CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS

P O L I G R A F I

number 99/100 • volume 25, 2020

EDITED BY

LENART ŠKOF & JAVAD TAHERI

P O L I G R A F I

A journal of the *Society for Comparative Religion* (Koper, Slovenija)

ISSN 1318-8828, ISSN (online ed.) 2232-5174

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Editorial Office: Science and Research Centre Koper,
Institute for Philosophical Studies, Garibaldijeva 1, SI-6000 Koper, Slovenia
Phone: +386 5 6637 700, Fax: + 386 5 6637 710, E-mail: helena.motoh@zrs-kp.si
http://ojs.zrs-kp.si/index.php/poligrafi/index

number 99/100, volume 25 (2020)
C O N T E M P O R A R Y M U S L I M - C H R I S T I A N E N C O U N T E R S : L A N D S C A P E S O F T H E O L O G I C A L T H O U G H T
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Online edition, available at: http://ojs.zrs-kp.si/index.php/poligrafi/index
Publishing house – Orders – Copyright ©: Science and Research Centre Koper, Annales ZRS,
Garibaldijeva 1, 6000 Koper, Slovenia
For the publisher: Rado Pišot
Phone: +386 5 663 77 00, Fax: +386 5 663 77 10, E-mail: zalozba-annales@zrs-kp.si

The journal Poligrafi is indexed in: *Scopus*, *The Philosopher's Index, Cobiss*

Double issue: € 20,00

Poligrafi is published with the support of the
Slovenian Research Agency

number 99/100 • volume 25, 2020

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The "Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: Landscapes of Theological Thought" issue of Poligrafi delivers articles on contemporary insights into various modes of inter-faith encounters between Christianity and Islam, discussing the theoretical and practical topics around interreligious dynamics, insights into intersubjective encounters and religious peace-building, and also views on mysticism and spirituality – all as discussed within a broader inter-faith paradigm. Also attached to the main journal topics are two specific analyses from the Muslim point of view – on the meaning of the Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, and an exploration of the religion of Islam by a Malaysian Muslim philosopher, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

In his paper "Religion and Literature; Identity and Individual: Resetting the Muslim-Christian Encounter," Carool Kersten interrogates the notions of cultural schizophrenia, double genealogy and west-eastern affinities as developed by philosophers and creative writers, mainly Daryush Shayegan, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Navid Kermani. As one of the leading contemporary thinkers of the intellectual history of the modern Muslim world, Kersten shows that in the first two decades of the twenty-first century inter-faith encounters have become a casualty of a paradigm shift in the thinking about the global order from the political-ideological bi-polar worldview of the Cold War era to a multipolar world marred by the prospect of culture wars along civilisational fault lines shaped by religiously-informed identity politics. Kersten concludes his essay with a comparative evaluation of Shayegan and Meddeb and their encounters with the European (both French encyclopaedic and German Romantic) strands of thought.

"The Other as My Equal" by Iranian philosopher of religion Rasoul Rasoulipour brings a philosophical framework that allows us to see the causes of human alienation – from each other and from creation. By following the inclusivist notion of God, Rasoulipour first analyses various modes of separation between God and humans in divine scriptures of three Abrahamic religions in order to be able to

understand and possibly overcome the alienation between humans themselves, and also between humans and God. In this endeavour, he reads and interprets thinkers such as Albert Camus, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. Finally, he believes that all struggles, oppression and suffering result from this alienation or divide and that an essential mission of all religions needs to be to heal this divide by seeing the other as equal.

"Christian-Muslim Women in Religious Peacebuilding – Breaking Cycles of Violence," is a contribution from Slovenian ecofeminist theologian Nadja Furlan Štante. The main focus of her paper is the question of women's religious peacebuilding, which is understood in terms of women's active participation in building more liberating theologies and societies. The paper builds upon Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite's assertion that the "violence against women is the largest and longest global war." Furlan Štante is convinced that peacemaking within theology is actually always already marked by an inter-faith and inter-religious character and work, but also that peacemaking should be understood and placed as one of the starting points towards achieving the much needed transformation of the so called "violent" theologies into the more peaceful and liberating ones, especially for the still too marginalised role of women in them.

The aim of "Islamic Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue" as written by Iranian religious thinker and philosopher of religion Mohammad Saeedimehr, is to investigate Islamic mysticism and to find out how and to what extent mystical views can build good grounds for a productive and fruitful interreligious dialogue. Saeedimehr first provides a clarification of the meaning of interreligious dialogue as well as of the notion of Islamic mysticism as he understands and follows them. He then explores three mystical principles as three bases for the promotion of interreligious dialogue: "the unity of existence" (wahdat al-wujud), "the anthropological thesis of fitra (primordial nature)," and "the hermeneutic method for interpreting the Quran." Finally, Saeedimehr brings together the implications of all these three principles for interreligious dialogue.

"An Exploration of the Christian-Muslim Landscape in Modern Syria and the Contribution of Eastern Christian Thought to Inter-

religious Dynamics," is a contribution by an Anglican priest and researcher into Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria, Andrew Ashdown. His paper delves into Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria and broadly interrogates the importance of eastern Christian thought for the interreligious context within the Middle East. Based on fieldwork undertaken in government-held areas during the Syrian conflict, and combined with critical historical and Christian theological reflection, the article contributes to understanding Syria's diverse religious landscape and the multi-layered expressions of Christian-Muslim relations in a way that has not been previously attempted. The article is a contribution to knowledge and understanding of the changing Christian-Muslim dynamic in Syria, along with neighbouring regions and their religious landscapes.

