



Woodrow Wilson
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Division of United States Studies

Muslims in the United States

Identity, Influence, Innovation



Edited by Philippa Strum



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Muslims in the United States: Identity, Influence, Innovation

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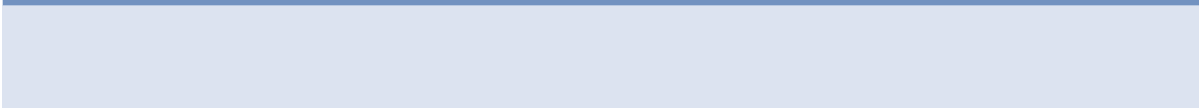
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Introduction*

Philippa Strum

There is no way of knowing exactly how many Muslims live in the United States, as the separation of religion and state mandated by the American Constitution prevents American officials from asking U.S. residents about their religion. The number of Muslim residents is contested, and estimates range anywhere from two million to seven million.¹

What is known, however, is that the American Muslim community is extraordinarily diverse and equally vibrant. The American Muslim Poll 2004, a joint project of Project MAPS: Muslims in the American Public Square and Zogby International, found that the largest ethnic groups among American Muslims are South Asians (34 percent, including 19 percent from Pakistan and 9 percent from India), Arabs (26 percent), African Americans (20 percent), and Africans (seven percent). Even these numbers minimize the diversity of American Muslims, whose background lies in over 80 nations. Slightly over one-third of them were born in the United States, suggesting that even as immigration brings more Muslims to this country, the number of second- and third-generation Muslim Americans is growing.²

According to the American Muslim Poll 2004, American Muslims as a whole are well-educated, affluent, young, and politically active. Fifty-nine percent are college graduates, 52 percent have an income of \$50,000 or more, 63 percent are under 50 years of age, and 82 percent of those eligible report that they are registered to vote.³ A 2004 study issued by the Michigan-based Institute for Social Policy and Understanding on Muslims in the Detroit metropolitan area, which has one of the country's largest Muslim populations, suggested that one-third of the region's Muslims were regular mosque-goers,⁴ although an earlier study by Project MAPS estimated that figure to be over 50 percent nationally.⁵ A study undertaken in conjunction with the Hartford Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religious Research estimated in 2002 that there were

*Susan Nugent and Acacia Reed, the Division of U.S. Studies Program Assistant and Program Associate respectively, were central to the organization of the 2005 conference and to the publication of this volume. Susan Nugent and Danielle Tarantolo, then the U.S. Studies Program Associate, were responsible for a major part of the work involved in organizing the 2003 conference and editing the resultant publication. The Division is grateful as well to the planning committees for the 2003 and 2005 conferences, and to PaL-Tech, Inc. and the International Institute of Islamic Thought for their financial support.

over 1200 mosques in the United States, and it is likely that the number has increased.⁶ While calculations again vary, there are probably more than 200 Islamic full-time schools in this country, not including hundreds of individual classes held at mosques and community centers.⁷

There is nonetheless a paucity of generally available scholarly information about American Muslims. With that in mind, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars' Division of United States Studies organized a conference, held in June 2003, to bring together some of the work of leading scholars of the many American Muslim communities. The papers from the conference were published, in English and Arabic, as *Muslims in the United States: Demography, Beliefs, Institutions*,⁸ and a number of them are included in this volume.

In one of the papers written for the 2003 conference, Dr. Osman Bakar of Georgetown University explored the impact of American theorists on Islamic thought in Indonesia and Malaysia and suggested a typography for the assessment of the impact of an Islamic scholar on Islamic theorists in another country. We reprint it here in the hope that the typology may prove useful to other scholars. Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the distinguished Islamic theoretician who gave the luncheon address at the conference and who was cited by Dr. Bakar as particularly influential in Malaysia and Indonesia, spoke of the potential impact of American Islamic thinkers. "There is every possibility that the Islamic intellectual community in the United States," he declared, "can and will play an important role in the future of the Islamic world," a role potentially as important as that of Andalusia in the 10th through 13th centuries.⁹

According to both Dr. Nasr and Dr. Bakar, the latent impact of American Islamic thought is facilitated by the greater intellectual freedom that many thinkers from Muslim nations experience upon arrival in the United States. It is also furthered, they agreed, by the willingness of some American Islamic theorists to focus on topics such as the environment, the relationship between science and Islam, the question of Islam and religious diversity, and changing gender roles in Islam – issues of increasing importance that are currently being addressed by relatively few Islamic thinkers in Muslim nations.

If Islamic thinkers in the United States are indeed likely to play an important role elsewhere in the world, that is a phenomenon worth study. The Division of U.S. Studies decided to follow the lead of Dr. Nasr and Dr. Bakar, organizing a second conference in May 2005 to try to assess the current influence of American Islamic theorists on the thought of Islamic thinkers in Muslim nations. In the course of doing so, the conference planners found themselves speaking about younger American Islamic thinkers whose work is still less known in other countries but holds the potential for significant influence. The conference was therefore reorganized so that roughly half of the papers focused on analyzing the influence of American thinkers, or the reasons for the lack of it, with the other half presenting the thought of younger and potentially influential innovative American theorists.

What follows is a selection of papers from the 2003 and 2005 conferences. They include assessments of the influence of American Islamic theorists, or the absence of

such influence, on Muslim thinkers in Africa (Sulayman Nyang), Southeast Asia (Osman Bakar), Pakistan (Tamara Sonn), Turkey (Ibrahim Kalin), and the Arab world (Joseph Lumbard). They look at American mosques (Ihsan Bagby), American Muslim intellectuals (Seyyed Hossein Nasr) and American Muslim civic and political involvement (Mohamed Nimer), as well as new approaches by American Muslim scholars to gender (Amina Wadud, Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, Amira el-Azhary Sonbol) and pluralism (Ali Asani, Jane Smith). American history is particularly relevant for many African-American Muslims, and this is reflected in the essays by Sherman Jackson and Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons. Finally, Scott Keeter and Andrew Kohut report on the current attitudes of non-Muslim Americans toward Muslims.

The Division of United States Studies hopes that this volume will prove useful to scholars, policymakers, and the public at large. Space limitations preclude republication of all of the papers from the earlier volume, but they remain available on the Division's website¹⁰ and will illuminate our work as we continue our study of the identity, influence and innovative ideas of Muslims in the United States.

NOTES

1. Zahid H. Bukhari, "Demography, Identity, Space: Defining American Muslims" in Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo, eds., *Muslims in the United States: Demography, Beliefs, Institutions* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), pp. 7-20, at p. 7. See also Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "Muslims in U.S. Politics: Recognized and Integrated, or Seduced and Abandoned?," *XXI SAIS Review* (2001), pp. 91-102, at p. 92. For some of the differing estimates, see, e.g., Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl and Bryan T. Froehle, "The Mosque in America: A National Portrait" (Council for American Islamic Relations, 2001), p. 3, available at <http://www.cair-net.org/mosquereport/>; CAIR press release, April 26, 2001, http://www.cair-net.org/mosquereport/mosque_report-nr.doc; Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, "American Religious Identification Survey 2001," available at www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/key-findings.htm; Tom W. Smith, "Estimating the Muslim Population in the United States" (American Jewish Committee, 2001); Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, "Muslim Americans: A Demographic Report," in Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Hopes, Fears, Aspirations: Muslims in American Public Life* (AltaMira Press, 2003).

2. Project MAPS: Muslims in the American Public Square and Zogby International, *Muslims in the American Public Square: Shifting Political Winds & Fallout from 9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (October 2004), available at <http://www.projectmaps.com/AMP2004report.pdf>.

3. Op. cit.

4. Ihsan Bagby, *A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy, Politics and Religion* (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2004), available at http://www.ispu.us/pdfs/detroit_mosque_2.pdf.

5. Bukhari, op. cit., at p. 12. The entire 2001 "American Muslims Poll," November/December 2001, is available at <http://www.projectmaps.com/pmreport.pdf>.

6. Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl, and Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Council on American-Islamic Relations, April 26, 2001), available at http://www.cair-net.org/mosquereport/Masjid_Study_Project_2000_Report.pdf.

7. In “Defining Islamic Education: Differential and Applications,” Susan L. Douglass and Munir A. Shaikh put the number of full-time Islamic primary, elementary, middle and/or high schools in the United States as at least 112. Douglass and Shaikh, 7 *Islam and Education* (December 2004), available at <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/cice/articles/sdms171.htm>. According to Karen Keyworth, co-founder of the Islamic School League of America, as of August 2005 there were at least 222. Information provided by Ms. Keyworth by telephone, August 16, 2005; also cited in Benjamin Duncan, “US Islamic Schools Under Scrutiny,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 9, 2004, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/ADC84B59-13CB-4180-8D69-4659A080EB0D.htm>. Dr. M. A. Muqhtar Khan puts the 2005 figure at over 400. Khan, “Struggling for the Souls of Islamic Schools,” *San Jose Mercury News*, July 3, 2005, available at <http://www.ijtihad.org/islamic-schools.htm>.

8. Strum and Tarantolo, op. cit.; Arabic edition 2004.

9. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “American Islamic Intellectual Activity and the Islamic World,” in Strum and Tarantolo, op. cit., pp. 137-150, at p. 146.

10. www.wilsoncenter.org/usstudies.

Part I

Islam and Muslims in the United States

American Muslim Organizations: Before and After 9/11

MOHAMED NIMER

The institutional growth of the American Muslim community has been remarkable: from one congregation in the mid-1920s to more than 2,000 organizations of all functional types by the end of the twentieth century. American Muslims are experiencing life as part of the increasingly global communications and economic systems led by the United States. All indications suggest a growing momentum among Muslims in favor of integration in America's civic and political life.

To be sure, some Muslims maintain an isolationist attitude toward U.S. society. Some believe that American society is largely hedonistic and morally corrupt. They are proud that Muslims suffer much less than others from problems of contemporary life such as alcoholism, drug addiction, AIDS, suicide, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, abortion, crime, and racism. They believe Muslims ought to avoid contact with organized society. Instead, they propose to focus only on *da'wa* (call to Islam) for Americans. Some of these isolationists believe the very presence of Muslims in the West is a phenomenon that will fade away once a true Islamic caliphate is established in Muslim lands. However, polls conducted by Muslim community organizations suggest that most Muslims believe such a development to be so unlikely that relying upon it will result only in the self-imposed marginalization of Muslims.

All communities suffer from social maladies. Viewing all American society as decadent is not very different from stereotyping Muslims as fanatics. Moreover, mainstream Muslims consider many American values to be consistent with Islamic moral teachings and view them as more present in the West than in most Muslim countries. Chief among these are the cultural norms of hard work, entrepreneurship, and liberty; civilian control of the military; the clear institutionalization of political power; a diffused process of making public decisions; and a functioning civil society that gives voice to the competing interests in the country.

Muslim activists increasingly express views based on their own strategic interests as American citizens who earn their living in the United States and whose children are growing up in this country and being socialized by its educational systems. As Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds and ideological beliefs form institutions, they ask the same questions others do when they embark on collective action: Who are we? What do we need? The core values of religious and ethnic associations, and the fact-based

assessment of the needs of the community and of the environment in which they operate, illuminate the answers. While mosques and Islamic schools address matters of worship and child education, charities and public affairs groups have focused on the social and political domains.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND CHARITITES

Social assistance activities are sanctioned by ethnic and religious values. Many Muslims give their alms to mosques. Others, perhaps because their community centers do not possess the institutional infrastructure to manage the collection and distribution of donations, seek out independent charity groups instead. While many of these groups specialize in sending emergency help abroad when there are international crises, a growing number of programs provide services to needy people in the local communities.

Indeed, large social service programs targeting domestic beneficiaries in various ethnic groups were created even before the emergence of international relief groups. Many such organizations are based on the religious concept of *zakat* (almsgiving). The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, which has been active since the mid-1970s, is perhaps the oldest and largest of such agencies. Its multi-million-dollar programs are funded by government and private foundations and include employment, welfare and liaison services. Recently, much smaller social assistance groups have emerged in communities around the country, performing the traditional social assistance function of collecting and distributing food, clothing and money to those in need. Some of these groups have worked on youth problems; others have provided services to specific beneficiary groups such as new immigrants, women and uninsured patients. The Shifa Community Clinic in Sacramento, California, the University Muslim Medical Association at the University of California at Los Angeles, the Crescent Clinic in Greater Kansas City, the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota, and the Hamdard Center in Wood Dale, Illinois are all examples of such organizations.

A large part of community charity resources is devoted to international relief efforts in countries where people live in extreme poverty and have faced wars and natural disasters. Several relief groups were formed by members of ethnic groups and have specialized in geographic locations that reflect the ethnic backgrounds of the founders. Perhaps the first charity established by Muslims in America was the Indian Muslim Relief Committee, which was founded under the sponsorship of the Islamic Society of North America in 1981. It has established training centers to help prospective college students prepare for entrance exams, provided scholarships for students, and built teacher-training centers for women.

The establishment of the Indian Muslim Relief Committee was soon followed by the emergence of groups focusing on other parts of the Muslim world. The Islamic African Relief Agency (now called the Islamic American Relief Agency) was established in 1985 with a focus on Africa. Mercy International (now Mercy-USA), founded in 1986, first provided help in Afghanistan. It then secured public and private funds to

deliver relief assistance in Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Chechnya, Kosovo, Mozambique, Somalia, Kenya and Turkey. The Benevolence International Foundation (BIF) was created to help people emerging from the ruins of communism. The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), established in Dallas in 1989, provides aid to Palestinian refugees. The Global Relief Foundation (GRF), established in Bridgeview, Illinois in 1992, has focused on Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. Life for Relief and Development was founded in 1993 in response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Iraq in the wake of the 1990-1991 Gulf War. In 1993, the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) established ICNA Relief, later renamed Helping Hand, which funds educational and social programs in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the homelands of most ICNA members. Like the other agencies, Helping Hand has contributed to emergency relief efforts throughout the world during times of crisis.

Muslim community relief groups together collect an estimated \$35 million per year from all sources.¹ This amount is small when compared to the large American religious and secular charities, but many of the country's large charitable organizations began with similarly limited funds. In the early stage of development, Muslim charity groups depend on a relatively small donor base and, unlike other religious charities, receive little public funding. The groups conduct fundraising activities through direct mail, charity dinners, advertisements in community publications, Internet sites, and participation in community conventions and similar gatherings.

While continuing to pursue community funds, Muslim relief groups have increasingly sought grants from government and international agencies and from private voluntary associations. The financial statements of Mercy, for example, indicate that it is raising a growing percentage of its funds outside the Muslim community. Its 1998 statement showed that 21 percent of its funds came from federal government grants and 17 percent came from the United Nations and private foundations.² Other community charity groups have applied for United Nations and U.S. Agency for International Development status and some, including HLF, GRF and BIF, have been successful.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Bush Administration decided to scrutinize Muslim community charity groups. This resulted in the closure of HLF, BIF and GRF. U.S. Government officials charged the groups with links to terrorism, a charge that the groups have denied. HLF, the largest American Muslim charity, acknowledged that some of the beneficiaries of its assistance programs may be relatives of people implicated in violence against Israel, but argued that it would be inhumane to deny food and medical assistance to refugees because of relatives under suspicion. HLF was on the U.S. Department of State's list of recognized aid providers until 2000. When recognition was withdrawn, the groups charged the government with religious and ethnic discrimination and initiated a legal challenge.

Suspicion about individual board members has troubled the other two groups, BIF and GRF. Enaam Arnaout, the founder of BIF, was associated with Osama Bin Laden in

the late 1980s, when he was assisting the Afghans fighting the Soviet invasion. Ironically, that cause was financed by the United States. After Arnaout admitted in 2003 that he had diverted the organization's funds to buy uniforms for Muslim fighters in Bosnia and Chechnya, the government dropped terrorism charges against both Arnaout and BIF and permitted Arnaout to plead guilty to one charge of racketeering conspiracy.³ No specific charges have been made against GRF but its board member Rabih Haddad is in prison facing charges of immigration violations.⁴ Local and national religious and ethnic community groups have criticized the government's actions in these cases and have called for the charities to be allowed either to resume their important work or to be tried in court.

The federal government also shut down Help the Needy, a group in Syracuse, New York that was delivering aid to Iraq, charging it with violating the sanctions on Iraq and operating without a proper license. Given the specific charges against the group, the community's response was muted. The national organizations made no comment and local leaders, who knew the Iraqi-born physician who spearheaded the group, noted that the government did no more than fine non-Muslim charities that violated the sanctions and asked only that the organization's leader be given equal treatment.

Unlike large philanthropic institutions found in other American faith communities, Muslim agencies have not been active in social advocacy at home or in recipient nations. Leaders of the charities usually argue that the aid they distribute is still too little to bring about quick policy results. The charities provide aid to poor people who are struggling to secure the basic needs of food and shelter. Donors usually regard any expenses other than deliverable benefits as administrative costs, and the charities have no option but to respect the donors' desire to keep the cost of delivering aid to a minimum.

At the core of the government crackdown on Muslims is apprehension about linkages between Muslims and Arabs here and those abroad. The identification of American Muslims with the general body of the *ummah* (the worldwide community of believers) is an element of their religious beliefs. At the same time, Muslim-American citizens are aware of their obligation to abide by the law and their right to enjoy its protection. Muslim leaders have in fact welcomed the suggestion of the U.S. Department of the Treasury that Muslim charities institute better financial controls, and Muslim groups have asked the Treasury to issue guidelines for best practices. The Treasury has done so.

Apprehension regarding the singling out of Muslim charities has nonetheless remained high. It has dominated the public discourse of Muslim America and became an issue in the public debate over balancing security with civil liberty. To deflect charges of anti-Muslim bias, the government awarded Mercy a grant to deliver school lunches to poor Albanian children at the same time that the administration issued its closure decisions. It was hardly a coincidence that the agreement with Mercy, along with the freezing of accounts of the other charities, came in the second week of December 2001. Government critics nonetheless continue to argue for anti-terror policies designed to punish criminal behavior rather than target ethnic and religious associations.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS GROUPS

American Muslims continue to face misunderstanding and intolerance. School textbooks are rife with stereotypes and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslim life. Many Muslims believe that the religious accommodations made for Muslims thus far have fallen short of what is required to assure their dignity within a constitutional framework based on liberty and equality for all. Muslim employees must still negotiate their right to observe the essentials of their faith while they are at work and most Muslim students in public schools are not allowed to perform prayers in accordance with the requirements of their faith. Muslims have often noted that their complaints are usually handled on a case-by-case basis, although their experiences reflect a clear pattern of discrimination.

Several groups have addressed these concerns. The secularly-oriented, ethnicity-based Arab-American organizations created in the 1980s were followed in the 1990s by multi-ethnic, faith-based Muslim groups. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) has emerged as the premiere Arab-American civil and human rights organization, working to combat discrimination at home and to promote human rights for Arabs overseas. The Arab American Institute (AAI) has attempted to mobilize Arab-American voters.

Religious Muslims' attitudes toward participation in the political process have evolved over the years. During the early decades of their experience in the United States, Muslims were too few to wield any political clout. In addition, the community had to settle the debate over whether Muslims could take part in the political process of a non-Muslim country and remain true to their faith. By the 1990s it had become clear that the majority of Muslim citizens had decided in favor of participation. Mesmerized by this growing momentum, former U.S. congressman Paul Findley, who has interacted regularly with local and national Muslim organizations since the 1980s, documented his personal account of the rising political awareness of Muslim communities and the evolution of an American Muslim voting bloc as the twentieth century came to a close.⁵

The American Muslim Council (AMC) was established in 1990 with the broad objective of increasing Muslim participation in the political process. Acknowledging that public officials knew little about Muslims, the organization's leaders emphasized creating a new atmosphere in which Muslims would feel more welcome at government offices. The result was increased public recognition of Muslims in American society. AMC arranged for Imam Siraj Wahhaj of New York to deliver the first Islamic invocation before the House of Representatives, in 1991, and in 1992, Imam Warith D. Mohammed became the first Muslim to deliver an invocation before the Senate.⁶ Since 1996, the White House has invited Muslims to a celebration of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan. In addition to these symbolic gestures, a few Muslims have been appointed to public office.⁷

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) was established in the mid-1990s to defend Muslims against discrimination and defamation. It has used moral

persuasion and public pressure to resolve discrimination complaints. Complementing this community service effort, CAIR has produced educational material offering practical tips to employers, educators and health care professionals about accommodating Islamic religious practices. Since 1996, CAIR has issued its annual report, *The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States*, which documents incidents of anti-Muslim discrimination and violence based upon such ethnic and religious features as beard, complexion, accent, name, birthplace, and national origin.⁸

Other national and local groups were founded during the last decade. The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) was established to dispel the stereotypical image of the fanatical Muslim as a central feature of popular discourse. The group sees itself as the public voice of progressive Muslims and has reached out to liberal mainstream groups. The American Muslim Alliance (AMA) works to foster Muslim participation in the American electoral process, both by voting and by running for public office. To achieve this mission, AMA has invested in political education and grassroots mobilization. The group's major achievement was the defeat of Senator Larry Pressler, author of legislation that imposed sanctions on the Muslim country of Pakistan.⁹

Although these groups have achieved rapid progress in making the public aware of anti-Muslim prejudice and in achieving public recognition of the Muslim community, they continue to face the challenge of reaching out to the Muslim grassroots that logically constitutes their political base. Recognizing that the goal can be met only through multi-group collaboration, the Muslim public affairs groups established the American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPCC) in 1998. The following year AMPCC started a dialogue with the Council of Presidents of Arab-American Organizations. The two umbrella organizations identified their shared priorities as increasing voter registration, eliminating the use of secret evidence, and influencing U.S. policy on Jerusalem.¹⁰

Financial contributions to political candidates are a measurement of involvement in the political process. While many individuals contribute directly to candidates, others channel their contributions through political action committees (PACs). Federal Election Commission files indicate that Muslim PACs range from the less successful, such as the American League of Muslims, which contributed only \$147 in 1999–2000 before it was terminated, to others that have survived the initiation phase. These include the Pakistani American Public Affairs Committee, which contributed \$11,200 from July 9, 1998 to August 3, 2002, and the Albanian American PAC, whose contributions totaled \$99,150 from March 14, 1997 to August 9, 2002. There are also Arab-American PACs that are older and have contributed larger but relatively modest amounts (the Arab American Leadership Council PAC contributed \$218,129 from May 13, 1997 to September 10, 2002; the Arab American PAC gave \$19,153 from December 29, 1999 to July 22, 2002).¹¹

Some community contributions to congressional candidates are driven by local concerns, such as zoning permits for mosques and the resolution of parking and traffic

problems. Virginia Congressmen Jim Moran (D-VA) and Tom Davis (R-VA), for example, have established a relationship with Dar al-Hijrah Islamic Center in Falls Church. They have written letters to Fairfax County officials opposing a motion by Falls Church residents to revoke Dar al-Hijrah's user permit and supported Dar al-Hijrah's request that Fairfax County install a traffic light to facilitate street crossing in front of the mosque. (The county finally installed the light after a worshiper crossing the street was killed by a car.) Both Moran and Davis receive contributions from local Muslims.

Muslims enter the domain of politics with a disadvantage: they lack experience—although this will of course fade with time, as has been the case of other groups that once lacked political clout. Because of the fractured nature of interest group politics, the willingness and ability to form coalitions with a wide variety of partners is a key to effectiveness. This requires assessing areas of convergence and divergence and a willingness to coalesce in spite of the latter. To date, however, political interaction and alliance-building with Muslims as core participants has been sporadic.

Other groups have nonetheless recognized the growth of Islam in America. Some Catholic, mainstream Protestant, Irish, Asian-American, Latin-American, African-American and secular liberal groups, including most prominently the American Civil Liberties Union, have welcomed Muslims into the United States' pluralistic society. Some conservatives have embraced Muslims as potential allies on family-centered social agendas. While friction between Muslims and Jews over the Middle East conflict is at an all-time high, there has been some encouraging local interaction between members of the two communities. But American Muslims have not always been welcome. Similarly, some of the ideologically oriented anti-Muslim groups believe in a cosmic war between Islam and the West and cannot envision a place for Muslims in U.S. society.

MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER 9/11

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were followed by an unprecedented wave of hate crimes against Muslims. While providing ammunition to the anti-Muslim elements among neo-conservatives and the far right, the attacks presented Muslims with a chance they did not miss to address the American citizenry. Muslim leaders and various community organizations stepped up their public efforts, identifying with the victims of the attack and calling for swift punishment of the perpetrators. The AMC urged Muslims to apply for law enforcement jobs to help with the investigation of terrorism. In 2003, CAIR-Florida held a joint press conference with the FBI to ask members of the Muslim community to come forward with information to help in the apprehension of terrorism suspect Adnan G. El Shukrijumah.¹² American Muslim public affairs groups publicly supported the broad concept of the war on terror. They remained silent when the U.S. began bombing Afghanistan, but when the news media reported mounting civilian deaths, CAIR broke with other groups and called for a reassessment of the bombing targets.¹³

Muslim religious bodies have reacted publicly to terrorism by explaining Muslim religious values regarding war and peace. The Fiqh [Jurisprudence] Council of North

America, in conjunction with internationally respected Muslim scholars, issued an opinion stating that it is religiously permissible for enlisted American Muslims to take part in the fight against terrorism. As justification for its opinion the Council declared that Muslims are part of American society and must assume their share in its defense, and that the campaign to apprehend those responsible for the attacks and to stop future attacks on innocent people meets the criteria of a just war under Islamic teachings. Issuance of this opinion marked the first time in U.S. history that a reputable body of Muslim scholars sanctioned Muslim participation in an American war effort.¹⁴

American Muslim groups also rejected al-Qaeda's attempt to blame the United States for the misery of Muslims around the world. While distressed about the deteriorating conditions of Muslim countries, U.S. Muslims have often identified poor leadership in the Muslim world as the main source of its woes. As a small community seeking tolerance and understanding, Muslims in America are generally in favor of a world order that ensures peace, freedom and justice for all. American Muslim groups have opposed post-Cold War assertions that Islam is the West's new enemy. The plight of the Palestinians has taken center stage in the foreign policy positions of Muslim organizations, in reaction to the heavy-handed U.S. policy in the Middle East, its tilt toward Israel, and the breakdown of the peace process. The question of Jerusalem has received special attention because of the Muslim religious attachment to it.

The January 2003 statement issued by AMPCC on Iraq is a reflection of the American Muslims' curious position. Military confrontation between Muslims and Westerners runs contrary to the belief of many American Muslims that their community is a bridge between the Muslim and Western worlds. Muslims would not advocate war between members of the two worlds, but they could not allow themselves to remain silent about oppression. Describing the Iraqi regime as a dictatorship incompatible with Islam, AMPCC called on the President of Iraq to step down and allow the United Nations to administer free elections for the country. Resolving that a war on Iraq would be unjustified and would be likely to cause more problems than it would solve, the American Public Affairs Council called on the president of the United States to refrain from war.¹⁵

After the Bush Administration decided to go to war, toppling the Iraqi government and leaving the U.S. military in control of Iraq, MPAC issued a statement rejoicing in the fall of Saddam Hussein but cautioning against a lengthy occupation. It called for a speedy return to the rule of law and legitimate government in Iraq. It also asked the U.S. government to recognize that its past support for dictators was against U.S. interests and called for a resolution for the Arab-Israeli conflict based on Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian lands it occupied in 1967.¹⁶ No other group issued a statement when the U.S. began bombing Baghdad on March 20, 2003, perhaps because of prevailing misgivings about the war and the Iraqi regime.

Despite American Muslims' growing pragmatic engagement, their experience of politics has been full of uncertainties. Muslims have seen political candidates befriending

them when they need their votes but giving them a cold shoulder once in office. President Bush has felt no urgency to fulfill his 2000 campaign promise to do away with the secret evidence clause of the 1996 anti-terrorism law.¹⁷ In addition, the Bush administration showed little interest in even meeting with Muslim and Arab community organizations until the terrorist attacks of 9/11, although the AMPCC endorsed Bush for President and some conservative activists publicly credited Muslims for the Bush victory in 2000. Kerri Houston, director of the American Conservative Network, an outreach project of the American Conservative Union Foundation, argued that Muslim voters delivered Florida for President Bush. She wrote, “Muslim-Americans nationwide voted for Bush by an 80 percent margin—closer to 90 percent in Florida. Without their thousands of votes in the Sunshine State, a newly inaugurated Al Gore would currently be proposing a new slate of excuses for picking the American pocket.”¹⁸

Still, Muslim community members were perplexed at the discriminatory targeting of Middle Easterners and Muslims by federal government agencies following the 9/11 disaster. The Bush Administration has used secret evidence more frequently than its predecessors in detaining Arab and Muslim men without charge and freezing the assets of Muslim businesses and charities chartered under U.S. law as American corporations. Supporters of those measures see them as part of the war on terror; opponents suggest that the government has failed to substantiate or, in most cases, even allege that there are links between the victims of secret evidence and terrorist attacks. In many cases, the government has pursued a policy of arrest first, investigate later, effectively violating the constitutional guarantee of due process. In the high-profile case of the seizure of assets from Al-Barakaat in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Ptech in Boston, Massachusetts, the investigation cleared the suspects only after it caused irreparable damage to the businesses.¹⁹

Other measures initiated by the Bush Administration were no less discriminatory: the selective detentions, secret hearings and deportations of Arab and Muslim absconders; the special registration requirements for immigrants from Arab and Muslim-majority countries; the so-called “voluntary interviews” with thousands of U.S. visa holders from those countries, particularly men of Iraqi descent; the raids on Muslim-owned businesses and homes; and the surveillance of Muslim places of worship. These measures followed the rushed passage of the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 through Congress.²⁰ Critics charged that the Act gave the Department of Justice the power to detain non-citizens indefinitely, to use foreign intelligence as evidence in law enforcement in violation of the traditional firewall between the intelligence and enforcement evidence-gathering functions, and to arrest people and seize property in disregard of the Bill of Rights.

Muslim and Arab Americans have met such measures by increased outreach to other segments of American society. Community groups held joint press conferences with a wide spectrum of civic groups, calling upon the Bush Administration to uphold the Constitution and refrain from ethnic and religious profiling. AMC representatives

demanding permission to accompany individuals interviewed by federal agents, while MPAC mobilized monitors to assure that the process of immigrant registration was not abused.²¹ The campaign generated many media reports about the utility of the government campaign in combating terrorism, especially as the government failed to demonstrate that its crackdown on Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. produced any results related to terrorism. As of September 2005, more than 350 cities, towns and counties across the nation have passed resolutions critical of the PATRIOT Act.²²

Post-9/11 policies of the Bush administration sparked a feeling of betrayal among Muslims who voted for Bush in 2000. Community organizations succeeded in channeling the displeasure with the Bush administration into action at the ballot box. Straw polls by a number of community groups indicated that Muslims overwhelmingly swung in favor of the Democratic Party ticket in 2004.²³ Although their presidential candidate John Kerry lost the election, Muslims became extremely active in the political realm—most importantly in the key swing states of Florida and Ohio. Muslim local election organizers invested in developing state-wide voter lists and mobilized volunteers to get out the vote. They manned phone banks and called tens of thousands of voters to get them to pledge to cast their ballots. Politicization was clearly the Muslim response to post-9/11 grievances.

As for the public in general, it quite often appeared that post-9/11 abuses of Muslims by members of the non-Muslim public were rooted in ignorance rather than malice. Muslim community organizations resolved that their communities should educate others about their faith. Islamic centers, even those that had not particularly encouraged interfaith activities in the past, have held “open mosque” activities. The public reaction has been quite phenomenal, as interest in information about Islam and Muslims has surged since 9/11. Muslims in various localities have reported that non-Muslims attending such events were amiable, spoke candidly, asked sincere questions about Islam, or expressed sympathy to Muslims at a time of crisis. The National Council of Churches reciprocated by initiating an “Open Door” program designed to invite Muslims to churches on the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks.²⁴ Thus, despite the tragedy and the growing anti-Muslim rhetoric, improved relations between Islam and the West were reflected in personal contacts among neighbors and fellow citizens.

The growing concern about liberty forced many Muslims across the country into the public square and resulted in the growth of the community’s public affairs groups. CAIR, for example, more than tripled the number of its branches, from eight in early 2001 to 25 in 2004. Other groups, including MPAC and ADC, reported similar administrative and membership growth. This organizational growth reinforced participatory political attitudes among Muslims, as reflected in the increased electoral mobilization. In the presidential election of 2004, AMPCC, which changed its name to American Taskforce for Elections and Civil Rights, increased its membership from four organizations to twelve. Unlike the old AMPCC, the new coalition was endorsed by virtually all Muslim national community organizations.

The main object of Muslim participation in mainstream politics is empowerment. Muslim public affairs groups have succeeded in making the stereotyping of Muslims a matter of public debate and in resolving many incidents of discrimination and defamation, and have demonstrated their ability to mobilize support for their concerns about the treatment of Muslims by government, the media and civic groups. To some Muslims, however, community public affairs groups seem to be overly engaged in soft “press-release politics” and “photo-op events,” with little to show for all the funds they collect. Such sentiment is usually held by recent immigrants who lack experience in the workings of democratic political institutions. Segments of the African-American Muslim community share this view to some extent and call for a renewed focus on *da'wa* and local social activism. To the many Muslims who appreciate the difficult and time-consuming task of developing a grassroots consensus, however, the community's public affairs organizations have rendered a valuable public service by communicating their communities' concerns about domestic and foreign policy. They have also educated community members about their rights and helped them gain access to the political process.

These efforts, modest as their results may have been, have shifted political attitudes among Muslims in favor of participation in American government and politics. The mainstream view recognizes non-Muslim citizenry groups as social entities that have rights and duties and that can be treated as allies on matters affecting the common good. Muslim interaction with others has increasingly been characterized by an attitude of engagement that identifies negative actions and views with specific groups rather than with broad religious communities.

The growth of Muslim social and public affairs organizations must be seen as a Muslim reformation process in progress. Muslims across the country have recognized the value of organizations whose functions are specialized and defined in terms of services rendered to the community. The process has led to the emergence of leaders other than the traditional imams whose valuable contribution is increasingly associated with mosque activity. In other words, Muslims are internalizing the value of functional specialization in the very structure of their community, a process that characterized the evolution of modern Western institutions. This may not result in a separation between “church” and the Muslim public, since there is no church structure in the Islamic faith, but it is prompting a Muslim subculture that values the role of specialists and institutions in the various domains of life.

Several patterns of interdependence across religious, intellectual, and geographical boundaries have emerged in the formation and administration of Muslim community organizations. Muslims have raised funds to build community organizations from any number of legitimate sources, whether public funds or private Muslim international donors who have studied or have done business in the United States. The challenge now is whether Muslim organizations can grow bigger and more confident, with greater transparency and openness, and whether their detractors can appreciate that such growth reflects the fact that the United States is a much more pluralistic nation than it has ever been.

NOTES

1. Mohamed Nimer, *The North American Muslim Resource Guide: Muslim Community Life in the United States and Canada* (Routledge, 2002), p. 98.
2. Calculations based on 1998 Audited Financial Statements of Mercy-USA. Recent statements are available at <http://www.mercyusa.org/2004AuditedFinancialStatements.cfm>.
3. CBS News, "Plea Deal for Muslim Charity Chief" (Feb. 10, 2003), at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/02/10/attack/main540011.shtml>.
4. Karen Schwartz, "Rally marks Haddad's six month detention" (The Michigan Daily Online, May 22, 2003), http://www.michigandaily.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2002/06/17/3d0d6c1499075?in_archive=1. Haddad was subsequently deported. See Sarah Freeman, "Rabib Haddad deported," July 15, 2003, http://www.notinourname.net/haddad_15jul03.htm.
5. Paul Findley, *Silent No More: Confronting America's False Images of Islam* (Amana Publications, 2001) See in particular chapters 10 and 12, Findley's account of the Muslim participation in the 1996 and 2000 elections.
6. AMC members were shocked by revelations regarding the involvement of a founding board member in a plot to assassinate the king of Saudi Arabia in 2003. Most withdrew their support for the organization, which has since become almost defunct. However, the increased political participation among American Muslims, which was initially pioneered by AMC, has outlasted the organization.
7. As of September 2005, for example, Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad, formerly the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, has been appointed as the ambassador to Iraq, and Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni serves as the appointed director of the National Institutes of Health.
8. See, e.g., Council on American-Islamic Relations Research Center, "The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2002: Stereotypes and Civil Liberties" (2002), <http://www.cair-net.org/civilrights2002/civilrights2002.pdf>.
9. Senator Larry Pressler of South Dakota was the author of a 1985 amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 requiring a cut-off of U.S. economic aid and transfer of military equipment to Pakistan unless the President of the United States certifies that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear weapon and that continued U.S. aid will significantly decrease the probability of its developing one in the future. Section 620E(e) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. P.L. 87-195; 22 U.S.C. 2375(e). Pressler was defeated in 1996 by Tim Johnson. The Act was amended again in 1995 to remove the prohibition on most forms of economic assistance to Pakistan in the absence of presidential certification, but not the prohibition on military assistance, although it permitted the one-time release of military equipment ordered earlier. P.L. 104-107, Section 559.
10. "A Joint Statement by the American Muslim Political Coordination Council and the Council of Presidents of Arab-American Organizations," press release issued by Muslim Political Affairs Council [member of AMPCC] (July 6, 1999).
11. Federal Election Commission Disclosure Reports, <http://herndon1.sdrdc.com>.
12. "CAIR-FL Statement at Joint Press Conference with FBI," press release issued by CAIR-Florida (March 27, 2003), <http://www.cairflorida.org/ViewArticle.aspx?Code=PR-&ArticleID=77>.
13. In October, 2001, CAIR drafted a statement calling for an end to the bombing in Afghanistan, and at an emergency summit on October 20-21, 2001, fifteen national Islamic organizations signed the statement. See Theresa Watanabe, "Bombing Carves a Rift Among Muslims in U.S.," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 20, 2001; available at <http://www.islamicity.com/re->

cognitions/latimes/011020/default.htm; “American Muslims call for peaceful efforts to end conflict in Afghanistan,” press release issued by the Muslim American Society and the Islamic Circle of North America (Oct. 22, 2001), http://www.icna.org/wtc_pr.htm.

14. Phillip Kurata, “U.S. Islamic Leaders Issue Fatwa on U.S. Muslim Soldiers Fighting Terrorists” (U.S. Department of State International Information Programs, Oct. 16, 2001), http://www.omarmasry.net/american_muslim_soldiers.htm. The statement was written by Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, President of the Fiqh Council of North America and President of the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, and Sheik Muhammad Al-Hanooti, a member of the Fiqh Council of North America.

15. Heba Abdalla, “Hopping on the campaign trail,” *al-Ahram*, 16-22 October 2003, available at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/660/in6.htm>.

16. “MPAC Statement on Brink of War,” press release issued by the Muslim Political Affairs Council (March 19, 2003), http://www.mpac.org/popa_article_display.aspx?ITEM=459. See also http://mpac.org/news_article_display.aspx?ITEM=498.

17. See transcript of Second Presidential Debate, Oct. 11, 2000, <http://www.debates.org/pages/trans2000b.html>. The bill that then-Governor Bush mentioned in the debate was the Secret Evidence Repeal Act of 2000 (S. 3139), proposed by Senator Spencer Abraham.

18. Kerri Houston, “Into The Mosque: The GOP Should Forge Friendship With U.S. Muslims,” *Investor’s Business Daily*, February 13, 2001. Also, according to an article in the *Middle East Times*, there are 60,000 eligible Muslim voters in Florida, and 91% of Muslims in Florida voted for Bush. “U.S. Muslims Might Have Elected Bush,” *Middle East Times*, December 8, 2000, available at <http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20001208-043041-1511r>.

19. See, e.g., “Terrorist Financial Network Fact Sheet,” press release issued by the White House Office of the Press Secretary (Nov. 7, 2001), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011107-6.html>; “Software Company Tries to Survive Terrorism Investigation,” *USA Today*, Jan. 4, 2003, <http://www.detnews.com/2003/technology/0301/04/technology-51266.htm>. According to a press release by AMC, the group’s president attended one of the interviews in Dearborn, Michigan on December 6, 2001. “AMC President Attends FBI Interview as Observer,” press release issued by AMC (December 7, 2001).

20. USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, P.L. 107-56.

21. See, e.g., “MPAC Conducts a Successful Monitors Training” (Jan. 7, 2003), “MPAC’s Guide for Monitoring INS Special Registration” (Jan. 8, 2003), and “Report to White House on INS Special Registration Procedure” (Jan. 17, 2003), press releases issued by the Muslim Public Affairs Council, http://mpac.org/media_menu.aspx.

22. For a list of these cities, towns and counties, See Bill of Rights Defense Committee, “Resolutions Passed and Efforts Underway, By State,” Sept. 1, 2003, <http://www.bordc.org/list.php>.

23. A CAIR survey on election night found that 93 percent of subscribers to CAIR-Net voted for Bush’s challenger. See <http://www.cairnet.org/default.asp?Page=articleView&id=1304&theType=NR>.

24. “Churches Plan Interfaith Openhouses to Commemorate Sept. 11,” press release issued by the National Council of Churches (Aug. 20, 2002), <http://www.wfn.org/20-02/08/msg00149.html>.

Imams and Mosque Organization in the United States: A Study of Mosque Leadership and Organizational Structure in American Mosques

IHSAN A. BAGBY

INTRODUCTION

The institution of the mosque in the United States is in its formative stage. The vast majority of mosques (87 percent) were founded after 1970 – 62 percent since 1980. Mosque leadership reflects this formative stage, with the current leadership being composed of either first-generation Americans or first-generation Muslims. The American mosque today is therefore best understood as an emerging institution that is adjusting to the new environment of the United States, simultaneously questioning the cultural constructs of the Muslim world and remolding itself in an Islamic image. The major challenges before Muslims are the uneasy position of the imam in the mosque organization and the as yet unformed identity of mosques as congregations.

In spite of its short history, the American mosque is quite a success story. As indicated above, mosques are increasing in number; they are also growing in size. According to “The Mosque in America: A National Portrait,”¹ which serves as the basis for this paper, there were 1209 mosques in the United States as of 2000. This constitutes a 25 percent increase from the 962 counted in 1994. Attendance at the average *jum‘ah* (Friday congregational prayer) increased 94 percent, from 150 in 1994 to 292 in 2000. During the era of mosque construction, which began in the 1980s, approximately 313 mosques were built, including 83 constructed in the 1990s.

Mosque communities are extremely diverse but fall into the two general categories of African-American and immigrant.² Over one-fourth (27 percent) are attended primarily by African Americans; 73 percent by immigrants. The two groups have distinct histories which were largely separate until the 1990s, but this is changing rapidly as the two communities develop and deepen relations and contacts. One sign of change is that only seven percent of all mosques are attended by only one ethnic group (Figure 1). Over 90 percent are attended by some African Americans and some Arabs or South Asians.

MOSQUES AS CONGREGATIONS

Mosques in the United States function as congregations but in general do not think of themselves as congregations – their identity as such is still very tenuous. A congregation can be defined as a “voluntary religious community” that organizes various activities such as worship, religious instruction, community services, stewardship and fellowship.³

“Voluntary” in this context implies two factors. The first is that members choose to participate in a congregation. Membership is not ascribed in the sense that a person is neither born into a congregation nor automatically made a member of a religious group by virtue of nationality. Second, congregations are not parishes, where believers are

Figure 1. Mosques Grouped According to Dominant Ethnic Groups*

Percentage of Mosques in Each Category	
African-American	27%
South Asian	28%
Arab	15%
South Asian and Arab, mixed evenly**	16%
All Other Combinations	14%

*Dominant groups are calculated as follows: 35–39 percent of participants in one group and all other groups less than 20 percent; 40–49 percent of one group and all others less than 30; 50–59 percent of one group and all others less than 40; any group over 55 percent.

**Mixed groups calculated by two groups with at least 30 percent of participants each.

bound to attend the church in a particular area. In the voluntary spiritual marketplace of the United States, congregations must recruit members.

The other key word used to define congregation is “community.” A congregation as community entails a self-conscious, self-contained and self-supporting group that might have significant ties to a denomination or an archdiocese but retains a distinct identity and autonomy, however limited those may be in many cases. Congregations are above all else fellowships, constituted by their members. Membership, which is therefore the backbone of the congregation, carries with it a certain amount of power that can often be at odds with that of the clergy or religious leader. Such communities function to serve the religious needs of their members and to give full expression to their religious vision and mission. As a result, congregations are not just places to worship but centers for diverse activities that reflect the religious impulses of their members. Congregationalism, initially a Protestant phenomenon, has become the norm in the life of virtually all religious groups in the United States. However, as in the case of Islam, it is not necessarily the accepted theory of all religious groups. Most of the world’s mosques are simply a place to pray. They lack the concept of membership and do not for the most part function as congregations. In addition, certain Islamic notions do not support the idea of congregationalism.

Since classical times, mosques either have been built by a government or a rich donor or have been endowed as a *waqf* (trust). The role of the mosque’s imam, who is appointed by the government or a mosque trustee, is to lead the five daily prayers, deliver the Friday sermon and, possibly, conduct classes. The imam as depicted in classical religious literature is primarily a prayer leader, meaning that he has memorized portions of the Qur’an and can recite them properly. Based on the degree of his training, the imam also supplies religious guidance and interpretation. There is no clergy class in Islam and while virtually anyone can lead the prayers, the role of the imam as formal prayer leader and religious guide has been largely professionalized in the Muslim world. Imams are qualified to serve by completing at least a program in a Qur’anic school (*madrassa*) or by receiving a B.A. from an Islamic college. They are

trained only to lead prayers and give religious guidance, however, and not to lead a congregation, pastor to the needs of believers, or organize religious activities.

A Muslim cannot be a member of a particular mosque. As indicated in the Qur'anic passage, "Mosques belong to God" (Q 72:18), Muslims do not believe that a mosque belongs to a particular group of people. A Muslim should be able to go to any mosque and feel at home. The fellowship in Islam is not the fellowship of the mosque but of the *ummah* (the worldwide community of believers). It is the *ummah* that is the congregation; the mosque is simply the place where the *ummah* performs certain worship functions.

Most religious groups that came to the United States did not bring a tradition of congregationalism with them. The absence of government support for any one religion was the impetus for the transformation of religious groups into congregations. Without other societal institutions to serve religious needs, the congregation became the sole vehicle for fulfillment of the various purposes and missions of religion. Another reason for the development of American congregationalism is that during the seventeenth century, lay members wielded great power because of the absence of clergy and because they were bolstered by the democratic spirit of the new republic.⁴ As the clergy became more professionalized, its power increased but did not supplant lay leadership.

American Muslims quickly adopted the congregational model because the mosque was an existing institution that could serve diverse needs. The mosque became a place where children could be instructed about their religion, possibly in the language of their parents; where religious holidays could be celebrated with dinners and games; and where life-cycle events such as *aqiqah* (births), marriages and deaths could be solemnized. The non-American mosque model would not have been central to any of these functions, but in the United States, mosques replaced the extended family, social networks and social and educational institutions. As centers of a variety of activities, mosques have now come under pressure to expand their services to accommodate all of the needs of believers.

Mosques function as congregations, then, because almost all immigrant mosques in the United States were founded by groups of lay leaders who organized themselves to establish and run a mosque, rather than by a government or rich individual. As in the formative stage of other religious institutions, lay Muslim leaders rather than imams initially held power in their congregations. To this day, newly arrived immigrant groups create mosques in which lay leadership is central.

Many mosque participants nonetheless do not accept the concept of membership and full participation as congregants in a particular mosque. For some, the mosque is only a place of prayer; for others, it is a place that serves certain needs but to which complete commitment is unnecessary. A few give their full commitment to the mosque but do not participate in the formal mosque organization.

Mosques in the United States, therefore, are voluntary religious communities or congregations, but the notion of congregation as a distinct entity that commands loyalty and commitment is not well-established in the minds of many Muslims. While on the

surface mosques act like congregations, they do not feel like congregations internally. Mosques are still evolving. In essence, American Islamic theology has not developed sufficiently to include a vision of Islamic congregationalism.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Mosque organizational structures are of two general types. One is the imam-led mosque where the imam or mosque leader (most often called the *amir*) exerts considerable power and authority over all aspects of the mosque. The other type of mosque organization is the *majlis*-led type where the governing body, the *majlis ash-shura* (literally, “consultative council”: an executive committee or board of directors) holds the decision-making power and the imam’s role is limited to the traditional one of leading the prayers and teaching Islam.

Over 81 percent of all mosques have an imam. In roughly half of those, the imam is considered its leader; in the other half, he is not.

Ninety-four percent of mosques have a *majlis ash-shura*. The final decision-making power in 59 percent of those mosques is held by the *majlis*; in 28 percent, by the imam; and in 11 percent, by a mosque leader.

The decisive distinction between these two models is ethnicity. Ninety-three percent of all African-American mosques are imam-led, and in over three-fourths of these, the imam is the leader and final decision maker. Only 38 percent of immigrant mosques utilize the imam-led model; almost 62 percent follow the *majlis*-led model.

The preference in African-American mosques for the strong imam model is most likely due to the cultural influence of the Black church, where the Black preacher tends to dominate, and to the strong authoritarian male leader model of the revolutionary/Black nationalist organizations of the 1960s. These influences find ready parallels in the dominant Islamic tradition in which the Muslim political leader held all power in his hands, although he was advised to consult with other worshippers.

In many African-American mosques, once an imam is elected he cannot be replaced, so worshippers cannot seek change through elections. Strong imams often resist the influence of knowledgeable Muslims, especially those who have been trained abroad, because of the potential threat to the imam’s authority. This often leads to the departure of the more knowledgeable Muslims, limiting the mosque community’s exposure to Islamic knowledge, and of other members who are frustrated by the lack of avenues for opposing the imam (Figures 2 - 5).

The typical African-American mosque is small, urban and low-budget, and tends to be imam-led. *Majlis*-led mosques tend to be larger, high-budget, and evenly divided between urban and suburban.

When African-American mosques are removed from the calculations and only immigrant mosques are considered, some differences between imam-led and *majlis*-led mosques disappear but others remain. One difference that disappears is the urban-suburban split: the location of immigrant mosques is evenly divided between urban and suburban areas. Another major difference is size. Immigrant imam-led mosques tend to

Figure 2. Leadership of Mosques

Imam (leader of mosque)	41%
Imam (not leader)	40%
No imam	19%

Figure 3. Final Decision Maker in All Mosques

<i>Majlis ash-Shura</i>	59%
Imam	28%
Mosque Leader	11%
Other	2%

Figure 4. Breakdown of Imam-Led and Majlis-Led Mosque

Imam-Led Mosque	53%
Strong Imam - imam is leader and final decision maker	28%
Balanced - imam is leader and <i>majlis</i> is the final decision maker	13%
Mosque leader is the leader and final decision maker	12%
<i>Majlis</i>-Led Mosque	47%
Strong <i>Majlis</i> - imam not leader; <i>majlis</i> is final decision maker	32%
No imam; <i>majlis</i> is final decision maker	15%

Figure 5. Mosque Organizational Types by Predominant Ethnicity

Organizational Types	Ethnicity of Mosque				
	African-American	South Asian	Arab	South Asian and Arab	All Others
Imam-led mosque	93%	36%	32%	25%	63%
Majlis-led mosque	7%	64%	68%	75%	37%

be smaller than immigrant *majlis*-led mosques: while eight percent of imam-led mosques have *jum'ah* attendance of over 500, 20 percent of *majlis*-led mosques have attendance over 500.

There is also a slight association of mosque leadership with budget. While 25 percent of immigrant imam-led mosques have a budget over \$100,000, 32 percent of *majlis*-led mosques have a budget over \$100,000 (Figures 6 & 7).

It can be argued that the larger the mosque, the greater the need and pressure to be more inclusive of mosque participants, and the greater the need to have an effective *majlis*; the smaller the mosque, the easier it is for a strong imam to maintain authority. From this point of view, a strong imam organizational model may be a deterrent to mosque growth.

Figure 6. Mosque Organizational Types by Jum‘ah Prayer Attendance (Immigrant Mosques Only)

Jum‘ah Attendance	Imam-led mosque	Majlis-led mosque
4 – 50	23%	18%
51 – 100	22%	13%
101 – 200	18%	15%
201 – 500	29%	34%
500 +	8%	20%

N=297 Statistically significant at .017

Figure 7. Mosque Organizational Types by Mosque Income (Immigrant Mosques Only)

Mosque Income	Imam-led mosque	Majlis-led mosque
0 – \$9,999	24%	13%
10,000 – 39,999	29%	27%
40,000 – 99,999	22%	28%
100,000 +	25%	32%

N=270 Statistically significant at .082

The *majlis*-led organizational model, where the *majlis* is the final decision maker and the imam is not considered the mosque leader, is almost exclusively an immigrant phenomenon. The adoption of this model reflects two factors. One is that immigrant mosques were founded as a result of the efforts of a group of people who gave their time and money for that purpose. This investment by the group confers a deep psychological sense of ownership. As in the formative period of congregations in American history, lay leadership held central power in the congregations because they were the founders and because clergy were for the most part absent. Lay leaders who built and maintained the mosques did not want to give up authority to an imam.

The second factor is that many immigrant Muslims do not have full trust or respect for imams. Many in South Asia, particularly the educated elite, have little respect for poorly educated village imams who are graduates only of Qur‘an schools. In the United States, graduates of *madrasas* are given responsibility for leading prayers and teaching the children Qur‘an, but little else – they sometimes do not even deliver the Friday sermon. In the Arab world, the status of imam has suffered in the past decades as the best and brightest students chose the world of science while only the less capable opted to pursue religious degrees. In addition, the simple reality is that imams in the Muslim world are not trained for the job of leading a congregation and are viewed as qualified only to lead prayer and teach Islam. Most mosques in the Muslim world define the role of imams as dealing with anything that directly relates to Islam: prayers, sermons, performing marriages, funerals and giving Islamic counseling. All other activities and mosque business are the responsibility of the *majlis*.

In addition to the imam's lack of qualifications for leading the mosque, his role is limited by the concern that if he had too much power he might take the mosque in unacceptable directions or simply wrest power from the *majlis*. In some mosques the *majlis* is concerned that the imam might be too conservative for the more liberal direction of the *majlis*. One female *majlis* member of a multimillion dollar Islamic center that does not have an imam commented that the *majlis* had looked for an imam but could not find one that fit its mentality. Her hope was that a medical doctor, who gave most of the sermons at the mosque, would retire and then serve as imam.⁵

The *majlis*-led model presents a number of problems, however. Frequently, when a *majlis*-led mosque has a well-liked imam, mosque participants support a more powerful role for him. In these cases, the *majlis* can be viewed as an arena for self-interest politics while the imam is viewed as pure and concerned only about Islam. Another problem that can befall *majlis*-led mosques is the frequent firing of imams who are perceived as stepping out of line, especially if the *majlis* disapproves of their sermons.

In American history the professionalization of the clergy led to its greater power in the congregation. A fair assumption is that when imams are better trained to serve congregations, their power in congregations will grow, and that of the *majlis* will diminish. Such professionalization will occur when American-based Islamic seminaries are established to train American-born imams or systematic training programs are developed for imams educated overseas.

The introduction of professionally trained imams in African-American mosques might also cause change in the imam-led model. If a mosque is wealthy enough to hire an imam, it is likely to maintain the power to fire him as well, increasing the *majlis*' power.

Most mosques currently tend to one of two extremes, in which either the imam has total power or the *majlis* has power and the imam is not considered the leader. The middle ground and the model that seems to offer the best means for shared governance is a mosque in which the imam is the leader but the *majlis* is active and has final decision-making authority. Only 13 percent of mosques have this type of organizational structure, and the number of these mosques in the *Mosque in America* sample is too low to permit accurate assessment of their effectiveness. It might be assumed that the model will become more popular as mosques grow in size and imams become more professionalized.

PAID AND VOLUNTEER IMAMS

The tenuous position of the imam is reflected in the fact that only one-third (33 percent) of mosques have paid, full-time imams (16 percent of these imams work a second job) (Figure 8). A little over seven percent of mosques have paid, part-time imams. Over 40 percent of all mosques have volunteer imams.

Based on comments in the survey, the volunteer, full-time imams are in some cases retired or disabled and therefore able to give a large amount of time to the mosque. The majority, however, are imams who have a secular full-time job but give so much time to the mosque that they consider their imam position to be a full-time job. A few

Figure 8. Paid/Volunteer and Full-Time/Part-Time Imams

Paid, Full-Time	33%
Paid, Part-Time	7%
Volunteer, Full-Time	11%
Volunteer, Part-Time	30%
No Imam	19%

indicated that they are paid as the principal of the mosque’s Islamic school and their position as imam is unpaid although full-time.

The full-time, paid imam is almost entirely a phenomenon of the immigrant mosque. Over 93 percent of all full-time, paid imams hold their position in immigrant mosques; only seven percent are in African-American mosques. Of the immigrant mosques, South Asian mosques have the greatest number of full-time, paid imams. This is probably due both to the South Asian custom of having the *madrasa*-trained imam lead prayer in mosques and to the fact that since few South Asians are fluent in Arabic, most mosque participants would not feel qualified for the position of imam.

The majority of volunteer imams are African-American. Almost three-fourths (74 percent) of full-time, volunteer imams are African Americans. Almost half (49 percent) of all part-time, volunteer imams are from African-American mosques.

In most cases, paid imams are not the leaders of the mosque, while volunteer imams are the leaders. Approximately 71 percent of paid, full-time imams and 60 percent of paid, part-time imams serve in mosques where they are not the leader. Two-thirds of volunteer, part-time imams function as leaders (Figures 9 & 10).

Unpaid volunteers clearly run the vast majority of American mosques. This reflects the dual reality that African-American mosques do not have paid imams and immigrant mosques do not give the paid imams major leadership responsibilities.

Figure 9. Paid Full-Time Imams and Mosque Ethnicity

South Asian	41%
Arab	17.5%
South Asian/Arab	17.5%
Other	17%
African-American	7%

Figure 10. Mosque Leadership and Paid/Volunteer and Full-Time/Part-Time Imams

	Paid Full-Time	Paid Part-Time	Volunteer Full-Time	Volunteer Part-Time
Imam is leader	29%	40%	86%	66%
Imam is not leader	71%	60%	14%	34%

Mosques with an annual income of over \$40,000 and *jum'ah* attendance of over 201 are most likely to have a paid imam, whether full- or part-time. While 25 percent of mosques with an income between \$10,000 and \$39,999 have paid imams, 53 percent of mosques with an income between \$40,000 and \$99,999 have a paid imam.

Jum'ah attendance of over two hundred seems to be a decisive threshold in having a paid imam. While 35 percent of mosques with attendance between 101 and 200 have paid imams, 63 percent of mosques with attendance between 201 and 500 have paid imams.

Mosques have a remarkably low number of paid clergy in comparison with other religious congregations in the United States. Only 33 percent of mosques have full-time, paid imams, while 89 percent of other congregations have paid ministers.⁶ All small congregations have difficulty employing a full-time, paid pastor. About 48 percent of Presbyterian churches with Sunday attendance below 90, for example, have no full-time pastor, but the vacancy rate is only 12 percent for churches with attendance roughly between 90 and 250.⁷ Similarly, 83 percent of mosques with *jum'ah* attendance under 100 do not have full-time paid imams. While only 12 percent of Presbyterian churches with attendance of 101 to 200 lack paid ministers, 84 percent of mosques with similar attendance do not have paid imams (Figures 11 & 12).

Figure 11. Paid/Volunteer Imams by Mosque Annual Income

Mosque Annual Income					
	0 – \$9,999	\$10,000 – \$39,999	\$9,999 – \$9,999	\$40,000 – \$99,999	\$100,000 +
Paid Imam	12%	30%	35%	63%	75%
Volunteer Imam	61%	45%	51%	25%	8%
No Imam	27%	25%	14%	12%	17%

Figure 12. Paid/Volunteer Imams by *Jum'ah* Prayer Attendance

<i>Jum'ah</i> Attendance					
	4 – 50	51 – 100	101 – 200	201 – 500	201 – 500
Paid Imam	12%	30%	35%	63%	75%
Volunteer Imam	61%	45%	51%	25%	8%
No Imam	27%	25%	14%	12%	17%

The low number of paid imams is largely attributable to the low priority given to hiring them, which stems from the lack of respect for them and suspicion of imams trained overseas. In one East Coast mosque in the *Mosque in America* survey, as the mosque leader talked about the extensive plans for building a new mosque, a Christian visitor asked him when the mosque intended to hire an imam. The mosque leader looked a little puzzled and explained that an imam was not necessary and that in any event the congregation was not certain it could find a man whose views of Islam did not clash with theirs.

Figure 13. Projection of Mosque Income Using Southern Baptist Giving Rate

Mosque Income	Average <i>Jum'ah</i> Attendance	Projected Income Using Southern Baptist Formula (\$952 per person)
0 – \$9,999	87	\$82,824
10,000 – 39,999	125	\$119,000
40,000 – 99,999	312	\$297,024
100,000 +	712	\$677,824

Another reason for the low number of paid imams could be the relatively low incomes of mosques. This observation in turn suggests another difference between mosques and congregations of other faiths. Mosque incomes are small because of the relatively small donations given by mosque attendees. The average number of attendees at a Southern Baptist church, for example, is 161, and the average annual giving per attendee is \$952.⁸ The average *jum'ah* attendance at mosques with an income of 0–\$9,999 is 87 (Figure 13). Using the Southern Baptist formula of \$952 donated per attendee, 87 attendees should result in a budget of \$82,824 – a far cry from \$9,999.

Mosque attendees clearly do not donate at the same rate as Southern Baptists or any other Christian congregation. This is not attributable to lower individual income levels of mosque attendees, as most researchers point to the relatively high income levels for Muslims in general and immigrant Muslims in particular. The 2001 *Muslims in the Public Square* survey found that over 50 percent of Muslims earn more than \$50,000 annually.⁹ The low mosque income stems instead from the tenuous identity of mosques as congregations. Overseas mosques are not supported by the body of attendees; they depend largely, as indicated earlier, on rich patrons or the government. The idea of being committed to a mosque community of which one is a member, and of contributing funds to it, is not well established in the immigrant Muslim mind. The result is that the wealthy members of the mosque provide the primary support for the mosque.

