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Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals and Their Responses to Modern Science and Technology

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Introduction

Muslim intellectuals have responded in various ways to the modernization brought about by the West. Historically, we can recall names such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad Iqbal—all prominent names in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—who attempted to counter Western thought by tapping into Islamic resources. In the process, they helped to articulate Islamic philosophy and thought. The stimuli behind the responses made by such thinkers came from the Western colonization of Islamic societies.[1] From the eighth to the fourteenth centuries especially, Western civilization lagged

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[1]For an account of the encounter between Islam and the West and of some of the responses made by Muslim intellectuals, see Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1988); and Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968).

behind Islamic civilization. By a process of economic and cultural advancement, however, it turned the tables on the latter civilization and became, both in material and intellectual terms, the dominant power in the world, posing certain challenges to non-Western civilizations. It is to some of these challenges—which can be subsumed under the broad heading of "modernity"—to which modern Muslim thinkers often respond in their works.

In this paper, I would like to examine the responses of four contemporary Muslim thinkers to modernity in general and to modern science and technology in particular. They are Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ziauddin Sardar, and Pervez Hoodbhoy. These thinkers, while they do not represent the whole range or spectrum of contemporary Islamic thought, can yet be seen as representing the major lines of thought with regard to the issue of Islam and modernity in the Islamic world. Furthermore, their ideas have exerted a powerful influence on the worldwide Muslim intelligentsia. In view of their intellectual stature and profundity of thought, and also in view of the significance and relevance of the issues that they address in their writings, I have selected them for discussion, hoping to provide a glimpse of the course that Muslims might take in their present and future engagements with a modernized and globalized world in which science and technology play an important role.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas:
An Islamic Response to Science and Secularism

A prolific author, Professor al-Attas has written mainly on Islamic philosophy and Sufism, Islam in the Malay world being his special focus. In offering an exposition of his thought, I will rely mainly on his book *Islam and Secularism* (1978), on his monograph *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (1989), and on his

television interview with Ziauddin Sardar, which was published in *Faces of Islam*.[2] His style of writing is almost German (Kant comes to mind)—with the sentences, punctuated by commas, semicolons, and hyphens, rolling on before coming to an end. Remarkably well read in Western as well as in Islamic philosophy, al-Attas expertly draws on both in presenting an argument. He has been described by some as verbose and long-winded, but, to me, he is a passionate thinker engrossed in his own profound thought and struggling to bring it to the surface for the benefit of others. In *Islam and Secularism*, especially in the second chapter, entitled "Secular—Secularization—Secularism," al-Attas diagnoses the ills of modern man, which he traces back to the path of secularization that the West has taken since the seventeenth century. The main object of al-Attas's attack is "the secular." But, in so far as modern science and technology are related to, even if they are not responsible for, the secularization of the West, his critique covers modern science and technology as well. His starting point, like that of Max Weber in his analysis of Western modernization, is the "disenchantment of nature" experienced by the West.[3] Like

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[2]See Ziauddin Sardar, ed., *Faces of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1989).

[3]Al-Attas acknowledges his indebtedness to Weber for this concept. He writes: "By the 'disenchantment' of nature—a term and concept borrowed from the German sociologist Max Weber—they mean as he means, the freeing of nature from its religious overtones; and this involves the dispelling of animistic spirits and gods and magic from the natural world, separating it from God and distinguishing man from it, so that man may no longer regard nature as a divine entity, which thus allows him to act freely upon nature, to make use of it according to his needs and plans, and hence create historical change and 'development'" (*Islam and Secularism* [Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978], 15–16). Compare this with Weber's statement on disenchantment: "The increasing intellectualization and rationalization . . . means . . . that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer

Weber, al-Attas saw this disenchantment as leading to secularization in the West. By detaching nature from the Divine, Western man no longer holds nature in awe or sees it in symbolic terms, but merely regards it as inanimate matter for man to dispose of as he pleases. According to al-Attas:

> The disenchantment of nature and terrestrialization of man has resulted, in the former case, in the reduction of nature to a mere object of utility having only a functional significance and value for scientific and technical management and for man; and in the latter case, in the reduction of man of his transcendent nature as spirit emphasizing his humanity and physical being, his secular knowledge and power and freedom, which led to his deification, and so to his reliance upon his own rational efforts of enquiry into his origins and final destiny, and upon his own knowledge thus acquired which he now sets up as the criterion for judging the truth or falsehood of his own assertions.[4]

Al-Attas partly blames science for this condition, invoking the history of astronomy, especially the Copernican revolution, to support his contention regarding the "terrestrialization of man." He writes:

> In the development of science in the West, the logical result of this rationalism and secularization of nature was highlighted by the Copernican revolution in physics in which the decentralization of the earth in the cosmos brought repercussions that reduced the importance of man himself therein. It finally led to man being deprived of cosmic significance; he became terrestrialized and his transcendence was denied him. . . . Perhaps more important in its secularizing effect to the development of science in the West, the Cartesian revolution in the 17th century effected a final dualism

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have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed" (quoted in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills [New York: Oxford University Press, 1958], 139).

[4]Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 35.

between matter and spirit in a way which left nature open to the scrutiny and service of secular science, and which set the stage for man being left only with the world on his hands. Western philosophy developed resolutely and logically alongside the secularizing science.[5]

Thus, al-Attas blames not only science, but also philosophy, for the secularization of the West, insofar as philosophy was influenced by and followed closely on the heels of science. In his support, he cites the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Pure Reason* convinced the West that metaphysical knowledge is beyond the ken of the human mind and senses, thus casting suspicion on "metaphysical knowledge." Kant was heavily influenced by the science of his day—namely, Newtonian physics—and sought to legitimize, or even objectify, Newtonian physics, partly as a response to David Hume's skeptical attack on human knowledge.[6] According to al-Attas:

After Kant in the 18th century, metaphysics was considered an unnecessary and deceptive guide to reality and truth which should be abandoned by rational, thinking men, as it was demonstrated by philosophy that spiritual realities and truths cannot be known and proved, and that none can be certain of their existence. It is the

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[5]Ibid., 33.

[6]David Hume's epistemological efforts could, in fact, be partially attributed to his attempt to provide a new grounding for human knowledge in the wake of the collapse of religion as a source of authoritative knowledge in the West. See Paul Russell, "Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), 2:247-265; see also Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979). Through his three major *Critiques*—namely, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *The Critique of Judgement* (1790)—Kant took it upon himself to defend science and reason as the bulwark of the eighteenth century Enlightenment—"disenchanting," in the process, religion through a philosophical move that saw the acceptance of both science and religion—albeit on different grounds than the ones he had intended.

> fruits of secularizing philosophy and science, which were altogether alien to the soil of true Christianity, which eventually led Western man to believe in human evolution and historicity.[7]

Al-Attas's diagnosis of the West led him to believe that the Islamic path could secure salvation for man and that the rest of human civilization need not follow the path of Western modernization. Al-Attas differs from Marx,[8] who saw Asia as following the lead of the West in respect of modernization. Al-Attas writes:

> Western man is always inclined to regard his culture and civilization as man's cultural vanguard; and his own experience and consciousness as those representative of the most 'evolved' of the species, so that we are all in the process of lagging behind them, as it were, and will come to realize the same experience and consciousness in due course sometime.[9]

Al-Attas's proposed alternative is reassertion of Islamic faith, belief, culture, and life. For, unlike primitivism, Christianity, or the modern West, Islam holds the right balance between the "modern" and the "symbolic." It is "modern" in the sense that it accepts the *proper* disenchantment of nature, politics, and values,[10] but it distances itself from modernity in that it still treats the Divine as a living reality, associating nature with it through symbolic expression. In Islam, nature is regarded as replete with the "Signs of God." According to al-Attas:

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[7]Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 35.

[8]According to David Lerner, "[A]s Marx noted over a century ago in the preface to *Das Kapital*: 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future'" (quoted in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills [New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1972], 9:386).

[9]Al-Attas, 22.

[10]Ibid., 38.

> The Holy Qur'an's description of nature and man—both in their outward manifestation and their inward hiddenness—as *ayat* (words, sentences, signs, symbols) is self-explanatory in that respect. Nature has cosmic meaning and must, because of its symbolical connection with God, be respected. . . . He [man] must treat nature justly; there must be harmony between him and nature. Since he has been entrusted with the stewardship of the Kingdom of Nature which belongs to God, he must look after it and make legitimate use of it, and not ruin and spread chaos over it. If nature is like a great, open Book then we must learn the meaning of the Words in order to discern their tentative and final purposes and enact their biddings and invitations and instructions to beneficial use in such wise [*sic*] that we may come to know and acknowledge in grateful appreciation the overwhelming generosity and wisdom of the incomparable Author.[11]

According to al-Attas, the Islamic view of nature is at odds with the "disenchanted," "secular" view of nature as found in the modern West. In the field of scientific knowledge, al-Attas also sees Western science—or perhaps the philosophical understanding and implications of it—as being antithetical to the Islamic view of knowledge. Like Seyyed Hossein Nasr (see below), al-Attas rejects neither rationalism nor empiricism but sees them as hierarchical expressions of the Divine. In his monograph *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (1989), he tried to apply the Islamic perspective to scientific knowledge, perhaps "Islamizing" science in the process. For al-Attas, scientific knowledge is not necessarily false, though it is rather limited in scope and does not represent the totality of knowledge. Rejecting the claim of the logical positivists, al-Attas insists that modern science does not tell us the whole story and that Islamic metaphysics and epistemology can rightly claim the status of genuine knowledge. According to al-Attas, therefore, what is needed is a philosophical conception of knowledge based on Islam—a conception that is broader in outlook than rationalism

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[11]Ibid., 36.

or empiricism and is related to Divine knowledge. That al-Attas subscribes to Islamic mysticism is no secret, as can be seen through his painstaking studies of such Malay-Muslim mystics as Hamzah Fansuri and al-Raniri.[12] In these works, al-Attas embarks on a detailed and meticulous examination of the religiophilosophical texts of the two religious scholars, drawing philosophical lessons from them. To be sure, al-Attas's works, especially his later work on al-Raniri, do not show a predilection for the ecstatic type of mysticism sometimes associated with Sufism but, instead, present Sufism as legitimate reason—namely, reason that meets the requirements of both logic and religious faith and is not divorced from divine guidance.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr: The Case for Islamic Science

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., hails from Iran. His many books include *Science and Civilization in Islam*, *The Encounter Between Man and Nature*, *Islam: Ideals and Realities*, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, and *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*. Describing himself as a "traditionalist," he seeks to defend, without being apologetic, a "classical" view of Islam and is critical of attempts to accommodate Islam within a modernist and scientific worldview. His philosophical view resembles Neoplatonism, albeit an "Islamized" version of it, which is not unprecedented in the history of Muslim philosophy. This brief background is helpful in understanding Nasr's position and his response to modern science and technology. Otherwise, it is a little puzzling as to what informs and motivates his critique of

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[12]See al-Attas's *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970) and *A Commentary on The Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din al-Raniri* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, 1986).

modern science and technology and the position from which he is attacking it. Nasr, while critical of modern science and technology, extols the virtues of "Islamic science," a term which has created a fair amount of controversy.

What is the essence of Nasr's critique of modern science and technology? Within the scope of this paper, I will try to summarize his philosophical position. In writings like *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr laments the profanation of nature by modern science, the divestment of nature of any symbolic significance, and the elevation of science to a status that is rightfully occupied by knowledge of "metaphysical truths." Thus, he will have nothing to do with modernist conceptions of science as found in the philosophy of the logical positivists or of Karl Popper. Nasr has nothing to do with the postmodernists either, regarding their philosophy as secular humanist in inspiration and, thus, detached from any notion of the Divine. Rejecting the modernist-postmodernist divide, which is essentially Western in character, Nasr sets up a "fifth column"— that is, he takes a position that is based on "Traditional Knowledge," which is religiously inspired and which found its philosophical ally in Neoplatonism. I deliberately chose the term "Traditional Knowledge" rather than Islam because Nasr's understanding of Islam is not derived exclusively from the historical Islam associated with the Prophet Muhammad, but has more to do with the larger Divine message of which he is but one messenger. Such an understanding is made possible by Nasr's deep preoccupation with Sufism, since Sufis like Ibn 'Arabi and Jalaluddin Rumi are true universalists in their religious orientation, their position finding genuine support in the Qur'an itself. Incidentally, it is the *Hadith* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet that gave "Islam" its religiocultural identity, distinguishing it from Judaism and Christianity, for instance. In this regard, Nasr's subscription to the notion of the "Transcendental Unity of Religions" differs markedly from the position taken by al-

Attas, who regards Islam as being the only true religion. Al-Attas himself is, however, careful to distinguish between the original Christianity brought by Jesus and the present-day Christianity, which acquired a certain sociocultural form and character as it passed through history in its Western setting.

Whatever the merits of modern science may be, Nasr does not regard it as the highest form of knowledge, or even as knowledge capable of delivering to us the nature of "ultimate reality." That knowledge can only be given through religious intuition inspired by the Divine. The relationship between empirical knowledge, rational knowledge, and Divine knowledge is explained by Nasr:

> In Islam and the civilization which it created there was a veritable celebration of knowledge all of whose forms were, in one way or another, related to the sacred extending in a hierarchy from an "empirical" and rational mode of knowing to that highest form of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah* or *'irfan*) which is the unitive knowledge of God not by man as an individual but by the divine center of human intelligence which, at the level of gnosis, becomes the subject as well as object of knowledge.[13]

Thus, Nasr does not deny the validity of scientific knowledge—knowledge that rests on the twin pillars of rationalism and empiricism; he only contends that this knowledge occupies a lower level when compared with religious and Divine truths.

Nasr sets great store by "the science of symbolism" related to the Divine, often citing the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy and René Guénon in this regard. For him, modern science, having "desacralized" nature, only conjures and constructs theories that are functional and utilitarian in purpose and practice in disregard of nature's symbolic aspect. Osman Bakar,

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[13]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 12.

Nasr's student, reflects his teacher's position when he adopts a neo-Pythagorean approach to mathematics:

> According to the Ikhwan al-Safa' (The Brethren of Purity), an eleventh-century brotherhood of Muslim scientists and philosophers, "the whole world is composed in conformity with arithmetical, geometrical and musical relations." But this mathematical content of the universe was never studied in Islam from a quantitative point of view alone. Muslim mathematics was both a qualitative and a quantitative science. Following the Pythagoreans, whose mathematical conception of the universe found easy acceptance into the Islamic worldview, many Muslim mathematicians speak of the "virtues" and "personalities" of various geometrical figures. One of their declared aims in studying geometry is to help prepare the human soul in its journey to the world of the spirits and eternal life. Similarly, the science of numbers is seen to be related to spiritual knowledge. Numbers are not merely quantitative entities on which may be performed the arithmetical operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Numbers are also qualitative entities. In its qualitative aspect, number is the spiritual image resulting in the human soul from the repetition of unity. Numbers are therefore regarded as the projection or as so many expressions of unity.[14]

In fact, part of what Nasr means by Islamic science is medieval science as found in Muslim culture but reflecting a Neoplatonic or neo-Pythagorean orientation. Thus, sciences such as "symbolic" mathematics and alchemy would fit in with Nasr's ideal conception of Islamic science, but not something mundane or practical such as Ibn al-Haytham's optics or Archimedes' engineering principles. In fact, in his book *Science and Civilisation in Islam*, in the chapter on physics, while referring to Ibn al-Haytham, Nasr clearly states his preference:

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[14]Osman Bakar, "The Unity of Science and Spiritual Knowledge: The Islamic Experience," in *Science and Spirit*, ed. Ravi Ravindra (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 90.

