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Hamas and its Vision of Development

GUY BURTON

ABSTRACT *This article accounts for the conceptualisation of development by the Palestinian Islamist party, Hamas. It concludes that Hamas's position on development can be seen in either two ways: 1) as broadly similar to mainstream neoliberal development; or 2) as significantly different and an alternative type of development. Which view taken depends on whether an Orientalist or non-Orientalist approach to understanding development is employed (with Orientalism linking development, modernity and progress with the West and denying it to the non-West). While an Orientalist view assumes that development only occurs within narrow parameters, obliging the non-West to 'catch up', a non-Orientalist approach would study Islam on its own terms—and therefore see Hamas's approach to development as an alternative to mainstream thinking. To account for this, the article studies the basis of knowledge in Orientalism and Islamic thought alongside Hamas's rise from its foundation in 1987 to its control of Gaza in mid-2007.*

The Palestinian Islamist organisation, Hamas, has received considerable attention since its foundation during the first *intifada* in December 1987 and through to its 2006 legislative electoral victory and subsequent control of Gaza since mid-2007. Much of the scholarly literature on the party has focused either on Hamas as a 'terrorist' political party or as a social movement whose support is based on charity and welfare provision through educational, health and youth services.¹ In terms of Hamas's political programme, studies have largely focused on its opposition to Israel and to the Oslo process and the extent to which it has sought to remain a relevant player on the Palestinian political scene.²

Given the focus on Hamas as a terrorist organisation or social movement, little attention has been given to its conception of 'development'—a significant gap given Hamas's shift from a party of opposition during the 1990s to one of government since the mid-2000s. Moreover, such oversight is lamentable for three further reasons. First, since the 1990s the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) of the West Bank and Gaza has increasingly become a two-party political system in which the Islamist Hamas has increasingly challenged the historic dominance of the more secular, catch-all

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525

Fatah party. Second, the failure to consider the other facets of Hamas beyond the terrorist organisation–social movement dichotomy has limited public understanding and discussion of the party. Third, Hamas’s rise to prominence has occurred during a period when neoliberalism has become the dominant discourse on development—and arguably ‘the only game in town.’

To redress this, the following article focuses on Hamas’s vision of development, thereby providing general insight into how contemporary Islamists approach the issue (Islamists here being defined as a group who aim to incorporate Islamic values, teaching and ideas into public political, social and economic life). At the same time the article does not present a comprehensive view of ‘Islamic development.’ Such an undertaking would be extremely challenging, given the diversity which exists within Islamic thought. Nevertheless, it does provide an insight regarding the extent to which Islam—through Hamas—may offer an alternative form to the more mainstream version of development associated with neoliberalism.

In addition to offering an account of how Islamic thought has been framed within Hamas, the article also considers the challenges of writing about Islamic thought and action through the prism of Orientalism. At one level, it places the study of Hamas and its views on development within the context of a wider body of literature and assumptions which can only be described as Orientalist; that is, a construction of particular ideas associated largely with Western scholars, analysts and observers who outwardly aim to describe and explain the non-West, but who ultimately operate in an internal way, by reflecting Western attitudes towards the non-West.³ At another level, Orientalism presents particular problems to the author of this article. As a white non-religious Westerner living and writing in the OPT, I am aware of the extent and limitations of my own Western-shaped education, assumptions and views. Reading and writing on Hamas and development required me to evaluate my own understanding of what constitutes scholarly ‘objectivity’ as against subjectivity and whether I have been sufficiently reflective in the course of drafting this article.

In examining the case of Hamas and its approach to development, I make two main arguments. First, while Hamas presents itself as an alternative to the largely dominant secular and neoliberal paradigm in the OPT, its approach to development constitutes a combination of both. This is evident in the most recent and arguably the most comprehensive document relating to Hamas’s thought on the subject to date: the 2006 election manifesto. Second, there is a challenge in studying Hamas and its understanding of development which owes much to the implicit and tacit assumptions associated with past research on both the party and political Islam more generally. Such thinking may be characterised as Orientalist, which says more about the attitudes and prejudices of the observer than the observed.

