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# Studies in Contemporary Islam

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## Paradigm Shifts in Muslim International Relations Discourse

*Farhang Rajae*\*

The fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of new international players, and, most important, the impact of globalization are significant indicators inviting scholars to reexamine the very foundations of the still prevalent Westphalian international system and its dominant theories. Until recently it was assumed that there was little or no international theorizing outside the Westphalian paradigm. It was under the spell of this paradigm that Kal Holsti in a recent survey of the sources used in the discipline in eight countries made the bold claim that “international theory barely exists outside the anglophone countries.”<sup>1</sup> Considering the ontological assumptions of modernity and its polity, the modern state, this statement suggests that if a theory is not based on the concept of interest defined in terms of the atomized “self,” and, by implication, in terms of the independent, sovereign “state,” it may not be called a theory. But a careful reading of the Westphalian international theory reveals a built-in contradiction. On the one hand, the theory represents an exclusive approach because it takes into consideration only theories based on utilitarian rationality, ignoring other forms of rationality. On the other hand, it claims that modernity-based theories present eternal rules that have universal applicability.

A different premise would, however, lead to a different conclusion. Fortunately, critical theories within the Western intellectual tradition rightly question the modernist discourse, criticizing it for overreliance on a particular construction.<sup>2</sup> The present essay has a twofold purpose. First, it aims to show that non-Westphalian discourse, such as that of Islam, has produced sophisticated international relations theory. Second, it captures the current debate among Muslims on the same issue. The latter objective cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> K. J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen, 1985), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> In revisiting the prevalent Westphalian international relations theories, Jim George brings out these basic presuppositions. See his *Discourse of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction of International Relations* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994).

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achieved without a proper appreciation of the evolution of the intellectual debates in Islamic history. Methodologically, the two aims are interconnected, and a comprehensive treatment of the state of the international Muslim discourse shows the sophisticated nature of non-Westphalian theorizing.

Muslim debate over issues related to “international” and “foreign” affairs falls into three phases, the present being the last within a broader Islamic intellectual discourse. The first phase began after the Islamic polity reached a state of maturity and sophistication in the ninth century and was centered on the question of how this polity should interact with others. A comprehensive *Shari‘a*-based politics was formulated that not only regulated the life of its subjects within the boundaries of the polity but also had an elaborate set of rules for foreign relations and international politics. The juridical nature of the Islamic polity made its international relations (IR) theory, too, juridical in terms of a duality between “the abode of Islam” and “the abode of war.” The polity was, however, an inclusive one in that it was based on the “general interest” of humanity. Everyone, regardless of creed, had rights and duties within the bounds of the *Shari‘a*, and those rights and duties were properly balanced. This phase may be termed the phase of “Muslim politics,” occurring within the framework of a polity constructed in accordance with the Islamic revealed message.

The second debate occurred as a result of the encounter of the Islamic world with modernity, particularly during the age when modernity and imperialism joined forces. Suffering a major setback in this encounter, the Islamic world lost its internal confidence. Modernity presented the centrifugal axis around which various trends emerged, ironically labeling themselves Islamic. Feeling that the totality of Islam was threatened, Muslims were mostly reactive in the general form, and even in the content, of their responses. This inaugurated the second debate, led to the flourishing of various Islamic movements, and contributed to the radicalization of Islamic international theory. The world was divided into two realms: one was the realm of Islamic revolutionaries and the other—comprising the rest of the world—of those living in a state of unbelief and decadence. Muslim politics was transformed into Islamic movement. The logic of the evolution of Muslim history not properly construed, this phenomenon was termed “Islamic fundamentalism,” “militant Islam,” “Islamic revival,” “Islamic menace,” and the “Islamic threat.”

Then came the third debate, which, though still in its formative phase, is very significant. On the one hand, it gives evidence of the restoration of confidence in an important segment of the present Muslim world. On the other hand, it shows that Islamic revival has enormous potential for the formation of a renewed Islamic IR theory. The failure of secular ideologies on the one hand and the consequences of the globalization process, which encourages multiculturalism, multiplicity of voices, and the growth of a global open and civil society, on the other hand, have given this new debate an important momentum. The three sections of this paper outline the core concepts of each phase.

## **The First Debate**

Islam invites submission to a righteous way of life that is meant to regulate human beings' life both in this world and in the hereafter. In both worlds or realms, the same objective is pursued—salvation. Indeed, throughout the Qur'an, the two worlds (*ad-Dunya wa'l-Akhira*) are cited together (for example, 2:130, 200, 220; 3:22, 45, 56, 145, 148). Unlike Christianity, which emphasizes orthodoxy, but like Judaism, Islam insists on orthopraxy—hence the centrality of the juridical approach to understanding the role of Islam in Muslim politics. But while Judaism is not a missionary religion, universalism constitutes one of the tenets of Islam. Islamic Law—the *Shari'a*—is both comprehensive and universalistic. Any “Islamic polity” ought thus to be based on the *Shari'a*. The *Shari'a* consists of two main parts: acts of worship (*Ibadat*, which regulate human beings' relation to God for the purpose of eternal salvation) and transactions (*Mu'amalat*, which regulate human beings' relations with one another, ensuring smooth conduct of worldly affairs and thus paving the way for eternal salvation). Both are devotional acts, whether one recites the Word of God or whether one makes a business transaction with another person. Herein lies the root of the overstated claim of the inseparability of religion and politics in Islam. Indeed, as Rosenthal rightly observes, “Both realms form a unity under the all-embracing authority of the Shari'a. . . . A Muslim's life—ideally at least—is ruled in its entirety by the Shari'a, which lays down the precise rules and regulations governing his relations with God as well as with his fellow-Muslims and non-Muslims.”<sup>3</sup> Politics, society, economy, education, culture, and other societal constructions are mere tools for the implementation and enhancement of this comprehensive project. The main duty and function of the individual Muslim or an Islamic institution is to strive to observe rules and carry out commandments within a given framework. The notion of “striving,” then, is the key to one's behavior toward the outside world. Basing their arguments on the Qur'an, the Muslim jurists summarized this major duty by means of the concept of *Jihad*.

Thus the original Islamic international relations theory was to be found in “the Book [Section or Chapter] of *Jihad*” in the works of the jurists. *Jihad* takes two forms. The greater *Jihad* involves internal striving to do “good” and avoid “evil,” while the lesser *Jihad* involves external striving to remove obstructions to the Path of God. It was on the basis of this distinction that the Muslim jurists divided the world into the two realms of *Dar al-Islam* (the Realm of Islam) and

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<sup>3</sup> Erwin Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 8.

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the *Dar al-Harb* (the Realm of War).<sup>4</sup> For a long time, this dualism constituted the central concept of Islamic international relations. Within this framework, Muslims made sense of their foreign relations, each Muslim polity adapting it to its peculiar needs and interests. Thus, in actual practice, other concepts were introduced, such as the notion of *Maslaha* (interest), which is comparable to the notion of the reason of state. It is no surprise that during the ‘Abbasid Period (750–1258), when the Muslim world created its first empires, and later during the Ottoman Period (1281–1923), when the Islamic world restored its civilization, this ideal paradigm was modified to incorporate many ambiguous issues and vague areas of relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. The dualistic theory was thus expanded to include a “Realm of Treaties” (*Dar al-‘Ahd*) representing the many ambiguous areas where the Islamic polity concluded treaties with others. As in the Western theory of international relations, the two concepts of war and peace in Islam became the main realms of international relations theory, and soldier and diplomat served as its main protagonists.

From the eighth to the eleventh centuries, there were four big powers on the world scene. The rivalry between the ‘Abbasid and Byzantine (324–1453) Empires replaced that between the Romans and the Persians. In Europe there were the Frankish Empire of France and the Umayyad Dynasty of Spain. It is interesting to observe that, contrary to the ideal paradigm, the ‘Abbasids were more at odds with their fellow religionists of Spain than with the non-Muslim Franks.<sup>5</sup> Many diplomatic missions were conducted between the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne (768–814) and the ‘Abbasid Caliph Harun ar-Rashid (786–809). “For the ‘Abbasids the Frankish ruler became a potentially useful counterweight both to Byzantium and to the rival Umayyad dynasty in Spain.”<sup>6</sup> This interesting balancing of power is one aspect of what I mean by “Muslim politics.”

This paradigmatic duality, along with its sophisticated political practice, endured until modern times. Indeed, after the Mongol forces had destroyed the universal authority of Baghdad (1258), the seat of the Islamic Caliphate, the Muslim world restored itself in the form of powerful empires of the Ottomans, the Safavids (1501–1732), and the Mughals (1526–1858), giving new vitality to Islamic civilization and Muslim politics. Then came the challenge of the modern world. This challenge proved too difficult for the traditional Islamic paradigm to survive. Not only did modernity prove to be a more powerful rival, but it also presented a different frame of mind altogether. The old cosmological outlook gave way to a secular worldview in which power replaced righteousness as the

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<sup>4</sup> This classical approach has been ably presented in English by Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239–249.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Collins, *Charlemagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p 152.



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ultimate end of politics. The new international order was to be based on “non-sectarian territorial demarcations, the equality of all political units, and international peace as the permanent norm.”<sup>7</sup> How was the Islamic world to react? The political breakdown aside, the intellectual homogeneity of the Islamic outlook was also destroyed, and so the stage was set for the second debate. The cosmological outlook, which assumed the orderly nature of human existence, was shaken. Many voices with completely different ontological views emerged, advocating responses ranging from complete acceptance of modernity to a radical rejection of it. Here I am concerned with those voices which formulated their responses within the overall framework of familiar Islamic paradigms, concepts, and vocabularies.

## II

### **The Second Debate**

Whatever their specific features, the overriding character of these responses was their reactive nature, caused by the Islamic world’s loss of its internal confidence in the face of an emergent powerful West. By the end of the nineteenth century, the bandwagon of the industrial mode of production ushered in “the age of the empire.”<sup>8</sup> Soon the greatest power of the modern age, the Ottoman, became the sick man of Europe. The heartland of the Islamic world, the Middle East, became, in L. Carl Brown’s words “the most penetrated international relations subsystem in today’s world.”<sup>9</sup>

Toynbee’s now classic designation of the extreme positions of the Zealots and the Herodians helps to explain the Muslim responses. The two positions grew out of the Jewish reaction to the Hellenism of the first half of the second century BCE. The Zealots rejected Greek civilization while the Herodians, who supported the Idumaeen King Herod the Great, regarded as their own every single accomplishment of the Greeks. The Zealots, on the contrary, felt the need to integrate more and more into the world of their indigenous customs instead of accepting the differentiation presented to them by the new civilization.<sup>10</sup> In the Muslim world, one group advocated, like the Zealots, absolute rejection of the modern ways, thus refusing to take part in the unfolding saga of the encounter of modernity and Islam. The second advocated complete integration into the

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<sup>7</sup> James Piscatori, “Islam in the International Order,” in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 319.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Leon Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold Joseph Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, new revised and abridged edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 436–440.

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modernization project, ruling out all possibility of Islamic participation within the emerging new rules of the game. These two positions were not true opposites but the two sides of the same coin. As Toynbee writes: “Both are in practice desperately defensive attempts to ignore or forestall a new situation produced by the introduction of a novel dynamic element into the life of a society.”<sup>11</sup> Both overwhelming approval and stubborn refusal would lead to radical reactions: the first demands absolute conformity and the second absolute rejection. As a result, both preclude any attempt at evolving an indigenous response. A third group, however, attempted what has been termed a “reconstruction of Islamic teaching in the modern world.” It strove for some degree of accommodation with modernity and called for a revival of religious teaching in light of modernity.<sup>12</sup> Prominent Muslim thinkers such as Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Asadabadi, known as al-Afghani (1839–1897), and his student and colleague, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), tried to revive positions that would avoid the excesses of both the Herodians and the Zealots. If they were not successful in presenting an actual, well-defined position, they at least succeeded in presenting a model for their followers to emulate. For one thing, they revived independent reasoning (*Ijtihad*) that had hitherto been declared unacceptable. This last response is more relevant to understanding the present debate among Muslims over international theories because, while the two extremist positions had marginalized Islam, distancing it from the real social life of Muslims, this one tried to revive it as much as the circumstances allowed. The more the Western powers of Britain, Russia, and France dominated the world scene, the more they turned the Muslim world into a theater of their “great game.” As a corollary, those Muslims who advocated modernization in both the intellectual and social spheres came to occupy high status and seats of power. And the more complete the assimilation of Muslims to the Western ways became, the stronger was the impetus for the Islamic movements to mobilize their forces. In the process, multiple voices and trends emerged. They ranged from Islamic modernism to puritanical revivalism.

Thus, the advocates of Islamic modernism and those of revivalism together represented the main positions taken in the second debate during the first half of the twentieth century. The second half of the century presented a different scene, however. First, during this period, the cold war dominated international politics. Second, liberation movements in the former colonial regions of Africa and Asia restored much of the confidence lost during the movement of the return to the self. Third, a revival of religious sentiment in the West itself, as symbolized by Vatican II, paved the way for the resurgence of religion in social and political life. Fourth, nonreligious ideologies such as liberal nationalism, pan-Arabism, and Ba‘thism, which had become dominant ideologies in various Muslim

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1962).

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countries, failed to improve the lot of the masses who had gradually become an important force in politics. Thus, those who refused to respond to the challenge of modernity and the West now saw their opportune moment and formulated new theories. Like their classical counterparts, they concentrated on the notion of *Jihad*, or striving, as the key concept for formulating any theory of international relations, but, unlike them, the new Muslim protagonists dispensed with the notion of *Maslaha* or interest. Some replaced the latter with the notion of *Hijra* (migration), thus replacing the two notions of struggle (*Jihad*) and interest (*Maslaha*)—held in a complex balancing relationship in classical theory—with the exclusionary notions of confrontation (their understanding of *Jihad*) or migration (*Hijra*).<sup>13</sup>

Islamism may be said to be the defining feature of this phase, for Islamic movements and Islamic ideologies now replace Muslim politics. The protagonists of this new phase considered it their main duty to turn their “creed” into an ideology with a rigid binary opposition. Muhammad Baqir Sadr (executed in 1980), Rouhollah Khomeini (d. 1989), Abu’l A’la Mawdudi (d. 1979), Murtaza Mutahhari (assassinated in 1979), Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966), and Ali Shari’ati (died mysteriously in 1977) are prominent examples of this group. These thinkers tried to prove that Islam could compete with other ideologies and was even superior to them. Their primary objective was to replace modernity with an Islamic ideology. Although this new phase indicates the presence of a degree of confidence among Muslims, it nevertheless constitutes a reaction to modernity and to the Western world and cannot be called proactive. For the purposes of our discussion, we will examine Khomeini’s IR theory.

Khomeini’s theory resembles the traditional Islamic dualistic IR theory, but he introduces a change both in concept and in content. He presents his view of the duality in terms of the oppressed (*mustad’afun*) and the oppressors (*mustakbirun*) rather than in terms of the Realm of Islam and the Realm of War. The two terms used by him are derivatives of Arabic verbs meaning, respectively, to weaken and to enhance. Taken from the Qur’an, they are meant to convey the duality of the oppressed (as in 2:59 and 27:5) and the oppressor (as in 16:22, 23). Khomeini takes this duality to its extreme in that he views all things in terms of binary opposition. Human beings, freedom, worldview, politics, political party, political organization, country, foreign policy, economic policy, and virtually everything else can be either oppressive or godly and just. Note, for example, the following statement by him: “Since the beginning of the world, there have always been two parties, one the party of God, and the other one un-Godly and Satanic.”<sup>14</sup> At present, according to Khomeini, the logic of the

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<sup>13</sup> The idea is well documented and argued by Gilles Kepel in *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Speech delivered on 27 December 1982. See *Keyhan* (28 December 1982), p. 18.

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oppressors is operative, and the only way to avoid the un-Godly world is to submit to the message of Islam as embodied in its law. The totality of this law makes Islamic society self-sufficient with no need for borrowing or intercivilizational fertilization:

The law of the Shari'a embraces a diverse body of rules and regulations, which amounts to a complete social system. In this system of laws, all the needs of man have been met. . . . Islam provides laws and instructions for all of these matters, aiming as it does to produce integrated and virtuous human beings who are walking embodiments of the law.<sup>15</sup>

He then reminds his audience that God has promised the earth to the oppressed, as stated in the Qur'an: "And we desire to show favor unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples, and to make them inheritors" (28:5).

The peak in the second debate in Islamic IR theory is reached with the Islamic Revolution of Iran when the Islamic panacea was turned into a constitution for the creation of an Islamic state and was expected to perform miracles. The first decade of the revolution was a time of euphoria for all Muslims throughout the world. Soon, however, it was realized that, like other "isms" such as Ba'athism, nationalism, and Pan-Arabism, the "Islamic solution," too, was utopian in character. Furthermore, the enormous changes of the 1980s, bringing the cold war to an end and ushering in the globalized world, started a new debate within the Islamic world. The new paradigm is both promising and accommodating. The generation of the 1960s still has a strong voice, particularly where Muslims are active as a movement and excluded from the political process; Algeria and Palestine are cases in point. But, wherever new generations of Muslims are in a position of power, the new debate is less exclusivist.

### III

#### **The Third Debate**

While the Islamic Revolution in Iran showed that the problems facing the Muslim world are too deep to be eliminated by a successful revolution and its Islamic pronouncements, it has left behind an important legacy: it has restored a very high degree of confidence among Muslims. The most important consequence of this restoration of confidence is that Muslims are relinquishing their reactive mode and reaffirming Islam, in a realistic way, as the foundation

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<sup>15</sup> Rouhollah Khomeini, *Imam and His Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1982), pp. 43–44.

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of their social and political lives. An interesting paradox has been created for Muslims. As long as the dominant intellectual paradigm projected the idea that Islamic heritage had little relevance for modern life, the *modus operandi* of Muslims was rather simple. They more or less followed a double life. A Muslim would follow the existing rules of the game dictated by the international system. He would even wear the modern Western dress during the day but—ostensibly following Islamic norms at home—put on the Islamic garb at night! Indeed, separation between religion and politics (rather than between church and state) was very much the accepted rule. The story of the robbers who would rob a caravan but then line up for prayer aptly reflects the state of mind of the majority of Muslims during a long period of time. Once, when one of the victims objected to this blatant hypocrisy, the chief of the bandits calmly replied: “It is simple: this is my religion and that is my profession.”

Making Islam relevant again, however, proved as difficult as putting the proverbial genie back into the bottle. The lack of any central political or intellectual authority has given rise to as many Islams as there are Muslim states.<sup>16</sup> Going further, one can even argue that there are as many Islams as Muslims care to proclaim. For example, any search on the World Wide Web would produce many home pages maintained by the self-appointed spokespersons of Islam. Thus, it may be more accurate and logical to talk about Muslim theories of international relations than a single Muslim theory. What this signifies is that the Pan-Islamic ideological approach of the Islamists has turned out to be no less inadequate than the secular ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, one can argue that the first two quarters of the twentieth century were the era of “modernizing Islam,” the third quarter was that of “replacing modernity,” and the last quarter seems to have ushered in the era of “Islamizing modernity.”

Muslims seem to have become realistic enough to recognize their limitations, but they have also gained sufficient confidence to try to formulate a contemporary theoretical framework of their own. The new generation of Muslims has realized what Fernand Braudel observed decades ago: “Today, the liberation of Islam is very nearly complete. But, it is one thing to secure independence, and quite another to keep pace with the rest of the world and look clearly toward the future. That is much more difficult.”<sup>17</sup> The new generation emphasizes model building and seems to be returning to a combination of struggle (*Jihad*) and interest (*Maslaha*)—just as was the case during the classical age of Islam—but within a modern context.

The most important traits of this new generation or world of Muslims are as follows: First, more than two centuries of modernization and Westernization have made a lasting impact on the Muslim world, the least part of which is the

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<sup>16</sup> Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, tr. Richard Mayne (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 93

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implanting of many institutions of the modern national state. For example, the Islamic world now includes more than fifty countries with Muslim majorities. The result, as one analyst put it, is that “Islam has become nationalized, producing as many Islams as there are countries with Muslim majorities.”<sup>18</sup> Ever since the fall of what Marshall Hodgson calls the three “gunpowder empires,”<sup>19</sup> the Muslim world has lost its erstwhile cosmological outlook and can only dream of its glorious past.

Second, no longer is the Muslim world capable of supporting universalism and transnationalism to the extent that its ideology demands and dictates. As the Iraq-Kuwait crisis or the Gulf War demonstrated, the reality is that many countries of the Islamic world are not even capable of defending their own boundaries. Most Muslim countries fall in the categories of developing or underdeveloped states. In fact, many argue that what has enabled the countries of the Islamic world to survive and muddle through is petrodollars and the royalties they receive from selling their natural wealth. This has given rise to the theory of the Rentier State, according to which the oil-producing countries live on the rent they receive from leasing their natural resources.<sup>20</sup> The demographic situation is not very promising either. The Muslim countries have a young population with a high degree of illiteracy, and the population’s lack of skill and expertise further exacerbates the unevenness of development, a common feature of many developing countries.

Third, while one can see the emergence of a transnational class of Islamic Yuppies (young upward-mobile professional Islamic entrepreneurs), whose general outlook on the Islamic order might converge, the practical measures they take to uphold Islam and ensure its application to specific realities do not seem to be leading to the emergence of a *Pactum Islamicum*. While Muslims still cling to the legacy of Islamic civilization, their lives are shaped by the provisions and practices of the states under which they live. As Fouad Ajami correctly observes:

Civilizations do not control states, states control civilizations. States avert their gaze from blood ties when they need to; they see brotherhood and faith and kin when it is in their interest to do so. We remain in the world of self-help. The solitude of states continues; the disorder in the contemporary world has rendered that solitude more pronounced.”<sup>21</sup>

This does not mean that Muslims should or are giving up their religious principles. On the contrary, they insist on being both modern and Muslim. This

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<sup>18</sup> Piscatori, “Islam in the International Order,” p. 313.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), Vol. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Giacomo Luciani and Hazem Beblawi, *The Rentier State*. (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Fouad Ajami, “The Summoning: But They Said, We will not Hearken,” *Foreign Affairs* 72:4 (September- October 1993), p. 9.

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is the paradox and the interesting feature of the third debate. Muslims seem to follow a two-faced foreign policy in their international relations. They have to follow the reason of state in order to survive but the reason of Islam in order to maintain their legitimacy. The actual fate of the new debate within the present international system depends on how successful they are in implementing this two-faced policy. Consider the case of Iran. Its actual behavior in Central Asia, in the Persian Gulf, in the Iraq-Kuwait crisis, in the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute, toward the Middle East peace talks, and at international organizations has been basically motivated by the reason of state, whereas its stance on the Salman Rushdie issue, its rhetorical position on the Middle East peace talks, and its denunciation of “Western cultural onslaught” have been dictated by the reason of Islam and that of the revolution. An Iranian official summed up the matter for me in Tehran in the following words:

“Iran is a solar state by the fact of Islam, and the revolution and its glorious history. She thus has to project its Islamic, revolutionary, and universalistic ideals. Owing to the mere fact of her actual position in the international system, however, she has to become conservative and reactive to the broad strategies presented to her at the international scene.” (July 1996).

The most difficult task is that of balancing the two approaches. Here again the case of Iran is interesting and instructive. In May 1998 one of the protagonists of the new debate in the Muslim world won the presidential election. He promised an “Islamic civil society” and the rule of law in domestic politics, and *détente* and dialogue of civilizations at the international level. Thus, the main objective of the new Islamic international theory is to assert the Islamic identity and secure the interests of the Muslim world. This resembles the two classical concepts of *Jihad* and *Maslaha*, though within a globalized context. Such views were reaffirmed in the recent meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tehran. For example, the new chair of the OIC defined the post-Cold War world as follows:

A new order based on pluralism is taking shape in the world that, God willing, will not be the monopoly of any single power. What is imperative for us—Muslim countries—is that while valiantly resisting all kinds of expansionism, we should strive to secure our proper position and stature in contributing to the shaping of the new world political order and new international relations.

He added that “cultivation of confidence is the first and most appropriate strategic approach to ensuring security” (9 December 1998). An interesting article in a recent issue of one of Tehran’s leading current affairs journals captures well the debate in the present phase. The author argues that confrontational attitudes would eventually lead to servitude, whereas

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independent policies generated by self-confidence will lead to the restoration of identity. In his words:

The political independence achieved after the Islamic Revolution did not move on the track to true independence, leading to the establishment of a logical and strong relationship with the world. The cycle between confrontational and servile relations with the West (especially the United States of America in recent years) could have been converted into logical relations with the preservation of identity and adherence to mutual interests. After their revolutions, China, India, and some other countries witnessed the rise of successful movements for political independence, but the Middle East and the North African nations have until now continued to repeat the cycle of confrontation, dependence, war and surrender, and slavery.<sup>22</sup>

For the future, the author advocates a new international relation theory in which mutual respect and struggle for peace are coupled with national interest.

It seems that the third debate of international relations in the Muslim world is resolving into the conversion of the Islamic movement into a new phase of Muslim politics. It was argued that, in the second phase, Muslims lost heart in the face of modernity and, consequently, turned inward, becoming extremist or radical. Having now regained their confidence, they have regained their heart. Just as the traditional "Muslim politics" was composed of an Islamic heart and a mind that was the product of the Islamic but also of other civilizations, so the newly emerging politics is composed of an Islamic heart and a mind that partakes of both Islam and modernity. Reza Davari, a prominent Muslim professor of philosophy and activist, describes the new *Homo Islamicus* as an individual "with the heart of a believer and the mind of an infidel . . . not a person with a believer's mind and an infidel's heart."<sup>23</sup> In the same way, just as the traditional Islamic IR theory borrowed from other civilizations without ever losing its own Islamic heart, the new one also seeks to combine the Islamic worldview with modern achievements. It concentrates on state building through a revitalization of the basic tenets of the Islamic ontological framework, which involves submitting to the will of God while at the same time preserving human integrity.<sup>24</sup> This has to be accomplished not through imitation of the West but through institution of a new Islamic civilizational process within the context of the new globalized world in which every Muslim community has to balance the three forces of local heritage, modern demands, and Islamic commandments.

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<sup>22</sup> Taqi Rahmani, "Diplomacy of Confrontation, Dependence, or Identity and Interests?" (in Persian) *Iran-i Farda* (October-December 1997), pp. 53-56.

<sup>23</sup> Reza Davari, *Falsafa dar Buhran [Philosophy in Crisis]* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1373/1995), p. 382.

<sup>24</sup> Farhang Rajaei, "The Paradox of Arab State Building in the Post-Bipolar World," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 8 (1996), 2:301-319.



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The second of these three aims at formulating an international relations theory that is inclusive and works for mutual respect and a dialogue of civilizations.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Abdulhamid A. Abu Sulayman, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Methodology and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993).

## Understanding the Political Behavior of Islamists: The Implications of Socialization, Modernization, and Rationalist Approaches

*Anas B. Malik*\*

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the rise of political Islam in the Muslim world has received much media attention and comment. Khomeini's revolution in Iran demonstrated to many that Islam-inspired political ideologies had potent mainstream appeal. Since then, developments such as the rapid rise of Hamas (the Islamic resistance movement in Palestine), the wide electoral support for Islamist political figures in Jordan and Egypt, Anwar Sadat's assassination, the World Trade Center bombing, Saddam Hussein's carefully-timed shift from Arab socialist to Islamist propaganda, and the civil war in Algeria have continued to highlight the links between Islam and politics. This paper examines approaches to understanding why Islamists sometimes choose to participate in elections and run for office but sometimes choose to withhold participation, boycott, or engage in insurrectionary political activity.

"Islamist" is a term that means persons, organizations, or institutions that offer explicit Islamic justifications for their policy positions. By Islamic justifications I mean the explicit use of scriptural, historical, cultural, or philosophical material normally associated with the religion of Islam. On closer examination, we find substantial variety in the field of Islamist groups or groups claiming Islamically-inspired policy positions. These include small terrorist cells, such as the various incarnations of Islamic Jihad found in Jordan and Palestine, that appear to rise, disappear, and reappear irregularly. The field also includes mass-based multipurpose social organizations with career politicians and an explicit commitment to nonviolence, such as the Muslim Brotherhood of

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Egypt and Jordan. It includes explicitly political parties, such as the Islamic Liberation Party (ILP), which is found across the Levant, and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan. It includes, finally, traditional *‘ulama* of various stripes—including those sitting on national *fatwa* (religious decree) boards, Sufi orders, and prominent scholars of Islamic law.