PAID/VOLUNTEER IMAMS AND MOSQUE ACTIVITIES

Paid imams are not associated with increased *masjid* activity except in the area of traditional Islamic activities such as classes, congregational prayer, and holding all five daily prayers in the mosque. The *Mosque in America* study used five scales for *masjid* activities: (1) Islamic activities (weekend school, various classes, youth activities, etc.), (2) *salah* (prayer – whether a *masjid* held all five prayers), (3) community involvement (various social and community services such as giving food and anti-crime programs, which benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims), (4) outreach (visiting churches, contacting the media, interfaith activities), and (5) political involvement (contacting politicians, having politicians visit the mosque, voter registration) (Figures 14 & 15).

Ironically, mosques with volunteer imams are more active in community involvement and outreach than mosques with paid imams. Mosques with paid imams do better than those with volunteer imams only in the political arena. Mosques with volunteer imams

are more active primarily because African-American imams, who are almost all volunteer imams, are more externally focused and more concerned with issues of social justice, outreach and politics.

Even when African-American imams are excluded from the calculations, mosques with paid imams are no more active than mosques with volunteer imams. The only exception is in the area of political activities. Twenty-five percent of mosques with paid imams have a high level of political activity in comparison to nine percent for mosques with volunteer imams and 15 percent for mosques with no imams (Figure 16). The greater political involvement of mosques with paid imams probably has less to do with whether imams are paid or volunteer than with the fact that political involvement is often associated with larger, wealthier mosques, which are also the mosques with the greatest number of paid imams.

Figure 14. High Levels of Mosque Activities by Paid/Volunteer Imam
(Percentage of mosques with paid/volunteer imam that score high in activity)

	Paid Imam	Volunteer Imam	No Imam
High Islamic activities (8 - 10 activities)	61%	45%	31%
All five <i>salah</i> held	87%	56%	58%
High community involvement (6 - 7 activities)	19%	32%	9%
High outreach (3 activities)	55%	62%	46%
High political involvement (4 activities)	26%	18%	14%

Figure 15. High Masjid Activities by Mosque Ethnicity

Activity	African-American Mosques	Immigrant Mosques
High community involvement	48%	13%
High outreach	70%	51%
High political involvement	26%	19%

Figure 16. High Mosque Activities by Paid Mosque Staff
(immigrant mosques only)

Activity	No full-time paid staff	One full-time paid staff	Two full-time paid staff
High community involvement	7%	10%	31%
High outreach	46%	52%	64%
High political involvement	8%	16%	46%

The overall association of paid imams with high levels of Islamic activities and low levels of other mosque activities confirms the observation that the job of trained imams is in most cases limited to Islamic activities and does not include other mosque activities such as community service and outreach.

Although paid imams are not associated with high levels of external mosque activities, paid mosque staff is, but only if African-American mosques are excluded from the statistical analysis.

The difference is linked to having full-time staff beyond the imam. Mosques that have two or more paid staff are typically those with larger attendance and higher incomes. Logically, when a mosque is large and wealthy, it can afford to hire extra staff that can focus on external activities.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF IMAMS

Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of imams do not have at least a B.A. in Islamic studies. Only 13 percent of imams have an M.A., which would be roughly comparable to the kind of professional degree required of most Christian and Jewish clergy. Approximately 16 percent of imams have a “certificate.” For South Asians, that signifies a person who has graduated from a Qur’an school or *madrassa*; for African Americans, it means completing a short training program for imams offered by various organizations (Figures 17 & 18).

Only four percent of African-American mosques have an imam with at least a B.A. degree in Islamic studies, and over three-fourths (78 percent) of African-American mosques have an imam with no formal Islamic training. Since the 1970s a handful of African Americans have completed B.A.s in Islamic universities overseas and even more have completed the Arabic language programs (often two to three years) offered by Islamic universities, but few of these African Americans serve as imams in mosques. The reasons are multi-faceted. First, most African-American mosques cannot afford to pay a full-time imam and therefore most of these trained imams have taken chaplain jobs in the prison system. Second, tension has existed between the established, non-trained imams and the trained, often younger imams. The non-trained imam frequently feels threatened by the trained imam, and the trained imam often views the untrained imam with condescension.

Arab mosques have the highest percentage of imams with at least a B.A.: 65 percent, as compared to 49 percent for South Asian mosques. Over 19 percent of South Asian mosques and 22 percent of mosques evenly divided between South Asians and Arabs, but none of the Arab mosques, have imams who possess a certificate.

As with paid imams, imams with Islamic degrees are more typical of large, higher income and suburban mosques; mosques with imams who lack formal Islamic education tend to be smaller, lower-income and urban. Imams with certificates are more evenly distributed among all mosques. Islamic education is not associated with higher external activities, and mosques with imams who have no formal Islamic education have fewer Islamic activities but more external activities. The association of Islamic education with

Figure 17. Islamic Education of Imams

B.A. from overseas Islamic university	24%
M.A. or Ph.D. from overseas Islamic university	10%
M.A. or Ph.D. from American university	3%
Certificate	16%
No formal Islamic education	4%

Figure 18. Islamic Education of Imams by Mosque Ethnicity

Ethnicity of Mosque					
Islamic Education	African American	South Asian	Arab	South Asian and Arab	All Others
B.A. from overseas Islamic university	3%	30%	48%	38%	29%
M.A. or Ph.D. from overseas Islamic university	1%	15%	15%	14%	15%
M.A. or Ph.D. from American university	0%	5%	2%	7%	4%
Certificate	18%	19%	0%	22%	12%
No formal Islamic education	78%	31%	35%	19%	40%

higher levels of Islamic activities is equally true for imams with certificates and imams with Islamic degrees.

ATTITUDES OF IMAMS AND MOSQUE LEADERS

The Mosque in America does not provide definitive answers about the social and political attitudes of imams and mosque leaders. Approximately 40 percent of all imams in the study were interviewed. Almost three-fourths (74 percent) were from mosques where the imam is the leader, and 26 percent were from those where the imam is not the leader. The views of imams who are not the leaders of their mosques, and who are also largely the imams with Islamic degrees, are therefore not well represented. With this limitation in mind, I have divided interviewees between African-American imams, immigrant imams and mosque leaders. African-American imams are almost all in mosques where they are the leader. Immigrant imams are evenly divided between mosques where they are the leader and those mosques where they are not.

What emerges overall are only subtle differences among African-American imams, immigrant imams and mosque leaders. All three groups favor Muslim involvement in American society, most worry about the immorality of American society, and most are fairly middle-of-the-road in terms of Islamic conservatism (Figure 19).

Survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement that Muslims should be involved in American politics. Overall, a higher percentage of

Figure 19. Interviewees for the Mosque Study

African-American imams	21%
Immigrant imams	19%
Mosque leaders	60%

immigrant imams agreed with the statement than any other group. A large number of immigrant imams “somewhat agree,” indicating that they do not feel that participation is a high priority or that they are worried about its utility. Nonetheless, this dispels any notion that immigrant imams are committed to isolationism. A small but significant number of African-American imams oppose political participation. Many of them believe that the United States government and its entire political system are oppressive, suppressing Black people and the poor and hating Islam for opposing that system. One leader commented that “we live in the belly of the beast.” From the point of view of these imams, politics has won little for poor people and has not changed the basic plight of African Americans. On the contrary, these imams believe that political involvement entails compromise and corruption of one’s principles and dignity.

Another survey question asked whether the United States is an immoral society. Over two-thirds of each group agreed with the statement that the United States is immoral, indicating the deep concern that imams and mosque leaders have about the moral climate of American society. Immigrant imams do not have a harsher view of the United States than do other imams and mosque leaders.

The Mosque in America attempted to measure the level of conservatism/traditionalism among imams and mosque leaders by asking a question about their interpretations of the holy texts of Qur’an and *Sunnah* (normative practice of the Prophet). The study delineated three categories: (1) a literal interpretation of the texts without reference to the classical legal schools. This group includes leaders, found largely in the Arabian Gulf region, who follow the highly conservative interpretation of *salafi* thought; (2) those who follow one of the classical legal schools (*madhhabs*) and would be considered traditionalists; (3) those who follow the Qur’an and *Sunnah* but are willing to use a contextual interpretation (Figures 20 & 21). This last group includes a wide spectrum of leaders, some of whom are fairly liberal but the majority of whom remain close to the fairly conservative classical consensus of the great scholars.

Over two-thirds of imams and mosque leaders took the position that the Qur’an and *Sunnah* should be interpreted in light of modern circumstances. Surprisingly, only eight percent of immigrant imams said that they follow one of the traditional *madhhabs*, which would have seemed to be the logical preference of graduates of South Asian *madrasas*. The more middle-of-the-road response indicates that imams, especially immigrant imams, are not strong advocates of traditionalism or extreme conservatism.

A greater conservatism is evidenced in the responses to a question about women’s participation on the governing board of the mosque. The mosques of African-American

Figure 20. Percentage of Imams/Leaders agreeing/disagreeing with the statement “Muslims should participate in the political process”

Political participation	African-American Imams	Immigrant Imams	Mosque Leaders
Strongly agree	72%	68%	73%
Somewhat agree	12%	28%	15%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	16%	4%	12%

N=410 Statistically significant at .011

Figure 21. “America is an immoral, corrupt society” by Imams/Leaders Percentage agreeing/disagreeing with the statement

America is immoral	African-American Imams	Immigrant Imams	Mosque Leaders
Strongly agree	32%	32%	25%
Somewhat agree	35%	34%	43%
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree	33%	34%	32%

N=402 Not Statistically significant

imams are relatively open to women participating in mosque governance: 82 percent allow women on the board (Figures 22 & 23). A significant number (39 percent) of the mosques of immigrant imams and mosque leaders, however, responded that women are not allowed on the board. This seems to indicate that while theological conservatism might not be dominant, immigrant mosques retain a significant degree of social conservatism. It should be noted that immigrant imams do not seem to be the sole bearers of this conservatism; instead, it is part of a set of cultural values that Muslim immigrants have transported to the United States.

CONCLUSION

Mosques are in their formative stage in the history of Islam in the United States, and changes are inevitable as the Muslim community matures. A solid foundation for the future growth of mosques has been laid but critical issues such as the tenuous identity of mosques as congregations and the uneasy leadership position of imams remain to be resolved.

While mosques are congregations, the idea of congregationalism does not fit well with Islamic theology. In Islam, mosques belong to God, not to a particular group. Muslims are members of the *ummah*, not a mosque. For mosques to flourish, however, it is clear that they must garner a greater commitment of human and financial resources from participants. The challenge lies in balancing the Islamic impulse for unity against the practical need for strong congregations. Mosques need Muslims to feel a sense of membership in the mosque, even if it is not the equivalent of a Christian commitment to membership in a particular church.

Figure 22. Islamic Approach by Imams/Leaders

Islamic Approach	African-American Imams	Immigrant Imams	Mosque Leaders
Contextual	23%	26%	20%
Literal	76%	66%	73%
<i>Madhhabi</i>	1%	8%	7%

N=404 Not Statistically significant

Figure 23. “Are women allowed on the governing board?” by Imams/Leaders

	African-American Imams	Immigrant Imams	Mosque Leaders
Yes	82%	61%	68%
No	18%	39%	32%

N=404 Not Statistically significant

Today’s mosques are either imam-centered (primarily African-American mosques) or *majlis*-centered (largely immigrant mosques). There are problems with both models. Can the American mosque find a balance between the imam and lay leadership? The central fact is that the traditional position and role of imam does not fit the needs of mosques in the United States. When effective Islamic seminaries are established in the United States, a new stage will begin in the history of Islam in this country. Imams who are trained for the American mosque should accelerate the development of the mosque and its activities, but this development portends a battle within mosques with a strong *majlis* or strong imam. While the *majlis* and entrenched imam are likely to resist the trained imam, it nonetheless seems inevitable that the trained imam will eventually triumph.

The challenge, however, will be to balance the power and authority of the imam with the Islamic tradition’s lack of a clerical class and that the Islamic community as a whole is the focus of God’s relationship to humans. To be true to both the needs of the congregation and the Islamic worldview, a mosque should not follow the clergy paradigm of an imam-centered institution where the imam is the nexus of congregational life. While imams should be the leaders of mosques, the real authority must remain with the community of believers. Leadership will then be more collaborative, with the imam a partner in the congregation’s mission, empowering the human resources within the congregation as a whole.

NOTES

1. Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl, and Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001), http://www.cairnet.org/mosquereport/Masjid_Study_Project_2000_Report.pdf. The study was conducted in cooperation with Hartford Seminary's Faith Communities Today (FACT) study. The FACT study brought together virtually all American denominations, which devised a common questionnaire. Each group then administered the questionnaire to leaders of its congregations. The MIA study first identified all the mosques in the United States. A total of 1209 mosques was counted, and 631 were randomly sampled for the study. Telephone interviews were successfully conducted from March to September, 2000 with 416 leaders (a completion rate of 66 percent). The results have a margin of error of ± 5 percent.

2. "Immigrant" includes people who were born in the United States but whose parents or grandparents were born abroad. There are, however, only a handful of mosques that are dominated by second or third-generation immigrants.

3. Stephen R. Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, eds., *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), v. 2, pp. 54-99.

4. Jay P. Dolan, "Patterns of Leadership in the Congregation," in Wind and Lewis, op. cit., pp. 225-256.

5. Conversation between author and mosque official at the Islamic Association of Cincinnati (personal communication, April 18, 2003).

6. Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today* (Hartford Seminary, 2001), p. 64.

7. Presbyterian Research Services, "Congregations, How They are Served, Giving Information, and Worship Attendance by Church Membership Size" (2001), <http://www.pcusa.org/research/compstats/cs2001.htm>.

8. Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael J. Donahue, *Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches* (John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 29, 32.

9. Zogby International and Project Maps: Muslims in American Public Square, "American Muslim Poll (Nov/Dec 2001)" (December 19, 2001), p. 6, <http://www.projectmaps.com/pmreport.pdf>.

Black Orientalism: Its Genesis, Aims and Significance for American Islam

SHERMAN A. JACKSON

INTRODUCTION

In 1978, Edward Said published his now-famous *Orientalism*.¹ A Christian Palestinian, Said devoted *Orientalism* to exposing the manner in which the prejudices and power of Europe, and later the United States, created both a geographical entity called “the Orient” and a scholarly tradition of speaking and writing about it. This was not the Orient of Japan or China; this was the “Near East” and “Middle East.” While Jews, Christians and others contributed to the cultures and history of this region, Islam and Muslims were the primary if not exclusive targets of Orientalism. As the incubator and projection of Western fears, desires, repressions and prejudices, occidental discourse about the Orient normalized a whole series of self-serving and condescending stereotypes about Arab and Muslim “Orientals.” These, in turn, justified the propriety and inevitability of Western domination and privilege. This self-serving, power-driven psychological predisposition, deeply rooted and often consciously indulged, constituted what Said meant by Orientalism.

Said noted that Orientalism was not a purely political affair, something that only Western governments and armies used against Oriental despots and their cowering subjects. Western intellectuals and academicians played a major role in the enterprise. Even when British, French or American scholars approached the Orient with no conscious political aims, they could neither transcend nor disengage themselves from the social, historical and institutional forces that shaped their mental schemas. The Western scholar, wrote Said, “c[a]me up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second.”² As an individual, s/he might look *across* the Atlantic or Mediterranean to the Orient; but as a Westerner, s/he could only look down from a self-described superior civilization, a perspective destined to shape the Orient into a projection of the most deeply ingrained Western fears, prejudices and obsessions.

If White Westerners approached the Orient as Europeans and Americans, one would expect Blackamerican thinkers and scholars to approach it as Blackamericans.³ The meaning and implications of this would depend, of course, on where Blackamericans were in their own existential struggle and on what influence the Orient itself was perceived as exerting on their lives. Prior to the 1970s, what little role the Orient played in Blackamerican thought was almost exclusively positive. From the 1970s on, however, there was a palpable change in the image and status of the Arab/Muslim world among Blackamericans. The change coincided with the move of large numbers of Muslims from the Middle East and Asia to the United States, which produced a major shift in the priorities, sensibilities and image of Islam in this country. Whereas before the 1970s Islam in the United States had been dominated by a Black presence and thus a Black,

American agenda, from the 1970s on “real” Islam increasingly came to be perceived as the religion of Arabs and foreigners who were neither knowledgeable about nor genuinely interested in the realities of Blackamericans. With this development, Blackamericans who identified with Islam, especially Sunnis, came under increasing criticism as “cultural heretics”: self-hating “wannabees” who had moved from the back of the bus to the back of the camel. This occurred in the context of the Blackamerican converts to Islam having defected either from the Black Church or some other Blackamerican movement. The result was that from the very beginning, certain elements within the Blackamerican community perceived Islam’s gains as their own loss. Ultimately, all of this would culminate in the rise of Black Orientalism.

Unlike Said’s “white” Orientalism, the aim of Black Orientalism had nothing to do with a desire to control or dominate the Orient. Like Said’s Orientalism, however, its target was emphatically Islam. Black Orientalism was essentially a reaction to the newly developed relationship among Islam, Blackamericans and the Muslim world. It followed the shift from Black Religion to historical Islam as the basis of Islamic religious authority among Blackamerican Muslims. Its ultimate aim is to challenge, if not undermine, the esteem enjoyed by Islam in the Blackamerican community by projecting onto the Muslim world a set of images, perceptions, resentments and stereotypes that are far more the product of the Black experience in the United States than they are of any direct relationship with or knowledge of Islam and the Muslim world. By highlighting the purported historical race-prejudice of the Muslim world and, in some instances, the alleged responses to it, Black Orientalism seeks to impugn the propriety of the relationship between Islam and Blackamericans and ultimately to call into question Blackamerican Muslims’ status as “authentic,” loyal Blackamericans.

In this essay, I trace the rise of Black Orientalism, its causes and nature, and its significance for American Islam. This will include a brief examination of the development of Islam among Blackamericans, in order to place Black Orientalism in a meaningful historical context. It will be followed by a word about the shifts and dislocations in Blackamerican Islam that were engendered by the influx of Muslim immigrants to the United States, following the changes in immigration quotas in 1965. I will then sharpen my definition of Black Orientalism, highlighting the distinction between it and valid criticisms of Arabs and/or Muslims. That will be followed by a brief, synecdochic response to one particular manifestation of Black Orientalism. I will conclude with a word about the significance of Black Orientalism for the present and future of Islam in the United States.

RELIGION, IDENTITY AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM AMONG BLACKAMERICANS

In tracing the history of Islam among Blackamericans, it is important to begin with the fact that the United States is unique among the great Western democracies in that a significant proportion of its Muslim population was born in this country. The spread of

Islam among Blackamericans did not follow any of the patterns familiar to Islam in other parts of the world: it was not the result of immigration, conquest or the efforts of traveling Sufis. The rise of Islam among Blackamericans owes its impetus, rather, to a masterful feat of appropriation of the vehicle of Black Religion. The early Blackamerican “Islamizers,” Noble Drew Ali and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, enlisted Islam not only as a strictly religious expression but as a basis for an alternative modality of American Blackness. Blackamericans at large came to see in this religion not only a path to spiritual salvation but a path to a more authentic Blackamerican self. Elijah Muhammad campaigned not only against Christianity but against those “finger-poppin’, chittlin’-eatin’, yes sa bossin’ Negroes.” Islam, in other words, as “the Black Man’s Religion,” was as much about identity and what E.E. Curtis IV refers to as “cultural nationalism” as it was about religion in a restricted sense.⁴

This added dimension of being enlisted as the basis of an alternative modality of American Blackness is crucial to understanding the rise of Islam among Blackamericans. It is also critical, however, to a proper understanding of the rise of Black Orientalism. On the one hand, it was this dimension of Blackamerican Islam more than anything else that thrust it into competition with the Black Church and other Blackamerican movements. At the same time, it was precisely this dimension of Blackamerican Islam that was and remains neither understood nor appreciated by the immigrant Muslims who came to monopolize the authority to define a properly constituted Islamic life in the United States. In the face of this new, immigrant authority, purportedly grounded in the super-tradition of historical Islam, Blackamerican Muslims found themselves unable to address the realities of their lives in a manner that effectively served their needs or in terms that were likely to be recognized as Islamic. At the same time, this new ideological dependency left them unable to insulate the positive features of their Blackamerican culture from the hostile reflexes of an immigrant Islam that was still reacting to its nemesis: the modern West. All of this would leave Blackamerican Muslims open to the charge of being followers of a religion that countenanced, if it did not endorse, the devaluation, marginalization and subjugation of Blacks.

FROM BLACK RELIGION TO HISTORICAL ISLAM

The history of Islam among Blackamericans begins, for all intents and purposes, in the early twentieth century, with the marriage of Islam and Black Religion. Black Religion, however, should not be understood to constitute a distinct religion per se but rather a religious orientation. It has no theology or orthodoxy; it has no institutionalized ecclesiastical order and no public or private liturgy. It has no foundational documents, like the Bible or the Baghavad Ghita, and no founding figures, like Buddha or Zoroaster. The God of Black Religion is neither specifically Jesus, Yahweh or Allah. It is, rather, an abstract category into which any and all of these can be put. Black Religion can be described as the deism or natural religion of Blackamericans, a spontaneous folk-orientation grounded in the

belief in a supernatural power yet uniquely focused on that power's manifestation as interventions in the crucible of American race relations. In short, Black Religion is a holy protest against White supremacy and its material effects. According to C. Eric Lincoln, its point of departure was American slavery, and had it not been for slavery, there would have been no Black Religion.⁵

The Black Church emerged out of the marriage between Black Religion and Protestantism and conferred a palpably religious dimension upon the Black struggle in the United States. Indeed, the Black Church remained the dominant host of Black Religion until the beginning of the twentieth century. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth, however, Blackamericans began to migrate en masse from the South to Northern metropolises, where the relationship between the Black Church and Black Religion was ruptured and the latter was forced to look for new accommodations. Joseph R. Washington, Jr. described this alienation from the Black Church:

Since the 1920s, black religion, the religion of the folk, has been dysfunctional. From this period on the once subordinate and latent stream of white Protestant evangelicalism has been dominant and manifest, relegating the uniqueness of black religion to verbal expression from the pulpit in such a way that action was stifled.⁶

The early "Islamizers," Noble Drew Ali and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, emerged in the context of this ruptured relationship between the Black Church and Black Religion, offering asylum to Black Religion in what they presented as Islam. By using Black Religion as a vehicle for appropriating Islam and making it meaningful and valuable to Blackamericans, these early Islamizers were able to popularize the religion and render it the cultural property of Blackamericans as a whole. The establishment of a sense of ownership was critical to the rising rate of Blackamerican conversion. It was also an important factor in the Islamizers' ability to influence Blackamerican culture at large. One sees signs of this in the newly developed disdain for pork or in the spread of Arabic names, in both their proper and bastardized forms (i.e., those of the a-ee-a pattern, such as Lakeesha, Tamika, Shameeka). In short, this historical feat of appropriation marked the true beginning of the history of Islam among Blackamericans and gave the religion roots in American soil. Indeed, without this historical achievement, it is doubtful that Islam would have come to enjoy its current success among Blackamericans.

If only by default, Black Religion remained the primary means by which Blackamerican proto- and Sunni Islam validated itself until 1965, when the administration of Lyndon Johnson repealed the national origins law that had restricted immigration almost exclusively to Northern and Western Europeans. It was not the Qur'an or the *Sunnah* or books of law and exegesis that authenticated a view as Islamic, but the act of throwing off the yoke of White domination or the demand to conform to the dictates of the new persona of the dignified Black man. As long as this remained the case, Black Orientalism existed only as a cry on the margins of Blackamerica. With the repeal of the national origins law, however, and the massive influx of Muslims from the Middle East

and Asia, a new basis of religious authority was introduced into American Islam. The primary authenticators of Islam were no longer Black Religion and Black Americans but, rather, immigrants who spoke in the name of the historical *'ulūm shar'īyah*, or Islamic religious sciences. In addition to its impact on Black American Muslims, this shift in the basis of Islamic religious authority effected a fundamental change in the attitude of Black American non-Muslims towards the Arab/Muslim world.

Prior to the shift from Black Religion to historical Islam, the Arab and Muslim worlds were invariably included as constituents of an idealized Third World, a regiment of Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* grinding out the universal ground-offensive against White supremacy and Western imperialism.⁷ After this shift, and the establishment of critical masses of immigrant Muslims in the United States, there was a growing number of Black American scholars who denied the Arab and Muslim world this status and portrayed it instead as a precursor, partner or imitator of the West in its denigration and subjugation of Black people. Several works by Black American writers from the early 1970s reflected this development: C. Williams' *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, S. Maglangbayan's *Garvey, Lumumba, and Malcolm: Black National-Separatists*, Y. Ben-Jochannan's *African Origins of Major Western Religions*, and H. Madhubuti (Don L. Lee)'s *Enemies: The Clash of Races*.⁸ This was the beginning of Black Orientalism, a trend that has continued into the new millennium.

BLACK ORIENTALISM AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Not every criticism of the stereotypes, prejudices and practices of Muslim Orientals is an expression of Black Orientalism. Valid criticism, however, is distinct from ideologically-driven denigration. The former is based on direct experience or knowledge of verifiable facts; the latter, on imagination, ideology and projection. When Black Americans condemn the exploitative activities of (Muslim) Arab liquor-store magnates in the greater Detroit or Chicago areas, this is no more an exercise in anti-Muslim Black Orientalism than earlier critiques of Jewish slumlords were of anti-Semitism. If the old anti-miscegenation laws prove how deeply ingrained anti-Black racism was among American Whites, de facto anti-miscegenation sentiment among Muslim Orientals cannot be written off as a benign "cultural preference." In short, if the association among Islam, Black Americans and the Muslim world should not cause wild and unwarranted projections, neither should it require turning a blind eye to real offenses experienced at first hand.

Nor must Black American criticism of Muslim Orientals be limited to contemporary facts or experience. The pre-modern Islamic legacy remains the repository of the greatest authority for contemporary Muslims and it continues to inform the thought and sensibilities of Islam in the United States. When we turn to this legacy, we find that Muslim legal, historical, exegetical and belle-lettristic literature are replete with anti-Black sentiment. It is neither Black Orientalism nor a manifestation of anti-Muslim bias to criticize and analyze such works but, on the contrary, such criticism and analysis is necessary for the establishment of a standard that can be applied fairly and consistently across the board.

Consider the following example: in his famous *Prolegomenon*, Ibn Khaldūn (808/1406) says of Blacks in the southern portion of Africa that “they are not to be numbered among humans.”⁹ The early Meccan jurist, Tâ’ûs, refused to attend weddings between a Black and White because, given his understanding of the Qur’anic verse about the Satanic impulse to “change God’s creation” (*taghyîr khalq Allâh* – Q 4:119), he deemed them to be “unnatural.”¹⁰ Numerous early Mâlikî jurists held, reportedly on the authority of Mâlik, that while under normal circumstances a valid marriage contract required that the woman be represented by a male relative (*walî*), this requirement could be relaxed in instances such as those where the woman hailed from lowly origins or was ugly or Black.¹¹ This, they argued, was because Blackness was an affliction that automatically reduced a woman’s social standing.¹² Similarly, the twelfth/eighteenth century Mâlikî jurist, al-Dardîr, categorically affirms the unbelief (*kufrî*) of any Muslim who claims that the Prophet Muhammad was Black.¹³

Nothing would excuse the casual dismissal of such statements from white Americans or Europeans, nor should their authors’ status as Muslim Orientals earn them such an exemption. Holding up such statements for comment and criticism is not Black Orientalism. It is, rather, responsible scholarship whose ultimate aim and effect should be to alert Muslims to the ways in which they have failed to live up to their own ideals.

Having said this much, however, it must be acknowledged that critical references to statements and actions by Muslim Orientals can approach Black Orientalism. This is the case when they proceed on the uncritical assumption that what might be systemically racist comments in the context of the United States are isolated instances with other meanings in the context of another society. Race and color, in other words, are assumed to be consistent determinants of human relations and possibilities in Muslim society. In short, Black Orientalism implies not only that Muslim society produced expressions of race- or color-prejudice, but that such prejudice defined these societies and in so doing circumscribed the lives and possibilities of Black people within them.

Among the strongest contentions giving currency to the assumption that Black life was circumscribed in Muslim society is the erroneous claim that Blacks in Islam were a slave class as they were in the United States. This not only adds credence to the notion that Black life was circumscribed, but confers upon all seemingly racially-biased statements and actions the appearance of being part of the ruling class’ effort to justify its domination over its subjugated wards. In point of fact, however, as every historian of Islam knows, most slaves in Muslim society were not Black but of Turkish origin, and there is no evidence that most Blacks were slaves.¹⁴ Even assuming that Blacks were a slave class in Muslim society, however, there is, as Ira Berlin notes in *Many Thousands Gone*, a major distinction between “societies with slaves” (e.g., African society) and “slave societies,” like the United States, where color and slavery were coterminous. According to Berlin,

In societies with slaves, no one presumed the master-slave relationship to be the social exemplar. In slave societies, by contrast, slavery stood at the center of economic production, and the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations:

husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, teacher and student. From the most intimate connections between men and women to the most public ones between ruler and ruled, all relationships mimicked those of slavery....“Nothing escaped, nothing and no one.” Whereas slaveholders were just one portion of a propertied elite in societies with slaves, they were the ruling class in slave societies; nearly everyone—free and slave—aspired to enter the slaveholding class.¹⁵

The presumption that Blacks under Islam were a slave class in a slave society is a major premise of Black Orientalists and a primary means by which they impose a single interpretation upon every racially-tinged statement or action by an Arab or non-Black Muslim. If views such as Mâlik’s regarding Blackness as an affliction are to serve as proof that Arab Muslims were all Jim Crow segregationists, however, what is to be made of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s statements about dark-skinned women, or Frederick Douglass’ reference to the “ape-like appearance of some of the genuine Negroes,” or Alexander Crummel’s labeling of West Africans as “virile barbarians,” or, for that matter, comedian Chris Rock’s declaration, “I hate niggers!”¹⁶ Clearly, Muslims south of the Sahara, who overwhelmingly adopted the Mâlikî school’s interpretation of Islam, ignored the view attributed to Mâlik and required a male relative to validate a marriage. Why should the prejudicial view attributed to Mâlik and some Mâlikîs be accepted as the final, definitive word?

We might also ask whether the statement of Ibn Khaldûn quoted above is necessarily an antecedent to such “scientific” racist theories as those of Jensen, Shockley and the authors of *The Bell Curve*.¹⁷ In making such a determination, how justified would we be in ignoring Ibn Khaldûn’s explicit statements to the effect that “race” is an imagined social construct, that the notion of Black intellectual inferiority is false, that the Old Testament story about Noah cursing his son Ham does not refer to Blackness but says only that Ham’s sons shall be cursed with enslavement, and that it is climate, not blood, that affects endowments such as intelligence or civilization?¹⁸ According to Ibn Khaldûn’s theory, the farther people are removed from the moderate climate of the Mediterranean, the less their intelligence and civilizing potential. Thus, he imputed the same savage-status to Africans farthest removed to the south and to White “Slavs” (*Saqâlibah*) who were farthest removed to the north.¹⁹ One must ask why the history of race relations in the United States should be the only prism through which his statements can be viewed.

It is true that the examples cited, as well as many others, demonstrate that Arab and other non-Black Muslims were afflicted with race- and color-prejudice.²⁰ The insinuation, however, that such attitudes stemmed from the same psychology and implied the same all-encompassing social and political reality as that created by white Americans stems more from imagination than from fact. In the year 659/1260, some seven centuries before the United States’ civil rights movement, a Black man appeared in Cairo after the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols and claimed to be a member of

the ‘Abbâsid House. The Mamlûk Sultan, himself a former slave, ordered the Chief Justice to make an official inquiry into the claim. After his genealogy was confirmed, the Black man took the name al-Mustansir and was inaugurated *amîr al-mu’minîn* (Commander of the Faithful); i.e., Caliph, temporal successor to the Prophet Muhammad.²¹ To date, however, no Western nation has been headed by a Black man.

Clearly, facts such as these must be considered if the real significance of race and color prejudice in Arab/Muslim society is to be understood, but Black Orientalism deliberately ignores or suppresses them. This is done in order to invest race prejudice in the Muslim world with the same significance it has in the United States. The result is that cultural bias and the deliberate, race-based monopoly and abuse of power become so indistinguishable that a cultural idiosyncrasy such as Rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot’s contempt for the gaunt figures and flat buttocks idealized by *Cosmopolitan* magazine takes on the same significance as Jesse Helms’s and the Republican party’s opposition to affirmative action.²²

NATIONALIST BLACK ORIENTALISM: MOLEFI ASANTE

There are at least three types of Black Orientalism: the Nationalist, the Academic and the Religious. All three impugn the relationship between Blackamericans and historical Islam. Because of space limitations, only Nationalist Black Orientalism is discussed below.²³

In 1980, Professor Molefi Kete Asante started a fire with the publication of his provocative work, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*.²⁴ The book became the manifesto of the “new” Afrocentric movement.²⁵ It was followed in 1987 by *The Afrocentric Idea* and in 1990 by *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*.²⁶ The purpose of these works was to lay out the aims, ideological underpinnings and practical methodology for an approach to historical, cultural and sociological studies that viewed the world, especially the African world, from the perspective of Africa and Africans rather than from the dominant Eurocentric perspective that claimed to be objective and universal. Asante criticized other approaches, including those of Africans and African Americans, that he felt had been influenced by bias and by assumptions accepted uncritically by the European and American academy. Chief among these was the negative assessment of the achievements of Africa and its contributions to world civilization. Afrocentrism was a clarion call to Africans and African Americans to free themselves from these negative stereotypes and return to their true African selves. It was also an appeal to non-Africans to consider the African rather than the reigning European perspective as an effective tool for re-humanizing the world.

As a professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, a city heavily populated by Blackamerican Muslims, Asante was well aware that Afrocentrism faced stiff competition. To neutralize its competitors, he argued that they were inconsistent with the dictates of Afrocentricity, which reflected the true African self. He wrote of Islam,

Adoption of Islam is as contradictory to the Diasporan Afrocentricity as Christianity has been. Christianity has been dealt with admirably by other writers, notably

Karenga; but Islam within the African-American community ha [sic] yet to come under Afrocentric scrutiny. Understand that this oversight is due more to a sympathetic audience than it is to the perfection of Islam for African-Americans. While the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad was a transitional nationalist movement, the present emphasis of Islam in America is more cultural and religious.²⁷

Asante's critique of Islam is neither theological nor philosophical. He does not attack the foundational beliefs of Islam, such as its monotheism or belief in an Afterlife, but rather what he considers the negative, self-deprecating place of Blacks in Islam. His appeal, in other words, is to certain sensibilities developed by Blackamericans as a result of their New World experience. His message is essentially that Islam inherently promotes an Arab supremacy that is no less pernicious and injurious to Blacks than the White supremacy of the West.

Asante insists that the Arabs have structured Islam in such a way that non-Arabs (that is, Blackamericans) are forced to accept the inherent superiority of Arab idiosyncrasies and presuppositions. This leads to "the over-powering submissiveness of Africans and other non-Arabs."²⁸ The specific means of enforcing this submissiveness were: language (that is, the primacy of Arabic among Muslims); *Hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca; the *qiblah*, or the direction in which Muslims must turn when offering ritual prayers; the doctrine that Muhammad was the last prophet; and customs such as dress that were informed by a specifically Arab culture. While space does not permit a full treatment of all these points, what follows should be sufficient to demonstrate that Asante is a proponent of Black Orientalism. In assessing the validity of this critique, it is important to remember that the determining factor is not whether his list is factually correct but whether the meaning attributed to it is grounded in objective analysis or ideology.

The first issue has to do with language. In response to the thesis that Arabic spread among Muslim populations because of its "prestige and usefulness," Asante writes, "While this is partially true, it is more correct to say that the language succeeded because of force and punishment."²⁹ He offers no historical proof from European, African or Arabic sources. Rather, Asante relies on his readers' tendency to utilize their Western experience as the analogue for all historical reality. The Arabs, in other words, must have forced Arabic upon their vanquished populations, because the loss of African languages among the American slave population proves that white Americans forced their language upon their slaves.

But if the ability to "force and punish" were the primary means by which language spread, Turkish would have wiped out Arabic in all the areas of the Middle East over which the Ottomans ruled for almost half a millennium. If prestige and usefulness were really marginal as incentives, what accounts for the existence in places as far removed from the Arabs as China, Russia or Surinam of Muslim populations who continue to learn the language and who pride themselves on their ability to do so? Moreover, even if one concedes that Arabic spread by "force and punishment," would the ultimate effect and meaning of this imposition be the same as Blacks' experience in the New World?

Here we come to a critical failing that virtually compels Asante to projection. He equates Whiteness with Arabness and then goes on to assume that the two function identically. This approach assumes that Arab supremacy had the same effect on Blacks as White supremacy, essentially relegating Blacks to a negative category made inescapable by their skin color. In fact, however, the attempt of the Umayyads (the first Muslim dynasty) in the first/seventh century to perpetuate a system that reduced non-Arabs to second-class citizenship failed. After that, once a people was Arabized, it became equal in its Arabness to its conquerors, as was the case, e.g., with the Egyptians, Syrians, and North Africans. This was true whether the adoption occurred through force, choice or osmosis. Arabized peoples often eventually superseded the “original” Arabs in intellectual, artistic and other pursuits, including the acquisition of power, as occurred, e.g., with Abû Nawâs in Arab poetry, al-Ghazali in Muslim theology, Abû Hanifa in Islamic law, and the famous Barmakid family of politicians.³⁰ By contrast, when the language, religion and culture of New World Africans were destroyed and replaced by English and Protestantism, they were rendered neither English nor American. The naturalization law passed by the United States Congress in 1790 defined American-ness as Whiteness, and Whiteness was a boundary that Black people could not cross.³¹ It is thus misleading to imply, as Asante does, that the experience of subject populations, even under a regime of Arab supremacy, was the same as the experience of New World Blacks under a regime of White supremacy. I have often been asked by Arabs who hear me speak Arabic if I am an Arab. I have never been asked by a White person who heard me speak English if I was White. If Arabization, forced or voluntary, expressed a commitment to the principle of *E pluribus unum* (from the many, one), American Whiteness emphatically excludes Blacks on the principle of *E pluribus duo* (from the many, two).³²

The remainder of Asante’s list implies submissiveness, but we might note that while White American Muslims change their names, perform the pilgrimage, offer the daily prayers, modify their customs and often replace their dress, because of their understanding of their duty as Muslims or a preference for traditions they deem to be identifiably Muslim, Asante does not speak of White American submissiveness to the culture and religion of the Arabs. The reason is that in his experience and that of Blackamericans generally, White people simply do not have culture and religion imposed upon them. Being forced into the role of passive recipient is an exclusively Black reality. It is the force of this projection of the Blackamerican experience that both leads Asante to his submissiveness thesis and sustains its currency among his Blackamerican readership.

Asante’s critique reflects a desire to delegitimize Islam in the Blackamerican community. His criticisms are based more on projections from the Blackamerican experience, however, than on an objective assessment of Islam itself. In describing “White” Orientalism, Edward Said noted that it was grounded in the fears, desires, repressions and prejudices of the West. Asante’s Black Orientalism, like that of all Black Orientalists, attempts to cast Islam and the Muslim world in a mold that accommodates Blackamerican imaginings, resentments, prejudices and difficulties in confronting the intractable problem of American race relations.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLACK ORIENTALISM FOR ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES

From the decades following the Civil War, Black America has maintained a cultural/political orthodoxy dedicated to policing the boundaries between Blacks and “pseudo-Blacks.” Pseudo-Blacks have traditionally been identified as those whose cultural authenticity and/or political loyalty to the Blackamerican community are in doubt. This cultural/political orthodoxy has always been part of the mores and sentiments of the folk, and paying homage to it has been the *sine qua non* of success for any serious movement among Blackamericans—even those, such as Elijah Muhammad’s, that sought to alter the substance of Blackamerican culture. The early Blackamerican Islamizers’ understanding and respect for this tradition facilitated the popularity and growth of their movements. Immigrant Islam, however, arrived in the United States oblivious to this reality, and passed on much of this myopia to Blackamerican Muslims who came under its influence. The result has been a cognitive dissonance in which fossilized doctrines and practices from the Muslim world are imagined to be viable substitutes for effectively engaging American, and particularly urban American, reality. At the same time, the power and status that Islam once enjoyed within the Blackamerican community has been displaced in many quarters by a sense of disappointment and betrayal and a feeling that Islam and Muslims are irrelevant if not detrimental to the Black cause.

In this context, the rise of Black Orientalism must be viewed not only as a reflection of attempts by Blackamerican Christians and other non-Muslims to regain lost ground. The perspective of immigrant Islam must also be recognized as threatening the status and future of Islam in Black America. Blackamerican Muslims must confront and take concrete steps to overcome ideological dependency, for they will cease to exist at the mercy of the definitions of others only when they acquire the authority to define a properly constituted Islamic life for themselves.

Black Orientalism, however, is not a problem for Blackamerican Muslims alone. Immigrant Muslims are equally affected by the phenomenon, especially in the context of the United States after September 11. In earlier times, the criticism Black leaders and thinkers leveled at Blackamerican Muslims never reached the point of threatening Islam’s place in the collective psyche of Blackamericans. In the present atmosphere, however, given the diminished relationship between Islam and Black Religion, on the one hand, and the nationwide rise in anti-Muslim mania, on the other, this danger is far more imminent. Any permanent estrangement between Islam and Blackamericans would be nothing short of disastrous for Muslims of all backgrounds, for it is primarily through Blackamerican conversion that Islam enjoys whatever status it does as a bona fide American religion. To date, Blackamericans remain the only indigenous Americans whose conversion to Islam connotes neither cultural nor ethnic apostasy. Without Blackamerican Muslims, Islam would be orphaned in the United States, with virtually

nothing to save it from being relegated to the status of an alien, hostile threat. This has obvious implications for anyone associated with Islam.

The threat of Black Orientalism nonetheless lies far more in the refusal of Muslims, Blackamerican and immigrant, to recognize and address the causes that brought it into being than it does in the efforts of Black Orientalists themselves. Muslims must confront, honestly and energetically, the question of whether the shift in the basis of Islamic religious authority had to result in the kinds of dislocations that led to the rise of Black Orientalism. This question is critically important for Blackamerican Sunnis, because they cannot return to classical Black Religion in a manner that privileges it over the historical Sunni tradition. The question for them is whether they can master and supplement that tradition to speak to their realities as Blacks, as Americans and as Muslims.

As for immigrant Muslims, it may be time to recognize that their greatest interest as Muslim-Americans lies not in the situations in Palestine or Kashmir but in establishing a sense of their belongingness, however problematic, in the collective psyche of Americans as a whole. This may mean devoting more energy to attaching themselves to an already-existing tradition of Islamic belongingness in the United States. In such a context, Black Orientalism will reveal itself to be as great a threat to them as it is to Blackamerican Muslims. It is a threat, however, that will only be defeated through practical and attitudinal changes, not the same old rhetorical smoke and mirrors.

NOTES

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978).

2. Op. cit., p. 11.

3. I use the term “Blackamerican” as an alternative to both the “African” and the hyphenation in African-American. My contention is that Blacks in the United States, certainly religiously speaking, are no longer African. Politically, the hyphen in African-American does not have anything like the efficiency that it does in the case of Jewish-Americans or Italian-Americans, the latter’s Jewishness and Italianness being essentially protected by their Americanness.

4. Edward E. Curtis IV, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (State University of New York, 2002).

5. C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion and the Continuing American Dilemma* (Hill and Wang, 1999), p. 31.

6. Joseph R. Washington, Jr., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (University Press of America, 1984), p. 37.

7. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1965).

8. Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization* (Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1971); Shawna Maglangbayan, *Garvey, Lumumba, and Malcolm: Black National-Separatists* (Third World Press, 1972); Yosef Ben-Jochannan, *African Origins of Major Western Religions* (Alkebu-lan Books, 1970); Haki Madhubuti, *Enemies: The Clash of Races* (Third World Press, 1978). On these and other works, see the informative article by Y. Nurridin, “African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way,” in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John Esposito,

Muslims on the Americanization Path? (Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 282–287.

9. Ibn Khaldûn, ‘Abd al-Rahmân b. Khaldûn, *al-Muqaddimah* (Dâr wa Maktabat al-Hilâl, 1986), p. 45. Throughout this essay, dates are given according to both the Muslim and the Christian calendars.

10. See Muhammad al-Amîn al-Shanqîti, *Adwâ’ al-bayân fî idâh al-qur’ân bi al-qur’ân* (Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1421/2000, 10 vols.), I:330. Al-Shanqîti refutes the position of Tâ’ûs by referring to several marriages conducted by the Prophet between a Black and a White, e.g., Zayd b. Hâritha (White) with Barakah, the mother of Usâmah (Black); Usâmah b. Zayd (Black) with Fâtima bt. Qays (White, from the “royal” tribe of Quraysh); and Bilâl (Black) with the sister of ‘Abd al-Rahmân b. ‘Awf (White).

11. Malik ibn Anas (c.713–c.795), a legal expert in the city of Medina, founded a school of Islamic jurisprudence.

12. *Adwâ’*, I: 330. Al-Shanqîti, himself a Mâlikî, refutes this view and cites several poems in praise of the beauty of Black women.

13. Al-Dardîr, *Al-Sharh al-Kabîr* (Dâr al-Fikr, N.d., 4 vols.), IV: 309 (on the margin of Muhammad al-Dasûqî, *Hâshiyat al-dasûqî ‘alâ al-sharh al-kabîr*).

14. This is obviously not the place for a full treatment of slavery in Muslim history, though the subject certainly deserves a full study, especially given the tendency on the part of Blackamericans to assume that American slavery is the norm that all other systems of slavery followed. They thereby make no distinction between slavery in a capitalist society and slavery in a non-capitalist order, slavery that is race-based and slavery that is race-neutral, slavery that draws slaves under the full orbit of law and slavery that denies slaves any legal rights at all. This makes objective discussions of Muslim or African or Polynesian slavery virtually impossible. It also obscures the fact that it was not slavery but White supremacy that was, and remains, the cause of Black subjugation in the United States.

15. Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 8.

16. See M.E. Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Free Press, 2000), pp. 193–194; Douglass quoted in W.J. Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 80; Crummel quoted in Moses, op. cit., p. 69. Chris Rock, comedian, used the line, “I love black people ... but I hate niggers” in one of his comic routines.

17. Richard Hernstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (Free Press, 1994).

18. Ibn Khaldûn, *al-Muqaddimah*, pp. 89, 63, 61. Ibn Khaldûn states that al-Mas‘ûdî took the fallacious notion of Black intellectual inferiority from the Arab philosopher al-Kindî, as cited by Galen.

19. *al-Muqaddimah*, op. cit., p. 60. But see the entire discussion, p. 44ff., for a full exposé of the theory of climate. This is confirmed by St. Clair Drake in his *Black Folks Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology* (University of California, 1987, 2 vols.), II: 157–159. Drake relies on the French translation of Ibn Khaldûn. In my view, Drake was not a Black Orientalist. Indeed, the fact that he relies exclusively on Orientalist writings but is still able to avoid Black Orientalism shows the extent to which this phenomenon is far more conscious than unconscious. Black Orientalists, in other words, tend to find only what they are looking for.

20. See, for example, St. Clair Drake, op. cit., II: 77–184.

21. See Shâfi‘ b. ‘Alî, *Husn al-manâqib al-sirrîyah al-muntaza‘ah min al-sûrah al-zâhirîyah* (‘A. Khowaytar, ed., 2nd ed., Riyadh, 1410/1989), p. 79. There are numerous other instances of

Black rulers in the central Arab Islamic lands.

22. See Sir Mix-A-Lot's hit single, "Baby Got Back," on the album *Mack Daddy* (Universal, 1992).

23. All three forms of Black Orientalism are discussed in my *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

24. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Amulefi Pub. Co., 1980).

25. As Wilson Jeremiah Moses points out, Afrocentric thought dates back at least to the nineteenth century and was even championed in the twentieth century by a number of White scholars, most notably Melville Herskovitz in *Myth of the Negro Past* (Beacon Press, 1958) and Martin Bernal in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (Rutgers University Press, 1987). The term "Afrocentrism" itself was used by W.E.B. DuBois as early as 1962. See Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1-2, 11-12.

26. Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Temple University Press, 1987); Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge* (Africa World Press, 1990).

27. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Africa World Press, 1996), p. 2. This was the eighth printing of the work that originally appeared in 1988.

28. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, op. cit., p. 3.

29. Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Africa World Press, 1998), p. 131. This is a reprint of the work first published in 1990.

30. Though born of a Persian mother, Abû Nawâs (130/747-c. 195/810) was and is considered to be among the greatest of all Arab poets. See *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (E. J. Brill, 1913), I: 102. Al-Ghazalî (450-505/1058-1111), also of Persian lineage, is thought by many to be the most famous Muslim after the Prophet Muhammad himself. His most influential works were written in Arabic. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, II: 146-149. Abû Hanîfa, again of Persian ancestry, was the eponym of the Hanafi school of law, numerically the largest in all of classical Islam. He died in 150/767, and even today many if not most Muslims believe he was a pure Arab. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, I: 90. The Barmakid family, originally a Buddhist priestly family from Balkh, rose to power as government ministers under the Abbasid Caliph. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, I: 663-666.

31. In the Act of March 26, 1790, Congress authorized naturalization for "free white persons" who had resided in the United States for at least two years and swore loyalty to the U.S. Constitution. The racial requirement remained on the federal books until 1952, though naturalization was opened to members of some Asian nationalities in the 1940s.

32. For more on this theme, see Matthew F Jacobson's important *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 109-135.

American Public Opinion about Muslims in the U.S. and Abroad

SCOTT KEETER AND ANDREW KOHUT¹

The horrific events of September 11, 2001 focused the attention of the American public on the Islamic world and Muslims, both in the United States and abroad. Subsequent events, including further terrorist attacks in several nations as well as the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have heightened that focus. While the reactions of most Americans to these events are a testament to their core values of tolerance and religiosity, they also signal a cautionary note about the future of relations between cultures that share many values but still differ in significant ways.

Public opinion surveys conducted in the aftermath of September 11 indicate that the American public responded to the terrorist attacks with surprising equanimity, for the most part making important and subtle distinctions in its evaluations of Muslims.² Subsequent polling has reinforced the notion that most Americans have not judged Muslims and Islam on the basis of the actions of a few extremists. Even in the aftermath of the deadly July 7, 2005 London bombings, American images of Islam were little different than they had been over the previous three years.

This analysis of the polling data indicates that American opinion about Muslims actually became more favorable after September 11, that most Americans do not regard Muslim Americans as hostile to the interests of the United States, and that most do not think that the terrorist attacks signal the coming of a major clash between the West and Islam. President Bush's efforts to promote tolerance in the aftermath of the tragedy appear to have played a role in this public response. Citizens knowledgeable about Islam are more accepting of Muslim Americans than those

Figure 1. Rating Muslim Americans

	Mar 2001	Nov 2001	Mar 2002	Mid-July 2003	July 2005
Favorable	45%	59%	54%	51%	55%
Unfavorable	28%	17%	22%	24%	25%
No opinion	31%	24%	24%	25%	20%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Rating Islam

	Oct 2001*	Mar 2002	Mid-July 2003	July 2004	July 2005
Favorable	47%	38%	40%	39%	41%
Unfavorable	39%	33%	34%	37%	36%
No opinion	13%	29%	26%	24%	23%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*ABC/Beliefnet. All other data from Pew Research Center polls.

with less knowledge, but they are also more likely to understand that much of the Islamic world is skeptical or hostile toward the United States. Despite a high degree of toleration, mainstream American culture has not yet fully accepted Muslims and considerable suspicion remains. There is a willingness to see Muslims profiled for security checks, as well as other signs of wariness about Islam and Muslims.

Favorable View of Muslims, Less So for Islam

Despite a number of incidents of anti-Muslim bias and hate crimes in the aftermath of September 11, public opinion toward Muslims in the United States has been very temperate. Favorable ratings of Muslim Americans rose from 45 percent in March 2001 to 59 percent in November 2001 before falling somewhat to 51 percent in July 2003. Two years later (July 2005), it stands at 55 percent. Currently, one quarter (25 percent) express an unfavorable opinion of Muslim Americans (Figure 1).³

Opinions of “Muslims” who are not identified as “Americans” tend to be less positive than for Muslim Americans. In March 2005, a 45 percent plurality felt favorably toward Muslims, with 28 percent expressing an unfavorable view. This result has changed little since early 2002 (Figure 2).

The larger distinction, however, is between ratings of Muslims as individuals and perceptions of Islam generally. When asked for its opinion of Islam, the public is divided, with 41 percent saying they have a favorable view of the religion, and 36 percent unfavorable. This represents a six point drop from an October 2001 ABC/Beliefnet poll, which found 47 percent expressing a favorable opinion of Islam in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy.⁴

While predominantly favorable, positive public views of Muslims continue to lag behind attitudes towards many other religious groups. Protestants, Catholics and Jews are rated favorably by roughly three-quarters of the public, with very few respondents expressing unfavorable opinions of these groups. It is worth noting that Americans are far more critical of atheists than they are of Muslims: 50 percent have an unfavorable view of atheists, compared with only 28 percent unfavorable toward Muslims and 25 percent toward Muslim Americans. The United States is a profoundly religious nation – the most religious of the wealthy industrialized countries – and has considerable respect for religious people of all persuasions as well as skepticism about those who lack religion.

Comparisons with World War II

Public opinion about Muslims in the aftermath of September 11 presents an interesting contrast to the way the Japanese and Japanese Americans were viewed during and after World War II. There are important differences between the situations, including the fact that Japan as a nation waged a lengthy and bitter war on the United States. Nonetheless, American prejudice toward Japanese Americans as well as the Japanese was very different from the moderate reaction of public opinion today about Muslims.

Figure 2. Favorability Ratings

Opinion of	Favorable	Unfavorable	Can't rate
Protestants			
Mid-July 2003	70%	10%	20%
March 2002	74%	8%	18%
Catholics			
July 2005*	73%	14%	13%
Mid-July 2003	69%	18%	13%
March 2002	74%	13%	13%
Jews			
July 2005*	77%	7%	16%
Late May 2005	77%	7%	16%
February 2004	77%	8%	15%
Mid-July 2003	72%	9%	19%
March 2002	74%	9%	17%
Evangelical Christians			
July 2005*	57%	19%	24%
Mid-July 2003	58%	18%	24%
March 2002	55%	18%	27%
Muslim- Americans			
July 2005*	55%	25%	20%
Mid-July 2003*	51%	24%	25%
March 2002*	54%	22%	24%
People who aren't religious			
Mid-July 2003	50%	33%	17%
March 2002+	51%	30%	19%
Muslims			
March 2005	45%	28%	27%
Late February 2004*	48%	32%	20%
Mid-July 2003+	47%	31%	22%
March 2002+	47%	29%	24%
Atheists			
July 2005*	35%	50%	15%
Mid-July 2003*	34%	52%	14%
March 2002*	34%	54%	12%

* asked on Form 1

+ asked on Form 2

Source: Pew Research Center polls

In a March 1942 poll by the National Opinion Research Center, 43 percent of Americans polled agreed that the Japanese would always want to go to war to make themselves as powerful as possible, and another 25 percent said the Japanese might not like war but were easily led to it by powerful leaders.⁵ (Sentiment that the Japanese were innately warlike rose even further during the war.) Half of Americans (48 percent) interviewed in December 1942 thought that Japanese Americans who were forcibly moved inland from the Pacific coast should not be allowed to return to their homes after the war. Among those who opposed returning the Japanese Americans to their homes, nearly two-thirds favored sending them to Japan or to another country. About three in ten admitted that they hated the Japanese people. In 1944, 61 percent said that white people should get preference over Japanese Americans for any jobs that were available.

After the war, opinions were not much different. Half of Americans polled in December 1946 (47 percent) said that the Japanese would go back to their old ways. That same year, one-fourth of the American public said that the average Japanese American was disloyal to the United States. Two-thirds (66 percent) believed that the average Japanese living in this country did some spying for the Japanese government. Majorities polled at the end of the war (December 1945) said that the Japanese people were naturally cruel, and 63 percent said the Japanese people entirely approved of the killing and starving of prisoners.

Mixed Views on Religion and Violence

By comparison with attitudes during World War II, public opinion about the Islamic world is more moderate – though significant numbers of people nonetheless believe that much of the Islamic world is anti-American. Over four in ten (42 percent) in 2004 thought that a significant proportion of Muslims around the world hold anti-American views, up from 36 percent in March 2002. Polling in predominantly Muslim nations by the Pew Research Center and by Gallup has found high levels of anti-Americanism among Muslim populations.⁶ These views were especially widespread after the start of the war with Iraq but were substantial long before preparations for the war began (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Perceived Number of Anti-American Muslims around the World

	March 2002	June 2003	July 2004
Almost all	6%	7%	8%
Most	12%	17%	15%
About half	18%	25%	19%
Some	24%	24%	27%
Just a few	21%	15%	17%
Don't know	19%	12%	14%
	100%	100%	100%
NET 1/2 or more	36%	49%	42%

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Figure 4. Is Islam More Likely than Other Religions to Encourage Violence?

	March 2002	Mid-July 2003	July 2004	July 2005	Diff. (02 to 05)
Yes	25%	44%	46%	36%	+11
No	51%	41%	37%	47%	
Neither/DK	24%	15%	17%	17%	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Percent "Yes" among...					
White Evangelical	36%	51%	54%	50%	+14
High Commit	41%	52%	n/a	57%	+16
Low Commit	32%	51%	n/a	33%	+1
White Mainline	25%	50%	48%	28%	+3
White Catholic	24%	39%	47%	42%	+18
Black Protestant	24%	36%	36%	27%	+3
Secular	18%	38%	36%	26%	+8
Conservative	33%	54%	53%	44%	+11
Moderate	22%	43%	48%	33%	+11
Liberal	20%	32%	36%	31%	+11
Knowledge of Islam					
High	26%	43%	n/a	33%	+7
Medium	21%	45%	n/a	40%	+19
Low	26%	43%	n/a	33%	+7

The public sees much less anti-Americanism among Muslims in this country. Fully 62 percent of Americans polled in March 2002 say some or just a few Muslim Americans hold anti-American sentiments. One in five nonetheless thinks that at least half of the Muslims living in the United States are anti-American.

More Americans today than in 2002 believe that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers, but the number who feel this way has ebbed somewhat over the past year. There has also been an increase in the percentage of people who say that, in general, religion plays a large role in causing wars (40 percent in July 2005, 34 percent in March 2002).

The July 2005 Pew Research Center survey (conducted in the aftermath of the London bombings) found that 36 percent of Americans believe that Islam is more likely to encourage violence than other religions, up from 25 percent in the March 2002 poll but down from 46 percent one year earlier. Highly-committed white evangelicals are especially likely to hold this view (Figure 4).

The Importance of Leadership

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, President Bush and other national leaders quickly made public appeals for tolerance toward Muslims. The Pew Research Center survey conducted in November 2001 found evidence that Americans

heeded the president's call, and most notably that the president's own core constituency of conservative Republicans showed by far the biggest turnaround. In November, nearly two-thirds of conservative Republicans (64 percent) felt favorably toward Muslims, up 29 percentage points from the March 2001 survey (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Views of Muslims Improved among Conservatives

Opinion of Muslim Americans	Mar-01		Nov-01	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
Total	45%	24%	59%	17%
Conservative Republican	35%	40%	64%	19%
Moderate-Liberal Republican	50%	18%	61%	18%
Independent	51%	20%	60%	17%
Conservative-Moderate Democrat	46%	24%	56%	19%
Moderate-Liberal Republican	56%	16%	68%	18%

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Young People More Positive about Muslims and Islam

Another reason for the moderate public response to September 11 is that younger Americans are significantly more tolerant and accepting of diversity. On a range of attitudes regarding race, religion, and many social issues, the United States has seen a significant trend of new generations entering adulthood showing greater tolerance than their elders. This trend has helped to minimize the degree to which the public has blamed Muslims in general for the terrorists' actions. In March 2002, a majority of those under age 30 expressed a favorable view of Muslim Americans, Muslims, and Islam alike (57 percent, 57 percent and 51 percent respectively). Older Americans generally have a favorable opinion of Muslim Americans, but express more skepticism toward Muslims and Islam.

Americans age 65 and older in particular hold mixed views when it comes to Muslims and Islam. By 43 percent to 25 percent, members of this group in 2002 said they felt favorably about Muslim Americans, but seniors who were asked about Muslims rated them less positively (30 percent favorable versus 30 percent unfavorable). Just one in four has a favorable opinion of Islam, while 37 percent express an unfavorable opinion. These patterns are seen in nearly every poll conducted between 2002 and the present (Figure 6).

Increased levels of education in the United States also help account for differences between public reactions in 2001 and those seen during World War II.⁷ College-educated Americans express more favorable views of Muslims and Islam than those who did not attend college. In 2002, about half (52 percent) of college graduates had a favorable view of Islam, compared with just 29 percent of those who

Figure 6. Young More Tolerant

	----- Age -----			
Opinion of Muslim Americans	18 – 29	30 – 49	50 – 64	65+
<i>Muslim Americans</i>				
July 2005				
Favorable	62%	57%	55%	40%
Unfavorable	25%	22%	25%	30%
Can't Rate	13%	21%	20%	30%
March 2002*				
Favorable	57%	60%	53%	43%
Unfavorable	23%	21%	22%	25%
Can't Rate	20%	19%	25%	32%
<i>Muslims</i>				
March 2005				
Favorable	62%	46%	41%	31%
Unfavorable	21%	29%	27%	35%
Can't Rate	17%	25%	32%	34%
March 2002**				
Favorable	57%	49%	48%	30%
Unfavorable	26%	28%	30%	30%
Can't Rate	17%	23%	22%	40%
<i>Islam</i>				
July 2005*				
Favorable	46%	47%	37%	26%
Unfavorable	39%	32%	40%	28%
Can't Rate	15%	21%	23%	36%
March 2002*				
Favorable	51%	36%	38%	25%
Unfavorable	29%	36%	30%	37%
Can't Rate	20%	28%	32%	38%

* asked on Form 1

** asked on Form 2

Source: Pew Research Center polls

never attended college. Similarly, 64 percent of college graduates were favorable toward Muslim Americans; just 41 percent of those who had never attended college felt this way.