This sort of physics, which resembles the works of Archimedes—at least in approach, if not always in techniques and results—is of much interest from the point of view of modern science, whose unilateral approach to Nature is based upon a somewhat similar perspective. But from the point of view of Islamic civilization, such studies, as well as those dealing with automata and various types of machines, occupy a secondary and peripheral role in the total scheme of knowledge. They should always be so regarded, therefore, if medieval Islamic civilization is to be seen in its own perspective. To make the periphery the center, and the center the periphery, would be to destroy the fundamental relationships upon which the harmony of the sciences of the medieval world was based. Such studies as the optics of Alhazen, which from the modern standpoint of the "progressive growth of science" may seem to be of the utmost importance, have never stood at the heart of Islamic intellectual life, which has focused its interest on the unchanging rather than the changing aspects of cosmic manifestation. These studies are, to be sure, of much interest to Islamic science, but they should never be regarded as synonymous with it.[15]

This is not to suggest, however, that Nasr only includes under "Islamic science" what reflects a Neoplatonic orientation, and his work *Science and Civilisation in Islam* clearly shows this. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Nasr's notion of an ideal Islamic science would favor that which could be identified with symbolism and the Divine.

On the subject of man's relationship to nature and on the role played by scientific knowledge in that relationship, Nasr adopts what I would call a "romantic religious position" in view of his appeal for a return to a "religious" perspective on nature and of his denunciation of the analytical-functional method of the natural sciences. According to Nasr:

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[15]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 127-128.

> Islam has certainly its share of responsibility in drawing the attention of its own adherents, as well as the world at large, to the spiritual significance of nature and the necessity to live in peace and harmony with the rest of God's creation. The Islamic tradition is particularly rich in preserving to this day a sapiential knowledge combined with love of the natural environment, a metaphysics of nature which unveils her role as the grand book in which the symbols of the world of Divine Majesty and Beauty are engraved. It also possesses an ethics, rooted in the revelation and bound to the Divine Law, which concerns the responsibilities and duties of man towards the non-human realms of the created order. It is incumbent upon Muslims to resuscitate both of these dimensions of their tradition in a contemporary language which can awaken and lead men and women to a greater awareness of the spiritual significance of the natural world and the dire consequences of its destruction.[16]

Thus, for Nasr, our attitude toward the environment should be informed by the Islamic perspective, which treats nature not merely as a material object to be exploited by man for his worldly gains, but as an entity that is infused with Divine symbolism and is, therefore, to be approached with respect, care, and responsibility.

Ziauddin Sardar: Muslims Between East and West

Unlike Nasr or al-Attas, whose ideas were developed amidst the secure environment of predominantly Muslim cultures and societies, Ziauddin Sardar found himself having to expound Islam within a predominantly non-Muslim—namely, British—society. A Pakistani Muslim living in Britain, Sardar belongs to the Muslim minority in Britain's increasingly multicultural society. Although he does not compromise his Islamic principles, as is evident from his writings, his exposition of Islam and of

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[16]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis," in *Kesturi* 1 (1991), 2:45-46.

science and technology is carefully couched in a language that would offend neither his Muslim constituency nor his Western associates or peers. Sardar seeks to present Islam as an alternative to a Western culture that is caught in a crisis of legitimation brought about, at least in part, by the extension and embodiment of Enlightenment ideals through modern science and technology. In doing so, he finds it convenient to capitalize on the protest made against science and technology by certain groups in the West. Social critics, such as Theodore Roszak and Herbert Marcuse,[17] have pointed to the banality and oppressiveness of contemporary Western culture, whose wealth-producing science and technology have impoverished the human spirit and imprisoned man within the iron cage of modernity. Choosing to join such eloquent protests against modernity, Sardar presents Islam as the alternative. But, here, Sardar is faced with a problem: what kind of Islam will serve as an alternative to the decadent West? Sardar carefully treads between the paths of mysticism and pragmatism; he does not reject mysticism, though he is mindful of its escapist tendencies and its social impotence, and he is conscious of the need for backward Muslim states to develop their science and technology under the guidance of Islamic principles. Thus, unlike those—Bassam Tibi, for instance—who advocate secularism as a means of salvation for Muslims, Sardar, like a conservative Muslim, insists that development, including the development of modern science and technology, should come under the purview of the Islamic faith.

Sardar's so-called Islamic critique of science is really a Western critique of science dressed in Islamic lingo. In fact, his numerous references to Western critics of science, such as

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[17]See Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) and Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972).

Roszak, Jerome Ravetz,[18] Marcuse, and others—the gurus of the counterculture movement of the 1970s—betray the Western origins of his critique of science. Sardar, however, is not in complete agreement with his Western counterparts. He parts company with them at several junctures. On the one hand, he comments in the following words on those who are mystically inclined:

> Similar criticisms of science, and echoes of mysticism, can be heard in the works of Illich, Nasr, Davenport, Goodman and Teilhard de Chardin. All these scholars advocate a very personal morality; the object is to achieve salvation. There is a danger, however, that ethics of a personal and mystical nature may be seen as escapism. . . .
> 'Salvation' is not enough, we also need an enrichment of life. Any operational ethic must give concrete shape to the ultimate spiritual and physical values in everyday activities. The ideal must be translated into a reality, and not simply in the future in the heavenly kingdom.[19]

And he differs, too, with those who reject the nature and existence of spiritual reality, choosing instead to accept a humanist conception of knowledge, for he accepts the reality of the spiritual. He cites the words of Rumi:

> The Inner eye is a kind of inner intuition or insight which, in the beautiful words of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, 'feeds on the rays of the sun and brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to analytical reasoning and sense-perception'. Indeed, it is something that 'sees'; and its 'reports', properly interpreted, are never false. This is not to say that the Inner eye is a

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[18]His close association, and in some cases collaboration, with Jerome Ravetz is of some interest in this regard, especially when we note Ravetz's status as a major critic of science in Britain in the 1970s, especially through his work *Scientific Knowledge and Its Social Problems* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971).

[19]Ziauddin Sardar, *Science, Technology and Development in the Muslim World* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 28.

> mysterious special faculty; it is, rather, a mode of dealing with reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word, does not play any part. Yet the vistas of experience thus opened to us is as real and concrete as any physical experience. To describe it as 'spiritual', 'mystical' or even 'supernatural' does not detract from its value as experience. [20]

Sardar is, perhaps, one of the few Muslim intellectuals who have tried to achieve a balance between the spiritual and materialistic dimensions of Islam. He is one of the few who have taken the trouble to delve into such subjects as science and technology policy, attempting to make it relevant to Muslim society. Whatever depth he lacks in the spiritual and metaphysical understanding of Islam—such an understanding clearly being the forte of those like Nasr and al-Attas—he makes up by his forays into studies on science and technology policy in Muslim countries. In fact, his search for a balance between spirit and matter is not due merely to an idiosyncratic temperament on his part, but is grounded in Islam itself. He writes:

> Islam presents a balanced view between the neo-Dionysian and the neo-Apollonian. This is seen most clearly in the treatment of time. In the rationalist philosophy time is a linear progression: for a particular individual scientist, time ends with his life. . . . For the mystics, only some kind of belief in life after corporeal death can make life on earth meaningful. Islam synthesizes the two views: this life is life in time, while the Hereafter is the life in eternity. . . . We must look upon life as a tapestry in which time and eternity are woven together. This brings unity in the life of the individual and moulds science and society into a co-ordinated whole where each contributes to the welfare of the other, and no individual sacrifices his own interests. This concept of life resolves the contradictory and conflicting claims of scientism, altruism and egoism.[21]

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[20]Ibid., 31-32.
[21]Ibid., 33.

Is this mere rhetoric? Does Sardar's approach have positive policy implications for the Muslim community in particular and for the human race in general? If so, does it compromise the genuine and authentic teachings of Islam? No easy answers can be given. Another contemporary Pakistani Muslim writer, Parvez Hoodbhoy, taking the bull by the horns, confronts the present realities and dilemmas facing the worldwide Muslim community in a way that Sardar's diplomatic and calculated approach does not.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Islam, Science, and Modernity

In a thought-provoking book entitled *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality*, Pervez Hoodbhoy criticized the position, especially concerning "Islamic science," taken by such Islamic thinkers as Nasr and Sardar. Hoodbhoy, whose mentor was the late Professor Abdus Salam, sees science as a universal phenomenon and so views labels like "Islamic science" or "Christian science" to be misplaced, if not erroneous. Hoodbhoy extols the virtues of modern science, seeing it as a great liberator of the human race from past errors and superstitions. This is not to suggest that he is against religion or that he holds religion and science to be antithetical to each other. He supports both science and Islam, but he sees the present attempts at relating the two as untenable or simply wrongheaded. What is his position on the relationship of science to Islam?

For Hoodbhoy, Islam is not intrinsically opposed to science. The position taken by certain Muslim thinkers and scholars (*ulama*), however, has been opposed to science, both in the past and in the present. In Chapters 8-11 of his book, Hoodbhoy examines the issue by taking an excursion into the history of medieval Islamic science. For him, the history of Islam contains a

sufficient number of precedents to warrant his claim that science could indeed have reached great heights in Islam but was suppressed by religious authorities opposed to rationality and free enquiry. According to Hoodbhoy:

> But for all the panegyrics and adulation, there lurks the proverbial skeleton in the closet: the great scholars of Islam were often endangered not by Mongol hordes or infidel Christians but, instead, by homegrown religious orthodoxy. The tension between zealotry and secular learning was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, present almost from the instant at which the Hellenistic sciences were introduced into Muslim civilization. Sometimes subdued, but sometimes overt and violent, the opposition of the orthodox ulama often posed a mortal threat to those who studied science, philosophy and logic. . . . Scholars, therefore relied on the critical support of enlightened Caliphs and rulers for protection from powerful religious figures who considered their work to be heretical.[22]

Hoodbhoy laments the present-day backward condition of most Islamic countries with regard to economic development, industrialization, and science and technology.[23] He thinks that it is detrimental for Muslims to adopt a critical posture toward science, especially a posture that is seemingly legitimated by religion. But he is not totally uncritical of Western science either, and he certainly does not regard science as being above criticism. In fact, he sees the Western and Eastern problematics in relation to science as being essentially different. He writes:

> While science must be vigorously pursued both for development and for enlightenment of the mind, one must be clear that science is not a replacement for religion and that it does not constitute a code of morality. Science provides a unique framework and

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[22]Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (Kuala Lumpur: S. Abdul Majeed & Co., 1992), 109.
[23]Ibid., Chapter 4.

paradigm for calculating and quantifying; but it knows nothing about justice, beauty, or feeling. The emotional void in a technological culture, the unbridled pursuit of weapons of destruction, the callous destruction of the environment in the name of progress, and the imbalances induced by science in the economic and social progress of humanity, are the consequences of a unilinear vision of progress which consecrates and elevates science to the level of an ethic and a morality. This delusion must be opposed as vigorously as rationality must be fought for. But the battleground for the skewed outlook on science is primarily in the West, while the struggle for rationality is in the East.[24]

For Hoodbhoy, the salvation of the Muslims lies in adopting a "modernist" approach toward science, technology, and Islam. Doing so would not entail changing the essentials of Islam, only adapting it to contemporary needs with a view to ensuring the survival of the Muslim *Ummah* in the contemporary age.

Analysis and Comment

In my exposition of the views of four contemporary Muslim thinkers about modern science and technology, I have tried to explain how those views are similar in some respects and different in others. I would now like to address one or two more general issues. First, what are the points of contrast between Islamic perspectives on science, as presented by Muslim intellectuals perceived to represent the "authentic" Islamic position, and contemporary Western perspectives on science, and what are the implications of this contrast for the development of science in the Muslim world? Second, can the scientific perspective and the religious perspective with regard to knowledge of the natural world, especially with regard to the question of the "symbolic" and the "functional," be reconciled or resolved? The "semiotics" of scientific theories suggest that there

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[24]Ibid., 137-138.

are two major aspects of a theory, symbolic and functional.[25] A theory's functional aspect refers to its usefulness or utilitarian value—for example, in solving engineering problems. Its symbolic aspect refers to the picture of nature it evokes. In Thomas Kuhn's terminology, the symbolic aspect would be represented by the metaphysical component of paradigms—the component that gives rise to a certain worldview.[26] We see this clearly in the history of astronomy, for instance—in the controversy surrounding the Copernican revolution. Copernican astronomy not only had mathematical, astronomical, and geographical implications (the functional aspect of that astronomy), but also had an impact on the Christian-European

[25]The German philosopher and mathematician Gottlob Frege made a somewhat similar distinction when he coined the concepts "sense" and "referent." "Sense" refers to the meaning one imputes to a word referring to an object. "Referent," on the other hand, is the physical object being referred to. A comparable distinction will be found to exist between "denotation" and "connotation," the former being similar to "referent," the latter, to "sense." See G. Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. P. Geach and M. Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 56-78. The American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce, through his theory of signs, also draws a similar distinction. For him, signs can be divided into three types: icon, index, and symbol. Peirce then goes on to discuss the "meaning" to which signs refer. See Robert Almeder, *The Philosophy of Charles S. Peirce: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), Chapter 1.

[26]Compare this with, for instance, Gerald Holton's notion of "themata" in his *The Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974). Like Kuhn, Holton believes that theories contain "metaphysical" assumptions—which he calls "themata"—that often motivate and guide the scientist in his choice of theories. Holton's "themata" would approximate my notion of the "symbolic" with regard to scientific theories. At its root, the commitment to themata is "nonrational" in the sense that it is "preanalytic" and contains psychological investment. As Holton puts it: "Such a quasi-aesthetic judgement is a form of thematic commitment with deep psychological roots. It is frequently the basis for choices made in actual scientific work. . . , though it is not common to see this confessed in public print" (26).

worldview, i.e., its symbolic aspect (the symbolic aspect). This distinction will help us to avoid any confusion regarding the nature of our critique of science.

Two major points of difference can be discerned while comparing Islamic and modern perspectives on science. The first concerns the place, role, and meaning of reason in human life. Descartes made a clear and neat distinction between mind and body, or between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This view of science, which is quite different from an Islamic view of science, represents a revolution in the history of Western thought: It marks modernism off from medievalism in all its versions, whether Christian or Islamic. The mind-body distinction drawn at the conceptual level in the seventeenth century was preceded by a parallel disjunction, made earlier, between God or spirit and the natural world. In other words, the Cartesian distinction represents a "disenchantment" at the level of man as opposed to an earlier disenchantment that occurred at the level of nature. The freeing of nature, matter, and body from God, mind, and spirit had the significant effect of leaving the "inanimate" world free for man to act upon, thus paving the way for modern science. As a result, the study of nature now achieves autonomy, and specialization is admitted. This, in Weberian terms, would constitute secularization of the natural realm. But such complete dichotomization, as al-Attas, Nasr, and Sardar point out, would not be permitted in Islam. Thus, the Muslim dilemma would seem to consist in the following: Either one compromises Islamic principles in the pursuit of modern science, or one retains Islam at the expense of modern science. This, however, is a simplistic way of putting the issue since it glosses over certain complexities and nuances.