The article is structured in several parts. The first section examines the concepts of modernity and development and locates their origins in the West. The ‘West’ is defined geographically and culturally, which offers a limited perspective of the non-West (and Islam.) The second section looks at how Islam has responded to the challenge presented by the West. It sets out the

basis of Islamic knowledge and its purpose, as a means of returning to the origins of Islam. Three main reform movements are noted, which coincided with Western influence during the 19th and 20th centuries. Their influence contributed to the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, which is accounted for in the OPT in the third part. The fourth and fifth sections address Hamas's approach to development during its time in opposition (1980s–1990s) and in government (in the Palestinian Authority—the PA—between 2006 and 2007 and in Gaza after 2007). In the conclusion I note the contradictory nature of the Hamas experience and its implications for how Islamists may approach development: as either little different from mainstream (Western neoliberal) development (through the Orientalist perspective) or as substantially different (if Orientalist stances are removed).

Modernity, modernisation, development and Orientalism

To understand how one group of Islamists—Hamas—views development and whether it offers something different, one must understand what constitutes 'development' generally. By doing so one sees that 'development' has Western roots. This is important, since it essentially frames the way that other forms of social change and transformation are seen. Moreover, recognition of development's Western-centrism highlights the relevance of Orientalism as a body of values, ideas and literature which have shaped the West's view of the non-West, including Islam.

When considering the West, it is possible to define it geographically and culturally. Spatially the West encompasses Europe along with the territories conquered and settled by European elites, such as North America and Australasia. Culturally the West has dominated many of the assumptions associated with the contemporary world, for example in historiography, philosophy and technology. Its origins stem from those thinkers during the 18th century Enlightenment in Europe who perceived the West as set apart from the non-West through the a process of 'modernisation'—a concept synonymous with the term 'development'.⁴ For Enlightenment thinkers modernity and modernisation constituted a significant and substantial transformation in the nature of social, political and economic relationships.⁵ At the same time such transformation was notable for being perceived as more than just change, by occurring in a process that was perceived as positive, linear and increasingly progressive.

That Enlightenment thought was seen as optimistic was in stark contrast to Orientalist assumptions about the non-West, both past and present. Orientalism is less an accurate understanding and account of the non-West than a summary of Western assumptions, concerns and expectations about it. Orientalist thinkers and thinking both implicitly and explicitly portrayed the non-West as different from the West. Non-Western societies were largely perceived to be either static or in decline and therefore incapable of experiencing the same form of social, political and economic transformation as experienced in the West; this distinction provided a hierarchical basis for Western dominance over the non-West.⁶ Moreover, it made clear that

'progress' was only possible for such societies if they became 'modern', that is, if they adopted the process of modernisation (or development), which essentially meant following the West. The notion of non-Western development or progress was therefore largely absent—a trend which has arguably continued to the present day.

Western exclusivity in relation to modernisation/development was reflected in various ways. First, following the Enlightenment it was advanced through the imperialist ambitions and colonial practices of the core Western nation-states. While the European powers had previously imposed themselves on African, Asian and Oceanic territory (and the US on the plains of North America), what was distinct about post-Enlightenment imperialism was its link to ideas of progress, modernisation and development. Previous imperialist ideas of mercantilism and the search for new markets were downplayed in favour of a more altruistic (at least to Western minds) aim to 'improve' the conditions of non-Western people. Inherent in this idea was the assumption of the 'white man's burden'; the notion of self-sacrifice to bring progress to the non-West was used by European and North American elites to win over their domestic publics to support efforts to 'develop' and 'modernise' societies overseas.⁷

Second, after 1945 formal imperialism and colonialism went into decline. Former colonies gained their independence. This so-called 'development age' coincided with a transfer of power within the West from the previously dominant European powers to two superpowers: the US and the USSR. Until 1989 the struggle between these two Western superpowers was played out along ideological, strategic and economic lines. Central to the conflict was a choice between capitalism and socialism, ideas which originated within the West and for which the two superpowers sought to gain allies in their struggle against each other from the developing world, usually by providing them with financial assistance. That both capitalism and socialism were Western-centric modes of production was reflected in Marx's distinction between Western and non-Western history and that advance in the Orient had to mean the destruction of its own, static mode of production in favour of Western models.⁸