Among religious groups, white evangelical Protestants have the least favorable view of Islam. Fully 46 percent of white evangelicals today say they view Islam unfavorably, compared with just 31 percent who rate it favorably. These numbers are largely unchanged since 2002 (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Education and Religious Tradition Related to Views of Islam and Muslim Americans

	----- Opinion of -----			
	Muslim- Americans		Islam	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
College grad				
July 2005	66%	14%	55%	30%
March 2002	64%	16%	52%	31%
Some college				
July 2005	63%	17%	47%	32%
March 2002	61%	20%	41%	33%
H.S. or less				
July 2005	44%	34%	30%	42%
March 2002	48%	26%	29%	34%
White Evangelical				
July 2005	53%	26%	31%	46%
March 2002	51%	30%	29%	45%
White Mainline				
July 2005	53%	23%	42%	36%
March 2002	52%	17%	40%	28%
White Catholic				
July 2005	61%	17%	48%	31%
March 2002	63%	18%	37%	33%
Black Protestant				
July 2005	67%	28%	50%	33%
March 2002	59%	21%	n/a	n/a
Secular				
July 2005	49%	22%	42%	31%
March 2002	44%	25%	44%	34%

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Negative views of Islam also have ideological and regional components. Political conservatives express substantially more unfavorable views of Islam than do liberals, and negative opinions of Islam tend to be greatest in rural areas and in the South.

Islam Is Different

Clearly, many Americans make a distinction between their opinions of Muslims and their view of Islam, which is more negative. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that relatively few non-Muslim Americans think that their religion and Islam have much in common. Just 27 percent see similarities between the Muslim religion and their own religion, while more than half (59 percent) see Islam as very different. This gap rose after

November 2001, when 52 percent saw major differences between their religion and Islam, and 31 percent saw similarities.

Opinion on this question among college graduates, who hold the most favorable views of Islam, shifted dramatically in the months following September 11. In November 2001, just after the attacks, roughly half of college graduates saw common ground between their own religion and the Muslim religion, while 38 percent did not. By March 2002, just 40 percent saw similarities between their religion and Islam, while substantially more (49 percent) saw major differences. Even so, college graduates remained twice as likely as those who did not attend college to see similarities between their religion and Islam (40 percent versus 19 percent) (Figure 8).

While roughly a third of white mainline Protestants, black Protestants, and white Catholics say their faith and the Muslim faith have a lot in common, only 16 percent of white evangelicals agree, and while 11 percent of highly committed white evangelicals say there is common ground with Islam, 78 percent see wide differences.

These religious divides parallel regional differences. More residents of the Northeast and West see Islam as having a lot in common with their own religion than those in the South and Midwest. Residents of small towns and rural areas feel they have less in common with Islam than those in larger cities and their suburbs.

Age and gender also are related to perceptions of Islam. Overall, three in ten respondents under age 65 say the Muslim religion and their own have a lot in common, compared with just 17 percent of those 65 and older. More men than women see Islam as similar to their own faith (34 percent versus 22 percent). All of these patterns have changed little since 2002.

The Role of Knowledge

Knowledge about Islam plays an important role in helping the public make crucial distinctions in thinking about the role of religion in momentous events as well as everyday life. Those who are more knowledgeable about Islam are more tolerant toward Muslims and Muslim-Americans and more favorable toward the Islamic religion, but they also have a greater understanding and awareness of anti-American sentiment among Muslims in other countries.

Few Americans feel they know a lot about the Muslim religion. Roughly two-thirds of Americans (66 percent in 2005) say they know little or nothing about Islam and its practices, while just five percent say they know a great deal about the religion. This is virtually identical to the way Americans responded in mid-November 2001.

While just 33 percent say they know a great deal or some about Islam, nearly half (48 percent) know that Muslims use the term “Allah” to refer to God and 51 percent know that the Islamic equivalent to the Bible is the Qur’an. The latter fact is better known now than two years ago (when only 42 percent could correctly answer the question), perhaps a consequence of recent news reports about alleged incidents of desecration of the Qur’an by U.S. military personnel at detention centers where suspected terrorists were being held (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Little in Common

	<i>Your religion & Islam...*</i>		
	A lot in common	Very different	Don't know
Total			
July 2005	27%	59%	14%
March 2002	27%	57%	16%
Men			
July 2005	34%	56%	10%
March 2002	34%	55%	11%
Women			
July 2005	21%	60%	19%
March 2002	22%	59%	19%
College grad			
July 2005	43%	48%	9%
March 2002	40%	49%	11%
Some college			
July 2005	31%	55%	14%
March 2002	31%	55%	14%
H.S. or less			
July 2005	17%	66%	17%
March 2002	19%	63%	18%
White Evangelical			
July 2005	18%	69%	13%
March 2002	16%	69%	15%
High Commitment			
July 2005	16%	74%	10%
March 2002	11%	78%	11%
Low Commitment			
July 2005	21%	60%	19%
March 2002	21%	58%	21%
White Mainline			
July 2005	31%	53%	16%
March 2002	31%	53%	16%
White Catholic			
July 2005	29%	54%	17%
Mid-July 2003	22%	54%	24%
March 2002	36%	45%	19%
Black Protestant			
July 2005	29%	61%	10%
March 2002	32%	55%	13%

**Asked only if respondent gives a religious identification other than Islam.*

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Figure 9. Knowledge of Islam

	<i>Percent correctly identifying ...</i>	
	Allah	Qur'an
Total		
July 2005	48%	51%
Mid-July 2003	45%	42%
March 2002	47%	43%
July 2005		
18 – 29	49%	43%
30 – 49	51%	54%
50 – 64	51%	59%
65+	35%	40%
College grad	67%	77%
Some college	58%	60%
H.S. or less	33%	32%

Americans who are familiar with basic aspects of the Muslim faith – those who can correctly identify the Qur'an and Allah – rate Muslims and Islam far more favorably than those who know little or nothing about Islam, and are almost three times as likely as those who know little or nothing (41 percent versus 15 percent) to think the Muslim faith has a lot in common with their own religion.

Yet knowledge of Islam does not necessarily lead people to believe there is less anti-American hostility among Muslims or that Islam is no more violent than other religions. Americans who know rudimentary facts about Islam are, if anything, more likely to see anti-American sentiment among half or more Muslims around the world. Familiarity with the religion has no effect on people's evaluations as to whether Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence, or whether some religions are more likely than others to encourage violence (Figure 10).

Religion in the World

Regardless of their feelings about Islam, Americans remain staunchly supportive of religion's influence both in the United States and in the world. Half think that religion's influence in the world is currently in decline, and the vast majority who believe this think it is a bad trend (85 percent) rather than a good one (9 percent). Among the minority (38 percent) who think that religion's influence in the world is currently on the rise, there is only slightly less uniformity. Three-quarters (73 percent) say the increasing influence of religion in the world is a good thing, while only 18 percent think it is bad (Figure 11).

When asked to consider lessons from the terrorist attacks, the public's view is no different. By nearly two to one, more believe that the bigger lesson of September 11 is that

Figure 10. Familiarity Breeds Good Feelings ...

	<i>Knowledge about Islam</i>		
	High	Mod	Low
<i>Favorable view of ...</i>			
Muslim Americans			
July 2005	65%	64%	40%
March 2002	27%	59%	14%
Difference (2002 to 2005)	-4	-6	+7
Muslims			
Mid-July 2003	59%	49%	36%
March 2002	57%	50%	38%
Islam			
July 2005	49%	51%	26%
March 2002	53%	44%	24%
Difference (2002 to 2005)	-4	+7	+2
<i>Islam and my religion ... (July 2005)</i>			
Have a lot in common	44%	28%	12%
Are very different	49%	61%	64%
Don't know	7%	11%	24%
Total	100%	100%	100%

... But Doesn't Lessen Concerns

	<i>Knowledge about Islam</i>		
	High	Mod	Low
<i>Think many Muslims are anti-American</i>			
In world			
March 2002	40%	33%	33%
In the U.S.			
March 2002	18%	16%	23%
<i>Think some religions encourage violence</i>			
July 2005	54%	45%	40%
March 2002	51%	53%	4%
Difference (02 to 05)	+3	-8	0
<i>Think Islam encourages violence</i>			
July 2005	33%	40%	33%
March 2002	26%	21%	26%
Difference (02 to 05)	+7	+19	+7

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Figure 11. Religion's Influence in the World

	March 2002	Mid-July 2003
Increasing	48%	51%
Losing	45%	42%
Staying the same	47%	43%
No opinion	49%	43%
Total	100%	100%

March 2002		
	<i>If Increasing</i>	<i>If Losing</i>
<i>Is this a...</i>		
Good thing	73%	9%
Bad thing	18%	85%
Other/DK	9%	6%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Pew Research Center polls

Figure 12. Lesson of 9/11 (March 2002)

	<i>Religion has ...</i>		
	Too much influence	Too little influence	Other/DK
Total	28%	51%	21%
<i>Race/Religion</i>			
White	28%	52%	20%
Evangelical	11%	71%	18%
Mainline	27%	51%	22%
Catholic	26%	50%	24%
Black	22%	58%	20%
Protestant	16%	67%	17%
Secular	57%	23%	20%
<i>Religiosity</i>			
High	8%	73%	19%
Low	48%	32%	20%
Moderate	23%	55%	22%
Low	48%	32%	20%

Source: Pew Research Center poll

religion has too little influence in the world (51 percent) than think the lesson is that religion has too much sway (28 percent).

Perspectives on the role of religion in the world depend largely on the importance of religion in a person's own life. Highly religious Americans, by nearly ten to one, see the terrorist attacks as a sign that religion has too little influence in the world these days (73 percent), not too much (eight percent). Among those for whom religion is not particularly important, however, a 48 percent plurality says the bigger lesson is that religion is too influential, while 32 percent take the opposing viewpoint. This "commitment gap" exists within all religious groups (Figure 12).

Aside from those who are not strongly religious, men and younger people express somewhat more skepticism about the role of religion in the world. Whereas women predominantly say the lesson of September 11 is that religion has too little influence in the world (58 percent), men are more divided (44 percent say too little, 35 percent too much). Those under age 30 are split as to whether the lesson of September 11 is that there is too much (37 percent) or too little (44 percent) religion in the world, while older people strongly believe the latter.

At the same time, Americans believe that religion's effect is not always positive. Four in ten (40 percent) Americans say religion plays a major role in causing most wars and conflicts in the world, and nearly as many (35 percent) say it has a fair amount to do with wars and conflicts. This view is most prevalent among seculars, men, and college graduates (Figure 13).

Caveats and Concerns

Despite the generally favorable opinions Americans express about Muslims and Muslim-Americans, much public suspicion and misunderstanding remains. One can view the 55 percent favorable rating toward Muslim-Americans as a half-empty glass as well as a half-full one. Overall ratings of Islam remain nearly evenly balanced between positive and negative. Similarly, while it is only a minority view, nearly three in ten Americans view the September 11 attacks as part of an impending major conflict between the peoples of the West and those of the Islamic world, and another 26 percent believe that it will eventually grow into such a conflict.⁸ Compared with the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there has also been a rise in the percentage of the public that says it has become more suspicious of people who appear to be of Middle Eastern descent – from 28 percent in September 2001 to 37 percent a year later – and large majorities favor racial profiling at airports in an effort to reduce the chances of terrorism.

Anti-Muslim bias is also reflected in the way the public views Muslims as potential political leaders. Just as Al Smith and John F. Kennedy battled anti-Catholic bias in seeking the presidency, a Muslim candidate for president today would face a significant amount of prejudice in seeking the office. Although overt bias against Jews and Catholics has declined substantially in the United States in the past decades, polls indicate that a Muslim candidate would still face considerable barriers in public

Figure 13. Role of Religion in Causing Wars and Conflicts

	A great deal	A fair amount	Only a little/none at all	Don't know
July 2005	40%	35%	21%	4=100
Mid-July 2003	44%	35%	18%	3=100
March 2002	34%	31%	29%	6=100

Source: Pew Research Center polls

acceptance. A 2003 Pew poll found 38 percent saying they would not vote for a well qualified Muslim for president. In contrast, only 10 percent said this about a Jewish candidate and eight percent said it about a Catholic candidate.

Little Polling on Public Attitudes about Islam until September 11

As a concluding caveat, it is worth noting that our understanding of trends in opinion about Islam is hampered by the fact that national polling organizations in the United States did very little polling on the subject of public attitudes about Islam and Muslims until after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. A search of the comprehensive polling database of 400,000 questions dating from the 1930s maintained by the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut found 318 survey questions since September 11 that included the terms “Muslim,” “Muslims,” “Moslem,” “Moslems,” “Islam,” or “Islamic.” Prior to that date, only the Pew Research Center had asked general questions in 2001 regarding opinion about Islam. A spring 2001 poll asked about favorability toward Muslim Americans, and approval of allowing mosques to apply for federal funds if faith-based social service organizations were permitted to receive government support; a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll asked about the Nation of Islam in this context.¹⁰ A few questions were asked by national organizations in 2000.

In the 1990s, many questions about Muslims appeared in the database, but most were related to attitudes about American involvement in Bosnia, Kosovo, or the Persian Gulf. In the 1980s, items focused on attitudes about Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, or on conflict in the Middle East. A few national questions about Islam were found in the database in the 1970s, all related to the hostage situation in Iran. In the 1960s, only a few items mentioning black Muslims were located. No questions on the topic were found prior to the 1960s.¹¹

CHANGE IN OPINION ABOUT MUSLIM AMERICANS AFTER 9/11

Question: Now thinking about some specific religious groups... Is your overall opinion of Muslim-Americans very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	— March 2001 —			— Mid-November 2001 —			Change in Favorable
	Favorable	Unfavorable	DK	Favorable	Unfavorable	DK	
Total	45%	24%	31=100%	59%	17%	24=100%	+14
<i>Sex</i>							
Male	49%	25%	26=100%	59%	21%	20=100%	+10
Female	41%	24%	35=100%	59%	14%	27=100%	+18
<i>Race</i>							
White	43%	25%	32=100%	60%	18%	22=100%	+17
Non-white	51%	22%	27=100%	55%	16%	29=100%	+4
Black	52%	24%	24=100%	52%	19%	29=100%	0
Hispanic*	48%	21%	31=100%	56%	18%	26=100%	+8
<i>Race & Sex</i>							
White Men	47%	26%	27=100%	59%	21%	20=100%	+12
White Women	40%	24%	36=100%	61%	15%	24=100%	+21
<i>Age</i>							
Under 30	50%	24%	21=100%	62%	18%	20=100%	+7
30 - 49	48%	23%	29=100%	63%	17%	20=100%	+15
50 - 64	39%	29%	32=100%	58%	16%	26=100%	+19
65+	33%	22%	45=100%	48%	19%	33=100%	+15
<i>Sex and Age</i>							
Men under 50	57%	21%	22=100%	60%	21%	19=100%	+3
Women under 50	46%	26%	28=100%	65%	15%	20=100%	+19
Men 50+	38%	30%	32=100%	58%	21%	21=100%	+20
Women 50+	34%	23%	43=100%	51%	14%	35=100%	+17
<i>Education</i>							
College Grad.	55%	18%	27=100%	73%	11%	16=100%	+18
Some College	49%	21%	30=100%	62%	17%	21=100%	+13
H.S. Graduate	27%	27%	34=100%	56%	19%	25=100%	+17
< H.S. Graduate	35%	35%	30=100%	37%	26%	37=100%	+2
<i>Family Income</i>							
\$75,000 +	56%	22%	22=100%	68%	15%	17=100%	+12
\$50,000 - \$74,999	44%	24%	32=100%	72%	14%	14=100%	+28
\$30,000 - \$49,999	46%	25%	29=100%	59%	20%	21=100%	+13
\$20,000 - \$29,999	43%	26%	31=100%	60%	18%	22=100%	+17
< \$20,000	41%	27%	32=100%	52%	23%	25=100%	+11
<i>Region</i>							
East	47%	18%	35=100%	65%	14%	21=100%	+18
Midwest	43%	24%	33=100%	57%	20%	23=100%	+14
South	42%	30%	28=100%	56%	21%	23=100%	+14

	— March 2001 —			— Mid-November 2001 —			Change in Favorable
	Favorable	Unfavorable	DK	Favorable	Unfavorable	DK	
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>							
Total White Protestant	37%	31%	32=100%	59%	20%	21=100%	+22
- Evangelical	34%	38%	28=100%	55%	22%	23=100%	+21
- Mainline	40%	23%	37=100%	64%	17%	19=100%	+24
White Catholic	51%	16%	33=100%	70%	14%	16=100%	+19
Secular	51%	19%	30=100%	54%	16%	30=100%	+3
<i>Community Size</i>							
Large City	50%	26%	24=100%	57%	18%	25=100%	+7
Suburb	50%	23%	27=100%	64%	16%	20=100%	+14
Small City/Town	44%	22%	34=100%	59%	15%	26=100%	+15
Rural Area	36%	29%	35=100%	55%	22%	23=100%	+19
<i>Party ID</i>							
Republican	40%	32%	28=100%	62%	19%	19=100%	+22
Democrat	47%	22%	31=100%	58%	18%	24=100%	+11
Independent	51%	20%	29=100%	60%	17%	23=100%	+9
<i>Party & Ideology</i>							
Conservative Republican	35%	40%	25=100%	64%	19%	17=100%	+29
Moderate/Liberal Republican	50%	18%	32=100%	61%	18%	21=100%	+11
Conservative/Moderate Democrat	46%	24%	30=100%	56%	19%	25=100%	+10
Liberal Democrat	56%	16%	28=100%	68%	18%	14=100%	+12
<i>Bush Approval</i>							
Approve	n/a	n/a	n/a	61%	17%	22=100%	--
Disapprove	n/a	n/a	n/a	61%	18%	21=100%	--
<i>2000 Presidential Vote</i>							
Approve	41%	30%	29=100%	65%	17%	18=100%	+24
Disapprove	51%	19%	30=100%	65%	12%	23=100%	+14
<i>Marital Status</i>							
Married	44%	25%	31=100%	60%	16%	24=100%	+16
Unmarried	46%	24%	30=100%	58%	19%	23=100%	+12
<i>Labor Union</i>							
Union Household	44%	25%	31=100%	60%	16%	24=100%	+16
Non-Union Household	46%	24%	30=100%	58%	19%	23=100%	+12

* The designation Hispanic is unrelated to the white-black categorization.

OPINION OF ISLAM AND MUSLIM AMERICANS, JULY 2005

Question: Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam (...the Muslim religion)?

Is your overall opinion of Muslim Americans very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?

	— Opinion of Islam —			— Opinion of Muslim Americans —			
	Favorable	Unfavorable	(VOL.) No opinion	Favorable	Unfavorable	(VOL.)D K/Ref	(N)**
Total	39%	36%	25=100%	55%	25%	20=100%	(1000)
<i>Sex</i>							
Male	41%	39%	20%	54%	28%	18%	(477)
Female	37%	33%	30%	55%	21%	24%	(523)
<i>Race</i>							
White	38%	37%	25%	53%	25%	22%	(818)
Non-white	44%	32%	24%	61%	22%	17%	(173)
Black	44%	35%	21%	64%	26%	10%	(109)
Hispanic*	33%	38%	29%	52%	26%	22%	(63)
<i>Race & Sex</i>							
White Men	39%	41%	20%	53%	30%	17%	(391)
White Women	36%	34%	30%	54%	20%	26%	(427)
<i>Age</i>							
Under 30	43%	38%	19%	62%	25%	13%	(158)
30 - 49	43%	33%	24%	57%	22%	21%	(350)
50 - 64	38%	39%	23%	54%	25%	21%	(275)
65+	25%	39%	36%	40%	30%	30%	(202)
<i>Sex and Age</i>							
Men under 50	47%	34%	19%	58%	27%	15%	(252)
Women under 50	39%	35%	26%	59%	20%	21%	(256)
Men 50+	30%	49%	21%	47%	30%	23%	(222)
Women 50+	35%	31%	34%	50%	24%	26%	(255)
<i>Education</i>							
College Grad.	53%	29%	18%	65%	15%	20%	(354)
Some College	44%	32%	24%	63%	17%	20%	(236)
H.S. Graduate	30%	41%	29%	45%	33%	22%	(322)
< H.S. Graduate	23%	45%	32%	41%	27%	22%	(84)
<i>Family Income</i>							
\$75,000 +	49%	36%	15%	63%	21%	16%	(240)
\$50,000 - \$74,999	42%	37%	21%	54%	27%	19%	(155)
\$30,000 - \$49,999	38%	39%	23%	52%	24%	24%	(205)
\$20,000 - \$29,999	36%	34%	30%	48%	23%	29%	(91)
< \$20,000	34%	35%	31%	55%	28%	17%	(150)

	— Opinion of Islam —			— Opinion of Muslim Americans —			
Total	39%	36%	25=100%	55%	25%	20=100%	(1000)
<i>Region</i>							
East	45%	29%	26%	60%	20%	20%	(154)
Midwest	36%	35%	29%	53%	29%	18%	(248)
South	36%	41%	23%	54%	27%	19%	(389)
West	40%	36%	24%	53%	20%	27%	(209)
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>							
Total White Protestant	33%	42%	25%	53%	26%	21%	(452)
- Evangelical	26%	47%	27%	53%	29%	18%	(257)
- Mainline	42%	34%	24%	53%	23%	24%	(195)
White Catholic	42%	34%	24%	61%	17%	22%	(156)
Black Protestant	48%	35%	17%	67%	28%	5%	(71)
Secular							
<i>Party ID</i>							
Republican	32%	46%	22%	48%	30%	22%	(329)
Democrat	47%	31%	22%	61%	21%	18%	(315)
Independent							
<i>Party & Ideology</i>							
Conservative Republican	30%	51%	19%	46%	37%	17%	(213)
Moderate/Liberal Republican	37%	40%	23%	57%	19%	24%	(106)
Conservative/Moderate Democrat	42%	34%	24%	59%	23%	18%	(207)
Liberal Democrat	54%	26%	20%	70%	19%	11%	(96)
<i>Bush Approval</i>							
Approve	32%	44%	24%	50%	29%	21%	(465)
Disapprove							
<i>Marital Status</i>							
Married	37%	38%	25%	52%	29%	23%	(571)
Unmarried							
<i>Parents</i>							
Yes	45%	32%	23%	58%	21%	21%	(276)
No	36%	38%	26%	53%	26%	21%	(724)
<i>Labor Union</i>							
Union Household	40%	36%	24%	57%	27%	16%	(120)
Non-Union Household	39%	36%	25%	54%	24%	22%	(875)

* The designation Hispanic is unrelated to the white-black categorization.

** Sample size applies to “Opinion of Muslim-Americans” results. Sample sizes for “Opinion of Islam” results are approximately twice as large.

VIOLENCE AND ISLAM

Question: As I read you a pair of statements, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view even if neither is exactly right...The Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence among its believers, OR The Islamic religion does not encourage violence more than others.

	— July 2003 —			— July 2005 —			<i>Change in encourage violence</i>
	More likely to encourage violence	Doesn't encourage violence more than other religions	Neither/DK/Ref	More likely to encourage violence	Doesn't encourage violence more than other religions	Neither/DK/Ref	
Total	44%	41%	15=100%	36%	47%	17=100%	-8
<i>Sex</i>							
Male	46%	41%	13%	42%	47%	11%	-4
Female	41%	42%	17%	30%	48%	22%	-11
<i>Race</i>							
White	45%	41%	14%	37%	46%	17%	-8
Non-white	38%	42%	20%	29%	56%	15%	-9
Black	38%	46%	16%	28%	56%	16%	-10
Hispanic*	45%	35%	20%	--	--	--	--
<i>Race & Sex</i>							
White Men	49%	40%	11%	44%	46%	10%	-5
White Women	41%	43%	16%	31%	45%	24%	-10
<i>Age</i>							
Under 30	34%	56%	10%	35%	55%	10%	+1
30 - 49	48%	41%	11%	33%	53%	14%	-15
50 - 64	49%	37%	14%	37%	46%	17%	-12
65+	39%	31%	30%	43%	27%	30%	+4
<i>Sex and Age</i>							
Men under 50	44%	46%	10%	38%	54%	8%	-6
Women under 50	42%	46%	12%	30%	52%	18%	-12
Men 50+	51%	32%	17%	52%	33%	15%	+1
Women 50+	40%	36%	24%	30%	42%	28%	-10
<i>Education</i>							
College Grad.	41%	51%	8%	28%	62%	10%	-13
Some College	45%	43%	12%	33%	53%	14%	-12
H.S. Graduate	46%	37%	17%	42%	39%	19%	-4
< H.S. Graduate	41%	33%	26%	44%	26%	30%	+3
<i>Family Income</i>							
\$75,000 +	44%	46%	10%	37%	54%	9%	-7
\$50,000 - \$74,999	51%	43%	6%	38%	50%	12%	-13
\$30,000 - \$49,999	46%	42%	12%	38%	48%	14%	-8
\$20,000 - \$29,999	44%	36%	20%	35%	45%	20%	-9
< \$20,000	46%	39%	15%	35%	40%	25%	-11

	— July 2003 —			— July 2005 —			
	More likely to encourage violence	Doesn't encourage violence more than other religions	Neither/DK/Ref	More likely to encourage violence	Doesn't encourage violence more than other religions	Neither/DK/Ref	Change in encourage violence
Total	44%	41%	15=100%	36%	47%	17=100%	-8
<i>Region</i>							
East	47%	41%	12%	37%	48%	15%	-10
Midwest	44%	41%	15%	35%	49%	16%	-9
South	43%	38%	19%	37%	43%	20%	-6
West	40%	48%	12%	34%	51%	15%	-6
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>							
Total White Protestant	51%	34%	15%	40%	43%	17%	-11
- Evangelical	51%	36%	13%	50%	31%	19%	-1
- Mainline	50%	33%	17%	28%	57%	15%	-22
White Catholic	39%	49%	12%	40%	45%	15%	+1
Black Protestant	36%	44%	20%	27%	57%	16%	-9
Secular	38%	48%	14%	26%	54%	20%	-12
<i>Party ID</i>							
Republican	53%	33%	14%	47%	39%	14%	-6
Democrat	44%	42%	14%	30%	51%	19%	-14
Independent	4234%	53%	13%	34%	55%	11%	0
<i>Party & Ideology</i>							
Conservative Republican	60%	25%	11%	49%	38%	13%	-11
Moderate/Liberal Republican	44%	25%	17%	45%	39%	16%	+1
Conservative/Moderate Democrat	52%	35%	13%	34%	50%	16%	-18
Liberal Democrat	30%	61%	9%	25%	55%	20%	-5
<i>Bush Approval</i>							
Approve	48%	39%	13%	44%	42%	14%	-4
Disapprove	38%	48%	14%	30%	54%	16%	-8
<i>Marital Status</i>							
Married	46%	40%	14%	38%	46%	16%	-8
Unmarried	41%	44%	15%	34%	49%	17%	-7
<i>Parents</i>							
Yes	46%	43%	11%	34%	49%	17%	-12
No	42%	41%	17%	37%	47%	16%	-5
<i>Labor Union</i>							
Union Household	44%	41%	15%	41%	51%	8%	-3
Non-Union Household	44%	41%	15%	35%	47%	18%	-9

* The designation Hispanic is unrelated to the white-black categorization.

NOTES

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2. Polls based on random samples of the U.S. public typically include Muslim-American respondents, but not enough for a separate analysis unless the overall sample size is very large. On average, about 0.5 percent of Pew Research Center respondents give their religious affiliation as Muslim; in a typical survey of 1,500 people, this would mean that an average of seven or eight respondents were Muslims.

3. Most of the data discussed in this paper, unless otherwise indicated, come from polls conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Reports and raw data files are available at the center's web site online, <http://people-press.org>. A principal study for many analyses is described in the Center's report, "Americans Struggle with Religion's Role at Home and Abroad" (released March 20, 2002). The March 2001 study is entitled "Faith-Based Funding Backed, But Church-State Doubts Abound" (released April 10, 2001). A study conducted in November 2001 was also used extensively. Its report is entitled "Post September 11 Attitudes: Religion more prominent; Muslim-Americans more accepted" (released December 6, 2001). More recent data are taken from the following reports: "One Year Later: New Yorkers More Troubled, Washingtonians More on Edge – The Personal Toll Persists, Policy Opinions Change" (September 5, 2002); "Religion and Politics: Contention and Consensus" (released July 24, 2003); "Foreign Policy Attitudes Now Driven by 9/11 and Iraq: Eroding Respect for America Seen as Major Problem" (released August 18, 2004); "Views of Muslim-Americans Hold Steady After London Bombings: Fewer Say Islam Encourages Violence" (released July 26, 2005).

4. Poll archived in the iPoll databank of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <http://roperweb.ropercenter.uconn.edu/iPOLL/>. Access to iPoll is also provided through Lexis Nexis.

5. All World War II-era polls cited here are available through the iPoll databank of survey questions compiled by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut, *op. cit.*

6. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "What the World Thinks in 2002: How Global Publics View – Their Lives, Their Countries, The World, America" (December 4, 2002); "America's Image Further Erodes, Europeans Want Weaker Ties" (March 18, 2003); "Views of a Changing World 2003" (June 3, 2003); "A Year After the Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe, Muslim Anger Persists" (March 16, 2004); "U.S. Image Up Slightly, But Still Negative" (June 23, 2005); "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics" (July 14, 2005). Also see Gallup Organization, "Gallup Poll of the Islamic World" (February 26, 2002).

7. In 2002, 26.7 percent of Americans age 25 or over had completed four years of college or more, compared with only 5.4 percent in 1947. U.S. Census Bureau Educational Attainment data, Historical Table A-2: “Percent of People 25 Years Old and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex: Selected Years 1940 to 2002,” based on data from the Current Population Survey, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/tabA-2.pdf>.

8. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “One Year Later,” op. cit.

9. Data compiled by the authors using the iPoll databank at the Roper Center, op. cit.

10. Poll archived in the iPoll databank of the Roper Center, op. cit.

11. Data compiled by the authors using the iPoll databank at the Roper Center, op. cit.

American Islamic Intellectual Activity and the Islamic World

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR*

The subject of “American Islamic Intellectual Activity and the Islamic World” might lead skeptics to ask, what American Islamic intellectual activity? Few Muslims are currently present in the main intellectual arena in the United States, with the exception of a handful involved in Islamic studies. That, however, is gradually beginning to change.

There are two types of Muslim scholars who engage in intellectual activities of various kinds in this country. One type is those who were born Muslims and are immigrants or the children of immigrants to this country. The second is those, essentially from European backgrounds but also some African Americans, who have become Muslims.

Members of the second group are usually more engaged in the wider agenda of intellectual activity in this country than those in the first group. This is quite natural, and happened with Catholic immigrants in the nineteenth century as well as Jewish and Greek Orthodox immigrants in the early twentieth century. This phenomenon, however, is gradually changing for the Islamic community as well.

What conditions affect Islamic intellectual activity in this country? One of the greatest obstacles is the lack of criteria for evaluating Islamic intellectual activity and scholarship. Anyone with an Arabic or Persian or Urdu or Turkish name can claim to be a “Muslim thinker.” This is unfortunate, especially at a time when the value of a Muslim name has gone up. There are many people who present themselves as authorities on Islam but are not. This situation tests the mettle of the virtues that the human soul must have in order to be a good scholar, because the temptation is very great. But it has had a negative effect upon what is considered in certain circles to be Islamic intellectual activity.

There is also the problem of lack of momentum within the Islamic community to further the cause of Islamic intellectual activity. While the Muslim community in the United States is well off economically in comparison with almost all other minorities (except the Jewish minority), there is very little momentum in most Muslims families for pushing the young in the direction of intellectual activity, as

*This is an edited transcript of remarks made by Dr. Nasr at the luncheon session of the 2003 conference.

distinct from the pursuit of professions such as medicine and engineering. Having trained students for several generations here as well as in Iran and other parts of Islamic world, I always say jokingly that if parents who are devout Muslims and who love Islam have a son or daughter who announces that he or she has decided to enter the field of Islamic studies, philosophy, sociology or another intellectual field rather than medicine or engineering, the mother faints upon hearing of the decision. There is no push from the family towards an intellectual career for the children. This is in great contrast to the immigrant Jewish community in the early and middle part of the twentieth century; the Jewish experience then is something from which the Islamic community has a great deal to learn.

There are also, however, positive factors for the cultivation of authentic Islamic intellectual activity in this country. First and foremost of these is access to sources. One might say that the Internet makes it no longer necessary to be at the Library of Congress to have access to eighteen million books, but by sources I do not mean only written material or information transmitted by the Internet but human beings, first hand experiences of events, institutions, and objects of art and of historical significance. Even the information transmitted by the Internet, however, is a great deal more accessible in this country than in much of the Islamic world.

Secondly, it is almost impossible to be intellectually alert and active in this country and not be engaged with the issues of the day. No matter how much the earlier generation of the Islamic community tried to close itself off into a corner, the children, once they went to college, had to be involved with current issues and events. Therefore, in a sense, the Muslim community in this country, whether it likes it or not, is at the forefront of all the challenges facing the Islamic world as a whole.

Finally, and very importantly, there is the question of freedom. Freedom is a double-edged sword, in the sense that one can be free to be wrong and to destroy as well as be free to create. We have made a shibboleth out of freedom—we all love freedom—but we certainly do not love freedom to murder people or destroy sacred truth. In the field of religion and intellectual life there are those who have said that the Enlightenment was wonderful because it massacred Christian philosophy and theology, and those who have said that it was terrible because it secularized thought in the West. Freedom acts as a double-edged sword in the same way for the Islamic world and especially for Muslims in this country.

Even if it is a double-edged sword, intellectual freedom is very important; without it, there would be no intellectual creativity. Creativity implies the possibility of making mistakes, and Muslims must accept this risk as must Buddhists or Christians, Americans or Chinese or anybody else. If I write a piece of music or a poem, there is always the possibility that I may write a bad piece of music or a bad poem. But one has to take the risk even if one is afraid of doing something imperfect and negative. Of course, the risk in the case of Muslims in the United States is much greater than for those who already breathe in a completely secularized world, as far as religious truth is concerned, but freedom in this country has many more positive aspects than negative ones.

First, in the United States one is more free from the kind of local pressures that exist in different forms in the societies of the Islamic world. There are several types of governments within that world. Some, like Tunisia and Turkey, are secularist; some are pro-Western and some, like Egypt, are half-and-half; others, such as Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, consider themselves to be Islamic states (though all three have different understandings of what that term means). But in each instance, whether the government is trying to propagate a secularist position against Islam or a particular view of Islam for its own political reasons, other views are under pressure. What you can write about Ghazzali in Cairo is not always the same as what you can write about him here, because in Cairo you might write something that somebody in the government or al-Azhar does not like and then you can get yourself into trouble.¹ Here, nobody will bother you because of what you write on the subject, even if it is nonsense. As I mentioned, this also has a negative aspect: there is no distinct and reputable body of scholars in this country with Islamically acceptable religious and intellectual criteria for judging matters pertaining to Islam, in the same way that there are acknowledged scientific and academic experts and criteria for subjects such as American philosophy or chemistry or the history of the Civil War.

Second, the United States offers freedom from any direct political pressure, as far as writing on Islam is concerned, although there are at times invisible pressures. This makes the position of Muslims not only in the United States but also Western Europe unique. This is the first time in Islamic history in which a number of very important Islamic thinkers live outside the borders of Islam and have an influence on the Islamic world itself. Nobody knows what the consequences of this will be.

What are the subjects of particular significance for Islamic intellectual activity which can enable the community to play a role in the Islamic world as a whole while advancing its own welfare within this country? I consider the following to be among the most important areas in which Islamic intellectual figures in the United States, Canada and, to some extent, Europe, are bound to play a significant and creative role in the years to come.

The first is modern philosophies and ideologies. For the last two or three centuries, Western civilization has set the agenda for the rest of the globe, even when other countries have opposed it. The non-Western world was witness to forces of anti-colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when, for example, members of the Arab liberal movement in Egypt wrote against the British colonization of Egypt. On the intellectual level, challenging ideas were generated by the colonial powers; Muslims merely responded to them. Very few non-Western civilizations, whether Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, Buddhist, or others, have been able to set a global agenda, even intellectually; this is now more true than ever. The philosophical ideas usually float with the wind from the West to the rest of the world (except in certain special fields, such as mysticism, which go the other way), setting the context in which issues are discussed.

Nearly all “isms” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—Marxism, liberal capitalism, existentialism, feminism, socialism, nationalism—have come to the Islamic world from the

West, and I believe that the first and most important duty of Islamic intellectual activity in this country is to respond to these ideas in their place of birth, not through a third hand translation that eventually reaches the Muslim intellectual elites in the Islamic world. There have been and will be excellent responses from there, but I think the role of the community here is crucial in this all-important matter.

During the past few decades, the relationship between religion and science has become another major issue for the Islamic world. The question of Islamic science, the so-called “Islamization of knowledge” first carried out under this rubric by my late colleague Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi, is one on which I have been writing since the 1950s. The relationship between religion and science affects so much of our lives because science is not just science; it has become an ideology and even another “religion” for many people, so the conflict is like that of one religion against another. For many people, truth and falsehood, ethics, and the meaning of life are drawn from science; this is called “scientism.” This crucial issue includes the challenges of the applications of modern science. Many of these applications, such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, biotechnologies, and robotics, are significant to the field of religion and crucial for the future of the whole of humanity but they are issues most traditional scholars in the Islamic world rarely discuss in depth. Whether we are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, a member of any other religion, or atheist, we will all be affected by these issues. Again, this is a more crucial matter for Islamic thinkers in this country than for those in the Islamic world itself because the United States is the center of this type of technological creativity. The technology can also be extremely destructive on a certain level and in a sense is now seeping into the very understanding of what it means to be human. Given that fact, it is quite remarkable how passive many major Islamic thinkers have been about these issues during the last few decades. Most concentrate on political and economic issues, as if the world is going to go on exactly as it is for centuries while we solve those problems. These issues are fundamental and cut across religions and cultures in many ways.

The environmental crisis is closely related to the issue of religion and science. I do not think I need say much here about the importance of the environmental crisis, with which I have been concerned for a long time. I was in fact one of the very first people to predict the environmental crisis. Six months before Lynn White, Jr., gave his famous talk at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in 1966 on the historical roots of the ecological crisis,² I gave the Rockefeller Lectures at the University of Chicago, published as the book *Man and Nature*, in which I predicted a major environmental crisis and posited that its roots were really religious, spiritual and philosophical rather than merely bad engineering.³ The book was received with deafening silence in most of the Islamic world for a long time. At that time, though, I had some influence in Iran and was able to help the government to establish the first national park system there. I arranged for courses on matters pertaining to the environment to be taught at Tehran University and at Aryamehr University, where I was president. The public nonetheless had no interest whatsoever in the subject, as if the air pollution in

Tehran or Karachi had nothing to do with Tehran or Karachi but only with Los Angeles. It is the duty of Muslim thinkers here to awaken the rest of the Islamic world concerning this crucial issue. This is one of those fields in which freedom of expression is extremely important, because opposition on environmental grounds to a Muslim government's program can get you into political trouble. Here, at most, you might not get promoted next year if you make in-depth criticisms; there, you might be fired from your university post or land in prison.

Another issue which needs to be addressed is that of religious diversity. Although everybody in the United States talks about religious and cultural diversity, during the last two years the fruit of fifty years of ecumenical discussion between Christianity and Islam has been largely washed down the drain by ill-intentioned people who call the Islamic religion an evil religion. The discourse they generate is abominable and works against religious diversity. It must be answered by Muslim scholars and thinkers here before its bitter consequences reach the Islamic world.

Paradoxically, the Islamic world is very much interested in religious diversity. In a country like Iran, which is considered to be the arch Islamic fundamentalist state, there is a lot more discussion of religious diversity on the radio than there is on national radio stations in the United States. It is in fact one of the major issues on Tehran radio. The same is true in Malaysia and Indonesia. While it is not the case in every Islamic country, even in places like Egypt discussions in depth on this subject have begun in the last few years, and discussion on this matter is on the rise in countries such as Turkey. Jordan has hosted several conferences on this matter because of the intense interest of Prince Hassan and a few other people there. It has become a major intellectual issue for Muslims throughout the Islamic world.

The issue of religious diversity is being discussed in the literature in a variety of places and languages—Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Malay, Urdu, and so on. In Pakistan the tension between Muslims and the small Christian minority is being discussed, as is the question of Hinduism and the Muslim minority in India. This is a field to which the Muslims living in the United States have a duty to contribute. They not only must promote an understanding between Islam and both Christianity and Judaism, but must also bring out the salience and the significance of religious diversity in the kind of world in which we live.

Closely related to this issue is a Muslim response to specific Christian attacks. Attacks have been made against Islam by certain Christian writers going back to the ninth century, when after the conquest of Andalusia the translation of the book of John the Damascene on Islam from Greek into Latin became a source of misunderstanding of and attack against Islam. There is a thousand-year history of these types of attacks.

What is going on now, however, is worse: pseudo-theological attacks motivated by politics and expediency on the part of some on the Christian far right. Not all but some of these figures made the same attacks against Judaism thirty years ago, but since attacks against Judaism are no longer politically expedient, they have turned their attacks against Islam. Who is going to answer these attacks? What will be the consequences

when the attacks are known to every person in the bazaars of Damascus and Cairo? Some Muslim governments have tried to censor information about these attacks against Islam, yet many people have of course found out and there is already a great amount of anger. It is the duty of Islamic scholars in this country to respond to these attacks with reason and logic, with compassion rather than anger, and to appeal to religious teaching as well as human and historical situations, in order to provide effective answers.

Yet there have not been many such responses; most people have been afraid to speak. We live in times when a man who does not have the courage to give his own name uses instead a pseudonym taken from a medieval writer; that is, Ibn Warraq; and writes pernicious books against Islam which are widely distributed.⁴ If these books had been written against any other religion, they would have been called hate literature and would not have been published; yet they are found in every Barnes & Noble and Borders book store in this country. At the same time, many good books written by Muslims are sold only in *halal* meat markets [markets that sell meat prepared for sale in the manner prescribed by Islam], because mainstream bookstores refuse to carry them. This is obviously a major problem. The Islamic intellectual community is not going to survive easily if it is forced to live in an expanding atmosphere of hatred, with the proponents of this hatred hoping that it will take over the whole of society. Fortunately, that is not yet the case, but the trend is clear and the Islamic intellectual community has the responsibility to deal with it now before it is too late.

Closely related to this task is the duty of Muslim scholars in this country to provide a reasonable, intellectual and scholarly response to those Western scholars of Islamic studies who are in fact agnostics or atheists or who hate Islam. Some of them are excellent scholars who, although they do not hate Islam, do not write with sympathy with the goal of understanding it, and yet think that they know more about Islam than Muslims do. People who have taken two years of Arabic sometimes claim that they know more about what the Qur'an means to Muslims than somebody who has read the Qur'an every day of his or her life for fifty years. They claim that they are carrying out simply an objective study of Islam. Every study, however, implies a point of view, an ideology, a doctrine; philosophically speaking, it is impossible to study anything except from a certain point of view. It is the same way with the experience of the physical world. You cannot look at an object except from the particular point from which your eye looks at that object. Yet on the pretext that this type of scholarship is objective, many people are afraid to criticize it.

Fortunately, there is now a whole generation of younger Muslim scholars in the field of Islamic studies teaching or studying in this country. Many of them are very gifted, and I have a great deal of hope for them, but they will need the courage to face these invisible opponents. Happily, they have allies in a number of non-Muslim Western scholars of Islam who study it with empathy rather than disdain. If the young Muslim scholars do not say the right things at the right times, however, their promotion might be delayed for a year, or some similar punishment may be meted out. Nevertheless, it is really their duty to respond, even more so than it was fifty or a hundred years ago when,

for example, Ameer Ali published *The Spirit of Islam* to answer the English missionaries who had gone to India to convert the Muslims.⁵ Today the debate about the study of Islam from a Western point of view, presented simply as the objective study of Islam, must be carried out in this country and in Europe more than anywhere else and the answers must be provided above all by the Muslim intellectual community in the West. Furthermore, Western Muslims will not be able to get into other fields of endeavor unless they are intellectual in an Islamically meaningful way.

To formulate intellectual Islamic responses, what is required is authenticity. The Islamic community in this country can write thousands of books, give thousands of lectures, but if the rest of the Islamic world does not listen to them, they will be irrelevant. I have said jokingly that for the Islamic scholars who establish themselves in Western circles and even become famous, the test of authenticity is to go and proclaim their ideas in the bazaar of Cairo or Damascus. If tomatoes are not thrown at them, I will consider them to be speaking on behalf of those people; otherwise, they speak on behalf of nobody but themselves. The great danger that exists today, and that concerns the question of authenticity, exists in many different fields; law is an example. It is possible, of course, to interpret Islamic law in new situations, but you not only have to know the existing conditions well, but you must also have the necessary legal knowledge. An eminent English Muslim friend of mine said recently that there are 1,800,000 Muslims in Great Britain and 1,800,000 muftis and specialists in Islamic law. Many people open up the Qur'an and say, "I read this or that verse in translation and my interpretation is this." Authenticity requires knowledge and tradition. Without them, the impact of the Islamic community in this country on the Islamic world will be trivial and irrelevant. In fact one hopes that views based on totally inadequate knowledge will not dominate thinking among the more than billion people in the Islamic world. That would simply strengthen the allegations already being made by some political opponents of the United States who speak negatively about American Islam. This type of criticism already exists, in the streets of the Middle East, and is going to become much more accentuated if far-fetched interpretations of Islamic matters by Muslims living in the West begin to inundate the Islamic world.

It would be a great asset for the United States if an American Islamic scholar living in this country could write something that the people of Iraq or Iran or Pakistan or Egypt could read and appreciate and enjoy, and with which they could identify. They will say, "Look, this man is an American, but whether he has blond or black hair does not matter; he is writing in the United States but he is writing something that is authentically Islamic." If everything in the United States is written in such a way that it appears to those in the Islamic world as a kind of subversion, the political situation will become much more difficult.

Despite all of these difficulties, there is every possibility that the Islamic intellectual community in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe can and will play an important role in the future of the Islamic world. But the community must live up to its responsibilities and retain its authenticity.

The Islamic world even five hundred years ago was very vast, stretching from the Atlantic to the China Sea, yet almost always the center of ideas and influence remained in an area between Cairo and Lahore. This area was like a mountain top: when it rains on top of a mountain, the rain comes down to the bottom of the mountain and to the valley, but the opposite is not true. Throughout Islamic history nearly all the influential Islamic thinkers came from this area, with one great exception: Andalusia. Andalusia was the home of major ideas in fields from botany, medicine and philosophy to mysticism, theology and literature. The influence of the Iberian experience was felt in the heartland of the Islamic world, and there is no intellectual figure of the last seven hundred years more influential in the Islamic world than Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi, who came from Murcia in Andalusia.

The modern-day Islamic community in the United States could possibly become another Andalusian intellectual community for the rest of the Islamic world. Although we do not have the contiguity they had then (one had only to cross the Gibraltar Straits to be in Morocco), it does not matter because we now have modern means of communication. I hope and pray, at this very important historical moment not only in the Islamic world but also in the United States and in the rest of the world, that the Islamic intellectual community will realize what a tremendous challenge, and at the same time opportunity, it faces by virtue of the gifts God has given to the people who live in this country: the possibility to think, write, and live in peace and freedom, and to tackle the fundamental issues which concern the rest of the Islamic world and, ultimately, the whole of humanity.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

QUESTION: You raise the question of authenticity as a requirement for intellectual activity in the United States. We know, however, that there is tension between the African-American Muslim community and the so-called immigrant Muslim community about the definitive American approach to Islam. How do you reconcile that with your call for authenticity?

PROF. NASR: Throughout history Islam has manifested itself in very different cultures and societies, creating in each case an expression of Islamic culture that resonated with authenticity for the people living there. The American Islamic community, whether immigrant, African-American or Euro-American, must create its own American Muslim culture, one that is both American and Islamic, unless it is to survive only in a ghetto form.

In this context it is important to study the experience of Islam in China. For the first few centuries Chinese Muslims effectively ghettoized themselves. They wrote only in Persian and Arabic, rather than in Chinese, until the seventeenth century. Then the Islamic community decided to be a Chinese Islamic community and began to write in Chinese, using Neo-Confucian terms.

There have been tensions between Islamic communities in the past: between the *Ansar* and the *Mahajirun*, the Persians and the Arabs, the Turks and the Punjabis, and so on, but a *modus vivendi* gradually emerged. The black African community has every right to develop a black African Islamic culture that is not necessarily going to be identical to the Indian, Persian or Arabic one. In the same way, the Nigerian or Senegalese Islamic culture is not the same as the Iranian or Egyptian. In India, there are different Islamic cultures in Gujrat and Punjab. There does not have to be one homogeneous Islamic culture here.

QUESTION: The current American administration seems determined to reform Islam, and has developed programs to reform the educational system in Afghanistan. Now it is speaking about reforming the educational system in places like Saudi Arabia and Iraq. What is the challenge for us in that?

PROF. NASR: It might be a good idea to begin by reforming the curriculum of places like Bob Jones University, given the message of hate they propagate, and then turn to Afghanistan. But if there is going to be a change of curriculum, it should be undertaken by the people who are going to be involved in it. The British tried to impose curricular reform on both the Hindu and Muslim schools in nineteenth century India. The effort backfired and in fact led to great opposition to the West. We should remember that almost all of the most virulent opponents of the United States in the Arab world were graduates of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. AUB was established in the nineteenth century to convert the Arabs to Presbyterian Christianity and was utilized to brainwash them in the twentieth century when AUB became more secular. Our role must be to explain that if reforms are to be made, they must come from within. It is impossible to coerce religious reform from another religion. Islam would love to reform Hinduism, but that will not happen; God will not permit it. Islam cannot reform Christianity – although many wish that they could reform Christianity so that there would not be so much nudity on television and the Internet in the United States and, through their influence, elsewhere.

QUESTION: For the average Muslim in the United States or in the Muslim world the life of the community is still mediated largely through Islamic law. The question is how can I, sitting here in Washington, D.C., speak to issues of Islamic law in Cairo or Kuala Lumpur and, similarly, how can someone sitting in Riyadh or Damascus speak effectively about issues in the life of a community in the United States?

PROF. NASR: There are certain aspects of the law which are universal, such as whether you should say your prayers four or five times a day. But there are many domains which are particular to a culture, and this again has historical precedents when, for example,

Islam went to black Africa. Practices were followed there that were not followed in, let us say, Jordan or Iraq. The *'ulama'* initially had trouble understanding how that culture functioned. It took some time before they developed legal criteria to see what was *halal* (permitted) and what was *haram* (forbidden) in a particular context.

QUESTION: Can you discuss the phenomenon of the aversion to and alarm about Islam in this country?

PROF. NASR: I was very saddened by the fact that the small window of opportunity which opened in this country for about a month after the tragedy of September 11 was not taken advantage of, and there were no serious answers provided for the profound questions, "Why did this tragedy happen? Why do some people have this hatred? Where does it come from?" Even the word terrorist was never defined for the public at large.

The consequence was that a picture was painted in black and white, with one side considering itself as the embodiment of pure goodness and viewing the other side as pure evil. Because the other side, the one which was considered to be pure evil, was misusing Islam for its own ends, the religion was opened to attack by people who had always wanted to attack it. Not long ago, whether we had a Democratic president like President Clinton or a Republican president like President Reagan, no one in this country would have been able to say the kind of things that have been said during the last couple of years about Islam. That would immediately have been called hate speech. But it has now become common parlance. What is behind this? What is the reason for the aversion?

The events of the Middle Ages led to a deep fear of Islam in the Western mind, almost as if Muslims were still powerful enough to overrun the West. This suppressed fear has now emerged. It is very important to remember that Western civilization, to which the United States is heir, knew only one other as "other" during its period of genesis and early crystallization. The "other" was Islam.

Societies love to function by having an "other" to define as an enemy. As soon as the Soviet empire fell, many in the West began to look for a new "other," which they again identified as Islam. What would happen, after all, if the United States had no enemies? Some of the economy would collapse. The Islamic world is a kind of ideal "other" in the current situation, especially now that Islamic civilization is again seeking to assert its own identity after the experiences of the colonial period.

But it is the duty of Christians and Muslims and Jews, all of them, to try to prevent this demonization of an "other," because a schism of this kind can only end in catastrophe for all sides. Those people who speak about the clash of civilizations and religions are not only killing the other; they are also committing suicide. The killing of the other is a killing of the self. We live in a world in which it is impossible to separate the two.

NOTES

1. The great Muslim philosopher and theologian Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali lived during the eleventh century. Al-Azhar, the world's oldest university, is in Cairo.

2. Published as Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," 55 *Science Magazine* (March 10, 1967), pp. 1203–1207.

3. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (ABC International, 1999).

4. Ibn Warraq is the author of, e.g., *Why I am Not a Muslim* (Prometheus Books, 1995).

5. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam; A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam, With a Life of the Prophet* (Christophers, 1935).

The Intellectual Impact of American Muslim Scholars on the Muslim World, with Special Reference to Southeast Asia

OSMAN BAKAR

INTRODUCTION

Shortly before the tragic events of September 11, several leading Malaysian newspapers carried a feature article by *Bernama*, the country's National News Agency, based on an interview with me. The subject was Islam in America. Two of the points I raised aroused considerable interest. One was the extraordinary diversity of Islam in the United States. The other was the possible emergence of the United States in the next few decades as the most creative and productive center of Islamic intellectual life in the world, in spite of the fact that Muslims constitute only a small minority in the United States and an even more numerically insignificant part of the global *ummah* of 1.4 billion people. This prediction about the future of Islam in the United States may sound overly optimistic, but the optimism is not without a rational basis. Numerous factors favor the emergence of an American Islam that is spiritually dynamic and intellectually robust—provided that American Muslims remain faithful to the tenets of their religion. The intellectual freedom and cultural openness that characterize the United States stand out as the most important of these favorable factors.

In the interview, I spoke of the United States as “the second Mecca,” referring to the extraordinary ethnic, cultural and theological diversity of Islam in this country. What I meant was that apart from Mecca — and Medina — the United States is the only place in the world in which every ethnic Muslim group in the *ummah* and every Muslim school of thought current in the world are found. Islam in the United States is indeed a microcosm of the Muslim world. Its potential significance for both this country and the Muslim world is obvious. If the American Muslim community succeeds in coping with its diversity and pluralism and produces a distinctive and cohesive American Islam, interacting harmoniously and creatively with American diversity and pluralism, it will be in a position to serve as an influential model for the rest of the *ummah*. This will have far-reaching consequences for the entire world.

The idea of the United States of the near future becoming a major world center of Islamic learning and intellectual life and thought, even if not the most advanced in the world, is exciting. The idea is not new, but has existed in various Muslim circles for some time. After all, the phenomenon of a twenty-first century Western Islam exercising significant influence on the rest of the *ummah* would not be without historical precedent. Medieval Spanish Islam, which Maria Rosa Menocal calls “The Ornament of the World,” was once the enlightened western wing of Islam.¹ There is broad agreement in these discussions that if the United States were to emerge as the leading center of Muslim intellectual life, its influence on intellectual developments in the Muslim world would be enormous. While real achievements for the American Muslim community in the two domains of the development of an American Islam and the impact of an American Islam

on Islam elsewhere are within its practical reach, progress in the two spheres is not proceeding at the same pace. The creation of a distinctively American Islam is still in its initial stage. American Islamic identity and culture itself is not yet well-defined. In contrast, the intellectual relationship between American Muslims and the Muslim world has been forged gradually over the last two decades to the benefit of both. American Muslim scholars are already having a visible impact on contemporary intellectual life and developments in various parts of the Muslim world.

This essay provides a more detailed discussion of the intellectual impact of American Muslim scholarship – a subject which, in spite of its inherent interest, has received no detailed scholarly treatment to date – on Southeast Asia, home to about one-sixth of the *ummah*. Most of them are in Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation on earth. The community of American Muslim scholars has grown in both intellectual influence and numerical strength during the last two decades; what follows is an examination of the impact of the three who are most influential.

ISMA‘IL RAJI AL-FARUQI, FAZLUR RAHMAN, AND SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi (1921–1986), Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) are generally regarded as among the best known and intellectually influential Muslim scholars of the twentieth century.² While there are striking differences among them, there are also notable similarities. All three are naturalized American citizens who for different political or religious reasons, all related in some way to Islam, fled their native countries and settled in the United States. Their *hijrah* (migration) to the United States was a loss to their respective countries but a significant gain for Islam in the United States and for American scholarship. Interestingly, the global *ummah* also benefits from their presence in the United States, as it is doubtful that their contributions to the *ummah* would have surpassed those they have made as American Muslims had al-Faruqi remained in Palestine, Rahman in Pakistan, and Nasr in Iran.

Al-Faruqi, who became governor of Galilee in 1945 at the age of 25, was uprooted from his native Palestine upon the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. He and his family emigrated to Lebanon, where seven years earlier he had earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Beirut. Turning to academia as his new pursuit, al-Faruqi decided to undertake advanced studies in the United States. Here, he earned master's degrees in philosophy from Indiana University (1949) and Harvard (1951). Although he had fulfilled the requirements for the Department of Philosophy's Ph.D. program at Harvard, he decided to return to Indiana University and submitted and successfully defended his doctoral dissertation there in September 1952. The dissertation, which was essentially on Western philosophical thought, was entitled *On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*.³ "Both a scarcity of jobs and an inner drive," according to John Esposito and John Voll, "brought him back to his Islamic intellectual heritage and roots."⁴ He spent four years, 1954–1958, as a post-doctoral

researcher in Islamic studies at Cairo's al-Azhar University. His first teaching job was at McGill University, where he was both a visiting professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies and a Rockefeller Foundation fellow at the Faculty of Divinity, where he did research on Christianity and Judaism.

Rahman had joined the Institute of Islamic Studies' teaching staff as an associate professor a year earlier. He and al-Faruqi apparently were the first Muslim scholars of Islamic studies in North America. After three years as professorial colleagues at McGill, where they became well acquainted with each other's intellectual outlook and perspective and developed a personal relationship, both received invitations from director Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi to join the newly formed Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi as full professors. As a Pakistani citizen, Rahman was recruited for a long-term appointment but al-Faruqi, a non-citizen, was offered a two-year contract. Rahman was also appointed as a religio-political advisor to President Ayub Khan's government. Both scholars accepted the invitations with great enthusiasm, viewing them as offering a golden opportunity to put into practice their philosophical ideas about Islamic responses to modernity and the modern societal reconstruction of the *ummah*. As later recounted by al-Faruqi, they had dreamed in Montreal about making Pakistan the center of "a new level of Islamic scholarship in the Muslim world."⁵

Unlike al-Faruqi and Nasr, Rahman was not educated in the United States. His master's degree was from Punjab University in Lahore (1942) and his Ph.D. in Islamic philosophy was from Oxford (1949). His doctoral dissertation about the medieval Muslim philosopher-scientist Ibn Sina was later published under the title *Avicenna's Psychology* (1952).⁶ Rahman soon emerged as an authority on classical Islamic philosophy. In 1950 he became a lecturer in Persian studies and Islamic philosophy at Durham University, England, a post he held until his move to McGill.

Rahman's new job and role in Pakistan were to land him in controversy. He was called upon to formulate an Islamic response to the challenges of modernity that could serve as a basis for Pakistan's societal reconstruction. In his words, his responsibility was to interpret Islam "in rational and scientific terms to meet the requirements of a modern progressive society."⁷ In attempting to realize these objectives, Rahman received a strong helping hand from al-Faruqi. Soon, however, they were embroiled in Pakistani sectarian politics, involving the secular political elites and religious scholars ('*ulama*') among them, people whom Rahman had dubbed neo-fundamentalists. Eager to push their program through, Rahman and al-Faruqi called on the director to make changes to the academic programs and administration of the Institute. When they failed to get a response, they wrote a letter to the President, signed by Rahman, hinting strongly that the director should be replaced. In less than a year after having joined the Institute, Rahman was made its new director.

Rahman then encouraged al-Faruqi to prepare a new academic curriculum for the Institute that would be more in keeping with the two scholars' vision for future Muslim intellectual endeavors and scholarship. Al-Faruqi submitted the draft curriculum to

Rahman on March 16, 1963. He tendered his resignation from the Institute on August 5 of the same year, disappointed that Rahman had not implemented the curriculum. According to al-Faruqi, "Rahman was not pursuing the real objectives of the Institute, but rather was playing politics just as his predecessor has done."⁸ As al-Faruqi himself once declared, the Rahman/al-Faruqi Karachi experiment in Islam and modernity had failed.

Several factors were responsible for the breakup of the Rahman/al-Faruqi intellectual partnership. The most important was the strong religious opposition to their liberal modernist interpretations of Islam. The Pakistani '*ulama*' opposed al-Faruqi's controversial concept of Arabism (*urubah*), which he had developed at McGill and which seemed to his critics to glorify Arabness at the expense of Islam. The opposition made it apparent that he was unwelcome at the Institute. Al-Faruqi's evaluation of his stay in Pakistan was a negative one: "But not one of the original purposes I had in Montreal for Pakistan has been fulfilled," he said.⁹ Though he may have failed to affect Islamic learning in Pakistan during his brief academic appointment there, his stay had a significant impact on his thinking. As one of his former Pakistani students puts it, "Pakistani orthodoxy forced him to reconsider his stand on Arabism... He learned that orthodoxy was very strong, a fact that he must have thought about long and hard in order to devise a strategy for dealing with it in the future."¹⁰

When al-Faruqi returned to the United States in 1963, he managed to secure a one-year contract as a visiting professor in the history of religion at the University of Chicago's Divinity School. From 1964 to 1968 he was an associate professor in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University, where he established an Islamic studies program. This made him the first Muslim scholar in the United States to dedicate himself to the field of Islamic studies. He moved to Temple University in September 1968 as professor of Islamic studies and history of religions at the Department of Religion, a position he held until his death on May 24, 1986. It was during his Temple days that al-Faruqi developed strong academic and intellectual and political ties with Southeast Asian Islam, particularly in Malaysia.

In the four years after al-Faruqi's abrupt departure, Rahman had to weather the storm of religious protests against his ideas. In 1964, President Khan appointed him to the newly formed Advisory Council of Islamic Ideology to aid in its task of "making specific recommendations in the field of Islamic policy and law."¹¹ The Council quickly became the target for conservative and '*ulama*' opposition. As Earle H. Waugh noted, "Fazlur Rahman was at the center of the ensuing storm. His philosophical views of Islamic history were openly contested by the opposition, and his understanding of Islam was widely criticized."¹² The conservative and fundamentalist opposition was so fierce and unruly that Rahman had to leave Pakistan. He returned to North America in 1968, teaching briefly at the University of California-Los Angeles and then moving to the University of Chicago as professor of Islamic thought. In 1986 he was named Harold H. Swift Distinguished Service Professor, a title he held until his death in July 1988. His tenure at Chicago was as fateful as al-Faruqi's at Temple

University because of the influence of his controversial ideas on the Southeast Asian Muslim intellectuals there. This was especially true of the students from Indonesia, who made the ideas of the scholar disowned by his native Pakistan a major force in their land.

