of human agency, these human efforts to align one’s agential experience, including intentionality and action, to the role of *khalīfah* do not take place in a vacuum but rather are embedded, not only in a material context as the phrase “on earth” might imply thus far, but also because of the agential capacity of freedom of subjectivity, human agents give meanings and make moral assessments about their interaction with their material context. In addition, the production and distribution of material resources endowed on earth by Allah as a field of *istikhlāf*, necessarily require human interaction that takes shape through inter-subjective and relational patterns that in turn gives meaning and direction to this very human interaction whether in the form of collective action, cooperation, conflict, etc. Accordingly, the agential effort to observe and perform the mission of *istikhlāf* does not only take place under material structure but is also enabled and constrained by inter-subjective and relational contexts.

It could be argued that in western social and IR theory it is these material/social/relational contexts that exhaust the spectrum of conceptualization of structure not only content-wise, but also effect-wise since it regards human agency as a biological body + cognition, and ignores the pre-constitution of this agency through vicegerency. In more clear terms, it removes the relationship of embedment from the superstructure of *istikhlāf* by ignoring the relationships of endowment between Allah and human agency in one way and Allah and earth on the other. What this means is that the properties and natures of both human agency and its context of embedment that result from their position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf* are not taken into consideration when one examines the relationship between human agency and worldly structures through western theoretical tools. The Islamic ontological move that is proposed in this section is to re-insert the relationship of embedment between human agency and their worldly structure into the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. This does not only help in reclaiming understanding of agency to Islamic ontology, but subsequently also conditions the relationship between agency and worldly structures according to the constitutive superstructure of *istikhlāf*. For

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

our purposes in this chapter, when we are faced with a certain agent-structure solution from western social and IR theory, we now have an Islamic ontological landscape where that solution is assessed according to the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, more specifically, such a solution is to be assessed according to the constituted properties and nature of both agency and worldly structures, the former as *khalīfah*, and the latter as field of *istikhlāf* – whether the proposed solution “fits” in this wider ontology, for example if an agent-structure solution denies agential freedom of subjectivity, then it is to be rejected from an Islamic perspective, since it cannot capture the “authorization-accountability” relationship in the superstructure of vicegerency or *istikhlāf*.

This is a good place to give an outline of what the mission of *istikhlāf* involves. Following Taha Alalwani, this chapter views the mission of *istikhlāf* as one based on three pillars: First, *tawhīd*, the observation and belief in Allah as the only God. Second, *tazkiyah*, moral purification. Third, *ʿumrān*, material development.¹⁰ The following discussion introduces each pillar before explaining the relationship between them.

As a belief in the oneness of Allah, *tawhīd* is a testimony that it is only Allah who is worthy of worship. It is a testimony that one understands and appreciates the attributes and actions of Allah. Allah is the Creator of all things, including human beings and earth; He is the Most Knowledgeable, Wise, Merciful, Loving, and Forgiving who loves, protects, and guides His servants. *Tawhīd* is a belief that no one and nothing should compete with Allah in the heart, mind, or intentionality of Muslims who should direct all love, hope, and fear towards Allah.

In this regard, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, a Companion of the Prophet (ṢAAS) said: “One day I was with the Prophet, he said to me: ‘O young man, I am going to teach you some words: Be mindful of Allah, and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him facing you. If you ask, then ask of Allah. If you seek aid, then seek aid in Allah. And know that if the entire nation were to gather in order to benefit you with something, they could not benefit you with anything except with that which Allah has willed for you. And if the entire nation were

* (ṢAAS) – *Ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*: May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammed is mentioned.

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

to gather in order to harm you with something, they could not harm you with anything except with that which Allah has willed against you. The pen has been lifted and the pages have dried.”¹¹

A rather sudden switch of direction to western IR theory can contribute to illuminating the meaning of *tawhīd*, recalling Wendt’s “significant other,” who set the ground for cultural transformation in the internationality society through different capacities and means including the use of force and coercion.¹² *Tawhīd* here means that despite the pressure that the relationship with the “significant other” could place on the intentionality of the Islamic agent, submission of intentionality and action should remain directed towards Allah not the “significant other.” To illuminate further in contemporary terms, one could replace the words in the saying of the Prophet as follows “...and know that if the entire members of the international society were to gather in order to benefit you with something, they could not benefit you with anything except with that which Allah has willed for you. And if the entire members of the international society were to gather in order to harm you with something, they could not harm you with anything except with what Allah has willed against you. The pen has been lifted and the pages have dried.”

This should not be understood as a lack of appreciation of causality and the resources and constraints of man-made social arrangements. Rather, it should be viewed in opposition to those who “see” reality as man-made world. Moreover, given this description of *tawhīd*, it is better seen as a relationship between Islamic agents and Allah that reminds them of their position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, a reminder that they should not “become lost” in the “lattice-work” of relations in which they are embedded, and thus ensure their unity of agency and needs. In other words, *tawhīd* to the Islamic agent is the relationship that all other relationships follow.

The second pillar of the mission of *istikhlāf* is *tazkiyah*, the loose English translation of which is “purification.” Indeed, purification captures to great extent the meaning of *tazkiyah*. However in Islamic literature, purification is usually associated with discipline, referring to the disciplining of one’s self on conducting one’s behavior according

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

to high moral standards as guided by Islamic sources. More specifically, disciplining one's self involves working with one's natural desires and needs, rather than suppressing them, and expressing them in the "right" way.

In this sense *tazkiyah*, or purification, is an agential effort. That is why in Islamic literature, it usually comes in the form of "self-purification." In a sense this transcendence positions on the goodness or badness of human nature, of the first debate between Realism and traditional liberalism in IR theory and classical western political thought, since in *tazkiyah*, the self acknowledges the good and the bad, and is capable of an effort of purification that involves limiting the "bad" and improving the "good." The following Qur'anic verses clarify this meaning: "*By the self and Him who perfected it, and inspired it with what is wrong for it and what is right for it. Truly he succeeds who purifies it (zakkāhā). And he fails that corrupts it.*"¹³

The use of the word "inspired" which is a translation of the word "*alhamahā*" cannot fully convey the meaning here, which can better be captured by the phrase "gave hint to." This is important because it can better demonstrate that these verses insist that there is nothing inevitable about the goodness or badness of human nature. Rather, it is a human responsibility to follow the good and limit the bad in an effort to *tazkiyah* or purification.

Moreover, despite the focus on the individual level of *tazkiyah* in Islamic literature, collective purification, in the sense of maintaining a moral order, is strongly present in Islamic thought. In other words, in Islam the public sphere is not immune from observing *tazkiyah*. This is simply a necessary extension to *tazkiyah* at the individual level, since this moral inner struggle involves understanding, appreciation, and application of Islamic higher moral values like justice, mercy, forgiveness, etc. all of which can only be expressed through social action, action that is, to use Weber's simple and elegant definition "oriented towards, and takes account of the behavior of others."¹⁴ Islam is a religion of collective morals; huge parts of the main Islamic sources (Qur'an and Sunnah) provide Muslims with moral guidelines on how to lead pure and moral lives on both individual and collective levels.

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

Furthermore, those guidelines are not viewed merely as guidelines that should govern human behavior in disconnected events and situations. Rather, they are viewed as a moral system that guides human interaction in different social arrangements from marriage to economy. In this sense, the Islamic guidelines for collective *tazkiyah* can serve as underlying the normative structure of social and institutional arrangements.

The third pillar of the mission of *istikhlāf* is *‘umrān*, that is, material development. *‘Umrān* captures human interaction with its material context. In Arabic and within Islamic literature the meaning implies putting effort into transformation and betterment of material conditions. It is usually utilized to counter more purely spiritual strands of Islam like Sufism, seen by mainstream Muslims as discouraging work and putting effort into improving one’s life conditions. However, one should be mindful of the morally elevated description of *‘umrān*, as it does not offer a neutral or abstract image of interaction with material context, but insists on the development/improvement or usefulness of the “products” of this interaction. For example, building a factory to manufacture food products is *‘umrān*, building a factory to produce “alcohol” is not.

This takes us to an important set of relations; the hierarchal relations among *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān* that give coherence and predictability to observing, performing, and theorizing the mission of *istikhlāf*. These hierarchal relationships capture an image where every layer of interaction with one pillar is linked, gives meaning, and conditions the possibilities of interaction with the next layer. Accordingly, satisfying biological needs through interaction with nature must be governed and conditioned by meanings and guidelines of *tazkiyah*, while following those guidelines of *tazkiyah* is in turn conditioned by *tawhīd* or a belief in the oneness of Allah. This relational configuration must always be present when explaining an *istikhlāf* based agential action in order to avoid “meaningless” material pursuits as in rational/material based explanations, or purely man-made descriptions and “reasons” as in reflectivist/ideationalist based explanations when theorizing Islamic agency in international relations.

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

Given this discussion, a theory of Islamic agency does not only need relational/inter-subjective/material layers in order to capture the three pillars of the mission of *istikhlāf*, and hence the embedded nature of human agency, as constituted by its position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, but also a conceptualization of the hierarchal relationships between *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān*. As demonstrated above, however, embedment in the earth as a field of *istikhlāf* is only one relationship in the superstructure of *istikhlāf* that partly constitutes the role of *khalīfah*, the other relationship of endowment between Allah and human agency constitutes, or endows the *khalīfah* with the needed agential capacities to undertake the mission of *istikhlāf*. Indeed, from the above it is clear that the mission is a challenging one, that requires a high level of capacities, which allow human agency to make use of, and encounter structural resources and constraints, without losing sight of their role as vicegerents of Allah on earth and the associated authorization and accountability that define their agential pursuits.

The next section looks at those capacities that will serve as the properties and nature of agency prior to its operationalization in the social world.

Endowment: “Making of a *Khalīfah*”

*Agency relates to accountable reason. The idea of agency comes from the principle of accountable reason, that one acts with responsibility that one has to assume the possibility of intention, one has to assume even the freedom of subjectivity in order to be responsible. That is where agency is located.*¹⁵

The convenience of Spivak’s understanding of agency in expressing Islamic understanding of agency is striking, to say the least, as both stress a number of qualities that should underline any theory of agency in the social world including subjectivity, intentionality, and accountability. Yet, it is equally striking that these elements of agency rarely, if ever, make it to mainstream understanding of agency in western IR theory. Even, the more critical side in western social and IR theory

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

seems to miss the point of bringing in human qualities to an understanding of agency. As an example, Nicholas Onuf states that “we are physical beings capable of living in, and acting on, the world only as social beings, agency is a social condition.”¹⁶ From an *istikhlāf* point of view, Onuf is right about the fact that we can only act on the world as social beings, as captured by the embedded nature of the *khalīfah*, his conclusion that agency is a social condition, is beside the point, however, or only partly true. An Islamic theory of agency cannot afford to make this direct intrusion into the social world. The reason for this is that without social conditions of agency, we are not *just* physical beings, nor are our physical make up and power our only capacities to live in and act on the social world. We are vicegerents of Allah, *khulafā'* with already constituted human qualities beyond the physical make up and power that cannot be overlooked just like constructivists who focus solely on the social conditions of agency.

This section focuses on those pre-constituted qualities or capacities that make us capable of “living in and acting on the social world” prior to embedment. Clearly, Spivak’s three elements of agency mentioned above will be focused on, but claiming them to an Islamic theory of agency, that is claiming them to endowment and subsequently directing intentionality and accountability to Allah by insisting on the free subjectivity of the *khalīfah*. As mentioned, very little literature in IR theory makes use of those human qualities. Of course the reason being that most of this literature starts “working on” agency at the corporate level which allows very little space for such discussion.

Again, critical realists seem to offer a lifeline for bringing in human qualities to IR theory understanding of agency, and subsequently a space for an Islamic view of agency as essentially human to be presented. Prior to his personification move in *Social Theory of International Politics* Wendt offers what could be a fruitful discussion in humanizing, and subsequently Islamizing agency in international relations. His discussion of agential qualities “beyond the rationalist model of man,”¹⁷ and most importantly, the introduction of an alternative more humane equation of action, that is the equation of intentional action, is of course a welcomed effort by all those who are struggling to find a space

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

for theorizing faith-based agents in international relations. Sadly, though, it is not too long before all variables in the equation of intentional action are “submitted” to structural forces of social construction, again, losing human qualities, most important of which is freedom of subjectivity to structural forces.

Colin Wight explicitly builds his own theory of agency on Spivak’s three elements of agency, only wedded in Buzan’s notion of “power to act,”¹⁸ and Bhaskar’s notion of embodiment.¹⁹ Wight then carries on to propose a multi-layered conception of agency that includes subjectivity of the agent, context of embedment, and social roles, labeling them, correspondingly: Agency 1, Agency 2, and Agency 3. This is indeed an attractive line of inquiry to follow in conceptualizing Islamic agency. For example one could think of assigning the label “Agency 0” to the *khalīfah* to capture and add the endowed nature of agency to the other layers. As attractive as it is, the choice here is to refrain from going down this path for two reasons, first, to preserve the role of the *khalīfah* as “the champion” of the Islamic view of agency, and second, to preserve a wider space for articulating the relationship and balance between the endowed and embedded dimensions of agency according to the superstructure of *istikhlāf*.

That said, Wight does offer a very helpful discussion in solidifying freedom of subjectivity as an essential element to agency. He takes postmodernists and their notions of “death of subject” as a target and makes the argument that despite the social construction forces of culture and discourse, there is still a “self” that is never automatically or deterministically instituted; that there is a “self” which is in a relationship to the world by which it is constructed...capable of reflecting upon, and constantly renegotiating, the forces of construction.²⁰

It should be remembered here that the use of arguments and counter arguments from western social theory is not meant to prove something that cannot be proved in an Islamic context, but rather to better express Islamic views and communicate them to western audiences, a theme that runs through this thesis. Given this reminder, freedom of subjectivity as an essential element of human agency is well grounded in the Islamic belief system. One can even argue that such a principle

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

partly underlies the Islamic faith, which is built on the idea of voluntary and free choice of submitting to Allah. Furthermore, viewing freedom of subjectivity as a platform that underlies other agential capacities that human agents direct and utilize to submit to Allah and satisfy the requirements of *istikhlāf*, makes it “untouchable” property of human agency. The following saying of the Prophet Muhammad demonstrates that freedom of subjectivity is a “red line” that human agents cannot be stripped of: “When one of you see an evil-doing, he should change it with his hands, if he cannot, then with his tongue (speech), if he cannot then with his heart, and this is the weakest form of faith.”²¹

Taken in this context, this saying provides levels of agential capacities and efforts where freedom of subjectivity (heart in the saying) is the most basic that all others depend on. In a way, it is the last agential refuge when structural forces become so constraining on action and even speech. This is the “self” that Wight insists that is “constantly renegotiating the forces of construction.” For this reason, while the Prophet encouraged Muslims to take more of an active role in facing evil-doing with actions and speech, he acknowledges the constraints that might block such activity, yet he did not accept constraints on freedom of subjectivity as an excuse.