"Expounding the Concept of Religion in Islam as Understood by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas" is a paper by Mesut Idriz. As a professor of Comparative History of Civilizations and Islamic Civilization, Idriz discusses Malaysian Muslim philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who, beginning in the 1970s, explicated his thoughts for the English speaking milieu (as he did later in other languages). Idriz's article is a discussion of the meaning of the concept of religion (dīn) as understood and espoused by al-Attas in his work Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality. This contribution shows that a further comparative study between al-Attas's approach to the religion of Islam and the western and eastern approaches to the concept of religion as exposed in various literatures and beliefs would be a welcome and encouraging effort toward the advancement of mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim religious scholars.

Finally, with "Constructing and Expressing the Muslim Identity: Consuming Eid al-Adha" we complete our special issue. Amar Ahmed (a PhD candidate in sociology of culture) analyses one of the lacunae in ethnographic research with regard to Muslims' identity construction and expression from an internal perspective. As an Islamic holiday, Eid al-Adha is interpreted through the meanings and values that consumers of Eid al-Adha construct as parts of their identity. In this endeavour Ahmed also discusses related notions such as collectivism,

submission to God, sacrifice, charity, patience, and sacredness. The paper thus endeavours to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of what Muslims do and say during their consumption of Eid al-Adha with the anthropological and social meanings associated with this holiday and its rich symbolism.

Lenart Škof

RELIGION AND LITERATURE, IDENTITY AND INDIVIDUAL: RESETTING THE MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER

Carool Kersten

I've participated in so many of them, and I can tell you that they're absolutely nothing. It's gossip. There's no intellectual input in it. There is no respect for scholarship in it. A huge scholarship has already been produced devoted to the question of faith and reason. All this is put aside and we ignore it. We just congratulate one another, saying, "I respect your faith, and you respect mine." This is nonsense.

(Mohammed Arkoun)[1]

It is often far easier for congenial temperaments to understand each other across the lines of religious or cultural traditions than it is for contrasting temperaments to make sense of each other's faith, even when they follow the same cult or utter the same creed.

(Marshall Hodgson)[2]

The problem with interfaith encounters is that too often those choosing to participate in such events do not need convincing of the necessity for frank exchanges and respect for difference. Consequently, the real challenges are seldom confronted and the most difficult and pressing

1 Interview of John L. Allen with Mohammed Arkoun for the *National Catholic Reporter*, 17 May 2008, cited in Sandro Magister, "Dialogue among the Religions. The Vatican Prepares the Guidelines," Chiesa Espressonline, 11 June 2008, http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/205101bdc4.html?eng=y.

2 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization. 1 The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 28.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.227 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 5–26

issues remain unaddressed. With a nod to historian of Islam Marshall Hodgson's observation cited above, what is often more urgently needed, and at the same time much harder to achieve, is conducting *intra-*faith dialogues *within* faith communities between opposing doctrinal positions shaped by the different temperaments of adherents to one and the same religious tradition. What can be further extrapolated from the above quoted observation by Hodgson (who, incidentally, was a committed Quaker) is that with such dispositions also come different views of the current world order and the global politics associated with these. In this last regard, one cannot escape the uneasy feeling that in the past twenty odd years or so, inter- and certainly intra-faith encounters have taken a few steps back rather than moving forward.

Resetting the encounter

This shift, or rather reversal, in the encounters between religious traditions can be traced to the 1990s. To my mind, there are three publications that are emblematic of these changes in worldview. First of all, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.[3] This book represents the triumphant starting point of a new narrative, hailing the victory of democracy in combination with free market politics, which was enthusiastically embraced by proponents of neo-liberal political and economic agendas. Then, a few years later, the story took a more menacing turn with the release of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*.[4] It replaced the ideological standoff between a "Free West" and "Communist East," with the prospect of a multipolar world marred by culture wars along civilisational fault lines shaped by religiously-informed identity politics. This book by a specialist in international relations and security studies remains as confrontational in tone as the belligerent discourses of the preceding Cold War era. The

[3] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

[4] Originally an article in *Foreign Affairs* (Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), 22–49, https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621, it was reworked into a monograph: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World* Order (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

clear and neat bipolar East-West divide may have been replaced by a messier division into multiple civilisational blocs, but the underlying disposition remains Manichean, pitching the forces of light against the forces of darkness. However, soon after Huntington launched his Clash of Civilizations thesis, another book identified a single, new main adversary: Islam and the Muslims. With Benjamin Barber's *Jihad versus McWorld*, we are actually back at a new binary; the dichotomous divide of violent Islamism versus the West – and the rest.[5]

The events of 9/11 and other atrocities in London, Madrid, Paris, Brussels, and not to forget Istanbul, Bali, and Jakarta, and subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq; all these tragedies make one wonder whether Huntington was right from the outset, or whether the book has turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. A painful illustration of this is what happened to a counter narrative, launched from unlikely quarters just before the start of the new millennium: A proposition for a Dialogue of Civilizations, proposed by President Muhammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran, during the 1999 meeting of the United Nations' General Assembly. Within a few years the proposal was transformed into an Alliance of Civilizations, co-sponsored by the current president of Turkey (but then still serving as prime minister), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his Spanish colleague José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero; also first presented at the UN General Assembly, during the session of 2005. While both initiatives were adopted into United Nations contexts, the move toward the evidently more martial sounding "alliance" shows that also the world's largest international body has gone along with this securitization of relations between civilisations, and their underlying religious traditions.