Nasr had the earliest exposure to American education and learning of the three American Muslim scholars discussed here.¹³ Born in Tehran, he was sent by his parents to attend school in the United States at the age of twelve. He arrived in New York on December 17, 1945 and a month later entered the eighth grade at Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey. After graduating from the school in 1950 with the Wycliffe Award, bestowed on the most outstanding all-around student, Nasr became the first Iranian physics major at MIT. He received his bachelor's degree in 1954 and went on to graduate studies in geology and geophysics at Harvard. He received his master's degree in 1956 and, with his intellectual interests now focused on more traditional studies, he transferred to the department of history of science. There he wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Conceptions of Nature in Islamic Thought*, becoming the first Iranian to receive a Harvard Ph.D. (1958).¹⁴ Although he was offered an assistant professorship at MIT, he decided to return to Tehran and did so in the fall of 1958.

Shortly after his arrival in Iran, Nasr began his academic career as an associate professor of philosophy and the history of science at Tehran University's Faculty of Letters. In 1963, at the age of thirty, Nasr became the youngest full professor in the history of Tehran University. He continued to hold that academic position until the Iranian Revolution of 1979. His rise through the administrative ranks was equally rapid. He was named dean of the Faculty in 1968 and became the academic vice chancellor in 1972. He was vice chancellor only briefly, however, as he was almost immediately chosen as the president of Aryamehr University, whose patron was the Shah. An illness cut short his tenure as the University's president and he resigned from that position in 1975.

Paradoxically, it was during the twelve-year period of his formal education in the United States, a land that takes great pride in everything modern, that Nasr was transformed into a universal traditionalist. He frequently complained, after his return to Iran, that the country had become too modernized. It is interesting to note that while Rahman and al-Faruqi saw their mission in Pakistan as modernizing the life and thought of its people within the framework of Islam as they interpreted it, Nasr saw his main task in Iran as one of defending tradition in all its dimensions. His influential positions at Tehran University enabled him to begin transforming the teaching of philosophy in accordance with Islam's universal perspectives on tradition and knowledge. He succeeded in expanding and strengthening the teaching of Islamic philosophy both in content and method, expanding the scope of the study of Western philosophy, and in introducing non-Islamic Oriental philosophies. As Nasr himself sees it, his enduring legacy in Iran is a philosophical studies program in which Iranian students are able to "study other schools and traditions of philosophy from the point of view of their own tradition rather than studying their tradition from the perspective of Western thought."¹⁵

Nasr's interest in tradition is spiritual and intellectual in nature and civilizational and universal in scope. His commitment to the revival of tradition around the world was best symbolized by his key role in arranging for the first exhibition of Islamic science ever held in London's Science Museum, which took place during the 1976 Festival of the World of Islam in London. In Iran, his activities, intellectual and cultural programs, and institution-building revolved around the revival and restoration of tradition in areas such as philosophy, literature, science, art, education, architecture, music, and Sufi spirituality. Some of his activities and programs in these fields necessitated a close association and collaboration with the Shah and, particularly, Empress Farah. Nasr's relationship with the royal couple enabled him to create the Iranian Academy of Philosophy and led to his appointment as head of the Empress' special bureau, overseeing most of Iran's cultural activities.

His close relationship with the Shah and Empress led to Nasr's being victimized during the 1979 Revolution. He had left Iran with his wife and daughter on January 6, 1979 for a two-week trip to Tokyo via London to represent the Empress at the opening of a major exhibition of Persian art. As the pace of the Revolution quickened, however, Nasr received news that the Tokyo exhibition had been cancelled; shortly thereafter, the Shah and the Empress left Iran for Egypt. Nasr's house was plundered and his library, scholarly notes and other personal belongings confiscated or destroyed. He and his family were stranded in London for two months.

Nasr could not find a teaching job in the United Kingdom. His sole offer came from the University of Utah, which offered him a distinguished visiting professorship, and so he left once again for the United States. Thus, in Salt Lake City, Nasr "began that exile which was a return to the land in which I had studied for so many years and which was to become my new permanent home," he wrote in his intellectual autobiography.¹⁶ Although he was offered a tenured full professorship by the university, he decided to accept instead the offer of a professorship at Temple University. In the fall of 1979 Nasr moved to Temple's department of religion to join al-Faruqi in expanding its Islamic studies program. Five years later, he left Temple for his current position as university professor of Islamic studies at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

When Nasr arrived at Temple, its department of religion had the country's largest doctoral program. It became even bigger during the years that he and al-Faruqi were there together, with Southeast Asian students constituting the largest group among those who came from the Muslim world. Al-Faruqi played an instrumental role in bringing these foreign Muslim students to Temple. Nasr had never before had the opportunity to teach students from Southeast Asia, although some of his work was known to a few Malaysian students in the United Kingdom as early as the late 1960s. It was primarily through their Malaysian and Indonesian students at Temple that both al-Faruqi and Nasr became well known in Southeast Asia, where their numerous works became more widely disseminated and read than ever.

HOW DO WE MEASURE INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCE OR IMPACT?

Before assessing the intellectual impact of the three scholars introduced above, we must address the questions of what is meant by intellectual impact and how the impact of an individual scholar is to be measured.

Intellectual impact derives from the extent in both time and space of the reception and dissemination of the individual's ideas, the extent to which those ideas are discussed and debated, and the extent to which they are put into practice or find concrete application in society. The currency of ideas may be understood as having both a temporal and a spatial aspect, with the spatial aspect referring to how widely the ideas in question are disseminated. Literacy, language, intellectual culture, print media and political freedom are among the most important factors influencing the spatial spread of ideas. The temporal aspect refers to the length of time during which the ideas are influential. Are they easily discarded and forgotten or of more lasting value and influence? Again, the answer may depend on a number of factors, but obviously the intrinsic worth of the ideas themselves is one of the most important.

The extent to which ideas are discussed and debated in a particular society also depends on their forcefulness and the degree of their relevance to the needs and problems of that society. The needs of a society are of course substantially determined by the level of its economic, educational, and intellectual development. Finally, the extent to which ideas are put into practice and applied to societal problems, if indeed these ideas have a practical value, depends on factors such as human and financial resources, political patronage and intellectual freedom.

The currency, forcefulness, and application of ideas are dependent on both human and material agents. In the context of this discussion about the intellectual impact of scholars, it is obvious that students of the scholars emerge as the most important of the human agents in question. For this reason it is relevant to discuss the various educational institutions which have provided the scholars with opportunities to educate and train Muslim students from Southeast Asia. When these students completed their graduate studies and returned to their respective countries, they became the most effective agents in disseminating the ideas and perspectives of their teachers. Most of these returning graduates came to occupy influential positions in their societies, enhancing their roles as agents of their teachers' ideas. Most of the former students became academics, placed to transmit ideas to succeeding generations of university students; others became public administrators. Although the latter's role in disseminating ideas was much more limited than that of the academics, they had a greater advantage in applying the ideas they brought to concrete situations and problems. This was true of the Indonesian students studying under Rahman at Chicago and Malaysian students studying under al-Faruqi and Nasr at Temple. Political patrons are second to students in importance as human agents. Political patronage is especially important in Muslim societies. Ideas, no matter how good they may be, cannot be implemented in these societies without the support or blessing of political leaders. Scholars

who are interested in getting their ideas implemented in Muslim societies by, for example, establishing educational and religious institutions, usually have to approach national leaders and enlist their support. All three scholars discussed here have had varying degrees of success in cultivating the necessary political patronage in the pursuit of academic and intellectual goals.

The categories of measurement of these scholars' intellectual impact are as follows:

- (1) The number of their works known to the region, either in the original language or in translations;
- (2) The number of their works being used as either textbooks or references in institutions of higher learning in the region;
- (3) The number of their former masters and Ph.D. students from the region. Of special importance is how many of their students now occupy positions of influence;
- (4) The number of academic and public lectures they have been invited to give over the years in the region, including keynote addresses in seminars and conferences;
- (5) The frequency with which they have appeared in the local media;
- (6) The number of times they have been appointed as external examiners of doctoral dissertations and external assessors of university candidates for promotion to the academic ranks of associate and full professors;
- (7) The number of times they have been appointed as consultants to universities, governments, and the private sector;
- (8) The extent of their informal advisory roles in various kinds of local non-governmental organizations such as youth, religious, cultural, and educational organizations;
- (9) The number of writings about their life and works.

This assessment of the intellectual impact of each of the three scholars will be guided by the above nine categories. The following is not meant as a detailed, up-to-date assessment, which would require a more extensive study of their respective influence in Southeast Asia in each of those categories. However, it is possible to determine how they fared generally with respect to each of the nine indicators of intellectual achievements. The discussion below is limited to the intellectual impact of the scholars on Indonesia and Malaysia, the heartland of Southeast Asian Islam, which is both where most Southeast Asian Muslims live and the homeland of most of the Southeast Asian students who studied with the three scholars.

FAZLUR RAHMAN'S INTELLECTUAL IMPACT

According to the bibliography of Fazlur Rahman included in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman* published in 1998, Rahman wrote ten books, only four of which had been translated into the Indonesian language.¹⁷ Unlike

the situation in Malaysia, where English is widely used, the great majority of Indonesians are not conversant with English and must rely on translations. There may be a small number of Indonesian intellectuals who have access to all of Rahman's books in the original and to his sixty-odd articles in journals and chapters of books edited by other scholars, but most Indonesians have come to know his ideas primarily through those four translated works. His ideas have circulated widely among Indonesians who are attracted to his modernist philosophy and interpretations of Islam. This is evident from the numerous publications of commentaries and critiques of his ideas in books and articles in journals, magazines and newspapers.

The selection of the four of Rahman's works that have been translated has been unintentionally appropriate, at least from the point of view of Indonesian Muslim interest. The four books translated are: (1) *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (translated in 1983); (2) *Islamic Methodology in History* (1984); (3) *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1985); and (4) *Islam* (1985).¹⁸ In a sense, these are his more popular works on Islam, dealing with a wide range of issues that are of interest to the majority of Muslims. The other works not yet translated into the Indonesian language are works that are philosophical in nature and are therefore of intellectual interest only to a small group of people. Still, considering the fact that intellectual life and thought in Indonesia is more robust and open than in Malaysia, it is surprising these other works have not been translated, and this calls for an explanation. In Malaysia, where the number of readers of serious works is much smaller, Nasr's philosophical works such as *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* have been translated into Malay. The reason is financial: the translators' fees and the costs of publication are borne by the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, which is a government agency. The situation is different in Indonesia, where translations and publications are a private venture and where only popular books on Islam are likely to have profitable sales.

It is interesting to note that the first of Rahman's books to be translated into Indonesian, in 1983, was *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. That was a year before Nurcholis Madjid, the first Indonesian doctoral student under Rahmans's guidance, obtained his Ph.D. This provides clear evidence of the importance of teacher-student intellectual relationships as a factor in the dissemination of a scholar's ideas in his students' cultural region. Rahman had very few Indonesian doctoral students compared to al-Faruqi and Nasr at Temple, who between them had dozens of both Malaysian and Indonesian students. Rahman in fact had only two, the other one being Shafie Maarif. But Nurcholis and Shafie are two of Indonesia's leading intellectual-activists, nationally known even before they studied with Rahman. Shafie is now the leader of the 20-million strong Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second biggest religious organization, noted for its modernist inclinations. Muhammadiyah's former leader, Amien Rais, recently the speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly, also studied at Chicago. Because his field was political science he did not do his Ph.D. with Rahman, but he did take courses with Rahman. Nurcholis was a former national student leader who

rose to fame in his fight against the communists. He founded and became the rector of a private university known as Paramedina. He was a candidate in the Indonesian presidential election of 2004.

Rahman's ideas continue to be studied, discussed and debated in academic and intellectual circles in Indonesia primarily because his translated books are used as textbooks in Islamic studies programs in numerous Indonesian colleges and universities, including the *pesantrans* (Islamic boarding schools). Rahman clearly has a significant intellectual following that is in large part responsible for perpetuating his ideas in the national Islamic discourse. It was through his former Indonesian students that Rahman was appointed as an advisor to the Indonesian government in the establishment of Higher Education in Islamic Studies. Today the nation has a string of provincial institutions known as IAIN (State University of Islamic Studies), the very educational institutions where Rahman's ideas are quite influential.

While Rahman is currently the best known and most influential of the three scholars in Indonesia, it may not be long before Nasr overtakes him. More and more of Nasr's books are being translated into Indonesian. Rahman is less influential in Malaysia. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, the former deputy director of ISTAC (Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization) headed by the well-known Syed Naquib al-Attas, is the only Malaysian to have obtained a Ph.D. under Rahman's guidance. Rahman's ideas are still debated among Muslim intellectuals and scholars of Islam in Malaysia, but in a more critical manner.

AL-FARUQI'S INTELLECTUAL IMPACT

Al-Faruqi wrote thirteen books in English and two in Arabic, translated six books into English from Arabic, and edited three books in English.¹⁹ It is an indication of his close association with Malaysia that two of his thirteen books in the English language were originally published there. The first was *Islam and Culture*, published by ABIM (Malaysian Youth Movement of Malaysia) in 1980 when Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed's former Deputy Premier, was still its leader. The other was *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, published by IIIT (International Institute of Islamic Thought) in 1982.²⁰ Al-Faruqi had founded IIIT in the United States but later moved its head office to Kuala Lumpur. By 1982 Anwar, who was close to al-Faruqi, had left ABIM to join the ruling party UMNO (United Malays National Organization).

Only four of al-Faruqi's books have been translated into Malay: (1) *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*; (2) *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*; (3) *Islamization of Knowledge: The Problem, Principles, and the Workplan*; and (4) the previously cited *Islam and Culture*.²¹ While Rahman's works were translated into Indonesian at the initiative of his students, al-Faruqi's books were translated into Malay by the aforementioned government translation center, *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, largely under the direction of Anwar. The most widely read of the four translated books is *Tawhid*, but *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* has proved to be the most useful as a reference for courses on

Islamic civilization in Malaysian universities. *Islam and Culture* has been read primarily by ABIM members and its intellectual impact on Malaysians in general has not been significant. Because of a greater interest in the issue of Islamization, the translated *Islamization of Knowledge* appears to be more widely read by the Malaysian public.²²

As noted earlier, al-Faruqi, who was active in recruiting doctoral students from the region, had a substantial number of Muslim students from Malaysia and Indonesia. At one point between 1981 and 1986, there were twenty Malaysian and Indonesian graduate students at Temple. Al-Faruqi's tragic death in 1986, at the hands of a murderer in his suburban Philadelphia home, prevented him from seeing all of his students complete their studies. He did produce four Ph.D.s, all Malaysians, the earliest one earning his degree in 1981. Three of them became professors in Islamic studies at the National University of Malaysia; the fourth became a top civil servant in his country. Of the four Ph.D.s, Faisal Othman, who wrote a dissertation on the role of Malaysian Muslim women in national development, emerged as al-Faruqi's most faithful disciple, embracing the greater part if not all of his modernist philosophy and outlook.

Al-Faruqi served from time to time as an external assessor for promotions and doctoral defenses in several Malaysian universities. He traveled to Malaysia regularly to speak at conferences and to promote the activities of IIIT, particularly the promulgation of his ideas about the Islamization of knowledge. An intellectual-activist whom Rahman dubbed "the Jamaludin Afghani of his time," al-Faruqi had cultivated a close relationship with both Anwar and Mahathir in the hope of furthering his goal of a modern reconstruction of the *ummah*. Mahathir and al-Faruqi apparently share fundamental ideas about the development of a modern Islam and the societal reconstruction of the *ummah*. Al-Faruqi played an instrumental role in bringing about the Mahathir-Anwar political partnership that was to last until 1998, when political differences led Mahathir to fire Anwar as his deputy.

It appears that whatever intellectual impact al-Faruqi had in Malaysia was achieved in large part because of Anwar's personal initiatives. Anwar's and Mahathir's patronage, along with frequent appearances in the media, resulted in al-Faruqi's becoming a familiar intellectual figure in Malaysia. Al-Faruqi's ideas about Islamization of knowledge are strongly contested in the Malaysian discourse by Syed Naquib al-Attas and his school. Al-Attas, another scholar courted by Anwar, has claimed with much evidence that he was the one who introduced the idea of Islamization of knowledge to al-Faruqi when he was invited to Temple as a visiting professor. In Indonesia, al-Faruqi's intellectual influence is minimal when compared to that of Rahman and Nasr. IIIT did attempt to gain influence for al-Faruqi's ideas in Indonesia through its relationship with Bacharrudin Jusuf (B.J.) Habibie, especially when Habibie succeeded Suharto as President. After Anwar's exit from power, IIIT sought to move its center of operations to Jakarta. Regardless of the future of IIIT, which has been plagued by troubles in the aftermath of September 11, al-Faruqi has left behind work that will continue to be debated by students of Islam for many years.

NASR'S INTELLECTUAL IMPACT

The most prolific of the three scholars, Nasr has written thirty books in English and a few books in Persian and French, edited and co-edited ten books, and translated three others, two from Persian into English and one from English into Arabic.²³ His articles and reviews in several languages number more than five hundred. Out of this vast and still growing corpus, nearly half of his books in the English language have been translated into either Malay or Indonesian. It is important to note that since Malay and Indonesian are basically the same language, work translated into Indonesian is usually not translated into Malay and vice versa, and Nasr's volumes in Indonesian translation can be obtained in many bookshops in Kuala Lumpur.

Six of Nasr's books have been translated into Malay and eight into Indonesian, exceeding the number of al-Faruqi's and Rahman's translated works combined. Nasr's works are more widely read in Malaysia than in Indonesia, which seems odd in light of the number of translated works in the two neighboring countries. The explanation is that several books translated into Indonesian were actually available in Malaysia in English, and in large numbers of copies, because they were reprinted in the country. This writer, the first Malaysian Ph.D. under Nasr's supervision, established a publishing house to print Malaysian editions of his books. The following titles were published in Kuala Lumpur: (1) *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (translated in 1986); (2) *Science and Civilization in Islam* (1984); (3) *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1987); (4) *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (1989); (5) *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (1994).²⁴ Three of these works were translated into Indonesian. Because many of his works are available in English, and because of his universalism, Nasr's Malaysian readers include a significant number of non-Muslims. The volume most widely read by non-Muslims is *Man and Nature*.²⁵

Nasr's ideas were first introduced to Malaysia in the 1960s and 1970s, by a group of Malaysian students who were active in London's Islamic study circle at the Malaysian Students Center. Four of Nasr's early writings were read and discussed by members of this circle, including this writer. The titles that influenced many Malay students then are: (1) *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*; (2) *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*; (3) *Science and Civilization in Islam*; (4) *Ideals and Realities of Islam*.²⁶ When this writer returned to Malaysia in 1973 to help introduce a course on history and the philosophy of science in Islamic civilization at the National University of Malaysia and, later, the University of Malaya, I used these works as the main references. At about the same time that the London Malaysian Islamic circle was reading Nasr's work, a group interested in traditional Islam and led by Uthman El-Muhammady, then an assistant professor at the department of Islamic studies at the University of Malaya, held frequent discussions about them at the University Mosque. Anwar, then a student leader at the same university, attended the discussions. El-Muhammady is now a leading 'alim (religious scholar) whose works frequently cite Nasr. Thus Nasr's ideas have been circulating among educated Malaysians since the 1960s.

Nasr produced four Malaysian Ph.D.s, three of them at Temple and the last at George Washington University, all of whom became professors at Malaysia's leading universities. He was also a member of the dissertation committees of several other Malaysian Ph.D.s. Baharuddin Ahmad, one of the four Ph.D.s Nasr supervised, was responsible for all the Malay translations of Nasr's work beginning with the edited *Philosophy, Literature and Fine Arts* in 1989.²⁷ The subsequent success of Nasr's Malaysian former doctoral students is in part responsible for the dissemination of his ideas in Malaysia, with Ahmad's Malay translations helping to extend Nasr's intellectual influence.

Although Nasr had taught two Indonesian students from Sumatra at Temple, the people primarily responsible for the translation and dissemination of his ideas in Indonesia did not study under him. The country's former president, Abdul Rahman Wahid, was particularly instrumental in spreading Nasr's ideas. This intellectual-activist had translated Nasr's *Ideals and Realities of Islam* in 1981, making it his first work to appear in any local language in Southeast Asia. Before becoming President in October 1999, Wahid led *Nahdatul 'Ulama'*, Indonesia's largest and most influential religious organization, which has about forty million members. Interestingly, another major disseminator of Nasr's ideas is Nurcholis Madjid. Although a former student of Rahman, he embraced many of Nasr's ideas, particularly the latter's perspective on religious pluralism.

Nasr has not traveled to Malaysia and Indonesia as frequently as al-Faruqi did. Nonetheless, Nasr gave numerous academic and public lectures during the few trips he made to Malaysia (and one to Indonesia) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among them were several organized by Anwar in his capacity as a government minister. Thanks to his numerous books in the Malaysian market, writings about him and his appearances in the media, Nasr is quite a familiar face in the country.

CONCLUSION

The three scholars discussed here are controversial and colorful intellectual figures in contemporary Islamic thought. All of them have demonstrated their loyalty to Islam in clear terms. They shared a common desire to find an Islamic response to the challenges of the modern world, but they differed in their understanding of the past and in their vision of the ideal Islamic response that the global *ummah* needs. They have all spoken for a mainstream Islam that rejects extremes. Malay-Indonesian Islam has taken the historic step of welcoming them and their ideas when they were not welcome in their native lands. It is important to note, however, that the respective visions of Islam they took to Southeast Asia were conditioned by the American intellectual culture. Each of them has a core intellectual constituency in the region. Through the creative debates on their ideas that continue today, Malay-Indonesian Islam has shown not only the meaning and significance of diversity and pluralism within the unity of Islam but also the way in which American Islam can have a significant influence in the Muslim world.

NOTES

1. Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Little, Brown and Company, 2002).

2. Nasr is the only one of the three to have survived the century, having celebrated his seventieth birthday in 2003. Many of his former students honored him with a volume appropriately entitled *The Beacon of Knowledge*. Muhammad J. Faghfoory, ed., *The Beacon of Knowledge: In Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Fons Vitae, 2003). On al-Faruqi's life and works as an intellectual-activist, see, for example, John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 1; Muhammad Shafiq, *Growth of Islamic Thought in North America: Focus on Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi* (Amana Publications, 1994). On Rahman's intellectual life and thoughts, see Earle H. Waugh and Frederick M. Denny, eds., *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman* (Scholars Press, 1998).

3. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *On Justifying the Good: Metaphysics and Epistemology of Value*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University (1952).

4. Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, p. 24.

5. See Shafiq, *Growth of Islamic Thought in America*, p. 19.

6. Fazlur Rahman, ed. and trans., *Avicenna's Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 1952).

7. Waugh and Denny, op. cit., p. 39.

8. Shafiq, op. cit., pp. 18–19.

9. Op. cit., p. 19.

10. Op. cit., p. 20.

11. Waugh and Denny, op. cit., p. 39.

12. Op. cit., p. 28.

13. On Nasr's education, intellectual life and works, see his intellectual autobiography in Lewis E. Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr., eds., *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (The Library of Living Philosophers, 2001), vol. XXVIII.

14. This dissertation was later published under the title *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Harvard University Press, 1964). This work has seen several editions since then, the latest being the revised edition published by State University of New York Press, 1993.

15. Hahn, Auxier and Stone, op. cit., p. 33.

16. Op. cit., p. 73.

17. Waugh and Denny, op. cit., pp. 261–269.

18. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980); Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Iqbal Academy, 1965); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1982); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

19. Muhammad Shafiq, *Growth of Islamic Thought in America*, pp. 117–124. *Islam and Culture* was published by ABIM (Malaysian Youth Movement) in 1980.

20. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982).

21. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas of Islam* (Macmillan, 1986); al-Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, op. cit.; Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: The Problem, Principles, and the Workplan* (National Hijra Centenary Committee of Pakistan, 1982); Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and Culture* (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 1980).

22. On al-Faruqi's and IIIT's global activities and programs on Islamization of knowledge, see Leif Stenberg, *The Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*, (Lund Studies in History of Religions, 1996, vol. 6), pp. 153 – 215.

23. On Nasr's complete bibliography, see Hahn, Auxier and Stone, op. cit., pp. 835–964.

24. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1976); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Harvard University Press, 1968); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Longman, 1975); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (K. Paul International, 1990); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Library of Islam, 1993).

25. *Man and Nature* has a wider appeal to non-Muslim Malaysians compared to the other books for two main reasons. First, it is not exclusively a work on Islam but rather a comparative discussion of the global ecological crisis from the points of view of the different major spiritual traditions of the world. Second, for many years it was recommended reading material for the course on history and philosophy of science at the University of Malaya, where nearly half of the students are non-Muslims.

26. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Harvard University Press, 1964); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Allen & Unwin, 1968); Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, op. cit.; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Allen & Unwin, 1966).

27. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Philosophy, Literature, and Fine Arts* (Hadder and Stoughton, 1982; Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989).

Competing Visions of Islam in Southeast Asia: American Muslim Scholarship as a Shaping Factor

OSMAN BAKAR

INTRODUCTION:

COMPETING VISIONS OF ISLAM AND THE LONG INTRA-MUSLIM DEBATE

There are issues that are common to all Muslims, no matter where they live and no matter to which ethnic group they belong. One such outstanding issue is how best to interpret the Qur'an's messages, now in the fifteenth century of their currency, and how to apply them to the conditions peculiar to the modern world. In other words, Muslims around the world have been debating and dialoguing with each other about how best to respond to the modern world and about the shape their religion ought to take in it.

The debate is not a recent one. It has been raging for more than a century, whether in Mecca and Cairo, in the heartland of Islam, or in Jakarta and Lagos, on its geographical peripheries. In the past century, its perspectives and the core questions raised and formulated by various parties to this dynamic debate have undergone change, keeping abreast with major developments in both the Islamic world and the West and in their relationships in many areas.

The question of how to respond to contemporary issues is inevitably imbued with the divisive issue of how to view the Muslim past. Varied and contrasting Muslim responses to the modern world are partly the consequences of their diverse interpretations and appreciations of their own religious history and spiritual-cultural heritage, something that is common to the global Muslim community (*ummah*), and partly the result of the impact of internal and external factors that vary from region to region.

The debate is essentially about the place, character, and role of Islam in modern human society. It involves the fundamental questions of how completely Muslims should embrace the contemporary world, and how much of the Islamic legacy is to be preserved if they are to engage the challenges of the contemporary world while retaining their religious and cultural identity as Muslims. The Muslim responses to these questions over the decades have more or less generated several distinct religious positions on the place, character, and role of Islam in the contemporary world. We call each of these positions a "vision of Islam." Insofar as each position portrays itself as the representative or exponent of "true" or "authentic" Islam and tries to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim community at the expense of the others, the different positions may be seen as competing visions of Islam. This religious competition on such fundamental issues is proof enough that Muslim societies are far from the monolithic entities portrayed by many Westerners.

INTRA-ISLAMIC FLOW OF RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE: "ONE-WAY TRAFFIC"

One of the most important factors to have influenced the course of the debate in practically every Muslim society is the flow of ideas and trends from "outside." By "outside"

we mean both the rest of the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world, especially the West. However, in the case of the Middle East, including Iran and Turkey, this statement must be qualified. Until quite recently, and with few exceptions, the reference to religious influence from “the rest of the Islamic world” was applicable only to Muslim communities situated on the geographic peripheries of the Islamic world. The flow of religious ideas and trends between the heartland of Islam in the Middle East and its peripheries like Malay-Muslim Southeast Asia and the sub-Saharan African Islam has always been in only one direction,¹ with the Middle East exporting religious ideas to the peripheries but importing very little in return. Students from the peripheries studying in Middle Eastern institutions of higher learning were the main transmitters of these ideas. To many Muslims in the geographical peripheries, Al-Azhar University in Cairo has been and still is the most prestigious institution of Islamic learning.

In the last two decades, however, Malaysia, becoming a highly visible “periphery,” has seen a growing number of students from the Middle East studying in its colleges and universities, especially at the International Islamic University. Arab and Iranian students pursuing graduate studies in Malaysia are on the increase. In the past, if it was possible to speak of a contribution from the peripheries to the Islamic heartland in the fermentation of religious ideas, the contribution was through the presence of a number of leading religious scholars (*‘ulama’*) from the periphery in the holy city of Mecca, which they had adopted as their second home. As an example, several well known early twentieth-century Malay *‘ulama’* lived and taught in Mecca and Medina, counting among their students not only fellow Malays but also Arabs and non-Arabs from other parts of the Muslim world.²

The most important source of influence from the “rest of the world” has been the West, although there have been other sources as well. If India with a large Muslim population and with several internationally known Islamic educational institutions is to be treated as a part of this “rest of the world” then it is worthy of mention as a major source of influence on Islam in Asia outside the subcontinent. The late Indian religious scholar Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali al-Nadwi and the educational institution he headed, the *Nadwat al-‘Ulama’* (Assembly of Islamic Scholars), “developed influence both on the Arab Middle East and, to some extent, on Turkey.”³ The influence of Indian Islam on Malay-Indonesian religious thought in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago has been even greater, from its first appearance in the region through the modern period. Today, such influence comes from both the traditionalist and modernist streams of religious thought.⁴

WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP IN STUDIES OF ISLAM: PHASES OF INFLUENCE

There have been three major phases in the influence of Western scholarship on Islamic religious thought. The first phase covers the modern period until roughly the mid-twentieth century, when most colonized Muslim countries obtained their political independence. This is the phase during which Western scholarship on Islam was almost

totally in the hands of the “Orientalists.”⁵ “Orientalist” scholarship on Islam was the prime shaper of Western perceptions and attitudes toward that religion. To various degrees, Orientalist scholarship influenced the first generation of Muslims trained in the West or schooled locally in the Western tradition in colonial educational institutions. Unable to read Arabic but fluent in one or more European languages, these Muslims had to rely largely on Orientalist writings for intellectual discussions of Islam.

The second phase covered the post-independence period until the early 1970s, when the entire Muslim world was swept by a new wave of “Islamic resurgence.” This phase witnessed the emergence of alternative scholarship about Islam, mainly from a few Western Muslims. With the exception of two Muslim-born scholars living in Europe,⁶ the Western Muslims were converts. These include the German-Swiss Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) and Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984); the British Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), Martin Lings (1909-2005) and Charles Le Gai Eaton (1921-); the Austrian Jew Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad) (1900-1992); the Canadian Thomas Ballantyne Irving (1914-2002); and the Jewish-American Margaret Marcus (Maryam Jameelah) (1934-).⁷ Although these Western Muslim writers were few in number, their writing exercised considerable influence on the minds of Western educated Muslims. Like the Middle Eastern influence on religious thought in the rest of the Islamic world, the influence of these Western Muslims on the Islamic world as a whole was along both traditionalist and modernist lines.

Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and Eaton, building on the intellectual foundation established by René Guénon (Abd al-Wahid Yahya) (1886-1951),⁸ reflected the perspectives of traditional Islam, particularly those of Sufism. The writings of this traditionalist school deeply influenced a new generation of Muslim scholars including the Iranian-born Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-), Yusuf Idris (1926-2003), and the Malaysian Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-), who have been among the leading intellectual defenders of traditional Islam during the last three decades.⁹ Pickthall, Asad, Irving and Jameelah were among the best known of the early Western Muslim voices of Islamic modernism, although they represented different strands of modernism, with Pickthall and Asad expounding the “liberal” type and Irving and Jameelah, the “fundamentalist” type. It should be noted that with the exception of Jameelah, all the Western Muslims mentioned here wrote on Islam during the first half of the twentieth century. While they might have been grouped with the Orientalists in the first phase of Western religious influence, their writings did not begin to find a sympathetic audience in the Islamic world until the late 1950s and did not have a substantial impact on young Western-educated Muslims until the 1970s.

The intellectual perspectives of the traditionalist school were of historic significance for the competing visions of Islam in the Islamic world. Of all the basic tenets of Islamic modernism, perhaps nothing is more fundamental and more appealing to its adherents than the claim, best summed up by Fazlur Rahman, the leading ideologue of Islamic modernism,¹⁰ that traditional Islam in the post-Golden Age has failed “to understand

the underlying unity of the Qur'an" due to the "atomistic" and non-integrated approach to the book by its *'ulama'*.¹¹ In a philosophical sense, this particular tenet is the source of all other tenets of Islamic modernism. The failure to understand the Qur'an as a deeper unity, contended Rahman, has disastrous consequences for traditional Islam both in the field of law and, especially, in the realm of theological thought. Traditional Islam has been without a "definite *weltanschauung* [worldview]" – the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* – and has had to contend with a "rigid and unchanging system of thought."¹²

In order to arrive at an understanding of the inner reality of the Qur'an, modernist intellectualism defines its primary task as one of having to reexamine "the Qur'an as a whole, that is, as a set of coherent principles or values where the total teaching will converge."¹³ Referring to Islamic modernism in Indonesia, Deliah Noer, a leading scholar of Indonesian modernist movements, echoes Rahman's views: "It [reformism] is concerned with the rediscovery of what the reformists consider as the basic principles which are eternal and which can survive the changes of time and place."¹⁴ Rediscovery involves going back to the Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah* or the *hadiths*, bypassing tradition with all its "un-Islamic accretions,"¹⁵ reinterpreting the Qur'an according to "some adequate hermeneutical method"¹⁶ and subjecting the *hadiths* to a critical evaluation. It entails the exercise of *ijtihad* (personal reasoning) and the rejection of *taqlid* (uncritical acceptance of ideas).

Rahman acknowledged that the philosophers and the Sufis, the intellectual vanguards of traditional Islam, "did understand the Qur'an as a unity, but this unity was imposed upon the Qur'an (and Islam in general) from without rather than derived from a study of the Qur'an itself."¹⁷ In his view, their conceived unity is not real and intrinsic to the Qur'an, but rather an artificial intellectual construct based on the adoption of outside thought systems. The modernist position put its adherents at loggerheads with the traditionalists, challenging the perspectives of traditionalist Islam to the core. The traditionalists, however, also believe in the intrinsic unity of the Qur'an and of Islam. They argue that the traditional thought system and institutions that they defend, in principles if not in details, including the incorporation of foreign ideas into the realm of theology, do not compromise that intrinsic unity.

Until the appearance of Western Muslim traditionalists and the first generation of the Muslim-born intellectuals in the Islamic world whom they have influenced, the intellectual defense of traditional Islam suffered from severe shortcomings. In light of this intellectual barrenness in the Islamic world, the historic significance of the writings of Western Muslim traditionalists lies in their appearance at an important juncture in the conflict between the traditionalist and modernist "unitary visions" of Islam. Quite clearly, these writings have helped to furnish traditionalists all over the world with powerful intellectual arguments in the defense of Islam and in their counterattack against the tenets of Islamic modernism. While affirming the basic tenets of traditional Islam, these traditionalist scholars have also acknowledged the errors and shortcomings of contemporary traditional Islam, which they often criticized.¹⁸ In other words, they do not deny

the need for change and reform within the house of Islam, but argue that the needed reforms must take place “within Tradition.”

The third phase of Western Muslim influence covers the “Islamic resurgence” period from the 1970s through today. During this phase, the writings of the first generation of both traditionalist and modernist Western Muslims continue to make their impact, especially on the younger generations interested in “fresh” approaches to Islam. In fact, the modernist writings of Asad, Irving, and Jameelah have become even more influential among “fundamentalist” activists worldwide, particularly in Southeast Asia and among Muslim student activists studying in the West. The same can be said about the intellectual influence of Schuon and his traditionalist school, as well as other traditionalists. Their ideas have reached a wider audience in the Islamic world, in part because of the translations of their work into several Muslim languages and, perhaps more importantly, because of the many references to them by Muslim-born traditionalist scholars, especially Nasr. Their “fresh” approach to the defense of traditional Islam, which combines spiritual depth with intellectual clarity, apparently appeals to a growing number of young Muslim intellectuals.

This phase has also seen the influence of the first Muslim-born Islamic scholars who have become naturalized Americans or Europeans. They are, for example, the Americans Isma‘il R. al-Faruqi (1921–1986), Fazlur Rahman, Nasr, and Fathi Osman (1928–), and the British Zaki Badawi (1922–). A much younger generation of Western Muslim scholars, comprising both converts and Muslim-born, is also influential, and is a much bigger and still growing group. It includes Sulayman Nyang, Seyyed Vali Nasr, Amina Wadud, Sherman Abdul-Hakim Jackson and Joseph Lumbard in the United States; Ziauddin Sardar and Tim J. Winter (Abdul Hakim Murad) in Britain; and Tariq Ramadan in Switzerland.

CONTENDING VISIONS OF ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The focus of this paper is the contending visions of Islam in Southeast Asia and the impact of American Muslim scholarship on the debate between the contending parties. Muslim Southeast Asia is one of the six major geo-cultural zones of the Islamic world. About 230 million Muslims live in this region, nearly 90 percent of them in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim nation. The most comprehensive and substantive debate in the region is taking place in Indonesia and Malaysia, and it is the American Muslim influence on those countries that is discussed below.

Throughout both the pre-modern and modern periods, Southeast Asian Islam has been known for its openness and its adaptive responses to foreign intellectual and cultural influences. The primary Islamic influence on it has come from the Middle East but there has been considerable influence from the West, South Asia and China as well. American Muslim scholarship, however, is a relative newcomer to the region and as the description above of the phases of influence of Western scholarship on Islam indicates, it is only in the third and current phase that the influence of American Muslim scholarship has begun to be felt.

During this period of the growth of American Muslim intellectual influence in Indonesia and Malaysia, the contending Muslim positions have changed from what they were in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The reason is that, in the debate about “authentic” or “true” Islam, the contending visions have become more complex. They have exerted greater mutual influence, which has resulted in their convergence and in a blurring of many distinctions. Several contrasting elements of “Islamic authenticity” that traditionally divided these visions, however, have remained unchanged. This is especially true of the contention between traditionalist Islam and modernist Islam, which are still divided in Indonesia and Malaysia.

In the initial phase of the clash between the two contending visions of Islam, when external influences came mostly from the Middle East, the modernists pressed not only for educational, social, economic, and political reforms but for religious reforms as well.¹⁹ For example, the early modernists attacked the traditional educational system and institutions as represented by the *pondoks* and *pesantrons* (Malay-Indonesian traditional Islamic schools) as backward, and created an Islamic educational system that was “modern and progressive” not only in physical infrastructure and facilities but in curriculum design and teaching methods as well. Many of these modernists wanted to reform Islam by going back to what they believed to be a “purer and simpler” form of the religion that existed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad.²⁰ They considered Sufism and the established legal schools of thought (*madhahib*) as un-Islamic latter-day accretions to Islam that should be swept away from Muslim society.

In Indonesia, the most influential of the religious modernist organizations is the Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912.²¹ Its founding leader, Kyai Ahmad Dahlan, studied religious science in Mecca and was heavily influenced by the writings of the Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh. Dahlan considered four major factors to be responsible for the decline of Islam in Indonesia. These were syncretic mysticism, including certain schools of Sufism and various forms of esoterism (*aliran kebatinan*), the Hindu-Buddhist heritage, feudalism, and colonialism. As he saw it, “[S]yncretic mysticism fostered preoccupation with the ‘inner life and the after life’ at the expense of social problems; Hindu-Buddhism contaminated the purity of Islam; feudalism deified royalty in place of Allah; and colonialism encouraged Christianity.”²² Dahlan’s reformist struggle and the Muhammadiyah’s multi-faceted reformist programs were designed to provide an Islamic response to the forces and conditions that prevailed in contemporary Indonesian society, with the view of arresting the decline of Islam. He was reacting against traditionalism as manifested both in the well-established indigenous spiritual traditions and in the socio-political order shaped by the royalty or “feudal” traditions. Quite often, the two traditions he loathed were linked to each other. He also reacted against Dutch colonial rule, which he felt showed blatant favoritism toward the small Christian community at the expense of the Muslim majority. However, his opposition to all these forces was a “peaceful and systematic” one – so much so that the colonial authorities did not perceive him as a political threat to their rule.

In speaking of the need for Indonesian Muslims to adhere to the “true” teachings of Islam and to purify their faith by discarding “deviationist” traditional beliefs and practices, Dahlan’s reformist movement presented Indonesians with a vision of Islam that was certain to clash with the traditional vision. The argument was about what constituted the “true teachings” of Islam, and which beliefs and practices should be termed “deviationist.” Like the Wahabis, with whom he had theological bonds and shared attitudes toward traditional Islam, Dahlan and his movement openly expressed opposition to both the Indonesian Sufi thought that he considered too accommodative of pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist mystical ideas and to Sufi practices, especially “saint-worship.”

Leaders of reformist-modernist Islam such as Dahlan called on Muslims to abandon *taqlid* (the uncritical acceptance of interpretation of Islamic law by the ‘*ulama*’) and the practice of blindly adhering to the interpretations of past scholars, and to pursue instead the creative thinking of *ijtihad* that would allow them “to analyze and dissect the original Arabic scriptures in order to read for themselves the divine message.”²³ Indonesian religious modernists-reformists had come from both religious and secular educational backgrounds. Dahlan was a product of the religious stream of education but his contemporaries, such as the religious modernists Haji Agus Salim and Tjokroaminoto, both leaders of Sarekat Islam (Indonesia’s first mass nationalist organization), were Western-trained.

As was to be expected, the traditionalists fought back against the modernist-reformist assault on traditional Islam and their call for religious reform. The traditionalists saw themselves as defenders of traditional Malay Sunni orthodoxy, of which Sufism and the Shafiite school of Islamic law were the most important components. This orthodoxy is synonymous with the mainstream Malay Islam that took root in the Malay Archipelago as far back as the fourteenth century and that developed into a full-blown civilization, with Sufism making a major contribution to it. For the traditionalists, defending their vision of Islam was not just a question of defending spiritual beliefs that they identified with authentic Islam, but also of safeguarding a religiously-inspired culture developed over the centuries upon the foundation of those beliefs. A whole range of traditional cultural and related institutions, from the educational institution of the *pesantren* to the political leadership of the *kyai* (traditional title for a religious teacher such as one who teaches at a *pesantren*) has sprung from the Malay Sufi interpretation of Islam and its “liberal accommodation” of indigenous spiritual currents.

In 1926, the traditionalists founded a mass organization known as the *Nahdatul ‘Ulama’* (NU) to defend the vision and interests of traditional Islam from the onslaught of modernist Islam.²⁴ Its first chief leader was Hasyim Asy’ari (1871–1947), then the most revered of Javanese ‘*ulama*’, but it was Wahab Hasbullah (1888–1971), Asy’ari’s most gifted student, who played the pivotal role in the organization’s establishment.²⁵ Possessing a “diversity of talents and interests ranging from education and business to politics, international affairs and contemporary social issues” and a gift for organization and leadership, Hasbullah was the most influential defender of traditional Islam for half a century.²⁶ During the 1920s and 1930s, when hostility between the

traditionalists and the modernists-reformists reached its peak, he was the most visible in engaging eminent modernists on issues such as *ijtihad* and the leadership of the 'ulama'. According to Greg Fealy, "no other person has been so influential in shaping traditionalist responses to a variety of challenges over such a long period of time," and Hasbullah "deserves to be regarded as the most significant traditionalist Islamic leader in Indonesia" in the twentieth century.²⁷

The history of the religious contest in Indonesia between Islamic modernism and Islamic traditionalism can be traced by examining the history of rivalry, competition and occasional collaboration between the Muhammadiyah and the NU, and the kind of influence and impact they have exerted on each other. The two religious organizations are the largest in the country today and command immense influence in the Muslim community. Having survived the twentieth century as they enter the fourth quarter of their first century of existence, the two organizations have demonstrated their ability to adapt themselves to social change.

The situation in Malaysia has been somewhat different. While a similar religious feud between the traditionalists and the modernists has persisted as long as the one in Indonesia, Malaysia does not have religious organizations of comparable size and with the same contending roles as the Muhammadiyah and the NU. Each side to the conflict developed a formidable mass organization to represent its point of view only in the post-independence period. The organizations, both of which are political parties, are the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Islamic Party (PAS). In general, UMNO has displayed modernist tendencies; PAS, traditionalist ones. Prior to independence, the traditionalist forces organized themselves around the *pondoks* and the 'ulama' who ran them, and the state religious establishments headed by their respective Sultans. The modernists were either individuals or small organized groups of activists and literary figures.

However, in both countries the confrontation between the traditionalist and modernist forces created conditions that forced both sides to revise their respective positions. The Muhammadiyah has achieved a remarkable degree of success in its reformist struggle to modernize education and social welfare, to realize gender equality, and to promote civil society. On the religious plane, however, there has been only partial success. Leaders of the organization succeeded in banishing Sufism from the center stage of Indonesian theological discourse after many decades of anti-Sufism rhetoric, but Sufism is still a significant force in Indonesian society. A few prominent religious modernists such as Hamka (1908-1981) found many aspects of Sufism to be too attractive to be ignored. Rather than rejecting it, they made an attempt to reform and modernize it, especially by being less "doctrinaire" than the intellectual Sufism of the 16th century – specifically, Hamzah Fansuri and his Aceh school of the "Transcendent Unity of Being" (*wahdat al-wujud*) – and by "cleansing" it of elements from non-Islamic sources.²⁸ They have succeeded in shrinking the sphere of influence of the traditional 'ulama' as the sole authoritative interpreters of the religion, and thus in their view in curtailing

taqlid (uncritical acceptance of interpretations of Islamic law by the *'ulama'*). As a group, however, the traditional *'ulama'* remain a powerful voice, viewing issues in Islamic law principally through the lens of the Shafiite legal school.

The NU has made its stand on reforms very clear. It was generally prepared to agree with the modernists about educational and social reforms. Under the leadership of Hasbullah and Wahid Hasyim (1900-1957), son of Hasyim Asy'ari, it undertook reforms and modernization in various areas of societal life. It modernized *pesantran* education,²⁹ granted equal rights to education to males and females,³⁰ established community-based socio-economic bodies³¹ and, in the organizational defense of traditionalism, "adopted many of the methods of its modernist rivals, producing its own journals and promotional pamphlets, sponsoring public meetings and debates, recruiting members and opening new branches."³² At the same time, however, the NU leadership would not allow theological reform. It would not compromise its traditional theological position of defending Malay-Islamic Sunni orthodoxy and the primacy of the *'ulama'* as the authoritative interpreters of Islam.

The convergence and divergence of views that respectively unify and separate the traditionalist and modernist visions of Islam as just described provide the historical background for the current phase of contention that began in the 1970s.³³ This phase is significant in many respects, coinciding as it does with the global Islamic resurgence that entails a more assertive role for Islam in political and public life. Malaysia and Indonesia have been very much involved in this resurgence. In each country, Islamic resurgence made its appearance and gained momentum following a bloody national tragedy. In Indonesia, the tragedy was the 1965 abortive coup against then-President Sukarno, followed by an anti-communist witch-hunt in which the Muhammadiyah and the NU participated in the name of *jihad*. In Malaysia, the tragedy was the 1969 ethnic violence that took place between the politically dominant Malays and the economically dominant Chinese. The two tragedies forged political alliances between traditionalists and modernists to an extent unseen since the end of colonial rule. It is in this phase that western writing about Islam, especially by American Muslim scholars, has gained increasing influence with the Muslim intelligentsia in the two countries.

DOES AMERICAN MUSLIM SCHOLARSHIP HELP SHAPE THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN VISION OF ISLAM?

American Muslim scholarship has already left a visible impact on Islamic discourse in Malaysia and Indonesia. An earlier essay³⁴ examined the various facets of this impact, which was first noticeable in the 1980s. The essay detailed the intellectual influence of three American Muslim scholars – Fazlur Rahman, Isma'il al-Faruqi, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr – on Muslim academics, intellectuals, and scholars in Indonesia and Malaysia, and their impact on the Muslim public at large. The three scholars were not only the earliest American Muslims scholars to find a receptive Muslim audience in Southeast Asia but, through their writing on Islamic life and thought, they also became the most influential.

Although during the last decade more American Muslim scholars and writers, especially of the younger generation, have come to the attention of Muslims in the region, the work of the three elder scholars continues to enjoy the distinction of being the most widely read, either in the original English or in Malay-Indonesian translations.

Rahman was influential primarily in Indonesia, al-Faruqi in Malaysia, and Nasr in both.³⁵ They first gained an intellectual foothold on the soil of Malay-Indonesian Islam through the students who studied with them in the United States. Of the three, Nasr is the only one still alive, and is likely to become the most influential of the three in both Malaysia and Indonesia. During the past two years, his work has continued to be translated into the Indonesian language. The most recent work to be translated, *The Heart of Islam*,³⁶ has won praise in many quarters. It carries a long introduction by Budhy Munawar-Rachman,³⁷ a young intellectual and close associate of Nurcholis Madjid, Indonesia's leading intellectual, who himself studied under Rahman but is very much attracted to Nasr's work.

There are many reasons for the influence of Rahman, al-Faruqi, and Nasr. The one that is most important is that many Malay-Indonesian Muslims find the men's work to include fresh, comprehensive approaches to Islam, presented in ways that appeal to their modern educated minds. Decades of open debate and free discussion between different groups representing different perspectives on Islam have led to an eager search for the kind of holistic intellectual approaches to Islam that have been missing in their traditional religious education. They see in the writings of the three scholars fresh perspectives on Islam and solutions to Muslim societal problems that are in sharp contrast to the piecemeal and legalistic approach of the *fuqaha'* (jurists who interpret Islamic law) to those issues through their pronouncements of *halal* (religiously permissible) and *haram* (religiously prohibited).

Rahman's and al-Faruqi's work generally appeal to proponents of modernist Islam, who consider them to have provided its philosophical justification and intellectual defense. Rahman was particularly influential among the new breed of Muslim modernist intellectual-activists who gained national fame as students and youth leaders in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s. Many consider him to be one of the intellectual founders of Indonesian Islamic neo-modernism,³⁸ of which these young intellectual-activists have become the most widely known representatives in recent decades. The most notable of the "junior modernists," as Robert Hefner has called them, include Nurcholis Madjid, Dawam Rahardjo, Djohan Effendi, Usep Fathudin, and Utomo Danadjaja.³⁹

In Indonesian intellectual discourse, the use of the term "neo-modernism" is meant to show that there are both continuity and discontinuity of perspectives in the societal vision of Islam held by the new modernism, which emerged in the peculiar conditions of the 1970s, and the older modernism represented by national figures such as Hamka, Muhammad Natsir, and H. B. Rasyidi. There is continuity in the neo-modernists' thinking about *ijtihad*, rationalization of Islam, and the need for continuous engagement with contemporary challenges. The neo-modernists have departed from the position of the

old school of modernism, however, on a number of major questions, including the issues of the Islamic state (and the more general issue of Islam and politics), secularism and secularization, religious pluralism, and the indigenization of Islam.⁴⁰ With the neo-modernists accusing modernists of the old school of being “conservatives” and the latter denouncing the former group as “liberals” of the modern Western type, Indonesian modernism has become deeply polarized in the era of global Islamic resurgence and now consists of the two competing “schools” of “conservative modernists” and “liberal and progressive modernists.”

The influence on Islamic discourse in Malaysia and Indonesia of the modernist al-Faruqi, and of the International Institute of Islamic Thought which he founded, is most visible in the debate about Islamization of knowledge.⁴¹ For the last three decades, proponents of Islamization of knowledge, of whom al-Faruqi is one of the best known, have argued that this intellectual enterprise is absolutely necessary in the contemporary world, because many aspects of modern knowledge and modern science are at odds with Islamic teachings and the Islamic philosophy of knowledge. The general aim of Islamization of knowledge is to evaluate the whole body of modern knowledge critically in light of Islamic conceptions and theories of knowledge, spiritual values and ethics, and to integrate “proven” knowledge into the Islamic worldview. At the conceptual or theoretical level, it emphasizes that the production and formulation of knowledge should proceed within the framework of Islamic epistemological schemes. The application of knowledge should conform to the requirements of Islamic ethics.

While proponents of Islamization share a general consensus about its aims, they are divided on the issue of what exactly is to be “Islamized” and how best to realize “Islamization.” There are several schools of Islamization of knowledge.⁴² Al-Faruqi represents the modernist school, with followers not only in Southeast Asia but also in other parts of the Islamic world and the United States. His school of thought is challenged in Malaysia and Indonesia by the traditional school of Islamization, led by Naquib al-Attas and Nasr.⁴³ On the subject of Islamization, al-Attas appears to exercise a far greater influence on Malaysian-Indonesian Muslim intellectuals than either Nasr or al-Faruqi.

Nasr’s intellectual influence in Indonesia and Malaysia is distinguished from that of his two American colleagues in notable ways. Traditionalists and modernists are attracted to Nasr’s writing for different reasons. His core constituency of readers and admirers comes from among the traditionalists and those who, despite their modern education, live and think in the spiritual and ethical ambience of traditional Islam. At the same time, there is a sizeable segment of modernists, especially the “liberals” or “neo-modernists,” who read Nasr’s work partly because of their concern for both the positive and negative effects it could have on modernist perspectives. The traditionalists admire his articulate defense of traditional Islam, his exposition of almost every facet of Islamic life and thought, ranging from science and art to literature and Sufism, and for the approach he has taken in dealing with the major challenges that

confront not only the Islamic world but all humanity. Modernists are attracted to his insightful and powerful critique of the modern world, even though they may not agree with his proposed solutions.

Nasr's intellectual relationship with Indonesian Muslim traditionalists is analogous to that of Rahman with the modernists. Nasr has been characterized as a "neo-traditionalist" in Indonesian Islamic discourse,⁴⁴ but he is more than just an ordinary neo-traditionalist. He is regarded as the intellectual father of Indonesian neo-traditionalism, just as Rahman is seen as an intellectual founder of its neo-modernism. The use of the term "neo-traditionalist" to characterize his intellectual-religious position is meant to distinguish him from the "traditionalists," a term that is usually understood by Indonesians as applying to the NU's perspective on Islam.

There has always been a "liberal" faction within the ranks of the NU, and it was from that faction in the 1970s and 1980s that the present-day neo-traditionalists emerged. The most famous of them is Abdurrahman Wahid, who led the NU before becoming president of Indonesia in 1999. There is a close intellectual affinity between Nasr and the neo-traditionalists. It was Wahid who first introduced Nasr's writings to the Indonesian public in 1981, translating Nasr's *Ideals and Realities of Islam*,⁴⁵ which has brought more than a few Western educated Muslim intellectuals back to the fold of "Islamic tradition."

In the view of the neo-traditionalists, Nasr's traditionalism differs from that of the NU's founding fathers in significant ways. It is seen as more comprehensive in its meaning and scope, more spiritually and intellectually rooted in its foundation, and more universal and liberal in its approach to religious pluralism and diversity. While the NU's traditionalism seeks to defend Sunni orthodoxy alone, for example, Nasr's traditionalism comprehends a more inclusive orthodoxy that defends both Sunnism and Shi'ism as legitimate branches of Islam. Neo-traditionalists embrace Nasr's traditionalist position on this and many other issues, valuing his universalist and inclusive traditionalism in particular. The neo-modernists also find themselves sharing common ground with Nasr. It may seem strange that it is the combined intellectual efforts of the neo-traditionalists and the neo-modernists, represented respectively by Wahid and Madjid, that have helped Nasr's traditionalism take root in contemporary Indonesian intellectual life. That does tell us, however, how much the encounter between modernism and traditionalism has interacted in the Indonesian experience over the decades, producing new positions under the external influence of the kind of intellectual currents provided by Rahman and Nasr.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia today is one of the very few Muslim countries with a vibrant intellectual life and with intellectual and religious debates that are free, open, and peaceful. It is where practically every intellectual or religious school of thought is to be found, each vying for popular support. Religious thought is in such a fluid state that many people, especially the more "conservative" Malaysian Malays, find it chaotic. Amid the numerous religious

currents now visible in Indonesian society, however, the major ones are easily identifiable. Despite the steady growth of neo-modernism and neo-traditionalism, the older modernism and traditionalism remain the two largest streams of Indonesian Islamic thought.

As this essay indicates, the impact of the first phase of American Muslim scholarship has helped to produce the new schools of neo-modernism and neo-traditionalism as offshoots of the competing visions of Islamic modernism and Islamic traditionalism. With their two schools fast converging on many fundamental issues, the neo-modernists and neo-traditionalists appear ready to identify themselves with the even newer societal vision of Islam called “liberal Islam.” Wahid, Madjid, and Syafii, Indonesia’s three intellectual giants, are said to be in agreement that “liberal Islam” connotes “an Islamic thought that is open, inclusive and pluralistic, universal and cosmopolitan in its vision, and receptive to contextual *ijtihad* initiatives.”⁴⁶

Young members of the “liberal Islam” network, such as the controversial Ulil Abshar Abdalla,⁴⁷ now play an active role in opening up the Indonesian intellectual scene to various strands of “liberal Islam” from the West. Thanks to them, more and more American Muslim scholars of the second generation are making their presence felt among Indonesian intellectual circles, either through translations of their work or their participation in lectures, seminars and conferences. These second generation scholars are not thinkers of the stature of Rahman, al-Faruqi and Nasr, with comprehensive visions of Islam, but academics who are known for their work on specific Islamic issues such as women’s rights and gender equality, human rights, civil society, and religious extremism.

Even when these younger American Muslim scholars address Indonesian audiences on these issues, however, they frequently find the perennial theme of “authentic” interpretation of Islam resurfacing. It is still too early to speak of the impact of American Muslim scholarship of the second generation on the evolving vision of Islam in Indonesia. But be it in Southeast Asia or in the United States, the interpretation of Islam propounded by these younger American Muslim scholars must come to terms, whether wholly or partially, with the fundamental theses that were the work of their seniors such as Nasr and Rahman.

NOTES

1. In assessing the Islamic interaction between the Middle East and Southeast Asia, Fred R. von der Mehden, a leading scholar of Southeast Asian Islam, writes, “Middle Eastern religious ideas still dominate the exchange between the two regions. There is relatively little influence by Southeast Asian Muslim intellectuals on the rest of the Muslim world.” Von der Mehden, *Two Worlds of Islam: Interaction between Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (University of Florida Press, 1993), p. 97.

2. On some of the leading 19th and 20th centuries Malay ‘*ulama*’ who were known to have lived and taught in Mecca, see Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Singapore: Horizon Books Pte Ltd., 2001), chapters 10 & 11.

3. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 78.

4. The traditionalist stream of Indian Islam with the greatest influence on Malay religious thought in the modern period is the one identified with the *Dar al-'ulum* at Deoband. Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the current spiritual leader of Malaysia's opposition Islamic Party (PAS), who has ruled the state of Kelantan as its Chief Minister for more than a decade, is perhaps the best known of Malaysian graduates of the Deoband. The modernist stream, whose influence on Malay religious thought is far more limited than that of the traditionalist stream, is best represented by the work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Sayyid Amir 'Ali (1849-1928). The most notable Malay thinker and scholar to have been influenced by the modernism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the widely respected Zainal Abidin Bin Ahmad (1895-1973), popularly known as Za'ba.

5. The Orientalist community was comprised mainly of British, Dutch, and French scholars of Islam, reflecting the fact that their countries ruled the greater part of the Islamic world. In the eyes of Muslims, these Orientalists and their Orientalism were dedicated to the intellectual justification and defense of Western colonialism. The negative image of Orientalism has been long and well entrenched in the collective Muslim mind – so much so that more than half a century after the end of colonialism in the Islamic world, there is still denunciation of the “sins of Orientalism” from the pulpits. On the epistemological and ideological underpinnings of Orientalism, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 2003 edition). The first Orientalist who belonged to this phase but approached the study of the Orient differently was the French convert René Guénon (1887-1951), who had extensive knowledge of both Western and Eastern thought.

6. The two scholars referred to here are Muhammad Hamidullah and Fazlur Rahman. Professor Hamidullah lived in Paris from 1948 to 1996, and was then brought to the United States for medical treatment. He died in 2002. A translator of the Qur'an into French, English, and German, Hamidullah made an immense scholarly contribution to Islam in both Europe and the Islamic world. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), like Hamidullah, was from pre-partition India. Rahman earned his Ph.D. and taught Islam in England for many years before accepting academic positions at McGill University, Canada (1957-1960), in his native Pakistan (1960-1968), and finally as professor of Islamic thought at the University of Chicago (1969-1988). For more details of Rahman's intellectual career and influence, see Osman Bakar, “The Intellectual Impact of American Muslim Scholars on the Muslim World, with Special Reference to Southeast Asia” in Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo, eds., *Muslims in the United States* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), pp. 151-169, reprinted in this volume.

7. The Muslim world, especially followers of the modernist Islamic movements, know Weiss best as Muhammad Asad, the author of *The Road to Mecca* (Simon and Schuster, 1954) and *Islam at the Crossroads* (Arafat Publications, 1947). Irving's Muslim name is Ta'lim Ali. An intellectual-activist with a deep knowledge of medieval Spanish (Andalusian) Islam, he is the author of many books on Islam and is best known among Muslims for his translation of the Qur'an. T.B. Irving, *The Qur'an: First American Version* (Amana Books, 1985). Upon her conversion to Islam, Marcus adopted the Muslim name Maryam Jameelah. Like Asad, her numerous works made her a familiar intellectual figure in Islamic fundamentalist movements, especially those of the 1970s and 1980s.

8. Guénon became a Sufi in 1912. He was the author of, e.g., *Orient et Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1924); *La Crise Du Monde Moderne* (1927), published as *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne (Luzac & Co., 1942); and *East and West*, trans. William Massey (Luzac & Co. 1941).

9. Schuon was the intellectual and spiritual leader of this school, which believes in universal

and perennial wisdom. On his relation to the Islamic tradition, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition,” 5 *Sophia, The Journal of Traditional Studies* (Summer 1999), pp. 27–48. On Nasr’s life, works, and intellectual influence, see Lewis E. Hahn, Randall E. Auxier and Lucian W. Stone, Jr., eds., *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (The Library of Living Philosophers, 2001), vol. XVIII. On the intellectual biography of al-Attas and the traditional character of his ideas, see Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998).

10. Rahman’s philosophy of Islamic modernism is best articulated in *Islam and Modernity*, op. cit.

11. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, op. cit., pp. 2–3.

12. Op. cit., p. 3. Rahman mentions Ash‘arism, “the dominant Sunni theology throughout medieval Islam,” as a good example of the theological disasters traditional Islam has suffered as a result of the absence of a Qur’anic *weltanschauung*.

