Studies in Contemporary Islam

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Tools of Persuasion in Iran: Images of Women on Postage Stamps and Other Print Materials

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Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss some of the ways in which the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran makes use of propaganda and persuasion in order to present a favorable "Islamic" image of Iranian women. This image, as I will argue, is manipulated to suit the government's vision of what is right and what is wrong.

Harold Lasswell defines propaganda as "the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations. These representations may take spoken, written, pictorial or musical form."[1] According to Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, propaganda is "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape functions, manipulate cognition, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."[2] These definitions show how manipulation is involved, to a certain degree, in influencing both belief and behavior. Application of such definitions to both pictorial and literary works demonstrates how well the theory of persuasion and manipulation fits the religious and cultural image of a pious and perfect woman that the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to project. The Iranian government's censorship of nearly all kinds of

[1] Harold. D. Lasswell, "Propaganda," in Robert Jackall, ed., *Propaganda* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 13.
[2] Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1992), 4.

media facilitates persuasion and aids presentation of a "correct" and "accepted" image of the Muslim woman.

Advertising is a cultural artifact. Both popular and academic critics see it as anti-humanistic, as a means of fulfilling artificially created needs and desires, and as a device for controlling and exploiting dissent. Advertising is a mirror that reflects our social values and cultural trends. Critics of advertising argue that the use of women in advertising has an adverse effect on society. For example, a wide variety of products, from heavy industrial machinery to personal care items, are advertised by employing explicit or suggestive images of female nudity. It is widely believed that sexual imagery is effective in calling attention to the advertisement itself, by creating interest in the advertised products, and by motivating consumers to examine and buy the products.[3] According to one view, the commercialized Western culture is particularly brutal to women because, while claiming to free women from restrictive traditional roles, it actually exploits them, using their bodies as marketing tools. Advertisements that use women in this way have frequently been targeted in both academic and popular discussions. While the medium of advertising is recognized as a transparent cultural artifact for the identification of people's needs, it creates, in terms of meaning, a complex interactive process whose power cannot be underestimated.

The Islamic Republic of Iran avoids using advertisements that employ sexually alluring images of women aimed at persuading or manipulating consumers to purchase goods and services. On the other hand, it has been able to use "controlled" images to full advantage in an attempt to achieve politically motivated goals, as we will see later.

The overthrow of monarchy in 1979 awakened and politicized the women of Iran. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, thousands of women from all walks of life became active participants in the revolutionary movement. Whether motivated by religious zeal or secular aspiration, the vast majority of these women had expected to gain new rights and freedoms under the aegis of the Revolution. They had hoped that the Revolution would bring about an era of growing opportunities for them. This, in fact, was what the leaders of the Islamic Republic had promised to the women of Iran during the crucial days of revolutionary upheaval. However, no sooner had the Islamic Republic had established itself than the leaders of the

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[3] Alice E. Courtney, and Thomas W. Whipple, *Sex Stereotyping in Advertising* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1983), 103.

Revolution changed their rhetoric concerning women and the position of women in society.

Very soon after the success of the Islamic Revolution, new—and sometimes ambiguous—regulations concerning various aspects of women's lives were put into effect. For example, restrictions were imposed on the types of jobs women could hold. Many areas of higher education became the exclusive domain of men, with some areas, such as engineering, law, pharmacy, and biology being closed to women. Birth control was discouraged, and people were strongly urged to have larger families. Haleh Esfandiari has noted that female sexual abstinence in spousal relations was declared to be sufficient grounds for divorce.[4] Among the changes in governmental policies were those pertaining to personal and family law. For example, by imposing compulsory *hijab* ("veiling") on women, the laws dictated that Iranian Muslim women should dress in a certain prescribed manner. The clear implication was that the ideal image of the Muslim Iranian women to be shown to the world would be that of a woman in *hijab*.

In order to revive traditional, indigenous Shi'ite Islam in Iran, it was necessary to achieve authenticity in the name of Islam. Considering the secular life-style of the country's Westernized elite, the Iranian masses thought that they could achieve parity with the elite only through establishment of an Islamic government. Changes occurred in many areas of people's daily lives, as also in the social and economic policies of the government. Some of these changes were short-lived, and were reversed or modified, while others proved to be more long-lasting—and it is to this latter category that the government's *hijab* policy pertains In the meantime, restrictive policies concerning education, work, and birth control are being replaced with more tolerant ones, and this trend, one presumes, is a more permanent one. Relatively speaking, the life of women in Iran since the 1979 Revolution has witnessed gradual improvement.

Under the revolutionary regime, Western capitalist ideology was seen as the source of many evils and as a threat to the ideal Islamic society. A popular slogan in the course of the revolutionary struggle had been *nah sharqi, nah gharbi, jumhuri-i islami*—"Neither Eastern [values] nor Western [values], [but] the Islamic democratic." The view of the West as an evil force has been evidenced in numerous Friday sermons delivered throughout Iran. In 1983, Ayatollah Khomeini, the

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[4] Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives, Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 4.

leader of the Islamic Revolution, gave an important speech that has been frequently cited to prove the uniqueness of the Islamic Republic and of its position in the contemporary Islamic world. Khomeini said:

> O Muslims of the world who believe in the truth of Islam, arise! Gather under the banner of monotheism and the shelter of Islamic teachings. Curtail the traitorous hands of the superpower from your countries and its abundant treasures. Return [to] the glory of Islam. So away with differences and lustful desires. You have everything. Lean upon the culture of Islam. Struggle against the West and westoxication.[5] Stand upon your own two feet. Assail Eastern and Western intellectuals. Seek your own identity. Know that hired intellectuals have brought disaster to their countries and peoples.[6]

The idea presented here is simple: The Islamic Republic of Iran must neither follow the Eastern communist bloc nor adopt the Western values and patterns of life. Thus, both popular lifestyles and governmental policies influenced the West become objects of criticism. The Islamic Republic of Iran mounted several campaigns in order systematically to denounce aspects of Western, especially American, social and moral life. Many issues involving family, children, women's honor, and filial respect were raised and debated. Exploitation of women in the capitalist West became an especially hot topic and was effectively used as a tool of persuasion.

The Islamic Republic and the *Hijab*

The government of Iran is an active agent in implementing the *hijab* and the regulations of the Islamic code of ethics in the country. To this end, it uses persuasion, specific forms of which are employed through the agency of social movements, which in turn employ slogans to create an atmosphere calculated to alter perceptions, elicit emotional responses, make demands, and neutralize or suppress any opposition that might call into question the government's position or thwart the government's agenda.

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[5] In Persian, *gharbzadegi* (literally, "Weststruckness"), a term coined by Jalal Al Ahmad, an Iranian writer who wrote extensively about Western influence on Iranian culture. Because of its negative connotations, the term was later translated as Westoxication.

[6] *Mahjubah* (Tehran: The Islamic Republic of Iran), May-July 1983, 18.

The initial data for the present study were collected during two separate trips to Iran during the summers of 1996 and 1998. In my study, I noted that the Islamic Republic's claims concerning Iranian women's position in society were in several cases marked by contradiction. This was particularly true in regard to the restrictions placed by the Iranian government on the exploitation of images of women in commercials. For example, images of veiled women are used both by the government and by various governmental agencies that play an active role in using propaganda for a political purpose. All the media are subject to censorship by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Thus, all publications must obtain prior formal approval from the ministry, publication and distribution of any material without government approval being illegal. The guarding of woman's honor and chastity—or of woman's sexuality—is an officially declared concern of the government officials. The Preamble of the 1979 Constitution declares:

> A woman . . . will no longer be regarded as a "thing" or a tool serving consumerism and exploitation. In regaining her important duty and most respectful role of mother in the nourishing of human beings who belong to the school of thought, as a pioneer along with men, as a warrior in the active living battle fields, the result will be her accepting a more serious responsibility. In the views of Islam, she will assume higher values and beneficence.[7]

Curiously, however, as we will see, the government itself uses the images of veiled women on tickets to government exhibitions, on postage stamps, and on posters and stickers. In effect, such images are "religiously" exploited in order to serve the goals of the ruling government and the clerical community.

The Religious Community and the Clerical System

After the Revolution, initially, most members of the clerical and religious community opposed granting women the right to vote, but this attitude changed as the turmoil caused by the Revolution ceased. Advocates of female suffrage relied partly on the speeches and writings of two of the most prominent religious leaders, Morteza

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[7] As quoted in Valentine M. Moghadam. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rinner, 1993), 174.

Mottahari and Ali Shariati—both considered martyrs to the Revolution. In their speeches, sermons, and writings, they argued that Islam accepts the modern woman's role in society. They emphasized that Islam does not debar a woman from receiving education, taking up jobs, or being active members of society in other ways. Both Fatimah and Zaynab, the Prophet Mohammed's daughter and granddaughter, respectively, were depicted as perfect and ideal women who should be emulated by the women of Iran. Thus, Fatimah was portrayed as a model wife, mother, and daughter, as well as an excellent companion of her husband's during the latter's military expeditions. Her role as a patient woman who actively participated in the great religious and political struggles of her time was especially highlighted. Fatimah's merits were emphasized in Shariati's speeches, while Mottahari laid greater stress on the qualities of modesty, virtue, and sobriety of an idealized Muslim woman. Women like Fatimah and Zaynab were, accordingly, presented as being the exact opposites of the "greedy, painted, underdressed, or overdressed Western dolls"—an unambiguous allusion to the Westernized Iranian women of the pre-Revolutionary era. It was shown, on the strength of the works of writers like Mottahari and Shariati, that Islam in its ideal form could easily accommodate women's rights, thus reconciling tradition and modernity. Shariati never advocated segregation of women from men in public places, but neither did he promote integration; he remained silent on the issue. Shariati did not aggressively advocate the use of the *hijab*, though he showed a preference for it. Mottahari, on the other hand, was a strong supporter of a segregated society; uncomfortable with the idea of gender integration, he insisted on the imposition of the *hijab*. These two individuals made use of media that catered specifically to women. Mottahari tapped into the largest women's magazine, *Zan-i Ruz* ("Today's Woman"), using this publication "as a forum in which to plead for the tolerant attitude of Islam towards women precisely because of its wide circulation and its popularity among younger, upwardly mobile, educated girls and women."[8] Neither Shariati nor Mottahari was comfortable with the idea of the "career woman" or of gender equality. However, as Esfandiari later noted, "Their conservatism was not immediately evident to their followers."[9]

In his *Mas'ala-i Hijab* ("The Issue of the *Hijab*"), Mottahari

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[8] Esfandiari, 36.
[9] Ibid.

discusses the origin of veiling in the pre-Islamic era. There follows a chapter on the need for, and the logic of, the *hijab*, presenting philosophical, sociological, economic, moral, and psychological perspectives on the *hijab* issue.[10] Mottahari was an educated cleric, and his discourse appealed to intellectuals. He was a popular professor at the University of Tehran. His perspectives on women's issues and the *hijab* were derived from his seminary training. Shariati's formal training in a secular education system, his religious upbringing, and his training as a graduate student in Paris set him apart from Mottahari and cause his views on moral and social issues to be different from Mottahari's. Here, following, is an example from Shariati's works that demonstrates his skill in linking the notion of modesty in dress and other social and religious issues to value systems:

> When we present values, which are higher than the values represented by Miss Universe, a woman may become attached to those better values. When she has formed an attachment to these elevated values, she will endure and incorporate all of those values herself. She will choose herself and will not sense any belittlement or abasement.[11]

Shariati then speaks of the change of attitudes and values among the Iranian youth:

> The young people have not changed. This person who enjoyed wearing hot pants, is the same person who [now enjoys] wearing modest clothes. What has changed? Values have changed. The modest dress is related to national traditions and yet is the symbol of a new human perception. Both of these relate to religion.[12]

The modest dress is here presented as symbolic of religious belief. The idea is quite similar to Mottahari's view of the *hijab*. Both Shariati and Mottahari hold conservative views on the subject. This is not unusual since Ayatollah Khomeini and many other prominent religious leaders held similar opinions concerning woman and her behavior. Their opinions came to constitute the sole authoritative

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[10] Morteza Mottahari, *Mas'ala-i Hijab* (Tehran: Sadra Publication, 1374 H).
[11] In Laleh Bakhtiar, *Shariati on Shariati and the Muslim Woman* (Chicago: ABC Group International, 1996), 43.
[12] Ibid., 45.

interpretation of what the ideal Muslim woman is. Going one step further, Mottahari establishes a connection between the modest dress and intellectual level:

> But there is a type of modest dress, which is worn by intellectuals and the awakened generation who intentionally select the modest dress. This group says "no" with its selection. It says "no" to Western colonialism and European styles. With this choice a woman negates the West's ill-intentioned efforts and clearly says, "You cannot change me! You cannot transform and negate my social, historical and cultural values."[13]

From her religious belief a woman derives the freedom to think, decide, and choose for herself:

> A woman who has attained the level of belief chooses her own life, her way of thinking, her very being and even her own form of adornment. She actualizes herself. She does not give herself over to television and passive consumption. She does not do whatever consumerism tells her to do. She is not afraid to choose the color of dress because it may not be in style this year! She has returned and returned vigorously! To what? To the modest dress of Islam. As what? As a believer and committed human being.[14]

A critical look at this statement will show that women here are really not being granted much freedom. For if a woman is free to choose, then she should be allowed to exercise her freedom however she likes—even if she were to decide to give in to consumerism, fashion, or television ads. Shariati's statement—"she has returned and returned vigorously! To what? To the modest dress of Islam. As what? As a believer and committed human being"—would suggest that those women who do not choose the Islamic dress deserve to be labeled as "painted Westernized dolls" and are intellectually deficient and morally weak. Shariati's conclusion about the modest Islamic dress is expressed as follows:

> Do you want to know how the modest dress developed in the age of the Prophet of Islam? It was not proposed by

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[13] Ibid., 46.
[14] Ibid., 47.

> saying, "O Women! Cover your bodies from those to whom you are not related." No, It was related to Islamic belief. It is now worn by women who select this party and school of thought with its orientation and arms. The Muslim woman is no longer a plaything in the hands of foreigners to be painted and dressed as they will. And the same was true of the time of the Prophet.[15]

Tools of Persuasion:
The Images of Fatimah and Zaynab in Veil

Fatimah az-Zahra', the Prophet Mohammed's beloved daughter, and Zaynab, his granddaughter and the sister of the Imams Hasan and Husayn, hold a special place in Shi'ite Islam: They are models of virtue, and are to be emulated by all pious Muslim women in all matters, including dress—and the dress of Fatimah and Zaynab included the veil. Dress is viewed, from a religious viewpoint, as the human being's first "home," in which reside one's soul and body:

> A Muslim does not use his or her perfection in adorning the body like a commodity, put on display for sale, but rather, sells his or her life to God instead of [selling], displaying her or his body to people.[16]

This clerical opinion is supported by Qur'an 9:111: "From the believers God has bought their lives and properties and in return gives them paradise." This clearly stipulates that human beings should, instead of being overly concerned with worldly possessions and with adornment of the body, try to achieve nearness to God through acts of piety so that they might earn paradise in the next life.

In Iran, images of veiled women are displayed throughout the cities: on walls in public places as well as on promotional posters; inside business establishments, both government and private; inside and outside public vehicles; in all institutions of learning; inside airports; in parks and in hiking, skiing, and swimming areas; and even inside holy shrines.[17] These images, which are visual reminders

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[15] Ibid., 47.

[16] *Mahjubah,* May-July 1993, 21.

[17] It is a tradition in Iran that every Muslim female who reaches the age of maturity (usually nine years and above) covers her head and body properly while entering a mosque, a graveyard, or a saint's shrine. No one would dare to challenge this arbitrarily established tradition. Outside the entrances of the holy shrines, there are

of the Islamic Revolution, also served to elicit popular support for the war against Iraq, which lasted for almost nine years. Posters and stamps show that the Islamic Republic of Iran in those days sought to mobilize women for the war effort. Women participated in the Iran-Iraq war, working behind the front lines and in the battlefields. Their reasons for participating in the war varied, including economic deprivation, political repression, identification with the cause of Islamism, and rejection of Westernization. Many of those women who had participated in the war were disappointed by the government's subsequent policies and agendas concerning women and family law, for quite often these agendas and policies were fundamentally at variance with those for whose sake the women had taken part in the war.

Images of veiled woman on war posters and postage stamps served multiple functions. First, the veiled woman was portrayed—on account of her indirect participation as a moral supporter rather than on account of her direct contribution as a combatant—as a fighter for her religion, Islam, and her country, Iran, against the enemy, Iraq. She indicated a willingness to sacrifice herself in defense of the Revolution: She could fight with her fists—i.e., could join protest marches, chanting and uttering slogans—as well as with her weapons. In all the posters, notably, she is presented in her traditional *hijab*. In another role, she is a wife who would support her husband, who leaves for war, or a mother who would sacrifice her young son in the cause of her country, without showing sorrow or shedding tears. She knows that the man's chances of returning safely from the battlefield are slim—he will likely become a martyr. The stamp in Figure 1 shows a young wife tying a green bandana around

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signs reminding women to cover themselves by using the *chadour*—the traditional Iranian form of *hijab*; these signs did not exist before the Revolutionary era. On my visit to the shrine of Hazrat-i Ma'sumah, the sister of the eighth Shi'ite Imam, in the holy city of Qom (a center of Shi'ite clerical training), I was astonished to see the following sign at the entrance: "Wearing a *rupoosh* and *rusari* [loose outer gown and head-scarf] is not considered proper *hijab*; sisters must wear a traditional *chadour* in order to gain entry to the holy shrine's compound." This fairly large sign was posted near the ablution fountains and washroom facilities, where those women who needed to could put on the proper form of *hijab*. My biggest surprise came when I approached the tomb area, where a special *du'a* (supplication), composed in Arabic, for Hazrat-i Ma'sumah is recited in a very respectful manner, together with the *Fatihah* (the short opening chapter of the Qur'an) to bless her. Here I saw the same *hijab* warning sign inscribed on the top of the silver posts that stood, next to the fresh gladioli, supporting her tomb. I still cannot figure out why the sign would be needed since only women are allowed to enter the room that contains her tomb, men's entry into it being forbidden.

her husband's head. On the bandana one can clearly read God's name in Arabic, Allah. Published to honor the brigade (*basij*) recruits who had lost their lives for Iran in the war with Iraq, the stamp affords an excellent example of the use of the image of the woman who supports her husband as he sets out to protect his country in the name of God. In another stamp, she is depicted standing behind three generations of men, an elderly man (who may be her father), a young man (presumably her husband), and a young boy (her son). In the next section, we will see how effectively her image was used to promote the war and the Revolution. The woman supports the war even at the cost of the lives of all the important men in her life. To offer support of this kind is, in her eyes, to perform a religious duty; it is *jihad*, holy war, in which she participates indirectly. The reward in the next life awaits not only those men who sacrifice their lives in a war, but also the woman, for she is a genuine moral supporter of the noble cause. In this role, her prototype is Fatimah az-Zahra'. Given below is an extract from Ayatollah Khomeini's speech on the occasion of Women's Day,[18] in which Fatimah is glorified and depicted as a model Muslim women:

> Thus, this day is a living day for women and the day of the establishment of the foundation of respect for her great role in society. I congratulate the most respected women of Iran. Such a change has taken place in them that the satanic plans of more than fifty years [a reference to the Pahlavi regime] of efforts of the plans of foreigners and their shameless agents, which extended from corrupt poets to paid writers to propagandistic facilities [of the mass media], did not succeed. They proved that the Muslim woman who believes in [Islamic] values will not be misled. They [women] proved that they would not accept any damage from the evil conspiracies of the West and the Westoxicated. . . . May the Islamic movement of the Iranian women be victorious and proud. Salutations to this great group who with their valuable and courageous presence in the defense of their Islamic country and the Holy Qur'an, helped the Revolution reach victory and are now in the front and behind it, active and ready to sacrifice.