The second difference between Islamic and Western perspectives on science pertains to the status and role of matter or body. Muslim thinkers like al-Attas and Nasr point to the "nonsecularization" of reason in Islam, insisting on the

connection, in Islam, of reason with "spirit."[27] Such characterization brings the Islamic perspective on reason closer to some medieval conceptions of reason, such as that found in St. Augustine, and distances it from the post-Cartesian accounts of reason in the West, starting with Descartes's separation of mind from body and including materialist and Artificial Intelligence (AI) accounts of the mind. The Islamic conception of reason immediately binds it to the ethical and moral sphere, for reason in Islam is not an entity subsisting in its own right, but is linked to the Divine through its association with the soul.[28]

Finally, it is imperative for us to clarify the nature and aim of scientific knowledge and its relationship to religious knowledge, especially insofar as religion sometimes makes certain claims about the natural world that appear to conflict with scientific observations. We must distinguish between the symbolic and the functional in attempting to formulate a correct approach to science, even from a religious perspective. The confusion that often arises in making a response to science, including a religious response, is due to our inability to make a distinction between the symbolic and the functional. Thus, the error committed by Nasr, for instance, lies in his inability to distinguish between science as a symbolic system and science as functional knowledge. By conflating the two, he charges modern science with performing a role that it is not meant to play, namely, the religious-symbolic role, and, hence, unfairly

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[27]According to Nasr, rational thought is subordinate, though related, to "gnosis" or spiritual intuition. See Nasr, *Science and Civilization In Islam*, 26-27. A similar view about the relationship between reason and intuition is expressed by al-Attas in his *A Commentary on The Hujjat al-Siddiq of Nur al-Din al-Raniri* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, 1986), 461-465.

[28]For a critical account of the nature and role of reason in Islam and its influence on the development of science in Islamic civilization, see Toby E. Huff, "Science and Metaphysics in the Three Abrahamic Religions," in *Intellectual Discourse* 8 (2000), 2:173-198.

condemns modern science for its inability to perform such a cultural role. Having adjudged modern science to be too crude to perform such a lofty Neoplatonic task, he then turns to religious symbolism both as his source of inspiration and as a means of fulfilling the "spiritual gap" pertaining to the natural world. In other words, Nasr sought to "re-enchant" nature by invoking religious symbolism, thus relegating modern science to the realm of the ephemeral in a typically Parmenidean fashion, making it secondary to religious knowledge in its truth-claims about the world. While such an effort on Nasr's part might be laudable to the religionists, it has the effect of undermining the commitment of natural scientists, whose myth it must be that they are discovering truths about the natural world—however these truths might be interpreted. Nasr's position is that scientists are never capable of discovering these truths, for they reside in a plane that is inaccessible to science. This leaves open the question as to what the actual value and worth of scientific knowledge really is; it might even cast doubt on the legitimation and institutionalization of science.

It is pertinent for us to draw on contemporary philosophers' insights concerning scientific realism. While some philosophers of science subscribe to a realist philosophy of science, others reject realism in favor of a nonrealist philosophy. The distinction has some relevance for an Islamic philosophy of science inasmuch as a nonrealist philosophy of science would seem to offer the advantage of granting the legitimacy of scientific practice and scientific theorizing without necessarily making an ontological commitment to the worldview or world picture espoused by or on account of science. In any case, this ontological commitment is problematic for the convergent realist position, for the successor theory often repudiates the ontological claims of its predecessor, as Einstein's theory repudiates Newton's or as the wave theory repudiates the corpuscular theory of light. By engaging in this hermeneutical

exercise of rethinking the very relationship between language and the world, one is thus made aware of the hitherto unexplored possibilities in our construal of the relationship between science and religion. Although I am not suggesting a strictly Wittgensteinian approach, in which the idea of "language games" functions as the central analytical tool, I am suggesting that we explore and reexamine the relationship between language and reality much in the same manner as Ludwig Josef Johan Wittgenstein did.[29] Going back to the question of how a hermeneutical "reengineering" could throw some light on the question of how to construe the truth-claims of science and religion, I would suggest that this would be possible if we went beyond a literal reading of the relationship, on the one hand, between scientific statements and the world and, on the other hand, between religious statements and the world. To facilitate this approach, we can draw on the analytical tools provided by Western as well as by Islamic philosophy. On the Western side, we can study with benefit the theories of Wittgenstein, Donald Davidson, and Richard Rorty in the philosophy of language; on the Islamic side, we can consider the distinction between the two concepts of truth, namely, those of *sidq* and *haqq*.[30] While *sidq* refers to the linguistic property of truth-claims, *haqq* functions more like Kant's *noumenon* or thing-in-itself—that is, truth as

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[29]Using the resources provided by Wittgenstein's philosophy, the Austrian philosopher Fritz Wallner tries to reconcile, by means of his philosophy of Constructive Realism, the notion that our scientific description of nature need not be unique with the physicists and scientific realists' claim that they are dealing with an objective world. See his *Acht Vorlesungen über den Konstruktiven Realismus* (Wien: Universitatsverlag, 1990).

[30]See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1989).

reality in and of itself, which is inaccessible to the ordinary human faculties.[31]

At this stage, one might be prompted to inquire as to how such hermeneutical reinterpretations actually function to avoid a direct conflict between the assertions of science and religion. With regard to the language of science, one can argue that if we go beyond the naive realist construal of the relationship between language and the world, we may be able to construct a model of the relationship in terms of what, in Western philosophy of science, would be called a semantic conception of theories, developed by, among others, Fred Suppe and Bas van Fraassen.[32] In this construal, scientific theories, especially in physics, are viewed not as literal descriptions of the world, but as conceptual configurations that best accommodate the existing scientific data. Any "ontological picture" that emerges out of the conceptual configuration is at best treated as an "accidental property," which does not reflect the intrinsic structure of the world—the *thing-in-itself* in Kant's phrase. Thus, the question of whether light is "actually" a wave or a particle is rendered meaningless if the question is understood in the same sense in which we understand

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[31]The nineteenth-century German physicist Heinrich Hertz expressed a Kantian view of scientific theories when he wrote: "The images which we here speak of are our conceptions of things. With the things themselves they are in conformity in *one* important respect, namely, in satisfying the above-mentioned requirement [that what is predicted in thought through the models conform with observable phenomena]. For our purpose it is not necessary that they should be in conformity with the things in any other respect whatever. As a matter of fact, we do not know, nor have we any means of knowing, whether our conceptions of things are in conformity with them in any other than this *one* fundamental respect." Heinrich Hertz, *The Principles of Mechanics*, trans. from the German by D. E. Jones and J. T. Walley (New York: Dover Publications, 1956; reprint of 1899 London edition), Introduction, 1–2.

[32]For an account of the semantic conception of theories, see Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

an apparently or allegedly similar question such as, Is the table round or rectangular? or Is the ball hard or soft? While questions like the latter type are properly framed within the linguistic context of macro objects in the ordinary world, scientific questions such as the former type cannot be similarly understood. The temptation to reduce questions of the latter type to that of the former arises from the false association of imageries suggested by common nouns like "waves" and "particles." Physicists and philosophers of science, such as Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, get the credit for mooting, perhaps for the first time, the idea of the limitations of ordinary language expressions of physical reality. For these physicists, at a certain level of abstraction in science, especially in physics, the tools of ordinary language break down and we have to resort to the non-visualizable language of mathematics in order to adequately express physical phenomena. As Heisenberg puts it:

> When this vague and unsystematic use of the language leads into difficulties, the physicist has to withdraw into the mathematical scheme and its unambiguous correlation with the experimental facts.[33]

Similarly, coming to Islam, we find that the Qur'an contains two types of statements, *muhkamat* (those which are clear in meaning) and *mutashabihat* (those whose meanings are ambiguous).[34] The former can be literally construed, but the latter admit of greater hermeneutical flexibility, including allegorical and metaphorical exegesis. The very fact that Islam

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[33]Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*: *The Revolution in Modern Science* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 154-155. See, especially, Chapter 10, entitled "Language and Reality in Modern Physics."
[34]See Syed Muhammad Dawilah al-Edrus, *Islamic Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge in Al-Qur'an* (Penang, Malaysia: Secretariat for Islamic Philosophy and Science, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1992), 97-98.

recognizes the linguistic category of *mutashabihat* implies that it endorses the view that language and reality can be connected in more ways than one. Thus, I propose that the problem in the so-called conflict between science and religion arises, at least in part, from our narrow construal of the relationship of language and reality, which leads us to make questionable comparisons between statements. Also, such a theory of the relationship of language and reality allows both for the religiously symbolic construal of nature—as found in Nasr—and for the more functional and pragmatic construal of scientific theories—as found in Hoodbhoy. This is possible because we have moved beyond a narrowly literal correspondence theory of truth and language and have adopted a somewhat flexible, though not relativistic, view of language and reality. The mistake of asking which is the true account of reality only arises if we privilege one mode of speech over another. That privileging is, I would argue, the result of a moral and ethical choice and is not necessarily the outcome of an epistemological or ontological analysis. Thus, if we choose to regard the technologically operational as our arbiter of truth and reality on account of the nature of the industrial society we live in—a point made by J. F. Lyotard,[35] for instance—and reject the symbolic because of its lower or even nonexistent cash value, then we are making a moral choice, which, admittedly, has epistemological as well as other implications. Knowledge is deeply ethical—and more so in Islam—and not even epistemology can be treated independently of ethics, as was explained above.

In conclusion, contemporary Muslims must take a bold approach toward modern science and technology, and this approach must include an interpretation of how best to respond to the challenge of modern science and technology. In this

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[35]See J. F. Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report On Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

respect, the guidance of medieval Muslim thinkers and scholars can take us only so far, our contemporary challenges requiring contemporary modes of thinking and problem solving. The appeal to medievalism, especially to the High Middle Ages, is not peculiar to Muslim intellectuals; it is also found among certain Western historians and philosophers of science, as has been documented by, for instance, Lorraine Daston in her article "History of Science in the Elegiac Mode,"[36] in which she recounts how writers such as Alexander Koyre and E. A. Burtt speak of the new science as signaling the coming of the modern age and the decline of splendid medieval culture with its emphasis on mind and knowledge as opposed to crass materialism. I am by no means advising the abandoning of the age-old practices of Islam, for, unlike Christianity, Islam has not proved to be directly oppressive of the scientific establishment. Nor should Islam be equated with medievalism. Nevertheless, we cannot afford to engage in a critique of modern science as is found in the West today—and do so in the name of religion. The medieval position on science has to be understood as one among several positions taken by Muslims on science. I am confident

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[36]See Lorraine Daston, "History of Science in an Elegiac Mode: E. A. Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* Revisited," *Isis* 82 (1991), 313:522-531. To quote Daston: "[M]any shared Burtt's romantic longing for a closer integration of nature and humanity . . . they . . . persist as faint sighs in a body of scholarly literature critical of modernity. Here political right and left meet in an idealized vision of a world made whole (usually situated in the high Middle Ages), where humans nestled in a womblike nature before a rude birth into an indifferent universe. This vision could as easily come from a cultural conservative as from a radical feminist, and both might find sustenance and succor in Burtt. It is a form of anti-modern cultural nostalgia that cuts across decades and political lines. This is the key to the enduring appeal of Burtt and other historians in the elegiac mode. Saturation in the seventeenth-century texts and contexts that Burtt only grazed does not seem to have cured us of our hankerings for the premodern; it will take a demystified Middle Ages to make us grateful for modernity" (530-531).

that Islam can accommodate modern science and technology within its normative system and social framework. That confidence will start to wane only if we accept the Muslim medievalist position on science as the only legitimate Islamic position.

Synopsis of the Views of al-Attas, Nasr, Sardar, and Hoodbhoy

Contemporary Muslim Thinker	Attitude to Mysticism	Attitude to Modern Science and Technology	Attitude to Social and Economic Development
Syed Naquib al-Attas	Enthusiastically accepts it but rejects the idea of a universal mysticism that transcends religious boundaries and traditions.	Does not regard it as the high point of human culture. Regards the secular nature of science and technology as forfeiting any real advance made in the name of humanity.	Accepts it with qualification. At best, would regard it as a means to an end. Material development must be subordinated to religious and spiritual growth.
Seyyed Hossein Nasr	Embraces mysticism in its universal form. Regards the existence of a common core of religious truth, variously characterized as esotericism or *sophia perennis*, as real.	Is basically a medievalist. Does not regard modernity as the apex of human culture.	Lukewarm at best. Extols the virtues of "spiritual" development over material progress.
Ziauddin Sardar	Tolerant; neither rejects nor is enthusiastic about the idea or the phenomenon.	Takes it seriously. Sees the need for Muslim countries to develop their science and technology.	Is convinced of the need for the Muslim *Ummah* to develop economically.
Pervez Hoodbhoy	Would have nothing to do with it. Too much of a scientist to even entertain the plausibility of mystical experiences.	Adopts a very positive attitude. Shares this view with his mentor, the late Professor Abdus Salam.	Would like to see Muslim countries as highly developed as Western countries.

The Indigenization of an Intellectual Tradition: A New Trend in Contemporary Islam in Yorubaland (Nigeria)

Amidu Sanni[*]

Islam in Yorubaland: A Historical Outline

The contact of Sudanic Africa with the Orient predated Islam: commercial exchanges first brought the two geographical entities together. The emergence of Islam and the military campaigns that followed on its introduction to territories outside the Arabian peninsula, specifically from the seventh-century onward, ensured the contact of sub-Saharan Africa with Islam from such an early period.[1]

The wide expanse of land west of the Niger River and constituting the southwestern segment of Nigeria is known as Yorubaland. The language of its inhabitants, Yoruba, derives from the tribal toponym and is classified under the Kwa language

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[1]Adam 'Abd Allah al-Ilori, *Al-Islam fi Na'ijiriyah wa sh-Shaykh 'Uthman b. Fudi al-Fulani* (Lagos: Ath-Thaqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1978), 17-19.

group of the Niger-Benue area.[2] We cannot say with precision when Islam came to Yorubaland. But, according to I. A. Akinjogbin, Islam had come to the ancient Yoruba kingdom of Oyo by the fourteenth century through the trans-Saharan trade.[3] Exchange of goods in a sustained fashion over a considerable length of time often involves exchange of ideas, which would not have excluded religious ones. The Dyula Muslim traders of Mali, who were active participants in the trade, are believed to have reached this kingdom in the fifteenth century as the Songhay Empire was coming into the limelight following the decline of its putative precursor, the Mali Empire. That a number of Islamic terms in Yoruba—for instance, *Imale* (Islam), *alfa* (scholar), *yigi* (marriage)—are borrowed from Songhay underpins the Songhay factor in the introduction of Islam to Yorubaland.[4] Migrant Muslim clerics from Nupeland, a neighboring territory, were reported to have built a mosque at Qyo Ile, the capital of the Oyo kingdom, around 1550, during the reign of Ajiboyede, the thirteenth king.[5] Strong evidence of the presence of Islamic scholars in Oyo Kingdom is inferentially available from a legal responsum—namely, the *Shifa' ar-Ruba fi Tahrir Fuqaha' Yawruba*, addressed to them by Muhammad b. Masanih (d.

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[2]For more information on the origins of the Yorubas and their language, see Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: Christian Missionary Society, 1973; first published 1921), 3-8, and Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 58-61.

[3]I. A. Akinjogbin, "The Expansion of Oyo and the Rise of Dahomey 1600-1800," in *History of West Africa*, 2 vols., ed. J. F. Ade-Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1971), 1:311.

[4]See M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), 113-114.

[5]Adam 'Abd Allah al-Ilori, *Nasim as-Saba* (Lagos: Ath-Thaqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1986), 12.

1667), a Katsina scholar and a disciple of al-Maghili.[6] Further proof of the presence of Muslim scholars in Yorubaland at this time is found in the notice of the sale, in 1659, of an Arabic manuscript by a copyist of Malian descent, Habib b. Hasan al-Malawi al-Yawrubawi.[7] That Islam thenceforth recorded a remarkable appeal and following in Yorubaland is evidenced by the observation that nine Yoruba towns were populated by Malams (that is, Muslims) by the close of the eighteenth century.[8] Already in the nineteenth century, we possess clear proofs of the diffusion and infiltration of Islamic mores and concepts among the natives: in the *Ifa* verses, in the mantras of local diviners, and in the doxographic vaticinations of traditional priests are adscititious expressions of Islamic terms.[9] From the nineteenth century until the present, Islam has continued to expand and gain a remarkable following—so much so that it can safely be argued that more than half of the natives of Yorubaland profess the faith, albeit with observable variation in the degree of commitment and loyalty.