Third, following the apparent collapse of socialism (and state capitalism) after the 1970s, the dominant paradigm became an arguably more extreme and reductive form of capitalism: neoliberalism. The paradigm originated in the Western core of Europe and North America. Its most vocal advocates were the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the US and UK, and international financial institutions (the IMF and World Bank), which conditioned their financial assistance to developing countries on structural adjustment programmes of their economies and public sectors. Such programmes included reducing the size of the state at the expense of more private sector participation. To encourage this, neoliberal advocates promoted privatisations, deregulation and greater economic liberalisation. The rise of neoliberalism has gone largely unchecked over the past 30 years and now constitutes mainstream thinking on development. This is reflected in the fact that 'alternative' thinkers and thinking on development tend to share

broadly similar objectives to those of mainstream neoliberals (an emphasis on economic growth, exchange, reproduction), while mainstream neoliberals have taken on board previously 'alternative' issues, including the need for more grassroots involvement participation by NGOs, sustainability, environmentalism and capacity building.⁹

Finally, the West has been able to maintain control through its exclusive claim to what is and what is not development. The apparently selfless appeal to redirect resources to the 'underdeveloped' world highlights the power to label. By defining which societies are developed and which are underdeveloped, the developed West is able to maintain its hierarchical dominance over the underdeveloped non-West, since the latter will be involved in a never-ending game of 'catch-up'.¹⁰ More recently this is similarly reflected in some of the underlying assumptions associated with 'liberal peace', where (mostly) Western-based analysts and observers argue for a link between development and security and in which development (progress) is assisted by ever more extensive security measures. That the intention of such measures is to control and contain disorder rather than reach a more comprehensive resolution of conflict tends to be left unsaid.¹¹

Islamic responses to the West

To understand how a non-Western body of thought, Islam, has responded to the West, it is worth understanding the basis of knowledge within it. At its core all Muslims are taught that all knowledge is derived from God. His word was received by the prophet Mohammed in a series of revelations during the seventh century CE. This implies that the full sum of knowledge necessary to live a moral, spiritual and practical life has been available from that point.

The Muslim's aim is to live by the same values and principles that Mohammed and his associates held at the time of the first *ummah* (community). However, this became more difficult as time passed and issues emerged which Mohammed and the first Muslims would have had no direct experience of addressing. An expert body of scholars subsequently came into being to account for Islamic knowledge and its origins and so as to maintain the link with the original *ummah* in a context of changing circumstances and situations.¹²

The *ulema* (legal scholars) employed various tools to apply Islam in everyday life. The most important, Mohammed's revelations, were recorded and compiled in the holy book of the Qu'ran. In addition to the Qu'ran, the *ulema* made use of the *sunna*, which consists of Mohammed's declarations, customs and practices during his lifetime. The Qu'ran and the *sunna* constitute the *sharia* (straight path) that Muslims must follow if they are to live the right kind of life. Applying the Qu'ran and the *sunna* to everyday life is *ijtihad*, a process of ongoing consultation by learned Islamic scholars designed to build consensus regarding the interpretation of this primordial Islamic knowledge.¹³

Despite the common effort and singular goal, maintaining consensus has proved difficult. Over time different groups emerged and sought ways to connect with the past, a process which has continued into the present.

Moreover, the present period has coincided with a resurgence of Islam's visibility as a key global political, social and economic force, especially in the wake of the 1970s oil crises and the Iranian revolution. In response there has been a surge of Orientalist literature which portrays Islam as not only undergoing 'revival', but as an all-encompassing bloc that poses a challenge and threat to the West.¹⁴ Despite this material, it is notable that little attention is drawn to the diversity within Islam, such as the contrast between the Islam of the Iranian ayatollahs and the mujahedeen fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Yet Orientalist attitudes towards Islam have had a long history, dating back centuries. For the purposes of this article and the question of 'development', however, I limit consideration to the time of the Enlightenment. What was different about the periods before and after the Enlightenment was the West's physical presence in the Muslim homeland, when the Ottoman Empire was becoming weaker in relation to the West and just as Muslims were debating over how best to revive what was becoming an increasingly bureaucratised religion.¹⁵ Muslim thinkers observed the West's rising power and the ideas associated with it, from political and economic liberalism to Western advances in science and technology.