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[18] 20 Jumada II (23 April 1983), corresponding to Fatimah az-Zahra's birthday.

> May God's Mercy and Blessings be upon those mothers who sent their own youth to the battle to defend the Truth. We are honored by their martyrdom. Curse those dolls [unveiled women who wear Western clothes and flaunt their make-up] who had attached themselves to the shameful palaces inside and outside [of Iran], whose only thoughts are corrupt ones.
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> Endless greetings to the committed women who have taken part in the upbringing of children, the teaching of literacy classes and the teaching of social sciences and our rich Qur'anic cultures. The blessings of God upon the women who have attained the high level of martyrdom in this Revolution and in defending their country. Blessings upon those who are serving the sick and maimed in hospitals and clinics. Salutations to those mothers who have lost their young people in the most honorable of ways. Congratulations on Women's Day to the committed women of Islamic countries.[19]

Fig. 2 is a stamp published to honor Fatimah az-Zahra's birthday, which was declared Women's Day in Iran. A rising sun illuminates the background of the stamp. At the center of the stamp, we can see the green Islamic flag with *Allahu Akbar* ("God is Most Great") written in white Arabic script. Also at the center of the stamp, a veiled woman in conservative *hijab* is towering over a group of *basiji* volunteer soldiers who are going to lay down their lives for Islam and for Iran. The most interesting part of this stamp is the way the woman's veil is spread over the heads of these soldiers—like a mother bird's wind protecting and sheltering her offspring. The woman represents Fatimah az-Zahra', who will protect the sons of Islam.

Ayatollah Khomeini is not the only religious authority to speak of the importance of the person of Fatimah az-Zahra'. Her name and character are mentioned and praised on most occasions involving women. Here is what Ayatollah Montazeri says about her:

> In our society when our committed women took Zahra' as the model for their own lives, they were able, like her, to play the best role possible in the Revolution. Women's Day must recall all of the spiritual and moral virtues of

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[19] *Mahjubah*, May-July 1983, 54.

that person.[20]

Fig. 3 represents another fighter in Islam, Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammad. A white, veiled woman, with a clenched fist, is shown towering over the rest of the women, who are wearing black veils. The "Zaynab" of the image is the leader in a protest march. In the lower right corner of the image, we read: "Zaynab! O You, the Voice of Ali." This is a remarkable way of emphasizing Zaynab's importance as a female representative of the House of Ali, the first Shi'ite Imam. Her followers are the followers of Ali, for she is the voice of Ali.

The image of a Muslim woman in her *hijab* has traveled thousands of miles inside and outside the boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran via postage stamps. Through this image, one might say, she has acted on behalf of the Iranian government in popularizing an Islamic image of Iran. During and after the war with Iraq, numerous postage stamps were printed bearing images of veiled women, who were shown in different roles—for example, as nurses dressing the wounds of soldiers on the battlefield, and as moral supporters of sons, husbands, and fathers who were preparing to leave for war. In performing these roles, she, too, acquires the status of a martyr. The concept of martyrdom runs deep in Shi'ite belief, martyrdom being the greatest sacrifice a Shi'ite can offer in the way of God. One does not have to belong to a certain gender, nor does one have to perform a specific kind of action, in order to be able to offer this sacrifice. Thus, the sacrifice can take the form of any action in which one "sacrifices" her or his life or the lives of one's loved ones for the sake of God and Islam. A large number of Khomeini's speeches revolved around the theme of martyrdom, and Khomeini supported his arguments by citing the examples of the holy figures of Shi'ite Islamic history:

> Think about the fact that the best people at his own time, His Holiness the Lord of the Martyrs [Imam Husayn], peace be upon him, and the best youths of Bani-Hashim [the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Husayn], and his best followers were martyred, leaving this world through martyrdom. Yet, when the family of Imam Hossain was taken to the evil presence of Yazid [the Umayyad ruler], Her Holiness, Zaynab, peace be upon

[20] Ibid., 8.

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> her, said: "what we experienced was nothing but beautiful."[21]

Note the comment about martyrdom being a beautiful experience. Since they ascend to heaven without going through the long period involving resurrection, the martyrs are assured of their reward and are included among a group of people of a very high rank in heaven. Since they have died for the sake of their religion, Islam, their martyrdom brings joy rather than sorrow. Hence it is a beautiful experience. In another speech, Khomeini discussed the topic of the "Perfect Person"—the martyr:

> The departure of a perfect person, the martyrdom of a perfect person is beautiful in the eyes of the saints of God. Not because he has fought and has been killed, but because his war has been for the sake of God, because his uprising has been for the sake of God. Regarding martyrdom as a great blessing is not because he is killed. People on other side also get killed. His blessing is due to the fact that his motivation is Islam.[22]

As this passage indicates, one must not fear death while fighting in the cause of God. Similarly, a person's death should not be mourned, but celebrated and considered an honor and a blessing since the martyred individual is sure to ascend directly to heaven.[23] Thus, in Iran, it was customary to congratulate the families of the martyrs when the names of these martyrs were announced by the government. Khomeini also used the occasion of Women's Day in Iran (see Fig. 2), which coincides with Fatimah az-Zahra's birthday, to deliver speeches in which the role of the Muslim mother was glorified:

> You respected ladies are charged with bringing up pious children. Your job is to rear pious children and deliver them to society. . . . You should bring up children who will safeguard the Prophet's wishes and aspirations. The assistance of the women is many times more valuable than that of men. May God protect you in bringing up

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[21] Ibid., 54.

[22] W. T. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 124.

[23] For a complete collection of Khomeini's speeches regarding women see *Sima-i Zan dar Kalam-i Khomeini* (Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Culture, 1990).

human beings, the job of the Prophets.[24]

One of the most significant stamps representing veiled women in the Islamic Republic of Iran is that titled "The *Hijab*" (Fig. 4). This stamp honors the *hijab* and the Iranian Muslim militant women, the "warriors of Allah." It contains several symbolic representations. First, the woman is shown in the most conservative form of *hijab,* the one which the government advertises as the preferred form—that is, in the *maqna'ah* (Arabic: *miqna'ah*; a circular head dress framing the face and covering the chest and back shoulder areas) and *chadour* (a large, one-piece semicircular veil covering the head and the entire body, and held in place by one hand all the time) combination. Second, she is depicted with a rifle over her shoulder, which symbolizes her readiness to fight against Iran's enemy, and, by extension, Islam's enemy. Third, the veiled woman is shown inside an oval figure that resembles an eye, replacing as she does the pupil of the eye. Now the eye, being one of the most precious organs in the human body, has special significance in the cultural symbolism of Iran; for example, a very polite expression for acceding to someone's request is *Ba-ru-i chashm,* literally, "Upon my eyes." Thus, the placing of the veiled militant woman at the center of the eye carries several messages, one of which is that she occupies a pivotal position in the Islamic society of Iran—for she is as precious as the pupil of an eye. This, of course, is my interpretation of the postage stamp, based as this interpretation is on my own cultural background and on my understanding of Iranian culture. If it is valid, then it will have to be granted that such representations of Iran's Muslim woman go beyond simple representations of "veiled woman." Fourth, it is significant that the stamp uses not only black and white but also red color. The red may represent a martyr's blood, and may signify here that the woman is willing to shed her blood in order to protect her religion and country.

Other Printed Propaganda Materials for the *Hijab*

Posters are among the most common forms of printed materials distributed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to promote a specific form of *hijab* preferred by the government. Such posters are displayed everywhere, and so it is difficult to ignore them. Figure 5 presents the kind of "moral" dress a woman should wear. The two

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[24] Omid Nikfarjam, " Islamic Stance on Art," in *Echo of Islam*, 148 (1996), 77.

model women in the poster are completely covered, with the exception of their hands and faces. In Fig. 6, "The Face of Chastity" (*Sima-i 'Afaf)*, a young, conservatively veiled woman at prayer towers over other veiled women, who are holding aloft a banner that carries a quotation from Khomeini: "Today, our women must carry out their social and religious duties and obligations, and guard their chastity in public."

Fig. 8 offers a visual representation of the power of the Muslim woman as a fighter and leader. A woman is shown holding the banner of Islam that reads: *La ilaha illa llah,"* There is no god except Allah. The woman's face has a "fury" that matches the "flames" that can be seen at her feet; in the background, we can see the "fury-filled" male soldiers who are waving their guns in the air as a sign of their combat-readiness. The woman, in this role, represents Fatimah az-Zahra'; she is an excellent model for those soldiers who are behind her and are following her lead. The poster reads: "Woman, the Ever-Lasting Flame and Fury." This poster, too, was published to honor the birthday of Fatimah az-Zahra'. It further identifies the occasion as Women's Liberation Day.

Fig. 9, another excellent poster, depicts a "faceless" veiled woman, whom I interpret to be "any woman." The print reads: "*Hijab* is an exalted [literally, "divine, godly"] boundary. It is from a woman's side that a man ascends to heaven."

There is another class of posters, which I call "warning" posters. Distributed by the government, such posters must be publicly displayed by all business establishments. Like other signs, they warn that all women entering the premises of the establishment must be in proper *hijab* in order to be served. For example, Fig. 7 reads: "We Reserve the Right Not to Admit/Service Sisters in Improper *Hijab*."[25]

Another form of material used to promote the images of veiled women in Iran is the entry ticket to events organized by the tourism industry (Fig. 10). I attended one such exhibition in Tehran in the summer of 1996. Each ticket sold had a serial number and a faceless woman wearing the officially preferred form of *hijab*. On the back of the ticket, I read the following: *Khwaharam, Shayad Barandah-i Ma Shuma Bashid. Ziba-tarin Ta'bir-i Shuma az Hijab Chist?* "My sister, you may be our winner. What is your most beautiful interpretation of the *hijab*?" The buyer could turn in this ticket, with the *hijab*

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[25] See Faegheh Shirazi-Mahajan, "A Dramaturgical Approach to Hijab in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Critique*, 7 (1995), 34–51.

interpretation written on a certain line, at the entrance, and this would make him or her eligible for a prize drawing. I would like to draw the reader's attention to the phrase "most beautiful interpretation of the *hijab*" on the ticket: the positive-sounding phrase is a tool of persuasion at work.

Conclusions

Defense of Islamic culture is part of the declared nationalistic agenda of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One way in which the government seeks to defend Islamic culture is by ensuring that women's bodies are covered by means of the traditional Islamic *hijab*. Adoption of the *hijab* is taken to imply rejection of the alien Western dress.

The Islamic Republic of Iran could not have survived for very long without the support of the Iranian masses. The regime that, from the very start, espoused an Islamic agenda, was dependent on popular acceptance for its legitimacy. One of the conditions of "legitimate" government was constituted by images of women clad in black *chadours* and segregated in public. Realizing this, the government mounted a massive propaganda campaign in order to persuade and appeal to its domestic audiences. It relied on the power and role of religion in Iranian society. Religious images of holy females such as Fatimah az-Zahra' and Zaynab became the ideals that Muslim women could emulate. The sermons of the clergy and the popular literature of this period—which consisted of the early stages of the Revolution and continued into the post-Revolutionary era—are filled with citations of the conduct of such holy female figures of history, who gave their lives for the love of God, setting an example for generations of Muslim women to come.

The Islamic Republic of Iran used public resources such as public space, postage stamps, and government-sponsored exhibitions actively to promote the *hijab,* to engage its population and get it to accept the government's ideological stances concerning the correct form of "Islam" and "Islamic" behavior. The "pure" and "honorable" image of the perfect Muslim women, those who are the true followers of Fatimah and Zaynab, is jealously guarded by the government, to which, in the government's eyes, no stigma of manipulation attaches. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran went so far as to prohibit, in the Preamble to its Constitution, the representation of women in advertising. And yet, veiled women stare at passers-by from thousands of billboards all across the land. Their images can be seen

on postage stamps affixed to letters and parcels traveling within Iran and abroad, and these images are printed on tickets waiting to be picked as winners of the "most beautiful interpretation" of the *hijab*. Such are the images of Iranian women that have been used as tools of persuasion by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Figure 1. *Basij* ["Brigade"] of the Oppressed.
"Recruiting *Basij* will Preserve the Islamic
Revolution." Ayatollah Khamanei, 1993.

Figure 2. Birth Anniversary of Fatimah-i
Zahra. Women's Day.

Figure 3. Zaynab, O You, the Voice of 'Ali!
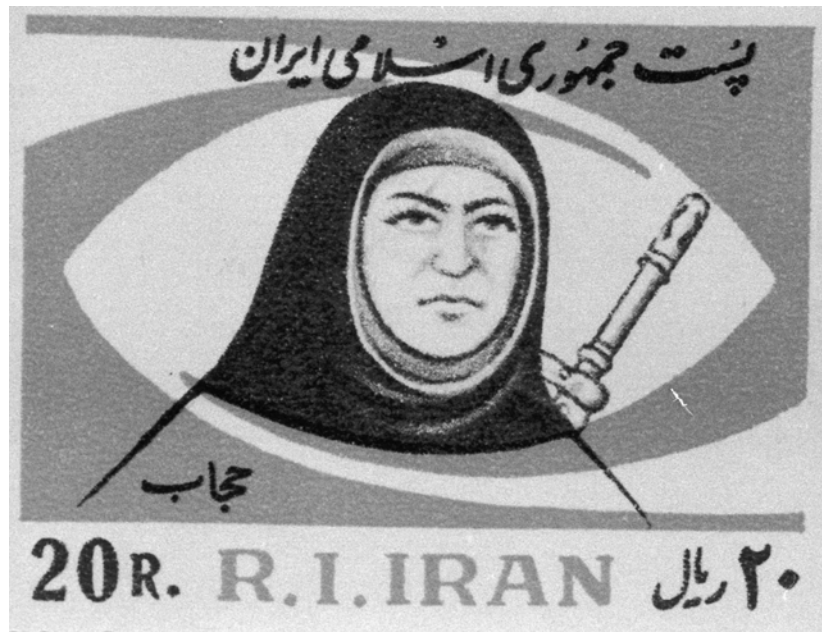
Figure 4. The *Hijab*.
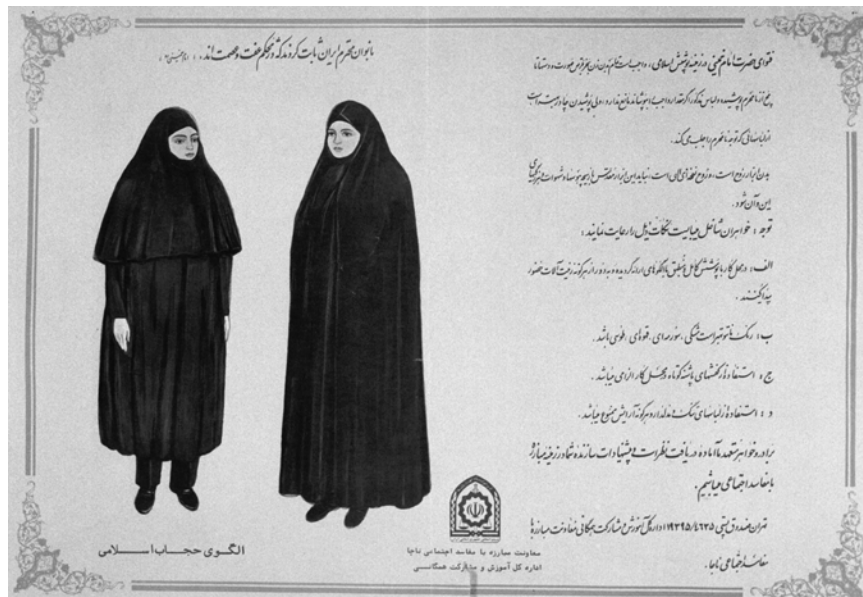
Figure 5. Model Islamic Dress. Khomeini's Decree Concerning Women's Islamic Dress.

Figure 6. The Countenance of Chastity.

Figure 7. We Reserve the Right not to Admit/Service Sisters in Improper *Hijab*. (*A poster inside business establishments.*)

Figure 8. Woman, the Eternal Flame and Fury. The Birth Anniversary of Fatimah, 27 Urdibihisht. Women's Liberation Day.

Figure 9. The *Hijab* is an Exalted Boundary. It is from a Woman's Side that a Man Ascends to Heaven.

Figure 10. My Sister, You May be Our Winner. What, in Your View, is the Finest Interpretation of the *Hijab*? (*Front and back of an entry ticket.*)

The Shari'ah Issue in Nigerian Politics

Victor F. Wan-Tatah[*]

The March 1999 announcement by Alhaji Ahmed Sani, the governor of Zamfara, that he would introduce the Shari'ah in the northern Nigerian state sparked violent protests and led to the killing of about two hundred people. The lack of an immediate and effective response from the newly elected head of state, who is a Christian from the South, was swiftly and severely criticized by the Nigerian public. Was he kowtowing to the Muslim majority in the north in order to protect his own power base? But when President Olusegun Obasanjo did respond, he inveighed the Muslim leadership for being inconsiderate and for jeopardizing the stability of the nation, since the governor of Zamfara had to request the army's intervention in order to suppress the violence and safeguard the property belonging to the Christians. To understand the issue of the Shari'ah in Nigeria, one must understand the delicate nature of Nigerian politics and the balancing act of power distribution among the three major regions that have always enjoyed limited autonomy. It is equally important to understand the recent history of the predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria in reference to Islam and the Shari'ah.