So what about other alternative approaches, on an abstract level represented by postmodern philosophy and postcolonial theory? Admittedly, unlike state and non-state political actors, intellectual endeavours generally unfold without bloodshed and human beings getting physically hurt. However, postmodern and postcolonial thinking tend to present dichotomous narratives. With their emphasis on difference

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5 Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld. How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Time Books, 1995).

(also called *différance*, alterity) all too often these discourses are just the other side of that same – binary – coin. As a historian of ideas, I have looked at attempts by intellectuals, such as the sociologists of knowledge Hamid Dabashi and Ali Mirsepassi, to transcend or – perhaps to phrase it more appropriately – subvert the false binary of Islam versus the West, and the unhelpful dichotomous worldviews on which they are based.[6]

In my current intellectual-historical research I am moving from academic philosophy and the sociology of knowledge to other forms of cultural criticism and alternative ways of engaging with religion, whereby the emphasis will be on sublimation rather than abstraction. For this, I am looking at writers working in the interstices of literature and scholarship, who respond to the challenge that literature too gets often caught up in the "us *versus* them" binary. Think of the criticism of the Eurocentrism of existing literary canons, generally consisting of books by "dead white men," and concomitant campaigns to decolonise knowledge. Even such somewhat highbrow intellectual debates percolate through into real-life politics and become part of the polarisation between advocates of multiculturalism and their populist detractors.

Re-resetting the encounter: religion and literature, identity and individual

The rest of this article offers some preliminary findings from orientational readings in the oeuvres of writers who resist the kind of polarisation bred by essentialist collective identity politics, often driven by self-appointed spokespersons of the religious communities involved. Here too, Marshall Hodgson's earlier cited observation is relevant. Aside from pushing the case for intra-faith dialogue, his attention for individual temperaments is shared by literary writers interested in religious themes, who use it to drive a counter narrative of acknowledging,

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[6] Carool Kersten, "Islam vs the West? Muslim Challenges of a False Binary," in *The Poesis of Peace: Narratives, Cultures and Philosophies*, eds. Klaus-Gerd Giesen, Carool Kersten, and Lenart Škof (New York: Routledge, 2017), 81–96.

recognising, implementing, actively integrating difference and alterity in the identity formation by paying more attention to the individual.

From the Anglophone world we can point to contributions by writers from South Asian extraction. A key marker here is *The Satanic Verses* (1989); the novel unleashing a storm of indignation that turned its author Salman Rushdie into a *cause célèbre.* Also books causing less controversy address the ambiguity of religious belonging and its role in individual identity formation: for example, *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali; *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) of Nadeem Aslam; and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007).[7] However, against the backdrop of Brexit, with its anachronistic ambition of reviving a commonwealth of former colonies in nostalgic reminiscence of the Empire, and the undermining of the "unity in diversity" on the other side of the Atlantic by the Trump administration, I want to shift the attention to authors who have mediated between the Muslim world and the cultures from mainland Europe. For the purposes of the present volume, the following three intellectuals have been selected, because they can be considered emblematic contributors to conversations featuring individual experiences. Navid Kermani (b. 1967); Abdelwahab Meddeb (1946–2014); and Daryush Shayegan (1935–2018).

Before reading the Iranian philosopher Shayegan, I had already begun engaging with the writings of Navid Kermani, a German author and scholar of Islam who is also of Iranian extraction. He has written comparative studies of German and Persian literature, presented in a book entitled *Between Quran and Kafka*, subtitled *West-Eastern Affinities* – although I think that "West-Eastern Investigations" would have been closer to the original German *west-östliche Erkundungen.*[8] Also Abdelwahab Meddeb, a Tunisian-born writer who spent his working

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7 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking Press, 1988); Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Double Day, 2003); Nadeem Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008); Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (London and New York: Hamish Hamilton and Harcourt, 2007).

8 Navid Kermani, *Between Quran and Kafka: West-Eastern Affinities*, trans. Tony Crawford (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2016); Navid Kermani, *Zwischen Koran und Kafka: West-östliche Erkundungen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2014).

life in France, caught my attention prior to engaging with Shayegan. A red thread running through his literary and academic writings is the notion of double genealogy; a reference to his indebtedness to Islamic civilisation and his own Muslim background, as well as the formative influence of a Francophone education. This points up not only a parallel with Kermani's west-eastern affinities, it also takes me back to something that I have stressed in an earlier project on contemporary Muslim intellectuals: that the liminality resulting from cultural hybridity, or from being situated in the interstices of cultural traditions, has creative potential, artistically as well as academically.[9] It also ties in with my continued interest in the earlier mentioned American-Iranian sociologist of knowledge and cultural critic Hamid Dabashi and his hermeneutics of alterity, advocating an anti-foundationalist theology of liberation that seeks to break the Islam vs the West binary and transcend dichotomous thinking about self and other.[10]

Despite being very different intellectuals, there is a family resemblance binding Kermani, Meddeb, and Shayegan together. Although belonging to different generations, Daryush Shayegan and Navid Kermani are both of Iranian extraction and shared an academic background in the study of religions. Like Abdelwahab Meddeb, who left his native Tunisia for France in the 1960s, Shayegan spent many years as an expatriate in Paris.