From the Orientalist perspective Islam and the West were portrayed in opposition to each other regardless of their own self-contained histories and narratives.¹⁶ Modernity offered a choice: whether or not to modernise and become like the West. However, underlying these two options has been a more problematic relationship between Islam and modernity. This is evident in two ways. First, it has been caricatured in the distinction drawn between Muslim 'modernists' and 'fundamentalists.'¹⁷ That difference has gained a normative dimension, which is reflected in the contrast between 'good' Muslims (ie secularised and westernised) and 'bad' Muslims (ie pre-modern and fanatic), respectively.¹⁸ This application has been applied to Hamas, most notably through the literature that has focused on its apparent support for terrorist activities.

Second, labelling Islamists as either 'good' or 'bad' disregards the nuances and overlap that have existed between different Muslim thinkers and their responses to modernity. From the 19th century three main reform movements emerged, none of which was mutually exclusive.¹⁹ One current, Wahhabism, argued for a return to Islam in its purest form, denying any role for the West. Another, the Aligarh movement, proposed to 'modernise' Islam by stripping out its most superstitious elements and reframing it as an ethical framework in which aspects of Western modernity, such as science and secularisation, could be incorporated. A third group, the Islamist modernists, of which Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) was arguably the most prominent, argued that Muslims could maintain their own history and faith while employing the most useful aspects of Western science and technology. This last approach was therefore neither a complete rejection or acceptance of the West; rather it combined elements of both.

The influence of these different reform movements continued into the 20th century and was reflected in the thinking of Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) and

Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), the former the founder and the latter a key ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), one of the oldest and largest Muslim organisations. Like al-Afghani before them, both al-Banna and Qutb tacitly acknowledged and rejected the modern/Western world. Al-Banna noted the various forms of knowledge that existed, implicitly recognising that Islam was in competition with them and could not therefore be imposed—even as he placed Islam at the top of a hierarchy of knowledge.²⁰ Moreover, he was open to the use of Western technology and political practices when it suited Islamists' purpose, including democracy within the context of an Islamic state.²¹ By contrast, Qutb was less receptive to the West. In his seminal 1964 book, *Milestones*, he saw the West as being in decline, with little to offer Muslims in political, scientific and material terms. He proposed a revival of Islam and a return to the original Muslim community. This would be achieved through a more literal approach to the Qu'ran and its teaching, which would be led by a vanguard steeped in Islamic knowledge.

Following al-Banna and Qutb, individuals like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Tariq al-Bishri, Kamal Abu al-Majd and Muhammad Salim al-'Awwa became prominent in the debate regarding Islamic revivalism and the development of the MB.²² Al-Qaradawi's (b 1926) work has been especially relevant in this regard, through his articulation of Islam as a set of principles which could be applied to the modern world and the importance of Muslim teaching and interpretation to the everyday. Al-Qaradawi is especially important since he is one of the more prominent Islamists who favour religious pragmatism and gradual Islamisation of state and society.²³

In practical terms contemporary Islamists like al-Qaradawi have tended to emphasise certain issues, such as education and communal action in the social sphere, while marginalising others. That oversight has been especially apparent in relation to economic activity; various Muslim scholars, including al-Qaradawi, have broadly accepted the prevailing economic order and its features, including the market, private property and globalisation.²⁴ Islamists accept these notions, since they claim to differ from the West in the fundamental goal of economics: whereas Western neoliberalism is driven by humans' acquisitive behaviour and competition, an Islamic economic system emphasises cooperation and social generosity.²⁵ In contrast to Islamists' criticism of the excesses of Western/neoliberal economics, they have highlighted Muslim communities' commitment to boost greater self-reliance, self-sufficiency, social justice and cultural authenticity.²⁶ Despite this stance, however, some critics charge Islamists with being too complacent on economic matters, noting that acceptance of the prevailing economic structure—and especially property ownership and capitalism—means that socioeconomic disparities will inevitably occur.²⁷

Hamas's emergence and rise

Much of Hamas's philosophy and practice reflected the general trend of Islamic thought during the latter half of the 20th century. As a result, it has had to face the same challenges that Islamists have faced since the 19th

century: namely, the fact that it must operate alongside a time-bounded and conceptually specific phenomenon of modernity associated with the West. This has meant that it has not only rejected but incorporated aspects of the 'modern' condition into its own vision, such as the Weberian conception of the state (ie the shift from personal and *ad hoc* rule to a more bureaucratised and routinised approach) and the role of the market in economic activity.