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[6]Ibid., 8; A. D. H. Bivar and M. Hiskett, "The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804: A Provisional Account," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962), 1:116; *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, vol. 2 of *Arabic Literature of Africa*, 2 vols., ed. J. O. Hunwick and R. S. O'Fahey (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 439; henceforth *ALA* 2.

[7]R. D. Abubakre, "The Contributions of the Yorubas to Arabic Literature," 2 vols. (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1980), 1:23-24.

[8]Stefan Reichmuth, "Imam Umaru's Account of the Ilorin Emirate," *Sudanic Africa*, 4 (1993), 167.

[9]T. G. O. Gbadamosi and J. F. Ade-Ajayi, "Islam and Christianity in Nigeria," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime, (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1984), 354. A standard work on Ifa divination among the Yorubas is Christoph Staewen, *Ifa—the African Gods Speak: The Oracle of the Yoruba in Nigeria* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1996). See also my article, "Diagnosis Through Roses and Sand: Islamic Elements in the Healing Custom of the Yoruba," *Medicine and Law Journal* 21 (2001), 2, forthcoming.

Islamic Intellectual Tradition

Islamic intellectualism—and, indeed, composition in Arabic—in sub-Saharan Africa has a history of some eight hundred years behind it—beginning, more precisely, in the documentary work of Ibrahim b. Ya'qub, otherwise known as Abu Ishaq al-Kanemi (*fl.* 1200).[10] A somewhat earlier period has been suggested by Bivar and Hiskett, who maintain that Arabic literacy and the custom of authorship in the Arabic language were introduced to West Africa in the eleventh century, during the period of the Almoravids.[11] The introduction of the Arabic language is almost a matter of course in any land wherever Islam is introduced. The reason for this is not hard to find. Classical Arabic, to borrow from Hiskett, is "the liturgical language of Islam"[12]: an adherent of Islam needs to read the Qur'an in the rituals and in other religiously inspired endeavors, and this is usually and preferably required to be done in Arabic.

In contrast to northern Nigeria, the history of a sustained and serious cultivation of Arabic among the natives in Yorubaland goes back only to the first quarter of the nineteenth century, as shown by the testimony of Richard Lander, the British explorer who visited the territory between 1825 and 1826. In almost every town he visited, he claimed to have seen Hausa teachers propagating Islam and teaching the natives reading and writing in Arabic.[13] The first—and until the arrival of Christianity in the nineteenth century, the only—literacy in

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[10]About whom, see *ALA* 2:16-19.

[11]Bivar and Hiskett, "The Arabic Literature of Nigeria," 105.

[12]M. Hiskett, *A History of Hausa Islamic Verse* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1975), 19.

[13]R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, 2 vols. (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830), 1:277. Cf. T. G. O. Gbadamosi and Ade-Ajayi, "Islam and Christianity," 348.

Yorubaland was in Arabic.[14] That Arabic was apparently well established among the natives at this time is further confirmed by another piece of evidence: adaptation of the Arabic script—with which the natives were already familiar—for a standard Yoruba orthography was one of the options considered by the Christian missionaries in their effort to produce ecumenical literature for their Yoruba clientele and patrons.[15] The idea seems to have been discountenanced, presumably because it would have promoted Arabic, hence Islam—a creed with which Christianity was competing for adherents and influence.

The subjects of study by the natives at the inchoate stage of the intellectual tradition were essentially religious—namely, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), paraenesis (*wa'z*), theology (*kalam*), asceticism (*tasawwuf*), and aphorisms (*ḥikam*). The culture of authorship follows, naturally, the learning tradition. An Anglican missionary described Ilorin as the "Mohammedan power" of nineteenth-century Yorubaland,[16] and its status as the intellectual capital of the territory at the time is no less remarkable. It is, therefore, not surprising that the oldest extant original composition in Yorubaland is from this town. The

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[14]See J. F. Ade-Ajayi, "How Yoruba Was Reduced to Writing," *Odu* 8 (1960), 49. It has been argued that the earliest collection of Yoruba words in print dates from 1819, when the English diplomat T. E. Bowdich undertook the project in Ashanti-Ghana. Hannah Kilham, the first to advocate the education of Africans in their vernaculars, is also reported to have made a collection of Yoruba words, which was published in 1828. See P. E. H. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages: Essays and Bibliographies* (London: Cambridge University Press, in association with the West African Languages Survey and the Institute of African Studies, Ibadan, 1967), 4-6.

[15]Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, Introduction, xxiii. A useful work on the use of the Arabic script for other languages is Alan Kaye, "Adaptations of Arabic Script," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 743–762.

[16]J. F. Ade-Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 60.

rendering in quintains (*takhmis*) of a paean of the Prophet Muhammad composed by Usmanu dan Fodio (d. 1817) was the first indigenous attempt at versification by a native. The rendering was made by Mahmud b. Shitta (d. c. 1880).[17] The oldest prose works—one a chrestomathy on linguistic sciences and the other a history of Ilorin—were also written by the Ilorin scholar Ahmad b. Abi Bakr, who bore the *nom de plume* Omo Ikokoro (d. 1936).[18] Essentially, compositions in the field of literary scholarship emerged from around the beginning of the twentieth century, when poetical productions on such themes as elegy, eulogy, satire, pietism, and occasional events started to appear. From then on, Arabic-Islamic scholarship has continued to grow in several Yoruba towns and cities, such as Ibadan, Lagos, and Ijebu, among others. During this period, the cultivation and employment of Arabic also grew. Chancellery transactions, correspondences, and Muslim court proceedings were done in Arabic until the second half of the twentieth century, this being the state of affairs even after English literacy had become widespread and formalized. For instance, one Muhammad Salah ad-Din recorded and corresponded in Arabic at the chancellery of 'Abbas Aleshinloye, chief of Ibadan (r. 1930-1946).[19] Similarly, Sheikh Ya'qub b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar (1876-1965), who wrote in Arabic, functioned as the registrar of the local Islamic court in Ikirun.[20]

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[17]See *ALA* 2:444. Shitta was the grandson of Sheikh Alimi (d. 1823), the Fulani founder of the Ilorin emirate and the presumed author of the oldest paraenetic poetical piece found in Yorubaland—namely, *Qasidah fi 'l-Wa'z*. See *ALA* 2:443.

[18]*ALA* 2:446-447.

[19]A useful study on the scribe is Isaac A. Ogunbiyi and S. Reichmuth, "Arabic Papers from the Olubadan Chancery: A Rebellion of the Ibadan Chieftains," *Sudanic Africa* 8 (1997), 109-35. Compare *ALA* 2:499.

[20]See *ALA* 2:543.

Indigenization of the Intellectual Tradition

The Arabic script is said to be next only to the Latin in terms of spread of use in the world.[21] Its modified form is used for many of the indigenous languages with which the Islamic faith came into contact. In the African tradition, we may mention Fulfulde, Hausa, Swahili, and Nupe as languages that have adopted the Arabic script. But this was before foreign influences—mediated through European colonialism—prevailed. Similarly, Asian languages—for example, Persian, Urdu, Malay, and Turkish—have also been influenced by Arabic in terms of script and vocabulary.[22] And in medieval Europe, we can talk of *aljamiada* literature—that is, Castilian text written in Arabic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[23]

The need arose to supplement the Arabic-Islamic literature of Yorubaland with a written Islamic literature in the vernacular. As the Islamic pattern of life took root among certain strata of the society, and as Muslim puritanism sought to dislodge the heathen tradition and the frivolous and bawdy pastimes celebrated in its oral verses, there started to emerge, before long, a Yoruba literate verse that was wholly Islamic in content and character and could serve as a missionary tool and as an agent of social reformation. Arabic being the only language of literacy known from the outset, the Arabic script became the obvious candidate for the transcription of Yoruba vocables and alphabetical characters. The modified Arabic script in which the Yoruba language is transcribed is known as *anjemi* (Hausa >

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[21]*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 30 vols. (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Incorporated, 1997), s.v. "Arab Civilization," 2:152.

[22]See Anwar Chejne, "Arabic: Its Significance and Place in Arab-Muslim Society," *Middle East Journal* 19 (1965), 448.

[23]A very useful and recent study on this is the sixth chapter of Ana Echevarria, *The Fortress of Faith. The Attitude Towards Muslims in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

ajami; Arabic > *'ajam*: "non-Arab/ic"). As mentioned above, it had been in use since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Yoruba-Islamic verse is known as *waka*. Moshood Jimba gives two explanations for the term, one of them relating it to its Hausa origin, the other, less tenable and somewhat specious, making it out to be a compound of *wa* ("come") and *ka* ("recount/apostrophize") that bears reference, frequently, to widows to whom professional Muslim raconteurs read the rules governing the period of their statutory confinement.[24] Songs, whether or not accompanied by instrumental music, were a familiar phenomenon of the local cultures of Sudanic Africa. The evolution of these songs and their subsequent development into a quotidian literary genre in the form of *waka* in Yorubaland was inspired by:

1. the zeal to propagate Islam and draw people's attention to its ideals and practices;
2. the need to provide a credible and no less entertaining alternative to the heathen and frivolous traditional verse, which was often characterized by cross-gender dancing, drumming, age-grade ceremonies, and other aspects of indigenous culture; and
3. the desire to moralize the society and neutralize the efforts of the votaries of bucolic pleasures, which often undermined the moral imperatives of the Islamic faith

In order to have the entire society embrace these and similar impulses, Muslims began to compose vernacular Islamic poetry in response to the dominant, Arabic-oriented Islamic puritanism. Badamasi b. Musa Agbaji (d. c. 1891), from Ilorin, was the first to compose literate Yoruba-Islamic verse employing Arabic rhyming schemes and script. He is also credited with the invention of some Yoruba poetical meters, which represented an

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[24] Moshood Mahmood Jimba, *Ilorin-Waka: A Literary Islamic and Popular Art* (Ilorin: Taofiqullahi Publishing House, 1997), 8.

osmotic adaptation of Arabic and indigenous metrical traditions, and his poems in this genre are said to have run into three volumes. Some of these poems have survived and are still in use among the Muslims, particularly the preachers in Yorubaland.[25] A poem in which he protests against a ban imposed by Emir 'Ali of Ilorin (d. 1891) against public preaching is transcribed and translated as follows:

Transcription

> *aa se dake jeje ni'lu imale * t'aase nasia nibe*
> *ka r'eni ti nnu lo ka pe oun lo mo * ka bii leere bi bee lo dara*
> *wa-litakun minkumu t' Oluwa wi da * e lo wonuu takarda o wa nibe*
> *eo baa bee * e o baa nibe*[26]

Translation

> Why should we keep quiet in an Islamic city without preaching,
> When we see someone going astray and yet leave him to his fate?
> Let's ask him [the Emir] whether this is good.
> What happens to the divine injunction [Qur'an 3:103]: "Let there be amongst you [preachers]." Check the Scripture and you will find it there.
> You will find it there like this. You will find it there.

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[25]Adam 'Abd Allah al-Ilori, *Lamahat al-Ballur fi Mashahir 'Ulama' Ilurin* (Cairo: An-Namudhajiyyah, 1982), 36; *ALA* 2:456-457.

[26]See Stefan Reichmuth, *Islamische Bildung und soziale Integration in Ilorin (Nigeria) seit ca. 1800*, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1998), 147, in which a German translation of the text is given. What is assumed to be an Arabic translation of the piece as provided by al-Ilori is largely a paraphrase and a recast, the Arabic original being as follows (see *Lamahat*, 37):

> *Sukutuna hakadha bi-la nasihah / Ka-mukthina fi d-duja bi-la ida'ah*
> *Wa-tarkuna l-juhala' 'ala d-dalalah / A-hakadha yanbaghi ya amirana*
> *Wa-l-takun minkum ummatun du'atun /Qalahu rabbuna li-du'atina*
> *Thabitun abadan fi kitabina / Unzuru Qur'anakum ya amirana*

For more samples of Badamasi's compositions in their original text, see Jimba, *Ilorin-Waka*, 17-22.

Since Badamasi's pioneering attempt to promote the Yoruba-Islamic verse from an oral model to a written form, the genre has continued to be popular among the indigenous Muslims in many Yoruba towns and cities. What is quite remarkable is that the Latin script, in spite of its widespread use and cultivation, has not been able, even among those who are literate in this script, to displace the Arabic script in the literary enterprise or the custom of composition of Yoruba-Islamic verse. The thematic spectrum has remained the same, and the motivation, unaltered: the exponents have always been concerned with religious ideals and moral standards and with warnings of the eternal damnation that awaits the morally perverse and the spiritually deprived, as illustrated by this contemporary composition[27]:

Transcription

Fol. 1r

Bismi llahi 'l-Rahmani 'l-Rahim. Allahuma salli ala sayyidina Muhammad wa sallim.

1. *B'oba ti Moka de ko je kirun * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

      B'oba ti Moka de ko je kirun

2. *B'oba ti Moka de asi bu'ti mu * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

      B'oba ti Moka de asi bu'ti mu

3. *Bi-ramulana ba-wole koje mukan * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

      Bi-ramulana ba-wole koje mukan

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[27]The holograph of this poem was acquired by a colleague, Rushdat Ojelade, while she was working on her doctoral dissertation at the University of Ibadan in the late 1980s. The codex used in the present study was obtained through A. F. Ahmad, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan.

4. *B'oba ti Moka de asi gbe'gbomu * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

  B'oba ti Moka de asi gbe'gbomu

5. *Biotuba koni d'alikaosara * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

  Biotuba koni d'alikaosara

6. *E ma ba jiyadi je n'tori Oloun * E so jiyadi dile ijo iranu*

  E ma ba jiyadi je n'tori Oloun

Fol. 1v

7. *Bi-banre Moka yoosi beja kan * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

  Bi-banre Moka yoosi beja kan

8. *Boba ti Moka de asi beja kan * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

  B'oba ti Moka de asi beja kan

9. *Musulumi ode oni koyemito * Binti Moka de beeni nbegi dina*

  Musulumi ode oni koyemito

10. *Imale alabede yi koyemito * Bi tin beja b'ogun beeni nre Moka*

  Imale alabede yi koyemito

11. *Kaaba o bio b'odalahira * Alaji tinjo fuji lona kaaba*

  Kaaba o bio b'odalahira

12. *E ma ba Moka je n'tori Oloun * Alaji tinjo fuji lona jihadi*

  E ma ba Moka je n'tori Oloun

Fol. 2r

13. *B'oba de Moka tan koni kirun * Alaji t'o garafa onifujirege*

B'oba de Moka tan koni kirun

Allah the Exalted said: "O ye who believe, certainly intoxicants, games of chance, idols, and divining by arrows are abominations devised by Satan, so keep away from them that you may prosper. Satan only seeks to stir up enmity and hatred amongst you by means of wine and gambling and to keep you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer, will you not abstain therefrom?"[28]

Translation

Fol. 1r

In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful. O Allah, bestow your blessings and peace on our master Muhammad.

1. When he returns from [pilgrimage to] Mecca, he would not observe the canonical prayers. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When he returns from [pilgrimage to] Mecca, he would not observe the ritual prayer.

2. When he returns from Mecca, he gulps wine. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When he returns from Mecca, he gulps wine.

3. When it is the time for Ramadan fasting, he keeps none. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When it is the time for Ramadan fasting, he keeps none.

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[28]This quotation from the Qur'an (5:90–91) is the concluding statement in the colophon of the original composition.

4. When he returns from Mecca, he smokes marijuana (with pleasure). A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When he returns from Mecca, he smokes marijuana (with pleasure).

5. If he does not repent, he would not reach the Kawthar pond. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> If he does not repent, he would not reach the Kawthar pond.