Kermani, Meddeb and Shayegan also shared an interest in medieval Sufism, engaging intensively with twelfth- and thirteenth-century poets and mystics, like Attar (1145–1220), Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and Shahab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (Sohrawardi) (1154–1191). In the case of Shayegan, this was done first under the direction of, and later in collaboration with, the French Orientalist and philosopher Henri Corbin, while Meddeb explored Sufism in *L'exil occidental* (occidental exile) and several translation projects.[11] All three also seriously studied religions other than their own. Aside from being a philosopher, Shayegan was

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[9] Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam* (London and New York: Hurst Publishers and Oxford University Press, 2011).

[10] Cf. Kersten, "Islam vs the West?."

[11] Daryush Shayegan, *Henry Corbin, La topographie spirituelle de l'Islam iranien* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1990); Abdelwahab Meddeb, *L'exil occidental* (Paris: Albin Michel,

a trained Indologist with knowledge of the languages and religions of South Asia.[12] His interests extended further into Chinese religions and Christian mysticism. Kermani has studied theodicy by comparing the Biblical figure of Job with the Persian poet Attar; he has translated a book on Jesus by Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime minister to take office in Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979; delved into Christian sacred art; and explored Jewish mysticism.[13] Meddeb did work on Judaism, taking part in an extensive historical survey project.[14]

Such catholicity also applied to the trio's literary interests, evincing comparable broad spectrums and extending beyond their joint Islamic heritage. Shayegan wrote about the Taoist Chuang Tzu and the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart; Meddeb translated Japanese poetry, while Kermani is an avid reader of Latin American writers like Pablo Neruda and Jorge Luis Borges, while also sharing Shayegan's interest in Octavio Paz. Consequently, all three have produced a varied oeuvre, composed of scholarly studies, engaged essays, and literary writings. Meddeb was a novelist and essayist, a poet and translator of Sufi poetry. So was Shayegan, who also translated novels by the Iranian writer Sohrab Sepehri into French alongside his work as an academic philosopher. Kermani has written novels, plays, travel reportage, and other prose texts that fit into the genre of life-writing.[15] In fact, all three writers wove autobiography into their academic and engaged writings. In his exchanges with Ramin Jahanbegloo, Shayegan talked extensively of his

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2005); Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Les dits de Bistami (Shatahāt)* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Tombeau of Ibn Arabi and White Traverses* (New York: Fordham University, 2009).

12 Daryush Shayegan, *Hindouisme et Soufisme, une lecture du «Confluent des Deux Océans»* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1979).

13 Navid Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes: Attar, Hiob und die metaphysische Revolte* (München: C.H. Beck, 2005); English translation: *The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Mehdi Bazargan, *Und Jesus is sein Prophet: Der Koran und die Kristen. Mit einer Einleitung von Navid Kermani* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006); Navid Kermani, *Ungläubiges Staunen: Über den Christentum* (München: C.H. Beck, 2016); English translation: *Wonder beyond Belief: On Christianity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

14 Abdelwahab Meddeb, Michael B. Smith, Benjamin Stora, and Jane Marie Todd, eds., *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

15 Torsten Hoffmann, "Trennungsprobleme: Navid Kermani's Autofiktionen," *Text + Kritik: Zeitschrift für Literatur* 217 Navid Kermani (2018): 6–22.

mixed Persian-Georgian origins.[16] Meddeb explicitly identified autobiography as elementary in religious intellectualism, arguing that this has been the case since Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, and to whom he referred as a "compatriot."[17] It is also a characteristic of modern humanism and the Enlightenment: think of Montaigne, Pascal, or Rousseau.[18] At various instances, Kermani has stressed the importance of his affinities with spoken Persian in terms of familial belonging and intimacy, and with written German where it concerns his intellectual belonging and literary taste.[19]

Adding Daryush Shayegan as a third interlocutor and interrogating his idea of "cultural schizophrenia" is done primarily for heuristic purposes: first of all, to frame the writings of Kermani and Meddeb for a larger project on religion and literature; secondly, to demonstrate that their respective notions of west-eastern affinities and double genealogy can be considered to constitute a panacea against afflictions associated with oscillating between different cultures, which Shayegan chose to phrase in psycho-pathological terms. Yet another reason for adding Shayegan is that in the course of his own philosophical investigations, he shifted from an interest in socio-political analyses toward a focus on individual intellectuals. Therefore, in this article I will amplify the ideas of Daryush Shayegan, and defer detailed elaborations on Navid Kermani and Abdelwahab Meddeb to other occasions.

Cultural schizophrenia (Daryush Shayegan)

Intellectual histories of contemporary Iran and other studies of present-day Iranian thinking written in English do not pay much attention to Daryush Shayegan; at least not to the same extent as to figures like

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16 Daryush Shayegan, *Sous les ceils du monde: Entretiens avec Ramin Jahanbegloo* (Paris: Le Félin, 2011): 21–22.

17 Abdelwahab Meddeb, "L'interruption généalogique," *L'Esprit,* 208:1 (1995), 78, https://esprit.presse.fr/article/abdelwahab-meddeb/l-interruption-genealogique-10706; Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Islam and Its Discontents*, trans. Pierre Joris and Ann Reid (London: William Heinemann, 2003), 167.

18 Meddeb, *Islam and Its Discontents*, 167.

19 Navid Kermani, *Wer ist Wir? Deutschland und seine Muslime* (München: C.H. Beck, 2017), 136.

Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969), Ali Shariati (1933–1977), or Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1946). Apart from the 1992 publication (in French!) of Ramin Jahanbegloo's conversations with Shayegan, more than a passing mention we find only in recent publications by Afshin Matin-Asgari and Siavash Saffari.[20] Here I want to stress again that for the purposes of the present investigation, Shayegan is a relevant and important thinker.