This paper will address a few specific issues pertaining to the Shari'ah in northern Nigeria, and will also consider some of the implications, for Nigeria as a whole, of the attempt to introduce the Shari'ah in a Nigerian context. Furthemore, we will take into account Islamic reform efforts attempted through the agency of the Shari'ah in selected African and non-African countries. We will argue that the Shari'ah may not be interpreted by narrow-minded political enthusiasts who have no regard for non-Muslim fellow citizens or by those who contravene the laws and customs of a pluralistic and secular society. We maintain that an obscurantist interpretation and ruthless application of the Shari'ah would constitute a travesty of

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Islamic law. That said, we should not suppose that those Muslims who seek to give the Shari'ah a role in polities in Muslim-minority lands or in Muslim-majority regions (as in northern Nigeria, where Shari'ah courts exist) are ignorant or uninformed. The larger problem, which still remains to be resolved by individual nations in Africa, which has a sizeable Muslim population, is the relationship between religion and politics. Most of the Nigerians who actively participated in the Shari'ah debate on the Internet's Naija Mall deplored the intrusion of religion into Nigerian politics on the premise that Nigeria is a secular state. Putting aside the fact that the notion of a secular state is somewhat nebulous, and that present formulation of the concept dates back to the post-Enlightenment European state, Sanneh makes a relevant criticism of the African leaders' "caricature" of the secular state. A blind copying of the Western state model "sets aside Africa's own history, of its precolonial heritage, and blindly charging into a future of material fulfillment. This inattention to African verities has come to haunt Nigeria, especially through Muslims, whose view of religion, like the African's, runs contrary to that of a state."[1] The Shari'ah issue, therefore, is not just Muslim or Nigerian; it calls for a reexamination of our very assumptions about religion and about Western influence on African politics.

The Colonial Context

The volatile mix of religion and politics in northern Nigeria has, as its colonial origin, the British policy of Indirect Rule, which was designed by Lord Lugard to minimize Britain's involvement and expenditure in her newly acquired territories. The policy was clearly utilitarian, since it worked in the colonizer's favor by making the traditional rulers serve colonial interests—often at the expense of their traditional statutes, which could be manipulated by complete strangers who knew nothing about, and had no appreciation of, native culture and tradition. That the British chose a particular time to create the problem that is our subject does not imply that the Shari'ah issue originated at that time. The direct and immediate

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[1] Lamin Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 184. In the pages that follow, Sanneh warns against the absolutization of state sovereignty in Africa, which militates against the practice of religion. The African political and educated elite deserves most of the blame for not working out solutions to their own peculiar African contexts.

frame of reference for our study came into being in the nineteenth century, which will be treated later in this paper. John Hatch[2] says that the notion of Nigeria as a single national entity has always been threatened by ethnic cleavages. He maintains that if the various communities of Nigeria had been allowed to develop naturally, they might have evolved into nation-states without outside intervention. It was the British colonial office that decided, in 1914, to create Nigeria as a single entity that we see today. Prior to that, it had been governed as three and two units, in 1900 and 1906 respectively. Until 1945, the British had the opportunity to resolve the problem of political partitioning and could have used it had they sought the contribution of prominent Nigerians, who would become future leaders in the new nation, such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and H.O. Davis, who had been educated in the United States. The two individuals relentlessly advocated, through the Nigerian Youth Movement, Nigerian nationalism.[3] During the youth conferences of 1938 and 1940, the movement specifically called for the abolition of Indirect Rule in Nigeria. The call was never heeded. When organized labor, whose membership represented a broad spectrum of Nigerian pluralist culture, called for a similar change, the colonial administration ignored the plea. In the Richards Constitution of 1945, national unity took a backseat to regional autonomy. Although the regionalization of Nigeria had begun earlier, the constitution's endorsement of Indirect Rule and its formal granting of the right of governance to Native Authorities greatly complicated the cause for a unified Nigeria. One obvious problem, according to Hatch, was that "the natives were also largely composed of illiterates and traditionalists; they could not measure up to the demands of the young progressively minded Nigerians of 1945."[4]

The constitution was introduced by means of a number of ordinances that vested mineral rights and public land in the Crown and empowered the colonial government to appoint or depose chiefs.

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[2] John Hatch, *Nigeria: A History* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1971), 197.

[3] The Nigerian Youth Movement played a critical role in developing a consensus on a unified Nigerian state. It aimed at unifying Nigerian tribes by creating an atmosphere of understanding and cooperation, by educating the public opinion, and by increasing nationalistic consciousness. Unfortunately, after the Akinsanya crisis of 1941, which resulted in the resignation of Azikiwe, the Youth Movement lost its momentum. The nationalist theme would be kept alive by voices from the West Indies and particularly by the Nigerian students abroad. See James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 220–267.

[4] Ibid., 207.

This, too, was a matter of concern for the critics. Azikiwe saw immediately the sociopolitical implications of the arrangement, for it would give the government control over the chiefs, who were traditionally linked with land allocation."[5] The three regional Houses of Assembly were established at Kaduna, Ibadan, and Enugu. Excepting the Northerners, who considered this feature of the constitution to be most attractive, nationalists of all backgrounds strongly objected.[6] Unfortunately, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which followed, kept intact the contentious provisions of the Richards Constitution,[7] leading to the elections for independence in 1959. After Independence in 1960, the unresolved issues of the colonial era would come to haunt the new state.

Given the degree of the hostility that arose during the following decade, administrative units with newly drawn boundaries were created with a view to achieving a fair and balanced representation of the major regions in the central government and in the House of Representatives in Lagos, the federal capital. The distinction between the major regional groups was much more than simply administrative. Each group was considered a separate "national" entity. The multiethnic character of Nigerian society and the regional boundaries coincided with ethnic and religious boundaries.[8] The northern region was made up predominantly of Fulani-Hausa people, who were generally suspicious of their two neighbors of the southern region. The latter were considerably more "modernized" in technical and administrative fields. Responding to the question why the northern region seemed to exhibit a delayed development of national consciousness, Coleman says that the explanation is to be found in the region's close identification with a fundamentalist Islam that caters to the needs and fears of an authoritarian structure. The traditional ruling class—the *Filanin gida*, "House Fulani"—who enjoyed British support, were anti-nationalistic and uninterested in social or political reform. Another explanation is that the Hausa's notion of obedience as the best expression of religious duty makes Islam a defining criterion for the unity and stability of a grouping of people who, with their divergent backgrounds and interests, are otherwise quite heterogeneous.

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[5] Hatch, 207.

[6] Coleman, 276–277.

[7] Bernard Nkemdirim, *Social Change and Political Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (Devon, England: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1975), 65.

[8] Ibid., 37.

Northern Nigeria's Experiment with Islamic Law

Of all the various attempts made at Islamic reform or revitalization in Nigeria, none is more analogous to the recent one than the *jihad* movement of the nineteenth century. The leader of this movement, Shaykh Usman dan (son of) Fodio (1754–1817), descended from a long and distinguished line of Fulani clerics of the Torodbe clan. The political situation in Gobir in 1764 found the sultans and the ruling class well poised to expand their territorial boundaries. The sultans were Muslim, but they did not seem to take their faith seriously. The non-Muslim animists practiced their religion unabashedly. The expansionist policies of the Gobi rulers led to intensified oppression and gross injustice, which any Muslim reformer must renounce. The conditions in Gobir, according to Hodgkin, tended to reinforce the Mahdist expectations that are frequently associated with nineteenth-century Nigeria.[9] When Usman dan Fodio swept through northern Nigeria with religious fervor to eradicate syncretistic diversions of the nominal Muslims and corrupt Hausa rulers, he was well received by masses of people, who might have shared very little of the religious convictions of the charismatic teacher and reformer. His triumph in 1805 was followed by the imposition of the Shari'ah in the conquered areas. The sultan was expected to follow the Shari'ah's provisions, while pagans and Christians underwent forced conversion to Islam. Although the *jihad* movement generated controversy and sparked the resentment of the Hausa, vanquished rulers were made accountable to Usman dan Fodio as he subsequently centralized his rule.

If Usman dan Fodio's successful *jihad* movement was the model the governor of Zamfara had in mind as he made his announcement in 1999, he was laboring under a misperception. An-Na'im warns that the attempts to transform the northern Nigerian state in conformity with the norms of the Shari'ah do not only prove impractical, but are contrary to the letter and spirit of the very law. His analysis reveals that the Sufi orientation of African Islam tends to be self-critical, flexible, inclusive, and pragmatic. In contrast, the modern Islamism in Africa is inclined to be self-righteous, rigid, exclusive, and

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[9] Thomas Hodgkin, ed., *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 45. See also J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 195, and Victor Low, *Three Nigerian Emirates: A Study in Oral History* (Evanston, Illinois, 1972), 65–71.

doctrinaire.[10] He further examines some of the legal constraints upon, and the potential for, the misuse of power at the hands of religious zealots who violate, in the name of Allah, universally recognized sanctioned human rights. Comparing the *jihads* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he remarks that the injustices arising from the application of the Shari'ah law are today, just as they were in the days of Usman dan Fodio, who forcibly converted non-Muslims to convert, sufficient reason for not implementing the law. Even when it comes to the Shari'ah personal law, Muslims' civil rights have been abused in places like the Sudan, where the National Islamic Front came to power in 1989. The gender discrimination in the law of the Shari'ah runs contrary to the National Laws of the Nigerian state and to universally acknowledged fundamental human rights.

We need not grant An Nai'm's objection to the enforcement of the Shari'ah law, but we would do well to consider other examples of Islamic reformism or revivalism that might be instructive in understanding the Nigerian situation. Recent scholarship on Islamization has made important distinctions between movements that exhibit certain common characteristics of a paradigm. Abdelkader Tayob[11] has enhanced our understanding of the different efforts made to bring about change in the Islamic communities of South Africa. He has done so by offering an interesting analysis of the shifting distribution of power within and outside the Mosque, and the analysis may be applied to the northern Nigerian context. Islamic revival in northern Nigeria, when examined in reference to semi-autonomous political regions, might give the deceptive impression that Muslims in that region are a dominant majority—an impression that may need to be corrected.[12] In the final analysis, Muslims of

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[10] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Nai'im, "Islam and Human Rights in Sahelian Africa," in David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander, eds., *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounter between Sufis and Islamists* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997), 81–82.

[11] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 1995), 35–36, locates the revivalist or modernization movement among the educated and in educational institutions in South Africa. The closest counterparts of northern Nigeria's advocates of Shari'ah-based reforms may be India's Deobandi *'ulama*, who claim to speak in the name of Islam and refuse to tolerate an interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah other than their own (see ibid., 125).

[12] Muslim countries can be divided into two groups, one consisting of those states in which Muslims are already in charge and have as their primary concern application of the Shari'ah, the second consisting of those in which Muslims or non-Muslims, depending on their ability to gain political support, might be able to contest for political

northern Nigeria have always played a dominant role in independent Nigeria. The attempt of the Ibo ethnic group to secede during the Biafra War (1967–1970) had religious significance. Political fault lines were drawn between the supporters of the breakaway state and the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Muslim states supported the central government while the Christian organizations and Israel supported Biafra. For a short while, prior to 1978, Muslim domination of the government was followed by efforts to introduce the Shariʻah. During the constitutional debate, Muslims preferred to live according to Shariʻah regulations rather than follow the secular laws of the state. Their wishes were granted when permission was given to establish a Shariʻah court of appeals at the federal level. Eventually, the court of appeals was abolished by a parliamentary committee of the Constituent Assembly out of a fear of division of the nation along religious lines. Protesting angrily, the Muslim legislators withdrew from the remaining legislative sessions. Objections to the Shariʻah Appeals Court clause came from Christian groups. The Christian Assembly of Nigeria (CAN) was formed to respond to the Islamic insurgency in the north and to demand for the state's Christians the same rights and privileges that might be granted to the Muslims. One of CAN's loudest protests came in 1985, when Nigeria joined the Organization of the Islamic States. Meanwhile, Islamic groups, such as the Society for the Victory of Islam, the Islamic Trust, and the League for the Elimination of Heresy, proliferated in the 1970s. In 1980, Yen Izala, one of the extremist Islamic groups, was involved in violent disturbances. The leader of the group, Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine, and his 4,000 followers were expelled from the Kano State by the governor. Maitatsine defied the governor and planned a takeover of the Kano Central Mosque.[13] The Yen Izala movement has been the cause of several fights and conflicts in four northern states, and most of its violent activities have been aimed at churches and bars.

African Precedents

Elsewhere in Africa, and before the *jihad* of Usman dan Fodio, Islamic militancy combined puritanical stridency and Mahdist

supremacy. Nigeria belongs to the latter category. For a comprehensive analysis, see Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 204–252.

[13] Ibid., 253–254.

sentiment. In Senegambia, the Muslim population was made up of Fulani and Mande traders, who were treated by the sedentary Jalonke as inferiors. Tension between the two groups escalated when, in 1645, the *'ulama* revolted against the traditional rulers. Nasir ad-Din led the movement of Islamic reform, which embodied Mahdist eschatological expectations.[14]

Nasir ad-Din justified his role as a revolutionary reformer by presenting himself as *al-Insan al Kamil* ("The Perfect Man"), whose mission of ideological perfection had to be carried out through Islamic reform. In order to accomplish his goal in such a way as to unify the *Ummah*, he took the Shari'ah as his model. His movement spread across Senegal into the Futa and Wolof kingdoms. Although he was subsequently killed, his "War of the Marabouts," as it was then popularly known, led to the spreading of his teachings and to the establishment of centers of Islamic learning in Senegambia in the eighteenth century. *Jihads* on a smaller scale, launched by other leaders, are worth a brief mention. The *jihad* of Alfa Ba in Futa Jalon was unavoidably precipitated when the Jalonke kings tried to suppress the Islamic prayer ritual in public in 1727–1728. An interesting *jihad* was that led by 'Abd al-Qadir in Futa Toro, in which members of the Denianke ruling class participated. However, it failed to prevent the enslavement of Muslims—and of the Denianke themselves—by the Bakna Moors from Mauritania.

Two other examples may be cited for comparison with the Shari'ah initiative in northern Nigeria. In the Sudan, the pro-Shari'ah forces have been heavily concentrated in the North, while the anti-Shari'ah population, comprising animists and about 90 percent of the Christians, resides in the South. The South's fear of the ruthless rule of the pro-Shari'ah Muslim North led to the formation of a guerrilla movement, known as the Anya-Nya. The South demanded a separate state for themselves. In a carefully crafted policy designed to balance antagonistic forces, President Ja'far Numayri, in 1977, gave key government positions to both the Southerners and the fundamentalists of the North.[15] The jockeying for greater political

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[14] Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London: Longman Group, 1984), 140. The messianism of the Mahdi was already prevalent in Mauritania in the teachings of Imam Nasir ad-Din. The Mauritanian Zwayas believed in making preparation for the end of time in order to avoid adverse divine judgment. Another factor influencing Nasir ad-Din's reformist zeal was the notion of the Prophet Muhammad as the Perfect Man.

[15] Pipes, 254–255.

power by the principal contenders has never abated. Pipes cautions that "only great political acumen by the government could prevent the two sides from taking up arms again."[16]

Two other case studies in Islamic insurgency in a worldwide context would definitely include Pakistan, which, unlike many other Muslim majorities that seek, through the Shari'ah, to exert their power in the larger society, was established in the name of Islam. In spite of its deep Islamic roots, Pakistan tolerates a plurality of opinion, and can still afford a good measure of secularism. India, though, seems to be a better candidate for consideration in this paper, since it has had a history of strife between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the 1970s, Hindus occasionally antagonized Muslims, who in turn went on the offensive attacking police and stocking up arms. After a period of inactivity and self-imposed exile, Indian Muslims became more assertive and outspoken. To them, the Shari'ah was mainly personal law, which became a symbol of cultural identification—a more conspicuous one than that in the Nigerian case. Nevertheless, Islamic organizations in India still prefer to resort to Shari'ah courts. The tension between Hindus and Muslims reached a critical point when masses of untouchables were converted to Islam in Meenakshipuram. Emboldened by the success, Muslim leaders of India's Jama'at-i Islami mobilized their members in order to win more converts. Sadly, the overall public response was negative, simply because conversion from Hinduism would prove too costly for people, who would lose their traditional religion and culture, which define their very identity in the caste system.[17]

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the introduction of the Shari'ah in northern Nigerian that followed the pronouncement of the governor of the Zamfara State. The political violence and controversy that have been unleashed cannot be hastily laid at the door of religion, nor can our understanding of the Shari'ah be limited to a single interpretation. The different components of this law, as we have seen in other African and non-African contexts, must be interpreted in reference to the Qura'n and the Sunnah. Therefore, whenever an individual or a group of revivalists or reformers single-mindedly try

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[16] Ibid., 255.
[17] Pipes, 261–264.

to force its rules on any group, whether it is Muslim or non-Muslim, they must be challenged and reminded about the basic teachings of Islam and about the central importance Islam attaches to political alliance and peaceful coexistence.

In the final analysis, the Prophet's life and the practical realism of the Shariʻah should create peace, not fear. In July 1998, the National Secretary of the All Peoples Party of North America (APPNA), Alhaji Yusuf Ali, wrote a letter to the chairman of his party announcing his resignation because "It has been particularly disheartening to know that the national leadership of the party has not only stood idly by and allowed the zealots elected under its banner to stand the principles of justice, equality and secularity on their head, but has actually defended their actions." This letter of resignation from a Nigerian Muslim, which is available on the internet, speaks for all reasonable Nigerians and for people of all faiths concerning the misuse of the Shariʻah in northern Nigeria.

Studying the "Other": Challenges and Prospects of Muslim Scholarship on World Religions

Ahmad F. Yousif [*]

Introduction

In institutions of higher learning in the Muslim world, in contrast to similar institutions in Western countries, scant attention is paid to the field of comparative religion. This, however, was not always the case. Between the third/ninth and sixth/twelfth centuries, Islamic civilization witnessed the rise—and also eclipse—of the discipline of *ʿilm al milal wa- n-nihal* (literally, "knowledge of religious groups and sects"). According to Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, interest in learning about other faiths and in interreligious debate and discussion during this period was so high that these areas became a subject of "salon conversation" and a "public past-time."[1]

Among the works written during the heyday of comparative religious studies in Islamic history are: *Ar-Radd ʿala n-Nasara* ("Refutation of the Christians") by ʿUmar b. Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 255/869), *Al-Farq bayna l-Firaq* ("Differences among Muslim Groups") by ʿAbd al-Qahir b. Tahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1038), A*l-Fasl fi l-Milal wa-n-Nihal* ("Decisive Treatise on Religious Sects and Divisions") by ʿAli b. Ahmad b. Hazm (d. 456/1064), *Al-Radd al-Jamil li-Uluhiyyat ʿIsa bi-Sarih al-Injil*) ("Proper Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus with Clear Evidence from the Bible") by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1112), and *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* ("Religious Sects and Divisions") by Abu l-Fath ash-Shahrastani (d. 548/1154). Mention

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[1] Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, ed., *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1991), ix.

may also be made of such writers as Muhammad b. Jarir at-Tabari (d. 313/926), who wrote about the religion of the Persians; Abu l-Hasan al-Mas'udi (d. 346/958), who wrote two books on Judaism, Christianity, and the religions of India; al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1025), who devoted part of *Al-Mughni* to Muslim sects and to religions other than Islam; and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 440/1053), who wrote about religion in India and Persia.

