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All correspondence should be addressed to:
AJIS, PO Box 669, Herndon, VA 20172-0669 USA
Phone: 703-230-2847 • Fax: 703-471-3922
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EDITORIAL

Editorial Note

This issue of the *American Journal of Islam and Society* comprises four research articles, which engage themes of development and change within the Islamic tradition alongside questions of Muslim identity. We begin with Abbas Jong's work, "Reconfiguring Political Islam: A Discursive Tradition Approach." In this article, Jong offers a thorough, deeply theoretical engagement with the concept of discursive tradition, which he restructures via the concept of social configuration. As a result, political Islam emerges neither as a discrete ideological project nor a transhistorical expression of Islamic governance. Instead, it is theorized as a dynamic and contested field embedded within shifting social terrains. It is in these changing environments, Jong argues, that Islamist actors engage in their diverse efforts of discursive labor to resignify certain Islamic concepts within shifting institutional and ideological parameters to produce a field of multiplicity and dynamic contradiction. As a result, Jong is able to offer a framework for thinking about political Islam and analyzing particular thinkers, movements, and moments in arguably far richer and more fruitful terms than has typically been offered to date.

We then turn to a study by Malik Mufti, "The Catholic Experience in America from Orestes Brownson to the Bozells: A Precedent for Muslims?" Malik's point of departure is to consider the history of American Catholicism and its adaptation to the "American creed," a part of an American liberal culture "that is both formally tolerant and ideologically compelling" to immigrants and their religious traditions. As scholars such as Harold Bloom and Alan Wolfe have argued, this American creed, characterized by the individualistic and anti-authoritarian features of the Protestant Reformation, ultimately transforms

all other faiths into variants of itself. After reviewing the works of key Catholic intellectuals such as the nineteenth-century convert Orestes Brownson as well as demographic and public opinion data, the author considers the extent to which Catholicism has maintained its identity in the American context. He then considers what the implications might be for American Muslims.

As our third research article for this issue, we then have Hamdija Begovic's "From Ummatic Muslims to State-centered Bosniacs: The Case of the Muslims of Bosnia." Here, Begovic considers the evolution of the national identity of Bosnian Muslims throughout the 20th century from what he calls an "Ummatic-centric focus" that uses the label "Muslims," toward a secularized identity demonstrated through their adoption of the ethnonym "Bosniacs." Typically, this shift was framed as necessary for the preservation of Bosnian Muslims in religious, cultural, and even biological terms. Begovic's study engages the pre-existing narrative of the Bosniac national renaissance, known as the *Preporod*, to provide a historical overview of how Bosnian Muslims transitioned from being part of the Ummah to identifying as Bosniacs tied to a nation-state, with an analytical reflection on the implications of this transformation.

The fourth and final research article in this issue is Bilkis Bharucha's article, "Islam, Science, and the Environment: An Application of Ibrahim Kalin's "Three Views of Science in the Islamic World," which offers a critical application of Kalin's framework to contemporary debates on Islam and environmental ethics. By examining ethical, epistemic, and meta-physical critiques of science, Bharucha considers how each approach has been mobilized in Muslim environmental thought, highlighting both their contributions and their limitations. The study's significance lies in showing how Kalin's model provides a productive lens for navigating the otherwise fragmented discourse on Islam and science, while also revealing the risks of drawing upon religious concepts for policy or ideological ends. This contribution enriches the broader conversation about how Islamic intellectual traditions engage with urgent ecological challenges. Alongside a number of insightful book reviews, the forum in this issue returns to discussions of the the Balkan context, with an insightful study by Enes Karić on the first Serbian translation of the

Qur'an by Mićo Ljubibratić, bringing to light a subject little-known to an English-language readership.

DAVID H. WARREN

LECTURER OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES AND ARABIC

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

ASSISTANT EDITOR, AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ISLAM AND SOCIETY

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ARTICLES

Reconfiguring Political Islam: A Discursive Tradition Approach

ABBAS JONG

Abstract

This article reconceptualizes Political Islam through the analytic lens of discursive tradition, restructured within the framework of social configurations. Departing from essentialist, universalist, nominalist, and reductionist readings, the study foregrounds the epistemological contingencies and internal pluralities that characterize Political Islam as a historically situated and discursively constructed phenomenon. Rather than treating political Islam as a fixed ideological project or a transhistorical expression of Islamic governance, the article theorizes it as a dynamic and contested field in which diverse actors articulate Islamic categories within distinct configurations shaped by contextual

Abbas Jong is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Humboldt University of Berlin.

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transformations, historical ruptures, institutional dislocations, regimes of reasoning, and so on. Drawing on Talal Asad's notion of discursive tradition, the analysis reconstructs its scope through the concept of social configurations, which enables a multilayered reading of Political Islam across three analytical levels: conditions of possibility, categorical and discursive formation, and social objectification. This theoretical reconstruction clarifies how Islamist discourses emerge not from doctrinal continuity alone, but through strategic negotiations over core issues such as temporality, authority, power, and legitimacy. Through comparative and context-sensitive examination of various Islamist traditions—from reformist to revolutionary, nationalist to transnational, moderate to militant—the article shows how Political Islam operates through a grammar of differentiation and reconfiguration within the broader Islamic tradition. The resulting framework not only situates Political Islam within shifting social terrains, but also offers an epistemological intervention into its interpretation as a plural, indeterminate, and generative discursive tradition.

Keywords: Political Islam, Islamism, Discursive Tradition, Islamic Tradition, Talal Asad

Introduction

Over the course of several decades, a range of terms including Political Islam, Islamism, fundamentalism, Jihadism, moderate Islam, Salafism, Wahhabism, and others have been employed to elucidate the increasing presence of Islam within the public sphere, particularly in the realm of politics. These conceptual frameworks and categories have been adopted by various scholars, each utilizing distinct approaches and pursuing different objectives to make sense of a wide array of phenomena. These phenomena encompass currents, discourses, movements, traditions, governments, parties, identities, actions, communities, dispositions, practices, ideologies, and all social entities that have sought to advance

diverse collective and political agendas, each grounded in distinct interpretations of the imagined Islamic tradition (Arjomand, 1995; Asad, 2011; Ayooob, 2004; Ayooob & Lussier, 2020; Ayubi, 1991; Bayat, 2013; Denoeux, 2002; Esposito, 1997; Esposito & Shahin, 2013; Hashemi, 2021; Hirschkind, 2013; Kepel, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Mahmood, 1994; Mandaville, 2014; March, 2015; Martin & Barzegar, 2009; Moaddel, 2002; Roy, 1994, 2006; Salvatore, 1999; Tibi, 2012; Voll & Sonn, 2009; Volpi, 2011b; Zubaida, 2000).

Within the broader context of Political Islam, a wide range of actors find their place, from the reformist ideas espoused by Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani to the revolutionary ideology propagated by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the radical jihadism associated with figures such as Osama bin Laden. Furthermore, this category includes movements from terrorist groups from Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Hamas, and the Taliban to Islamist movement and groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ennahda Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, Hezbollah, etc., as well as the establishment of Islamic states in Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, and other regions, collectively falling under the umbrella of Political Islam and Islamism. These diverse and sometimes contradictory uses and implications have made political Islam a contested and problematic issue (Asad, 2003; Hashemi, 2021; Hurd, 2008; Ismail, 2003; Jong & Ali, 2023; March, 2015; Schwedler, 2011; Varisco, 2009). In the contemporary cosmopolitanized world, where multiplicity, interconnectivity, fluidity, and transnationalism have imposed a form of constant transformation and indeterminacy on social phenomena, the situation has become even more critical. The concepts of Islam and Islamism, within practical politics and various contexts, is constructed and reconstructed within different configurations and for diverse purposes alongside other categories by various groups. This process has effectively erased any fixed and given meaning or significance for these concepts. Consequently, utilizing this conceptual framework necessitates a variety of theoretical and conceptual considerations alongside taking historical conditions into account.

“Islamism,” also referred to here as “Political Islam”—though some scholars (Cesari, 2021; Emmerson, 2010; Ismail, 2003; Voll & Sonn, 2009) argue for a distinction, as it is largely based on a presupposed, *a priori*, and essentialized understanding of politics, power and Islam, whereby

“Political Islam” is seen as primarily oriented toward power, state and political authority, while “Islamism” is viewed as a broader tendency encompassing various dimensions of social and individual life. However, by suspending this essentialist conception of politics and approaching Islam as a discursive tradition, we can instead identify multiple, internally diverse discursive traditions within Islam—including both Islamism and Political Islam—whose internal pluralities are shaped in relation to the particular aims and trajectories of each discourse, thereby deferring and destabilizing any universal or essentialist definition of either “Islam” or “politics,” as both the nature of Islam, politics, and their relationship are contingently constituted within and through these historically situated discursive traditions—is primarily understood as a multifaceted socio-political and ideological movement that advocates for the comprehensive application of Islamic principles and norms in shaping individual lives and society, including the political and legal realms, as many scholars have articulated (Ayoob, 2004; Denoeux, 2002; March, 2015; Volpi, 2011a). Many scholars in the field of Islamic political studies have considered Political Islam in various frameworks, ranging from a social-political movement and a revolutionary current to an ideology, a way of life, an Islamic identity, religiosity, discourse, doctrine, governance, religious fundamentalism and conservatism, an alternative modernity and so forth (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Esposito, 1997; Ismail, 2004; Mahmood, 2005; Roy, 2003; Tibi, 2005; Voll & Sonn, 2009; Zubaida, 2004).

Political Islam also encompasses a diverse spectrum of beliefs and practices, ranging from moderate, peaceful activism to more radical and potentially violent approaches, all aimed at establishing an Islamic state or society governed by Shariah law or through extensive references to Islamic tradition and granting a higher authority to their imagined of Islam in the public sphere (Fuller, 2003; Roy, 1994). For many groups of Islamists, Islamism is characterized by its emphasis on the central role of Islam in guiding not only personal behavior but also the broader social and political structures, and it often involves cultural differentiation from the West and a reconnection with pre-colonial Islamic values (Lewis, 1976, 1993). Adherents of Islamism may actively assert and promote Islamic beliefs, prescriptions, laws, and policies, thereby shaping

and influencing political and social activities within Muslim-majority or minority contexts.

Even in countries with a Muslim majority, where Islam—in its broad and pluralistic sense—constitutes an essential part of the individual and collective lives of Muslims, Islamists strive to impose and implement their envisioned version of Islam at both the public and political levels. They rely on their specific and exclusive interpretations and emphasize certain aspects of Islamic tradition to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, from an ontological perspective, many studies also view Political Islam as an epiphenomenon distinct and divergent from the secular and impartial public sphere, perceiving it as a regression to pre-modern forms of Islamic political order, a manifestation of fundamental economic and political interests, an outcome stemming from various social, political, economic, and cultural crises, an unprecedented intrusion of non-modern and irrational religious phenomena into the secular public sphere, or even as an invalid, fantastical, colonialist, and unreal category (Hirschkind, 2013; Hurd, 2008). However, the multiplicity and indeterminacy of the phenomena encompassed by these academic categories not only fail to enhance understanding but also distort and neglect the actual and objective realities. Therefore, in order to comprehensively investigate the intricate relationship between Islam and politics, it is crucial to explore more flexible, epistemologically complex, and efficient approaches that can accommodate the diverse array of phenomena and trends present in this domain.

In addressing these mainly theoretical and epistemological predicaments in conceptualizing phenomena categorized under Political Islam and Islamism, various theoretical and non-theoretical solutions have been proposed. One promising solution that offers significant potential for a more precise conceptualization of the complexities associated with phenomena categorized under Political Islam is to consider Political Islam as a discursive tradition. The idea of a discursive tradition was introduced by Talal Asad (2009) in his conceptual formulation of Islam as an object of anthropological inquiry amidst the dominant readings and definitions of Islam. A discursive tradition, as defined by Talal Asad, is a complex and evolving set of discourses that guide religious practice and

interpretation. It is characterized by its historical continuity, adaptability, plurality, and the interrelation of power and authority with tradition and discourse. This framework allows for a nuanced understanding of Islam that transcends rigid essentialist and nominalist definitions, acknowledging the dynamic interplay of historical, social, and cultural factors in shaping religious traditions (Asad, 2003, 2009, 2011, 2015).

This formulation, by juxtaposing the concept of tradition in the MacIntyrean sense with discourse and power in the Foucauldian sense and history in the Benjaminian sense, attempts to position Islam within and suspend the two central antinomies in Islamic studies in general and the anthropology of Islam in particular. These antinomies include essentialist and nominalist definitions of Islam, as well as the dichotomy between lived Islam (low Islam) and theological Islam reliant on tradition (high Islam). Asad seeks to argue in favor of a third state relative to these dichotomies by highlighting Islam as a discursive tradition and to move beyond them (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2003, 2009). Given the conceptual capacity and appeal of this notion in Islamic and religious studies, this idea has been adopted by various scholars as their primary analytical unit. Among these scholars, some have utilized this idea in the study of Political Islam to address the aforementioned challenges (see: Hirschkind, 2013; Hurd, 2008; Ismail, 2003, 2004; Jong & Ebrahimzadeh, 2024; Mahmood, 2005).

However, it should be noted that Talal Asad did not engage deeply and precisely in formulating this concept, and the lack of precise theoretical, epistemological, historical, and empirical foundations has resulted in further ambiguities, both epistemological and empirical, in making sense of various related objects. In studies related to Political Islam, the application of the idea of a discursive tradition has been employed merely for historicization or to make Political Islam more concrete, multifaceted, and complex (Hirschkind, 2013; Ismail, 2003, 2004; Mahmood, 2005), or solely to critique the general approaches of radical essentialism or constructionism in Political Islam (Hurd, 2008). In these studies, the notion of Political Islam as a discursive tradition has neither been explained nor referenced in terms of its epistemological foundations, implications, or methodological application in understanding phenomena categorized

under Political Islam. Instead, the discursive tradition in these studies has only provided some general clarifications in the examination of Political Islam.

However, any precise reference to and use of this idea necessitates a thorough understanding of its epistemological foundations and theoretical and discursive implications for its application in more concrete analyses. The central claim of this research is that examining the epistemological foundations of the idea of the discursive tradition, promoting it, and reinterpreting it based on the post-foundational epistemological premises of social configurations (Jong, 2023) will clarify, and expand the capacity of this concept. This, in turn, will more precisely and realistically address the aforementioned challenges related to the conceptualization of Political Islam. To this end, the article will review the epistemological foundations of the idea of the discursive tradition in defining Islam, particularly the antinomies of universalism/singularism, essentialism/nominalism and tradition/experience. It will then re-contextualize and revisit these foundations based on the premises and promises of social configurations. The study will also explore the implications of this examination and reinterpretation for inquires in Political Islam and more specifically in political Islamist thought.

It will be shown that, this effort allows for a comprehensive and flexible understanding of Islamist discourses and movements by revealing that they are constructed within an intricate network of relationships and a matrix of categories, ideas, tendencies, and variables that emerge within specific temporal and spatial contexts. The argument put forth emphasizes that the consideration of Political Islam as a discursive tradition necessitates viewing the subject of inquiry in a relational manner, in relation to other phenomena, discourses, and currents. Moreover, it entails acknowledging that these phenomena are not predetermined, or static based on rigid categories, religious principles, or dominant orthodoxy, but rather shaped as configurations within a historical constellation under specific conditions of possibility. These configurations encompass a network of interrelated categories and diverse internal and external relations. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that one of the most significant implications of considering Political Islam as a discursive tradition

is the ability to situate and understand it as a configuration within the broader Islamic discursive tradition—alongside other strands such as Salafis, Sufis, reformists/modernists, traditionalists, and the ulama.

Political Islam and the Discursive Tradition, Some Epistemological Considerations

The definition and nature of the object of inquiry in religious studies—namely, religion—in Islamic studies—namely, Islam—or in studies of Political Islam—namely, Political Islam or Islamism—represent a fundamental issue with significant ontological and epistemological implications for these fields. Talal Asad (2009), amidst prevailing definitions and debates surrounding the essence of Islam, proposes a novel definition of Islam as an object of anthropological inquiry. This definition, articulated in Asad's (2009) article "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," leverages the concept of a discursive tradition and offers extensive potential for rethinking Islam as a distinct object of study. Asad's approach directly engages with definitions framed around the antinomies of tradition versus experience and essentialism versus nominalism (and constructionism), while also addressing the predicament of historicism versus non-historicism indirectly (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2009; Jong & Ali, 2023). The following sections will preliminarily introduce and reinterpret these antinomies through the broader epistemological framework of universalism versus singularism. Addressing and transcending this antinomy promises to tackle a central epistemological challenge in Islamic studies, especially regarding Political Islam (Jong, 2023; Jong & Ali, 2023). The controversies surrounding the conceptualization of Islam, in both its ontological and epistemological dimensions, are crucial for understanding and addressing issues related to Political Islam.

The fundamental question that arises in the conceptualization of Islam, specifically in relation to Political Islam or Islamism, is whether Islam is a universal and trans-historical category that can be derived from sacred texts, rituals, teachings, and its broader historical context, allowing for a general definition, characteristics, or laws and traditions. Alternatively, is Islam merely a temporally constructed and contextually

transformed phenomenon by Muslims in specific times and places, under distinct historical and sociological conditions? Are we encountering a universal, official, theological, and standardized Islam that coexists with some historical and local representations (as proposed by Orientalists, politicians, theologians and some other scholars), or is Islam fundamentally comprised of singular entities and concrete phenomena, only implemented contingently and empirically, subject to specific conditions, and possessing limited universality and determinacy?

This situation can be extrapolated to the realm of Political Islam. Fundamentally, there exists a query as to whether Political Islam is a universal phenomenon rooted in overarching Islamic teachings, history and its relations to politics, thereby possessing inherent legitimacy, and subsequently, allowing for the examination of various representations of this universal Political Islam. Conversely, is Political Islam a contingent and diverse phenomenon arising from specific historical circumstances? Can Political Islam be considered as an episodic or singular manifestation emerging within particular contexts due to distinctive interpretations of Islamic teachings or reliance on specific references to the Islamic tradition? Framed in epistemological terms, does Political Islam represent a universal category encompassing timeless attributes, capable of encompassing diverse phenomena under general characteristics about the relations between Islam and politics? Or does it essentially function as an incomplete and singular category, accommodating limited phenomena contingent upon particular assumptions, conditions and relations between different forms of Islamicity and politics? (Jong & Ali, 2023)

Conversely, and as another means of approaching this issue, Talal Asad's formulation of the concept of discursive tradition brings attention to the debate over how to define Islam itself (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2009, 2015; Iqbal, 2017). Essentialist approaches seek to establish Islam as a universal, given, completed and transhistorical category, derived primarily from sacred texts, traditions, rituals, teachings, and its broader historical context. On the other hand, constructivist perspectives view Islam as a temporally constructed and contextually transformed phenomenon, molded by specific historical and sociological conditions. In this dispute, Islam or Political Islam is considered an empty term or name

for phenomena that, at an empirical level, exhibit only minimal similarities necessary to construct a singular, distinct phenomenon identified as Islam or Islamism. The central issue here is who or what carries the label or name of Islam and who participates in constructing the reality that is referred to as Islam. And fundamentally, what realities does the name Islam signify? However, these approaches tend to oversimplify the complexity and diversity inherent within Islam as a lived tradition and fail to account for the transformative claims and diverse interpretations and references made by contemporary Muslims (Asad, 2009).

The problem of tradition and experience, embodied in the idea of discursive tradition, further complicates the discourse surrounding the definition of Islam (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2009; Iqbal, 2017). Traditional, mainly theological and static understandings of tradition often emphasize a replication of the past, leading to static and fixed conceptions. However, the experiences of Muslims in modern times challenge these rigid notions of tradition. Should Islam and Political Islam be understood in relation to pre-existing theological traditions, jurisprudential schools, or the narrow circles of scholars, religious interpreters, and Islamists? Or is Islam merely the lived experience of Muslims in various societies and times, based on their diverse references, understandings, and uses of elements deemed Islamic, alongside other elements—without regard to their theological logic? Here, should we speak of *Islams*—especially at the level of lived experience—based on contexts, actors, and various interpretations of what is considered Islamic? Or is Islam, particularly in terms of sacred texts, teachings, and its general history, a single source or reality with multiple representations or historical developments?

In dealing with these antinomies, Talal Asad introduces the concept of “discursive tradition” to understand Islam beyond essentialist, constructionist and nominalist approaches as well as the dichotomy of experience and tradition (Anjum, 2007; Asad, 2009). This approach integrates elements of tradition, as conceptualized by Alasdair MacIntyre, with the Foucauldian idea of discourse and the idea of history by Walter Benjamin (Iqbal, 2017). For him, a discursive tradition encompasses a set of discourses that instruct practitioners on the correct form and purpose of particular practices within specific historical and material

contexts. According to Asad, an Islamic discursive tradition is “a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present” (Asad, 2009: 20). This definition highlights the dynamic nature of tradition, emphasizing that it is not merely a replication of past practices but involves an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation. In this framework, tradition is actively engaged with the present and future, allowing for a continuous evolution of practices and beliefs.

In general, Asad views discursive processes and power relations as central to shaping the nature and identity of religion, particularly in contrast to categories such as the secular, the nation, the state, and other related constructs, across different historical periods and spatial contexts (Asad, 2003). However, in his essay “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” he argues that Islam constitutes a uniquely discursive tradition, setting it apart from other religions (Asad, 2009). In Asad’s conceptualization, the discursive tradition is underpinned by the interrelation of tradition, discourse, and history, each contributing to a complex, evolving framework that resists static and essentialist interpretations. Tradition, rooted in MacIntyre’s notion of a historically extended and socially embodied argument, reflects a continuity that is not merely preserved but actively interpreted and reinterpreted within the ever-shifting contexts of social and political life. This continuous re-engagement ensures that tradition remains a living discourse, responsive to the demands of the present while being anchored in the past (MacIntyre, 1988). According to Asad, Muslims refer to and engage with Islamic tradition—including sacred texts and prophetic traditions—through various modes of reasoning, interpretation, and argumentation within different discursive, temporal, and spatial contexts. This dynamic process of reference and interpretation is particularly prominent in Islam’s engagement with diverse public issues. Discourse, drawing on Foucault’s insights, is the medium through which the power dynamics within a tradition are articulated and contested. It is within these discursive practices that the authority of religious texts and practices is both constructed and challenged, shaped by the socio-political forces at play. Asad’s emphasis on discourse highlights the critical role of power relations in the formation

and transformation of tradition, revealing how religious practices and beliefs are not simply inherited but are subject to ongoing negotiation and adaptation. (Enayat, 2017).

In Asad's anthropological reframing of Islamic tradition, history is not apprehended as a linear continuum but as a constellation of discontinuous moments, deeply informed by Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (2003). Asad (2009) draws implicitly from Benjamin's notion of messianic time and the interruptive force of historical materialism, in which the past is not a sequential inheritance but a site of critical intervention—blasted out of the continuum of history. This conception allows Asad to theorize tradition as a temporally fractured, power-laden field, where the past is neither inert nor nostalgically restored but reactivated through selective retrieval, rupture, and re-signification in the present. The Islamic discursive tradition, in this light, is not a continuous lineage of doctrines but a strategic and contingent engagement with the past, shaped by crises, interruptions, and recontextualizations. What Asad articulates is a form of historical reasoning where the authority of tradition is not premised on stability but on its capacity to be reconfigured in response to shifting political, epistemological, and institutional conditions. Thus, tradition is a performative site, not simply of transmission, but of contestation—where theological and political categories are re-encoded through historically situated discursive practices. This Benjaminian sensibility embedded in Asad's thinking repositions Islamic tradition not as preservation but as revolutionary citation, where moments of the past are seized in order to rethink the present and project alternative futures—making tradition itself a field of temporal and ideological struggle (Asad, 2009; Enayat, 2017; Benjamin, 2003).

Discursive traditions accommodate a plurality of voices and interpretations, recognizing that religious practices and beliefs are context-dependent and subject to historical and social influences. The theological and religious aspects of Islam are deeply intertwined with the practical experiences and actions of Muslims. This interconnectedness highlights the role of lived experiences in shaping and reshaping religious traditions. While discursive traditions emphasize continuity

with the past, they also incorporate critique and transformation. This dual focus ensures that traditions remain relevant and responsive to new conditions and challenges. In this context, this predominantly interpretive idea of Islam—as a discursive tradition—seeks to address and go beyond essentialism and nominalism, or historicism and non-historicism, as well as Islam as lived experience versus tradition, by highlighting the multiplicity of discursive articulations within Islamic traditions across different temporal and spatial contexts. These articulations are constructed by various actors within different power relations. Asad aims to suspend these issues by emphasizing that the Islamic phenomenon is constructed within a particular discursive tradition and specific temporal and spatial contexts, shaped by interactions among discursive and interpretive forces, relations, and discursive practices (Jong & Ali, 2023). In his various works, Asad attempts to elucidate this logic of articulating discursive traditions with illustrative examples. His examples include the revival of the tradition of *naṣīḥah* (advice) in contemporary Saudi Arabia for forming consultative and critical councils by ulama (Asad, 2003), the construction of the tradition of *al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining the right/honorable and forbidding the wrong/dishonorable) in contemporary Egypt as a form of political critique (Asad, 2015), and various references to texts or Islamic figures in Arab nationalism or Islamism in the contemporary Muslim world (Asad, 2003). All of these examples serve as instances of Islam configured as a discursive tradition.

In his article, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” Asad (2009) concludes his discussion with definitions and general considerations about discursive tradition without delving into the specific implications of this idea for the aforementioned epistemological contradictions and antinomies. It remains unclear and analytically underdeveloped how the concept of discursive tradition can practically resolve the tensions between essentialism and nominalism, or between historicism and non-historicism. Many key concepts such as the notion of time and space, the concept of practice, the role of dispositions, contexts, text, the problem of foundation, the structure-agency issue, contingency, regimes of interpretive, scale, etc., which are crucial in articulating discursive

traditions, are not thoroughly examined. This leads to epistemological ambiguity in the idea—an idea fundamentally constructed on epistemological debates—and its specific methodological implications. The concept holds some intellectual and theoretical potential for examining Islamic thought, but its practical applications are limited. This limitation is apparent in the overly general, imprecise, and non-operational use of the concept of discursive tradition in Political Islam studies, where scholars typically reference it in a broad, non-specific manner, often as a general enlightening and insightful idea. The notable exception is the work of Saba Mahmood (2005), who genuinely understands and appropriately applies the concept.

Moreover, scholars like Samuli Schielke (2007) and Hadi Enayat (2017) argue that Asad's focus on continuity over transformation is another point of contention. His work, while indebted to Foucault's genealogy of discursive formations, tends to emphasize coherence and continuity within Islamic traditions. This focus can obscure the inherently dynamic and often contradictory nature of historical developments within these traditions, thus failing to fully capture the transformative aspects of Islamic practices and beliefs. Furthermore, the concept of discursive tradition can lead to the erasure of significant transformations and the invention of artificial breaks within Islamic history. This can result in an oversimplified and ahistorical portrayal of Islamic traditions. Additional critiques highlight how Asad's framework might inadequately address the interplay between Islamic traditions, modernity, and modern power structures. The colonial and post-colonial contexts have significantly shaped Islamic discourses, and any comprehensive analysis must account for these power relations and their influence on the construction of Islamic traditions.

The extreme complexity of contemporary societies and the emergence of hybrid and indeterminate identities and collective entities further challenge Asad's framework. Muslims in diaspora communities navigate multiple cultural and religious influences, shaping their understanding and practice of Islam in ways that traditional discursive frameworks might not fully encompass. Within the framework of Asad, discursive traditions with high orthodoxy are more amenable to

examination, while other configurations with lower degrees of orthodoxy are almost disregarded (Anjum, 2007). This underscores the need for a more nuanced approach that can account for the fluidity and hybridity of contemporary Islamic identities. Moreover, while Asad's concept highlights the importance of authoritative discourses, it may underplay the agency of individual practitioners. The lived experiences and personal interpretations of Muslims are crucial for understanding how traditions are dynamically maintained and transformed. These individual practices and interpretations offer rich insights into the ongoing negotiation and redefinition of Islamic traditions (Jong & Ali, 2023). To address the epistemological limitations inherent in both the category of Political Islam and Talal Asad's conception of discursive tradition, this article proposes a reconstruction of the latter through the analytic framework of "social configuration."

Political Islam as Discursive Tradition and the Idea of Social Configuration

Unlike classical sociological units such as action, society, social fact, field, civilization and so on—which presume internal coherence, ontological unity, and normative closure—social configurations are post-foundational, historically contingent, and relational formations. They emerge not from essential and completed foundations, but from processes of partial grounding, which are always provisional, contested, and situated within shifting networks of social practices. A social configuration is composed of diverse and potentially incongruent elements—discourses, actors, symbolic orders, materialized practices—whose interaction forms a temporally-bound and spatially-situated assemblage. These formations are neither fully open nor deterministically structured; instead, they are defined by indeterminacy, internal tensions, and the boundary work that actors engage in to delineate "inside" from "outside." Social configurations are not universal, singular, or foundational, but rather constantly (re)negotiated through the dynamic interplay of contextual constraints, strategic alignments, and epistemic constructions. Their intelligibility depends on the relational positioning of categories and practices, and

their coherence is always partial—sustained through practices of cultural compromise, categories and discursive ordering, social closure and differentiation. Thus, when discursive tradition is reconceived as a social configuration, it no longer appears as a discursively articulated formation, whose boundaries are porous, whose internal logic is open to rupture, and whose continuity is sustained through active reconfiguration in response to political, theological, and historical contingencies (Jong, 2023, 2024, 2025).

These social configurations can be analyzed on three levels. The first level involves the conditions of possibility of their emergence, encompassing their contingency and historicity based on the partial determination of their foundations. At this level, the conditions of possibility of the emergence of these configurations, i.e., the identification of foundations within a constellation of historical and non-historical relationships shaped through the positions, interactions, practices, and dispositions of specific actors at a particular moment, are examined. These configurations in Islamist political thought can be constructed or reconstructed on foundations such as liberation, anti-colonialism, the establishment of an Islamic society (*ummah*), freedom, justice, the implementation of Shariah, and more, in specific temporal and spatial contexts and under particular conditions of possibility. The second level attempts to explain the process of construction and the characteristics of these configurations. A dual process of identity and difference is at work here. Configurations are fundamentally constructed around specific categories, their order, the unique relationships among them, their discursive expression, and their external relations. At this stage, the grammar of these configurations, at the moment of their actualization, will be precisely identified through identification of their key categories and expressions through parameters such as Islamist time and space, interpretations of the present, interpretations of history, the imagined community, orthodoxy, desired conditions and objectives, regimes of reference to sacred texts, regimes of reasoning and argumentation, and more. Just as a justificatory regime is formed around these categories and their ordering, a parallel regime of othering and differentiation also emerges in the construction of the “others” of these configurations. In Islamism, both regimes are legitimized through

different systems of reference and reasoning in relation to the Islamic tradition and sacred texts. The third level analyzes the construction of social realities and the tangible consequences related to these configurations, including the creation of various collective identities, social groupings and closure, collective actions, and social realities (Jong, 2024). At this level, the external and socialized aspects of these configurations will also be identified and analyzed based on the formation of various regimes of othering, methods and means of struggle, and the framing of their determination within movements, parties, states, and so on.

In this post-foundational approach (Jong, 2023, 2025), different actors (here, Islamists) with varied backgrounds but specific goals engage in interactions. These interactions generate an order of categories rooted in pre-existing traditions, social structures, and shaped by given conditions, as well as their perceptions and expectations. Consequently, elements from different traditions with diverse objectives are reconstructed within a configuration based on incomplete foundations (from religious to political, national, cultural, economic, etc.) at a particular moment. These foundations, which serve as the basis for the formation of configurations, are themselves shaped under specific conditions of possibility, yet they exist in a state of becoming and transformation. As such, they are neither permanent nor completed. Consequently, the configurations they give rise to are also not fixed or complete. On the other hand, this construction manifests through specific categories, their categorical order, and their discursive expression, forming the basis for social closures and social realities at another level. Thus, these configurations are contingent, and their characteristics—whether universal or singular, their historicity, orthodoxy or heterodoxy, transformation, rationality, regularity, authority, durability and objectivity—are all contingent upon a particular configuration within specific conditions of possibility. These conditions are continuously (re)constructed temporarily. Therefore, the starting and ending point of analysis is entirely limited to the configurations and the identification of the various relationships and characteristics pertinent to that configuration.

By considering the discursive tradition within the framework of social configurations, Islam, from an epistemological perspective, is

situated at the level of the particular, positioned between the singular—representing the lived and historical Islam—and the universal, which encompasses universal Islam or the trans-historical Islamic tradition. The particular represents a unique amalgamation of universality and historical singularity. Epistemologically, the particular signifies the intersection of the universal and the singular within a specific historical moment, giving rise to diverse discursive traditions with singular characteristics that possess distinct regularity, universality, consistency, and stability particular to each discursive tradition or configuration. Furthermore, this discursive tradition is in a perpetual state of transformation and evolution. This transformation is itself the result of the unfinished nature of the foundations of these discursive traditions, which are in a state of constant grounding. This means that an Islamic discursive tradition may ground around a political foundation such as liberation, or around a political-economic foundation such as distributive or consumer justice. However, the meaning of these concepts may quickly shift, or the foundation itself may, under changing contextual conditions, be reconfigured and take on a non-political character. Therefore, it is not possible to conceive of a permanent or finalized foundation for Political Islam, nor to attribute to it a fixed, stable, or universal essence. These features may apply to a specific range of Islamist configurations within particular historical periods. Thus, their generality is limited to this defined scope—derived through comparative studies and the identification of family resemblances among them. This is precisely what is meant by particularity: something that occupies a space between universality and singularity. Thus, the Islamic discursive tradition is comprehended as a historically evolving assemblage of discourses, embedded within the practices and institutions of Muslim societies and communities, intricately interwoven with the material existence of its adherents.

In this understanding of the Islamic discursive tradition, discourses are situated within the traditions embedded within power relations and the levels and types of orthodoxy related to that power regime. These have a temporal and spatial dimension and exist within a specific configuration. This means that religious power or authority is not solely related to religious texts and traditions. Instead, the power structures

significantly influence the way these texts are engaged with, interpreted, the rationality and mode of argumentation and reference, and even the interpreter within a specific configuration. Consequently, the Islamist discursive tradition is characterized by a distinctive rationality, foundational principles, different levels of orthodoxy, specific conceptions of time and space, regimes of reference to the Islamic tradition, modes of reasoning and argumentation, and so on, all intricately interwoven with textual sources, historical trajectories, power relations, and institutional frameworks (Jong, 2023; Jong & Ali, 2023).

Accordingly, understanding Islam as a discursive tradition within this framework provides a powerful conceptual lens through which to interrogate the multiplicity and complexity of Political Islam. Rather than treating Political Islam as a fixed ideology or a monolithic expression of Islamic politics, this approach foregrounds its heterogeneous and context-dependent nature as a field of competing discourses, interpretations, and practices articulated under specific historical, social, and cultural conditions. This framing disrupts essentialist or nominalist accounts that seek to locate a transhistorical and invariant essence linking Islam to politics, the state, or the public sphere. Within this configurational and discursive horizon, the longstanding opposition between universalism and singularism—whether Political Islam is the manifestation of a timeless Islamic core or a set of historically contingent articulations—appears less as a dichotomy to be resolved than as a terrain to be problematized. Universalist approaches posit a normative and continuous relation between Islamic revelation and political order, often assuming coherence across space and time; singularist views, by contrast, stress the discontinuities, ruptures, and contextual variations that characterize the emergence of Islamist formations. Yet, within the discursive tradition framework, these polarities are not mutually exclusive but are dialectically entangled: Political Islam operates precisely through the tension between Islamic universality and its plural actualizations at the particular level. It draws from a shared semantic archive of symbols, concepts, and texts, while simultaneously being refracted through diverse historical mediations and sociopolitical imperatives. Thus, Political Islam is better understood not through fixed typologies or taxonomic

definitions, but as a field of discursive production where categories such as Shariah, *ummah*, *jihād*, or *ḥākimiyyah* acquire meaning through situated interpretation, strategic deployment, and institutional embedding. Discursive traditions do not merely preserve doctrinal content; they actively shape the conditions under which meaning is generated, contested, and stabilized. This approach enables scholars to attend to the plurality, indeterminacy, and internal complexity of political Islamic discourses while recognizing their embeddedness in shifting relations of power, temporality, and community rather than assuming a singular political logic of Islam. It is precisely this emphasis on multiplicity and contingency that allows for a more accurate and conceptually rigorous engagement with Political Islam, not as a deviation from liberal political norms or an expression of essential religiosity, but as a historically evolving tradition of political reasoning (Asad, 2003, 2011, 2015; Hurd, 2008; Ismail, 2003; Zemmin, 2018; Jong & Ali, 2023).

Building on this framework, any coherent analysis of Political Islam as a discursive tradition must begin with an account of its conditions of possibility, that is, the historically contingent and structurally mediated arrangements that render certain Islamic discourses thinkable, sayable, and actionable at specific moments. The concept of social configuration foregrounds precisely this analytical starting point: that discursive traditions do not unfold from internal theological logic or doctrinal transmission alone, but emerge from a dynamic field of relational dependencies, contextual transformations, institutional reconfigurations, and epistemic ruptures (Jong, 2023, 2025; Jong & Ali, 2024). As indicated earlier, a social configuration is not a stable or bounded entity; rather, it is an indeterminate formation composed of shifting alignments among actors, categories, and regimes of intelligibility. It is within such formations that particular discourses crystallize and are rendered authoritative. Situating Political Islam within this framework enables a more precise account of how the fragmentation of premodern religious authority, the violent disruptions of colonial rule, the rationalizing logics of post-colonial statehood, and other contextual transformations reshape the very grounds upon which new forms of political Islamist configuration, discourse, referring, reasoning and so on become possible (March, 2015;

Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2014; Zubaida, 2009; Asad, 2003; Volpi, 2011a; Esposito, 1997; Moaddel, 2002; Roy, 1994, 2003, 2006). For example, the Islamist thought of Abul A'la Maududi arises from a configuration marked by the collapse of the Mughal-Islamic political order, British colonial hegemony, and the secularizing impulse of nationalist modernity in South Asia (Ahmad, 2009; Nasr, 1996). Within this condition of possibility, categories such as Shariah and *ḥākimiyyah* are resignified—not as juristic doctrines—but as the building blocks of a theopolitical order that contests both colonial sovereignty and postcolonial nationalism. Similarly, the Iranian revolutionary configuration out of which Khomeini's *velāyat-e faqīh* emerges is shaped by the theological vacuum produced by the Imam's occultation, the centralizing reforms of the Pahlavi state, and the mobilizing capacities of Shi'i ritual networks (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2014; Kurzman, 2004). In this context, the temporal category of *ghaiba* (absence) is collapsed into political immediacy, and sacred authority is reassembled within the structure of modern state sovereignty. In both cases, Islamist discourse is not merely an ideological project but a configurational response to altered structures of intelligibility. Foundational categories such as *ummah*, *jihād*, or *shūra* are not mobilized as stable tokens of Islamic authenticity, but are instead hierarchized, disarticulated, and strategically recomposed in relation to the specific problematics each configuration seeks to address—be it civilizational decline, colonial domination, state repression, top-down secular modernization, a crisis of legitimacy, state inefficacy, or epistemic fragmentation. Political Islam, therefore, must be analyzed not in terms of abstract textual continuity, but through the situated architectures of meaning that emerge within each social configuration—assemblages of discursive, institutional, and affective practices that generate new grammars of Islamic political agency.