For a proposed resetting of interreligious dialogues, it pays to examine more closely two of Shayegan's books written in French and appearing almost a quarter of a century apart: *Le regard mutilé*: *Schizophrénie culturelle* (1989) and *La lumière vient de l'occident* (2013).[21] According to Shayegan, we are not just dealing with – to maintain his psychopathological vocabulary – a personality split between Islam and the West; this in spite of the Western focus reflected in the title of Shayegan's most recent publication (in his case, we also need to account for influences coming from the South Asian subcontinent, and the polyglot Russo--Georgian world of the Caucasus).

Cultural Schizophrenia was originally written in French in 1989 and appeared in English translation three years later.[22] In this book, Shayegan moves from the political and social concerns addressed in *Qu'est--ce qu'une revolution religieuse?*, a title resonating with Ernest Renan's *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, to the individualized approach that I wish to investigate as part of my new project on cultural criticism and literary studies in relation to religion.[23] In Shayegan's own words, *Cultural Schizophrenia* examines "a narration of a hypothetical 'I', who can be anyone," but who lives in "a state of *In-between*," thus revealing the

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20 Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western: An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Siavash Saffari, *Beyond Shariati: Modernity, Cosmopolitanism, and Islam in Iranian Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity* (London etc: Lexington Books, 2004).

21 Daryush Shayegan, *Le regard mutilé: Schizophrénie culturelle: pays traditionnels face à la modernité* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989); Daryush Shayegan, *La lumière vient de l'Occident: Le réenchantment du monde et la pensée nomade* (Paris: L'Aube, 2013).

22 Daryush Shayegan, *Le regard mutilé*; Daryush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*, trans. John Howe (London: Saqi Books, 1992; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

23 Daryush, Shayegan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une revolution religieuse* (Paris: Presses d'Aujourd'hui, 1982).

inner contradictions of such a narrative ego, which translates on an individual level into cultural schizophrenia and, in terms of politics, into false consciousness.[24] It is also opportune to note a difference between the French and English titles of this book, in particular the crucial difference in subtitle: where *Le regard mutilé: Schizophrénie culturelle* speaks of *pays traditionnels face à la modernité*, "traditional countries in the face of modernity," in the English version this is narrowed down to "Islamic societies confronting the West."

Although Shayegan's own cultural grounding is that of the "world of Iranian Islam," his analysis functions as a stand-in for all other societies on the side-lines. While their experience of "unhappy consciousness" is not shared by Westerners, it is affecting all those "trapped in a fault-line between incompatible worlds."[25] A few years after the appearance of *Cultural Schizophrenia*, this notion of the fault-line was also employed by Huntington in the *Clash of Civilizations*. And whereas most illustrations provided by Shayegan pertain to Islam, and Iran in particular, the wider relevance of confrontations between civilisations is pointed up by the frequent occurrence of the earlier-mentioned Octavio Paz as Shayegan's most prominent non-Muslim interlocutor in *Cultural Schizophrenia*.[26]

Another useful text for thinking about intercultural communication, and about possible avenues for resetting the Muslim-Christian encounter, is *La Lumière vient de l'Occident*. The title presents a reversal of the Latin expression *Ex Oriente Lux* – "From the East Comes the Light." Moreover, the French *lumière* can be translated as either "The Light" or "Enlightenment." Aside from offering such multi-layered interplays of words, appearing almost twenty-five years after the original French version of *Cultural Schizophrenia*, Shayegan's later book also offers an opportunity for detecting both constant or sustained concerns, as well as further developments in Shayegan's thinking. As the title suggests, Shayegan retains his confidence in the intellectual achievements of European modernity, but without being dogmatic or ideological about

24 Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia*, ix.
25 Ibid., vii.
26 The writings and ideas of the Mexican intellectual are also an important point of reference for Navid Kerm.

it, as has been the case with Fukuyama and Huntington. In relation to the question of modernity, but also in reflecting on critical discourses, such as postmodernism and postcolonial theory, in *La Lumière vient de l'Occident*, Shayegan gives pride of place to the French Enlightenment thinker and Encyclopaedist Denis Diderot (1713–1784). Presenting him as the precursor of postmodern and postcolonial "polyphonic worldviews," Shayegan characterises him as a man who had already devised "a strategy of difference" in the eighteenth century.[27] This genealogical continuity is evinced by Shayegan's observation that contemporary philosophies of difference, developed by figures such as Gilles Deleuze and Gianni Vattimo, are products of a philosophical tradition that remains emphatically continental European.

In regards to a more immediate relation between Deleuze and Shayegan's thinking it is important to point to the latter's borrowing of Sohrawardi's idea of the *na koja abad*, or an imaginal "nowhere land."[28] The founder of what is known as the philosophical school of Illuminationism (*al-ishraq*) serves not just as a source of inspiration for Shayegan's own idea of the *non-lieu* or non-place, its affiliation with nomadic thinking – considered central enough to feature in the book's subtitle – is also an evident cognate of the nomad thought and nomadology in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *La lumière*, Books III and IV, entitled "Harlequin Identity" and "Zones of Hybridization" respectively, form the point of convergence where Sohrawardi and Deleuze come together in Shayegan's thinking, as he meditates and reflects on "double displacement," "rhizome and nomad thinking," "double decentring," "the in-between," and *na koja abad*, as the *temporalité de l'entre-deux*.[29]

Also Deleuze's eclectic borrowing from thinkers as different as Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, and Nietzsche is not dissimilar to the cut-and-paste writing style of *Encyclopédie* editor Diderot. Just as Diderot preceded Heidegger's attempt to subvert European philosophy by going perhaps not so much beyond as returning to before its intellectual

27 Shayegan, *La lumière vient de l'Occident*, 460.
28 Ibid., 217, 326, 339.
29 Ibid., 145ff.

trajectory was reduced to footnotes to Plato, so can Gilles Deleuze's appeal to the pre-Socratics, as well as his suggestion of the figure of the rhizome, be regarded as earnest attempts to not just dig for the foundations of European philosophy as we know it, but rather as offering an alternative for the prevailing arboreal model of thinking, by uprooting the metaphysical justifications for its tree of knowledge.