After a lapse of about six to seven centuries, there is, today, renewed interest among Muslims in studying other religions and faiths. Notable works in this connection are: Faruqi's *Christian Ethics*, *Trialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, and *Islam and Other Faiths*; Ahmad Shalabi's four-volume *Muqaranat al-Adyan* ("Comparative Study of Religions"); Taha al-Hashimi's *Ta'rikh al-Adyan wa Falsafatuha* ("Religions: Their History and Philosophies"); Muhammad Abu Zahrah's *Muhadarat fi n-Nasraniyyah* ("Lectures on Christianity"); Muhammad 'Abdallah Daraz's *Ad-Din* ("Religion"); and Sulayman Muzhir's *Qissat ad-Diyanat* ("Story of the Religions").

As in the early Islamic period, so today Muslim scholars and students face several challenges in their study of world religions. Some of these challenges are common to Muslim and Western scholarship on the subject, while others are peculiar to Muslim scholarship. They range from the challenge of defining and delimiting the field to those associated with methodology. This paper examines some of these challenges, drawing upon the classical Islamic heritage, the experience of Western comparativists, and the works of modern Muslim scholars in the field. First, however, it will deal with the question: Why do Muslim scholars need to make a serious study of other major world religions? To be sure, some Muslims are opposed to such an exercise, arguing that it will do more harm than good. It is, therefore, necessary to ask what led Muslim scholars, especially in the past, to study other religions.

Muslim Study of World Religions: Motivating Factors

Historically, several factors have motivated Muslims to undertake study of other religions:

1. *Qur'anic Injunctions*. For a Muslim, the main impetus for studying other peoples and their faiths comes from the Qur'an itself. Numerous Qur'anic verses urge human beings to reflect and ponder on the world around them. In so doing, Muslims cannot help but notice the diversity of beliefs professed by people. The Qur'an not only

affirms such differences, but also contains a wealth of information about other religions—both revealed and man-made—including Judaism, Christianity, paganism, and idolatry. Though not a textbook on other religions, the Qur'an encourages Muslims to investigate and study religious differences. For example, 49:13 says: "O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other)."

Exposure to different beliefs often contributes to greater mutual understanding and to collaboration among people of different faiths, reducing hatred and suspicion born of ignorance and prejudice. According to Qur'an 4:48, God has created differences among human beings as a means of testing the latter: "To each among you have we prescribed a Law and an open way. If Allah had so willed he would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues."

2. *Religious Dialogue*. The Qur'an stresses the importance of a healthy exchange of ideas among different religious communities: "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious, for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path and who received guidance" (16:125). The Prophet Muhammad, whom Muslims regard as the living embodiment of the Qur'an, was on several occasions known to have engaged in religious discussion with both Jews and Christians.

3. *Addition to Knowledge*. In the very early Islamic period, Muslims were sometimes surrounded by, and sometimes had as their neighbors, Jews and Christians, Magians, idol-worshipers, as well as star-, sun-, and moon-worshipers. Inspired by the above-quoted and other Qur'anic verses, classical Muslim scholars studied the beliefs of the various groups they encountered. Initially, they focused primarily on differences between the Muslims and the "People of the Book"— that is, the Jews and Christians. With the expansion of the Islamic State, however, they enlarged the scope of their inquiry to include the new religions they came into contact with, particularly Hinduism. Today, large numbers of Muslims live in multireligious societies. Muslims who live as a minority religious community in a land or region—as in North America—interact with non-Muslims on a daily basis. On the other hand, sizeable non-Muslim minorities exist in many so-called Muslim majority countries. Furthermore, modern systems of communication and transportation have increased

interaction among diverse religious groups. Such interaction inevitably raises the question: Why do people hold the beliefs they do or practice their religion the way they do? While some people may choose to ignore the fact of diversity of belief and to associate with like-minded people only, such an attitude of aloofness is becoming more and more difficult to maintain in a world that is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan.

4. *Truth and Falsehood*. Many classical Muslim scholars were motivated to study religious differences out of a desire to compare false religions with Islam—which they regarded as the religion of truth. Frequently, such studies were undertaken with the intention of refuting, either directly or indirectly, un-Islamic beliefs or philosophies—especially those that were perceived to have had a deleterious effect on the Muslims' faith. Such refutation was supposed to make Islam intellectually stronger and also more attractive to others.[2] According to Faruqi, study of other religions should aim at bringing out the commonalities rather than the differences among them. He thinks that it is up to the researcher to determine the extent to which the various religious traditions agree with "*din-al-fitrah*, the original and first religion."[3] Keith Roberts opines that a scientific study of other religions can be beneficial in that it will force one to be rigorous in the search for truth and in that it demands logical coherence in the articulation of faith.[4]

5. *Colonial Powers and Missionary Activities*. Muslim interest in studying other religions peaked in the sixth/twelfth century, declining thereafter. It resurfaced with the arrival of the colonial powers in the Muslim world. Muslims, on the one hand, wished to acquire a sounder understanding of the religion of those who had defeated them—namely, the Christians—and, on the other, hoped to counteract the work of the Christian missionaries who accompanied the colonial powers. Thus, we notice the appearance of such works as the *Mahomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*, written by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898);[5] among the later works were those written by

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[2] Mohammad Rafiuddin, "The Meaning and Purpose of Islamic Research," in *Research Methodology in Islamic Perspective*, ed. Mohammad Muqim (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1994), 11–12.

[3] Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 15–16.

[4] Keith A. Roberts, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), 35.

[5] C. W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Re-Interpretation of Muslim Theology* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978–79), 58, 70.

Abu Zahrah, Faruqi, and Shalabi. Interestingly, many Orientalist works written during this period were prompted by the desire to gain a better understanding of the mores and practices of the colonized people—with the eventual aim of strengthening administrative and political control over those people.

6. *Affirmation of One's Religious Commitment.* Study of other religions and philosophies may serve to increase one's own religious belief and commitment. Those who interact with people of different faiths often feel the need and pressure to find out more about their own faith. It is not uncommon for Muslim students in recent times to express the view that it was only after they had traveled overseas to study in non-Muslim countries that they truly came to understand Islam.

Defining and Delimiting the Field

A variety of terms have been used, particularly in the Western scholarly tradition, to designate the field under discussion. They have ranged from "comparative religion" to "religious studies" to "history of religion."[6] But first we will take a brief look at the relevant Qur'anic terminology.

The Qur'an uses three main terms for "religion": *din, millah*, and *ummah*. Although *din* has a number of meanings, including "obligation, direction, submission, retribution,"[7] it is frequently used to denote religion in the generic sense of the word.[8] In some cases, it refers to the primordial, monotheistic religion that, being one and the same, has subsisted throughout history. In others, it alludes to one of the false or corrupted forms (for example, polytheism) of a once true religion—a falsehood or corruption that may be regarded as *din* by those who accept it as a true and uncorrupted religion. This latter meaning is evidenced by 109:1–3, 6: "Say: O you who deny the truth! I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship

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[6] "History of religions is an academic pursuit composed of three disciplines: reportage, or the collection of data; construction of meaning-wholes, or the systemization of data; and judgement, or evaluation, of meaning wholes." Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataullah Siddiqui (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 161.

[7] L. Gardet, "Din," in B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht, eds., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–), 2:293.

[8] Ghulam Haider Aasi, "The Qur'an and Other Religious Traditions," in *Essays on Islam (2)*, Felicitation Volume in Honour of Professor W. Montgomery Watt, ed. Hakim Mohammed Said (Karachi: Hamdard Foundation Pakistan, 1993), 212.

that which I worship. . . . Unto you, your moral law (*dinukum*) and unto me mine." Commenting on these verses, the classical scholar Qurtubi says that the religion of the infidels has been referred to as a religion (*din*) because "they believed and adhered to it."[9]

Millah denotes a religious tradition, a worldview, or a faith.[10] The term implies a system of doctrines, creeds, and rituals that is followed by a group of people regardless of whether, from a social and political standpoint, that group does or does not make up an independent polity.

Ummah stands for a religiomoral and sociopolitical community. Ghulam Haider Aasi maintains that, although *ummah* sometimes gives "the meaning of a nation, a people, a culture or a civilization, . . . basic to all these groups of people is the idea of one binding religio-moral system of law and values."[11]

Islamic tradition does not assign an official name to the study of religious communities and sects. Faruqi says that the discipline was called *'ilm al-milal wa n-nihal*.[12] But there is no scholarly consensus on the term. According to Shalabi, the discipline of comparative religion, which he calls *muqaranat al-adyan*, can be traced back to al-Hasan b. Musa an-Nawbakhti's (d. 202/816) *Ara' wa-d-Diyanat* ("Opinions and Religions"). On this view, the discipline originated about the same time as a number of other Islamic sciences, including those of *Fiqh*, *Tafsir*, and *Hadith*.[13] Shalabi goes on to list a number of reasons for the decline of the discipline in later times. First, since, in Islamic societies, non-Muslims came to occupy high positions in the administrative and political fields, and since many members of the Muslim ruling elite were married to non-Muslim women, comparative works that showed Islam to be superior to other faiths—and the other faiths to be deficient in comparison with Islam—were ill-suited to the political climate of the times. Second, the Crusades, which aimed at wiping out Islam and Muslims by means of the sword, left little hope for religious dialogue and discussion. Third, most of the *fuqaha'* ("jurists") developed a fanatical loyalty to their own *madhhabs* ("schools") and had little interest in studying other *madhhabs*, much

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[9] Muhammad Sayed Ahmad al-Masir, *Al-Madkhal li-Dirasat al-Adyan* ("Introduction to the Study of Religions") (Cairo: Dar at-Tiba'ah al-Muhammadiyyah, 1994), 34.
[10] Aasi, 226–227.
[11] Ibid., 221.
[12] Faruqi, ed., *Trialogue*, ix.
[13] Ahmad Shalabi, *Muqaranat al-Adyan* ("Comparative Religion"), 4 vols., Vol. 1: *Al-Yahudiyyah* ("Judaism") (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1996), 31.

less other religions. Finally, some scholars refused to acknowledge the existence of other religions and felt that no comparison could be made between them and Islam.[14]

In the modern period, the most commonly used Arabic term to describe the discipline of study of other religions is *muqaranat al-adyan*, which is a direct translation of the Western term "comparative religion." The word *muqaranah* ("comparison") may mean *muwazanah*, *tashbih*, *qiyas,*[15] or *muqayasah*.[16] Generally, however, the word "comparative" in this context refers to the comparison of two or more kinds of phenomena.[17] It is also used to describe the method whereby likenesses or dissimilarities between two or more items are determined through a simultaneous examination of those items.[18]

The classic Western definition of "comparative religion" is that offered by Louis H. Jordon in 1905. According to Jordon, comparative religion is

> The science which compares the origin, structure and characteristics of the various religions of the world, with the view of determining their genuine agreements and differences, the measure of relation in which they stand one to another and their relative superiority and inferiority when regarded as types.[19]

In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the German-British philologist F. Max Müller (1823–1900) extended the comparative approach, which he had used in his philological studies, to the study of religion.[20] Central to this conception of comparative religion was application of the comparative—or scientific—method to the data

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[14] Shalabi, 32.

[15] Magdi Wahba, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms—English-French-Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), s.v. "Comparison."

[16] Ahmad F. Yousif, "Al-Nizam al-Ma'rifi 'inda l-Biruni fi Dirasat al-Adyan" ("Al-Biruni's Epistemology for Studying Religions"). Paper presented at the International Seminar on Islamic Epistemology, Amman, Jordan, 1998.

[17] Munir Ba'lbakki, *Al-Mawrid: A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li-l-Malayin, 1985), s.v. "Compare."

[18] *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 1993), s.v. "Comparative."

[19] In Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1975), xii.

[20] Seymour Cain, "History of the Study of Religion," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1995), 13:69.

supplied by the world's religions, past and present, in order to discover the laws that are operative in the realm of religion. In Germany, however, the use of this approach was limited to research on the background of the Old and New Testaments.[21] The term "comparative religion" remained in use until the end of World War II, even though, by the end of World War I, the discipline had already started to split up into a number of interrelated disciplines, such as history of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, and philosophy of religion.[22] Although, initially, the main discipline involved collecting, in a dispassionate manner, a massive amount of information about other people's religions, there has been, since World War II, a large-scale direct interaction among persons of diverse faiths, both on professional and on personal levels.[23] This has, in turn, led to a shifting of the focus of study. One result of the shift has been that Western scholars have almost entirely ceased to concern themselves with the "relative superiority or inferiority" of religions. A second outcome is that Western scholarship has almost abandoned the term "comparative religion,"[24] replacing it with a wide variety of terms, which reflect both diversity of thought and methodological uncertainty. One of the more popular of these terms is "religious studies," which came into existence in the 1960s, which was a period of growth of higher education in the West.[25] According to Sharpe, "religious studies attempts to study religion not on the basis of one tradition (or a part of a tradition) only, but "in the round."[26] In his view, religious studies can, at best, reveal the principles on which all religious belief and behavior, viewed from the believer's angle, rests—principles that, once grasped, can be applied in other, separate areas.[27]

It seems, however, that the discipline of religious studies began to lose its focus in the 1980s. Its curriculum has increasingly become "a crazy quilt of courses encompassing many disciplines, areas, regions,

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[21] Eric J. Sharpe "Comparative Religion," in Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 3:578–579.

[22] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, xiii.

[23] W. C. Smith " Comparative religion: Whither and Why?," in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 32.

[24] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, xii-xiii.

[25] Darlene M. Juschka, "The Construction of Pedagogical Spaces: Religious Studies in the University," in *Studies in Religion* 28 (1999), 1:86.

[26] Eric J. Sharpe. *Understanding Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 10.

[27] Ibid., 13.

languages and methods of inquiry."[28] At the end of the millennium, Juschka argues that "the discipline of religious studies is seen to be void, empty, [or] whimsical at best. Since it lacks an identity it also lacks cultural capital, and lacking cultural capital its survival in the changing world of the university is uncertain."[29]

In light of this historical overview of the origins, development, and status of the terms "comparative religion" and "religious studies" in the West, the next question to ask is: Where do Muslim scholars in the field stand in relation to such developments? The chasm between modern Western and Muslim scholarship in the field is very wide. In the Western academic setting, the discipline appears to be on the wane owing to a lack of direction and focus, but in academic institutions in the contemporary Muslim world, the field is still in the early stages of revival.

Western historical experience has demonstrated that each new scholarly attempt to define the field is based upon a new understanding not only of the goal of the research to be undertaken, but also of the methodology to be employed in the research. While the term "comparative religion" may have gone out of vogue in Western academic circles, comparison is still a valid method in Islamic intellectual circles. This method is frequently used in the Qur'an. It was also used by early Muslim scholars, particularly the *fuqaha'*, who were known for their use of *qiyas* ("analogical reasoning"). At the same time, some of the assumptions underlying the new term "religious studies" seem to be questionable from an Islamic point of view. The Western religious studies programs are predicated on the assumption that, epistemic certainty being unattainable, no religion has an exclusive claim to truth. On this view, we are left with three possibilities: (1) all religions are equally true; (2) all religions contain bits of truth; (3) none of the religions contain any truth at all. But while the above-stated assumption is in keeping with modern trends in Western philosophical thought, in which "no form of knowledge can be absolute," and all truth is relative, it would not appeal to a Muslim, since the denial of absolute values in favor of relative ones serves to negate God and the hereafter.[30]

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[28] Thomas L. Benson, "Religious Studies as an Academic Discipline," in Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 13:91.

[29] Juschka, 88.

[30] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 87.

Having said that, we must add that some of the issues that Western scholars in the field have grappled with must be addressed by Muslims as well. For example: Should study of world religions focus on the external—namely, doctrinal, legal, and social—aspects and manifestations of religion or on the internal—namely, experiential—aspects of religions, or on both? To what extent is it possible for an individual who is committed to a given religious belief to make an objective study of another religion? Should the study of other religions include an evaluative aspect or should it defer evaluation in view of the difficulty involved in attaining epistemic certainty about religions? Some of these questions will be dealt with in the following sections.

Challenges of Methodology

The classical Greeks, who were critical of the popular native religion, were curious about other religious traditions—and, therefore, open to studying these. In their quest for information and truth, they recorded and described what they saw, read, and experienced; they also compared and contrasted the material thus collected with their own tradition and culture.[31] But, according to Sharpe, the Judeo-Christian tradition, in contrast to the Greek, has been exclusivist and intolerant in the matter of religion. In his view, the New Testament exhibits a total lack of objective interest in other religious traditions and virtually rules out even the possibility of an objective study of other religions.[32]

The classical Muslim approach—insofar as one can speak of one—to the subject is in stark contrast to the Judeo-Christian approach. It is true that Muslim scholars viewed other religions from the perspective of the foundational sources of Islam, the Qur'an and Sunnah. At the same time, however, they felt free to approach the subject from several different angles. In this connection, we will briefly compare the methodologies of three representatives of the classical period—Biruni, Ibn Hazm, and Shahrastani.

Biruni made an extensive and profound study of Hindu civilization, including Hindu religion, philosophy, manners, customs, and scientific achievements. In both *Kitab al-Athar* (Eng. trans. *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*) and *Kitab al-Hind* (Eng. trans. *Al-*

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[31] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 3.
[32] Ibid., 7–8.