The second element of Spivak’s conception of agency, which this section uses to express the Islamic view of agency, is intentionality. There is, however, a natural tendency to conflate freedom of subjectivity with intentionality, one that is mirrored in the literature of international relations that choose to work with those elements of agency. For example, in developing his theory of agency, Wight deals, in a rather lengthy fashion, with freedom of subjectivity but then automatically assigns intentionality to his agents, without further exploration of the term “intentionality” *per se*. Wendt however, focuses on intentionality and ignores freedom of subjectivity.²² The view in this section, however, is that intentionality is a function of freedom of subjectivity; freedom of subjectivity is more basic than intentionality, freedom of subjectivity is a state of being, while intentionality is a capacity for cognitive creativity to direct one’s needs and actions according to one’s belief system. In this context, Wendt’s introduction

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

of the equation of intentional action as (Belief + Desire) is significant to improve western understanding of agency in international relations. Yet, Wendt lets this equation fall into a vacuum and subsequently offers it, specifically the belief side of the equation, an empty cognitive platform to be filled by culture, which in turn directs the desires and action of agents.²³ Instead of better expressing the Islamic view of agency as defined by the role of *khalifah*, the intentional equation of action must fall onto the platform of freedom of subjectivity, so when put forth under culture, beliefs (identity), and desires (interests) are protected against the theoretical activity of automatic construction by culture. Underlined by freedom of subjectivity, intentionality is better equipped to feature higher levels of cognitive creativity in directing desires and actions. This articulation of the relationship between freedom of subjectivity and intentionality is important in expressing the Islamic view of agency as both endowed and embedded. The point is that while both freedom of subjectivity and intentionality are endowed to human beings as essential elements of their agency, freedom of subjectivity is assured and protected by Allah. Without it the relationship of authorization and accountability between Allah and human agents becomes redundant, while intentionality is what human agents operate with under embedment. That is their tool to direct their action, whether according to following the guidelines of *istikhlāf*, or alternatively according to man-made social arrangements.

This leads to the third element of agency, which is accountability. Again, the issue here is one of direction. As human agents, we all have a sense of accountability and moral responsibility for our intentional actions. The issue is to whom should we direct this accountability and moral responsibility? Acknowledgment of endowment of agential capacities by Allah, takes the direction of accountability through intentionality, to Allah. Hence the relationship of authorization and accountability is in place. Another element of agency which Wight attaches to Spivak's three elements, namely, freedom of subjectivity, intentionality, and accountability is "the power to do." This is the least problematic agential capacity, or the most straightforward one, since both those who see the world through material lenses, or cultural ones,

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

seem to agree on it (of course taking into consideration difference in assigning significance to it, in explaining outcomes.)

So far, this section has been moving in parallel to Wight’s conceptualization of agency as both have utilized Spivaks’ elements of agency, namely, freedom of subjectivity, intentionality, and accountability. At this stage, that is prior to bringing in the embodied nature of agency to Wight’s, and the embedded nature of agency as defined by *istikhlāf*, Wight’s conception of agency is “intentional action or praxis.” However, the Islamic view of agency as introduced in this section is “endowed intentional action,” only adding endowment to intentional action, or alternatively, claiming intentional action to *istikhlāf*. The choice here is to bring together freedom of subjectivity and accountability under the label of endowment, and attach them to “intentional action.” This is not arbitrary playing with words. Rather, it is an effort to claim freedom of subjectivity and accountability to the relationship of endowment or the relationship of authorization and accountability of *istikhlāf*, whilst at the same time, to preserve “intentionality” and “action” as human qualities ready for operationalization or embedment under social structures.

The next section brings in the embedded dimension of the *khalīfah*, and in the process lays down the properties and nature of the context of embedment that allows the relationship of embedment between human agency and earth to be in harmony with the overall superstructure of *istikhlāf*.

Embedment: Earth as a “Field of *Istikhlāf*”

While mainstream IR theory usually stresses constraining effects of material and social structures, Islamic scholars insist on a balance between resources and constraints. The point is that without resources the mission of *istikhlāf* becomes impossible, and without constraints it is “meaningless.” In this light, both resources and constraints do not only ensure a dignified agential experience for the *khalīfah* and encourage creativity, but also constantly remind human agents of their relationship to Allah; when the resources/constraints balance is favorable

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

they are grateful, when constraints take hold of structural forces, they seek help and aid from Him.

In any case, Islamic ontology insists on harmony between the capacities of the *khalīfah* and field of *istikhlāf*. In his book, *The Makeup of the Muslim Mind*, Emad Aldeen Khalil says, "...As we move through the Qur'an, and encounter verses about the creation of universe and making the conditions convenient for life, we find those conditions originally linked to the awaited role of human beings, to perform it with purpose and coherence."²⁴ In another paragraph, and rather more explicitly, he says "according to Islamic view, Allah has specified the world and nature in a way that makes it perfectly convenient for the human being to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*."²⁵ Taking the constraints dimension into account, he adds that the balance is "just right" offering a "suitable challenge" according to human capacities.²⁶

The following discussion looks at what those constitutive properties are and the nature of the context of embedment as a material/social place that makes it a convenient environment for hosting the mission of *istikhlāf* performed by human agents. Such discussion however, should be directed and a focused one in order to serve the aim of preparing an Islamic ontological landscape before assessing any agent-structure solutions. Thus, for the context of embedment to be a welcoming field of *istikhlāf* it must feature two elements: first, predictability and coherence, and second, the presence of the needed resources and conditions of productions that suit the mission of *istikhlāf*.

Predictability naturally implies the presence of a set of laws, rules, etc. that one should follow in order to be able to perform some given mission. One can think of the relationship of predictability and laws by recalling Stephen Krasner's notion of the function of laws in "converging the expectations of actors."²⁷ Although in this case it is far from being *just* "around a given issue-area," but covers the whole agential experience and pursuits for the *khalīfah*, and is not just regulative as in regime theory, but constitutive of the nature and properties of earth as a field of *istikhlāf*. Constitutive laws that give human agents a sense of predictability and coherence to their mission are captured in

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

Islam by the concept of “*Sunan*.” Within the Arabic language and Islamic literature, “*Sunan*” are God-made universal laws that define the working of both nature and society, and can be both material and social/historical. The latter however has a clear normative function as it links norms and values, or the pursuits of values to consequences both material and social.²⁸ For example they link norms like justice, mercy, forgiveness, etc. to material and social conditions like equality, trust, cooperation, prosperity etc. A good example is offered by Ibn Taymiyyah, a thirteenth-century Islamic scholar, who derives the following universal law from the Qur’an and Islamic resources: “Allah will sustain a just state even if it is a state of unbelievers, and will not sustain an unjust state even if it is a state of Muslims.”²⁹ Here is a *Sunnah* or a universal law that constitutes a relationship between justice and sustainability. The issue then, for the Islamic observer is not one of seeking-knowledge about partial material/positivist laws like for example “balance of power,” but rather that he must ask the following question: “Balance of power between whom? What is the normative pursuit and moral standing for each?” The point is that *Sunan*, or God-made universal laws that relate moral action and normative pursuits to consequences are always in play. The issue is whether man-made frameworks capture this deep constitutive level of reality or limit the findings to man-made descriptions of material reality.

Sunan therefore, give predictability and coherence to the mission of *istikhlāf* both in its material and normative sense. In this context, gravity is also a *Sunnah*, although one that constitutes a physical property of earth as a field of *istikhlāf*. Yet, it is necessary for the predictability and coherence of the agential experience and pursuit of a *khilāfah*; a human agent cannot pursue the moral actions of building a mosque, distributing charity, or taking his/her parents for a walk, if the context of embedment did not feature the *Sunnah* of gravity. The same applies to normative *Sunan*, without which human actions would be aimless, since they give human action direction and purpose by expecting outcomes. Or, just as physical/natural laws give predictability and coherence to man’s interaction with the material world by setting the possibility of such interaction, so do normative *Sunan*

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

give predictability and coherence to human action and interaction by setting the possibilities of such interaction. In his book: *The Historical Sunan in the Qur'an*, Mohammad al-Sader stresses this quality of *Sunan* as God-made universal laws, where he explains that *Sunan* give causality more humane meaning by placing cause and effect in action-purpose relationships rather than in one of necessary conjecture.³⁰ Sader outlines a number of forms and appearances of *Sunan* or God-made universal laws in the Qur'an with a focus on the "conditional form" which he explains as one that is linked to human action in the form of linking action to consequences.

What is important for the purpose of this chapter however is to appreciate the function *Sunan* plays in giving human action a sense of predictability and coherence in performing the mission of *istikhlāf*. The quality of *Sunan* that allows it to play this role is its constitutive nature that sets the possibilities and directs expectations of one's actions and material and social conditions. It is understood that this point might be hard to comprehend within a "modern mind-set" where religion, or religious belief systems are thought of as a set of regulative rules for behavior. However, when we look at the issue from an Islamic perspective, this is only partly true; the regulative aspect of Islam, is regulative in the sense of directing human action towards a harmonious relationship with reality as constituted by *Sunan*. Of course human agents are free to direct their intentional actions differently, the point though is to attribute the "deep working laws of reality" to religion and place the burden of coming to terms with this reality on human agents and their designed or evolved institutional and social arrangements. This is an important change of angle from the view of modern western social sciences where the burden is on religion and faith based actors to come to terms with the "constitutive reality" of man-made social and institutional arrangements. A good example is the placing of the burden of conformity on states that adhere to the implementation of "Shari'ah" or Islamic law, as a regulative set of laws and rules, when interacting under the "constitutive" reality of the international society. Instead, bringing *Sunan* in as universal laws that constitute the reality of the social world, puts the

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

burden of conformity on the institutional man-made structure of the international society, or more specifically, on the normative-structure that underlines it. On the other hand, assessing the normative structure of the international society according to Islamic universal laws of *Sunan* ensures a higher level of predictability to Islamic agents since it places those normative structures in a relationship to material/social consequences as outlined by the Islamic *Sunan*.

If *Sunan* set the possibilities of action and interaction between the *khalifah* and the field of *istikhlāf* through assurances of predictability, then the second element that supports a view of a harmonious relationship between human agents and their context of embedment is the presence of the actual conditions of production that allow human agents to utilize their endowed capacities to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*. Indeed, the field of *istikhlāf* must feature those “raw” materials that allow human agency to produce man-made “products.” That is, in order for the pillar of *‘umrān*, or material development, to be realized, the *khalifah* must be embedded in a context that features material resources, while guidelines for *tazkiyah*, cannot be realized, or held in place, unless the context of embedment features an inter-subjective layer, or an ideational space, that can hold meanings, ideas, norms, and values of purification and *tazkiyah*. And finally a relational layer where the pillar of *tawhīd* can be realized and “tested.”

Earth then as a field of *istikhlāf*, is readily endowed with the nature and properties that allow human agents to make man-made products whether in material or social/institutional sense. Tanks are man-made products, but so is capitalism, sovereignty, and the modern international society. As agents that enjoy freedom of subjectivity, they are “free” to observe the pillars of *istikhlāf* and the hierarchal relationship between them in those products, or not. Yet, from an Islamic perspective this does not change the fact that human agents are vicegerents of Allah and the earth is a field of *istikhlāf*. In other words, a given structural or relational configuration between the conditions of production for agential action that does not follow the relational configuration between the pillars of the mission of *istikhlāf*, does not change the nature of the context of embedment as a field of *istikhlāf*; a given social

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

arrangement might feature strong material interaction with very little space for meanings and norms. This however, does not change the fact that such arrangement is constructed on the field of *istikhlāf*. The point is that it is not man-made “products” that exhaust the reality of the field of *istikhlāf*, but the very raw materials, or the material, inter-subjective, and relational space that underlies those products that make earth what it is: a field of *istikhlāf*. To explain further through an example from IR literature, that is Wendt’s ontological treatment of “shared culture” of the international system;³¹ the “three cultures” of anarchy (Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian) are man-made arrangements or social/institutional products. The very existence of a layer of inter-subjectivity that can hold these cultures, as real and independent, is what makes the earth a field of *istikhlāf*. It is this level of reality and its material and relational parallels, that this section tries to capture and reclaim to the Islamic ontology of *istikhlāf*, where man-made products like the social/institutional product of contemporary international relations are constructed on.

This calls for a conceptualization of structure or man-made social arrangements that focus on structural conditions of productions and their configuration in order to fit the endowed properties of the field of *istikhlāf* on the one hand, and the agential pursuit of *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān* on the other. That is, a conceptualization of man-made social arrangements that does not only feature relational, inter-subjective, and material contents but also a space to link those contents according to the hierarchal relationship of *istikhlāf*. Such configurational criterion is indeed demanding and rather unpopular in the discipline where debates usually favor one type of content over another: idealist vs material, etc. Fortunately though, thanks to the critical realist intrusion in reshaping the ontological landscape of the discipline such conceptualization has been introduced, again by Colin Wight, who represented the relationships of Roy Bhaskar’s four planes of social activity as a proposal for conceptualizing structures.³² Bhaskar’s four planes of social activity are:

- 1 material transactions with nature (resources, physical attributes, etc.);

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

- 2 inter-intra-subjective actions (rules, norms, beliefs, institutions, etc);
- 3 Social relations (class, identity, production, etc.);
- 4 Subjectivity of the agent (subjectivity, identity³³).