Some of these groups are more active in organized propaganda activities than others. Some have more explicit prescriptions for social policy. There is significant variation across these groups in terms of civic participation—the extent of their nonviolent participation in the governing process. The difference becomes apparent when we look at their participation in elections at different levels. The explanations frequently found in journalistic writings and other forms of popular commentary suggest that the religion of Islam, scriptural doctrine, or other features of Islamic culture provide the motivations and therefore the explanations for the electoral behavior of Islamist politicians. Despite the shared religion, substantial differences persist in the approaches Islamists take to elections, with some advocating participation to the fullest extent possible in all circumstances, some rejecting the ideology of elections altogether in favor of radical revolutionism, and some charting another course somewhere between these extremes through active boycotts or passive absenteeism.

The question of the political participation of Islamists has received journalistic and scholarly attention but frequently in an atheoretical form. Rather than drawing on identified research traditions examining political participation, existing research has tended to rely on historical and case study accounts, sometimes with a policy focus but rarely with the aim of applying or improving through innovation existing theoretical apparatuses. To fill this gap, this paper examines three well-established traditions in the study of political participation. These approaches are political socialization, rational choice, and modernization theory. The focus here is both on identifying the guidelines that each social scientific tradition offers in explaining the political participation behavior of Islamists, and on making a selective analysis of the applicability and potential fruits of each approach. Specific applications to cases in Jordanian and Egyptian politics are discussed. The note concludes with an evaluation of the research strategies and suggests a practical and potentially fruitful research path.

### **Introduction to the Case Material**

Jordan provides an interesting case study. Over the course of the history of elections, some Jordanian Islamists have participated consistently, others have participated and then boycotted, still others have not participated, and then participated, and some have allegedly been involved in insurrectionary activity against the regime. Shortly before the 1993 parliamentary elections in Jordan, a royal decree changed the electoral law from the unlimited vote system to the

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single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system. Compared with the previous arrangement, the SNTV voting system is detrimental to party campaigns because it makes it harder to coordinate voter activity in support of a party-backed candidate list. Instead, the SNTV system favors locally-networked independents.

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has been known as a moderate force. The Muslim Brothers were the best-organized interest group in terms of the ability to mobilize voters on the ground, and the 1989 election had distinguished them as the largest opposition group in the country. The change to this new electoral rule sparked tremendous debate among the Muslim Brothers and their political arm, the Islamic Action Front, about the value of participating in the elections. Those who advocated a boycott argued that the new electoral law was biased against parties and would result in fewer parliamentary seats for the IAF. This would make it look as though the Islamists were losing support. The advocates of participation recognized the bias against the IAF but argued that a boycott by the largest party would undermine the already vulnerable process of democratization. The IAF finally chose to participate despite the protest resignation of a prominent figure in the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1997 elections, the SNTV electoral rule was not altered. Restrictive press laws had been introduced and were not relaxed before the elections. The IAF boycotted the 1997 elections.

The Islamic Liberation Party had a representative in the Jordanian Parliament in the mid-1950s. The ILP had a reputation for hardline positions advocating the overthrow of the regime. Despite its public refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Jordanian state, the party chose to participate in the parliamentary process. Jordan's brief parliamentary experiment ended in 1957 with the imposition of military rule. The process was reestablished with by-elections in 1984 and full elections in 1989. The ILP chose not to participate in either of the two.

The Egyptian experience exhibits a similar variation in the participation behavior of Islamists. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's (EMB's) founder, Hassan al-Banna, ran for Parliament, was elected, and served there in the late 1940s. The EMB initially supported Nasser's revolution, but its relations with the regime quickly soured. Nasser accused EMB members of maintaining a secret paramilitary organization and plotting his assassination. The EMB was targeted for repression and was not able to reestablish itself as a moderate and nonviolent participant in the electoral process until the 1980s. In contrast, the Egyptian Gama'a Islamiyya (Islamic Assembly) has been known as a rejectionist group associated with various violent episodes. The Gama'a has consistently rejected and boycotted national-level parliamentary elections in Egypt.

## **Political Socialization**

The political socialization approach looks at the role of previously learned values in explaining current political attitudes. The study of political socialization is oriented toward the macropolitical sources of political behavior—those tendencies and constitutive forces in society that are usually larger and more potent than any single individual. The behavioral revolution in the study of political systems, according to Ronald Inglehart (1983), had the impact that “[p]olitical behavior seemed to be determined more by the milieu into which one was born, and by one’s early socialization, than by the individual’s rational assessment of current issues” (Inglehart, 1983: 430). Behavioralists emphasize early political socialization over current issue conflicts in explanations of political behavior.

In view of this, socialization explanations of the electoral behavior of Islamist politicians emerge from the social milieu of their origin rather than the specific issues surrounding any given election. The social milieu includes religion, class, and intergenerationally transferred values. At the extreme, this is analogous to Converse’s (1969) model of the strength of party identification, which was “interpreted as the result of intergenerational transmission, plus the amount of time one had voted in free elections” (Inglehart, 1983: 430). To understand the choices made by Islamist politicians, the explanatory factors are thus intergenerationally transmitted values and another nonissue variable (such as length of experience with different political decision systems).

Conover prefers “political learning” as a more inclusive term than political socialization (Conover 1991: 131). Conover describes two related but distinct approaches to the study of political socialization. One tradition focuses on “society’s molding of the child to some a priori model, usually one perpetuating the status quo,” and the other emphasizes “the child’s idiosyncratic personal growth” and “the attainment of attitudes that do not necessarily contribute to the maintenance of the political system” (Conover, 1991: 130–131). A narrow application of the political socialization approach would focus on the development of “diffuse system support” and its contribution to system maintenance. Diffuse system support means “a generalized belief in the legitimacy of the regime and its authorities” (quoted in Conover, 1991: 137).

In studying the political orientations of Islamists, the focus would be on the role of socialization in influencing the attitudes of Islamists toward electoral processes. Practical research would examine the ways in which institutional arrangements promote the development of participatory orientation toward elections. The choice of Islamists to participate or not to participate would then be described as the success or failure of those institutions at socializing Islamists into participatory attitudes. Examples of such institutions include local city and town decision-making bodies (such as neighborhood assemblies, town meetings, and city legislatures). The effectiveness of these institutions in inculcating

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democratic habits would explain the extent of Islamists' inclinations to participate in elections. Another possibility is to trace the role of schools and the educational system. According to the socialization approach, these are the early shapers of political attitudes that are instrumental in developing diffuse system support.

Journalistic references to Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Jordan as breeding grounds for radical Islamism are based implicitly on such a political learning model. The assumption is that the refugee camps do not inculcate democratic habits or effectively socialize consent to the existing political order. Rather, the socially marginalized fringe existence in refugee camps conditions youth to seek revolutionary expressions of political demands because they did not learn to accept a civic order in their early years.

A more innovative application of the political socialization approach would include cultural aspects of political learning. Conover suggests that "the central values that define a particular political culture and the crucial skills that citizens must have to preserve that culture and system" should be included in the study of political socialization (Conover, 1991: 137). Sidney Verba defined a society's political culture as "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which define the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics" (Verba, in Pye and Verba, eds., 1965: 413). Based on Conover's suggested focus on the particular political culture of citizens, and taking Verba's well-known definition as a starting point for identifying political culture, cultural variation would predict the variation in Islamist attitudes toward elections. The object would be to break down the label "Islamists" and look for particular cultures within that category. Instead of a single "deep culture" understanding of Islam, the explicit scriptural justifications and understandings of specific Islamists would be examined.

Explicit justifications for participation typically take as their exemplar the Qur'anic story of the prophet Joseph's willingness to participate as a minister in a heathen Egyptian regime. The purported lesson here is that of the permissibility and duty of civil participation in a regime even if that regime's policies overall are not fully Islamic. The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, for example, has used this to provide religious justification for their participation in the parliamentary process as well as the creation of the Islamic Action Front. Justifications for nonparticipation and rebellion sometimes draw an analogy from the Qur'anic description of the confrontational relations between Egypt's Pharaoh and the prophets Moses and Aaron. As might be expected, radical, rejectionist Islamist groups tend to espouse this second position. Immediately after assassinating Anwar Sadat, the radical Islamist Khalid Islambuli proclaimed his identity and shouted: "I have killed Pharaoh" (Kapel, 1985). This statement reflected Islambuli's deep commitment to the Moses metaphor. The two positions exemplify the varying interpretations of scriptural sources that result in almost opposite prescriptions for political behavior.

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Other justifications typically refer to the practice of the Prophet Muhammad in the course of his *Da'wa* (inviting others to Islam). For example, the Prophet preached for thirteen years in Mecca before making the *Hijra* (migration) to Yathrib (renamed Medina) and establishing an Islamic state. Some factions in the Islamic Liberation Party take this piece of history as a literal timing device for their program of social Islamization—thirteen years of peaceful preaching before more radical measures are introduced. Other groups have made the *Hijra* an integral element of their program of purification, a prime example being Shukri Mustafa's group, the so-called *Takfir wa'l Hijra* (Esposito, 1992; Kepel, 1985).

The political culture angle in the socialization approach is difficult to apply as an explanatory variable. The problem can be summarized in the form of a question: How can we identify where one political culture begins and another ends? In their explicit justifications for policy decisions, Islamists typically use the same textual sources (the Qur'an and *ahadith* [Prophetic traditions]). Yet, as illustrated in the above example, these have the potential to produce a wide variety of policy prescriptions.

There are at least two ways to reconcile this with the political culture approach. The first is to say that more than one political culture exists here. Each policy position thus represents a different cultural origin. The weakness of this argument consists in the danger that we might end up redefining culture for each case and so produce a new culture for each policy position. At the extreme, the definition of culture becomes purely tautological, depriving it of all explanatory power. The second is to argue that while the political culture is one, it does not have a determinate influence on policy positions. Within one culture, it is possible to have a variety of policy ideologies. The problem arises when we try to separate culture from ideology. Additionally, we may end up seeing every policy position as linked to a specific ideology. Again, there is the danger of giving ideology a purely tautological role, ideology being automatically defined in terms of each policy position. In the abstract, socialization into a political culture is generally thought of as shaping broad attitudes rather than very specific preferences for specific policies. As a result, there is not a lot of face validity to the multiple microcultures argument.

The boundaries between cultures become even more confusing when a leading figure in the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, a professor of *Shari'a* (Sacred Law) and widely known as a hard-liner, proclaims, "I am with Greenpeace" (Interview with Dr. Hammam Saeed, Amman, May 1996). Exotic elements of global leftist allegiances thus mix into the worldview of an Islamist involved in local politics. The universal values of Islam, including justice and respect for the environment, justify such wide-ranging loyalties.

Ideology can serve as a tool for legitimating strategic and politically pragmatic choices. It can also serve to form identities and drive choices. Separating these two roles of ideology is difficult if not impossible. It is related

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to the problem of strategic preference revelation found in rational choice analyses that try to identify preference structures. Actors sometimes have an incentive to misrepresent preferences in order to manipulate outcomes.

In terms of practically carrying out research, the Inglehart/socialization research tradition relies heavily on surveys. Surveys would seek to elicit information about the socioeconomic background and learned values of Islamist political actors. The practical limitations on survey work are the expense and time involved, and also other costs and intangibles that vary according to context. Not the least concern is that the politically repressive conditions prevailing in many Middle Eastern environments present a forbidding obstacle.

### **Agency Theory/Rational Choice**

Rational choice approaches focus on the incentives and disincentives operating on choice-making individuals. Leaders of groups act according to structural constraints and incentives. Their private interests may not coincide entirely with the supporters' preferences. Leaders may defect when they find a new and reliable source of rewards. For example, they may shift from party loyalty to regime support if they feel that sufficient rewards and protection from repercussions are made available by the regime.

Agency theory provides useful analytical tools for examining Islamists' choices. The basis of the principal-agent problem is well established in the New Institutional literature, particularly in the work of Oliver Williamson (1985). In brief, an asset owner (the principal) delegates the task of asset management to a hired employee (the agent). The employee's interest is in maintaining his employment status and receiving his wage. The owner's interest is in the optimal usage of the asset. The divergence between the two is the source of the principal-agent problem. The agent has an incentive to shirk—to earn his wage without doing the work, or by doing minimal work. The principal's interest is in getting the maximum input from the agent and having the latter represent the principal's interest alone.

In the case of political representation, the constituent base can be seen as the principal and the representatives as the agents. The constituents have an interest in seeing to it that their preferences alone are represented by the agent. The agent, or the political representative, has his own interest—namely, to maximize his personal rewards and minimize his personal costs. Some constituent preferences may be costly to the individual representative, and he may shirk his responsibility. The ability and willingness of the constituents to monitor and sanction his behavior influence the degree to which the representative actually represents constituent interests.

This approach would lead us to focus on the incentives and disincentives for electoral participation facing individual politicians. The most obvious ones are material incentives, such as the salary that goes with being an elected



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representative. The most obvious costs are such things as losing office and losing constituent support. Regimes are interested in co-opting dissident leaders without granting them major concessions. They try to manipulate the rewards and costs associated with specific behaviors in order to best further their own interests. A regime might offer a dissident leader a government career or the promise of a future political appointment in return for a compromise on a political position. Sufficient guarantees from the regime and fears of a fickle constituency may lead the politician to become co-opted. In the case of Jordanian politicians, those who ignore a call to boycott elections or to vote a certain way are typically accused of having been co-opted. In one famous incident, a bill was introduced under which elected politicians received an option to buy tax-free cars. Most of the Islamist politicians were affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood called on them to reject the bill. The politicians stood to gain personally from the bill in terms of buying cars tax-free. Most voted in favor of the bill and were suspended from the Muslim Brotherhood. This is a clear example of a case where delegates did not represent a constituent group's preferences because of the private rewards accruing to those delegates. The constituency was not able to impose a sufficiently deterrent sanction although it was clearly able to monitor the situation.

The existence of a uniform assumption about actor goals is a common feature of rational choice analyses. An example is the goal of getting elected or appointed to government office and maintaining tenure in office for as long as possible. Under this assumption, a boycott or refusal to participate seems on the surface to make no sense since it would defeat that goal. Within such a context, paradoxical results might be explained in terms of "nested games," a concept developed by George Tsebelis (1990). Political actors are involved in games in multiple arenas. An apparently suboptimal choice in one arena (such as refusing to run for election) can become intelligible by including other institutional and contextual arenas that structure actor incentives. Another significant facet of political life in Jordan is that most full-time politicians also have other careers. For example, they may be medical doctors, engineers, or university professors. If they deviate too far from constituent preferences, one possible sanction they face is losing their other, "normal" career.

Another feature of the issue of Islamists' participation in elections is that most such cases occur in democratizing polities. In such cases, the newness of the electoral institution means that the rules of interaction are relatively fluid and imprecise, and actor goals are likely to be fuzzy. This makes it more difficult to apply rational-choice explanations because "rational choice is a better approach to situations in which the actors' identity and goals are established and the rules of interaction are precise and known to the interacting agents" (Tsebelis, 1990:

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32)<sup>1</sup>. Where an authoritarian regime engages in political liberalization and offers a new arena of political participation to society, it is in effect creating a new “game.”

The newness suggests that the rules may rapidly change. The field of potential participants has not yet had the chance to learn the rules of interaction. Actor goals are fuzzy in the sense that clear priorities have not been made clear over a history of repeated interaction. The utility of the rational choice approach is limited when both goals and rules are unclear.

Mancur Olson’s “logic of collective action” (Olson, 1965) is another rational choice perspective relevant to the question of electoral participation by Islamists. Olson suggested that the “free-rider” problem was an obstacle to collective action and to the formation of interest groups. Despite common interests, those groups that are unable to overcome the free-rider problem are unlikely to achieve collective action. Smaller groups are better able to obtain contributions from all members. As a result, smaller groups are—all other things being equal—more likely to achieve collective action than larger groups are. As for the attitude of Islamists toward elections, it is clear that substantial organization is required to mobilize a vote. It may be that Islamists are unable to overcome the organizational difficulties of getting voters to the polls. As such, they might see other routes of political expression involving smaller groups as more appealing simply because they do not present the same collective action problem. Group size is thus likely to have an impact on the choice of strategies for propagating a political message. A mass-based, bureaucratically complex, and highly institutionalized organization like the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated its ability to mobilize voters and organize a coherent electoral campaign in both 1989 and 1993. The loosely linked cells of Islamic Jihad in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are examples of smaller groups. Their size constrains their options with regard to nonmass political action, and encourages terrorist tactics as an effective means of expressing their political demands.

### **Modernization**

Modernization theory is based on the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Political participation defines modernity. A lack of participation is

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<sup>1</sup> Rational choice is a tool which can be applied best to situations in which there are clearly defined roles and strong structures of selection (Ostrom, 1995). An example is the side of the road on which the driver drives. Regardless of his individual preferences, if a driver disobeys the rule of staying on his side of the road, he will not be on the streets for long—whether as a result of police monitoring and sanctions or of traffic accidents. The structure will eventually *select* drivers such that only those that drive on the appropriate side will remain on the roads. The traffic system is a highly developed set of clear rules in which repeated interaction occurs. In this sense, it is a very appropriate “nail” for a rational-choice “hammer.”

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symptomatic of a traditional polity. In contrast, modern polities exhibit “[r]ationalized authority, differentiated structure, and mass participation” (Huntington, 1968: 35). Huntington suggests that the “level of political community a society achieves reflects the relationship between its political institutions and the social forces which comprise it,” where a social force is “an ethnic, religious, territorial, economic, or status group” (1968: 8). By definition, Islamists are considered a social force because they are a religious group.

Modernization theory’s strength consists in describing an aggregate societal process. However, the theory is not well suited to insights about the variation in behaviors of different groups. Huntington uses the term “modernization revisionism” to refer to the reactions to shortcomings of the theory of modernization (Huntington, 1972: 413). One of the most interesting strands of thinking that emerged from “modernization revisionism” was the notion that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive categories. They may coexist, and “‘traditional’ identities may be invigorated in a way that would have never happened in ‘traditional’ society” (1972: 415). Modern Islamist movements, tendencies, and organizations are an example of this phenomenon. They represent a traditional religious identity that has been adjusted to suit the novel challenges of modernity.

Huntington’s aim is to sketch a broad, aggregate portrait of the dynamics of a modernizing society. Huntington suggests, as one hypothesis, that among traditional political systems, some “are more highly institutionalized than others (i.e., are more adaptable, complex, coherent, and autonomous); these presumably will be better able to survive modernization and accommodate broadened patterns of participation” (Huntington, 1972: 419). Elections are a political feature of modern polities. A deduced hypothesis is that rates of participation in elections can be explained by the degree of institutionalization in the preexisting traditional polity. Thus we would look at indicators of institutionalization in the traditional polity. Institutions are defined as “stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior” (1968: 12). This extremely general definition is not a useful guide for telling one what to look for when searching for institutions in the field. The definition, as it stands, does not distinguish between table manners and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Nevertheless, as criteria for political institutionalization, Huntington offers “the strength of political organizations and procedures in the society” (Huntington, 1968: 12). This strength depends on the “*scope of support* for the organizations and procedures and their *level of institutionalization*” (1968: 12). “Scope” means “the extent to which the political organizations and procedures encompass activity in the society.” To measure scope we would construct a measure of social activity, and a measure of political organizations and procedures, and look at the ratio of the one to the other. A political system’s level of institutionalization is measured by “the adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence of its organizations and procedures” (1968: 12). One

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critique of this criterion is that traditional societies also relied on institutions. Complexity is arguably the best single measure in terms of tangibility.

A related application of the modernization approach would be to extend the logic of the aggregated approach to implications for specific groups. The dislocating impact of modernization produces fodder for all varieties of Islamism, including radical variants. Rural migrants who manage to find a job in the city develop a stake in the system and are more likely to be attracted to the institutional, nonradical groups. Those who are unable to find work and are left frustrated are less likely to have a stake in the system. They are more attracted to radical, rejectionist movements. This is a mixture of modernization theory and Ted Gurr's (1970) "relative deprivation" explanation for political dissent. The researcher employing this strategy would look primarily for socioeconomic categories clearly associated with specific groups. An example might be that of the unemployed recent migrants to the city. Another category would be that of students. The rejectionist Egyptian Gama'a apparently recruits mainly from students. Another potential category is that of the educated upper-middle class urban professionals. These are more likely to be civic and participatory in their electoral behavior because they have developed a stake in social stability.

In applying Huntington's theses to the issue of Islamist participation in elections, "modernizing societies" would constitute the relevant set for comparison. One impact of modernization is the "increased participation in politics by social groups." We expect higher levels of electoral participation by Islamists as modernization progresses. One problem with this is that we actually see divergence among Islamists in Jordan. Some who were participating earlier have categorically refused to participate now. In some ways, the usefulness of the modernization approach depends on how closely we want to explain our case. If we are looking for a bird's eye view, the approach would appear to be well suited. If, on the other hand, we are seeking an explanation of variation among different groups from election to election, the modernization approach is not appropriate. Modernization is a macrostructural, longer term process.

Because Huntington writes in such broad sociographic terms, his primary unit of analysis is unclear beyond "the society" as a whole. His analysis centers on levels of social aggregates. As a result, his work is best suited to explaining levels of political participation across societies rather than variation in political participation across groups in a particular society.

### Conclusion

In comparing the three approaches discussed in this paper, it is apparent that modernization theory is best suited to capturing longer-term processes of social change. Rational choice approaches are the least well-suited to capturing social change. Political socialization is also not explicitly geared toward the study of

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social change. These two approaches are better suited to explaining variation across groups in a social “snapshot” or cross-section.

In studying the participation by Islamists in electoral politics, a potentially fruitful focus is the role of incentive structures facing individual politicians. Although the perspective based on strategic choices made by self-conscious political actors is appealing as an analytical tool, a formal model approach is not well suited to such study. The theory cannot be overly static. The approach must be flexible enough to accommodate the dynamic aspects of the understanding between the regime and groups in society. Typically, those situations in which Islamists have the choice to participate or boycott elections are in authoritarian regimes undergoing some sort of limited liberalization. This has been the case in Jordan and Egypt. Society seems poised at such times to head in novel and uncharted directions. Strategies, interactions, and outcomes are not predictable. Institutional rules are fuzzy. The orthodox rational choice approach is best suited to the opposite situation, namely, normal politics in a highly stable and ordered setting, clear actor choices, and repeated interactions (as discussed above in the rational choice section).

For practical research, the challenge would be to find a general notion of strategic choices in a changing environment without becoming too historical. This would have a rational choice assumption of survival or power maximization but would not be associated with the sort of stable environment of repeated interaction we normally associate with rational choice analyses. This approach can be described as a rational-choice based path-dependency process. The unit of analysis is the individual, and the focus is on Islamist politicians. By a path-dependent process I mean that decisions made and events surrounding an earlier historical period lead actors down a certain route and preclude or greatly diminish the probability of certain sets of outcomes in future periods. This is not a determinate process but one that emphasizes the role of earlier decisions in shaping and constraining future actions.

The rational choice approach remains appropriate because of the focus on individuals and the emphasis on conscious choices. The focus on individuals alone is not enough to make this research method rational choice because behavioralist studies have also chosen the individual as the unit of analyses. It is the combination of the individual unit of analyses with the emphasis on strategic decision-making that makes this closer to a rational-choice analysis. Tsebelis (1990) suggests that apparent irrationality may be rendered “rational” through a description of the nested games and multiple arenas in which players are simultaneously engaged. Tsebelis’s notion is overly static for the breadth of the cases a researcher would want to consider. Given a year to work, a researcher sticking dogmatically to Tsebelis’s approach would probably be able to analyze only the decisions surrounding one election.

It may be fruitful to extend the behavioral assumptions offered here by including elements of prospect theory (Levy, 1997). The essence of prospect

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theory is that individuals react to threats: they are more willing to engage in risk-taking behavior when faced with the prospect of a loss and are more risk-averse when given the prospect of a gain. This element of prospect theory can be added to the survival-seeking assumption to produce a relatively sophisticated behavioral assumption about Islamists. The researcher would then look for the presence of strong threats or sanctions when explaining major changes in the approach Islamists take toward elections.

One widely used distinction divides dissidents into moderate and revolutionary. This distinction restates the original problem of explaining participation, nonparticipation, and boycotts among Islamists. Moderate dissidents recognize that if they are too extreme in their positions against the regime, they are likely to face brutal repression; and that if they are too constrained by ideology or a commitment to voter support, they are likely to have to stick to extreme ideological positions as a way to ensure survival as a recognizable entity. In some ways, however, the moderate/revolutionary distinction only redefines the problem without solving it.

A useful starting assumption is that all groups of Islamists have both revolutionary and moderate tendencies. Earlier decisions and experiences tend to reinforce certain tendencies through reputational and other effects. In Jordan, for example, the Islamic Liberation Party in the 1950s took a hard-line, rejectionist position toward the Hashemite monarchy. Yet there was arguably a moderate tendency within the ILP also since it chose to nominate candidates for parliamentary seats and won some parliamentary representation. At the time, the ILP enjoyed significant popular support. In the period of martial law that followed the parliamentary experiment, the ILP was severely repressed. This meant that the ILP was removed from policy relevance, particularly in its ability to deal patronage-based favors to its constituent base. As a further consequence of the repression, the ILP was able to maintain its appearance in the domestic arena only on the basis of reiterations of its ideological position. This meant that when elections came around again thirty years later, the ILP's base of support had dwindled. Its position was only known by its hard-line rejectionism and to compromise on that would have been to compromise on its *raison d'être* and to alienate its remaining supporters.

In very practical terms, the research effort would be predominantly devoted to interview work. It would concentrate on the decisions of Islamist elites. It would be based on questions designed to elicit responses that revealed strategic choices. It would emphasize the role of previous decisions and strategic choices of the politicians and groups as shaping the strategic menu of choice in future decisions. It would seek to establish what individual Islamists perceived as the greatest personal threats. It would be important to get interviews with several members of each party bloc. Talking to members of the Muslim Brotherhood is quite easy in Jordan but somewhat less so in Egypt. Getting interviews with clandestine, violent, or revolutionary Islamists in both Jordan and Egypt would

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be hazardous to a researcher. Those countries have very active government security services known as the *mukhabarat*, which discourage such activities. However, most illegal dissident groups have representatives in Western countries, usually based in London. Thus, one route would be to speak to those expatriate representatives. This is not an ideal substitute because the representatives might be too far removed from politics on the ground to give insights into strategic decision-making.

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## Redeeming the Nation: Redemption Theology in African-American Islam

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### Why Redemption?

In a typical call to potential converts to the Black Muslim version of Islam, the prophet of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, proclaimed: “Islam is our salvation. It removes fear, grief and sorrow from any believer and it brings to us peace of mind and contentment.”<sup>1</sup> Four decades later, his son, W. D. Muhammad, the leader of the orthodox Sunni American Muslim Mission—the reformed offspring of the Nation—seems to deliver a similar message:

Allah, the God Creator of all, intends us to be saved by Al-Islam. . . . He, Allah, intends that we overcome our ethnic weaknesses with Al-Islam, that we establish ourselves in a spiritual way, in a moral way with Al-Islam. . . . Trying other things will be wasting time and will make more problems for us as a group.<sup>2</sup>

How is W. D. Muhammad’s message similar to that of his father? How is it different? What can possible similarities and differences tell us about the religious movements of the father and son? It was these questions that initially prompted me to trace the theme of redemption in the religious rhetoric of the Nation of Islam and its Sunni orthodox descendant, the American Muslim Mission.

The redemptive aspect of the religious theology of the Nation of Islam and the redemption rhetoric of the American Muslim Mission are among the most important continuities that connect these two movements to the rich tradition of African-American religion, or what C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya have termed the “black sacred cosmos.” This term was introduced by Lincoln and Mamiya in their book *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* with the intent to provide a systematic model for the study of the African-American religious worldview. The two authors stress that the black sacred

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<sup>1</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, New York: Temple of Islam, 1957), 2: 48.

<sup>2</sup> Warith Deen Muhammad, *Al-Islam: Unity and Leadership* (Chicago: The Sense Maker, 1991), p. 110.