6. You committed dishonesty at Jiyad against a seeker of Allah's pleasure; you pilfered a piece of clothing at Jiyad to be worn at a dancing reception for returning pilgrims.

> You committed dishonesty at Jiyad against a seeker of Allah's pleasure.

Fol. 1v

7. When going to Mecca, he would behead a dog as a heathen sacrifice. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When going to Mecca, he would behead a dog as a heathen sacrifice.

8. When he returns from Mecca, he beheads a dog (in thanksgiving). A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When he returns from Mecca, he beheads a dog (in thanksgiving).

9. The Muslim of today, I cannot understand (his behavior). When he returns from Mecca, he takes to highway robbery.

> The Muslim of today, I can't understand his behavior.

10. O ye proclaimer of Islam who goes about with a knife, I cannot understand. He offers dog as a sacrifice to Ogun, yet he goes to Mecca.

> O proclaimer of Islam that carries a knife, I cannot understand.

11. The Ka'bah (mosque) will call you to account in the hereafter, O you pilgrim that dances to Fuji music on the way to the Ka'bah.

> The Ka'bah (mosque) will call you to account in the hereafter.

12. For God's sake, don't bring the pilgrimage to disrepute, you pilgrim that dances to Fuji music at Jiyad (quarters).

> For God's sake, don't bring the pilgrimage to disrepute.

Fol. 2r

13. When he reaches Mecca, he would not observe the canonical prayers. A pilgrim he was who mounted the Arafat, yet adept at dancing to Fuji-Reggae music.

> When he reaches Mecca, he would not observe the canonical prayers.

Analysis of the Poem

Certain difficulties are characteristically associated with the rendition and transcription of Yoruba-Islamic verses, not the least being the absence of a standard orthography of the Yoruba alphabet in Arabic script. The diversity between the phonological and morphological systems of Arabic and Yoruba has been adduced as a reason for the lack of a coherent and systematic pattern of writing Yoruba in Arabic script. The imprecision and the uningenious approximation of the two

sound systems to each other are such that, more often than not, only the authors of such materials can read them with absolute ease and correctness.[29] Jimba adduces two more reasons for the difficulty in question. First, contemporary exponents of the intellectual culture pay scant attention to writing Yoruba in Arabic script. Second, the mistakes arising from transmission are often not corrected: most of the poems are transmitted either orally or in the form of copies made from exemplars that may themselves be defective or may suffer from structural deficiencies or dialectal idiosyncrasies.[30]

The colophon of the poem under study does not contain the name of the author, but, according to A. F. Ahmad, the composer is from Ikorodu.[31] Internal and external evidence allows us to draw certain conclusions about the author's sociocultural background. The poem is written in a fine *maghribi* hand and is lustrously vocalized. The author must have been to Mecca for the pilgrimage, as can be deduced from his vivid description of dancing Nigerian pilgrims who lodged at Jiyad, one of the principal residential quarters for African pilgrims in the Holy Land. The date of composition is not known, but we can assume, for the reason offered below, that it was not earlier than 1979. In this year, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister (b. 1948), the putative originator of Fuji music in Nigeria, released an eight-track, long-playing record under the number SKOLP 3. The track entitled "Fuji-Reggae" is the fourth and concluding track of

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[29]I. A. Ogunbiyi, "Arabic-Yoruba Translation of the Quran: a Socio-linguistic Perspective," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3 (2001), 1:27. A recent study by Ogunbiyi on the subject is "The Search for a Yoruba Orthography in the 1840s: Obstacles in the Choice of the Arabic Script," a paper presented at a colloquium held at the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, between 13 May and 5 June 2002.

[30]Jimba, *Ilorin-Waka*, 18, n. 1.

[31]Interview with Dr. A. F. Ahmad.

the flip side. Incidentally, Fuji music itself has its roots in the Islamically inspired *were* music, which emerged in the mid-1950s and is often performed during the Muslim fasting period of Ramadan. A remarkable echo of the *waka* matrix of Ilorin is discernible in our piece, further evidence of the enduring influence of this intellectual powerhouse on Yorubaland. It may be assumed that the author of our piece is literate in Latin numeracy and probably in Latin script, too. The reference to the Qur'anic passage that he used as an envoi at the end of his poetical composition is indicated in Latin numerals.

The piece is satirical and admonitory; it upbraids Muslims who engage in frivolity, carnality, and idolatrous sacrifice during and after the holy pilgrimage to Mecca and warns of the evil end that awaits those who fail to repent. The Islamic salvation pericope and its exposition in verse or prose draw much of their imagery and ideas from the eschatological literature of Islam. The Yoruba-Islamic paraenetic verse, eminently exemplified by the piece under study, follows this tradition. For example, *al-kawthar*, the water of life to which all believers would have access in the hereafter, is a familiar motif in Islamic eschatological lore,[32] and this is the image reflected in line 5 of our piece. Line 6 presents—for some of the reasons outlined above—a difficult reading, hence the not-too-felicitous transcription. That the author uses the Arabic script in spite of his demonstrable knowledge of the Latin script is an eloquent testimony to the esteem in which the Arabic language is held by Yoruba authors writing under the influence of Islam and, indeed, by the exponents of Yoruba-Islamic verse.

The remarkable use of Arabic or its script among Yoruba Muslims—demonstrated in the profusion of Arabic inscriptions, graffiti, and Islamic aphoristic expressions on doorways, homes,

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[32]Cf. Qu'ran 103. See also *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Kitab al-Iman: bab tafadul ahl al-iman fi l-a'mal," *hadith* 21, and "Kitab at-Tawhid," *hadith* 532.

and public and private vehicles, confirms the popularity of the language among the adherents of the Islamic faith in Yorubaland. It is not even uncommon to see Yoruba medical prescriptions, therapeutic recipes, or Yoruba incantations consigned to writing in the Arabic script by Muslim faithfuls. Whether this is cultivated to maintain the secrecy and mystery surrounding this type of literature or is intended to sustain the aura of respectability and esteem associated with literacy in Arabic is difficult to establish with any definitive precision. The most sensible explanation will be to attribute it to both reasons.

In conclusion, an important cautionary note must be sounded: The indigenized Islamic literature of Yorubaland as represented by the Islamic verse should be regarded as a genre in its own right and not as a literary subaltern of an oriental archetype. Imposing alien standards on Yoruba-Islamic verse, wishing that it had followed the paradigms of the conventional Arabic-Islamic literary models, or deprecating it for lacking such features as are found in the classical prototypes—that is, punishing it under "a cluster of absences," to borrow from Gudrun Kramer[33]—will be to deny the creativity of indigenous minds and to stigmatize an autocephalous literary type, which Yoruba authors writing under the Islamic dispensation can rightly claim to be. Although the literary tradition among Yoruba authors remains loyal to the archetypal model of authorship in Classical and Standard Arabic, it has nonetheless maintained a remarkable penchant for the employment of the vernacular in the custom of authorship and writing, and this does not show any sign of dying out in the foreseeable future.

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[33]See her "On Difference and Understanding: The Use and Abuse of the Study of Islam," *ISIM* [International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World] *Newsletter* 5 (June 2000), 6.

The Urban Mosque:
Urban Islam, Activism, and
the Reconstruction of The Ghetto

Akel Ismail Kahera[*]

Little or no attention has been given to the social and political efficacy of the urban mosque in urban studies, in the evaluation of public policy, or in sociological literature—hence, the absence of a discourse on the activist role that the urban mosque has played in inner-city—predominantly African American—neighborhoods across the United States over the last three decades.[1] A recent study of mosque attendance among African American Sunni Muslims indicates the following: 62 percent attend urban mosques located in city neighborhoods, 27 percent attend inner-city neighborhood mosques, and 5 percent attend mosques located in suburban areas.[2] These figures suggest that 89 percent of the African American Sunni Muslim communities are located in urban areas.

The urban mosque can serve as a locus of support to people, especially since most people who live in ghetto-like conditions

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[1]For example, see Khadijah Bint Abdullah, "A Masjid Resurrects a Neighborhood," *Islamic Horizons* (January-February 2000), 38-41.
[2]Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Pearl, and Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001), 26.

continue to face serious problems in terms of health care, education, and economic stagnation. There are an estimated fifteen hundred to three thousand mosques in the United States and a Muslim population of five to eight million. African Americans make up 42 percent of this figure, with the other 58 percent broken down into first- and second-generation ethnic groups who have immigrated to America from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East over the past thirty years.[3]

In poverty-stricken neighborhoods, the urban mosque is seen by many as an alternative institution, one of whose primary accomplishments is the manner in which it has dealt with social displacement, neighborhood isolation, and political neglect. For this reason, "urban Islam" in poverty-stricken neighborhoods combines orthodox religious practices and social activism. The social activism of "urban Islam" is vital to the community at large because it sustains hope. The urban mosque organization also symbolizes stability.

Imams (traditionally, prayer-leaders, but also the official directors of mosques) and other mosque administrators have always recognized the need to engage with residents of their local

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[3]For a detailed summary of the Muslim population in the United States, see Fareed H. Numan, "The Muslim Population In The United States: A Brief Statement" (December 1992 [cited 21 January 2001]), available from http://www.islam101.com/history/population2_usa.html. The breakdown of the total Muslim population is as follows: African Americans: 42 percent; Indo-Pakistanis: 24.4 percent; Arabs: 12.4 percent; Africans: 5.2 percent; Iranians: 3.6 percent; Turks: 2.4 percent; Southeast Asians: 2 percent; white Americans: 1.6 percent; East Europeans: 0.8 percent; all other groups: 5.6 percent. The ten states with the highest concentration of Muslims are, in descending order, California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio, and Maryland. This represents 3.3 million Muslims. There are more than 1,500 mosques, compared to 600 in 1980, 230 in 1960, and 19 in 1930. In addition, there are 400 Islamic schools (108 full-time), over 400 associations, an estimated 200,000 businesses, and over 80 publications.

neighborhoods. Such individuals command respect. There are a number of inner-city neighborhoods where the mosque administrators and the community residents have worked hand in hand to improve the living conditions and provide service to the residents of the local community. The following are only some of the many notable examples: the United Muslim Movement (UMM), Central Philadelphia; the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP), West Philadelphia; Masjid Muhammad, Grove Hall, Boston; and Baytullah, Ivy City, Washington, D.C.

In 1995, researchers from the University of Pennsylvania conducted an ethnographic study of the Sunni Muslim community of West Philadelphia. According to their report, the operation of two mosques in West Philadelphia—AICP and Masjid Mujahedeen—had actively improved the neighborhood, resulting in a high level of public satisfaction. The report stated:

> [I]n West Philadelphia, a Muslim-owned store neighbors the west side of the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects [AICP]. . . . [T]he store opens during times when the mosque holds special events, such as holiday prayers or special lectures. The store sells clothing and halal meats [meat slaughtered according to Islamic law]. Also Masjid Mujahedeen (413 S. 60th street) has associations with the local restaurant and barber shops. South-Side Sandwiches (422 S. 60th street) across the street is associated with the mosque, and donates food to help people in need. . . .
>
> [L]ectures that deal with subjects such as nutrition are common. . . . a female doctor came to speak with Muslim women at the mosque to lecture about eating low-fat foods. . . .
>
> Emergency situations are common problems mosques have to help remedy. Masjid Mujahedeen provides emergency social services for the community. . . . These emergency situations vary from people in distress, people who need help defending

> themselves, and providing emergency shelter . . . whether they are homeless or travelling.[4]

In *Good City Form*, Kevin Lynch has described the outgrowth of community life as a problem of social services that are apropos to certain dominant ways of thinking about the forces that shape a neighborhood or city.[5] There can be no doubt that the display of social activism described above has benefited the local community, resulting in a collective improvement of the quality of urban life. In 1967-1968, whole communities and neighborhoods across America were devastated as a result of race riots. Newark, New Jersey, was only one of the many cities that suffered greatly from the devastation. As reconstruction began in the 1970s, reaching a turning point in the 1990s, the number of urban mosques—mostly storefront buildings—founded during this period in America also rose. At present, 43 percent of the mosques are located in city neighborhoods, 21 percent are in downtown neighborhoods, 21 percent are in rural areas, and 16 percent are in suburban areas.[6]

Newark was one of the urban areas where new mosques were established during this period. Whether social conditions can be altered through a faith-based institution whose constituents have been alienated or rejected or have encountered discrimination is a debate to which the case of Newark is very much relevant. Space does not permit a narration of the problems relating to the history and philosophy of urbanism in America or a treatment of the current debate on the subject

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[4]Tabassam Shah and Jeffrey Diamond, "A Research Paper on the Sunni Muslim Community of West Philadelphia," Student Papers from Ford Foundation Associated Classes (Department of History, The University of Pennsylvania, Fall 1995 [cited 24 January 2001]); available from http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/Ford/WPhila_Muslims.html.

[5]For an in-depth discussion of this point, see Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

[6]Bagby, Pearl, and Froehle, 24-25.

among academics, specialists, and politicians. It may, however, be observed that, in some neighborhoods, the services provided by the urban mosque have contributed to the development of small businesses in low-income areas, which, in the long term, can only raise living standards despite the national poverty-line income dilemma. This type of activism is exactly what is proposed in Newark's fifth ward. Amin bin Qasim Nathari, one of the founders of the Masjid As'habul Yameen on 4th Avenue in East Orange, reports that his association, Global Village Development Corporation

> has achieved its mission to date without accepting a dime from fund-raisers, lectures and 'kindness,' and that upcoming plans are to provide free or low-cost subsidized day care and the building of a computer lab with 10 to 12 stations for after school programs, with the ultimate goal of adult computer literacy courses. [7]

Newark and East Orange are served by more than a dozen urban mosques. While the urban mosque is primarily a religious institution, the collective understanding of religious experience and its positive spin-off cannot be overstated. In the neighborhood surrounding Masjid As'habul Yameen, for example, the crime rate has dropped since the establishment of the community mosque ten years ago, and the commercial activity that takes place adjacent to the mosque has increased in the past five years.[8]

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[7]Jill Lerner, "Muslim Residents are Helping to Revitalize Amphere Commerce," *East Orange Record*, 17 September 1998. The Global Village Corporation includes the Masjid As'habul Yameen, the Muslim Village Books & Things, An-Nur Learning and Resource Center, and the Muslim Community Center of Essex County (MCCEC).

[8]Information obtained from Amin Nathari, Director, Masjid As'habul Yameen, March 2000.

The *East Orange Record* published an article entitled "Muslim Residents are Helping to Revitalize Amphere Commerce." The article notes that

> in accordance with the comprehensive Islamic principles which address economic, spiritual and social issues, the Muslim population is working to change the sociological dynamic of the neighborhood. A drop in crime and increase in new development have been attributed to the efforts of the [local mosque].[9]

The *East Orange Record* also reports that the East Orange deputy police chief praised the Muslim population as a "stabilizing influence" in the area, noting that there was an almost zero percent crime rate within the Islamic community.[10] One official of the local mosque interviewed by the *East Orange Record* for the aforementioned article discusses the role and the initiatives of the mosque in the local community in the following words:

> Once we took the initiative, we made the area safe from both an economic and security point of view. We told the drug dealers our mission and said 'we are not going to let you do that in front of us,' but we won't turn a blind eye either. Some of the dealers accepted Islam after recognizing the association's commitment and compassion.[11]

II. Space Matters: The Revival of Branford Place, Newark, New Jersey

For a few decades following the riots of 1968, Branford Place was one of the forgotten streets of Newark. It was infested with drug and alcohol addicts and was known for rampant vagrant behavior. Today, it is difficult to think of Newark without the

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[9]Lerner.
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid.

urban contrast of the past, which includes the spontaneous transformation of Branford Place. The presence of the mosque/office complex since the early 1970s has given a fillip to the growth of commercial activities all along the street, which sports *halal* deli and restaurants, Muslim bookstores, and stores that sell Islamic artifacts or cater to the needs of Muslim and non-Muslim clientele. These and other types of businesses, located in the Muslim-owned building at 24 Branford Place, above the prayer halls, have changed the area's identity. The Muslim community worships daily in a provisional prayer space (*musalla*) on the second and fourth floors of the renovated office building, which was bought from the city's list of abandoned properties in the 1970s. Because the Branford Place mosque/office complex is located in downtown Newark, the upper floors of the building are rented for business, law, and medical offices; for social and job-training services; for a computer school and a travel agency; and for a Muslim school, which was open from 1978 to 1988, with one hundred students enrolled in pre-K through grade eight classes. These types of business activities help to demonstrate how this mosque/office complex provides an aggregate of community services.