According to Bhaskar, social life occurs on a terrain constituted by four independent dimensions or planes of activity, yet, those planes of social activity all intersect and are subject to multiple determinations.³⁴ Wight rightly believes that it is unnecessary to privilege one plane of activity over another since the impact of differing planes of activity on social outcomes might vary across time and space. Accordingly, Wight proposes a relational view of structure as relations linking together the various planes of social activity. He elaborates further that, “...brute material facts, the distribution of capabilities, for example, are not a structure but one element in a social field of activity that is structured. As structured, it stands in relation to the ideas held by agents about such a distribution as well as the relationship between the agents engaging in the activity.”³⁵

Having the fourth plane of social activity that is “subjectivity of the agent” sidelined for now since, as mentioned above, the framework of the Islamic view of agency that is being developed in this chapter does not intend to “go all the way” with Wight’s multi-layered, numbered expression of agency (agency 1, 2, 3), one can clearly find an expression of every pillar of the mission of *istikhlāf* in a given “plane of social activity” as Bhaskar calls them, and even the necessary space to link them together in Wight’s proposal for structural conceptualization as relationships between those planes of social activity.

Tawhīd was introduced above as a relationship between the human agent and Allah. This relationship however can only be expressed and “tested” through embedment in relations with others who “compete” for the direction of intentionality and needs of the Islamic agent. Fear, love, hope, and other needs are always present and satisfied through relationships. *Tawhīd* involves submission of intentionality and directing those needs towards Allah. Thus *tawhīd* cannot be expressed,

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

captured, or theorized, unless a relational dimension of conceptualization of structure or man-made social arrangements exists.

Tazkiyah (purification), the other pillar of the mission of *istikhlāf* can be captured through the inter-subjective plane of social activity (rules, norms, beliefs, institutions, etc). *Tazkiyah* is about following given guidelines for self and collective purification, and is a consequence of *tawhīd*, if one believes in Allah as the most Knowledgeable and Wise, then it follows that it is His guidelines that are to be followed. Many of those guidelines specify how human agents satisfy their social and material needs and the meanings they give to such needs, moreover, those guidelines set the normative ground for human interaction and values that must be observed therein, not unlike rules, norms, and ideas that underline modern social arrangements, only that they are God ordained. The inter-subjective plane of social activity then is where Islamic rules and guidelines compete with man-made moral and cultural guidelines which makes it a necessary dimension in re-describing the Islamic agents' experience according to the ontology of *istikhlāf*. *Umrān*, or material development is also provided a space in Bhaskar's four planes of social activity (resources, physical attributes).

Wight's conceptualization of structure, as relations between the various planes of social activity, is equally important to link the various structural conditions of production in a given social arrangement according to the hierarchal relationships between the pillars of the mission of *istikhlāf*. The issue, however is that he does not offer a "preferred" or normative criterion for the relational configuration between the planes of social activity. The mission of *istikhlāf* on the other hand, insists on a hierarchy where *tawhīd*, leads to following guidelines of purification that in turn give meaning to interaction with resources and satisfy natural needs. This is not only a conceptual issue, but also normative; that is when an Islamic agent is faced or embedded within social arrangements where material needs condition the range of ideas, norms, and relationships, it will always be out of harmony with the direction of his intentionality and action. Likewise, when a Muslim theorist is engaged with a theoretical exercise about a given

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

social arrangement *tawhīd* always comes first, and with it the relational dimension of structure, not the material one. In other words, when a Muslim theorist works with a social arrangement to capture or re-describe the embedded side of Islamic agents within according to the Islamic ontology of *istikhlāf*, a good starting point is to “look at” the relational configuration between planes of social activity or conditions of production, and assess such configuration according to the hierarchical relationship between the pillars of the mission of *istikhlāf* and point out the tension between the two.

If we are not born with a sign on our forehead that reads “a *khalīfah* of Allah,” so nor is written on earth a sign that reads “a field of *istikhlāf*.” Just like the role of *khalīfah*, we get to learn about the nature of our context of embedment as a field of *istikhlāf* through socialization with man-made social/institutional arrangements that have been evolving or designed with different attitudes towards the relationship of authorization and accountability before Allah. It could well be that the relational layer of a given social/institutional social arrangement does not feature *tawhīd*: the inter-subjective layer does not feature God-ordained guidelines and moral assessments for purification, and subsequently, its material dimension does not feature *‘umrān*. A human agent, a *khalīfah*, could well be “placed” in such man-made social/institutional arrangements that occupy certain spaces in the field of *istikhlāf*. Another possibility is “placement” in a man-made social/institutional arrangement that acknowledges endowment and hence accountability before Allah. Yet, from an Islamic perspective, the ontological fact remains that human agency is always embedded, although it is also always endowed. Thus, from an Islamic ontological perspective agency becomes: endowed, embedded, and intentional action. The conceptualization of social arrangements according to Wight’s relations of planes of social activity is indeed helpful in attaching embedment next to endowment in the Islamic view of agency since it ensures a complementary relationship between the purpose of endowment and the “tools” needed to realize this purpose through the context of embedment. The next step is to propose a framework of agency that can capture the interplay between these dimensions of

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

agency That is, the endowed and embedded nature, in order to preserve the “*khalīfah*” as one coherent agent with spiritual and social dimensions. The task is to develop, or borrow an agent–structure solution that respects the endowed properties of human agency: freedom of subjectivity, intentionality and action on one hand, and the structure of the embedded context as relationships between planes of social activity that mirrors the pillars of the field of *istikhlāf*. In other words, the task is to develop or borrow an agent–structure solution that fits the relationship of embedment in the superstructure of *istikhlāf* and hence preserve the nature and properties of both the *khalīfah* and the field of *istikhlāf*.

From Embedment to Embodiment: The *Khalīfah* “in Action”

So far, this chapter has been endeavoring to bring together elements of agency according to Islamic ontological principles. What we now have is an Islamic view of agency as: endowed, embedded, and intentional action. This was achieved partly through a discussion of the context of embedment, that is earth, as a social/material place of *istikhlāf* featuring universal laws that ensure predictability, and relational/inter-subjective/material conditions of productions that in turn ensure a harmonious relationship between human agency and their context of embedment. The point was to insist on the fact that although embedment usually points towards structural context, it is also a dimension of agency, hence the element of “embedment” in the Islamic view of agency. The inclusion of embedment as an element of agency can only mean that such account cannot be expressed unless important decisions regarding the relationship between the endowed element of agency and the embedded element of agency, have already been made. This means that an agent–structure solution has to be in place in order to express the elements of this account of agency in a coherent and sensible way. That is, agency, from this perspective, “comes ready” with an agent–structure solution.

The spectrum of possibilities is rather wide in western social and IR theory. It encompasses solutions that range from excessive

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

individualism to extreme structuralism and some solutions in between that attempt to find a middle ground. Here, patience with constructing an Islamic ontology based on *istikhlāf* where the nature and properties of both agency and structure have been outlined, should pay off. Through the superstructure of *istikhlāf* and the subsequent specifications of both agency and context of embedment, we now have ontological criteria for “placing” an Islamic view of agent-structure relationship on this spectrum.

To put this criterion in practice, if we chose to express the Islamic view of agency through individualist solutions that ignore the independent reality of structures and their causal effects on outcomes, and instead claim reality and causality to individuals and their actions, then we can preserve endowment, intentionality, and action in the Islamic view of agency, but lose embedment. That is, omitting the phrase “on earth” from the Qur’anic verse and as a consequence the relationship of embedment in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, and hence, losing the “social” dimension of *istikhlāf*.

However, if we chose to move towards the structural side where there are structural causal and constitutive powers but no intentional action, then we preserve embedment but lose intentionality and meaningful purposeful action. Equally importantly, we lose agential awareness of endowment. More obviously, we lose agential awareness of the fact that those arrangements are constructed on an already constituted field of *istikhlāf* through its position in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. In other words, agency loses its “sense of place” and with it the role of *khalīfah*.

If we move back to the middle in order to find more balanced solutions then we are faced with a number of solutions that can usually be found under the label of “structuralism” that attempt to do justice to both agents and structures. However, in most cases we end up with conflation, and confusion of properties and nature of agency and structures, and subsequently a confusion of agential actions and structural effects.³⁶

To better express the Islamic view of agency as endowed, embedded and intentional action, what is needed is an agent-structure

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

solution that can preserve agential awareness of the role of *khalifah*, and the relationship of accountability and authorization from A, and at the same time insist on the actualization and socialization under man-made social arrangements. Elaborating on Wight's example of Mr. Blair's relational context as an agent, can clarify the point: demonstrating his multi-layered account of agency, Wight draws a brief sketch of Tony Blair's placement in the social field as follows: "... Tony Blair, for example, may relate to: (1) his local shopkeeper as a consumer; (2) the cabinet as political leader; (3) the leader of the opposition as an ideological and political opponent; (4) ethnic minorities in Britain as political leader from within an overlapping cultural system; and (5) his wife as an economic provider (perhaps) and husband... For on the multi-layered account developed here, Mr. Blair *never*³⁷ appears as a coherent, singular, unified agent with easily identifiable goals, but instead is driven through multiple social complexes."³⁸

Although the account of the Islamic view on agency developed in this chapter shares a great deal, and even builds on Wight's notions of agency, the aim at this conjecture is to avoid this conclusion. Instead, the Islamic flavor or application of this notion of agency aims at an account of agency that "*always* appears as a coherent, singular, unified agent with easily identifiable goals *despite of* placement in multiple social complexes." This is what attachment of endowment to embedment should achieve, or in other words, the attachment of the role of *khalifah* to other socially and relationally positioned roles such as: consumer, political leader, and husband. Subsequently the framework which is needed is one that attaches, or places, relationally positioned roles in the context of embedment to, or on, the role of *khalifah*, in order to bring in the consumer, the political leader, and the husband, as social roles, under the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. The important point to make is that, just like in the example, those roles do not refer to different agents but as different social roles "filled" by the same human agent who is aware of his/her role as *khalifah* while "moving" from one role to another relationally positioned "worldly" social role.

Fortunately, there is such a framework, or agent-structure solution that makes the relationship of embedment just fit in the superstructure

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

of *istikhlāf*. That is Bhaskar’s Transformational Model of Social Action (TMSA). This model, I believe, satisfies the requirements of representing the elements of agency as embedded and intentional action, and offers a “friendly” landscape where these elements can be attached to endowment in order to fit the Islamic view of agency as endowed, embedded, intentional action. In his words, Bhaskar summarizes his model as follows, “people do not create society, for it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition of their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as ensemble of structures, practices, and conventions, which individuals produce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism).”³⁹ The advantage of Bhaskar’s model in the purpose of this chapter should be clear; first, is the distinction between agents, people, or individuals, on the one hand, and society, social arrangements or social forms on the other, and the subsequent preservation of the properties and nature of each. This distinction, in turn, allows the application of the Islamic view of agency which features distinct properties and nature of human agency from those of the context of embedment, and so it ensures a clear path of such an application. Second, Bhaskar’s model does justice to both society and person, or agent and structures by allowing a space for both to be present and in play in any social outcome; his realization that action, and intentional action is a necessary condition for society, while society is only present in human action, and that human action always expresses and utilizes some or other social forms, does not have to mean that neither can be identified with, reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from the other,⁴⁰ thus avoiding the confusion of other “structurationalist” solutions and ensures that all elements of social context are in place and are “ready” to be attached to endowment. Thirdly, his departure from the dominant view that “see” structural effects only in a constraining way, is useful to better express the Islamic view that stresses the harmonious relationship between the human agent as *khalīfah*, and earth as a field of *istikhlāf* which hosts social arrangements that offer both resources and constraints. Bhaskar makes this point

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

clear by stating that “real subjectivity requires conditions, resources, and media, for the creative subject to act.”⁴¹ This is not very different from the principle that a *khalīfah* requires the conditions of production for performing the mission of *istikhlāf*.

Note here, his use of terms like “intentional,” and “creative” to describe agential action, while at the same time acknowledging the presence of a dimension of social embedment in every human action. What allows Bhaskar to capture the property of agential intentionality is his ability to spot what he calls an “ontological hiatus” between society and people or structure and agents, that could be thought of as providing a “break” or a moment of reflexivity, that according to him should be featured in any mode of connection (viz. transformation) which other models typically ignore.⁴² Bhaskar is right that other models do not offer generous time and space for agential action to demonstrate much intentionality and creativity. Structural solutions, in particular, are the least generous in this regard; terms like reproduction, and even “transformation” are usually rushed over in favor of terms like “constitution” and “causality” that usually point toward “structures” not “agents” let alone intentional creative agents. This ontological hiatus on the other hand suggests that “much is going on” not only in “transformations” but also, even, *during* “reproduction.” It is this ontological hiatus that an Islamic view of agency requires in order to place agential capacities like freedom of subjectivity, intentionality and accountability.

As a matter of fact, although Bhaskar’s transformational model of social activity does provide a generous space and time for intentional agential action, it does need a qualification in order to carry the burden of holding a high level of agential awareness which requires a constant reflection on one’s role as a vicegerent or a *khalīfah* of Allah on earth, which involves in turn, the totalization of the context of embedment as one element in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. To avoid any conflation of the properties and nature of agents and structures, Bhaskar, unnecessarily, downplays the level of reflexivity and awareness of agents, by proposing that “...people, in their conscious activity, for the most part, unconsciously reproduce (and occasionally transform) the

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

structures governing their substantive activities of production. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family or work to sustain the capitalist economy.”⁴³ Here is a clear limitation on agential awareness that is needed to express the Islamic view of agency. The point is that the limitation does not seem to be a necessary one, since such distinction could have been demonstrated through a discussion of the “range of praxis” or action, which was coined by Bhaskar himself. Such discussion could have also, naturally, touched upon issues and problems of collective actions and possibilities of structural transformation while leaving individual “intentionality” and a level of awareness untouched. This is a safer way to draw this distinction at least from an Islamic perspective. To recall, the Prophet Muhammad acknowledges constraints on action and speech but not the heart, where freedom of subjectivity and intentionality make their presence. It could be understood that one “cannot do much” to transform the capitalist economy, but there is no reason why one should expect a level of agential awareness that cannot capture its “evil” aspects, at least in the “heart.” Yet, remember that the Prophet Muhammad called this high level of awareness the weakest form of faith, a stronger form of faith is for one to act on his/her range of praxis, yet with a “structural” awareness. So, yes, many Muslims choose to open bank accounts at Islamic banks not traditional banks to advance Islamic banking, and marry to help reproduce the nuclear family as a “pure” and responsible way of association between men and women, although perfectly knowing that the range of their praxis or action is limited, they nevertheless act with structural awareness or with the intentionality of structural transformation/reproduction.