13. Rahman, op. cit., p. 20.

14. Deliah Noer, *The Modernist Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 305.

15. Noer, op. cit.

16. Rahman explains that his Qur’anic hermeneutics is “exclusively concerned with the cognitive aspect of the revelation and not with its aesthetic-appreciative or power-appreciative aspects.” Rahman, op. cit., p. 4.

17. Op. cit., p. 3.

18. Schuon, for example, often criticized the “errors and excesses” of some of the well-known representatives of traditional Islam – indeed of traditional religions in general – but always within the framework of a total and fully integrated spiritual tradition. See, for example, his *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, trans. J. Peter Hobson (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976). In it, Schuon criticizes the limitations of Ash‘arism as a theological system, but unlike Rahman, who portrays it as being “in conflict with the Qur’an” (*Islam and Modernity*, p. 3), Schuon accepts the Islamic legitimacy of Ash‘arism as a theological system. On this issue, see also Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (The Islamic Texts Society, 1999), chapter five, “The Atomistic Conception of Nature in Ash‘arite Theology,” pp. 61–101.

19. For a good account of the pre-independence modernist-reformist Islamic movement in the Malay-Indonesian world and the various dimensions of reforms it sought to achieve, see Giora Eliraz, “The Islamic Reformist Movement in the Malay-Indonesian World in the First Four Decades of the 20th Century: Insights Gained from a Comparative Look at Egypt,” 9 *Studia Islamika, Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* (2002), pp. 47–87.

20. Some scholars have called the belief in a pure and simple Islam “scripturalism.” A scholar of Indonesian Islam has described the spirit of scripturalism in the following terms: “These reformists pressed for a return to the fundamental truths of the Islamic text and tradition, the Qur’an and *hadith*. They rejected other authorities, including the venerated *kyai* and the other Muslim scholars and teachers who taught the ornate philosophies and legal systems of medieval Islam.” James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, 1978), p. 24.

21. On the origin of the Muhammadiyah and its organizational development that transformed it into the largest and most influential Muslim reformist movement in Southeast Asia as well as on the life of its founder, see Peacock, op. cit.

22. Op. cit., p. 35.

23. Op. cit., p. 24.

24. On the origin, historical development and the traditionalism of this religious organization, see Greg Barton and Greg Fealy, eds., *Nahdatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia* (Monash Asia Institute, 1996); Nakamura Mitsuo, "Nahdatul Ulama" in John L. Esposito, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. III (1995), pp. 217–223.

25. On the life and thought of Wahab Hasbullah, an important defender of traditional Islam, see Barton and Fealy, op. cit., pp. 1–41.

26. Op. cit., p. 14.

27. Op. cit., p. 41.

28. Hamka's real name was Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah. He was an interesting figure in the creative encounters between the traditionalists and the modernists. While he was regarded as a religious modernist, in the words of Peter Riddell, Hamka "parried the anti-Sufi statements of modernists by advocating a type of Sufism shorn of its perceived un-Islamic practices but still maintaining a solid mystical core." He wrote several works on Sufism, the best known of which was perhaps *Tasawuf Modern* (Modern Sufism). On Hamka and other voices of "modern Sufism" in the Malay-Indonesian world, see Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, op. cit., pp. 216–224.

29. The transformation of *pesantran* education includes the introduction of graded classes, vetted textbooks, and girls' education. See Mitsuo, op. cit., p. 219.

30. Abdurrahman Wahid, a former president of the NU and former president of Indonesia, wrote about the historic significance of the NU's policy on gender equality in education, implemented as early as the 1930s: "[T]he relatively easy acceptance of the right of women to obtain an education equal to that of their male counterparts testifies to an ability to rethink the archaic concepts previously embedded in traditional culture." See his Foreword in Barton and Fealy, op. cit., p. xiii.

31. These include bodies "to advance Muslim farming and trading ventures." Op. cit., p. xix.

32. Barton and Fealy, op. cit., p. 14.

33. As Fazlur Rahman observed more than two decades ago, "the original gap between the traditionalists (the Nahdat al-'Ulama') and the reformists (the Muhammadiyah) has been almost closed." Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, op. cit., p. 128.

34. Bakar, "The Intellectual Impact of American Muslim Scholars on the Muslim World," op. cit.

35. A previous essay details nine categories of measurement of these scholars' intellectual impact. Bakar, op. cit., pp. 160–161; see this volume, p. 94.

36. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (HarperSan Francisco, 2002), translated as *Pesan-Pesan Universal Islam untuk Kemanusiaan*, trans. Nurashiah Fakhri Sutan Harahap (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

37. Munawar-Rachman is currently the director of the Center of Islamic Studies, Paramadina University Jakarta.

38. For Indonesian Muslim intellectuals' appreciation of Rahman's role and influence as a neo-modernist thinker, see, e.g., Abd A'la, *Dari Neomodernisme ke Islam Liberal: Jejak Fazlur Rahman dalam Wacana Islam di Indonesia* (From Neo-modernism to Liberal Islam: Fazlur Rahman's Traces in Islamic Discourse in Malaysia) (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2003); and the work of his former student Syafie Maarif, currently the Muhammadiyah's leader, entitled *Peta Bumi Intelektualisme Islam di Indonesia* (*The Landscape of Islamic Intellectualism in Indonesia*) (Bandung: Mizan, 1993). Rahman's previously cited *Islam and Modernity*, translated into Indonesian-Malay as *Islam dan Modernitas*, trans. Ahsin Muhammad (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985), is the most widely quoted work on the subject of Islam and modernity, modernization, and religious renewal.

39. Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 113-114.

40. For a discussion of the neo-modernists' position on these issues, especially that of Madjid, see Hefner, op. cit., pp. 114-119.

41. On al-Faruqi's and IIIT's global activities and programs on Islamization of knowledge, see Leif Stenberg, *The Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity* (Lund Studies in History of Religions, 1996, vol. 6), pp. 153-215.

42. For a detailed comparative study of the different schools of Islamization of knowledge, see Stenberg, op. cit.

43. Although al-Attas and Nasr have many commonalities that justify them to be grouped together in the traditional school, they do have significant differences on a number of issues, particularly their estimation and appreciation of knowledge traditions in non-Islamic religious traditions.

44. See, e.g., Sofiah, M.S., "Sketsa Gerakan Pembaharuan Islam di Indonesia Abad XX" ("A Sketch of the Islamic Modernist Movement in 20th Century Indonesia") in 3 *Jauhar: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Kontekstual* (*The Essence: Journal of Contextual Islamic Thought*), (June 2002), p. 134; also Munawar-Rachman's several references to Nasr as a neo-traditionalist in his introduction to the Indonesian-Malay version of *The Heart of Islam*, pp. ix-lviii.

45. The translation appears under the title *Islam: Antara Cita-Cita dan Fakta* (Bandung, 1981).

46. See *The Heart of Islam: Pesan-Pesan Universal Islam untuk Kemanusiaan*, p. xxxii.

47. Ulil, as he is popularly known in Indonesia, is the NU's head of human resources think tank, Lakpesdam-NU. In 2001 he founded the Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islam Network) with strong support from many Indonesian public intellectuals, including Madji, as well as from several think tanks in Washington, D.C.

The Declining Influence of American Muslim Scholars in Pakistan

TAMARA SONN

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1980s, Mumtaz Ahmad and Sulayman Nyang noted that three émigré scholars – Fazlur Rahman, Isma‘il al-Faruqi, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr – exercised significant influence in the Muslim world.¹ In 2003, Osman Bakar reiterated that claim, noting specifically their influence on Muslim thinkers in Southeast Asia.² At the same time, Seyyed Hossein Nasr expressed confidence that, given the greater intellectual freedom granted scholars in the United States, American-based Muslim scholars would play an extraordinary role in the future of the Islamic world.³ The current potential impact of these scholars, however, has been undermined by political realities. The American military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, reports of widespread abuse of prisoners by U.S. military personnel, the stalemate in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and the declining standard of living in many parts of the Muslim world are among the major factors contributing to growing hostility toward the United States. This is particularly true in Pakistan, where the United States’ support for President Musharraf, despite his failure to implement democratic reforms, renders American calls for democracy and pluralism elsewhere – even when they come from Muslim scholars – as hypocritical at worst and, at best, irrelevant.

What follows is a discussion of the declining influence of Muslim scholars in the United States on Pakistan. It should be noted that some American Muslim scholars retain residual influence among the educated elite and Sufi minorities. The concern of the majority, however, as evidenced by the popularity of certain domestic religious scholars, appears to be economic assistance and rights denied by the foreign-supported government. This essay will conclude with observations concerning the increased influence of Pakistani thinkers among American Muslims.

LINGERING INFLUENCE

There is evidence that some American Muslim scholars retain influence in Pakistan. In recent years, Suhail Academy in Lahore has published reprints of Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s works. According to Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Director General of the Islamic Research Institute, however, Nasr’s influence is confined to “an intellectual elite,” particularly those attracted to Sufism and “the ‘traditional’ Islamic perspective, as distinct from the perspective of the present-day radicals and activists.”⁴

Fazlur Rahman’s influence is also limited, but in a different way from that of Nasr. Although few of his works are available in Urdu, Fazlur Rahman “continues to arouse some interest among a section of intellectuals,” Ansari reports. Naveen Ghulam Haider of Karachi University is currently completing a dissertation on his work, for example. But Fazlur Rahman’s influence is limited to those “who can make their way through

his writings which, for most of the ordinary readers of English books in Pakistan, are pretty difficult to follow,” according to Ansari; both his intellectual level and English writing style are beyond the grasp of ordinary Pakistanis.⁵ Those who are attracted to his ideas are characterized as modernists and secularists, particularly those “somewhat repelled by both the ‘fundamentalists’ and the ‘traditionalists’.” For most Pakistanis, Fazlur Rahman remains a non-entity. In fact, four years ago, Khalid Hasan reported in Pakistan’s English-language newspaper *Dawn* that Rahman was “all but forgotten in Pakistan. Few people in the country that he loved and pined for, having been forced into exile in Ayub’s last days by a cabal of religious reactionaries, would even know today who he was.” Hasan contrasts that anonymity with Rahman’s fame in more developed countries “as one of the greatest modern scholars of Islam” whose books “are to be found in every university library in the world” and on whose works a conference was held in Istanbul in 1997.⁶ Dr. Ansari was hard-pressed to identify any of his students who have achieved a high popular profile in South Asia. This contrasts with the situation in Malaysia, where some of his students remain highly influential.

There is no evidence of Isma‘il al-Faruqi’s continuing influence in Pakistan. Akbar Ahmed’s writings do have some influence, particularly in the North West Frontier Province, where his work appears in the province’s English-language curriculum.⁷ Again, however, this represents a tiny minority of Pakistanis.

Some European-American scholars have also registered in Pakistan. These include Jeffrey Lang, whose *Struggling to Surrender* was translated into Urdu.⁸ Lang is an enthusiastic convert to Islam. His work is highly personal and edifying to those concerned with negative American stereotypes of Islam. William Chittick’s work on Ibn Arabi has found some popularity among those attracted to mysticism and intellectual spirituality. Chittick’s *The Vision of Islam* achieved relatively widespread general popularity among the educated elites fluent in English.⁹ In an effort to expand the readership of this work, the Islamic Research Institute in Islamabad has recently commissioned its Urdu translation and hopes to publish it soon.¹⁰

What this limited influence of scholarly work indicates, of course, is the predominance of what Dr. Ansari calls “the present-day radicals and activists.” But what is the reason for this? And what is the nature of the influence these “radicals and activists” are wielding?

The lack of influence of American Muslim scholars in Pakistan is no doubt in large part a function of both the persistent absence of economic development in the context of continued military conflict on Pakistan’s western and eastern borders, and the internal political conflict that is the result of growing popular discontent with Pervez Musharraf’s military government. These combine to explain the single greatest factor in the situation: Pakistan’s persistent illiteracy. According to statistics compiled by the government of Pakistan, the adult literacy rate in 1997 was roughly 39 percent, up from 38 percent in 1994 – in a country whose government expenditure on education over the past decade has been one percent.¹¹ Obviously, people who cannot read are subject to the influence of what they hear – in mosques, in *madradas*, and in ever-popular cassettes.

INFLUENCE OF ORAL TEACHING

What kind of discourse is attracting broad popular attention in Pakistan? “Popular” implies the majority, who are most strikingly non-educated non-elites. What are the topics that concern them? The most obvious place to look for the answer to that question is in mosques. There are a number of *maulanas* (religious scholars) who have achieved extraordinary popularity. A few have developed a national following through the widespread sale of cassettes of their *khutbahs* (sermons). Among them is Maulana Bijili Gar, the most popular Pukhtun speaker in Peshawar, whose cassettes are distributed throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan.

According to Robert Sampson, currently working on a dissertation on the *khutbahs* of these popular preachers, the most common theme is the suffering of the majority poor, particularly in contrast with the elites. As Sampson puts it, they speak “of the hard time the poor have while the rich officers leave the [air conditioning] on in their offices when they are not even there.”¹² Interestingly, this theme is often articulated as a matter of human rights. In an undated cassette obtained by Sampson at an Islamist rally in 1990, Gar thunders:

My brothers! When Bhutto shouted *rotay, kapra, makan* [food, clothing, shelter]...people gave their vote in expectation that with the government he would give people *rotay, kapra, makan*. When the government was formed, Mufti Sahib told him in the assembly that just the slogan was not enough – put some meat to these words. They are the basic human rights [*bunyadi insani huquq*]; *rotay, kapra, makan*, education and drinking water are the basic human rights. Come on, give some effort to this. There is not one city in Pakistan to which people can go to the courts and get their rights [*haq*]. Bhutto Sahib told him, “What, am I God that I can give people those rights?” If you are not God, then why are you tricking the people? On the face of the earth the governments are rare that give benefit to the people. It is a must that a government distributes God’s benefits to the people, but Bhutto Sahib refused. In the last election, the PPP [Pakistan People’s Party] again said *rotay, kapra, makan* – and again we said in the assembly that just the words are not enough. Give attention to the people’s basic human rights. Neither the past PPP nor this one has attended to the basic human rights. Each party just shouts out. [But] what will a poor people do with a shout that was a trick?¹³

In the same lecture, Gar reminds his listeners that religion entails far more than ritual alone. The “rights of human beings” (*huquq al-abad*) are essential to religion. In fact, he says, “The balance of teaching is three-quarters for human rights and one quarter for the rights of God.” He gives the example of a *hadith* from Bukhari about two women. One of them is very religious, “busy in prayers twenty-four hours a day,” while the other does only the prayers required five times a day. When the Prophet Muhammad is asked which one will go to heaven, he tells his questioner to ask the women’s neighbors how they treated them. When that has been done and the

results reported, the Prophet concludes that the woman who is very religious will go to hell since she has not respected the rights of her neighbors. The woman who performs only the required prayer, however, will go to heaven because she has been good to her neighbors. In a similar example, Gar concludes that true piety cannot be judged by ritual alone, but only by how well people treat their fellow human beings. On the Day of Judgment there will be a long line of people whose rights have been violated. Those violations will reflect negatively on those who performed religious rituals but ignored the rights of human beings. Violations of human rights will in effect remove the positive effect of the violators' prayers so that they will be judged only by their sins.

Some ten years later, the theme has changed little. On a popular tape obtained by Robert Sampson in Peshawar in 2003, Gar continues in the same vein, proclaiming, "If a single house in a neighborhood passes a hungry night, Allah will send that whole neighborhood to hell. The whole neighborhood will go to hell."¹⁴

The world described by these popular preachers is divided between the majority poor, suffering nobly, and the minority rich, who live in excessive, wasteful comfort, in defiance of both their own promises and God-given mandates concerning charity. The world of these preachers is also divided between good, believing Muslims and conspirators against Islam. There are the "usual suspects": Hindus, Jews, and America are described as having conspired through the years to destroy Islam. Into this mix may be thrown the Ahmadis, who were declared apostates during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's administration.¹⁵ The most recent addition to the list are the Isma'ilis. As a small sect associated with the wealth of their leader the Aga Khan, the Isma'ilis have never enjoyed high status in Pakistan, but recently they have been identified as threats to the influence of the traditionalist preachers and added to the list of anti-Islamic conspirators. The extent of their unpopularity was demonstrated when, in November 2002, General Musharraf signed an executive order designed to help educational reform in Pakistan. Among other things, the order made available a British-style system of O- and A-level exams for the country's private schools. Although the exams were not compulsory, and the Board had nothing to do with curriculum, the fact that the exams were administered through the Aga Khan University's Examination Board immediately sent up red flags. These modest educational reforms efforts have therefore become bogged down in a highly publicized anti-Isma'ili campaign. Pakistanis are being told that the sect is seeking to destroy Islam. This effort, added to the grievances against General Musharraf, has recently spun into an effort to have the Isma'ilis declared apostates, like the Ahmadis before them.

INFLUENCE OF SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES

These two popular themes of contemporary oral discourse in Pakistan – the suffering of the poor compared with the profligacy of the rich, and bifurcation of the world in accordance with virulent conspiracy theories – are not unrelated. What could be more

predictable than to “other-ize” and cast aspersions on those considered responsible for the suffering of the poor? Or to seek resolution of the conflict between these two counterpoints in an essentialized, idealized Islam? This essentialization and idealization of Islam is a third major theme in popular oral discourse in Pakistan, just as it has been since the rise of Islamism in the early part of the twentieth century. Islam is “the solution,” it is a “total way of life,” it provides guidance for all aspects of life; there is no need to look outside of Islam for the solution to life’s problems.

But there are many ways to interpret the perfection of Islam. The Tablighi Jama’at, for example, has been preaching a simple return to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices as a cure for society’s ills since the 1920s.¹⁶ At the other end of the spectrum is the sophisticated and creative reformer, Muhammad Iqbal, the putative “father of Pakistan.” Iqbal has been lionized in Pakistan. His tomb stands just outside the Padshahi Mosque in Lahore and is a popular tourist attraction, if not a pilgrimage site. His poetry remains extremely popular among Pakistan’s educated classes, and his inspiration is still quoted in popular *khutbahs*. However, his philosophical reformist thought, expressed most brilliantly in his 1938 *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,¹⁷ remains outside the sphere of the more popular Islamist thought even today, and it is certainly beyond the reach of those unfamiliar with his many allusions to modern philosophy.

Yet after years of relative marginalization in favor of Islamist ideology, Iqbal’s thought is currently gaining popularity among Muslims in the United States. The most recent issue of the Islamic Society of North America’s (ISNA) *Islamic Horizons* is devoted to his work. Published with the assistance of Dr. Muhammad Suheyl Umar, director of the Iqbal Academy in Pakistan, it is entitled “Iqbal: The Voice of Muslim Progress,” and his work is characterized as “a message for our times.” An examination of which aspects of Iqbal’s work are stressed in the issue is most revealing. Among the primary foci is the universalism of Iqbal’s message, which the lead article claims “needs to be shared with the world.”¹⁸

That message is characterized as Islam’s “peace and justice” for all.¹⁹ The peace and justice that Islam supplies are not meant for Muslims alone, much less for a specific sect, ethnicity or gender, but for all human beings. In his poetry, Iqbal stressed “constant struggle in order to contribute to the Islamic cause of serving humanity at large.”²⁰ “Iqbal was a humanist,” we are told by Farzana Hassan Shahid, president of Canada’s Muslims Against Terrorism. “[H]e saw no conflict between the humanitarian ideal and Pan-Islamism. He saw Islam as universal in essence.” Shahid quotes Iqbal: “My aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction...a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race.” Shahid summarizes, “The notion of divinely granted human dignity underlies all of [Iqbal’s] Urdu poetry.”²¹

How to achieve this universal social restructuring based on human dignity? First, by freeing Islam “from fossilized theological thinking;” that is, through reformation of Islam.²² Dilnawaz Siddiqui explains that Iqbal “was particularly frustrated with the older

generations of Muslims who were trapped in the deceits perpetrated and exploited by...traditional mullahs, and corrupt Sufis,” among others. He quotes Iqbal’s couplet, “The religious elite have lost all the wealth of spirituality and wisdom.”²³

Like many reformers from the time of Jamal al-Din Afghani in the nineteenth century and thereafter, Iqbal identified the intransigent, traditionalist orientation of the ‘*ulama*’ as obstacles to progress in promoting the well-being of the Muslim community. Like his modernist peers, Iqbal taught the need for rethinking the sources of Islam for application in changed circumstances; that is, he taught the need for *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* is Islam’s “particular problem-solving skill of analogy and analysis” that kept the Islamic community “contributing to human civilization.” However, when Muslims “failed to take advantage of this source of self-renewal...decline became increasingly precipitous.”²⁴ Darjis Naqvi and Dilnawaz Siddiqui write that Iqbal felt severely the loss of Islam’s spirit and cultural dynamism, but “he did not exclusively blame external forces for the present plight of Muslims.”²⁵ Colonialism was partly to blame, but its negative impact was compounded by “myopic mullahs’ excessive ritualism.” Instead of blind traditionalism, Muslims had to return to what Iqbal called “the principle of movement in the structure of Islam.”²⁶

Jerusha Lamptey presents excerpts from Iqbal’s *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, in which Iqbal describes the task of *ijtihad*:

The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past...The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us...Let the Muslim of today...evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.²⁷

But *ijtihad* can only be performed by people who are well-educated in both Islamic sources and the world in which they live. According to Iqbal, Muslims must go beyond traditional education and, as the Qur’an commands, learn from their surroundings. In other words, Islam has to be reformed through education. In Iqbal’s view, the problem in education was twofold. Not only were the ‘*ulama*’ and Sufi sheikhs lacking in a profound understanding of Islamic and modern sources, but religious education had been radically separated from secular education. Under the threat of loss of control of education, traditional religious educators had rejected modernization. The threat was felt all the more acutely when the champions of modern education were often colonialists. As was the case throughout the Muslim world, then, India experienced the development of a cultural schizophrenia by default. Traditional scholars were left in charge of religious education, while all other subjects were handled separately. Siddiqui argues that the “dualistic nature of the education system created by the British – and continued today – was...responsible for the almost total breakdown of communication between the secular and religious

systems.”²⁸ Iqbal deplored this situation, and called for the re-integration of education through the modernization of Islamic education to include all subjects.

An educated Muslim populace would then be able to develop democracy. Former Pakistani ambassador Syed Ali Ahsani writes in the same issue of *Islamic Horizons* that Iqbal saw democracy as “the central concept in the Islamic political system and the basis of the Islamic state founded on the quality of humankind and the unity of God.”²⁹ He rejected the radically secular and capitalist democratic system that seemed to guide the colonial powers that had subjugated the Muslim world. Democracy properly guided by spirituality was the Islamic ideal. Islamic government should always “be at the service of people,” providing “equality, solidarity and freedom” for all people, “irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, and gender.”³⁰

CONCLUSION

ISNA’s *Islamic Horizons* is among the more influential American Muslim journals. That it devotes an entire issue to the work of a single scholar, particularly a progressive thinker like Muhammad Iqbal, is highly significant. Perhaps instead of asking about the influence of American scholars on Muslims in Pakistan, we should be asking about the influence of Pakistani scholars on American Muslims. While that comment is somewhat facetious, the valorization of this progressive thinker in the aftermath of September 11 is highly significant. It indicates a clear awareness of the need to come to grips with problems in the Muslim community’s self-perception, as well as an awareness of the need for intellectual renewal and development. Looking back at Iqbal’s work does make it seem unnecessary to introduce new scholarship into Pakistan. Little seems to have changed since the days of Iqbal, but it is not for lack of wisdom among highly educated Pakistanis. It seems instead to be due to lack of a critical mass of highly educated Pakistanis.

The need for education is at least as critical now as it was when the state of Pakistan was created. Siddiqui claims that if Iqbal were alive today, he “would be pained to see the...strong and piercing paws of the mullah and the Sufi at the throats of ignorant Muslim masses...and the sustained dualism of the Muslim education system.”³¹ It is surely true that popular *khutbahs* contain inflammatory material and some are no doubt of questionable intellectual merit. But as the work of Robert Sampson mentioned above indicates, a significant part of the popular preachers’ appeal is that they address legitimate human rights, in terms that social justice activists might even recognize as progressive. Perhaps instead of asking what Pakistanis read, we should listen to what they say. Perhaps we should listen to the voices of the popular preachers. Of course, it is unpleasant to hear Americans demonized as conspirators against Islam. Perhaps, however, we should examine the rationale for these claims. Just as in pre-1979 Iran, popular messages are circulating – in the thriving cassette trade. Perhaps we should listen to their messages. And perhaps we should encourage our allies in the Pakistani government to do likewise. In the words of Maulana Bijili Gar, “[E]ducation and drinking water are basic human rights. Come on, give some effort to this.”

NOTES

1. See Mumtaz Ahmad and Sulayman Nyang, "The Muslim Émigré Intellectuals in the United States: Ismail al-Faruqi, Fazlur Rahman, and Hossein Nasr," *LIX Islamic Culture* (July 1985), pp. 277-290.
2. Osman Bakar, "The Intellectual Impact of American Muslim Scholars on the Muslim World, with Special Reference to Southeast Asia" in Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo, eds., *Muslims in the United States: Demography, Beliefs, Institutions* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), pp.151-169.
3. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "American Islamic Intellectual Activity and the Islamic World" in Strum and Tarantolo, op. cit., pp. 137-150.
4. Personal communication from Zafar Ishaq Ansari to author, March 19, 2005.
5. Op. cit.
6. Khalid Hasan, "Pakistan's Forgotten Son," *Dawn*, 26 Safar 1422/21 May 2001.
7. Akbar S. Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and a professor of international relations at American University in Washington, D.C. His numerous books include, e.g., *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1988) and *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (Routledge, 1992, 2004).
8. Jeffrey Lang, *Struggling to Surrender: Some Impressions of an American Convert to Islam* (Amana Publications, 1994).
9. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Paragon House, 1994).
10. Communication from Zafar Ishaq Ansari, op. cit.
11. See International Literacy Explorer, "Statistics on Literacy," http://www.literacyonline.org/explorer/country_results.iphtml?ID=123; Pakistan Girl Guides Association, "Statistics on Literacy in Pakistan," <http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/literacy/pgga/statisti.htm>; and UNICEF, "At a Glance: Pakistan," http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/pakistan_statistics.html.
12. Communication from Robert Sampson to author, March 4, 2005.
13. Maulana Bijili Gar, Tape 339, obtained at a rally of Jamiat Ulema Islam (the oldest organization of Islamic scholars in Pakistan) in Nowshera 1990.
14. Maulana Bijili Gar, Tape 717 (obtained by Robert Sampson, November, 2003).
15. Ahmadis are followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908), who founded a religious community in the late nineteenth century in what was then British India. Pakistan declared them to be non-Muslim in 1974 and it is now a criminal offence for Ahmadis to practice their faith in that country.
16. The Tablighi Jama'at is an apolitical movement of spiritual guidance and renewal that emphasizes ritual and proselytizing among other Muslims.
17. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Javid Iqbal, 1962).
18. Dilnawaz A. Siddiqui, "A Message for Our Times," *34 Islamic Horizons 2* (March/April 2005), p. 17.
19. Op. cit., p. 17.
20. Op. cit., p. 22.
21. Farzana Hassan Shahid, "Universal Solidarity," in *Islamic Horizons* op. cit., p. 45.
22. Op. cit., p. 45.
23. Op. cit., p. 18.
24. Darjis B. Naqvi and Dilnawaz A. Siddiqui, "Muslim Reformers," in *Islamic Horizons* op. cit., p. 42.

25. Op. cit., 43.
26. Op. cit., p. 43.
27. Jerusha Lamptey, "Religious Renewal," in *Islamic Horizons* op. cit., pp. 49-53.
28. Siddiqui, op. cit., p. 18.
29. Syed Ali Ahsani, "Iqbal and Democracy," in *Islamic Horizons* op. cit., p. 40.
30. Op. cit., p. 40.
31. Siddiqui, op. cit., p. 23.

“The Sun Rising From the West”: The Influence of American Islamic Thinkers on Turkish Intellectual Life

IBRAHIM KALIN

The Turkish intellectual scene has been dominated for almost two centuries by a debate about tradition and modernity. While the terms tradition and modernity have been defined variously, taking on different meanings during the different periods of Turkish modernization, they have remained at the center stage of Turkey’s struggle to cope with the challenges of modernity. The debate lies in the background of the following discussion of Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi, Fazlur Rahman and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, all of whom live or lived in the United States, produced their works in English, and have influenced a number of Turkish academics and intellectuals.

According to a tradition attributed to the Prophet of Islam, one of the signs of the end of times is that the sun will rise from the west. While this can be interpreted differently, one possible meaning is that the normal course of events will be reversed in the last cycle of human history. The rise of a new class of intellectuals influencing the mainland Islamic world from the West may seem just as contrary to the “normal” course of events. For more than a thousand years, major intellectual and religious ideas traveled from the heartland of the Islamic world to the periphery; that is, from places such as Istanbul, Cairo and Persia to the Balkans, Africa and the Indo-Malay world. Traditional ‘*ulama*’ (scholars of jurisprudence and other Islamic sciences) continue to have a discernable influence on Muslims in the West. Their influence, however, is counterbalanced by the growing impact of Western Islamic thinkers. This is especially true when it comes to dealing with the intellectual challenges of the modern world.

Isma‘il Raji al-Faruqi was as much an intellectual as a man of action. His life-long project, called the “Islamization of knowledge,” attracted the attention of many Islamic scholars and led to a lively debate on the meaning of an Islamic epistemology today. Fazlur Rahman was the last great champion of Islamic modernism – a tradition that goes back to the 19th century. He devoted a good part of his scholarly career to the formulation of an Islam that would be modern not only in its social and political orientations but also in its theological and philosophical assumptions. He considered it futile to attempt to modernize Muslim political institutions without first modernizing the minds of Muslim individuals and societies. As one would expect, his radical modernism caused a great deal of debate, gaining him as many severe critics as enthusiastic supporters.

In sharp contrast to Rahman, Nasr has suggested that the only way to overcome the misdeeds of modernity is not more modernization but rather a return to the pre-modern, or what Nasr has called “traditional Islam.” While calling for such a return, Nasr also presents a comprehensive critique of modernism and the modernization policies of contemporary Muslim societies. According to Nasr, contemporary Muslim societies have created scores of second- and third-rate versions of modern Western ideas. His

views on science, the environment, secularism, philosophy, arts and spiritual life and the relations between Islam and the West continue to be debated among numerous Turkish scholars and intellectuals.

While discussing the above intellectual figures as the “sun rising from the west,” the following also explores the question of what it means for these figures to be called American Islamic thinkers and what it implies for the way they are perceived in Turkey. A key question is what bearing the American-Islamic identity of these figures has on the perception of the United States in the broader Islamic world. Given the potential role of these figures as bridge-builders between the United States and the Islamic world, this question has important implications for the future relations between the two worlds.

BEN HUR AND A STORY OF “ORIENTALISM”

Before turning to the three American Muslim intellectual figures, however, let us move back a bit in history to the second half of the 19th century, when an interesting interaction took place between the Ottoman sultan and an American who was both a diplomat and a man of letters. The date was September 3, 1881; the place, the Yildiz Palace overlooking the Bosphorus. The author of the novel *Ben Hur*, the career-soldier and diplomat Lew Wallace (1827-1905), had just been appointed as the new American ambassador to Turkey. After a long and anxious wait in the lobby of the palace, Wallace, who was at the palace to pay his first official visit to Sultan Abdulhamid II, was received by the young Sultan. Wallace presented the good wishes of his government and thanked the Sultan for receiving him. In turn, Abdulhamid II asked Wallace several questions about the United States. As the meeting drew to an end, Wallace said something which the interpreters refused to translate. Abdulhamid became curious and asked the translators what had been said. Trembling, they replied that Wallace wished to shake hands with the Sultan on behalf of the American people. The unprecedented request violated the centuries-old tradition of saluting the Sultan from afar, maintaining a royal distance between him and his visitors. To the utter surprise of the Ottoman officials, however, Abdulhamid smiled, walked towards Wallace, and shook his hand. According to a biographer of Wallace, it was the first time in the entire history of the Ottoman Empire that the Ottoman Sultan had shaken hands with a foreign diplomat.¹

That was the beginning of a long friendship between Abdulhamid II and Lew Wallace. During the latter’s four-year stay in Istanbul, he and the Sultan met frequently and discussed world affairs, the situation in the Balkans, and the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. While Abdulhamid sought Wallace’s opinion about various issues, he also asked questions about the United States, its people and its landscape. They shared meals and followed them by drinking Turkish coffee and smoking Turkish tobacco, both of which Wallace came to favor. Wallace admired the Sultan’s interest in American politics but lamented the fact that the 1884 elections, which brought the Democratic Party into power, received virtually no coverage in either the British or the Turkish media.²

In one of their meetings, Wallace signed and presented a copy of *Ben Hur* to the Sultan. Wallace's diary reports that the Sultan had wanted to read the book and ordered it to be translated into Turkish, although neither the copy nor the translation can be found today. With the Democratic victory in the 1884 elections, Wallace's term in Istanbul came to an end. Abdulhamid expressed his disapproval of the American tradition of permitting the winning party to appoint new officials and told Wallace, a Republican, that he would be glad to write to the new American president and ask him to keep Wallace on as the American ambassador. He went further and, in a surprising gesture, offered to make Wallace an Ottoman ambassador in Europe. Wallace declined both of the Sultan's requests and returned to the United States.

The relationship between the two nonetheless continued until Wallace's death. In 1893, Wallace published *The Prince of India, or, Why Constantinople Fell*, a novel that tells the story of the Ottoman dynasty and praises the Ottomans for their dignity and sense of justice. Wallace wanted to dedicate the book to Abdulhamid II but changed his mind, after considering the political climate of the time and also, perhaps, deciding it was inappropriate to dedicate a novel to a Sultan, he changed his mind. He continued to express his gratitude to Abdulhamid and the Turks and, in the 1890s, became a target of the Armenian lobby as a result of the public lectures in which he defended the Ottomans against the charges of persecuting Christian minorities.³

The story is relevant here as an indication that the Turkish perception of the United States as an ally and friendly country goes further back than the Cold War era of the 1950s and 1960s, when Turkey and the United States developed a "strategic partnership" between the world power and its strategic ally in the Middle East. During these years, the United States was viewed by the vast majority of Turkish people as a natural ally because of its stance against communism, its support of democracy and human rights, and the acceptance of religious-ethical values that stood in contrast to the policies of communist countries. Even though Turks criticized the excesses of American consumer culture, the United States was praised for creating equal opportunities and providing a good education for its citizens.

Today, however, a deeply negative image of the United States is on the rise. It should be noted nonetheless that the current image of the United States in countries such as Turkey is not rooted in an ahistorical cultural essentialism, as some have suggested,⁴ but is the result of hard facts and policy decisions that have affected the lives of millions of people across the Islamic world.

The positive perception of the United States by the Turkish public is of special importance for assessing the influence of American Muslim thinkers on Turkey, for two reasons. The first is that the perception lends legitimacy to the work of Muslim scholars living in the United States. Many Turks have noticed that a group of influential Muslim scholars and thinkers, with varying perspectives on the issues of the day, is able to produce a literature on Islam in academic settings in the United States. Their contribution to the study of Islam is therefore seen not as abstract scholarship but as intellectual responses to the challenges

posed by the modern way of life. Their work has also been viewed as an honest presentation of Islam to American society. This feeling has gained further currency with the increasing number of American converts to Islam.

The second aspect of this view of the United States has to do with what the nation has meant for many other immigrants: a land of opportunity. Given the thriving American Muslim population and its growing prosperity, many see the United States as a host country that presents both opportunities and challenges for American Muslims. The Turkish view of Malcolm X may best exemplify the dual sense of hope and fear that many in Turkish intellectual circles, as well as in other parts of the Islamic world, experience about the United States. Even before the translation of his autobiography⁵ into Turkish, Malcolm X had become a symbol of American Muslims. He is perceived in Turkey as a Muslim hero who stood up against racism and spoke for the rights of African Americans.

MALCOLM X: ISLAM BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE?

Malcolm was not a scholar. His influence has not been so much intellectual and academic as social and political, for his charismatic personality and his life-long struggle to address the issues of racism, poverty, inequality and injustice have contributed to his being perceived as a hero beyond national and racial boundaries. His popularity was rekindled when the movie *Malcolm X* was shown in Turkey. Malcolm's struggle out of a life of crime and his transformation into a Muslim leader is still seen as the story of many African-American Muslims, and the pilgrimage that transformed him from a radical black nationalist into a mainstream Muslim is hailed as the triumph of a kindred soul concerned with the burning issues of his people.⁶

One part of Malcolm's story brings him even closer to Turkey. While in Mecca, Malcolm met Kasim Gulek, a Turkish member of parliament from the People's Republican Party that was founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Even though the party is known for its unflinching secularism and open distance from anything religious, Gulek became one of the first people to change Malcolm's understanding of Islam. According to Malcolm's account, Gulek had a great affinity for all African Americans and especially black Muslims. He felt sufficiently comfortable with American Muslims to correct many of Malcolm's ill-formulated ideas about issues such as color, race and the brotherhood of Muslims that goes beyond racial and ethnic boundaries.

Turks have equal admiration for Muhammad Ali, who is probably the most famous Muslim hero from outside the Islamic world. Like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali is seen as someone who stood up against injustice and oppression. His adoption of the names of the two most sacred and powerful figures of Islam, the Prophet of Islam (Muhammad) and his cousin and son-in-law (Ali), grants him a special place in the hearts and minds of many Muslims. His decisive victories are still remembered as the triumph of a Muslim boxer with an unshakable belief in God and his Prophet. Turks feel a similar warmth for other American Muslim athletes such as Karim Abduljabbar, Hakim Olajuwon and Larry Johnson.

Malcolm's autobiography is still widely read in Turkey today. Many of the national newspapers, including *Zaman*, *Milliyet* and *Hurriyet*, cover developments within the African-American Muslim community, following the trajectory from Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X to Muhammad Ali, Louis Farrakhan and Warith al-Din Muhammad. C. Eric Lincoln's classic work *The Black Muslims in America* was translated into Turkish in the early 1990s.⁷ Recently, a young Turkish scholar completed a doctoral dissertation on African-American Muslims. His work deals with conversion patterns among African Americans but also highlights a number of issues from mosque space to race considerations and African-Americans' relations with the larger Islamic world.⁸

For many Turks, the wide spectrum of ideas and opinions among American Muslims is indicative of the special circumstances that have given rise to what many now call American Islam. The term, when used in relation to the daily lives of American Muslims, refers admiringly to their struggle to live the spirit of Islam in a culture they perceive as posing countless challenges to any religious community and particularly to Muslims. It is also this sense of challenge that leads many Turks to take a tolerant attitude towards what they regard as certain idiosyncratic practices of American Muslims.⁹

This tolerance, however, applies primarily to American converts. Immigrant Muslims living in the United States are usually subject to different criteria, especially if their views about major religious and political issues are in conflict with the mainstream practices in the Islamic world. The reason for the critical attitude is that controversial matters, even when they are purely religious or juridical, are seen through the prism of American politics and foreign policy decisions. A recent example is the debate about the service of Muslim soldiers in the American army. The question that was discussed widely and finally posed to scholars at al-Azhar University in Cairo was whether Muslim soldiers are allowed to participate in the invasion of a Muslim country such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Whatever the answer to the question, it is bound to be one with political implications, and this element plays a major role in the way "American Islam" is perceived and discussed among Turkish intellectuals.

ISMA'IL RAJI AL-FARUQI: MAN OF THOUGHT, MAN OF ACTION

A Palestinian and former Arab nationalist, Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi was a remarkable person both as a scholar and as a man of action. He not only wrote books and organized numerous conferences but also trained students and established institutions. It would not be an exaggeration to describe him as the first Muslim scholar-intellectual to make a home for himself in the United States.

His work addresses the three important subjects of the resuscitation of Islamic thought, the plight of the Palestinian people, and interfaith relations, with his influence on Turkey confined primarily to the first two. Al-Faruqi was a firm believer in what he called the Islamization of knowledge. He, along with Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Naquib al-Attas,¹⁰ was one of the champions of the idea in the 1970s and 1980s. Al-Faruqi established and became the founder-director of the International Institute of Islamic

Thought (IIIT) to develop the Islamization of knowledge project. The Institute has carried out numerous programs, published many books and is one of the most active Islamic institutions in the United States today. It is largely through the activities of IIIT that the work of al-Faruqi and his followers came to be known in Turkey and other Muslim countries.¹¹

Al-Faruqi's work on the Islamization of knowledge focused on the question of knowledge in contemporary Muslim societies. He held that modern knowledge is secular in its outlook and must be Islamized if it is to have any cultural significance for the Islamic world. He therefore turned to the social sciences and tried to outline a new framework for what he called the Islamic social sciences. This "tawhidi paradigm" was formulated to unite different fields of knowledge in a holistic manner, relating them ultimately with revealed knowledge; i.e., the Qur'an and the Islamic concept of Divine unity (*tawhid*). As al-Faruqi states in his *Tawhid*, Divine unity is the key concept of the Islamic worldview and should be seen not only as a precept of belief but also as a source of knowledge.¹²

In spite of various critiques of the Islamization of knowledge project, the project has initiated a debate on the nature of modern knowledge and its relation to the Islamic intellectual tradition. In Turkey, the debate has taken place primarily at the divinity schools of several Turkish universities, including the Universities of Marmara and Ankara. A number of works that explored the concept of an Islamic social science and its potential meanings for both social scientists and scholars of Islam have been published. A key term in this debate, addressed by many university professors and freelance writers, is "methodology." Al-Faruqi's main contribution has been to raise the issue at the intersection of modern social sciences and Islamic knowledge. His work has also contributed to an ongoing debate about Islamic science in Turkey.¹³ While al-Faruqi's name is still known in some scholarly circles, his influence has abated since the late 1990s. He is nonetheless remembered as an important American Islamic thinker with one foot in the West and the other in the Islamic tradition.

FAZLUR RAHMAN: THE LAST MODERNIST OF ISLAM

It is not easy to assess Fazlur Rahman's influence on the Turkish intellectual scene. As a modernist thinker, Rahman was known for his controversial views about Islamic jurisprudence, *hadith*, Sufism and Islamic history in general. Rahman's radical claims have been hotly debated for the last twenty-five years in Turkey, as they have been in his home country of Pakistan. While many have criticized him for reducing Islam to history and emptying it of its metaphysical and spiritual content, he has had a following among a number of Turkish scholars of Islam. In a sense, Rahman has been almost single-handedly responsible for the emergence of a Turkish version of Islamic modernism in recent times.

Rahman's most controversial thesis has to do with the meaning of *hadith* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam. Adopting Schacht's concept of the "living tradition,"¹⁴

Rahman believed that what are today called the authentic *hadith* collections are in fact compilations of later generations designed to preserve the earlier practices of the Prophet and his companions. In other words, much of what is now considered the Prophetic tradition (*Sunnah*) has grown out of the accumulation of numerous ideas and practices common among the generations that lived after the death of the Prophet. According to Rahman, this disqualifies the *Sunnah* as a source of religious law, for it has been too contaminated by later traditions that cannot be traced back to the Prophet.

The classical *hadith* scholars established a canon by which they sifted through an enormous body of sayings attributed to the Prophet, and compiled their own collections. Today these are known as the “six authentic collections of *hadith*” (*kutub-u sittah*). The scholars of *hadith* were aware of the problems of authenticating a report as a saying of the Prophet, for the authentication has deep religious consequences. Many spurious sayings have in fact been identified and rejected as false. What Fazlur Rahman proposed, however, was something broader and more radical. He was less concerned with authenticating a certain *hadith* than with granting the *Sunnah* a new status within the Islamic tradition. His assessment of the *Sunnah* strips the Prophet of his legally binding role in Islamic law. The Prophet remains as a source of ethics and spirituality but can no longer be imitated in the way in which he has been in the last fourteen hundred years.

Rahman’s view of the *Sunnah* has broad implications for the implementation of Islamic law in the modern world. Rahman argued that the legal, social and political practices of the Prophet and his companions were responses to the specific circumstances of their times and therefore need not be replicated at other times. The real source of Islamic law is the Qur’an, which contains only a limited number of legal injunctions, but even the Qur’an is not immune from the contingencies of history. According to Rahman, while the ethical and spiritual message of the Qur’an is universal, it can still be read as an historical text addressed to a specific people during a specific period in history.¹⁵ What this implies for Islamic law is clear: the legal tradition of Muslims ought to be reformulated in view of the commonly accepted norms and practices in the modern period. By the same token, the traditional *shari‘a* rulings need to be revised, updated and, if deemed necessary, abandoned.

To provide a methodological basis for this program, Rahman used contemporary hermeneutics and proposed a new reading of the Islamic tradition. It involved ignoring the fourteen hundred years of Islamic history and returning to the Qur’an. After reading the Qur’an in this “beyond-Islamic-history” context, it is necessary to return to the present and reread the Qur’an in the light of modern conditions.

Rahman’s ideas have generated a lengthy debate among Turkish scholars of Islamic studies. Most of his works were translated into Turkish by his students, some of whom studied with him at the University of Chicago and others of whom became his students through visits and correspondence. A group among them formed several scholarly associations and published books and journals. The first major journal of Islamic studies with Rahman’s clear imprint was the Ankara-based *Journal of Islamic Studies*

(*Islami Arastirmalar Dergisi*), published beginning in 1987 in Turkish with English and Arabic articles. It was followed by a number of books and journals, most of which were dedicated to the further development of Rahman's project of an Islamic modernism. A publishing house called the "School of Ankara" took it upon itself to disseminate Rahman's ideas on Islamic law and the *Sunnah*.

Today there is a sizable literature on Rahman's work in Turkish.¹⁶ While some of the studies follow his line of thinking, most are highly critical of his open-ended modernism and his willingness to reduce the Prophetic *Sunnah* to a historical construction. Many scholars, including his own followers, admit that Rahman came under the influence of such Orientalists as Goldziher¹⁷ and Schacht, and his modernism is therefore seen as emerging out of Orientalism rather than from European modernism. Another point of criticism raised against Rahman is his critical attitude towards Sufism. For many Turkish scholars, Rahman's reading of Sufism is shallow and screened through his modernist agenda. Like other modernists in the 19th and 20th centuries, Rahman considered the Sufi tradition to be a later accretion to Islam. This kind of criticism is hardly likely to find any serious following in a country like Turkey, where the Sufi tradition has been part and parcel of Turkish culture for more than a millennium.

In summary, Rahman's legacy is alive among many Turkish scholars, academics and writers. His radical modernism, however, has been modified and a more moderate form of Islamic reformism is beginning to emerge. This seems to be an inevitable result of Rahman's project. As one of his best-known students in Turkey wrote in a personal communication to this author, to take Fazlur Rahman a step further is to go beyond Islam.

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR: ISLAM, TRADITION AND BEYOND

It is rather ironic that Rahman began to have an influence in Turkey at around the time another Muslim thinker with diametrically opposite ideas began to be translated into Turkish. Seyyed Hossein Nasr's growing influence acted as a measure of balance against Rahman's project of a modernist Islam. His critique of both Western and Islamic modernism cleared the ground for the introduction of the term "traditional Islam" into the contemporary Turkish vocabulary. Since then, Nasr's critique has created an intellectual space for the discussion of issues such as science, the environment, art, spirituality and relations with the West.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's entry into Turkish intellectual life started with the translation of his *Man and Nature* in 1980.¹⁸ This was followed by the translation of his *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*.¹⁹ Nasr then began to be translated with some regularity, and Turkish is now the only Islamic language into which all of Nasr's major English works have been translated. Unlike Rahman, however, Nasr's influence has not been confined to a small group of academics but has reached a much wider audience that ranges from academic scholars and columnists to politicians and artists. Unlike both al-Faruqi and Rahman, Nasr's influence is not due merely to the translations of his books into Turkish. His numerous visits to Turkey have been instrumental in making

his views available to large audiences, and he has also been in contact with numerous Turkish intellectuals, academics and writers.

Nasr's wide-ranging interests and prolific career give him a rather different place in contemporary Islamic thought. While the emphasis on tradition remains the central theme of his thought, he has produced an enormous corpus dealing with virtually all of the important issues of the present age from an Islamic point of view. Numerous Turkish intellectuals and students regard him as a reincarnation of an authentic traditional Muslim *alim* (scholar-intellectual). His scathing criticism of the modern world is seen as balanced by his call to build bridges between the Western and Islamic worlds.

In addition to his general influence on the revival of contemporary Islamic thought, Nasr has also been instrumental in raising several important issues in the Turkish intellectual world. These include his defense of Islamic science against the secular outlook of modern scientism as well as his extensive work on the sacred concept of nature, interfaith relations, and the significance of Sufism for the revival of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Some of these issues had been raised before Nasr's influence began to be felt in Turkey, but he has given them a deeper philosophical dimension. Most importantly, he has provided hope to several generations of young Turkish intellectuals through his relentless defense of Islam against the onslaughts of both modernism and fundamentalism.

There is a growing literature on Nasr and his work in Turkish. The first comprehensive study of his views on religious pluralism was published by Adnan Aslan, whose doctoral dissertation compared the views of Nasr and John Hick on religious pluralism. Aslan contrasted Hick's Kantian notion of the religious unknown with Nasr's view of the plurality of religious forms as unity-in-plurality.²⁰ He also brought Hick and Nasr together by conducting an interview with the two of them. It was a meeting not only of two minds but of two worlds, with a prominent Christian theologian and a Muslim thinker speaking together for the first time about the question of interfaith relations at such a high level of philosophical discourse.

In 2002, the Istanbul-based Foundation for Science and Art, where Dr. Nasr had lectured several times, organized a panel about him. Leading scholars Ilhan Kutluer, Mahmud Erol Kilic, and Adnan Aslan presented papers on Nasr's views of philosophy, Sufism, and religious pluralism.²¹ Kutluer discussed Nasr's idea of philosophy as wisdom; i.e., as a form of thought closely associated with intuition and revelation. Kilic analyzed Nasr's definition of spirituality not only as ethics but as a source of knowledge, as well as spirituality as a means for understanding the various knowledge-claims of the modern world. Lastly, Aslan talked about Nasr's view of the plurality of religious forms and his approach towards the "religious other." The panel was one among many other formal and informal discussions that have taken place around Nasr's thought. Like al-Faruqi and Rahman, he has opponents who charge him with presenting an esoteric view of Islam and neglecting the urgent social and political issues of the Islamic world.

After the events of 9/11, Dr. Nasr's views on the relations between the Islamic world and the West became even more important and relevant. His latest book, *The Heart of Islam*, which was written after 9/11, is read today as the response of a Muslim scholar-intellectual to the tragic events and their aftermath.²²

CONCLUSION

The influence of American Islamic thinkers on the Turkish intellectual scene remains both constructive and critical. The issues they have raised and the questions they have asked, regardless of the answers they have given, are likely to remain on the agenda of many students and scholars. The fact that these figures produced their work in the United States has a positive impact on the perception of the United States as a land of freedom and equal opportunity. This very fact, however, makes their position a highly political one. Their "situatedness" in the United States, to use a rather clumsy expression, gives them a unique opportunity to act as intellectual negotiators between that country and the Muslim world. At the same time, it also makes their work vulnerable to political manipulation. The voices of American Islamic thinkers will help the relationship between the United States and the Islamic world when their views are taken seriously in the United States and recognized as important contributions to an honest search for truth.

NOTES

1. Irvin McKee, *"Ben Hur" Wallace: the Life of General Lew Wallace* (University of California Press, 1947), p. 199

2. Lew Wallace, *An Autobiography* (Harper and Brothers, 1906), p. 970.

3. The novel was Lew Wallace, *The Prince of India, or, Why Constantinople Fell* (Osgood, McIlvaine, 1893). Wallace's defense of the Sultan: "Defends the Sultan: Gen. Lew Wallace Speaks of the Present Trouble with Turkey," *The New York Times*, Apr. 23, 1900; "Armenians Attack Wallace: Meeting at Boston Passes Resolutions Against the ex-Minister," *The New York Times*, Apr. 30, 1900. Lew Wallace's study in Crawfordsville, Indiana has a number of artifacts from his time in Istanbul. It also contains a portrait of Sultan Abdulhamid II and one of his sons as well as a golden Majidiya, all of which were the Sultan's gift to Wallace.

4. See, e.g., James W. Ceaser, "A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism," *152 Public Interest* (2003), pp. 3-18.

5. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Grove Press, 1965).

6. See, e.g., the entry on Malcolm in the Turkish Encyclopedia of Islam: Ali Kose, "Malcolm X," *27 TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara, 2003), pp. 483-484.

7. C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Beacon Press, 1961), published as *Siyah Muslimanlar*, trans. N. Ozata (Istanbul: Bengisu Yayincilik, 1992).

8. Nuri Tinaz, "Conversion of African-Americans to Islam: A Sociological Analysis of the Nation of Islam Associated Groups," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, 2001.

9. For an evaluation of American Muslims from this point of view, see Recep Senturk, "Amerikada Yasayan Muslimanlar" in *Gunumuz Dunyasinda Musliman Azinliklar* (Istanbul: ISAM, 1998), pp. 85-130.

10. See, e.g., Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur:

Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978).

11. Al-Faruqi's *Islamization of Knowledge: The Problem, Principles, and the Workplan* (Islamabad: National Hijra Centenary Committee of Pakistan, 1982) was translated into Turkish in 1985. The other publications of IIIT translated into Turkish include Abu Hamid Abu Sulayman's *The Islamic Theory of International Relations*, Taha Jabir Alwani's *Ethics of Disagreement*, and Ilyas Ba-Yunus' *The Islamic Sociology*. Hisham al-Talib's *The Training Guide for Islamic Workers* (International Islamic Federation, 1991, 2nd edition) was also translated. For several years, the IIIT's academic journal, *The American Journal of Islamic and Social Sciences* (AJISS), was published in Turkish.

12. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Tawhîd: Its Implications for Thought and Life* (International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1982).

13. For an important volume on the subject, see *İslam Bilimi Tartismalari*, edited and translated by Mustafa Armagan (Istanbul: İnsan Yayinlari, 1990). See also Mevlut Uyanik (ed.), *İslami Bilimde Metodoloji Sorunu* (Ankara: Fecr Yayineyi, 1991), which contains a number of articles on the Islamization of knowledge.

14. Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Clarendon Press, 1950).

15. For a critical review, see Mehmet Pacaci, *Kur'an ve Ben: Ne Kadar Tarihseliz?* ("Qur'an and Me: How Historical Are We?") (Ankara Okulu Yayinlari, 2000).

16. See, e.g., *İslam ve Modernizm: Fazlur Rahman Tecrübesi: 22-23 Subat 1997*, Istanbul (Istanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı Yayinlari), the proceedings of a conference held in honor of Rahman in 1997. For a critical evaluation of Rahman's views on *hadith*, see Ibrahim Hatipoglu, *İslam Dunyasinin Cagdaslasma Seruveni* (Istanbul: Hadisevi, 2004) and *Cagdaslasma ve Hadis Tartismalari* (Istanbul: Hadisevi, 2004). For a general overview of Rahman's life and work, see Alparslan Acikgenc, "İslami Uyanis ve Yenilikcilik Dusunuru Fazlurrahman'in Hayati ve Eserleri," *İslami Arastirmalar Dergisi* (October 1990), No. 4, pp. 232-252. See also Mehmet Aydin, "Fazlurrahman ve İslam Modernizmi," *İslami Arastirmalar Dergisi* (October 1990), No. 4, pp.273-284.

17. Ignác Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton University Press, 1981).

18. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1976); published in Turkish as *İnsan ve Tabiat*, trans. Nabi Avci (Istanbul: Yeryuzu Yayinlari, 1982).

19. Nasr, *İslam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Longman, 1975), published in Turkish as *İslam ve Modern Insanin Cikmazi*, trans. Ali Unal (Istanbul: İnsan Yayinlari, 1984).

20. Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Islamic and Christian Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Curzon Press, 1998).

21. The panel presentations were later published as *Notlar: Seyyid Huseyin Nasr'da Gelenek, Tasavvuf ve Dini Cogulculuk* (Istanbul: Bilim ve Sanat Vakfı, 2004).

22. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (Harper San Francisco, 2002).

The Impact of American Islamic Thinkers in Nigeria

SULAYMAN S. NYANG

Since the end of the Second World War, and especially since the late 1970s, scholars of Islam in the United States have witnessed the emergence of a vibrant Muslim community whose intellectuals and scholars are beginning to impact Muslim thought worldwide. This is largely due to the post-World War II immigration from Muslim lands to the United States and to the adoption and internalization of Islamic ideas and values by a growing number of African Americans and others.¹

The purpose of this study is three-fold. The first objective is to identify the American Islamic thinkers with influence on the African continent. The second objective is to describe the nature of this influence and the manner in which it constitutes a critical and credible part of the African mental furniture imported from the United States. Finally, this study will explore the implications of this phenomenon for African and American dialogue in the twenty-first century.

AMERICAN MUSLIM THINKERS AND THE WEST AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE

The Muslim-American influence in Africa is a relatively new subject and the interaction between American Muslims and the peoples of the African continent is still embryonic. There are only a few individuals whose writings have crossed the Atlantic and who are beginning to impact African intellectual and cultural circles. Not only is there a paucity of American Muslim thinkers who are influential in Africa, but the size of the continent and the large number of states staking their claims within it make the topic a difficult one. For this and other related reasons, this study will be confined to West Africa, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria.

There are several additional reasons for this focus. The Muslim peoples of West Africa have both historical and contemporary connections with the United States.² The slave trade brought millions of people to the United States from the west coast of Africa; at least ten per cent of them answered to Muslim names, although that fact and their history was largely ignored until the second half of the twentieth century. In addition, World War II and the Cold War led to the migration to the United States of the free Muslims whom I have called elsewhere the “Children of the Cold War.”³ There is therefore a large number of Americans with ties to West Africa. Another factor in this equation is the impact of Islam on African Americans during the last century and the manner in which that influence has connected the Pan African Movement and the members of the black religious organizations that C. Eric Lincoln called proto-Islamic or Islamized.⁴ Lincoln was alluding to the fact that many of these groups are not necessarily orthodox Islamic groups. They have, however, enthusiastically embraced Islamic concepts that are clearly differentiated from what they had known as American Christians, and so their identification with Muslims in Africa is clear.

An additional factor, which was an unanticipated consequence of the Cold War, was the substantial number of American graduate students who went to Africa to study Islam and who wrote dissertations on aspects of Islam in Africa. These studies have served as intellectual bridges linking many white and black Americans to African Islam.

The development of a new intellectual climate is also attributable to the flow of students from Africa to the United States. A significant portion of the Muslims who migrated to the United States during the last 50 years arrived as students during the Cold War, welcomed by this country as part of its ideological struggle against communism.⁵ Most of them were in the social sciences and humanities and came to know the writings of American scholars on Islam in Africa or the works of American Muslims such as Isma'il al-Faruqi and Fazlur Rahman. Those who had not formally studied the writings of these men came to know about them through the Muslim Student Association (MSA), which itself was aligned with the West against communism. While young Arabs from the Middle East, young Africans from sub-Saharan Africa, and young Southeast Asians read the writings of Nasser of Egypt, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sukarno of Indonesia, the members of the MSA distributed the writings of Syed Qutb, Maulana Mawdidi and others in the Islamist Movement. As discussed below, it was in this context that the late Isma'il al-Faruqi's works came to serve as a link between the MSA and its counterparts in Africa.⁶

It should be noted that forces other than academia have contributed to the growing presence of African Muslims in the United States. Many African Muslims have come to the United States as a result of violence and wars in Muslim lands in Africa and the United States' direct or indirect involvement with them. These refugees are scattered throughout the country. Somali Muslims, for example, have become a significant factor in the Muslim population because of the large numbers brought by the American government. They have settled in areas as dispersed as northern Virginia, Salt Lake City, Nashville, San Diego, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. In addition to Somalis, the American population now includes Muslims from Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Africa, Nigeria, Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and other African nations.

The growing Islamic revivalism on the African continent has also affected the influence of American thinkers. The revivalist trend dates from the late 1970s, when the Iranian revolution erupted and the Shah of Iran fell. The rise of Imam Khomeini brought new relationships that are changing the African intellectual landscape. While scholarship on Islamic history in Africa south of the Sahara demonstrates that Shi'a ideas were present among some Muslims in the region, those ideas were not institutionalized in the form of religious bodies or communities. Unlike the thinking of Wahabis and other Salafi groups around the Muslim world, the residual Shi'ism in West Africa takes the form of veneration for Ali Ibn Abi Talib and his son Hussein.⁷ What is interesting about recent trends in the West African region is the growth of a small body of Shi'a African Muslims who are reading the writings of their counterparts in the Middle East and in the United States. These include Seyyed Hossein

Nasr and Hamid Algar, even though their writings are diametrically opposed to each other.⁸ The former was closely linked to the Shah of Iran, and the latter became the most visible supporter of the anti-Shah forces. Both have become relevant to the African intellectual landscape.

CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCE

There are four criteria for establishing the influence of American Muslim thinkers. The first is the presence of the author in the discourse of the literate classes, as seen in the number of citations of the author's work. Second, the influence of an author can be seen in references in newspapers and magazines. Third, such an influence can be gleaned from the textbooks listed in the recommended readings at colleges and universities. Finally, such an influence can be evident in the bookstores where international publications are sold to the general public.⁹

THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN MUSLIM THINKERS IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

The Early History

Yankee goods and Yankee entrepreneurship have a long history in West Africa. Yankee traders were involved in the Black Cargo trade and continued to be active in the region after the slave trade ended.¹⁰ The penetration and settlement of Africa by the European colonial powers meant that many Africans who mastered the English language began to encounter American literature and cultural artifacts. While purveyors of American culture such as missionaries and traders seeking markets in colonial Africa were more successful in the developing settler colonies in the southern and eastern regions of the continent, some were active in West Africa.