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cosmos reveals itself through religious symbols and meanings that are unique to African-American religious experience. Among examples of symbols and meanings characteristic of the black sacred cosmos, Lincoln and Mamiya list: 1) the strongly redemptive worldview; 2) the ecstasism and emotional expressiveness of black worship and religious experience; and 3) the emphasis on “the necessity of freedom as an expression of complete belonging and allegiance to God.”<sup>3</sup>

The idea of the black sacred cosmos is the methodological springboard for my analysis of the redemptive motifs in the two most prominent African-American Muslim movements. I will supplement Lincoln and Mamiya’s concept with the methodological structure provided by Charles Long in his analysis of the black religious worldview in the book *Significations*. Like Lincoln and Mamiya, Long analyzes symbolic images at work in African-American religious experience. But he goes further and equates what he sees as three fundamental black religious symbolic images with methodological principles for the study of black religion. These symbols/principles are “1) Africa as historical reality and religious image; 2) the involuntary presence of the black community in America; 3) the experience and symbol of God in the religious experience of blacks.”<sup>4</sup> I will, essentially, follow Long’s suggestion that, through a careful examination of these—and possibly other—symbols/principles, a student of black religion can perceive and effectively interpret the uniquely African-American religious worldview.

I have chosen to examine the idea of redemption because of its centrality in the black sacred cosmos and black cultural milieu in general. I will not address the Christian doctrine of redemption at any great length, even though it is the basis for the redemption theme in the black sacred cosmos. I will argue that, even though the particulars of the African-American understanding of redemption have been changing throughout the history of the conversion of thousands of blacks to the Nation of Islam and during their later conversion to Sunni Islam, the thread of the redemptive worldview has pervaded all religious change. My understanding of redemption, therefore, transcends the particularities of its technical usage in Christian theology. My investigation into African-American Muslim redemptive religious thinking is aligned with Mahmoud Ayoub’s broad comparative definition of redemption in his important work, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*:

Redemption is used here in its broadest sense to mean the healing of existence or the fulfillment of human life. . . . This fulfillment through suffering is what this study will call *redemption*. The basic assumption is that all suffering can, in some sense, be regarded as redemptive where

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<sup>3</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Long, *Significations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 174.

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faith is present; the faith which gives hope against despair and fulfillment against the annihilation of death.<sup>5</sup>

The hope for redemption is a thread that connects the three elements of Long's threefold methodological structure. It is through redemption motifs that the African-American religious hope is animated in the images of Africa or the experience of God. Here, the particular images of Africa and the experience of God are necessarily redemptive because they inspire people to hope in the face of present suffering. Notably, the notion of redemption animates the fundamental African-American understanding of God as the Deliverer of the sufferers; it brings into the fundamental religious worldview of African-Americans hope for the salvation of those who suffer as well as the expectation of God's judgment over those who inflict suffering upon them.

It is also important to note that this theme, central to the black sacred cosmos, is almost nonexistent in Sunni Islam. A typical explanation for this is that the doctrine of redemption never developed in Sunni Islam owing to the absence of the doctrine of original sin in either the Qur'an or the *Hadith*: if there is no original sin, there is no need for redemption.<sup>6</sup> Thus the fact that the redemption motifs have been very strongly present in both the proto-Islam of Elijah Muhammad and the Sunni Islam of W. D. Muhammad points to the presence of culturally specific black religious expressions in both of these movements.

Significantly, despite the absence of the doctrine of original sin in Islam, there are numerous examples of redemptive theologies in Islam in general. These are primarily represented by various Shi'a groups. If the absence of the doctrine of original sin explains the virtual nonexistence of redemption theology in normative Sunni Islam, what is it that makes redemptive theology possible within Shi'ism? Such a comparative question can shed some light on the problem of African-American Muslim redemptive religious thought.

In Sunni Islam, the closest term for "salvation" is "success [*falah*]."<sup>7</sup> As generally understood, *falah* refers to one's success in this world, leading to success in the hereafter. What opens up the room for the development of redemptive thought in Islam is the perceived relation between suffering and success. It is important to keep in mind that suffering by itself is not seen here as a precondition to success. Rather, it serves as a test of a Muslim's faith in God. Furthermore, in Islamic tradition, people are tested by means of suffering and calamity commensurately with the strength of their faith.<sup>8</sup> This understanding of the relation between one's endurance in the face of distress and success in the

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<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism*, (The Hague, The Netherlands: Morton Publishers, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 24.

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hereafter is reflected in a *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad: “The greatness of the reward [of the man of faith] is proportionate with the greatness of his afflictions. For, if God loves a people, He visits them with afflictions. He who is content [with God’s will], with him will God be pleased, and he who is wrathful, divine wrath will he have.”<sup>9</sup>

Shi’a Muslims have based their redemptive theology on this general Islamic understanding of the relation between suffering and success. Such an interpretation was possible because both the Qur’an and *Hadith* provided a room for it. Indeed, there were many other factors that directed specifically Shi’a interpretations of the Islamic doctrine of success and suffering. Primarily, those interpretations derived from specific historical and cultural circumstances.

There is clearly room in Islam for a parallel African-American redemptive thinking. Whether or not, and how, African-American Muslims proceed with their own interpretation of such religious potential depends on specific questions that they would ask of their religion. In order to see why and how African-American Muslims invest their understanding of Islam with redemptive aspects, one should look for culturally specific forces behind African-American Islamic thought.

### Methodological Approaches

In their article “Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism as a Response to Racial Stratification,” Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer point to an oft-repeated assertion that 11:00 A.M. on Sunday morning is “the most segregated time in American society.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, despite a probably more oft-repeated Muslim assertion of racial brotherhood in Islam, the time of Muslim communal Friday prayer is also the most segregated time in the Muslim communities in the United States. Just as in the case of Christian America, this segregation of Muslim communities of different racial and cultural backgrounds is, to a great degree, a result of many cultural prejudices. The prejudices, however, are not the main factor in this segregation. They are only an important indication of a fundamental factor of ethnic stratification in American Muslim congregations—the differences in cultural and social backgrounds of the members of different Muslim groups in the U.S.

In the case of African-American *Sunni* Muslims, such difference from other ethnic Muslim communities is most obvious in the style of the *khutba* (sermon) given by black *imams* to their congregations and the response they get from their audience. In many of my visits to African-American *Sunni masjids* (mosques)

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<sup>9</sup> Muhammad b. Yazid b. Maja, *al-Sunan* (Cairo: al-Babi al-Halabi, 1373/1954), II: K 36, Ch. 23, H. 4026 as quoted and translated *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, “Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism as a Response to Racial Stratification,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretative Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1977), p. 272.

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during Friday congregational prayers, I witnessed a kind of tacit dialogue taking place between an *imam* and his audience during the sermon. Now and then I would hear members of the prayer group say in a lowered voice, responding to a certain point in a sermon, “*Allahu Akbar!*” (“God is Most Great!”) or “*Alhamdulillah!*” (“Praise be to Allah!”) or “Preach it!” or “Tell it, brother!” At other times, I would hear them respond by a quiet “Well, well!” One can never find such involvement on the part of the audience in an immigrant Muslim *masjid* in the United States or in a traditional Muslim congregation in most of the Islamic world.

This kind of involvement of the members of the congregation in the *khutba* given by an *imam* is an element of the black sacred cosmos carried into African-American Islam from black Christianity. It is a part of the cultural heritage that still lives on in the African-American Muslim community. Specifically, this is a part of what Lincoln and Mamiya characterize as “the ecstaticism and emotional expressiveness of black worship and religious experience.”<sup>11</sup> Yet it is very different from the similar emotional expressions in a black Christian congregation. In their new Islamic setting, such expressions are much more restrained. Even if there is any ecstaticism about them, it is never shown. What remains is the involvement in the form of very quiet responses that each believer seems to pronounce to herself/himself rather than intending it to be heard by others. Such change and continuity in the expressions of the traditional black sacred cosmos can be found almost everywhere in African-American Islam. An attempt to analyze a good number of such expressions requires a much more extensive study than the present project would allow. What is important here is that such continuity in style, however altered by a different setting, supports my hypothesis that African-American Islam belongs in the realm of the black sacred cosmos.

It has become a common assertion in the study of African-American religion that African-American Christianity was born out of a creative synthesis of Euro-Christian and African religious beliefs. In this view, the black sacred cosmos was forged by Africans in America through a creative adaptation of Christianity to their previous worldviews. In his book *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, Peter Paris summarizes this point by stating that “the only way Africans could make Christianity their own . . . was to Africanize it in much the same way as Europeans before them had westernized Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> This view is also expressed by other authors, such as John W. Blassingame and Albert Raboteau. In his book *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, Blassingame stresses that the process of African adaptation of Christianity in America was facilitated by many structural similarities between African and

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<sup>11</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 38.

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Euro-Christian religious systems.<sup>13</sup> Albert Raboteau, in his *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, proposes much the same explanation for the synthesis of African and Euro-Christian elements in African-American religion:

The differences between Protestant Christianity and African religious belief were, of course, much more numerous and much more important than the similarities, but there were enough similarities to make it possible for slaves to find some common ground between the beliefs of their ancestors and those of the white Christians.<sup>14</sup>

The precedent of the forging of African-American Christianity out of African and European religious systems points to the methodological basis of my work—namely, that Islam took as strong a hold among African-Americans as it did only through the latter's active incorporation of Islamic religious beliefs into their existing cultural and religious worldview, their black sacred cosmos.<sup>15</sup>

The African-American Islamic worldview has been created—just like the black sacred cosmos in African-American Christianity—out of the African-Americans' creative interpretation of a set of other religious (in this case, Islamic) beliefs according to the African-American worldview. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the important symbols of Africa as historical reality and religious image, the involuntary presence of the black community in America, and a culturally specific experience of God in the religious experience of blacks emphasized by Charles Long have continued to play a central role in the rhetoric of the leaders of the Nation of Islam and its Sunni descendant, the American Muslim Mission.<sup>16</sup> The characteristically black emphasis on a strongly redemptive religion as well as the emotional expressiveness of black worship and the stress on “the necessity of freedom as an expression of complete belonging and allegiance to God” pointed out in Lincoln and Mamiya's study have also continued to be central to African-American Islam in both of its forms analyzed here.<sup>17</sup> The specific interpretations of these symbols have surely changed in the course of development of the Nation of Islam and the American Muslim Mission. Equally importantly, the Islamic influence has also been instrumental in transformations that African-American

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<sup>13</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> According to the *New York Times*, in 1989 there were six million Muslims in the United States, one million of whom were black. The same source states that close to 90 percent of new converts to Islam are African-American. See Ari L. Goldman, “Mainstream Islam Rapidly Embraced by Black Americans,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1989, i, b-4. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, in 1997, African-Americans constituted 90 percent of all converts. See “US Muslims An Emerging Force,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1997, A-1.

<sup>16</sup> Long, *Significations*, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, p. 17.

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religious consciousness has undergone within the framework of black Islam. Yet, since worldviews are necessarily dynamic structures, continuities are only important in the context of change. My main task, therefore, is to attempt an interpretation of the apparent continuities and changes in African-American Islam in relation to the black sacred cosmos. I am employing here two methodologies that are flexible enough to account equally for such continuities and changes.

The first methodology that I am going to use is the “dialectical model” of the Black Church developed by Lincoln and Mamiya in their book *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*. The model presented by these authors is close to the “ethnic community-prophetic” model developed by Hart Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen in their important work *The Black Church in the Sixties*. They follow the general emphasis of the Nelsens’ model on the significance of the Black Church “as a base for building a sense of ethnic identity and a community of interest among its members.”<sup>18</sup> A similar emphasis is found in the classic study on the Nation of Islam by E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America*. Essien-Udom summarized his approach to the Nation as an attempt to analyze “the effort of thousands of American Negroes to resolve for themselves [the] fundamental problem of identity and to provide a context for their moral, cultural, and material advancement within the limits set by the American scene.”<sup>19</sup> While retaining this emphasis in the studies of the Nelsens and Essien-Udom, Lincoln and Mamiya have developed a model that takes into account a “constant series of dialectical tensions” within black churches. I selected the Lincoln-Mamiya model in view of its methodological flexibility: it allows one to account for changes in black religious movements. In the words of Lincoln and Mamiya, “The strength of the dialectical model of the Black Church is that it leads to a more dynamic view of black churches along a continuum of dialectical tensions, struggle, and change.”<sup>20</sup>

The Lincoln-Mamiya model presents six sets of dialectical tensions apparent in the development of black churches: the dialectic between priestly and prophetic functions, between other-worldliness and this-worldliness, between universalism and particularism, between the communal and the privatistic, between the charismatic and the bureaucratic, and between resistance and accommodation.<sup>21</sup> As Lincoln and Mamiya point out, it must be kept in mind that all of these six sets are inherently related to each other. Any separation between them is only useful for analytical purposes. I will single out the dialectic between the other-worldly and this-worldly aspects of the religious rhetoric in the Nation of Islam and the

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<sup>18</sup> See Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen, *Black Church in the Sixties* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1975), p. 11–13.

<sup>19</sup> E.U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. vii.

<sup>20</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12–15.

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American Muslim Mission for the purpose of deciphering the continuities and changes in the redemptive discourse of their leaders.

Lincoln and Mamiya explain the methodological aim of this particular dialectical set:

Other-worldly versus this-worldly projects the orientation that believers have toward the world. “Other-worldly” means being concerned only with heaven and eternal life or the world beyond, a pie-in-the-sky attitude that neglects political and social concerns. “This-worldly” refers to involvement in the affairs of this world, especially politics and social life, in the here and now.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note, for my study of the redemptive rhetoric of Elijah Muhammad and W. D. Muhammad, that

The other-worldly aspect, the transcendence of social and political conditions, can have a this-worldly political correlate which returns to this world by providing an ethical and prophetic critique of the present social order. In some instances eschatological transcendence can help to critique the present. One example of this is found in the mysticism of Nat Turner, whose eschatological visions directed him to attempt a strategy of violence to overturn the system of slavery.<sup>23</sup>

And, as I will later argue, the eschatological prophecies of Elijah Muhammad are also a relevant example since they resulted in a significant this-worldly action on the part of the members of the Nation of Islam, and this action was directed at improvement of their social and economic situation here and now. A similar, yet different, dialectic between this-worldly and other-worldly emphases is noticeable in the discourse of Elijah Muhammad’s son, W. D. Muhammad.

In order to analyze the shifts of emphases between this-worldly and other-worldly redemption rhetoric that occurred throughout the history of the Nation of Islam, the transformation of that rhetoric into the American Muslim Mission, and the subsequent changes that took place in the rhetoric after the 1975 “Sunni Revolution” of W. D. Muhammad, I will employ the typology of black sectarianism proposed by Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer in their article “Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism as a Response to Racial Stratification.”<sup>24</sup> Baer and Singer build their typology around a behavioral and an ideational dimension of groups’ responses to racial stratification. I have used their typology precisely because of its emphasis on social action in response to racial stratification since

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Baer and Singer's typology is much indebted to previous typologies of sects and cults by Milton Yinger and Bryan Wilson. See Baer and Singer, “Toward a Typology,” p. 263; Milton J. Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1970); and Bryan Wilson “A Typology of Sects,” in *Sociology of Religion*, ed. Roland Robertson (Baltimore: Penguin Press), 1969.



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such a response was and is very important to both movements analyzed in this work.

Baer and Singer base their typology on the assumption that different groups place different emphases in their response to racial discrimination. One such response can be instrumental, “that is, it may focus upon the attainment of concrete goals that are expected to improve the objective status of its adherents.”<sup>25</sup> Or, it may be expressive in that “it provides for the release of the emotional tensions accumulated through the experiences of its members in an oppressive situation.”<sup>26</sup> Baer and Singer propose to study both of these responses through the lenses of “attitudinal orientation” of a particular group. Among such orientations, they distinguish those aligned along a “positive” or “negative” axis. By “positive” orientation they mean cases when groups tend to be “attracted to or accept the values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant group,” whereas a group with “negative” orientation “rejects or is repulsed by them, at least conditionally.” They develop their typology further by proposing that “mainstream or established sects” are both instrumental and positive in their character while “messianic-nationalistic sects” are instrumental but negative. Similarly, “thaumaturgical/manipulationist” sects are expressive and positive, and “conversionist sects” are expressive but negative.<sup>27</sup>

By “established sects” Baer and Singer mean the groups “committed, at least in theory, to a reformist strategy of social activism which will enable Blacks to become better integrated into the political, economic, and social institutions of the larger society.”<sup>28</sup> A messianic-nationalist sect would combine “religious belief with an ideal of achieving cultural independence and political and even territorial self-determination.”<sup>29</sup> Further, they explain that “conversionist sects characteristically adopt an expressive strategy of social action, emphasizing the importance of various behavioral patterns, such as shouting, ecstatic dancing, and glossolalia (speaking in tongues), as outward manifestations of ‘holiness’ or ‘sanctification.’”<sup>30</sup> Finally, “thaumaturgical/manipulationist sects maintain that the most direct way to achieve socially desired ends . . . is by engaging in various magico-religious rituals or by acquiring esoteric knowledge which both provide an individual with spiritual power over himself and others.”<sup>31</sup>

As in the case of Lincoln and Mamiya’s model, I select this methodology because of its flexibility. Baer and Singer’s typology presents various types of reaction to racial stratification not as “pure” types but as emphases on different orientations of responses. For example, in the case of the groups I am analyzing here, it must be noted that the Nation of Islam in its early days had all four of the

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<sup>25</sup> Baer and Singer, “Toward a Typology,” p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

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orientations outlined by Baer and Singer. The narratives of the pioneers of the movements often recall Fard Muhammad's extraordinary magical abilities. Apparently, he attracted the attention of many of his followers by performing various acts of magic and promising them fast acquirement of esoteric knowledge. The emphasis on drastic conversion of one's entire lifestyle, including dress and diet, was also very important throughout the history of the Nation of Islam. Yet, what matters most for my analysis is that the Nation's primary orientation was toward total independence for its members and all African-Americans in general. It is particularly important for my study that Elijah Muhammad's redemptive rhetoric was chiefly directed at the attainment of such independence before *and* after the end of this world. Therefore, from the perspective of Baer and Singer's typology, the Nation of Islam would fall under the rubric of messianic-nationalist sects. On the other hand, the American Muslim Mission would tend to belong in the category of mainstream or established sects. The following typical integrationist statements by W. D. Muhammad illustrate this latter tendency quite well: "I am a patriot of . . . the true blood of the Constitution of the United States"<sup>32</sup>; "Now we are balancing [Elijah Muhammad's teachings] so we can develop an awareness in the children [of Islam] that they are not only members of a race but they are citizens—members of a nation—we want to grow in the full dimension of our country"<sup>33</sup>; "My greatest desire for our community AMM [American Muslim Mission] is to . . . one day hear that a Muslim, a real Muslim, a genuine Muslim from our Community has become a governor, or senator, or head of some big American corporation."<sup>34</sup>

A combination of Lincoln and Mamiya's dialectical approach to black religious groups and Baer and Singer's typology of sects can potentially be of great assistance in analyzing the redemption motifs in African-American Islam. Most important, such a combination can help to shed some light on the dialectics of this-worldly and other-worldly rhetoric in the Nation of Islam and the American Muslim Mission as these movements developed from a messianic-nationalist group toward a mainstream one. The next two sections of this work follow this general methodological framework.

### Elijah Muhammad's Theology of Redemption

In his article, "The American Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History," C. Eric Lincoln states, "Elijah Muhammad must be credited with the serious reintroduction of Islam to the United States in modern times, giving

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<sup>32</sup> From an interview with Dirk Sager, correspondent for Station ZDF, German Television, "Communicating for Survival," World Community of Islam News Release, 27 December 1979. See C. Eric Lincoln, "The Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History," in *The Muslim Community of North America*, ed. Earle H. Waugh, Baha Abu-Laban, and Regula B. Qureshi (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), p. 291.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291–292.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

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it the peculiar mystique, the appeal, and the respect without which it could not have penetrated the American bastion of Judeo-Christian democracy.<sup>35</sup> What enabled Elijah Muhammad to accomplish this enormous task of (re)introduction of a new religious system? One answer lies in his ability to adapt his message to his followers' religious background, which, indeed, was his own background, too. Elijah Muhammad was able to interpret foreign terms of Islam in a way that made sense to his adherents. This is the only way that a new religion can be successfully introduced to any culture. Significantly, Elijah Muhammad's son, W. D. Muhammad, points to this when he evaluates his father's teacher, Fard Muhammad, as a "genius of theology." He comes to this conclusion because of Fard's apparent ability to present his message in terms familiar to his African-American audience. W. D. Muhammad says,

I believe he was a genius of theology, with reference to his symbolic nature. The really interesting thing about Fard Muhammad—which Elijah Muhammad himself recognized—is that this man was introducing himself as a Christ figure to displace the "old" Christ that Christianity gave black people.<sup>36</sup>

W. D. Muhammad's observation hints at an overall strategy, employed by Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad, of using already familiar Christian religious terminology in order to introduce a religion whose central doctrine was repudiation of Christianity. More important, the founding fathers of the Nation of Islam were using Christian themes as they had been developed in the black sacred cosmos. Two such themes are particularly important here: African-American identification with Israel and the understanding of God as both the deliverer from their present condition of suffering and a fellow sufferer. Both of these motifs are important for the development of the Nation's eschatological doctrine in which salvation was promised to black people precisely because they were the chosen people and it was believed that they were to be redeemed by a person who was both God the deliverer and God the fellow sufferer.

The story of Elijah Muhammad's conversion to Fard Muhammad's religion sheds a great deal of light on the eschatological dimension of the Nation's theology. Elijah Muhammad met Fard in the early fall of 1931, more than a year after Fard had begun his prophetic career in the Detroit ghetto. Elijah Muhammad recalls:

[W]hen I heard what was said [about Fard], I wanted to meet Him. And I finally met Him, and when I met Him, I looked at Him and He, well, it just came to me like this, that this is the Son of Man that the Bible said that or prophesies that will come in the last days of the world, and I couldn't get that out of me. And I shook His hands with Him, and I said to

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221

<sup>36</sup> Clifton Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Transition from Separatism to Islam, 1930–1980* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press Inc.), p. 108.

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Him, I said, you are the One that the Bible prophesies that will come at the end of the world under the name Son of Man and under the name The Second Coming of Jesus. . . . He looked at me a little stern, and then He smiled, and He put His head down to me, beside my head, then whispered in my ear and said these words. . . . ‘Yes I am the One, but who knows that but yourself, and be quiet.’<sup>37</sup>

In *The Supreme Wisdom*, the definitive text of the Nation’s theology, Elijah Muhammad recounts his first meeting with Fard somewhat differently:

I asked Him, ‘Who are you, and what is your real name?’ He said ‘I am the one that the world has been expecting for the past 2,000 years.’ I said to Him again, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘My name is Mahdi; I am God, I came to guide you into the right path that you may be successful and see the hereafter.’<sup>38</sup>

The second version of the story probably better resembles Fard’s original words. Here, Fard speaks of himself in specifically Muslim terminology. He calls himself Mahdi, the proclaimer of the end of the world. In addition, he uses such distinctively Islamic terminology as the “right path” (*as-sirat al-mustaqim*, the words from the opening *surah* of the Qur’an, *al-Fatiha*, which every Muslim recites in every prayer and which refers to Islam as the straight/right path leading to success—that is, paradise) and “success” (*al-falah*, one of the central words of the Islamic call to prayer). Significantly, the notion of success is probably the closest to the Christian notion of redemption.<sup>39</sup> Yet, it is a characteristic indication of his belonging to the traditional black sacred cosmos that Elijah Muhammad never emphasized this Islamic “talk” of success. More important for him was what he and his followers regarded as an obvious fact—namely, that Fard Muhammad represented the Second Coming of Jesus. Here, Elijah Muhammad equated the Islamic “Mahdi” with the Christian “Second Coming of Jesus.”

My interpretation of Elijah Muhammad’s Christianized version of Fard’s words coincides with C. Eric Lincoln’s observation that “Elijah Muhammad was almost single-handedly responsible for the deification of Fard.”<sup>40</sup> Significantly, there is little evidence that Fard ever taught his own divinity. Until his disappearance in 1934, it was a common belief among the members of the sect that Fard was their prophet, not God. Even Elijah Muhammad, who, as he himself said, had discovered the divinity of Fard in 1931, did little to deliver this knowledge to his brothers in faith. He declared that Fard “didn’t allow . . . [him]

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<sup>37</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The History of the Nation of Islam* (Cleveland: Sectarius Publications, 1993), pp. 1–2.

<sup>38</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, Inc), p. 15.

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... to go far with that kind of teachings while he was present.”<sup>41</sup> It was only after Fard had left that Elijah Muhammad began to teach “the truth” about his “Allah.” And since Fard was now God, Elijah Muhammad emerged with the mantle of his “Allah’s” last prophet.

Elijah Muhammad’s interpretation of Fard Muhammad’s divinity shows his genius for acquiring religious power. More important, it demonstrates that he based his acquisition of this power on a central element of the black sacred cosmos that he shared with his cobelievers—an expectation of the coming redemption. Elijah Muhammad’s whole upbringing as a son of a Baptist preacher in Georgia prepared him for his pivotal meeting with Fard Muhammad:

I had from a child up wanted to learn the scripture, because my father was a preacher, and I always from a child up wanted to help him or to take his place one day as a preacher. And so, I was always studying the Bible, and I had read much about the coming of the judgment and the coming of God and Jesus returning to resurrect the dead and all like that; I had studied much of that. And so, all of His talk and teachings corresponded to what I learned of the scripture; and therefore I had become one of His . . . hundred per cent converts.<sup>42</sup>

It appears that Elijah Muhammad accepted Fard as the Second Coming of Jesus because this interpretation corresponded to his expectations of the Savior who would come to deliver the black people from the bondage of their present suffering.

The story of Elijah Muhammad’s conversion and his subsequent interpretation of Fard’s divinity reflects a major problem in any hermeneutics of the Black Muslim image of God. It is clear that Elijah Muhammad saw Fard Muhammad as God. Yet, according to Elijah Muhammad, this God was different from God the Creator. Above all, Fard Muhammad was a human being who was born on 26 February 1877 somewhere in the Middle East. The emphasis on Fard’s humanity points to the central aspect of the Nation’s experience of God. Evidently, the Black Muslim theology does not present—in fact, it opposes—any notion of God resembling the monotheistic transcendental deity of Christianity and Islam. Rather, it constructs the notion of the black people as a *collective* deity. In this view, every single representative of the Black Nation is God. While every black person is God, he or she is also a fully physical being. Through this physicality, every single black god is mortal. There is no afterlife in this picture. The collective deity of the Black Nation is, however, imperishable. The redemption of the Black Nation comes through this collective deity. In this context, what Fard Muhammad is pronouncing with his coming to America is the time for the collective redemption of the collective unity of black gods.

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<sup>41</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The History of the Nation of Islam*, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

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Elijah Muhammad based his claim of Fard's divinity on biblical sources. In a typical statement, he declares:

These are the facts and this is according to the Bible that the Son of Man would come and not the son of a spirit. And this I want to make clear to . . . those who believe in the spirit being God and not Man. Main base of it all now to show forth who's God and He's not who they thought He was, that He's in man and man is God.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, Elijah Muhammad stressed that Fard's knowledge of the exact time of the end of the world was the decisive sign of his divinity:

No prophet has been able to tell us the hour of the judgment. Not one but He, the great all wise God, Allah. He is called the 'Son of Man,' the 'Mahdi,' the 'Christ.' . . . The knowledge of the hour of judgment is with the Executor only.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant here that Elijah Muhammad calls Fard the Executor, not the Creator. It appears that for Elijah Muhammad, God the Creator is different from God the Executor. Elijah Muhammad speaks of this as a self-evident fact:

We all know that there was God in the beginning that created all these things and do know that He does not exist today. But we know again that God the person of God continued until today in His people, and today a Supreme One (God) has appeared among us with the same infinite wisdom to bring about a complete change.<sup>45</sup>

The Nation's prophet talks here about the people of God who "until today" have represented the person of God. This people is the black people, the "Supreme Rulers of the Universe" from whom the person of God the Executor had emerged. Fard Muhammad appears here not as a single transcendent God, but as God the Executor, a representative of a nation of gods who is entrusted with the mission of redeeming his Nation. He symbolizes the divine unity of God and His people, which translates into the understanding of God as a collective deity consisting of all black people. Therefore, for the Black Muslims, God's "person" is they themselves, and they are God. This unity is the foundation of the very existence of this world since, without the black people, there is no God, and without God, no black people.

The Black Muslim notion of deity is certainly very different from either the Christian or the Muslim monotheistic construction. How, then, can one explain the possible origins of this strange idea? In my view, the most logical explanation to this hermeneutic problem lies in the popular religious worldview of black Americans. I propose that the notion of Fard Muhammad as a representative of the collective deity had its roots in the traditional black sacred cosmos. Two aspects of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 7–8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

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the black sacred cosmos are important here: the fundamental distinction between God and Jesus Christ and the understanding of the black people as the chosen people, or the new Israel.