Hamas derives its origins from the MB. The MB was founded by al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, but it was only in the second half of the 20th century that it grew to prominence, becoming the largest and most significant opposition and challenge to the Nasser regime after the 1952 military coup. Its threat was sufficient that its leaders and activists faced repression, including the execution of several key actors, among them Qutb in 1966. The MB's influence was not just felt in Egypt, but in the surrounding region. This included the Gaza strip which, following the 1948 war between Israel and several Arab countries, resulted in Egypt's control of the territory. Following the 1967 war, Israel gained control of Gaza, which it has maintained to the present, initially through direct occupation and, since mid-2005, through an ongoing siege of the territory, backed by incursions.

In Egypt the MB faced regular persecution from a hostile and predominately secular dictatorship. As a result, Islamism remained a largely marginalised ideology. Only after Israel's defeat of Egypt and the Arab states in 1967 did Islamism become a viable alternative. For the MB and its supporters the Arabs had lost because they had not been sufficiently Muslim and had therefore failed to prepare accordingly. During the following decade disillusion increased as the growing disparity between the Arab world and the West became clearer, alongside rising poverty and repression by the region's governments against their own people. Increasingly people began to turn to Islam for answers.²⁸

Among Palestinians the 1970s had been a highpoint for the main national liberation movement, the Fatah-dominated Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Military action and diplomacy raised both the profile of Fatah and the PLO on the one hand and the Palestinian question in world opinion on the other. In contrast to Fatah and the PLO the Palestinian branch of the MB had opted for a more reformist path in this period and focused its efforts on organising, teaching and proselytising.²⁹ The organisation cultivated its support in universities and other institutions and concentrated on the personal development of society, through religious teaching and moral education.³⁰

The PLO's militarism and the MB's reformism meant that Israel targeted the PLO and largely left the Islamists alone. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon, fracturing the PLO and driving it into exile in Tunisia. This also weakened the position of the PLO among Palestinians within the occupied territory, providing space for Islamists, including the MB, to operate.³¹ That space enabled Islamists to found Hamas as their political party in Gaza in December 1987, the same month that the first *intifada* broke out. This heralded Hamas's first stage. In this period it still constituted an opposition (and for Israel a proscribed) party. This was followed by its second stage,

when it gained power, first through the 2006 elections and then after its seizure of power in Gaza after June 2007. The following sections consider these two periods and Hamas's perspective on development within them.

Education and community action under Hamas, 1980s–1990s

The MB and its Palestinian successor, Hamas, adopted many of the same strategies as those of other Islamist movements. These included the use of reform through education, preaching and guidance; communal activities such as the provision of *zakat* (welfare) and other social services; political action such as mass mobilisation and lobbying of leaders to introduce *sharia*; and the use of military force or violence.³² Of these strategies, the last began to be used in the latter half of the 1980s, mainly as a means of wresting back societal support for other Islamist organisations like Islamic Jihad. But, of the other three, education and community action were arguably the most relevant for making sense of Hamas's understanding of development, mainly because they linked socioeconomic needs with religious values.³³ This is especially relevant when Hamas's primary document is analysed: its founding 1988 charter.³⁴

First, education was especially important to Hamas and the MB since it offered the principal means to advance their objectives within society. Hamas's commitment to religious education highlights its continuity with the ideas of Hassan al-Banna and other more recent Islamists. The centrality of education to Islamists in general and Hamas activists in particular arose from the fact that religious education was the means by which faith would be reignited and social activism promoted.³⁵ In Article 16 of the charter the party emphasised the importance of Muslim training and an Islamic education, including religious obligations such as knowledge of the Qu'ran, *sunna*, Islamic history and heritage. In addition, it encouraged specialists and scholars to assist in the production of a 'curriculum that will provide the Muslim with the correct world view in ideology and thought'.³⁶ Hamas's concern with the role of education was such that it adopted a contrary position to the PLO-affiliated Unified National Leadership (UNL) during the first *intifada*; whereas the UNL encouraged students to participate in general strikes against the occupation, Hamas exempted educational institutions and insisted students go to class.³⁷