Biruni's India), Biruni discusses a total of twelve religions and religious communities and then compares their traits with corresponding features in Islamic and other known cultures.[33] He makes three types of comparisons: interreligious, intrareligious, and intersectarian.[34] This enables him to make use of his knowledge of the Greek and Indian philosophical systems to reach conclusions and make observations that would be understood and appreciated by his fellow Muslims. It is noteworthy that Biruni wrote about Hindu doctrine in a completely detached manner. He quoted Hindu sources verbatim at length when he thought they would contribute to elucidating a subject. Biruni himself confirms that his book "is not a polemical one" and that it is "nothing but a simple historical record of facts."[35] Biruni was highly successful in describing Hinduism in an objective manner, without identifying himself with the religion.[36]

Ibn Hazm was the first Muslim comparativist to use a critical analytical approach to study other religions, particularly the Jewish Torah and Christian Gospel.[37] Although both the Christians and Jews kept rejecting his analysis for three-quarters of a millennium, Faruqi states that today some Christians have come to acknowledge the worth of Ibn Hazm's study.[38] As far as his methodology was concerned, Ibn Hazm would report all the beliefs of the group in question and then critically analyze them with a view to showing their merits and demerits. Using the *Zahirite* methodology, he rejected interpretations of the Old Testament offered by clergymen

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[33] Jussi Aro, "Encounter of Cultures in the Work of al-Biruni," in Hakim Mohammed Said, ed., *Al-Biruni Commemorative Volume* (Karachi: Hamdard National Foundation, 1979), 319.

[34] Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft: A Case Study of the Works and Contributions of Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni." Ph.D. diss., International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Malaysia, 1996, 107. See also A. Jeffery, "Al-Biruni's Contribution to Comparative Religion," in Said, *Biruni*, 125–159.

[35] *Al-Biruni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Custom, Laws and Astrology of India about AD 1030.* Edward C. Sachau, ed. and trans., with notes and indices (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910), 7. See also, Ahmad F. Yousif, "A Socio-cultural, Religious Analysis of al-Biruni's Contributions Towards the Study of Science, Mathematics and Philosophy," in M. A. (Ken) Clements and Leong Yong Pak, eds. *Cultural and Language Aspects of Science, Mathematics and Technical Education* (Brunei: University Brunei Darussalam, 1999), 18–19.

[36] *Al-Biruni's India*, xxii.

[37] Mahmoud Ali Himaya, *Ibn Hazm wa-Manhajuhu fi Dirasat al-Adyan* ("Ibn Hazm'a Methodology for Studying Religions") Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1983), 148–149.

[38] Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 19.

and Christian theologians, who, he thought, might have committed errors in interpreting that scripture. Ibn Hazm preferred to examine the original texts and arrive at new conclusions, taking an approach similar to that taken by the Protestant Reformers in understanding the Bible.[39] He would, however, reject the texts if he found contradictions in them.

Shahrastani's *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal* is a virtual short encyclopedia on all the religions, sectarian groups, and supernatural and philosophical systems known at his time. According to Sharpe, Shahrastani has the honor of having written the first ever history of religion. In his view, Shahrastani's work "far outstrips anything which Christian writers were capable of producing at the same period."[40] In contrast to Ibn Hazm, who bases his analysis strictly on a study of original and primary sources, Shahrastani does make use of a number of secondary sources—for which he is severely criticized by A. J. Arberry, who remarks that Shahrastani's *Milal* "is little more than a farrago of quotations from older writers, loosely arranged and inconsequently strung together without the slightest acknowledgment."[41] A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn, who are less critical of Shahrastani, argue that, although Shahrastani draws heavily on Ash'ari's *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, he does make use of other sources as well and often differs considerably from Ash'ari—especially in terms of arrangement of material and classification of the subsects—and gives a fuller account of some of the sects than Ash'ari does. Kazi and Flynn point out, furthermore, that Shahrastani's section on the Isma'iliyyah seems quite independently written.[42] Nevertheless, they admit that Shahrastani rarely mentions his sources, with the exception of Abdallah b. Mahmud al-Ka'bi (d. 319/931), whose name occurs quite frequently.

Unlike Ibn Hazm, Shahrastani does not critically analyze the ideas of the groups he discusses. Generally, he reports the views of the sects without elaboration and without comment, though he offers an occasional brief criticism.[43] "I have," he says at the beginning of his book, "stated their beliefs as found in their books without favoring

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[39] Himaya, 178.

[40] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 11.

[41] A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn, Introduction to Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 4.

[42] Ibid., 4.

[43] Ibid., 7.

them and without attacking or criticizing them."[44] This approach, however, has not found favor with some Muslim scholars. Mahmoud Ali Himaya, for instance, criticizes Shahrastani for not correcting the mistaken ideas he described. Himaya thinks that the major problem with such an approach is that false ideas may stick in the readers' minds, without these readers knowing whether such ideas are false or wrong. He further says that it is easy to learn about the ideas of another group and report them, but that it is more difficult to respond to the wrong ideas.[45]

This brief review of the differing methodologies of three Muslim scholars has shown that there is no such thing as a single "classical Muslim method" for studying other religions. Both Biruni and Shahrastani preferred to take a descriptive approach, but Biruni obtained his information from firsthand field research, while Shahrastani relied more heavily on secondary sources. Ibn Hazm, on the other hand, preferred the critical analytical approach and relied exclusively on original religious texts, ignoring secondhand commentaries on those texts.

In the modern era, Western scholars have used an increasingly wide variety of methods to study the field. The so-called Orientalist methodology reigned supreme in nineteenth-century Western Europe. The Orientalists treated the religions of the world as "dead-cold data and static external observables in human behaviour or as enemy territory, which must be reconnoitered in order to be conquered with the least possible effort."[46] In their view, the ideal scholar was a detached academic who surveyed material impersonally, almost majestically, and subsequently reported on it objectively. This detachment meant that the scholar studied the religion without participating in it.[47] In addition, many Orientalists were evolutionists in the sense that they tended to classify religions historically, geographically, and culturally, systematizing them into various "isms," each a rough equivalent of a biological species.[48]

One of the shortcomings of the Orientalist methodology is that it failed to recognize that "religion is not a 'scientific' fact that can be

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[44] Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa-n-Nihal* ("Muslim Sects and Divisions"), ed. 'Abdul 'Aziz Muhammad al-Wakil (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d), 14.
[45] Himaya, 147–148.
[46] Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 9.
[47] Smith, 44–45.
[48] Sharpe, "Study of Religion," in Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 13:84.

coldly examined in the manner of a geological or biological sample." [49] To be sure, several dimensions of religion are amenable to scientific study, but these may not be religion as such, the heart of a religion consisting of the meaning a religion holds for those who believe in it.[50]

A second shortcoming is that the great majority of the Orientalist writings were prejudiced by Western—if not strictly Christian—categories of thought and analysis.[51] Sharpe says that comparisons frequently involved "undue and conventional selectivity, which chose not what is most important in an exotic tradition, but what is accessible and superficially attractive." In addition, many Western students tended to treat the "other" tradition as a mirror for their own concerns.[52]

As already mentioned, "comparative religion" since World War I was broken down into a number of subdisciplines, each with its own methodology or approach. The anthropological approach examines the role of religion in early or traditional societies—particularly the ways in which religious rites and ceremonies bind a community together—the role of a chief or shaman in the life of the people, and the function of myth in revealing a tribe's self-understanding and identity.[53] Anthropologists are also interested in finding out how society's religious beliefs and institutions sanction or elicit acceptance of a certain behavior and how these factors assist in making that society integrated and cohesive.[54] A favorite method of the anthropologists is that of participant observation, which requires an open, serious, and respectful attitude toward alien ways of life and thought.[55]

Many of those who used the anthropological approach to study other religions were criticized for being armchair scholars, in the sense that their methods were skewed by unreliable data obtained at second hand, by unsifted sources, and by inauthentic comparisons and haphazard synthesis in which bizarre phenomena were focused on, or certain types of examples selected, to prove preconceived theories. The latter-day anthropological method—that of undertaking

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[49] Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 3.
[50] Smith, 35.
[51] Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 35.
[52] Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, 88.
[53] Richard C. Bush et al., *The Religious World Communities of Faith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), 9.
[54] James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 29.
[55] Cain, 72.

intensive fieldwork—has also been criticized as impressionistic, haphazard, or simply meaningless busywork, while even the technique of "participant observation" has been dismissed as the romantic illusion that one can get an inside view of a foreign culture in a few months or years.[56]

The sociological approach to other religions focuses on group or social behavior and on the way religion interacts with other dimensions of our social experience.[57] The psychological approach, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the study of such experiences as conversion, prayer, and mystic ecstasy, using such methods as questionnaires, personal interviews, autobiographies, and other empirical data that could be analyzed, classified, and statistically measured.[58] The historical approach is concerned with establishing the role that religious experience and ideas play in the lives of individuals and communities; it is also concerned with determining how religion influences the development of larger societies, nations, and whole cultures. In reconstructing a religion's past or by attempting to distinguish historical fact from myth, legend, saga, and religious tradition, the historian draws on a vast range of nontextual sources, including archaeology, numismatics, and geography.[59]

The phenomenological method attempts to supply the deficiencies of the Orientalist approach and of the reductionism of several of the above-noted approaches. It is designed to portray each religion in its own terms as a unique expression, as a reality that is not to be reduced. In order to achieve this goal, the phenomenologist must remain detached and impartial. But insightful description and interpretation also requires a genuine feel for, and empathy with, religious experience.[60] The phenomenologist must exercise *epoche*, or suspension of judgment, a state that allows him or her to see through the eyes of those who believe—or of those who are committed.[61]

But even the phenomenological approach is not immune to criticism. Seyyed Hossein Nasr criticizes it for collecting "religious phenomena without any normative judgement, as if one were

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[56] Ibid., 73.
[57] Livingston, 31.
[58] Cain, 77.
[59] Livingston, 28.
[60] Ibid., 38.
[61] Sharpe, *Understanding Religion.* 32.

collecting mollusks."[62] The phenomenological method does not distinguish between true and untrue religions. Nasr, on his part, invokes the *philosophia perennis*—or the "traditional" method, which concerns itself with "religion in its trans-historical reality." [63] This "traditional" school "studies the ethics, theology, mysticism or art of each religion in light of the absoluteness of its Divine Origin." It does not however, state the reality of a religion only in terms of its historical unfolding.[64] "Basing itself on the knowledge provided by the *philosophia perennis*, the traditional school judges between grades of Divine manifestation, various degrees and levels of prophecy, major and minor dispensations from Heaven and lesser and greater paths even within a single religion." It insists on the study of religion from a religious point of view and opposes the relativization that characterizes much of the modern, academic study of religions.[65]

We will now return to a question we raised earlier: What is the appropriate methodology for Muslim scholars to use in their study of other religions? Obviously, such a methodology will have to be firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. But it must also be acknowledged that the Qur'an is first and foremost a book of guidance and not a "how-to manual" on every conceivable subject. It follows that development of an Islamic or Qur'anic methodology requires determination of the fundamental principles and premises on which such a methodology should be based.

Consciously or unconsciously, all scholars hold certain convictions or make certain assumptions about reality.[66] Some view the various religions as so many paths to the truth; others regard all truth as relative; and still others think that all religions are false or are the products of the human imagination. The danger consists not in one's holding of certain preconceptions about reality, but in one's refusing to acknowledge their existence and in laying claims to objectivity when, in fact, one is proceeding from a certain set of presuppositions. What assumptions might underlie a Muslim's approach to the study of other religions?

First and foremost, Muslims must put such study in its proper context. According to Qur'an 42:13, God raised prophets among all

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[62] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1993), 60.

[63] Ibid., 55.

[64] Ibid., 62.

[65] Ibid., 60–61.

[66] Livingston, 22.

nations in order to guide the latter: "The same religion has He established for you as that which he enjoined on Noah—that which we have sent by inspiration to thee—and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus: namely that ye should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein." Some people accepted the prophets' message while others rejected it—or, if they accepted it, did so only in order to subvert it from within (either by altering the text, context, or meaning of the revelation or by consciously concealing its message—for example, 2:59, 146). Thus, a Muslim scholar is charged with making an objective study of the doctrines and practices of other religions—and does so with reference to those religions' own source materials—with a view to differentiating truth from untruth. The evidence offered in support of every faith must be subjected to rational, critical scrutiny. An Islamic methodology, in this respect, will have both a descriptive and an analytical component. Furthermore, the Qur'an enjoins Muslims to study other religions in a fair and sensitive, and not in a derogatory, manner: "But do not revile those whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance. For, goodly indeed have we made their own doings appear unto every community (*ummah*)" (6:108). If it is determined that a doctrine meets the revelational criteria laid down in such Qur'anic verses as 25:1 and 35:31, then it is to be accepted as genuine, otherwise not. Some may argue that taking the Qur'an as the starting point may compromise the objectivity of investigation. We will deal with this objection below, but will here make the prefatory remark that, from a strict Islamic point of view, the notion of the relativization of truth would be unacceptable to a Muslim scholar of world religions, for, according to Qur'an 2:256, "Truth stands out clear from error."

Objectivity and Religious Commitment

We will consider two issues. First, is a Muslim's religious commitment an asset or a liability in his or her study of the other faiths? Second, is a "value-free," objective study of religions possible at all? The first question can be asked about any person, Muslim or non-Muslim, who undertakes to study a faith other than his or her own. As Nasr says, one of the biggest challenges facing religious people is "how to study other religions sympathetically, without

losing the sense of absoluteness" about their own religion.[67] In its Western acceptation, the term "comparative religion usually presupposes, if it does not categorically require, a certain degree of detachment from a dominant religious tradition and also a degree of interest in the religious beliefs and practices of others."[68] This view was also expressed by the Hindu writer Radhakrishnan, who argued that "the scientific student of religion is required to treat all religions in a spirit of absolute detachment and impartiality."[69] Some scholars hold that religious commitment constitutes a barrier to understanding because it tends to prevent one from seeing other religions in any perspective other than one's own. It is also said that religious commitment, once it has been left behind, can give valuable insights into religious life.[70] Underlying such views is the belief that only secular rationalists, who are not committed to any religious tradition, are capable of studying religions in an objective manner.

The presumed relationship between religious commitment and bias and between secularism and objectivity has today come increasingly under fire. According to Bulend Senay, "the idea that the study of religion and human sciences should and could be value-free is a myth and an ideology in itself" since all scholars make judgments in terms of their selection of problems, their preference of certain hypotheses or conceptual schemes, and their neglect of others.[71] Advocating a similar view, Sharpe says that today it is assumed that no student is capable of evaluating material dispassionately or "objectively" since every student is in subtle bondage to a period, an ideology, a theology, a social class and/or a climate of opinion. He further states that even if it were possible to achieve a state of freedom from presuppositions, the desirability of such a state would in itself be a judgment of value.[72] Wilfred Cantwell Smith says that even "the secular rationalist is coming to be seen as a person like another: not a god, not a superior impersonal intellect, monarch of all it surveys, but a man with a particular point of view."[73]

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[67] Nasr, 61.
[68] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 2.
[69] Ibid., 259.
[70] Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, 21.
[71] Bulend Senay, "Another Introduction to Islam: The Myth of the Value-Free Study of Religion," in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 15 (1998), 2:89–90.
[72] Sharpe, "Study of Religion," in Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 13:84.
[73] Smith, "Comparative Religion," 46.

From an Islamic point of view, of course, the proposition that only a Muslim with a low degree of Islamic commitment can objectively study other faiths must be rejected. There need not be a contradiction between a Muslim's religious commitment and his or her study of other religions. A Muslim, by definition, is one who submits himself or herself to God's will. And, as we have seen, part of following God's will is to study other people—both past and present—and their beliefs. In undertaking such study, Muslims will be guided by the divine revelation they possess, but they will also use their rational and critical faculties. Furthermore, as we have already noted, Muslims have been commanded to enter into a dialogue with members of the other faiths—and they must engage in such dialogue with fairness and sensitivity, and use not only the divine guidance at their disposal, but also their rational and critical faculties.

It must, however, be admitted that, depending on the method of investigation one employs, one's religious commitment may limit the effectiveness of one's study of other religions. In employing the method of participant-observation, for example, a Muslim might have to face the question of the extent to which he or she may participate in idol-worship in order to gain an inner sense of what it feels like to be an idol-worshiper. Similarly, if committed Muslims employ the phenomenologist's technique of *epoche* "to get out of one's self and put oneself as it were entirely in parenthesis,"[74] how long can they remain in such a state without neglecting their religious obligations—their daily prayers, for example? The difficulties encountered by Muslim scholars studying other religions is attested to by the modern Muslim scholar Abu Zahrah, who confesses that the greatest difficulty he faced in his study of Christianity, even though he placed his reliance on Christian source materials, was in recording or discussing Christian beliefs or doctrines in a fair and unbiased manner, particularly when those beliefs and doctrines contradicted those of his own religion.[75] Abu Zahrah adds that fairness also demands that scholars not neglect rationality. In other words, it is wrong to endeavor to be too fair—that is, to try to be fair to the point where the focus no longer remains on knowledge, truth, and reason.[76]

Thus, while a committed Muslim may be able to understand the external manifestations of other religions, the extent to which he or

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[74] Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 4.

[75] Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Muhadarat fi n-Nasraniyyah* ("Lectures on Christianity") (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1966), 12.

[76] Ibid., 13.

she will succeed in understanding the inner religious experience of a person of a different faith will remain questionable. But one might argue that such limitations to understanding will exist for any scholar—Muslim or non-Muslim, religious or secular—who tries to study the faiths of other people. Sharpe says that, although on a purely intellectual level, the outsider may know far more about a given religious tradition, its history, structure, and social implications than does the average devotee, the believer knows something that agnostic or the atheist can never know. While the agnostic and the atheist can observe and evaluate the outward machinery of religion, they cannot grasp the divine-human relationship, which lies at its heart.[77] Similarly, Theodore Ludwig says that "in looking from the outside, we miss the inner compulsion of commitment and the special meaning that the religion provides for the insider." As such, it is important that we make a conscious and devoted effort to understand the religious traditions of others, trying to look at the religious ideas and symbols from the perspectives of the "insiders." This is not an easy task, and it will never be carried out fully.**[78]**

Issue of Evaluation

As already noted, the recent trend in modern Western scholarship has to been to defer evaluation of a religious belief or doctrine in view of the epistemic uncertainty believed to surround the study of such belief or doctrine. Nevertheless, scholars like Livingston argue that any study of religions "should involve some form of critical analysis" so that it does not "consist merely of rote memorization, simple indoctrination, uncritical advocacy or the effort to proselytize."[79] According to Faruqi, it is difficult for the researcher to judge or evaluate religious facts since any such appraisal of their worth or analysis of their content is bound to be prejudiced and warped and, at best, inadequate and incomplete.[80] He nevertheless believes that "there is no escape, in the comparative study of religion, from some evaluation of the content examined." If no religion could be judged by any laws foreign to it, then it would follow that no religion could be

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[77] Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, 19.
[78] Theodore M. Ludwig, *The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 10.
[79] Livingston, 22.
[80] Faruqi, *Christian Ethics*, 8.

judged at all.[81] In Faruqi's view, the key to evaluating religious traditions is to establish and elaborate higher principles that will serve as a basis for comparing various systems of meanings, of cultural patterns, of moralities, and of religions. Such principles should provide the reference by which the meanings of such systems and patterns may be understood, conceptualized, and systematized.[82] Faruqi enunciates a number of such principles: (1) the elements that make up a system must not be contradictory of one another—this is the principle of internal coherence;[83] (2) the system or view presented must cohere with cumulative human knowledge; (3) revealed truths must cohere with the religious experience of humankind; (4) for a system of meanings, a cultural pattern, or a system of religious truth to establish its claim as a system, its truths must correspond with reality; and finally, (5) the religious system must contribute, in its totality, to the upward march of the human being toward ethicality, higher value, and God-consciousness.