Once the conditions of possibility have reconfigured the discursive terrain, the second analytic layer of Political Islam as social configuration centers on how specific Islamist formations are constructed through a selective ordering of categories, regimes of meaning, and justificatory practices. Here, Political Islam is not defined by the mere invocation of Islamic concepts, but by the way these concepts are prioritized,

articulated, and interrelated within a relational architecture of meaning. This involves a dynamic process of categorical selection, internal hierarchization, discursive justification, and differentiation—processes through which key signifiers such as *jihād*, *shūra*, *ḥākimiyyah*, *ummah*, or Shariah are not only activated but imbued with distinct semantic valences. Crucially, these categories are never deployed in isolation. They are embedded within particular discursive grammars and structured by regimes of reference and reasoning that authorize their meaning through intertextual citation of Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, classical jurisprudence, and other interpretive traditions. In this framework, what defines an Islamist configuration is not the presence of certain concepts per se, but their specific arrangement—the relative priority assigned to categories, the justificatory logics that stabilize their meaning, and the rhetorical and institutional devices that mediate their application. For example, in revolutionary configurations such as Maududi’s or Khomeini’s, concepts like *ḥākimiyyah* and *velāyat-e faqīh* take precedence as anchoring nodes around which all other categories are ordered, whereas in reformist or participatory Islamist configurations—such as those associated with figures like Rachid Ghannouchi or Malaysia’s Anwar Ibrahim—the grammar is recalibrated to emphasize *ijtihād*, ethical normativity, and institutional negotiation (Ahmad, 2009; Nasr, 1996; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2014; Euben & Zaman, 2009). These differences are not merely discursive preferences but expressions of a deeper configurational logic: each tradition organizes its categories around a specific vision of Islamicity, a desired political order, and an interpretation of the present crisis and its historical genealogy. The internal coherence of these traditions is maintained not through theological consistency but through the activation of distinct justificatory regimes that legitimize the configuration’s ordering of values, political goals, and relations to sacred texts. Simultaneously, a logic of differentiation is at work: in constructing themselves, Islamist configurations generate a field of “others”—secularists, liberal reformers, traditionalists, or rival Islamist currents, and so on—against whom their internal ordering gains both contrast and legitimacy. This dual process—of intra-discursive construction and inter-discursive opposition—produces not only the content of Islamist thought but also its boundaries, modes of reasoning, and claims

to authenticity. It is through this interplay that configurations become intelligible as particular formations—bounded yet dynamic, plural yet rooted, and politically consequential.

At the third level of analysis, the social configuration of Political Islam manifests through its objectified effects, that is, its capacity to generate concrete social realities, institutional arrangements, collective identities, and political imaginaries. These outcomes are material articulations of the discursive configurations previously described. Through the performative enactment of prioritized categories such as *ummah*, Shariah, or *jihād*, Islamist traditions construct not only internal logics but external structures of authority, community, and contestation. These social articulations unfold across multiple domains: political institutions (Islamist parties and movements), juridical frameworks (Shariah-based reforms or legal pluralism), pedagogical infrastructures (madrasas, *da‘wah* networks), ethical regimes (moral policing, Islamic economy, or family law reform), among others. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt reconfigured the category of *al-amr bi-al-ma‘rūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar* from a private moral responsibility into a communal obligation that structured public engagement, electoral politics, and social services—thus giving ethical discourse a political and institutional embodiment (Ismail, 2003; Mandaville, 2007; Wickham, 2013). By contrast, some Salafi-inspired actors often deploy a decontextualized literalism that depoliticizes Islamic categories, restricting them to ritual compliance and doctrinal purity while rejecting institutionalized politics altogether (Meijer, 2009; Wiktorowicz, 2006). Meanwhile, groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon mobilize categories like resistance, *velāyat*, and martyrdom within a theological-military grammar that fuses political sovereignty with eschatological symbolism—redefining communal identity around the axis of anti-colonial *jihād* and theological militancy (Hamzeh, 2004; Roy, 2006).

More radically, Jihadist formations such as the Taliban and ISIS reconfigure these categories within hyper-politicized and violently exclusivist grammars. The Taliban’s configuration is anchored in an ethno-religious vision of Islamic governance centered on *amr wa-nahy*, *ḥudūd* punishments, and tribal customary law (*‘urf*) as sources of both divine and social

authority—converging into a form of postcolonial Islamic authoritarianism rooted in both Deobandi orthodoxy and Pashtun identity (Rashid, 2000; Giustozzi, 2009). By contrast, ISIS articulated a globally expansive and totalizing configuration built on categories like *khilāfah*, *takfīr*, and *hijrah*—not only declaring a caliphate but legitimizing mass violence and institutionalized slavery as expressions of divine sovereignty and anti-modern rupture. Their ideology fused scriptural literalism with apocalyptic temporality, constructing a theology of purification through blood, and violently excluding not only non-Muslims but Shi'a, secular Muslims, and even rival Islamists (Gambhir, 2015; Bunzel, 2015; March, 2015). These configurations do not arise from doctrinal innovation per se, but from strategic reordering and resignification of inherited Islamic categories in response to perceived crises of authority, colonial subjugation, and theological fragmentation, among others. As such, they generate new social realities—territorial rule, gender regimes, legal orders, militant networks—through the operationalization of a particular Islamic grammar embedded in historical ruptures and antagonistic relational logics. These effects reveal that Political Islam's discursive traditions are not merely interpretive spaces but materially consequential formations. They not only inscribe meaning onto texts but inscribe power onto bodies and landscapes—structuring the moral economies, institutional architectures, and communal boundaries of the societies in which they intervene (Jong, 2024; Hurd, 2008).

Within the framework of social configuration, the issue of power and authority is not reducible to legal formalism or theological orthodoxy but must be examined as a discursively constructed and strategically mobilized phenomenon. In Islamist configurations, authority is not merely derived from divine texts, but is produced through interpretive acts, institutional alignments, and positional negotiations within complex epistemic fields (Schäbler, 2016). The legitimacy of Islamic political authority—whether in the form of the ruler, the jurist, the scholar, the party, or the movement—is contingent upon its capacity to mobilize recognizable regimes of reference and reasoning that situate its claims within a broader archive of Islamicity. That is, who speaks for Islam and with what authority is not resolved by recourse to timeless standards,

but through discursive practices that construct orthodoxy, authorize inclusion, and delineate heresy. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood grounded its authority in its ability to integrate classical jurisprudence with mass mobilization and social welfare, thus reframing Islamic leadership as a synthesis of scholarly lineage and popular legitimacy (Wickham, 2013). Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *velāyat-e faqīh* displaced traditional quietist Shi'i jurisprudence—a doctrine he himself had followed earlier in his clerical life—by inserting the jurist into the center of political sovereignty, thereby redefining divine representation through a restructured epistemology of eschatology and immediacy (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2014). By contrast, ISIS rejected both state-based clericalism and democratic legitimacy, instead asserting *takfīrī* orthodoxy through direct scriptural citation and violence, collapsing textual authority into performative domination (Bunzel, 2015). These examples show that Islamic authority is not a static inheritance but a dynamic outcome of discursive boundary work—where regimes of reasoning (e.g., *ijtihād*, *qiyās*, *maṣlaḥah*) and regimes of referencing (e.g., Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, classical texts, modern fatwas) are activated to validate political claims. Within this logic, traditional sources such as *taqlīd* (emulation) or *ijmā'* (consensus) are not simply repeated, but strategically repositioned to serve emergent political grammars. Authority becomes not the repetition of a past norm, but the reconfiguration of a relationship to the tradition under novel conditions of intelligibility. Thus, what appears as theological continuity often conceals deeper ruptures in the grammar of justification. Islamist discursive traditions selectively activate and silence elements of the Islamic archive—producing new forms of *fiqh al-siyāsah* (jurisprudence of governance), legitimating new institutional actors (parties, movements, jurist-states), and delegitimizing rivals through claims to scriptural purity or political betrayal. The very structure of othering—whether of secularists, traditional ulama, or rival Islamist currents—is itself part of the performative construction of authority, through which configurations distinguish their epistemic center from deviance, error, or compromise (Euben & Zaman, 2009; Hurd, 2008; Denoeux, 2002). Political Islam, then, does not inherit a stable structure of religious authority; it constructs it anew within contingent

historical, institutional, and semantic fields, by aligning textual references, interpretive regimes, and political institutions into a coherent—if always contested—configuration of legitimacy.

Within the grammar of Political Islam as a discursive tradition situated in social configurations, time and history emerge as core axes of semantic struggle and ideological production (Jong & Ebrahimzadeh, 2024). Islamist discourses do not operate within a secular-linear temporality that charts historical development along a continuum of progress and rupture (Asad, 2003). Rather, they recalibrate temporality through selective genealogies, theological imaginaries, and strategic anachronisms that reconfigure the past, interpret the present, and project the future in Islamic terms. The invocation of foundational Islamic epochs—whether the Prophetic Era, the Rightly-Guided Caliphate (*khilāfah rāshidah*), or the classical jurisprudential centuries—does not signify a return to doctrinal authenticity per se, but functions as a temporal device for authorizing political futures. These moments are not merely commemorated but are reinscribed into the present through acts of citation, appropriation, and resignification. In Maududi's vision, for example, the Shariah is reimagined not as a juristic code frozen in time, but as a totalizing theopolitical order capable of displacing colonial legality and modern secularism. Similarly, the concept of *ḥākimiyyah* (divine sovereignty) is not merely a theological proposition, but a discursive weapon that collapses sacred temporality into the field of immediate political confrontation (Ahmad, 2009; Nasr, 1996; Euben & Zaman, 2009; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2014). The Taliban and ISIS provide stark examples of how Islamist temporality can be mobilized to structure both political agency and violence. The Taliban's claim to restore a puritanical Islamic Emirate is not a nostalgic revival but a selective reconfiguration of historical Islamic order within the ruins of colonial fragmentation and Afghan state collapse (Giustozzi, 2019). ISIS, by contrast, collapses eschatological and historical time through its vision of an impending apocalypse—strategically deploying the imagery of early Islam to frame its Caliphate as both a return and a final rupture (McCants, 2015). Such projects reveal that Islamist time is not chronological but kairological—a series of divinely significant moments whose invocation reorders political agency and

moral urgency (Asad, 2003; Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2008). Furthermore, the very critique of the present—secularism, corruption, Westernization, decline, occupation, imperialism—is often structured as a temporal lament, marking a fall from divine order, while solutions are articulated as redemptive futures, legitimized through scriptural intertextuality and historical analogy. This discursive logic transforms time itself into a political resource: crises become signs of divine trial, stagnation becomes a call for *tajdīd* (renewal), and rupture becomes the ground for theological reentry and strategic intervention (Roy, 1994; Euben & Zaman, 2009; Esposito, 1997). The conceptual elasticity of Islamic categories—such as *ummah*, *jihād*, *shūra*, or *velāyat*—enables their redeployment as temporal signifiers that organize experience and reauthorize political order in the face of dislocation. Thus, Islamist discursive configurations do not simply react to historical events; they produce a reconfigured temporality that links divine sovereignty with worldly strategy, theological pasts with aspirational futures, and sacred narratives with political contestation (Jong & Ebrahimzadeh, 2024). In this regard, history is not merely a backdrop to Political Islam but a performative archive, whose fragments are continually reassembled to structure the meaning, legitimacy, and direction of political struggle.

Thus, in this discursive framework, Political Islam should be understood as a tradition constituted by a historically dynamic reservoir of configurations—contingent, relational, and contestable formations that crystallize around unstable yet recurring categories such as Islamicity, historical decline and revival, textual authority, governance, Shariah, gender, othering, the collective imaginary of the *ummah*, among others. As mentioned, these categories are never absolute; they are activated, ordered, and hierarchized differently depending on specific social and historical predicaments. It is in this process of configuration—and not in any essential feature—that the Islamist discursive tradition gains coherence. The case studies and comparative engagement with other Islamic traditions, such as Sufism, Salafism, modernist-reformist thought, traditionalism, and the authority of the ulama, reveals both the points of convergence and the deeply embedded axes of epistemological, theological, and strategic divergence (Denoeux, 2002; Euben & Zaman, 2009;

Esposito, 1997). These divergences constitute the grammar through which Islamism defines itself. For example, whereas some Sufis articulate Islam through inward spiritual transformation, other Islamists externalize Islamic values into political form and public normativity (Zaman, 2002). Salafis may share Islamists' invocation of return, but they reject their historicist interpretive regime in favor of a decontextualized literalism (Haykel, 2014). Many reformists and modernists, by contrast, center *ijtihād* and contextual ethics, seeking to reconcile Islamic tradition with modern knowledge formations—whereas many Islamists often reconfigure tradition as a counter-hegemonic project anchored in resistance to secular modernity (Haykel, 2009; Safi, 2003; Rahman, 2008; Salvatore, 1999). Some traditionalists and ulama, for their part, foreground the continuity of inherited norms and scholarly lineages, while many Islamists frequently contest, reorient, or attempt to subsume these authorities under new political or ideological arrangements (Zaman, 2002; Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). These general comparisons, which must be specified through case-by-case analysis, reveal the multiple and often conflicting logics through which Islamic discursive traditions engage core categories—logics that are activated differently within each configuration of Political Islam.

These axes of difference reveal that Islamist configurations are shaped not by fixed content but by how categories are ordered, prioritized, and articulated in relation to other traditions and the shifting historical conditions under which they emerge. Islamists may share with some Sufis a referential attachment to divine authority, yet radically differ in the domain of its application: private spirituality versus collective governance (Euben & Zaman, 2009; Wiktorowicz, 2006). With many Salafis, Islamists may echo the rhetoric of authenticity but diverge in epistemic method—favoring historicized, even strategic, interpretive regimes over Salafi literalism and anti-political purism (Lauzière, 2016). When contrasted with modernists and reformists, the divergence deepens at the level of conceptual method: Islamists often reject modernity as a normative horizon, while reformists embrace it as a site for rethinking Islam (Wickham, 2004; Voll, 1983, 1991; Zemmin, 2018; Rahman, 2017; Salvatore, 1999). Against some traditionalists and ulama, many Islamists

frequently assert their own modes of legitimacy—challenging inherited scholarly hierarchies while simultaneously attempting to reconstruct religious authority within new political frames (Mandaville, 2014; Euben, 1999; Wiktorowicz, 2000; Zaman, 2002, 2012). Across all these discursive encounters, the boundaries are porous, and overlap is inevitable, but the activation and hierarchy of categories—such as the role of the state, the centrality of Shariah, interpretive mediation, or the treatment of gender and religious others—differ systematically. These differences define how Islamist configurations construct meaning, authorize action, and position themselves within the broader Islamic field.

Thus, Political Islam as a configurational discursive tradition is best conceptualized as a space of shifting, relational configurations—each defined by the particular arrangement of categories, interpretive strategies, and socio-political orientations. These configurations are never complete or stable; they are marked by incompleteness, contestation, and strategic adaptation. They do not map neatly onto conventional labels such as “fundamentalist,” “utopian,” or “anti-colonial,” which obscure rather than clarify the discursive specificity of Islamist projects. What defines each configuration is not its surface content, but its internal architecture—the epistemological frameworks it deploys, the regime of reference it constructs, and the manner in which it locates Islam in relation to modernity, the state, secularism, authority and other Islamic traditions. A single movement may shift across multiple configurations without forfeiting its referential coherence—moving from revolutionary rhetoric to institutional pragmatism, or from moral protest to legal reform—precisely because it draws from the flexible, contested, and generative space of the discursive reservoir. It is only through tracing family resemblances—partial, overlapping, and historically emergent affinities between configurations—that the broader contours of political Islam can be meaningfully apprehended (Ahmed, 2016). Therefore, understanding political Islam requires a methodology that is not typological or essentialist but comparative and genealogical, tracing how discursive formations evolve through both internal rearticulation and external differentiation. In doing so, it becomes possible to analyze Political Islam not as a monolith but as a dynamic and plural tradition—rooted in Islamic

history, yet continually reconstituted in the face of new predicaments, interlocutors, and possibilities.

Conclusion

Political Islam, when approached through the lens of discursive tradition and social configuration, reveals itself not as a singular ideology or unified movement, but as a plural and historically contingent field of political articulation. It operates across divergent terrains—national, transnational, institutional, insurgent and so on—where Islamic categories are strategically prioritized, resignified, and reassembled within distinct configurations. These configurations are not byproducts of theological fixity or scriptural determinism, but performative responses to particular conditions of possibility—ranging from colonial disruption and postcolonial state formation to epistemic crisis and ideological contestation, among others. As such, Political Islam must be understood as a dynamic grammar of Islamic reasoning, through which actors mobilize tradition to construct new political imaginaries, institutional orders, and claims to authority.

The diversity of this tradition is evident in the wide spectrum of its enactments. Thinkers such as Ali Shariati foreground Islam as a revolutionary and liberatory discourse, embedding concepts like *tawhīd* and *shahādah* within a theology of emancipation and social justice. Conversely, Islamist actors like Osama bin Laden or ISIS reconfigure the same Islamic lexicon—*jihād*, *ḥākimiyyah*, *khilāfah*—into a totalizing apocalyptic vision that collapses religious meaning into violent rupture. The Taliban's authoritarian reconstruction of the Emirate, and the Islamic Republic of Iran's complex integration of Shi'i jurisprudence with modern state institutions, likewise illustrate how Political Islam materializes through structurally distinct social configurations, each activating specific archives of tradition to legitimate divergent regimes of power. These cases underscore that the core categories of political Islam—Shariah, *ummah*, *velāyat*, *jihād* and so on—do not possess intrinsic political meaning, but acquire force and intelligibility only within historically situated discursive formations.

Thus, the essence of Political Islam lies not in its doctrinal core, but in the strategic work of configuration: the selective retrieval of tradition, the ordering of Islamic categories, and the construction of regimes of reference that authorize particular claims to Islamicity. This article has emphasized the need to move beyond essentialist, singularist, or nominalist approaches, and instead foreground the epistemological conditions, genealogical ruptures, and political stakes through which Islamist discourses emerge. Only by attending to the layered operations of discursive labor, and by tracing how Islamic concepts are resignified within shifting institutional and ideological terrains, can we grasp the profound multiplicity and internal contradictions that constitute the field of Political Islam today.

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The Catholic Experience in America From Orestes Brownson to the Bozells: A Precedent for Muslims?

MALIK MUFTI

Abstract

Muslim Americans confront the challenges of adapting to a liberal culture that is both formally tolerant and ideologically compelling; a culture often understood as growing out of the individualistic and anti-authoritarian features of the Protestant Reformation. Scholars such as Harold Bloom and Alan Wolfe have argued that due to its appeal, this dominant culture—what may be called the American creed—transforms all other faiths

Malik Mufti is Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, where he teaches courses on international relations as well as the politics and political thought of the Middle East. His most recent book is *The Art of Jihad: Realism in Islamic Political Thought* (SUNY Press, 2019), and his most recent article is “Nietzsche, the Muslim *Falāsifa*, and Leo Strauss’s Avicennan Turn” (*Review of Politics*, 2024).

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into variants of itself. They predict that a similar liberalizing assimilation will take place with Islam. In order to assess the validity of this prediction and its implications, this article looks at the experience of another religion that also came to America resistant to the individualistic focus of the American creed. It does so by tracing the evolution of American Catholicism beginning with perhaps its most influential exponent, the nineteenth-century convert Orestes Brownson. After reviewing—through demographic and public opinion data as well as the analyses of some leading contemporary Catholic thinkers—how successfully Catholicism has maintained its identity in the American context since Brownson’s time, the article concludes by considering the implications for Muslim Americans.

Keywords: Muslim Americans, Catholicism, Orestes Brownson, American Creed, Liberalism

Introduction

Life in America poses exceptional challenges for Muslims. Here they cannot live in uncomplicated accord with their conventional verities, yet they are not forced to submit to an alien value system. Instead, like the adherents of many other faiths before them, they are drawn into the embrace of a liberal ethos or creed that asserts a freedom empowering every individual to seek meaning and salvation within himself or herself. The appeal of this American creed—in Harold Bloom’s words, a “religion of the self” so liberating that it “tends to exclude a sense of the communal”—is such that, although rooted in Protestantism, it has “ceased to be Christian” and relentlessly transforms all religions arriving in America, including Judaism and Islam, into variants of itself.¹ Similarly, Alan Wolfe has predicted an “Americanization of Islam” that will transform it “into something for which there is little or no historical precedent.”²

Are Bloom and Wolfe correct? In order to get a better handle on this question and its ramifications, it is worth looking at the experience of another universal faith initially resistant to the atomizing tendencies of

the liberal American creed, beginning with the writings of one who has been called “the Catholic thinker *par excellence* of the United States. There are no rivals.”³ His religious and intellectual journey—encapsulating the tension between appreciation for liberalism’s egalitarian tolerance and concern about its potentially corrosive effects on social morality and solidarity—prefigures a central challenge for all subsequent Catholic thinkers in America. As such, however, it also constitutes an instructive comparative case study for Muslims eagerly seeking acceptance in this country but anxious to uphold their conception of the common good.

Orestes Brownson

Orestes Augustus Brownson was born in 1803 to poor Protestant farmers in Stockbridge, Vermont. At the age of six, following his father’s death, he was given over to be raised by Congregationalist neighbors. After rejoining his mother and siblings in western New York at the age of fifteen, he embarked on an idealistic odyssey that initially followed the conventional trajectory of liberal-minded Protestants recoiling from the strictures of Calvinism: becoming first a Presbyterian in 1822, then a Universalist in 1824, and then a Unitarian pastor by the early 1830s. All along, however, his central animating drive remained a fierce egalitarianism committed to the elevation of the impoverished and downtrodden. As one student of his thought put it: “Brownson had come to spiritualism as Mazzini had come to it, to find a lever for moving the masses.”⁴ He himself much later acknowledged the anthropocentric focus of his early piety: “The only God I recognized was the divine in man, which I supposed to be the real meaning of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.”⁵ In 1836 he took several further steps that both reflected his ongoing adherence to the American creed—self-exalting, egalitarian, optimistic—in its liberalizing progression, and at the same time reinforced his conviction that this creed had to remain grounded in a religious framework. This was because, he explained in an essay published that year, religion “is natural to man” and the “religious sentiment is universal, permanent, and indestructible.”⁶ Disappointed by what he viewed as its neglect both of spiritual rigor and of the common good, however, Brownson came to

fear that the institutional form of Christianity called Protestantism is “no longer animated by a living soul. The sentiment of the Holy has deserted it, and it is a by-word and a mockery.”⁷ American Unitarianism, the latest articulation of Protestantism, “being, as it were, the jumping-off place from the Church to absolute infidelity, is evidently on the decline. [...] Men go out from our midst to Europe, and come back half Catholics.”⁸

While denying “that I profess to bring forward a new religion,” Brownson explained that the church he had founded earlier in the year—the “Society for Christian Union and Progress [...] of which I am the minister”—aimed to restore the harmony of spirit (holiness) and matter (equity and social justice) characterizing true Christianity. This true Christianity, he argued, is incarnated in the “symbol of the God-Man” Jesus. For Brownson, this symbol “teaches all who comprehend it, to find Divinity in Humanity, and Humanity in Divinity. By presenting us God and Man united in one person, it shows us that both are holy.”⁹ The realization of humanity’s divine nature would in turn abolish all evil: “Slavery will cease. [...] Wars will fail. [...] Education will destroy the empire of ignorance. [...] All will be seen to be brothers and equals in the sight of their common Father.”¹⁰ Brownson emphasized the egalitarianism of his conception: “The time is not far distant when our whole population will be philosophers.”¹¹ Small wonder then that he joined Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Ellery Channing—whose sermon asserting humanity’s “likeness” to God Brownson celebrated as “the most remarkable since the Sermon on the Mount”¹²—in the Transcendental Club he helped found in September 1836. It was a logical next step in the conventional liberal trajectory.

Politically, Brownson at this point naturally inclined toward the Jacksonian Democrats. President Martin Van Buren, who had been Andrew Jackson’s vice president, appointed the historian George Bancroft as Boston’s Collector of Customs in 1837, and Bancroft promptly secured a lucrative position for Brownson as well. The following year Brownson founded a journal—the *Boston* (later renamed *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*)—to, as he put it, “support” the Democratic Party and “imbue” it “with our ideas of Christian Democracy.”¹³ An early book review in that journal displayed an egalitarianism well beyond mere

equality of opportunity. After asserting, somewhat contradictorily, both that “he, who has yet to learn that no human being is or can be ignoble, is in our judgment a sorry democrat,” and that those who are “really and intrinsically superior to the common mass will always be permitted to tower above them,” Brownson concluded: “The democrat of to-day [...] does not lop off the heads of kings and priests, but he seeks to arrive at equality by making *every* man a king and a priest. He is a leveller, but he levels upward not downward. He is not affected by the fact that some are higher than others, but by the fact that some are lower than others.”¹⁴

In another essay in 1839, Brownson made his populist partisanship still more explicit, distinguishing between the Hamiltonian “party of Privilege” seeking “a strong government, one capable of holding the people in awe, in check, in submission,” and the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian “party of Equality” grounded in “the primitive fact, that all men are born essentially equal, and that there is something divine in every man” and accordingly demanding “a weak government and a strong people.”¹⁵ He stood with this latter Democratic Party, which “speaks [...] the voice of the people; and the voice of the people is the voice of God.”¹⁶ By July 1840, however, with presidential elections looming, Brownson’s inability to abide deepening socio-economic inequities led him to publish an essay that edged him beyond the liberal mainstream. “The Laboring Classes” mounted a withering critique of American capitalism, arguing that the country’s workers suffered under a system of wage slavery enforced by a too-powerful central state and legitimized by a priesthood that denigrated worldly activism.¹⁷ Even now, however, Brownson’s confidence that the wisdom of the masses ultimately conforms to divine justice kept him anchored in the sometimes conflicting egalitarian and libertarian principles of the American creed. Thus, while political reform still required smaller and less centralized government, economic reform mandated sweeping (and presumably state-imposed) checks on income inequality such as “abolishing hereditary property.”¹⁸

But perhaps the most salient of the tensions in Brownson’s 1840 essay relates to religious reform. On the one hand, he rejected as inadequate the Protestant emphasis on private, self-focused virtue: “we deny in the outset that a man, who seeks merely to save his own soul, merely

to perfect his own individual nature, can be a good Christian. [...] No man can be a Christian who does not begin his career by making war on the mischievous social arrangements from which his brethren suffer.”¹⁹ In its embrace of the “principle of authority” and substitution of “dead works for true righteousness,” the Protestant Church embodies oppressive priesthood no less than the Catholic Church. “Both therefore ought to go by the board.”²⁰ On the other hand, Brownson not only maintained but extended the libertarian and egalitarian tendencies that lie at the heart of Protestantism. Thus, the locus of law is found “within the [individual] soul,” so that: “There must be no class of men set apart and authorized, either by law or fashion, to speak to us in the name of God, or to be the interpreters of the word of God.”²¹ Likewise, true Christianity, “the Christianity of Christ” as opposed to that of the priests, aims “to bring down the high, and bring up the low,” to “secure to all men the equality of position and condition, which it is already acknowledged they possess in relation to their rights.”²² Once again, then, the grounding and guarantee of a virtuous regime for Brownson lay in the innate goodness and wisdom of the masses rather than in the political engagement of any elites.

It is widely recognized that the presidential election of 1840, which Van Buren lost apparently in part because he was tarred by the radicalism of “The Laboring Classes,” catalyzed a decisive shift in Brownson’s thinking. As he himself later put it in an autobiographical essay: “I took [...] even as late as 1840, the democratic premises as true and unquestionable. [...] I had taken them in with my mother’s milk.”²³ But the election caused him to recoil from “this Protestant and Democratic theory of man and society, to which the world seems tending.” It “disgusted me with Democracy as distinguished from Constitutional Republicanism, destroyed what little confidence I had in popular elections, and made me distrust both the intelligence and the instincts of ‘the masses’.”²⁴ Brownson’s anti-populist turn intensified during the following years. A July 1845 essay in his journal declared: “Say not blasphemously, *Vox populi vox Dei*; but say rather [...] *Vox populi vox Diaboli*. Who condemned our blessed Saviour to the cross, – Socrates to drink the hemlock? Who [...] but your wise *vox populi* [...] as arrant a knave, as

vain, fickle, conceited, malicious, and murderous a rascal, as ever walked the earth?" Notwithstanding his penchant for radical changes of mind, Brownson's core political and religious views for the rest of his life would all grow out of this fundamental realization.

At the political level, his allegiance shifted now to "Washington, [...] Adams, Hamilton, and all the distinguished men of the old Federal party, – men who, though decried by Mr. Jefferson and the French Jacobins, were the great men of their times, and whose practical political views contrast favorably with the brilliant and fanciful theories of their opponents."²⁵ The inadequacy of those fanciful theories arises from their consonance with the selfishness debilitating American social relations, a "selfishness, which our institutions themselves naturally generate."²⁶ What is the antidote? "Do not answer by referring us to the virtue and intelligence of the people. We are writing seriously, and have no leisure to enjoy a joke."²⁷ The only "solution" according to Brownson is "religion"—and not just any religion, but one "free from popular control, above the people [...] and able to command them."²⁸

At the religious level, accordingly, Brownson executed a turn away from Protestantism at least as radical as his political turn away from Jefferson and Jackson. Protestantism will not do, because instead of being "given to man from above," it is "spider-like, spun out of his own bowels."²⁹ Its "fundamental principle is, PRIVATE JUDGMENT," which "necessarily implies that each and every man is in himself the exact measure of truth and goodness," so that each individual "decides, with the Bible as without it, what is and what is not God's word, what God has and has not revealed; and therefore what he is and what he is not bound to believe, what he is and what he is not bound to do."³⁰ Such a conception inevitably led to the idolatrous self-exaltation of Transcendentalism, the "logical termination" and "*reductio ad absurdum* of Protestantism."³¹ And what lies beyond, finally, is full-fledged nihilism: the progressive corruption of religion initiated by the Reformation—"incited by the Devil [...] born of hell"³²—"in Transcendentalism reaches its termination, exhausts itself, and can go no farther; for there is no farther. Beyond Transcendentalism [...] there is no place. Transcendentalism is the last stage this side of NOWHERE."³³

Such are the conclusions that led Brownson to convert to Catholicism in 1844. He believed his new religion more capable of exerting “a moral check” because its Church could command believers into obeying God’s law, and more capable of counteracting selfishness because it promoted a social solidarity, “a fellowship of feeling among all classes which is utterly wanting in Protestant countries.”³⁴ Most fundamentally, Brownson had come to view it as more realistic. Protestantism, because it denigrates “reason and free-will” is “no less unsound as philosophy than it is in faith.”³⁵ Catholicism seeks to propagate virtue in accordance with naturally varying human capabilities: “the Church works with man as she finds him, and only wants to make him what he can really be,” in contrast to an understanding of equality as the “process of cutting off the heads of the tall men, and in pulling out the small men, as one might do a spy-glass, so that both become of a size.”³⁶ Brownson, however, never adequately developed his thoughts on equality as it relates to political action. In 1853 he lectured students that “The entire universe [...] is hierarchically organized and governed, and save in the sense of justice between man and man, and man and society, equality is an idle dream, an empty word [...] Whoso seeks to reduce all men to the same level, whether by levelling downwards or by levelling upwards, wars against God and nature.”³⁷ Yet two years later he was still affirming “the natural equality of all men” and resting his hopes for a better world on “a change in the people” rather than on political reform from above.³⁸

Brownson might have benefited here from the insights of the medieval Muslim *falāsifa* on the implications of varying human capabilities for the relationship between religion and politics. Ibn Rushd in particular emphasized the difference between an Islamic egalitarianism blind to distinctions of ethnicity, race, or class on the one hand, and an Islamic recognition of natural rank order at the individual level—reflected in the Qur’anic verse: “And it is He who has made you viceroys of the earth, and has raised some of you above others in degrees” (6:165)—on the other. It is this recognition, he argued, that allows sound Islamic governance to convey the same truths about moral discipline, social solidarity, and political responsibility in a variety of discourses, ranging from the philosophic to the poetic, to each human being in accordance with his or

her capabilities. But Brownson showed no indication of familiarity with the *falāsifa* and his comments on Islam—beyond noting the religion’s claim to “the purest theism” and identifying it as a fearsome challenger to the Catholic Church—reflect his era’s conventional dismissals of it as sensual, anti-intellectual, and belligerent.³⁹

Between Accommodation and Resistance

Orestes Brownson maintained to the end of his days the consonance of Catholicism with the American Republic’s founding principles as he understood them.⁴⁰ Successive waves of Catholic immigration—mainly from Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century, and again from Latin America after the mid-1960s—reinforced the inclination to blur incompatibilities to better promote social harmony. As a result, American Catholic thought continued to exhibit an unresolved tension between accommodation and opposition to central elements of the American creed. The Cold War, and the imperative of bolstering the liberal democracies against their communist adversaries, further sustained this tension.

As thinkers such as France’s Jacques Maritain and Germany’s Karl Rahner worked to reconcile Catholic theology with emergent democratic norms in Europe, their most prominent American counterpart was the Jesuit priest John Courtney Murray.⁴¹ After years of attacks by more conservative Catholic theologians who “arranged to have his work censored by the Vatican authorities in 1955,”⁴² Murray gained a decisive upper hand in the more democratic climate leading up to the Second Vatican Council, publishing an influential book in 1960 that followed Orestes Brownson in claiming the ground of social equity and justice for Catholicism. Because of its “individualistic exigencies,” Murray argued, Protestantism constitutes “not only a heresy in the order of religion but also [...] a corrosive solvent in the order of civilization, whose intentions lead to chaos.”⁴³ A state “wherein every individual is a sort of little god almighty, whose power to preserve himself is checked only at the point where another little god almighty starts preserving *himself*” can only lead to the “knaveish denial that there is any such thing as public morality”

at home, and an extreme “pacifism” that cannot bestir itself to combat injustice and aggression abroad.⁴⁴

In order to assert what he called a “providential” convergence between Catholicism and the liberal American creed, however, Murray had to adopt the historicist critique of “conceptualist classicism” elaborated by the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan, “who in an enormously influential phrasing described the trajectory of modern Catholicism as that of an institution moving away from a classicist worldview to one possessed of ‘historical consciousness.’ The classicist worldview understood human nature as ‘always the same’ and applied universal principles to ‘concrete singularity.’”⁴⁵ In line with Lonergan’s alternative view that human nature—and with it therefore the religious strictures required to discipline it—is variable, Murray helped shape the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Liberty propelling the Catholic Church in the liberal direction it continues to follow today.

A less accommodating engagement with liberalism, however, took place on the right wing of American Catholic thought. One of its leading practitioners, contemporary with John Courtney Murray, was Brent L. Bozell Jr., a convert from Episcopalianism who went on to work for the “red-baiting” Senator Joseph McCarthy. In a collection of essays from the 1960s to the 1980s, Bozell – like Brownson and Murray before him—decried the “urge to [...] divinize man” and the consequent “poison of self-love which has produced the cancer of libertarianism.”⁴⁶ And like Brownson, Bozell did not hesitate to break with many of his conservative American colleagues in denouncing capitalism as a destructive outgrowth of “the command to seek self.”⁴⁷ Unlike both Brownson and Murray, however, he identified those pathologies with what he himself called “the American creed”⁴⁸: “The reason the authors of the Declaration [of Independence] did not mention a limitation on the people’s authority is that they did not, in any serious sense, recognize any limitation.” As a result, Bozell concluded: “The Constitution has not only failed; it was bound to fail. The architects of our constitutional order built a house in which secular liberalism could live, and given the dominant urges of the age, would live. The time has come to leave that house and head for home.”⁴⁹ A renewed outburst of liberal “creedal passion” in the 1960s and

1970s seemed to relegate Bozell permanently to the margins of American political thought as a “conservative kook” and to confirm the hegemony of Murray’s approach.⁵⁰ But Murray’s would quickly prove a pyrrhic victory, for that same resurgence of liberalism would catalyze both a quantitative and a qualitative erosion of the alternative that Catholicism hoped to offer America.

Quantitatively, the influx of Catholics following the easing of immigration restrictions in 1965 raised their proportion of the American population from 5 percent as late as 1850 and 17 percent at the end of the nineteenth century to about 25 percent in the early 1970s. After then plateauing for a number of decades, however, that proportion began to decline in the mid-2000s, falling back to 20 percent by 2024.⁵¹ The fact that among young adults (aged 18-29) an even lower proportion—only 15 percent—still identified as Catholic in 2016 indicates that the downward trend is a long-term one.⁵² Beyond lower birth rates due to increasing use of contraception and birth control among Catholics in the West (despite Church doctrine) and the decline in American mainstream religiosity more generally, the Catholic Church is losing believers at a higher rate than is the case with other major religions: already by 2015, according to the Pew Research Center, 28 percent of all Americans raised Catholic no longer considered themselves Catholic.⁵³ Moreover, Catholicism has been in retreat even in Latin America, where its share of the population dropped from 92 percent in 1970 to 69 percent in 2014 to 57 percent by 2020 – primarily due to conversions to Protestantism, and especially to Pentecostalism, which now claims two-thirds of Latin American Protestants. Asked about the reasons for their conversion, 81 percent of respondents invoked a central feature of Protestantism by saying “they were seeking a more personal connection with God.”⁵⁴ As a result, the role of Hispanic immigrants in sustaining Catholicism’s share of the American population has also diminished: “Nearly a quarter of Hispanic adults in the United States were raised Catholic but have since left the faith,” and the overall proportion of U.S. Hispanic adults identifying as Catholic fell from 67 percent in 2010 to 43 percent in 2022.⁵⁵

These figures point to the second, qualitative, reason Catholicism seems to be in decline: it is itself being assimilated into the overarching

American creed. If anything distinguished it from Protestantism in the past, it was the principle that every man is *not* his own priest; that there needs to be an intermediate agency qualified to interpret and implement religious doctrine. For Catholics, this agency is supposed to be the Roman Catholic Church. And yet, according to Pew Research Center polling, only 32 percent of Americans self-identifying as Catholic in 2019 said they have “a lot” of confidence in the clergy to provide useful guidance about their religion’s teachings (compared to 45 percent of American Protestants who felt that way).⁵⁶ Even on a social issue to which the Catholic Church is particularly sensitive, abortion, and even among more active Catholic practitioners (those “who attend religious services a few times a year or more often”), only 34 percent expressed “a lot” of confidence in clerical guidance, compared to 46 percent of such Protestants.⁵⁷ Finally, while 73 percent of all American Protestants say churches and religious organizations “do more good than harm,” the proportion of American Catholics who agree is 10 percentage points lower.⁵⁸ The point seems clear: Catholicism in America is losing its ability to sustain a hierarchy of interpretive judgment.