Bhaskar’s model has clear generational quality that he chose to “hide” from human agents’ awareness within the model. This is not the case in the Islamic view of human actions; the following example from the Qur’an teaches Islamic agents about the transformative/reproduction (generational) quality of human praxis: *“He will say: ‘Enter ye in the company of the peoples who passed away before you – humankind and jinns, – into the Fire.’ Every time a new people enters, it curses its sister-people (that went before), until they follow each other, all into the Fire.*

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

Saith the last about the first: 'Our Lord! It is these that misled us: so give them a double penalty in the Fire.' He will say: 'Doubled for all' : but this ye do not understand."⁴⁴ With this "sad" conversation in mind, especially the phrase "it is these that misled us," it is hard to sustain the idea that human agents act with no awareness of the structural implications of their activities. Of course, in the last instance, the level of awareness displayed by human agents varies, but so does the level of rationality as articulated by Weber. Yet, that does not stop him from using an ideal-type model of rationality. Likewise, there is no reason why the Islamic view of agency should not be based on an ideal-type model of agential awareness and intentional action.

With this qualification in mind, Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity is ready for hosting an Islamic view of agency as endowed, embedded, intentional action. The starting point for this exercise could be captured through Bhaskar's notion of "position-practice system" as a mediating system between human agents and social structures. In his words these are: "... "slots" in the social structure into which active subjects must slip in order to reproduce it... such a point linking action and structure must both endure and be immediately occupied by individuals. It's clear that the mediating system we need is that of the positions (places, functions, rules, tasks, duties, rights, etc.) occupied (filled, assumed, enacted, etc.) by individuals, and of the practices (activities, etc.) in which, in virtue of their occupancy of these positions (and vice versa), they engage... now such positions and practices, if they are to be individualized at all, can only be done so relationally."⁴⁵

The key term in this proposal of agent-structure connection is "occupied" and its derivatives: "filled," "assumed," and "enacted." This explains why Wight uses the term "embodied" to refer to the social dimension of his own notion of agency, which he makes clear depends on Bhaskar's social ontology. However, the social dimension of agency according to the Islamic view as has been developed so far in this chapter, used the term "embedded." This was for the sake of stressing the point of totalization of earth as a field of *istikhlāf* and to highlight the relationship between this field of *istikhlāf* and human agency as one

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

of two elements in the superstructure of *istikhlāf*. Once this image of the superstructure of *istikhlāf* is in place, “zooming in” to capture the dynamics of this relationship is better served by the use of the term “embodied.” Thus, at this stage a change of Islamic view of agency from endowed, *embedded*, intentional action to endowed, *embodied*, intentional action is necessary as it ensures a smooth application of the role of *khalīfah* to the worldly social roles that Bhaskar offers in his model so clearly and generously as “structural slots.”

To recall, Bhaskar’s planes of social activity included four planes (material, inter-subjective, relational, and subjectivity). His position-practice system, point of contacts, or structural slots, which according to him “must be done relationally” falls into the third plane of social relations. That is, the starting point for an agent connection with social structure is through occupancy or embodiment with social roles that are relationally structured. It is the starting point because it is through relationally positioned social roles that human agents come to have access to other planes, or more accurately, resources/constraints or conditions of productions of the other planes of social activity namely the inter-subjective and material.

Recall also that in the discussion on the four planes of social activity above, a plea was made to set aside subjectivity as a “plane of social activity.” This plea was based on two concerns, one ethical and one analytical. The ethical concern is that human agency deserves more than a label of “plane of social activity.” A more dignified expression for an Islamic view would be (human agency + three planes of social activity). The analytical concern has to do with anticipating the current situation of the need for preserving human agency as pre-constituted and endowed with the role of *khalīfah* that “occupies,” “fills” or “embodies” relationally structured social roles, or point of contacts, that give them access to the inter-subjective and material conditions of productions, which they in turn utilize using their endowed capacities: intentionality and action to perform the mission of *istikhlāf*.

If roles can only be individuated relationally, and if relations can only be between roles, then indeed Bhaskar’s third plane of social

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

relations can best be captured as a plane of relations between social roles. However, the roles this section endeavors to link are not two worldly social roles filled by two different subjectivities or human agents. Rather, they are between two roles of the same human agent: one endowed and the other embodied, the role of *khalīfah*, and a worldly social role be it a “consumer,” “political leader,” or a “husband.” As a human agent, who is aware of his endowed role as *khalīfah*, an individual moves through the plane of social relations occupying and embodying different social roles, each giving him/her access to specific rules, meanings, and norms for interaction, and access to material conditions of production for material interaction and development. From an Islamic view, what gives human agency its coherence is the capacity to take on the role of *khalīfah* to underlie each and every embodied role, the Islamic view of agency then insists that an individual explicated in all these relations is a *khalīfah* and consumer when he interacts with his local shopkeeper, a *khalīfah* and a political leader when interacting with the cabinet, and a *khalīfah* and husband when interacting with his wife. One could argue that this would make “life easier” for Mr. Blair; having one overarching direction of accountability that all other relations are viewed through (*tawhīd*), one set of moral guidelines (*tazkiyah*) to underline the specificities of rules and material production (*‘umrān*) of all social arrangements that the human agent interacts with through occupying social roles or “structural slots.”

Conclusion

The view of Islamic agency developed in this chapter “as endowed, embodied, intentional action” underlined by the role of *khalīfah* is a general one that can be applied to all social arrangements. At the same time, it is clearly an account of agency that is centered on human and individual agents, not collective or “corporate” agents. The latter in particular is the mainstream view of agency in international relations enacted by states. The next chapter looks at this ontological distance between Islamic views on agency and the macro structures of contemporary international relations; such exploration will however, reveal

“Reclaiming Reality”: Human Agency as Vicegerency

that those macro-structures of international relations are based on micro-level meanings on human nature and needs reproduced and amplified by the state at the international level. The next chapter is an attempt to break up this cycle and in the process “locate” a *khalīfah*.

2

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In: The Ontological Barriers to Islamic Agency in International Relations

The Islamic view of agency developed in chapter two is a general one that can be applied to any social arrangement. It is essentially, however, an individual role, endowed to human agents. The problem is that the higher we climb up towards macro-structures, the more challenging it becomes to maintain the theoretical presence of individuals and with it the human flavor of agency. International Relations is a good example, as a macro-social arrangement it does not offer 'points of contact' or social roles for individuals. This chapter argues that this is an unnecessary ontological barrier that denudes macro social arrangements from human agency and makes international relations one of the most heavily guarded social arrangements against the intrusion of the *khalīfah*.

To do this, this chapter will attempt to break up the social roles of contemporary international relations according to Bhaskar's notion of structural slots or points of contact featuring relations, inter-subjective, and material planes of social activity where micro-meanings and activities of human agents as policymakers can be linked to macro-structures. This will demonstrate that social roles of international relations are essentially intermediate social forms that link micro meanings and activities to macro-conditions of productions.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the first section will examine the social role of *member of international society* because of its historical and sociological flavor rather than, for example,

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

the international system that is usually conceptualized as a mechanical system holding only material conditions of productions. The discussion will set the stage for the second section where Rues-Smit's work in *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* will be represented to demonstrate what kind of micro-level assumptions about human agency feed into the macro-structural of international relations and how these, in most part, conflict with Islamic understanding of human agency as vicegerency of Allah on earth.

The third section will take issue with mainstream IR theory for treating the reproduction of these links as automatic, normal, and global, forcing theoretical effort on Islamic agency to leave behind all that makes an agent an Islamic one. The discussion will be based on a critique of Wendt's social theory of international politics, since his sociological treatment of the issue reveals more clearly the unwarranted ontological barriers that keep the notion of 'modern individual' circulating in, while keeping everyone else out, including the *khalīfah*.

This chapter will conclude by emphasizing the need for a re-examination of the role played by the dominant configuration of the levels-of-analysis in IR, as the source of these ontological distortions⁴⁷ in order for western IR theory to be more "honest" about micro-macro links that feed into the structures of the modern international society, and subsequently open the gate for other culturally distinct micro-understanding of human agency, purpose, and needs including Islamic understandings as underlined by the notion of *istikhlāf*.

'Member of the International Society' as a Social Role

Surprisingly, treating the social role of *member of international society* as a structural slot, or a point of contact to be filled by a subject becomes more natural when applied to Islamic understandings of agency compared to western/modern ones. This is due to the fact that so much has been smuggled into the structures of the modern international society concerning the moral purpose of the state, nature of society, and human nature as experienced by western societies, which in turn,

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

makes the reproduction of this social role by western subjectivities almost automatic. This is why it is not abnormal that many IR theorists, especially those working on foreign policy analysis, treat social roles as unit-level phenomena,⁴⁸ where the social role of a member of international society is not seen as a structurally positioned social role to be filled by agents but as a continuity of agential collective action. Yet it is both ontologically and ethically unacceptable to treat this role as a continuity of collective action of Islamic agents since much of this smuggling of micro-level meanings to the structures of modern international society took place “behind their backs” or was “forced down their throats.”

Those more structurally and sociologically aware theorists who treat social roles as structural phenomena still commit an ontological mistake by insisting that the subjectivity that fills the social role of a *member of international society* must be a corporate agent, namely a state. The issue is that once a corporate agent is allowed to assume a social role in a theoretical framework, then assigning of intentionality and moral responsibilities usually follows. Again, it is the stability of patterns of reproduction of this social role by western agents in international relations that seems to convince IR theorists of the possibility of treating the state as a “stable platform,” divorced from society, denuded of human agency, and enjoying unmediated intentionality of its own. The point, however, is that there is no notion of corporate agency in Islamic ontology. Agency in Islam is always human. From an Islamic view then, agency cannot be ascribed to a state, the state is not a person and certainly not a *khalifah*.

Clearly, these two alternatives of embodiment of Islamic agency within the structures of international relations raise serious ontological and ethical issues, leaving us with Bhaskar’s notion of treating a social role as a point of contact where intentional agents are granted access to the relational/inter-subjective/material conditions of production of the international society. The question remains however, which Islamic entity should fill the “structural slot” of a “member of international society”? The point is the inter-subjective and relational layers of the structure of the modern international society insist that such

The *Khalifah* is Not Allowed In

entity is the corporate intentional actor of the “state” as originated in western practice and theory of international relations. On our side, agents/actors are descriptions of human agents. Another possibility, a rather popular one, is utilizing the Ummah as such an actor, again with ascription of intentionality and moral responsibility.

Let us start with the latter possibility of having the Ummah as the principle agent/actor when theorizing Islamic action in international relations. First, it is important to stress that the concept of one unified Islamic Ummah remains a valid, even encouraged, ethical goal despite unfavorable structural configuration in international relations. Moreover, such ethical aspiration should constitute a major part of research programs on Islamic international relations. Yet, the fact remains that building a framework that captures Islamic action in international relations needs more specific units of analysis that can give support to such ethical aspiration. The issue is that if we follow the practice of assigning intentionality and moral responsibility to the Ummah, we will be doing this only “fictionally.” The Ummah is not a real actor capable of reflexivity, intentionality, and has a sense of moral responsibility independent of its members or representatives. In a way, by following this path, we will be hiding the real actors who hold the moral responsibility for representing the Ummah. Moreover, as long as the structures of modern international society do not feature a social role for the Ummah that transcends the geographic borders and national sovereignty, then we will continue to “speak of” the Islamic Ummah at international relations in a rather loose and casual way, for the simple reason that it does not “fit” into the relational and inter-subjective layers those structures have to offer. That said, my inspiration for the Ummah is not directed towards its realization as an agent or a unit of analysis, but towards its realization as an alternative international society or at least a regional society among Islamic states. Such aspiration however, should take place on, and among, Islamic states as institutional platforms and through the intentional actions of morally responsible Muslim individual policy-makers.

The other possibility, which is human agency, clearly does not fit the “macro-space” that is associated with the social role of a

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

“member of the international society.” This leaves us with the “state,” we can call it an “Islamic state,” but the fact remains that, once the collective action of the Muslim society is represented by the state, a western institutional invention, then it is bound to reproduce a range of inter-subjective understandings that might be in conflict with Islamic normative and legal principles that links understandings of human agency, rights, and needs. Worse yet, since states in western IR theory are represented as intentional actors/agents, an assumption that we usually borrow uncritically, then this reproduction, theoretically, takes place over the heads of actual human policy makers. The result is there is no one to take responsibility for this activity.

The framework developed in chapter two should help in this case. First, however, we need to treat the state itself as an institutional structure, or a social arrangement, not an actor that reproduces the macro structures of the modern international society on “our behalf.” As a Muslim society, we need to “view” the state as a “point of contact” through which Muslim agents and policymakers, have access to the culture of the international society. We need to break up the social role of a “member of international society” and examine what kind of relational/inter-subjective/material contexts our societies and policy-makers are reproducing/transforming.

So instead of the mainstream map that our secular/strategic analysts force on our eyes where we see reified eternal structures and “fictionally” intentional/rational state actors, this chapter offers an alternative one. A map that captures collective action “occupying” an institutional platform of the state on the back, not over the heads, of intentional human agents through the processes of institutionalization and authorization,⁴⁹ in order to make contact with the inter-subjective, relational, and material planes of international relations through the social role of *member of international society*. The social role here has a duality of existence, on one hand it is a structural phenomena featuring the structural configuration of the modern international society, and on the other, by crossing the boundaries of the state, it provides the conditions of productions for a society’s collective action.

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

This encounter however, must be mediated and interpreted through the intentionality of human agency within the state “since there is an ontological wall here that collectivities do not cross (or cross only on the backs of individuals).”⁵⁰ Accordingly we should not think of the state as a closed structure or a barrier that blocks the encounter between micro meanings concerning human agency on one hand, and the structures of the modern international society on the other. Rather, we should think of the state as an open structure criss-crossed by the structural configuration of the role of a *member of the international society*, which “spreads the influences of macro processes and factors into micro-level activity and back again. In this sense, macro processes feed into activity...while the micro activity itself reproduces these wider social relations.”⁵¹

To appreciate this change of view, we need to move from the abstract to the substantive and briefly dive into those micro-level assumptions that continue to feed into the structures of the modern international society. The aim is to demonstrate that despite being articulated as society of corporate agents, the modern international society is nothing more than a structural configuration designed to serve the needs of the modern individual not the *khalīfah*.