American intellectual and cultural influences were particularly important in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where emancipated Africans from the United States settled. These two areas have the oldest connections to the Anglo-Saxon world.¹¹ Because of their Christian upbringing and their ever-growing contact with Americans, these English- or Creole-speaking Africans knew little about Islam, and Islam was not mentioned in the centers of learning founded by American missionaries. Whatever these Afro-Saxons knew about Islam was the handiwork of Edward Blyden, the famous black intellectual who served as a bridge between Muslim Africa and the United States.¹² Blyden, who was born in the Virgin Islands and who later settled permanently on the West African coast, is remembered as the prominent descendant of Africa who studied and spoke highly about Islam despite his commitment to Christianity. Although Blyden was not a Muslim, his unbiased presentation of Islam in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* led enthusiastic African-American Muslims to mistake him for a Muslim and has continued to inspire Africans and Americans seeking knowledge about the relevance of these Abrahamic religions for African society.¹³

The English language played an important role in creating a trilateral bridge linking Great Britain, the United States and the African continent. If English was used in British India to wean Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from their ancestral cultures, as Indian scholars have argued, the British in North America assimilated people from different European backgrounds through the use of English. British philologist William P. Russel noted this phenomenon:

The English language...is already the most general in America. Its progress in the East is considerable; and if many schools were established in different parts of Asia and Africa to instruct the natives, free of all expense, with various premiums of British manufacture to the most meritorious pupils, this would be the best preparatory step that Englishmen could adopt for the general admission of their commerce, their opinions, their religions. This would tend to conquer the heart and its affections, which is a far more effectual conquest than that obtained by swords and cannons; and a thousand pounds expended for tutors, books, and premiums, would do more to subdue a nation of savages than forty thousand expended for artillery-men, bullets, and gunpowder.¹⁴

There was little written American Muslim scholarship during the first decades of the voluntary migration of Muslims to the United States, which lasted from the 1860s through the 1920s. Muslims were not to be found then in American colleges and universities as either scholars or students. In the 1890s and early 1900s Alexander Russell Webb, an American diplomat in Manila, converted to Islam and pioneered the development of an Islamic press in the United States. His writings, however, do not appear to have reached Africa.¹⁵

In fact, the African Muslim migration during that period was limited, as was the migration of Muslims from other regions of the world, in part because African Muslims and their co-religionists elsewhere in the larger Muslim world were becoming subjects of European colonial powers and were unlikely to immigrate to the United States. Those who might have been inclined to make the attempt might well have feared melting into the ocean of names and faces in American society. There is a widely quoted story about a Lebanese who boarded an American ship bound for the United States and who supposedly jumped off the ship when he learned that there were no mosques in the country. The fear of disappearance into what was then a distant and strange culture persisted right up to the Second World War. Another reason for the paucity of Muslim immigrants to either Europe or the United States before the Second World War was the limited number of Muslims with sufficient command of European languages.¹⁶

THE POST-WAR PERIOD TO THE PRESENT

The slow flow of Muslim immigrants to the United States changed with the dramatic events of the two world wars, the Cold War, and succeeding decades, all of which made almost all Euro-American societies more culturally and religiously pluralistic. As mentioned

above, the Cold War also opened American halls of higher learning to Muslim and non-Muslim African students, thousands of whom arrived to study at the feet of American scholars and then took their knowledge back to their homelands. Ali A. Mazrui, Lansiné Kaba, and Idris Makward are only three among the most famous of these beneficiaries of American education. Each of the three in turn became the president of the African Studies Association of the United States; each has become familiar with American Islamic Studies scholars and has disseminated their ideas among Africans.

Although none of these three academics is a trained student of Islam, their work has added to a dynamic dialogue about both Islam in Africa and Islam in the United States. When Henry Louis Gates of the DuBois Institute at Harvard University produced a documentary on Africa, for example, he drew upon the knowledge and advice of experts on Africa.¹⁷ A controversy nonetheless developed between Gates and Mazrui about the presentation of the Arab presence in Africa and the manner in which Islam was linked to the slave trade. The controversy, which was aired on Internet chat rooms, came to include bitter exchanges between Mazrui and Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka about African identity and the role of the two dominant Abrahamic religions in that self-definition. Soyinka, a self-consciously liberal advocate for secular democratic rule in Nigeria and beyond, attacked Mazrui for being an “Islamic fundamentalist,” a charge forcefully denied by Mazrui.¹⁸ The work of Lansiné Kaba, the Guinean-American scholar who is a dean at the University of Illinois–Chicago Circle, brings the two worlds together in a similar fashion. His Maraboutic background has enabled Kaba to enhance our knowledge of Islam in Africa, particularly through his published dissertation on the Wahabiyya movement in French West Africa.¹⁹ He has also contributed to the literature on the Nation of Islam through his essays about Islam and the black experience.

Although neither Mazrui nor Kaba teaches about Islam, their written work and public speeches have brought Islam into the heart of contemporary African thought. Many Africans as well as non-Africans who read or heard about the Soyinka and Mazrui controversy were sufficiently intrigued to research the intellectual origins of the two men and learn the ways in which Islam is directly or indirectly relevant to their self-definition. Mazrui’s work has addressed Islam and the Muslim experience in the past and in the modern world. Soyinka’s ties to Islam are evident in his Yoruba origins. Both of these two learned men from Africa have come to know or read about the writings of Isma‘il al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Fazlur Rahman and other American Muslim scholars.²⁰ Mazrui has delivered the Isma‘il al-Faruqi lecture to the annual convention of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists and has collaborated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought established by al-Faruqi as well as with the School of Islamic Social Science.

The work of Virginia Commonwealth University professor Amina Wadud on Islam and gender has given her global visibility in the Muslim world, including Africa.²¹ The controversy surrounding her *khutbah* in South Africa several years ago was the first sign of her visibility in African intellectual and religious circles. Her latest foray into the

forbidden territory of imamship during moments of prayer has led to a new controversy, and African Muslims are already asking for more information about this new trend in American Islam. To date, there have been two divergent responses. One school of thought sees Wadud's action as yet another heretical act by the African-American Muslim community. The first was the deification of Farad Muhammad in the theology of the Nation of Islam; the new teaching by Wadud and her colleagues in the Progressive Muslim movement is the second. A competing school of thought offers some justification and support for her position. Ali A. Mazrui has written that Wadud can be seen as a latter-day Rosa Parks of the Muslim feminist movement, and that her unprecedented act makes her a pioneer for all women in the Abrahamic traditions.²²

It is therefore clear that American Muslim thinkers are gradually beginning to exercise some influence in African societies. The influence is reflected in references in bibliographies developed for courses on Islam or on religions in Africa, as well as in controversies about the Abrahamic religions in Africa and the Diaspora. American thinking about Islam also reaches Africans through the dissemination of materials written by famous African-American Muslims. Though Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik Shabazz) is not considered here as a scholar, his texts or texts associated with him have exercised some influence among Muslims in Africa, especially in South Africa.²³

The three American Islamic thinkers whose influence is most visible in West Africa and in Nigeria in particular, however, are Isma'il al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fazlur Rahman. Islam is currently a major bone of contention in Nigeria, and the work of American Muslim thinkers is especially relevant in the discourse about the future of Islamic thought there and elsewhere in Africa.

The influence of these three scholars can be found in the universities and colleges of Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa. The University of Ibadan offers a number of courses on Islam. Religious studies have occupied a place in its curriculum since the early days when the university was staffed by British colonial teachers. The teaching of Islam then reflected the curricula of the British universities, and the textbooks used were the ones that were found in departments of religion in British and Commonwealth universities. The introduction of texts from the United States became more commonplace in the post-colonial era when growing numbers of Nigerians studied in North America. Those who studied religion at McGill University in Canada or in United States universities in the 1970s and 1980s returned home with a knowledge of American Islam and American Muslim thinkers. Many of these Nigerian scholars also became familiar with interfaith dialogue.

The writers with whom they became familiar while in American (and, to some extent, European) universities were primarily al-Faruqi, Nasr, and Rahman, and the returning scholars introduced these authors' texts to their own students. Examination of the University of Ibadan catalog for the Department of Islamic Studies shows that the three writers' texts were used in the last decades of the twentieth century and are still being used. Their influence has been limited, however, by the phenomenon

described as “book famine” by the late Michael Crowder, a prominent student of African affairs.²⁴ The phenomenon, the result of poor political leadership and mismanagement of state finances over the last decades of Nigerian independence, has derailed Nigeria’s academic train, and secular courses as well as Islamic studies have suffered.²⁵ The Department of Islamic and Arabic Studies currently has no professor of Islamic Studies. The last person to serve in that capacity retired two years ago.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s work is known to two groups of African Muslims. The first is the Sufi-oriented Muslims whose cosmopolitanism has exposed them to global writings about Sufism; the second, African students of religion or African development who have been introduced to Nasr’s other books. This is why *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* is on the reading list of some courses at the University of Ibadan, Bayero University and others in northern Nigeria, while *Sufi Essays* is read both in university courses on mysticism and by some Western-educated members of Sufi brotherhoods in Africa and elsewhere in *dar al-Islam*.²⁶

Fazlur Rahman’s work is known to Africans who have had contact with modernist Pakistani Muslim intellectuals unaligned with Maulana Mawdudi’s movement.²⁷ His works are also read by many Nigerian and West Africans associated with members of the Ahmadiyya Movement.²⁸ Members of this group have had a tumultuous relationship with Maulana Mawdudi’s disciples in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Their sense of victimization by the *Jamiat Islami* (Islamic Party) in Pakistan leads to their sense of sympathy with Rahman, whose departure from his homeland was caused in large part by a negative reaction from Islamists who disagreed with his approach to Islam.²⁹

His influence in Africa is also the work of the African students, mentioned above, who studied in the United States during the Cold War. There were relatively few American universities that offered Islamic studies and so most African students met Rahman either at those universities, at annual conferences, or through their bookstores and university libraries. Those Nigerian and other African students who studied at the University of Chicago, Temple University, George Washington University, Howard University, Princeton University, Harvard University or McGill University were introduced to his *Islam and Modernity* and *Major Themes of the Qur’an* by Rahman’s academic children and grandchildren.³⁰ The career of Professor Sodiq Yushau, a Nigerian academic who studied under al-Faruqi at Temple University, suggests the importance of al-Faruqi’s students to Islamic studies in the United States and elsewhere. Yushau began his teaching career at Virginia Commonwealth University when al-Faruqi’s student Ibrahim Abu Rabia left for the Hartford Seminary, and moved to his present position at Texas Christian University when al-Faruqi’s student Imtiyaz Yusuf left that post for one in Thailand.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s influence in African academic circles comes primarily by reputation, without the intervening factor of organized promotion by disciples and colleagues. Al-Faruqi’s influence, by contrast, is the result of the circulation of his writings via the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, the Muslim Student Society of Nigeria, the

International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations and other Muslim organizations, as well as through the teaching of those who had close contact with him³¹ and the libraries in Nigerian universities and institutions (colleges of Arabic and Islamic studies) that have been established by Muslim philanthropists and organizations.

Al-Faruqi was prominent in southern Nigeria but less influential in Nigeria's northern universities before 1981, when the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was created in the United States. His influence in the north increased after the introduction there of the Islamization of knowledge program, which he originated, and particularly after 1986, when the Nigerian office of the IIIT was established under the leadership of Professor Madi Adamu, then Vice-Chancellor of Usman dan Fodio University, Sokoto.³² The fact that the Islamization of knowledge program was launched in the northern part of the country has led to the greater visibility of al-Faruqi's work there. Young academics in that part of the country are now fully aware of al-Faruqi and many of them are using his work as stepping stones in their own research. This has a great deal to do with the IIIT's Nigerian office, which undertakes an extensive list of activities. It organizes conferences and seminars on the Islamization of knowledge program in universities around the country, and collaborates and networks with other organizations. It also publishes the work of scholars and researchers on the Islamization of knowledge program and distributes (both without cost and for sale) journals and books on Islam. These include the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* as well as other work by American Muslim scholars.

The result has been the organization of more than 270 seminars on the Islamization of knowledge program. Disciples of al-Faruqi and the IIIT have established a temporary office and library in Bayero University in Kano; provided research grants to students pursuing bachelor and higher degrees, particularly on the Islamization of knowledge (the Usman dan Fodio University remains the only university in the country with a special program on the Islamization of knowledge); published a newsletter, *IIITN Newsletter* (IIITN is the acronym of the International Institute of Islamic Thought of Nigeria) and a journal (*al-Ijtihad*); and established the al-Faruqi Bookshop at Bayero University. This organized promotion of al-Faruqi and the IIIT has made al-Faruqi the only American Muslim thinker whose works have been translated into African languages, although there is an ongoing effort to translate works of other American Muslim scholars into Hausa.³³ There do not appear to be similar efforts in the southern part of Nigeria to translate these works into Yoruba, either because English is widely used among the Yoruba and no translations are needed or because of a lack of institutional support of the type available in the North.

CONCLUSION

A combination of unexpected historical circumstances facilitated the emergence of a vibrant Muslim community in the United States in the decades following World War II. Although 9/11 and subsequent measures such as the Patriot Act will continue to exercise great psychological and political impact on the way members of the

American society perceive their Muslim neighbors, the fact remains that American Muslims will continue to play an active role in the making and sharing of culture in this country. One can therefore anticipate that American Muslim thinkers will eventually be recognized for their contributions to American values.

The earlier warehouses and activities of Yankee traders in Africa and the post-World War II access of the African “Children of the Cold War” to American halls of learning have provided the platform for intellectual dialogue between Americans and Africans. The American academy not only provided the African students with American concepts and values but also brought attention to the intellectual products of the American Muslim community, in the work of writers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Isma‘il al-Faruqi, and Fazlur Rahman. The thread of immigration binds these scholars together. Not only were they the “Children of the Cold War,” in the sense that the moral contest between capitalism and communism opened the United States to peoples of the Third World, but their biographies fit the pattern of migration that the Abrahamic religions share in common. Their relocation to the United States can be seen as a secular version of *hejira* (the flight of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) from political tumult in their homelands.

This essay suggests that the current book famine in Africa, especially in countries such as Nigeria where universities and colleges have been forced to operate at less than full capacity, has limited not only the influence of American Muslims but all American thinkers whose books and publications are too expensive for the average undergraduate to buy. Unless corrective measures are taken, this phenomenon of book famine will impede both economic and cultural development in that part of the world.

NOTES

1. Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, John L. Esposito, eds., *Muslims' Place in the Public Square: Hopes, Fears and Aspirations* (Altamira Press, 2004); Mohamed Nimer, *The North American Muslim Resource Guide: Muslim Community Life in the United States and Canada* (Routledge, 2002); Abdelhamid Lotfi, *Muslims on the Block: Five Centuries of Islam in America* (Ifrane, Morocco: Al Akhawayn University Press, 2002); Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John L. Esposito, eds., *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States* (Altamira Press, 2003); Baha Abu-Laban and Michael W. Suleiman, eds., *Arab Americans: Continuity and Change* (Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989); Earle H. Waugh, Baha Abu-Laban, and Regula B. Qureshi, eds., *The Muslim Community in North America* (University of Alberta Press, 1983).

2. Sylvaine Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York University Press, 1998); Abdullah Hakim Quick, *Deeper Roots: Muslims in the Americas and the Caribbean before Columbus* (Ta-Ha Publishers, Ltd., 1996); Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Writers' Inc. International, 1995); Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (Routledge, 1997).

3. Sulayman S. Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America* (ABC International Group,

Inc., 1999); Yvonne Y. Haddad, ed., *The Muslims of America* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Michael A. Koszegi and J. Gordon Melton, ed., *Islam in North America: A Source Book* (Garland Publishing, 1992).

4. C. Eric Lincoln, "The American Muslim Mission in the Context of American History," in Waugh, Abu-Laban and Qureshi, op. cit., pp. 215-233.

5. Sulayman S. Nyang, "Continental African Muslims in the United States," in David Levinson and Melvin Ember, eds., *American Immigrant Cultures: Builders of a Nation* (Macmillan, 1997).

6. Sulayman S. Nyang and Mumtaz Ahmad, "The Muslim Intellectual Émigré in the United States," 59 *Islamic Culture* (July, 1985), pp. 277-290.

7. Aziz Batran, *Islam and Revolution in Africa* (Amana Books, 1954).

8. On Hamid Algar, see, e.g., *The Roots of the Islamic Revolution* (Open Press, 1983); *The Sunna: its Obligation and Exemplary Aspects* (Islamic Publications International, 2000); *Wahhabism: a Critical Essay* (Islamic Publications International, 2002).

9. The idea of intellectual influence is much debated among scholars of intellectual history. See, e.g., Kenneth R. Janken, "African-American and Francophone Black Intellectuals During the Harlem Renaissance," 60 *Historian* (Spring, 1998), pp. 487-506; Ramin Jahanbegloo, "The Fourth Generation of Iranian Intellectuals," *The Iranian*, November 2000, available at <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/2000/November/Jahanbegloo/index.html>; William M. Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (W.W. Norton, 1996).

10. George E. Brooks, *Yankee Traders, Old Coasters and African Middlemen: A History of American Legitimate Trade with West Africa in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston University Press, 1970).

11. For Liberian history and the rise of the Americo-Liberians and the Creoles of West Africa, see, e.g., J. Gus Liebnow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Indiana University Press, 1987); D. Elwood Dunn and S. Byron Tarr, *Liberia: A National Polity in Transition* (Scarecrow Press, 1988).

12. The term Afro-Saxons comes from Ali A. Mazrui, *The Political Sociology of the English Language: An African Perspective* (Mouton, 1975).

13. Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (W.B. Whittingham & Co., 1888; republished by Black Classic Press, 1994).

14. William P. Russel, *Multum in Parvo; or A Brief Display of More than a Thousand Errors in Each of the Undermentioned Writers* (London: Barrett, 1801), pp. 93-95, quoted in Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language* (University of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 106-107.

15. Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, *Islam in America: a Brief Statement of Mohammedanism and an Outline of the American Islamic Propaganda* (Oriental Publishing Co., 1893). For information about Webb, see <http://www.muslim.org/islam/webb1.htm> or <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Woods/4623/amexemtimes/amexem-times6.html>.

16. Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (W.W. Norton, 1982).

17. "Wonders of the African World with Henry Louis Gates Jr.," a six-part series, aired October 25-27, 1999 on PBS. The companion volume is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Wonders of the African World* (Knopf, 1999).

18. For coverage of the debate between Ali A. Mazrui and Wole Soyinka, see Ali Mazrui, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Soyinka: The Strange Case of Nobel Schizophrenia," available at http://www.binghamton.edu/igcs/igcs_site/dirton3.htm and [152](http://igcs.bing-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

hamton.edu/igcs_site/dirton3.htm. Soyinka's response to Mazrui is available at www.westafricareview.com/vol1.2/soyinka.html.

19. Lansiné Kaba, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa, 1945-1960* (Northwestern University Press, 1974).

20. For a bibliography of Isma'il al-Faruqi's writings and a discussion of his thought in the United States, see Muhammad Shafiq, *The Growth of Islamic Thought in North America: Focus on Ismail Raji Al Faruqi* (Amana Publications, 1994); John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2001). Discussion of the writings and activities of Nasr are in Mohammad H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Fons Vitae, 2003); Charles E. Butterworth, "Revelation Over Rationalism: the Thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr," 15 *Humanitas* (September 22, 2002), pp. 101-104; Peter Heinegg, "The Very Model of an Modern Muslim Eulogist," 52 *Cross Currents* (Winter 2003), pp. 569-571. For a bibliography of Fazlur Rahman and a discussion of his contributions to the study of Islam in the American academy by his colleagues and former students, see Earle H. Waugh and Frederick M. Denny, eds., *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman* (Scholars Press, 1998). See also Asma Afsaruddin's excellent review of the Waugh and Denny volume in 120 *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* (October 1, 2000), pp. 679-681.

21. For a sample of Wadud's writings, see Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999); "American Muslim Identity: Race & Ethnicity in Progressive Islam," in Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (One World Press, 2003).

22. Ali A. Mazrui defended Wadud in his Annual Mazrui Newsletter (Newsletter No. 29, Early 2005), at <http://www.alimazrui.com/>, pp. 12-13. On March 18, 2005 Wadud, a professor of Islamic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, led Friday prayers and delivered the sermon at a service in the Synod House of New York City's Cathedral of St. John the Divine. More than 100 men and women attended the service, which was held at a church because no mosque in the area would permit the use of its facilities.

23. For a discussion of the impact of Malcolm X in black intellectual circles in the United States and overseas, see John Henrik Clarke, *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times* (Macmillan, 1969; republished by Africa World Press, 1991).

24. Michael Crowder, "The Book Crisis: Africa's Other Famine," 41 *African Research and Documentation* (1986), pp. 1-6.

25. For a discussion of book famine in Africa, see also Garreth Byrne, "The Book Famine in Africa: A Former Teacher Observes," 284 *Contemporary Review* (April 2004), pp. 207-213, available at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2242/is_1659_284/ai_n6141912.

26. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Longman, 1975); *Sufi Essays* (G. Allen and Unwin, 1972).

27. Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) envisioned Islam as a political movement and called for the establishment of an Islamic state.

28. A messianic movement established in 1889 by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

29. Much of this section of the paper draws on the author's personal correspondence with Professor Afis Oladosu of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan.

30. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1982); *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

31. These include Nigerian Islamic scholars at the University of Ibadan, the

University of Ilorin, Olabisi Onabanjo University, the University of Lagos and Lagos State University, such as Prof. Babs Mala, the late Prof. M.O.A Abdul, Prof. D.O.S Noibi, Father Joseph Kenny, Prof. I. Oloyede, Prof. Y. Quadri, Prof. K Balogun, and Prof M. Opeloye.

32. The Islamization of knowledge project is an attempt to integrate the scientific method with the precepts of Islam. See, e.g., International Islamic Publishing House and International Institute of Islamic Thought, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (2nd ed., International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989).

33. One example is Tijani M. Imam's translation of Taha Jaber al-Alwani's *Adab Al Ikhtilaf Fi Al Islam* into Hausa.

New Horizons for the Influence of American Muslim Intellectuals in the Arab World

JOSEPH E. B. LUMBARD

INTRODUCTION—THE ARAB WORLD

While the Islamic world has undergone dramatic changes over the last two centuries, the changes have been particularly extreme in the Arab nations. Other Muslim countries such as Iran and Turkey have lost many peripheral territories, while maintaining much of their previous political and geographic continuity. In both its heartland and its periphery, however, the Arab world has been divided into many different political entities. It was not a completely unified political entity during the Ottoman period or before, but it had never been as divided in the history of Islam as it is today. There are now 22 countries in the League of Arab Nations, including entities as disparate as Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen and the Republic of Djibouti.

When one travels throughout the Arab world, one is aware of an enduring cultural homogeneity. With the increasing penetration of the “New World Order,” however, even this is crumbling, especially in the more Westernized countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. One must bear this in mind when considering any issue that pertains to the Arab world, whether it is political, economic, religious, or intellectual. Although still bound by religion and language, the Arab world is no longer a single entity. Though geographically adjacent to one another, countries like Egypt and the Sudan, or Syria and Jordan, are often worlds apart. Even within individual countries, the modern and the medieval seem to exist side by side, so that one might see a shepherd dressed in traditional Bedouin garb grazing his sheep across the street from a Starbucks coffee shop frequented by young Arabs wearing the latest western fashions. Such seismic shifts make it difficult to discuss any aspect of the Arab world in broad general terms. This is especially true when one turns to the intellectual scene.

There was great intellectual homogeneity in the Arab world of the pre-modern period. Many of the same basic texts in law, theology and other disciplines were studied and discussed in regions as far apart as Timbuktu in Mauritania, Nishapur in Iran and San’a’ in Yemen, and a traveling scholar or statesman could find a familiar intellectual milieu in almost every major Islamic city. Major books such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*¹ had an impact from Iran to Andalusia. In addition, the work of accomplished scholars would be recognized almost instantly.

By contrast, the intellectual of the contemporary Arab world may have attended either a traditional *madrasa* or a Western-style university. The products of the two educational systems may share the same concerns but will often have recourse to two or three completely different *weltanschauungs* when attempting to address them. In addition, the traditional homogeneity of the *madrasa* system has been compromised by state involvement. In Egypt, for example, al-Azhar University now offers classes in business,

modern economics and other non-religious topics, and the religious instruction is but a shadow of its former self. The current president of al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyib, has commented to this author that many of the instructors are only vaguely familiar with the central texts of their discipline and now teach their students instead from small pamphlets that they or their own teachers prepared. As a result, the classical tradition is being watered down and forgotten.

The traditional *madrassa* system has also been challenged by strident puritanical movements that attempt to side-step one thousand years of scholarship in an effort to return to the “golden age” of Islam. The result of all these changes is a bewildering array of perspectives with no central axis. Many who claim to be grounded in the classical tradition are in fact attempting to destroy it by undermining the schools of law and theology that have served the Arab world for over a thousand years. An example of this is the so-called *fatwas* issued by bin Laden and others. The 1998 *fatwa* urging *jihad* against “the Jews and the Crusaders,” for example, relies upon several Qur’anic verses and thus appears to be grounded in the classical tradition. Closer examination, however, indicates that all of the Qur’anic verses are employed in an innovative manner that runs counter to the treatment of these verses in traditional Qur’anic commentary.² This is merely one example of a technique that has now become widespread.

Much of the current intellectual diversity comes from the influence of Western political powers and Western philosophical schools. Everything from democracy to communism, from liberalism and structuralism to deconstruction and beyond, has found a following, of whatever size, in the Arab world. Marxism was a particularly popular alternative for many years and still has a subtle influence on the political opinions of many Arab thinkers. In some cases, Western philosophies have been completely rejected by the Arab world; in others, the result has been uncritical acceptance. Despite the fact that many Arab intellectuals have been heavily influenced by modern European thought, American and European Muslims have had little impact. While a figure like Muhammad Abduh, the Shaykh al-Azhar, may have been influenced by Western thought and culture and even by the Orientalist critique of Islam, there have been no similar figures deeply influenced by the thought of those Westerners who are Muslims.³ This is due in no small part to the place of the Arabic language in Islamic history.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF ARABIC

As the language of revelation and the language of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabic has always held pride of place in the Islamic world. Wherever Islam spread, Muslims have had to learn at least some Arabic in order to perform their daily prayers. Scholars could not but learn Arabic in order to help establish an Islamic legal system based upon the Qur’an and the sayings of the Prophet. When Islam spread to Persia, it was the Persians who perfected the science of Arabic grammar. Although many Persian Muslim scholars were tremendously influential in Islamic intellectual history in the Arab world, few wrote texts in the religious sciences in Persian. The fact that the great intellectuals of

the Persian world, from Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1128) of the Seljuk Empire to Mulla Sadra (c.1571-1640) of the Safavid Empire, were highly accomplished in Persian but wrote their seminal texts in Arabic. This is merely one example of the Arabization of Muslim intellectuals throughout Islamic history. The phenomenon is should be remembered as one attempts to assess the influence of any non-Arab intellectuals in the Arab world, for when it comes to Islamic knowledge, whether theology, law, mysticism, or Qur'anic studies, Arabs have rarely felt the need to familiarize themselves with developments in other languages. There are some exceptions to this, such as the importance of Turkish during Ottoman times. In religious matters, however, Turkish scholars were always forced to be more familiar with Arabic than were Arab scholars with Turkish. This was inevitable, given the centrality of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in what is a "religion of the book."

This Arabic-centric notion of Islamic knowledge continues to prevail today. In the modern period, one result is that while other parts of the Islamic world such as Iran, Turkey and Malaysia have developed extensive familiarity with religious thought in other lands, few in the Arab world are aware even of the names of famous American Muslim scholars. This author has asked many leading scholars in the Arab world about the influence of American Muslim intellectuals in their region and has found that many viewed the question as irrelevant. Others have replied that the Arab world has more to contribute to America in terms of Islamic knowledge and that the question should be about the influence of Arab Muslim intellectuals in the United States. Few are familiar with the names of specific American thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman and Khaled Abou El Fadl. While the two most recognized names are those of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Hamza Yusuf, it appears to be only their names that are recognized (or, in the case of Hamza Yusuf, only his television personality); little is known of their thought. Even some who are aware of them do not venture to read their books, nor are their books readily available. While almost all of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's books have been translated into Turkish and Persian, for example, only five or six have been translated into Arabic, and most of those are no longer distributed in bookstores. The only book of Nasr's currently available in Arabic bookstores is the recent translation of his *Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*.⁴

This author has been involved in attempts to have translations of Nasr's works prepared and published by al-Ahram, the largest publishing house in the Arab world. The response from a senior executive to a comment about how important it would be to translate *The Heart of Islam* and *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* into Arabic was one of bewilderment. "But we have many books on Islam in Arabic," he said; "Why would we need to translate these books from English?" Told that these books deal with issues pertaining to the difficulties that Muslims face in remaining true to Islam while living in the modern world, he became more open to the idea. Even after agreeing that Nasr's books constitute a unique contribution, however, he decided not to pursue the project because he could not foresee a large readership.

An important factor in the publisher's decision, and in any discussion of the impact of American Islamic thinkers, is that literacy rates in several Arab countries are quite low. Very few even of those Arabs who are well educated engage in leisure reading. One is often struck by how few homes, even in relatively educated and affluent households, contain bookcases. There may well be more books sold on Islam in the United States than are sold in Egypt, the most populous nation in the Arab world. A brief glance at publication rates around the world shows that Belgium publishes more books every year than the whole of the Arab world. This state of affairs merits further study, but it is beyond the parameters of this essay.

The low readership rates suggest that most Arabs receive their knowledge of Islam in a passive manner. Many are told what Islam is and what it entails, but are not invited by their religious and educational institutions to think critically about their religion and their history. Friday sermons continue to play an important role in shaping the understanding of Islam. This is complemented by information received in school and by educational sessions held in mosques or homes, where American Muslim intellectuals have had almost no influence. Even the mosque and the school are now less central in informing Muslims about Islam, however, as over the past twenty years, television has become the most influential and far-reaching medium for the dissemination of religious ideas in the Arab world. One American Muslim intellectual, Hamza Yusuf Hanson, has broken into the ranks of the Muslim televangelists in the Arab world, and in so doing he has become more influential on the popular level than all other American Muslim intellectuals combined.

HAMZA YUSUF HANSON

Hamza Yusuf (he prefers to be called by both names) is an American convert to Islam. Born into a Greek Orthodox family in Walla Walla, Washington, he embraced Islam in 1977 at the age of seventeen. He then dedicated himself to the study of Arabic and the traditional Islamic sciences, and spent the next ten years studying in various parts of the Arab world. Much of his knowledge of Islam was acquired in Mauritania. After returning to the United States and completing degrees at Imperial Valley College and San Jose State University, he began preaching. Over the past fifteen years Hamza Yusuf has gained a large following among young Muslims, both converts of European or African descent and second generation Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds. A gifted preacher, Hamza Yusuf's central message has been that one can continue to live by the principles of Islam in a modern environment, but that this requires a return to and reaffirmation of the traditional principles of Islam. In 1996 he founded the Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, California. The Institute, which has grown steadily, recently began publishing *Seasons*, a journal of Islamic studies, and is now developing a program for training young Muslim clerics.⁵

Hamza Yusuf became relatively well known among Muslim scholars in the Arab world during the 1990s, although this was through personal contacts rather than from any acquaintance with his thought. Westernized Muslims familiar with English were also aware of his many lectures circulating on tape and some had traveled to

attend his *Din* (religion) intensives where he and others would familiarize young Muslims with the basic practices and teachings of Sunni Islam. His influence in the Arab world multiplied exponentially in 2003, however, when he starred in a Ramadan television series entitled “*Yalla Shabab*” (O Young People). According to one Arab media mogul, this series “has transformed the nature of religious programming in the Arab world.”⁶ Hamza Yusuf has told this author that the goal of the program is to provide a more interactive mode of religious programming. Most religious programming in the Arab world consists of a preacher or scholar sitting down and lecturing to the public, but Hamza Yusuf considers views the autocratic nature of this programming to be responsible for turning youth away from Islam. “*Yalla Shabab*” was followed in 2004 by a similar program entitled “*Rihla* [Journey] with Sheikh Hamza Yusuf.” Both programs, mostly in Arabic, show Yusuf traveling throughout the world, mostly in the United States, with several Arab youths. In their travels they meet with figures as disparate as scholars such as Nasr, Umar Faruq Abdallah and Noah Feldman; American activists such as the parents of Rachel Corrie (a young American who was crushed by a bulldozer in Palestine); and the Muslim Music group *Native Deen*. Yusuf’s usual format is to begin with an informal interview, after which his young traveling companions chime in with questions and a discussion evolves. The objective is to promote tolerance through inter-civilizational dialogue and reflection upon the traditional teachings of Islam.

Each half hour segment originally aired right before the breaking of the fast during Ramadan 2003 and Ramadan 2004. Because most people are home and tired from the fast at that hour, it has become common throughout the Arab world to air special Ramadan television programming then. A program shown in this time slot on MBC (the Middle East Broadcasting Centre) in the Middle East is equivalent to one airing in the United States on NBC or CBS in a primetime Wednesday or Thursday night television spot.

“*Yalla Shabab*” and “*Rihla* with Sheikh Hamza Yusuf” were a tremendous success. As no polling data is available, it is difficult to measure the exact impact the two series have had. To someone living in the Arab world, however, it is clear that many who viewed them were enraptured, not only by what Hamza Yusuf had to say but by the sight of a Caucasian speaking fluent Arabic and knowing far more about Islam than even many well-educated Arab Muslims. Hamza Yusuf’s face is now known from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, and in some Arab countries he cannot walk down the street without being stopped for an autograph. The success of these programs is remarkable because the content is unlike anything else in Islamic religious programming. Watching Hamza Yusuf’s programs was the first time Arabs saw people such as Noah Feldman, a Jewish scholar of Islam at New York University, speaking fluent Arabic and expressing a nuanced understanding of Islam and the Middle East. They also witnessed Americans protesting the American war in Iraq, and many got their first taste of Islamic philosophy and the traditional principles of Islamic art. The success of Hamza Yusuf’s programs has propelled him

into the religious elite of the Arab world. He recently became the first Caucasian to be invited to perform the sacred task of cleaning the *Ka'ba*, an honor usually reserved for kings, princes and revered religious scholars.⁷

In addition to the direct influence he has exercised through his own Ramadan series, Hamza Yusuf has also served as a guide and inspiration for the young Egyptian television preacher Moez Masoud. Masoud hosts informal religious programs in English that first aired on the international cable channel Arab Radio and Television (ART) and are now replayed on the international Iqra' cable channel, owned by ART but devoted to religious programming. The format is much like that of "*Yalla Shabab*" and "*Rihla* with Sheikh Hamza Yusuf," except that the programs are filmed in a studio, rather than on multiple locations, and are in English rather than Arabic. Like Yusuf, Masoud has abandoned the traditional format for religious programming and turned instead to an interactive format in which young Muslims, male and female, discuss different aspects of Islam and how Islam impacts their lives. In a radical break from accepted norms for religious programming, Masoud asked to have women without the *hijab* (veil or head covering) appear on the program. "I was after reality," he says. "The show is a random group of Muslim youth who collectively attempt to understand the Qur'an. It does not represent a utopian world."⁸

Masoud has told this author that he has undergone a religious transformation since his early twenties when he was a student at the American University in Cairo. He met Hamza Yusuf after his own first television series, "Parables in the Qur'an." He described the series as "somewhat immature" and said that Yusuf and others have helped him to reach a more sophisticated understanding of Islam and thus reshaped the nature of his subsequent programs, "Stairway to Paradise" and "So Close No Matter How Far..."

The success that Masoud, still only in his mid-twenties, and Hamza Yusuf have achieved indicates that there is a great desire for this new interactive form of religious programming. MBC attempted to produce a similar program for a third straight year but was unable to reach an agreement with Hamza Yusuf. Nonetheless, it is likely that similar programming with Hamza Yusuf will appear in the next few years and that other religious programming following the informal discussion format introduced by Hamza Yusuf and Masoud will take hold. Though still in its infancy, this type of programming has radically challenged accepted norms for both form and content in Islamic religious programming. Hamza Yusuf may well prove to have a deep impact in the Arab world that extends far beyond his own programs.

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

The second most influential American Muslim intellectual in the Arab world after Hamza Yusuf probably is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Iranian by birth, Nasr has been well known to intellectuals in the Arab world for over forty years, although his influence has waned since he moved from Iran to the United States in 1980. In 1964-1965 he served

as the Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Studies at the American University in Beirut (AUB), where he delivered a series of public lectures entitled “Dimensions of Islam” that became the foundation for his *Ideals and Realities of Islam*.⁹ AUB was a bastion of Orientalism in the mid-1960s, and many within the university were opposed to the traditionalist thrust of Dr. Nasr’s lectures.¹⁰ The lectures nonetheless echoed a strong desire within the Arab world to reiterate the traditional teachings of Islam in a modern context. The lectures soon attracted a standing-room-only audience, and discussions of them appeared in newspapers in Lebanon, Jordan and Cairo.

After one year at AUB, Nasr returned to his native Iran, but his impact in the Arab world continued. He lectured regularly in Arab nations and was one of the main organizers of the first International Conference on Muslim Education, held in Mecca in 1977. In addition, his books *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, *Three Muslim Sages*, *Sufi Essays* and *Islamic Science: an Illustrated Study* were translated into Arabic.¹¹ All of this, however, occurred before he moved to the United States and became an “American” Muslim intellectual. While his direct influence has declined since then, his ideas have spread through the influence of many Western-educated Arabs, most of whom have read his works in English. Nasr’s greatest influence, however, which has gone relatively unnoticed by commentators, involves his teachings on Islamic art and spirituality. These have served as an essential catalyst for the first institute for classical Islamic Art in the modern Arab world.

In the late 1980s, Nasr was invited by King Hussein of Jordan to become the President of the Al al-Bayt University in Jordan. He declined the offer but suggested to the king that he create an institute for the study of traditional Islamic art and another institute for the study of traditional Islamic science. The latter has not been established, but Nasr’s suggestion about an institute for traditional Islamic art was realized in 1998 with the founding of the College of Traditional Arts and Sciences at Balqa University in Amman, Jordan. It is the only institute for the study of traditional Islamic art in the Arab world. In addition to providing hands-on training for undergraduate students, the college has hired many craftsmen who produce works for hire, and its more talented graduates are employed upon graduation. They work in all forms of Islamic art, including plaster, calligraphy, Qur’anic illumination, wood, and brass, and their work is increasingly in demand throughout the Arab world. They are now responsible for remodeling many of the offices of the royal family in the Jordanian Court and for the interior design of the Grand King Hussein Mosque, scheduled to open during Ramadan 2005. Their most impressive achievement has been the reconstruction of the *Minbar* (pulpit) of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi from the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. The *Minbar* was burned to the ground in 1967 and, due to the intricacy of the geometrical design, was not reconstructed. Working with a team of craftsmen, Minwar al-Meheid, the director of the institute, recreated the geometric patterns from old photographs. The craftsmen then reconstructed the traditional methods for creating these patterns out of wood without glue or nails and for the last four years have been

painstakingly recreating and assembling the *Minbar's* more than ten thousand pieces. When the project is completed, it will stand as one of the most significant modern artistic achievements of the Arab world in the modern era.

The College of Traditional Arts and Sciences has been growing steadily under the patronage of the Royal Hashemite family for the past seven years and will soon move to its own independent facilities. It has graduated an average of seven students per year, and that number has now increased to fifteen to twenty students per year. The college will soon begin a masters program in Islamic art and architecture. Minwar al-Meheid has been in close consultation with Nasr about the development of the institute. In 1999, Nasr and Keith Critchlow of the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts Department of the Prince of Wales' Institute of Architecture (VITA) in London went to Amman to help guide the college in establishing itself academically and intellectually. Minwar al-Meheid received a Ph.D. from VITA, where he had immersed himself in the perspective of the traditional school, represented by such figures such as Nasr, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, and Martin Lings.¹² It is their vision, according to al-Meheid, that dominates the school from theory to practice. Five of the six full-time teachers were trained at VITA and all of them are influenced by the traditional perspective. Because the college's students have not been trained to think critically and are often both confused by the traditionalist perspective and hampered by the lack of translations of the traditionalist writings on art available in Arabic, the college has produced a small volume of traditionalist writings translated into Arabic.¹³ It contains essays by Nasr, Burckhardt, Schuon, and René Guénon.¹⁴

The influence of the College of Traditional Arts and Sciences is beginning to be felt across the Arab world, as wealthy Arabs from countries beyond Jordan commission work from its craftsmen. Some members of the faculty have also proposed establishing similar schools in other Arab nations. The result could be a slow revolution in the attitude towards traditional Islamic art both in the Arab world and beyond. While not everyone will grasp the philosophy and the academic approach behind the work of the college, it will nonetheless have a subtle effect on all levels of society by promoting a return to the traditional arts that have been all but abandoned in the Arab world for most of the last fifty years. As Minwar al-Meheid observes, the presence of traditional Islamic art is one of the essential ingredients of a fully integrated Islamic society.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

What, then, do the Americans Hamza Yusuf Hanson and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have in common? Though of very different backgrounds and perspectives, they have both been trained by traditional Islamic scholars and possess intricate knowledge of the classical Islamic intellectual tradition. This training gives them legitimacy in the eyes of Arab scholars, and enables them to speak of modern issues in a language that is comprehensible to scholars trained in the classical tradition. They are also familiar with the Western intellectual tradition and are thus able to bridge the gap between the two worlds, helping their counterparts in the Arab world make better sense of the challenges facing them

from abroad. Perhaps most importantly, they both speak Arabic and are completely at home in Arab culture. They thus provide models for the ways in which American Muslim intellectuals can build stronger bridges for a meaningful discourse with Muslim intellectuals in the Arab world. Without such bridges, discussions of Islam between the Arab world and the United States will be composed only of juxtaposed monologues rather than true dialogue. The very different mediums of television programming introduced by Hamza Yusuf and the work of the College of Traditional Arts and Sciences established at the behest of Seyyed Hossein Nasr mark the beginnings of an important trend. With a whole generation of young traditionally-oriented American Muslim scholars now studying Arabic and the traditional Islamic arts in earnest, it is possible that the roads they have paved may become well traveled in the not so distant future.

NOTES

1. Muhammad Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (505-1111 A.D.) was the most influential Islamic philosopher of the medieval period; the 40-chapter *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* remains his most important work.

2. See David Dakake, "The Myth of a Militant Islam," in Joseph Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars* (World Wisdom Books, 2004), pp. 3-38.

3 Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), an Egyptian reformer and pioneer of Islamic modernism and nationalism, was one of the founders of the Salafiyyah movement that called for modernization based on Islamic principles. Perhaps his best known book is *The Message (Theology) of Unity (Risalat at-Tawhid)*, originally published in 1897, trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg (Allen and Unwin, 1966).

4. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Library of Islam, 1993; The Islamic Texts Society, 1999).

5. The Zaytuna Institute's website is at <http://www.zaytuna.org/>.

6. Author's conversation with a source who prefers to remain anonymous.

7. The *Ka'ba* is the sacred cubical shrine in Mecca toward which Muslims pray, and which according to Islamic tradition was built by the prophets Abraham and Ishmael.

8. Hadia Mostafa, "Best of Both Worlds" *Egypt Today*, February 2003, available at <http://www.moezmasoud.com/articles/articles37.html>.

9. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (Allen & Unwin, 1966).

10. "Traditionalist" is used here as Nasr defines it: "Tradition as used in its technical sense in this work, as in all our other writings, means truths or principles of a divine origin revealed or unveiled to mankind and, in fact, a whole cosmic sector through various figures envisaged as messengers, prophets, *avatars*, the Logos or other transmitting agencies, along with all the ramifications and applications of these principles in different realms including law and social structure, art symbolism, the sciences, and embracing of course Supreme Knowledge along with the means for its attainment." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (SUNY Press, 1981), p. 68.

11. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, op. cit.; *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhraward'i, Ibn 'Arab'i* (Harvard University Press, 1964); *Sufi Essays* (G. Allen and Unwin, 1972); *Islamic Science: an Illustrated Study* (World of Islam Festival Publishing Co., 1976).

12. Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) was a metaphysicist as well as a painter. Titus Burckhardt

(1908–1984), also a metaphysicist and a childhood friend of Schuon, was a major historian of Islamic art. Martin Lings, their close associate (1909–2005), was the author of works on Islam as well as the keeper of oriental manuscripts and printed books at the British Museum.

13. *Maqamat fi 'l-funun al-islamiyya* (Mashru'a al-tarjuma' al-mushtarak bayna Ma'had al-Funun al-Islamiyya wa Mua'sasa Al al-Bayt, 2003).

14. Like Burckhardt, Schuon and Lings, Renée Guénon (1886–1951) was a member of the traditionalist school and a critic of modernism.

15. Much of this paragraph draws on the author's conversations with Minwar al-Meheid in 2005.

Does Islam Encourage Pluralism? American Muslims Engage the Debate

JANE I. SMITH

Reflecting on the results of a Fulbright seminar held in September 2002, a year after the 9/11 attacks, sociologist Patricia Chang noted that many of the Muslim participants were perplexed rather than impressed by the apparent tolerance of Americans toward a diversity of faiths. “If you believe your religion to be true,” asked a Pakistani cleric, “and you believe it is your duty to share this truth with others, then why would you think that religious pluralism is a good thing?” Tolerance, Chang realized, can easily be understood as a lack of religious conviction or, worse, shameful hypocrisy.¹ She titled her reflections, “Puzzled by Pluralism.”

I think she is right – pluralism is a bit puzzling. So I set out to see what American Muslims, or at least those who have lived in the United States long enough not to be suffering too much from the cultural shock of our pluralist society, have to say about their religion and the pluralist challenge. I began with two general assumptions, both of which have been proven incorrect as I have worked through this material. The first was that there would be a plethora of writing about Islam and pluralism, especially since 9/11. Since that fateful September, there certainly has been a good deal of rhetoric insisting that Islam is not an exclusionary religion, and Muslims have been arguing with great skill and persuasion that the old Herbergian description of America as Judeo-Christian must be changed to include the Muslim presence.² In fact, however, the literary output in terms of sustained argument is short of overwhelming, and less credible effort has been made to locate Islam firmly in a pluralist America than I expected.

The second assumption I brought to this task was that clear efforts would have been made to distinguish between pluralism as a descriptor and pluralism as an ideology of inclusion. Much ink has, in fact, been spent on suggesting the existence of conditions of pluralism in a range of contexts: at the time of the Prophet and the revelation of the Qur’an, throughout the history of Islam in its relations with other communities of faith, within Islam in the contemporary world, and within the culture of the United States as Muslims reflect on their place in that culture. Only a few writers have tried to distinguish in their presentations between that kind of description and pluralism as an attitude, an approach to the world, and an affirmation that multiplicity is God’s choice. Some have discussed tolerance, described by Chang as the general attitude of Americans toward the

nation's many faith traditions, and have advocated it as an essentially Islamic attitude. Others have worried that tolerance as a response is tepid, almost insulting, and not representative of the insistence of the Qur'an on a truly positive attitude toward pluralism.

PLURALISM AND A "MODERNIZED" ISLAM

Most of the writers under consideration for this essay talk about pluralism in relation to religion, specifically Islam, and root their discussions in references to specific verses of the Qur'an. A few look at pluralism as a concept which they generally feel to be essential to a "modernized" Islam. Husain Kasim's *Legitimizing Modernity in Islam*, for example, responds quite specifically to the "clash of civilizations" theory that has become popularized since introduced by Harvard's Samuel Huntington.³ Kasim's primary theme is the discussion of values and norms that he sees as having to be grounded in rationality and guided by ethical discourse. Citing Habermas, Levinas, and Derrida, he is really trying to construct what he calls a "Muslim *modus vivendi*" in Western modernity. The meeting ground for pluralistic cultures is in the ethical discourse that allows for the universalization of norms. It is difficult to see in his argument, however, how that universalization can lead to other than what he ultimately identifies as Islamic ethical discourse.⁴

Pluralism for some of those writing in the "modernized Islam" genre means thinking about the application of Islamic law. Emory University law professor Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, for example, writing in *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, is concerned with the reality of minority communities in Muslim nations, a descriptor kind of pluralism, and tries to see how it can be made to work for non-Muslims. By rehabilitating *naskh* (abrogation), he says, essentially eliminating laws that are not consistent with universal human rights while affirming those sources that support universal rights, Muslims can establish the basis of legally applicable rules of Islamic law today.⁵ Others espouse a kind of Islamic political pluralism in their argument that Islam is compatible with liberal democracy. In an article entitled "Islam and Liberal Democracy," Laith Kubba makes the case that neither the Islamic way of life nor most current Islamic writing serves to support that compatibility, and in fact recent attempts to implement Islam in public life have, in his words, "produced dismal results." This has encouraged discussion about how to show that Islamic values do promote democracy, human rights and political pluralism. After lengthy argumentation, he concludes that this end can be accomplished by adopting open political systems and establishing democratic governments throughout the Islamic world.⁶

Sulayman Nyang of Howard University gave an innovative presentation on Islam and pluralism in Hartford, Connecticut in the late 1990s when he was a Luce Fellow at Hartford Seminary and the University of Hartford. Published as "Seeking The Religious Roots of Pluralism in the United States of America: An American Muslim Perspective," Nyang's presentation looked first at ways in which American Muslims, including secular humanists, social isolationists, and moderates sensitive to the realities

of pluralism within the Muslim community itself, view American pluralism. (He characterizes these groups, respectively, as grasshoppers, oysters and owls). Acknowledging that American Muslims need to leave triumphalism behind and remember the Qur'anic insistence that there is no compulsion in religion, he suggested that a number of emphases in American culture, including libertarianism, materialism, individualism and consumerism, make it difficult for Muslims to appreciate pluralism. If Muslims can promote dialogue about both their inner pluralism and the outer pluralism of Western society, he concluded, they can help create conditions and opportunities for developing public policies that are not "devoid of moral and spiritual content."⁷

Adrian College's Muqtedar Khan also treats pluralism primarily as a political concern, although with something of an opposite twist. One of the most frequently heard voices in the post 9/11 defense of Islam as a legitimate component of American culture, Khan contributed an essay entitled "Living on Borderlines: Islam beyond the Clash and Dialogue of Civilizations" to *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*. In it, Khan offers a critique of the West as unable to sustain a position of pluralism in the sense of an ideology rather than a descriptor.⁸ Because relationships between Islam and the West have taken place in what he calls "relations of power" rather than genuine dialogue, we have learned from each other under conditions of domination. Today, propaganda overrides truth, and because of the globalization of western values such as democracy, individualism, secularism and economic liberalism, it is impossible for the West in general and the United States in particular to tolerate any kind of international pluralism. Acknowledging that a similar charge could be levied against Islamic countries and cultures, Khan's main argument is that the West prefers intimidation to dialogue. One must conclude that for Khan, pluralism itself is held captive to the reality of the power equation.

PLURALISM AS AN ISSUE OF JUSTICE IN ISLAM

Several influential contemporary thinkers have chosen to address the question of pluralism and Islam in terms of internal critique. Acknowledging the inherently pluralistic nature of the faith, affirmed by the texts and demonstrated throughout its history, they focus on ways in which Muslims today have fallen short of the ideal and in fact have not given full recognition and voice to some of Islam's constituent members. This critique has been most evident within the American context in the voices of women and persons of minority racial-ethnic communities. If Islam truly affirms pluralism, they ask, why are these constituencies not being heard and taken into full consideration?

One of the most articulate spokespersons for the full inclusion of women in Islam based on scriptural authority is Amina Wadud of Virginia Commonwealth University. For well over a decade she has argued strongly for the importance of women becoming directly involved in what she calls an alternative exegesis of the Qur'an. A clear statement of her position is found in her "Alternative Qur'anic Interpretation and the

Status of Muslim Women.” When Muslims struggle with the idea of equality of women in postmodern discourse, she argues, there is a huge gap because of the historical silencing of female voices. Rhetoric alone will not serve to close the gap that results from the absence of women’s voices in scriptural interpretation. One way to close that gap is to employ what she calls the “new *ijtihad* approach,” an alternative and women-inclusive mode of Qur’anic exegesis that will result in a continual, and radical, rethinking of the meaning of the sacred text and of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Nothing short of this will serve to explicate the vision of the Qur’an fully and accurately for the true relationships between men and women. Islamic pluralism, in effect, will be allowed to show its true self.⁹

While Wadud is African American, the main focus of her ongoing work has been the rehabilitation of the Qur’anic interpretation of women and men rather than the status of Islamic racial minorities. Addressing the treatment of women but also bringing up concerns about prejudice against people of color, Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons of the University of Florida offers a straightforward critique of the failure of Islam to meet the challenges of genuine pluralism. She pulls no punches in her 2003 article, “Are We Up to the Challenge? The Need for a Radical Reordering of the Discourse on Women.”¹⁰ “Frankly,” she says, “I am tired of the contortions, the bending over backwards, and the justifications for the oppressive, repressive, and exclusionary treatment of women in majority Islamic societies as well as in minority Muslim communities in the U.S.A.”¹¹ While the force of the article is toward the rehabilitation of women’s full roles in Islam and Simmons, like Wadud and others, argues for a “gender-equitable interpretation of the Qur’an,” she also suggests that race and skin color distinctions, along with those of gender and class, have never been absent from Muslim communities.

Perhaps no one has addressed the issue of the lack of full inclusion of African Americans in the immigrant American community more engagingly than the University of Michigan’s Sherman Jackson, although the issue of race is only one concern in a very energetic agenda. Jackson identifies what he calls “the problem of the false universal” as the major concern Muslims will have to face in the 21st century. By “false universal” he means, in general, “a manifestation of history internalized, normalized, and then forgotten as history – at least for those on the inside looking out.” Specifically, he is calling attention to what he describes as the treachery of the non-inclusion of black American Muslims in the configuration of an American Islam. His most succinct description of “the false universal” can be found in a 2003 article entitled “Islam(s) East and West: Pluralism between No-Frills and Designer Fundamentalism,”¹² although he also talks about it in his recently published volume *Islam and the Blackamerican*.¹³ The reality of 9/11 has made it crucial that a reformed and pluralist Islam be honed for inclusion in American society. The danger comes when the dominant is equated with the universal; that is, when primarily imported and traditional interpretations of Islam are offered to the exclusion of others. He worries about what

he calls American Muslim romantics, among whom he classes Abdullahi an-Na‘im, who insist that Muslim tradition is the cause of many of Islam’s problems in the modern world. Rather, he says, the great promise of Islamic tradition is precisely its ability to accommodate what might even be “contradictory interpretations and expressions of Islam.”¹⁴ This heritage of Islamic pluralism and accommodation of difference he sees as essential to the future of Islam in the United States. Jackson worries deeply that western Muslims advocating reform, specifically the “romantics,” offer an Islam that is tolerant, nonviolent and egalitarian, but one that in fact is based on false universals. Ultimately, such an interpretation fosters neither pluralism nor tolerance. Jackson makes the effective case that a truly pluralistic American Islam will be one that fosters what he calls the inspiring concept of “the collective enterprises of good.”¹⁵

If Wadud, Zoharah Simmons and Jackson are arguing for a pluralistic and inclusive Islam in which all parties are genuinely included, Farid Esack comes at it from a somewhat different perspective in his opus *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism*. The subtitle, “An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression,” reflects the fact that Esack Farid writes out of his experience with struggles for liberation in South Africa. He is included in this essay on American Muslims because he identifies South Africa and the United States as his two current bases of identification and operation. Hermeneutical responses to a situation of oppression-liberation, such as those presented in the South African context, quite naturally involve the quest for pluralism, albeit one that exacts a high price. “For those who eke out an existence on the margins of society,” says Esack, “a pluralism of splendid and joyous intellectual neutrality is not an option.”¹⁶ True pluralism involves the liberation of all people in societies that are patriarchal, racially divided, and economically exploitative. Pluralism for Esack is thus both descriptive and prescriptive.

Esack serves as a helpful bridge into a discussion of the arguments put forward as to whether the Qur’an itself is truly pluralistic. He cites a number of verses which he calls cornerstones of the Qur’an’s acceptance of religious pluralism, regretting, as do Abdulaziz Sachedina, Khaled Abou El Fadl and others, that traditional interpretation of scripture sometimes has been used to circumvent this obvious intention.¹⁷ He identifies the doctrine of supersessionism as the culprit in the traditional refusal to acknowledge the validity of other religions for salvation.¹⁸ Of the many important insights that Esack shares in this work on liberation, however, he is particularly incisive in insisting that the pluralism of the Qur’an is not one that affirms complete equality for all positions. The Qur’an does not espouse a kind of liberal position in which coexistence means absolute equality. The Prophet and his community actively opposed beliefs that contravened the basic message of God’s oneness. Speaking of his experience with apartheid in South Africa, Esack says that the struggle made clear the fact that Otherness takes many forms, some of which must be opposed. Thus while a theology of religious pluralism is linked to a theology of liberation, “the vague liberal embrace of all forms of otherness”¹⁹ must be avoided.

PLURALISM AS A QUR'ANIC VISION

Thus far the writers we have considered use the Qur'an as a backdrop, or even a starting point, for their respective arguments for an understanding of pluralism in Islam but, with the exception of some of the pieces of the intricate argumentation laid out by Esack, they do not have an explication of Qur'anic perspectives on other religions as their specific focus. What follows is a consideration of those who do address this question, either generally or specifically. Some affirmed their positions before 9/11 while others are clearly writing in response to that event and its aftermath.

It is not really within the purview of this study to attend carefully to the assertions of those who share a more broad-based Sufi interpretation; a few references will suggest their general orientation. For the most part, such responses are affirmative of the commonalities among faiths, at least at the spiritual level, and for some, of the metaphysical unity of all faiths. Qamar-Ul Huda of Boston College, for example, argues that insofar as Qur'an verses addressed to Jews and Christians seem to be negative or condemning, they are simply responding to "the intense exclusiveness of each tradition."²⁰ Such verses, he says, attempt to inform this kind of exclusive thinking. They were revealed for several purposes, including correcting anything that deviated from previous revelations, asserting a continuity of monotheism, emphasizing the importance of one-to-one relationships with the divine, and underscoring the unity of the traditions. References to textual inconsistencies among Jews and Christians were not intended to imply that they lack divine truth, but to point out historical inaccuracies. One gleans from such an analysis that the unity of the traditions pertains only when it is basically an "Islamic" or "Qur'anic" unity.

The title of the article by Sufi Shaykh Kabir Helminski of the Mevlevi Order of Muslims in *Taking Back Islam: American Muslims Recall their Faith*, the post-9/11 volume edited by Michael Wolfe, is nearly as long as the essay: "Islam: A Broad Perspective on Other Faiths: A Sufi Poet and Scholar Finds Religious Pluralism Not Only Acceptable But Inherent in Islam."²¹ Helminski is not, of course, the first to take comfort in that discovery. He insists that God has not granted a spiritual monopoly to any one religion, that the Qur'an in fact encourages competition in virtue and goodness among all people of faith, and that Islam is uniquely positioned to serve as a reconciling force among different religions because at its core it promotes tolerance and respect for all. Not much is new here, as we can find a number of writings quoting such verses. What is significant, however, is the distinction made between Islam with a capital "I" and *islam* without that capitalization. It reminded me of the three years spent on my own doctoral dissertation trying to determine that distinction in the Qur'an, in light of the fact that the Qur'an does not have capital letters. Helminski in a few pages points to the distinction, beginning with Q 3:19, which says that the essential religion with God is Islam. His translation is not, however, capital "I" Islam but the term "submission." He argues heartily for the pluralist vision of the Qur'an, in which all faithful are (small "m") *muslims* in relationship with God, yet understands that even within this context of pluralism humankind is clearly warned against rejection of the signs of God.

In many ways, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, by Abdulaziz Sachedina of the University of Virginia, lays the groundwork for the commentary of a number of scholars who are considered below. The publication date is 2001, but it appeared before rather than after the attacks and the subsequent outcry for clarification about Islam. Sachedina is in search of a system of democratic pluralism within Islam that will maintain the equality and dignity of all humanity. He concludes both that the Qur'an provides "a prescription for coexistence among people of diverse faiths" and that Islam can serve as a model religion for furthering interpersonal justice within society.²² If Islam were to realize its own principles of justice, forgiveness and the forging of new social relationships, the result would be a pluralistic and democratic Muslim global community.

Sachedina proposes an Islamic theology that would foster the original pluralism of the Qur'an by taking into account the fact that human life is constantly changing. He introduces the concept of *fitra*, an individual's original state in response to revelatory guidance. In this natural state humanity is aware of good and evil, as well as the individual's relationship to the divine and to other people. In this sense, Sachedina views pluralism as the unity that binds all humanity in recognition of its natural predisposition. The Islamic ideal is a world community that shares a cross-cultural moral concern for egalitarianism. The author challenges Muslim thinkers and believers to pursue a discourse across cultures in which Islam, Christianity and Judaism provide guidance. Himself an Ithna Ash'ari Shi'ite, Sachedina criticizes both Sunnis and Shi'ites for having hindered the progress of Islamic tradition: Sunnis, for their exclusivist interpretations; Shi'ites, for putting limitations on who qualifies to use human reason in applying the teachings of the Qur'an. Sachedina, then, emphasizes a theology based on the Qur'anic acknowledgement of people of other faiths and on the recognition that all humanity is created in the nature of the divine. It is this Islamic definition of the other as a dignified creation of God that provides the basis of a public rationale for religious pluralism. Sachedina sees this as the foundation of a preventive diplomacy that can serve to promote democracy, communication and pluralism in the face of existing global violence.²³

In a much shorter piece entitled "Is Islamic Revelation an Abrogation of Judaeo-Christian Revelation?" Sachedina points to the efforts of some classical Muslim exegetes to separate their own salvation history from that of Christianity and Judaism.²⁴ Arguing much like Qamar-Ul Huda for the unity of humankind at the level of universal moral-spiritual discourse, he insists that nothing in the Qur'an, either directly or indirectly, serves to abrogate previous scriptures. Perhaps, he ventures, conversations about abrogation of the two scriptures by the Qur'an may have taken their cue from Christian discussion about Christianity having superseded Judaism. In the colonial and post-colonial period, he says, Muslim exegetes have to some extent recaptured the pluralist thrust of the Qur'an. Here again he affirms the essential unity of the belief of the *ahl al-adyan al-ilahiya* (people of the divine religions) based on three factors: their *fitra*, or innate disposition to believe in God; their continuous exposure to divine guidance through revelation; and their proclivity for doing good works. Of course, the unity is an

Islamic (or, we could say, an *islamic*) one. There is a refusal, says Sachedina, to restrict the Qur'anic promise of salvation to other monotheists, but of course his monotheism has an essentially Islamic definition.