Deleuze's preference for immanence over metaphysics and transcendence is shared by his Italian fellow philosopher of difference Gianni Vattimo. This is a reason why Shayegan is drawn to Gianni Vattimo's use of the notion of *penseiro debole*, or "weak thought," which is used to advocate a "weakening of ontologies."[30] At the same time, these weak ontologies are employed in rethinking Christian theology and philosophy of religion as evinced by several of Vattimo's later books.[31] This brings me to the way religion features in the writings of Daryush Shayegan, which opposes the ugly side of present-day religion. By this, Shayegan means the ideological use of religion by cultural critics, such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, for essentialist identity politics. Their "us-versus-them" binary is just the other side of the coin of clash of civilisation theorists like Samuel Huntington, and the Islamophobic discourses that have emerged in its wake. For this reason, Siavash Saffari counts Daryush Shayegan among the critics of Ali Shariati and his followers. Together with Javad Tabataba'i and Abdolkarim Soroush, Shayegan charged that the reappropriation of the Islamic tradition by ideologues of the Iranian revolution resulted in "delaying the negotiation of modernity in Iranian society."[32] In Shayegan's estimation the politicisation of Islam is demeaning, constituting a veritable desacralisation of religion – the exact phrase that was used in the 1960s and 1970s by

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30 Ibid., 295ff. Cf. also Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti. *Weak Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

31 Gianni Vattimo, *Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty. *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Gianni Vattimo and John D. Caputo. *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

32 Saffari, *Beyond Shariati*, 33.

the Indonesian Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005).[33] The "neo-Shariatis" who continue this post-revolutionary revival of left--leaning progressive thinking "acknowledge the 'ideological' character of Shariati's discourse," but "reject the logic of Shayegan, Tabatabaei [sic!], and Soroush in equating ideology with dogma."[34]

Afshin Matin-Asgari situates Shayegan in an intellectual circle gravitating around Henri Corbin, which also included sociologist Ehsan Narqhi (Naraghi) (1926–2012) and fellow philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933). It operated in Tehran from the 1950s until mid--1970s, alongside another circle led by the philosopher Ahmad Fardid (1909–1994). Fardid's significance lies in having played a key role in introducing the philosophy of Heidegger in Iran and in coining the term *gharb-zadegi*.[35] Variously translated as "Westoxification," "Occidentotis," and "West-struckness," this notion was given wider currency by Jalal Al-e Ahmad and adopted by other intellectuals endeavouring to synthesise elements from socialism and the Islamic tradition into a kind of leftist-progressive interpretation of Islam, whereas Fardid actually shared Heidegger's "attraction to right-wing regimes."[36] Shayegan was closer to Corbin than to Fardid, but both circles were "defining Iranian authenticity by drawing on European discourses of Eastern spirituality" and "merg[ing] esoteric Shiʿism and European counter-modernist philosophy."[37] Matin-Asgar may be correct in regards to Corbin, who was involved in the Eranos meetings, which also included Carl-Gustav Jung and Mircea Eliade, and to some degree also with respect to Nasr, who is regarded as an influential exponent of Traditionalism and *de facto* successor of René Guénon (1886–1951) and Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), the founders of a concomitant strand of modern-day, but distinctly anti-modern, Sufism.[38] But, as Matin-Asgar acknowledges elsewhere in his book, Shayegan's stance is more subtle, offering:

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33 Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics,* 36, 230.
34 Saffari, *Beyond Shariati,* 42.
35 Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western,* 198–199.
36 Ibid., 201. Cf. also: Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65.
37 Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western,* 202.
38 Ibid., 203–204.

…their circle's most intellectually sophisticated take on Iran's encounter with modernity. Shayegan's superior linguistic prowess, as well as his specialization in Indian religions, made him more competent than his teachers at comparing European and Asian cultures and religions. His first major work, *Asia Facing the West* (1977), identified Asian civilizations with "great religions that make up their fundamental essence," offering the promise of "deliverance and redemption," in contrast to a modern Western civilization defined by moral "nihilism."[39]

Like Vattimo, Shayegan resists falling into all-out cynical nihilism, which is so often considered a hallmark of postmodern philosophy. Instead, Shayegan is very much concerned with salvaging the soul, even advocating a re-enchantment to the world – as the other part of the subtitle of *La Lumière* reads. He envisages a reintegration of the spirit into a mode of thinking that remains indebted to Enlightenment. Accommodating such a "simultaneity of levels of human consciousness" is one of the valuable achievements of post-Enlightenment modernity.[40] A further affirmation of this ability to accommodate varying systems of knowledge from different epochs in human history, and of the need to privilege the spiritual dimensions of religions, Shayegan found in the reception of the Persian translation of *La Lumière* by young Iranians. In his own interpretation, to them, the book was:

> A justifying testimony capable of apprehending their states of mind, a suitable frame in which to fit their newly found convictions. They had become nomadic migrants, incorporating into their worldviews the varying identities corresponding to different historical periods.[41]

In the conclusion of *La Lumière*, Shayegan returns to Diderot, ending with the observation that throughout his writings Diderot made an effort to retain what Shayegan calls the unity of different types of

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39 Ibid., 207.