From the Modern Individual to the Modern International Society

In his book *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations*, Christian Reus-Smit offers a conceptualization of the modern international society as a normative system, the most important element of which is the hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of the state,⁵² that since the late eighteenth century has been increasingly identified with the augmentation of individual’s purposes and potentialities, especially in the economic realm.⁵³ Subsequently, Reus-Smit traces the rise of the individualist social ontology, which defined legitimate statehood and rightful state action, and contrasts it to the holist social ontology that underlined the moral purpose of the state within the absolutist European system of maintaining a divinely ordained social life. According to his historical

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

survey, individualism was more than a political phenomena but rather a shift in political, scientific, and economic thoughts within the latter in particular. Economic theorists argued that individuals' social roles were not determined by convention or the will of God. But instead "humans were portrayed as restless, acquisitive, and competitive pursuing social positions commensurate with their ambitions and capacities."⁵⁴ For political theorists, "the old image of the polity as a divinely ordained social organism was abandoned and replaced by new ideas of contractual community of free individuals,"⁵⁵ who were, according to David Kolb's idea on the modern individual "stripped down to a unified core, a perceiving, choosing being potentially free to maximize whatever is desired." That said, Rues-Smit makes the important point that "Ideology, however, is never what it seems, and certain primary and substantive interests, principally economic maximization and technological progress, were smuggled into the new accounts of human nature."⁵⁶ The importance of this realization stems from the fact that it puts the distinctiveness and possible conflict of interest between the modern individual and the *khalifah* on the table with each maximizing different interests and subsequently requiring different structural configuration of planes of social activity.

Rues-Smit elaborates that "the absolutist dictum that the monarch should rule according to natural and divine law made even less sense than before, as sovereignty was no longer God's bequest. From now on, the state was bound to observe the general will and further the national interest. In the end, "God's will" and the "general will" proved equally amorphous and manipulable sources of government policy."⁵⁷

Given this discussion, he concludes that the most important implications for this shift was a new moral purpose of the state that entailed the new principle of procedural and legislative justice which prescribes that only those subject to the rules have the right to define them, and that the rules of society must apply equally to all citizens.⁵⁸ These principles came to provide the justificatory foundations for the principle of sovereignty, and were further carried to the international level in the form of multilateralism and contractual international law. The final

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

image that Rues-Smit provides for the constitutional structure of the modern international society is one based on a hegemonic belief in the moral purpose of the state as serving the needs of the individuals, specifically material and economic ones, organized by the principle of sovereignty among states, and reproduced through multilateralism and contractual international law. In other words, when a society occupies or embodies the role of the *member of the international society*, it is bound to be positioned relationally to other societies through equal sovereignty, act in accordance to the hegemonic belief of the moral purpose of the state as maximizing economic and material pursuits, in a legal and normative context of multilateralism and contractual international law.

Rues-Smit's work demonstrates that there is a strong link between western understanding of human nature, needs, and purpose, on one hand, and the structures of the modern international society which we live in today as the highest man-made or human collective arrangements that cover the whole of earth, the field of *istikhlāf* on the other. In this context, the modern institution of the "state" plays a major role in amplifying and reproducing those micro-meanings on human nature and needs at the macro-structure of international relations. Through its moral purpose, as developed in western experience, it has become a platform for socialization that once occupied by a society, such society embodies the social role of *member of international society*. This "map" of socialization of societies under contemporary structures of international relations is considered an improvement when assessing Islamic action in international relations. As mentioned in chapter one, the two dominant discourses on international politics in the Islamic world lack such appreciation of social context of action. On one hand, the strategic/secular discourse uncritically treats the structures of the international relations as material and eternal without a second thought to the social dimension of those structures, let alone the reproduction/transformation quality of agential actions concerning ideas and norms. This is for the simple reason that in the Islamic world, strategic analysts who seem to dominate the scene and "jump" from one media outlet to another, do not view the state as a social and

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

institutional space defined by its links to the institutional structure of the modern international society, but as a unit in a mechanical international system. On the other hand, the traditional/normative discourse, while thankfully holding strongly to the moral purpose of a Muslim society, does not seem to have a theoretical appreciation of the interaction between the moral purpose of the Muslim society and the transformative forces that occupy the state, and subsequently, access to the relational and inter-subjective international conditions that productions could bring. Breaking up the social role of a *member of international society* could shed light into a landscape of socialization where the origins of the modern international society, including the micro-meanings on human nature and agency, and the hegemonic belief of the moral purpose of the state can be captured as structural causal forces constraining, and maybe sometimes, enabling Islamic action in international relations. In other words, a theory of Islamic agency in international relations cannot be captured unless those structural dimensions in the form of constraints/resources are taken into account.

That said, it should be understood that this is mainly an analytical effort, despite the clear normative implications. It brings “face-to face” the Islamic collective “self” and the underlying meanings and ideas of the modern international society, in what I hope to be an improved framework in terms of coherence and predictability of interaction between agential action and structural causal forces. Within such framework more specific problems can be undertaken in a context of assessing the structural configuration of a given issue – areas according to the structural configuration and contents of the mission of *istikhlāf* (*tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān*), and the casual relationships between structural constraints and agential moral action. Thus, from the outset it seems that adherence to the principles of multilateralism and contractual international law are the inter-subjective requirements that govern the relational plane of the social role of a *member of the international society*. If this was the case then there would have been no need for this discussion since there is nothing inherently in these mechanisms that prohibits the Islamic collectivity or society from communicating

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

and negotiating the universal principles of the mission of *istikhlāf*. The issue, however, is not participation in multilateral and contractual arrangements. Rather, the issue is what they serve: the supremacy of material and economic interests, that has been shown to be smuggled as the main interests of human agents and then produced on a macro-level through their identification with the moral purpose of the state. It is these smuggled micro contents in the role of *member of international society* that create a set of conditions of productions that constrain the social activity of Islamic agents on the state and international levels. From an Islamic view, multilateralism and contractual international laws are normatively neutral mechanisms that could lead to good or evil, depending on the underlying conditions of productions that facilitate such collective effort. According to Muslims, God says in the Qur'an (5:2): "...help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity." This is in line with Wight's account of mechanism as a process or technique for achieving a desired end state or outcome,⁵⁹ which means that mechanisms like multilateralism and contractual international law have a technical part (process, technique) and a normative one (desired end state or outcome). Given this definition, Islamic agents should not have a problem with the technical part, but would take issues with the normative part. For example, Islamic agents should have no problem with WTO but with some aspects of labor rights, not with the IMF but with its neoliberal policies. The problem though, is that the technical part of multilateralism and contractual international law has been so attached to the normative one that it is hard to reproduce the former without the latter.

As mentioned above, the dilemma of Islamic agency in international relations does not stop here; the penetrating quality of the global inter-subjective planes, and the ontological necessity of linking macro-structures to micro activities and meanings, mean that it is not only the universal dimension of the emission of *istikhlāf* that is at risk but also the role of *khalīfah* for individual Muslims within the Muslim society. Western man-made human rights that do not necessarily serve the "right" of sustaining the role of *khalīfah* by individual Muslims, are

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

good examples. A good example is also recent discussions on “gay rights” in the U.N. given, the literature on norm creation, it seems that such norms are quickly making their way into the socialization context in international relations. As formulated and understood in western societies, “gay rights” can have a destructive impact on the institution of the family as understood in Islam which is the main micro-institution where Muslim individuals learn about their own role as vicegerents of Allah on earth.

The above discussion should be helpful in improving our capacity as Muslim international researchers to better capture Islamic agential actions in international relations by energizing our traditional/normative understandings while placing the burden on the strategic/secular camp to “come clean” about their normative stands. Yet, as long as our reference point for action still resides somewhere in between society/state links, then we will continue to run the risk of “speaking” casually and loosely about Islamic action and more importantly about moral responsibility associated with this action. In other words, we will still be lacking analytical sharpness in assigning moral responsibility to agents despite our improved capacity to capture structural and institutional dimensions of action. In this light, applying the Islamic view of agency developed in chapter two as “endowed, embodied, intentional action” at the collective level in order to link Muslim society to the structures of the modern international society through the social role of *member of international society* is helpful since it sets the context of structural configuration and contributes to capturing the role states play in linking micro meanings of human nature, needs, and purpose, to the structures of contemporary international relations. The next logical step is to zoom in to these dynamics and “spot” the human agents within these structures as real agents who enjoy intentional action, and a “real” sense of moral responsibility. Such focus allows an Islamic theory of agency to bring agency “back in” the superstructure of *istikhlāf*, since endowment is defined by a relationship of authorization and accountability between Allah and human agents. Such relationship is what constitutes them, partly, as *khulafā’*. The problem, however, is that given the ontological landscape of international

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

relations, it is hard to find human agents. The reason for this is that the links between western-originated assumptions about human agency and the contemporary structures of international relations are almost never part of mainstream IR theory. Instead, mainstream IR theory treats these links as stable, automatic, normal, and global reproduced by states, not as institutional platforms but as actors that replace actual human actors in the name of necessary abstraction. In the process placing agential actions and capacities from human agents to states so that if the contemporary structure of international relations were built for the modern individual, western IR theory makes sure that no one else, including the *khalīfah*, gets in. In other words, for a researcher trying to develop a theory of Islamic agency in international relations, western IR theory appears like a sign that points to the contemporary structures of international relations, but with a phrase on it that says, “sorry, only modern individuals are allowed in.”

IR Theory: ‘Only the Modern Individual is Allowed In’

The problem with IR theory is not the fact that it is a western invention, but rather it is representation in itself as a global project. Through this it imposes its ontological foundations on other, would be culturally distinct IR research programs that already have strong ontological assumptions. In his 2003 presidential address to the International studies association, Steve Smith called the discipline of international relations a very partial one that reflects the interests of the wealthy and imperial powers.⁶⁰ He listed ten features of IR theory that allows it to play this role, among these are a number of features that can help in understanding the ontological and substantive barriers that block theorization about Islamic agency in international relations like the focus on the state as the unit of analysis and the universal notion of rationality.⁶¹ These are important realizations that expose the political dimension of IR theory. However, for our immediate purposes, it might be more beneficial to re-state or incorporate some of these features in an account that best demonstrates the role of IR theory in

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

reproducing the link between western thought on human agency and the contemporary structures of international relations.

As mentioned above, mainstream IR theory rarely problematizes the links between western thought on human agency on the one hand, and the structures of modern international society on the other. I have also mentioned that while ontologically distorting, and reifying those links as immune from agential transformation at the level of the state might be understandable, because of the almost automatic reproduction of those links by western agents it would also be ethically understandable if this reification was part of foreign policy theoretical exercise designed to understand the behavior and interests of a western agent in international relations. Since it could be argued that reification here, is not about treating human agents within as cultural dopes but rather is about the reasonable expectation of the internalization of the 'reason of the state' by those human agents to the point that it might be theoretically more beneficial to go up one step the abstraction ladder and concentrate on the interests and behavior of the state. What is not ethically acceptable however is to articulate this theoretical exercise as part of the ontological landscape that defines the discipline, unless acknowledged as a western project and not a global one.

Reification of the state in IR theory and hiding its nature as an intermediate level that links micro meanings to macro structures through its moral purpose, serves a double-function. First, for agents within the state, the state becomes immune and de-linked from their transformational praxis. Second, for the international realm, the state becomes a 'stable platform'⁶² to be written off by the circulating culture within the structures of the modern international society. This is the ontological landscape for Wendt's social theory of international politics that, I believe best points towards the unwarranted ontological barriers that can block theorizing about Islamic agency in international relations from taking advantage of the explanatory power of IR theory. Wendt believes that articulating the state as a stable platform is necessary to theorize about the international system, but by doing so, he stabilizes the links between assumptions about human agency, moral purpose of the state, and the structures of the modern international

The *Khalifah* is Not Allowed In

society. Wight summarizes Wendt's ontological solutions as follows: "Put simply, Wendt advocates a structuralist solution to the agent-structure problem at the level of the state and the state system, and a structuralist solution at the level of the individual and the state."⁶³ This double ontological move that allows Wendt to close the system, ensures that whatever conditions of productions are available within the system for agential activity, in terms of inter-subjective understanding including ideas, norms, and rules, will keep circulating in and will always be immune from transformation from outside the system. This is a serious problem that can hinder any serious attempt to use IR theoretical frameworks to theorize about Islamic agency in international relations since once a researcher trying to theorize about Islamic agency in international relations is faced with this double-ontological barrier, he/she has no choice but to leave behind all that makes an agent Islamic, offer it as an "empty" platform and allow it to socialize within this artificially closed system of the modern international society.

As devastating as these ontological barriers can be to theorizing about Islamic agency in IR, it is not the most constraining of all; what brings Islamic theorization about agency in international relations to a complete halt is Wendt's notion of the personification of the state, which is a logical result of Wendt's structuralist/strcuturalist move. Although Wendt shares this notion with all mainstream western IR theoretical frameworks, his effort is more ontologically serious since he does not claim this move as a necessary abstraction like others do in western IR theory but actually believes that the state is a "real" actor with real intentions! Although contemporary Muslim researchers do follow the other camp in justifying the move on the ground of necessary abstractions, the belief in the state as a real actor is still somehow "strange" to Islamic thought. The process of transferring intentionality, responsibility, and accountability from human agency to some structure like the state does not make sense in Islamic ontology because of the fact that these agential qualities involve high-level interaction with Allah that requires a moral and psychological personality that cannot be ascribed to the state. Now, according to Wendt's formulation of

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

international politics that locates agency to states, if Allah wants to hold accountable some agents for their actions within that level, He will look at international politics and find no one, unless states go to heaven ...or hell!