Small wonder, then, that the boundary between Catholicism and Protestantism is blurring. “Evangelical” as an umbrella term covering all articulations of American religion which emphasize the personal, individualized conversion experience of being “born again,” includes Pentecostal Protestants and pentecostalized “charismatics” of formally non-Protestant religious traditions who “have experienced the ‘in-filling’ of the Holy Spirit” as manifested in practices such as speaking in tongues and faith healing. According to the Pew Research Center, 23 percent of all Americans in 2006 were either Pentecostals or charismatics so defined; with 54 percent of Pentecostals and 39 percent of charismatics (26 percent of all Americans) reporting having “received direct revelations from God,” 59 percent of charismatics (and 46 percent of all Americans) affirming that God grants believers material prosperity, and 71 percent of charismatics (and 56 percent of all Americans) affirming that God grants believers good health.⁵⁹

Here, then, is the real beating heart of the American creed. As early as 1967 it began to resonate among American Catholics with the formation

of “Roman Catholic Pentecostal prayer groups” at Duquesne and Notre Dame universities, and by the early 1970s attracted over 350,000 followers nationwide, activated by the movement’s “greater emphasis on lay participation” and their own “disillusionment with political action on college campuses and [...] heightened concern with personal growth.”⁶⁰ By 2006, fully 36 percent of all American Catholics identified themselves as charismatics; a rate higher even than among Protestants, 28 percent of whom identified as either Pentecostal or charismatic.⁶¹ Among Hispanic-American Catholics the trend is still more pronounced, with 54 percent identifying as charismatics, and 31 percent claiming “to have received a direct revelation from God.” Again, these figures do not include the 20 percent or so of Hispanic-Americans who formally embraced Protestantism.⁶² In short, the evidence seems to support Harold Bloom’s contention that “Americanized Catholicism” has itself evolved into yet another manifestation of the self-focused American creed.⁶³

A Catholic Alternative Today?

Contemplating the acute political and economic cleavages of his time and what he viewed as the failure of mainstream religions to offer effective remedies, Orestes Brownson predicted that Protestantism would continue to devolve into ever more extreme subjectivist deviations and warned that should Catholicism falter as well, “a new principle of social and religious organization, capable of engaging all minds and hearts [...] will present itself. Men will not live always in a religious anarchy.”⁶⁴ Today, a sharp decline in mainstream religiosity at a time of renewed political polarization would seem to bear out Brownson’s warnings. One indicator is the general turn away from organized religion: the proportion of Americans saying they are Christian declined from an average of 89.6 percent during the 1970s to 85.2 percent during the 1990s to 73.6 percent during the 2010s, dropping to a low of 63 percent in 2021. At the same time, the percentage of those professing “no religion” has risen dramatically, from 6.7 percent in the 1970s to 20.8 percent in the 2010s and 26.0 percent by 2019.⁶⁵ Among Americans between the ages of 20 and 34, “More than 40% [...] are religiously unaffiliated.”⁶⁶ While such

statistics have encouraged opponents of religion to believe that the tide may be turning in their favor here, as it already seems to have done in many European societies, there may be reasons to temper their optimism. In the first place, the decline in mainstream religiosity does not translate into a significant increase in atheism. The proportion of Americans polled who describe themselves as atheists only rose from 2 percent in 2009 to 4 percent in 2019. While none believe in “God as described in the Bible,” moreover, 18 percent of these self-described atheists say “they do believe in some kind of higher power.”⁶⁷ Where, then, have the rest of the 26 percent of Americans professing “no religion” gone? One study suggests: “Rising rates of disaffiliation may not necessarily indicate an increasingly secular orientation but rather an abandonment of traditional religious practices in favor of a more personalized and customizable spirituality”⁶⁸—in other words, in favor of purer, even more individualized articulations of the fundamental American creed.

An earlier Pew poll sought to elaborate. It found that the proportion of Americans who say they have had a “religious or mystical experience” has been rising steadily: from 22 percent in 1962 to 49 percent in 2009, when for the first time they outnumbered those saying they have not had such an experience. Moreover, such experiences are “more common today among those who are unaffiliated with any particular religion (30%) than they were in the 1960s among the public as a whole,” and also more common among those below 65 years of age. Even among atheists, agnostics and the “secular unaffiliated,” 18 percent reported having them.⁶⁹ Finally, the study revealed that those American “unaffiliateds” professing no religion gave either exactly the same or slightly higher positive responses on a range of supernatural questions as did the general population: belief in reincarnation (25 percent); belief in astrology (25 percent); communication with the dead (31 percent); and experience with a ghost (19 percent).⁷⁰

In a country where 38 percent of Americans still reject evolution, and where the number of those who believe it is “very important for parents to have their children vaccinated” actually dropped from 82 percent in 2008 to 71 percent a decade later, the persistence of supernaturalism coupled with the erosion of orthodox religion could present significant social

and political challenges.⁷¹ If, as Orestes Brownson suggested, some form of religious belief really is a recurring, chronic characteristic of all human societies, no matter at what stage of economic or social development, might he also have been correct that the failure of existing hegemonic religions could end up paving the way for the rise of some new dogma with uncertain consequences for rational inquiry? Catholicism remains a powerful force in American society today. It continues to provide solace and inspire good works in millions of followers. It also continues to gain converts, including prominent intellectuals and politicians, and counts six of the nine current Supreme Court justices as believers. Confronted by the challenges outlined above, however, its most thoughtful exponents struggle to find ways of sustaining the faith of its adherents while still preserving doctrinal integrity and the Church's corrective role in national morality. While most remain anchored in the liberal grounding of the American creed and its internal tensions, accordingly, a growing number have begun to seek solutions elsewhere.

In his 2018 book *Why Liberalism Failed*, Notre Dame University's Patrick J. Deneen for one blamed the dominant American ideology for being simultaneously atomizing—"The loosening of social bonds in nearly every aspect of life [...] reflects the advancing logic of liberalism and is the source of its deepest instability"—and centralizing, as the state's "extensive capacities for surveillance and control of movement, finances, and even deeds and thought" expand without limit; all while promoting an unjust and spiritually degraded culture of hedonistic "immediate gratification."⁷² Now, as a result, a crisis point has been reached where liberalism will transition either into "an administrative state run by a small minority who increasingly disdain democracy" or "some form of populist nationalist authoritarianism or military autocracy."⁷³ Since "revolution" will likely only generate more "disorder and misery," Deneen instead prescribed one of the characteristic Catholic responses to the crisis: "a fundamental withdrawal from American society into updated forms of Benedictine monastic communities" which can offer "smaller, local forms of resistance" as well as "practices fostered in local settings, focused on the creation of new and viable cultures, economics grounded in virtuosity within households, and the creation of civic polis life."⁷⁴

Fragmentation may yet turn out to be the ultimate outcome for America, but what exactly will sustain each subculture against the overarching “anticulture of liberalism”?⁷⁵ This question underlay the otherwise laudatory review of Deneen’s book by Adrian Vermeule, professor of constitutional law at Harvard. Lacking “any substantive comprehensive theory of the common good” with which to supplant liberal dogma nationwide, he argued, Deneen’s communitarian enclaves have no hope of surviving.⁷⁶ Vermeule, a convert from Episcopalianism in 2016, therefore advocated an alternative Catholic response: rather than “retreating to a nostalgic localism, nonliberal actors” need to “strategically locate themselves within liberal institutions and work to undo the liberalism of the state from within.”⁷⁷ What such a statist or “integralist” alternative might look like is spelled out in a 2020 manifesto by two other like-minded Catholics, which affirmed equality—“the capacity for the fundamental moral reasoning in which, among other things, politics consists, does not vary among men, unless there be some positive malady”—but rejected individualistic conceptions of freedom on the grounds that “the common good is better and more divine than the good of one.”⁷⁸ Both the economic (“usuriously” capitalist) and political (secular) premises of liberalism are thus repudiated, leaving the “two powers, spiritual and temporal [...] hierarchically arranged” so that “all temporal rulers must be subject to the authority of the Catholic Church.”⁷⁹

In his own 2022 book *Common Good Constitutionalism*, Vermeule draws from his field of scholarship to argue against both the “progressivist” and “originalist” approaches to public law contending for dominance today. While the former seeks to expand relentlessly the “individualist, autonomy-based, and libertarian” principles he holds responsible for many contemporary social ills, the latter remains at best a merely “disruptive” response, “an essentially Protestant method of hermeneutic that [...] invokes *sola scriptura*” to rebel against progressive legislation without being able to articulate a coherent moral and communal alternative.⁸⁰ Vermeule propounds instead a “common good constitutionalism” rooted in Western—classical and Christian—natural law tradition and reflected, as he sees it, in the true aims of the American Constitutional order.⁸¹ Such a regime requires a powerful state, entailing (as he put it in

an earlier piece) “a powerful presidency ruling over a powerful bureaucracy” tasked with “protecting the weak from pandemics and scourges of many kinds—biological, social, and economic—even when doing so requires overriding the selfish claims of individuals to private ‘rights’.”⁸² Vermeule is clear about brooking neither liberal nor libertarian values: “The claim, from the notorious joint opinion in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, that each individual may ‘define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life’ should be not only rejected but stamped as abominable, beyond the realm of the acceptable forever after. So too, the libertarian assumptions central to free speech law and free speech ideology [...] Libertarian conceptions of property rights and economic rights will also have to go, insofar as they bar the state from enforcing duties of community and solidarity in the use and distribution of resources.”⁸³

Apparently partly in response to Vermeule’s friendly critique, Patrick Deneen followed up with a second book that drops “Benedictine” retreat from society for an “aristopopulism” in which a “relatively small [...] elite cadre skilled at directing and elevating popular resentments” seeks to ride a populist wave to power.⁸⁴ Drawing on “the classical and Christian tradition of the West—a common-good political order,” it will then implement “forms of legislation that promote public morality, and forbid its intentional corruption.”⁸⁵ The effective extent of Deneen’s envisaged “regime change” from liberalism, however is called into question by the unexpected acknowledgment at the end of his book that “the unseen theological foundations of liberalism were originally Christian.”⁸⁶

Deneen takes care to warn against populist demagoguery of the kind whose current “nominal champion in the United States” is “a deeply flawed narcissist.”⁸⁷ He and fellow Catholics such as Adrian Vermeule are serious thinkers trying to address a real crisis in American political culture. Once again, however, we are confronted by a series of daunting questions about their school of resistance to the prevailing American creed. Can Roman Catholicism reverse its numerical decline? Vermeule suggests that U.S. immigration authorities give “priority to confirmed Catholics, all of whom will jump immediately to the head of the queue. Yes, some will convert in order to gain admission; this is a feature, not

a bug.”⁸⁸ But we have already seen Catholicism retreat even within its Latin American wellspring. Again, can Roman Catholicism overcome its own progressive transmogrification into just another variant of the American creed in this country, and its accelerating liberalization even within the Vatican, given Deneen’s recognition of its role in shaping the very ideology he now seeks to overthrow? Most fundamentally, can a Catholic Church which in 1964 reaffirmed that “by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system” really supply the legal basis for any alternative to secular liberalism?⁸⁹ These are weighty questions, because of all Christian sects Catholicism would seem to possess the most formidable resources for addressing the pitfalls of liberalism.

The concern that an effective Catholic critique of American liberalism going beyond either monastic retreat or capitulation to Trumpism has yet to take shape is highlighted by the legacy of an earlier exponent we have already encountered: L. Brent Bozell Jr., who has been described as the “true source” of contemporary religious radicalism.⁹⁰ Beset by illness and by disappointment at his alienation from mainstream American conservatism, he faded into relative obscurity by the 1970s. One of his sons, however, became a Benedictine monk, while another, L. Brent Bozell III, emerged as a conservative activist in the 1980s later associated with the far-right Tea Party movement. His son, L. Brent Bozell IV, in turn gained notoriety after being arrested for participating in the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, and then sentenced to prison for nearly four years.

Implications for Islam

Are American Muslims destined to traverse the same path? Public opinion indicators might suggest an exceptional ability to combine adherence to core values—even when they run counter to prevailing liberal tendencies—with continued vigor and dynamism. Thus, a 2001 poll showed that 68 percent of American Muslims favored the death penalty, 71 percent opposed gay marriage, 65 percent favored banning the display or sale of pornography, 53 percent favored allowing non-denominational

prayer in classrooms, and—illustrating the fact that most prefer even their non-Muslim neighbors to be God-fearing—59 percent favored allowing public schools to display the Ten Commandments. The same poll also showed wide support for big-government policies such as universal health care (94 percent), more government assistance to the poor (93 percent), stricter environmental regulations (92 percent), stronger anti-terrorism laws (84 percent), and stricter gun regulations (79 percent).⁹¹ Most of these findings seem compatible with “common-good” conservatism. At the same time, such relatively counter-cultural attitudes do not appear to be generating a drop-off in religious commitment. American Muslims have the lowest median age (33) of any major religious grouping, and their numbers are projected to more than double between 2017 and 2050.⁹²

Moreover, 92 percent of American Muslims said they were “proud to be an American” in 2017, and 80 percent expressed satisfaction with their lives here.⁹³ Although three-quarters said there is “a lot of discrimination against Muslims,” a minority (48 percent) reported being personally subjected to any intolerance or discrimination—with most of these saying only that they had been “treated or viewed with suspicion” at some point during the past year. By contrast, 49 percent said “someone expressed support” for them because they are Muslim during the previous year, and 55 percent described the American people as “generally friendly toward Muslim Americans” while only 14 percent described them as “generally unfriendly.”⁹⁴ Overall, then, a picture emerged of a young and thriving community holding on to its core values even as it finds a congenial home in the United States.

A closer look, however, reveals an important shift in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The majority population’s forbearance diminished in ensuing years so that by 2016, 25 percent of American adults believed that most Muslims in this country are “anti-American” while another 24 percent thought at least “some” of them are.⁹⁵ In part because of the proliferation of such sentiments, many Muslim Americans came—as Jewish Americans had done before—to appreciate the virtues of liberal tolerance around this time. Already by 2009, Gallup polling found that 29 percent of American Muslims now described their political views as

“very liberal” or “liberal,” a proportion higher than that among self-described Protestants (16 percent) or Catholics (20 percent), though not Jews (45 percent).⁹⁶ At the same time, the number of Muslims favoring bigger and more powerful government declined from 79 percent in 2007 to 67 percent in 2017, further indicating a shift toward more properly liberal or libertarian attitudes. A parallel turn occurred on social issues, with the proportion of American Muslims who believe homosexuality should be accepted by society, for example, rising from 27 percent (2007) to 39 percent (2011) to 52 percent (2017).⁹⁷

Many American Muslim leaders welcome this trend. M.A. Muqtedar Khan, former president of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists of North America, for example, celebrated in 2003 the emergence of “a liberal understanding of Islam more in tune with dominant American values,” and declared it the “manifest destiny” of American Muslims to inculcate that understanding back to the rest of the Muslim world.⁹⁸ Khan’s enthusiasm was shared by Feisal Abdul Rauf, imam of a Sufi mosque in New York City and prominent advocate of interfaith dialogue, who argued in 2004 that the Declaration of Independence “embodies and restates the core values of the Abrahamic, and thus also the Islamic, ethic.”⁹⁹ More generally, therefore, “the American creed [...] individualistic [...] affirming the supreme value and dignity of the individual [...] at its core [...] expresses the [...] *Islamic* ethic.”¹⁰⁰ Underscoring the parallelism with Protestant subjectivity at the core of that American creed, Abdul Rauf invoked the Sufi image of the believer polishing “his or her mirror to become the best, most accurate, and transparent divine reflector possible, which is the best way to love God back. What better offering can we offer God other than the best possible mirror in which He sees Himself reflected?”¹⁰¹ After urging Muslims “to find their American identity through learning from the immigrant experience of American Catholics and Jews,” finally, he echoed Muqtedar Khan in calling on them to participate in an American campaign to “actively support the development of an Islamic democratic capitalism” that “ushers in” the Muslim world’s “last stage or ‘end’ of history.”¹⁰²

Even when a sanguine view of convergence between Islamic and American values is complemented by progressive critiques drawing

attention to gender or race inequities, a liberal articulation of Islam is often envisaged as spearheading positive worldwide change. Thus, in her introduction to a 2005 anthology of pieces by American Muslim women, Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur wrote: "I believe that Islam is in the midst of global transformation. This transformation is being led largely by Muslims in the West because we have certain academic freedoms along with freedom of speech and freedom to worship. [...] Now more than ever, the world needs to hear our voices."¹⁰³ Mohja Kahf adds in the denunciation of sexism that is her contribution to the volume: "our job now is to birth a new Islam, a new Islamic culture."¹⁰⁴

More recently, however, perhaps partly in reaction to escalating Islamophobia, questions are being raised about liberalism itself, whether in its conservative or progressive manifestations. Arguing that "dominant forms of American liberalism have prevented the political assimilation of Muslim Americans," Edward Curtis, for example, questions whether "liberal states may be structurally incapable" of sustaining the "kind of democracy" that is "committed to justice and equity."¹⁰⁵ Others such as Nadia Marzouki by contrast worry that liberalism is all too capable of assimilating Muslim Americans, but in a way that "depoliticizes" them into a docile and blandly universal "spirituality."¹⁰⁶ Still others hone in on the individualistic and libertarian core of liberalism. In her fascinating study of the transfiguration of hijab-wearing in America from a display of submission to higher law into an assertion of personal autonomy, Butheina Hamdah quotes a Muslim fashion designer for whom wearing the hijab represents "the freedom to choose my lifestyle," while for the founder of *MuslimGirl* online magazine it reflects a "Muslim feminist" desire to "empower women's individual choices and autonomy of their own lives."¹⁰⁷ Hamdah observes that insofar as wearing the hijab functions "as a path to self-fulfillment or self-actualization" for such women, "they have effectuated liberalism's aim to transform the Muslim identity to one that aligns with liberal ideas." As a result, she worries, "[w]ithin a liberal paradigm in which principles such as autonomy, individualism, and public reason have become self-evident truths, there is now a normalization of a particular type of acceptable Muslim identity (i.e., an increasingly secular, liberal one)."¹⁰⁸

Tracing the essential problem back to liberalism's roots in the American creed, as so many Catholic thinkers before have done, Sherman Jackson, a Muslim professor of religion and American Studies at the University of Southern California, likewise expresses alarm: "In its quest to affirm the priesthood of all believers [...] Protestantism would raise the value and authority of private, interiorized belief over those forms of religious conviction and practice that recognized the community as a source of religious authority." By also proving so effective in "its effort to empty the socio-cultural eco-system of all supernatural or mystical elements," Protestantism in America contributed to an increasingly secular liberal culture that "privileges the individual self [...] and] its right to pursue individual fulfillment" beyond the authority of any religion. Since "the notion that religion is or should be irrelevant to life outside the home runs counter to the whole point of the mosque as a public, religious institution," the implications for Islam in America are dire: "There is simply no way to sustain the long-term health and welfare of a fish in contaminated water, no matter what or how much we feed the fish."¹⁰⁹

Hamdah's and Jackson's concerns can be further developed by looking at two of the most sustained recent defenses of Islamic liberalism. In *Islam without Extremes*, Mustafa Akyol reaffirms liberalism's two core principles. *Equality* in modern times has demolished the old hierarchical order: "In medieval times, only a tiny group of Muslim elites [...] had the chance to find a library to study foreign philosophies. Now, almost everyone can do that – it just takes an Internet connection. The world now has many individuals who have both the mindset to think independently and the means to act accordingly."¹¹⁰ *Individual autonomy* can therefore be freely asserted: "Today, the same question haunts the minds of millions of my coreligionists [...] Is Islam a religion of coercion and repression? Or is it compatible with the idea of liberty – that individuals have full control over their lives and are free to be religious, irreligious, or whatever they wish to be?"¹¹¹ From these two modern advances it follows that religion can only be a subjective, private pursuit divorced from political authority or contestation: "Everyone should have freedom from both the state and the society, in other words, to have genuine religiosity."¹¹²

In *What is an American Muslim?*, Abdullahi An-Na'im asserts that a "secular state" (which is "required by – not merely tolerated or accepted by – Islam and Sharia") "neither depoliticizes Islam nor relegates it to the so-called private domain."¹¹³ Yet no less than with Akyol that is where the logic of his argument leads, rooted as it is in the radical "self-determination" of every individual: "I am particularly concerned about the part that the human subject does for herself; what the 'self' needs to be and do in order to realize the 'determination' it wishes to have. The *subjects* of change must be the ones to determine [...] this process of self-transformation."¹¹⁴ This being the case, no "human being or institution" is entitled "to adjudicate among competing views, or to decide by majority vote, on the religious truth or fallacy of any view." Instead: "Religious truth to each believer is what she or he believes it to be."¹¹⁵ An-Na'im finally arrives at the same conclusion Orestes Brownson had reached about Protestantism: "Judgments about what is religiously permissible or prohibited [...] or what is required or merely permitted [...] need to be made by believers. Whatever Sharia norms a Muslim accepts according to the interpretation he or she accepts [...] are always determined by believers personally."¹¹⁶

It is therefore noteworthy that both Akyol and An-Na'im express anxiety about Protestantization; the former by agreeing that conservative Muslim thinkers who fear such a development "have a point," the latter by describing its earlier effect on Jews, Catholics, and Mormons as "negative."¹¹⁷ Orestes Brownson by contrast—like Hamdah and Jackson after him—had no difficulty discerning the direct correlation between Protestantism and liberalism, to say nothing of the pitfalls lying beyond. Recent indicators would seem to bear out the relevance of his prognoses for American Islam as well. The proportion of Muslims polled who say religion is "very" important in their lives dipped from 72 percent in 2007 to 69 percent in 2011 and then again to 65 percent in 2017, while about 23 percent of Americans born Muslim "no longer identify with their childhood religion."¹¹⁸ This willingness to explore alternatives, coupled with the undeniable appeal of self-expression and self-empowerment proffered by the liberal American creed, raise questions about the future trajectory of Islam in the United States.

As Muslims weigh the costs and benefits of assimilation into the American creed, and as they contemplate the alternatives available to them, they might benefit from a careful review of how their Catholic predecessors here have struggled with those same questions before turning to some of their own traditions of political philosophy for guidance. There they will find insights and resources that can help them contribute to the political and social health of the country where they have found a new home.

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From Ummatic Muslims to State-centered Bosniacs: The Case of the Muslims of Bosnia

HAMDIJA BEGOVIC

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of the national identity of Bosnian Muslims throughout the 20th century, from an Ummatic-centric focus on their Islamic identity (using the ethnonym “Muslims”) to a state-centered, secularized, and “modernized” identity, adopting the ethnonym “Bosniacs.” This shift is framed as necessary for the biological, religious, and cultural preservation of Bosnian Muslims. The study builds on Bosnian sociologist Sacir Filandra’s typology of the Bosniac national renaissance

Hamdija Begovic is a Bosnian-Swedish Ph.D. student in political sociology. He is also active with the Ummatics Institute. His interests include issues related to Muslims dealing with modernity, and ummatic futurology.

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(*Preporod*), which he divides into three phases. The most recent phase emphasizes statehood, while earlier phases focused on religious preservation (during the Hapsburg/Ottoman and Yugoslav monarchy eras) and nationhood (under Communism). Filandra links this third phase to Alija Izetbegović's political movement, which spearheaded the broader Bosniac mobilization for statehood. Izetbegović's "Party for Democratic Action" is seen as the primary driver of this national struggle within the post-Communist political system. The paper provides a historical overview of how Bosnian Muslims transitioned from being part of the Ummah to identifying as Bosniacs tied to a nation-state, alongside an analysis of the Ummatic implications of this transformation.

Keywords: Ummatic, Preporod, Bosniac, Bosnia, National Identity

Introduction

This paper provides a concise overview of the historical evolution of Bosniac strategic positioning within the Bosnian political landscape, spanning from the Hapsburg occupation to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the Bosnian state. The analysis is grounded in Bosnian sociologist-historian Sacir Filandra's division of the Bosniac national movement (*Preporod*, meaning "renaissance" or "national awakening") into three stages, culminating in Alija Izetbegović's political project to affirm Bosniac identity through a Bosnian state. Filandra's three-stage framework of the *Preporod* is outlined, followed by an examination of the movement within the broader context of the Ummah and Ummatic political consciousness among Bosniacs. This analysis draws primarily on the works of Muhammad Iqbal and Wael Hallaq, which challenge normative assumptions about modernization and secularization that have shaped Bosniac identity from the fall of the Ottomans to the present day. While Filandra's typology is acknowledged for its descriptive value, this study critically examines whether the normative conclusions drawn from the Bosniac experience in the 20th century hold up to scrutiny. Particular attention is given to the presuppositions

surrounding the modern nation-state and state-bound national identities. Here, the works of Iqbal and Hallaq are instrumental in questioning these assumptions. Additionally, the study explores how Bosniac identity might align with a broader Ummatic identity that transcends the post-Westphalian political order. This aspect of the research is informed by the works of Darryl Li and Lia Merdjanova. Li critiques Islamophobic narratives about pan-Islamic solidarity and proposes alternative frameworks for transnational Islamic cooperation beyond the nation-state paradigm, while Merdjanova delves into the multifaceted nature of Ummatic identity, both within the context of Bosniac historical experience.

From Post-Ottoman Hapsburg Occupation to Post-Communist Bosnian Independence: The Three Stages of the *Preporod*

The three stages of the Bosniac national movement unfold against the backdrop of key events in European history: the Hapsburg occupation of Ottoman Bosnia and World War I; the interwar Yugoslav monarchy and World War II; the Yugoslav Communist era; and finally, the period of Bosnian independence, the ensuing war, and the Dayton Accords, leading up to the present day. Before delving into these three stages of the *Preporod*, it is worth noting that Filandra's classification aligns with broader frameworks, such as Ivo Banac's description of the gradual secularization of Bosnian Muslim identity. Banac outlines three phases: during the Habsburg and early Yugoslav periods, Bosnian Muslims were primarily seen as a *religious community*.¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, under Communist leader Josip Broz Tito, their loyalty was rewarded with the recognition of a secularized Muslim nationhood within the Communist framework. This allowed for the unique coexistence of Muslim national identity and atheism.² Finally, Banac identifies the post-Communist phase of statehood, marked by the emergence of Alija Izetbegovic's political movement.³ It was during this period that the term "Bosniac" was officially adopted as an ethnonym by the Second Bosniac Congress (*Drugi Bosnjacki Sabor*) in 1993,⁴ shifting from its earlier use as a territorial designation encompassing non-Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The evolving meanings of "Muslim" and "Bosniac" are central to understanding the

Preporod. These terms reflect the recurring controversies over the national identity of Slavic Muslims in Bosnia and the interplay between their identity and political status. Rather than offering a rigid definition of “Bosniac” at this juncture, the term’s conceptualization will be explored gradually, tracing its shifts and nuances throughout the narrative. The hypothesis that the transition from “Muslim” to “Bosniac” signifies the secularization of Bosnian Muslim identity provides a useful framework for analysis. Filandra’s (and Banac’s) division of the Bosniac national movement into three stages serves as a pedagogical tool to trace the transformation from “Muslim” to “Bosniac,” highlighting the historical, political, and ideological dynamics at play.

Stage One of the *Preporod* (The Hapsburg Occupation until 1960’s Communist Yugoslavia)

The Bosnian political landscape has long been shaped by the interplay of three primary actors (Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs) amid ongoing interference from major international powers. As argued by Mujanović⁵ and others,⁶ nationalism and ethnic chauvinism have been systematically exploited by these groups’ elites, often with the complicity of international forces, to sustain a corrupt, kleptocratic system rooted in the late Ottoman period.⁷ It is within this context of inter-Slavic rivalry and external influence that the Bosniac national movement unfolds. The Bosniacs’ relationship with one such external power, the Hapsburgs, was marked by ambivalence, oscillating between hostility and acceptance. Initial resistance to Austrian occupation, through military confrontation, economic boycotts, and mass migration to Ottoman territories, gave way to a more pragmatic acceptance, particularly after the dispiriting Young Turks revolution.⁸ During this period, Bosniac elites focused on preserving the Muslim aristocracy’s landholdings and safeguarding Islamic practices. Calls for Bosnian autonomy within the empire emerged as a strategy to protect Muslim interests, but Filandra notes that questions of nationhood, statehood, and language, which was central to Serb and Croat nationalist movements, were notably absent from Bosniac discourse at this stage.⁹ This lack of emphasis left many Bosniacs caught

between competing Serb and Croat nationalist projects,¹⁰ often identifying with one of these groups and thus becoming, in Merdjanova's words, "a nation in search of a name."¹¹

Nevertheless, Bosniacs maintained strong connections with the Ottoman Porte, prompting the Austrians to implement policies aimed at severing these ties. The Austrian-appointed *ra'is al-'ulama'* (Grand Mufti) was one such measure, though the position eventually required accreditation from the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam. Bosniacs continued to study in the Ottoman Empire through grants, preserving cultural and intellectual ties.¹² With the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire and the rise of the Yugoslav monarchy, Bosniacs organized under the *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija* (JMO), a politico-religious movement that continued to advocate for religious and land rights.¹³ However, some Bosniacs, uneasy about religious compromises within Yugoslavia, emigrated to Turkey, leading to a decline in the Muslim population of the Balkans.¹⁴ Those who remained prioritized the territorial integrity of Bosnia, viewing it as essential to their survival. The JMO argued that a unified Bosnian political framework was the only safeguard against domination by other groups.¹⁵ During World War II, Bosnia-Herzegovina was incorporated into a fascist Croat state, but post-war Communist rule reversed this arrangement, maintaining the country's historical borders and granting Bosnia-Herzegovina the status of a socialist republic. This reaffirmed the region's territorial and political unity, setting the stage for subsequent developments in the Bosniac national movement.

Stage Two of the *Preporod* (The Communist Period Until the Fall of Yugoslavia)

The second stage of the *Preporod* under Communist rule was characterized by a secularization of the Bosnian Muslim identity. The focus shifted away from the preservation of the Islamic character of Bosniacs and more attention was given to achieving nationhood status within Yugoslavia, on par with the Serbs and Croats. The Muslim identity here is the one described in the literature as a "sociological definition" of a Muslim, i.e., someone who identifies with the name, the history and the culture

of Islam and Muslims, but might be more or less adherent in terms of the theology and the religious practices.¹⁶ This, in short, means that the term during this time became an ethnic rather than a religious marker for the increasingly secularized Muslims of Bosnia. Also, the political dimensions of this sociological identity became intimately tied to Bosnia itself such that it gained the status of a homeland.¹⁷ Organizations such as *Mladi Muslimani* ("Young Muslims") that continued to work for the preservation of Islam amongst the Bosniacs and criticized the docility of the Islamic clerical organization in this regard (given that it had largely become an instrument of the Communist party) were outlawed, with some of its members executed. Alija Izetbegović's activities with this organization earned him his first stint in prison, between 1946-1949.¹⁸

Official recognition of Muslim nationhood in came in 1968.¹⁹ This measure was intended to counter Serb and Croat nationalism (playing national groups against each other, in general, was a way for the Communists to manage intra-party rivalries and to compensate for the lack of democratic pluralism), and to strengthen ties to Muslim countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. It had the effect of legitimizing the Bosniacs as serious political players, particularly since nationality formed the basis for the distribution of resources. This also had the effect of increasing Bosniac self-confidence and easing the grip of the secularization process through a national safety valve, as it were.²⁰ In addition to this, recognizing Bosnian Muslims as a nation was part of a larger strategy of legitimizing regional Communist elites, rewarding the Muslim elites in the Communist party for their loyalty. It was also part of a strategy based on the idea that steering the direction of Muslim national affirmation would help "modernize" the Muslim population and prevent the emergence of subversive, reactionary tendencies.²¹

The Third Stage of the *Preporod* (From the Fall of Communism Onwards): Izetbegović and The Party for Democratic Action

This stage was made possible by the convulsions that resulted from the fall of the Berlin Wall, divorcing the Bosniac national movement from Communist control. In December 1990, during the first congress

of the newly-formed “Party for Democratic Action” (henceforth SDA, the acronym of *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* in the Bosnian original), the process of secularization hitherto described was denounced as “brutal” and “vulgar,” destroying the “essentially religious” nature of Bosniac national consciousness. This third phase of the *Preporod*, then, was to a significant extent characterized by the emergence—by way of SDA—of the more religiously inclined section of the Bosniac intelligentsia, out of their Communist-era underground existence.²² A crucial point in this third phase of the *Preporod*, then, was the adoption in 1993 of the name “Bosniac” as the official ethnonym, such that we have the case of a people who entered the war as Muslims and exited it as Bosniacs.²³

The Bosniac strategy with regard to the newly-independent Bosnia-Herzegovina was based on the understanding that the integrity of the Bosnian geographical unit, in this case in the form of a state, signified the *sine qua non* of Bosniac survival.²⁴ Bosniac political strategy coalesced around the strengthening of Bosnian state institutions with the attendant promotion of a kind of civic nationalism. This accounts for the seemingly paradoxical situation in which the Bosniacs were named “Muslims” during the Communist phase of their national movement, only to adopt a more secular ethnonym as they emerged out of it and returned to their religious roots. Even so, there remains some tension or dissonance in this strategy as it entails adopting an ethnically particularistic *Bosniac* identity in which Islam holds a central position (even if only as a cultural signifier) alongside an identification of a secular, civic and multicultural *Bosnian* identity fixed to a state. Added to this are the complexities inherent in the dual European and Islamic components that come with the Bosniac identity. Bougarel and Clayer have pointed out that the constant insistence on being representatives of a tolerant, European, modern and sometimes even secular Islam (as contrasted against influences from the Arabian Peninsula) comes from the Bosniacs having to justify their existence in Europe.²⁵ This clinging to a “tolerant, Bosnian Islam” trope appears to be part of a general Bosniac strategy for affirmation and legitimacy by the West, tied to their adoption of a secularized ethnonym.²⁶ This is very much accords with Babuna’s thesis, which argues that the political and military crisis in Bosnia pushed the SDA into following a

pragmatic, strategic policy of survival, more or less devoid of political ideology. The shifts between and appeals to the Western and Muslim worlds during the war were made in desperation more so than through deliberation, and in post-Dayton Bosnia a realpolitik-based approach has prevailed in which European integration and a secular Bosnian state are deemed necessary for the survival of the Bosniac people.²⁷

Analysis

What are some of the wider implications of the Bosniac experience for the prospects of Ummatic political cooperation and, indeed, unity? One of the first things that might strike the observer is that the Bosniac identity is multi-faceted or paradoxical, depending on which angle you chose to look at it from. And similarly, this might be a drawback or an advantage depending on how you look at it. With regard to the multi-facetedness of the Bosniac identity, Merdjanova in her study on the relationship between Balkan Muslims and the Ummah points out that the very concept of Ummah is riddled with complexities to begin with. It is of “a dynamic nature and encompasses a plurality of discourses, actors, funds, and ideological and political interests.” It coexists with national identity, but it also interacts and competes with it. Added to this there are the pan-Balkan Muslim identity,²⁸ and the neo-Ottoman identity shared with Muslims (and non-Muslims) everywhere from Turkey, to the Crimea, to the Middle East.²⁹ There is also the identity of the Westernized, secular “European Muslim,”³⁰ making for a potential cocktail of imagined identities. She argues that the Bosnian government’s appeal to the Ummah during the war was primarily tactical.³¹ What we have here, then, might be understood as a tug-of-war between a Westernized secular identity and an Ummatic, religious identity, which Bosniacs have yet to come to terms with.

An original approach to the question of Bosniac positioning during the war with regard to their balancing act between the “international community” (a euphemism for the West) and the Ummah, respectively, has been provided by Darryl Li. He prefers to understand these two imagined concepts as two rivalling universalisms: the liberal Western and the

Ummatic, with the latter in effect defying the conventional understanding of the Westphalian nation-state as a fundamental constituent unit.³² What Li has shown in his work is that Izetbegovic, SDA and the Bosnian government had to juggle three different identities: their civic Bosnian identity, their European identity, and their Muslim identity extended beyond Bosnia itself (as part of the Ummah). These three different identities were utilized strategically depending on which gains SDA sought to achieve. When they appealed for Western intervention, they emphasized their European identity. When they sought to attract civic-minded non-Muslims in Bosnia, they emphasized their Bosnian identity. When they appealed to Islamic solidarity, they emphasized their belongingness to the Ummah. Bosniac identity, in other words, is inherently ambivalent, if not elusive.

The complex nature of this is compounded by the consideration that nationalism itself might serve as an ersatz-religion even if religion-proper is taken out of the equation, making things difficult to disentangle when the national identity is intertwined with a religious identity.³³ At any rate, this account contradicts (or at least nuances) Filandra's more straightforward typology in which there is a steady secularization of Bosniac identity. Whilst Filandra's description might serve as a heuristic tool to understand the general evolution of Bosniac identity during the 20th century, there is some ambiguity. This is a natural consequence of the fact that Bosnian Muslim identity has been negotiated within all of the following phases: a Muslim empire (the Ottomans), a Catholic empire (the Hapsburgs), an Orthodox dominated monarchy (during the first Yugoslav state) and two secular states (the second Yugoslav state and the *de jure* independent Bosnia that is *de facto* a US/EU protectorate, or quasi-protectorate).³⁴

If we do settle upon understanding the above-described aspects of the Bosniac identity as a tug-of-war, then it would naturally follow that the Bosniacs run the risk of losing their Ummatic identity as they tumble down into the secular, Western side of the field. But this is not necessarily how one needs to understand this. Whilst there might certainly be an element of Machavellianism to Bosniac appeals for help, which cater to the recipient in terms of their packaging, Correia has noted

that the Bosniacs whom she has studied feel comfortable, on a personal level, with juggling several seemingly contradictory religious and secular identities.³⁵ In other words, this aspect of Bosniac strategizing might also have arisen as a natural extension of a certain compounded aspect to Bosniac identity. Seen from this angle, the Bosniacs could serve as natural bridge-builders between the Ummatic and Western worlds, which might facilitate civilizational cooperation. One example of this can be found in the pre-presidency writings of Alija Izetbegovic. In *Islam Between East and West* (1993) he provides an intellectual foundation for the Bosniacs' potential role in facilitating East-West understanding by presenting Islam as a balanced synthesis between materialism and spirituality, or civilization and culture. This serves to conceptualize Islam in a way that is intelligible to a Western audience, and these intellectual efforts, in combination with the Bosniacs role as an embodiment of European Islam, has the potential to de-otherize Muslims in Europe. But this then begs the question: how do we avoid a situation in which the Bosniacs find themselves in a tug-of-war between the Western and the Ummatic? For a discussion of this, we need to return to Filandra's analysis. It is clear that his account of the development of Bosniac identity is not merely descriptive, it is meant to be normative. He understands the secularization process to be necessary for Bosniac survival.