40 Shayegan, *La lumière vient de l'Occident*, 6.

41 Ibid., 8. A recent study of the interest among young Iranians in religious ideas and practices that fall outside the orthodox interpretations propagated or condoned by the regime of the Islamic republic is Alireza Doostari, *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018).

knowledge, because "without the unity of the physical, moral, and poetic, the only alternative that remains for mankind would be barbarity."[42]

Double Genealogy (Abdelwahab Meddeb)

This term barbarity also features in the subtitle of one of Abdelwahab Meddeb's books: *Sortir de la Malédiction: L'islam entre civilisation et barbarie* (2008), which can be translated as *Escaping the Curse: Islam between Civilisation and Barbarity*.[43] In this wide-ranging essay collection, Meddeb engages with both Muslim and non-Muslim authors and thinkers: ranging from the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, and the accursed field featuring in his manifesto for universal peace entitled Purifications; to the analysis of the Quran chapter "The Table" (*Sura al-Ma'ida*) by the theologian of religions Michel Cuypers; to the dissident Sudanese mystic and activist Mahmud Muhammad Taha and his contrarian exegesis of the Quran, which resulted in his execution in 1985 on charges of heresy and sedition.[44]

Ever since the appearance of the novel *Talismano* in 1987, the notions of nomadism and hybridity, which we have already seen featuring in the writings of Shayegan, have remained recurring motifs or vignettes in the literary oeuvre of Meddeb, in particular where it concerns the interest he shares with Shayegan in the Persian Illuminationist Sohrawardi.[45] Meddeb's essays in *L'exil occidental* on the desert and Sohrawardi's "Western exile" turn these (imaginal) localities into the topographical meeting points of cultural hybridity, where nomadism and Sufism are explicitly connected with migration and crossing the lines between cultures as well as states of consciousness, noting that "it is in the in-between (*entre-deux*), which they instated, that

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42 Shayegan, *La Lumière vient de l'Occident*, 463.

43 Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Sortir de la Malédiction: L'islam entre civilisation et barbarie* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

44 Meddeb, *Sortir de la Malédiction*, 12, 120–124; 151, 239–246.

45 Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Talismano* (Paris: Éditions Sindbad, 1987); Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Talismano*, trans. and introd. Jane Kuntz (Champaign and London: The Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).

one finds the energies actualized, which have accorded to nomadism and Sufism a spiritual conjuncture."[46]

Meddeb expanded his reflections on cultural hybridity into a double genealogy, reflective of his own mixed Mediterranean origins as a Tunisian working in Paris and writing in French. Aside from turning it into a recurring theme in his literary writings, he had made this also the subject of his doctoral studies and further investigations of the bilingualism that characterises the hybrid identities of many intellectuals from his native Maghreb (encompassing Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).[47] Although a Tunisian Arab by birth, Meddeb was also a self-confessed loyal citizen of the Fifth French Republic. His republicanism bears a similarity to Navid Kermani's advocacy of patriotism without nationalism; citizenship; and the importance of the project of European Unity.[48]

West-Eastern Affinities (Navid Kermani)

When it comes to identity, Kermani's views are quite similar to those of Shayegan. Both challenge the primordial understandings of ideologically-informed identity politics positing essentialist binaries of us versus them, instead of conceiving of identity as a construct. What Shayegan calls the "illusions of identity" can also be found in Kermani's objection to essentialist identity politics. Humans are no drawing boards. Passports are not icons, but travel documents.[49] For Navid Kermani, individual identities are composites and he also stresses that he is not preoccupied with being a Muslim. In this regard he does not shy away from making controversial statements that remind one of the rapturous exclamations of the early Sufis, such his observation that with regards to religious questions he had learned more

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[46] Meddeb. *L'exil occidental*, 11.

[47] Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Écriture et double généalogie,* superv. Anne Roche (PhD thesis, Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, 1991).

[48] Karolin Machtans, "Navid Kermani, Advocate for an Antipatriotic Patriotism and a Multireligious, Multicultural Europe," in *Envisioning Social Justice in Contemporary German Culture*, ed. Jill E. Twark and Axel Hildebrandt (Camden House: Boydell & Brewer, 2015): 290–311.

[49] Kermani, *Wer ist Wir?,* 135.

from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* than from the Prophet Muhammad.[50] There are also parallels between what Kermani has said in his book on German Muslims about interfaith and intercultural dialogues, and the quotes by Arkoun and Hodgson at the beginning of this article:

> The very term "Dialogue of Culture" is pure ideology. No, even worse, well-intended as it may be, it nevertheless confirms unintentionally its opposite: "Culture War". [...] The Dialogue of Cultures is as much a caricature as those analyses, which reduce today's world to a Clash of Civilizations.[51]

> The fault line does not run between cultures, rather, it runs right through them.[52]

> Germany's Islam Conference is a process in which the participants learned on behalf of their society how complicated identities really are.[53]

Kermani also agrees with Shayegan about the desacralisation of religion; a view not only shared by Nurcholish Madjid, but by yet another Iranian intellectual: Abdolkarim Soroush. It leads Kermani to conclude that "where religion and politics are mixed, religion is desecrated; turning it away from its actual objective, namely to perfect the individual and give direction to its relationship with God."[54] It is at this point that the concerns of Kermani converge not only with those of Shayegan, but also with Meddeb's, in the sense that they are predominantly interested in the spiritual dimensions of Islam, and religions in general: As internalised Islam, mysticism could prove to be the domain where piety and enlightenment, individuation and devotion merge.[55]

50 Kermani, *Zwischen Koran und Kafka*, 11.
51 Kermani, *Wer ist Wir?*, 127.
52 Ibid., 55.
53 Ibid., 150
54 Ibid., 129.
55 Ibid., 130.