In his *Significations*, Charles Long states that Jesus Christ has been experienced in black religion “more in the form of a dema-deity than a conquering hero.”<sup>46</sup> Both forms—the experience of Jesus as a dema-deity and a conquering hero—are present in the Black Muslim image of Fard Muhammad. Here, Fard Muhammad is a black brother who not only taught Elijah Muhammad but also dined and lived in his house. Even more important, Fard Muhammad is a god who, just like many others of his followers, experienced material depravity, persecution, and imprisonment by the authorities. In this image of Fard Muhammad as a fellow sufferer and understanding companion, he comes very close to the image of Jesus in the black sacred cosmos.<sup>47</sup> But Fard Muhammad is also depicted in Black Muslim theology as the Savior of the Black Nation of gods—hence the importance of the central holiday in the Black Muslim calendar—the birthday of Fard Muhammad, commemorated every year on 26 February as the “Savior’s Day.” This centrality of Fard Muhammad’s image as Savior is reflected in the closing part of Elijah Muhammad’s speech on the Savior’s Day on 26 February 1965:

At this time, I must say . . . that we have a Savior that is Born, in the Person of Master Fard Muhammad, to save us, and He’s well able to do it. And I ask all of you, my people, to unite and come and accept Islam, unite with your people; it will unite you with your people all over the world . . . as I say unto you in the name of Master Fard Muhammad, the Almighty God, Who was to come and did come, your Savior and my Deliverer.<sup>48</sup>

It is significant that Elijah Muhammad here connects Fard’s role as Savior and Deliverer with the unification of the Black Nation. This establishes a direct relationship between the Nation’s understanding of God with the Black Muslim doctrine of redemption. From the standpoint of Black Muslim theology, redemption could only be achieved through unification of the Nation of gods. This would be evidenced primarily by their knowledge of their own true divine identity. According to Elijah Muhammad’s teachings, the black people lost their knowledge of who they really were because the race of “white devils” concealed it from them. It was Fard Muhammad’s task to relate to the black people of America—the Bible’s “Lost Sheep”—that they were the descendants of the glorious tribe of Shabazz, a part of the original black civilization who created the Earth itself.<sup>49</sup> He also taught that a mad scientist from the tribe of Shabazz had genetically engineered the race of white mutants who did not possess any positive human

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<sup>46</sup> Long, *Significations*, p. 181.

<sup>47</sup> See Long’s discussion of Jesus as a dema-deity *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>48</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *Blood Bath Teachings, the Suicide of Malcolm X* (Cleveland, OH: Sectarius Publications, 1993), p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, p. 103.

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qualities, only lust for power and money.<sup>50</sup> The creation of the white race was the Black Muslims' version of original sin for which the black race had been punished by 6,000 years of white domination. This domination was supposed to come to an end through the agency of Fard Muhammad. According to Elijah Muhammad, Fard designated 1914 as the starting point of the Armageddon—the final battle between the forces of good (the black Nation of gods represented by Fard as God the Executor) and the evil race of devils. But he postponed the actual battle to give the blacks time to unite around the cause of defeating the devil. This made redemption conditional upon their unification.

In his book, *Kinship, Religion and Rituals in a Nigerian Community*, Jacob K. Olupona explains that, in the West-African context, conversion to other religions implies a necessary compromise between a new religion and a traditional cosmological framework:

In the African context . . . the old worldviews are not entirely destroyed as whole systems and replaced by other complete worldviews. It is better to say that elements from the worldviews that make sense are added while those which have proven inadequate are deleted. The process occurs in all cultures, for worldviews are dynamic organisms. Conversion, then, represents both a continuity and discontinuity with the old traditions.<sup>51</sup>

In the conversion of Elijah Muhammad and his followers, too, the elements of continuity and discontinuity were present. Building on Olupona's statement, I would also argue that the elements of a newly-introduced worldview will "make sense" only when interpreted in terms corresponding to those already familiar to potential converts. I, therefore, propose that the Black Muslim understanding of Fard's divinity and the redemptive unity of all the black people had to correspond to and resonate with similar themes in the black sacred cosmos. One of these important themes was the biblical story of the Exodus.

In his work, *A Fire in the Bones*, Albert Raboteau stresses the "intensity of slaves' identification with Israel."<sup>52</sup> According to Raboteau, the story of the Exodus "functioned as an archetypal myth for the slaves."<sup>53</sup> He explains that this story had "blunted the sharp edge of the question of why God had permitted slavery: We are Israel; God frees Israel."<sup>54</sup> Charles Long supports this observation when he argues that the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt served as "an archetype which enabled the slave to live with promise."<sup>55</sup> This identification with Israel placed the African-Americans in the position of moral authority over white America. It also

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 31, 103.

<sup>51</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, as quoted in Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 42.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>55</sup> Long, *Significations*, p. 179.



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assigned special significance to Jesus as a deliverer of the black people.<sup>56</sup> I would argue that it was this notion of the African-Americans as the chosen people that enabled Elijah Muhammad to construct his theology of black gods and white devils. It was also from this that the figure of Fard Muhammad as the deliverer of the righteous had emerged.

It must be stressed, however, that in projecting the origins of the Black Muslim ideas of the Black Nation of gods and its redemption into the traditional black sacred cosmos, I do not intend to say that this was a mere copy of the traditional symbols derived from the story of the Exodus. Rather, this was a development of those symbols shaped by the specific spiritual needs of Elijah Muhammad's followers, the majority of whom inhabited the world of the black metropolitan ghetto. The questions to which these people sought answers by reference to their religion presented a markedly different variation on the same questions that their slave ancestors had sought earlier. To be sure, the fundamental questions that face the religion of the oppressed remained the same here, too. Like their ancestors, the Black Muslim's central problem was assessing their humanity in the context of racism—the problem of double-consciousness. This very fundamental issue of the black sacred cosmos has undeniably been the most important force at work in the shaping of the Black Muslim notion of the black collective deity.

In the final analysis, the symbol of the united Black Nation as a collective divinity represented the Black Muslim response to the problem of double-consciousness. It provided an answer to both of the problems stressed in Long's model of black religion: It 1) established a solid identity grounded in the historical and religious image of Africa, and 2) promised redemption from the "involuntary presence of the black community in America."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the Black Muslim theology of redemption through a collective deity managed to combine answers to these two problems in a single symbol of God's chosen people who themselves became a collective God. Fard Muhammad's double image of conquering hero and fellow sufferer is important here because it reinforced this fundamental notion of redemptive unity of people and God.

In their article, "Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism," Baer and Singer identify five characteristics of a messianic-nationalist sect:

- 1) acceptance of a belief in a glorious Black history and subsequent 'fall' from grace; 2) adaptation of various rituals and symbols from established millenarian traditions; 3) messianic anticipation of divine retribution against the White oppressor; 4) assertion of Black sovereignty through the development of various nationalist symbols and interest in territorial separation or emigration; and 5) rejection of certain social patterns in the

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<sup>56</sup> See Albert Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Long, *Significations*, p. 174.

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Black community, including family instability, female-headed households, and male marginality.<sup>58</sup>

All of these features played a vital part in the Nation of Islam. The Black Muslim racial doctrine projected a history of a glorious past and a “fall” of the black civilization. The coming redemption of the black race was explained as a rectification of all the wrongdoing of the white race that appeared in the wake of the fall of the original civilization. This Black Muslim picture of paradise-lost-and-found constituted the center stage for their theology of redemption. The Nation’s doctrine of redemption was based on the collective remembrance of what the originating myth of the natural unity of the black people and its God described as the true divine nature of the Black Nation. This racial—and, subsequently, religious—unity was perceived as the key to Black Muslim redemption. The appeal of such symbolism of redemptive divine unity was grounded in the black religious tradition of a highly redemptive worldview, which was reflected in the symbols of Israel and God as fellow sufferer and deliverer. It was reinforced by specifically Black Muslim nationalist symbols reflected, for example, in the very name of the movement, the Nation of Islam. All of the above observations allow us to safely place the Black Muslim movement in the category of messianic-nationalist sects.

According to Baer and Singer’s classification of messianic-nationalist sects, the Nation of Islam would be characterized as “instrumental” in its strategy of social action and “negative” in its “attitudinal orientation.”<sup>59</sup> The “negative” characterization of the Nation’s “attitudinal orientation” can be explained through its racial theory and subsequent stress on the necessity of separation from the larger American society. Still, does the Nation’s religious system fit characterization of an “instrumental” sect? More specifically, was the Nation’s redemptive response to the conditions of racial discrimination in any way “instrumental”? Lincoln and Mamiya’s statement about the dialectic between this-worldly and other-worldly orientations in the Black Church can help us to find an answer to this question.

It seems that the Nation of Islam was clearly a millenarian movement. Its theology was built around the notion of God’s imminent judgment over the white devils and restoration of the original black civilization. In many ways, it continued the tradition that Timothy E. Fulop has termed “millennial Ethiopianism.” In his article, “‘The Future Golden Day of the Race’: Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1877–1901,” he explains:

Millennial Ethiopianism . . . is the most distinctively African-American millennial tradition. . . . In contrast to white millennial theories that emphasize America, Anglo-Saxon culture, and the radical break with the Old World, millennial Ethiopianism posits a pan-African millennium, a

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<sup>58</sup>Baer and Singer, “Toward a Typology,” p. 265.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

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future golden age continuous with a glorious African past accompanied by God's judgment of white society and Western civilization.<sup>60</sup>

The notions of the redemptive unity of the black people and God's judgment over the whites constitute the Nation's continuation of this earlier tradition. However, the particularities of the Black Muslim development of this tradition place it in a separate category. Such particularities become evident when seen through the lenses of the dialectic that according to Lincoln and Mamiya, exists between this-worldly and other-worldly orientations in the Black Church.

One of the most important developments in the Black Muslim doctrine of redemption was its emphasis on physical redemption in the lifetime of its members. The religion of the Black Muslims lays special emphasis on rejection of the life after death. Elijah Muhammad taught that one of the most gruesome crimes committed by the whites against the blacks was the Christian deception about a final justice in the afterlife. According to the Nation's prophet, this aspect of the Christian teaching was nothing but a deadly deception devised by the white devils in order to institutionalize their domination over the superior black race. It taught the blacks to love their white "brothers" despite all humiliation and pain that the latter inflicted on them. It taught them to obey their masters and humbly wait for the time to enter heaven, which they would reach only after death. To counter this deception, Elijah Muhammad explained that waiting for justice after death was pointless.<sup>61</sup> Instead of waiting for redemption in heaven, Elijah Muhammad called for redemption on earth.

Elijah Muhammad described heaven and hell as conditions of present life. The white man had, he claimed, oppressed the black race by teaching it about a false heaven somewhere in the sky while the whites themselves enjoyed the real heaven here on earth. Islam, Elijah Muhammad clarified, "makes hell and heaven not two places, but two conditions of life."<sup>62</sup> "Stop looking for anything after death," he admonished his followers; "death settles it all. Allah has made it clear that heaven on earth constitutes: money, good homes and friendship in all walks of life."<sup>63</sup>

Elijah Muhammad's injunction to seek "heaven on earth" coincided with his prophecy of the imminent onset of Armageddon. One of the most striking examples of such a vision of a coming millennium is given in his *Message to the Black Man in America*, in which Elijah Muhammad declared the mid-1960s as the most likely time for the final battle of good and evil. "The years 1965 and 1966," he explained,

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<sup>60</sup> Timothy Fulop, "'The Future Golden Day of Race': Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1977-1901," in *African-American Religion: Interpretative Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy Fulop and Albert Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1977), p. 231.

<sup>61</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *Supreme Wisdom*, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>63</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *The Message to the Black Man in America* (Cleveland: Sectarius Publications, 1993), p. 15.

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“[are] going to be fateful for America, bringing in the ‘Fall of America.’”<sup>64</sup> In the years after 1967, the exact date was never mentioned. But the stress on the immediacy of the Day of Judgment remained.<sup>65</sup> The combination of this belief in the approaching judgment and the notion of an earthly millennium prompted the Black Muslims to enforce a strict moral code whose primary goal was a striving toward recreation of the perfect state of the bygone black civilization here and now. This led to a great endeavor for economic success—a kind of new “Protestant Ethic—on the part of the Nation’s members.”

The importance of this striving for economic development of the Black Muslim community is reflected in the words of Malcolm X:

If a man is lazy let him go to the Christian Church. But if you are ambitious and hard working, come to the Temple of Islam. . . . We want you to wear Islam in your heart and expand our stores. . . . In Islam everyone works. . . . There is no room for laziness and no room for ignorance in the Nation of Islam.<sup>66</sup>

In my own interviews, I have been informed by several former members of the Nation of Islam that the notion of economic and social advancement and, what was associated with it, the stress on personal and community discipline was a central, if not *the* central aspect of the Nation’s values.<sup>67</sup> Undoubtedly, this emphasis on economic improvement was much influenced by the Black Muslim expectations of the coming millennium.

The last point made above leads me to conclude that Elijah Muhammad’s other-worldly millenarian rhetoric constituted an instrumental response to racial stratification because it primarily focused on promoting a striving toward improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Black Muslim community here and now. The Nation’s doctrine of redemption embodied in itself both other-worldly and this-worldly tendencies. Its other-worldly aspect was primarily represented by the expectation of the imminent end of the present world. But the Black Muslim rejection of an afterlife, together with its stress on economic success, was drawing the movement in the direction of this-worldly action. In the end, the combination of the two tendencies resulted primarily in work aimed at active improvement of the community’s economic and social conditions before the arrival of the expected millennium.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>65</sup> See Martha Lee, *The Nation of Islam as a Millenarian Movement* (Lampeter: Mellen House, 1989), p. 59–60.

<sup>66</sup> Malcolm X, as quoted in E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America* (New York: Doubleday Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 180–181.

<sup>67</sup> Personal Interview: Abdul Malik Muhammad, rec. Office of Showcase, Inc., 14 March 1994, Philadelphia, and Kareem Abdul as-Samad, rec. Masjid Allah, 12 March 1994, Philadelphia.

### **W. D. Muhammad's Rhetoric of Redemption**

After the death of Elijah Muhammad in February 1965, his son Wallace Muhammad (now Warith Deen Muhammad) was appointed Chief Minister of the Nation of Islam. This initiated the gradual transformation of the twentieth century's most significant black nationalist organization into an orthodox Islamic religious movement. The transformation involved every element of the Nation's ideology and structure. Following the dictates of Wallace Muhammad, the movement was brought into alignment with Islamic Sunni orthodoxy within a few years after his ascent to power. The movement now pledged its allegiance to the strictly monotheistic Islamic doctrine of God; Fard Muhammad was no longer presented as a manifestation of the black collective body of God. Accordingly, Elijah Muhammad ceased to be revered as the last messenger of Allah, giving place to full recognition of the prophethood of the revered last messenger of Islam, Muhammad. The racial doctrine of white devils and black gods, too, was rejected. In addition, W. D. Muhammad eliminated the Nation's millenarian doctrine and stressed his allegiance to Sunni Islamic theological understanding of the end of the world.

W. D. Muhammad's Sunni revolution is indeed remarkable if one takes into account that Malcolm X had failed to inspire a similar change in the landscape of African-American Islam during the months after his conversion to Sunni Islam. He was unable to attract a significant number of African-Americans to his orthodox Muslim Mosque, Inc. Seeing that his efforts were not very fruitful, Malcolm bitterly exclaimed, "I had known . . . that Negroes would not rush to follow me into the orthodox Islam which had given me the insight and perspective to see that the black men and white men truly could be brothers. America's Negroes . . . are too indelibly soaked in Christianity's double standard of oppression."<sup>68</sup> Undoubtedly, Malcolm X hinted not only at the failure of secular and Christian blacks to accept Sunni Islam but also at the Black Muslim's inability to break out of the "double standard of oppression" that they had inherited from their Christian counterparts.

The drastic changes initiated by W. D. Muhammad came as a surprise to many veterans of his father's movement. At Elijah Muhammad's death, the Nation was at the peak of its membership and at its most stable economically and socially. Elijah Muhammad's teachings seemed so successful that any possibility of drastic change in the Nation's doctrines appeared almost irrational. W. D. Muhammad's own mother, Clara Muhammad, displayed just such a sense of amazement at her son's disbelief in her husband's teachings. When she first heard about it in the late 1950s, she exclaimed, "What's wrong with you, boy? Are you crazy?"<sup>69</sup> Considering all of

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<sup>68</sup> Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 364.

<sup>69</sup> From W. D. Muhammad's interview with Clifton Marsh. See Clifton Marsh, *From the Black Muslims to Muslims* (Metuchen: the Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 118.

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the above, one might ask, how was it possible for W. D. Muhammad to bring the Nation of Islam and its proto-Islamic nationalist ideology so rapidly and so effectively into line with orthodox Islam?

Lawrence Mamiya's analysis of the Islamization of the Black Muslim movement, first published in his article "From Black Muslim to Bilalian: The Evolution of the Movement," sheds some light on possible forces that helped the Nation to accept W. D. Muhammad's revolution. Mamiya's approach to this issue is based on the Weberian thesis of the existence of a dialectical relationship between the development of religious ideas and socioeconomic life. He hypothesizes that a fundamental change in "the internal socio-economic conditions of the Nation . . . contributed to the shift in ideology."<sup>70</sup> According to the Weberian concept of "elective affinity," potential converts will select out of a set of religious beliefs the ideas they find most relevant to their situation.<sup>71</sup> This concept seems to apply to the changes that took place within the Nation of Islam. Typical of many former Black Muslims, my interviewee Imam Abdul-Malik R. Ali of the Masjid al-Taqwa in New Jersey informed me that he had become Muslim in the late 1960s because he was inspired by Elijah Muhammad's teachings of economic and social self-help.<sup>72</sup> Many other interviewees seem to confirm that they saw Elijah Muhammad's teachings of personal and communal discipline and economic self-sufficiency as the chief lessons of his message. It seems that the Nation's soldiers tended to select or focus on the idea of economic uplift and, consequently, made enormous efforts to achieve economic and social success. Apparently, as Mamiya points out, due to such ideologically motivated economic striving, "the Nation of Islam, which began as a lower-class movement, [became] increasingly middle class."<sup>73</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude, in line with Mamiya's research, that the Black Muslim's worldview changed when their values and socioeconomic conditions began to match those of the middle class. By the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Elijah Muhammad sanctioned some moderation of the Nation's most radical dogmas. Martha Lee, in her study of the Nation's millenarian doctrine, observes that in the articles he wrote and speeches he made from 1970 to 1975, Elijah Muhammad "[toned] down his anti-White rhetoric."<sup>74</sup> The call for the immediate coming of the millennium was also toned down in the years following the failure of Elijah Muhammad's prophecy of the end of the world in 1965 or

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Mamiya, "From Black Muslim to Bilalian," in Michael J. Koszegi and Gordon J. Melton, *Islam in North America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1992), pp. 170–173.

<sup>71</sup> Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1946, as it is used in Lawrence Mamiya, "From Black Muslim," p. 245.

<sup>72</sup> Personal interview: Imam Abdul-Malik R. Ali, rec. Masjid Allah, 22 November 1993, Philadelphia.

<sup>73</sup> Mamiya, "From Black Muslim," p. 245.

<sup>74</sup> Martha Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, p. 73.

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1966. However, these changes were not very dramatic. What was it that kept the Nation from undergoing a drastic transformation in respect of their official beliefs?

Elijah Muhammad's charisma was probably one of the most important factors. The Black Muslims remained profoundly loyal to Elijah Muhammad's ideology until the day he died. The change in the socioeconomic conditions of the Nation's members produced a situation in which they could respond to alternatives more suited to their now middle-class status. But such alternatives had to be presented under the umbrella of Elijah Muhammad's charismatic authority. W. D. Muhammad's status as a son and legal heir to Elijah Muhammad's religious command provided him with the necessary aura of his father's charisma. W. D. Muhammad skillfully used this charisma as he introduced his Sunni Islamic reforms as the logical continuation of his father's teachings.<sup>75</sup> This justification for the reforms coincided with the Black Muslims' new interests, which now tended toward a more open stance toward the larger American society. Sunni Islam, introduced by W. D. Muhammad, offered just such a possibility of ending the movement's isolation in which the new middle-class element no longer had any stake.

W. D. Muhammad's ambition to lead the Nation toward Orthodox Islam did not coincide with his appointment as the leader of the Nation. Rather, it was a decades-long process, a spiritual evolution from a Black Muslim to a Muslim. By the mid-1960s, W. D. Muhammad's awareness of the enormous differences between Elijah Muhammad's teachings and those of the Qur'an prompted him to accept the ideas and practices of orthodox Islam and, thus, to become a devout Muslim. But he taught his followers how to become Sunni Muslims through a gradual introduction of a combination of new interpretations of the religious tenets of his father as well as the Bible and Qur'an. Such a combination was a necessary one. While the constant reference to the Nation's teachings provided the necessary sanction from the religious authority of Elijah Muhammad, the use of biblical imagery corresponded with the religious worldview of his followers that was deeply rooted in the black sacred cosmos of African-American Christianity. "What I have done," W. D. Muhammad stated, "is simply talk on the double meaning of Elijah Muhammad's teaching."<sup>76</sup> And, just like his father before him, W. D. Muhammad began explaining this double meaning in biblical language. It was only several years later that he abandoned the language of the Bible completely and switched to the Qur'an.

This employment of biblical imagery is reflected in W. D. Muhammad's use of the Book of Revelation as a metaphorical basis for the new understanding of the

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<sup>75</sup> An example of such justification is a story that W. D. Muhammad told the movement's newspaper, *Muslim Journal*, in 1993. He explained that even Elijah Muhammad did not really deny the Islamic notion of life after death, for just before his death he confessed to his son, "Son, there must be something after death." *Muslim Journal*, 10 December 1993, p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Muslim Journal*, 12 November 1993, p. 15.

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Nation's development. In this allegorical construction, W. D. Muhammad proposed that the period under the leadership of his father was similar to the "First Coming of Christ." This was the "First Resurrection" of black Americans to their original faith. He further linked the new stage of reforms introduced by him to the "Second Resurrection," which continued and complemented the first one. W. D. Muhammad explained:

In the First Resurrection God began to raise us out of graves by beginning to unveil the Truth. In the Second Resurrection the Truth is not just unveiled in a sense of scriptural interpretation, but we come to a kind of a natural interpretation . . . We have been taught many things in the teachings of the Great Master W. F. Muhammad [Fard Muhammad] and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad that prepared us for this time.<sup>77</sup>

Significantly, W. D. Muhammad linked the importance of the second stage in the development of the movement to the further strengthening of the community of Muslims in the United States:

There are important parallels in the study of Christ's life and death and the study of our former life as a people and our death as a people in the West. These parallels are seen further in his scriptural resurrection and our resurrection as a people in the body of Christ of the Second Coming, which is the Nation of Islam. The Second Coming is a gift from the Divine Hand. Revelations [sic] 21:1-3.<sup>78</sup>

W. D. Muhammad envisioned that his community would strengthen itself through a reintegration into mainstream American society. In order to rationalize this change in the Nation's isolationist worldview, he reinterpreted Elijah Muhammad's initial explanation of the biblical apocalyptic vision of Ezekiel's Wheel as the Mother Plane guided by Allah in the person of Fard Muhammad to destroy the white world. In the new interpretation, W. D. Muhammad explained that Ezekiel's Wheel was actually a scriptural representation of a divinely revealed community, the Nation of Islam: "Ezekiel saw this body as a wheel (Nation of Islam) in a wheel (world community), the Revelator saw it as a city manifested down from the sky, indicating a divinely revealed community."<sup>79</sup> Through such allegorization of the biblical vision, W. D. Muhammad stressed that, in the time of the "Second Resurrection," the African-American Islamic community needed to reconsider its relations with the mainstream society. He explained that Elijah Muhammad had achieved the "First Resurrection" by isolating his community from the outside world. This separation helped the Black Muslims to acquire a new identity and to form a strong sense of community. It also promoted

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<sup>77</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 April 1975, p. 13, quoted in Martha Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, p. 83.

<sup>78</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 2 May 1975, p. 1, quoted *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>79</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 April 1975, p. 13, quoted *ibid.*, p. 83.



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the positive effects of the Black Muslim work ethic. However, as W. D. Muhammad argued, once this remarkable progress was attained, the Black Muslims needed to move toward a more open society and share their success with others. This, he stressed, was the ultimate “Mission of Islam.”<sup>80</sup>

W. D. Muhammad stressed the importance of unity within the Muslim community. Only a unified community of Muslims could survive reintegration into the American mainstream. And, indeed, only a unified community of Muslims could help their Christian brothers and sisters to improve their social and economic standing. He envisioned that the message of Islamic monotheism was the sole means of unifying his community; the message would also pave the way for the African-American Muslim integration into the worldwide Islamic community, the *Umma*. Indeed, W. D. Muhammad’s stress on Islamic monotheism resulted from his belief in the Sunni understanding of God. In his article in the *Muslim Journal*, the central newspaper of the American Muslim Mission, he says that he felt that “the first thing . . . [he] . . . had to change was the [Black Muslim] idea of God.”<sup>81</sup> He felt so “because Islam is ‘Tauheed.’ We believe in the Oneness of God, and the whole ramification of that we call ‘Tauheed.’”<sup>82</sup> In light of this central dogma of Islam, he rejected the Nation’s belief in Fard Muhammad as a representative of the collective divinity of blacks.<sup>83</sup> This also prompted him to reject the prophethood of Elijah Muhammad.

Besides realigning the Nation’s teachings with the norms of orthodox Islam and incorporating the movement into the wider society, W. D. Muhammad reinterpreted the Black Muslim race theory. He initiated this transition in the ideology of the Nation of Islam, when, on 18 June 1975, four months after Elijah Muhammad’s death, he made this revolutionary statement: “There will be no such category as a white Muslim or a black Muslim. All will be Muslims. All children of God.”<sup>84</sup> In an already familiar manner of allegorization of Elijah Muhammad’s teachings, he explained that the white man himself was not the devil, rather it was his racist state of mind. In May 1975, he wrote: “I’m not calling those people [whites] ‘devil.’ I’m calling the mind that has ruled those people and you ‘devil.’”<sup>85</sup>

It is important to note that W. D. Muhammad combined this reinterpretation of the Nation’s race theory with a stress on the Muslim community’s role in eliminating racism. His reinterpretation of the race theory went hand in hand with

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<sup>80</sup> *Muslim Journal*, 19 February 1994, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Muslim Journal*, 12 November 1993, p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> W. D. Muhammad reinterpreted Fard’s position in the Nation as that of its founder, rather than its God. He argued that Fard did not introduce himself as God, and that this was solely Elijah Muhammad’s invention. In an interesting detail, W. D. Muhammad recalled asking his mother, Clara Muhammad, “Momma, did Fard tell you he was God?” When she said, “Well, no,” he exclaimed, “He didn’t tell you he was God, so why should I say he is God?” *Muslim Journal*, 20 August 1993, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> *Nashville Tennessean*, “Rule Switch Allows Whites As Muslims,” 19 June 1975, as quoted in Lawrence Mamiya, “From Black Muslim,” p. 249.

<sup>85</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 23 May 1975, p. 16, as quoted in Martha Lee, *The Nation of Islam*, p. 85.

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his revision of the Nation's eschatology. Following the Nation's oratorical tradition, he explained these ideological changes in biblical terms. In a June 1975 article, he stated:

You can destroy the devil by destroying the mind that the person has grown within them. If you can destroy the mind, you will destroy the devil . . . . Today the Nation of Islam (the body-Christ) is destroying the devil without hands by casting him into the Lake of Fire (Divine Truth and Knowledge).<sup>86</sup>

As Martha Lee points out in her work, *Nation of Islam: an American Millenarian Movement*, W. D. Muhammad's "flirtation" with Christian imagery was brief. As in the case with other biblical symbology, "after emphasizing the new doctrine [of the Second Resurrection] for a period sufficient to insure its general acceptance, Wallace began to stress the scripture of the Qur'an."<sup>87</sup> Yet, even though the American Muslim Mission of W. D. Muhammad is now fully aligned with the tenets of Sunni Islam, one can notice that the rhetoric of its leader is still very much influenced by themes specific to the black sacred cosmos; only now these themes are articulated in Qur'anic terms. Now, the theological views of W. D. Muhammad and his followers are strictly Islamic. They do not differ in any way from any characteristically mainstream interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna that one can find elsewhere in the Sunni Muslim world. However, one can note a significant difference in W. D. Muhammad's interpretation of the general Islamic tenets, not in his formal but in his "informal" theology, his religious rhetoric aimed at a meaningful implementation of the Islamic message in the lives of African-American Muslims. This continues the long tradition in African-American Islam: Black Muslims previously employed the biblical language because they had inherited it from the black sacred cosmos of their ancestors; now African-American Sunni Muslims use the symbolic language of the Qur'an in the same manner.