*Scarcest are the political forces and actors, most needed in Bosnia, who think through, understand and comprehend Bosniac survival in such a way that they see the preservation of the Bosnian state as a condition for the preservation of Bosniac nationhood and spirituality. Mistaken are those who consider that by only defending the religious or the religious and national aspects, neglecting the defense of Bosnia as a state, will the faith and the nation be adequately defended. Historical experience tells us that it is only through the state and state apparatus that national and spiritual distinctiveness is safeguarded.*³⁶

It is difficult, at first glance, to argue against such an analysis given the difficult political terrain that the Bosniacs have had to navigate in a

post-Ottoman world, as evidenced most recently by the genocide during the 1990s. This is particularly the case given how irrelevant the Ummah has been as a political player in the international political arena, with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) having proven quite toothless. It could therefore be argued that there has been an element of *darurah*, to use a term borrowed from the field of Islamic *fiqh*, to this type of pragmatic strategy that focuses on preserving Bosnia as a political unit in the form of a nation state as other more traditionally Islamic forms of political organization have proven to be unviable. This pragmatic strategy reflects a temporary suspension of idealized Islamic political forms, such as transnational Ummatic governance, in favor of survival within the constraints of the modern international system. However, the accompanying embrace of a secularized national identity, and its anchoring within a post-Westphalian state is fraught with complications that might impede Ummatic political cooperation. The justification that the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina need to operate within the political framework that the current world order offers (by way of an appeal to pragmatism), I would argue, loses its cogency when and if one forgets, ignores or fails to acknowledge that this was done out of necessity, and instead understands it to be a permanent measure that one then starts to build one's identity around. Or one doubles-down on this strategy even as new opportunities for Ummatic political cooperation begin to emerge. As pointed out by Sadek Hamid,

*The Umma is nearly two billion strong and youthful, with more than half of its population under the age of 30. We currently make up around 20 percent of humanity, possess numerous resources, and have hundreds of millions of educated people who are globally distributed and connected like never before. Globalization has helped increase ummatic sentiment through the possibilities of instant communications technology, travel and trade.*³⁷

In other words, it is when one goes beyond pragmatism and promotes a secularized Bosniac identity within a post-Westphalian world order as more than a means to an end, promoting it instead as the end in

itself, that one in effect forfeits the Ummatic. On the other hand, denying the European-ness of the Bosniac identity would be equally perilous, as it denies the Bosniacs their natural role as bridge-builders, even as it puts into question European peoples' (even beyond the Bosniacs) right to retain their European identity if they embrace an Ummatic outlook on politics. This impoverishes the Ummah.

Why do I caution against an identity tied to the post-Westphalian world order? Here I would argue that the consequences of a Faustian bargain with nationalism ultimately reach beyond the politics of the day. One of the most eloquent spokesmen for the position that I argue for here was Muhammad Iqbal. In a discussion on his political philosophy Sevea points out,

[T]he Allama rejected the ideology of nationalism and the modern nation-state structure. [... His] view of colonialism as an exercise of power extending beyond physical domination into the realm of intellectual hegemony inspired his rejection of calls for the adoption of western political ideas and institutions. The mere transplantation of western political ideas and institutions, Iqbal argued, would only serve to perpetuate colonial domination, even after de-colonisation.³⁸

Indeed, Iqbal argued that the adoption of the nation-state system infringed upon the very foundation of Islam, endangering the believer's *tawhid*.³⁹ His analysis goes deeper still:

Iqbal recorded in a letter to Edward Thompson that his foray into the realm of politics had been dictated by his interest in Islam as a moral polity and the fear that nationalism would lead to atheism. It was endemic in the nation-state system, he argued, that religion be relegated to the private realm; thus, the only factor uniting the people of the nation-state would be 'irreligiousness'.⁴⁰

He also argued that the overbearing political structure of the modern state "over-organizes" the individual, exploiting him or her for the purpose of the state itself.⁴¹

This very problem, along with others tied to the state, has more recently been discussed by the likes of Wael Hallaq who argues that any notion of Islamic governance, rooted in the Shari'ah (as it has historically come to be articulated through the Sunni and the Shi'i Schools of Law), requires as a necessary condition for its viability that the Islamic paradigmatic way of living and understanding—with its theoretical-philosophical, sociological, anthropological, legal, political and economic underpinnings which have evolved over centuries—remain intact within society. This intactness provides the driving force that animates that society, by constituting its “central domain” (a notion borrowed from Carl Schmitt).⁴² This paradigm is the proverbial canvas upon which the Shari'ah-centered institutional framework can be painted. The central domain contains the “ideal values that remain the distinctive desiderata and the locus of purposive action and thought.” The absence of this paradigm and the central domain renders any attempt at applying Islamic governance futile.⁴³ It would naturally follow, then, that any Muslim nationalism within a paradigm that is fundamentally incompatible with an Islamic central domain cannot be a permanent solution to the problems with which the Bosniacs have to contend. It creates new problems, even as it might perhaps solve some others. The main problem it creates, in my view, is that it replaces the Islamic paradigmatic way of living by making it appear as unfeasible or extreme. Hallaq argues (“the genealogy argument”) that the modern state grew out of historical circumstances that are specific to Europe and rooted in its own paradigm shaped by the Enlightenment, and that the imposition of European political structures to societies that do not share the same historical experiences and are based on different paradigms will cause major disruptions to those societies, necessitating violence (physical, psychological, epistemic, and so on) in that process. This describes what colonization of the Muslim world entailed. One particularly insidious aspect to this is that the state “came to be associated with a ‘value-free’ scientific method that was presumably based on universally valid laws” and that it is imagined to be “subject to universal scientific principles that must by definition be as timeless as reason itself.”⁴⁴ This also explains why Filandra considers the Bosniac secularized identity to be more advanced, whereas a return

to a “mere” Muslim, Ummatic identity appears to be either retrograde or unrealistic, if not bizarre.

Hallaq also points out (“the metaphysical argument”) that the citizen, as it were, serves the state, based on the idea that the state derives its legitimacy and sovereignty from an imagined construct, the nation (in the abstract), of which it is an embodiment (in tangible terms): “To be a citizen, therefore, means to live under a sovereign will that has its own metaphysics. It is to live with and under yet another god, one who can claim the believers’ lives.”⁴⁵ The implications of this are devastating, considering that *shirk*, or setting up a rival to God, is considered the ultimate cardinal sin in Islam, rendering the modern nation-state incompatible with Islamic governance on that account alone. A case in point, not provided by Hallaq, but rather by Salman Sayyid in one of his studies on Islamism, is Khomeini who declared that through the doctrine of *vilayet-e-faqih*, a modern innovation in Shi’i jurisprudence developed as a mechanism to guide the Islamic Republic, the political rule of the Iranian state has precedence over the Shari’ah itself. As Sayyid points out: “[T]he Islamic Republic had the right to abrogate any or all of the [Shari’ah], in the wider interests of the *Ummah*. There is nothing traditional about this ruling; it is not derived from any canonical text and it actually makes observations of Islamic precepts secondary to state interests.”⁴⁶ State matters are privileged and everything else is ancillary. This makes clear why the post-Westphalian state model around which a secularized Bosniac identity emerges is fundamentally incompatible with Islamic metaphysics, which is why the earlier incarnation of said identity, manifested in the “capital M *Musliman*” ethnonym by which one can be both *Musliman* and an atheist Communist, strikes us as particularly dissonant and had to be discarded. But the problem does not resolve itself simply through the adoption of another name.

Hallaq then argues (“the legal argument”) that the modern conceptualization of the state falls back upon an integrated and an integrating system that represents, or incarnates, the will of the nation. This is manifested through law. It is law, and the enforcement of law, which becomes the instrument through which this national will is translated from the abstract into the tangible. This, again, is highly problematic

from a Shari'ah perspective, according to Hallaq, as it *de facto* erases the distinction between the legal and the executive or governing spheres of society, which need to be clearly separated for Islamic governance to be legitimate and, indeed, feasible. Hallaq is arguing that the Shari'ah, or rather the process by which it is interpreted and communicated within society through the '*ulama*', needs to be independent from the ruling body, and it needs to emerge out of civil society, bottom-up, rather than top-down from state institutions. In other words, the Shari'ah needs to be an independent "legislative power" that emerges out of a living tradition within a community which accepts the metaphysical premises on which the Shari'ah is based by first practicing its "moral technologies of the self" (the spiritual and ritualistic elements of Islam which constitute a fundamental part of the Shari'ah itself) before it can spill over into the other "branches" of government. Only when embedded within a "moral-legal system" anchored in a particular God-centered metaphysical understanding does it make sense for the Shari'ah to inform judicial power.⁴⁷ In such circumstances where this is the case and that condition is fulfilled, the judicial power and the executive ruler are subservient to the commands of the legislative.⁴⁸

As for Iqbal's contention that nationalism leads to atheism, I believe that Hallaq successfully substantiates this concern. He points out that one consequence of the modern state growing out of an Enlightenment paradigm, wherein reason is instrumentalized, is that an is/ought dichotomy lay at the foundation of modern law, in contravention to the very basis of Islamic governance where the distinction between "moral" and "legal" is completely absent. In fact, the legal is "an organically derivative category of the moral."⁴⁹ Islamic law presupposes a "moral universe," whereas paradigmatic modern law is positivistic. This explains why, for example, usury as condemned in both Aristotelian and pre-modern Christian ethics is now universally accepted in modern economic theory and an integral part of the nation state's economic structure due to the exponential economic growth that it facilitates. Instrumental reason and the is/ought dichotomy at the root of positivistic law is inimical to Islamic governance because it is at least a necessary condition for "a cold universe that is ours to do with as we like."⁵⁰ It therefore follows

that any identity, such as the Bosniac one, which is directly tied to a political system based on the is/ought dichotomy cannot be the ultimate one for a Muslim.

Finally, and crucially for anyone invested in an Ummatic political project, such an identity, given its embeddedness in a post-Westphalian world order, presupposes a Wallerstenian world system which automatically renders the Ummatic incongruous. Hallaq argues that the modern nation state is surrounded, fortified, and upheld by a discursive structure that serves to legitimize it in the minds of those that it encompasses. The nation-state depends for its survival on the ability to, not only organize the lives of its citizens, but to organize their minds through generating “social and cultural consent,” by working its way through various units of society. There is an element of coercive power here (not least through mandatory education), but it is mainly a case of subordination through cooperation, or absorption: “[T]hrough state schools and an education regulated by state law (which destroys earlier [pre-colonial] forms), a paradigmatic scholarly elite is created and re-created as a cultural domain responsive to the state’s overall penetration of the social order.”⁵¹ The state is a contingent reality, yet in the mind of the citizen (as educated by the state) it is taken to be a necessary one. The debilitating problem for proponents of Muslim nationalism is that the paradigmatic (stable and functioning) nation-state is understood to be the Euro-American one, having emerged out of a specific historical context and being sustained by the legal, bureaucratic and metaphysical reinforcements discussed in the previous points. Now, if the Bosniacs are interested in gaining international recognition for their state (and a state is not a state without being recognized as such by other states), it needs to be a part of the community of nation states, which entails being part of a global economic system that reinforces the advantage of the already dominant states (that gained their dominance by way of colonialism). The system is largely imposed on the weaker states. This means that the discourse surrounding the paradigmatic (Euro-American) nation-state is reinforced in the process, since this global system is dominated by the rich, Western states that other states measure themselves against.⁵² The Bosniacs, by way of their Bosnian state, are seeking to enmesh themselves in a world

system that emerged out of colonialism which, in part, was premised on “rooting out the Shari’ah, it having been an impediment to Europe’s political expansion and, far more importantly, economic domination.”⁵³

Conclusion

The above analysis has, I believe, demonstrated why calling the transition from “Muslims” to “Bosniacs” and the adoption of the Bosnian state as a national homeland a “national awakening,” a *Preporod*, might be misdirected. The thesis presented is not that “Bosniacs” as an ethnonym is problematic in itself or that a return to being mere “Muslims” is necessary. Indeed, a multi-faceted identity which accommodates being European Bosniacs and Ummatic Muslims means richness and vividness that is to the advantage of both the Ummah and the West. What I am saying is precisely that this richness and vividness are needed, and are to be sought in embracing an Ummatic identity that is tied together with the Bosniac identity and which transcends the post-Westphalian nation state.

Whilst the political maneuvering of Bosniacs in the 20th century and their identification with Bosnia-Herzegovina as a political unit may have been a *darurah*, a *Preporod* that is more worthy of that name can only be realized when Ummatic sentiments get translated into concrete political gains, i.e., when an Ummatic identity ceases to be viewed as quixotic, becoming instead viable as a foundation for political action. After all, as Bosniacs the people that are the focus of this paper are a mere 3 million strong, but as part of the Muslim Ummah they reach almost 2 billion. Moreover, Hallaq argues that the project of finding alternatives to the *status quo*, which involves reanimating the world and blurring the distinction between is and ought, cannot be a Muslim monopoly. It needs to be a shared human endeavor. It is a general question of shifting the central domain, from the economic and the political to the moral; and for Muslims, specifically, it is a question of what they can bring to the table in this regard. It is a table at which their “Western counterparts” are present. Muslims, therefore, need to develop a vocabulary that suits the context and that Muslims’ interlocutors can understand: “This would

require nonconformist thinking and native imagination, because the social units that would make up the larger sociopolitical order must be rethought in terms of moral communities that need, among other things, to be reenchanting.”⁵⁴ By secularizing and modernizing their identity, along with anchoring it to a nation-state, the Bosniacs are not only doing a disservice to themselves, but to humanity at large.

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- 7 See Mujanovic, Jasmin (2018) *Hunger and fury: the crisis of democracy in the Balkans* (London, United Kingdom: Hurst & Company 2013), 17-40
- 8 Imamovic, Mustafa *Historija Bosnjaka*. (Sarajevo: Preporod 1998), 361-362 and Filandra, Sacir *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*. (Sarajevo: Sejtarija 1998), 27-31
- 9 There is a teleological bent to Filandra's analysis here, in that he considers this first stage to be underdeveloped and deficient as its focus was mainly religious. In other words: increasing secularization of the Bosniac identity suggests maturation. Cf. Filandra, Sacir *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*. (Sarajevo: Sejtarija 1998), 53.
- 10 Filandra, Sacir *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*. (Sarajevo: Sejtarija 1998), 34-39 and Mujanovic, Jasmin (2018) *Hunger and fury: the crisis of democracy in the Balkans* (London, United Kingdom: Hurst & Company 2013), 37-39
- 11 Merdjanova, Ina *Rediscovering the Umma: Muslims in the Balkans between nationalism and transnationalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30-34. This, again, takes a secularized conceptualization of a "nation" for granted, suggesting that a religious identity by itself is somewhat lacking. The idea that one might not feel a particular need for, or find much merit in, a secularized national identity does not seem to be entertained.

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- 22 Sarac Dzenita "Neuspjeh sekularizacije i jakanje religijskog identiteta pocetkom 1980-ih godina u Bosni i Hercegovini" in (ed.) Kamberovic, Husnija *Rasprave o Nacionalnom Identitu Bosnjaka: Zbornik Radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za Istoriju, 2009), 154-155
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- 25 Bougarel, Xavier & Clayer, *Nathalie Europe's Balkan Muslims. A New History*. (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2017), 215 & 223-224

- 26 Ibid., 193
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- 40 Ibid., 141
- 41 Ibid., 143-144
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- 44 Ibid., 24
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Islam, Science, and the Environment: An Application of Ibrahim Kalin's "Three Views of Science in the Islamic World"

BILKIS BHARUCHA

Abstract

Contemporary discussions on Islam and science are highly variegated, often taking on fundamentally opposite assumptions. The remarkable divergence in the basic methods and assumptions underlying publications in this field make any meta-study, or comparison between approaches, nearly impossible. One pragmatic meta-framework of Islam and science that incorporates a wide range of views and provides meaningful distinctions between them

Bilkis Bharucha is an aspiring writer developing her voice through personal and reflective writing. She works in environmental education and has a background in agricultural development. She received her B.A. from the University of San Francisco (2010), and is studying for an M.A. at Zaytuna College (2027).

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is suggested by Ibrahim Kalin. In his chapter titled, “Three Views of Science in the Islamic World,” Kalin identifies three (non-exhaustive) Islamic critiques of science, which he labels as: ‘ethical/puritanical’; ‘epistemological’; and ‘ontological/metaphysical’. Applying Kalin’s framework to contemporary publications on Islam and the environment offers a rich analysis, enabling us to identify attempts at the instrumentalization of Islamic ethics, hermeneutics, and metaphysics, as well as identify contact points between religion and science.

Keywords: Islam and science; Ibrahim Kalin; environmental ethics

Introduction

The academic literature in the field of Islam and science is exploding. In just the past two decades, hundreds of journal articles and dozens of new books have been published in the field, indicating a strong interest in applied topics, including Islamic jurisprudence and ethics (*fiqh*), applied hermeneutics (*tafsīr*), and applied theology (*kalām*). Interest in applied topics has been balanced by a number of theoretical works and models emerging from a critical application of history, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy to the field of Islam and science. In their contributions to models of Islam and science, scholars have pointed to a wide variety of considerations, including the importance of distinguishing between mainstream and reformist Islam (Çoruh, 2020: 152–161), epistemic discontinuities in science (Iqbal, 2017: 25–64) and avoiding a unified historical approach (Dallal, 2017: 219–244).

All of this indicates remarkable divergence in the basic methods and assumptions underlying publications in this field, making any meta-study, or comparison between approaches, nearly impossible. The lack of meta-principles or guidelines to discuss the subject matter presents a real problem. For example, the introductory monograph, *Islam and Science*, proceeds with a historical approach in describing key figures (Guessoum and Bigliardi, 2023). This approach summarily does the job, offering an overview of the subject; however, it remains ineffective in characterizing substantive issues, limiting the possibility for further analysis.

The burgeoning field of Islam and science, then, may be in the process of being ‘reconstructed’ from multiple sides: first, as it attempts to integrate with a paradigm of religion and science that developed from a theology and metaphysics different from its own; second, as it responds to the epistemic shifts between premodern, modern, and postmodern science, and third, as practitioners in the field operate within different paradigms of Islam. In this case, a historical trajectory is not enough to account for the similarities and differences between what seem to be wildly differentiated attempts at understanding the relationship between Islam and science.

A Parsimonious Model: “Three Views of Science in the Islamic World”

Contemporary discourse on Islam and science indicates that any meta-framework or model employed to characterize the discourse must be comprehensive enough to include most, if not all approaches, and precise enough help us understand the differences and divergences of each perspective. One pragmatic meta-framework that proves useful as an efficient model of Islam and science, incorporating a wide range of views and providing meaningful distinctions between them, is suggested by Muslim philosopher Ibrahim Kalin in the anthology “God, Life and the Cosmos,” edited by Muzaffar Iqbal. In his chapter titled, “Three Views of Science in the Islamic World,” Kalin identifies three (non-exhaustive) Islamic critiques of science, which he labels as: Ethical/puritanical, Epistemological, and Ontological/metaphysical. For each view, Kalin briefly describes the time-period and context of development, key proponents, and limitations or problems. He concludes that the “ontological/metaphysical” framework is the most adequate, being free of inconsistencies while remaining intellectually and ethically satisfying.

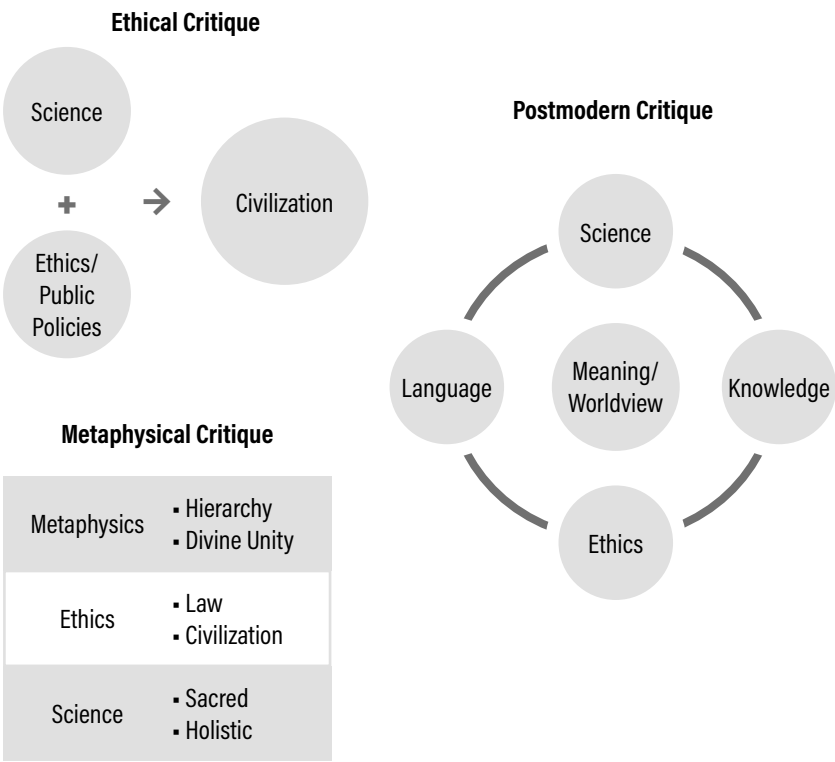
The parsimony of Kalin’s framework allows for its continued application. In this article, I apply Kalin’s framework to contemporary discussions on Islam and the environment to characterize different approaches, along with their key motivations and concerns. Using Kalin’s model, we can also anticipate and find evidence for problems and

limitations for each approach. However, as Kalin concludes, his framework is not exhaustive. It is safe to say that the thinkers discussed below generally defy a neat classification, as the scope of their work is often multi-layered. Nonetheless, this framework remains useful in isolating key features for each type of critique of modern science. Informing us from the environmental perspective is Anna Gade, through her ethnographic account of *Muslim Environmentalisms*.

The primary thinkers who have contributed to the field of Islam and science noted in Kalin's framework, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar, have also provided their own classification system of key thinkers. Nidhal Guessoum provides a rich narrative of their views, as well as the unique classification systems they each suggest. Their models offer overlapping ideas on how traditional and modern approaches to science and religion might be understood (Guessoum, 2010). The thinkers also identify unique groups, such as Muslim creationists and 'Bucaillism' as noteworthy in the religion and science discourse. These thoughtful yet somewhat ad-hoc categorizations attempt to resolve the issue of creating a comprehensive model for religion and science, but fall short of being able to articulate a framework that efficiently captures all perspectives.

Kalin does not develop a detailed theoretical model to characterize engagements on Islam and science; instead, after a brief historical overview, he articulates key philosophical differences between the various approaches taken by Muslims in the modern era. Kalin describes the "puritanical" view of science as the most popular, especially during the 19th century. This approach emphasizes the value-neutrality and objectivity of modern science, assuming no philosophical or ideological attachments. It adopts a linear view of history, where the "torch of science" is carried through civilizations in an inevitable march toward "progress," prompting a need to justify religious teachings through science, and the rise of scientific interpretations of the Qur'an. The second group identified by Kalin is characterized by its postmodern critique, which questions the epistemic status or truth claims of modern science, taking it to be a social construction. Under this approach, Muslim social scientists have attempted the "Islamization of knowledge," creating space for the Islamic point of view within the framework of modern

philosophy. The third group offers a metaphysical critique of modern science, emphasizing the metaphysical and ontological foundations of the modern natural sciences. Kalin concludes that the metaphysical approach is the most comprehensive and compelling because it gets to the root of the problem. Below are visual models of how each approach might organize the relationship between metaphysics, ethics, science, and society:



The terms “modern,” “postmodern,” and “traditional” are used to describe three different approaches. These terms are not strictly defined but serve to distinguish each critique. Key thinkers from each approach are used to exemplify each framework. A significant challenge for both the modern and postmodern approaches is the gap between their stated goals and how these are applied in practice. For the traditional approach, questions arise about whether its vision is as universal as it claims. The

examples used are not intended to be exhaustive, but to show how each lens might interpret environmental issues. This offers a rich analysis, enabling us to identify attempts at the instrumentalization of Islamic ethics, hermeneutics, and metaphysics.

Applications to Islam and the Environment

The Ethical Critique of Science

The ethical critique of science separates between ethical and technical questions. Their proposed remedy is two-fold: (1) continued advancement in scientific research and technologies and (2) inserting a dimension of social and environmental ethics into scientific practice. Kalin critiques the first because “this view looks for the solution in the problem itself.” As for the second, Kalin directly points out the susceptibility of this view to mobilization by various interests: “To limit ethics to policy implementations is to make it a matter of personal preference for the scientific community, whose political and financial freedom against that of the government and giant corporations is highly questionable” (Kalin, 2017, 65–98). Indeed, although figures such as Muhammad Abduh insisted that “the mother and father of science is proof,” to indicate that science was free from any cultural or nationalist ideologies, the scientific endeavor at that time was largely the product of nationalism as countries frantically sought to improve the technological capacity of Muslims (Guessoum, 2010). While it is true that scientists must know their limits, and that “metaphysics, theology, and ethics are [...] beyond the scientist’s professional competency,” values do play a role in shaping scientific inquiry (Koperski 2015). The assumption of science as a value-neutral endeavor can foment a ‘value-smuggling’ problem. By untethering the scientific endeavor from ethics, scientists are assumed to be defining research problems and priorities in an objective or value-free manner, while, in fact, remaining susceptible to, and influenced by either individual or cultural ‘background beliefs.’

Contemporary attempts to integrate Islamic ethics within public policy toward environmental matters also show surprising outcomes.

Consider the following defense of conservation: “The principle of conservation is part of the constant value that does not change or alter in accordance with people’s desires or economic conditions [...] Water should be conserved whether it is in plentiful or not. The principle should be applied in isolation of that which humans might consider important” (‘Izz al-Dīn, 2000). The author then mentions two concepts used in contemporary Islamic discourse on modifying practical ethics: *istiḥsān* (preference for that which is better) and *istiṣlāḥ* (public welfare). This discussion seems to offer a reasonable, principled defense of conservation. However, the question for practical ethics remains: does it inform practice? Gade’s own fieldwork on water conservation in Indonesia provides a striking example of how religious ethics works in a community setting. She discovered that conservationists were more successful when they presented the issue as one that would threaten the ability of the community to perform ritual ablution, which would affect the validity of daily prayers, rather than as a general exhortation to limit pollution for public health (Gade, 2019). It was only when the environmental threat was subsumed by the threat to religious practice that the community was motivated to take action. This example demonstrates a subtle difference between the instrumentalization of ethics for ideological purposes, and the application of ethics to solve contemporary problems. In the first case, practical ethics (on water conservation) were used to inform public policies by appealing to a common good (i.e., *istiṣlāḥ*). While this is a perfectly acceptable use of *fiqh* principles, it does not carry import for individual behavior. Instead, if coupled with an ideological environmental commitment, it appears to be an instrumentalization of religious ethics for social purposes. While this approach may be useful in articulating and defending state-level policies, it does not motivate individuals in the way that a threat to their personal religious practice and ethics might. In the second case, practical ethics on water conservation becomes relevant to individuals through the application of specific *fiqh* rulings, namely, on the purity of water used for ablutions.

‘Izz al-Dīn’s broader work on Islamic environmental law also describes an administrative system in which the practical ethics of officials played a significant role in shaping policies (Gade, 2019). Thus,

several important nodes of ethical practice, such as those found within the persona of administrative officials, or within community or individual settings, are ignored when ethical considerations are left entirely to public policy. Additional problems emerge when applications of *fiqh* are equated with public policy. For example, Gade explains that traditionally, fatwas were never enforced as a “public policy,” but that “nonbinding fatwas bring a moral authority to bear on environmental justice and may even carry a practical and activist impetus to draw up specific measures,” as demonstrated in the previous example (Gade, 2019: 150). The scope of Islamic law, then, may be personal, communal, or governmental, with varying levels of bindingness.

Another limitation of relying on Islamic jurisprudence to inform our engagement with technology is articulated by Mutaz El-Khatib in his chapter on genetic interventions in an anthology on bioethics by Muhammad Ghaly. While El-Khatib focuses on bioethics rather than environmental topics, his criticism generally holds for any form of technology. El-Khatib examines the limits of a *fiqh*-based approach in bioethics, pointing out the shortsightedness of modern jurisprudential approaches in countries like Egypt, where technologies are regarded as morally neutral instruments until they are employed toward a certain end. He argues that examining the effect of technologies on human life is a meta-ethical question, requiring philosophical evaluation. To be clear, El-Khatib is not suggesting that by asking meta-ethical questions we take a *maqāsid*-based approach to *fiqh*. Rather, he points out that it is inappropriate to task a jurisprudential scholar, whose primary concern is with practical positions on specific issues, to adequately identify the “impact of modern technology” (Ghaly, 2018). This raises an important concern about whether jurisprudential scholars can properly fulfill their roles without collaborating with philosophers and scientists, or if that is essential to produce adequate responses to technical questions with meta-ethical implications.

El-Khatib also notes that some fatwas move beyond public policy to appeal directly to the individual conscience. For instance, one fatwa recommended that “doctors and laboratories fear God who is watching them and stay away from actions that harm the individual, society, and

the environment.” Ultimately, however, the problem with using a jurisprudential approach to address questions of technology is not just one of extending the application of *fiqh* from the domain of public policy to the communal or individual domain, as described above. Rather, the discussion is outside of the domain of jurisprudence entirely and ultimately falls under the domain of philosophy, and even theology (Ghaly, 2018).

To summarize, proponents of the ‘puritanical’ view of science employ both technical and ethical/policy solutions for contemporary environmental problems. Their primary engagement with scripture is through jurisprudence, with arguments often developed through appeals to the public good. Some may seek rulings that are oriented toward public policy, while others are focused on communal or individual ethics. However, there are problems with both, reducing ethics to public policy, and using *fiqh* to bypass philosophical questions in modern science and technology. Thus, technical solutions, public policy and applications of *fiqh* all remain essential, but inadequate solutions. In the next section, we explore how the epistemological critique of science articulates an ‘Islamic’ science for all domains and potentially entertains philosophical concerns.

The Epistemic Critique of Science

The epistemic critique of modern science historicizes science, religion, and language, emphasizing the interpretive frameworks under which all knowledge and meaning is produced. Under this approach, the “Islamization of knowledge” movement rose to introduce the Islamic point of view within the framework of modern philosophy. A related project, the “Islamization of science,” is best understood through the works of Ismail al-Faruqi and Ziauddin Sardar, two key proponents of this approach. Al-Faruqi is best known for founding the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and proposing an entire overhaul of science through articulating a framework of Islamic education (Guessoum, 2010). Sardar is better known for his de-colonialist lens, critique of Western science, and the construction of a new ethical framework for science (Guessoum, 2010). Thus, while both sought to reconstruct science using

the lens of Islam, al-Faruqi attempted to reformulate an epistemology of science using “Qur’anic principles,” while Sardar wanted to re-orient science within a broader Islamic worldview (Kalin, 2017: 65–98). Despite these differences, however, their approaches, as we will learn, face similar limitations.

Kalin’s general critique of this approach is that it puts the subject before the world; anything outside the subject is devoid of intrinsic meaning. Furthermore, if modern science is regarded as a socially constructed edifice of the West, then “Islamic science,” too, cannot be universally valid. Kalin concludes that the project of Islamizing the natural and social sciences falls prey to the “epistemologist fallacy” of modern philosophy. Kalin’s criticism warns against making purely identity-based claims, as it undermines the validity of one’s own position. One might concede, however, that this provincializing of science, especially under the methods of decolonization, has done much to help trace the provenance of ideas for correct cultural attribution. Tracing the genealogy of ideas helps to articulate (or construct) a field’s independent place in Islamic thought and to identify uniquely Islamic methodologies informed by an Islamic metaphysics. Proponents of this view might argue that a careful tracing of ideas and disciplines to their cultural fountainheads allows us to introduce alternative ethics and methodologies into the “metaphysically blind” outlook of modern science. This approach may be responding to El-Khatib’s suggestion to consider philosophy in issues of technology and science, by advocating for an alternative philosophy that is Islamic.

Under this lens, the environmental problem is the outcome of a particular cultural endeavor (e.g., Western science, or capitalism). It is not a universal problem. A thoroughgoing environmental response through this lens would first seek to deconstruct given environmental values and norms, before seeking to find an Islamic response. However, what we find instead is a partial engagement, where environmental values are accepted uncritically, and an Islamic solution offered by instrumentalizing “Qur’anic” terminologies. As a result, we find the growth of a vibrant Islamic environmentalism complete with its own vocabulary and methodology, providing a clear example of the eventual outcomes of adopting the “Islamization” approach.

The Islamization of environmental ethics involves the re-deployment of Qur'anic terminologies such as *āyāt* (signs), *khalīfa* (steward), *amāna* (trust), *ʿadl* (justice), and *mīzān* (balance) (Abdul-Matin, 2010). Gade (2019) decries such “self- directed, keyword-finding” approaches:

Before their adoption as environmental, terms meaning “steward,” “trust,” and “balance” have been used for multiple conversations in contemporary Islamic religious thought from topics ranging from gender to politics [...] Such tokenized use of Islamic terminologies can be challenged by the tradition of Muslim readings of the Qur'an that are liable to de-center mainstream environmental norms.

The deployment of scriptural terms without reference to any system of jurisprudence for practical ethics, or to a system of hermeneutics to contextualize the concepts lends itself to an organizing principle that is perfectly arbitrary. Regardless of whether “mainstream environmental norms” are defensible, defending them using an arbitrary list of “Qur'anic values” remains an unconvincing approach. As Gade points out, Muslims have developed an extensive system of hermeneutics and law to preserve the integrity of the scriptural tradition. A more convincing approach, therefore, would engage directly with that tradition. Thus, upon closer examination, some postmodern constructions of Islamic environmentalism yield a hermeneutics that instrumentalizes religious terminologies to accommodate environmentalism.

This approach clearly echoes al-Faruqi's idea of recreating a science using Qur'anic principles, and mirrors the approach taken by Sardar when he lists “fundamental Islamic concepts” for a new ethics of science. Incidentally, Sardar's keyword choices are: *tawhīd*, *khilāfa*, *ibāda*, *ilm*, *ḥalāl*, *ʿadl*, and *istiṣlāḥ* (Guessoum, 2010). Such keyword-listing approaches may be “no more than dissected parts of Islamic theology, law and ethics, in outline form,” (Izz al-Dīn, 2000: 81). Yet, their usage becomes problematic because without reference to the broader landscape of jurisprudence or hermeneutics, these terms can be deployed for an environmental agenda, for a critique of modern science, or for just about anything else. Eventually, the type of ethics that is articulated is

not grounded in anything beyond the author's usage of the terms, and meaningful vocabulary becomes vacuous.

One might counter that aligning environmental values with Islam does not present a problem, invoking al-Faruqi's more pragmatic approach toward Islamization. In fact, Sardar feared that al-Faruqi's Islamization approach would "try to paint an Islamic color on western sculptures," and "Bring Islam under the West's fold by attempting to Islamize fields of knowledge that had originally been produced in the western mold" (Guessoum, 2010). Proponents of the Islamization movement were therefore quite aware that their approach easily lent itself to a superficial 're-colorization' of knowledge, even if they did not realize the more insidious aspect of eroding Islamic vocabulary. Thus, even if the agenda is accepted, the Islamization project may still undermine language, by applying terms to specific agendas.

It might be worth noting that Gade's method is also postmodern/ decolonial and takes an ethnographic approach to describing Muslim environmental practices. Ultimately, however, Gade is not interested in establishing a new academic discipline of Islamic environmentalism, as much as she is in narrating ethnographic descriptions of "Muslim environmentalisms." Instead of trying to engage with a "decontextualized and generalized" environment, she remains focused on describing how historical trends inform contemporary practices (Gade, 2019). In some aspects, then, her approach aligns well with the decolonial thrust of Sardar's. However, her project remains thickly descriptive and refrains from instrumentalizing scriptural terms.

Finally, returning to the validity of this approach given Kalin's criticisms, we learn that while the epistemic critique can be readily understood in the context of social sciences and humanities, its extension into the domain of natural science remains more controversial. When applied to the appropriate domain, such as philosophy or the social sciences, this approach can yield remarkably astute insights into Muslim practices (e.g., as found in Gade's work). While Kalin points to the utter relativism engendered by the underlying philosophy of this approach, it is unlikely that the proponents of this approach would accept that charge. Instead, they may point to a more granular metaphysics that affirms access to objective, metaphysical

truths, while maintaining cultural relativism for other scientific domains, which may be further subdivided into localized beliefs. However, since the thrust of the work under the epistemic critique of science does not elaborate on metaphysical claims, and instead grounds itself in Muslim practices, or simply focuses on the reconstruction of various disciplines from an Islamic perspective, we can conclude that these approaches do not make a direct appeal to metaphysics to develop their criticism. In the next section, we explore approaches to the environment that develop from those who do establish their claims by reference to metaphysics.

The Metaphysical Critique of Science

The traditionalist view offers a full-fledged critique of modern science (and modernity in general), seeking to restore a sacred view of the universe. Under this view, the environmental problem is identified both scripturally and philosophically. Scripturally, it is the result of a spiritual disaster within humanity, or the result of human wrongdoing (Gade, 2019; Brown, 2013; Nasr, 2005). Philosophically, the environmental disaster is evidence that modern science operates without any metaphysical commitments, having conflated method and philosophy. This approach cites the hierarchy of being to explain the interconnectedness of life and the necessity of ethics. The interconnectivity and holism of human and natural systems exists because it is contained within a hierarchy, at the core of which is belief in one Creator (Nasr, 2001). As a result, ethics cannot be dismissed as an afterthought, or as a voluntary measure tied to public policy or governance. Rather, existence itself requires ethical behavior and individual responsibility.

Another key element of this approach is the semiotics of nature; in fact, this theme is found across all Islamic approaches to the environment. Regardless of how modern science is critiqued, all works on Islam and the environment note that nature is regarded as a sacred symbol that communicates with humans and must be decoded. However, groups differ on how such decoding works. For modernists, decoding is done through scientific investigation, where the symbol to be decoded is a natural law. For traditionalists, decoding occurs through contemplation,

since the language of symbols conveys a greater certainty, or truth, than mere words. It may appear that by characterizing nature as a symbol that contains a meaning beyond itself, this approach instrumentalizes nature. However, the broader cosmology of this approach would seek to prevent that understanding, by placing all creation into a meaningful relationship with its Creator. This approach seeks to create a direct link between humanity and nature through the shared performance of worship.

Some extend the semiotics of nature to the language of theophany (Brown, 2013; Nasr, 2001), while others clarify that “Islam does not perceive the environment or its elements as a god, but rather as an ontological symbol upon which people’s minds can be focused to understand the Creator” (‘Izz al-Dīn, 2000). In general, even those who adopt a theophanic view of nature clarify that the natural world consists of manifestations of the divine names, rather than the essence of the Divine. The theophanic view of nature has been used to defend the preservation of species by pointing out that species extinction would limit the avenues available to understand the Creator, or the manifestation of divine names. This view, of course, raises questions about the role of already extinct species. A similar question regarding extinction that emerges from this view is, if a species mentioned in the Qur’an, such as the honey bee, becomes extinct, does it irreversibly limit future access to revelation by removing the visual/experiential object of reference?