Conclusion

This paper has examined several challenges facing Muslim scholars and students of world religions. It began with a discussion of what led Muslim scholars of both the past and the present to study other religions. It then identified three terms—*din, millah*, and *ummah*—employed by the Qur'an to describe religious communities. It argued that the discipline of study of other religions does not have a single, agreed-upon name in Islamic tradition, though most modern Muslim scholars would use the term *muqaranat al-adyan*—a direct translation of the Western term "comparative religion." In this connection, it was noted that, while the term "comparative religion" is no longer in vogue in Western scholarship, it is still valid in Muslim scholarly discourse since the comparative technique is frequently used in the Qur'an, and also in the works of classical Muslim scholars in various fields, especially jurisprudence. On the other hand, the term "religious studies," which has found favor with Western academics since the 1960s, may not be acceptable to Muslims on account of its questionable epistemological foundations.

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[81] Ibid., 20.
[82] Ibid., 10.
[83] Ibid., 11.

We also noted in the course of our inquiry that there is no single Islamically sanctioned method of studying other religions, for while some Muslim scholars use a descriptive approach, others prefer to analyze religious traditions critically. Similarly, while some scholars make use of primary sources, others rely on secondary sources. Common to all these divergent approaches, however, is the attempt to base the perception of reality on the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Qur'an, as we saw, offers principles and guidelines that Muslims can use to establish a framework for the study of religions. For example, the Qur'an confirms the existence of religious diversity in the world, making it incumbent upon Muslims to study, in a fair and objective manner, different religious beliefs held by people. We also touched on the issue of religious commitment affecting objectivity of study in the field of comparative religion, concluding that the notion of complete objectivity is a myth, that all scholars bring their perceptions—in the form of convictions or assumptions—of reality to bear upon their investigations, and that the reasonable thing to do is to state openly one's convictions or assumptions rather than to deny their existence. The paper concludes with the observation that evaluation of religion is an integral part of the Islamic, as opposed to the modern Western, approach to the study of religion. While many Muslim scholars have no qualms about using the Qur'an as the criterion for evaluating the truth claims of religions, non-Muslims would reject such a criterion. In order to overcome this evaluative gap, Faruqi has laid down a number of principles to help scholars understand, systematize, and evaluate other religions.

Needless to say, the list of challenges treated in this paper is far from exhaustive. Much more work needs to be done to develop a well-rounded Islamic methodology in the field of comparative religion.

Indian Muslims and the Search for Communal Harmony: Some Notes on Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan

*Irfan A. Omar** *

Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan (b. 1925), founder of the Al-Risala Movement in India, is an internationally known Islamic scholar. In the course of over forty years, he has authored more than one hundred books in Urdu—many of which have been translated into Arabic, English, and Hindi—and has published numerous articles in newspapers and journals as well as in the pages of the *Al-Risala* monthly (published in Urdu and English by The Islamic Centre, New Delhi, of which he is the founder-president). His first book, *At the Threshold of a New Age*, marked a turning point in the history of Muslim scholarship. Written in Urdu,[1] the book urged Muslims to pull themselves out of their state of backwardness; it announced the arrival of a "new age," with which, it argued, Muslims must come to terms. It sought to create among Muslims an awareness of the changing patterns of thought, of the liberating forces of scientific achievements, and of the overall development of human civilization, of which, at one time, Muslims themselves were the leaders. Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan has since striven—through his writings, lectures, and personal contacts—to change both the subject and the strategy of the Indian Muslim discourse, which had almost always focused on either the past glory of India's Muslims or on their real or imagined present-day difficulties vis-à-vis the country's Hindu majority.

The Muslims of India make up one of the largest minorities in the world. They have lived in relative peace and harmony with the Hindu and other religious communities in India for over seven centuries. It

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[1] Wahiduddin Khan, *Naye 'Ahd ke Darwaze par* (Delhi: Islamic Publishing House, 1955).

is only in recent times, especially in post-Independence India, that hostility between segments of Hindu and Muslim populations has grown, erupting in the form of what are generally called "communal riots."

Taking a simplistic view of things, one might argue, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith did several decades ago,[2] that the Muslims of India are incapable of accommodating themselves to a pluralistic setting and are unwilling to share political power with other religious communities. To Smith, the explanation for this state of affairs lay in the fact that, historically, Muslims had always been either rulers or subjects, and so did not know how to live as equal partners with other communities in an independent India. But this view fails to explain the situation in countries such as Pakistan, where Muslims had to share power not with non-Muslims but with their co-religionists.

An alternative hypothesis cites the politicians' need to keep communal hatred alive in order to promote their vested interests. Referring to the recent "bus diplomacy" carried out between the leaders of India and Pakistan, Valson Thampu claims that there is compelling evidence that "communal hatred is a swindle, a psychological germ warfare, employed by those who love none but themselves. 'Religion in danger' has been, without exception, the war cry of those who seek only to buttress their vested interests thereby."[3]

Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan takes an altogether different view of the matter. He refrains from blaming external factors for the communal conflict, holding none but Muslims responsible for the conflict. He argues that the main problem that India's Muslims—or their leaders—faced at the time of Independence was not whether they should share political power with the Hindu majority in a democratic India; the main problem was the fact of the power struggle itself. Quite apart from the question of with whom Muslims should share power—the question arising from the scenario presented by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League—was the fact that Muslims were unwilling to share power at all, whether among themselves or with the other interest groups. Wahiduddin Khan contends that struggle for power constitutes the core of the problem, and that this struggle continues even today, whether between Muslim and non-Muslim groups or between various

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[2] Wilfred C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[3] Valson Thampu, "Vajpayee's Return Bus Ride: Will It be a Redeeming Moment?" E-mail communication, 21 February 1999.

Muslim groups (in Pakistan, the struggle has manifested itself, in a secondary way, in the Muhajir-Pathan and Bengali-Punjabi conflicts in the country's fifty-year political history). Thus, the fact of belonging to the same religion is of no consequence since the conflict is generated not by religious differences but by divergent political interests.

In the next few pages, we will review some of Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan's thoughts on communal harmony in India with reference to his important book, *Indian Muslims: The Need for a Positive Outlook*.[4] In this book, Wahiduddin Khan speaks of a "new India" that may one day become free of mistrust and communal friction, as was envisioned by its founders. In 1947, India became an independent country. But, with freedom achieved, the events took a sad turn as communal conflict grew. The subsequent experience of the people could hardly be described as characteristic of a truly free country. The dream of a "new India" is, however, still alive and can be realized if both Hindus and Muslims decide to settle their differences amicably. But, until both communities realize the need for such a settlement, one of the two communities ought to take it upon itself unilaterally to extricate itself from situations that could lead to conflict, showing tolerance in the face of intolerance shown by the other community. Wahiduddin Khan advises his own—Muslim—community to take the initiative in this regard (21). He urges Muslims to develop positive thinking and to be at the giving end for the sake of others and for the sake of the nation. Citing Qur'an 13:17,[5] he argues that, like the Sikhs, Parsis, and Christians, Muslims too can gain respect by proving themselves "useful to others" (23).[6]

On 6 December 1992, the Babari Mosque in Ayodhya was torn down by a Hindu mob. Qur'an 22:4 says that to destroy a mosque is to commit a grave injustice (111), and, accordingly, the Islamic Shari'ah commands that mosques be protected. The Babari Mosque incident created a difficult and dangerous situation. Some Muslims felt that the scenario called for a redefinition of the Shari'ah's command concerning protection of mosques—that the larger issue here was protection of the lives of Muslims and non-Muslims, the issue of the

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[4] New Delhi: Al-Risala Books, 1994.

[5] The verse tells how, after a spell of torrential rains, the scum of the flood waters is carried off and pure water is left behind.

[6] In recent months in India, however, there has been an alarming increase in hostilities against Christians, which, overall, has been a "giving" community.

protection of the mosque having become secondary since mosques, as places of worship, may not be used as a political platform. Wahiduddin Khan presented a "three-point formula" with the intent to "enable Muslims to re-define their responsibilities towards the mosque in the light of the *shari'ah's* broader sense of purpose" (120).[7] Expressing his optimism that the situation in Ayodhya could be brought back to normal, leading to the establishment of peace and harmony between the Hindus and Muslims, he said that there is "historical evidence that destruction, having run its course, must ultimately abate and come to an end" (31). Wahiduddin Khan supports the notion of a multicultural India that would accommodate peacefully the country's various religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities and their cultural heritages. He speaks of a culturally diverse, religiously tolerant, and politically free India, as envisioned by the founders of the Republic of India and as enshrined in India's secular constitution.

Throughout *Indian Muslims*, Wahiduddin Khan pits Islam against Muslims, the ideal against the reality, the tradition against the practice. Islam advocates peaceful coexistence, but, during the past several decades, Muslims in India have, by and large, displayed a confrontational attitude toward the Hindu community—an attitude cultivated by some of their leaders. It is imperative for Muslims to follow Islam and live in harmony with other communities. Muslim adversarial attitude toward the Hindu community is sometimes justified by reference to Qur'an 2:193, which reads: "And fight them on until there is no tumult and oppression."[8] The verse, however, clearly suggests a defensive strategy to be used in times of *fitnah* ("oppression"; Marmaduke Pickthall translates the Arabic word as "persecution"), and is not, as another writer says, "an order to fight

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[7]The formula stated that "Muslims give up their plea for the Babari Masjid to be rebuilt [at the same spot], that they should be given guarantees that no such demolition will take place in future, and that such pledges should be made part of the Constitution of India" (119). This formula for resolving the conflict over the Babari Masjid was widely supported by the media, by the community leaders of other religious traditions, and by intellectuals and other prominent people in India. See also "Unravelling the Ayodhya Knot," *The Times of India*, 11 February 1993; "Khan's 3-Point Formula for Ayodhya," *The Hindustan Times*; "Withdraw Claim to Mosque," Maulana Tells Muslims," *Indian Express*, 4 April 1993; and "Wahiduddin Formula to Solve Ayodhya Issue," *The Hindustan Times*, 19 April 1993.

[8]A. Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1992).

for domination everywhere all the time."[9] Wahiduddin Khan insists on putting the verse in its proper context. The verse, as he explains in his rendering of the Qur'an, was meant to curb the rebelliousness of Arabia's idol worshipers.[10] Since Muslims in India are neither persecuted nor oppressed specifically on account of the practice or preaching of their faith, there is no reason for them to engage in any form of confrontation either with Hindus or with the State. In fact, Muslims are better-off in India than in many of the so-called Islamic countries.[11]

Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan's objective in writing *Indian Muslims* was to shake the Muslim community out of the psychological and emotional frame of mind that has been "atrophied in memories of their glorious past" (36) and to persuade them to come to grips with present-day realities. Being a minority in India is not the issue; having the right priorities is. Having the right priorities might involve taking a "reverse course" or even making a "strategic retreat," which may appear to be an unwise thing to do, but which may, in the long run, prove to be the best option for Muslims. Wahiduddin Khan regrets that misconceptions about Islam and Muslims exist among some Hindu groups, which, consequently, display a militant, hate-filled attitude toward Muslims.

Wahiduddin Khan cites the Asian Americans as a model for Muslims. Instead of complaining about the loss of their "rights" in an alien environment, the Asians in America became prosperous and successful through sheer hard work, earning the respect of other groups and communities in their new homeland (63).[12] The Muslims of India can do the same—if only they decide to follow Islam. Islam is the most "natural" of all the paths leading to the discovery of the divine. Muslims must return to the Qur'an in order to reach an egalitarian understanding of Islam. Here Wahiduddin echoes Sayyid Ahmad Khan and seeks to emulate him, noting with regret that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's contemporaries failed to appreciate the latter's wise thought (57).

Just as not all of the Hindu perceptions of Islam and Muslims are correct, so not all of the demands and complaints made by Muslims

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[9] M. Nejatullah Siddiqi, "Muslim Minorities in the 21st Century: A Case Study of Indian Muslims," *Encounters* 3 (1997), 2:134.

[10] *Tazkir al-Qur'an*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Maktabah-i Al-Risala, [1985] 1990), 1:80–81.

[11]"Islam: An Ideological Movement for Peaceful Coexistence." An Interview with Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan, by Irfan A. Omar, *The Minaret*, December 1996, 36–38.

[12] W. Khan, "American Asians: A Model," *The Times of India*, 12 July 1988.

against the Indian government or the majority community are genuine. A common complaint made by Muslim leaders is that, in contrast to the other communities of India, the Muslim community has been deliberately kept from making progress, and that the instruments of discrimination and communal riot have been used to this end.[13] This, Wahiduddin argues, is a mistaken view. The problem can be laid at the door of "yellow journalism," which is popular in Muslim as well as in non-Muslim circles. It is this type of journalism that has convinced some Muslims that they are being persecuted because they adhere to a religion that happens to be different from the religion of the majority (90 ff.).

Wahiduddin Khan concludes *Indian Muslims* with an urgent call for a dialogue between Hindus and Muslims.[14] In his view, it is imperative that Muslims, instead of presenting governments and politicians with lists of demands, try to build bridges with their Hindu neighbors—a point that was first made in 1965 by Sayyid Abid Husain.[15] History has repeatedly shown that the communal problem can be solved only when all parties concerned make a joint effort to solve it; simply urging the government to prevent the unfortunate communal riots from occurring, or invoking the constitutional rights of minorities, is not going to help. As Theodore Wright correctly points out, communal riots happen "despite the best intentions of a weak central government, which is unable to control its own lower level bureaucracy and police."[16] This is precisely what happened in the case of the destruction of the Babari Mosque in 1992.

The oft-debated issue of minorities in India has been the subject of many studies. In *Indian Muslims*, Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan argues that, given the diversity and marked differences between various peoples of India, our efforts should be directed at rebuilding national communal identity on the basis of "multiculturalism" rather than of "uniculturalism." The 180-odd pages of the book are proof that the author is alive and sensitive to the realities and needs of

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[13] W. Khan, "An Identity Crisis?" *The Observer*, 15 March 1997.

[14] Wahiduddin Khan was, perhaps, the first Muslim leader to call for such a dialogue in the post-Babari Mosque period. See his "Dialogue to End Communal Strife," in *The Times of India*, 20 April 1993.

[15] S. Abid Husain, *Hindustani Musalaman A'inah-i Ayyam men* (New Delhi: Sayyid Abid Husain Memorial Trust, [1965] 1991); translated into English as *The Destiny of Indian Muslims* (Lahore: Qadira Book Traders, 1983).

[16] Theodore Wright, Jr., "Limitations on the Human Rights Approach to Problems of the Muslim Minority in India," in Omar Khalidi, ed., *Indian Muslims in North America* (Watertown, Massachusetts: South Asia Publishers, 1991), 50.

contemporary times. He is fully committed not only to the ideal of peace in the abstract, but also to establishing peace between Muslims and Hindus on the ground. The book's numerous references to "tolerance," "religious harmony," and "non-confrontation" point to the author's deep engagement with the issue of communal peace and harmony. For Wahiduddin Khan, achieving peace between Hindus and Muslims in India is not an impossible goal to achieve and does not require either community to make compromises since each community's scriptures already enjoin that they strive for peace.[17]

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[17]W. Khan, "The Policy of Peace in Islam," *SIDIC* (Rome) 29 (1996), 2–3: 13–15.

Book Reviews

Review Essay: Islam in South Africa

Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1999. ISBN 0-8130-1651-7. Price $49.95 hardback. Published in association with Religion in Africa, a series of the African Association for the Study of Religions.

Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*. Cape Town, South Africa: Juta & Co. Ltd. ISBN 0–7992–1612–7. Price R67.95 paperback.

In the first book, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons*, Abdulkader Tayob traces the historical development of several Muslim communities in South Africa, and he does so by discussing certain crucial and dynamic factors in South African Islam, as indicated in the subtitle—*Mosques, Imams, and Sermons.* A note about the word "sermon" is in order. A Western reader might construe the word "sermon," as used in an Islamic context, in a Christian sense—and, perhaps, there are similarities or parallels— and so an explanation of the nature of the Islamic sermon would have helped the reader to understand the subtleties of the use of this particular discourse as a symbol and as an instrument of power in the hands of charismatic or well-educated shaykhs or imams. Nevertheless, Tayob makes it clear that, in Islam, the sermon is much more than the symbol in Geertzian terms because it is linked to a divine tradition. The tradition validates and inspires through the solemn act of Qur'an recitation. The ritualized proclamation is both a numinous event and an opportunity for creative contextualization.

The book brings fresh insight to an important area of religious and cultural study. Sacred symbolization is examined within the context of particular ethnic and religious communities, whose origins, for the most part, happen to be Southeast Asian. Various mosque discourses reflect some of these origins and also the distribution of power within the religious community. Changes in the community sometimes take place in reaction to the social and political pressures from the once apartheid-driven state of South Africa. Seen in this light, the different discourses represent, on the one hand, the dominant

ideology of the country's ruling class as represented in *jama'at* committees of the mosques or by influential imams, and, on the other hand, the general effort of the religious community to survive through selective opposition to the state or through strategic accommodation. In situations where the committee is in control, the imam's ability to depart from accepted practices in rituals or in preaching on ceratin topics is severely restricted.

Chapter two traces the origins of the Cape Mosque Discourse to the arrival of the Mardyckers, who came to South Africa in order to serve the European colonists. These are the so-called "coloureds" of the apartheid regime who occupied a position between the natives and the Europeans. The majority of the Muslims who came from Madagascar, India, and Southeast Asia fared worse as slaves of the Dutch Company. Shaykh Yusuf is credited with the establishment of the first mosque, which became a place of refuge for runaway slaves in the 1700s. In spite of the shaykh's prominence, the Mosque Discourse here started with Banndieten or convicts (23). The early discourse was dominated by Frans Bengalen, who not only represented the Muslim community to the state, but also built a strong religious institution in which scholarship was valued. No wonder, the Cape Mosque Discourse, though peripheral, came to be highly respected and admired by transregional bodies. It is, consequently, of much significance in the Islamization of South Africa.