In the context of the present study, it is particularly important to note that W. D. Muhammad's rhetorical application of the universal message of the Qur'an continues a long tradition of African-American Christian interpretation of the Bible, the tradition which C. Eric Lincoln calls "informal theology." In his preface to Henry Mitchell's article, "Black Preaching," Lincoln explains:

Black religion has had the anomalous distinction of depending upon a body of theology unsympathetic to its basic presuppositions for its interpretation of the faith. Black religion begins by affirming both the righteousness of God and the relevance of black people within the context of Divine righteousness. White theology upon which black Christianity depended has given little attention to the black individual or to the collective black experience in its concern with what it considered the

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<sup>86</sup> *Muhammad Speaks*, 11 July 1975, p. 13, as quoted *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

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significant aspects of the faith. . . . The theological enterprise was . . . addressed to white interests and to the white condition because (despite its origins) Christianity was white and Western and only incidentally concerned whatever lay beyond the Western pale. . . . [Therefore, the only way that] the Black Church survived [was] through the informal theology of itinerant preachers carrying on the traditions of the oral historians of the Old Country.<sup>88</sup>

The historic African-American “informal theology” has traditionally provided interpretations that filled the black experience in America with religious meaning. Thus are the traditionally black interpretations of Christian symbolism reflected in the African-American identification with the biblical story of the Exodus and the understanding of Jesus as both God the deliverer and God the fellow sufferer.

In his informal theology, W. D. Muhammad continues the same tradition of interpreting a general religious tradition, now provided by the definitive texts of Islam, in accordance with the present experience of the black community in the United States. What is important here is that he continues to address the kinds of religious meanings that are central to the black sacred cosmos. Indeed, one such central theme is that of redemption.

Significantly, W. D. Muhammad does not propose any new theology of redemption. Sunni Islam does not contain the idea of redemption per se. This corresponds to the Islamic concept of *fitra*, the primordial nature of any human being. According to this doctrine, Islam is the natural religion of any human being. In the context of this doctrine, the Christian idea of original sin and subsequent redemption contradicts Islamic teachings. The complete “Sunnization” of the former Nation of Islam made it impossible for W. D. Muhammad and his followers to continue any discussion of redemption in strictly theological terms. This motif of the black sacred cosmos is, however, still very prominent in his rhetoric.

In line with his complete allegiance to Sunni orthodox Islam, W. D. Muhammad evokes the redemption motif in strictly this-worldly terms when he addresses the current social and economic situation in the black community. He employs Muslim terminology when he talks about the lack of social and economic mobility in the African-American community as a “punishment from Allah”:

I believe our race is under punishment. It is punishment for big crimes. . . . The big crime: The more freedom, the worse the behavior. We forgot the high and noble aspirations of those who suffered slavery and Jim Crow, those who worked for our sake and for our future. We forgot the high principles and great moral and civil aspirations and stayed to have fun on the weekends. We treated those sacrifices and that suffering as though it was for us to have fun weekends in these big cities of America.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Experience in Religion* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974) p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> Warith Deen Muhammad, *Al-Islam: Unity and Leadership* (Chicago: The Sense Maker, 1991), p. 106.

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As in the traditional black sacred cosmos, W. D. Muhammad's "redemption talk" centers on the redemption of the black community. In line with Sunni orthodoxy, W. D. Muhammad stresses that this crisis is never a result of some bad constitution of the human nature. Rather, this is a result of the lack of confidence in one's innately positive nature. Therefore, when he talks about redemption, he talks about the necessity to strive to be a good Muslim, the necessity to live up to one's positive *fitra*. Here, again, he primarily refers to the problems of the community, "our ethnic weakness" as he calls it:

Allah, the God Creator of all, intends us to be saved by Al-Islam. . . . He, Allah, intends that we overcome our ethnic weakness with Al-Islam, that we establish ourselves in a spiritual way, in a moral way, and in a material way with Al-Islam. . . . Trying other things will be wasting time and will make more problems for us as a group.<sup>90</sup>

Through the lenses of the Islamic doctrine of *fitra*, W. D. Muhammad stresses a traditional Islamic idea according to which every human being has the potential to be God's most perfect creation since this is the way human beings were originally created.<sup>91</sup> He explains that, although the way toward "excellence" is open to every human being, Muslims are more likely to achieve it since they belong to the most "excellent religion."<sup>92</sup> Alluding to a well-known Qur'anic verse (3:110), he says that "Muslims are the best community. This is what Allah says of us, and Muslims need to be told that more and more."<sup>93</sup>

Continuing Elijah Muhammad's emphasis on the importance of work ethic, W. D. Muhammad says that, according to the Qur'an, the African-American Muslims' endeavor to always be the "best community" requires them to adhere not only to high spiritual, intellectual, and moral standards but also to high economic standards. And continuing Elijah Muhammad's emphasis on Islam's this-worldly orientation, W. D. Muhammad connects the Islamic eschatological vision with economic uplift:

Allah tells us to seek the end, the paradise by utilizing what "Allah" has made available to me. That means to receive the promised reward of the "Hereafter" and be in good shape with Allah, I have to use my moral force, my spiritual force, my intellectual force, and everything in my possession. I should be marshalling everything in my resources to make progress toward the 'Hereafter' (the Destiny).<sup>94</sup>

And, just like his father before him, he stresses that the religion of his community requires discipline, which, in turn, is bound to bring improvement to the black community: "Understand . . . that our religion insists upon certain

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> W. D. Muhammad, *Al-Islam*, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup> *Muslim Journal*, 16 December 1994, p. 15.

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disciplines that if we bought [*sic*] them, we would be a success even if we don't understand much religious mystery. . . . If we would pay the price of disciplines, we would start to be a success overnight."<sup>95</sup> In W. D. Muhammad's vision, the necessity for discipline is directly related to the Islamic idea of *fitra*, for it both requires the discipline and assures that people are able to withstand it.

Continuing his usage of the concept of Islam as the natural religion of all human beings, W. D. Muhammad constructs the notion of a separate Muslim identity around this idea of *fitra*. In a typical statement, he reinterprets the old Black Muslim concept of original black people in Islamic terms, evoking the notion of *fitra*:

We were told that our original self is a righteous Muslim and we were told that the black man is the . . . original man. . . . The only truth in that statement is the truth that every man can appreciate—no matter what color your skin might appear. Because what it is talking about is not the physical color . . . it is talking about the original consciousness. . . . When we are talking about man's first state of mind, when he is not distrustful, but he is trustful, he doesn't have any knowledge, the world has not given any knowledge to him yet, he has no light in his brain . . . he doesn't even have a flashlight of learning. . . . [All what he has is faith]. . . . So he's a black child in that sense. . . . He's the original. . . . I hope you understand: faith is the beginning of life, not knowledge but faith.<sup>96</sup>

Here, the idea of Islam as a natural religion constitutes the foundation for the establishment of a distinct African-American Muslim identity. W. D. Muhammad says: "An African-American Muslim is not to be just typical of African-Americans."<sup>97</sup> What makes an African-American Muslim different is his/her attachment to the natural religion of any human being, Islam. "Al-Islam should be seen as your distinction," stresses W. D. Muhammad.<sup>98</sup>

According to W. D. Muhammad, the African-American Muslims' identification with Islam places a special responsibility on them. Even though a minority, they can exemplify a positive lifestyle for the rest of the African-Americans: "Do you think people are saved by a majority? Study history. Societies have always been saved by a minority, a select few."<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it is through this Muslim Umma that the broader African-American community can be saved. The importance of the new Muslim community for the redemption of African-Americans is stressed in the very name of the reformed Nation of Islam, "the American Muslim Mission." W. D. Muhammad explained this new name in 1980 as a reflection of the Muslim term *da'wa*, the spread of faith. Significantly,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Audiotape: Warith Deen Muhammad, *From Africa to America*, 1993.

<sup>97</sup> Warith Deen Muhammad, *Al-Islam*, p. 102.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.110.

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here he repeats his emphasis on the importance of community: “The Qur’anic term for Mission is ‘DA-WAH.’ . . . Literally, the term Da-wah signifies involvement in those concerns affecting the life of society, and the need to stay on top of issues.”<sup>100</sup>

The term *da’wa* reflects the new Qur’anic language employed by the Sunni Muslim African-American leader. But his emphasis on the importance of *da’wa* in the life of the African-American community as a whole is an indication of the continuation of the strongly communal character of the black religious worldview that has been carried into black Sunni Islam from the Nation of Islam and the black religion before the Nation. It is directly related to the notion of the African-American Muslim community as the redeemer of the broader black community. The continuation of this important theme signals that, even if the use of the biblical language of redemption is no longer evident in W. D. Muhammad’s rhetoric, the emphasis on the motif of redemption or the uplift of the African-American community still occupies a central place in it. The motif is now expressed in a radically different language. Previously, the idea of the redemption of the community was expressed in the symbol of God the Redeemer, but now the redeeming transformation of the community is associated with the religion of al-Islam. As in the case of the Nation of Islam, the main emphasis remains on communal redemption.

Through a gradual reinterpretation of the Nation’s religious tenets, W. D. Muhammad has transformed it into a mainstream religious movement. His movement’s orientation now resembles that of mainstream African-American Christian denominations (such as the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., the National Baptist Convention of America, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church). The American Muslim Mission is now committed to assisting its members to better integrate into the American economic, social, and political mainstream. The mainly middle-class membership of the movement has tapped into the general paradigm of the American Dream. This new status of the movement seems to fit fully Baer and Singer’s typology of mainstream or established sects.<sup>101</sup>

In the case of the American Muslim Mission, Baer and Singer’s typology can be usefully supplemented by a thesis proposed by Allen Richardson in his important work *Strangers in This Land*. In his survey of the development of Islam in the United States, Allen Richardson summarizes his findings by saying that the “growth of Islam in the United States, both among born Muslims and converts, is fully denominational.”<sup>102</sup> He specifically points to the American Muslim Mission as a movement developing in a denominational manner. This agrees with

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<sup>100</sup> *Bilalian News*, 23 May 1980, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Baer and Singer, “Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism,” pp. 263–264.

<sup>102</sup> E. Allen Richardson, *Strangers in This Land: Pluralism and the Response to Diversity in the United States* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1988), p. 150.

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Richardson's overall hypothesis that "new religions" in America "have begun to conform to the mainstream American denominational model."<sup>103</sup>

Richardson sees the development of denominationalism in America's "new religions" as an adaptation to American realities. The denominationalism of "new religions" is, in part, a response to the fundamental contradiction in the American views on identity and diversity. According to Richardson, this contradiction results from the coexisting tendencies in American society to assimilate the "new religions" into its religious mainstream and to tolerate their differences at the same time. As a result, religious minorities still fear assimilation into the "melting pot" of American religion and culture. This provokes the growth of denominationalism in America's "new religions," including Islam. Ironically, or rather significantly, the "new religions" seem to follow a very mainstream denominational model of preserving themselves against assimilation into the mainstream.

In my view, Richardson is correct in observing that the group of W. D. Muhammad is a denomination. But I do not think that other groups in African-American Islam and American Islam in general conform to the same model. Richardson fails to notice that the case of the American Muslim Mission is unique in African-American Islam. (And it is even more unique in the context of American Islam in general.) There are many African-American Sunni Muslims who do not think of themselves as being a part of any particular group. Even when they belong to a group, such a group may not enjoy sufficient influence on a national level to justify their designation as denominations. The uniqueness of W. D. Muhammad's movement consists in its long history of maintaining a very strong and separate Black Muslim, and later African-American Muslim, identity. This identity has been linked to the highly centralized organization of the Nation of Islam and the powerful charisma of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. W. D. Muhammad has inherited from his father Elijah Muhammad not only the organization but also the latter's position as a leader of this community. Even after his very dramatic move to decentralize the movement in 1985, there are still hundreds of mosques (*masjids*) that continue to accept his authority and are affiliated with his organization. Individual Muslims in these *masjids* likewise continue to associate themselves with W. D. Muhammad.

Such denominational development of the movement has had even more significant implications. W. D. Muhammad's group seems to have the potential to become a focal point of an even larger movement, possibly a denomination, in African-American Islam. The possibility of the rise of a large African-American Sunni movement has been stressed, for example, by a prominent leader in this community, Imam Siraj Wahhaj.<sup>104</sup> Such possibility is promoted by the legacy of the black consciousness movement that has been instrumental in forming the ideological framework for the self-consciousness of the black Americans as an

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>104</sup> Personal interview with Imam Siraj Wahhaj, rec. Masjid al-Taqwa: New York, 19 December 1993.

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ethnic group. This ethnic self-consciousness, combined with Sunni religious homogeneity, is a viable basis for the formation of a larger African-American Muslim movement, which might also develop into a denomination.

W. D. Muhammad's rhetoric of redemption seems to confirm that his movement occupies a distinct position among the American Sunni Muslim groups. The rhetoric reflects his interpretations of normative Islamic doctrines, those interpretations emerging as a result of encountering culturally and socially important questions that people face today in American society. Significantly, such interpretations are given in terms that seem to correspond to the stream of cultural continuities that, in the end, constitute a black religion and a black religious worldview.

In the end, it should be reemphasized that the kind of religious rhetoric of W. D. Muhammad examined here is not a theology in a formal sense. It is, rather, an "informal theology" that is aimed at deriving from the foundational Islamic texts meaning that is specifically applicable to the African-American community. Significantly, W. D. Muhammad does not develop any additional understanding of salvation or resurrection after death. His rhetoric is strictly this-worldly. Here, the idea of redemption is played out in the context of the general African-American Muslim striving for economic, social, and political uplift of the black people here and now.

### Conclusion

In this work, have tried to reflect on the African-American Muslim interpretation of the issues of injustice and suffering. My primary finding is that both the Nation of Islam and the American Muslim Mission have extended that interpretation and tried to find in their religion an inspiration for overcoming their conditions. They have done so in response to the issues they have faced in their lives. Indeed, their interpretation always bore a specific reference to their heritage as blacks in America and their present situation as an underprivileged minority. The questions of social injustice and suffering seemed always to be central to their religious thinking—hence my interest in the redemption motifs in the rhetoric of leaders of the two movements.

In his *Black Theology of Liberation*, James H. Cone poses a question central to the black religious understanding of suffering and salvation: "Suffering is the badge of true discipleship. But is it appropriate to speak the same words to be oppressed?"<sup>105</sup> The most characteristic answer to this question in the long tradition of black interpretations of Christianity—and, as I hope to have demonstrated here, Islam—is an unequivocal "no." The most important reason for this lies in the black experience of suffering. As Cone explains, "Black theology realizes that it is man

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<sup>105</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), p. 55.



### *Yuskaev: Redeeming the Nation*

who speaks of God; and when that man is black, he can only speak of God in the light of the black experience.”<sup>106</sup> Black interpretations of suffering have prompted the African-American people to traditionally associate themselves with the biblical story of the Exodus and the suffering but redeemed people of Israel. From here emerged their close, even intimate, relationship with God the Deliverer personified by Jesus. The figure of Jesus was particularly important because he too was a suffering servant.

The tradition of identification with the chosen community of Israel continued in Elijah Muhammad’s theology of the black people as chosen people. Their personal relationship with God—both deliverer and suffering servant—developed in the Nation’s doctrine of black people as a collective deity who is delivered from the bondage of white domination by one of their own, the Nation’s Savior and Elijah Muhammad, Personal Deliverer. In his son’s interpretation of the redeeming role of Islam for African-Americans, the American Muslim Mission is being constantly reminded of its status as the “best community.” Indeed, every individual member of this community has the potential of becoming the zenith of God’s creation, for this is what the Islamic doctrine of *fitra* underscores. The personal, and indeed redeeming, relationship of God to this community is emphasized by W. D. Muhammad when he says that it is “Allah’s Will . . . that this religion of ‘Al-Islam’ and the Book of ‘Qur’an’ are destined to be our Savior.”<sup>107</sup>

The continuation of the redemption motif in African-American Islam points to an important conclusion: the need to study Islam among the black people of America through the lenses of the larger tradition of black religion. This underscores the value of Charles Long’s proposal for an academic study of black religion, which he envisions as a study of “initial ordering of the religious experiences and expressions of the black communities in America.”<sup>108</sup> Long makes the significant observation that “such study should not be equated with Christianity, or any other religion for that matter. It is, rather, an attempt to see what kinds of images and meanings lie behind the religious experience of black communities in America.”<sup>109</sup> I hope that in my study, which essentially follows the general lines of Long’s proposal, I have been able to demonstrate that such an approach is indeed viable and useful.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> W. D. Muhammad, *Al-Islam*, p. 102.

<sup>108</sup> Long, *Significations*, p. 174.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## Jailhouse Religion: The Challenge of Corrections to the American Muslim Community

*Frederick M. Denny and the Late Olga Scarpetta\**

The growth of the Muslim community in America is a major story. Although estimates of the Muslim population in the United States vary widely, there are probably at least 4.5 million. This growth has resulted from immigration, conversion, and birth rates. Immigration has brought the greatest numbers of Muslims to these shores, from a wide variety of national and ethnic backgrounds in traditional Islamic countries in the Middle East and South Asia, as well as Bosnia, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Conversions to Islam by United States citizens of long standing have been especially heavy among African-Americans, although substantial numbers of other Americans have also converted and continue to do so.

There is in America now a veritable microcosm of the global Ummah, living in social, legal, economic, and cultural circumstances markedly different from traditional Muslim contexts. This is the greatest imaginable challenge to Muslims on these shores, who are struggling to maintain an authentically Islamic way of life in a secular, pluralistic environment where the separation of church and state prevails.

Among the specific challenges to Muslims in America are avoiding interest-dominated financial institutions, securing *halal* (similar to the Jewish idea of kosher) food, providing Islamic education for youth, working toward fair representation in the media and textbooks, avoiding intimidation and harm in school and in the workplace, exercising rights of prayer and religious holidays, maintaining proper relations between the sexes, providing Islamic mortuaries and cemeteries, protecting the community from proselytizing efforts of other religions (notably Christianity), creating and maintaining relations with other faiths, resisting assimilation to American cultural and social norms, and learning how to participate in the political process at local and broader levels. This list

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### *Denny and Scarpetta: Jailhouse Religion*

concerns challenges from outside the Muslim community, mostly. But there are intracommunity issues that must be addressed, as well. Among these are sectarianism, ethnic divisions, questions about women's rights and roles, disagreements about the proper use of mosques (e.g., whether social and recreational activities belong), and the need to establish an Islamic environment for community life and build strong associations and organizations that tie local communities into wider fellowships for cooperation and for achieving long-range goals.

One of the greatest challenges is addressing in Islamic ways the plight of Muslims caught up in the American criminal justice system. The problem of Muslims in prison is at the same time a measure of the power and the promise of Islam for large numbers of Americans who are in extreme distress. As is well known, a disproportionately large number of minorities and poor people are involved in the American criminal justice system. One source reported that "almost one in four (23 percent) black men in the age group 20–29 is either in prison, jail, on probation, or parole on any given day." (Mauer, 1990: 4). That proportion is even higher today. Very many people of the so-called American "underclass" have come to view time in prison as an unavoidable part of life.

A major question in corrections policy is whether prison should rehabilitate or punish, not to mention get dangerous and "offensive" (Irwin, 1986: 23–25) people off the streets and under guard. There appears to be a prevailing attitude in American corrections today that rehabilitation efforts have been a failure. Consequently, the emphasis seems to be increasingly on punishment and warehousing. Bishop George D. McKinney Jr. of the Church of God in Christ, and working out of the San Diego area, has recently written:

Not long ago we went to a metropolitan facility in San Diego and asked some of the inmates: "What kind of rehabilitation is going on in this facility?" A boy answered our question with a question of his own: "What the hell is rehabilitation?" He went on to describe his personal experience in that particular correctional institution. "What we get here pure and simple," he said, "is punishment. That's why no record is kept that shows that any progress is being made by anybody. What this place is about is not rehabilitation and not correction. It's about punishment." (McKinney, 1993: 43)

A leading Muslim prison official, Imam Warithu-Deen Umar, who is Area Coordinator for Ministerial Services for the State of New York Department of Correctional Services, has argued that rehabilitation of many offenders, even when there are such programs, is not possible because they have not yet been *habilitated*. That is, many incarcerated persons have little or no idea of how to cope in American society. They may be functionally illiterate, inexperienced in sustaining meaningful and mature relations with the opposite sex, ignorant of basic moral values, without parental or other appropriate adult role models, disconnected from society beyond the street, bred in violence, accustomed to

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murder and brutality as a way of life, addicted to drugs, unknowing about basic etiquette in job-seeking as well as lacking job skills, unable to fill out an application or handle a checking account and bill-paying, ignorant about basic hygiene, and generally unsocialized into the kinds of contexts that provide the resources and channels through which a human being can achieve significant personal and occupational goals.

Nevertheless, in the New York State Department of Correctional Services there continues to be a commitment to rehabilitation, especially in the area of religion. In a 1991 “Report to the Commissioner, of the Task Force of Religious Leaders on the Practice of Religion in Corrections,” the Rev. Dr. Earl B. Moore, Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, said:

Put most succinctly, the statement upon which we are agreed holds that the practice of religion in the correctional setting is virtually a *sine qua non* to Corrections’ essential purpose of returning to the community the offender who has begun his or her rehabilitation and is thereby equipped for reintegration as a responsible and contributing member of the community. Religion is uniquely qualified to serve this purpose. (Moore, 1991: 1–2)

The report then proceeds to specify ways and means by which the State of New York might improve religious programs and staffing in a growing prison population marked by increasing religious diversity. The emphasis throughout the six-page report is on striving to develop a humane and just environment both for inmates and staff, noting the dual roles of institutional chaplains as advocates for the well-being of prisoners, according to the beliefs and practices of their denominational constituencies, and of the officers of the correctional system itself, as New York chaplains are civil service employees. The high rank of Dr. Moore, an African-American Baptist minister with a congregation in Manhattan, places him just below the Commissioner and, thus, confers on Ministerial Services staff unusual powers, especially in emergencies. This situation is not the norm in the rest of America. Imam Warithu-Deen Umar is on Dr. Moore’s Albany staff and supervises *all* chaplains in the northern sector of New York State.

Most Americans and many others around the world are by now familiar with the story of Malcolm X’s conversion to the Nation of Islam while in prison. A large number of African-American males, especially, have since discovered Islam in prison, so that a fair proportion of Muslim African-Americans can now trace their conversions to a corrections origin, either personally or through the influence of others who embraced Islam in prison and became role models. There have been and continue to be a variety of sectarian groups in America’s prisons with some kind of self-declared commitment to Islam—among them Sunnis, Shi’is, Ansarullah, Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Five Percenters, New World of Islam, Hanafis, and others. The Nation of Islam, although not considered authentically Islamic by mainstream Muslims, has had a

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long-standing concern for prisoner's religious rights and has achieved a record of successful litigation that has had important consequences for the religious rights of other prisoners, too. (See Moore, 1991; Haddad and Smith, 1993).

Even with the progress made in achieving Muslims' religious rights in prison, there is still much to do in the large variety of jurisdictions in America. If progress has been notable in places like New York State and Connecticut, for example, other regions are still in the pre-Islamic stage of awareness and policy or somewhere in between. Among the rights that Muslims seek to exercise are: to observe regular prayer times, including the crucial Friday noon *salat*; to be served *halal* food that is also nourishing and balanced (pork and pork by-products are common in prison diets); to wear Islamic dress and grow facial hair; to use perfumed oils for Friday *salat*; to observe the Ramadan fast (which requires special meal times in the evening and predawn) and the Feast of Fast-Breaking; to have Islamic literature available; to receive professional-level Islamic guidance, instruction and counseling, and other things.

In New York State, a leader in prison religious services, there are now more than thirty-two full-time professional Muslim prison chaplains and a record of humane regard for prisoners' religious rights and needs. New York City, a separate corrections jurisdiction from the state, has a similar record, with a current Muslim chaplaincy staff of ten full-time *imams* and *da'iahs* (female Muslim chaplains). Its head chaplain, Imam Luqman Abdush-Shahid, with his office at Rikers Island Jail, as Director of Ministerial Services for the City of New York Department of Correctional Services, is also supervisor of the chaplains representing all the other religions in city and county facilities. (It should be noted that "chaplain" is considered by Muslims to be merely an occupational title, with no necessary connection with Christianity. Muslim chaplains prefer the title of *imam*, of course, but seem resigned to having it take hold in an evolutionary process. In fact, Muslim chaplains are usually addressed as *imam* so-and-so anyway, just as a Jewish "chaplain" would be addressed by his congregation as "rabbi.")

In April 1993, out of some 22,000 inmates at the Rikers Island facility, some 4,000 to 5,000 were Muslims. In 1975 there were 1,325 Muslims in the New York State prison system, out of a total population of 14,000. In 1993 the New York State prison "ummah," as it is called by *imams*, was 10,363 (as of January 1993), according to the state's own statistics. That amounts to 17.1 percent of New York State's total of 62,000+ inmates. Since 1975, then, the total inmate population has swollen over 400 percent while the Muslim proportion has increased by nearly 800 percent. As Imam Warithu-Deen Umar remarks in his report, from which we have taken these numbers, "This [i.e. Muslim] population continues to increase at a rate of nearly 1 point of 1 percent each month. Allahu Akbar!" (W. D. Umar, *The Sijjin Connection*, Jan. 1993, 3)

A great challenge to the Muslim community in America as a whole, as well as to the rest of society, is the disappointingly high recidivism rate of released

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Muslim inmates. Even so, it is not as high as the overall recidivism rate. We have raised this issue with Muslim leaders and received differing explanations. One view is that recidivists were not real or “good” Muslims to begin with, just “jailhouse Muslims” who converted for protection and a certain prestige as well as special privileges. There appears to be some justification for this view in some cases. But another reason for recidivism, according to corrections *imams* and, increasingly, acknowledged by *imams* in the general Muslim population, is the lack of prerelease and postrelease programs and facilities like halfway houses and job-training centers as well as qualified human resources to staff them. Also lacking are continuous, well-coordinated contacts between Muslim inmates and mosque congregations, a factor that has made an important difference in some Christian prison ministries. (See McKinney in Askew and Wilmore, 1993: 49–54).

The strong bonds that are often forged within a prison-based Muslim community, once left behind, are too often not replaced by a similarly disciplined structure of living and learning within what was also a severely regimented and tightly structured prison environment. Mosque congregations and other Islamic agencies are beginning to recognize the urgent need for action and resources to help fellow (and usually new) Muslims in distress, but relatively little in the way of concrete programs has as yet been established. One reason for inaction is ignorance of the situation. Other reasons include racism, ethnic and class differences between immigrants and African-Americans, especially, and fear of getting involved with criminals and the criminal justice system.

There is a contradiction here, obviously, between these attitudes and the strong tradition of Islamic beliefs and values about brother-sisterhood in the Ummah and seeking always to help fellow Muslims in whatever way is best. But immigrant Muslims are mostly separated from Muslims in American corrections by differences in education, residential location, occupational status, income, customs, strong family traditions of honor and loyalty, and a desire to be identified with white, middle-class society. As one African-American prison *imam* sadly related to us, involvement of Muslim immigrants—who often have educational, financial and social resources to help—would involve them, individually and as congregations, with the American underclass. Moreover, many immigrants come from countries where the police are greatly feared, for good reason. Also, Muslim immigrants, just like American Christians, do not want to run the risks of helping criminals—many of whom are indeed dangerous, unstable and seemingly incapable of either rehabilitation or habilitation.

There is also a certain shame in admitting that coreligionists are incarcerated in large numbers. It has traditionally been a source of shame and embarrassment for American Jews to have members of their community in prison. So also does it appear to be for middle- and upper-middle-class Muslims. There used to be a

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fair number of Jews in American prisons up until about 1950, mostly because of Jews engaged in organized crime (*New York Times*, 1992). But even with a reasonably sanguine projection of increased aid for Muslim inmates and a consequent improvement in the recidivism rate, conversion to Islam in prison is likely to continue as a main passage for inmates as they are processed into prison life. After all, Judaism is not a missionary religion, nor are many inmates in American facilities likely to develop an interest in becoming Jews on their own.