New Jersey has the fourth largest Muslim population in the United States. Of the country's estimated Muslim population of five to eight million, New Jersey represents 4 percent of that figure, or 200,000.[12] The Greater Newark community is a cosmopolitan congregation of twenty thousand Muslims who live in Newark and the surrounding areas. While a great majority of this figure are African American Sunni Muslims, Branford Place is not dominated by any single ethnic group.

On Friday, the day of assembly (*yawm al-Jumuʻah*), African American, Caribbean, Egyptian, Moroccan, Indian, Pakistani, West African, and Indian Muslim worshipers who reside in the

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[12]See Numan.

Greater Newark area and the surrounding areas frequent the congregation prayer or *salat al-Jumu'ah*; thus, about seven hundred to a thousand men and women attend the prayer. Significantly larger numbers—from three to five thousand—attend the the two *Eid* prayers—*Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*—which occur after Ramadan and *hajj*, respectively, and the special *tarawih* night-prayers during the fasting month of Ramadan. For over eight years, a unified *Eid* committee has held *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* prayers in the West-Side Park at 12th Street and 18th Avenue and at Weeqway Park.

Recognition of the urban mosque as an institution supporting the trend of urban revitalization in the city of Newark has increased over time. Because the mosque/office complex is located in proximity to Newark City Hall, city government officials are conscious of the major differences the presence of the mosque has made. City officials have made various concessions, which satisfy part of the religious experience of the community. For example, since the use of the mosque for the Friday service has been sanctioned, cars may park on designated streets for an extended period of time during the service—roughly, from 1 P.M. to 2:30 P.M.

The Branford Place mosque/office complex has reversed the lack of attention from which the commercial property that borders the mosque—and which was previously abandoned—suffered. The revival of commercial activity in the area over the past two decades testifies to the noticeable urban growth brought about by the mosque/office complex. That the presence of the complex has created a positive civic and religious node in downtown Newark is now recognized by public and government officials. The Muslims who work or do business in the downtown area now have easy access to a place of worship, and the mosque/office complex provides a variety of different services to the public in general.

In the early 1970s, when the Branford Place building was first bought from the city, the property surrounding the building showed signs of gross neglect. Many of the newly thriving storefront shops were boarded up or were in a run-down condition. The Muslim community immediately rallied around the mosque, and its efforts and programs reversed the process of worsening social and economic conditions. Today, people congregate on the sidewalk outside the mosque/office complex on Fridays; vendors sell their goods, food, and different types of Islamic paraphernalia; and the faithful gather to engage in casual conversation or to negotiate a sale. This atmosphere highlights the pleasant communal relationship that the mosque has cultivated.

The Branford Place mosque has been a strong urban catalyst for economic growth and stability. It has allayed the fear that comes with urban disorientation; contributed to the creation of a positive urban environment; and enriched the lives of those residing in its vicinity. Furthermore, it has enhanced the relationship between the local Muslims and non-Muslims, including the government of Newark, and it has fostered a positive relationship with the members of the community at large. The Branford Place urban mosque/office complex has arguably contributed to the well-being of both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The history of the Branford Place mosque/office complex shows us how an urban mosque can have a bearing on social and economic growth. The complex is a public space for congregational worship, but it is also a full-time educational institution, as it has provided much-needed Islamic instruction to young children and teenagers for over a decade.[13] At the same

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[13]For more than a decade, a highly trained and qualified resident *shaykh*, a native of West Africa, officiated at Branford Place. He was respected by the community for his scholarship in Islamic law and for his ability to give authoritative legal opinions. He had a Ph.D. from New York University,

time, the mosque provides free access to women, who play an active role in the administration of the school as well as of other community activities. Fundraisers and educational projects, such as the "Mosque Scholarship Committee," a youth committee started by three African Muslim women, regularly convene and hold various types of events at Branford Place. Only Jersey City, which has had a vibrant immigrant community since the early 1970s, rivals Newark in terms of religious activities and educational programs.

In their seminal work, *Islamic Values in the United States*, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Adair T. Lummis show that all immigrant Muslims in the United States have had a long association with some aspect of Islam in the countries from which they come. The image these immigrants retain of the mosque is soaked in memories and meanings of the past.[14] In their minds, the mosque assumes a different function and a different role, which are not easily transferred to the United States. In the United States, however, the mosque takes on a dramatically different role, a point I have discussed in a recent publication.[15] Because the majority of Muslims in Newark are

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having obtained, previously, degrees in Islamic law (*Shariah*) from the Islamic University of Madinah, Saudi Arabia. He provided much-needed guidance on legal questions and gave advice on marital issues and on various aspects of worship.

[14]Yvonne Y. Haddad and Adair T. Lummis, *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). This book explains how most immigrant communities view the role of the mosque in light of religious and social mores. They discuss various types of issues, including issues arising between first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants and issues that are related to gender and are the source of much discontent among Muslim men and women. It should be noted, however, that the Newark community is different in many ways, and, as such, it does not suffer from the identity crisis or from the generational insecurities highlighted by Haddad and Lummis.

[15]Akel Islamail Kahera, *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2002).

African American, the mosque assumes special importance when viewed in the context of an urban environment in America. The social and religious needs of the Newark community, however loosely defined or understood, are important. After the prayer, education is considered most essential, but social activities that promote or enhance solidarity are not to be ignored either. The Branford Place mosque/office complex has been successful in creating and maintaining a sense of community feeling analogous to Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyyah*, or "group feeling."

III. Jihad (Struggle) Against Drugs in the Ghetto: The Masjid at-Taqwa, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York

In 1988, the Masjid at-Taqwa, which is located in the heart of Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York, launched a jihad (organized effort, struggle, etc.) against the drug dealers in the neighborhood surrounding the mosque. Their efforts to rid the community of this menace reveal how an effective urban mosque can produce positive social results, changing, in the meantime, the psychological aspects of the habitat. The psychological aspects of a habitat are an urban reality, and, ultimately, those who control "space" and "place" (for example, the street) shape the image of the city. According to Stanford Anderson:

> Streets, in concept and in reality, accord poorly with institutionalized categories of problems and professionals. 'The economy of the street' is apt to strike us as a confusion of categories even though every specialist is permitted to operate abstractly on the more exclusive environment of the city.[16]

In Bedford Stuyvesant, the "economy of the street" was dominated by the sale of drugs. The local mosque, Masjid at-

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[16]Stanford Anderson, *People in the Physical Environment: The Urban Ecology of Streets* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975). Thresholds Working Paper 1.

Taqwa, which had been established in 1981, launched the struggle for control over neighborhood streets and urban space in 1988. After a two-year-long confrontation with the drug dealers, it succeeded in reclaiming the streets for the residents of the neighborhood.

By 1989, Masjid at-Taqwa, in collaboration with the New York City Police, had closed down fifteen drug houses. The effort was successful largely due to the positive interaction between the police and Muslim patrol groups from the mosque, who steadfastly guarded the neighborhood streets adjacent to the mosque. In one operation, the efforts of the Masjid at-Taqwa organization drew a favorable and sympathetic response from the media covering the operation, during which several members of the organization were arrested when they targeted a building where drug transactions were taking place. The members of Masjid at-Taqwa entered the building and ordered the drug dealers to leave; however, five mosque members were subsequently arrested when the drug dealers called the police.

The strategy to rid the area of drugs was proposed to the 79th Precinct Police, which agreed to the plan. According to the plan, the Masjid at-Taqwa organization would work with the police in a forty-day patrol operation after the police had swept the area clean of drug dealers.[17] The members of the Masjid at-Taqwa kept the drug houses under round-the-clock surveillance for the said period of time, informing people that drugs were no longer being sold at the location.[18]

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[17]Saul N. Weingart, Francis X. Hartmann, and David Osborne, "Case Studies of Community Anti-Drug Efforts," NIJ Research in Brief (Indiana Prevention Resource Center, Indiana University, October 1994 [cited 17 January 2001]); available from http://www.drugs.indiana.edu/prevention/commprev.html.

[18]Rachel Kohn, "The Spirit of Things: The Black Imam of Brooklyn" (21 May 2000 [cited 17 January 2001]); available from http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s129522. htm.

Lynch's notion of "the image of the city" treats a habitat as a reflection of individual habits and collective behavior. It isolates group feeling (*'asabiyyah*) and religious conduct as unique types of collective experience. For this reason, human values and spatial principles are expressed in terms of public services. That is to say, the characteristics of a habitat are both physical and psychological.

The jihad launched by the Masjid at-Taqwa (literally, the mosque of piety or faith) reinforces the belief that a grassroots organization can engage in liberating actions outside the system of established political constraints. In their ardor to correct the psychological patterns of life on the drug-infested streets surrounding the mosque and the neighborhood—and aware that there were no other means for dealing with such a complex problem—the members of the Masjid at-Taqwa came up with a radical scheme. Confronting the problem—presented both by drug pushers and by users—involved conditions of danger, but the members of the Masjid at-Taqwa were motivated by their Islamic faith in undertaking the project to salvage the neighborhood. In their case, fighting drugs became a matter of faith.

IV. Conclusion: The Ghetto and the Activist Role of the Urban Mosque

The two case studies discussed above can be matched by others in other places, especially in cities with high concentrations of Muslims. However, since no comprehensive studies of the activist role of the urban mosque exist, we may refer to a debate that has arisen within the larger sociological discourse on life in urban America. Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton write in their book, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*:

> The emergence of the black ghetto did not happen as a chance by-product of other economic processes. Rather, white Americans made a series of deliberate decisions to deny blacks access to urban housing markets and to reinforce their spatial segregation. Through its actions and inactions, white America built and maintained the residential structure of the ghetto. Sometimes the decisions were individual, at other times they were collective, and still other times the powers and prerogatives of government were harnessed to maintain the residential color line; but at critical points between the end of the civil war in 1865 and the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, white America chose to strengthen the walls of the ghetto.[19]

In general, Massey and Denton's observations are relevant to the present discussion. They have drawn our attention to the cultural, social, religious, demographic, and racial factors that affect life in urban America. Indeed, one cannot separate these factors from life in urban America. Part of the challenge that faith-based activism faces involves services that each mosque can provide to the local community. To be efficacious, the mosque must satisfy the community's social and educational needs as well.

The extent to which the urban mosque affects American life will vary, of course, according to its efficacy in each community. We have examined the urban mosque as a component of American public life and seen that its place in the physical environment accords with its potential to help improve social, environmental, and behavioral conditions. We also saw how this "new" urban institution promotes and delivers social services and in what ways it has been a catalyst for social change. In *Good City Form*, Lynch remarks that a "substantial equity of environmental access, at least up to some reasonable range of

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[19]Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19. See, especially, Chapter 2, "The Construction of the Ghetto."

space and diversity of setting, must surely be one fundamental characteristic of a good city."[20]

We have talked about the various types of innovative social and educational services that have been introduced by the mosque-centered communities under study. Our case studies have shown that, playing a social or public role, mosques can, in various ways, deepen and intensify human experience. The interaction between human experience and the urban mosque can help to clarify some of the issues raised by Lynch and others.

Much more work can be done to appraise the extended influence of the urban mosque on a community's social life and economic growth. Although the urban mosque in the United States is essentially concerned with collective worship, its association with social, cultural, educational, and economic activities is just as important. The stability and presence of the mosque in urban America is, therefore, based on expectations informed by the practice of Islam in this country.

Considering the special problems of large families, of broken homes, of children born out of wedlock, of income deficiencies that affect children, and of the cycle of deprivation, the services provided by the urban mosque reflect the community's aspirations, needs, and capacities. Without exaggerating, we can affirm the readiness of the mosque to support a modest distribution of financial benefits to the poor, the needy, and the "legitimately dependent" through the *zakat* and *sadaqah* system, the establishment of which is both a religious and a social obligation. The *zakat* institution is well established in the Qur'an and in Islamic law. Muslims who meet certain financial criteria must give a small percentage of their net annual savings in *zakat*. *Sadaqah* is given voluntarily, with the intention of receiving God's blessings. It can take the form of a material gift, like money; of intellectual and physical support; of a valuable service

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[20]Lynch, 229.

provided to the community or an individual; or of support given to a noble cause that benefits society, a community, or an individual. The amount of *sadaqah*, unlike that of *zakat*, is not fixed; one may give as much *sadaqah* as one wishes.

Our society accepts a plurality of norms with respect to the ways in which human potential can enhance life. At present, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and the urban mosque, as a vital organization and representative symbol of that religion, seeks to define and meet an important social challenge.

Playing for Respect:
Some Notes on the Interplay
Between Islam and Athletics

Faiz Shakir

Muslims in America today remain engaged in an ongoing quest for acceptance and respect. Observant Muslims often get noticed on account of their names, dress, and dietary practices. For the same reasons, though, they are sometimes labeled as "different"—and the perception of Muslims as "different" may lead to misunderstanding, stereotyping, and unequal treatment of Muslims by some of the country's non-Muslim majority. In this paper, however, I will not address the causes behind the stereotyping and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims in America, but will look at some of the possible remedies for such problems. In specific terms, my argument is that participation in sports, by creating codependence among athletes from various backgrounds, can generate a spirit of understanding and tolerance among the participants, and that Muslims can use the arena of sports to project and foster a better image of Islam and Muslims in American society. Over the past half century, sports have promoted greater acceptance, in this society, of blacks and women, and I believe they have the potential to do the same for Muslims, who desire respect and feel that they have been victims of misunderstanding.

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*Faiz Shakir recently graduated (with honors), with a major in government, from Harvard University.

Sports provide a setting for individuals to assess one another *as individuals*, rather than as members of a stereotyped group. In team sports, the contribution of each member is crucial to team success. As a result of codependence that necessarily marks team dynamics, teammates, who must spend considerable time with one another and interact in a variety of situations, gain a better understanding of one another's likes, dislikes, character, and conduct. In contributing to team performance, a member's race, color, or religion is overlooked in favor of that member's importance to the chemistry and overall achievement of the team. When the Houston Rockets beat the New York Knicks in 1994 to win the National Basketball Association championship, Houston's fans and players readily embraced their star player, Hakeem Olajuwon, a black Muslim, who was accepted as an individual instead of being singled out as a person belonging to a certain faith. We can be reasonably certain that Olajuwon's presence on the team enabled the Rockets players and fans to have a better understanding of Islamic rituals, obligations, and teachings. Such an understanding reduces the likelihood that non-Muslims will feel insecure or threatened, either spiritually or physically, by the presence of Islam or Muslims around them.