Chapter three covers the Claremont Main Road Mosque Discourse, which, in many ways, is similar to the Cape Mosque Discourse. Its early history was dominated by Abdol Roef, who was succeeded by his sons from 1907 until 1964 as imams. Members of the Claremont Mosque, like those of the Cape Mosque, developed close ties with their leader, who took keen interest in their affairs. After a period of conflict over leadership issues between Abdol Roef's nephew Abdullah and his brother Cassiem, the Muslim Judicial Council ruled against hereditary imamship, declaring it contrary to Islamic law. The council's discourse was set against the local mosque leadership, and it justified itself by appeal to the Shari'ah. Perhaps, the uniqueness of the Claremont Mosque Discourse after the collapse of the Roef dynastic role consisted in the emergence of a new paradigm, one that now had a political dimension as well (53). College and university students played a leading role in linking the Claremont Mosque Discourse with the redefinition of Islamic identity in the modem world. One external factor which made this change possible was the

Group Areas Act, which forced some Muslim families to move from Claremont, and which indirectly created an opening for Fakier, the temporary imam, to articulate his sociopolitical vision in conformity with Islamic law. When Fakier departed to Saudi Arabia for studies, two leaders of the Muslim Youth Movement took over and endeavored, in the 1980s, to stop the manipulative use of Islam. The Claremont Mosque Discourse paid singular attention to the community and enforced imamic accountability to a much higher degree than any other mosque had in South Africa.

The Transvaal Mosque, discussed in chapter four, was built by Indians, who first came to South Africa in 1860 as indentured servants and traders. After the abolition of slavery, the importation of indentured servants continued to meet the need for plantation workers in Natal. As they moved into other parts of the country, these indentured servants built mosques that were controlled by *jama‘at* committees. The Transvaal Mosque adopted a policy of state accommodation, which, in turn, forced its religious leaders to appeal to Qur'anic and other sources to assert their authority. Members of the said committees were generally well-off and took advantage of their contacts with state and religious leaders. The religious leaders of the Transvaal Mosque were able to develop—on the basis of *‘ilm*, Islamic knowledge—standards of orthodoxy that would help curb the committees' excessive measures or "innovative" practices. The Deobandi ‘ulama, who represented this tradition of knowledge, enforced dress codes where none had existed before, and criticized certain observances and celebrations as lacking sanction in scripture or authoritative texts.

The Brits Mosque, the subject of chapter five, operated under the efficient control of *jama‘at* committees, which demanded from its members contributions of various types; Tayob mentions the regular contributions made by travelers taking certain toll routes, and fund-raisers (63). To counterbalance committee predominance, the ‘ulama counted on the support of the Deoband-influenced Tablighis. The African Muslims in Brits are mostly Malawians who are paid the lowest wages, even by *jama‘at* committees. With the change in the mosque population, the use of the Urdu language was discontinued in the mosque. The subject of the African Muslims has been only briefly explored in this chapter, and one wishes that, in the South African context, where Christianity is identified with the apartheid ideology, the author had devoted at least one chapter to the important matter. It would have been particularly relevant to describe the contribution

of contemporary Islam to the new African National Congress government in the post-apartheid era.

Chapter six discusses the sermon as ritual inscription of space. Space is an instance or an event that is transcendent and not simply repetitive. The notion of sacred space is constantly shifting and taking different postures: for example, the Brits Mosque condemned apartheid, whereas the Transvaal Mosque was constantly engaged in a struggle for survival, at the cost of doctrinal compromise.

Chapter seven introduces the important theme of recitation. Ibn al-'Arabi's *Bezels of Wisdom* enables us to appreciate the meaning of recitation as the possibility for what Paul Tillich would call continuing or secondary revelation, which, in the South African context, might apply ethical and ritual declarations from the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet—but in concrete local terms.

I hope that the author can complete his research on South African Islam by looking at the indigenous South African Islamic mosques and their contribution to the liberation struggle. The discourse of black South African Muslims might provide sources for validating religious power, in addition to the traditional sources that have been cited in connection with other mosques. The book sets the background for a more focused description and analysis of the driving force behind the success of Islam in South Africa. It is impossible to understand the different discourses represented by the authorities with competing claims for *'ilm*, without taking a closer look at the internal and external factors that have shaped them.

Tayob's second book, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*, traces the movement's origins and its role, performed with wisdom and courage, in persuading the Islamic community, which had up to this point lived in familiar and comfortable religious surroundings, to embrace its prophetic role in a changing South Africa. The book deals with the problem of modernity and the Islamic response to it. The measure of response depends on the source of religious knowledge, and on the expert's ability to retool it to suit changing circumstances. The standard sources for the various Muslim paradigms are the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Kuhnian notion of the paradigmatic shift in reference to ordinary science would definitely apply to Islamic resurgence in South Africa as far as radical reformulation, or change in the production, of religious knowledge is concerned. Thomas Kuhn reminds us that whenever a failure to solve a normal problem with the help of established or familiar rules gives rise to anomalies,

extraordinary episodes or shifts develop into what we call scientific revolutions.

The first significant shift in Islamic knowledge required justification of the popular practice of visiting the graves of saints as consistent with an earlier practice by the Prophet's family. The catalyst to the major paradigmatic shift within South African Islam was the printing process, which indirectly undermined the superior claim of religious specialists, such as the 'ulama and shaykhs. The pioneers in this revivalist movement were neo-Sufis from Cairo, Damascus, Aden, and Delhi. The Sufis at first held fast to the ideal of mystical union with the ultimate reality, while the neo-Sufis stressed the importance of studying Hadith and of emulating the Prophet. In northern Nigeria, Usman dan Fodio crusaded against all forms of syncretism and nonconformity with the Shari'ah. He received measured support in his opposition to British colonial rule, and, along with a similar Tijaniyyah movement in Algeria in the nineteenth century, redefined the role of Islam in the colonial world as a humanizing force.

Muslim scholars trained in the West injected a reformist element into Islamic resurgence by founding new institutions and promoting political activism within colonial contexts. Islamism is, by far, the most decisive force in contemporary Islamic resurgence. Its origins go back to the Muslim Brothers of Egypt and the Jama'at-i Islami of the Indian subcontinent. From the very start, the Muslim Brothers led a movement to build schools, medical clinics, and welfare agencies in Egypt. Eventually, the Brothers became involved in a campaign to achieve political power, and were split, with one section advocating a gradualist approach, and the other, the revolutionary option.

The Jama'at-i Islami, in Pakistan, attracted students, who helped to define the new Islamic state. Abu al-A'la Mawdudi stood for a pure Islamic ideology, and took active part in constitutional debates related to the Shari'ah. A political theology that was once peripheral seems to have spread to many parts of the Islamic world. It has, in fact, become one of the dominant paradigms, and is particularly popular with students of science and technology. It draws its logic from the ideal example of the Prophet, according to which, the Prophet, in the seventh century, initiated social and political transformation before becoming a guide in ritual and spiritual matters (30). This logic is consistent with the neo-Sufist formulation of a similar project that might involve undertaking *jihad* in order to

cleanse local cultures and replace them with the "purified" prophetic community.

Chapter two deals with the Muslims of South Africa. The majority of these Muslims were slaves who worked for Dutch settlers in the Cape. The imams went out of their way to serve the religious and social needs of Muslims. Starting out in secrecy, Islam in South Africa gained public prominence after the imposition, in 1886, of a state ban on overcrowded cemeteries. Muslim disputes centered on the correctness of certain ritual observances—for instance, the ritual honoring Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam. Abu Bakr Effendi, a prominent leader of the Long Street Hanafi Mosque, wrote the Arab-Afrikaans Catechism and started a school for girls, at a time when an Islamic education acquired abroad had greater value than that acquired locally. Locally educated religious authorities were called imams, while those who went abroad were called shaykhs. In judicial matters, the final authority rested with the Muslim Judicial Council. A recently established, but less influential, body contending for the authority of the 'ulama in the Cape is the Islamic Council of South Africa, headed by Shaykh Abu Baker Najjar, who had earlier resigned from his position in the Judicial Council.

Understandably, Indian Muslims receive much attention in the book, for they make up the majority of South Africa's Muslim population. They were called "passenger" Indians—those who had paid their way to South Africa—and, as British subjects, were granted residency status in the country. Others were recruited to work in sugar plantations. Although Indian Muslims married into Cape Muslim families, the two groups did not always relate well to each other. The exception to this was the youth organizations, in which youth from different backgrounds spoke with one voice against apartheid. In Natal, the mosque committees were much more influential than the religious leaders. Another impediment to the formation of a common Islamic identity was the formation of ethnic and religious Islamic groups that reflected their Indian origins. Some of their autochthonous ritual practices did not always agree with Islamic doctrine. The task of determining whether the practices of Muslims were Islamically correct rested with one of two distinct religious authorities—the conservative Deobandi 'ulama in the mosque committees of the Transvaal, and the "liberal" Sunni 'ulama, whose approval or disapproval of practices was not always based on a literal reading of the Qur'an. The Deoband School was established in India subsequent to the work of the eighteenth-century revivalist

Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702–1762). The majority of the 'ulama in the Transvaal were of Deobandi persuasion. While embracing the Hanafi approach to jurisprudence, they stayed away from politics. While the Deobandis criticized the liberal Sunnis for their laxity and compromise-prone attitude in regard to Islamic legal prescriptions, the latter argued that a practice was above criticism or objection as long as it did not undermine the Muslims' basic belief in one God. These 'ulama turned out to be more individualistic in their approach; they were certainly in sympathy with the poor.

Chapter three is an analysis of South African Islamic educational institutions and of the initiatives taken in this connection by prominent shaykhs. The traditional Islamic madrasah has always supplied the educational needs of the community, but, given the competitive advantage of white missionary schools, the madrasah schools needed a major overhaul. Taking as his model the efforts already under way in the Ottoman Empire, Shaykh Abu Bakr Effendi used the well-known Hadith collection *Mishkat al-Masabih* as a guide for reform. When the Christian missionaries constructed a school for women, he built a school for Muslim women in 1870. He also founded Muslim missionary schools in order to propagate the Islamic faith and improve the traditional system of Islamic education. Similar other institutions were set up with the aim of addressing the Islamic community's concerns about the government's policy of relocating the Asians and coloureds. Muslim organizations, generally, took apartheid to be a common foe. The Muslim Youth Organization, along with the Muslim Teachers' Association, was critical of the government's racist policies; the latter organization discouraged its members from participating in Afrikaner celebrations. The imam of the Stegman Road Mosque, Abdullah Haron, was actively involved in youth leadership training. His denunciation of apartheid endeared him to Africans in the wider community. The Natal Muslim Council focused on producing teachers who were more highly qualified than the Indian 'ulama, and stressed the importance of the study of Arabic. Furthermore, the establishment of the Islamic Propagation Council in 1957 sought to expose the flaws and contradictions of the Bible with a view to stemming the tide of Muslim defections to Christianity.

Chapter four brings us to the organization that was at the center of the Islamic insurgency movement—the Muslim Youth Movement (MYN). Since its establishment in 1970, the MYM had organized meetings and conventions that were aimed at broadening the youth's base of religious knowledge through lectures delivered by prominent

Muslims from abroad, and through the setting up of new branches of the movement. At the heart of the movement were deliberations of the MYN executive committee (74–76), which thought up strategies for the Islamization of South Africa. The five principles identified by this movement included education, unity of the Islamic identity, and marginalization of women and of the members of the Black community. In the first phase, the movement's main thrust, which nurtured the above-mentioned principles, consisted in affirming that Islam was a way of life, not a private institution in the limited Western sense. Tayob reminds us of a fact that is not well known to outsiders—namely, that the MYM members and the Muslim Students' Association were contemporaneous with the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, and that the latter's leadership, including Steve Biko, collaborated with Ebrahim Jawdat, a founding member of the MYM.

The successes of the "Islam is a way of life" ideology are recounted in chapter five. Under the scrutiny of Deobandi 'ulama, the MYM created a separate women's wing of the Islamic Movement, and also introduced a hierarchical order of membership. The *Halal Manual* contained a comprehensive vision of Islamization. Because the slogan—Islam is a way of life—created controversy and directly contradicted the stance taken by the 'ulama, the leaders of the MYM had to look for independent funding sources. A press center and the Islamic Medical Association were established subsequently.

In chapter six, Tayob returns to the theme of insurgency among non-Muslim majorities. Drawing on the work of Khurram Murad of the Jama'at-i Islami in Britain, he cautions that the pattern of insurgency in countries that have a Muslim majority should not be duplicated in countries with Muslim minorities. In a sense, this is contextualization. How, then, should Islamization proceed in the South African context? By doing away with "Islam as a way of life" and adopting a strategy of political activism that targets selected projects, which would include responding to the Dutch Reformed Church's vilification of Islam, demanding inclusion of Islam in University curricula; organizing conferences, dealing with issues of socioeconomic justice, and forging ecumenical alliances with other Muslim and Christian organizations.

In light of the unpredictable shifts of power, of the competing claims to religious power, and of the real danger of a backlash in a situation that favors piecemeal or wholesale contextualization, the leaders of the insurgency movement must learn from the past

mistakes. The movement should reflect the community's demographic profile, and should accommodate dissident or conservative voices. The question of credibility is bound to arise, and the efforts of the leaders of the movement are liable to fail if the keepers of the traditional houses of wisdom are alienated. Still young, the modernizing forces of Islam in South Africa are—and will likely remain—peripheral. The book gives an account of the setbacks that progressive Islam has suffered in South Africa, but it also sketches exciting possibilities for the educated Muslims, who are committed to the building of a democratic and non-racial South Africa that could become the envy of the world.

Tayob's two books complement each other. Together, they satisfy an acutely felt need to provide an analytical study of Islam in a part of the world where the Dutch Reformed Church represented the religious discourse of oppression. The evidence marshaled by Tayob in these books convincingly demonstrates that the overall Islamic discourse in South Africa has been oppositional and prophetic. The missing link in South Africa's Islamic phenomenon still remains the Black Muslim presence, which, as Tayob himself admits, still awaits treatment.

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Alija Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*, 2nd rev. ed. Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1989 (first published 1984). 303 pages. ISBN 0-8925-057-2. $12.00 paperback.

The author of this book is the president of Bosnia, who served, during Tito's reign, a fourteen-year term in a Yugoslavian prison for his Islamic activism and "fundamentalist digressions." Educated in Sarajevo and Paris, Alija Izetbegovic has been active in Islamic work throughout his adult life. Writing, lecturing, and organizing Islamic educational and welfare activities, he has been a constant source of intellectual and spiritual inspiration to thousands of young Muslims in Bosnia and in other republics of former Yugoslavia.

Izetbegovic's main objective in writing this book is to examine the roots of the cultural crises, moral anarchy, and political upheavals of the modern West and to show how these problems are generated by

the adoption of partial truths and reductionist ideologies. The central thesis of the book is that there are three distinct views of the world that reflect three different elemental possibilities: religious, materialistic, and Islamic. Of these, the Islamic worldview is integral in that it combines both pure religiosity and pure materialism. While pure religion emphasizes conscience and pure materialism emphasizes nature, the focus of Islam is on the human being, who lives in both the worlds of conscience and nature. The author then goes on to show how both pure religion (Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism) and materialistic philosophies (socialism and capitalism) have supplied partial answers to life's integral questions of "ideals" and "interests" and how they have been trying to compensate for their primal inadequacies and half-truths through continuous compromises in both theory and praxis. The author argues, on the basis of considerable historical evidence, that the actual achievement of these two opposing views of the world has been quite different from what they originally aspired to accomplish. A modified, post-Renaissance humanist interpretation of Christianity and the religiomoral basis of socialist egalitarianism with its teleological view of history clearly demonstrate that it is impossible to be a consistent "Christian" or a consistent materialist.

It is with respect to these formulations and arguments that Izetbegovic builds a case for Islam as a "Third Way," the only worldview that takes into account both the spiritual and material needs of human beings. It is because of this integral worldview that Islam has always been a target of attack from two opposite directions: from the direction of religion, which considers Islam "too natural, actual, and tuned to the world," and from the direction of science, which sees in Islam elements of religion and mysticism. Despite its apparently contradictory "right"- and "left"-wing tendencies, Islam is a unity which simultaneously reflects inspiration and experience, eternity and time, thought and practice, soul and body—in short, human life in all its aspects. Izetbegovic shows how Islam played an important role as an intermediary between the ancient cultures and the modern West. He urges that, today, Islam should again, "in a time of dramatic dilemmas and alternatives," resume its role as an intermediary ideology in a divided world.

The final chapter of the book develops another interesting and rather provocative hypothesis—namely, that Anglo-Saxon culture in general and English culture in particular (as opposed to the cultures of other European societies) have found a middle road between

religion and materialism, and thus bear a strong resemblance to the "Third Way" of Islam. Izetbegovic argues that the English polity and economy, and English art, literature, philosophy, and social thought are the closest approximation of the bipolarity of the Islamic model. The author highlights the parallelism between Islamic and English minds by citing series of examples from Roger Bacon to George Bernard Shaw. Building on the parallel drawn by Spengler between the Prophet Muhammad and Cromwell, he notes that, from the viewpoint of the philosophy of history, the emergence of England and the Anglo-Saxon spirit in the West has many things in common with the emergence of Islam in the East. It is no wonder, then, that, while on the continent, an empiricist will, as a rule, also be an atheist. In England, the birthplace of empiricism, John Locke placed the concept of God at the center of his ethical theory and upheld the sanctions of the afterlife in his enunciation of moral principles for society. Spencer's *Education*, Izetbegovic argues, might very well have been written by a Muslim intellectual. The whole thrust of the Anglo-Saxon moral philosophy, with its emphasis on harmony between the individual and society, on egalitarianism, on social responsibility, and on the ethical basis of political economy, clearly shows the correspondence between the English and Islamic moral and intellectual traditions.

Not disagreeing entirely with Izetbegovic's hypothesis about the differences between the Continental and Anglo-Saxon traditions of moral philosophy, this reviewer feels that the argument seems to have been stretched too far. Although he seeks to focus on the most historically significant variations between Continental and English social and moral thought and praxis, Izetbegovic tends to overlook certain important affinities between these two traditions—affinities that are obviously derived from the religious mainstream of Western Christianity. If our primary concern is not so much with causal relationship as with long-term implications and consequences of ideas, then even the left Hegelians, with their passionate desire for social harmony and intellectual crusade for universalism and political reform, could be connected to their cousins in the British Isles. One could also argue that the strong emphasis on communitarianism in Continental sociopolitical thought is closer to Islam than the British and American tradition of individualism.