Second, a sense of community and community action is applied through education to address other aspects of social life. An example of this is Islamic economic policy, which begins with self-realisation through Islam and a behavioural change within an individual. From this comes an altered approach to development which connects individuals at the grassroots level and encourages them to cooperate communally to achieve distributive equity and economic growth. Various instruments contribute to this approach, including a commitment to profit sharing, equity participation and a rejection of both excessive consumption through *israf* (waste avoidance) and individual profiteering. Alongside these are mechanisms to facilitate redistribution, including *zakat* (a tax on wealth and savings allocated to social spending).³⁸

This sense of community is expressed further in the 1988 charter, where Hamas claims a Muslim society is a cooperative one (Article 20). This stance is accentuated by the particular context of the Israeli occupation, which obliges Palestinians to resist. That vision is spelt out in more detail in Article 21, which notes the different forms that social welfare can take, through either material, spiritual or collective means.³⁹ The link between resistance and development was subsequently expanded on in a later document, the Introductory Memorandum, which claimed that resistance against the occupation would be achieved through 'steadfastness'. To facilitate this, various forms of Arab and Muslim support to the Palestinian cause would be accessed so as to provide support for the affected people.⁴⁰ Such social assistance draws on the mechanisms noted by others in generating public support for Hamas and its predecessor, from the use of charitable institutions, mosques, religious education classes, to *zakat* committees, medical clinics, relief societies and other organisations.⁴¹

Hamas and the state, 2000s

During the 1990s the Oslo process came to dominate the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. An agreement was signed between the PLO and Israel in 1993, which set out the framework and timetable for the creation for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territory and the creation of a Palestinian state by 1999. As part of that process the PA was set up in 1994. Hamas refused to participate in the 1996 legislative elections, claiming that Oslo did not remove Israel's occupation and that refugees outside the occupied territory were excluded from participating.⁴² Hamas's opposition to the elections was therefore based on political rather than religious grounds. At the next legislative elections, in 2006, Hamas took part. It now justified this as a way of 'protecting' the resistance and in order to end corruption in the Fatah-dominated PA. Its subsequent electoral victory transformed the nature of the party, changing its role from that of opposition (to the PA and Israel) and into a party of government.⁴³

Hamas's shifting position in relation to elections reflected deeper changes that had occurred between the mid-1990s and 2006. The presence of the PA meant that Hamas faced direct competition with Fatah for support from the Palestinian people. At the same time Fatah's more cooperative approach with Israel appeared to be generating it support. Hamas had to respond and as a result it began to downgrade its military stance against Israel and to make greater use of social activism in an effort to appeal to the Palestinian public.⁴⁴

Hamas's change of direction contributed to its surprise election victory in 2006. However, the new government's position did not go unchallenged. Hamas in government upset a large number of groups and resulted in a series of crises, including a financial boycott by the international donor community, strikes by public employees, intermittent clashes with Fatah and a growing financial crisis in the public sector.⁴⁵ These various challenges prompted a degree of self-restraint by the new Hamas government in the PA, in particular through fewer efforts to Islamise the education system or the state.⁴⁶ At the

same time the various crises prompted Fatah and Hamas to come together and establish a National Unity government in March 2007.

The joint Hamas–Fatah government did not last long. Within months the two sides were fighting again, eventually leading to a political split of the occupied territory, with Fatah controlling the West Bank and Hamas establishing a virtual one-party state in Gaza. Since mid-2007 Hamas has largely disregarded the PA’s constitutional framework and acted against Fatah in the territory by preventing its members from participating in party congresses. Its control over the security apparatus is unchallenged, while attempts against the Hamas government in Gaza, such as a civil service strike, led the party to appoint its own officials. In the economic sphere, Hamas has introduced various monitoring, licensing and taxation systems alongside the tight Israeli and Egyptian control of what can enter and leave Gaza, including over some of the tunnels which supply goods from Egypt. This has provided it with a financial base within a context of economic stagnation.⁴⁷