*“Jailhouse Religion.”* We were struck during our joint field research by the expression “jailhouse religion.” A high corrections official in Albany dismissed much of what Muslim inmates are involved with as “just jailhouse religion, that’s all.” “Jailhouse religion” is an old expression, but we wanted to know what meanings it has for today. We received varying definitions and interpretations of the term from a variety of professionals, including a Roman Catholic priest in Harlem with many years of corrections chaplaincy experience, a college professor of sociology of Black religion in America with many years of experience as a prison volunteer, a leading corrections chaplain-*imam*, and others. Jailhouse religion is a multileveled phenomenon, but it is first of all a category of religion in total institutions. Here, following, are some characterizations of “jailhouse religion” (hereafter JR):

JR often involves a relationship with powerful individuals and/or groups. With African-Americans this most often has some kind of Islamic reference, regardless of sectarian affiliation or whether a type of Muslim inmate population is inmate led or guided by outside leaders.

JR may, in relation to the first point, be motivated by a desire for protection and special privileges. Membership in an Islamic group is a clear sign to others that abuse, interference, hassling, etc. of a member may reap potentially serious consequences with the group as a whole involved in protecting individual members.

JR may be a state of personal reflection, remorse about one’s past deeds and a desire to reform one’s behavior and start a new life in a spirit of repentance. This is a major aspect in the original designation of prisons in America as penitentiaries. Remorse and repentance may be a transient condition, but they are not necessarily so. Nor should it be assumed that these states are insincere. There can be a profound awareness that leads to positive, long-lasting outcomes to the benefit of the inmate.

JR may or may not be connected with conversion or reconversion, but it is often perceived to be a positive indicator of an inmate’s progress toward rehabilitation. It may contribute to a favorable parole review, or at least it is often thought to.

JR is a survival technique, and not just in the sense of providing physical protection by belonging to a powerful inmate sub-group. Islam,

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especially, provides a nearly complete way of life in facilities where it can be practiced freely (subject to the administrative regime). Purification rites, regular worship, study, Qur'an recitation, diet, fasting, mutual caring and vigilance, the hope of a blessed afterlife, the conviction of serving a just God, special clothes and growing facial hair as well as other things all contribute to the development of a Muslim personality that transcends the order of humdrum prison life while conforming to it in nonviolent ways. There is something about having the Qur'an, alone, that brings joy, refreshment, courage, and purpose to inmates, as it does to all Muslims. The cultivation of Islam as a "jailhouse religion" can provide the training ground for a lifetime devotion to the religion after release, as well. In this sense, it is grossly inadequate to characterize Islam as "jailhouse religion" if by that term is meant something shallow, transient, calculating, or inauthentic.

JR provides contacts with the outside through visits of *imams*, teachers, Muslim brothers and sisters, and correspondence. The potential for systematic and fruitful outside contact is considerable. When an inmate ceases to have visitors or whose correspondence dries up, then danger both from inmate predators and from low morale and depression can become extreme.

JR may be, as one prison *imam* told us, following a strong, brutal inmate leader or gang, with no relation to spiritual or ethical values or habits. Whether this qualifies in any way as religion is debatable, but there is total commitment involved, with sometimes fatal as well as otherwise fateful consequences. We would regard this phenomenon as a kind of alternative to jailhouse religion as such, but sharing aspects of the protection variety.

What we have provided in the way of types of jailhouse religion has been collected from corrections professionals and experienced prison volunteers. The perceptions cover a wide range of attitudes and behavior. A trend of Islamic prison ministry that is being administered by an increasing number of *imam*-chaplains is "institutional *da'wah*" ("missions"). This entails the establishment and maintenance of an ongoing Islamic environment for the prison Ummah, wherever it is. Muslims want to have the same status and recognition as the older, mainline prison ministries. Institutional *da'wah* is, thus, a kind of institutionalized Islamic network of services for inmates. Rehabilitation is an important aspect, but even more important is an Islamic *habilitation*, managed by cadres of professional chaplain-*imams*. The prison ummah can embrace both "jailhouse Muslims," in the superficial sense, and committed Muslims.

Much of Islamic life behind prison walls has been led by inmate *imams*, from a variety of sects. This has often been effective and helpful, also, for entire corrections programs in a great variety of facilities. Unfortunately, there have also often been problems connected with inmate-led Muslim communities in



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prisons. In New York State inmate *imams* are no longer permitted. Moreover, the trend in that state is toward a single Muslim brotherhood in prison. All who profess belief in the Divine Unity (*tawhid*) are accepted as Muslims. But *imams* there promote mainstream Sunni Islam. Their approach to sectarian groups is tactful and discursive, proceeding by calm, rational dialogue and respectful techniques of persuasion, appealing especially to the Qur'an and Hadith. *Da'wah*, according to National Association of Muslim Chaplains training tapes, is calling people to Islam, but in no way browbeating or coercing them. Allah, alone, can convert people to Islam, the *imams* insist.

Institutional *da'wah* of a mainline Sunni type does tend toward orthodoxy, thus marginalizing other Islamic and quasi-Islamic individuals and groups that would be considered sectarian at best from a Sunni perspective. What will come of this trend from the perspective of prison administrations and the courts is impossible to say at this time.

The National Association of Muslim Chaplains, recognizing the need to evolve from inmate *imam* arrangements to fully institutionalized *da'wah*, has established criteria for chaplain-*imams*, who now start out in New York State with salaries of over \$40,000. The minimum criteria are:

(1) Should be qualified *imam* (or equivalent), i.e., know the *salat* (prayer service five times daily) perfectly; have reliable knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith and basic *fiqh* (jurisprudence); have good character and reputation; possess leadership ability and demonstrated achievements.

(2) Education (other than Islamic): should have at least a bachelor's degree, preferably in sociology, penology, or psychology.

(3) Must have professional demeanor (punctuality, deportment, personal appearance, and grooming are all very important).

(4) Normally should not be a former inmate. (There is mixed opinion on this matter, but the emerging consensus appears to be that noninmates have no recidivism potential and provide a better model for postrelease life. They also would tend to be more credible with prison administrations, with whom they must deal as both costaff professionals and ombudspersons, a difficult dual task. However, at Rikers Island, two of the most effective chaplain-*imams* are former inmates whose totally transformed lives provide hope for inmates embracing Islam. We see this as an "Amazing Grace" factor that will continue to assert itself spontaneously in the pursuit of institutional *da'wah*.

## **Conclusion**

Islam, as well as other religions, will continue to provide opportunities for "jailhouse religion" in the shallower senses. But Islam also shows great promise of providing an induction into a totally transforming life with a meaningful and reachable goal. The large numbers of newly incarcerated persons who declare Islam as their religion upon admission to a facility show how this particular

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“jailhouse religion” now extends to the larger society of the American streets where there are so many people who expect to spend time in jail or prison eventually, and perhaps repeatedly.

In a plenary address a few years ago at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, a leading scholar of the African-American church observed that, in many cases, the only people reaching out really effectively, and at great personal risk, to help members of the American underclass—particularly Black and Hispanic minorities—whether in the streets, crackhouses, jails or prisons, are Muslims. The speaker observed, poignantly (and from a Christian perspective), that many “souls” are thus being “lost to Islam.” We turned to each other in the audience in astonishment. We were thinking of souls being “saved”—to use a central Christian expression—through Islam. And Muslims themselves share a conviction that God is working through them in America—whether in corrections or the general population—in providential ways.

One of us heard eloquent testimony to this at the 1992 annual meeting of the Association for Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) in Michigan. For the first time at AMSS a panel on Islam in corrections was held, with first-rate papers on *da'wah*, *jihad*, and other Islamic initiatives in prison. A major emphasis was the need for involvement of the general Muslim community in North America to recognize incarcerated brothers and sisters as part of the worldwide Ummah of Islam and, thus, deserving of its protection and aid. Since that meeting, a general increase in such panels, as well as the organizing of special conferences, has been going on in American Muslim circles and involving experienced professionals. The general Muslim community in America is also gradually becoming more involved in meeting the challenge of corrections to the Ummah here, but so are jail and prison administrations that have come to regard Muslim inmates as a potentially positive asset and not as a problem.

The Arabic word *jihad*, introduced a few lines above, is normally translated as “holy war.” But to Muslims it means “exertion, struggle” in the way of Allah. The “Greater Jihad,” as Muhammad expressed it, is the struggle to overcome sin and to get control of oneself according to Islamic principles. That is what is meant by *jihad* in corrections—not a war against the penal system or against non-Muslims, but the continuing struggle to realize Islam in the lives of its adherents. It is our belief that Muslims in America will continue to make significant contributions to the ways in which citizens of this country view corrections so as to develop more humane principles and better methods of dealing with this increasingly urgent dimension of our common life.

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## Democracy on Trial in Malaysia

*Mumtaz Ahmad\**

Malaysia, until recently proclaimed a model of stability, development, and democracy for other Third World and Islamic countries to follow,<sup>1</sup> is in turmoil. The change came when, on 2 September 1998, Malaysia's Prime Minister Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad summarily dismissed his heir apparent Anwar Ibrahim, who was both Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. The following day Anwar was expelled from the ruling United Malay National Organization (UMNO). A few days later, Mahathir ordered Anwar's detention under the draconian Internal Security Act, a notorious legacy of British colonial rule that gives unlimited power to the government to imprison anyone without specific charges and without judicial remedy.

Anwar Ibrahim, as Deputy Prime Minister since 1993, was in line to succeed Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad and was regarded, both at home and abroad, as the country's second most influential political leader. In his capacity as founder of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and as the architect of wide-ranging Islamic institutions and projects in Malaysia, Anwar was highly respected among the Islamic circles all over the Muslim world. His removal from office and arbitrary arrest have understandably caused a great deal of resentment and anger not only among his supporters in his own country, but also among the well-wishers of Malaysia all over the world. Particularly disturbing about the Mahathir-Anwar split is the malicious and vengeful anti-Anwar smear campaign that has been launched to justify the Prime Minister's action. Allegations against Anwar—yet unproven but well publicized in the government-controlled media—include those of treason, sedition, corruption, adultery, a homosexual dalliance, and holding suggestive conversations on the telephone with a colleague's wife.

According to Anwar, on 24 August 1998 Mahathir told him that he had "credible evidence" of Anwar's sexual improprieties and asked him to resign. Anwar categorically denied the charges and volunteered to face a judicial inquiry. He refused to resign and accused the Prime Minister of blackmail. The

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<sup>1</sup> Clark D. Neher and Ross Marley, *Democracy and Development in Southeast Asia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 101, 107; Chandra Muzaffar, *Challenge and Choices in Malaysian Politics and Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Aliran, 1989), p. 198.

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“evidence,” of course, was none other than the affidavits which the state security agencies had obtained from certain individuals associated with Anwar Ibrahim by putting them through the notorious torture chambers of Kuala Lumpur’s Bukit Aman prison. Not surprisingly, Dr. Munawar Anees, a former consultant who “confessed” to being sodomized by Anwar, and all other witnesses later recanted and told horrifying stories of the torture to which they were subjected while under police investigation. Anwar Ibrahim himself was brutally beaten in the prison by the Inspector General of Police himself, who later confessed to this illegal action but escaped any punishment by the Mahathir government.

Anwar, however, remained defiant: “These charges are a total fabrication—politically inspired, designed to finish my political career,” he told *Business Week* two days before his detention. “I am not prepared to submit to this political conspiracy to undermine my position and defeat me through nasty deeds. I challenge him [Mahathir] to use democratic means to unseat me,” Anwar told *Time* magazine.

A few weeks after his detention, Anwar Ibrahim was put on trial on charges of corruption. Even by Malaysian standards, the trial was a travesty of justice which “shocked and shamed” the nation.<sup>2</sup> The presiding judge, at his own discretion, amended the original charges against Anwar in order to strengthen the prosecution’s case, expunged from court records certain important defense testimonies, and charged defense attorneys with contempt of court when they tried to press their client’s legal right to a fair trial. From the very outset it was evident that the court proceedings were intended to scandalize and smear the former Deputy Prime Minister by giving the prosecution full opportunity to present sordid but unsubstantiated allegations aimed at destroying his political career. Most international observers as well as independent Malaysian legal experts agreed that Judge Augustine Paul was guilty of serious procedural and substantive lapses during the trial. Several members of the Malaysian bar and prominent intellectuals accused the judiciary of subservience to executive power; of letting corporate interests influence judicial decisionmaking; and of corruption, abuse of authority, and judicial misconduct.<sup>3</sup> One observer bluntly noted that the “courts appear to have become a mere extension of the executive.”<sup>4</sup> In these circumstances, the negative verdict handed down by the

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<sup>2</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, “A Travesty of Justice,” *Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur), No. 21, February 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Chandra Muzaffar, “The Administration of Justice,” *Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur), No. 19, December 1999.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. Muzaffar Tate, “The Malaysian Dilemma,” *Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur), No. 24, May 1999. Commenting on Anwar Ibrahim’s trial, Muzaffar Tate remarks: “Only the simple-minded can fail to have discerned its political agenda and the web of conspiracy and intrigue which has surrounded the trial of Anwar. All the indicators point to a scenario in which the former Deputy Prime Minister has been framed for political reasons, and his downfall brought about by an unholy collusion between the executive and its main enforcement arm, the police, on the one hand, and certain members of the judiciary, on the other.”

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court in Anwar's case was a foregone conclusion: the judge found Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim guilty of four charges of obstructing the course of justice and sentenced him to six years' imprisonment. The political significance of the duration of the jail term—longer than most people had expected—was not lost on political observers who noted that the “conspirators want Anwar locked up for at least two general elections so that they can consolidate their position in the event that something untoward happens to the aging and ailing Mahathir Mohammad in the very near future.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the long-drawn “slugfest” between Mahathir Mohammad and Anwar Ibrahim, which has already gone through two rounds, has, at least for the time being, placed Mahathir far ahead in the game of power. Anwar is in the dock again, facing charges of sodomy, and Mahathir is ready for an early poll.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that Anwar put up the strongest challenge ever to Mahathir's political power when he launched the reform movement after his dismissal, attracting thousands of young men and women in several cities of the country. Anwar was the first politician in Mahathir's eighteen-year rule who publicly challenged the self-proclaimed father of the new Malaysia's integrity and accused him of massive corruption to enrich his family and friends. However “bruised and battered,” Mahathir is still holding his ground while Anwar is languishing in jail.<sup>7</sup>

The secret of Mahathir's political survival lies as much in his use of oppressive political measures as in his political skillfulness. Mahathir has rarely used democratic means in dealing with his political opponents. His favorite instruments in politics are the 1960 Internal Security Act and the Emergency Ordinance of 1969. In 1987, when he was faced with a rebellion within the ruling UMNO party, he quickly invoked the Internal Security Act to imprison without trial more than one hundred politicians—mostly from his own party—political activists, religious leaders, professors, and members of parliament. Three newspapers were banned. Known as “Operation Lalang,” these measures succeeded in emasculating the opposition and frustrating Mahathir's enemies within UMNO. When the head of the judiciary and other justices criticized these draconian actions, Mahathir dismissed the Lord President of the judiciary and all those judges who had opposed his undemocratic method of dealing with opposition.

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<sup>5</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, “The People's Verdict,” *Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur), No. 24, May 1999. See also his “One Man's Obsession,” *Time* magazine, 26 April 1999.

<sup>6</sup> The new trial, like the earlier one, seemed flawed from the start. The prosecution changed twice the exact year when Anwar was alleged to have had sex with his ex-chauffeur, Azizan Abu Bakar. At first the prosecution said the year was 1994. When the matter was brought to court, the year was changed to 1992. When it turned out that the building where they were said to have met for sex did not exist in 1992, the year was changed to 1993. See *Economist*, 12 June 1999.

<sup>7</sup> *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 27 September 1999.

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But Mahathir, like Pakistan's former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977, may soon run out of options. 1999 is a far cry from 1987, and an Operation Lalang may not bear the desired results in today's political milieu where democratization, liberalism, civil society, and human rights are vital issues. Mahathir is known as a master politician and a skillful operator, but the crisis triggered by Anwar's expulsion, the kangaroo-style trial, and the subsequent imprisonment of Anwar has raised troubling questions about the rule of law, civil liberties, and the future of democracy in Malaysia which will haunt Mahathir in the next elections.

Mahathir's attack on Anwar is not only intended to remove a perceived threat to his political authority, but is also an indication that he has had enough of democratic politics and wants to go back to the authoritarianism of his formative years in public life.<sup>8</sup> The real cause of the split between the "father" and the "son" is the difference in style, emphasis, and views on such issues as the nature of the state, democracy, civil liberties, tolerance of dissent, and the autonomy of civil society. In other words: two different generations and two different visions of Malaysia in the twenty-first century.

At the center of the Mahathir-Anwar conflict are two contrasting memories of the past and two divergent visions of the future of Malaysia. Mahathir represents the generation of Malay leaders who, even though they consciously seek a rupture from their colonial legacy, are nevertheless products of the colonial experience of authoritarian rule and state-centered politics. Mahathir's slogans of "Malaysia Incorporated," "Look East," and "Vision 2020" are indicative of a new articulation of national identity, appropriating the idiom of modernization and the ethics of commercialism.<sup>9</sup> Mahathir's use of the metaphor of a business company to formulate the goals of the Malaysian state and society is in sharp contrast with Anwar's idea of Malaysian Islamic identity and cultural distinctiveness, his view of a free and vigorous civil society, and his vision of Malaysia as a moral community embracing all ethnic groups in a pluralistic framework.<sup>10</sup>

Besides this fundamental philosophical conflict, which eventually brought about a parting of the ways between the two giants of contemporary Malaysian politics, several proximate explanations of the current crisis can be offered.

First, we should not discount Mahathir's own fears that Anwar was stealing the whole show, practically replacing him as the father of modern Malaysia and receiving all the national and international attention and limelight. Mahathir is

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<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of Mahathir Mohammad's authoritarianism, see Clark D. Neher, *Southeast Asia in the New International Era* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 120–138.

<sup>9</sup> For a perceptive analysis, tying ethnography to structural imperatives and with a focus on the links between the cultural logics of human action and economic and political processes in Malaysia, see Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 225–239.

<sup>10</sup> Anwar Ibrahim, *The Asian Renaissance* (Kuala Lumpur: Times Publications, 1997).

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concerned about his place in history much more deeply than about anything else; he is concerned about how posterity will remember him. He wants to leave the stage of leadership triumphant, and at a time when he is seen as the most successful and popular leader in Malaysian history. He wants to leave behind an economically prosperous and politically peaceful Malaysia. Anwar was seen as a threat to the legacy Mahathir desired to leave: Anwar was overshadowing him both at home and abroad. Perhaps Mahathir was not provoked by any immediate threat from Anwar to his power, and what concerned him most was his anticipation of things: Anwar's emergence as a calm, prudent, and statesman-like leader, and as an alternative to his own erratic style of governance. More important, Anwar was becoming more and more vocal in pointing out certain fundamental flaws in Mahathir's policies and style of political and economic management.

Second, Anwar's adversaries—and there were quite a few within UMNO—took advantage of the deteriorating relations between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and poisoned Mahathir's ears, feeding him exaggerated stories of Anwar's alleged conspiracies to overthrow him. Mahathir seems to have found these accounts so credible that he launched a preemptive strike against his former protégé. He became convinced that if he failed to strike first, the game would be over for him.

Third, it is possible that Anwar's own carelessness and open-door—and open-mouth—policy might also have precipitated the crisis. It now appears that Anwar misread the signals and wrongly concluded that the political climate was ripe for launching an intra-UMNO campaign against corruption, nepotism, and cronyism. He authorized (or at least allowed) the UMNO youth leader and his close friend Ahmad Zahid Hamidi to unleash, in a party meeting, a blistering attack on the corrupt practices of UMNO leaders, implicating, in no uncertain terms, even the Prime Minister. Mahathir took the matter personally and concluded, rightly, that Hamidi could not have delivered the attack without Anwar's endorsement. It was at that time that he decided to punish Anwar for publicly challenging his authority and integrity.

“Political corruption,” “nepotism,” and “cronyism” in contemporary Southeast Asian political parlance are metaphors for a style of governance represented by the former President of Indonesia, Suharto, whose corrupt and oppressive government was ousted in 1998 by a popular movement. The use of similar rhetorical slogans by Anwar and his friends to describe Malaysian politics was seen by Mahathir as a clear signal that the stage was being set by Anwar to hold the Prime Minister personally responsible for the country's economic woes, to disgrace him like Suharto, and, eventually, to overthrow him.<sup>11</sup> Mahathir saw Anwar as another Habibie in the making. And the evidence

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<sup>11</sup> But even as severe a critic of Mahathir Mohammad as Chandra Muzaffar resents the drawing of parallels between the leadership styles of Suharto and Mahathir and between Indonesia and



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was there: Anwar had met Habibie in Canada in May and had reportedly received “brotherly advice” from the new Indonesian President to gradually distance himself from Mahathir before it was too late. “Don’t make the mistake I made,” Habibie reportedly told Anwar.

Shortly after his dismissal, Anwar Ibrahim admitted: “I have been sharing my vision with too many people” (read: I have been talking too much). Many of his statements about corruption in UMNO which were made in private gatherings of “friends” were later relayed to Mahathir. It is now clear that some of his cabinet colleagues and UMNO leaders, jealous of his popularity and political influence, and aspiring to take his place as the successor-designate, filled the Prime Minister in on Anwar’s “ambitions.” By early August, Mahathir was convinced that Anwar was up to something. There was no time to waste. He had to strike. And strike he did with all sorts of serious allegations he could think of—from treason to sedition, from corruption to disobedience, and from homosexuality to womanizing.<sup>12</sup>

Mahathir also thought that while he was confronting the West and exposing its conspiracies to weaken the Asian economies and, especially, to punish Malaysia for its independent foreign and economic policies, Anwar was busy making “secret deals” with Western leaders and Western-dominated international financial institutions. Mahathir noted that the Western press, especially the British, while it always cast aspersions on him, calling him “paranoid” and “erratic,” presented Anwar as a voice of reason and rationality.

It is not that Mahathir and Anwar were at loggerheads over the issue of the Third World’s relationship to the West. Both seem to have aspired to liberate the Third World from subjugation to and dependence on the West. They differed in their approaches, however. Mahathir, regarded by some as a throwback to the post-World War II generation of Third World leaders (Nasser, Sukarno, Nkrumah being others) was rhetorical and confrontational in his dealings with

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Malaysia: “Neither corruption, nor poverty, nor authoritarianism in Malaysia today bears any resemblance to the situation in Indonesia under Suharto.” See his “The Anwar Episode: An Analysis,” *Commentary* (Kuala Lumpur), Special Issue, October 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Anwar’s decision to “confront” Mahathir, his mentor and elderly statesman, should also be seen in the context of traditional Malay political culture. It is Malay custom not to challenge their leaders, especially in a confrontational manner. Malays believe in *taat setia* (absolute loyalty) to their rulers and consider it a case of *kurang ajar* (impropriety) to question the authority and integrity of their leaders. The traditional modes of political negotiation emphasize consensus rather than confrontation. Mahathir, and probably many Malaysians too, were shocked when Anwar broke this golden rule of traditional Malay political behavior and dared to challenge “the father of New Malaysia.” For comments on traditional Malay political behavior, see Neher, pp. 123–124. Two things, however, need to be added here: One, Mahathir himself was the first Malay leader to break this custom during the UMNO strife of 1987 when, in a shocking display of internecine factionalism and confrontation, he ousted Tunku Razaleigh Hamza and several of his followers from the party. Second, the modern democratic politics with its periodic electoral competition and campaign bickerings has already undermined the consensual and communitarian basis of the traditional patterns of political behavior in Malaysia.

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the West, while the vision of Anwar's generation was defined more by universalistic or global objectives than by narrow nationalistic considerations. Anwar was, until recently,, articulating his ideas on the subject of "Islam and the West" in terms of a "civilizational dialogue" and "building bridges" in order to promote understanding and harmony in international relations. Interpreting this in mundane political terms, Mahathir thought that Anwar was trying to present himself to the West as a more acceptable Asian/Islamic leader than Mahathir. Anwar's personal rapport with some Western leaders (Lady Thatcher, Madeleine Albright) and his dignified handling of negotiations with international financial institutions was an anathema to Mahathir, who saw Anwar's international contacts as a sign of his own failure to come to terms with global realities.

What exacerbated the already tense relations between Mahathir and Anwar was the East Asian financial crisis and its impact on the Malaysian economy. The differences between the two leaders were real and substantive, and they were played out against the backdrop of a financial crisis. As the ringgit fell, the stockmarket plummeted, businesses collapsed, and unemployment increased, Mahathir was blamed for economic mismanagement. Mahathir, in turn, attacked international currency speculators as the main culprits responsible for the flight of capital from the country. The foreign media were quick to dub Mahathir's reaction as "the insane rantings" of a "paranoid" leader unable to come to terms with the global economic realities and, indeed, with his own ill-founded economic policies.

As the crisis deepened, the difference between the approaches of Anwar and Mahathir to economic recovery became even more pronounced. While Anwar was inclined to follow the traditional World Bank–International Monetary Fund (IMF) recipe of tight money supply, higher interest rates (to prevent capital flight), and liberalization of the terms of capital flow, Mahathir was concerned with the socioeconomic and political consequences of these measures. The Indonesian example had clearly shown that structural adjustments of the type prescribed by the IMF, while helpful to the international investors, had played havoc with the lives of the native people. Unlike Indonesia, Malaysia had witnessed an almost miraculous growth of its economy during the last two decades precisely because it had disregarded almost every tenet of Reaganomics, Thatcheronomics, and the IMF–World Bank policy directives. Malaysia was a textbook case of how to violate every policy directive of the IMF–World Bank and still achieve an average rate of growth of 8.5 percent consistently over a fifteen-year period with all sectors of the economy simultaneously recording strong output growth.

Given this experience of Malaysia, it is understandable why Mahathir was reluctant to accept Anwar's IMF-endorsed prescription for economic recovery. The Prime Minister preferred a credit expansionary policy to stimulate the

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economy and create job opportunities. Mahathir was in favor of low interest rates to boost investments and prevent recession.

While these differences soured the relationship between Anwar and Mahathir and hurt the Malaysian stock market, there were signs that Anwar was inclined to go along with the Prime Minister's views and policies in order to remove any sense of uncertainty in the nation's financial market. What prevented this agreement from taking definite shape was Mahathir's insistence that the government allocate funds—amounting to billions of ringgits—to rescue some local business corporations. One of these corporations was Konsortium Perkapalon, a shipping firm associated with Mirzan Mahathir, the Prime Minister's son. The firm had incurred huge debts and was on the brink of bankruptcy as a result of currency devaluation. Mahathir also wanted to bail out several other business corporations linked to his family and friends.<sup>13</sup>

Taking cue, perhaps, from the Indonesian experience, where President Suharto's attempt to rescue his son's mismanaged business operations with state funds had provoked a popular backlash, Anwar refused to endorse similar bailouts for Mahathir's family and friends. Anwar's insistence that irresponsible business ventures not be rescued at government expense openly threatened the interlocking relationship that had long existed between the corporate sector and the state and that was dominated by the ruling UMNO coalition. Several major business corporations, which were owned and controlled by Mahathir's family and close political associates, and which routinely receive generous government grants and, in turn, donate millions of ringgits to UMNO coffers for its political campaigns, also regarded Anwar as a threat to their interests.<sup>14</sup>

It was thus a complex interplay of personal and political factors that led Mahathir to view Anwar's actions and policies as proof of his heir-apparent's betrayal and disloyalty. Anwar's enemies, both in UMNO and in the corporate sector, who were waiting in the wings, finally succeeded "in merging their goals with Mahathir's motives."<sup>15</sup>

As for future prospects, although mass demonstrations and protests processions are being organized in Kuala Lumpur by the supporters of Anwar Ibrahim and protagonists of the "Reformasi," Mahathir, as usual, is taking no chances in crushing dissent. Using all of the repressive laws at his disposal, and even illegal means, the government seems to have decided not to allow the opposition forces to come out on the streets. Several of Anwar's supporters have also been jailed under the Internal Security Act on charges of creating public disturbance. Given the fact that Malaysian law does not permit the assembly of more than four persons without a government permit, it will be impossible for the Reform movement to launch even a peaceful movement of opposition.

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<sup>13</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, "The Anwar Episode," p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between the Malaysian corporate sector and UMNO, see Neher, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> Chandra Muzaffar, "The Anwar Episode," p. 3.