Two figures Kalin associates with this approach, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Syed Naquib al-Attas articulate an epistemology of science centered on unity, informally referred to as “*tawhidic* epistemology.” Since all knowledge comes from the same Divine source, and scripture and nature are both described as “signs,” both domains must be accessed using the same interpretive methods. Nasr acknowledges that the non-literal, esoteric approach is unique to Sufis/gnostics, noting that for Islamic legal scholars, the Qur’anic text is more literal and prescriptive, with the natural world simply providing a context or setting for human actions to take place (Nasr, 2001). This distinction is important and identifies clear boundaries between different registers of hermeneutics. Al-Attas (2014) then proceeds with the gnostic epistemological approach to develop a detailed methodology for scientific inquiry: since the obscure verses of

the Qur'an are interpreted allegorically using verses that are clear and established, the Islamic approach toward empirical science is to explain the empirical world, consisting of ambiguous signs, through what is already established as true namely, the places of things within a system of relations. That is to say, the hierarchy of the cosmos allows us to understand the places of things and their significance, or limits thereof. Science, then, is simply an allegorical interpretation of those relations. By reconstructing science under this type of metaphysical interpretive framework, empirical facts are more likely to bend, and the role of 'fact-discovery' may be diminished in favor of 'fact-interpretation.'

Additionally, in his *Prolegomenon to the Metaphysics of Islam*, al-Attas (2014) begins an "Islamization of language" project to ensure that key Islamic terms are not sullied by limited and secularized underpinnings. Al-Attas identifies a "basic vocabulary of key terms" that have been misappropriated and "de-Islamized" and provides detailed explanation of each one to restore the "Islamic vision of reality and truth." His list of terms includes *'ilm* (knowledge), *'adl* (justice), *adab* (good manners and noble character), *ta'dib* (the education that instills *adab*), *faḍīla* (virtue), *ikhtiyār* (choice), and *sa'āda* (happiness). While this seemingly arbitrarily selected list of keywords resembles the approach discussed in the previous section, al-Attas is in fact claiming to restore the traditional understanding of those very keywords that have been deployed for secular purposes, or words that have changed meaning in their social context. This approach is found within the Islamic tradition. For example, Ghazali also attempted to restore the definition of words that he noticed had become corrupted through usage over time, and that had become more specific or general than their original use. Thus, the concern over language and vocabulary itself is not a hallmark of the epistemic critique; the metaphysical approach similarly has concerns over language, but they take a preservationist approach.

Most remarkably, al-Attas (2014) also redefines truth. Truth is no longer a correspondence of statements to facts; instead, under the "Islamic vision," it must also "satisfy the requirements of wisdom and justice," and include judgements of value, priority, and order. This may point toward a relativization of truth, as it attempts to combine factual and

ethical judgements; it may be subject to Kalin's critique of postmodern approaches. This problem has been noted by others who point out that the use of "non-publicly verifiable interpretations of revelation [...] is unlikely to convince anyone who is not already committed to its specific metaphysical vision" (Harvey, 2023: 404–420). And, although "many of his key interpretations of scriptural vocabulary fall within the established range of exegetic view," al-Attas instrumentalizes the terms to articulate a specific, Akbarian metaphysics that is obtained through spiritual intuition, and not directly through scripture (Harvey, 2023: 404–420).

While al-Attas adopts a postmodern approach in re-defining truth, his non-publicly verifiable approach to scripture echoes the esoteric interpretations favored by others using the metaphysical approach. For example, Nasr suggest a reinterpretation of one of the Divine names: "[A]ccording to the Islamic perspective God Himself is the ultimate environment which surrounds and encompasses Man [...] in the Qur'an God is said to be the All-Encompassing (*muḥīṭ*) [...] and the term *muḥīṭ* also means environment" (Nasr, 2005). By introducing the concept of a divine environment, Nasr fully embraces a theophanic view of nature. Ultimately, approaches that rely on esoteric hermeneutics that are not established through traditional exegesis have very limited validity.

Other proponents of the metaphysical critique of science are more careful in separating God from nature, and only refer to personalized accounts of Sufi/gnostic texts to articulate their view:

I looked on the universe with eyes undistracted and with Divine help I saw that all beings speak the existence of the Creator, and that in reality every silent thing is actually speaking. I opened myself to the hints or signs that glimmer in nature, and I fathomed the allegories they represent. I realized that everything in reality is gifted with the capacity to communicate either by the sense or by the intellect. I realized that the language of silence is more eloquent than speech (Ibn Ghanim, 1980).

This 13th century text captures the general sentiment of the semi-otics of nature: the language of symbols is the language of certainty

and truth. Yet, this is not empirical science, nor does it claim to replace it. Additionally, while this text recommends an allegorical approach to nature, it does not immediately do so on the basis of an epistemology based on unity, nor based on esoteric hermeneutics. Rather, it relies on anecdotes that speak for themselves. Other proponents of the metaphysical critique of science seek to standardize or generalize such narratives, and in doing so, attempt to make authoritative claims about Islam.

One such example is identified by Gade (2019: 210) in Nasr's work on the environment. She points out that Nasr constructs a "traditional Islam" in contrast to the "West" and deploys it for his "problem-solving" environmental paradigm. Nasr's environmental paradigm, insists Gade, is neither universal, nor timeless, since not all societies consist of "modern man" living in a "crisis." This demonstrates two problems in Nasr's approach: first, the construction of a "traditional Islamic perspective" toward science, on behalf of whom he speaks; and second, the attempt at universalizing particular concerns by appeals to religion. Yet, Ghanim's personal account on the semiotics of nature demonstrates that the metaphysical critique of science can easily be communicated without deploying religion, and without collectivizing individual, personal experiences.

Similarly, while the motivation to incorporate environmental concerns into normative Islam may be important for a particular subset of Muslims (especially those living in the West), it cannot be adopted as the standard account of "Islam and the environment." Contrary to Nasr's environmental paradigm, Gade points out that the Islamic understanding of "crisis" is not attached to planetary collapse: "Muslim worldviews have had a notion of crisis embedded in their eschatological reality from the start as an ongoing calculus, not the projection of an ultimate collapse into oblivion" (Gade, 2019). That is to say, no crisis exists today that differs from what existed thousands of years ago. Rather, given our moral accounting, there is a continuous threat of ultimate crisis if we do not behave morally, and a continuous opportunity for redemption if we do.

It is important to acknowledge that Nasr's critique of modern science remains compelling for many Western Muslims as it speaks directly to

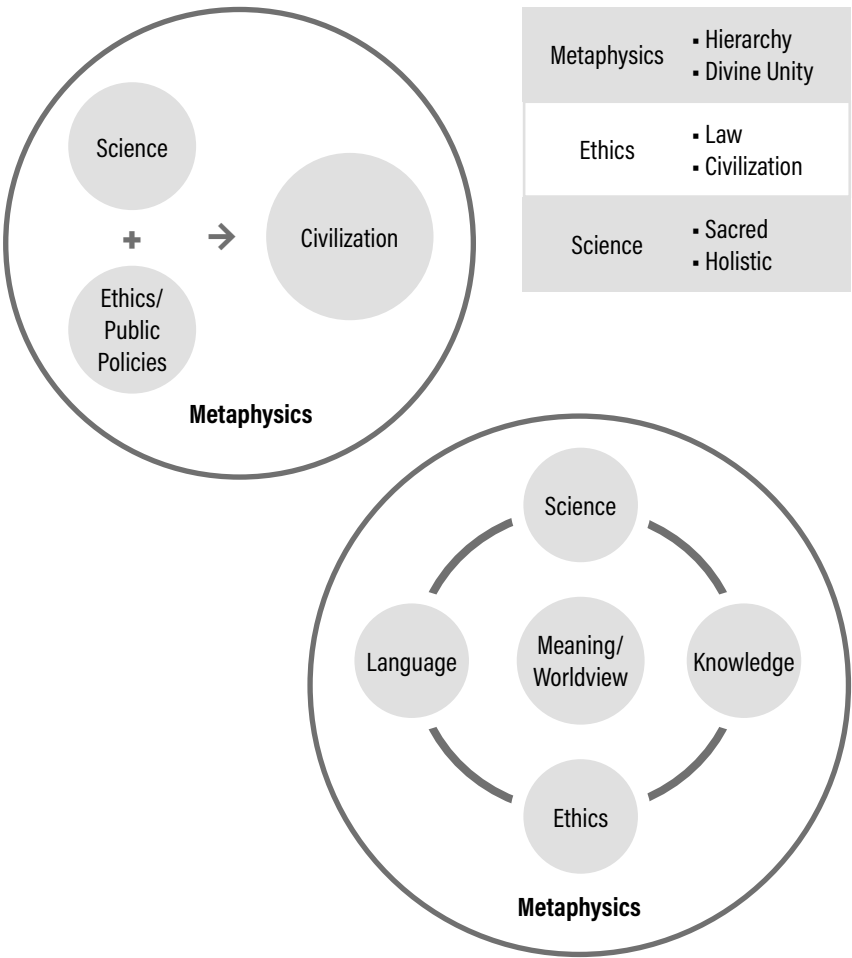
their environmental concerns. For Muslims in the West who wonder about when we might see a Muslim Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, or Wendell Berry emerge, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is very much the answer. If one is a “modern man” living in a world of “crisis,” Nasr’s account is undeniably compelling. Yet, once we take stock of our time and place, it is apparent that those are the wrong questions to ask of our tradition. Instead of trying to situate a specific, contemporary problem in universal/Islamic terms, we can look to the tradition on its own terms. Similarly, al-Attas’s *Prolegomenon* may be compelling to those who are already committed to his worldview. However, his engagement remains embroiled in a hopelessly self-circular space. Both Nasr’s and al-Attas’s grand metaphysical projects fail to be universally compelling; instead, a personalized account from a 13th century mystic is far more compelling in communicating the same message, for reasons described above. Finally, Gade is right to suggest that the Islamic environmental ethic we seek is perhaps best found in the daily rituals and practices, the lived traditions of Muslims, found in different expressions of religious life.

Conclusions

Kalin’s Model

The classification of thinkers who have contributed to discussions of Islam and the environment is generally straightforward, given that Kalin lists key figures and offers the defining features for each approach. However, some complications do develop. First, since this classification specifically considers views of religion and science among Muslim thinkers, it is important to note that each approach necessarily operates against a metaphysical backdrop. For example, in topics on the environment, we find a rich “common denominator” of semiotics and theophany of nature. However, groups do differ on how they deploy this view. For example, in the metaphysical critique, we find that this approach is used to generate an alternative method of empirical science. On the other hand, the modernist critique incorporates it into the practice of normal science. Of course, metaphysics is not explicitly mentioned in

the modernist and postmodern critiques of science, but if we attempt to model religion and science through Kalin’s framework, it is important to acknowledge the shared framework of metaphysics, even if it is deployed differently by each group. Thus, the models may be modified as such:



A second issue that develops in Kalin’s model is properly distinguishing between the postmodern and traditionalist groups. Kalin characterizes the former as denying objectivity in favor of a provincialized science. On that basis, al-Attas’ work closely follows the postmodern approach, despite his detailed articulation of an Islamic metaphysics. While it is

evident that his critique of science is more comprehensive than the postmodern view would allow, al-Attas' approach in Islamizing truth by integrating facts and values remains a defining feature of his work. That is to say, while other thinkers also allude to key elements of the metaphysical critique more broadly (such as the semiotics of nature, theophanic nature, and interconnectedness), they do so without provincializing truth, thereby making their work more readily accessible to public reasoning.

A third issue that Kalin fails to clearly point out in his model is that the same "subjectivist epistemology" attributed to the postmodernists is adopted by the traditionalists in their approach to science. Here, a discussion of realism/antirealism is warranted. Realism refers to our ability to affirm truths about reality, instead of holding them to be social constructions. Realism/antirealism can be deemed "global" or "local" depending on its scope. It can also be differentiated along domains, such as metaphysical, scientific, or linguistic. Here, we see both postmodernists and traditionalists, effectively adopting scientific antirealism to create a more robust critique of modern science. However, Kalin suggests that postmodernists take a global stance on antirealism, applying it to all domains, including metaphysics, thereby falling into the trap of subjectivism. In contrast, the metaphysical critique affirms access to objective truth, while emphasizing that such claims are not the task of empirical science. This approach often criticizes modern science for conflating truth with utility. In fact, an antirealist view of science can be reconciled with metaphysical realism, simply by differentiating between the claims of science and those of metaphysics, such that the former may be regarded as purely utility-based, and the latter, on their correspondence with reality. Thus, the metaphysical critique adopts an antirealist stance toward science, but preserves a broader metaphysical focus within which it reconstructs an Islamic science. As a result, it seems very similar to the postmodern approach. The primary difference is that the metaphysical approach is not as concerned with deconstructing existing methodologies of science to replace it with an Islamic view, which is directly the purview of postmodernism, as it is with layering on of additional levels of meanings, using different registers that permit non-scientific ways of interacting with the natural world.

More broadly, this analysis challenges the assumption in the philosophy of science that religion enters discourse on science in the form of meta-theoretic shaping principles, and not at the level of theory or observation (Koperski, 2015). This exercise in applying three contemporary critiques of modern science to discourse on Islam and the environment demonstrates that despite their shared metaphysical principles, each approach offers theoretically distinct models for religion and science:

- 1 Ethical Critique: Religion only enters the methodology of science through meta-theoretic shaping principles, helping to establish first principles.
- 2 Epistemic Critique: Additionally, it accommodates religiously-informed theories of science; Islamization of disciplines, primarily in the social sciences.
- 3 Metaphysical Critique: Additionally, it accommodates value-laden observations to construct an entirely new methodology of empirical science (al-Attas, 2014).

Approaches to Islam and Science

Contemporary discussions of Islam and science are highly variegated, often taking on fundamentally opposite assumptions. These divergences are difficult to capture in an efficient model that goes beyond simply narrating a history of Islam and science. Kalin's pragmatic delineation between modern, postmodern, and traditionalist approaches to science rescues us from both the isolation of self-referential paradigms, and the incidence of historical narratives, permitting a more substantive discussion.

Employing Kalin's model to understand contemporary work on Islam and the environment sheds light on the limitations faced by each approach. Each group suffers from the problem of instrumentalizing religion. Perhaps, as Gade points out, this is simply a feature of how the topic of "Islam *and* the environment" develops as a field, and what motivates its study. Nonetheless, Kalin's model helps us analyze how particular understandings of the relationship between Islam and science hold noticeably different implications for how ethics, hermeneutics, and

metaphysics are employed in contemporary discussions of Islam and science.

The ethical critique seems to maintain scientific and metaphysical realism. Under this view, science is offered its own autonomous domain. Their proposed solutions of using technology and introducing ethics might be an adequate solution to many environmental problems. However, it is important to acknowledge that ethical practice stretches across a variety of domains and can be subject to instrumentalization if meta-ethical questions that should be reviewed under the domain of philosophy are handed over to scholars of jurisprudence without adequate review.

The epistemic critique takes a decidedly antirealist approach toward science, but often is incomplete in its critique and moves to quickly “Islamize” a discipline through the use of arbitrary hermeneutics. More thorough approaches, such as Gade’s, offer thoughtful engagement on whether it is even appropriate to discuss “Islam and the environment.” While Kalin labels this group as adopting a subjectivist epistemology, it may be that this is a localized subjectivism, and is only applied to the discipline in question, and not to metaphysical truths. Finally, the metaphysical critique of modern science does not seek to resolve environmental problems piece-meal, through specific policy regulations or even through “better science,” but instead points to an ontological hierarchy that gives meaning to the relationship between humans and the natural world through the practice of ethics. Thus, this approach emphasizes the necessity of ethics. It also emphasizes the semiotics of nature, provided by accounts ranging from personal anecdotes of mystics, to developing a new methodology of empirical science. While the objectives of this approach are clear, it may require better spokespersons to explain their critique in a manner that is both accessible and compelling.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Shi‘i Materiality Beyond Karbala: Religion That Matters

LEIDEN: BRILL, 2024. XXIV+400 PAGES.

FOUAD GEHAD MAREI, YAF A SHANNEIK,
AND CHRISTIAN FUNKE, EDS.

In recent years, the field of Shi‘i studies has undergone a significant transformation, expanding beyond traditional religious, theological, and historical inquiries to encompass a more nuanced exploration of the material and sensory dimensions of Shi‘i religiosity. While earlier scholarship on Shi‘ism focused heavily on its foundational texts, rituals, and political movements, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of material culture in shaping religious experience. *Shi‘i Materiality Beyond Karbala: Religion That Matters* marks a pivotal moment in this scholarly evolution, offering a fresh, interdisciplinary approach to understanding Shi‘i devotion through objects, spaces, substances, and sensory experiences. The volume moves beyond the familiar focus on *Karbala* and *Ashura*, turning attention to how materiality mediates the sacred, sustains communal identity, and facilitates encounters with the divine across diverse contexts. By engaging with fields such as Religious Studies, Material Religion, Anthropology of Religion, and Media Studies, this book provides a ground-breaking perspective on the

multisensory and material aspects of Shi'i life, reflecting a much-needed shift in the study of religion and material culture.

The collected volume consists of a Foreword, Introduction, and three main parts (Part 1: *The Visuality and Aurality of Shi'i Materiality*, Part 2: *Gendered Perspectives on Shi'i Materiality*, and Part 3: *Sacred Objects and the Materiality of Shi'i Life-Worlds*), each containing four chapters, making a total of twelve chapters. This division reflects the volume's broad and interdisciplinary approach, allowing for an exploration of Shi'i materiality from multiple perspectives—ranging from sensory experiences and visual culture to gender dynamics and the role of sacred objects in shaping religious life. By organizing the chapters in this way, the book offers a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of how materiality influences Shi'i religious expression and practice.

Each contribution stands as an independent scholarly article, allowing readers to engage with individual case studies while contributing to the broader thematic inquiry of the book. In the *Foreword*, Katja Rakow situates *Shi'i Materiality Beyond Karbala: Religion That Matters* within the broader field of material religion studies. She emphasizes that religion is inherently material, as it relies on various media—such as objects, images, spaces, and sensory experiences—to render the sacred tangible (p. ix). Rakow highlights how disciplines like material culture studies, visual culture studies, and the anthropology of the senses have reshaped the study of religion, shifting attention toward lived religion and the materiality of religious practice (p. x).

She underscores that this volume stands apart from previous works by taking a comprehensive approach to Shi'i materialities, moving beyond a focus on devotional objects to explore the full spectrum of material engagements, including visual, sonic, and corporeal dimensions. The book examines how religious actors interact with material things and how these interactions shape religious experiences, emotions, and communal identities (p. x). While acknowledging that no single volume can fully encapsulate the vastness of Shi'i materialities, Rakow asserts that this collection provides a crucial entry point for understanding the embodied and materialized aspects of Shi'i religious life (p. x).

In the *Introduction*, editors Fouad Gehad Marei and Yafa Shanneik outline the central aims of the volume, emphasizing the importance of materiality

in the lived religious experiences of Shi'i communities. By bringing together scholars from diverse disciplines, the book explores how material objects and sensory experiences shape Shi'i religious life across *Twelver*, *Alawi-Nusayri*, *Alevi*, and *Bektashi* communities in varied geographical contexts, including Norway, Turkey, Albania, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kashmir, Kuwait, and Lebanon (p. 1). The volume operates on the premise that religion is inherently corporeal and physical, taking form through images, bodies, sounds, smells, and other sensory engagements that render the sacred tangible (p. 1).

A key doctrinal tenet of Shi'ism is the devotion to *Imam Ali* and his descendants (*Ahl al-Bayt*), whose suffering—epitomized by the martyrdom of *Imam Husayn* at *Karbala*—shapes Shi'i cosmology and historical consciousness (p. 2). The editors acknowledge that the book does not cover *Zaydi* or *Isma'ili* contexts, as its contributions largely stem from European academic conferences that have historically focused on *Twelver Shi'ism* and related groups (p. 2). The volume expands existing scholarship on Shi'i ritual and material practices in three key ways: first, by examining Shi'i communities beyond the Middle East and Muslim-majority regions; second, by shifting focus beyond *Muharram* rituals to underexplored practices such as *ziyāra*, *Mawlid an-Nabī*, and *tabarruk* rituals; and third, by acknowledging the broader influence of the "*Karbala paradigm*" while examining a wider repertoire of Shi'i religious expressions (pp. 4–6). Rather than merely analyzing what religious objects symbolize, the book investigates their active role in shaping sociopolitical ecosystems and religious experiences (p. 8).

The editors position the volume at the intersection of material religion, new materialism, and post-anthropocentrism, viewing Shi'i materiality not just as a representation of faith but as a means of making the sacred tangible and experiential (p. 8). Shi'i heritage is constructed through sacred sites, relics, art, sound, oral traditions, and rituals, wherein emotions, sensory experiences, and material culture collectively memorialize Shi'i history and devotion (p. 9). The contributions in this volume thus offer a comparative perspective on Shi'i materiality across different geographies and sectarian traditions, illustrating how material and sensory engagements cultivate affective and embodied connections with *Ahl al-Bayt* and other sacred figures (p. 10).

In the chapter 1, Sara Kuehn explores the material expressions of Albanian Bektashi religious life, focusing on paintings and their symbolic meanings. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork (2011–2019) in Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo, she examines how Bektashi communities use visual and material culture—paintings, objects, and costumes—to articulate their faith. She frames her analysis within material religion, demonstrating how these visual elements serve as religious practices bridging the symbolic and material (p. 46). A central theme is the role of paintings in the *Kryegjyshata* (World Headquarters of the Bektashis) in shaping religious identity. These artworks express core Bektashi beliefs, particularly devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and are seen as conduits of divine grace (p. 53). One painting illustrates the Albanian Bektashi community's ties to Shi'i traditions, reinforced by *Baba Mondi's* pilgrimages to Iraq—differentiating them from Turkish Bektashis, who identify as Sunni (p. 51). Another painting presents the rivalry and unity of dervish “world models,” depicting *Karaxha Ahmed Sultan*, *Haxhi Bektash Veli*, and *Sari Ismail Sultan* (p. 59). Other depicted figures, such as *Kaygusuz Sultan* and *Asim Dede*, underscore the historical development of Bektashism in the Balkans (p. 59, 63). Beyond paintings, Kuehn discusses the symbolic significance of ritual objects in the *Kryegjyshata's* reception room, including an open Qur'an, a white salt crystal, and a bowl of colorful sweets. These objects reflect the Bektashi interpretive framework of *zahir* (the outward, public dimension) and *batin* (the hidden, esoteric meaning), emphasizing balance in religious practice (p. 67). Finally, Kuehn highlights how persecution, especially in the 19th century, led Bektashis to encode their teachings in visual and material forms. This tradition continues today, as their current leader *Baba Mondi* navigates both the broader Muslim public sphere (*zahir*) and the esoteric dimensions (*batin*) of Bektashi belief (p. 69).

Chapter 2, by Stefan Williamson Fa, delves into the integration of audio technologies into devotional practices within Azeri-Turkish Twelver Shi'ism. Drawing on ethnographic research in Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, Williamson Fa explores how the circulation of audio recordings of specialized reciters, known as *meddah*, has transformed the way Shi'i Muslims engage with religious rituals (p. 77). The chapter highlights

how these recordings, initially distributed through cassettes and now available through digital media, allow for the extension of *majlis* (ritual gatherings) into everyday life, facilitating devotional engagement anytime and anywhere (p. 81). Williamson Fa examines the diversity in style and content of the *meddah* recitations across different regions, showing that despite differences in local practices, the devotional content remains consistent in its focus on *Ahl al-Bayt* (p. 77). However, the chapter also addresses the tension between those who view the integration of media technologies into religious practices as a positive development and those who see it as blurring the lines between devotion and entertainment (p. 90). The history of audio recordings in Shi'i devotional spaces is also explored, noting the gradual loosening of restrictions on such media in Turkey, especially after the 1990s, which allowed individual reciters to gain widespread fame (p. 82-85). These recordings help create a sense of transnational community, linking believers across physical borders and allowing them to maintain a connection to religious practices in a global context (p. 93). Williamson Fa's analysis demonstrates that these technological changes are not simply modernizing Shi'i devotion but are part of a continuity of devotional practices that adapt to new media forms, allowing religious expression to reach beyond traditional communal spaces (p. 80). The chapter ultimately argues that the circulation of devotional media plays a crucial role in shaping the global Shi'i soundscape and expanding the ways Shi'i Muslims experience and express their faith (p. 93).

Chapter 3, by Ines Weinrich, examines the sonic and performative aspects of *Hizbullah's Mawlid an-Nabi* (the Prophet *Muhammad's* birthday) celebrations, particularly focusing on the 2012 main event broadcast on al-Manar TV (p. 98). This chapter relies also on her ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2013, which includes observations of both Sunni and Shi'i commemorations across Lebanon and Syria (p. 98). Weinrich's analysis highlights the integration of Shi'i and Lebanese aesthetic forms in the celebration, with a particular focus on the sonic practices used to express devotion and political solidarity (p. 99). *Hizbullah*, since its inception, has emphasized the use of symbols, flags, and distinct aesthetic markers, particularly in its political iconography, which includes the iconic yellow flag with the *Hizbullah* logo (p. 102).

This emphasis on aesthetic design extends to the party's commemorative rites, which include not only Shi'i religious observances like *Ashura* and *Eid al-Ghadir* but also party-specific events like the commemoration of martyrs and the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon (p. 104). These events are marked by specific sonic genres, including *Ashura*-derived mourning songs, political hymns, and newly composed pious songs (p. 105). The *Mawlid* celebration itself involves both Sunni-Shi'i convergences and intra-Shi'i distinctions. For instance, certain songs are shared between Sunni and Shi'i *Mawlid* commemorations, such as *Tala'a l-Badru 'Alayna* and recitations on the Prophet's birth, but distinct Shi'i themes are also introduced, such as invoking *Ahl al-Bayt* for intercession (pp. 116-118). This reflects a broader trend in *Hizbullah*'s celebrations where a balance is sought between emphasizing Shi'i identity and fostering political rapprochement with Sunni communities (p. 118). Weinrich further explores the politicization of *Ashura* rituals and their evolution in *Hizbullah*'s repertoire, noting that the party's sonic practices are increasingly professionalized. This professionalization and diversification in musical styles serve not only to reinforce Shi'i identity but also to express *Lebanonization*, reflecting the party's broader political goals within Lebanon (p. 122). Through these evolving sonic practices, *Hizbullah* uses sound to create a unique space that combines religious devotion, political resistance, and national identity, ultimately contributing to the party's influence in both the religious and political spheres (p. 122).

Chapter 4, by Maryam Aras, delves into the transformation of contemporary Iranian eulogy and elegy rituals (*maddāhi*), focusing on their evolution after the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). Historically, *maddāhi* has been a key part of Shi'i commemorations, particularly during *Muharram*, honoring *Ahl al-Bayt*. Aras explores how these rituals became a tool for the Islamic Republic to mobilize citizens and foster a shared sense of national duty. The chapter highlights the materiality of these rituals, including bodily actions, pop culture influences, and material spaces, all contributing to the cultural identity of youth loyal to the Islamic Republic (pp. 127-128). A central figure in this transformation is the eulogist *Sadeq Ahangaran*, who became a prominent voice for the Islamic Republic

during the war. Ahangaran's wartime eulogies, which merged entertainment with ideological mobilization, connected the culture of war to civilian life through soundscapes emphasizing the "sacred defense" (p. 128). The media, particularly the war documentaries *Revāyat-e Faṭḥ*, played a critical role in amplifying these eulogies, incorporating music and sermons to evoke strong emotional responses from viewers (pp. 136-138). *Morteza Avini's* direction of *Revāyat-e Faṭḥ* blended visual imagery with eulogies to enhance the emotional impact, with the music often overshadowing the sermon itself, helping to bridge the battlefield and civilian life (pp. 137-138).

Aras also examines the institutionalization of these rituals, with professional organizations training ritual singers (*maddāḥān*) to innovate in their performances. These singers now incorporate a mix of traditional Iranian music, patriotic ballads, and pop influences (p. 146). One significant shift is the integration of pop music, exemplified by *Hamid Alimi*, who adapted secular love songs into religious elegies. This reflects the hybridization of Iranian musical traditions and the incorporation of contemporary cultural elements into religious rituals (pp. 148-149). In her analysis of chest-beating, Aras explains that it is traditionally seen as a form of repentance for the Shi'is of Kufa, who failed to assist *Imam Husayn* in the Battle of *Karbala*. She also describes it as a ritualized form of self-punishment in Shi'i culture (p. 147). However, while this interpretation is widely accepted, it is important to note that this view is not universally agreed upon, and there are various other perspectives on the meaning and context of chest-beating. The practice is much more nuanced and can hold diverse symbolic meanings depending on different interpretations within the Shi'i community. In conclusion, Aras' analysis shows how the materiality of Shi'i cultural memory has evolved since the Islamic Republic's establishment. The hybridization of religious rituals with popular culture, such as pop music and new performance styles, reflects broader social and political changes while still preserving deep symbolic meaning. These rituals now resonate more with younger generations, connecting them to a shared cultural memory. Despite these innovations, the rituals still carry deep symbolic meaning, connecting participants to a shared history and a collective cultural memory (pp. 150-151).

In Chapter 5, Sana Chavoshian examines the emotional and spiritual connection *washwomen* (women who washed the bloodstained uniforms of fallen soldiers) developed with the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2014 to 2017, Chavoshian highlights the profound kinship these women, often mothers themselves, formed with fallen soldiers through their act of cleaning bloodstained uniforms. This “consanguinity,” not based on genetic ties, was rooted in the haptic contact with the blood of martyrs, transforming the act of washing into a deeply intimate and spiritual experience (pp. 157–158). Chavoshian’s analysis provides a fresh perspective on the materiality of martyrdom, emphasizing how the washwomen’s emotional and physical labor was crucial, yet overlooked by the state, in the war effort. The chapter explores how handling bloodstained uniforms created a transcendental connection to the martyrs for the washwomen. Far from just cleaning, the act became a ritual that allowed them to forge a spiritual bond with the soldiers and their sacrifice. This form of martyrdom, however, was not recognized by the Iranian state, which focused mainly on male soldiers who died in battle (pp. 163–164). While mothers of martyrs were acknowledged, the contributions of the washwomen were marginalized. These women, in turn, sought recognition as active participants in the war, fighting for their own “share of martyrdom.” Their efforts were a way to reclaim agency within the patriarchal state structures, challenging the state’s narrow, gendered definitions of martyrdom (pp. 164–170).

Chavoshian further discusses the rituals women held at places like the Howeyzeh cemetery, where they honored the martyrs and asserted their emotional and spiritual connection to them. These rituals, though largely ignored by the state, provided washwomen with spaces to remember and reframe martyrdom to include their labor and personal sacrifices (pp. 170–177). The chapter concludes by reflecting on the symbolic power of blood in Shi’i material culture. The bloodstains on the soldiers’ uniforms became a bridge between the women, the martyrs, and the divine. Through their labor, washwomen created sacred maternal bonds with the martyrs’ spirits, offering a new, affective perspective on martyrdom that transcended traditional military and patriarchal narratives (pp. 177–181).

In Chapter 6, Ingvild Flakerud explores the formation of Twelver Shi'i male virtues through the practice of *zur-khane* exercises, an ancient form of Iranian athletic training. The *zur-khane*, or "House of Strength," is more than a physical workout space—it fosters moral qualities like courage, generosity, humility, and societal responsibility (p. 195). Flakerud's ethnographic fieldwork in Shiraz in 2001, supplemented by video recordings, interviews, and informal conversations, provides the foundation for her analysis. She employs a material cultural approach, examining how the objects, architecture, and rituals involved in *zur-khane* training contribute to the development of virtues (p. 185-188).

Flakerud argues that *zur-khane* exercises create an agential relationship between the body and the tools used, such as weights and whirling implements. These tools help athletes cultivate attention, precision, and a sense of responsibility. The body functions both as a tool to be trained and as the tool that shapes the ethical self, demonstrating how embodied ethics are integral to the learning of virtue (p. 199). This relationship is central to Flakerud's understanding of how physical practices contribute to moral development. The architecture of the *zur-khane* space also plays a crucial role in instilling ethical values. For instance, the low entrance forces athletes to bow their heads, fostering humility. The circular shape of the arena encourages equality by eliminating hierarchical divisions, though senior athletes still guide novices. This layout promotes mutual respect and a sense of shared experience among participants (pp. 200-203). Spirituality is also a significant component of *zur-khane* practice, as prayers, poetry, and stories are recited during exercises. Many of these texts honor figures like *Imam Ali*, offering moral guidance and deepening the athletes' connection with God and the *Ahl al-Bayt*. These recitations help athletes reflect on their ethical responsibilities and solidify their commitment to living a virtuous life (pp. 203-207). Flakerud concludes by emphasizing *zur-khane* as a unique male-only space where the body, material culture, and ethical formation intersect. Through these practices, athletes not only develop physical strength but also cultivate virtues that prepare them to contribute to a just society (pp. 214-216). With this study, Flakerud provides valuable insights into how material culture and embodied practices can contribute to the formation of virtue in a religious context.

Chapter 7, by Nada Al-Hudaid, explores the intersection of materiality, agency, and social capital in religious statue art in Kuwait, focusing on *khidma*, a religious service dedicated to *Ahl al-Bayt*. Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015 and subsequent follow-up trips, Al-Hudaid examines how religious statues are central to the materialization of religious devotion in contemporary Shi'i culture. A key figure in this trend is *Umm Mish'al*, a pious Shi'i woman and artist who pioneered the creation of religious statues, which have since been widely adopted across Kuwait and the broader Gulf region. Al-Hudaid highlights how *Umm Mish'al*'s work has earned her significant social and cultural capital, positioning her as a key figure in Shi'i religious artistic production (pp. 218-220). The chapter emphasizes how the production of religious statues by women like *Umm Mish'al* challenges the male-dominated religious landscape of Kuwait. These women gain cultural significance not only for their artistry but also for their role in facilitating devotion to *Ahl al-Bayt* through their creative contributions. *Umm Mish'al*'s art has had a broad impact on Shi'i rituals and religious practices, particularly in regions like Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq (pp. 226-227).

Al-Hudaid further explores the multifaceted nature of *khidma*, which creates sacred spaces, models social relations, and generates both symbolic and social capital. She examines how women's artistic work in *khidma* fosters agency, using the concept of the "docile agent" to discuss how women like *Umm Mish'al* gain subtle autonomy within patriarchal structures. While their work requires clerical validation, it also allows them to carve out a space for female participation in the religious sphere (pp. 222-223). The chapter also highlights the materiality of the statues, arguing that these objects transcend mere representation and become imbued with spiritual significance. *Umm Mish'al*'s statues, made from materials like fabric and recycled clothing, are seen as material hierophanies—sacred embodiments of *Ahl al-Bayt* that evoke empathy and devotion within the Shi'i community (p. 249). This contribution to Shi'i material culture emphasizes the pivotal role of women in the development of religious art. Overall, Al-Hudaid's chapter offers a nuanced understanding of how religious art, particularly in the form of statues, operates within the context of *khidma*. It explores the intersection of

gender, agency, and materiality, showing how female artists shape both personal and communal religious experiences and build social and cultural capital through their creative contributions.

In Chapter 8, Marianne Hafnor Bøe examines the practice of *mahr*—the payment from husband to wife in Islamic marriages—within the Iranian diaspora in Norway. Using a materiality lens, Bøe explores how *mahr* functions both symbolically and transactionally in a diasporic setting, shaped by religious, social, legal, and economic factors. The study, based on a three-year research project, reveals that despite many Iranians in Norway distancing themselves from Shi‘ism, *mahr* remains an important component of Shi‘i marriage, even when practiced outside of Iran (pp. 254-255). Bøe shows that *mahr* takes on various meanings depending on its form. While some choose token *mahr* amounts—such as a single rose or sweets—as romantic gestures, others opt for larger sums that signify financial security and cultural identity. Interestingly, the interviewees also referenced the symbolic value of *mahr*, such as the use of 5 gold coins symbolizing the five members of *Ahl al-Bayt*, which reflects a continued connection to Shi‘i religious practices even as they seek to modify the practice (pp. 259-260).

A major theme in this chapter is how *mahr* embodies Shi‘i identity while also reflecting political and socio-economic aspirations. Some diaspora members, particularly refugees, prefer symbolic *mahr* amounts, distancing themselves from the financial and patriarchal aspects of Shi‘i marriage in Iran. This shift aligns with broader trends of financial independence and a desire to redefine marriage outside of traditional expectations (pp. 261-262). The materiality of *mahr* also serves as a bargaining tool for women, providing financial security in case of divorce. However, its evolving practice—especially when replaced with modest gifts—challenges the traditional interpretation of *mahr* as a “price” for a wife. Women in second marriages or with financial independence increasingly favor token *mahr*, using it as a way to assert autonomy while distancing themselves from patriarchal norms (pp. 263-265). Ultimately, *mahr* serves as both a material and symbolic expression of belonging, identity, and negotiation in Shi‘i diaspora marriages. It reflects the complex interplay of religion, culture, politics, and personal aspirations, as

Iranian diaspora members navigate their connections to Shi'i Islam and their evolving social context in Norway. Through its material expressions, participants both affirm and challenge elements of Shi'i Iranian marriage, illustrating the multifaceted nature of this practice (p. 268).

Chapter 9, by S. M. Hadi Gerami and Ali Imran Syed, takes a historical and textual approach—distinct from the ethnographic focus of previous chapters—to examine the origins and evolution of the veneration of *turbat al-Husayn* (the soil from *Imam Husayn's* grave). The authors trace how this ritual practice became central to Shi'i religious identity, offering spiritual blessings (*tabarruk*) and reinforcing the community's distinct theology. The veneration of *Husayn's* grave soil emerged gradually rather than immediately after the Battle of *Karbala* (680 CE). Although contemporary studies often assume its early significance, the authors argue that it became a widespread practice only in the second and third Islamic centuries, largely due to the endorsement of the fifth and sixth *Imams*, *Muhammad al-Baqir* and *Jafar al-Sadiq* (pp. 278-279).

By the time of *Imam al-Kazim* in the late second century AH, the practice of taking soil from the graves of righteous figures was widespread. However, *Imam* explicitly prohibited the consumption of soil from all graves except *Husayn's*, marking the soil's special status within the community (p. 282). The chapter emphasizes how the veneration of *Husayn's* grave soil played a crucial role in shaping Shi'i identity. It became a marker of distinction from the broader Muslim community, reinforcing the theological significance of *Husayn's* martyrdom and the divinely appointed nature of Shi'i leadership (p. 276). By the third century AH, *turbat al-Husayn* had become fully integrated into Shi'i religious life, despite ongoing debates over its effects and limitations (p. 286). Finally, the chapter reframes the development of this practice as a gradual process, influenced by Shi'i *Imams* and the evolving identity of the early Shi'i community. It highlights how material objects, such as sacred soil, played a key role in the formation of Shi'i religious tradition and collective memory.