Given the historical power of athletics to offer minorities greater opportunities for social acceptance, it is somewhat surprising to note, in this country, the conspicuous absence of Muslims not only in the professional ranks, but also at the college, high school, and even youth league levels (though, of late, the numbers do seem to be increasing). The ability to run, throw, hit, shoot, or catch is certainly not acquired through religious affiliation. The general abstention of Muslims from sports appears to be conscious and willful. Muslim parents seem reluctant to immerse their children in an environment that, they fear, would not be conducive to the cultivation of Islamic piety. Surely, living in a free society places one in many situations in which one is tempted to engage in conduct incompatible that is

with one's beliefs. But while one's character and piety will certainly be tested in the arena of athletics—as they will be in any other arena, for that matter, athletics being no different than school, the science club, or a friend's house—the benefits of participation in athletics will far outweigh the possible "harms." Going one step further, I would argue that, from a cultural or religious standpoint, athletics offer a distinct advantage over other fields. In most areas of social interaction, one is under great pressure to conform to peer behavioral norms, the price of nonconformity usually being some form of ostracization. In athletics, on the other hand, one participates in social life through activities that revolve around competitive experiences. An athlete who belongs to a team is rarely cast as an outsider for long, and is, sooner rather than later, accepted as a member of the team regardless of his or her beliefs or culture. Teammates realize that team success, after all, depends upon the success of each individual member.

One difficulty that Muslim athletes face in a non-Muslim society is that of reconciling the demands of the obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan with maintaining their commitment to play and perform as members of their teams. The physical challenge of playing while abstaining from food and drink drives many Muslim youths away from sports activities during Ramadan. But Ramadan can be taken as presenting Muslims—including Muslim athletes—with the opportunity to strengthen their spirituality and perform acts of goodwill. Instances are not lacking in which non-Muslim teammates and coaches have not only accommodated the religious needs of the Muslim members of a team, but have also demonstrated a willingness to adapt to meet certain needs—like the need to observe the obligatory fast.[1] In December 2000, the

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[1]There are also instances in which fellow teammates have offered positive help to Muslims whom they have found to be steadfast in their faith. For example,

Los Angeles Times printed an article featuring how some Muslim athletes were finding ways to perform their religious duties and, at the same time, maintain their commitment to high school athletic teams.[2] Proving that greater understanding leads to greater acceptance, these Muslim athletes exhibited creative ways to cope with their participation in games during Ramadan, at the same time increasing general awareness about their religion. The article narrated how one high school basketball coach allowed his Muslim players to take a few moments off from practice each day to break their fast; if they were in the midst of a game, the fasting Muslim athletes would eat on the bench and break their fast. In the same article, a Muslim soccer player recounted how, during Ramadan, his coach reduced the amount of running he was required to perform at practice. Through their devotion to their faith, the Muslim players brought greater awareness of Islam to thousands of people. A high school athletics commissioner, who only learned of the Muslim athletes' fast through media coverage, remarked, "We need to alert coaches and schools to be aware of cultural differences."[3] In southern California and elsewhere, Muslim high school athletes, besides increasing awareness about Islam and Muslims, have promoted acceptance of Islam as one of the religions of America, in some cases changing the public's attitude toward Islam and Muslims.

Shareef Abdur-Rahim, playing for the small-market, low-visibility Vancouver Grizzlies franchise, has been touted by *Sports Illustrated* as "the best [basketball] player you've never

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they would not offer Muslims alcoholic drinks and, at dinner, would alert Muslims whether the food contained a pork ingredient. In cases like these, it is obvious that peer pressure no longer remains negative but assumes a positive, supportive role.

[2]William Lobdell, "Muslim Athletes Develop a Game Plan for Fasting," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 2000, 1.

[3]Ibid.

seen."[4] In the magazine, Abdur-Rahim openly brought attention to Islam, catching the attention of many avid sports fans throughout the world. Focusing on his fast during Ramadan, *Sports Illustrated* detailed Abdur-Rahim's daily routine during the month and the challenges he faces. Abdur-Rahim and many other Muslim athletes—such as those in southern California— who bring attention to their faith are paving a more comfortable path for future generations of Muslim athletes to follow.

The acceptance and respect that Muslim athletes may receive have not come without a price. Muhammad Ali, a pioneer in many respects, single-handedly increased awareness of Islam in a way that educated an entire nation about Islam and Muslims. Ali, the third greatest athlete ever according to a recent ESPN-sponsored study, gained notoriety in 1967 when he refused, on religious grounds, to fight in Vietnam. Ali was stripped of his boxing title—which he would later regain—and was sentenced to five years in prison. The Supreme Court overturned the conviction in 1971. When he resumed his boxing career, some of the announcers refused to call him by his Muslim name, and he was not allowed to box in some states. Ali's challenges are unlikely to be encountered by future Muslim athletes, but it took Ali's courageous stand to open the eyes of others to Islam.

Ali's story presents a case of intolerance and rejection in this country, and adversity does strike Muslim athletes in a number of forms. For example, in 1993, basketball's six-time Most Valuable Player Kareem Abdul-Jabbar reflected on the subtle economic inequality existing between Muslim and non-Muslim athletes. Commenting in *USA Today*, he said, "People avoid you. It's hard getting endorsements. For most [sponsors], you don't fit the All-American image."[5] Moreover, former NBA player

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[4]Jackie MacMullan and David Sabino, "Inside the NBA," *Sports Illustrated*, 17 January 2000, 70.

[5]Carolyn White, "Muslim Stars Search for Acceptance," *USA Today*, 3 May 1993, 1C.

Charlie Scott, upon converting to Islam, was not allowed to change his name to Shaheed Abdul-Aleem because, according to the general manager of the Phoenix Suns, that name was not marketable.[6]

At the beginning of this article, I said that sports can accomplish for Muslims what they have already accomplished for other minority or underprivileged groups. When, in 1947, Jackie Robinson, an African American, broke the color barrier by joining the Brooklyn Dodgers, he preceded, and arguably led the way for, greater changes that followed. A year later, President Harry Truman desegregated the military.[7] In 1954, the famous Supreme Court school desegregation case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down, followed by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Robinson's situation was unique, but, certainly, he paved the way for future black athletes, including Ali, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods. Similarly, Babe Didrikson's incredible track-and-field accomplishments in the 1930s, on the heels of the women's suffrage movement, opened the door for future women professionals, such as Martina Navratilova and Mia Hamm, to pursue their athletic dreams. Also, more than ever before, her participation led men to begin viewing women as their equals. These developments symbolize the importance of athletics in changing the social dynamic of America. Recently, more Muslim names and faces are appearing on professional basketball and football teams. New York Knicks star Larry Johnson, St. Louis Rams receiver Az-Zahir Hakim, and world boxing heavyweight champion Hasim Rahman are some of the prominent Muslims who have appeared in championship contests in their respective sports. With the number of Muslim professional athletes increasing, the number

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[6]Ibid.

[7]Larry Schwartz, "Jackie Changed the Face of Sports," ESPN Network; available from: http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/features/00016431.html?qt=greatest+athletes.

of Muslim athletes at college and high school levels should also register a significant increase. Muslim athletic participation may not spur a social revolution in the name of Islam, but the more necessary gains of acceptance and respect will slowly be attained through the educative value of such participation.

The role of Muslim women in athletics is a difficult issue to approach, owing to the differing views of modesty held in the community. The use of the gender-neutral term "Muslim athletes" certainly includes women athletes. Whether Muslim women participate in sports or not will be largely determined by their families. The inclusion of women in sports will, besides promoting diversity and ensuring more equitable gender representation, bring greater awareness about Islam and Muslims to more and more people. Muslim athletes, female as well as male, can contribute significantly to the gains of the larger Muslim community in the country. And Muslim women athletes could, without compromising their religion in any way, challenge stereotypes about women's status in Islam and win greater respect for their religion.

Book Reviews

Nadje Al-Ali. *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement.* **Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Cambridge Middle East Studies, Vol. 14. xv, 264 pages. HB $64.95. ISBN: 0-521-78022-5.**

This book by a young Iraqi scholar is less about women and more about a group of women's organizations dominating the feminist scene in contemporary Egyptian society. It is helpful in that it gives us the story of educated Egyptian women and their perspectives on society, women, poverty, state, nation, imperialism, and Zionism. However, the book does not shed any real light on the role of women in general in Egyptian society, on the class composition of society, on the increasing gap between the rich and the poor—especially since the beginning of the *Infitah* (Open Door) policy in the 1970s—or on the economic and social dilemmas facing the contemporary Egyptian state. The author has been influenced by postcolonial discourse, which is not exceptionable in itself, but, then, how many women in Egypt are even aware of such an approach? Many of us who have been educated in the West spend many years glued to books about colonialism and neocolonialism—to the extent that we forget to be in touch with the real people who are still part of history, imposing on these people, instead, some of our bookish findings.

The author states, at the outset, her preference for secular and leftist women organizations. Guided by the principle that

these groups have not received the same attention as the Islamist women or Islamist movements in Egypt, she surveys the history of women's activism in Egypt from the nineteenth century to the present. The author relies heavily on Western and less on Arabic or Egyptian sources. She writes: "The post-colonial state in Egypt was shaped by nationalism and nation-building, regionalism, contestations over legitimacy and interest-based and populist corporatism" (53). The women's movement, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, made major strides in spreading secular ideas in Egypt and in improving the country's social and cultural scene. The economic fortunes of the majority of men and women were adversely affected by the Sadat regime, and the situation today is no better.

The women interviewed by the author express their concern not only about educational and social matters, but also about the future of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. These relations are, to be sure, a central issue in today's Egyptian society. One must note, however, that the concern over this issue is shared by the Islamists. For example, the best authors to have written on the subject are the Islamist jurist Tariq al-Bishir and the Islamist journalist Fahmi Huwaydi.

The most interesting part of the book, for me at least, is the author's discussion of the issue of secularism in the context of the current debate among Egyptian intellectuals. The author is quite right in calling this one of the hotly debated issues in Egypt (129); one could say the same with reference to the rest of the Muslim world. The author tries to frame the discussion in the wider context of the debate between Islamists and secularists in Egyptian society, though she errs when she states that Anouar Abdel-Malek is an Islamist thinker. The discussion is of general importance since it has tended to polarize the Egyptian intellectual and cultural scenes and since there has been, from the early days of the Sadat regime, some confusion in Egypt as to the identity of the state itself. Is it a Muslim state that tries to

implement the Shari'ah, or is it a secular nation-state? One must bear in mind that Egypt, which has been ruled by the military since the 1952 revolution, has not accepted any real opposition to the power of the army.

Despite its limited scope, the book sheds important light on the educated segment of the secular feminist movements in contemporary Egyptian society. It is focused on urban women, mainly on those living in the city of Cairo, and does not concern itself as much with women in the countryside or in Upper Egypt. The story of Egyptian women outside the cities of Egypt has yet to be told.

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Paul Dresch. *A History of Modern Yemen.* **Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xviii, 285 pages. HB $59.95. ISBN** 0-521-79092-1.

Yemen holds a special place in the historical memory of both Islam and the Arab people. Aside from being important in the historical narrative of early Islam, Yemen has exported its version of Islamic practice to South Asia and Southeast Asia from the twelfth century onward. It is impossible to read the history of Islam in these two major regions without having a solid understanding of pre-Ottoman Yemeni history and of the sea trade perfected by the Arab merchants of South Arabia, notably of Oman and Yemen. Speaking of Oman, the author astutely observes that the country "faces the Indian Ocean and its history has turned on the combination of oceanic trade to East Africa and South Asia with hinterland support" (11). Modern Indonesian history, for example, is indebted to Yemeni history and ideas to such an extent that no serious scholar of Southeast

Asia would consider Yemeni contributions to the region irrelevant. The influence of Yemen on Southeast Asia began well before the start of European intervention in the area. Part of this story, in its modern form, is brilliantly told by Linda Boxberger in *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s–1930s* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002). Thus, the lives of entire communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Southern Philippines have been permanently imprinted by Yemeni influence on religious and cultural levels. Who can underestimate the influence of such leading families as the al-Saqqafs or al-Attases on the history of Southeast Asia?

A History of Modern Yemen does not delve deeply into the Yemeni diaspora, except when it comes to remittances sent home from the different corners of the globe. However, this book contains one of the best accounts I have read in English of the history of modern Yemen, beginning roughly at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing to the present. Yemen has not received the same scholarly coverage as has, for instance, its powerful and rich neighbor, Saudi Arabia. The Dutch were interested in Yemen, especially in the history of its Hadhramawt community, because of the immigration of its citizens to Southeast Asia. The British, of course, became interested in Aden, especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, because of its importance in maintaining their empire in South Asia. However, there exists an immense amount of Ottoman sources on Yemen. The story of the Ottoman loss in Yemen is still told in secular Turkey with much passion and regret. Many Turks still feel that they were betrayed by the Arab tribes in Yemen and Transjordan, but the combined Ottoman-Turkish story and memory of Yemen transcend this sad chapter in Turkish-Arab relations. Yemen held a somewhat special place in the Ottoman narrative: it functioned as the Ottoman gateway to East Africa and the Indian Ocean. The deaths of thousands of

young Turkish soldiers in Yemen during World War I is still commemorated in Turkish folk consciousness. Yemen, after all, is not as far away a place as is sometimes thought.

Dresch's book is important in that it documents not only the history of outside powers in Yemeni life and politics, but also the history of the different geographic regions in the country, of the tribal influences, of the rise of a modern national consciousness, of the end of the Imam regime, of the split of Yemen into two countries, and of the final unification of Yemen in the early 1990s. The story of modern Yemen is very interesting indeed.

The Ottoman defeat in World War I heralded a new age for Yemen. Imam Yahya was busy consolidating his power in North Yemen, and the British were busy fortifying Aden, one of their treasured possessions in the Indian Ocean. These two major forces were subject to internal and external influences and pressures of change. The Imam or his descendants could not prevent the winds of change from affecting Yemen, and, with Britain massively engaged in the war in Europe and elsewhere, the protectorate of Aden became more important than ever for the British.

With the rise of the Arab nationalist movement in the 1950s and the rapid rise of Nasserism throughout the Arab world, Egypt began to play a prominent role in Yemen's internal affairs. According to Dresch, "local rulers in the South who opposed his [Nasser's] aims were condemned as imperialist stooges" (61). More interesting is the Egyptian military intervention in Yemen before 1967 and its impact on internal Arab politics, especially on Saudi-Egyptian and British-Egyptian relations. The defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war with Israel forced it to withdraw its sixty thousand troops from the area. The Israeli connection is significant not just because of the 1967 event, but also because of the presence, until the early 1960s, of an ancient Yemeni Jewish

community, dating back to pre-Islamic Yemen, from which many were airlifted to Israel in the 1960s.

The next period of Yemeni history, especially that which followed the withdrawal of the British from South Yemen in 1967, is marked by the division of the country into two states, North and South Yemen. South Yemen opted for socialism, which ended in failure by the beginning of the 1990s. The history of socialism in South Yemen was sad for many economic, political, tribal, and religious reasons. Perhaps the Arab world was not ready for a socialist country in its midst, or perhaps the political elite of South Yemen failed to develop a coherent Arab socialist ideology that would appeal to the country's masses. In the long run, however, a united Yemen has certainly proved to be a more effective entity than a divided Yemen.

With a population of eighteen million—most of whom are under the age of fifteen—scarce economic resources, rugged mountains, tribal communities, and immense political change in the Arab world, how is it possible to safeguard the unity of Yemen while continuing to modernize the country and open it up to a democratic political process? Undoubtedly, as the author ably shows, the tasks facing contemporary Yemen are enormous. The author seems to think that the current political leadership is more interested in preserving its political and economic power than in opening up the country to real development and democracy. As is well known, this is the sad story of almost every contemporary Arab country. However, the major question is, Where is Yemen going in the twenty-first century?

In its search for identity in the modern period, Yemen has been trying to find some balance between Islam, Arabism, and Westernism. It is doubtful that Yemen will fall into the hands of Islamists or that, in the atmosphere currently prevailing in the Arab world, it will lead the Arab world to unity. Yemen faces enormous internal and external challenges. Dresch's book

provides the necessary background for understanding those challenges.