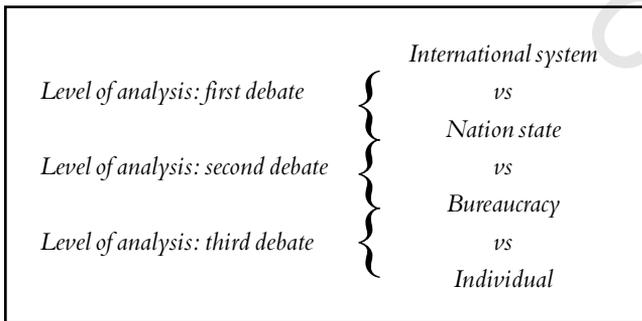
The point is to understand why this is problematic in capturing Islamic agential action in international relations; for the framework developed in chapter two, the state simply does not fit into the super-structure of *istikhlāf*; it's not a human agent, it's a "corporate" one, with no moral and psychological personality. Thus, it cannot be linked to Allah in a relationship of authorization and accountability. In this light, having the state as our unit for analysis for Islamic action in international relations can only mean that we have agreed among ourselves as Muslim researchers, although implicitly and uncritically, to "cut" our interaction in international politics from this relationship of authorization and accountability before Allah. In other words, we seem to say that "this part of 'earth,' or the social arrangement that occupies it, is not part of the field of *istikhlāf*." Given this location of agential capacities at a structure or an institution instead of at human agents, the chapter had to start with articulating the social role of a member of international society as a constitutive intermediate social form that needed to be broken up in order to "spot" where the elements of agency: intentionality, action, and accountability, reside. So far we could not find a human agent where we can apply the role of *khalīfah*. Instead we found those elements of agency located at the state, only that this "imagined" corporate agent serves to reproduce a totally different understanding of human agency not at the political/state level but also constitute the very meaning of humanity.

At this conjecture, diving into the planes of social activity of the role of *member of international society* demonstrated that such a role is immune from being articulated as an "eternal home" for Islamic action since the corporate agency that this role requires does not fit Islamic understanding of agency that insists on moral responsibility before Allah. Yet, treating it as a point of contact within the structures of international relations contributed to an appreciation of the structural and substantive conditions of productions in international relations

The *Khalīfah* is Not Allowed In

that must be in place when theorizing Islamic action therein. At least now we know what is being reproduced/transformed in such social arrangements and we can assess those conditions of production and their structural configuration according to the pillars of *istikhlāf*. However, the search for a *khalīfah* is still on.

As stated above, Wendt's account of international politics is of course not the only one that denudes the field of international relations from human agents. Neo-realism and neo-liberalism also lead to the same dead end, yet, it is Wendt's sociological treatment of the issues that seems more "teasing" since they point to a possible path and then close it. Whether mechanically or sociologically based, the ontological distortions that mainstream IR theories share seem to come from the same source: the levels-of-analysis (figure 2.1), the dominant formulations of which in IR "forces/allows the relocation of agency at every move up or down the levels, so that what appears as a structure at one level becomes an agent on another."⁶⁴ Allowing this, supposedly, methodological tool to draw the ontological landscape of the discipline necessarily limits serious examination of this landscape through more appropriate ontological tools like the agent-structure problem and the macro-micro problem.⁶⁵ What is needed then is "levels of being" as called by Onuf and deployed by Wight to disentangle this methodological/ontological mess in the discipline. Only then will micro activities re-connect with macro-structures and human agency appears again on the international level.



(Figure 2.1) The dominant IR account of Levels-of-Analysis

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at building on the theme of chapter two, namely, linking roles; the endowed role of *khalīfah* to worldly social roles in a given social arrangement. The challenge, however, was that mainstream IR theory either treats social roles as unit-level phenomena or, only licenses corporate agents to fill those social roles when treated as structural phenomena. It was demonstrated that both did not represent viable alternatives for theorizing about Islamic agency in international relations that in turn, opened the path for applying Bhaskar's notion of the social role as introduced in chapter one. The aim was to expose the links between two destined levels that never meet on the ontological landscape of the discipline: the individual and the international, which seemed like the only way to understand the macro-level constraints/facilitations of international relations on the role of *khalīfah*. This was achieved by presenting Rues-Smit's study that links modern notions of human agency to the structures of modern international society through the moral purpose of the state. In this context, the social role of member of international society was revealed as an intermediate social form linking western-originated micro-level meanings to the macro structures of modern international society. Using Wendt's articulation of the ontological landscape of international relations as a target, issues were taken with mainstream western IR theory for "hiding" these links, and keeping modern western understandings of human agency circulating within an artificially closed system, while ensuring that no other notions on human agency, including the Islamic notion of *istikhlāf*, breaks through.

I ended the discussion with Wight's claim that all these ontological distortions that main IR theory commits are based on treating the levels-of-analysis as a guide to the ontological landscape of the discipline. The next chapter introduces Wight's reconfigured version of the levels-of-analysis or "levels of beings" and demonstrates how it can open a path for theorizing about Islamic agency in international relations.

3

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

I concluded chapter two with the claim that the ontological landscape underpinning mainstream western IR theory makes theorizing about Islamic agency in international relations an impossible project. The reason for this unyielding position is the fact that placing Islamic agents within substantive theoretical frameworks such as intentional corporate entities in artificially closed social systems, already concedes too much on ontological grounds to the western understanding of agency. In turn, I argued that the role of IR theory in forcing theoretical efforts on Islamic agency in international relations into placing agency within such substantive frameworks is sustained by the dominant configuration of the levels-of-analysis in the discipline.

This chapter starts by introducing Wight's reconfigured version of levels-of-analysis. The focus of the first section will be on the nature of levels as 'levels of being' and the resultant ontological necessity that intentional human agency has to feature in every level. The second section will shift the focus to the possibility of taking advantage of this opened ontological path by Islamic agency. The section will be divided into three sub-sections that map out the three levels of analysis. The point is to trace how micro-meanings of *istikhlāf* can climb up those levels. Once the discussion reaches the international level, a substantive theoretical framework for Islamic agency in international relations

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

will be suggested, one that is built on a structural understanding of the encounter between the western-originated structures of contemporary international relations and the micro-meanings of *istikhlāf*.

Opening the Gates of International Relations to the *Khalīfah*

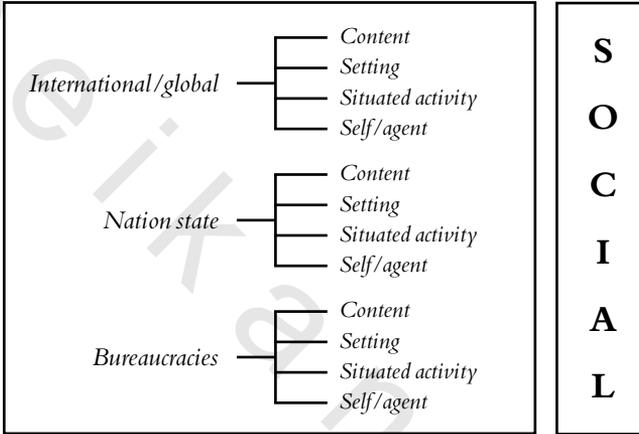
As mentioned in chapter two, the problem with the dominant configuration of the levels-of-analysis in the western imagination of international relations is that it “forces/allows the relocation of agency at every move up or down the levels, so that what appears as structure on one level becomes an agent on another.” So by the time we reach the nation state vs. International system level, human agency disappears. I argue that, from an Islamic perspective, this is problematic since a field denuded from human agency means that it is also immune from responsibility and accountability before Allah, unless states can “think” about Allah, or alternatively, Allah addresses states!

It is also important to note that what is being blocked by these levels-of-analysis is not just human agency understood in terms of individuals within the state complex like bureaucrats, government officials, etc, but if, as Wight insists, that we should think of international relations as global social relations⁶⁶ and that the international emerges from the social not the domestic, then the dominant formulation of levels-of-analysis necessarily blocks micro-meanings and activities about human nature, social relationships, and nature of society from the international level, while, as was shown in chapter two, they feed into the macro structures of contemporary international relations. States do not operate or are not placed on a cultural vacuum but rather on social relations that link it to other institutions including academic institutions, family, mosque/church, etc. In a way the identity and moral purpose of the state emerges out of, or is even constituted through its relationship with those institutions. Moreover, individual human agents who assume or embody positions in state institutions as policymakers and state officials are “raised” and “groomed” in those institutions.

Thankfully, Wight offers a reconfigured version of levels-of-analysis, or as he calls them, after Onuf, “levels of being” (figure 2), that can

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

be invaluable to theorizing about Islamic agency through the notion of “differing positioning” of human agents across the levels that allows planes of social activity to “travel” across the levels “on the backs” of those human agents, not over their heads as in mainstream western IR theory which is borrowed uncritically by the strategic/secular strand in the Islamic world.



(Figure 3.1) Wight's reconfigured version of levels-of-analysis

To reach this, more friendly for Islamic agency, ontological landscape Wight starts by two ontological necessities of the social world; the first is that “in the social world both agents and structures are necessary for any social act to be possible”⁶⁷ and the second is that it is “only through embodied human agents that action can occur.”⁶⁸ These two ontological facts of the social world allow Wight to disintegrate the levels into their component parts or sub-levels, one of which is necessarily human agency. Subsequently, Wight chooses not to include a distinct individual level since individuals feature in every level and are tied into their social contexts.⁶⁹ Above the basic sub-level or component of human agency that accommodates individual action, he adds situated activity, settings, and context, “where situated activity shifts the focus towards the dynamics of interaction between several individuals that produce outcomes and properties that are a result of the

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

interchange of communication between the group as a whole.”⁷⁰ While settings “refer to the way the nature of setting within which situated activity takes place will make a difference to the manner in which those individuals interact,”⁷¹ context “highlights the manner in which selves, situated activity, and settings exist within a structurally organized context.”⁷² While each sub-level adds its own dimension of social activity, it is at the context sub-level where structural configuration of planes of social activity and the emergent conditions of productions take shape, giving the entity occupying the level its purpose and identity. That is also where agents within acquire their socially embodied causal powers since its at the sub-level of structurally organized contexts that points of contact or social roles link subjectivity of the individual to the totality of relations of planes of social activity.

According to this formulation then, the state is a structure occupying a level of being, not an agent or an actor. Instead it is a multilayered structure that offers human agents within different experience of social activity at each sub-level; at each sub-level the balance between human intentional praxis and causal powers of social roles changes, to put it another way, the higher we move up the sub-levels the more we can start speaking of the state powers and the causal powers of social roles like presidents and less about the specific capacities of specific individuals occupying the social role and vice versa. Yet, while the facilitations and constraints of conditions of production become clearer on the human intentional praxis at the context sub-level, it is those social causal powers that allow human agents to feature on the next level. After explaining the dynamics of social action within each level between (human agency, situated activity, settings, and context), Wight moves on to propose another set of relationships to capture the links between one level to another.

As a Critical Realist, Wight expectedly likens the notion of levels to that of emergence, in this light, he insists that “a level has its own laws and modes of operation, which, while embedded within the level out of which it emerged, are not reducible to that lower level.”⁷³ Accordingly we can think in terms of levels without thinking of the emergent level in terms of a self-contained unit. Instead we should

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

think of levels as ‘interpenetrated contexts’. This led him to view levels as “bound together in the ongoing flux of social life...in this respect part of the context for each of the levels is the other level.”⁷⁴ However, we must remember that this ongoing flux of social life that links micro and macro-levels of social reality is always mediated and carried over from one level to another by human agents, this means that in figure 2 above, the self/agent slot in different levels is not occupied by different individuals. It is the same individual differently positioned because of the ongoing flux of the relational plane of social activity.

To clarify, let’s place “Ahmad” at the self/agent slot in figure 2 above, an appropriate name for an Islamic human agent, it is through the differing positioning of Ahmad that various levels interact. He is a member of a Muslim society, and a leader or a political leader of a state, which in turn gives him the socially driven causal power to act on the international level. At the same time, it is only through the movement of Ahmad across the levels of being that the planes of social activity of the international and domestic ever “meet.” That is, it is through the ideas and practices of Ahmad or his intentional action that the norms of the Muslim society, the state, and the international society “meet.” The important point to make, however, is that Ahmad, as a Muslim human agent will always be part of the picture when analyzing Islamic action in international relations. Depending on the research problem before hand, the Muslim researcher can choose the appropriate level of analysis. If the research problem is concerned with some aspect of the specificities of intentional action and individual moral responsibility then the state level might seem an appropriate one. There the interaction between human qualities at the sub-level or component of the individual and the sub-levels of situated activity, settings, and context within the state structure can be manageable enough. Situated activity, settings, and context will provide structural arrangements that specify the powers of the social role of political leadership within state institutions. Once we have Ahmad as an intentional human agent embodying this role, then we can capture his actions as an Islamic constrained/enabled action according to our expectations from him as a Muslim human agent, or a *khalīfah*, and our understanding of the structural

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

constrained/enablement within the state structure. However, let's not forget that levels are "interpreting contexts" which means in this case that the context of the state level is partly constituted by other levels, most important of which is the international level. Yet, they will only feature less prominently of course. Another research problem might necessitate more focus on the international context or the structure of the modern international society. Approaching such a research problem through the international level, guess what, Ahmad is still there. Such a move up the level on this terrain does not force us to place agency at the state in order to make "contact" with the international society and leave behind the *khalifah*. The only difference is in balance of causal powers not of the nature of entities. In this level the state structure does not come to constitute the context component, but rather is degraded to the components of situated activity and settings, while institutions of the international society give an identity and meanings to the context of actions. Still a human action only situated and channeled through the state.

Moreover, according to Wight's reconfigured version of levels-of-analysis there is no ontologically valid reason to believe that Ahmad won't take the content of his intentionality (accountability, responsibility), and his understanding of inter-subjective meanings from one level to another. It is true that each level has its own structural configuration, but it is also true that levels are interpenetrating in an open social system. In the case of Ahmad, the expectation of carrying out these agential properties is even more warranted because of the pillar of *tawhīd*, which means that regardless of the relations that he might be implicated in and the constraints of conditions of productions at any given level, for him, Allah is always the "significant other," and subsequently, responsibility and accountability before Allah as a *khalifah* will govern his intentionality and direct his actions accordingly.