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Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, or Indonesia, Malaysia is not a mass politics society. The Malaysians, though highly politicized intellectually, have traditionally shown considerable restraint in expressing their political anger in the public sphere. Far from being a psychological trait, this has much to do with the colonial tradition and the suppression of political dissent in the postindependence period through such devices as the Internal Security Act, the Emergency Ordinance, and the Societies Act. An important variable in predicting the prospects for political reform as envisioned by Anwar is the way the state in Malaysia is structured. The political agenda is strictly controlled by the state, which has at its disposal—and does not hesitate to use—several “effective” instruments to ensure continuation of its control. The 1981 Societies Act, for example, empowers the government to ban any group, social, political or religious, that seeks to challenge it, providing no judicial remedy against government action. Other institutional means for the dissemination of dissenting views (free press, for example) are either weak or under direct state control. Mahathir’s paternalistic authoritarianism permeates the entire system—from party to bureaucracy, from school to mosque, and from market to media. It is in view of such facts that Malaysia’s democratic processes seem more a matter of form than of substance and the so-called “Asian Style Democracy” cannot but show its true colors.

At this time, the role of the Malay middle class and the emerging Malay bourgeoisie is critical to the success of any movement of political reform in Malaysia. Many members of these classes are Anwar’s cohorts. But the fact is that much of the educated middle class and the nascent Malay bourgeoisie (a product of the 1969 New Economic Policy) have been largely depoliticized through state largesse and public-funded affirmative action opportunities in business, commerce, industry, trade, and finance. The new middle class, often called “MUMPIes” (Malaysian Upward-Mobile Professionals), and the emerging Malay bourgeoisie are products of the state and, thus, hardly have an autonomous political and economic base. As part of the postdevelopment strategy, which is based on an implicit social contract between the state and the middle classes, economic liberalism favored by the bourgeoisie has comfortably coexisted with political authoritarianism in Malaysia as elsewhere in the Third World.<sup>16</sup> The Malaysian middle classes and the bourgeoisie want economic and

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<sup>16</sup> Contrary to the conventional view that the middle class and the bourgeoisie are the harbingers of political liberalism, Aihwa Ong argues that capitalist development and the rise of middle classes in Asia have followed a different trajectory from the one experienced by Western societies. Capitalism in Europe emerged as a result of independent urban and commercial and trade guilds and from a long-drawn struggle for bourgeois democracy by these classes. In Asian societies, on the contrary, it is the state that played a major role in transforming premodern agrarian societies into modern industrial ones. As a “revolution from above” (Barrington Moore’s phrase), this state-sponsored transition also included “the formation of middle classes, whose structural position and loyalty are

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political reform but are politically too weak, economically too dependent on the state-controlled system of credit and concessions, intellectually too ineffective, and psychologically too timid to launch a movement for fundamental reform in Malaysian society, economy, and polity. Another fundamental structural weakness within the ranks of the Malaysian bourgeoisie is the ethnic split in it between the established Chinese and the upcoming Malay segment. Given its relatively insecure ethnic location, the Chinese section of the bourgeoisie will be reluctant to participate in a movement for liberal political reform for fear, on the one hand, of government backlash and, on the other, of being charged with subverting the majority ethnic group. The Malay bourgeoisie, still in a nascent stage, is equally unlikely to be enthusiastic about changing the political status quo that midwifed it.

The youth of the ABIM of the 1970s who unleashed a powerful force of moral values and Islamic democratic changes in Malaysian civil society are now ensconced in comfortable government and corporate jobs. While they will remain loyal to Anwar, fear of government oppression—the fear of losing jobs, for one thing—will likely keep them from coming out on the streets to confront Mahathir and bring Anwar back to power. As long as inflation is under control and unemployment down, and as long as the Malay middle class and the bourgeoisie feel that Mahathir can effectively address their economic concerns, including the “four Cs” (car, credit card, condominium, and club), Mahathir will remain strong. Only a severe economic downturn will cause mass political agitation and engender a movement for political change and economic reform sought by Anwar.

The only hope for change lies with the younger constituency of Anwar Ibrahim, the college and university students who are inspired by his ideas and share his vision of Malaysia as a free, prosperous, democratic, pluralistic, and moral society. In the 1970s, when the ruling “administracy” of Malaysia embarked on the pursuit of economic growth to the exclusion of almost everything else, ABIM emerged as a powerful counterforce to fill the moral and ethical void created by the single-minded obsession with materialism. It is to be seen whether the college and university students affiliated with ABIM—Anwar’s original constituency—will rise to the occasion and once again challenge the state for the sake of democracy, civil liberties, Islamic morality, and socioeconomic reforms.

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much more firmly tied to state projects than were the structural position and loyalty of the early bourgeoisie in the West.” Ong, pp. 197–198.

## Book Reviews

### *Review Essay*

History of Bangladesh: In Search of a More Flexible Narrative\*

Prasenjit Duara. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China and India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Pp. x, 275. Price HB \$32.00. 0-2261-6721-6.

Joya Chatterji. *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932–47*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Cambridge South Asian Studies 57. Pp. xvii, 303. Price HB \$69.95. 0-5214-1128-9.

Richard M. Eaton. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*. Berkeley: University of California, 1993. Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 17. Pp. xxvii, 359. Price HB \$50.00. 0-5200-8077-7.

Peter Van der Veer. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Berkeley: University of California, 1994. Pp. xvi, 247. Price PB \$15.95. 0-5200-8256-7.

I still remember what my doctoral supervisor Professor W. H. Morris-Jones once told me in a conversation: “Two kinds of people should not write serious history—journalists and hyperpatriots.” The conversation was prompted by a stern review he had written of a book that dealt with the last few years of the British Raj. Somewhat shaken at his observation, I asked him why he was of that opinion. He was blunt in his response: “Journalists are not trained to do historical research, and patriots are too emotional in dealing with narratives. In either case, it will be a poor specimen of history!” I was then skeptical about the truth of what he said, but now, three decades after that exchange, I feel there is great wisdom in his words. Indeed, postmodernist historians are questioning the validity of the historical narratives dished out with enthusiasm in the form of nationalist claims, patriotic diatribes and anecdotes, and invented memories.

One of the recent and seminal works on historical thinking is Prasenjit Duara’s *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern*

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\* A shorter version of this review appeared in *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, in December 1998.

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*China and India*, and the theme of this review is partly borrowed from it. The work mainly seeks to prove that nationalism and the nation-state have heavily influenced the historical accounts of postcolonial countries and that history has consequently been largely homogenized, constructed, manipulated, imagined, invented, and even dictated by politicians and patriotic narrators without being subjected to examination for fact and evidence. When nationalism is the locus of history, the narrative structure of history becomes linear and unified, and the past is transmitted mostly through the medium of a single view, leader, or group with little space allowed for diversity.

Last December, I wrote a piece for *The Daily Star*, highlighting some aspects of the rancorous history of Bangladesh. I agree with some of the readers that there is a need for a more focused discussion on the subject, to which, however, one cannot do justice within the limited space of a newspaper column. I do not pretend to fulfill that perceived need here, and this piece only presents some freshly raised historiographical questions not exclusively relevant to Bangladesh. National history is usually much older than the nation-state—and a more complex phenomenon. Indeed, nationalism itself is pluralistic, though aggressive nationalists often thrust upon the nation a reified account that rejects all variant views as tainted and odious. But the dominant rigid versions of nationalistic history are being severely criticized by new conceptual viewpoints. Several postmodernist thinkers have challenged linear descriptions of India's past. Dr. Ayesha Jalal has challenged the view of Pakistani history promoted by the country's bureaucrats and political leaders, and she has reportedly angered the Pakistani government, which does not like to see the officially validated history questioned. She not only challenged the kind of history that is taught through school textbooks in Pakistan, but she has also raised critical questions about Mr. Jinnah, the architect of Pakistan—something few would dare to do.

Regrettably, Bangladeshi history is still a victim of the politicized imagination and invented memory. Monopolistic patriotism and an unrelenting fixation on the past are hardly conducive to healthy historiography. What is often represented in Bangladesh as the “consciousness of the freedom struggle” was, in 1971, not at all monolithic in character, even though it was the Awami League that led the fight for independence and subsequently laid an exclusivist claim to the interpretation of national history. Many historians are either hanging fire or participating in the politically dictated mission of rewriting Bangladeshi history. The Bangladeshi historical account has become a protected craft, and it is zealously watched over by those who claim to be nationalists, freedom fighters, and (whether true or not) victims of the Pakistani crackdown; the reminiscences of the liberation struggle, of course, belong to the privileged domain of those who fled to India in 1971. Few credits go to those who were trapped in Bangladesh and endured suffering in a war-torn nation. The Bangladeshi historical account is almost a jigsaw puzzle of anecdotes from the year in 1971, but, by themselves, such anecdotes do not satisfy the rigors of

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historiographical tests. The account has also been a victim of the politics of rage, personal vendetta, political rancor, witch-hunt, and the hard-to-verify accusations that are enmeshed with the extravagant historical claims.

The Bangladeshi comprehension of the past and sense of identity are not just a theoretical debate. Some people are using their historical claims, without invoking any objective measure of patriotism, to acquire power, jobs, prestige, business, influence, recognition, and privilege, or to malign others or to satisfy their personal ego. By contrast, a paradigm shift clearly seems to have occurred in the study of Indian history. Two years ago, in an interview with *The Hindu*, Romila Thaper, a well-known historian, explained that, in India, history is no longer divided into the ancient, medieval, and modern, or Hindu, Muslim, and British categories. In Bangladesh, on the contrary, overtly patriotic history is still caught up in questions like, what happened in 1971, who did what that year, and who declared or did not declare independence? Even the main political parties are divided on these questions. In Pakistan, the study of history is preoccupied with the creation of the Muslim state in 1947, and mainstream historians there are still engaged in justifying Pakistan's establishment. Bangladesh, likewise, is still caught in the crossfire of claims and counterclaims, and it is a matter of great concern that history in this country has become an instrument to be used against personal enemies and political foes. It would be more pertinent and appropriate to compare the social and economic changes that took place—or did not take place—from 1947 to 1971 on the one hand and since 1971 on the other. But after defeating the Pakistani military, Bangladesh searched for a fresh historical legitimacy that was to be found only in the deconstruction of the Pakistani era.

Unlike earlier voices that exclusively blamed Muslim separatism for the religion-based division of Bengal in 1947, a new, if small, group of Indian historiographers have acknowledged the role of Hindu communalism in the division. Joya Chatterji represents that fresh breed of historians who have questioned the old historical charges that Muslims were the sole “culprits” in the partition of Bengal. In her critically acclaimed book, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932–47*, Joya Chatterji argues that Jinnah's Muslim League alone was not responsible for dividing Bengal. It was, she maintains, the Hindu identity, nourished and cultivated for a long time by several leaders and groups—and, particularly, by prominent writers like Bankim Chatterjee and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, who envisioned an alternative history for Hindus—that laid down the intellectual foundation for Hindu-Muslim confrontation. The Indian National Congress Party, influenced by orthodox Hindu leaders and Calcutta's non-Bengali (Marwari) businessmen, later failed to make a compromise with those Muslims who wanted to keep Bengal united. The main reason for this failure was a fear of (Muslim) political domination in an independent and united Bengal with a representative democracy where the Muslim majority was expected to prevail.



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Joya Chatterji's thesis is not entirely new, but, with the aid of massive documentation, she has proved what many Bengali Muslim leaders have already been hinting at since the 1940s. The postindependence Bangladeshi liberals have generally stuck to the old, popular Indian/West Bengali allegation that the Muslim League and Jinnah were primarily responsible for the 1947 division of Bengal. Many Bengali nationalists also believed that the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan had disproved the two-nation theory that originally divided India in 1947, and that Jinnah himself modified the theory once Pakistan had come into existence. To blame the two-nation exclusively for the division of Bengal is a debatable premise, to say the least. And the theory will remain a part of Bangladesh's political inheritance as long as Bangladesh remains a separate state and does not merge with India. I once said to Joya Chatterji that if a Muslim (Bangladeshi) were to say about Hindu communalism in Bengal what she had said, the Bengali nationalists (of Bangladesh) would have scorned him/her as a Hindu-hater, a *Maulabadi* (fundamentalist), a promoter of the two-nation theory, and a Pakistan-lover.

Joya Chatterji's most recent analysis of the Bengali Muslim identity has confuted those Bangladeshi secularists who almost instinctively blamed the *kath mullahs* (obscurantist religious scholars) for allegedly having kept the communal fires burning for centuries. The mainstream liberal intellectuals of Bangladesh, in their attempt to present themselves as patriotic, proliberation, and progressive, lose no time in deriding the *'ulama*. But the latest research of several respectable scholars on the subject says otherwise. Richard Eaton in his insightful work, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, has dismissed the European colonialist and Orientalist stereotyping of the Muslim *'ulama* as a stagnant and reactionary force that has lingered on in today's Bangladesh. In Eaton's eyes, the (Islamic) religious gentry played a dynamic role in Bengal's history, and he emphatically concludes that the story of Islam in Bengal is to be counted among the success stories of world religions. Such views are, of course, unacceptable to those in Bangladesh who claim to be secular patriots. Any talk of political Islam in Bangladesh, including academic analysis, is likely to invite bitter, scornful attack by the "proliberation, secular and progressive" forces. According to the somewhat convoluted logic of the attack, political Islam was opposed to the creation of Bangladesh and therefore must be denied a role in the history of Bangladesh.

The nature and history of nationalism in Bangladesh cannot be separated from the evolving religious nationalism in India. The Dutch author Peter Van der Veer in his *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* stunned many specialists by demonstrating that Indian nationalism, at its very foundation, was religious, not secular, notwithstanding the existence of an officially proclaimed secular ideology. According to him, the extreme manifestation of Indian nationalism takes "one religion as the basis of national identity" and "relegates the adherents of other religions to a secondary, inferior

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status.” Even Salman Rushdie (no friend of the so-called Islamic fundamentalists!) in his *Imaginary Homelands* (Penguin, 1991) reached a similar conclusion—namely, that Indian nationalism has drifted toward a Hindu identity and that no reversal of this trend is in sight. To those in Bangladesh who hold to what might imprecisely be described as the postliberation political dogma, India, even after the rise of Hindu nationalism, represents a case of successful secularism. Both mainstream politicians and secular intellectuals of Bangladesh would unhesitatingly go along with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule in New Delhi and the anti-Muslim (that is, both anti-Bangladesh and anti-Pakistan) campaign of the BJP’s highly organized cohorts. Most of the secularly oriented Bangladeshi intellectuals adopt a take-no-prisoners approach with their own Islamic groups, and this has already clouded the historiographical scene in Bangladesh.

The nationalists and patriots of Bangladesh need to reappraise their stand on the history of Bangladesh. Neither the Awami League nor the centrist Bangladesh Nationalist Party has given much thought to its historical premises, and the two parties have not done much to reconcile their differences over who declared the independence of Bangladesh in March 1971—the Awami League chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Ziaur Rahman, a military general of the time. The clash over the history of Bangladesh is as bitter in 1999 as it was in 1972. Patriotism alone does not create sound history, and a warped sense of patriotism creates warped history, which makes the burden of the past too heavy for the nation to bear. Bangladesh needs more flexible narratives of its past.

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Kenneth Cragg. *Muhammad and the Christian*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1999. Pp. xii, 180. £11.99. 1-8516-8179-5.

Kenneth Cragg. *Jesus and the Muslim*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1999). Pp. xv, 315. £14.99. 1-8516-8180-9.

### I

With God as teacher and man as a promising but wayward student, Islam recognizes no supernaturally sanctioned faculty higher than the prophethood that brings divine law and guidance. Putting the matter this way, we can fruitfully explore the central dispute between Christians and Muslims. In *Muhammad and the Christian*, originally published in 1984, and in its companion volume, *Jesus and the Muslim*, originally published in 1985, Rev. Kenneth Cragg questions the standard Muslim confidence that law and

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prophethood, along with the auxiliary mechanism of retribution, suffice to achieve their avowed aim of getting us to become righteous. Does divine legislation indeed fulfill the divine intention that inspired it? The Qur'an sees man as a promising but often disobedient student who can learn through repeated exhortation and devout attention to excellent example. But he can also fail miserably as the scripture readily admits—and as Cragg is eager to emphasize. Relying as they do on a multilingual scholarship and almost half a century of practical experience of the Islamic world, Cragg's reservations deserve serious appraisal and his account should not be despised.

Cragg wonders: Do we need something more than the institution of prophethood? And could that higher institution be "sonship," understood not as some crudely physical relationship but rather as the exemplification of the divine relationship to man—a relationship characterized by divine initiatives of suffering love and grace? Do we need a God who comes rather than brings, who gives Himself to us in unconditional love? Doesn't our condition instinctively crave for such dimensions of grace and love that a resourceful and worshipworthy sovereignty is well able to supply? Why should we be content merely with prophethood and the threat of punitive sanctions? Doctrinally and morally, these are thoughtful questions, surely; and let us grant to Christians and Muslims alike the right to their own consciences in matters of moment.

Islam and Christianity adopt different theological positions partly because of their different estimates of human nature. Cragg's Protestant lament is that, in view of human perversity, Islam overestimates the educative influence of law. Evil is inveterate; it resides in the heart; it cannot be removed merely by external action or belief. Islam, Cragg alleges repeatedly, for all its enthusiastic condemnation of idolatry, misjudges the depth of the perversity that flouts the law of God. The idolatry that the Qur'an condemns so passionately is not more inveterate than the perversity that fathers it.

If the argument is *ad hominem*, directed by a Christian against his fellow Jewish and Muslim believers, then Christianity, notwithstanding Cragg, is in no better shape vis-à-vis human recalcitrance than Islam or Judaism. For we are as free to reject the grace of God as of Allah or Yahweh. The perversity of man is a part of his constitution. Nothing, grace apart, can cure it. Nothing, arbitrary grace apart, can save us from our own sinful perversity.

The whole logic of prophethood itself, argues Cragg, demands the saving actions of the Christ. Christianity is the natural terminus of Islam. "Sonship" is the natural heir of prophethood. Islam, continues Cragg, terminates the divine engagement with man at the jejune level of law and warning. In doing so, it arrests arbitrarily and prematurely the proper movement of love and grace.

These are claims that carry conviction only with devotees. In fact, to the rest of us, the step Cragg describes as natural is not even intelligible. No one, not even God, could take that step. Cragg ignores the conceptually prior problem of

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the coherence of the Incarnation and the intelligibility of the related doctrines of the Trinity and Sonship. He believes that the Incarnation supplies a richer moral potential than anything on offer in Judaism or Islam. This may actually be true, but even if that were so and, moreover, we laid aside the Jewish and Muslim reservations about the Incarnation as blasphemous, the question of coherence must stay. The moral potential of metaphysically incoherent doctrines is irrelevant. If the Incarnation were coherent, we still need to ask how such a divine initiative eases the normal human travail in fulfilling sacred obligation or indeed helps to reduce the perversity of militant evil.

### II

That God is supremely great or greater (*Allahu akbar*) is a conviction common to all the theisms of Hebrew lineage. The issue that divides them is precisely how this divine supremacy is to be understood. What makes God great? Cragg contends patiently that Islam misunderstands the greatness of God when it deflects the issue of human perversity into the political dimension, where rejection is subdued rather than redeemed. In both books, Cragg argues carefully and reverently that Muhammad's recruitment of the political wing was a necessary corollary of his belief that prophethood exhausts the divine resources for dealing with human sin and rebellion. God has warned through his spokesmen; men disregard and ignore, and need to be taught a lesson. Cragg asserts that when divine tuition fails to cure perversity the pen runs out of ink—the sovereignty that has no richer resources than law must opt for coercion. For God must succeed; and yet God's Party—*Hizb Allah*, in Qur'anic terminology—has run out of the only arsenal allowed to the truly faithful. If the prophet sticks to his guns, so to speak, the message is not merely taught but enforced. The sword then becomes mightier than the pen. In that sense, God and His Messenger do indeed have the last word.

The God of Christian faith, continues Cragg, succumbing for once to the very triumphalism he rightly condemns in Muslims, is above this kind of greatness. For when his message fails to educate, as it nearly always does, his grace and long-suffering are there to preempt any premature punitive options. Men have failed the examination, refused to learn the lesson, and yet the properly divine response here is a Christian one: to redeem their failure by a greater initiative of love and grace, a love that suffers, suffers unjustly, to redeem the unjust. It is merely human to resort to force in the face of failure. Divine ends require divine means; God's prophets must represent God's ways of dealing with mankind. The weapons of Muhammad's wars are, charges Cragg, to be carried backward into the character of his God. Islam's own slogan *Allahu akbar* is denied internally by the Muslim refusal to allow God to be really "greater" than merely the omnipotent Lord who dispatches prophetic instruction

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manuals for us and punishes failure with hellfire. Why shouldn't so great and resourceful a sovereignty take more radical measures in order to frustrate the impious will? Why shouldn't it redeem and rehabilitate the evil that it fails to cauterize through mere education? Only a God who can do this would be worthy of worship, would be *akbar*. Only such a God ought to have the last word.

Cragg is right to insist that mere exhortation, no matter how multiple and vehement, coupled with condemnations of perversity, threats of punishment, and edificatory sermons, do not suffice. Men flout them all. Excellent examples won't do either: the villain and miscreant couldn't care less about the exemplary goodness of the saint or the martyr. In the face of enforced religion, perversity simply withdraws deeper into the privacy of the heart; the prayer ritual may even encourage hypocrisy. Even collective piety, impressive in assembly and ostentatious in passion, is rarely genuine after the strange thrill of the public gaze has subsided. And piety, even when achieved, carries, as the study of hagiography shows, its own temptations and trials. For with that kind of moral excellence belong insidious tendencies to self-righteousness and, with a further twist of the spiral, a new, deeper kind of hubris, this time apparently sacred.

The perversity of man and the disturbing scale of our rejection of God are facts of religious history. But can we cure this perversity by any mechanism other than preaching and the law? It is incoherent to seek an external rescue from the plight created by human recalcitrance to divine law. There is a rut here. God warns; men disregard; God punishes and destroys. But there we have it. Such is the ultimate style of divine art. For man, created free, has an inner, regrettably often dominant tendency to wrongdoing. Nothing can cure it in most of us although God mysteriously cured it, by fiat, in prophets and drastically reduced it for the saints. The greatness of God consists in doing what is possible. The gesture in the Incarnation is metaphysically incoherent though even Jews and Muslims appreciate the moral stresses that desire it. Christians must demonstrate the coherence of this move.

### III

The God of Islam is a kind educator, and he wants the lesson learnt. The face of divine law may justifiably be stern so long as it is not hostile in its final intention. The God of the Qur'an knows both the word and the blow, so to speak, of authority and command. Discipline can bring intemperate demands and chastisement, but a foolish lenience is equally wrong. God supplements education with his grace. The view that God will show mercy to us sinners can often be a refuge for irresponsibility and a ready pretext for neglecting His law. Admittedly, disbelief in the divine mercy is a piece of cardinal infidelity in Islam. The Prophet taught that "God is more merciful toward His servants than is a mother toward her child." But once the season of education is over, God

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wants the lesson learnt. The Lord of Muhammad is compassionate yet vigilant, watching over His servants from the watchtower.

God, for Muslims, is neither a tragedian nor a sentimentalist. From cover to cover of the Qur'an, one discerns a total understanding, without illusions, of human nature as it is and of the related need for the firm yoke of the law. For we do not easily change for the better. The aim of the Qur'an is not to impose from the outside unrecognizable duties, but rather to extract from within man an awareness of duties implicitly recognized to be binding. It is in this context that the scripture calls upon its readers time and again to think reverently, to bring their eyes close to the texture of their mortality.

The task of educating man would be a forlorn hope if the material with which the prophet works were unpromising. Scripture appeals to our higher nature, which already acknowledges our duties and acknowledges all the more for failing to fulfill them. It is essential, if a religious idea is to be viable, that it embodies, albeit in fairer form and considered proportion, the very obligations which men are already to some degree able to fulfill. Effective ideals are a picture of valid human hopes and potentials, not an embarrassing reminder of what is impossible.

But aren't the prophetic injunctions, in some sense, radically new and demanding? Or else why must the divine spokesman, as so often happens, cry in the wilderness to an unheeding multitude? Cragg's critique of Islam forces us to note these disturbing questions. Admittedly, there will be rejection and conscious opposition to the moral ideals of our higher nature. The Qur'anic claim is that the voice of the warning prophet finds its way into the consciences of those inclined to submission (*islam*). For the ideals that make us authentically human are the very ideals that our higher nature instinctively craves and the Qur'an is the place to find both.

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Bruce Lawrence. *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1995 [reprint]. Studies in Comparative Religion. Pp. xxviii, 306. Price PB \$16.95. 1-5700-3091-X.

Bruce Lawrence. *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xix, 237. Price HB \$26.95. 0-6910-5769-9.

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With the recent rise to global prominence of what has come to be labeled “fundamentalism,” international observers of religious, political, and social phenomena have hastened to gauge the impact of fundamentalist groups on the sociopolitical environments in which these groups choose to operate. Before this can be done, however, it is necessary to have and agree on a definition and a typology of fundamentalism in order to ensure that a valid and common set of characteristics are being studied. Bruce Lawrence’s *Defenders of God* attempts to formulate a broad intellectual framework within which fundamentalism can be described, compared, and evaluated. Lawrence does so by breaking free from what he believes is a rather error-prone analytical framework used by modern scholars. In its place, he constructs a framework that is quite useful in evaluating fundamentalism in general but becomes a little suspect when applied to the specific phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism.

The thesis of *Defenders of God* is well founded and well documented. Citing numerous scholars and their relevant works, Lawrence reviews arguments supporting or attacking the position he takes, giving equal time to both sides. In the end, he manages to come out with an unimpaired theoretical framework, not one that is muddled in an attempt to placate any possible detractors.

Lawrence begins by saying that our present approach to the study of fundamentalism is wrong. Starting with the development of language and its effects on discovery and discourse, Lawrence notes the increasing tendency to use oppositional language in discourse and the predominance of an either/or mentality.

This modality of thought would have great consequences at the dawn of the Enlightenment and the rise of the West, which Lawrence attempts to redefine in view of the inherent flaws in the popular depiction of the West. First, while the Enlightenment changed the content of intellectual discourse, it did not change its context entirely. The dualistic mode of thought was still present, and the Enlightenment presented itself in opposition to older ideas and values. A strict dualism thus shaped the context of this confrontation; the Enlightenment was more than an alternative to the older order—it sought to negate it; and the irreconcilability of the two meant that one of them eventually had to go.

As progressive or as positive as these developments may have seemed then, or may seem now, they, Lawrence believes, may have gone too far. In dividing experience and action into the dualism of rational vs. irrational—and hence that of valid vs. invalid, the academia turned its collective back on important sources of knowledge and understanding. Lawrence calls for a revalidation of some of these, among them ideology. Ideology, returned to a position of validity, would yield a better understanding of fundamentalism since fundamentalism is religious ideology. Seeing fundamentalism as religious ideology will, according to Lawrence, lead us to a better understanding of the processes which give rise to fundamentalist fervor and will also enable us to predict the processes of thought and action in which fundamentalists are likely to engage in the present

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and in the future. A confrontational paradigm would taint all cross-cultural study, especially in disciplines, such as religion, where emotion and personal belief are involved.

So far, Lawrence speaks in general terms. He goes on to assess the influence these developments have had on fundamentalist theory and praxis. Lawrence sees fundamentalism as a reaction against modernism, though he qualifies his statement by confining the use of the term of modernism to such particular forms of it as secularism and nationalism. Furthermore, fundamentalism is a historical accident since it arises, in any form that it does, as a reaction to something else. Without some defining event which poses a threat or challenge to closely held beliefs and practices, fundamentalism, according to Lawrence, would not develop. Given this, it is possible to focus on what is most important to the Muslim reader and move from Lawrence's general treatment of fundamentalism to his treatment of Islamic fundamentalism in particular. In doing so, we might be able to judge the validity of his theoretical construct and its implications.

For Lawrence, Islamic fundamentalism could not have arisen without two defining events: the establishment of European hegemony through colonialism and the removal of colonial rule but continuation of colonial institutions with the Muslim world's return to self-determination. Colonial rule in the Muslim world lived on through such European ideas as secularism and nationalism, which would become the most powerful ideologies opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. In short, colonialism left in its wake an ethos foreign and threatening to Islamic values that were seen as all-important by some segments of the Muslim populace. This threatened constituency then moved toward more organized social action in its own self-interest—thus giving rise to fundamentalist movements.

In the Islamic world, fundamentalists, according to Lawrence, wage their war on many fronts. The enemy changes from time to time and place to place. Nationalism, secularism, humanism—whatever the “ism”—is the enemy as long as it is perceived to stand in opposition to what fundamentalists believe to be eternal, immutable truths. Yet to oppose some aspect of modernity on a purely intellectual plane would not be enough. The prevailing ethos prevails because of institutions and people that sustain it, and so they too must be opposed. While one can thus far agree with Lawrence, it is difficult to take with him the next leap of logic—namely, that fundamentalists are by definition oppositional and, therefore, fundamentalists who gain power are no longer fundamentalists. How, one might ask, does the Islamic Republic of Iran fit into this scheme? Furthermore, fundamentalists are, by Lawrence's definition, marginal players, and so being at the center of power robs them of their distinction of being fundamentalists. Lawrence's argument, applied to Islamic fundamentalism, strays since he seems to use a definition to create a valid fundamentalism instead of using fundamentalism to create a valid definition.