But this is a minor point. Izetbegovic knows his subject well. He is well-versed in Western thought and is intimately familiar with the relevant literature in the physical, biological, and social sciences as

well as in the humanities. He is at his best when he discusses masterpieces of Western art and literature and offers new and often provocative interpretations of their meaning for the individual and society.

Izetbegovic's critique of evolution and materialistic/scientific bases of human life is both comprehensive and devastating. In presenting his case, he draws on the fields of physics, chemistry, zoology, molecular biology, and cultural anthropology, and offers, as an alternative to the view of the constancy of culture, his own view of the evolution of "civilization." His critique of humanism is similarly brilliantly conceived. He rejects the possibility of developing a secular ethics—an ethics that is based on the denial of God. In line with such moral philosophies as Jacques Maritain's, he very clearly shows how concepts fashionable in contemporary humanistic philosophy (justice, equality, fairness, fraternity) become meaningless if they are not firmly anchored in belief in God. Izetbegovic's treatment of culture and civilization, mass culture, family, and community is also competent and illuminating.

Izetbegovic takes what may be called an existentialist view of Islam. To him, "Islam is a method" (one is quickly reminded of Sartre's *Search for Method),* and not a "ready-made solution." And this method is not something given; one has to discover it for oneself. This view seems a somewhat new interpretation of Islam, and is apparently contrary to the orthodox view, which regards Islam as a predetermined, totally-defined, and once-for-all-completed religion and way of life. As far as I know, the only other Muslim thinker who comes close to this view is Muhammad Iqbal, who spoke of the continuity of the creative process in the universe and of the opening up of new horizons for the human being on earth. But it must be noted that Iqbal's concept of the continuity of *kun* refers to the physical and intellectual spheres and not to the moral sphere, which, according to him, is "given" in the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet.

It is probably because of this existentialist view of Islam that the author seems to acknowledge a persistence of "tension" even within the framework of Islamic bipolarity. That is, the tensions that he identifies in religion and science would not find their complete resolution even in Islam, although they do assume a new, creative, and sublime posture in the Islamic bipolarity.

The major focus of the book is on critique of pure religion and pure materialism. The only detailed treatment of the Islamic alternative is in chapter 8, especially in the section entitled "Bipolarity of the Five

Pillars of Islam." Thus the critique comes out so much stronger and so much more convincing than the affirmation. Two-thirds of the book either consists of criticism of religion and materialism or deals with the supremacy of art and religion over science. Discussion of Islam as a "Third Way" thus remains relatively brief and sketchy.

Chapter 3, "The Phenomenon of Art," though excellent in its own right, becomes larger than life in the context of the basic premises and objectives of the book. That is, it tends to present a highly exaggerated case in favor of the primacy of art and literature over science. As such, it undermines the central thesis of the book, namely, that both are half-truths. (Art and literature, in this particular case, become substitutes for religion and Islam.) There is, however, a difference between the statement that art and literature are products of religious inspiration and the statement that they are religion as such.

Also, Izetbegovic's view of religion is basically anthropological. Hence, he includes all sorts of ancient myths, superstitions, and magical rituals in his definition of religion. So far, so good. But the problem arises when he equates this kind of raw and unstructured religious symbolism with the coherent and systematic theology and cosmology of the revealed religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), treating that symbolism on a par with these religions' theology and cosmology.

Like some other contemporary Muslim writers—but not on the same scale as they do—our author at times commits the familiar intellectual sin of comparing "our best" with "their worst." Perfected by the Christian missionaries and polemicists writing on Islam and the Muslim Word, this comparative technique has now been appropriated by some Muslims as well, especially in their *da'wah*-oriented writings, which compare Islamic *norms* and *ideals* with Western *practices* and *behaviors*, instead of comparing ideals with ideals and practices with practices.

Having expressed some minor disagreements on certain issues, I must conclude by saying that *Islam Between East and West* is an excellent work of multidisciplinary scholarship. A book of this type cannot but be somewhat polemical in its style and presentation. In the main, however, *Islam Between East and West* is full of perceptive observations on matters of moral and social philosophy. The style is lucid and the presentation of arguments is brilliant and highly engaging. The author, who knows the West from close quarters, has a masterly grasp of his subject. Unlike many other Muslim intellectuals

who have compared Islam and the West in terms of their worldviews and of their philosophical positions on individual and society, Izetbegovic does not impose a single standard of orthodoxy on the West's entire intellectual history. He takes a more discriminating and nuanced view of Western intellectual history, discussing important points of divergence within both the atheistic and the religious traditions. He is acutely aware of the intricacies of the theological debates in Western Christianity as well as of the controversies associated with the secular ideas of utopian politics. He draws fruitful comparisons between these two opposing intellectual currents and identifies certain important structural affinities between Islam on the one hand and some aspects of Western thought and praxis on the other.

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Ralph Braibanti, *Chief Justice Cornelius of Pakistan: An Analysis with Letters and Speeches*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999. 505 pages. ISBN 0–1957–9018–9. Price $17.50 hardback.

Written by a leading scholar on Pakistan, this book about an important chief justice in the country's formative years makes a significant contribution to the academic literature on Pakistan. The book includes three essays on the legal thought of Cornelius, which are set within the larger framework of Pakistani government and society, and nine letters and eight speeches by the chief justice. The volume also includes a preface by the author and the first three Cornelius Memorial Lectures, with the author of the first of these (1993), Nasim Hasan Shah—later himself a chief justice of Pakistan—also penning the Foreword.

The first essay, "An Analysis of the Thought of Cornelius," is the most interesting and original of the three (the other two are reprints from Braibanti's earlier works). It provides a detailed assessment of the legal thought and philosophy of the man who served as Pakistan's chief justice for eight years, from 1960 to 1968 (not for seventeen years, as it says on page 1 of the book). This essay is enriched by the evaluation of Cornelius's thought from today's historical vantage point. Reference is made, for instance, to social policies and

developments of the 1990s, involving the premises and values of Catholicism and Islam. It also contains useful segments on Pakistan's minorities, including the Christians and Parsis, though the discussion does not extend to the persecution that Christians have faced in recent years on account of the legislation that was passed during the Zia years of Nizam-i Mustafa.

Alvin Robert Cornelius was born in 1903 in Agra, in the United Provinces, and died in 1991 in Lahore, in the Punjab, at the age of 88. His father was a mathematics professor at a college in the princely state of Indore. His forebears were landholders in the State of Madras. His mother came from a Christian family, the D'Rozarios, from central India. After his early studies, he took and passed the India Civil Service examination, and then studied in England. Soon after joining the Indian Civil Service, he was appointed to the judicial branch (1930), and from then on he stayed with the law and judiciary throughout his career.

The author is clearly fascinated by the fact that Cornelius, though a Christian, was able to wield, as a leading jurist, enormous influence in an avowedly Muslim state. As Braibanti states in the Preface: "I slowly came to the realization that the career of A. R. Cornelius was a living refutation of the civilizational clash hypothesis. Here was a real instance of a devout, practicing Christian who synthesized Islamic and Christian thought. . . . The present volume is the result of that realization" (xxiii). Pakistan during Cornelius's tenure was a relatively newly-founded state. But it was not just any state; it had been founded for expressly religious purposes (the only other modern state to have been established on religious grounds is that of Israel, which came into existence in May 1948—in less than a year after the creation of Pakistan in August 1947). Yet, curiously perhaps, the latent tension in this Christian-Muslim formulation is not realized in the book since Cornelius's Christianity is, Braibanti suggests, largely muted, because of the chief justice's deep and abiding respect for Islam and its values.

The book goes on to give an account of Cornelius's contribution to the legal development of the new state. Its treatment of this subject is broad and comprehensive—both in the three essays and in the memorial lectures, which offer a useful discussion of the pressing legal issues of the time. As a result, the book provides a virtual catalogue of the important legal issues that have faced the Pakistani nation from its early days to the present.

The essays also bring up the points of intersection between the law and the bureaucracy. Here Braibanti is in his element, holding forth on Cornelius's views and policies concerning such important features of Pakistan's legal-administrative system as the writ jurisdiction, *droit administratif* ("administrative law"), and the tribal law traditions (*jirga*) contained in the Frontier Crimes Regulation. As a student of Braibanti's in the mid-1970s, I still recall the passion with which he spoke of Cornelius, of his even-handed approach to the law, and of his commitment to sound legal principles, which were reflected in his own approach to those important elements that became fixtures of Pakistan's legal system.

The book is clearly a labor of love. Also, it is consistent with the author's earlier scholarship—both historical and disciplinary—which includes studies of normative political science and of bureaucracies that Braibanti is best known for. Thus, it contains references to the theories and concepts of such thinkers as Harold Lasswell—thinkers who were active at the time of Braibanti's association with Cornelius in the 1960s (Braibanti at that time held an advisory position at Pakistan's Civil Services Academy). And so, the true value of the book consists, perhaps, in its being a "period piece"—of the 1960s, when Pakistan was going through a formative phase. To visit that period again with its relative liberality is to see a sharp contrast to present-day Pakistan, where militant and narrowly-defined Islamic parties loom a bit too large on the political horizon, and where the judiciary seems powerless in the face of extremist and desperate forces.

Pakistan's present leadership would do well to read this book, which could help usher in conditions of greater tolerance and understanding in the body politic, reducing the sectarian violence that bedevils the country. For students of Pakistan, this is an important book that will greatly aid their understanding of the development of legal traditions during a formative period in the country's history.

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Washington, DC

Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1999. 212 pages. Price $17.9 paperback. ISBN 1–85168–146–9.

The prolonged debate between the Muslim traditionalists and radical rationalists has raged through Islamic history with varying intensity: in medieval times, it took the form of a civil discourse between the M'utazilites and Ash'arites, but, beginning in the eighteenth century, it turned into an armed conflict between the Wahhabis and their opponents. The Islamic response to modernity too is marked by a similar division between those who have been trained in old-style madrasahs and those who are the products of a Western-style educational system—though a variety of other positions have been taken between the traditionalist and modernist poles. The traditionalists call the modernists "agents of the West," whereas the modernists accuse the traditionalists of leading a fossilized existence and of being incapable of taking up the challenge of modernity.

Aside from the response of wholesale, servile acceptance of Westernism, three types of responses to the cultural challenge posed by modernity were made by Muslims. In the first category belong the isolationist religious movements, which rejected the Western way of life completely. The second category is made up of accommodationist reformers like Muhammad 'Abduh and Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, who were impressed with Western science and technology, yet tried to maintain their own religiocultural roots while adopting the materially beneficial aspects of Western culture. The third category includes the later reform movements, which posed an ideological challenge to modernity and presented Islam not only as an alternative paradigm, but also as a meta-theory by which to judge all competing paradigms.

Several serious Muslim thinkers are of the view that it is their internal conflicts that leave Muslims exposed to attack by external forces. This may not be true completely since it seems, so argue these thinkers, that the powerful anti-Islamic forces are trying to engage Muslims and Islam in a conflict that, from the Muslim point of view, is being prematurely precipitated. In the meantime, these forces, backed by global media, are painting Muslims as a real and major threat to world peace.

Against this background comes Farid Esack's attempt as a Muslim to find a religious path in today's world. His 1997 work, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, established his credentials as a contributor

to the interfaith struggle against oppression in general and against the South African apartheid regime in particular. In the volume under review, *On Being a Muslim*, Esack recognizes that mighty forces of oppression are lined up against the voiceless weak. The oppressors' fears and prejudices are based on the unknown. But, "when they are based on the known then it is a known processed by the mass media, which is owned and controlled by the powerful. While the dispossessed have their fears and prejudices, the powerful in the West have the economic and military power to transform fear and prejudice into potent weapons for destruction and 'defence'" (155).

In the face of such injustice, the most common reaction of Muslims is to feel anger and frustration at being victims of conspiracies. Esack acknowledges that "very often conspiracy theories do have some germs in reality," but belief in such theories leads to fatalistic thinking (157). Esack seeks to challenge and change such mental constructs among Muslims, whom he charges with harping on the theory and philosophy of Islam while neglecting to implement the universal Islamic principle of justice for all.

Esack, who was appointed by Nelson Mandela to South Africa's Commission for Gender Equality, and who has been associated with interfaith movements since his student days in Pakistan, has been accused by his coreligionists—Muslims—of playing to the Judeo-Christian gallery. But he urges Muslims to tackle rationally the burning global questions of today—namely, gender equality, religious freedom, and racial tolerance. He believes that Muslims must be willing to face reality and learn to be responsible for their actions. As a bottom line, there must be "a comprehensive commitment to personal growth through involvement alongside others in a struggle to create a more humane and just world where people are truly free to make Allah the centre of their lives" (3). Esack's moral courage and outspokenness have, however, put him in an awkward position. To the non-Muslim, he is a Muslim theologian tenaciously defending his faith; to many of his coreligionists, he is only an agent of the West.

Esack traces his commitment to praxis back to his experiences in Pakistan. Br. Norman Wray of St. Patrick's Technical High School in Karachi asked him to transform the Islamic Studies classes into "a programme of discussion, camps and excursions" (3). This experience, he believes, led to his discovery of a spirit of pluralism in Islam in that he found a space within his own theology for non-Muslims. He was thus able to see and appreciate the Christian involvement in real

issues of justice and liberation theology as opposed to "enthralling theological gymnastics of the 'ulama (clerics) of the court" (5).

In the opening chapter, entitled "On being with Allah," Esack contrasts a "personally meaningful and socially relevant Islam" with "a stagnant and fossilized Islam confined to a set of rituals that are mere motions" (1). He wishes to take a middle path between "dehumanizing fundamentalism and fossilized traditionalism." "This is a path of radical Islam committed to social justice, to individual liberty and the quest for the Transcendent who is beyond all institutional, religious and dogmatic constructions. This is an Islam that challenges us to examine our faith in personally and socially relevant terms" (2). Esack expects Muslims along with others to contribute to the "creation of a world wherein it is safe to be human" (ibid.).

Muslims, if they wish to be effective in the global arena, must remold their personal and social lives; they must develop a candid and critical self-awareness—and thus become and remain committed to self-renewal. This process of self-discovery and development is the theme of the second chapter. Here, Esack admits that the odds are stacked against the spiritually oriented: "Equally significant is the idea that the socio-economic system wherein we find ourselves— irredeemably capitalist, racist and patriarchal—does what it does but I am responsible for my reaction" (42) He says that our responses to the challenges of life must not be arbitrary, but should be rooted in our understanding of ourselves as beings in a state of journeying toward God.

In the third chapter, Esack attempts to integrate his own experiences and contemporary insights with the tenets of the Qur'an and Hadith. He suggests ways in which Muslims can collaborate with non-Muslims in the creation of a just social order. These include liberating oneself from the burden of formality, cultivating careful listening to others' opinions, and showing a measure of tolerance in distinguishing between evil and the evildoer.

In the fourth chapter, Esack argues that not only Islam, but all religions are "the product of socio-political dynamics" (87). He underscores the need for all, especially for the religious groups, to engage in social activism and to question the power and authority of the manipulators.

In recent times, Islam and Muslims have been much maligned for their "suppression" of women." Esack devotes the entire fifth chapter to this issue. He boldly accuses Muslim male chauvinists of refusing

to examine their attitude toward women. Under attack from the global media, Muslim men have been forced to take up the matter. He acknowledges the fact that most world religions are male dominated. But, he writes: "The dehumanization of women cannot continue unaddressed and the quiet suffering in roles assigned by men must be confronted. For how long can we, Muslim males, pretend that they have no voices of their own? For how long can we continue to seek refuge in spurious sayings of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) that they are of 'faulty intelligence' or 'push them back as Allah has pushed them back'? The emotional, psychological and sexual abuse of women in our societies is real and we need to confront it" (113)." The Muslim responses to such issues have been either hawkish or apologetic. The hawkish view justifies the current status of women by asserting that God Himself wills inequality for women, whereas the other view, being relatively humane, encourages men to be gentle and kind to women. Esack suggests a third approach—that of justice, not that of mere kindness, which is just another form of disempowerment of women.

The sixth chapter focuses on pluralism. Esack attempts to define Islam from the perspective of Muslims living as minorities or majorities in various cultures. He thus seems to assign to Muslims multiple—that is, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national—identities. (The reader is reminded of Akbar Ahmad's *Living Islam* [1994], which, taking an anthropological approach, defines Islam in terms of what Muslims do.) Esack calls upon the people of various faiths to cultivate empathy for those who belong to faiths other than their own. He challenges the view, held by some Muslims, that Muslims are the victims of other people's prejudices, and that they themselves are completely free from any bias against others. The Qur'anic insistence that we uphold justice even when its verdict is against ourselves "is a powerful invitation to examine and to challenge the self and the many selves within us—both as a community and as individuals" (161).

How all this relates to the current situation of South African Muslims is the subject of the final chapter of the book. The chapter, despite its specific reference to South Africa, offers insights that will be useful to Muslims everywhere, particularly to Muslim minorities in non-Muslim societies. Esack analyzes the concerns and aspirations of South Africa's Muslims in the context of the country's secular democratic constitution. Among the issues discussed in some detail are the media coverage of Pagad's struggle against gangsterism and

drug abuse, the closure of Radio Islam owing to the Muslim community's refusal to broadcast female voices, the Muslims' tendency to see South Africa as a potential Islamic state, and the advisability of having a separate Muslim political party. A subject that receives special treatment is that of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Muslim attitude toward which can only be described as one of indifference.

The book concludes with two letters, one containing criticism of his views and the other, his response to the criticism. To the charge that, in his writings, he makes a selective use of the Qur'an and Hadith to support his argument, Esack replies by pointing out that this could be said about any Muslim presentation, orthodox or progressive, that while "the text is invariably and inevitably used as a pre-text," it does not necessarily follow that all prior opinion is necessarily baseless (194–195). To the charge that he denies the uniqueness of Islam, he responds by saying that while he may not be able to offer normative Islam as the path for all, he would like to offer "islam," in the literal sense of submission to God's will, to all.

Esack shows remarkable courage in engaging in self-analysis. He has the guts and the gall to laugh at himself and at the myopic and distorted perceptions of Islam. He does not pretend to be able to solve all the problems facing the worldwide Muslim community. He is broadminded enough to learn not only from his own experiences, but also from those of others, regardless of the latter's faith, race, or gender. But he does seem to have played down the deliberate and planned assault on Islam and Muslims that has been launched both in the media and in the academe and that is motivated by political and economic interests. He ignores the collusion between major secular and religious forces that have targeted Muslims. Esack ignores these facts possibly because he aims at building a broad-based coalition of forces against the real threats to humanity at large.

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