What is significant about this period is that although there has been a growing polarisation of Palestinian political life between the secular Fatah and Islamist Hamas, it has coincided with a narrowing of the gap in terms of the two parties’ conception of ‘development’. This has been apparent in Hamas’s public presentation of its policies in three ways: one, a diminution of references to Islam; two, an expansion in terms of the policy areas that it has commented on; and, three, a shared commitment with Fatah to establish a neoliberal and socially conservative form of development and state. In terms of the most relevant public statements regarding these trends, Hamas’s 2006 election manifesto and the 2007 programme for a National Unity government are especially pertinent, particularly when compared with recent development-related documents by the Fatah-led PA since mid-2007.

With regard to Hamas’s 2006 manifesto, it had relatively fewer references to Islam than the party’s 1988 charter and more mention of governance issues and the need for civil reform.⁴⁸ Where Islam was mentioned it was concentrated in six areas: on education, women and children, social policies (where Islam could strengthen social norms), religious guidance and preaching, legislative policy, and cultural and media policies (the latter to prevent corruption and Westernisation).⁴⁹ The references to Islam in education and social policy reflect long-standing commitments in these areas. The proposals on social policy also conveyed a conservative emphasis on social matters. This is evident in the position regarding the role of the family as a means of providing social solidarity and protection and a paternalistic approach to the redistribution of wealth and assistance to particular marginalised groups (women, children, orphans, the poor and the disabled).

Economically, the manifesto was broadly neoliberal. No mention was made of Islam other than some implicit references in favour of ‘balanced economic development’ which avoids excess, including ‘unproductive projects . . . [which] damage social and moral matrices, such as nightclubs, gambling parlours, etc.’⁵⁰ It promoted a self-sufficient and widely distributed ‘resisting economy’ to reduce the impact of the Israeli siege and sanctions, although it did not specify how this was to be achieved. While some public provision was

mentioned (ie the use of public funds for public housing projects), the manifesto left space open for private providers, including in the health sector.

Hamas's increasingly neoliberal trend was reflected in the subsequent National Unity programme agreed between Hamas and Fatah in March 2007. In this document there was a more explicit mention of both parties' desire for a dynamic private sector and government's role as providing the environment in which investment could take place. While the programme expressed support for job creation schemes to tackle poverty and unemployment, it was silent regarding the role of the state. A similar situation was apparent in the sections relating to social development: there was no mention made as to whether the providers of more social security (especially in health provision and insurance) should be either public or private. Where there was more detailed commentary was over the pursuit of a more enhanced and depoliticised internal security system and a joint commitment to notions of political pluralism, democracy, consultation and human rights.

That Hamas shared many of the same development objectives as Fatah can be observed by comparing the measures laid out in the 2006 manifesto and the 2007 National Unity agreement with what are arguably the two most important documents produced by Fatah and the PA since the mid-2007 split: the 2007 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) and the 2009 Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State programme. Both documents promote the idea of Palestine as a 'stable and democratic state', where political pluralism, equal rights (particularly in relation to education, health and housing) and the rule of law exist. The state's role is viewed to be largely limited to that of providing the conditions for public security and the development of a vibrant private sector, the aims of which are to contribute to the creation of an open, knowledge-based and competitive economy.⁵¹ In adopting these measures, the documents reflect the global consensus on the correct role and actions of the state, especially among the Western-led international donor community that has bankrolled the PA since its formation. In particular, they emphasise a reduced role for the state from one that has historically been a provider of public services to one that mainly acts as a regulator of private providers.⁵²

Conclusion

In this article I have examined the vision of development by Islamists in general and Hamas in particular. To account for this, I have had to provide the context in which Islamists and Hamas have operated: namely, an environment in which the West has been both a significant physical presence in the Muslim world and has framed the concept of development, including how it may be understood and applied. In this final section I consider several points, each one worthy of further research and study.