An important qualification for Wight's levels that seems necessary to better serve the aims of this project is to substitute his micro-level of bureaucracy with a level of society/community. If the international emerges out of the social not the domestic,⁷⁵ then the state level should

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

also emerge out of the social. I realize however that society/community can hardly be thought of as micro-level; yet, the point here is to capture the point that the level of the state emerges out of micro political and non-political contexts including meanings and activities concerning human nature, the role of religion, the nature of society, family relations, etc. and how they underpin settings of political organization from which the level of the state emerges. This is an important qualification because of the fact that the role of the *khalīfah* is not a political role that emerges or belongs to a political structure. Rather it is a human role that transcends involvement in different social arrangements and is likewise learned and reproduced in different contexts.

On the Road to the International Level: Bringing in the *Khalīfah*

With human agency back in the picture, the international level does not seem immune from the mission of *istikhlāf* now. In other words, Islamic agency understood as endowed, embodied, intentional praxis is now a possible theoretical project on this reshuffled ontological landscape. In this context, the role of the *khalīfah* is not a theoretical abnormality. Rather, it is a real world choice by real human agents within the realm of international relations. It is this agential choice and the structural conditions of productions that surround it that should form an important cornerstone for theorizing about Islamic agents in international relations.

Accordingly, involvement of Islamic agents with macro-level phenomena like balance of power or regional integration can now be captured through linking macro-level structural configurations of international relations to micro-level meanings of *istikhlāf*. However in order to arrange this “meeting” between *istikhlāf* and international relations on Wight’s reconfigured ontological landscape, we need first to dive into micro-level Islamic settings and contexts and see how they make their way to the international level. Of course on the “backs” of Islamic human agents and through the causal powers of social roles within the state.

Islamic Community: Teaching *Istikhlāf*

One of the most important Islamic notions about human nature in Islam is *fiṭrah*, which basically means that the desire for submission or Islamization of agential capacities is printed within human nature. That is, if a person is “left alone,” he/she will come to some sort of understanding of the role of *khalīfah*. Yet, because human agency is always embodied, they are never “left alone” to discover or explore this built-in humane feature. An agent is always born and raised in a society/community that encourages a role in relation to Allah, at least initially, since as intentionality matures, freedom of subjectivity “kicks in,” and an agent becomes capable of delinking his/her subjectivity of all levels of embodiment. Accepting/rejecting the role of *khalīfah* becomes an intentional choice that the agent will be held accountable for before Allah. That said, the Islamic society/community as a whole is not excused from reproducing/transforming the necessary conditions of productions that facilitate the choice of Islamization of agency. The following Qur’anic verses demonstrate this collective effort: “By (the Token of) Time (through the ages), verily Man is in loss, except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of the Truth, and of patience and constancy.”⁷⁶ Just like many other verses in the Qur’an that carry instructions to Muslims, these verses presuppose collective action or at least the capacity for collective action. According to the framework developed in chapter two, the phrase “(join together) in the mutual teaching of the Truth, and of patience and constancy” can be interpreted to mean the collective effort to direct new generations of Muslims to their role in relation to Allah, and subsequently to their responsibility to performing the mission of *istikhlāf*. In this sense, the aim of collective action is to ensure that the structural configuration of every social arrangement within the Muslim community/society features the configuration and contents of those of the mission of *istikhlāf* in order to ensure that the social roles within are ready to be linked to the role of *khalīfah*.

Discussion of collective action automatically brings issues of institutionalization and authorization to the fore; as demonstrated in

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

chapter two. The two principles of procedural and legislative justice solved these issues for western societies. The first principle in particular fits the modern notion of society as *Gesellschaft*, or the rational, contractual, large-scale way of organizing humankind,⁷⁷ which has come to underline the political culture where the state emerges. The issue is that the Islamic group, regardless of its size, cannot be conceptualized as *Gesellschaft*. Rather, the Islamic group always comes together as *Gemeinschaft*, or a community where it can enjoy the relational and inter-subjective flexibility that better suits the mutual “teaching of the Truth.” The point is that despite the fact that being a *Gemeinschaft* is an important part of the character of the Muslim collectivity, once Islamic collective action connects with the state level, this feature seems to disappear, both in reality and theory. This is due to the fact that the solutions of institutionalization and authorization provided by the modern state do not feature this community flavor that allow first the mutual teaching of *istikhlāf*, and second the institutional transfer of accountability before Allah, simply “chocking” the *khalīfah* before reaching the state level. The Islamic path is different; where *tawhīd*, is expected to be followed by implementation of Shari‘ah or Islamic law, which fills an important part of the inter-subjective plane of the structure of an Islamic community as a collective declaration that “Allah knows best” when it comes to both individual and collective purification. The implementation of Shari‘ah does not only solve the collective action problem of institutionalization among members of the Muslim community, but also links *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān* together. To put it in another way, the collective implementation of Shari‘ah gives both coherence and substance to the structural configuration of the Muslim community. The issue of authorization in Islamic collective action is obviously less developed, since both the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad only give the wider moral principle, which is, apparently, not enough for a number of contemporary Islamic regimes, who treat the process of authorization as immune from the mission of *istikhlāf*. For some of the human agents who occupy roles within contemporary Islamic states, the mission of *istikhlāf* starts afterwards. That is why it is not abnormal to see a

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

monarchy-based Islamic state, or military coup, aiming at establishing an Islamic state. Yet, if authorization is about the transfer of accountability and responsibility⁷⁸ among members of the Islamic community, then authorization is itself a social arrangement. Treating it as immune from the mission of *istikhlāf* means that it becomes a void where no one is responsible before Allah for observing *tawhīd* and purification. Moreover, treating authorization as immune from the mission of *istikhlāf* does not help theoretical efforts in Islamic agency to take advantage of the reconfigured version of the levels-of-analysis demonstrated above. So if western IR theory is guilty of “hiding” the links between western micro-level understanding on human agency and nature of society on the one hand, and the moral purpose of the state on the other, the lack of both theoretical and real world concerns and ethics of authorization on the Islamic side can only mean that Islamic micro-level understandings on *istikhlāf* might not make it to the state level.

As shown through the discussion of levels-of-analysis, the interaction of levels is always mediated by human agents, or takes place because of a differing positioning of individuals across levels. The essentiality of human agency in linking the society/community level and the state level are best captured by Wight’s example: “a democratic state requires agents committed...to democratic norms and principles. If such agents were no longer to be found, then such a state would encounter severe difficulty in remaining democratic.”⁷⁹ By the same token, we can say that an Islamic state requires agents committed to Islamic norms (*tawhīd* and purification). If such agents were no longer to be found, then such a state would encounter severe difficulty in remaining Islamic. An agent who chooses to deny the rights of the members of the Islamic community to observe *tawhīd* and purification in the process of transferring responsibility and accountability, in this case, before Allah, does not seem like one who is committed to the mission of *istikhlāf*. In this reading, authorization is not only necessary to “find” Islamic agents needed for the Islamic state, but is also necessary for the mission of *istikhlāf* to be carried over to the state and international levels.

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

To sum up, the path of the mission of *istikhlāf* to the social/domestic level to the state level is a harsh one even after “flattening” the levels of analysis. Two main difficulties need to be taken seriously; the first is the ready-made conditions of productions of the modern state structure that require institutionalization and authorization solutions that do not seem to encourage the mutual teaching of *istikhlāf*. The second is a lack of observing the pillars of *istikhlāf* at social arrangements of authorization by contemporary Muslim communities. These real world difficulties however, do not need to hinder theoretical efforts in Islamic agency in international relations. Rather they should be viewed as substantive issues, mapped on a structural framework for Islamic action in international relations.

The State Level: The Moral Test of Activating the Causal Powers of the State

As any other level of being, activity at the state level needs both structure and human agents who, in the Islamic case, have been taught “*the Truth*” about their roles and mission before Allah. At the state level, if one is to follow an individualist path, which is usually followed by traditional Islamic literature, the focus will be on the individual qualities of the Muslim leader or government officials that allow them to carry out the duties of the role of *khalīfah*. Indeed, some classical Islamic literature on the subject is as specific as assessing the physical qualities of the Islamic leader. In this case, there is endowment but no embodiment. On the other hand, if we follow mainstream IR theory’s structuralist solution at the state level, then the Muslim leader or government officials simply vanish; in this case, there is no one to be endowed with *istikhlāf*. This point has been made clear throughout this work but is still worth mentioning at this stage where the barrier of the “state as an actor” is being crossed.

As mentioned in section one of this chapter, stratifying the state level to sub-levels that link the agent to its multilayered contexts ensures that both the intentionality of the agent and the conditions of productions that facilitate/constrain actions are present. For the

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

Islamic agents moving into the state level, the sub-levels are “experienced as already established forms of organization, with which they have to contend in various ways.”⁸⁰ The issue is whether these established forms are normatively neutral, or that their reproduction/transformation leads to moral ends. The discussion on the moral purpose of the state, serving the economic and material needs of the individual clearly demonstrates that the social forms of the state do lead to moral ends. Wight, however, believes that essentially an organization “understood as a complex of positions, roles, and relations, has no normative dimension. However, in practice it is clear that empirically most organizations do indeed have a normative dimension. This normative dimension emerges as a result of the fact that once embodied (occupied by individuals) the constitutive roles and functions a given organization serves, are given a moral character. Once moral agents occupy these positions, roles and relations, organizations pursue moral ends and undertake moral activities to secure these ends.”⁸¹ Although one could hope for a more ensuring tune from Wight, this seems enough to bring in the Islamic agent to the state level as a *khalīfah* since it allows a space for the mission of *istikhlāf* to define the moral activities of Islamic agents in order to pursue their moral ends, that is satisfying the requirements of endowment.

This means that the state is not itself a moral person. Rather the state is an organization that gives the moral activities of agents embodied within a set of social causal powers that allow the reproduction/transformation range of their actions to reach social arrangements within and beyond this ensemble. The state then does not exercise power, but facilitates the exercise of power by agents.⁸² For example, it is because of the social role of a president that an agent fills within a state that his praxis reaches social arrangements beyond the state like regional balance of power or global economic arrangements. Yet, as mentioned above, this exercise or activation of powers by agents is never normatively neutral since such an act of activation will always be facilitated or constrained by conditions of productions that have been reproduced/transformed in the past by moral agents who occupied this role and may have been pursuing different moral ends. Moreover, because of

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

the interpenetrating nature of levels of being, the state should not be seen as a closed box. Rather, the state should be seen as itself socially positioned in relations to other entities and phenomena in other levels. So just like the causal powers of the state reach beyond the state level, the conditions of productions of those causal powers are necessarily, partly, reproduced and transformed in the micro-level of community/society, and the macro-level of the international. In this way the state becomes an intermediate structure linking micro meanings and activities with macro social arrangements. Yet, this interplay only takes place when intentional human agents activate the causal powers of the state.

The International Level: The *Khalīfah* Meets The Individual...It's Not Personal...It's Structural

This dissertation is written after more than three centuries of continuing reproduction of western-originated micro/macro links through the modern purpose of the state. Yet, it is also written at a time of Islamic “awakening” where increasing number of Islamic agents are filling roles within this intermediate level of the state in order to enhance their causal powers on the international level. The image of interpenetrated levels allows us to view the reproduction of Islamic meanings of *istikhlāf* and the reproduction of western meanings of the modern individual as agential pursuits on the macro-level, that is, the international level. A theory of Islamic agency in international relations should necessarily shed light on the Islamic struggle to map the configuration of the pillars of *istikhlāf* on the structural configuration of contemporary international relations. After three centuries of the evolution of the modern international society, based on western meanings on the moral purpose of the state serving the material needs of the individual, an Islamic theoretical framework has no place to start but at agency, hence the focus of this book. In other words, despite the fact that conceptualization of the structural dimension of Islamic agential production/transformation remains an important aim of this effort, at least initially the focus of Islamic theorization on international relations should be the human agent, by “putting on” Islamic ontological lenses

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

and “see” what the Islamic agent “sees.” Only then one can appreciate the structural expressions of the normative struggle of Islamic agents within the state and international levels. It is true that the capacity of an Islamic agent to understand the structural configuration of the planes of social activity and the resultant conditions of productions that are available to him/her in such social arrangements remains an empirical question, depending on their ability to reflect on the endowed nature of their agency and on their ability to negotiate these construction forces with the requirements of their mission of *istikhlāf*. Yet, any serious theoretical effort to conceptualize Islamic agency must have an emancipatory impulse in order to sustain the normative flavor in both Islamic theory and practice.

When a *khalīfah* “enters” the state level, as a policymaker, the context that he/she contends with is more than just the sum of past moral activities of Islamic agents. Rather, because of the fact that the casual powers of social roles within the state are drawn from beyond the state level, in this case the international level. That is why when an Islamic agent fills the role of a president or a diplomat, he/she is forced to speak of national interest, economic competitiveness, universal human rights, etc. while these are clearly macro-level phenomena they do have their origins at western micro-level meanings about human agency and nature of society. Here it is important to mention that every piece of western-originated social arrangement within the international level does not conflict with the mission of *istikhlāf*. There is so much that the *khalīfah* can reproduce at this level that does not bring discomfort to maintaining *istikhlāf*. Certainly, as long as the structural configuration of contemporary international relations follows a modern-based hierarchy of relationships between planes of social activity, it will always be out of tune with the mission of *istikhlāf*. Yet, there remains vast room for mutual reproduction of social arrangements that satisfy both Islamic meanings of purification and western-produced inter-subjective meanings governing a given social arrangement or issue-area within international relations. The issue is that according to the framework developed in this book, there is nothing such as automatic or unintentional reproduction when it comes to Islamic agency

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

since at any given ‘level of being’ human agents are capable of reflecting on the higher level. The state does not replace intentional human agents in international relations, the structures of international relations are open structures that are linked to all ‘levels of being’ of the social world, and the totality of the social world does not block human agents’ awareness of their positions in relation to Allah in the super-structure of *istikhlāf* where each human agent is endowed with the role of *khalīfah*. *Istikhlāf* then is not a theoretical abnormality. Rather, it is constrained/facilitated real world choice that intentional Islamic human agents are constantly facing.