In chapter 10, Amelia Gallagher examines the role of material objects in the *ziyāra* (shrine visitation) practices of the Alawi-Nusayri community, focusing on shrines in Sutaşı, a historic village now part of

Samandağ in Hatay Province, Turkey (p. 289). She explores how both natural and man-made materials shape religious experiences and sustain shrine-centered devotion (p. 290). Gallagher provides a brief history of the Alawi-Nusayris, which consist of an elite religious class and the general laity. Her focus lays on public religious practices, particularly shrine visitations and festivals that often include animal sacrifice (pp. 292-295). European travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries documented the significance of *ziyāra*, describing the distinctive white-domed shrines scattered across Alawi regions (p. 296). Whether or not these shrines contain actual graves is often irrelevant; they are treated as sacred due to their association with revered figures (p. 298).

Several *ziyāras* in Sutaşı are dedicated to prominent Islamic and Alawi figures, including multiple sites for *Hıdır*, as well as shrines for *Melek Cafer al-Tayyor*, *Mikdet el-Yemin*, and others. A shrine known as “The Seven Prophets” may reference the Qur’anic *Seven Sleepers*. Other sites commemorate historical shaykhs such as *Hasan İbin Mekzün Sincari*. A notable *ziyāra* is dedicated to *Sultan Habib Neccar*, a figure associated with Jesus Christ (pp. 301-302). Gallagher categorizes shrine-related objects into mobile materials and foundational objects. Mobile materials include petitionary objects, healing aids, and ritual items such as cloth strips tied to shrine structures, incense, candles, coins, oil, and sacred texts (pp. 307-313). Foundational objects, which define the shrine’s sacredness, include cenotaphs, stone formations, and sacred trees (p. 304). Each type of object is examined individually. She concludes that *ziyāras* are created “from the ground up” in both a literal and symbolic sense. Material elements contribute to their religious significance, even as some communities begin to oppose aspects of material-based religiosity (p. 313). Through a material culture perspective, Gallagher demonstrates how physical objects shape sacred spaces in Alawi-Nusayri religious life. This chapter provides a valuable analysis of how shrine-based devotion continues to evolve within this historically significant yet often overlooked tradition.

Chapter 11, by Hakim Sameer Hamdani, explores the evolving observance of *Jashn-i Nisf Sha‘ban* (Festival of Mid-*Sha‘ban*) among Kashmiri Shi‘is, highlighting its shift from a night of atonement (*barāt*) to

a celebration of *Imam al-Mahdi's* birth (*vilādat*). While the festival, also known as *Shab-i Barat*, has traditionally been observed by both Sunni and Shi'i Muslims with themes of divine forgiveness and sustenance, Hamdani argues that its meaning has transformed within Kashmiri Shi'ism, particularly after the 1979 Iranian Revolution (pp. 318-320). The historical trajectory of the festival in Kashmir reveals its syncretic roots. Although there is no evidence of its Shi'i observance in the sixteenth century, Mughal-era sources link it to the illumination of homes and public spaces, possibly influenced by Hindu traditions (pp. 322-324). The Mughal court's adoption of *Shab-i Barat* further popularized it among Kashmir's Sunni majority. However, prior to the twentieth century, its observance, including supererogatory prayers, remained largely confined to the educated elite due to widespread illiteracy and limited access to Persian and Arabic religious texts (p. 328).

Hamdani identifies two phases of Kashmiri Shi'i engagement with Mid-*Sha'ban*. Until the late twentieth century, the festival centered on atonement, grave visitation, and communal feasting (p. 328). However, after 1979, Shi'i observance increasingly emphasized *Mahdism*, introducing new devotional practices such as *arīza* writing—"petitions" to *Imam al-Mahdi* immersed in running water (pp. 342-343). While Sunni participation in *Shab-i Barat* has declined since the 1990s due to the armed insurgency in Kashmir, which disrupted traditional grave visitation practices, and the growing influence of neo-Salafi and Wahhabi movements that reject it as an innovation (*bid'ah*), the festival has continued to evolve among Kashmiri Shi'is, further sectarianizing religious life (pp. 346-351). One assertion in the chapter—that Shi'is generally frown upon fasting on the fifteenth of *Sha'ban* unless undertaken as a votive vow (*nazr*) and fasting is seen as a rejection of the blessings associated with the festival (p. 339)—oversimplifies Shi'i practice. While Kashmiri Shi'ism may emphasize festivity over fasting, fasting on the *White Days* (13th-15th of each lunar month) remains a recommended practice in Shi'i tradition. Many Shi'is fast on this day as part of their devotional rituals, particularly in connection with prayers for *Imam al-Mahdi* (p. 339). Despite this minor oversight, Hamdani's chapter provides a compelling analysis of the shifting meanings of Mid-*Sha'ban* in

Kashmiri Shi'ism, illustrating how political and ideological influences shape religious observances over time.

In Chapter 12, Christiane Gruber presents a nuanced and interdisciplinary study of the shrine complex of *Abdal Musa*, an important Alevi-Bektaşî pilgrimage site in Turkey. Through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates textual analysis, ethnography, and eco-critical theory, Gruber explores how architecture, devotional imagery, votive practices, and nature shape Alevi religious experience (p. 356). The chapter begins by situating the shrine of *Abdal Musa* within the historical and cultural framework of the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition, noting its development as a major Sufi lodge (*tekke*) during the Ottoman period. While its architectural grandeur has diminished over time, key sacred sites remain: the tomb of *Abdal Musa*, the tomb of his cook *Budala Sultan*, a cemetery, sacred wells, unique rock formations, and a sycamore tree that serves as a focal point for votive offerings (p. 355). These features highlight the integration of materiality and spirituality in Alevi devotion, distinct from mosque-centered worship (p. 387).

Gruber's analysis of the shrine's visual culture reveals an interplay between Shi'i-Sufi iconography and Turkish secular nationalism. Inscriptions featuring the Twelve Imams coexist with images of Atatürk, reflecting Alevis' complex identity within a state that often marginalizes them (pp. 358, 365). However, the chapter's assertion that Twelver Shi'ism is most prominently espoused in Iran and India (p. 361) overlooks its significant presence in Iraq, the Levant, and other regions with rich indigenous Shi'i traditions. The chapter's discussion of eco-materiality is particularly compelling. Pilgrims engage with natural elements—rocks, trees, and water—as part of their devotional practices. The miracles attributed to *Abdal Musa* reinforce the saint's connection to the land, and votive acts such as tying cloth to trees or collecting sacred stones demonstrate a unique ecological spirituality (pp. 373, 381). The discussion of trees as devotional sites (p. 377) and rocks as hierophanies—divine manifestations—further enriches this perspective (p. 378). Gruber also highlights contemporary challenges, particularly the destruction of sacred trees, linking environmental degradation to religious marginalization (p. 388). Overall, her study broadens our understanding of Alevi

devotion by emphasizing its material and ecological dimensions, making a valuable contribution to the study of Islamic pilgrimage and religious material culture.

One of the key strengths of this collected volume is its empirical grounding in fieldwork, which provides rich, firsthand perspectives on Shi'i materiality across different contexts. The inclusion of minority Shi'i communities and the comparative analysis of various regional and religious traditions add to its depth and diversity. Additionally, the book is visually engaging, as the inclusion of images helps readers better grasp the materiality discussed. The use of local spellings and Romanizations based on vernacular traditions rather than standard linguistic norms is another commendable aspect, as it respects indigenous expressions and highlights linguistic plurality. That said, while the volume offers a wealth of ethnographic and historical insights, its level of detail and analytical depth make it more suitable for an academic audience than a general readership. The specificity of the case studies, the theoretical frameworks employed, and the engagement with specialized discourse may be challenging for those unfamiliar with the subject. However, for scholars in religious studies, anthropology, and Middle Eastern studies, the book provides invaluable contributions to the study of Shi'i materiality beyond its conventional narratives.

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AKIF TAHİIEV
POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW
GOETHE-UNIVERSITÄT
FRANKFURT, GERMANY

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SHERMAN JACKSON

The relationship between Islam and the state (or, more broadly, the place of religion in the modern, “secular” world) remains a vibrant topic in academic and public discourse. However, the central categories in this debate—notably, “religion/religious,” “Islam/Islamic,” and “the secular/secularism”—are often contested or insufficiently defined. Their usage is further shaped by scholars’ interpretations of their historical origins or by assumptions about how these domains of thought and practice ought to function in modern societies.

The field of Religious Studies, for instance, has long debated the category of “religion.” Scholars have considered whether “religion” in the modern sense—as a system of beliefs and practices that denotes a specific sphere of life—can be universally applied across all cultures. The prevalent narrative, articulated by pioneering scholars like Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1963), presents the reified category of “religion” as a modern Western construct. This framing has generated two primary responses among scholars of Islam, particularly within Western academia. One group argues for applying Western categories of religion (and the secular) on Islam without

qualification, assuming the universality of these concepts (e.g., Sadik J. al-Azm, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im). Another group adopts a postcolonial or decolonial stance, thus presenting Islam as a counterexample to everything deemed "modern" or "Western." These scholars, like the late Shahab Ahmed, accept the narrative that the religious/secular distinction is a modern Western invention and frame the binary as alien to Islam and its history. While this approach aims to center Islam's distinctiveness, it often overlooks crucial features of Islamic thought. Its focus on presenting Islam as an antidote to the prevailing modern Western "religion" obscures crucial historical and conceptual nuances.

Most of this literature lacks a serious study of the equivalents of the modern concepts of "religion" and "the secular" in non-Western intellectual traditions. Consequently, the modalities of religion and secularity in Islamic thought and historical experience remain underexplored. Only recently have some scholars such as Rushain Abbasi (2019, 2020), Paul L. Heck (2023), Caner K. Dagli (2024), and others attempted to address this gap. Within this emerging research, Sherman Jackson's monograph, *The Islamic Secular*, makes a distinctive contribution. Jackson offers a long-overdue systematic examination of "Islam," *sharī'a*, and "the secular" through the lens of Islamic thought. He critically engages with various academic views of Islam and the modern state, while remaining fully grounded in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Building on his 2017 article, also titled "The Islamic Secular," Jackson expands his argument across six chapters, organized into two main parts.

The first part, titled "The Conceptual Landscape," explores the semantic and jurisprudential distinctions within the Islamic tradition that underpin Jackson's argument. Chapter 1 traces the formation of "the secular" in the modern Western context, highlighting its association with anti-religious or non-religious connotations. This mutual exclusion is also imposed on modern Muslims, requiring them to inhabit either religious or worldly modes of being (pp. 33–35). This "macro-mode" of the secular, as Jackson dubs it, "targets religion as a whole [...] seeking to extirpate it from human life" (p. 35). However, Jackson carefully amplifies a non-oppositional understanding of the secular in both Western and non-Western conceptual histories. This "micro-mode" of secularity

emphasizes human responsibility in managing worldly affairs while viewing religious matters as limited to commandments revealed in scripture (pp. 30–39). Jackson’s approach then differentiates between realms of religion and secularity but refrains from sharply delineating them as mutually exclusive domains (pp. 39–42).

In Chapter 2, Jackson delves deeper into this framework by exploring the classical jurisprudential categories of *ḥukm sharʿī* (rulings revealed in scripture or extrapolated from it) and non-*sharʿī* (spheres outside *sharīʿa*’s direct supervision). Drawing on figures like the Shāfiʿī jurist and famous theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1210 CE) and Mālikī renowned jurist Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi (d. 684AH/1285CE), Jackson demonstrates how these scholars had articulated nuanced distinctions between areas explicitly regulated by *sharīʿa* and those left to human reasoning and discretion. Building on this classical differentiation within Islamic thought, Chapter 3 advances the concept of the “Islamic Secular.” The construct is based on Jackson’s argument that Islam envisions two distinct but complementary realms: the realm of *sharīʿa*, rooted in revealed sources and jurisprudential reasoning, and the secular realm, which lies beyond *sharīʿa*’s jurisdiction yet remains under God’s purview. Unlike the dominant Western secular, often framed as irreligious or antithetical to religion, Jackson’s “Islamic Secular” is religious in that it does not exclude divine oversight in “secular” pursuits such as politics, economics, and science. This reframing of the secular challenges the binary opposition between religion and secularity which has prevailed in the Western thought. It also aims to reform the Muslim internalization of this sharp distinction between religious and secular spheres by reviving the Islamic jurisprudential differentiation of these domains of human endeavor.

The second part of the book, “The Islamic Secular, Modernity, and the Modern State,” applies Jackson’s framework to contemporary debates on Islam’s compatibility with modern political structures. Chapter 4 revisits Wael Hallaq’s critique of the modern nation-state, which he deems fundamentally incompatible with Islamic governance centered on *sharīʿa*. Chapter 5 engages with Abdullahi An-Naʿim’s argument that Islam must separate itself from the modern secular state to remain relevant, while

Chapter 6 evaluates Andrew March's proposal for rearticulating Islam-as-*sharī'a* within liberal citizenship. Through critical engagement with these perspectives, Jackson demonstrates the vitality of the "Islamic Secular" as a framework for navigating the relationship between Islam and the modern state. His analysis underscores the inadequacy of the existing models, offering instead a vision where Muslims can participate in modern political life outside of *sharī'a* while viewing their secular engagement as an Islamic practice under divine guidance.

Jackson's work is remarkable in its intellectual scope, bridging pre-modern Islamic jurisprudence with contemporary political theory and religious studies. His engagement with classical Muslim jurists grounds his argument in a robust jurisprudential tradition. Moreover, his critique of the Western secular as a universal model is both timely and persuasive, challenging Muslims and non-Muslims alike to rethink the relationship between religion and the state through the genealogies of these terms in Islamic intellectual history. To be sure, Jackson's use of "the Islamic Secular" might generate criticism, given the term's history and connotations. However, the book is not aimed at reconciling Islam with secularism. Rather, it consciously appropriates the widespread term "the secular" to rearticulate an established Islamic jurisprudential delineation between *sharī'a* and non-*sharī'* realms of governance and judgment. Certain marginal aspects of Jackson's argument might still warrant further research, such as his informative but limited engagement with the category of *dunyā* (worldly life) (pp. 37–38; 126–127). This limitation stems from his central focus on jurisprudence, which overlooks the broader conceptions of religion and secularity—particularly those expressed through the concept of *dunyā*—in non-juristic Islamic disciplines of learning.

Be that as it may, *The Islamic Secular* is indubitably a landmark contribution to Islamic Studies, Religious Studies, and beyond. It offers a compelling framework for reconsidering the interplay between religion, secularity, and the state from the perspective of Islamic thought. Jackson's decades of scholarship culminate in this seminal work, challenging prevailing assumptions and opening new avenues for research and dialogue on Islam and the modern state. By redefining the secular

through an Islamic normative lens, Jackson also encourages Muslim readers to move beyond simplistic appropriations of the religious/secular binary. This shift can help unlock their potential for both their religious and worldly contributions to the modern world. *The Islamic Secular* is essential reading for scholars, students of Islam, and anyone interested in the intersections of religion, Islam, law, and the modern state.

MOHAMED LAMALLAM
ADJUNCT LECTURER
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic Law, and Modernity

COLUMBUS: LOCKWOOD PRESS, 2023.

377 PAGES.

MOHAMMAD H. FADEL

Thomas Kuhn's concept of the "paradigm shift" in scientific revolutions provides a compelling framework for understanding the role of *taqlīd* in Islamic law. Just as Kuhn argued that scientific progress occurs through shifts between dominant paradigms rather than through a linear accumulation of knowledge, Mohammad H. Fadel suggests that *taqlīd* serves as a stabilizing force within Islamic jurisprudence, ensuring continuity amid evolving legal interpretations. While often viewed as an impediment to legal innovation, *taqlīd*, in Fadel's analysis, functions as an institutional mechanism that enables both preservation and controlled adaptation of Islamic law over time. This review examines Fadel's contributions to the discourse on *taqlīd*, highlighting its social logic, epistemological foundations, and implications for modern Islamic legal reform.

The book is organized into four key sections, each exploring different dimensions of Islamic law: its interaction with the state, the principles underpinning its jurisprudence, its impact on gender and family dynamics, and its influence on economic regulation. The first section, "Islamic

Law and the State,” examines how Islamic jurisprudence has historically interacted with political authority. Fadel challenges the notion that Sunni legal thought lacks a structured theory of governance, arguing instead that Islamic law has always presupposed the existence of a political order necessary for its implementation. This section also discusses the challenges of legal reform in modern contexts and the implications of *fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* (the jurisprudence of minorities) in shaping the rights of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority states.

The second section, “Islamic Jurisprudence,” focuses on the development of legal theory and the role of *taqlīd* in sustaining legal continuity. Fadel examines the social logic behind *taqlīd* and its institutional function in stabilizing legal interpretation. He also explores the relationship between *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) and *furūʿ al-fiqh* (substantive law), arguing that substantive legal doctrines often evolve independently from theoretical principles. This section highlights the complex balance between legal adaptation and adherence to established jurisprudence—a theme that is elaborated further throughout the book. The third section, “Islamic Law, Gender, and the Family,” delves into the gendered dimensions of Islamic legal thought. Fadel examines how medieval Sunni jurists conceptualized gender roles and the legal status of women in various domains, such as testimony, marriage, and guardianship. He critically assesses the Mālikī school’s interpretation of the guardian’s role in marriage and engages with broader discussions on political liberalism and family law pluralism. The final section, “Islamic Law and the Market,” addresses economic ethics and financial regulations in Islamic law. Fadel explores the historical prohibition of *ribā* (usury) and its implications for modern financial systems. He argues that contemporary Islamic finance must reconcile traditional legal norms with the practical demands of economic regulation. The book concludes with a discussion on how Islamic legal principles can inform ethical financial practices while maintaining economic efficiency.

A prevailing narrative in Islamic legal studies views *taqlīd* as a departure from the vibrant legal dynamism of the early Islamic period, leading to what has been described as the “closing of the gates of *ijtihād*.”¹ However, Fadel challenges this assumption by demonstrating that *taqlīd*

was not merely a passive form of legal imitation but rather a pragmatic response to the complexities of sustaining a coherent legal order. He situates *taqlīd* within the broader framework of Islamic legal history, showing that it functioned as a mechanism to maintain jurisprudential consistency, thereby facilitating judicial decision-making and preserving legal norms across generations.

Fadel explores how the rise of the *mukhtaṣar* (abridged legal manual) tradition in Sunni legal schools was a direct response to the institutionalization of *taqlīd*. These works condensed the vast corpus of jurisprudence into accessible legal summaries, allowing judges and jurists to apply established precedents efficiently. This codification process was essential in ensuring that Islamic law remained applicable in diverse socio-political contexts. Contrary to the notion that *taqlīd* stifled legal thought, Fadel argues that it enabled a controlled form of legal adaptation while preserving the integrity of the legal tradition. One of the most thought-provoking aspects of Fadel's discussion is his examination of the ethical responsibilities of the muqallid (one who follows juristic precedent). He engages with the famous maxim, "*Istafti qalbaka wa-in aftāka al-nāsu wa-aftūka*" ("Consult your heart, even if people issue legal opinions for you"), to explore the tension between autonomy and trust in Islamic legal practice. According to Fadel, *taqlīd* is not blind adherence to legal authority but a form of delegated epistemic trust. Jurists, as specialists in legal reasoning, serve as intermediaries between divine revelation and the lay public, making *taqlīd* a necessary component of a functioning legal system.

Fadel's analysis challenges the view that *taqlīd* is inherently at odds with ethical agency. Instead, he suggests that within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence, *muqallidūn* exercise moral discretion by choosing which legal authority to follow. This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of *taqlīd*, wherein jurists and their followers engage in an ongoing process of legal interpretation and application. A key contribution of Fadel's work is his discussion of the relationship between *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *furū' al-fiqh* within the context of *taqlīd*. He critically engages with the Mālikī principle of *istiḥsān* (juristic preference), arguing that substantive legal doctrines often develop independently of theoretical legal

principles. This insight is particularly significant in understanding how *taqlīd* functioned in practice: rather than rigidly applying abstract legal theories, jurists engaged in pragmatic legal reasoning while still adhering to the overarching framework of established jurisprudence. By emphasizing the interplay between *uṣūl* and *furūʿ*, Fadel demonstrates that *taqlīd* did not render Islamic law static. Instead, legal traditions adapted over time through interpretive mechanisms that allowed for a degree of flexibility while maintaining institutional continuity. His argument is particularly relevant in contemporary debates on Islamic legal reform, as it suggests that meaningful change does not necessarily require abandoning *taqlīd* but rather re-engaging with its epistemological foundations.

Fadel's reassessment of *taqlīd* carries significant implications for contemporary discussions on the reform of Islamic law. He critiques simplistic calls for reopening the gates of *ijtihād* without considering the structural role *taqlīd* has played in sustaining Islamic legal institutions. Instead of viewing *taqlīd* as an impediment to reform, he argues that a reconfigured understanding of *taqlīd*—one that acknowledges its historical function and potential adaptability—can facilitate meaningful legal evolution. To conclude, Mohammad H. Fadel's treatment of *taqlīd* in *Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic Law, and Modernity* presents a compelling reevaluation of a concept long mischaracterized as an obstacle to legal progress. By highlighting the stabilizing function of *taqlīd*, its ethical dimensions, and its role in mediating between legal theory and practice, Fadel offers a historically grounded yet forward-looking framework for understanding Islamic law. His work challenges the binary opposition between *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*, advocating instead for a sophisticated engagement with Islamic legal traditions that acknowledges their inherent dynamism.

MOHAMMED ERIOUCHE
INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER
RABAT, MOROCCO

Endnotes

- 1 Hallaq, W. B. (1986). "On the Origins of the Controversy about the Existence of Mujtahids and the Gate of Ijtihad." *Studia Islamica*, (63), 129-141.

Prophet al-Khiḍr: Between the Qur'anic Text and Islamic Contexts

LONDON: LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2022. 156 PAGES.

IRFAN A. OMAR

Khiḍr is not widely known or extensively theorized, even though he frequently appears in Muslim literature and has been embraced by several Muslim civilizations. Building on the extensive research and analysis of the enigmatic prophet Khiḍr by Patrick Franke and Talat Halman, Irfan A. Omar's *Prophet al-Khiḍr: Between the Qur'anic Text and Islamic Contexts* contributes to correcting this oversight. By examining Khiḍr through a "wider frame of understanding", Omar hopes to demonstrate the important intersectional connections between the Khiḍr narrative and other savior-sage type stories. This covers both symbolic and legendary viewpoints in addition to textual and literary representations (22) and to "examine Khiḍr's diverse attributes as a celestial messenger entrusted with aiding the pious and truth-seekers, irrespective of time or location, status, or faith" (27). Omar's efforts have given us a rich, widely portrayed, painstakingly detailed, composite, and colorful picture of the Khiḍr tale throughout Islamic history and genres.

The enigmatic character Khiḍr is referenced in Sūrat al-Kahf while discussing Moses's interaction with an anonymous spiritual entity (18:

60–82). The sole reference to him in the Qur'an is "a servant of God," and early scholars of the Qur'an, known as *mufasssirūn*, believed that he was Khidr, also known as "The Green One." The goal of the *mufasssirūn* was to determine how this God-servant, who seemed in the narrative to receive information straight from God, should be interpreted in the context of Islamic prophetology, especially in relation to Moses. In addition to being the topic of early *tafsīr*, Khidr also became the focus of Sufi storytelling, debate, and imagination. From the beginning, Khidr came to represent intuition, equanimity, helping the poor, safeguarding travelers, greenery in the natural world, water, and the divine *rahmah*. Scholars, Sufis, poets, and laypeople have all assigned their own variants onto these themes in their interpretations of his aims, powers, and importance, albeit these have varied depending on the occasion. In enigmatic visits to Muslims, he is said to have brought protection and heavenly insights to everyone from Ibn al-ʿArabī to a fisherman in Punjab.

By examining the Khidr narrative across various Islamic genres and settings, Omar presents a synopsis of the legacy of the Qur'anic Khidr, highlighting the growing roles he played as his story merged with other legends and showcasing a range of symbolic representations derived from important attributes Khidr is purported to have. In order to show and analyze Khidr's solid foundation in the textual sources of Islam—the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, and Sufi literature—Omar assembles a wide variety of sources (p. 2). The Qur'anic and *ḥadīth* sources that "inspired the story of Khidr to try to communicate an allegorical story about Moses" are examined in the book's opening chapter (p. 15). According to the Qur'anic narrative, Moses searches for Khidr and discovers him at "the meeting place of the two oceans." The acts of Khidr in the narrative seem to be at odds with the "ethical norms subscribed to by Moses" (p. 15). According to Omar, Khidr symbolizes the "rupture that exists between esoteric and exoteric knowledge" and divine assistance for the weak via his deeds (p. 16). The interaction between Moses and Joshua reveals that divine knowledge "may be received in the form of 'law' or revelation or as mystical, intuitive knowledge" and truth that extends beyond what can be logically discerned.

It is said of Khidr that he is green or wears a white coat; *ḥadīth* describe him sitting over a wasteland that turns green and verdant. According to

Omar, Khidr seems to have satisfied the most fundamental necessity for understanding the dynamic relationship between the divine and human realms in the cultural dimension that separates orthodox and Sufi thinkers (19). The book's second chapter addresses the worries of early Qur'anic exegetical scholars and later Sufi thinkers on Khidr's status as a prophet and, subsequently, an initiating shaykh in absentia. Omar goes into further detail on how he came to be identified as both a prophet and a "friend of God" (*wali*), building on the symbolic meaning of Khidr being associated with fertility, regeneration, fish, water, and the safety of travelers. For mystics, Khidr comes to stand for immortality, which is further developed into a metaphorical "state of being" that the mystically oriented faithful pursue.

The significance of Khidr in Sufism is the subject of the third chapter of the book. Sufi emphasis on the master-disciple connection, the initiation principle, *ma'rifah*, and "divine insight," which he is said to possess, and reveal when he appears to the pious, are all reflected in the Khidr narrative. In Sufi metaphysical cosmology, he is acknowledged as one of four spiritual poles and stands for the "initiating principle," which states that a Sufi shaykh is always present to their students/adepts regardless of time and place, even when they are not physically there. The Uwaisiyyah Sufi order from Central Asia even regards Khidr as its founder shaykh. He was always accessible and gave *khirqah* to some Sufis, exemplifying a "Khidrian trope" of the master-disciple bond (67).

Chapter Four discusses the presence in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East of popular religious traditions that incorporate Khidr legends, temples dedicated to Khidr, and devotional rituals (Omar does not reference Africa in this discussion). Here, Omar considers the story's themes and potential ties to other legendary and pre-Islamic stories. A variety of localized holy sites, each with its own narratives of Khidr's appearances, have been built by Khidr shrines, according to certain folkloric and cultural expressions of the story. Examples of composite forms depicting him as non-Islamic figures like St. George are presented to us, and we discover that Khidr is the Muslim equivalent of local Hindu-oriented vernacular devotion for Muslims in India. According to Omar, Khidr may be seen as a Muslim means of connecting concepts and narratives that are dispersed throughout time and geography. He turns into

a representation of the centuries-long cooperative transnational, trans-cultural, and interreligious legacy (118).

The last chapter of the book offers an engaging and poignant account of Muhammad Iqbal, an Indo-Pakistani poet of the 20th century, and his poetic exchanges with Khidr. Iqbal's profound "philosophy of action" influenced how he saw Khidr, whom he saw as a representation of movement, action, and rebirth. This symbolism in Iqbal's poetry, written in pre-partition colonial South Asia, eloquently portrayed his existential and theological idea of "self," which asserted that human agency is the journey to learn, act, and seek nearness to God, but not unification with Him. Here, Khidr's association with the oppressed, the traveler, and the seeker, as well as the story of Moses and Khidr in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, which mentions the meeting of two oceans of Shari'ah and structure on the one hand, and of *ma'rifah* and transcendence on the other, create a fertile ground for Iqbal's poetic imagination and leadership as a religious intellectual during a critically difficult period for Muslims in South Asia.

The Khidr story is a multifaceted and enduring religious and spiritual resource, and Omar's *Prophet al-Khidr* is a highly valuable addition to the literature on Khidr. The book may appear somewhat brief, yet it is also evident that the Khidr narrative resonates powerfully with significant themes and issues regarding knowledge and how the supernatural makes it available to people. The book also demonstrates how the Khidr narrative endures as it presents countless ways to understand topics at the heart of the Islamic religion, from the sublime to the banal. Overall, readers will gain a deep understanding of the significance and power of the Khidr story in the Islamic tradition as well as a more comprehensive understanding of the key themes in Islam that the Khidr narrative and symbology—as well as the questions surrounding them—can shed light on from Omar's readable and insightful study.

MUHAMMAD ASAD LATIF

RESEARCH FELLOW

ISLAMIA UNIVERSITY OF BAHAWALPUR

BAHAWALPUR, PAKISTAN

Marital and Sexual Ethics in Islamic Law: Rethinking Temporary Marriage

LANHAM: LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2023. 220 PAGES.

ROSHAN IQBAL

An excellent contribution to the field of Qur'anic Studies and to the field of Muslim feminist ethics, this book is a valuable contribution. Through the controversial, if I may say so, sensational legal route of temporary marriage, or *mut'a* in Islam, Iqbal introduces the significance of *tafsir* in Qur'anic interpretation in a systematic manner. Furthermore, the book has a relevant social aspect that will be of great interest to young American undergraduates, particularly young Muslims in the West. A brief, clear, and straightforward section on methodology precedes a neat division of chapters. Nineteen exegetes discuss how they interpret Q.4:24, which justifies temporary marriage or *mut'a*. Even though the claim is largely addressed to Shi'i Muslims, the exegetes surveyed in this book are diverse: Shi'i, Sufi, Zaydi, Ash'ari, and Isma'ili.

The book explores Qur'anic exegetical processes: "questions about organization, presentation, and hermeneutical principles" (p. 3). The first chapter provides an introduction to the institution of temporary

marriage (*mut'a*) in Islam, accompanied by a historical overview of scholarly discussions on the subject. The second chapter employs Q.4:24 as a lens to examine the development of Qur'anic exegesis during the formative period of Islam. The third chapter addresses the middle period, specifically the fourth/tenth century, highlighting how Qur'anic exegesis during this era exhibited "polyvalent readings" and "sectarian concerns" that intensified debates surrounding *mut'a*. The fourth chapter examines the modern period, focusing on the impact of colonization on *tafsir*. The fifth chapter strengthens the author's argument by asserting that *mut'a* cannot be fully understood through textual sources alone and necessitates a broader methodological framework. It highlights that most Sunni schools of law, including the Shāfi'i, Mālikī, and Ḥanbalī Schools, deem *mut'a* entirely invalid. In contrast, the Ḥanafī School considers it a valid marriage contract but deems the time-limited nature of the contract invalid. Despite these differences, none of the four Sunni schools classify participants in *mut'a* as fornicators, reflecting ongoing confusion about its status (p.15). Both Sunni and Shi'i hadiths document the Prophet Muhammad endorsing *mut'a* to his companions. However, Sunni schools largely reject the practice, influenced by the sermon of 'Umar, the second caliph, who declared such contracts invalid (p. 20). Shi'i Muslims interpret 'Umar's sermon as evidence of *mut'a*'s permissibility during the Prophet's lifetime, while Sunnis view it, alongside other hadiths, as signaling a definitive prohibition of the practice.

Chapter One examines the evolution of early *tafsir* tradition and its influence on legal interpretations within Muslim scholarship. The chapter provides an overview of the diverse legal opinions held by scholars regarding Q.4:24. Due to the scarcity of female exegetes from the early period, the author includes 'A'isha, the wife of the Prophet, as an exegete. Iqbal argues that 'A'isha's "recollections of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, as well as her own comments, fit the practical definition of the earliest works of *tafsir* (exegesis)" (p. 3). Although she did not produce a formal exegesis, 'A'isha bt. Abi Bakr (d. 56/678) clearly stated that *mut'a* was prohibited. In turn, 'Abbas (d. 68/687-8) initially permitted *mut'a* but later prohibited it. Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150/767) employed Qur'anic verses to argue for the abrogation of *mut'a*. Al-Tabari

(d. 310/923) presented two opposing interpretations, one supporting and the other opposing its permissibility. Ismā'īlī readings, such as that of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934-5), provided no definitive clarity on the matter. Conversely, al-ʿAyyāshī (late third/ninth century), a Shiʿi convert exegete, permitted *mutʿa*. Overall, the early exegetical phase of Islam demonstrates polyvalent interpretations of *mutʿa*.

The subsequent chapter examines the medieval period, tracing the evolution of exegesis on Q.4:24 as scholars delineated sectarian distinctions and incorporated philosophical and theological methodologies into their commentaries. This chapter highlights seven prominent figures in Qurʾanic exegesis: al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), al-Zamakhshirī (d. 538/1144), al-Tabrisī (d. 548/1154), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Maybūdī (6th/12th century), al-Kāshānī (d. 736/1336), and Ismāʿīl Haqqī Buruṣāwī (d. 1137/1727). Al-Thaʿlabī, al-Zamakhshirī, and al-Rāzī present arguments on both sides but ultimately deem *mutʿa* impermissible. Al-Tabrisī explicitly affirms its permissibility. Maybūdī and al-Kāshānī omit the discussion entirely. Al-Qurṭubī and Buruṣawī extensively address Q.4:24 but reject *mutʿa*. Overall, medieval exegesis of Q.4:24 reflects the solidification of sectarian boundaries. While proto-Sunni scholars in the early Islamic period exhibited division regarding the permissibility of *mutʿa*, the medieval era witnessed a unified Sunni consensus against it. In contrast, the Shiʿi position remained consistent across both early and medieval periods, continuing to permit *mutʿa*.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth analysis of seven exegetes from the modern period, examining their interpretations of *mutʿa* in the context of European notions of marriage and sexual pleasure. Most of these scholars either avoid endorsing or explicitly prohibit the practice. Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) and Rashīd Ridā (d. 1354/1935), co-authors of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, categorically deemed *mutʿa* impermissible. Ibn ʿAshūr (d. 1394/1973), a Sunni exegete, permitted *mutʿa* but on grounds distinct from Shiʿi interpretations, arguing that it was never historically banned. Mawdudī (d. 1399/1979), a South Asian Muslim scholar, showed limited interest in *mutʿa*, focusing instead on broader issues related to family and marriage. Shiʿi scholars, such as Faḍl Allāh (d. 1330/2010) and Ṭabātabāʾī (d. 1400/1981), predictably upheld the permissibility of

mut'a. The chapter also features two female exegetes: Farhat Hāshimī (b. 1471/1957), who bypasses detailed exegetical analysis of *mut'a* in Q.4:24, interpreting the reference to marriage in general terms, and Nusrat Amin (d. 1403/1983), who explicitly supports the permissibility of *mut'a*, contending that 'Umar's sermon cannot override the Prophet's ruling.

Chapter Five presents the most substantial contributions, advocating for a constructivist approach and proposing "a new interpretive path to Islamic law" (p. 117). Drawing on insights from Kecia Ali and Hina Azam, the author underscores the importance of critically examining the historical context of medieval jurists. She grounds her framework in "the maqasid (purposive) tools of juristic process" as articulated by the Shi'i scholar Muhammad Taqī al-Mudarrisi (b. 1945), outlining four essential methodological interventions for advancing research in Muslim sexual ethics: i) Muslim feminist methodological interventions, ii) legal ethnographic studies, iii) moral philosophy, and iv) the science of sexuality. A minor critique arises regarding her reliance on the authority of a male scholar, which seems inconsistent with the originality and incisiveness of her four-part model. This choice may reflect an effort to maintain relevance with both traditional and modern feminist scholarly audiences. Nonetheless, the author highlights the importance of intertextuality, that is, examining the Qur'an's holistic worldview as well as intratextuality, notably analyzing the Qur'an in relation to hadith literature, when interpreting Q.4:24. These approaches empower feminists to pose critical questions that are often overlooked in male-dominated scholarship.

The next method advocates for future ethnographic research to examine the impact of *mut'a* on men, women, and children. Shahla Haeri's 1989 study is highlighted as a significant ethnographic work, in which she observed that some women derive financial and/or sexual benefits from *mut'a*, ultimately framing it as having "liberatory potential." However, the author outlines critical questions for ethnographers to consider, including whether *mut'a* blurs the distinction between marriage and adultery, if it reduces adultery or fosters a lack of self-restraint, and whether it promotes promiscuity, potentially undermining permanent marriages. Additional inquiries address how *mut'a* expands personal freedom, how young individuals can defend *mut'a* in light of Qur'anic

injunctions such as “lowering one’s gaze,” and the implications for children, particularly whether men can ensure justice for children born from *mut‘a* relationships.

The third method introduces moral questions, some of which overlap with ethnographic concerns but delve deeper. For instance, how does *mut‘a* redefine the concept of consent in sexual relationships? Does *mut‘a* consistently ensure free consent for women, or are there instances where consent may be compromised? The author distinguishes between the legal and moral dimensions of consent (p. 134). Furthermore, while *mut‘a* may legitimize sexual pleasure, the author argues that pleasure alone cannot justify multiple partners. This raises additional questions: can multiple *mut‘a* partnerships genuinely enhance pleasure and satisfaction, and how does *mut‘a* influence the ideal conception of marriage, particularly within American society (p. 137)?

The fourth method represents a groundbreaking yet essential intervention, posing the question: how can recent advancements in the science of sexuality contribute to a reevaluation of gendered sexuality within Muslim legal scholarship? This inquiry is particularly pertinent given that progress in research on female sexuality may challenge traditional Muslim legal perspectives on *mut‘a* and marital ethics. The section introduces critical and bold questions (pp. 140-147), ensuring the study’s enduring relevance. For American Muslims, the book raises thought-provoking issues that are likely to gain significance in the coming years. It is a must-read for courses on gender and religion, particularly those focusing on religious ethics.

BEENA BUTOOL
VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
NAZARETH UNIVERSITY
ROCHESTER, NY

Agency, Rationality, Morality: The Qur'anic View of Man

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ISLAMIC THOUGHT, 2024. 107 PAGES.

MONA M. ABUL-FADL

Mona M. Abul-Fadl (1945-2008) had a mind of dazzling brilliance, making her one of the pioneering female Muslim scholars of her generation and a keen observer of the rapid devolution of society divorced from spiritual tradition in the modern context. In this powerful work, she provides a reading of the Qur'anic view of man as *insān* against a background of the preoccupations of modernity. Her emphasis is on rationality, freedom and morality, and the goal is the reintegration of man and the recovery of community through a reconciliation of self and the rediscovery of the essential meaning of divine guidance in so far as it relates to human life in this world. Taking the Qur'an as a divine discourse of many tiers and depths, the work singles out aspects of its discourse on creation. Abul-Fadl takes this discourse as a pivot for developing a view of moral man and moral community, with the focus remaining on the former.

To understand this work one must first understand its author. An intense thinker, Abul-Fadl made significant contributions not only to her field of research but also notably to Islamic theology, advocating for

the morality and ethics of its spiritual perspective to be given a place in modern academic discourse. Hers was a didacticism that emphasised that people are not inhuman units, cogs in a machine, but a complex, nuanced creation that needed to be understood more than studied. Her interests covered a range of topics from Islam and the Middle East to political theory, epistemology, cultural studies and feminist scholarship. And as the decades go by, it seems she was incredibly perceptive. Her ideas and commentary not only endure but seem to gather momentum and carry greater weight. For this reason she must not slip into obscurity.