The scope of Sachedina's thought, as that of Farid Esack, makes investigation of other contributors to the discussion on pluralism somewhat pale by comparison. We should nonetheless acknowledge again that both of those scholars made their respective cases before 9/11. Almost all the other commentators whose opinions are considered below wrote in the context of a post-9/11 defense of Islam for a questioning, and sometimes antagonistic, American audience. When UCLA professor Khaled Abou El Fadl published *The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourse*, for example, in which he defended pluralism as a descriptor for the great, complex and diverse civilization of Islam, the year was 1997. He argued (within the tradition) that Islam rejects elitism, that the truth is accessible to all Muslims regardless of race, class or gender, and that every Muslim may potentially be the bearer of God's truth.²⁵ By the time he published *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* it was 2002, and the emphasis shifted from relationships within Islam to those between Muslims and others. Is Islam tolerant of other religions? he asked, and not surprisingly determined that the answer is yes. Abou El Fadl's own contributions to the volume are a substantive first chapter and a concluding response to the responses of other thinkers to his proposals. He clearly writes in defense of an Islam other than that propagated by exclusionary, intolerant Wahhabism. His prose is straightforward as he attempts to answer the questions most on the minds of post 9/11 Americans about killing in the name of Islam, *jihad*, the categories of *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam*, the poll-tax on *dhimmis* (Christian and Jewish members of Islamic states), and so-called Muslim intolerance.

Abou El Fadl tries to provide a context for Qur'anic verses that may in themselves appear exclusionary, stressing the importance of historical circumstances and of the moral construction of meaning over a literal reading of the text. The Qur'an both accepts and expects the reality of difference and diversity insofar as diversity is a primary purpose of creation. He defends Islamic civilization as both diverse and, on the whole, remarkably tolerant. Going somewhat further than most of his co-religionists, Abou El Fadl says that while the Qur'an clearly claims absolute truth for Islam, "it does not completely exclude the possibility that there might be other paths to salvation," that "the Qur'an recognizes the legitimate multiplicity of religious convictions and laws," and that "it is possible for non-Muslims to attain the blessing of salvation."²⁶ Rather than press the theological ramifications of such potentially radical conclusions, however, he retreats into a discussion of the Qur'an's insistence that there is no compulsion in religion, that war is never holy, and that non-believers are not to be subordinated. It is, he insists, the responsibility of contemporary Muslim interpreters of the text to affirm its message of tolerance and openness to others.

Several contributors to the volume, a few of them American Muslims, replied to Abou El Fadl's essay. Sohail Hashmi questions what Abou El Fadl means by the term "tolerance" and insists that the history of Islam contains more intolerance than the author is

willing to admit. Muslims societies, in short, have fallen short of the Qur'an imperative.²⁷ Hashmi gives a purposefully positive spin to tolerance, affirming that religious difference is not just a necessary evil but a reality to be embraced by those who seek the truth (based on the Qur'anic invitation to religious people to vie with each other in righteousness). He advocates a new exegetical course, but on the whole neither adds to nor confirms Abou El Fadl's assertions about the lack of absolute truth claims in the Qur'an. Neither do Amina Wadud, who in this volume urges a collaborative effort between intellectuals and lay Muslims in understanding the tolerance of the Qur'an, or Akeel Bilgrami, whose main point is that only democracy will allow the voice of tolerance in Islam to prevail.²⁸ Abou El Fadl's response suggests that the real question is not about Muslim tolerance but whether non-Muslims are willing to be tolerant of Islam.

The theme of justice in relation to pluralism has been a recurrent one, as we have seen. In his introduction to *Progressive Muslims*, Colgate University professor Omid Safi sets the tone for the book by insisting that pluralism is both the by-product and the presupposition of justice. Like Abou El Fadl, he is writing specifically in the post 9/11 period to offer an alternative to Wahhabism. "An important part of being a progressive Muslim," he says, "is the determination to hold Muslim societies accountable for justice and pluralism."²⁹ To be a pluralist Muslim one must think not only about the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, but about how to live on this planet in harmony with all living creatures. It means, he insists, challenging interpretations that he groups together as exclusivist, violent and misogynist. We must open up a place for the many Muslims, he asserts, who aspire to justice and pluralism.

Safi explicitly challenges those who envision an Islam that is merely tolerant, arguing that the truly pluralistic society that Muslims must struggle to foster is one in which "we honor and engage each other through our differences and our commonalities."³⁰ Reminding us that we all have the same breath of God in our being (Q 15:24, 38:72), he insists that the test of true pluralism is the openness to engage what he calls sources of wisdom and compassion, from wherever they come. He picks up a piece of the pluralism agenda proposed originally by Farid Esack in urging that Muslims might be aided by studying Christian liberation theology, which could help them speak out against oppression in Islam. Unlike Esack, he does not acknowledge that he has already engaged in such study himself.

Among the contributors to Safi's volume on progressive Muslims is Amir Hussain of California State University. Hussain addresses pluralism from the perspective of inter-faith dialogue.³¹ He offers a helpful addition to the conversation, if one that is a bit longer on generalities than on creative contributions as to how to challenge some of the theological impasses that recur in Christian-Muslim encounters. Hussain, like some others, defends pluralism as an ideology based on certain verses of the Qur'an, though he does not distinguish clearly between the reality of the diverse context in which the text was revealed and the ideology of pluralism. He does not attempt to "explain away" less inclusive verses on the basis of context or general intention, but acknowledges that

the Qur'an is, in some passages, less than inclusive. In general, however, he interprets the text as pluralistic on the grounds that it "sets forth perennial principles of humane behavior."³² One of the major challenges for Muslims as they engage in serious inter-faith dialogue, he says, is the fact that the Qur'an really does seem to say different things in different places about the relationship between Muslims and members of non-Muslim communities. The challenge to dialogue is to come to terms with the full range. Some verses can be used both to defend good relations and build bridges between faiths and to justify mutual exclusivism. Ultimately, of course, he admits that the litmus test is whether a dialogue partner is other than a monotheist, which must be the boundary of an Islamic religious pluralism. "Admittedly, there is a difference in dialogue and relationships with those other than Jews and Christians. As Islam is a strictly monotheistic religion, Muslims believe that the most grievous sin is polytheism."³³ Hussain, along with a number of other commentators, looks to verses like Q 49:13 which affirm God's intention to create humanity as tribes and nations, and those guaranteeing that there is no compulsion in religion.³⁴ These verses mean that God was addressing all humanity and not just Muslims, he says; that diversity has a positive value; and that people are encouraged to learn from their differences.

One volume openly challenges the Christian theological position of pluralism, especially as it is articulated by the British/American philosopher and theologian John Hick. Muhammad Legenhausen finds this kind of fully open pluralism, in which all religions are seen to contain truth, just as they all foster both helpful and unhelpful mythologies, categorically unacceptable. In *Islam and Religious Pluralism*,³⁵ written in 1999, Legenhausen refutes both liberal theological pluralism and what is often described as the "intermediate" Christian theological position between pluralism and exclusivism; namely, the so-called "inclusivist." While Legenhausen's criticisms are clear and unsurprising, it is somewhat difficult to grasp just what kind of Islamic pluralism he is advocating. Using the label "Islamic non-reductive pluralism," he says that we must admit our ignorance about exactly how God provides guidance to the sincere. He does find some value in Hick's denial of traditional Christian dogma about the Incarnation of Christ and his display of a tolerance that is not only admirable but is demonstrated more completely in the Islamic tradition. The bottom line of Legenhausen's Islamic non-reductive pluralism, however, seems to be his conclusion that, "[T]hose who choose a religion other than Islam are making a mistake,"³⁶ whether it is done willfully and thus sinfully, or simply because they have made an excusable error.

Two contributions to the conversation about pluralism remain to be examined. The first is that of Mohamed Fathi Osman, of the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in Los Angeles. Pluralism is one of the mainstays of Osman's ongoing messages about Islam in the West, and is the particular focus of works such as his 1996 *The Children of Adam: An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism* and his 1998 article, "Monotheists and the 'Other': An Islamic Perspective in an Era of Religious Pluralism."³⁷ While pluralism initially meant ethnic and religious differences, he says, it came to be extended to the

understanding that because there is no single understanding of truth, many beliefs and communities must enjoy equal legitimacy. He finds this concept supported in Q 49:13.³⁸ Pluralism in this sense must be on the basis of equality for all participants and cooperation for the benefit of all. Muslim theologians have struggled over the question of whether “Truth” is one or manifold, and have generally concluded that were it to be *one*, only God would know its meaning and humans would of necessity vary in their understanding.³⁹ Pluralism is thus the positive affirmation of both particularity and diversity, based on constructive moral and practical relations. Osman is always careful to describe societies in which pluralism means equally responsible females and males, insisting the Qur’an provides no grounds for gender discrimination. He makes the interesting point that while pluralism can be presented as a rational ideology, “intellectual understanding...does not provide the same moral depth as spiritual conviction and religious commitment.”⁴⁰ While the writers we have considered thus far have chosen to limit their religious pluralism to an inclusion of People of the Book, Fathi Osman goes farther. Stressing the importance of dialogue among Muslims, Jews and Christians, he also makes it clear, on the basis of the Qur’anic insistence that every human being has a spiritual compass and dignity granted by God (Q 17:70), that the conversation should be extended to include Buddhists, Taoists, and members of other faiths. “The diversity of humankind is enriched by the way in which individual and group specialties can complement each other through interaction and cooperation,” he says, citing Q 49:13. “The inborn differences represent an enriching variety.”⁴¹ That said, and he makes the point more than once, the main focus of Osman’s talk about pluralism remains within the Abrahamic family, reminding Muslims of the common ground shared by all People of the Book in having been the recipients of the divine book of God. Unwilling to give up monotheism as an absolute, and yet insisting on an ultimately broader definition of pluralism, he says, “Monotheists have to stand together in developing a monotheistic morality among believers in the One God, and morality in general among all people everywhere.”⁴²

Pressing somewhat the same point as the Sunni Egyptian Osman about an ultimately broader pluralism, Isma’ili Harvard scholar Ali Asani seems to take it a step further. Asani, unlike Osman, clearly wrote his article “On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur’an” in the aftermath of 9/11.⁴³ Asani makes many of the same points echoed by others who want to affirm the pluralistic nature of Islam, giving examples of tolerance in the history of Islam, the Qur’an’s affirmation of both universality and plurality, and the scriptural insistence that there is no compulsion in religion. His original contribution, at least in terms of the writers considered in this essay, is his move to expand the term “People of the Book” to include other religious groups such as those encountered by Muslims in the early days of the spread of Islam (he notes in particular the Zoroastrians in Iran and the Hindus and Buddhists in India). Not all Muslims would feel comfortable about stretching the concept of People of the Book in this way, he admits, but in Asani’s understanding, “the fact remains that these types of interpretations were made possible by the pluralistic nature of the Qur’anic worldview.”⁴⁴



So we return to the question of the Pakistani cleric with which we began: “If you believe your religion to be true...then why would you think that religious pluralism is a good thing?” The authors cited in this review are not clerics but academics, and they are speaking not just to their own faith communities but to both the academy and a larger public audience. In many cases they insist on the inherent pluralism of Islam, defending the inclusion of this faith within pluralist American society in light of post-9/11 critiques of Islam as monovocal, violent and exclusive.

These contributors to the discussion agree in one way or another that:

- (a) the Prophet faced situations in which different religious communities had to be addressed;
- (b) throughout history, Islamic societies existed in circumstances of pluralism, both internal and external;
- (c) the contemporary pluralist world in general, and American society in particular, must find ways in which to respect difference and foster cooperation (some of these authors write specifically to affirm the affinity of Islam and democracy);
- (d) all of these realities must be seen in light of the essentially pluralistic message of the Qur’an in which it is affirmed that God created *different* nations and tribes, that there is *no* compulsion in religion, and that only God is the ultimate knower of truth.

Pluralism, in the explicit understanding of many of these analysts, must include justice and equal opportunity (and equal treatment) for all.

The differences, if they are such, perhaps lie in the definition of “all.” A few authors are clear that Islam so obviously reflects the truth of God that no other choice is possible. Pluralism for them seems to have a very tight definition, and sometimes seems more a philosophical imperative than a religious affirmation. Others insist that as the Qur’an affirms a continuing revelation to all People of the Book, pluralism means the acceptance of all monotheists as believers who can attain salvation. Among those who affirm this position, some defend the verses that seem to speak ill of Christians and especially of Jews on the basis of different contexts of revelation and of the overall pluralistic affirmations of the Qur’an. Still others admit that certain verses really are negative, and that dialogue has to come to terms with the apparently exclusive as well as obviously inclusive passages as honestly as possible. A very few are willing to say that the pluralism affirmed in the Qur’an is one that must find ways to relate to and accommodate those beyond the category of People of the Book (or, as in Asani’s case, even to make the category itself more inclusive).

But therein lies the real problem. The essence of Islam is the understanding of monotheism. There is only one God, and those who believe otherwise are specifically accused in the Qur’an of having committed the sin of *shirk*, or association with God. Can full acceptance, or even the milder “tolerance,” really be applied to the understanding of those who believe

in many manifestations of God or even no ultimate God at all? Most Muslims find such an idea virtually impossible to accept. Tightening the circle, can it be said that Christians, as People of the Book, are fully accepted under the umbrella of pluralism if they insist on the divinity of Jesus? The answer would seem to be no, but few of those who are arguing for Islamic pluralism choose to address that head-on. Including Christians in the category of monotheists affirms the original revelation to Jesus and his community, not later theological versions. Finally, then, for most Muslim theorists and theologians, pluralism can accommodate only the response of *islam*, the small “i” submission that is the innate and natural recognition of the divine *one*.

Then what *does* one do with those Qur’anic verses that clearly and specifically affirm difference and promise that no person is under any religious compulsion? If a theological pluralism, such as that espoused by certain liberal Christians (recall Esack’s warning about “the vague liberal embrace of all forms of otherness”), simply is not possible in Islam, can one persuasively posit an Islamic way of understanding that affirms different religious cultures? The writers whose works are considered in this essay clearly believe that the answer is yes, both because current conditions mandate such understanding and because the Qur’an—at least in some verses—does seem to affirm it. The task has been engaged, but it is fair to conclude that it has certainly not been completed. Why would a Muslim think religious pluralism is a good thing? The Qur’an gives good clues, but not a definitive answer. We will no doubt see even more attempts to frame a positive response to the question in the very near future.

NOTES

1. Patricia Chang, “Muslim Visitors Question the American Way: Puzzled by Pluralism,” *The Christian Century*, September 6, 2003, pp. 8-9; available at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2894>.

2. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Doubleday, 1955).

3. Husain Kasim, *Legitimizing Modernity in Islam: Muslim Modus Vivendi and Western Modernity* (Edwin Mellow Press, 2005); Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” 72 *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), pp. 22-50, available at <http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/misc/clash.htm>; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

4. Kasim, op. cit., pp. 138-146.

5. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse University Press, 1990).

6. Laith Kubba, “Recognizing Pluralism,” 7 *Journal of Democracy* (April 1996), pp. 86-89; available as “Islam and Liberal Democracy,” http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v007/7.2kubba.html.

7. Sulayman Nyang, “Seeking the Religious Roots of Pluralism in the United States of America: An American Muslim Perspective,” 34 *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1997), pp. 402-417.

8. M.A. Muqtedar Khan, “Living on Borderlines: Islam Beyond the Clash and Dialogue of

Civilizations,” in Zahid H. Bukhari et al., eds., *Muslims’ Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations* (Altamira Press, 2004), pp. 90–93.

9. Amina Wadud, “Alternative Qur’anic Interpretation and the Status of Muslim Women” in Gisela Webb, ed., *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 3–21.

10. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, “Are We Up to the Challenge? The Need for a Radical Reordering of the Discourse on Women,” in Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oneworld, 2003), pp. 236–248.

11. Op. cit., p. 235.

12. Sherman A. Jackson, “Islam(s) East and West: Pluralism between No-Frills and Designer Fundamentalism” in Mary L. Dudziak, ed., *September 11 in History* (Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 112–135.

13. Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

14. Jackson, “Islam(s),” op. cit., p. 115.

15. Op. cit., p. 132.

16. Farid Esack, *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism* (Oneworld, 1997), p. 78.

17. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Khaled Abu El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam: an Islamic Perspective on Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Beacon Press, 2002).

18. Supersessionism is the belief that Christianity is the fulfillment of Biblical Judaism, and that Jews who deny that Jesus is the Messiah are no longer among the Chosen People.

19. Esack, op. cit., p. 179.

20. Qamar-Ul Huda, “Knowledge of Allah and the Islamic View of Other Religions,” 64 *Theological Studies* (2003), pp. 278–305; available (for fee) at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_go2217/is_200306/ai_n8647368.

21. Shaykh Kabir Helminski, “Islam: A Broad Perspective on Other Faiths: a Sufi Poet and Scholar Finds Religious Pluralism Not Only Acceptable But Inherent in Islam,” in Michael Wolfe, *Taking Back Islam: American Muslims Recall Their Faith* (St. Martin’s Press, 2002), pp. 153–157.

22. Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, p. 139.

23. Op. cit., pp. 11–14.

24. Abdulaziz Sachedina, “Is Islamic Revelation an Abrogation of Judaeo-Christian Revelation?” in Hans Kung and Jürgen Moltmann, eds., *Islam: A Challenge for Christianity* (Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 94–102.

25. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Authoritative and Authoritarian in Islamic Discourse: A Contemporary Case Study* (Dar Taiba, 1997), p. 16.

26. Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, op. cit., p. 17. The volume, edited and with a preface by Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague, consists of an essay by Abou El Fadl and commentaries by Milton Viorst, Sohail H. Hashmi, Tariq Ali, Abid Ullah Jan, Stanley Kurtz, Amina Wadud, Akeel Bilgrami, Mashhood Rizvi, John L. Esposito, Qamar-Ul Huda, and R. Scott Appleby, along with a final response by Abou El Fadl.

27. Sohail Hashmi, “A Conservative Legacy,” in Abou El Fadl, op. cit., pp. 31–36.

28. Akeel Bilgrami, “The Importance of Democracy,” in Abou El Fadl, op. cit., pp. 67–71.

29. Omid Safi, “Introduction: ‘The Times They are A-Changin’: a Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism,” in Safi, *Progressive Muslims*, op. cit., p. 2.

30. Safi, op. cit., p. 24.

31. Amir Hussain, "Muslims, Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue," in Safi, op. cit., pp. 251-269.
32. Op. cit., p. 258.
33. Op. cit., p. 265.
34. "O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another..."
35. Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (Al-Hoda, 1999).
36. Op. cit., p. 176.
37. Mohamed Fathi Osman, *The Children of Adam: An Islamic Perspective on Pluralism* (Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Occasional Paper Series, 1996); Mohamed Fathi Osman, "Monotheists and the 'Other': An Islamic Perspective in an Era of Religious Pluralism" in *LXXXVIII Muslim World Journal* (July-October 1998), pp. 353-363.
38. See footnote 33, above.
39. Osman, *The Children of Adam*, op. cit., p. 15.
40. Osman, op. cit., p. 45.
41. Osman, "Monotheists and the 'Other,'" op. cit., p. 354.
42. Op. cit., p. 363.
43. Ali Asani, "On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an," 71 *The American Scholar* (Winter 2002), pp. 52-60. A very similar piece, available on the web for free, is Ali Asani, "So That You May Know One Another: a Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam," 588 *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2003), pp. 40-51.
44. Op. cit.

On Muslims Knowing the “Muslim” Other: Reflections on Pluralism and Islam¹

ALI S. ASANI

O humankind We [God] have created you male and female, and made you into communities and tribes, so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest amongst you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is All-knowing and All-Aware. (Q 49:13)

In my professional life as a scholar of Islam, I have often been asked whether Islam is truly a religion that advocates tolerance of peoples of other faiths. Does it encourage Muslims to live in peace with non-Muslims, or is it an ideology that is prone to create conflict, be it interreligious, intercultural or international? Furthermore, I have been asked to comment on the role that Islamic religious beliefs play in instigating individual Muslims to commit acts of terrorism and violence against peoples of other faiths. What I am rarely asked are questions concerning tolerance within Islam: how do Muslims handle differences among themselves regarding doctrine, ritual practice and other matters of faith?

I personally became aware of issues concerning tolerance for religious diversity within Islam when, many years ago, I left my home in Kenya and came to the United States to attend Harvard College. During my first year of undergraduate study, I enrolled in an intensive course in Arabic taught by a visiting professor from Lebanon. One day, during the second semester of the course, the professor, who was a Sunni Arab, asked me to which denomination of Islam I belonged. When I replied that I was a Shi‘a Muslim, an Ismaili,² he looked stunned and exclaimed in Arabic, “*la hawla wa la quwwat illa billah*” (“There is no protection or strength except with God”), a remark usually made when someone is truly shocked or seeks God’s protection from evil. That moment was the first time that my identity as a Muslim had been challenged. Three decades later, after having taught a variety of courses on Islam at Harvard, I still overhear remarks by a few—some Sunni Muslim students that impugn my ability to teach Islam – not on the basis of my academic qualifications or publications, but simply because of the particular Muslim community to which I belong. Even a prominent and highly-respected Sunni Muslim scholar of Islamic Studies remarked publicly at an academic conference, “What does he know about real Islam? He is Ismaili.” The intent of such comments is clear: they are intended to marginalize and hence de-legitimize whatever thoughts, opinions and ideas I have about Islam because I am judged not to be a “proper” Muslim.

Viewed from the perspective of Islamic history, these attitudes are hardly surprising for, as a minority within a minority, the Ismailis, with their distinctive interpretation of what it means to be Muslim, have been marginalized and variously stereotyped as heretics and infidels by the Sunni majority. Historically, in the face of persecution from various Sunni Muslim religious and political authorities, the Ismailis have sometimes been forced, like other Shi‘a groups, to resort to *taqiyya* — the concealing of one’s true

religious identity. *Taqiyya* was an expedient measure of self-protection adopted by the Shi'a when large numbers of adherents were killed because of their beliefs. Although such overt persecution has abated in recent decades, virulent anti-Ismaili campaigns continue to flare up in several countries, often incited by Sunni Wahabi-Salafi groups. The most recent instance has been in Pakistan, where the *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (United Action Front), a coalition of religious parties allied with the government of General Pervez Musharraf, has been agitating to introduce legislation to declare the Ismailis, or Aga Khanis, as they are often pejoratively called, to be non-Muslim.³

Thankfully, not all Muslims have been so bigoted and narrow-minded. There are those whose interpretation of Islam is humanist in spirit and influenced by traditions of ecumenism and who have been willing to embrace Ismailis as co-religionists, even though they may be unable to understand or agree with their doctrines and ritual practices. Humans, these Muslims claim, are not the final arbiters of faith – God is. As long as an individual recites the *shahadah*, the testimony of faith, and considers himself or herself to be Muslim, he or she belongs within the Muslim *ummah*, the worldwide community of believers. Whether and how one practices one's faith is an affair between the individual and God, provided one's beliefs do not harm society.

Clearly, there are glaring inconsistencies in the manner in which Muslim communities respond to diversity. In this essay I will reflect on Muslim attitudes toward religious pluralism in two related contexts: inter-religious – that is, Muslim attitudes to non-Muslims and their religious traditions, and intra-religious – that is, attitudes toward diversity of religious beliefs amongst Muslim communities. I will focus particularly on the latter (intra-Islamic pluralism) since this is a subject that most Muslims regard as taboo. There are several reasons for the reluctance of Muslims to engage with this topic, perhaps the most significant being that many Muslims, in the contemporary context in which Muslim identities and cultures are being threatened by non-Muslim (western) hegemonies, mistakenly perceive that acknowledging and accepting a plurality of religious beliefs and practices amongst themselves is a sign of disunity and hence weakness. They therefore respond to questions concerning diversity of interpretation and practice within Islam by vehemently denying that it exists. Differences among Muslims are cultural, not religious, they proclaim; there is “only one” Islam. As Tariq Ramadan aptly points out, this conception of Islam as a uniform theological monolith, and the inability to recognize and engage with intra-Muslim religious diversity, have resulted in the strange situation where Muslims, either as individuals or groups, will ignore or exclude one another and yet claim to the outside world that we are all brothers and sisters.⁴ Such enigmatic attitudes have deeply impacted the way in which Muslims understand the concept of pluralism.

At the outset I should clarify that by pluralism I intend not merely the acknowledgement, acceptance and tolerance of diversity but an engagement with diversity that is based on respect for difference. Pluralism does not mean the elimination of difference. As my colleague Diana Eck points out, “pluralism is engagement with, not abdication of, differences and particularities.” To engage in pluralism is, therefore, to

attempt to understand and appreciate how the other, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, is different. To talk about Muslim attitudes toward pluralism, whether inter-religious or intra-religious, is to confront a paradox, by no means unique to Islam, of a religious tradition and its texts being used for contradictory goals: on the one hand, to promote pluralism, harmony and tolerance; on the other, to justify intolerance, persecution, war and even killing. Such contradictory attitudes, in my opinion, can be only partially explained by pursuing a purely textual approach that highlights those verses in the Qur'an that Muslims of various persuasions often use as proof-texts to legitimize their positions, be they exclusivist or pluralist. They are better understood by examining the manner in which interpretations of the Qur'an and its teachings are influenced by the contexts in which Muslims live. In other words, explanations should be sought in the lived experiences of Muslims, realizing that their interpretations of religious texts, either individually or communally, are influenced by a complex web of religious, social, cultural, political, and economic factors. These factors may be specific to a local context or, as we have seen in the last two or three centuries, they may be transnational in nature, responding to the dynamics of competing global political and cultural hegemonies. A contextual approach, rather than a strictly textual approach, I submit, helps us better explain the conflicting and contradictory attitudes in Muslim societies on pluralism and related issues such as respect for difference, freedom of thought and freedom of religious belief.

With regard to inter-religious pluralism, a convincing case can be made for the existence of a strong pluralist ethos within the Qur'an and the *hadith* (sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad), the major scriptural sources of Islamic thought. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere,⁶ this ethos is evident in many ways. For example, I cite here a conception central to Muslim understandings of religious diversity: God's message is universal, but its manifestations are plural and revealed through multiple prophets. This idea provides the basic underpinning for the manner in which the Qur'an relates itself and the faith that it preaches to Judaism and Christianity, the monotheistic traditions that preceded it in the Middle East. Far from denying the validity of these predecessor traditions, the Qur'an repeatedly affirms their essential truth, acknowledging that their message comes from one and the same God, and that it (the Qur'an) is only the latest of God's revelations to affirm and confirm the revelations that preceded it:

Say: we believe in God and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them and to Him [God] do we submit. (Q 3:84).

Other Qur'anic verses envisage a world in which people, regardless of their differences, are united by their devotion to God. Such sentiments are, for instance, echoed in the following verse in which God addresses humankind and affirms the principle of unity in diversity: "Surely this community of yours is one community, and I am your

Lord; so worship me” (Q 21:92). The emphasis on the universality of God’s message is also emphasized in the Qur’an’s fundamental teaching that God has revealed His message to *all* peoples and to *all* cultures; not a single people or nation has been forgotten (Q 35:24). Although humans may have misinterpreted that message to suit their needs in creating conflicting traditions, all religions, at their core, have sprung from the same divine source and inspiration. As a result of this underlying essential unity, salvation, according to the Qur’an, is not exclusive to Muslims, but extends to any one who is righteous and Godfearing. (Q 2:62).

The Qur’an also recognizes the fundamental right of individuals, be they Muslim or non-Muslim, to interpret matters of faith for themselves. An often quoted verse of the Qur’an declares, “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (Q 2:256), explicitly acknowledging that individuals cannot be forced to profess beliefs contrary to their will. Even if individuals perversely choose disbelief, they nevertheless have the right to make that choice as well. A chapter of the Qur’an entitled *The Unbelievers*, referring to those who reject the message of monotheism preached by the prophet Muhammad, stresses that belief is a matter of personal conviction and that difference in faith should not be the cause for persecution or abuse. “Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship, and I will not worship that which you have worshipped, and you will not worship that which I worship, to you is your path (religion) and to me is mine.” (Q 109: 1-6).

The Qur’an’s endorsement of religiously and culturally plural societies and the recognition of the salvific value of other monotheistic religions greatly affected the treatment of non-Muslims in Muslim lands. Through the centuries, various Muslim societies have attempted to implement these pluralist ideals with varying degrees of success. It is also clear, however, that other Muslim societies, at certain historical times and in certain contexts, have chosen to ignore these pluralist ideals or to cast them aside. In their place, discourses of exclusivism and intolerance became prevalent. The most significant of these can be traced back to the eighth and ninth centuries when Islam became a religion of empire and attempts were made to bestow theological legitimacy to the growth of Arab imperial hegemony. Within this context, certain segments of the Muslim political and religious establishments promoted anti-pluralist – that is, exclusivist – readings and interpretations of the Qur’an, primarily to advance hegemonic goals. For this purpose, as Abdulaziz Sachedina has so ably demonstrated, several Muslim exegetes devised terminological and methodological strategies to mold the exegesis of the sacred text so as to provide a convincing prop for absolutist ends.⁷

The principal means by which the exclusivists were able to promote their view was through the declaration that the many verses calling for pluralism, commanding Muslims to build bridges of understanding with non-Muslims, had been abrogated by other verses that call for fighting the infidel. The verses in question were revealed in the context of armed conflicts between a small, beleaguered Muslim community and its powerful Christian, Jewish and pagan Arab adversaries. Typical of these verses is the following:

“Then when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and perform the prayer and pay *zakat* [the alms tax], let them go their way. Surely God is forgiving and merciful.” (Q 9: 5). Another verse, revealed when certain Jewish and Christian groups betrayed the Muslim cause and joined in the military assault by the pagan Arabs against the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community, cautioned against taking Jews and Christians as close political allies (Q 5: 51). It is only by completely disregarding the original historical context of revelation of such verses and using them to engage in a large-scale abrogation of contradictory verses that the exclusivist Muslim exegetes have been able to counteract the pluralist ethos that so thoroughly pervades the Qur’an.

Exclusivist conceptions were central to fostering social and political solidarity among previously feuding Arab tribes. As such, this solidarity became the backbone of the early Arab Muslim empire, providing “an effective basis for aggression against those who did not share this solidarity with the community of believers.”⁸ It is within this context that political concepts such as *dar al-Islam* (territories under Muslim suzerainty) and *dar al-harb* (territories under non-Muslim control) became prominent, although they have no real basis in the Qur’an. On the basis of these exclusivist readings, which were developed with a view to asserting hegemony, some Muslims today have not only proclaimed the superiority of Islam over other religions, but have also declared Christians and Jews to be infidels whom Muslims should not befriend.

With regard to intra-Islamic diversity, we encounter a similar paradox reflected in the dichotomy between pluralism and exclusivism, tolerance and intolerance, that we see with inter-religious diversity. Much of the discussion thus far regarding an ethos of pluralism in the Qur’an in the context of inter-religious diversity is also relevant to our consideration of intra-Islamic diversity. Of particular significance is the fact that the Qur’an defines the term “*muslim*” by stressing its literal meaning, “one who submits to God,” rather than the more commonly used understanding of the term that narrowly restricts its meaning to indicate religious identity in a sociological sense. By employing this definition, the Qur’an lays open the possibility of including in the category “*muslim*” any one who submits to the one God. In this sense, it views all who submit to God as being *muslims*. Such a broad definition is thus an affirmation that there are diverse ways of being *muslim* in a theological sense. The ecumenical spirit of the Qur’an is even reflected in many *hadith*, or sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Of particular relevance is the *hadith*, “Difference of opinion in my community is a blessing.” In a similar vein, another *hadith* condemns intolerance among fellow Muslims: “He who calls his brother an infidel is himself an infidel.”

Notwithstanding the teachings of the Qur’an and the Prophet concerning the fundamental right of individuals to interpret matters of faith, as well as their broad inclusive definitions of who is a believer or a Muslim, diversity of interpretations became an issue of major contention in early Islamic history. In the first several centuries after the death

of the Prophet Muhammad, there emerged a variety of theological, legal, philosophical and mystical conceptions of what it meant to be a Muslim. During the course of historical developments, attempts to define which of these conceptions represented “true Islam” became intricately connected with political conflicts concerning leadership. As a result, notions of religious and political loyalty overlapped so closely that religious dissent was often regarded as political dissent. The eventual emergence and triumph of Sunnism as a creed favored by the Abbasids meant that alternative conceptions were rejected as heretical and as constituting a threat to social order.⁹ As Fazlur Rahman points out, “with all its concern for a liberal pluralism for institutions and basic individual freedoms, the Qur’an under certain conditions admits that the state when representing society is paramount.”¹⁰ According to the Qur’an, it is the duty of those in authority to create a just social and moral order by controlling discord and eliminating corruption. Based on such verses of the text, the persecution of those whose religious beliefs could potentially disrupt the social and political order was deemed legitimate. Furthermore, since disputes amongst Muslims in the post-Prophetic period were primarily over the nature of religio-political authority, it is not surprising that those in political authority would persecute those who held alternative religious viewpoints, especially if those interpretations undermined the legitimacy of a particular ruler or dynasty. As a result of this vexing intersection between the religious and the political, those in positions of religious authority in various Muslim communities have hurled charges and countercharges of heresy, infidelity and even apostasy at those who disagree with them. Since infidelity and apostasy are punishable by death in most traditions of Islamic law, these charges became effective tools with which to squelch freedom of religious belief. Historically, then, intra-Muslim intolerance was a result of a nexus between religious and political authorities, resulting in the state becoming an agent of intimidation to ensure conformity.¹¹ Not surprisingly, this situation has created obstacles in contemporary Muslim societies which prevent free and open dialogue among Muslims on issues of faith, leading Tariq Ramadan to comment, “Groups know one another, know how to identify one another, and work out where they are in relation to one another, but then they immediately ignore one another, exclude one another, or insult one another, without any attempt at discussion.”¹²

Historically, exclusivist interpretations of the Qur’an have been used to justify dominion over other Muslims, specifically those whose interpretation of the faith and religious practices have been perceived as deviating from the norms established by exclusivists. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several areas of the Muslim world witnessed the rise of movements which, in response to what was perceived as a general moral laxity and decline, attempted to “purify” Islam. The leaders of these movements targeted a whole range of practices and beliefs among fellow Muslims which, in their eyes, constituted evidence of religious backsliding. In particular, Sufi forms of Islam were attacked as not derived from “authentic” Islam. In certain cases,

these attacks took on a military character and “*jihads*” were launched against fellow Muslims with the intention of forcibly imposing upon them those interpretations of Islam favored by the exclusivists.

The most dramatic and influential of these movements was the Wahabi movement in Arabia. Named after the reformer Abd al-Wahab, who died in 1791, this puritanical movement acquired an explosive energy after its founder allied himself with a petty Arab chieftain, Muhammad Ibn Saud. Abd al-Wahab was influenced in his thought by the writings of a controversial fourteenth-century thinker, Ibn Taiymiyyah (d. 1328), whose exclusivist and literalist interpretations of the Qur’an led him to declare that the descendants of the Mongols were *kafirs* (infidels), notwithstanding their public profession of belief in Islam. To propagate their particular brand of Islam, the Wahhabis attacked fellow Muslims whose practices they considered “un-Islamic.” Targeting in particular popular expressions of Sufi practice as well as Shi’i Muslims, the Wahabis steadily expanded their power over Central and Western Arabia until they were able to effect the political unification of the peninsula into the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Once established, the Wahabi authorities instituted a religious police force, which, among its other functions, compels Muslims to perform ritual prayer at the appropriate times of the day. This is in direct contradiction of the Qur’an’s commandment, “Let there be no compulsion in religion.” Not surprisingly, this movement considered Jews and Christians to be infidels. To this day, Saudi Arabia’s state version of Islam is founded on an exclusivist interpretation of the Qur’an, intolerant of both inter-religious and intra-religious plurality.

In more recent times, exclusivist discourses have been prevalent among a variety of groups in the Muslim world including the so-called Islamists, who have increasingly interpreted Islam in exclusivist ways to provide a political ideology on which to base their conception of a modern nation-state. The reasons for the rise of such groups are complex. Broadly speaking, these movements are a reaction against modernity, westernization, economic deprivation, global domination by western powers (particularly the United States), and support by such powers for repressive regimes in predominantly Muslim lands. The failure of borrowed ideologies, such as capitalism, communism, or socialism, to deliver economic and social justice in many Muslim countries, has created exclusivist groups seeking a “pure” and “authentic” language in which to criticize the failing modern Muslim state, a state which has marginalized or displaced traditional religious authorities in a bid to maximize political power. The search for a solution to the myriad political, social, and economic problems confronting Muslims has led these exclusivist groups to use Islam as a political ideology for the state: “Islam is the solution.”

The zeal of such groups to understand Islam in a “pure” monolithic form, to engage in revisionist history, and to read religious texts in an exclusivist manner that denies any plurality of interpretations, has created a situation in which any Muslim who dares to disagree or oppose their perspective is immediately branded a *kafir*. In some cases, such as in Pakistan, the invocation of Islam by the state itself to determine social and legal frameworks has provoked questions about which brand or interpretation of Islam would be

used in the process and whether Islam defines the state or the state defines Islam. Responding to these and other questions, the Munir Report of 1954, commissioned by the government of Pakistan after a series of sectarian riots rocked the country, concluded that no two scholars of Islam could agree on a definition of Islam or on who is Muslim, with Shi'as and Sunnis declaring each other to be *kafirs*.¹³ Nonetheless, in the 1980s, Pakistan implemented policies of Islamization. The intention was to turn Muslims into “better Muslims” through legislation based on one particular religious viewpoint – that of the *Jama'at-i Islami*, a Sunni religio-political party that views Islam as a political ideology for the nation-state. As part of these policies, Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, then president of Pakistan, issued an ordinance in 1984 forbidding a group known as the Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims or their places of worship mosques. These offenses were punishable by three years of imprisonment and a fine. Islamization policies have divided rather than united Muslims in Pakistan, unleashing what Ishtiaq Ahmed has aptly described as “secticide,” or the destruction of a religious sect of one group of Muslims by another.¹⁴ The dangers of secticide are real, not only in Pakistan, but in several other Muslim nation-states, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia.

Aside from the fact that intolerance and intimidation in the name of religion violate the basic core teachings of the faith, it is increasingly clear that traditional attitudes toward intra-Muslim diversity are outdated today from both national and international perspectives. What is required is a paradigm shift in the ways in which Muslims relate to their co-religionists. At the national level, key Muslim nation-states, particularly in the Middle East, have yet to recognize that the notion of a monoethnic, monolingual, monoreligious state is an idea that has outlived its usefulness, for it fails to come to terms with the fundamental aspect of humanity: its diversity. This failure poses a serious threat to the fabric of several Muslim societies, which are increasingly being torn by sectarian and ethnic conflicts. It is only by recognizing pluralism as an organizing principle that these societies will be able to embrace positively the religious and ethnic diversity among their Muslim (and non-Muslim) populations. At an international level, the technological and information revolutions and easier means of travel are increasingly bringing Muslims from different religious and cultural backgrounds into closer contact with each other. Notions of what it means to be a Muslim in a globalizing context are changing rapidly. For these and other reasons, there is, therefore, a pressing need to develop a theology of intra-Islamic pluralism based on core Islamic teachings. Indeed, the development of such a theology should parallel attempts of Muslim communities to engage in inter-religious pluralism and dialogue with peoples of other faiths. Given the historical and theological wounds that have been festering for centuries and the ongoing competition for religious and political hegemony among various groups, intra-Muslim dialogue may seem an impossibly difficult task. This does not mean, however, that it should not be aggressively pursued as a goal.¹⁵ In the words of Tariq Ramadan, “This dialogue is extremely difficult, sometimes much more difficult than interreligious

dialogue itself, because discussion with one's nearest and dearest is so risky. This commitment is nevertheless essential if we want to break down internal ghettos and sectarianism and try, within manageable limits, to respect one another more."¹⁶

Better literacy about Islam is crucial to the project of developing intra-Muslim pluralism. This would involve understanding and appreciating various Muslim perspectives as well as recognizing the rights of individuals and groups to interpret issues of faith without coercion. The acquisition of such literacy does not entail giving up distinctive interpretations that characterize diverse faith communities, be they Sunni, Shi'i, etc. but, at a fundamental level, should emphasize teaching about faith perspectives without demonizing Muslims who hold alternative viewpoints. Engendering literacy about other faith communities through the study of religion as a cultural and historical phenomenon should become an important objective of curricula in secular schools in Muslim societies, especially in subjects such as world cultures or social studies. Only by raising levels of literacy about religion in the Islamic world will Muslims become aware of the implications of Qur'anic teachings concerning "religious and cultural pluralism as a divinely ordained principle of coexistence among human societies."¹⁷ Indeed, genuine engagement with Qur'anic ideals of pluralism is an essential prerequisite for realizing social, economic and political justice for all members of society.

Among the world's Muslim communities, Muslim Americans are uniquely poised to engage in a discourse of pluralism. On the one hand, they are involved in the age-old struggle within the United States itself between those who want to define the nation in exclusivist (Christian) ways and those who want to uphold the pluralist ideals enshrined in the Constitution and in civic norms. On the other hand, they are faced with an unusual set of challenges and opportunities, for no other country in the world has a Muslim population as diverse as that of the United States. Belonging to over 50 different ethnicities and nationalities, they in fact mirror, in fact, the diverse face of the United States itself. In addition, they represent among themselves many different interpretations of Islam. It is therefore crucial that this plurality be recognized and understood, for it is the essence of what it means to be Muslim in the United States today. It provides Muslim Americans with remarkable opportunities to think creatively and in innovative ways about intra-Islamic diversity that could, in the future, make the United States the crucible in which new principles of intra-Islamic pluralism are forged and one in which the Qur'anic injunction "to know one another" is realized for all humans.

NOTES

1. The author would like to thank Michael Currier and Eboo Patel for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

2. As Shi'a Muslims, the Ismailis believe that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, religious and political authority was inherited by his son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) and, after him, by his direct male descendants. Ali and his descendants were holders of the

office of Imam, entrusted to ensure the ongoing implementation and interpretation of the divine message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. In 765, on the death of the Shi'a Imam Jafar as-Sadiq, the Shi'a, as a result of a dispute over succession, split in two factions. Those who claimed that the Imamate was inherited by his son Musa al-Kazim and his descendants came, on account of their belief in twelve Imams, to be identified as Ithna Ashari Shi'a or Twelver Shi'a. The Ithna Ashari believe that the twelfth Imam will return to the world at the end of time to restore justice and ensure the triumph of good over evil. The Ismailis, so named because they upheld the imamate of Ismail, the other son of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq, believe that the line of imams continued among the descendants of Ismail. Over the centuries, as a result of disputes over succession to the Imamate, several sub-groups developed among the Ismailis with each group following a different descendant. Here I use the term Ismaili to indicate specifically the Nizari Ismaili group whose present Imam or leader, Shah Karim al-Husayni, Aga Khan IV, is the forty-ninth Imam. The Nizari Ismailis are currently the only Shi'a group to have a living Imam claiming direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad and Ali ibn Abi Talib.

3. Since the late eighteenth century, the Imams or spiritual leaders of the Nizari Ismailis have been popularly referred to by the title "Aga Khan," bestowed on them by the Qajar Shahs of Iran. Opponents of the Nizari Ismailis claim that on account of the veneration they accord to the Aga Khans as their Imams, the Nizari Ismailis are not really Muslim and should therefore be called Aga Khanis.

4. Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 106.

5. Diana Eck, *A New Religious America* (Harper Collins, 2001), p. 71.

6. Ali Asani, "On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an," 71 *The American Scholar* (Winter 2002), pp. 52-60.

7. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 29.

8. Op. cit.

9. For a detailed discussion, see Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Ashgate, 2004), pp. 20-34.

10. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Bibliotheca, 1980), p. 44.

11. Saeed and Saeed, op. cit., pp. 28-31.

12. Tariq Ramadan, op. cit., pp. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 209-210.

13. *Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, 1954), available at <http://aaail.org/text/books/others/misc/munirreport/munirreport.shtml>.

14. Ishtiaq Ahmed, "Who is a Muslim?," *Daily Times* (Pakistan), March 15, 2005.

15. In an attempt to foster better understanding and dialogue among Muslims, King Abdullah II of Jordan convened a meeting of representatives of a variety of Muslim groups in Amman in July 2005. The meeting was organized partly in response to the strategy employed by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda to declare those Muslims who oppose them to be infidels and/or apostates, making them legitimate targets of assassination. The religious leaders attending the meeting issued a joint statement declaring that it was impossible and unacceptable to declare apostate or infidel any group of Muslims who believe in God, the Prophet Muhammad, the pillars of faith, and who respect the pillars of Islam and do not deny any necessary article of the religion.

16. Ramadan, op. cit.

17. Sachedina, op. cit., p. 13.

The Role of Women in the American-Muslim Community and Their Impact on Perceptions of Muslim Women Worldwide

AMINA WADUD

In this essay I will present some ideas about Muslim women in the United States. I am an American Muslim woman and my story is one of many overlapping stories about Islam in the modern West. The questions to be answered below are: What is Islam, and how do its history, traditions, multiplicity of cultures, and development, affect its definition? How have differences and similarities between Islam and the modern West evolved? What particular concerns do Muslim women have as Muslims and as women? How have Muslim women in the United States constructed their unique identities as Muslims and Americans, given both the tendency of non-Western cultures to claim that they alone are Islamic and the propensity of Islam for patriarchy? What, if anything, can Muslim women around the world learn from Muslim women in the United States?

WHAT IS ISLAM, AND HOW DO ITS HISTORY, TRADITIONS, MULTIPLICITY OF CULTURES, AND DEVELOPMENT AFFECT ITS DEFINITION?

While Islam has never existed without both male and female Muslims, it is men who have been and remain the predominant public articulators of the meaning of Islam. Traditionally, definitions of Islam have been drawn from a variety of sources; the same is true of Islam in the United States today. In both cases, the two primary sources for all of Islamic thought and development are the Qur'an and Prophetic *Sunnah*. These two have been reflected upon and implemented in endless ways, creating a vast number of secondary sources. The Qur'an and *Sunnah* have been employed within the American context in a unique way, however, often remaining divorced from the centuries-old intellectual and practical approaches to implementation that exist within an established Muslim *ummah*. It is therefore especially important to observe the interactions between the two primary sources and Muslims themselves when examining the identities and experiences of Muslim women in the United States.

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is a religion of revelation descended from the patriarch Abraham. The Qur'an is the penultimate act of Allah's Self-disclosure.¹ The Creator of all humankind was not content merely to place human beings on this planet, but also intercedes in the affairs of humankind through His or Her own Self-disclosure. God becomes known through the two types of revelation: implicit and explicit. There are implicit signs of revelation (*ayat*) in all of nature. All of creation, including ourselves, is an aspect of Allah's Self-disclosure (Q 14:53, 30:20-21). According to the Qur'anic story of Abraham's search for truth (Q 6:73-83), it is possible to come to know Allah, to accept His oneness as well as to experience Her, through intimate interaction with natural creation as a whole.² Islam has therefore never known a severe split between science and religion, because the Qur'an encourages human beings to study, contemplate, and theorize about the realm of nature (Q 67:3-4).

The other kind of revelation is explicit. Allah becomes known through words, but revelation through language is both deficient and exuberant. The Qur'an is deficient because it cannot claim to be the complete disclosure of the Creator: Allah cannot be contained within any one act, no matter how sacred to Its worshippers. The text is exuberant because it often says more than we can comprehend fully and what is said can be interpreted and re-interpreted for new meaning.

As the Qur'an is an act of Allah's Self-disclosure and the primary source of all that has been determined to be "Islam," the Qur'anic position on women is of great significance. Many American Muslim women seek guidance and inspiration in the Qur'an. Whether they do so by studying one of the many English translations, along with commentary in Arabic or English, or by drawing assistance from other Arabic sources and interpretation, and whether they are descendents of Muslim cultures or come from the non-Muslim American culture, the Qur'an is a major influence on their identity formation.

There are so many understandings of the Qur'an that the degree to which the Qur'an's position on women shapes American Muslim women's identity cannot be documented. It is nonetheless clear that the extent to which Muslim women in the United States claim to follow the Qur'an and *Sunnah* is unparalleled, and differs substantially from that of Muslim women in cultures with a sizeable Muslim majority and established Islamic institutions and public organizations. The filtering of the Qur'an through these institutions decreases the reliance of the world's Muslim women on the Qur'an itself. One might argue that Muslim women in the United States benefit from their direct access to the Qur'an, both in its original language and in translation, rather than having it filtered through centuries of Arab-Islamic patriarchal literature. Both women and men in the United States use the Qur'an as its own interpretive tool. While this approach may be somewhat naïve, it may also suggest the influence that American Muslim women could have on Muslim women globally.

There are also disadvantages to the "Qur'an only" method, including the haphazard nature of interpretation and application of the larger body of Islamic texts in the American context. The *Sunnah* of the prophet Muhammad is the second primary source, though its need for an historical record and the fact that it has never had the support of all Muslims make it a lesser source. Despite that, without the embodiment of the Qur'anic ethos in the person of the Prophet, we would hardly know what it means to be Muslim. The prophet's example as expressed in the *Sunnah* is therefore indispensable for understanding what Islam is. His embodiment was so significant that later developments of historical *shari'a* were dependent upon the *Sunnah* in more concrete ways than they were upon the Qur'an.

In the context of indigenous American Muslim cultures and ideology, the *ahadith* have become a secondary and somewhat arbitrary foundation for the understanding and practice of Islam. Muslim communities in the United States formulate their own unique praxis, whether consistent or inconsistent with established *shari'a* practices in other countries. American Muslims from cultures with various *shari'a* courts and judicial systems, which

exist alongside or in lieu of secular laws, also make up a part of these American communities. It is hard to say whether the presence of Muslims in the United States with background experiences in the established *shari'a* stabilize or challenge the ad hoc nature of American Muslim legal observations and practice. During the past century and a half, Islam has developed in the Americas with no single formula outlining the relationship of *shari'a* law to secular law. As a result, Muslims in the United States do not understand “law” in the exclusive, historically rigorous, and diverse sense of *shari'a*. When the way of life incumbent upon a Muslim is a hodgepodge, unsystematically selected from the Qur'an and the *ahadith* and both often only in translation, the perceived meaning of Islam is unprincipled, unpredictable, and haphazard. Muslims in the United States will routinely cite “the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*” but have little sense of the development of coherent legal rules and applications.

The ad hoc nature of interpretation has a negative effect on Muslim women's experiences of social justice. Although *shari'a* as it has developed historically is extremely patriarchal, its goal is still social justice. It therefore contains measures for establishing justice that many of those involved in progressive Islamic reforms have depended upon, not only to solidify their approach but also as a source of practical mechanisms for implementation. This approach does not seem to be available to those Muslim women in the United States who formulate responses only to particular verses from the Qur'an or *ahadith* without reference to the long history of response to those same verses or *ahadith* by Muslim scholars in a variety of cultural, political, economic and social settings.

American Muslim women are simultaneously open to the flexibility of this haphazard *ijtihadic* methodology and prevented from relying upon established social justice principles of operation and implementation – specifically, rulings in classical Islamic thought that pertain to the protection of human dignity and women's rights. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in *nafaqah* (maintenance, or alimony). The Qur'anic verse 4:34 is interpreted to mean that men are required to provide material maintenance for women.³ Women have both lost and gained privileges from the extensive juridical discussions of this matter. On one hand, they gain from the affirmation that men must provide economic support for women and are subject to legal intervention if they fail to do so. On the other hand, women suffer in the area of their autonomy within and outside of the family. A woman loses freedom to make her own choices and to participate in various aspects of family life because she is dependent upon her husband not only financially but also socially and culturally. She is considered more virtuous if she is married, which necessarily affects the degree to which she can shape her own identity. Young girls shape their behavior to advance their marriage prospects and older women limit their public participation to conform to the dominant male perception of the good Muslim woman.

Despite the absence of actual material support from male members of the Muslim family and their consequent experience of greater financial responsibility, American Muslim women, especially in African-American communities, defer to the dominant patriarchy of Islamic tradition. Though there is relatively less social pressure on Muslim

women in the United States to conform to traditional Islamic patriarchal ideals than there is in Muslim countries, women take less advantage of these diminished restraints than one might expect. The somewhat conservative nature of Muslim communities in the United States is particularly apparent in the area of gender relations.

HOW HAVE DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE MODERN WEST EVOLVED?

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of any culture as it Islamizes is the interaction between the unique elements of the culture and the tenets of Islam to form a complete way of life. Because Islam has existed throughout history in vastly divergent cultures, it is often difficult to distinguish the Islamic from the cultural. This is particularly true in the area of gender relations, as the manifestation of patriarchy is strongly influenced by cultural and environmental contexts. Some aspects of patriarchy are more overt in Bedouin cultures than in agrarian cultures, for example, as the latter rely more on cooperation between women and men.

Much has been said about patriarchy in modern, technologically advanced, postindustrial cultures, which differ from their predecessors but draw from their pasts in interesting ways. Capitalism and consumerism, which characterize these present day cultures, value men's activities over women's. Their economic systems literally pay more to men than to women. They value activities in the public sphere, which is dominated by men, over the private sphere, which is still viewed as the women's domain. Even as women leave the exclusively private sphere and enter the public domain, they remain responsible for their duties and responsibilities in the private sphere.

In the context of the larger American society, sharing across public and private spheres between males and females seems to be increasing, while in Muslim-American cultures there is less of this kind of sharing. Women are still inextricably identified with the private or domestic sphere, despite their increased participation in wage-earning employment. In this respect, American Muslim women have more in common with traditional and modern Muslim-majority societies than they do with the larger American society. It is still considered inappropriate for women to relinquish child care and housework to the husband in a Muslim family, whether in the United States or abroad. That these dynamics still exist here in the United States is perplexing, because the larger society has more easily accepted women and men's shared participation in the home, and values the greater family income that results from women's paid work.

WHAT PARTICULAR CONCERNS DO MUSLIM WOMEN HAVE AS MUSLIMS AND AS WOMEN?

Single female heads of household, especially in the African-American Muslim communities, are of particular interest. Single parenting is a legitimate and valuable contribution to the concept of family in Islam and in the United States. It is nonetheless disturbing that Muslim-American women heads of household assume roles that

shari'a delegated to men, and which are actually performed by men in many Muslim cultures, while simultaneously extolling the virtues of a traditional Islamic culture where only men fulfill *nafaqah* and where a woman's earnings belong exclusively to her. The contradiction here is between the actual experience of the women and their rhetoric. They do not seem to view the task of fulfilling both the traditional female roles and the traditional male roles as evidence of their greater freedom and autonomy, but rather as a burden they would gladly lay aside, should they have the opportunity to divide the roles according to the "real" Islam. In this split between theory and reality, theory seems to be given precedence.

Whatever principles and virtues may be seen as fundamental to Islam, there is a need for radical reform to bring action into line with ideals. The reality of single female heads of households presents an opportunity to promote greater reforms in gender relations, but to date the opportunity largely has been missed. American Islam therefore shows no sign of leading or setting an example for the radical improvement of gender relations in Muslim communities worldwide. On the contrary, women in the United States have fewer of the privileges granted them by Islamic law, as well as fewer of the advantages of their non-Muslim (that is, American) culture and law. They experience the least desirable aspects of both, getting less from Islam and less from the American culture.

Muslims worldwide believe that the United States has lost the value of family. This sentiment was first engendered by the breakup of the extended family network and the dominance of the nuclear family, but the "blended" families of modern American society also present challenges to the traditional Islamic notions of family, in spite of the flexibility of Muslims.⁴ The larger American culture does not stigmatize a female divorcee, as do Muslim cultures inside and outside of the United States. In immigrant American Muslim communities, greater autonomy for women may lead to greater confidence outside of marriage, but the Islamic disapproval of female divorcees is strong enough to lead many Muslim women to remain in less than satisfactory marriages. In African-American Muslim communities, divorce itself may not be stigmatized, but being unmarried still is. While this is equally true for Muslim men, the preference for marriage over celibacy is nonetheless a greater advantage for men than women, as it is women who lose their autonomy and mobility when they marry. Though autonomy is a principal feature of agency, women are directed away from independence and towards their role within a male-dominated family structure.

The concept of agency, by which I mean *khilafah*, is important here. I draw from the Qur'anic passage about human creation, "*inni jaa'ilun fi-l-'ard khalifah*"⁵ ("verily I will create on the earth an agent, trustee or vicegerent"). This statement establishes the ontology of all human creation: humans are created as agents of Allah on the earth. The exact nature of their agency has been explored but not fully defined in Islam's intellectual history. There is no consensus on the relationship between free will and predestination: the extent to which agents are subject to Allah's will and the extent to which they are independent. Both free will and predestination are accepted as matters of faith in

Islam, but as in other religious traditions, the exact details remain part of the mystery of belief in a Creator who would create free beings. These concepts inform the question of how women simultaneously have agency and are subject to a divine decree greater than their individual or collective will.

Throughout Muslim history, women's agency has been subjected to larger entities such as the family. This is the case even in the United States, where a Muslim woman is defined by her relationships. While all humans are extensions of a vast network of relationships, a Muslim man must act as an independent agent in order to fulfill his *khi-lafah* and be fully Muslim. He is also accepted as an independent agent in social terms. A woman, on the other hand, begins as the daughter of her father, is transformed into the wife of her husband, and then becomes the mother of his and her children. Any role she may fill in between these familial relationships or as a consequence of their disruption becomes problematic not only before the law but as a matter of social recognition and stigma. A divorced woman finds herself in the difficult state between her initial accepted position as a daughter and her acceptable status as a wife.

According to the law, a woman who is no longer a wife returns to the household of her father. In reality, few Muslim women actually do return and instead must make their way independently, with or without children. While *shari'a* calls for continued financial maintenance of children, the divorced wife has no expectation of alimony. Some legal systems, such as those in Iran, expect a woman's *mahr* (bride gift) to be sufficient for alimony. The *mahr* is agreed upon at the time of the marriage contract, and functions as contingency support should the woman be divorced. In the context of Muslims in the United States, *mahr* is more symbolic or tokenistic. A man extends a gift to his prospective wife as an acknowledgement of her agreement, but not as a major contribution to any eventual support for an independent woman. Many women therefore find themselves empty-handed at the time of divorce.

As in the Maliki school of law, American Muslim women are more likely than women in some Islamic countries such as Iran to have custody of their children should their marriage dissolve.⁶ A divorced Muslim woman in the United States, however, cannot automatically rely upon her ex-husband for assistance. The father's financial support for his children is unconditional in *shari'a*, but it is conditional in the United States. Many women therefore begin this stage in their lives with neither spousal nor child support. How does a woman avail herself and her children of that support without a *shari'a* court system? Though the extent to which American Muslim women take advantage of American custody and child support laws is undocumented, general observation suggests that few Muslim women who find themselves divorced without alimony seek the legal recourse available to them. Because a woman is unlikely to avail herself of either her local secular legal rights or her religious rights, she is often left dependent on the good will of her ex-husband to provide for their children.

It should be noted that U.S. child support laws are not gender-specific: both parents are responsible for child maintenance. Ironically, this shared responsibility can

cause a woman and her children to lose their *shari'a* rights to paternal maintenance of children. The percentage of women who have experienced financial equity during the marriage is very small, perhaps because of the Muslim understanding from the Qur'an that the man is the provider. Divorced women therefore tend to have severely limited financial resources. Although the only recourse is to local custody and support law, some Muslim women feel unable to use the secular legal system as a replacement for Islamic law. This is one way in which the dual experience of being both American and Muslim has hurt women, and demonstrates the way in which Muslim-American women seek their identity through Islam even when it is to their own financial disadvantage.

HOW HAVE MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES CONSTRUCTED THEIR IDENTITIES AS MUSLIMS AND AMERICANS, GIVEN BOTH THE TENDENCY OF NON-WESTERN CULTURES TO CLAIM THAT ONLY THEY ARE ISLAMIC AND THE PROPENSITY OF ISLAM FOR PATRIARCHY?

As we begin the twenty-first century, one of the most interesting topics within the study of Islam and women concerns Muslim women's identity formation. There are increasing numbers of women activists and scholars establishing both a theoretical framework for and a practical manifestation of what it means to be Muslim and female today. The field of Muslim women's studies, which stands at the intersection of Islamic studies in the field of religion and women's studies across disciplines, has emerged within American academia only in the last decade. Even as Islamic thought promoted certain ideas about women, it developed without specific attention to gender, and so scholars who have recently begun to think about this topic have many unanswered questions. Most of the work on Islam and women is in the form of case studies, as for several decades scholars have done research on particular historical and modern groups or individual women and have moved from these to offer broader ideas about the role of women in Islam. There are few coherent theories about gender in the copious literature, so the studies do not suggest a consistent approach toward the study of women as full agents in the context of Islamic society and history. Comprehensive analyses of the meaning of gender are still needed, especially given the wide diversity among women and the reflection of this diversity in the case studies.

The strength of the scholarly movement towards Muslim women's studies lies in the fact that women are participating as both subjects and agents. Historically, Islamic thought showed women as subjects, mere reflections of men's agency and meaning, with women's historical record being generated only by men studying Islam. The opportunity for women to speak as their own agents, generating substantial records of their own identities and roles in Muslim society and thought, has emerged only in the past few decades. Such studies met with great resistance in the Muslim world. As a result, many scholars emigrated, either because they were forced to flee or chose to migrate to the more welcoming Western academic and intellectual circles.

Intellectuals from all parts of the Muslim world, seeking greater freedom to interrogate Islam, and interested in reconstructing it towards more egalitarian ideals and praxis, have found a home in secular institutions across Europe and the United States. Recent work on Islam and women suggests that there are important distinctions between the experiences of men and women in Islam that require further investigation, and Muslim women in the United States have become leaders in this area. The ideas developed from these inquiries are funneled back to the Muslim world, which can either react positively, by meeting the challenges presented, or negatively, as happens when academic and religious ministries ban works generated in the West. Whichever reaction predominates, both intellectuals and laypersons in the Muslim world are being exposed to the challenges presented by these new scholars.

The most exciting part of the new scholarship is its quest to redefine Islam in gender-inclusive terms. Rather than applying gender theories from the realm of secular studies, these efforts seek gender-inclusive components in Islam's own primary sources. They examine the ways in which the long-standing Islamic tradition can be utilized to create an egalitarian framework that acknowledges the diverse meanings of what it is to be Muslim. This process is both an affirmation and a redirection of that tradition. Gender-inclusive studies are also part of the new reformist and post-structuralist studies of Islam in modernity, and they represent an important part of the way Muslims have sought to answer the challenge of modernity. To create an authentic Islamic identity out of this intellectual and political process it is necessary to preserve and protect the tradition while subjecting it to new interpretations.