The ontological landscape and the structural framework where the Islamic agent is embodied has developed to capture these “moments” of tension when the behavior, interests, and identity of the Islamic agent are subject to differing causal forces that come from differing sources: the requirements of *istikhlāf*, and the requirements of the social roles where the agent is linked to the relational, inter-subjective, and material forces of constructions. Once we give the configurations among *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān* a structural expression on these planes of social activity, then we can compare it to the configuration of whatever piece of international arrangements that faces the Islamic agent. Again, it is important to remember that the one who makes this comparison, assessment, choices, and makes decisions is not “the state” as our uncritically borrowed tools tell us, but actual intentional embedded human agents within the state structure who are morally responsible before Allah for these choices. Now, the contents and structural configurations of national interests, economic competitiveness, and universal human rights will have to pass the “test” of *istikhlāf*. If for example, national interest is defined in a way where the material plane of activity governs the inter-subjective and relational then, the *khalīfah*, empowered by the causal powers of the social role within the state and the international level is to work on transforming this configuration not to reproduce it. Indeed, a challenging mission. Yet, the reason why it is such a challenging mission is because it is taking place at the state and international level, two levels that host structures that have been subject to continuous constructions by the modern

Towards a Theory of Islamic Agency in International Relations

individual. If such a mission is so challenging to the Islamic human agent within in terms of both awareness and action, then it should not be for the Islamic observer or Muslim international relations researcher who can produce theoretical frameworks that capture Islamic agency in international relations as constrained/enabled moral action, which mirrors the deeper ontological version of Islamic agency as “endowed, embodied, intentional action.”

Indeed, there is no reason why Muslim observers should give the social arrangement of contemporary international relations immunity from assessment according to the rules and laws of the field of *istikhlāf*. Nor is there a good reason to give immunity to Muslim policymakers from assessment according to the high moral standard of the role of *khalīfah*. They might “hide” behind notions like “personification of the state” and “reason of the state,” but a serious effort on Islamic action in international relations should be able to locate them and place them in their position before Allah in a relationship of authorization and accountability. This is not only a normative necessity for an Islamic theory of agency in international relations, but is also an ontological one. Articulating the issue as ontological means that Islamic action in international relations is no longer assessed case by case, or on ad hoc terms, but is captured “eternally” in a theoretical framework that underlines research problems that are concerned with such action. The capacities of human agents are always endowed, and thus the relationship of endowment with Allah will always constitute part of human action. Human agency will always be embedded and embodied, thus structural dimensions of action will always constitute part of human action. What makes an agent Islamic is the capacity, through intentional action, to satisfy the requirements of endowment through embodiment.

Once the ontological landscape is flattened and Islamic agential pursuits find structural expressions, a substantive research agenda on understanding Islamic behavior, interests, and identity can develop in different issue-areas in international relations ranging from international political economy to security studies. Social arrangements like International regimes, security arrangements, free trade agreements,

The *Khalīfah* in International Relations

environmental global policy, balance of power, are all constituted by relational, inter-subjective, and material dimensions or planes of social activity, and only reproduced/transformed by socially empowered intentional human agents through their position in the institutions and structures of the state. An Islamic agent in international relations is embodying a social role as a political leader in the institutional structure of the state. This embodiment of the worldly social role of a political leader gives him causal powers that allow his intentional action to reach the social arrangements of the modern international society. Remember that the reconfigured version of the levels of analysis makes this theoretically possible to capture. Hence, this is the embodied nature of agency, which mirrors the second part of the phrase in the Qur'anic verse (2:30): “I will create a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth.” Allah has willed that this particular human agent is a vicegerent within a certain context of embedment that is the “state,” which is nothing more than an institutional and social arrangement that occupies a material and social space on earth, the field of *istikhlāf*. Such “placement” allows the *khalīfah* to “act” on the international level. This is his mission of *istikhlāf*, which he will be held accountable for before Allah. Given, appreciation of structural content and effects of the context of embedment, intentionality of agential action, and the relationship of endowment, and more “friendly” levels of analysis, Islamic agency in international relations can be captured as endowed, embodied, intentional action.

Conclusion

In the concluding pages of this, rather brief and humble attempt to energize Islamic thought on international relations, I must confess that the editing phase took place during the unsettling time that has come to be known as the “Arab Spring.” In almost every state/society complex where a revolution took place “Islamists” held sway; before my own eyes, abstraction is becoming real. Theoretical entities are taking human shape, and “Islamic agency” is becoming “Islamic agents.” To be even more honest, this has caused some confusion and hesitation about whether I should go on in publicizing my thoughts taking into consideration the risk of being irrelevant, highly abstract, and so removed from reality. This also explains to the patient editors in the London office of the International Institute of Islamic Thought why editing took so long.

This hesitation, however, was turned into assertion on the importance of this work when I saw a “dangerous liaison” being formed between the new Islamic-based political groups and Realist/Strategic analysts of international relations. Some Islamic-oriented policymakers are using a realist/strategic discourse where more than anything else, terms like “power,” “national interest,” and “balance of power” are appearing in their comments on international and even regional politics. To be sure, no one is expecting Islamic policymakers to be pacifists or idealists, nor do I think they should be. Yet, the absence of a normative vision in their image of international relations, and a higher moral standard for their action, does not “suit” the Islamic label.

This small and humble work is an attempt to propose a model for Islamic policymakers in international relations that goes beyond the pursuit of material needs of the “modern individual” as enacted by the moral purpose of the modern state, expressed by the realist/strategic

Conclusion

discourse of national interest and purely material calculation of power. It is a proposal to take *istikhlāf* seriously and a reminder to the Islamic policymaker of his role as a *khalīfah* and responsibility before Allah for his actions. Nevertheless, I still acknowledge the highly abstractive and theoretical flavor of this work and I do not expect it to be part of an Islamic-based foreign policymaking anytime soon. I do however, hope that it contributes to better formulating an ontological landscape for approaching research problems that are concerned with Islamic action in international relations, and in the process, further close the gap between theory and practice, one that should not be sustained in Islamic settings.

The framework of Islamic agency developed in this book as “endowed, embodied, intentional action” which captures Islamic action in international relations as “constrained/enabled moral action” could provide such bases where further research programmes can be developed. The reason is not only that it is an ontologically sound framework, but equally importantly, it is because it opens two paths one to individual characters, morals, and sense of responsibility before Allah, and the other on structural resources and constraints that necessarily shape individual action. Furthermore, it suggests a way to link them together in a coherent account that takes both agential characters and structural contents and effects into account.

Examples of further lines of inquiry that this framework provides can include a focus on individual capacities, awareness, and attributes according to the moral standard of the role of *khalīfah*; on the structural dimension the issue of “institutional engineering/design” stands out like a good target, especially at times when a re-constructing of the institutional infrastructure of the regional system is much needed. The structural configuration among the pillars of *istikhlāf* (*tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, *‘umrān*), as expressed in the three planes of social activity (relational, inter-subjective, and material) can serve as an architectural guideline for such a collective effort of structural transformation.

One final confession should be made on the issue of “borrowing” theoretical tools from western IR theory. My own ethical stand is that there is nothing wrong with borrowing explanatory tools from non-

Conclusion

Islamic disciplinary settings. Yet, there is an ache in the heart and mind that goes hand in hand with this rather, heavy borrowing practice. I hope that further and more mature efforts on the subject can minimize this practice and actually invent Islamic alternatives on the explanatory and methodological levels. Running the risk of basing the argument on an “overused” metaphor, let me liken the situation to the forest/trees image; the effort in this book was to insist on the context as a “forest,” something that western IR theorists do not “see,” they only see “trees” but do not see the “forest.” As a matter of fact they are experts in ways and methods connecting, linking, and charting maps of “trees.” Their tools and skills to capture causal/constitutive relationships, macro-micro links, agent-structure relationships, and levels of analysis, etc. are impressive, yet for some reason they still do not “see” the totality of the forest. This is what we lack in contemporary Islamic thought. In our defense, it is their “trees,” or social and institutional arrangements. They constructed the modern international society, the modern state, the capitalist global economy, etc. and they know their way around them. There is no harm in learning “some techniques” on “how to go on,” as long as we see the totality of the “forest,” or the totality of the field of *istikhlāf*.

All praise to Allah, who taught us about it in the verse “*I will create a vicegerent on earth.*” Through *Sunan*, and *tazkiyah* He further taught us what “trees” or institutional and social arrangements should be “implanted.” Yet, it is our responsibility to learn the art of “planting” or institutional design according to *tawhīd*, *tazkiyah*, and *‘umrān* in order to sustain our own agency as vicegerents of Allah on earth.

Notes

1. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought* (USA: IIIT, 1993).
2. Nadia Mustapha (IIIT: International Relations in Islam Series, 1996).
3. See, for example, Nuno Monteiro & Keven Ruby, "IR and the False Promise of Philosophical Foundations," *International Theory* (Cambridge University Press: March 2009), vol.1, issue 1.
4. I acknowledge the debate and the disagreement on the interpretation of the meaning of *Istikhhlāf* in the Qur'an, although as mentioned above, I follow most works associated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought that interpret *Istikhhlāf* as vicegerency of Allah on earth.
5. Colin Wight, *Agents, Structures, and International Relations: Politics as Ontology*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
6. See, Christian Rues-Smit's *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
7. It must be noted here that having Allah as part of a structure might not seem appropriate to some Muslim readers, the reason is that one of the attributes of Allah is "Al-Şamad" meaning "Self-Sufficient" which further means that Allah does not enter into relationships for the sake of satisfying needs, indeed He is elevated from such claims. For example the relationship of "father-son" is rejected in Islam because it implies that by entering into a relationship as a "father" to a "son" Allah is satisfying the "needs of a father" from such a relationship which does not fit the attribute of "Al-Şamad." The point in this section is different, Allah enters this relationship as Endower, Giver, to both human agents and earth, thus the insistence on those relationships to be one-way constitutive relationships.
8. Monteiro & Ruby, 2009, p.28.
9. Qur'an (2: 256).
10. Alalwani, T. J., "Introduction" to *International Relations in Islam*, 1996, p.18.
11. Al-Tirmidhī. *Imam Al-Nawawi Forty Hadiths* : Hadith 19.
12. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.268.
13. Qur'an (91: 7-10).
14. Martin Hollis & Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ,1990), p.72.
15. Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", interview with the Editors in *The Spivak Reader*, D. Landry and G.

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- Maclean (eds.), (USA: Routledge, 1996), p.294.
16. Nicholas Onuf, "Worlds of Our Own Making: The Strange Career of Constructivism" in Puchala, ed., *Visions of International Relations* (University of South Carolina Press, 2002).
 17. Wendt, 1999, p.116.
 18. Wight, 2006, p.206.
 19. Ibid., p.212.
 20. Ibid., p.210.
 21. Al-Bukhārī.
 22. See Wendt's discussion on "beyond the rationalist model" in chapter three of *Social Theory of International Politics*.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Emad Aldeen Khalil, *The Makeup of the Muslim Mind* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1983), p.115.
 25. Ibid., p.117.
 26. Ibid., p.118.
 27. Stephen Krasner, *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
 28. Baqir al-Sader, *The Historical Sunan in the Qur'an* (Damascus: Ta'aruf Press, 1989), p.55.
 29. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Risālah al-Ḥisbah* (Collection of Fatwas).
 30. Al-Sader, 1989, p.75.
 31. Wendt, 1999, p.260.
 32. Wight, 2006, p.174.
 33. For some reason, Wight includes "identity" at the third and fourth planes, this does not seem clear, although it could be understood to be in line with his multi-layered notion of agency.
 34. Wight, 2006, p.174.
 35. Ibid., p.175.
 36. Roy Bhaskar, *Possibility of Naturalism* (Routledge, 1979, p.32.
 37. Emphasis is mine.
 38. Wight, 2006, p.219.
 39. Bhaskar, 1979, p.36.
 40. Ibid., p.37.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid., p.35.
 44. Qur'an (7: 38).
 45. Bhaskar, 1979, p.40.
 46. Wight, 2006, p.115.
 47. Ibid., p.103.
 48. Wendt, 1999, p.258.
 49. Ibid., 1999, p.220.
 50. Wight, 2006, p.188.
 51. Ibid., p.215.
 52. Reus-Smit, 1999, p.6.
 53. Ibid., p.9.
 54. Ibid., p.124.
 55. Ibid., p.125.
 56. Ibid., p.126.
 57. Ibid., p.129.
 58. Ibid.
 59. Wight, 2006, p.33.
 60. Steve Smith, "Singing our World Into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 48, no.3, 2004, p.507.
 61. Ibid., p.517.
 62. Wendt, 1999, p.197.
 63. Wight, 2006, p.188.
 64. Wight, 2006, p.107.
 65. Ibid.
 66. Wight, 2006, p.299.
 67. Wight, 2006, p.111.
 68. Ibid.
 69. Ibid.
 70. Ibid., p.113.
 71. Ibid., p.114.
 72. Ibid.
 73. Ibid., p.110.
 74. Ibid., p.113.
 75. Ibid., p.223.

Notes

76. Qur'an (103: 1–3).
77. Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society: The Social Structures of Globalization* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.110.
78. Wendt, 1999, p.220.
79. Wight, 2006, p.222.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., p.202.
82. Ibid., p.220.

Humanity's role as steward is not only a deeply moral one but also a society wide one. Meaning that the idea of *Khalīfah* feeds directly into notions of state, society, and politics; hallmarks of international relations.

This book compares and contrasts Islamic worldviews and Western theoretical perspectives on international relations to suggest that a combination of the two could lead to a mutually beneficial redefinition of contemporary international relations utilizing Western theoretical tools and incorporating an Islamic perspective. Particular focus is given to the Islamic concept of *istikhlāf* as an ontological and normative foundation. The reasoning being that all man-made social arrangements on "earth", as well as international society, should be considered a realm of *istikhlāf*. This allows for return to an eternal and critical first principle, linking all social roles to this principle, which is that man as designated by the Qur'an, is God's *khalīfah* or Vicegerent on earth. It's a statement of great magnitude. This radical approach has required serious engagement with some deeply held assumptions of Western International Relations theory including the subsequent distinction between the causal responsibility of the state on the one hand, and the moral responsibility of statesmen on the other. The result is an ontological terrain in which Islamic actors in international relations are theoretically re-linked to Allah as his Vicegerents, and the structure of modern international society assessed according to the normative foundations of *istikhlāf*.

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