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Some of the assumptions underlying Lawrence's treatment of Islamic fundamentalism, and of Islam in general, are also questionable. First, in describing the Islamic experience, he claims that that experience is closed to those who do not speak or read Arabic, implying that there is a dogmatic language requirement that must be met in order functionally to become a Muslim; the theological experience is open to all, but that is it. But the experience of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of non-Arabic speaking converts would strongly imply otherwise.

Lawrence also claims that fundamentalists defend normative systems that are undiscoverable, that the norms they hold to be true must be taken purely on faith. This is not necessarily so for Islam, which encourages exploration of the universe for the proofs it contains in support of the guidance it furnishes and considers blind faith a sin. One common characteristic of the Islamic fundamentalist movements is the call for *ijtihad* and dissemination of the dogmatic ethos that has come to surround the *Shari'ah*. To say that Islamic fundamentalists are rigid ideologues is one thing, but to attribute this rigidity to dogmatic Islam is another. Besides, to imply the existence of such a dogmatic Islam would weaken Lawrence's theory that fundamentalism is a historical accident. A dogmatic Islam that must be taken on faith alone, as Lawrence puts it, would raise fundamentalism from the level of a historical accidental to that of a historical certainty since there will always be some movement or values that, being something "other" than the dogma, will be found to be incompatible with it. Pursuing this theme of incompatibility, Lawrence asserts that fundamentalism is incompatible with many forms of government, though, disappointingly, he does not go on to specify what it is compatible with. Lawrence does declare that fundamentalism is incompatible with monarchy and socialism, the two most predominant forms of government in the Muslim world today, and so he does not find it surprising that the Middle East is such a fertile ground for fundamentalism.

Lawrence's depiction of an inherently antagonistic fundamentalism is somewhat inadequate. For, if fundamentalism is an ideology, and as an ideology calls for action, then what action does it call for? The establishment of an Islamic form of governance? If fundamentalists do call for the establishment of a specific form a government, what form must it take and to what evidence can Lawrence point in detailing it? On the other hand, if Islamic fundamentalists merely call for the establishment of the *Shari'ah*, then what specific system of government, if any, is implied? Lawrence's analytical framework seems valid only for marginalized fundamentalist groups, but then begs the question when required to explain the experience of such groups in the few instances where they have somehow succeeded in taking power. For Lawrence, fundamentalists, once they come into power, no longer remain fundamentalists, and are thus easily explained away—leaving the integrity of his concept intact. Lawrence seems to ignore the evidence that many fundamentalist groups, once they are

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able to participate in government, participate in it while remaining within the governmental system and without necessarily opposing it. Some of the fundamentalist groups have become quite adept at electoral politics as well.

Lawrence realizes that the monarchies and socialist governments predominant in the Muslim world are far from being model Islamic governments. He readily admits that they may appear Islamic through their manipulation of Islamic symbols but that their commitment to the faith is shallow at best. Yet, he sees no point of contention between the fundamentalists and the governments in these matters. Lawrence further admits that the current governments—*government* here standing for people, not system—co-opt Islamic symbols and control any Islamic revival to their advantage, usually to forestall a popular backlash against their failed policies. In doing so, the regimes come into competition with the fundamentalist groups over the use of symbols, trying to win the same constituency. Admitting all this, Lawrence still sees fundamentalism as being inherently incompatible with *systems* rather than *regimes*, whereas all the evidence he presents shows that fundamentalism is incompatible with the current regimes. This is one danger of treating fundamentalism as religious ideology, on a par with other ideologies.

But none of these minor inconsistencies detract from the overall value of Lawrence's work. The analytical framework he constructs as it pertains to fundamentalism in general—as a movement of protest against modernity and its attendant value system—is well founded and will prove to be of great future value. Lawrence only seems to run into trouble when he begins to analyze Islamic fundamentalism. It is possible that the breadth and scope of his work prevented him from offering a detailed treatment of Islamic fundamentalism, itself the subject of whole volumes. Lawrence mentions the importance of testing hypotheses in analyzing fundamentalist movements. But *Defenders of God* sets forth a hypothesis and leaves the reader looking for tests to which it might be subjected. Lastly, *Defenders of God*, written as it was nearly ten years ago, is interesting in that it serves as a basis for comparing Lawrence's later work on similar subjects. It would be interesting to explore Lawrence's view of fundamentalism after he has tested his own hypothesis in the years following the publication of his book.

*Shattering the Myth* is Lawrence's most recent work on Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Written nine years after *Defenders of God*, it does not treat the subject in as much depth as the earlier work. Distinctly less apparent is his reference to modernity and its relationship to fundamentalism. In its place, Lawrence relies heavily on nationalism as the spoiler of the fundamentalists' efforts to gain a central place in their sociopolitical environments. Lawrence begins by stating that the mythologized "monolithic" Islam does not exist. For Lawrence, Islam is a rich system of symbols with intertwined meanings, meanings whose choice is due as much to social or political expediency as to dogma. It is his view that Islam is not inherently violent and that this is a

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stereotype that must be laid to rest in order to understand the nature of Islamic activities. Islam and Muslims are rational actors and can be understood rationally, or as rationally as a religious ideology can be understood.

There is also the matter of tone. Lawrence remarks, "I will try to chart my own middle way, steering between the twin minefields of apologetics and polemics." But at various points in this work, he fails to do so. Most evident are his dangerous brushes with apologetics. He often justifies the Islamic worldview by comparing it to the Christian and Jewish, remarking that the Islamic worldview is no less faulty than any other. In addition, he states, "If violence pervades Muslim public life . . . it is because violence pervades the world order." Such statements are at odds with his attempts to demonstrate Islam's relevance based upon its own merits.

These points can, however, be overlooked without in any way challenging the importance of Lawrence's efforts. There are more critical factors that keep us from fully understanding the historical and contemporary processes involved in the activities of Islamic fundamentalists. We must understand motivation, at the very least. We must also understand the relationships, past and present, between fundamentalists and their world in order better to understand their actions and the motivations behind them. For Lawrence, the defining element of fundamentalism is its opposition to nationalism; fundamentalism cannot be understood without a thorough understanding, first, of nationalism, and, second, of the relationship between the two.

Lawrence's treatment of nationalism in *Shattering the Myth* seems to deny the nuances which characterize its relationship to fundamentalism in his earlier works. For example, in *Defenders of God*, Lawrence puts fundamentalism at odds with modernity; in *Shattering the Myth*, nationalism is the principal enemy. What he does not adequately account for, however, is modernity's relationship with nationalism or fundamentalism. If there is a relevant relationship between the three, does this still affect how we view the causality that, according to him, exists between nationalism and fundamentalism? To say that Islam is incompatible with much of what modernity offers does not necessarily mean that Islam is incompatible with nationalism. The confusion surrounding Lawrence's treatment of nationalism in reference to fundamentalism is due to the fact that at various points in his book it is difficult to tell whether he is being too abstract or too specific in his use of these concepts.

Furthermore, there needs to be a better articulation of the concepts Lawrence treats in his work. No doubt, all of them are important to describing one another through comparison or contrast, but Lawrence's theory, which uses the explanatory value he believes they have for one another, has not reached its full maturity in *Shattering the Myth*. While he recognizes our ignorance of the relationship between nationalism and fundamentalism, Lawrence himself does little to further that understanding. His strong emphasis on nationalism seems to lead one to believe that he credits nationalism with being the determinant of

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fundamentalist sentiments among certain societies. This goes beyond merely stating that nationalism and fundamentalism are at odds with each other. Yet, the reasons as to why nationalism is the determinant of fundamentalism are not sufficiently revealed.

But while he does attempt to explain what gives rise to fundamentalism, Lawrence does not explain why fundamentalism could not have some other, more obvious cause. In this book, in stark contrast to *Defenders of God*, the reference to modernity's role in shaping fundamentalism is almost nonexistent. But by ignoring the relationship between fundamentalism and modernity, we ignore the battle fundamentalism wages on a moral plane—unless of course we dismiss the moral discourses of fundamentalists as mere rhetoric and not at all indicative of their true concerns. This would then imply a hidden agenda on the part of fundamentalists, reducing their activities to a mere lust for political power. On the other hand, Lawrence, if he does not wish to dismiss the moral discourse of fundamentalism, must explain just how nationalism offends the moral sensibilities of fundamentalists and motivates them to coalesce into definable bodies for collective action.

In the end, Lawrence seems to be too abstract in his description of the relationship between nationalism and fundamentalism. It would make for a more effective explanation to specify if there is some characteristic of nationalism—such as an aggressively secular tone—that brings fundamentalism into opposition to a nationalist movement. Even in this case, it does not follow that nationalism and fundamentalism are universally incompatible. Even Ernest Gellner, whom Lawrence often quotes, states in his book *Nationalism*, “Islam and nationalism could always co-exist.” Modernity is more aptly called the cause of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Secular nationalism, on the other hand, is better described as the contemporary competitor of fundamentalism for a common constituency.

It is true that nationalism and fundamentalism can be at odds but only because of their competition for a common constituency, control of which would lead them to the center of power. Further exacerbating the competition is the use of the same symbol systems. In Muslim countries, both nationalists and fundamentalists use an Islamic symbol system, which inevitably leads to ideological clashes. Yet, we cannot deny the possibility of a religious nationalism that would avoid much of the opposition between the two. Nationalism can be based on a common religious identity. Even though this may not often happen, the possibility of its occurrence has ramifications for any theory which sees fundamentalism as resulting from the opposition of nationalism to modernity and posits a never-ending struggle between nationalism and fundamentalism.

There remain only a few minor points worthy of note. Lawrence's treatment of women's issues—though he calls these an important indicator of Islam's “progress”—is not very well articulated with the rest of the book. It is also in his

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description of this so-called progress that he most often loses his objectivity because he seems to be using some unstated standard to measure the Islamic societies' relative lack of "progress" in this area. Lawrence's measure of progress, which often sounds quite Western, presupposes that it is a valid standard to use.

Lawrence spends a great deal of time on the term *jihad*. While earlier in his book he warns us about the need to separate the reality from the rhetoric, it is in his discussion of *jihad* that he refuses to heed his own advice. To Muslims, the term *jihad* simply symbolizes struggle. This is the reality of the term. Yet, Lawrence treats it only in its rhetorical sense, and in the sense the West has popularly given it, when he calls it "holy war." His chapter on the concept only perpetuates a rhetorical symbol used by Islam's detractors as often as, if not more than, by its supporters. With plenty of opportunity to clarify himself, Lawrence gives no indication that his understanding of the term *jihad* is any less erroneous than the reader's, whose own interpretation Lawrence assumes may be faulty.

The criticism offered here of Lawrence's work by no means diminishes the value of his contribution. *Shattering the Myth* is recommended reading and suggests directions future scholars may profitably take in their study of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Even the final chapter on *jihad*, for all its perpetuation of negative connotations, when read in the proper context of comparison between two different interpretations of a rhetorical concept, is of immense value. In addition, an understanding of Lawrence's theories in *Defenders of God*, written nine years earlier, may help qualify some of his assertions in *Shattering the Myth* and, as a result, save the reader from misreading Lawrence.

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Omar Khalidi. *Indian Muslims Since Independence*. New Delhi: Vikas Publication House, 1995. Pp. 246. Distributed in the U.S.A. by South Asia Books, Columbia, MO. Price HB \$28.00. 0-7069-9570-8.]

Omar Khalidi of M.I.T. writes about Indian Muslims as an insider, a native of the former princely state of Hyderabad and educated initially there. Yet he displays the objectivity of an outsider and his grasp of modern social science methods and concepts shows his subsequent western training and residence. The book is a revision of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Wales.

The author essays to give in eight chapters a dispassionate, scholarly description of the third largest Muslim community in the world, after Indonesia and Pakistan, all three of which tend to be overlooked by specialists on Islam

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and the Arab Middle East. After a brief and not very theoretical or comparative introduction in which he narrows his focus further to the Urdu-speaking Muslims of North India and the Deccan, where Muslim rulers held sway for seven centuries, Khalidi plunges into the most sensitive topic of Hindu-Muslim relations: communal riots. He sets forth a typology of communal violence and provocatively locates India's in the same category, "inter-societal violence that does not threaten the state," as the pogroms of Nazi Germany and Bosnia. After dismissing the proximate causes such as Hindus playing music before mosques and Muslims slaughtering cows, he leans to a mixture of economic (destroy business competitors) and political (terrorize or punish Muslim voters) explanations for the riots, leaving the reader to wonder why class solidarity has succumbed to religious identity even in the industrial cities of India.

There follows in Chapter 3 the most original and valuable contribution on "Muslims in the Indian Economy." His focus on the interior regions which Muslims once dominated leads him initially down the well-trodden path of charging discrimination against Muslims in the postindependence civil service, army, and police recruitment, but unlike others does not neglect the Muslim peasantry, artisans, and industrial proletariat for whom these middle class careers are largely irrelevant although a few of them now qualify for "Other Backward Caste" preferences. Like African Americans, these Muslims are held back also by their aversion to modern vocational education and their inclination instead for traditional Islamic schooling for the boys. Here his exclusion of the non-Urdu speaking, chiefly Gujerati, Tamil, and Malayalee, business communities of coastal India causes him almost to ignore one of the few bright spots for the Muslims of India. However, the recent spread of communal violence to the South (e.g., Coimbatore) jeopardizes even this.

The following related chapters on "Muslim Educational Backwardness" and "The Urdu Language and Muslim Identity" cry for comparison with other minorities both inside and outside India, particularly the Irish, Jewish, and overseas Chinese who have been much more adaptable yet preserved their group identities. Are Urdu and Hindi really different languages as well as scripts?

Finally, Khalidi investigates the question, seldom asked by either Muslim or Hindu writers, what are the Hindu majority's views and attitudes toward and demands upon the Muslim minority? And secondly, what various political strategies have or might Muslims adopt in response? Perhaps these chapters might better have come first in the book to set the stage for particular policy problems. In apparent contradistinction to the goal of the Nazis in Germany toward Jews—expulsion and extermination—the "Hindutva" forces in India, the Sangh Parivar, at least publicly aim only at the forced assimilation of all indigenous Muslims and conflict arises over the desire of most Muslims to maintain their religio-cultural identity.

Regarding alternative strategies, Khalidi discounts too readily the nonpartisan pressure group method, so effective for American Jews. Perhaps this

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stems from a misunderstanding of the meaning of lobbying in American politics. Secondly, he dismisses the “nationalist” Muslims in the Congress Party as unrepresentative “show boys” and wistfully hankers for a return to reserved legislative and civil service seats for Muslims, if not separate electorates. Thirdly, he accords more credibility than this reviewer would to the Muslims’ strategy of forming their own political party, which has been effective (at great cost in riots) only where Muslims enjoy local majorities as in his own Hyderabad (the Majlis Ittihad-ul-Muslimin), Kerala (the Indian Union Muslim League), and, he might have added, Kashmir (the National Conference), but which has failed elsewhere (the Muslim Majlis of Uttar Pradesh). In this analysis, he does not even mention, fourthly, the possibility of “joining the enemy,” like Jewish neoconservative Republicans in the United States. The Bharatiya Janata Party cabinet now has two Muslim members!

Khalidi’s clear preference for cultural pluralism is currently fashionable in the United States (“diversity” and “multiculturalism”) just when the Hindu majority in India has been moving in the opposite direction toward assimilation (“Indianization”) of minorities. The price of individual if not group survival may be a greater degree of accommodation to Indian nationalism. In this connection, one of the few errors in the book is to confuse Nehru’s opposition to separate electorates and to religion in general (p. 153) with a “dismissal of Muslim culture” (p. 231), of which he was an admirer. More practical is Khalidi’s advice to Muslims to become computer literate (p. 119) and “outside the political arena to begin networking with trade unions, professional organizations, non-Muslim religious leaders, social workers and voluntary organizations of all types” (p. 233) in order to build up the cross-pressures within the majority community which sometimes protect minorities.

The author’s very thorough bibliographies at the end of each chapter put the lie to Barbara Metcalf’s assertion in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (November 1995) that the study of Indian Muslims has been neglected among South Asianists.

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Abdulkader I. Tayob. *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1995. Price PB R60.00. 0-7992-1612-7.

The recent political change in South Africa, including the movement toward the establishment of a civil society, is making available to the outside world much hitherto unknown information about various groups and religious activities in that country. This book about the history and development of South African Islam since 1658 falls under this category of information. It is indispensable for

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any library's Islamic studies and sociology of religion sections. Unlike other stereotypical studies about religion in the so-called open societies, the book under review approaches the phenomenon of Islam in South Africa from a historical-contextual perspective. It succinctly addresses the internal development of the multiethnic South African Muslim community as it sought to shape its identity in relation to its homelands—the Malay-Indonesian archipelago and India—and in response to the challenge of living under the apartheid system. The book describes the intergenerational changes that have occurred in the community's perspectives.

The book, consisting of seven chapters, undertakes to discuss, within the South African context, Islamic resurgence, which is defined by the author as the "variety of perspectives and positions within a religiously vital and politically active Islam" (p. xii). Chapter 1 sets the parameters of the study by discussing the rise of the Islamic movement in South Africa and the challenge it posed to the traditional patterns of Islamic understanding in the country. The South African Muslim youth ventured to develop a new Islamic paradigm of active engagement in the religious, social, and political transformation of their country. Tayob here examines the role of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), formed in 1970, the pioneer and foremost Islamic revivalist organization in contemporary Africa.

Chapter 2 is a historical survey of the coming of Islam to South Africa and the constructs of Islam in the three regions of the Cape, Transvaal, and Natal with their different ethnic, religious, and social characteristics and features. It charts the history and impact of the Malay, Shafi'i, Hanafi, Ottoman, Sufi, and Indian Deobandi/Tablighi strands, or schools of thought, on the activities of the various sections of the South African Muslim community. It brings out the internal variety of, and the transformations that occurred in, the South African Muslim community's religious perspectives during the apartheid era.

Chapter 3, titled "Islamic Resurgence," provides a history of the forerunners of Islamic resurgence in South Africa since 1933. The phenomenon of Islamic resurgence in South Africa was initiated by the younger generation of Malay Muslim immigrants who rejected their ethnic identity as Malays in favor of their religious identity as Muslims.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the emergence and evolution of the Muslim Youth Movement, led by young South African Muslims dissatisfied with the ritualistic, ethnic, ideological, and organizational structures of the Islamic resurgent movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan, in the Muslim world. The first stage of the South African Islamic resurgent movement involved the task of informing Muslims that "Islam is a way of life." Laying emphasis on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, on the study of the Arabic language (instead of Urdu), and on the goal to have an "English translation of the Quran in every home in South Africa" (p. 111), the MYM



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sought to institute a rational and intelligent approach to Islam as a religion and way of life. The MYM also sought a more active role for Muslim women.

On the public front, the MYM initially adopted a “reticent” attitude (p. 119) toward racism in South Africa, preferring to concentrate on the ideological transformation of the South African Muslim mind and society. In 1974, it launched a program to invite the Africans victimized by the apartheid policies to Islam through social welfare programs such as “Operation Winter Warm” and “Qurbani” (p. 123).

The second phase in the history of the MYM is identified as Islamism. It involved concentration on training and securing economic and ideological independence with a view to producing Islamist workers. During this phase, the MYM was inspired by the ideological concepts of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the structural framework of the Jama‘at-i-Islami of Pakistan, and the ideational tenets of Professor Ismail al-Faruqi of Temple University, Philadelphia, USA—all of which are integral parts of the voices of Islamic resurgence. The MYM sought to gird itself both ideologically and structurally, laying emphasis on training and schooling of members, with the aim of producing its own *‘ulama* (p. 156). In relation to state apartheid, this phase witnessed “the inadequacy of Islamism and the Movement’s failure to respond creatively and constructively to the South African context” (ibid.). Meanwhile, the MYM continued to face opposition from the South African Deobandi/Tablighi leaders who criticized the MYM as a modernist movement. While the more radically oriented antiapartheid Muslim leaders, such as Mawlana Farid Esack and Achmat Casseim, chose to form their own organizations, viz., the Call of Islam and Qiblah movements, choosing to work in close ranks with nationalist movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress, and seeking a more active role for South African Muslims in the broader liberation struggle against apartheid. In contrast to them, the MYM saw “itself as the local manifestation of the global Islamic movement” (p. 152), that is, not an exclusively antiapartheid movement but an overall religious movement addressing different aspects of life and thought.

The most recent phase of the MYM is described by the author as that of Islamic Contextualism, during which the organization has sought to configure the role of Islamic resurgence in a Muslim minority context by seeking role representation and endorsement for Islam in South Africa through active engagement in the building of a civil society. This phase has seen the emergence of the MYM’s political profile, bringing the MYM into confrontation with the apartheid state (pp. 161–162).

This period has also witnessed a change in the MYM leadership, which was now prepared to engage in the struggle for the eradication of apartheid and establishment of justice in the country (p. 167). The new leadership knew well that the MYM “had a role to play in the ‘New South Africa’ and not only in the

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small enclaves of an Islamic South Africa” (p. 176). This phase saw the emergence of the MYM as a national organization representing the progressive face of Islam in South Africa and promoting establishment of appropriate relations between the state and organized religion.

This absorbing book is a detailed survey and analysis of the role of an Islamic resurgent movement—the MYM—in the changing political and civil context of South Africa. It brings home the fact that Islamic resurgence, in spite of its Ummatic span, is not a monolithic but a contextualized phenomenon.

This book is essential to the study of the history, forms, and development of Islam and Muslim society in South Africa. It is also a highly valuable addition to the literature on global Islamic resurgence. It is sure to serve as an important sourcebook for future studies of Islam in South Africa.

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Mushtaqur Rahman and Guljan Rahman. *Geography of the Muslim World*. Chicago: IQRA International Educational Foundation, 1997. Pp. xxii, 319. Price PB \$20.00. 1-5631-6372-1.

There is a dearth of sound instructional and learning resources on Islam and Muslims in social studies in general and in geography in particular. Such materials are especially lacking in modern Western languages, which have gained currency as media of instruction in the metropolitan culture of most Muslim nations as well.

Large communities of Muslim immigrants now exist in several Western countries, which are witnessing a rapid growth of Islam among their populations. These Muslims naturally feel the need to establish their identity and explore their potential. At the same time, the host majority communities feel the need for greater awareness of Islamic culture and of diverse Muslim groups. This need is further underscored by the current trends of social and economic globalization. Muslims have attracted the world’s attention by virtue of their strategic location, their rich natural resources, and their (growing) population of 1.2 billion Muslims in fifty-two Muslim-majority countries with significant minority populations in many others.

*Geography of the Muslim World*, written by the husband-and-wife team of Dr. Mushtaqur Rahman and Mrs. Guljan Rahman, attempts to meet this twofold need. The IQRA International Educational Foundation of Chicago has published this 320-page volume as part of its senior-level school curriculum. The authors themselves are Muslim geographers with an established reputation. Mushtaqur Rahman is Professor Emeritus of Cultural Geography in the Department of Anthropology at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Guljan Rahman is a former

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professor of Geography at Sir Syed Girls College, Karachi. They have coauthored several books in the field.

The volume under review reflects the authors' rigorous scholarship. It consists of, besides the authors' preface and the publisher's note to parents and teachers, an introduction and forty-nine chapters. The text is greatly enhanced by fifty-two maps and sixty-eight figures; a selected bibliography is also provided. The concise introduction treats the essentials of Islamic culture and several other issues. Even a cursory glance at the book gives evidence of the meticulous research work that has gone into the book. The authors have succeeded in accurately depicting the vast, complex, and changing political and economic landscape of the Muslim world, explaining at the same time that the spirit of a universal Islamic culture surges through and links up different Muslim nations.

A stupendous task like this can hardly be flawless. The authenticity of information granted, the claim concerning the modernity of methodology cannot be easily defended. The areas of improvement in this regard would certainly include, among others, reorganization of the content into fewer chapters. The present assignment of one separate chapter to each country regardless of its area, its population, and the complexity of issues facing it is cumbersome. While the figures and photographs are beautiful, the same cannot be said of the maps. The inclusion of the Xinjiang (China) mosque in the chapter on Kazakhstan can be misleading. On the map of the old world (p. 2), while the boundary between North and South Yemen (former or present) is clearly demarcated, those between the countries of the Muslim world are barely identifiable. In two separate places, both San'a and Aden appear as capitals of Yemen, and the text does not clarify the matter. The value of the book would be greatly increased by stating learner objectives, sequencing the contents compatibly with the objectives, and providing test questions and an index.

Overall, the book is a valuable addition to the current instructional resources on a grossly neglected subject. Both Muslim and non-Muslim readers will find it highly useful.

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## Journal of Qur'anic Studies

In spite of the fundamental importance of the Qur'an for Islam and Islamic Studies there is no journal dedicated to Qur'anic studies in the West or in the Muslim world. This is an obvious gap in scholarly periodical publications which the Centre of Islamic Studies has undertaken to fill by launching a journal dedicated to that subject.

The *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* will aim to publish original, scholarly articles on all aspects of the Qur'an, focusing on the linguistic and stylistic features of the text itself, and also on other media associated with it (for example, audio-visual and computer databases). The Qur'an's influence on literature, theology, law, ethics and political and social studies will be another major area of interest.

Articles will be in both English and Arabic. This will create a strong and unique link between scholars in the West and the Muslim world. Authors from all over Europe, and from the United States, Asia and Africa as well, will be invited to contribute. Although the Journal will principally be dedicated to articles, it will contain book reviews and a section providing information about activities related to the Qur'an, such as conferences, courses, and forthcoming publications and theses.

The *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* will be published twice yearly in the first instance (June and December), and each issue will be up to 200 pages in length. It is expected that libraries as well as scholars of the Qur'an, Islamic Studies and Comparative Religion in the Muslim world and the West will subscribe to the Journal. The first issue is expected to be published in June 1999.

The editors affirm their dedication to impartial and scholarly inquiry.

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## ¶Call for Papers

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The traditions of Qur'anic textual scholarship and interpretation continue to undergo change and development. The ways in which we read, understand, interpret, debate and represent the Qur'anic text are now informed by a number of approaches, some of which have their origin in disciplines not conventionally associated with the Arabist / Islamkunde fields of inquiry. More established scholarly traditions also continue to produce significant additions to our knowledge of the Qur'an and of the

related cultural and scholarly production, in written, oral and graphical form.

The convenors are seeking to juxtapose this array of ideas and methods with what might seem a basic question: how is the Qur'anic text to be read and interpreted? We have listed some possible starting points:

- The making of the text: collection, codices and *qira'at*.
- Writing and representing the text: from al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf to HTML.
- Linguistic approaches to the Qur'an.
- The Qur'an as 'themes': problems and perspectives.
- Frameworks for the study of recitation.
- Issues in Qur'an translation.
- The beginnings of the *tafsir* tradition.
- Qur'an and *tafsir* in *madrasa* and university curricula.
- The Qur'an in popular culture and literature.
- Tafsir* in periodical literature and the mass media.

Needless to say, contributions on relevant topics other than those listed are also welcome.

Our objective is to stimulate discussion, debate and research on all aspects of the Qur'anic text and interpretation. If you would like information on the conference and the submission of papers, please contact the convenors.



*Studies in Contemporary Islam*, a refereed journal, is published semiannually, in spring and fall. It is devoted to the understanding, review, analysis, and critique of contemporary Islamic religious, intellectual, and philosophical developments on the one hand, and of sociopolitical changes in Islamic societies on the other. The journal aims to be interdisciplinary and international in its range and coverage. It is intended to serve as a forum for scholarly dialogue and exchange, not to promote a particular point of view or ideology.

**Notes to Contributors.** Two copies of a manuscript should be sent to Mumtaz Ahmad, Department of Political Science, Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia 23668 (junaid@erols.com), with a copy sent via e-mail to Mustansir Mir (mmir@cc.yzu.edu). *The Chicago Manual of Style* (14th edition) is the preferred reference for format and style, but, within a given manuscript, consistent use must be made of any style used. Authors will be requested to supply accepted manuscripts on disk. It is assumed that a manuscript submitted to *Studies in Contemporary Islam* is the author's original work and is not under submission anywhere else.

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