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Lewis V. Baldwin and Amiri YaSin Al-Hadid. *Between Cross and Crescent: Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Malcolm and Martin.* **Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. The History of African-American Religions series. xii, 475 pages. HB $34.95. ISBN: 0-8130-2457-9.**

Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X are quite clearly larger-than-life figures in twentieth-century American history. Attempting to capture their unique contributions in the midst of fascinating, and often tragic, social forces would be a monumental task, but undertaking a comparative analysis of their contributions is, if nothing else, courageous—all the more reason to observe that *Between Cross and Crescent* is an impressive work covering a great deal of ground, both philosophical and historical. The book represents the combined effort of two noted scholars, who divide between themselves the task of dealing with specific topics—a wise choice, given the enormity of the task at hand and the authors' own interesting backgrounds. A look at the table of contents gives the reader a good idea of the topics covered:

1. Out of the Dark Past: Malcolm, Martin, and Black Cultural Reality
2. Al-Qur'an and Sunnah: From Malcolm X to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz
3. Of Their Spiritual Strivings: Malcolm and Martin on Religion and Freedom

4. In the Matter of Faith: Malcolm and Martin on Family and Manhood
5. The Character of Womanhood: The Views of Malcolm and Martin
6. A New Spirit of Resistance: Malcolm and Martin on Children and Youth
7. The Great Debate: Multiethnic Democracy or National Liberation
8. Reluctant Admiration: What Malcolm and Martin Thought about Each Other
9. Toward a Broader Humanism: Malcolm, Martin, and the Search for Global Community

The work has excellent notes and has a full bibliography and index.

In the opening chapter, the reader becomes acquainted with the parameters of the study and the inherent problems with the approach. Often, there are gaps in the specific information about each of the two figures precisely when one wishes to make a comparison between them. Obviously, Malcolm and Martin did not always speak on the same subjects or refer to the same influences. Still, it is a bit disconcerting to read phrases like, "Malcolm undoubtedly became familiar" or "Martin must have had some exposure." This, however, is not typical of the study as a whole, and the writers are, as a rule, dedicated to their sources. The very fact, however, that one is occasionally pushed to the limit of the sources seems inevitable, given the stature of Malcolm and Martin. The authors are well aware of the status of the two figures as "cultural icons" and acknowledge the difficulties that this presents. Another way to express this is to note that definite "popular orthodoxies" have grown around these figures, their meanings, and their continued significance—making dispassionate analysis nearly impossible. The authors, however, are up to the task.

Al-Hadid's analysis of Malcolm X from an Islamic perspective is both informative and challenging. He is clearly willing to consider *some* of the hardest issues with regard to African American interest in Islam, both historical and contemporary, but this reviewer would have hoped for a somewhat more critical analysis of the role of Sunni Islam in the life of Malcolm X. Sadly, of course, we will never be able to have a full appreciation of such a matter, but we rely on scholars like Al-Hadid to tell us what can be known, given an understanding of the wider Islamic context. There is somewhat of a tendency to be apologetic about the post–Nation of Islam experience of Malcolm X (on page 103, Baldwin raises this issue quite strongly), although one also appreciates the strong conviction that more mainstream Islamic influences led Malcolm X to reconsider his earlier criticism of King and be more open to wider involvement in his efforts with the founding of organizations like the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

In the section entitled "Of Their Spiritual Strivings," the writers raise serious and important issues and are often willing to be critical of their respective traditions. An important contribution of the work consists in the consideration it gives to the role of various streams of Christianity within the African American communities that were most certainly part of the context of King's development and of those traditions that clearly had a negative impact on Malcolm X. Baldwin begins to look at the hypocrisy of certain expressions of Christianity and the impact of this on Malcolm X (88), but I would have appreciated even more in-depth analysis of this issue from a scholar of Baldwin's stature. Finally, the issue of Jewish involvement, particularly in King's campaigns, has assumed greater importance of late, but, certain comments (119-121) excepted, it is largely set aside in this work. For obvious reasons, this is an area requiring further examination; it has potentially

important ramifications for the relationship of three significant American communities.

The chapter on womanhood raises all the right issues of King's and Malcolm X's relation to the women's movement then and now. Here is, perhaps, where the two leaders were at their weakest, especially in the hindsight of modern analysis in feminist and womanist contexts in contemporary theory and debate. This excellent chapter is critical, insightful, and, most certainly, suggestive of the need for further analysis. This chapter also leads, quite naturally, into an analysis of the role of the family in the life and philosophy of the two great leaders. As is often the case with leaders who are thrust into the center of historical forces, we learn that their idealism and practice are often wrenched apart from the realities of being leaders of movements. The rhetoric of the centrality and importance of the family, sadly, is often accompanied by the regrets of leaders who find that their own families suffer a great deal from these public figures' notoriety and their struggle to fulfill their calling.

Especially for the interested nonspecialist, the book's final chapters examine the political philosophies of Black Nationalism and civil rights struggles in the twentieth century in their various formulations and suggest some helpful and hopeful ways in which the legacy of these two figures can become a part of creative work toward contemporary struggles in African American and global contexts. In the area of social and political philosophy, the only major weakness of the book is that neither Baldwin nor Al-Hadid seem to have much sympathy with, or much interest in, the depth of King's philosophy of nonviolence or the possible misrepresentations of nonviolence in some of the public pronouncements of Malcolm X. At times, the whole subject of nonviolence is dealt with somewhat tangentially, which, in my opinion, is a failure to appreciate the strategic value of nonviolent direct action in King, or even in Gandhi, as well as of the historical precedents for success that advocates of

nonviolence throughout history are clearly able to marshal if given voice to do so. Nonviolence theory is a huge area that has received, in this reviewer's opinion, insufficient attention, given its centrality to King's philosophy and Malcolm X's reactions to King. A complete chapter on King and Malcolm X on nonviolence would have been justified. In general, however, this book contributes a great deal to our appreciation and understanding of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., and, even more clearly, of part of the agenda that continues to confront Christians and Muslims in American and global contexts. It is a timely work indeed!

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Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Mohammed Iqbal.* **Rev. ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997. xiv, 183 pages. HB $18.95. ISBN 0-19-563979-0.**

This revised version of the book, first published in 1951, restates much of the author's original thesis about the significance of Iqbal's life and thought. In the original version, the title, *The Ardent Pilgrim,* conveyed something of the author's active response to the passion of the poet's call for reinvigorated Muslim minds and hearts. One did not, and does not, need to be a Muslim to feel the compelling urgency of Iqbal's poetry. Singh writes of the "crystalline beauty" of much of Iqbal's' work (17). Singh first worked on this manuscript in Europe in 1947, when the violence of the partition of India into two countries was tearing the subcontinent apart. In that context, he may well have felt tormented in his own mind by contradictory feelings—his love for Iqbal's poetry and his grief over the horrors of the

partition events. Iqbal's poetry was generally understood to have been a factor in those events.

In the preface to the first edition, Singh acknowledged that Iqbal was a private person and that little was known about his personal relationships. In his preface to the revised version, Singh indicates that the linking of Iqbal with the founding of Pakistan has meant that Indians have tended to demonize the poet as a fanatical Muslim, whereas Pakistanis have been inclined to uncritical enthusiasm for a founding father. Singh apparently wants to transcend both the demonizing and the deifying. He observes that much more information about the poet's life is now available. This is the reason given for the publication of the revised version.

India celebrated the centennial of Iqbal's birth in 1973, and Pakistan did so in 1977. This fact is symbolic of the general lack of communication on the two sides of the border on the subject of Iqbal. In the 1940s and 1950s, three authors—Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Victor Kiernan, and Iqbal Singh—wrote books affirming the value of Iqbal's poetic voice as a vitalizing force in the culture of Indian Muslims. The three also said that Iqbal's social and political thought was old-fashioned and misguided. Kiernan's English translation of Iqbal's poetry, *Poems from Iqbal,* came out in 1955. In the preface, he noted that "what made Iqbal a great poet was his hatred of injustice." He also remarked that Iqbal did not grasp the systematic details of socialist thought (V. G. Kiernan, *Poems from Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy, Lahore, 1999, xviii-xxi).

In *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, published in 1943, Smith wrote one chapter on Iqbal's virtues as a promoter of revolution and another on Iqbal as a reactionary. All three socialists—Kiernan, Smith, and Singh—urged people to love Iqbal's poetry and share his desire for social justice but to reject his social and political thought as hazy idealism. In his new version of *The Ardent Pilgrim*, Singh indicates that, fifty years

later, he still accepts Smith's original analysis of the flaws in Iqbal's thinking. Singh writes:

> Iqbal did not see, or did not wish to see, that an everlasting equivocation and moral ambivalence was of the very essence of the destiny of the Indian middle class; that sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, even the most steadfast of idealists among its ranks were doomed to fall for the most trifling temptation. (77-78)

In *Modern Islam in India*, Smith claims that Iqbal was an idealist who dreamed about social justice and a redeemed human social order but who failed to comprehend the material bases of historical reality and could not appreciate the need for an authentic socialist revolution. In the revised edition of his book, Singh again quotes the judgment of Smith's first book that Iqbal "never understood what socialism is" (142). Singh adds that, even if Iqbal had lived long enough to complete his study of socialism, he still would have rejected its basic assumptions as destructive of the dogmas on which he built his "airy structure of a theocratic charitable social order" (142). Thus, Singh has not changed his original rejection of Iqbal's idealism as a form of escapist rhetoric, pie-in-the-sky dreaming. The implication is that this dream of an idealized theocracy led to the creation of Pakistan and still confuses Pakistani minds.

The horrors of the partition violence in 1947 shocked Smith into a rejection of his earlier socialist view of idealism as an unfortunate delusion of the human spirit. His discovery of the brutality by means of which the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union had repressed dissent also shocked him out of naive socialist theory. He came to acknowledge the horrors of a social order that acknowledged no moral responsibility for the well-being of people who did not belong to the governing class. Singh, however, says nothing about this change in perspective in Smith's writings. Why quote Smith, one wonders, and fail to note that Smith himself changed his mind?

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The new edition of Singh's book repeats the appreciation of the vitality and lyrical power of Iqbal's poetry and restates the socialist analysis of the stupidity of Iqbal's idealism. What is more unpleasant is that the revised version indulges in a lot more *ad hominem* disparagement of Iqbal's character. Just as much of anti-Gandhi rhetoric in the West has taken the form of attacking Gandhi's ideas on the grounds that Gandhi's eldest son rejected him, so Singh devotes fifteen pages of the final chapter of his book to the hostility that Iqbal's eldest son, Aftab, expressed toward his father (153-168). Iqbal had been married in his teens before he left to study, first, at the university in Lahore and, later, in England. Aftab was born while his father was still a teenager. The wife and child did not live with Iqbal when he was a student in Lahore, nor did they accompany him to Europe.

When the poet returned to Lahore from his studies in England, he was unhappy in his marriage, and a divorce was arranged. Aftab was raised by his mother's family and did not live with his father, who subsequently remarried and had two more children. The son resented his father's neglect and was critical of him. There is nothing remarkable about this tale of filial antagonism resulting from a divorce. Singh, however, takes the son's complaints about his father as evidence of flaws in Iqbal's character. Further, Singh says very little about the other two children, who were raised by their father, who are still living in Lahore, and who have consistently testified to their good memories of their father. It appears that Singh's selective use of the data about Iqbal's family life is used to buttress his thesis as to the unreliability of Iqbal as a moral person. The younger son, Javid, spent nine years carefully researching the materials about his father's life in order to write a detailed biography in Urdu (*Zindah-Rud*, Sheikh Ghulam Ali, Lahore, 1979). Singh pays little attention to the evidence from this book.

Smith's original condemnation of Iqbal as a confused social thinker had maintained that Iqbal was reactionary about women.

On this subject, Iqbal said different things at different times, but there is no doubt that two of the highly educated women among his personal friends, Emma Wegenast and Atiya Faizi, liked and respected him. The Muslim women of the later generation who have written about their struggles for justice in Pakistan regard Iqbal as a good model of progressive thinking (see Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, eds., *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Zed Books, London, 1987]). The issue is important only because Singh is still promoting the earlier thesis about Iqbal as a reactionary with respect to women. Singh does not mention that, when Iqbal was dying, he asked that a German governess be entrusted with the care of his young children.

Singh comments about Iqbal's daughter, Munira: "What happened to Munira we can only guess" (159). But why do we have to guess? Munira married the son of one of Iqbal's friends and has lived in Lahore all her life. She has raised her sons and now enjoys life as a grandmother. She is a quiet person but well known to the citizens of Lahore. Is Delhi so far from Lahore that even this information was beyond Singh's reach? Munira's brother, Javid, refers to her several times in his writings, in which he speaks of their childhood with their father:

> However, Munira was his favourite. She, with her German governess . . . would spend hours in his room. Father spoke German fluently, and usually talked [to the governess] in German. He also told Munira to learn German. 'German women are very brave', he explained to her. (Javid Iqbal, "Iqbal My Father," in *Iqbal, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed. Hafeez Malik, Columbia University Press, New York, 1971, 61-62).

This is not the image of a patriarchal father trying to repress his daughter's spirit.

Singh entitles his last chapter about Iqbal's family "Matters of No Importance?" Given the amount of more accurate information that is now available directly from Iqbal's family

and close friends, one wonders why Singh's portrayal of Iqbal's character is colored with more than a little irresponsible journalistic gossip. Singh says in his preface that he is reissuing the book because of the new information that has become available about Iqbal. Yet, Singh's selection from this alleged new evidence transmits a more negative view of the poet than was the case in the first edition.

The question raised originally by Smith, Kiernan, and Singh about Iqbal's economic and social thought refers to the differences in theory between Adam Smith and Karl Marx. In his book on economics which he wrote while he was still a young university lecturer in Lahore, Iqbal followed Adam Smith. Adam Smith, whose seminal book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776, was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment and a professor of moral philosophy. He maintained that the social changes arising from the transition from a feudal economic structure to one encouraging trade and commerce were potentially good. But he also said that monopolies, such as the Dutch and English East Indian Companies, were wicked because of the destruction they wrought in the lives of the people they exploited.

Adam Smith said that a good social and economic order would only be possible if the victims of economic oppression had the political tools to combat, to control, and to limit the power of the monopolies. Iqbal's social thinking follows Adam Smith's in this respect. Iqbal thought that the Islamic ideals of social justice and mutual responsibility would provide a sound basis for designing a future just society. Iqbal did not use the word "theocracy." He said that the principle of movement in the structure of Islam meant that modern Muslims should reconstruct their social life in light of Islam's eternal principles and create that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam (Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1960, 1980 reprint).

A spiritual democracy is not a theocracy. Iqbal was an idealist in the manner of Adam Smith. The latter maintained that the creation of a good society would necessitate acceptance of the principle that all persons should acknowledge mutual responsibility for the well-being of all. The issue at stake in a debate between a materialist and a spiritual view of human consciousness is one that Iqbal understood well. A spiritual democracy values the uniqueness of each person and stresses the need for the well-being and good treatment of all. The notion of "spirit" in Iqbal's thought means the creative potential latent in every person. Iqbal referred to communists as twisted minds: a twisted mind would be one that strove to create a political system that would compel all citizens to become subservient to the state.

Iqbal feared this threat of domination by the state in Marxist thought. The arguments of the socialist thinkers against Iqbal seem to stem from a greater feeling of despair on their part, a feeling that only a strong state could straighten out injustice. Iqbal was more optimistic. The poet did not think a totalitarian state could effectively make for a better world. This was the issue fifty years ago, and it continues to be an urgent question. In the 1940s, Singh thought Iqbal was wrong, and, apparently, he still thinks so. In this respect, the issue is not between India and Pakistan but between spiritual democracy and totalitarianism.

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