Abul-Fadl's faith provided the basis for her intellectual stature, with matters pertaining to the secular humanistic perspective a lifelong passion for her. She was clear that there are fundamental issues that epitomize the human condition for which only a spiritual viewpoint can offer deeper and unique insights, allowing objective truths to be discovered, and guiding people to navigate the upheavals of life, and in fact better themselves in the moral context. For her, that theocentric humanist worldview, as epitomized in the Islamic paradigm of knowledge, was a potential force for cultural renewal. Committed to intellectual engagement Abul-Fadl powerfully challenged the hegemony of 'truths' built on little more than consensus asking awkward questions, pointing out flaws, and espousing through rigorous logic the self-evident truth of God and creation with an erudition that enhanced her academic reputation. Bringing to the fore eternal truths as opposed to ephemeral ones that are time-bound, she devoted her life to this philosophical vision, as realised in her writings, teaching, and public lectures, establishing her credentials as a scholar of great exegetical clarity and systematic exposition.

We must bear in mind that Abul-Fadl had grown up between two cultures. The greater part of her childhood was spent between England and Egypt, and she was a keen advocate of inter-civilizational dialogue. Hence, her refusal to yield to supposedly uncontested 'scientific' and 'rational' truths on the human condition as well as orientalist approaches to understanding the Muslim presence, did not signify for her the building of a theological wall and the subsequent refusal to engage with those outside. Rather, through articulating rejection and commonality, critique and commentary, she sought to open dialogue and engagement,

to penetrate beyond the Western sense of historical rivalry and explore the potentials of a shared consciousness.

Abul-Fadl felt the urgency of that conversation given the decay she was witnessing, of a modernity suffering a crisis of values and even moral anarchy. Not driven by purposes or goals, what kind of self-government could man hope to achieve? What good is the triumph of technology or the god of progress, if it provokes nihilism and a universalized state of existential angst or anomie, living a life without meaning?

In this powerful and instructive work, Abul-Fadl anticipates the flaws of a purely secular humanistic understanding of man as *insān* proving thereby that in a world of appearances (or illusion) versus reality, God cannot be dismissed so easily. Her assertive critique of a utilitarian understanding of the human being, buttressed by denial of notions of ultimate consequentialism, gives readers an acute insight into the limits and scope of core liberal, secular humanistic ideas that she contends lack explanatory power. Abul-Fadl is careful to point out that the treatise's use of the term man/mankind to mean men and women as a translation of *insān*, is purely a matter of convention with reference to modern English and western tradition. However, this is not to eclipse *insān*'s true import for she decries its rendering in the Qur'anic context arguing that every time the Qur'anic gender neutral and universal term "*insān*" is used, subsuming men and women under the category of humankind, it is rendered in English or French as "man" or "homme." This is problematic because despite the fact that these terms are conventionally used to denote universality, their gendered bias remains inherent to the detriment of their universality.

Man is a moral creature inasmuch as he is a deeply corrupting force. Accordingly, if we abandon absolute morality in favour of a relativistic ethics to promote in effect a society of 'rational' individuals governed by haphazard values, or a 'practical ethics' as Bertrand Russell would contend, built on pure trust devoid of spiritual belief, then to what extent are we endangering a civilisation we so wish to hail as technologically advanced? That is, juggling plates in a system of ever-eroding social control, where technological achievement, or the benefits of progress, are clearly not enough. A true and accurate understanding of the human

being is no doubt vital and, whilst modern disciplines in the context of the human sciences are right to make man the focus of study, a data-driven, spiritually devoid analysis misses the fundamental purpose of human life, and is a gamble. Man is left with no soul and nothing to live for.

In the author's view, the Qur'an is the best explanation of man as *insān*. It makes the human being the focal point of exposition acting as a blueprint for our existence, and guiding humanity through the journey that is life. Of greater significance, God is the Creator and origin of everything. Origins are fundamental, impacting definitions, engagement, and the type of society humanity chooses to structure for itself. Like ripples in a pond, life is lived relationally from the family unit to wider society, linking human beings in a chain that ultimately traverses across national borders to shores beyond our own. Thus, how are we to conceive of origins? Are we to view *insān* as simply an evolutionary creature, mere matter and energy, governed by animalistic tendencies which prioritise survival? Is he governed by his passions, drives and impulses? If so, from where do these emerge? If man's growth and development, whether alone or within society, demands a 'practical ethics', then who decides and what defines the forms of that value system (and trust) and the extent of its conservatism? In other words, if man chooses to be driven by alcohol, drugs and other dark pleasures, then why not unleash this potential? If judgements are to be made on a utilitarian basis then who decides the criteria and how to account for conflicting normative ethics and competing interests?

These questions deeply vex the human sciences, which increasingly try to make sense of non-practical, irrational, non-ethical and indeed illogical behaviours such as war, social problems of crime or the darker appetites of men, as well as various psychiatric disorders, with an ever-burgeoning development of ideas, research, questions, and hypotheses. The holy grail of a just and equitable world based on inclusivity and unity is not going to emerge through the power of knowledge alone focusing on the greater good, but a sense of accountability before God. Despite some inevitably valuable and nuanced insights by the human sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science etc.) there are also fundamental flaws, inescapable from honest appraisal,

because the premises at the root of secular liberal humanism governing its theoretical framework are inadequate and contradictory, if not false.

The author makes an impressive case for the Islamic perspective in her own brilliantly erudite and scholastic style, demonstrating the breadth of her knowledge. Her penetrating observations are clear and easy to understand, focused on central tenets without having to articulate each and every aspect of analysis, contributing to a greater understanding for readers and allowing them to form their own assessment. The Qur'an allows both for a powerfully complex understanding of *insān*, as well as a powerfully simple one. Its message is clear: God is the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. It speaks to both a broader audience as well as a highly specialised one. The arguments put forward have logic and coherence. It explains ethics but notably also a root cause, a dark force permeating existence that drives men to evil. With time short and the stakes high, man as *insān* is the moral centre of the universe, and has a fundamental purpose to play within it. If he fails to leverage the power of his spiritual knowledge then the only foreseeable future is one of chaos. Man has been created to 'know' God and designated the task of being vicegerent, the perspective of his existence demanding constant moral self-reflection, stretching the boundaries of this understanding, as well as ethical engagement with the objects placed around him in this vale of tests (people, animals, nature), to ultimately realise his moral potential. He is utterly dependent on God. From the very air he breathes to the food and water he consumes, his assumption of freedom and independence being nothing but delusion. His tinkering with the world of objects in the name of science and expressions of liberal triumphalism for having understood some of the laws/working mechanisms of an infinitesimally complex universe, border on narcissism. The cosmos has its place, but *insān* is its heart and soul.

SHIRAZ KHAN
RESEARCHER
IIIT LONDON OFFICE
LONDON, UK

Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present

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312 PAGES.

OMER AWASS

Islamic law, its classical origins and modern resurgence, has been the subject of increasing attention in academia. Whereas previous literature in the area of Islamic law often carried orientalist leanings, modern research attempts to re-evaluate the Islamic legal tradition on its own merits. Dr. Omer Awass contributes to this effort in, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present*. Awass examines the formation, history, and transformation of Islamic legal discourse and institutions through the lens of the fatwa, or legal opinion. He explores how the issuing of fatwas was influential in the development of the legal tradition generally, while at the same time serving as a social instrument that contributed to the formation of the Muslim societies. Awass' investigation of fatwas is historically contextualized and he demonstrates legal development through his selection of fatwas. Furthermore, his analysis provides a fascinating window into

the minds of renowned Muslim jurists and their engagement with the legal tradition. Finally, while Awass' main focus is on the Sunnī legal tradition, his inclusion of non-Sunnī sects, Zaydī and Ibādī traditions respectively, while informative, could be improved with a stronger comparative context.

Dr. Omar Awass completed his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Temple University with a specialization in Islamic Law. The present text is an extension of his dissertation entitled, "The Evolution of Fatwa and Its Influence on Muslim Society." He is currently an Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at American Islamic College. Overall, Awass' stylistic approach to the topic of the Islamic legal tradition is comprehensive and would benefit new students to the study of Islamic law. Due to the fact that Awass discusses a broad time span—from the classical period to modern day and is not limited geographically, this text is ideally suited for students that are interested in gaining a broad view of Islamic legal history, through the case study of the fatwa.

Awass organizes his text chronologically. He begins by placing the intellectual birth of the fatwa squarely in the primary sources of the Islamic tradition: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He follows the shaping of the fatwa from the post-Prophetic period, through the classical age. He elaborates on the impact of *madhhab*-establishment on the issuing of fatwas, arguing that strict adherence to the *madhhabs* limited juristic freedom scholars had previously enjoyed. He discusses the devastating impact of colonization on the Islamic legal system. Specifically, he highlights how British colonizers, frustrated by the unpredictable nature of Islamic law, created dual legal systems that would ultimately rob the Islamic courts of their relevance and power. Finally, Awass analyzes the re-emergence of the fatwa in the post-colonial era. He examines fatwas issued by two institutions, the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation), an intergovernmental organization that arose in the post-colonial nation-state era and the IIFA (International Islamic Fiqh Academy), a subsidiary organization that consists of expert jurists and scholars of Islamic jurisprudence. He concludes that while the Islamic legal tradition remains intact, there has been a shift in the post-colonial period from a text-based approach to one that is more contextualized.

Awass provides a concise and thorough historical context for each of the different stages of development in Islamic law and demonstrates legal development effectively through his chosen fatwas. For example, Awass selects the fatwas of Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) to highlight legal development over time. In this section, he first offers the necessary historical context on the figure of Rashīd Riḍā: he was a Muslim reformist that sought to re-examine foundational sources, independent of the strict interpretations imposed by the *madhhabs*. Next, he looks at two of Riḍā's fatwas on the topic of *ribā* (usury), separated temporally by twenty years. In undertaking this analysis, Awass makes his intention clear: "The purpose of looking at these fatwas, both of which focus on the issue of usury, is to examine the progression of Riḍā's reformist agenda throughout his career" (218). In the first, known as the Calcutta fatwa Riḍā defines *ribā* according to the established Sunnī schools of law and then evaluates whether the transaction he is asked about constitutes *ribā* according to those definitions. In other words, he offers deference to the *madhhab* paradigm. "He ultimately concludes that this modern interest-based transaction is legitimate from the point of view of Islamic law because it resembles what the Prophet had done with his debts by willingly giving back more than what was owed" (220).

Twenty years later, Riḍā issued the Hyderabad fatwa in response to a similar question on *ribā*. In high contrast to his previous approach, in the Hyderabad fatwa, Riḍā clearly differentiates himself from *madhhab*-followers. Riḍā says that his fatwa will be strictly based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah and not on one of the opinions found in the *madhhabs* (76). Awass expounds upon what factors led to this change in Riḍā's legal thinking. Through this example, Awass clearly demonstrates how a jurist's legal approach and philosophy evolves, even on a singular topic. This fatwa is the perfect case study to demonstrate such development because it is the author's own legal reasoning.

Awass' approach, aside from reporting the substantive content of the fatwa, also provides a unique window into the minds of prominent legal thinkers and how they crafted their opinions. In other words, which sources of authority they appealed to in order to deliver the most effective fatwa. Interestingly, throughout his book Awass chose the fatwas

of historical giants, like Ibn Taymiyya, Rashīd Riḍā, and ‘Uthmān Dan Fodio, among others, as the focal point of his analysis. All of these figures are often thought of as socio-political revolutionaries, but Awass’ analysis of their fatwas also draws out their legal nature, providing a greater layer of complexity to their personas.

The first fatwa is that of Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) on the Mongol incursions. Awass equips the reader first with an important introduction: Ibn Taymiyya, while being a Ḥanbalī jurist, was not entirely deferential to the schools of law. In his fatwa, Ibn Taymiyya concluded that the Tartars could not be considered legally Muslims even though they declared the *shahadah* (declaration of faith), so it was necessary to resist them as foreign invaders. Awass does insightful work highlighting Ibn Taymiyya’s approach to reaching this legal conclusion. He notes that Ibn Taymiyya recognizes three levels of authority in his opinion: text of Qur’an and Hadith, the authority of early scholars, and historical precedent of early Muslims in similar situations (160). Ibn Taymiyya relies less on *madhhab* precedent and prefers jurists of his time, and yet masterfully cites opinions of all the *madhhabs*. Awass captures Ibn Taymiyya’s legal genius and says, “his legal discourse represents a kind of integrative jurisprudence where politics, morality, and history coalesce to cope with realities of the present without necessarily disregarding the legal precedents that had been established before him nor confining himself to the conclusions that were reached in those precedents” (162). This summary, and the prior analysis, allows the reader to appreciate, not only the fatwa for its historical significance, but also the multi-faceted legal reasoning of Ibn Taymiyya.

Awass also dives into a fatwa of ‘Uthmān Dan Fodio (1754–1817), a jurist-scholar and social reformer from West Africa. Dan Fodio famously permitted his followers to repossess properties that had been confiscated from them from the political authority he would eventually defeat. Aside from the fatwa’s conclusion, Awass allows the reader to examine Dan Fodio’s thought process and legal logic as he crafted his fatwa. Dan Fodio first appeals to an analogous situation from the history of the Songhai Empire in Mali in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. He then cites the ruling of a preceding jurist and his own brother’s fatwa. While

Dan Fodio draws on the Mālikī *madhhab* to legitimize his fatwa, he also employs purposive (i.e., legal principles-based) language. Awass notes, “Dan Fodio’s ruling supports peoples’ rights to reclaim their usurped properties under any conditions except those situations that would lead to greater upheaval/corruption (*mafsadah*). This latter position echoes the fundamental principle behind Islamic law: “to promote the common good and deter corruption (*jalb al-maṣlaḥah wa-dar’ al-mafsadah*)” (191).

While Awass’ primary narrative follows the development of Sunnī law, he dedicates substantial sections to non-Sunnī sects, including the Zaydī and Ibādī Schools; these sections are informative, but could be supported by a greater comparative contextualization. In discussing a fatwa issued by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 298/911) or al-Hādī, a Zaydī legal scholar, Awass first introduces him as a later scholar that had a direct impact on the way Zaydism is practiced today in Yemen. He further provides the context for why al-Hādī’s fatwa on water resources is particularly important geographically because rain water was a primarily source of irrigation in this region. As a means of introducing Zaydism generally speaking, however as a theological and legal tradition separate from Sunnī Islam, Awass writes: “a defining characteristic of the Zaydī legal school maintains that for a jurist to be qualified to issue legal opinions, they must possess all of the tools for independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and not base their opinions on precedent (73).” He later adds that, “Zaydism limits the role of reason in lawmaking to *qiyās* (analogy) (73).”

This background and the accompanying historical context, could be more fully developed to better appreciate the nuanced differences between Sunnī and Zaydī Islam. This section could be strengthened by adding a section on how and when Zaydism, as a theology, branched off from Sunnī Islam, and how the legal trajectory of Zaydism diverges, both in theory and practice, from the Sunnī framework. Awass’ contextualization on Ibādism was far more comprehensive. He traces the foundation of Ibādism through the authority of Jābir ibn Zayd (d. 93/711), whom early shapers of the Ibādī *madhhab* used as the focal point of their legal decisions. He adds that Ibādī law also recognizes the Qur’ān, Sunnah, *ijmā’*, and *qiyās*. He adds that, “the proliferation of *ḥadīth* further facilitated within the Ibādī *madhhab*, which always acknowledged the prophetic

practice as a source of law.” These comments allow the reader to identify some differences between Ibāḍism and Sunnī law, but a fuller discussion would be beneficial.

These sections also leave the reader with unanswered questions. What specifically about Jābir and his approach found traction in the Iraqi legal milieu? Was it theological differences between Ibāḍism and Sunnī Islam that ultimately bred the later political and legal differences? While these questions are not directly related to the topic of legal development and fatwa, it seems necessary to provide this context to gain a fuller picture of the different *madhhabs*’ approach to law.

Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law is a valuable contribution to the field of Islamic legal theory, history and development. Awass’ exploration of fatwas effectively demonstrates how the Muslim civilization grappled with the challenges of their time and legally negotiated solutions. Awass’ coverage of the topic is historically well contextualized and he effectively demonstrates legal development through his selection of fatwas. Furthermore, Awass’ analysis provides insight into how Muslim jurists engagement with the legal tradition. Finally, while Awass’ main focus is on the Sunnī legal tradition, his inclusion of non-Sunnī traditions could be enhanced with a more extensive comparative element. In recounting the trajectory of how fatwas began and have been used over time at the hands of jurists that span the globe, Awass positions himself well to comment on where Islamic legal theory is heading. While he adequately describes the current state of affairs as being more contextual than text based, he leaves open-ended the query of whether the current trend will become a mainstay of the legal landscape or whether this is a temporary phase.

NAZISH MITHAIWALA
THE ISLAMIC SEMINARY OF AMERICA
RICHARDSON, TX

The Global Halal Industry: A Research Companion

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HUSSAIN MOHI-UD-DIN QADRI

The Global Halal Industry: A Research Companion presents an exhaustive exploration of the rapidly expanding halal industry worldwide. It examines the various dimensions of the halal sector, addressing commercial, regulatory, technological, and Shariah-related considerations. Structured to appeal to both scholars and industry professionals, the text provides insight into the numerous facets of the halal industry, ranging from food and pharmaceuticals to cosmetics, tourism, and finance. In addition to offering theoretical perspectives, the book proposes practical solutions to key challenges, such as the harmonization of standards. Nonetheless, the text encounters certain shortcomings, particularly in its uneven treatment of regions and sectors, which will be discussed in detail.

This work investigates the evolution of the global halal industry by focusing on several sectors, including food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, tourism, and fashion. In Chapter 1, the book underscores the expansion of the Muslim population and the influence of cultural globalization as principal drivers of the industry. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth

exploration of the Islamic concepts of halal and haram, while Chapter 3 offers a historical analysis of the industry's growth across different regions. Chapters 4 and 5 delve into the halal food industry and supply chain logistics, highlighting challenges in certification and transparency. Chapter 6 focuses on halal tourism, and Chapters 7 and 8 turn to halal pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and fashion. Chapter 9 emphasizes the urgent need for the standardization of halal certification processes, and Chapter 10 discusses the role of emerging technologies, such as AI and blockchain, in enhancing transparency within the halal sector. Overall, the book offers a valuable perspective for academics and professionals seeking to understand the dynamics of this burgeoning industry.

The first chapter provides an overview of the global growth of the halal industry, linking it to the rise in the Muslim population and the effects of cultural globalization. A notable strength is the chapter's discussion of how halal products attract consumers beyond the Muslim demographic, due to factors like health, quality, and ethics. However, the lack of detailed empirical data to support these trends weakens its arguments, as a more data-driven approach would have enhanced its credibility. Chapter 2 delves into the theological and ethical foundations of the concepts of halal and haram, providing both lexical definitions and a philosophical analysis. The author's clear explanation of these concepts is a strength, as it establishes a solid framework for understanding the halal industry's core principles. However, the chapter could be strengthened by incorporating contemporary applications of these principles in modern industries, which are only briefly addressed.

Chapter 3 offers a historical perspective, tracing the halal industry's development from its early roots to its current global reach. The global landscape is discussed with reference to key regions, including the USA, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Although the chapter provides a well-documented timeline and insightful regional analysis, it falls short of offering a comparative evaluation between regions, which would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the varying opportunities and challenges. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the complexities of the halal food sector, ranging from certification processes to the challenges of cross-contamination and technological innovations. A strength of these

chapters is the detailed discussion of certification procedures. However, it misses an opportunity to explore cutting-edge technologies, such as blockchain, which could address some of the transparency and trust issues identified. In discussing the halal supply chain, these chapters offer a forward-looking analysis, including projections for the halal logistics market. Despite its strength in identifying regulatory and logistical challenges, these chapters lack concrete solutions, leaving readers without practical strategies for overcoming these hurdles.

Chapter 6 provides an extensive analysis of the halal tourism industry, highlighting the significance of culturally sensitive services, such as halal food and family-friendly accommodations. While it effectively outlines the sector's key components, the chapter would benefit from more case studies showcasing successful halal tourism destinations, thus offering practical guidance for emerging markets.

The chapter on halal pharmaceuticals addresses the growing demand for Shariah-compliant medical products. It is particularly strong in its balanced discussion of the opportunities and challenges within this sector. Nevertheless, a lack of real-world case studies limits the chapter's practical applicability. The simultaneous discussion of halal cosmetics and fashion is commendable, as it recognizes the overlap between these sectors in terms of ethical consumerism. However, the chapter could be enhanced by offering more strategic insights for companies aiming to navigate these evolving markets, especially regarding consumer education and marketing.

Focusing on certification standards, Chapter 9 critiques the inconsistent use of halal logos and calls for stronger oversight. Although it identifies key issues, the absence of a clear roadmap for achieving global standardization detracts from the chapter's overall effectiveness. In its exploration of AI and blockchain, Chapter 10 highlights the potential of these technologies to improve transparency and traceability within the halal industry. However, without concrete examples or case studies, the discussion lacks the practical grounding necessary to fully convince readers of its feasibility.

The Global Halal Industry: A Research Companion is an ambitious work that provides valuable insights into the halal industry, covering

sectors such as food, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and finance, while examining the interplay between Shariah principles, commercial practices, and emerging technologies like AI and blockchain. Despite its strengths, the book faces some limitations, particularly its uneven focus across sectors and regions, with less depth on key areas like halal tourism and pharmaceuticals. Additionally, the absence of empirical case studies and comparative regional analyses limits its practical applicability for policy-makers and industry practitioners. Nevertheless, it remains a significant contribution, offering forward-looking perspectives on the industry's technological future.

In conclusion, *The Global Halal Industry: A Research Companion* serves as a crucial resource for both academics and industry practitioners. Its comprehensive scope and attention to Shariah principles make it a valuable starting point for anyone looking to understand the multifaceted nature of the halal industry. While the book excels in providing theoretical insights and addressing key industry trends, it could be enhanced by a more balanced focus across sectors and regions, alongside the inclusion of more empirical data. Nonetheless, it remains a pioneering work in an increasingly relevant field, offering a foundation for further research and practical implementation in the global halal market.

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MUHAMMAD CHOLIL
MUHAMMAD FAIZUL MAMDUH
HESTI EKA SETIANINGSIH
AIRLANGGA UNIVERSITY
SURABAYA, INDONESIA

Maulana Azad: A Life

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HABIB, S. IRFAN

Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, a multifaceted figure, was celebrated as a thinker, orator, journalist, politician, leader, and Muslim intellectual, with a deep understanding of both Islamic and contemporary knowledge. S. Irfan Habib's *Maulana Azad: A Life* offers a comprehensive and fresh biographical account, exploring key moments that shaped Azad's life and remain relevant today (p. 2). S. Irfan Habib (b. 1931) is a prominent Indian historian of ancient and medieval India and the former Abul Kalam Azad Chair at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. The book challenges prevailing historical narratives, aiming to dismantle stereotypes about the past (p. 10). Structured thematically, it includes five chapters, along with an introduction and an epilogue.

In the introduction, Habib recognizes the limitations of available sources on Azad's biography, noting uncertainties surrounding certain aspects of his life. However, he underscores the importance of *Gubar-i-Khatir* (The Dust of Memories), which offers valuable insights into Azad's perspectives on various subjects (p. 11). Habib's goal is to present Azad within the contemporary "context of Islam and nationalism" (p. 14), portraying him as both a significant religious scholar and a staunch

advocate of nationalism. The first chapter, "The Early Years," examines Azad's ancestry, family background, and formative influences. Although Azad expressed disdain for his ancestral environment (p. 19), he admired certain family members (pp. 20-22). Khairuddin, Azad's father and a prominent Sufi scholar, played a pivotal role in his upbringing, though Azad later rejected "traditional" practices (p. 42). Despite Khairuddin's efforts to shield him from "atheistic" ideas, Azad encountered the works of Syed Ahmad Khan, which sparked intellectual and religious unease (p. 43). Habib also highlights Azad's early involvement in journalism at the age of twelve, earning recognition from scholars such as Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914) and Shibli Numani (1857-1914). Furthermore, the chapter explores the ideological influence of thinkers like Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) on Azad's religious and political thought (p. 61).

In the second chapter, "Maulana Azad and Critical Thinking in Islam," Habib contends that Azad's engagement with Islam was characterized by rationalism and critical inquiry. His intellectual development was influenced by Delhi-based scholars such as Mawlawi Zakaullah (1832-1920) and Nazir Ahmad (1831-1912), as well as the broader scientific and philosophical currents of colonial India. Habib emphasizes Azad's advocacy for pan-Islamic solidarity and his efforts to reconcile Islam with science, inspired by Jamal al-Din Afghani (p. 80), as well as his alignment with Salafist thought through Muhammad Abduh (p. 85). Notably, Azad's defence of Sarmad, a 17th-century Armenian mystic and scholar of comparative religion, highlights his intellectual openness. Habib portrays Azad as a liberal thinker who championed composite culture and transcended a narrow belief in religious unity (pp. 87-89). Habib commends Azad for his significant *tafsīr*, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, asserting that, prior to Azad, no Muslim scholar had truly grasped the Qur'an's core message—a claim that remains contentious. Azad employed reason and critical thinking, integral to Islam, to challenge the constraints of *taqlīd*, which had long stifled Muslim intellectual progress, enabling a genuine interpretation of the Qur'an. Habib provides an in-depth analysis (pp. 91-118) of Azad's interpretation, particularly of Surah al-Fatihah, the

Qur'an's opening chapter. In this interpretation, Azad conducts a comparative study of five religions to illustrate his respect for and belief in "the truth of all creeds" (p. 101) or the "unity of all religions." Azad sought to dispel notions of exclusivity associated with any religion or community, as Habib argues, "Islam as a faith is not a monolith" (p. 114). Indeed, Habib presents Azad's perspective that religions possess two dimensions: the unchanging universal spirit shared across all prophetic messages and the external manifestations, which are shaped by secondary, contextual circumstances.

In the third chapter, "Azad, Islam, and Nationalism," Habib provides a nuanced exploration of Azad's intellectual and political milieu. Beginning with a brief history of nationalism, Habib situates Azad within the broader context of nineteenth-century Muslim leaders and intellectuals in West Asia, influenced by the rise of nationalistic tendencies against European imperialism. Azad's advocacy for inclusive nationalism, shaped by an acute awareness of the dangers of communal politics in the Indian subcontinent, is highlighted. Habib underscores Azad's dual identity as "a proud Muslim and an equally proud Indian" (p. 129), emphasizing his commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity as integral to his vision of a unified Indian nation. The chapter also delves into the complex interplay between Islam and nationalism, drawing parallels between Azad's ideas and early Islamic history. Habib notes Azad's reliance on the example of Prophet Muhammad's alliances with non-Muslim groups in Medina, reflecting a progressive and composite approach to nationalism. This perspective is contrasted with the exclusivist stance of the Muslim League, countered by scholars like Mawlana Hussain Ahmad Madani of the Deoband seminary, who debated Iqbal's interpretation of term's like *millat* and *qawm* (pp. 34-47). For Azad, nationalism was not merely political but rooted in humanism, as Habib observes, forming the foundation of his nationalist thought (p. 147). Habib further examines the contributions of Azad's contemporaries and lesser-known figures who supported the cause of composite nationalism. He emphasizes Azad's reliance on leaders such as Allah Baksh Sumroo (p. 168) and highlights the sacrifices of numerous Muslim figures whose efforts for an undivided India remain underappreciated in contemporary narratives.

In the fourth chapter, “*Ghubar-i Khatir*: Beyond Faith and Politics,” Habib turns to Azad’s literary contributions, particularly *Ghubar-i Khatir*, written during his imprisonment in Ahmadnagar Fort. Described as a masterpiece akin to *Tarjuman al-Qur’an*, this work addresses diverse themes ranging from philosophical inquiries to personal reflections. Habib reveals Azad’s love for solitude, nature, and simple pleasures—such as swimming, tea, and birds—as well as his belief in cheerfulness as a hallmark of success (pp. 179–182). A significant focus is Azad’s passion for music, explored in what Habib identifies as Azad’s longest letter on the subject. Azad argued that music, far from being prohibited, remained a cherished art in Islamic history, with the Prophet denouncing only its excessive indulgence (p. 208). The work also reflects Azad’s deep engagement with Urdu and Persian poetry, further illustrating his literary and cultural sensibilities. Habib characterizes *Ghubar-i Khatir* as a “literary masterpiece,” offering unparalleled insights into Azad’s multifaceted personality and intellectual depth, aspects not as prominently featured in his other works.

In the final chapter, “Building a New India: Education, Culture, Science, and the Pluralist Ethos,” Habib explores Azad’s significant contributions to shaping post-independence India’s education, science, and cultural policies. Azad faced the dual challenges of addressing the economic devastation left by colonial rule and reforming an inadequate education system. He emphasized unity, justice (*‘adl*), and the democratization of learning as essential pillars for national progress (p. 228). Although well-versed in Western philosophy and languages, Azad criticized Macaulay’s education model for its failure to cultivate national consciousness and equity. Instead, he advocated for inclusive education, particularly for women and adults, as a means to counter societal narrow-mindedness (p. 231). While committed to preserving Indian culture, Azad pragmatically acknowledged the utility of English in modern education (p. 228). Habib highlights Azad’s alignment with Tagore’s humanist ideals, evident in his efforts to integrate arts and literature into education through institutional reforms. However, Azad’s vision was often constrained by persistent budgetary limitations—a challenge that continues to affect India’s education system (p. 240). The chapter

concludes by underscoring Azad's enduring legacy of pluralism, where his scholarly and cultural expertise informed progressive policy-making. For Azad, education was not merely a tool for development but a necessity as fundamental as food and shelter (pp. 231, 236).

In the epilogue, Habib summarizes the key themes from earlier chapters, highlighting Azad's neglect of personal health and reaffirming his stature as a visionary scholar rather than merely a politician—one who advocated for an inclusive, composite India (p. 271). Habib's analysis occasionally appears uneven, particularly in addressing Azad's controversial stance on the "unity of religions," which was rooted in his unconventional exegesis of *Surah al-Fatihah*. While many traditional scholars have criticized this view, others argue that Azad's position has been misrepresented¹—though scholarly ambiguity persists (p. 97). A significant divergence emerges in evaluating Azad's exegetical objectives. Azad sought to purify Qur'anic interpretation by removing Roman and Iranian influences, advocating for a return to the pristine interpretations of early Muslim exegetes. Habib, however, challenges this premise, arguing that interpretive diversity is not "un-Islamic or against the spirit of Islam" (p. 97) but rather aligns with Islam's rich intellectual tradition. The work has some shortcomings. Some references are missing (pp. 61, 91, 98, 109–110), while others are incorrect (pp. 109–111, endnotes 107–112). Additionally, some typographical errors are present (pp. 142, 145, and 185). Despite these issues, the book offers an engaging narrative of Azad's life and his pivotal role in shaping a unified India.

MOHD YASEEN GADA
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

Endnotes

- ¹ On this see, Muhammad Yaseen Gada (2022), “Tarjumān Al-Qur’ān and Tafhīm Al-Qur’ān: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Qur’ānic Chapters,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 7(1): 115-40. <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v7i1.467>, pp. 119-120.

FORUM

KOPAH: A Serbian Translation of the Qur'ān by Mićo Ljubibratić

ENES KARIĆ

Abstract

This essay examines the historical and social context surrounding Mihajlo Mića Ljubibratić's first translation of the Qur'ān into Serbian, published in 1895 in Belgrade. The article explores the political and social factors influencing Ljubibratić's decision to undertake this translation, as well as the reception of his work in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. It also discusses subsequent editions and publications of the translation. Additionally, the essay analyzes the Russian and French sources used in the translation and provides commentary on Ljubibratić's stylistic choices within their sociolinguistic context.

Enes Karić is a professor of Qur'anic studies and history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo. He previously served as the Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports with the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1994-1996).

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Keywords: Mićo Ljubibratić, Qur’ān translation, Serbian nationalism

Introduction

The year 2025 marks 130 years since the publication of the first edition of *Korān* (KOPAH), Mićo Ljubibratić Hercegovac’s (1839–1889) Serbian translation of the Qur’ān. This is, as far as is known, the first published and printed complete translation of the Qur’ān into the common language of many Southern Slavs, now referred to as Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, and Montenegrin. In 1895, Ljubibratić’s translation was published in Belgrade by the Ilija Milosavljević Kolarac Foundation. It was printed in Cyrillic and featured a beautifully designed edition with the title page stating: “Printing financed by the Foundation of Ilija Milosavljević Kolarac, State Printing Office, Biograd, 1895.”

Few books published in the Balkans at the end of the 19th century have garnered such widespread and diverse attention. Ljubibratić’s *KOPAH* drew interest from political, cultural, religious, and national audiences. Its publication is accompanied by a fascinating story, not only about the translator and his wife Mara, who faithfully preserved his work after his death in 1889, but also about the translation itself, which serves as a testament to significant national, cultural, religious, and political currents in Austria-Hungary and the Western Balkans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first edition of Ljubibratić’s *KOPAH* in Belgrade was well received by many Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans, where it was reported as an unusual and noteworthy event in the press at the time, though there was some opposition. This essay sheds greater light on the production of this remarkable translation.

The Life of Mićo Ljubibratić

Mićo Ljubibratić was born in 1839 in the village of Ljubovo near Trebinje,¹ in eastern Herzegovina. He completed his Orthodox elementary education at the nearby Duži monastery before continuing his studies at a general grammar school in Dubrovnik, often referred to as the Italian

school, where he became proficient in Italian and French. In 1857, amidst uprisings against the Ottoman Empire in eastern Herzegovina, the young Ljubibratić joined the insurgency under the leadership of Luka Vukalović. According to the Serbian encyclopedia, Ljubibratić demonstrated his commitment to the cause by setting fire to his own house, signaling to his comrades that he had no home to return to and was fully dedicated to the fight.²

During the uprisings of the Orthodox population in Herzegovina from 1857 to 1878, which were directed against the Ottoman Empire and often against Muslims in the region, Ljubibratić played a key role in peace negotiations, representing the insurgents in meetings with Bosnian Muslim representatives in places like Cavtat and Mostar. It was likely during this period that he conceived the idea of translating the Qur'an into Serbian, believing such a translation could help persuade Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) to support Serbian national initiatives in the Western Balkans. Ljubibratić fought against both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, rallying support from Orthodox, Muslim, and Catholic communities. His influence extended from Imotski to Italy, where in 1880 he met Giuseppe Garibaldi.³ The only empire against which he did not lead uprisings was the Russian Empire. To further his revolutionary goals, Ljubibratić also became involved in Freemasonry.

Ljubibratić proudly fought as an insurgent “for the Serbian national cause” in the Balkans during the second half of the 19th century. However, unlike most insurgent leaders of his time, he recognized the importance of cooperation with Bosnian and Herzegovinian Muslims and Catholics. His work on KOPAH, the first complete translation of the Qur'an into a South Slavic language in the Western Balkans, was a direct consequence of his rebellious actions against the Ottoman and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Information about Ljubibratić as a translator of the Qur'an remains scarce. In encyclopedic entries, he is barely mentioned, as noted by Sinan Gudžević, who asked, “Who was Mihajlo Mićo Ljubibratić, whose literary work is completely unknown, and who [...] accomplished a translation feat of translating the Qur'an?”⁴

During the 1857–1862 uprising, it is known that Ljubibratić served as the secretary to the uprising's leader, Luka Vukalović. Sparse and

unreliable sources suggest he lived in Belgrade from 1864, led secret organizations, was subordinate to Garašanin, and was influenced by the Italian Risorgimento. The most credible accounts of Ljubibratić during the Herzegovina uprising come from Kosta Grujić, who wrote in September 1875:

Everyone around me is sleeping, only I am awake, partly because I am bitten by lice and partly out of desperation, for I can see that the entire uprising is amiss. The Montenegrins here are mostly here to plunder, with no discipline, almost like our Herzegovinians, some of whom are fraternizing with the Turks and working against us, while others lack courage. The few who are capable are disorganized. Leaders could not be worse, and there is no central government. Mićo [Ljubibratić] is opposed everywhere, and he himself, poor man, is exhausted in body and spirit, for he too has lost all hope in the progress of our cause. Serbia is not rising, Montenegro does not dare, and alone, we are not capable of doing anything with such people. Committees are useless and are only making things worse. There is no bread, there is nothing. The whole cause has just failed.⁵

The Serbian historian Milorad Ekmečić (1928–2015), in his text published in *Biografije Matice Srpske* (*Biographies of Matica Srpska*),⁶ described Mićo Ljubibratić as follows:

Ljubibratić traveled to Italy to negotiate cooperation with Giuseppe Garibaldi, staying in Caprera and Rome. The period from 1877 to the Herzegovina uprising of 1882 marked the development of his political ideology for Serbian liberation. He devised a project for reconciliation with the Mohammedans and the conditions that should be established with the Porte, collaborating closely with a group of Bosnian beys, particularly with Omerbeg Ćemerlić.

Ekmečić emphasized Ljubibratić's strong interest in a political agreement with Bosnian Muslims stating, "Cooperation with Muslims, even at the cost of sacrificing peasant rights to resolve the agrarian issue by

dismantling feudal relations, was the foundation of his activity.”⁷ Ekmečić added that Mićo Ljubratić expressed his political activities toward Bosnian Muslims in calls for joint cooperation against the Ottoman Empire:

He wrote many calls to Bosnian Muslims to work together with the Serbs in liberating Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Turks and in this regard, he became one of the most significant ideologues of secret organizations. Under the very recognizable influence of the Italian Risorgimento, he harmonized Serbian liberation ideology with the Italian model. In the first place, the starting point was that ethnic identity is determined by language, so all the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina, “regardless of religion, are brothers: according to God, language and homeland.” Sent to Herzegovina in order to prepare the joint uprising of Muslims and Orthodox Christians in 1866, he completed the ideological framework of this future revolution based on the equality of all religions, the preservation of the property of the Muslim nobility and the democratic form of the state.⁸

According to Muhamed Hadžijahić (1918–1986), a Bosniak historian, the first complete translation of the Qur’ān into one of the mentioned Slavic languages appeared in 1895 under the title *Коран*. Hadžijahić emphasized the significant role of Ljubratić as a “Herzegovinian uprising leader”⁹ in the 1875 uprising in Nevesinje and its surroundings. He further elaborated on Mićo Ljubratić’s contributions, stating:

The author of [this] translation [of the Qur’ān] is a Herzegovinian uprising leader Mićo Ljubratić, who stood out as a proponent of fraternal cooperation between Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. The translation was published after Ljubratić’s death.¹⁰

The uprising against the Ottoman Empire erupted once more in Herzegovina in 1875, persisting until 1878, when Austria-Hungary, following the Congress of Berlin, forcibly invaded and occupied Bosnia

and Herzegovina under the pretext of “establishing order.” With Austria-Hungary’s arrival in 1878, Mićo Ljubibratić’s political aspirations were dashed.¹¹ The Ottoman Empire was ousted, but Ljubibratić now believed it would be easier to garner support among the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina to resist the new empire.