The other exciting area of development in Muslim women's identity formation is the growth of Muslim women's grassroots organizations and networks. Women gather within almost all local communities for a number of reasons, among which are learning and furthering their personal development within Islam. This is viewed as a re-creation of the practice during the lifetime of the prophet, when women not only sat alongside the men to learn but also, with the help of the prophet's wife Umm Salamah, organized a study session exclusively for themselves as women. The study circle is one of two major types of initiative by small groups of women in American Muslim communities that serve as precursors to other community activities by women. The second major initiative consists of providing ad hoc services designed to meet immediate social needs. If a family's home burns down, for example, or its major wage earner suffers illness, women gather to provide emergency services. Some types of services, especially those in support of women and children, are easily transformed into larger, more organized public welfare projects such as the creation of shelters for battered women. In this way, women are forming support services in areas such as child welfare, early education, and domestic violence. Many full-time alternative schools run by women started as home schools where several parents worked not only with their own children but also with children from other families; as the need grew larger, it led to more elaborate planning and coordination.

Muslim women's networks may begin as sisters' auxiliary groups, designed to work alongside community services performed by men, or as combined efforts by women and men. Organizations such as Muslim Women United, Women of Peace, or Committee to Enhance the Role of Women in Society (CERWIS), all of which began as volunteer work by individual women, were not only founded by women but responded particularly to women's needs individually and within the family. The organizations often evolve into more complex, professional or corporate structures with chairpersons, secretariats and even physical locations. They move from servicing the needs of a few members of the community to organizing regional and national conferences, workshops and retreats. These women's grassroots networks, which demonstrate women's independent capacity to create alternative structures, have therefore become an extremely important aspect of American-Muslim women's identity formation.

Some minor efforts have been made to create permanent national-level Muslim women's organizations. However, these have more often taken the form of regional organizations that choose to call themselves national. Muslim women have not yet solved the problem of organizing both the East and West coasts without a central organizational headquarters, nor does there seem to be a single issue around which a national-level organization could form. Although many issues of shared concern exist, the questions of which of them will predominate on the national agenda and who the representatives of these interests might be has yet to be resolved.

One significant challenge for the future, therefore, is to create a nationwide umbrella organization made up of representatives from various local and regional women's groups. Such an umbrella organization, especially in a time of Internet communications and listservs, might be able to move the organizational efforts of Muslim women to the next logical phase. It would not only be a source of direct contact with the diverse Muslim communities but would also be able to represent Islam and Muslim women in national Islamic and non-Islamic institutions and organizations. As Muslim women's lives and activities become included in the modern study of Islam in the United States, such an umbrella organization could provide information not only to Muslim women and their organizations but to others, such as Islamic scholars. Regular reports on best practices and on issues of particular concern to women in Muslim communities would demonstrate the vitality of Islam and Muslim communities nationwide. It is unclear, however, if such an umbrella organization could form along the same lines as the Muslim women's networks discussed here. Major funding resources would be needed to spearhead such an initiative, and the many inevitable questions about Muslim women's autonomy in organizations could thwart such an effort. There is the additional danger that a major funding organization that began such an effort might acknowledge only some groups and ignore others as a way to promote its own vision of what it means to be Muslim and female.

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, CAN MUSLIM WOMEN WORLDWIDE LEARN FROM MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES?

I have worked with Muslim women and Muslim women's organizations for the last three decades. My work has been within the United States, on behalf of national, local and regional efforts, as well as outside the United States, as part of international efforts. As I straddle these two realms, I am confident about the important strides Muslim women have been making towards their own identity formation worldwide. Neither the developments of Muslim women's networks and grassroots organizations nor Muslim women's scholarship are unique to North America; rather, Muslim women in the United States are part of the global arena of Islam and women. While Muslim-American women face distinctive challenges and enjoy distinctive opportunities as a result of their American citizenship, neither the challenges nor the opportunities have placed them in a unique or exceptionally exemplary role vis-à-vis the world community.

In the area of personal status or family, American Muslim women are more influenced by their own notions of Islam and family than they are by some of the civil, legal, and social privileges available to them as Americans. In this sense, they impose on themselves non-egalitarian gender relations despite the existence of more egalitarian civil codes and practices. Although American Muslims in general avail themselves of their First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom of religion, Muslim women do not exercise these rights as a means to alleviate inequitable Muslim practices or interpretations of Muslim law. In contrast, secular constitutional codes have been called upon to oppose Islamic laws in countries such as South Africa and Malaysia, both of which have substantial non-Muslim populations and the concomitant need for their laws to accommodate more than Islam. American Muslim women have also failed to lobby about gender issues in Islam rather than about issues relating to all American Muslims and their minority status. Indeed, Muslim women continue to be victimized because of their adherence to symbolic reflections of Islam, particularly in dress, and national prejudice against Islam results in insufficient efforts to prevent the sometimes blatant violation of Muslim women's civil liberties. No one addresses their rights as women, above or beyond their rights as part of the Muslim minority in a sometimes hostile country.

In spite of the great intellectual freedom in the United States, Islamic studies suffer both when compared to the study of other religions and because of the historical and political preference for things Western in fields other than religious studies. Even the strides made in the area of Muslim women's studies are achieved against a continued backdrop of hostility and double standards. Though there are many legitimate reasons for Islamic reform, the extent to which it must be an independent and authentic Islamic movement has not been stressed in the American context. Muslim women must distinguish themselves from a large body of contested needs and agendas in order to have their particular struggles as women and as American Muslims acknowledged.

NOTES

1. The ultimate act of Divine Self-disclosure would eradicate any distinction between the Creator and creation and thus achieve an annihilation of all of creation.

2. In this paper, Allah is referred to as He/She/It interchangeably.

3. The verse reads, “*wa bi-maa yanfiqū min amwalihim alayhinna*,” meaning “and on [the basis] of that which they [masculine plural] provide from their wealth for them [feminine plural]” (Q 4:34).

4. “Blended” families here refers to the many forms of familial relations that have been established in addition to the “traditional” family of a husband and wife in a lifetime partnership with parentage only over their shared biological offspring.

5. *Khilafah* means “agency;” *khalifah* means “agent.”

6. Malik ibn Anas (c. 713–c.795), a legal expert in the city of Medina, founded one of four schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

Muslim Women's Experience as a Basis for Theological Interpretation in Islam

GWENDOLYN ZOHARAH SIMMONS

Muslim women living in Muslim contexts, even in the West, are and have been subordinated by and to men. Feminists, including this writer, believe that life would be better for both women and men if societies were not organized with men in dominant and women in subordinate roles. A change in the gender hierarchy is necessary not only for the liberation of women but for social transformation more generally. The struggle for a participatory democratic form of government in Middle Eastern countries, for example, will not be successful as long as over half of the population is kept in a subjugated and oppressed state. Gender hierarchies are central to the continuation of non-democratic patriarchal governments. Iranian feminist activist Mahnaz Afkhami, in her call for a global movement for women's human rights, says that such a movement is not "exclusively a woman's project" but rather a project to create "a more productive and humane future for everyone."¹ The renowned Muslim scholar Fatima Mernissi concurs with the idea that transforming women's lives in repressive societies is key to achieving truly participatory democracies.²

As a feminist civil and human rights activist for over twenty-five years,³ I find unacceptable the second-class citizenship of Muslim women as I have experienced it in Muslim countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Living in Jordan for eighteen months and traveling several times to Egypt, Palestine and Syria, once to Saudi Arabia and Senegal, and twice to Morocco has enabled me to see at first hand the situation of women in these parts of the Muslim world. Daily interactions, attendance at conferences and seminars and one-on-one interviews enabled me to learn how women's lives are negatively impacted in rigidly gendered hierarchical societies and how deeply entrenched are the patriarchal notions of women's subordinate "place" in these societies. I should note that I experience the same thing when I go to the mosque in the city of Gainesville, Florida where I live and work.

Even as a visibly foreign woman going back and forth alone in the Muslim world, on foot, in the streets, and on public transportation, I felt the extreme discomfort of being "out of place" in public space, which was in fact men's space. Men let me know I was "out of place" through rather extreme verbal sexual harassment. While I have experienced sexual harassment on streets in countries such as the United States, Mexico, and Thailand, I had never experienced the intensity with which it was expressed in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The sexual harassment was tinged with a hostility that was sometimes shocking and frightening. When I spoke with other women, I learned that this behavior was not reserved for Westerners, or women of visible African descent (which I thought might have been a factor),⁴ or women not wearing *hijab*.⁵ Jordanian, Egyptian, Palestinian and Syrian women told me that the same kind of harassment is sometimes directed at them, especially if they are out in public alone.

As a Muslim and an academic, I felt the need to understand how and why gender segregation and traditional roles for women remain so important to men (and to many women) in these Islamic countries, as well as to grapple with the reasons African-American converts, raised in a culture that is less gender-hierarchical, become so wedded to unequal gender roles. Why is it that many Muslims hold onto patriarchal notions about women's "place" and remain more entrenched in traditional values related to the roles of women than people in other nations and in societies shaped by the other two monotheistic faiths?⁶

These questions were uppermost in my mind when I attended the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China and sought answers from Muslim women from numerous countries. As I went from workshop to workshop during the non-governmental organizations meetings, I heard Muslim women debating the situation in their homelands and the "rightness" and "wrongness" of their status vis-à-vis the Qur'an, *ahadith* and *shari'a* law. Many "progressive" women⁷ blamed the plight of women in the Muslim world on Islamic law, which they described as patriarchal, misogynist, and not reflective of the Qur'an or the example of the Prophet Muhammad. A few very radical women⁸ blamed Islam, saying that the Qur'an is sexist and that women's status in the Muslim world will not change until their lives are no longer governed by religious law and edicts. Many of the visibly traditionalist Muslim women⁹ said that there was nothing wrong with Islam, the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad or the *shari'a*. They placed the blame on men's "incorrect" interpretation of the religion as laid out in the Qur'an, and men's refusal to respect the rights given to women by God.

There is no governmental requirement that Muslim women in the United States must live under Islamic law but many are either opting or are being coerced to do so. Many young American Muslim women converts are being taught to accept an inferior personal status by their husbands, fathers, brothers, imams and other Islamic teachers. The rationale for women's subordination is based on the men's understanding of the Shi'a or the four Sunni schools of law. Surprisingly, there is much less questioning by American Muslim women converts of the supposedly Islamic patriarchal perspectives on gender than there is among Muslim women in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Senegal and Syria. This is particularly notable for the many African Americans among these women, whose religious and secular communities have a history of independent women leaders displaying assertiveness and self-reliance.¹⁰ One nonetheless finds African-American Muslim women in major urban centers marginalized in the public sphere.¹¹ They often adopt the most conservative "Islamic dress," including *hijab* (head covering) and *nikab* (face veil) and some go as far to wear gloves in mid-August in Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Gainesville, Florida. There was scant visible leadership by women until March 18, 2005, when Amina Wadud publicly gave the *khutbah* and led a mixed gender congregation in *jum'ah* prayers in New York City.¹² In spite of the vilification of the group by Muslim clerics and laypersons from Cairo to Riyadh and throughout the United States, Raheel

Raza, a Canadian woman, publicly gave the *khutbah* and led a *jum'ah* prayer in Toronto on April 22, 2005. This group also found all of Toronto's mosque doors closed to them and held its Friday prayers in a backyard.

The majority of Muslim women, however, face side or back entrances and cramped quarters in the back of prayer rooms or in balconies, out of sight of men and away from the mainstream of mosque activities. The number of children with whom one often sees these American Muslim women struggling suggests that large families are being encouraged. I have been told by Philadelphia Muslims that polygamy is becoming less uncommon in their communities, with the Islamic ideal of "a man supporting a wife who stays home and performs domestic duties" being turned on its head and the women relying on their public assistance checks to provide for the unregistered husband and the children.

I do not suggest that Islam affects all Muslim women uniformly. "Practices which characterize women's status and roles vary according to class [and race]. Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, [race] and other ideological institutions and frameworks."¹³ Women do, however, share things in common across race, color and class lines, simply by virtue of being women. "Women are differentiated from one another; but as women we share a common biological structure which affects our psychic [and existential] identity."¹⁴ As Mahnaz Afkhami has commented, "[T]he conditions women have in common outrank and out-value those that set them apart."¹⁵

Nor do all Arab and Muslim women constitute a homogenous oppressed group. The oppression of Arab and Muslim women is not caused by Islam itself and cannot be traced in a straight trajectory from the time of the Prophet Muhammad up to the present day. Arab Muslims and their societies do not operate outside of history. As Leila Ahmed and other women scholars have shown, European colonization of Arab Islamic nations often made life for Muslim women far worse than the lives they experienced prior to European control of their societies.¹⁶

It is nonetheless true that "the social relations between the sexes in patriarchal societies and groups such as those found in Muslim countries and groups is organized so that men may dominate and women must submit."¹⁷ There is a gender hierarchy in patriarchal societies that places women in subordinate positions. Because of the near universality of these gender arrangements, there is much to be gleaned from looking at the writings of feminist historians, anthropologists and scholars of other disciplines who attempt to explain women's oppression.¹⁸

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER ROLES

Feminist religious scholars maintain that patriarchal religions and the societies that they have helped to shape have traditionally viewed women as naturally subordinate to men because of their reproductive roles,¹⁹ their smaller size, and what is usually inferior physical strength. In most cases women's reproductive function has been expanded to embrace childrearing, housekeeping and homemaking as roles for which women are

said to be inherently suited. Assumptions about the physical and emotional effects of pregnancy and motherhood, the appropriate role of women in society stemming from the physical act of childbearing, and the perceived response of women to childbearing have contributed more than any other factor to the discriminatory treatment of women and to the maintenance of the ideology of separate spheres. The claim of the “naturalness” of separate spheres for men and women is a description less of everyday life than of a persistent ideology. The public-private sphere dichotomy is entrenched and bolstered by the legal system, in the United States as elsewhere.²⁰ Women have been relegated to the domestic sphere, separated from the public sphere where laws are made and rules governing the community are developed. The public sphere is also the domain of religion. It is difficult enough for women to penetrate this male domain in the West; to attempt to do so in some Islamic countries is to face the accusation of undermining Islam and the very foundation of Muslim society.²¹

Anthropological studies have shown that people in every culture maintain and transmit ideas about the roles that women and men perform, the rights they have in relation to each other and the values associated with their activities.²² Gender is a social category with a social interpretation and valuation that is a significant aspect of one’s personal identity. “Woman’s place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things that she does or even less a function of what, biologically she is, but the meaning her activities acquire through her social interactions.”²³ One’s gender role is learned as it is transmitted to a child almost from birth, through daily interactions between the two sexes in families, neighborhoods and the society at large. The child observes early the allotment of rights and privileges such as the right to speak and be heard, to make decisions, to participate in community leadership, and to officiate in religious ceremonies.

GENDER ROLES AND ISLAM

Amina Wadud addresses the cultural construction of gender issue in the Qur’an in her important *Qur’an and Woman*. While arguing against the idea held by many Muslims that the *Qur’an* defines specific roles across cultures solely based on anatomy, she maintains that Islam’s holy book does acknowledge sexual differences and that each culture defines the distinctions to be made in the roles that men and women will play. As she writes, “There is no detailed prescription set [in the Qur’an] on how [men and women] are to function, culturally.”²⁴

Religion plays a significant role in developing and maintaining a society’s gender system. Anthropologist Nancy Bonvillian tells us that it is “through enactment of rituals and recitations of religious narratives [that] the ideological foundations of a culture are transmitted and reinforced.”²⁵ Sex-assigned roles are deeply embedded in these rituals and narratives and become part of the believer’s subconscious. “Religion is therefore among the domains that most influence a given people’s construction of reality and society.”²⁶ Religions provide explanations for and justification of prevailing cultural constructs of gender. This is as true in Islamic societies as in any other.

In the last twenty-five years, Western feminist scholarship has demonstrated that women have been made invisible by male scholars who have based their scholarship on studies by men about men, omitting women's experiences as relevant and accepting existent gender paradigms without question. Where women are represented in such scholarship, they are presented solely through a male perspective. While patriarchal scholarship has functioned differently in different social, historical, religious and cultural contexts, it has consistently silenced and marginalized women, rendering them invisible. Feminist scholars, seeking to counter this one-sided scholarship, are filling in the gaps in traditional academic disciplines such as anthropology, law, history, sociology, religion, theology and the natural sciences by studying women's experiences. Feminist scholarship goes further by centering women's experiences as the beginning point for investigations of social, cultural, and scientific knowledge. Feminist religious thought considers women's experience to be the starting point of feminist theological inquiry. As Rita Gross argues, "Feminist theologians affirm that women's experience possesses a religious authority of utmost importance, never to be overlooked or denied, never to be sacrificed in order to conform to external or traditional sources of authority."²⁷

This is not a position that traditional scholars of Islam regard as theologically correct. In Islam, Allah (God) is the beginning point of all theological reflection, as God has declared that humans are to serve as His/Her Vicegerents over the whole of creation. The male and female Vicegerents are created from a ray of Allah that became the souls of all human beings. Many progressive and conservative Muslims therefore challenge the idea of human experience, whether male or female, as the starting point of theological reflection. They argue that all solutions to the problems Muslim women face must begin with Islam and specifically with the Qur'an, as the Muslim's source of identity derives from Islam and Islam alone.²⁸

This position is problematic because some of the Qur'anic text calls for different and unequal treatment of women and men. As noted Islamic legal scholar Abdullahi An-Na'im states, "some of the restrictions imposed on women [in Islamic law] are based on clear texts of the Qur'an and *Sunna*."²⁹ The verses that exhibit such restrictions and are most frequently mentioned are Qur'anic verses 4:34, 4:35, 2:282, and a few others.³⁰ Referring to Islamic law (*fiqh*), An-Na'im adds, "some of the *shari'a* rules on family law and inheritance violate the fundamental and constitutional rights of women [and] the constitutional principle of equality before the law."³¹ These are problems that cannot be ignored or wished away. The whole legal edifice of discrimination against women is based on these few Qur'anic verses and a number of questionable *ahadith*.

From a twenty-first century human rights perspective, such differential treatment clearly falls into the category of unacceptable discrimination. Women today are astronauts, pilots, presidents and prime ministers (even in some Islamic nations), lawyers, Supreme Court justices, college presidents, surgeons, dentists, soldiers, sailors, athletes, coal miners, truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, and members of every profession, which makes it ludicrous to assert (as some Muslim clerics still do) that women are

innately inferior to men, physically and mentally weaker, unable to think clearly or make decisions, and suited only for childbearing and domestic duties.³² Informed persons can no longer rationally justify maintaining such antiquated ideas.³³

Difficult as it is, the Qur'anic basis for these views must be confronted. One way of doing so is to view discrimination against women as one would view slavery. Just as few Muslims would publicly advocate a return to the historically accepted practice of slavery, Muslims should no longer advocate discriminatory treatment of women. Muslims must begin to find such discrimination in all of its forms as abhorrent as slavery.

For many Muslims, the only acceptable challenge to human rights abuses, sanctioned by Islamic law, is through a reinterpretation of the texts. The question of course becomes, whose reading or interpretation are we to accept, and what will be the basis for this reinterpretation?³⁴ Until recently, Qur'anic interpretations and the laws based upon them were almost exclusively a male province from which women's voices and experiences were excluded. Religious feminist scholarship challenges such male-only reading as constituting, at best, a representation of only half of humanity's insight and understanding. Many of the Muslim scholars who advocate Muslim women's rights do not endorse questioning the Qur'anic verses that sanction unequal treatment for women but they do call for the inclusion of women's voices and perspectives in the reinterpretation of these texts. For the religious Muslim feminist, women's experience is just as important as men's experience in interpreting God's will for His/Her creation.

Mainstream academic scholars have criticized feminist scholarship's grounding in women's experiences, saying that such scholarship is too subjective, neither objective nor neutral, and therefore inadmissible as "real" knowledge. Feminist religion scholars such as Rita Gross, Rosemary Ruether, Lyn Davidman, Amina Wadud, and Riffat Hasan have replied to such critiques by noting that all "theological thinking" or *tafsir* (exegesis or interpretation) is grounded in and derived from human experience, even in traditions that call the source of their authority revelation.³⁵ This is not a point of view embraced in traditional Islam any more than it is accepted in fundamentalist Christianity or Orthodox Judaism, but the traditional view is being challenged from within Islam itself. Abdolkarim Soroush, the Iranian Islamic reformer, has written perceptively about the experiential basis of religious knowledge. "Religious knowledge," according to Soroush, "is a variety of human knowledge, subject to change, exchange, contraction and expansion... [It is] human, fallible, evolving and most importantly is constantly in the process of exchange with other forms of knowledge."³⁶ Soroush implores us not to conflate the divine with human understanding of the divine.

All interpretation and extrapolation of scripture is based on human experience, study, understanding, and reflection. The uniqueness of feminist theology is not that it is grounded in human experience and understanding, but rather that it formally declares that women's experience is its foundation. Feminist religious thought has stripped the mask of objectivity from theological thought, exposing its foundation in male experience. Feminist scholarship in all disciplines has demonstrated repeatedly

that what has been called “human experience” has for the most part reflected only half of the human experience. Women’s voices have been silenced; women’s experiences as members of the human family have been subsumed under men’s experiences and have not been counted. “Claims of objectivity and universality served to reinforce the status-quo and provide excuses for ignoring groups of people defined as marginal [or other].”³⁷ Muslim feminist scholarship is bringing women’s experience into the process of interpretation in Islam, as is happening in Christian and Jewish religious feminist scholarship. It is through this process that Muslim women will gain their rightful place in their religion and in their societies.

NOTES

1. Mahnaz Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom: Women’s Human Rights in the Muslim World* (Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 5.

2. See Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Addison-Wesley, 1992).

3. I define “feminist” as a person, male or female, who believes that women are equal members of the human family and are imbued by God with the same spiritual, intellectual, and emotional abilities and characteristics as men. The feminism that I embrace seeks to eradicate gender hierarchies and to end enforced female subordination, limited options for women, and religiously, racially, or socially enforced powerlessness for women. I espouse a feminism that seeks to see women exercise our God-given right to participate in defining what it means to be truly human – male and female – in light of Qur’anic definitions as well as the collective wisdom, knowledge and experience of human beings.

4. I learned in Jordan that there is color discrimination in that country, with darker skin associated with “slavery,” “servility” and “inferiority.” The dark-skinned women with whom I spoke said that they experience a form of sexual harassment made worse by the color of their skin.

5. I learned from personal experience that wearing full “Islamic dress” in Jordan does not protect a woman from virulent sexual harassment.

6. There are of course real differences in the Islamic world about this matter. Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Senegal and Singapore appear to be working to throw off their misogynist legacy. While they retain traditional values regarding chastity, virginity before marriage, etc., they have loosened the tight reins on women in the economic and political spheres. At the same time, there are strikingly similar traditional sentiments held by men and women in ultra-orthodox Jewish communities and among fundamentalist Christians in the United States.

7. I have designated these women as “progressive” because they espoused equality for women in keeping with U.N. guidelines on human rights and rejected discriminatory treatment based on *shari’ah* or other religious justifications that they saw as inherently anti-Islamic.

8. By “radical,” I mean that these women were secularist and wanted an end to religious law governing personal status. A number of them said that they were exiles from Iran and that Imam Khomeini and the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution had ruined their lives.

9. I describe these women as “visibly traditionalist” in part because of their very conservative dress: many wore *abayas* or overcoats and wimple-like head coverings, with face veils and gloves. They also espoused a “return to Islam” and an “Islam is the only solution” ideology.

There was great tension between the “radicals” and the “visibly traditionalist.” At several points the verbal fighting almost evolved into physical confrontations between the two groups.

10. This is of course not the case in all African-American Islamic communities. A group of African-American Muslim women formed *Nisa al-Salaam* (Women of Peace) in Philadelphia a number of years ago, for example, and are working both to educate Muslim women about their rights and to develop social services for Muslim women in the Delaware Valley Area.

11. According to Temple University sociologist Michelle Byng, who has conducted surveys among African-American Muslim women about male/female relationships, the women are consciously playing a new post-conversion role in their relationships with their Muslim husbands. They see themselves as accepting the more subordinate roles in exchange for their husbands accepting their “new” roles as dutiful husbands and fathers, i.e., husbands who will work hard, bring their money home, parent their children and remain monogamous unless there is an agreement that the husband can take a second wife. A number of the women indicated that polygamy practiced properly is acceptable to them, as they prefer it to “the outside girlfriend(s)” phenomenon so common in American society. Author’s conversation with Michelle Byng, Spring, 2000.

12. See footnote 22, p. 153.

13. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 63.

14. Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* (Routledge, 1991), p. 26.

15. Mahnaz Afkhami, op. cit., p. 5.

16. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender In Islam* (Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 127-168.

17. Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 3.

18. Studies that challenge the “universality” of women’s oppression, particularly among Third World peoples, include Nigerian feminist sociologist Ifi Amadiume’s *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (Zed Books, 1987), which discusses the Nnobi people of Nigeria. Amadiume charges that white feminist anthropologists have determined that “universal social and cultural inferiority of women is a foregone conclusion: sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human life.” She says that this global claim is itself ethnocentric and that “the domestic/public dichotomy which led them [white feminist anthropologists] to the conclusion that maternal and domestic roles were responsible for the supposed universal subordination of women was a feature of their particular class and culture. These post-doctoral women anthropologists had not de-anthropologized themselves before embarking on their gigantic project of assessing women’s condition in societies chosen haphazardly from all over the Third World.” *Male Daughters*, p. 4.

19. Eleanor Leacock has written, “In some ways it is the ultimate alienation in our society that the ability to give birth has been transformed into a liability.” Eleanor Leacock, “Introduction,” in Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (International Publishers, 1972), p. 40.

20. Lucinda M. Finley, “Transcending Equality Theory: A Way out of the Maternity and the Workplace Debate,” in D. Kelly Weisberg, ed., *Feminist Legal Theory: Foundations* (Temple University Press, 1993), p. 190.

21. “It is often said that women and the family are the foundations of the Islamic community, the heart of Muslim society.” John Esposito, “Introduction,” in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad & John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xii.

22. I am aware of charges that generalizations about gender relations cross-culturally are based on a small sampling of cultures. Amadiume has commented, "Maurice Godelier suggests that there could be as many as 10,000 societies on the globe of which anthropologists have studied only between 700 and 800. It is even more shocking to learn that 'fewer than fifty serious monographs have been specifically devoted to the relations between men and women.'" Maurice Godelier, "The Origins of Male Domination," *I New Left Review* (May/June 1981), quoted in Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, op. cit., p. 10.

23. M.A. Rosaldo, "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding," 53 *Signs* (1980), pp. 389-417.

24. Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 25.

25. Nancy Bonvillian, *Women and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender*, 2nd ed. (Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 221.

26. Op. cit.

27. Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion* (Beacon Press, 1996), p. 109.

28. See, e.g., Maysam J. Al-Faruqi, "Women's Self-Identity in the Qur'an and Islamic Law" in Gisela Webb, ed., *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 72-101.

29. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 38.

30. Surah IV, 35 (*The Holy Qur'an*, trans. A. Yusuf Ali):

*Men are the protectors And Maintainers of women,
Because God has given The one more (strength)
Than the other, and because They support them
From their means.*

*Therefore the righteous women
Are devoutly obedient, and guard
In (the husband's) absence
What God would have them guard.*

Surah IV, 34:

*As to those women On whose part you fear
Disloyalty and ill-conduct, Admonish them (first)
(Next), refuse to share their beds,
(And last) beat them (lightly);
But if they return to obedience, Seek not
Against them Means (of annoyance)*

Surah II, 282:

*Oh ye who believe! When you deal with each other,
In transactions involving Future obligations
In a fixed period of time, Reduce them to writing
Let a scribe write down Faithfully as between The parties:
Let not the scribe Refuse to write: as God Has taught him,
So let him write. Let him who incurs The liability dictate, But let him fear
His Lord God, And not diminish Aught of what he owes.
If the party liable Is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable
Himself to dictate, Let his guardian Dictate fully.
And get two witnesses, Out of your own men, And if there are not two men*

*Then a Man and two women, Such as you chose, For witnesses,
So if one of them errs, The other can remind her.*

31. An-Na'im, op. cit., pp. 44, 88-91.

32. Numerous Internet sites contain comments by Islamic clerics about women's supposed inferiority. Mufti Ebrahim Desai, for example, asked if God has endowed men with more intellect than women, responded, "Inferiority is no shame...it is the prerogative of *Allah Ta'ala* to grant intellect to whom so ever He wishes to. If in His Wisdom He granted men more intelligence than women, it is His Right...It is neither implied that *Allah Ta'ala* has degraded women, nor made them valueless. *Allah Ta'ala* has created man and woman for separate roles...women are generally more emotional than men in keeping with their role of motherhood. In the same light he has granted men more intelligence than women, in accordance of their role of guardians and overseers over women."

<http://www.islam.tc/cgi-bin/askimam/ask>.

33. "Today in the context of women's academic success [in Saudi Arabia], interpretations of *shari'a* that have been used to validate commonplace pejorative attitudes about women may appear more ridiculous than learned...By the measure of grades and graduation rates, women as a group have even achieved academic superiority over men." Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "The Ambiguity of *Shari'a* and the Politics of Rights in Saudi Arabia," in Afkhami, *Faith & Freedom*, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

34. For scholars of Islam such as Abdullahi an-Na'im, Farid Esack, Ghazala Anwar, Ibrahim Musa, and Nawaal El-Sadaawi, the fact that there are Qur'anic verses that discriminate against women explicitly or implicitly must be addressed. Progressives and feminists like Maysam al-Faruqi, Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, and Aziza al-Hibri who desire human rights for Muslim women living in Islamic societies feel that the solution to this delicate matter can and should be addressed by questioning sexist interpretations of the Qur'an, spurious *ahadith* used to justify the creation of discriminatory laws, and misogynist cultural influences on the male jurists who developed the schools of law in the ninth and tenth centuries. They, like most Muslims, refrain from questioning the Qur'an itself.

35. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, p. 109.

36. Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, translated, edited & with a critical Introduction by Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 16.

37. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum, eds., *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (Yale University Press, 1994), p. 6.

Finding Gender Freedom in Forgotten Laws: Scholarship and Activism in the Service of Reforming Personal Status Laws

AMIRA EL-AZHARY SONBOL

INTRODUCTION

Discourses about the past and paradigms that define history constitute the grids through which the lives of women in the present are played out. Such discourses and paradigms, and reactions to them, are the basis on which laws are proposed and changed and the lives of women are constructed and guided. “*Min fata qadimu tah*” (“He who is ignorant of his past is lost”): just as knowledge is power, so is lack of knowledge a source of powerlessness.

Perhaps the first time I was consciously involved in deconstructing the past was during my research for a Ph.D. thesis on the history of Egypt’s medical profession.¹ As an Egyptian doctor’s daughter, I had long heard about the medical school of Qasr al-‘Aini and understood it to have been one positive legacy of the British occupation of Egypt (1882-1952). As I sifted through material covering Egypt’s history during that period – hospital records of patients and medical services, records covering the history of the school and the students it graduated – the picture became more complex and an alternative picture of the past began to emerge.

At the time I began my research, modernization theory was all the rage. The modern state was seen in positivist terms as a modernizer and was contrasted with resistant and backward traditional societies. That was at the end of the 1970s, when modernization theory constituted basic classroom reading and Samir Amin was just beginning to discuss the problematics of development, and before Edward Said, Peter Gran or Fatima Mernissi give us significant intellectual breakthroughs.² I thought I was going to prove modernization theory: that Egypt’s education system and health services were introduced by the British after 1882, that traditional society had little to offer a modern state, and that any efforts exerted by Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha and others had been all but dead by the time the British arrived.³ The Egyptian archives, however, showed quite the opposite. They demonstrated that the major change in health services took place when the British closed the medical schools, which had been opened in 1827 for men and in 1831 for women. The British reopened the Qasr al-Aini medical school for men after having replaced all the Egyptian speaking staff, who had graduated from Western schools but were able to teach in Arabic, with a British/European staff that could communicate only in English. The result was a drastic shrinking of the number of students studying medicine, which fell from over 200 in 1893 when the Qasr al-Aini school was taken over to one student when it was reopened the following year.

Nineteenth-century British liberalism lay behind the range of policies that were introduced by Egypt’s new British-controlled government and were intended to reform and improve education. One policy was the requirement that students pay for their education; another, that they had to know English or French before being admitted.

Education in Egypt had traditionally been free of charge, with income from *waqfs* (Islamic religious endowments) and the government providing such services, and the impact of the new policies was harmful to education and Egyptian society as a whole. The policies created a gap in culture and professional differences based on class rather than on talent, making it impossible to continue channelling all those with interest and abilities into the various professions.

While my study of the medical schools was not focused on women, I was particularly surprised by the impact on them of the “reforms” introduced by the British. I had believed that it was the modern state and the forces of modernization that pulled unwilling women out of Islamic backwardness into a modern active and professional life. Women doctors were a product of this new spirit, I thought, but the evidence suggested otherwise. Traditional society had women medical practitioners, a necessity in a society that segregated the sexes and in which women refused to be examined by male doctors. Hospitals were divided into male and female sections and it was women practitioners who provided treatment in the female sections. When a male specialist was required, it was a woman, either a midwife or a doctor, who undertook to examine the patient and describe the ailment to the male physician. In other words, women were responsible for the health of half of the population before the reform of medicine in the nineteenth century. A medical school for *hakimas* (doctoresses⁴) was started four years after the one for men, and graduated hundreds of women *hakimas* from 1838 until the British closed it in 1893. In its place, the British encouraged those provinces that had adequate budgets to finance schools of nursing. Women doctors became a thing of the past until much later in the twentieth century, when nationalist governments began to re-educate them. In the colonial period, obstetrics and gynaecology were made the domain of male doctors rather than the exclusive province of women.

Male Egyptian physicians did not fare much better, as they too were undermined by laws and regulations reducing medical education from five years to four. The British ended specialization, which had involved two extra years of medical study after the initial five and, as mentioned above, began charging fees and requiring knowledge of European languages for admission. Laws were passed allowing foreign male doctors and foreign women midwives and nurses with any credentials at all from any nation to practice in Egypt. At the same time that colonial rule was making it harder for an indigenous medical profession to exist, other laws were enacted to compensate for the lack of obstetricians. One, for example, allowed male doctors in any field of medicine including, e.g., dentistry or dermatology, to take a diploma in obstetrics. Other laws forbade midwives from using forceps, which had become essential in difficult births. The repercussions to women as professionals, practitioners and patients were extreme. Male medical practitioners now had control of women’s bodies.

It is therefore clear that instead of experiencing progress, women lost ground with the coming of modernity, colonialism and nation-state building. But it was not just women who lost ground; so did society as a whole.

WOMEN'S HISTORY

Having studied Egypt's medical profession and become aware that the history of professions was an underexamined area in Middle East studies, I turned my attention to the history of the *'ulama'* (the community of scholars of Islam). The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the impact of the Iranian Revolution made the subject all the more interesting. When I began my research into the history of the Egyptian *'ulama'* in 1988, the literature and the field of Middle East studies was divided between modernists and Ottomanists/Mamlukids. The modernists focused on modern history dating roughly from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ottomanists studied the history of the Ottoman Empire, while Mamlukids concentrated on the period from the end of the Ayyubids and the beginning of Mamlukid rule in Egypt in 1250 through the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 and the demise of the Mamluks at the hands of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha (1805-1848). It was a split that continues into the present in spite of serious efforts made by Peter Gran, Afaf Marsot, Rifaat Abou-el-Haj and others to point to the continuities between the modern and pre-modern and the need to reassess historical periodization in Middle East studies.⁵

Reperiodization was to prove pivotal for my study of Muslim women. As my research and interaction with historian colleagues in Egypt proceeded, two things became clear. The first was that to understand the modern history of the *'ulama'*, it would be necessary to see their role before the beginning of the modernization that was undertaken by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha in the nineteenth century. There was literature about the *'ulama'*, but it was based on general histories and on the *'ulama'*'s own writings and was not about their interaction with society. I became particularly intrigued with their role as jurists, about which little had yet been written. Given my new knowledge of the history of the medical profession, I looked for similar patterns in legal and court practices. I therefore focused on legal practice in courts before the introduction of legal reforms, hoping to see the changes experienced by the *'ulama'* as a judicial class and by the society they serviced.

The second point became clear once I started examining Egypt's pre-modern/Ottoman court records and began to research legal practices in *shari'a* courts.⁶ The pre-modern life of Egyptian women had been presented in college classrooms and textbooks, in the United States and in the Middle East alike, as backward and antithetical to women's human rights and gender equality. The modern state was presented as the harbinger of change in women's lives, even though leftist critics could see women's condition worsening in Muslim countries – as it did in countries outside of the Muslim world – where capitalist penetration meant loss of control of agricultural land.⁷ Still, even such scholars found little in the lives of Muslim women before the nineteenth century to be worth writing about. In the field of law, anything to do with the *shari'a* was considered anathema by Western feminists of various ideological leanings.

Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot's paper on elite Mamlukid women and the control of power and wealth was an eye-opener.⁸ During 1990-1992, when I taught at the American University in Cairo and studied marriage contracts in the National Archives,

I realized that the nineteenth century was a pivotal age for social change in Egypt.⁹ I began to question the validity of arguments that saw the nation-state as a vehicle of gender equality, even while agreeing that the state had played an important role in women's emancipation by mobilizing them in state-construction. I soon wrote a paper pointing out the cost to women of nation-state building, including the decision to deny Egyptian nationality to sons of an Egyptian mother and a non-Egyptian father.¹⁰ The paper pointed directly at the marriage contract as the source of many of the ills facing Egyptian women today. By comparing marriage contracts before and after nineteenth-century legal reforms, I showed that legal reforms denied women the right to include contractual marital conditions even though such conditions had been the norm before the reforms, and that court systems no longer recognized and enforced such conditions as they had done in the past.

The archives also indicated that women had felt free to go to court seeking divorce, which was frequently granted on the basis of witnesses and other evidence. On those occasions when the wife demanded *khul'* (repudiation, in which the wife returns part or all of the dowry to the husband in exchange for ending the marriage), it was never denied, whether the husband agreed to it or not. The archival record did not include a single case where a wife sued for divorce and the judge denied it. The question the *qadi* (judge) considered did not seem to be whether to end the marriage or not; rather, it was whether the decree would be divorce or *khul'*. Since divorce meant that the wife retained all her financial claims on her husband and *khul'* meant that she renounced part if not all of her financial rights, the *qadi* merely determined what the financial settlement would be. It was not his place to keep a wife in a marriage against her wishes.

I had found a major difference in laws and the practice of courts before and after reform, and discovered that colleagues studying other nations were making similar findings about the life of women during the Ottoman period. Our discussions resulted in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, a collection of articles that presented some of these findings, particularly in regard to women's access to divorce under Ottoman rule.¹¹ One important general conclusion is that while there was great diversity in legal practices and the particular laws that were applied in different parts of the Ottoman Empire, there was nonetheless consistency in regard to gender laws and the accessibility of courts to the public at large. Another important conclusion was that judges did not make it their business to force women to stay with husbands if they did not want to do so.

The work suggested that when changes in personal status laws are discussed today, it is necessary to understand the laws that existed before the reforms introduced during the nineteenth century. Today Islamic and *shari'a* law are the subject of valuable studies, and work on the Ottoman court system is contributing to a better understanding of pre-nineteenth century social history. These include the writings of Haim Gerber¹² and the articles by Fariba Zarinebaf-Sharf, Nelly Hanna, Madeline Zilfi, Margaret Meriwether, and Abdel-Rahim Abdel-Rahman in the collection mentioned above.¹³

In the introduction to it, I argued for a new periodization of legal history and against conceptualization of the pre-modern period as negative and the modern period as providing women with greater freedoms and rights. The book questioned the dominant paradigm in gender studies of the Middle East, which described the “pre-modern” and “modern” as binary opposites, and suggested instead that there is a great deal of continuity between what is termed traditional and what is termed modern. While the patriarchal order itself was transformed with the emergence of the nation-state, what came into existence was a combination of older practices and new structures that included a good dosage of Western laws. This happened as part of the process of modernization and a hegemonic discourse of modernity embraced by a new Western-educated and cultured Egyptian elite. It must be remembered that the reform of laws and modernization of the legal and court systems occurred during the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, when women in Europe were fighting for their rights. The modernization of law in Egypt, undertaken by a male-dominated elite guided by Western advisors and under imperial tutelage, codified turn-of-the-century European gender laws rather than statutes reflecting the changes in their lives that women in post-World War I Europe had begun to experience. In that way, the fight for rights among women in Muslim countries is similar in many ways to the fight that their sisters waged in the Western world. However, in Egypt, women today must contend not only with patriarchy but with laws imported from Victorian Europe.

My training as a graduate student in the American academy, participating in conferences and other activities involving gender issues, had sharpened my awareness of inequalities in a direct and comparative way. Living and teaching in Egypt brought me into contact with the women activists, working for changes in personal status laws, with whom I have continued to work. As I read legal documents and books of *shari'a* law at the same time that I was interacting with students, women's groups, and the general public in seminars and lectures, it became clear that there was little knowledge of *shari'a* law beyond what is commonly discussed by famous clergymen or what is socially accepted. One particular example is illustrative. Not a single woman or man in a seminar entitled “Women in Islamic Tradition” that I taught at the American University in Cairo knew that a man kept his absolute right to divorce even if he had given the *'isma* (right to divorce) to his bride at the time they contracted their marriage. They all thought that only one partner in a marriage could have the right to divorce and that if the husband gave the *'isma* to his wife, he had abdicated the role of male and would become a laughingstock. The lack of knowledge of this particular law has many causes, including the Qur'anic rule about “the one holding the *'isma* in his hand” – meaning that it is either the man or the woman. The law itself, however, says otherwise, and provides that a man who gives his wife the right to divorce retains the same right for himself. Knowledge of the law could give women leverage in marriages, as opposed to the constant pressure that stems from their belief that according to the law they can be divorced unilaterally but do not themselves possess the right to divorce without having

to prove specific harm. I became convinced that the most serious problem facing women in the Islamic world, Muslim and Christian alike, was the lack of ability to get out of an unwanted marriage without the husband's approval. This was a central focus of *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws*, which began with a comparison of *khul'* cases in pre-modern and modern Egypt. It examined the differences in the treatment of *khul'* during the two periods, and indicated that *khul'* was a woman's divorce before the reform of laws but then became a divorce by agreement of husband and wife.

The work of activists in Egypt was becoming increasingly focused on marriage and family law. In 1992, a group of Egyptian feminists began discussing ways in which the marriage contract could be restructured to allow women greater access to divorce. Organized as "The Communication Group for the Enhancement of the Status of Women in Egypt," the group published a guide to women's rights in the tradition of the American Civil Liberties Union's *The Rights of Women*, setting out the various laws about women's rights and indicating how women could utilize them.¹⁴ The most controversial issue raised by the guide proved to be the marriage contract, and the attack on the activities of the Communication Group that followed publication of the guide focused on the marriage contract they proposed as a replacement for the existing one. The proposal contained a number of conditions that the couple contracting the marriage could include in their marital agreement and defined the contract as a "voluntary agreement" that detailed the dowry paid by the bridegroom to the bride. The guide contained the even more revolutionary idea that the contract would automatically grant the wife the *'isma*, giving her the right to divorce while preserving the same right for the husband. It would permit a wife to apply for divorce if her husband took a second wife, acknowledge her right to work outside the home, and guarantee "humane treatment" by her husband. The intent was to guarantee women the right to divorce if a marriage no longer fulfilled its purposes or if the husband became abusive. While such efforts to enforce a new marriage contract failed, Egyptian women activists managed to obtain a 2000 law recognizing women's rights to *khul'* divorce, which for the first time since the end of the nineteenth century enabled a woman to divorce without a husband's approval and without the need to prove lack of support, physical harm or a husband's impotence.

While a large majority of the activists were lawyers and members of non-governmental organizations, a good number were academics. The interaction between the two groups, one researching and writing, the other lobbying, was quite important for future changes in the law. Among the activist groups with strong academic membership in Muslim countries one must mention the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt, whose leadership and membership are on the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. They include Hoda al-Sadda, Omaira Abu Bakr, Hoda al-Sa'di and Sahar Sobhy, along with Mervat Hatem of Howard University and myself. This group has been active in rediscovering the history of particular Arab women of significance such as Malak Hifni Nasif and A'isha Taymour. Taymour's work calling for the liberation of

women was similar to yet preceded Qasim Amin's celebrated *The Liberation of Women*.¹⁵ Mervat Hatem's various articles on A'isha Taymour have opened an intriguing glimpse into intellectual debates involving Arab women much earlier in the nineteenth century than has been perceived.¹⁶ The picture of elite male thinkers, like Qasim Amin, "calling for" or "giving" freedom to women, can no longer stand unquestioned. The debates between men and women attending the annual conferences held by the Women and Memory Forum in Cairo beginning in 1999 were sharp and gendered. As more "famous" women are brought to the attention of the public, a different history of an activist and involved female population will become accepted as the norm. At the same time, students trained by the literature professors involved in the Women and Memory Forum were rewriting children's stories, with the female heroine saving the world rather than always being saved by a male hero. A group of academic women in Lebanon, known as the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers or "Bahithat," were also active in producing new studies about women in the Arab world and their history, lives and psychology. The image they presented was one of activism and empowerment, of a constant role being played by women as members of the Arab nation. Their conference, "Arab Women in the 1920s," was hosted by Jean al-Maqdisi at the American University of Beirut. It was meant to call attention to the dynamic life of women that might otherwise be forgotten as a result of new discourses that privilege religion and focus on Islamization and veiling.¹⁷ It was an intensive meeting about an important period in Arab history during which many changes took place and many of the laws, both liberating and imprisoning for women, were introduced.

THE LEGAL BATTLE TO CHANGE PERSONAL STATUS LAW

As the above indicates, one focus of Muslims women's activism has been the law, and the battle there is perhaps as important as the battles over educating women, equal access to work, and health and nutritional issues. Scholarly works about Muslim women and law were rare a decade ago but this is no longer the case, and excellent works deconstructing the past and reinterpreting the law for today and tomorrow are being written by both Muslims and non-Muslims. A large portion of this work is produced in the United States, but a significant amount is the product of research and reinterpretation in Muslim countries. The articles in *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws* were an early effort in that direction. These include Zarinebaf-Sharf's "Women, Law, and Imperial Justice in Ottoman Istanbul in the Late Seventeenth Century," showing the active role middle-class women took in endowing services for their quarters; Meriwether's "The Rights of Children and the Responsibilities of Women: Women as *Wasis* in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840," depicting Syrian women as guardians of their children;¹⁸ Largueche's "Confined, Battered, and Repudiated Women in Tunis since the Eighteenth Century," describing a new form of incarceration for women under French rule in Tunisia; and Mary-Anne Fay's "The Ties that Bound: Women and Households in Eighteenth-Century Egypt," delineating the

power of Mamluk women within ruling households.¹⁹ The impetus was to create new knowledge about women in the past so as to empower women in the present. Some articles were a plea for a rereading of Islamic law and an attempt to understand the intricacies of *shari'a* and the various schools involved in it. If we could demonstrate that *shari'a* was understood and practiced differently in different periods and places, then we could prove that *shari'a* was in process, that it was tied to historical context, and that it did not constitute a permanent body of God-given laws that was not open for change. The image of an unchanging *shari'a* had been adopted by Western scholars and Muslim scholars alike and enforced by the state with the support of the clergy. How could the image be changed except through deconstructing the normative view of the *shari'a*?²⁰ That has been the focus of my writings on Islamic law, as well as that of colleagues in the United States and in the Islamic world.

My “Adults and Minors in Ottoman *Shari'a* Courts and Modern Law,”²¹ a study of the legal changes that applied to girls and young women as they moved from minority to majority, showed the way modern laws limit women’s maneuverability. A discussion of various laws and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) interpretations in the pre-reform and post-reform periods illustrated the incorporation of the code Napoleon into Egyptian personal status laws which, for example, changed the age of majority that had been based on *shari'a* laws. It is generally accepted that Egyptian laws in areas such as criminal law, property, and commerce, like those of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, were based on the French code. Personal status laws, however, were assumed to be based entirely on *shari'a*. The article and subsequent work demonstrated that European laws altered the personal status laws of Muslim countries, changing the age of majority and making the nuclear family, consisting of a patriarchal head and his dependent wife and children, the center of legal discourse. European coverture laws were the source of new laws of obedience, *ta'a*, that violated the traditions of Islamic courts by allowing for the incarceration of wives by husbands.²²

The argument was developed further in my “The History of Marriage in Islam.”²³ I examined Egypt’s *shari'a* court records from the pre-Ottoman period to see the genesis of *shari'a* laws and what is known as the “Islamic marriage contract.” My research took me back into the Mamlukid period (1250–1517), the Ikhshidid period (935–969), and all the way back to ancient Egypt. I also spent two summers in southern France to research pre-modern French marriage contracts for comparative purposes. My conclusions were about the origins of “Islamic” marriage, the contradictions between legal practice in courts and *mufti* (Muslim legal expert) and *fiqh* discourses, and the similarities between “Islamic” marriage, pre-Islamic marriage and non-Islamic marriages. This was important in mounting a challenge to the assumption that the *shari'a* reflects God’s words and is therefore unchangeable. My approach was to prove that the *shari'a* had always been dynamic and changeable and there is therefore no reason to assume that it cannot be changed today to suit new circumstances. In other words, like law in other cultures and other parts of the world, *shari'a* was law in process, its definition and application largely

dependent on context. There was a constant creation of new *shari'as*, which I call “new *shari'a*.” In *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism*, I drew on the historical record to develop the idea of Hanafization of law as part of the nineteenth-century modernization and nation-state building project, and showed the patriarchal nature of the Hanafi laws that were codified into personal status law.²⁴

The difference between pre-modern and post-modern laws is also apparent in court procedures regarding *zina* (fornication) and rape.²⁵ The nation-state, its *muftis* and *fuqaha'* (theologians) engendered a new legal philosophy that resulted in a clear deterioration of the handling of rape and *zina*. Whereas before the reforms, women had only to prove rape, after the reforms they also had to prove that the rapist’s “intent” was to rape and that there was no incitement by the victim. Given the epidemic of rapes in Middle Eastern towns and the appearance of stoning as punishment for women accused of fornication, it was important to deconstruct the laws used by courts today and show that current *zina* procedures are a recent construction without root in earlier *shari'a* practices.

CONCLUSION

The project that I embarked upon was a history of women that drew on wider and perhaps more pertinent sources than those that had been used in the past. It was equally important to analyze culture as the product of individuals, classes, and social groups. What I found in the secondary literature was a history about women, and when it came to Muslim women, it was a history of subservience, oppression and “what has been done to women” rather than a history “of” women. Muslim women had been taken out of history. Their stories were dismissed just as they had been by the medieval *fuqaha'*. The fact that the histories were the cultural product of theologians, representatives of a group with specific interests, had somehow been lost in the modern discourses. The challenge was to read the texts as the products of a living culture and society. This approach permits a new understanding of what was produced, who produced it, and the context in which disputes, struggles, agreements, contracts and new laws came into existence. It enables us to go beyond seeing treaties written only by men as confirmation of patriarchy and to look instead for the issues pertinent to women and to women’s contribution to the thought process.

Many academics are involved in this process of scholarship and in trying to achieve greater rights for women. In addition to the historians mentioned above, they include anthropologists such as Fadwa el-Guindi, Shahla Haeri and Ziba Mir-Hossaini, who have long fought against the exceptionalist approach to Muslim women and have analyzed specific areas of inequalities needing to be addressed.²⁶ Other groups of academic activists have become involved in the rereading of the Qur’an and Qur’anic interpretation. This is happening all over the globe, as Muslim women become more involved in reading theology and interpreting Islam from a feminist perspective. Scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas are read the world over.²⁷ Muslim women in the United States read the works of groups like the “Sisters in Islam” in Malaysia, headed by Zina Anwar, who are engaged in rereading *shari'a* sources from a woman’s perspective.²⁸

There was an intensive three-day meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2001 with Ziba Mir-Hossaini, Amina Wadud, and Muslim women thinkers from the five Muslim Southeast Asian countries, discussing Islamic legal schools and ways to deal with issues such as polygamy and unilateral divorce.²⁹ During the first week of May, 2005, the Women and Memory Forum held the first conference in which women *faqihat* (female jurists) publicly met together to discuss a woman's *fiqh*.

The important thing about this effort is that it is communal, with academics interacting with colleagues interested in the same issues and with activists and women's groups. A new world opens to the academic who becomes engaged with activists such as Mona Zhul-Fiqar, who brought a group of lawyers and academics together in a 1997 Harvard Islamic Legal Studies Program conference to discuss issues such as marriage contracts and *khul'*.³⁰ Frank Vogel and Peri Bearman of Harvard University helped organize and host a three-day conference on "Women and the Labor Market" that brought women from Muslim countries and the United States together in 2002 to discuss women's work in the past and present. Conference members discussed subjects such as Muslim women's work in the writings of *muftis* and *fuqaha'*, the Qur'anic writings about women's work, the jobs that women held during various periods of Islamic history, and the labor laws under which Muslim women live today. Women's right to work is a critical issue for Muslim women, as employment laws in Muslim countries, combined with personal status laws, limit women's access to the workplace. My own work, based on Jordanian/Palestinian archives dating from the fifteenth century, shows that women were active in the marketplace, that they worked as doctors, merchants, and entrepreneurs, and that what the *fuqaha'* have to say about women and work today has very little to do with the reality of their lives or the practices of the courts in the pre-modern period.³¹ The Harvard conference, in which members of the Women and Memory group and colleagues from France and the United States participated, added to and extended my findings. Omaila Abu Bakr and I plan a conference on the same subject to be held in the Arab world.

There is much activity taking place. It is not about Muslim women alone but about a new perspective on the role of women. It is about writing women's history. When we analyze laws and human relations as cultural products specific to a certain time and place, women emerge as active members of the historical process. Reconstructing the history of women empowers women and is one way of challenging those who insist that gender inequality is based on Islam. If the past shows that Islamic societies had more egalitarian practices, how can a supposedly unchanging Islam be used as an excuse to marginalize women?

NOTES

1. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession in Egypt, 1800-1922* (Syracuse University Press, 1991).

2. See, e.g., Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, trans. Brian Pearce (Monthly Review Press, 1974); *Imperialism and Unequal*

Development (Monthly Review Press, 1977). Among the works relevant here are Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978); Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (University of Texas Press, 1979); Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Schenkman Publishing Co./Halsted Press, 1975).

3. Muhammad Ali Pasha, who ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848, established a new educational system that included a medical school.

4. So described by LaVerne Kunhke in her study of Egyptian female medical practitioners, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (University of California Press, 1990), p. 118.

5. See, e.g., Gran, op. cit.; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "The British Occupation of Egypt: Another View," 9 *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (November, 1978), pp. 471-488; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Women and Men in Late Eighteenth-Century Egypt* (University of Texas Press, 1995); Rifaat Ali Abou-el-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (State University of New York Press, 1991).

6. The court records I first examined were located in the main Cairo central court in Gala'. All *shari'a* court records were subsequently moved from the various courts in Egypt to a central location at Dar al-Watha'iq al-'Umumiyya in Cairo.

7. See Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) for a discussion of the impact of capitalist penetration and the loss of land-tenure on the life of Egyptian peasant women.

8. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "The Revolutionary Gentlewomen in Egypt," in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 261-276.

9. I discussed this in *Creation of a Medical Profession in Egypt*, op. cit.

10. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, "Nineteenth Century Muslim Marriage Contracts: Modernization and Standardization," originally presented at the Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman conference, Aix-en-Provence, July 1992; published in Daniel Panzac, ed., *Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey (1326-1960)* (Aix-en-Provence, France: Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman, 1996).

11. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (Syracuse University Press, 1996); translated as *Al-Mar'a, Qanun al-'a'ila wal-Talaq fi Tarikh al-Islam* (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-'ulya lil-Thaqafa, 1999).

12. See, e.g., Haim Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (State University of New York Press, 1994); *Islamic Law and Culture, 1600-1840* (Brill, 1999).

13. Fariba Zarinebaf-Sharf, "Women, Law, and Imperial Justice in Ottoman Istanbul in the Late Seventeenth Century," pp. 81-95; Nelly Hanna, "Marriage among Merchant Families in Seventeenth-Century Cairo," pp. 143-154; Madeline Zilfi, "Women and Society in the Tulip Era, 1718-1730," pp. 290-306; Margaret Meriwether, "The Rights of Children and the Responsibilities of Women: Women as *Wasis* in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840," pp. 143-235; Abdel-Rahim Abdel-Rahman, "The Family and Gender Laws in Egypt during the Ottoman Period," pp. 96-111; all in Sonbol, *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws*, op. cit.

14. *The Rights of Women: The Basic ACLU Guide to Women's Rights* (3rd Edition, 1993); The Communication Group for the Enhancement of the Status of Women in Egypt, *Legal Rights of Egyptian Women in Theory and Practice* (The Communication Group for the Enhancement of the Status of Women in Egypt, 1992).

15. A'isha Taymour, *Mir'at al-ta'ammul Fil-umur* (1892); Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women: A Document in the History of Egyptian Feminism*, trans. Samiha Sidhom Peterson (American University in Cairo Press, 1992).

16. See, e.g., Mervat F. Hatem, "A'isha Taymur's Tears and the Critique of the Modernist and the Feminist Discourses on Nineteenth-Century Egypt," in Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 1998); "The Nineteenth Century Discursive Roots of the Continuing Debate on the Social-Sexual Contract in Today's Egypt," 2 *HAWWA: Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World* (2004), pp. 34-63.

17. Proceedings of the conference were published as Jean al-Maqdisi, Nadia al-Shaykh, and Nazib Saba, eds., *al-Nisa' al-'arabiyyat fi al-'ishrinat* (Beirut: al-Bahithat al-Libnaniyyat, 2003). This author's contribution was an article entitled "*al-Mar'a al-misriyya wal-islamiat al-qanuniyya fi al-'ishrinat*."

18. A *wasi* is an executor appointed on the minor children's behalf in the case of the father's death, charged with management of their property and with their maintenance.

19. See footnote 13, above, and Mary-Anne Fay, "The Ties That Bound: Women and Households in Eighteenth-Century Egypt," pp. 155-172; Dalenda Lagueche, "Confined, Battered, and Repudiated Women in Tunis since the Eighteenth Century," pp. 259-276, both in Sonbol, *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws*, op. cit.

20. I discuss procedures in *shari'a* courts, women's litigation and various issues brought by them to courts in "Women in Shari'a Courts: a Historical and Methodological Discussion," 27 *Fordham International Law Journal* (2003), pp. 225-253.

21. Sonbol, "Adults and Minors in Ottoman Shari'a Courts and Modern Law" in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws In Islamic History*, op. cit.

22. See Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, "Ta'a and Modern Reforms" in 9 *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (October 1998), pp. 285-294; "Nineteenth Century Muslim Marriage Contracts: Modernization and Standardization" in Daniel Panzac, ed., *The Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey (1326-1960)* (Aix-en-Provence, France: Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman, 1996); "Rethinking Women and Islam" in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John Esposito, eds., *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (University Press of Florida, 2001).

23. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, "The History of Marriage in Islam," presented at a 1997 roundtable followed by a 1999 conference on the Muslim Marriage Contract, held at Harvard's Islamic Legal Studies Program; to be published as "History of Marriage Contracts in Egypt," 3 *HAWWA: Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World* (2005) and in Asifa Quraishi and Frank E. Vogel, *The Islamic Marriage Contract: Case Studies in Islamic Family Law* (Harvard University Press, 2006).

24. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse University Press, 2000). By Hanafization, I mean moving from the Shafi'i and Maliki schools of Islamic law to the Hanafi code. The Hanafi school of Islamic law, one of the four schools utilized in the Ottoman Empire, became dominant in Egypt by the end of the seventeenth century.

25. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, "Law and Gender Violence in Ottoman and Modern Egypt: A Comparative Study" in Madeline Zilfi, ed., *Women in the Ottoman Empire: History and Legacy of the Early Modern Middle East* (E.J. Brill, 1997).

26. See, e.g., Fadwa el-Guindi, "Veiling *Infatih* with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," 28 *Social Problems* (1981), pp. 465-485; Shahla Haeri,

Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'ī Iran (Syracuse University Press, 1989) and *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* (Syracuse University Press, 2002); Ziba Mir-Hossaini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law: Iran and Morocco Compared* (St. Martin's Press, 1993) and *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

27. Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (University of Texas Press, 2002).

28. See, e.g., Nik Noriani Nik Badli Shah, *Marriage and Divorce Under Islamic Law* (International Law Book Services, 1998) and *Marriage and Divorce: Law Reform Within Islamic Framework* (International Law Book Services, 2000). The Sisters in Islam site is at <http://www.sistersinislam.org>.

29. Conference, "Islamic Family Law and Justice for Muslim Women, Kuala Lumpur," June 2001. A conference report is available at <http://www.asiasource.org/asip/muslim-women.cfm>.

30. The papers are to be published in Quraishi and Vogel, op. cit. See footnote 23 above.

31. Amira el-Azhary Sonbol, *Women of Jordan: Islam, Labor and the Law* (Syracuse University Press, 2003).

Abbasids - Sunni dynasty (750 - 1257 A.D.)

Dar al-harb - the part of the world not governed by Islamic law, therefore considered a place of strife and conflict; literally, a “territory of war”

Dar al-Islam - the part of the world governed by Islamic rule; literally, “a place of peace”

Hadith/Ahadith (pl.) - accounts of the life, words and thinking of the Prophet Muhammad.

Halal - permitted for Muslims

Haram - forbidden for Muslims

Hijab - head covering worn by some Muslim women

Ijtihad - using one’s own abilities, while drawing on sources such as the Qur’an and the Sunnah, to understand Allah’s rulings

Jihad - struggle in the name of Islam

Jummah - Friday prayers

Kafir - disbeliever; a person who refuses to submit himself or herself to Allah

Khutbah - Friday sermon

Madrassa - school; usually refers to a Qur’anic school

Masjid - house of worship

Mufti - Islamic legal scholar who is empowered to give rulings on religious law

Salafi/Salafiyyah - the movement that seeks to practice Islam as it was practiced at the time of the Prophet Muhammad

Shari'a - the laws of Islam

Shi'a - one of the two main communities of Muslim believers

Sufism - the school of esoteric philosophy in Islam; sometimes referred to as Islamic mysticism

Sunnah - a collection of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad; along with the Qur'an, one of the two major sources of jurisprudence in Islam

Sunni - the larger of the two main communities of Muslim believers

'Ulama' - councils of Muslim theologians

Wahabism - literal interpretation of Islam as practiced by cleric Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-1792); now the formal doctrine of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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