First, the Western concept of Orientalism and its relationship to Islam has limited the choices available to Muslim societies on the one hand and disregarded Muslim thinkers' own responses to modernity on the other. Consequently Orientalism's limited scope for Islam and modernity has meant that at one level Hamas's understanding of development may be seen as not

too dissimilar from that of its principle, secular rival, Fatah. This is most apparent in public statements regarding public policy, in particular its 2006 election manifesto and the joint agreement with Fatah to form the National Unity government in 2007. Both documents presented Hamas's less religion-oriented and more extensive view of development across a wider range of issues. This contrasts with the more narrowly focused, religion-oriented passages on social development in its 1988 charter.

The absence of any substantial difference between Fatah and Hamas in terms of mainstream (neoliberal) development is reflected in the language of Hamas's most comprehensive statements on development yet. Its 2006 election manifesto makes it clear that it broadly favours a system that is relatively liberal in economic terms and conservative in the social sphere. The private sector is to be encouraged, not only for productive activities but also through the family and other private groups and organisations in the provision of social assistance and protection. Similar appeals to the private sector and a limited role for government are also present in subsequent Fatah-led PA documents. That this is the case makes the relative position of the two parties especially ironic today. Since the political separation of the West Bank and Gaza, the influential international donor community has sought to marginalise Hamas by providing financial assistance and support to the Fatah-run PA through a 'West Bank first' strategy, the intention being to show Palestinians the relative merits and advantages of supporting their Fatah client over Hamas.⁵³ Yet that this has happened cannot be considered without some acknowledgement of the fact that it has proved more manageable for the international community and Fatah to operate in the West Bank than it has in Gaza, which remains under Israeli siege. As a result, the capacity to pursue development objectives in the economic and social spheres in Gaza has been extremely limited. The effect has been the existence of a survival economy and social assistance based on humanitarian relief rather than a more sustainable medium- to long-term approach to development.

On the other hand, by concentrating on how Hamas compares and contrasts with Fatah and what it has and has not done in the PA and Gaza, misses an important point: namely, that this is a very Orientalist way of observing a movement and political party associated with Islam. Implicit in much of the literature is an assumption that Hamas faces one of two options: either to embrace (Western) modernity as the more secular Fatah appears to have done; or to remain a 'fundamentalist' party that rejects modernisation/development. Yet, as pointed out above, Islamists from al-Afghani to al-Banna, Qutb and al-Qaradawi have responded to modernity very differently from the way assumed by Orientalists. Alongside the more rejectionist path (Wahhabism) and the wholesale modernisation/Westernisation process (the Aligarh movement), these thinkers and their supporters in the MB and Hamas have offered an alternative: to revive Islam within their communities and adopt only those aspects of the West which may seem useful.

Reflecting this approach, Islamists in the MB and Hamas have prioritised religious education and community action. They have made use of representative democracy and elections when it has suited them. This may

account for their rejection of elections during the 1990s and support for them in 2006. At the same time Hamas's educational and communal activities constitute a form of social policy and protection which operates independently of the main focus in mainstream development, that is, neoliberal practices directed at reducing the role of the state, greater economic liberalisation and deregulation. Moreover, it also provides security in the context of a subsistence economy currently in operation in Gaza.

In other words, Hamas's vision and behaviour entails a different approach to that associated with development in the West. Indeed, Hamas's path shares some parallels with its sister party, the MB in present-day Egypt. The MB's membership and activist base includes individuals from across the left-right spectrum.⁵⁴ That such ideological diversity exists makes the point that the movement cannot be pigeonholed according to Western notions of development. Indeed, towards the end of the Mubarak regime, the range of the MB's position was reflected in constitutional reform, which combined both elements of the (Western) liberal discourse and other, Muslim conceptions. This was evident in the promotion of liberal governance, including checks and balances on state power and government, and the protection of certain civil and political rights on the one side, and a more Islamist interpretation of the state's role, the individual's relationship with politics and the role of the law on the other.⁵⁵

Finally, I conclude with some brief thoughts about the process of thinking about and writing this article. In general, I have aimed for objectivity in my research and writing, even though I am aware that this ideal is one that is largely unattainable. At the same time, reading and thinking about Orientalism and its relationship with regard to Islam and the concept of development, both generally and in relation to Hamas in particular, has prompted me to re-evaluate many of my assumptions. I have also found myself questioning whether I have been sufficiently critical in my past research. The result has been both instructive and educational delivering an experience that I would like to see more attention and recognition given to in work of this kind.

Notes

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