Miće Ljubibratić was already known to Austro-Hungarian authorities and their spies before the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. His insurgent tendencies and pro-Russian ideological leanings were viewed with suspicion. Some sources indicate that Ljubibratić was arrested near Imotski in 1876 and subsequently imprisoned for a year in Linz and Graz. Additionally, his insurgent activities were often undermined by regional intrigues among rival insurgent groups. Politically, Ljubibratić advocated for a joint uprising of Muslims and Christians against Ottoman rule. In pursuit of this goal, he maintained contacts with Bosnian Muslim representatives, such as Omerbeg Ćemerlić, to foster collaboration.

Ljubibratić championed the concept of “Bosnian unitarism,” envisioning Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign state, akin to Serbia’s independence achieved with Ottoman consent and its subsequent withdrawal. He aspired for a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina to align with Serbia as an ally in the Balkans during the latter half of the 19th century. In his work *Memoari sa Balkana* (Memoirs from the Balkans, 1858–1878), Martin Gjurgjević (1845–1913) described Ljubibratić’s political stance:

A certain Mićo Ljubibratić, a native of Herzegovina (possibly Zubac) who settled in Biograd after the Battle of Grahovac, came to Herzegovina and played a significant role in the uprising, acting in favor of the Serbian Obrenović dynasty. This was met with disapproval from both Montenegro and Austro-Hungarian diplomacy. One day, he was apprehended by Austrian gendarmes in Dalmatia and expelled to Serbia. On this occasion, Ljubibratić declared that he cared little about who governed Herzegovina, as long as: “The Turk is out!”¹²

In essence, Ljubibratić was open to Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming autonomous and independent, provided the Ottoman Empire was

expelled from the region. This stance embodied his vision of Bosnian unitarism. However, during that period, many nationalist factions in Serbia and Montenegro opposed Ljubibratić and his proposal for an alliance between Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. These groups advocated for Bosnia and Herzegovina, or at least a significant portion of it, to be annexed by Serbia. This opposition likely contributed to Serbia's delayed intervention to secure Ljubibratić's release from the Austro-Hungarian prisons in Linz and Graz.

In Serbian historiography, Mićo Ljubibratić's legacy is met with ambivalence. His socialist tendencies and advocacy for Bosnian unitarism were seen as overly ambitious, particularly his calls for Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the uprising against the Ottomans and, later, Austria-Hungary. During the peace negotiations of 1875 and in discussions between Ljubibratić and the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it remains speculative whether proposals were made to establish Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent and autonomous state or if such demands were intended for the Ottoman Porte in Istanbul. From this historical distance, it is important to avoid projecting modern notions of "naive pacifism" onto the second half of the 19th century. One should not assume that pre-1878 Bosnia and Herzegovina, prior to the Austro-Hungarian occupation, experienced an "idyllic political agreement" between Mićo Ljubibratić's Serbian insurgent faction and the Mostar *ulama* or the broader Herzegovinian bey elite.

In any case, Mićo Ljubibratić, after his release from prison in Graz, returned to Belgrade before traveling to Rome in 1879. According to the limited available sources, such as the online edition of *Srpska enciklopedija* (Serbian Encyclopedia),¹³ it was during this time in Rome that he began translating the *Qur'ān* into Serbian. Upon his return to Belgrade, Ljubibratić continued his insurgent activities, notably participating in the 1882 Herzegovina-Boka Kotorska uprising. His political agitation, along with that of his associates and Orthodox compatriots, encouraged many Bosniak Muslims to join this uprising, forging a new alliance with the Serbs against the Austro-Hungarian government.¹⁴ However, the uprising was not without its share of intrigue, deception, and betrayal. Following the failed uprising, Ljubibratić returned to Belgrade, where he lived out

the remainder of his life peacefully. It is believed that during his final years, from 1882 to 1889, he completed his Serbian translation of the Qur'ān. Mićo Ljubibratić passed away in Belgrade on February 26, 1889.¹⁵

Miće Ljubibratić's Translation of the Qur'ān

Miće Ljubibratić, the man who undertook the challenging task of translating the Qur'ān into Serbian, succeeded in producing a remarkably eloquent and polished translation. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his work published, as he passed away in 1889. Nevertheless, his translation is marked by a strikingly beautiful language and style. Even today, 130 years after its publication, Ljubibratić's work remains a testament to linguistic richness and clarity. His translation is characterized by vivid expression and enduring relevance, with many passages untouched by the passage of time. It is evident that Ljubibratić made the final revisions to his translation between 1885 and 1889. However, the exact moment when he decided to begin this monumental task remains a subject of inquiry.

It is challenging to provide reliable and factual answers to this question. The claim that he decided to translate the Qur'ān in Rome in 1879 cannot be corroborated by any documents, relying solely on "second-hand" testimonies. According to Muhamed Hadžijahić, the idea of translating the Qur'ān into Serbian had been brewing in Belgrade and Serbia since the mid-nineteenth century, driven by utilitarian and pragmatic goals. Hadžijahić therefore stated that:

[T]he idea of publishing a Serbian translation of the Qur'ān dates back to 1868, if not earlier. It seems that this project was motivated above all by political reasons with the aim of building national-political sympathies among Bosnian Muslims through the publication of the translation of the Qur'ān [... Jovan] Skerlić wrote that in 1868 [the newspaper] Srbija reported that a "learned and virtuous Serbian priest is translating the Koran into Serbian," and [the newspaper] Vila suggested that the United Serb Youth should publish that translation and "in this way, show its opinion about its Turkified brothers in the clearest way."¹⁶

Hadžijahić continued stating that, “It is useful to supplement Skerlić’s information with the fact that exactly at this time in Belgrade Ljubibratić was actively working on the uprising in Bosnia, while counting on winning over the Bosnian Muslims. On May 11, 1867 [Mihajlo Mićo] Ljubibratić also submitted his plan for the uprising to Minister Garašanin.”¹⁷ It should be pointed out that Muhamed Hadžijahić also noted that in this period in Belgrade Mićo Ljubibratić was spreading his ideas about the “joint action of Orthodox Christians and Muslims” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and he assured the then Serbian authorities in Belgrade that it was possible to win over “our Turkified brothers” in the fight against the Turks. In order to explain Mićo Ljubibratić’s beliefs, Muhamed Hadžijahić referred to the work *Prilozi za proučavanje hercegovačkih ustanaka 1857-1878* (Supplements to the Study of the Herzegovinian Uprisings of 1857-1878). In the work, Mićo Ljubibratić is quoted stating that, “Reconciliation with the Mohammedans of Serbian nationality is my idea, which I have been working on since 1861. Since my arrival to Belgrade in 1867, I recommended this idea to all Serbian governments up to 1874.”¹⁸ Hadžijahić added that “in 1867 there were [...] also some contacts established, so that a deputation of Bosnian Muslims also came to Belgrade.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, we do not know any further details about who were the members of this delegation of Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina that traveled to Belgrade in 1867, nor do we know who received the “Muslim delegation” in Belgrade and how they were treated. It should also be mentioned that the *Srpska Enciklopedija* (online edition) mentions Omer (Omerbeg) Ćemerlić as one of Mihajlo Mićo Ljubibratić’s collaborators working on reconciliation projects between the Orthodox Christians and Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁰

Several sources mention that the news about the translation of the Qur’ān into Serbian in Belgrade even spread to other European capitals. For example, “Revue Britannique,” in 1875, in its 6th volume (pp. 243-244) mentions the translation, where it says the following in French:

Le Coran a été traduit en slave à Belgrade, à l’usage des musulmans de cette nationalité, auxquels on offre de rentrer dans le giron slave

sans renoncer à leurs croyances. Le fanatisme féroce des partisans monténégrins, qui massacrent sans pitié les musulmans slaves, a fait avorter pour le moment la propagande serbe. Mais, comme les beys n'ont guère moins à se plaindre des Turcs, un accord entre les Slaves chrétiens et musulmans sur le pied de l'égalité civile et la liberté des cultes n'est pas aussi éloigné qu'on pourrait le croire. Il existe à cet égard un précédent, celui des musulmans de l'île d'Eubée, qui sont devenus de très-bons et loyaux citoyens du royaume hellénique et fournissent à son armée d'excellents officiers. Il ne faut pas oublier que la traduction du Coran constitue un schisme séparant radicalement les musulmans qui l'acceptent du khalifat de Constantinople, et que, si cet exemple était imité, l'islamisme, qui est de sa nature une religion "acéphale"; en d'autres termes, un protestantisme, ne tarderait pas à prendre rang à la suite des autres sectes protestantes autour de l'astre du christianisme, comme l'a fait récemment le mosaïsme.²¹

The Qur'ān was translated into Slavic in Belgrade for the benefit of Muslims of that nationality, who were encouraged to return to the Slavic fold without renouncing their religion. The savage fanaticism of the Montenegrin insurgents, who mercilessly massacred Slavic Muslims, temporarily halted Serbian propaganda. However, as the beys had little reason to long for the Turks, an agreement between Christian and Muslim Slavs under the banner of civil equality and religious freedom was not as implausible as it might seem. There was a precedent for this in the Muslims of Euboea, who became loyal citizens of the Greek kingdom and provided excellent officers for the Greek army. It is important to note that the translation of the Qur'ān marked a schism between radical Muslims who accepted the caliphate from Constantinople (Tsarigrad). If this example were to be followed, Islam, which by its nature is "acephalous" (i.e., without a supreme leader or head of religion), could become akin to Protestantism. In turn, it might not be long before it followed the path of other Protestant sects around the center of Christianity, much like the Mosaic religion recently did.

Unfortunately, it must be noted once again that comprehensive research on the broader reception of KOPAH (i.e., Ljubibratić's translation) in the Serbian press, as well as within the Serbian literary and political sphere at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, has yet to be conducted. What we have so far are only fragments and limited information about KOPAH and its translator, Ljubibratić. Following the sparse mentions of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān in the works of Serbian writers, we came across the book *Последњи пророк* [The Last Prophet] by Dragutin J. Ilić.²² Dragutin J. Ilić (1858–1926), the brother of the renowned Serbian writer Vojislav Ilić (1862–1894), wrote a critical review of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān just one year after its publication. He stated:

It was, first of all, useful to compare Ljubibratić's translation of the Koran with the Arabic text, because it was not translated from the original. In 2:209 and 35:9, Ljubibratić's translation reads: "Bog upućuje koga hoće a ostavlja u zabludi koga hoće" [lit. God guides whom He wills and leads astray whom He wills], but Arabic language experts claim that it does not say: "koga" [whom] but "ko" [who].²³ In the first version, Free Will [of people] would be absolutely denied, and in the second it would be absolutely recognized.²⁴

Occasionally, one might come across some news or references to the publication of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān in books by Serbian writers from that era. However, the full scope of the Serbian literary reception of KOPAH remains unknown. It appears futile to search the archives and the written legacy of Serbian writers from the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, as there is little hope of uncovering anything new that has not already been published. The publication of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān was also marked by an incident in 1895, specifically during the time when KOPAH had already been printed and was awaiting binding at the printing house in Belgrade. According to details provided by *Srpski Književni Glasnik* (Serbian Literary Herald) from November 1, 1931, the

writer and ethnologist Milan Đ. Milićević documented the following in his memoirs, dated March 14, 1895: “Ljuba Stojanović came to me and reminded me that there was a cross on the Koran next to the name of the late Ljubibratić (the translator) and that this would be a scandal for Muslims and a convenient opportunity to slander us Orthodox. So, oh my, I decided to erase the entire cross with a knife. I wrote to Ćumić to urge him to do the same thing on all copies.”²⁵ Muhamed Hadžijahić commented on this Milan Đ. Milićević’s note thus: “Because of this, if one looks carefully at the cover sheet and the title page of the edition of the Qur’ān from 1895, what can be noticed on every copy is an erased part where a cross was printed next to Mićo Ljubibratić’s name, and on some of the printed copies the title page was completely replaced with a newly printed one.”²⁶

The Reception of Ljubibratić’s Translation of the Qur’ān in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As mentioned, KOPAH or Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān was published in Belgrade in early 1895, nearly six years after the translator’s death. News of the “translation of the Qur’ān into Serbian” was also covered by several newspapers outside Serbia at the time. The magazine *Carigradski Glasnik* (*The Constantinople Messenger*), published in Serbian in Istanbul from January 14, 1895, to 1901, once a week,²⁷ reported on the release of Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān in a brief article. When Mićo Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān was published, many *ulama* circles from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandžak, and Montenegro strongly opposed it. It is possible that someone from these conservative and traditionalist circles followed the publication of Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān with a note in the “official gazette of the Scutari vilayet,”²⁸ as Hadžijahić described it, which read:

The translation of the Qur’ān in the Serbian language that was published in Belgrade cannot be in the least equal to the original. It is also stated that they found out that the translation “was sent to bookstores in Podgorica and it is sold there,” so it is considered

*necessary to issue this warning in case that this translation ends up in the hands of Muslim citizens and is read by them, whether they get the translation for free, or they pay money for it.*²⁹

Hadžijahić mentioned that he does not know the name of the newspaper in which these warnings were written. He claims that he found the note stuck on a copy of Ljubibratić's translation that belonged to the famous Sarajevo *hafiz* Ajni Bušatlić (1871–1946).³⁰ The newspaper of Mehmedbeg Kapetanović Ljubušak (1839–1902), *Bošnjak*,³¹ also wrote about Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān and (with reference to the newspaper *Carigradski Glasnik*) said: "In its latest issue, *Carigradski Glasnik* brings the news that the Ćupić's foundation in Biograd had a translation of the Koran made public, and that the official newspaper of the Scutari vilayet is angry, saying that the translation will not be correct, because it is not everyone's job to translate the Koran and establish its fundamental statements." In this same issue, the newspaper *Bošnjak*³² added the following short comment on this news: "To this, we say that it would be good if the Koran was translated correctly into Slavic, because then surely all learned people would have a different opinion about the Koran and Islam, because they would see that Islam was founded on firm foundations." The newspaper *Bošnjak*, probably its editor Mehmed Beg Kapetanović Ljubušak, did not provide any broader explanation of what is meant by "Slavic," nor was it indicated who are the people who should translate the Qur'ān into "Slavic."

Among the significant Bosniak newspapers from the first half of the twentieth century that considered Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān, the ultraconservative magazine *Hikmet* from Tuzla stands out for its response.³³ In a series of harsh articles directed generally against the translation of the Qur'ān, *Hikmet* disparagingly claims that Ljubibratić's translation is "a watered-down stew":³⁴

When direct translations from the Arabic language can be so weak, hallow and even completely faulty and incorrect, what should then be said about Ljubibratić's translation into our language, which is, as our people would say, "a watered-down stew," because it was

*translated from Russian, and into Russian from French, which is often opposed and referred to by our so-called progressives...*³⁵

Tuzla's *Hikmet* was not alone in its claim that Ljubibratić's translation had something to do with the French translation of the Qur'ān by Albert de Biberstein-Kasimirski (1808–1887), which was published in Paris in 1841.³⁶ This was also claimed by Mehmed Handžić (1906–1944), the aforementioned Dragutin J. Ilić and others. That there is a possible connection between *Le Coran*, i.e., the translation of the Qur'ān by Albert de Biberstein-Kasimirski, on the one hand, and Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān, on the other, can be deduced from the recent research on the influence that Kasimirski's translation had in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. In his *Translating the Qur'ān in an Age of Nationalism, Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey*,³⁷ M. Brett Wilson argues:

*The importance of the French language in late Ottoman intellectual life should not be underestimated, even in the domain of Islamic thought. Someone living in nineteenth-century Istanbul could easily purchase a French translation of the Qur'ān, complete and freestanding, without Arabic text or the glosses of commentators [...] It is all but certain that the most widely read translation in the late Ottoman period was the French-language Le Koran by Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski, originally published in 1841. It was in this context that Ottoman Muslim intellectuals began to discuss the need for a Turkish translation that resembled those in European languages.*³⁸

Here, Wilson sheds new light on Ljubibratić's decision to use *Le Coran*, i.e., the French translation by Biberstein-Kasimirski, as the primary template for his Serbian translation of the Qur'ān. It is likely that Ljubibratić was aware of the popularity of this French translation of the Qur'ān in Istanbul, and indeed on the Ottoman Empire as a whole amid the *tanzimat* reforms. And, in keeping with the modernist spirit of the time, it would likely have seemed natural to translate the Qur'ān into the Serbian language using *Le Coran*.

Returning to the reception of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'an by Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it should be noted that Tuzla magazine *Hikmet* claimed that, "translations of the Qur'an, due to their weakness, more or less emptiness and one-sidedness, do not affect the soul of the reader even remotely as the original, which is very often recited [i.e., read] with complete respect even by those who do not understand it."³⁹ Due to this assumption, *Hikmet* could not commend the style of Ljubibratić's translation. However, it is noteworthy that Ljubibratić's translation was praised by the most traditional Bosnian *ulama* between the two world wars, including Ali Riza Karabeg (1872–1944) and Mehmed Handžić (1906–1944). For example, Mehmed Handžić, a graduate of the renowned Islamic university al-Azhar, noted that Ljubibratić's translation is both linguistically and stylistically elegant: "Ljubibratić's translation—printed forty years ago—⁴⁰ despite our beautiful language it was written in, contains many mistakes and mistranslated verses. Furthermore, this translation is not translated from the original, but it is a translation of a translation."⁴¹

As can be clearly seen, Mehmed Handžić praised Ljubibratić's translation, describing it as characterized by "our beautiful language," which is a significant tribute to its quality. However, despite acknowledging its merits, Handžić also noted that the translation "contains many mistakes and mistranslated verses." Unfortunately, he did not specify which parts were incorrect or provide examples of passages in Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'an that were "mistranslated," nor did he list all the shortcomings of the translation. In his brochure *Prvi prijevodi Kur-ana u svijetu i kod nas* (The First Translations of the Qur'an in the World and in Our Country),⁴² after a brief analysis and presentation of Russian, Polish, Czech, and Croatian—complete or partial—translations of the Qur'an, Mustafa Busuladžić (1914–1945) turned to the "Serbian" translation of the Qur'an by Mićo Ljubibratić:

The Qur'an was translated into Serbian from French by Mićo Ljubibratić-Hercegovac, titled Koran (Printing financed by the Foundation of Ilija Milosavljević Kolarac, State Printing Office, Biograd, 1895). Ljubibratić's Serbian language is clear and sound. Based on Ljubibratić's Serbian translation, physician M.

*Jošanović-Batut, a professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade, made a selection of passages related to health and published them as Život, zdravlje, bolest i smrt u Kuranu (Life, Health, Illness, and Death in the Koran, Published by the Institute of Public Health in Sarajevo, State Printing House, Sarajevo, 1927).*⁴³

Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān also influenced some Bosnian Muslim translators of the Qur'ān in mid-twentieth-century Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mustafa Busuladžić believes that Ali Riza Karabeg (1872–1944),⁴⁴ the translator of the Qur'ān from Mostar, made extensive use of Ljubibratić's translation: "Along with the translation, Karabeg wrote a short preface. Karabeg's translation, which the translator himself claims to be translated from the Arabic original, is actually an adaptation with minor changes of Ljubibratić's Serbian translation, although Karabeg knew Arabic very well."⁴⁵ It should also be noted that *Zodijak* library in Belgrade published a selection from Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān titled *Iz Kur'āna časnog – Svetu celom opomene* (From the Holy Qur'ān – A Warning to the Whole World).⁴⁶

The Style of Ljubibratić's Translation of the Qur'ān and the Influence of Kasimirski's French Translation

Some observations have already been made regarding the praise for the style and language of Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān (e.g., by Handžić and Busuladžić). Furthermore, the fact that, over different periods, two selections from Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān have been published, along with two new complete editions in Cyrillic script—in 1990 in Sarajevo and in 2016 in Sarajevo and Banja Luka—speaks to the readability of the translation solutions offered by Ljubibratić. Ljubibratić's translation of the first surah of the Qur'ān (*al-Fātiḥa*) serves as an excellent prologue to his work. He opts for "ordinary words," achieving a sense of closeness in receiving the message of the Qur'ān and effectively conveying the voice of the Qur'ān, which suggests to people that they, like everything else, according to the Qur'ānic worldview, have one and only God, their creator:

У име Бога благога и милосрднога

- 1 Слава Богу, господару свега свијета,
- 2 Благому, милосрдному,
- 3 Владару судњег дана.
- 4 Тебе ми обожавамо, од тебе ми помоћи просимо.
- 5 Упути нас на праву стазу,
- 6 На стазу онијех које си ти обасуо добротинством,
- 7 Не онијех, који су на себе навукли гњев твој, нити онијех који блуде.⁴⁷

From reception theories, it is understood that every translation of a literary or religious text is also regarded as the translator's interpretation of that text. This principle applies to translations of the Qur'ān as well. Each translation of the Qur'ān serves as both an interpretation of the text and a reflection of the translator's views on Islam, their perception of the Qur'ān, and related matters. In this context, Mićo Ljubibratić's *KOPAH* is significant from both a theological (particularly comparative-theological) and a socio-linguistic perspective. Regarding these viewpoints—both comparative-theological and socio-linguistic—it is evident that Mićo Ljubibratić drew upon his knowledge of the Qur'ān and Islam from his high school education in Dubrovnik, his subsequent study of Islamic literature, and his interactions with contemporary Bosnian Muslims in Mostar, Sarajevo, and elsewhere. Even among the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina (who today identify as Bosniaks), Islamic terminology in the Bosnian language, as well as its religious lexicon, developed relatively late—at least in written form, using Latin and Cyrillic scripts—during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

It should be acknowledged that Islam, as both a religion and a culture, has influenced South Slavic languages, particularly those spoken by Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania. This influence is also apparent among Catholics and Orthodox communities in the Western Balkans. Many terms from the Qur'ān have been assimilated into colloquial language, such as *zakāt*

(giving alms), *ṣadaqah* (charity), and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). Notably, the Persian word *namāz* (performing obligatory rituals, in Arabic *ṣalawāt*) has played a significant role. Bosnian Muslims adopted the Persian term *namāz* as a substitute for the Bosnian word *molitva* (prayer). Over time, *namāz* became perceived as more “Islamic” to them than the Slavic term *molitva*. In the sociolinguistics of the Bosnian language, it is sometimes suggested that *molitva* signifies a “prayer” of lesser significance than *namāz* or *ṣalawāt*. When Bosnians say *klanjati namāz* (to perform *namāz*), it is understood to indicate something higher, greater, or more valuable than *vršenje molitve* (performing prayer). A similar distinction exists between the words *Gospod* (Lord) and *Gospodar* [Lord]. Generally, but not always, Christians use *Gospod*, while Muslims use *Gospodar*. This distinction arises from certain linguistic logic, a subject studied by sociolinguistics. The translator of the Qur’ān Mićo Ljubibratić sticks to his Orthodox terminology. He uses the word *Господ* (Lord) for the Qur’ānic word *rabb* and he also uses the word *молитва* (prayer) for the Qur’ānic word *ṣalāt* etc. Indeed, in Ljubibratić’s translation, the principle of intelligibility is not violated, although here sociolinguistics detects a gradual “transition of signs” or “transition of meaning” from one religious-linguistic area to another religious-linguistic area. There are thousands of proofs in Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān that the principle of intelligibility has not been violated. An excellent example is the surah Āli ‘Imrān (3:7):

Он је тај који ти је од своје стране послао књигу.

У њој се налази неизмјенивијех стихова, који су као мати књиге,

и других који су у преноснијем сликама.

Они којих срца скрећу с правога пута

трче за преноснијем сликама,

из жеље за нередом и из жеље за тумачењем;

али њихово тумачење нико не зна осим Бога.

Људи становитог знања рећи ће:

“Ми вјерујемо у ову књигу,

све што она садржи долази од нашега Господа.”

Јест, само људи разумом обдарени размишљају.⁴⁸

“*Стухови*” (verses) instead of *āyāts* (signs), then “*Господ*” instead of “*Gospodar*”—all of this represents Ljubibratić’s opting for “Orthodox” terminology, which a traditional Muslim reader from Bosnia and Herzegovina notices quite clearly. Of course, *KOPAH* or Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān contains an abundance of words or syntagms from the aegis of a Serbian Orthodox reading and understanding of the Bible. For instance, in addition to translations such as “*Господ*” and “*стухови*,” there are also translations by Ljubibratić such as: “*дан васкрса*” (day of resurrection),⁴⁹ then “*Господ и анђели*,” (Lord and angels),⁵⁰ and “*Бог и анђели поштују пророка*” (God and angels respect the prophet).⁵¹ Ljubibratić’s translation of the word “*ислам*” [Islam] as “submission to the will of God” is also interesting, as can be seen in the following translation: “*Који год жели друго богослужење ван покораванја вољи Божјој (ислам), то богослужење неће примити Бог...*” (Literally: Whosoever wants another form of worship outside of submission to the will of God (Islam), that worship will not be accepted by God).⁵² Kasimirski’s influence on Ljubibratić is also evident. Kasimirski translated the word Islam with the syntagm “submission to the will of God”: “Quiconque désire un autre culte que la résignation à Dieu (Islam), ce culte ne sera point reçu de lui...”⁵³ In fact, Ljubibratić took Kasimirski’s explanation for the word Islam: “Islām [...] signifie s’en remettre à la volonté de Dieu.” (“Islam [...] means relying on the will of God”).⁵⁴

KOPAH or Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān demonstrates how a translator’s religious and cultural background influences their work. The translator engages in a dialogue with the style of the Qur’ān, bringing their own socio-cultural characteristics into this interaction. This interplay is often evident in the translation. Ljubibratić, an Orthodox Christian, infused his translation of the Qur’ān—a significant contribution to the history of Qur’ān translations into Bosnian (Serbian, Croatian, etc.)—with his personal style and religious worldview. His translation shares stylistic constants with other notable works, such as Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) and Đuro Daničić’s (1825–1882) translations of the Bible. This includes not only the archaic language commonly found in such texts but also the incorporation of specifically *Christian* terms (e.g., *Господ* [Lord], *анђели* [angels], *хаџилук* [pilgrimage]). In his rendering

of Surah al-Baqara (2:1-5), Ljubibratić's spiritual perspective, the elegance of his archaic language, and occasional use of rare words (e.g., *кажипут* [a guide]) are particularly striking.

У име Бога благога и милосрднога

- 1 А. Л. М. Ево књиге о којој не може бити сумње; она је кажипут онијем, који се боје Господа;
- 2 Онијем који вјерују у сакривене ствари, који уредно свршавају молитву и раздају у поклонима добра, која им ми дијелимо;
- 3 Онијем, који вјерују у открића од горе послата теби и прије тебе; онијем који тврдо вјерују у будући живот.
- 4 Само ће с њима бити њихов Господ, само ће они бити блажени.⁵⁵

It should also be mentioned that in translating the name *Allāh*, the most frequent name used for God in the Qur'ān, Ljubibratić followed Kasimirski's example. Namely, just as Kasimirski translated the name *Allāh* with the French word *Dieu*, Ljubibratić used the Slavic word *Бог* (God). The opening segment of the translation of *āyat al-kursī* (2:255) in Kasimirski's translation reads:⁵⁶

*Dieu est le seul Dieu;
il n'y a point d'autre Dieu que lui,
le Vivant, l'Eternel."*

Ljubibratić faithfully followed in his footsteps:

*Бог је једини Бог;
нема другог Бога осим њега,
Живог, Непромјенљивог.*

Kasimirski's influence on Ljubibratić's translation of the Qur'ān is evident in several aspects. For instance, Ljubibratić closely followed the pagination of lines and paragraphs used by the French translator. Additionally, the names of significant figures in Ljubibratić's

translation—such as *Hoj* (Noah), *Аврам* (Abraham), *Мојсије* (Moses), *Лот* (Lot), *Јосиф* (Joseph), and *Вениамин* (Benjamin)—reflect the biblical tradition of the Serbian Orthodox Church. These names are deeply rooted in the Christian tradition of the Orthodox population in the Balkans. Muslim readers of the Qur’ān, accustomed to the Arabic equivalents—Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, Lūṭ, Yūsuf, and Binyamīn—do not find this nomenclature unfamiliar. However, sociolinguistic differences in language use highlight cultural nuances, which can be seen as a form of cultural wealth. Ljubibratić’s translation also reflects his Orthodox Christian background in the way he handles Qur’ānic oaths. For example, he uses expressions like *ваистину* (indeed, certainly, verily) and frequently employs the aorist tense, which aligns with the stylistic conventions of biblical language in the Orthodox tradition.⁵⁷

Concluding Remarks

Ljubibratić’s translation of the Qur’ān is a significant achievement in the South Slavic linguistic and cultural context. Over time, it has gained recognition and praise as a literary work. Through this translation, Ljubibratić demonstrated that the universal message of the Qur’ān could be effectively conveyed in Serbian, a language deeply influenced by Orthodox Christianity. The Serbian orientalist Darko Tanasković (b. 1948) described Ljubibratić’s translation as the “best in terms of language and style, and satisfactory in meaning.”⁵⁸ Following its publication, the translation had a positive influence on some Serbian writers who approached Islamic and Muslim themes with goodwill. For example, Branislav Nušić (1864–1938) wrote *Рамазанске вечери* (Ramadan Nights), and Aleksa Šantić (1868–1924) incorporated many Muslim motifs into his poetry. In terms of style, Ljubibratić’s translation is suitable for use in a mosque. However, its nomenclature and terminology also make it compatible with an Orthodox Christian context. Sinan Gudžević was right when he said the following:

Until someone with a Muslim name turns up and translates at least something from the Bible, Mićo Ljubibratić will not have

a peer in our language. Today, 120 years after the publication of Ljubibratić's Koran, it can be said that it is stylistically very beautiful, that our other translations do not surpass it in terms of readability, and that there can be no doubt that it was done with the greatest love. The fact that melek was translated as anđeo [angel], that Bog [God] was sometimes translated as Gospod [Lord], and poslanik [prophet] as prorok [seer], cannot be held against the translator, because at that time our language did not yet have a fully developed Qur'ānic terminology. The mistakes in Ljubibratić's translation are no greater than the mistakes of other translators of the Qur'ān from that period. One had to wait 43 years for the next translation of the Qur'ān into our language, the one by Ali Riza Karabeg, and it turned out to be merely a superficial reworking of Ljubibratić's translation.⁵⁹

Endnotes

- ¹ This information about Mićo Ljubibratić's origin and life is drawn from the site: <http://srpskaenciklopedija.org/> – Мићо Љубибратић. Accessed on October 1, 2024.
- ² See: <http://srpskaenciklopedija.org/> – Мићо Љубибратић. Accessed on October 1, 2024.
- ³ This information is, in part, drawn from the work: Milorad Ekmečić, *Ustanak u Hercegovini 1882. i istorijske pouke*, objavljeno u: *Radovi iz istorije Bosne i Hercegovine XIX veka*, Beograd, 1997.
- ⁴ Sinan Gudžević, *Miće Ljubibratić*, *Novosti*, Zagreb. January 13, 2015.
- ⁵ Cited according to Sinan Gudžević, *ibid.*
- ⁶ https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/stariSajt/biografije/biografije_sbr.pdf (biografija: Мићо Љубибратић – accessed on October 10, 2024).
- ⁷ https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/stariSajt/biografije/biografije_sbr.pdf (biografija: Мићо Љубибратић – accessed on October 10, 2024).
- ⁸ https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/stariSajt/biografije/biografije_sbr.pdf (biografija: Мићо Љубибратић – accessed on October 10, 2024).
- ⁹ Muhamed Hadžijahić, "Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur'āna kod nas," *Bibliotekarstvo*, XIII/3., Sarajevo, 1967., str. 43.
- ¹⁰ Muhamed Hadžijahić, "Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur'āna kod nas," *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹¹ Instead of a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina—an idea with some popular support—in 1878 Bosnia and Herzegovina became a *corpus separatum* under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- ¹² Martin Gjurgjević, *Memoari sa Balkana (1858 – 1878)*, Sarajevo, 1910., p. 75.
- ¹³ See: <http://srpskaenciklopedija.org/> – Мићо Љубибратић – accessed on October 1, 2024.
- ¹⁴ More on this in: Nikola Stijepović, *Hercegovačko-bokeljski ustanak 1882: borbeno dejstva i pouke*, published by Vojno delo, Beograd, 1963.
- ¹⁵ Mićo Ljubibratić's grave is located in the Belgrade New Cemetery.
- ¹⁶ Muhamed Hadžijahić refers to the book by Jovan Skerlić (1877-1914), *Omladina i njena književnost (1848-1871)*, Beograd, 1906, pp. 221-222.
- ¹⁷ For these claims Muhamed Hadžijahić refers to the following source: Savo Ljubibratić and Todor Kruševac, *Prilozi za proučavanje hercegovačkih ustanaka 1857-1878. godine. Godišnjak istoriskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine*, year VII. Sarajevo, 1956, p. 185 and further.
- ¹⁸ As it was said, Muhamed Hadžijahić refers to the following work: *Prilozi za proučavanje hercegovačkih ustanaka 1857-1878. godine* (authors Savo Ljubibratić and Todor Kruševac), published in: *Godišnjak istoriskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine*, year VII. Sarajevo, 1956, p. 200.

- ¹⁹ Regarding this, Muhamed Hadžijahić refers to the following source: “Zastava” o Bosni i Hercegovini. Prva knjiga. Svjetlost. Sarajevo, 1953, p. 118.
- ²⁰ This Omerbeg Čemerlić is also mentioned in the work *Odabrane biografije* (pub. Matica srpska), volume five, see online edition, entry on Ljubibratić.
- ²¹ “Revue Britannique,” 1875, vol. 6, pp. 243-244.
- ²² Cf. Dragutin J. Ilić, *Poslednji prorok*, published by Knjižara Mite Stajića, Beograd, 1896.
- ²³ What Dragutin J. Ilić wants to say is that the translation of this paragraph of the Qur’ān should read: “God guides to the right path those who want the right path, and leaves in error those who want to remain in error.”
- ²⁴ Dragutin J. Ilić, *Последњи пророк*, *ibid.*, p. 91, note 1.
- ²⁵ Cited according to: *Srpski književni glasnik*, Beograd, November 1, 1931., book XXXIV, No. 5., p. 350. Cf. Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur’āna kod nas*, *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ²⁶ For more see: Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur’āna kod nas*, *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ²⁷ Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur’āna kod nas*, *ibid.*, p. 43.
- ²⁸ Unfortunately, the name of this official newspaper of the Scutari vilayet is not known.
- ²⁹ Muhamed Hadžijahić, “Bibliografske bilješke o prijevodima Kur’āna kod nas,” p. 41.
- ³⁰ Cf. Hadžijahić, *ibid.*, p. 41.
- ³¹ The newspaper Bošnjak was published in Sarajevo from 1891 to 1910, and it was launched by the Bosnian Muslim reformer Mehmed-beg Kapetanović Ljubušak (1839-1902).
- ³² In the same issue of December 10, 1896.
- ³³ Adnan Jahić wrote an excellent monograph on Tuzla *Hikmet*. See: *Hikmet – riječ tradicionalne uleme u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Tuzla, 2004.
- ³⁴ Cf. *Hikmet*, year II, no. 23-24, Tuzla 1931, p. 323.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 323.
- ³⁶ Cf. Albert de Biberstein-Kasimirski, *Le Koran*, Paris (Charpentier), 1841.
- ³⁷ Cf. M. Brett Wilson, *Translating the Qur’ān in an Age of Nationalism, Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2014).
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ³⁹ *Hikmet*, *ibid.*, p. 323.
- ⁴⁰ Mehmed Handžić wrote this in 1937.
- ⁴¹ Mehmed Handžić, *Prijevod Kur’āna od hadži Ali Riza Karabega*, magazine *El-Hidaje*, year II, no. 9., Sarajevo 1937., p. 141.

- ⁴² Cf. Mustafa Busuladžić, *Prvi prijevodi Kur-ana u svijetu i kod nas*, Sarajevo, 1945.
- ⁴³ Mustafa Busuladžić, *ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Kur-an, preveo s arapskog Hadži Ali Riza Karabeg, Štamparija “Prosvjeta“, published by J. Karić, Mostar, 1937.
- ⁴⁵ Mustafa Busuladžić, *ibid.*, p. 13-14.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. *Iz Kur’āna časnog – Svetu celom opomene*, translated by Mićo Ljubibratić, selected by Miodrag Maksimović, foreword by Hasan Kaleši, Library Zodijak (published by Vuk Karadžić), Beograd, 1967.
- ⁴⁷ A literal translation reads: In the name of the compassionate and merciful God; 1. Glory be to God, Lord of the whole world; 2. The compassionate, the merciful; 3. Master of the Day of Judgment; 4. We worship you and you we ask for help; 5. Guide us to the right path; 6. The path of those whom you showered with charity; 7. Not of those who incurred your wrath, nor those who went astray.
- ⁴⁸ КОПАИ, Beograd, 1895, p. 35. A common English translation from Mustafa Khattab’s *The Clear Qur’an* for readers unfamiliar with this verse reads: “He is the One Who has revealed to you [O Prophet] the Book, of which some verses are precise—they are the foundation of the Book—while others are elusive. Those with deviant hearts follow the elusive verses seeking [to spread] doubt through their [false] interpretations—but none grasps their [full] meaning except Allah. As for those well-grounded in knowledge, they say, “We believe in this [Qur’ān]—it is all from our Lord.” But none will be mindful [of this] except people of reason.”
- ⁴⁹ КОПАИ, p. 341. (75:6).
- ⁵⁰ Cf. Ljubibratić’s translation of surah 89:23.
- ⁵¹ Cf. Ljubibratić’s translation of the paragraph in 33:56.
- ⁵² Cf. Ljubibratić’s translation (p. 43.) of the paragraph found in 3:85. (Ljubibratić’s pagination 3:79).
- ⁵³ Cf. Kasimirski, *Le Coran*, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1970, p. 77.
- ⁵⁴ Kasimirski, *ibid.*, p. 72.
- ⁵⁵ A common English translation from Mustafa Khattab’s *The Clear Qur’an* for readers unfamiliar with these verses reads: Alif-Lam-Mim. This is the Book! There is no doubt about it—a guide for those mindful [of Allah], who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you [O Prophet] and what was revealed before you, and have sure faith in the Hereafter. It is they who are [truly] guided by their Lord, and it is they who will be successful.
- ⁵⁶ Kasimirski, p. 66.
- ⁵⁷ On the translation of the Qur’ān by Mićo Ljubibratić and comparisons of his translation solutions with those given by our other translators of the Qur’ān, see many

sections in our book: *Hermeneutika Kur'āna*, published by Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, Zagreb, 1990.

⁵⁸ Darko Tanasković, *Kur'an*, Mogućnosti, časopis za književnost, umjetnost i kulturne probleme, no. 8/9, Split, 1979, p. 882.

⁵⁹ Sinan Gudžević, *Miće Ljubibratić*, Novosti, Zagreb, January 13, 2015.

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Mailing Address:

All correspondence should be addressed to:
AJIS, PO Box 669, Herndon, VA 20172-0669 USA
Phone: 703-230-2847 • Fax: 703-471-3922
www.ajis.org • ajis@iiit.org

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