By way of conclusion: a comparative evaluation

Within the oeuvres of Daryush Shayegan and Abdelwahab Meddeb, the cultural and religious critiques can be structured into tetralogies:

Daryush Shayegan	*Abdelwahab Meddeb*
Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?	*Face à l'islam*
Le Régard Mutilé: Schizophrenie culturelle	*La Maladie de l'Islam*[56]
Les illusions de l'identité [57]	*Contre-Prêches*
La lumière vient de l'Occident:	*Sortir de la Malédiction:*
Le réenchantement du monde	*L'Islam Entre Civilisation*
et la pensée nomade	*et Barbarie*

Aside from joint reference to pathologies (*Cultural Schizophrenia*, *The Malady of Islam*), after three volumes of diagnostics, both authors also propose a cure: in the case of Shayegan, the pharmacon consists in the kind of enlightenment writings produced by the *Encyclopédiste* Denis Diderot, whereas Meddeb returns to the ancient Greek statesman and writer Empedocles, but as read through the lens of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (Hölderin is also one of Kermani's abiding interests).

Shayegan and Meddeb are very French in their unabashed admiration and advocacy of eighteenth-century French Enlightenment thinkers, in particular the *Encyclopédistes.* This also applies to the way they talk about the encounter between Islam and the West, and in particular the effects of Westernization. Both Meddeb and Shayegan explicitly distinguish European and American variants of this process; showing themselves very disparaging of the latter, while being rather celebratory – not to say triumphant – about the former. This has something to do with Shayegan and Meddeb's long-standing associa-

[56] Abdelwahab Meddeb, *La Maladie de L'Islam* (Paris: Sieul, 2002).
[57] Daryush Shayegan, *Les Illusion de l'identités (*Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1992).

tions with France – their French connection, so to speak.[58] Illustrative of this distinction between Europeanisation and Americanisation is the following quote from *The Malady of Islam*, where Meddeb contrasts what he calls "European nuance" with the hyper-reality of Americanisation and its disastrous political consequences for individuality and human freedom:

> [T]he European individual, provided with his nuance, can speak to the Muslim in these terms: "I make Islam a civilization of my own, I internalize it: doesn't it sustain part of my soul? As a religion, it deserves respect: by the symbolic and the imaginal formation it grants to those who believe in it, doesn't it produce subjects who can be loyal subjects? But on the political and legal level, we believe in the universality of our own system [...] for human experience teaches us that as soon as the religious absolute is confused with the law and with politics, freedoms are stripped away."[59]

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58 Cf. also the decision of De Gaulle to leave the military pact of NATO because of American dominance, and earlier publications like Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Le Defi Americain* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1967).

59 Meddeb, Abdelwahab. *The Malady of Islam,* trans. Pierre Joris and Ann Reid (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 222.

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THE OTHER AS MY EQUAL

Rasoul Rasoulipour

In September 2007, during my first visit to the University of Notre Dame, I was invited for a talk at the Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. It was the time when they were opening a centre for interfaith dialogue named "Abraham's Tent." As a Shia Muslim who is familiar with the Holy Qur'an[1], I knew about the story of Abraham's sacred guests – it is narrated in the Qur'an in two chapters[2] -- but this was the first time I noticed that the story is about 'strangers' – strangers who are 'sacred'!

[Muhammad], have you heard the story of the honoured guests of Abraham? They went in to see him and said, 'Peace.' 'Peace,' he said, [adding to himself] 'These people are strangers.' (51:24–25)

Here God sets the scene that would become the prime example of how one's love ought to be directed outwardly, by his own encounter with Abraham outside his tent one hot Middle Eastern afternoon. As we examine the event and look at the manner of speech, the meal provided, and the attention paid to the strangers, we are shown the extent that Abraham was willing to fully give of himself to someone else without making the typical distinctions that we make in our lives in regard to other people.

Now, in the society of this time it would not have been strange to see a host be giving and generous to a visitor – it would in fact have been "strange and disturbing" if Abraham had not attended to his guests in some way or shape, going beyond modern Western norms of simply

[1] The citations in this article are from *The Holy Quran, A new translation*, trans. Abdel Haleem M.A.S. (New York: Oxford World's Classics, 2004).

[2] Chapters: 15:51–60 and 51:24–37. The story is narrated with some slight differences in Genesis 18:4–8.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.234 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 27–44

offering a kind smile or word. What one must pay attention to is the overwhelming gifts that Abraham offers to these strangers that had appeared outside his tent. God saw in Abraham a precious love, one that was fixed on the "other" as opposed to itself; he saw a love that took the norms of its society and superseded them in every aspect.

> Abraham was truly an example: devoutly obedient to God and true in faith. He was not an idolater; he was thankful for the blessings of God who chose him and guided him to a straight path. We gave him blessings in this world, and he is among the righteous in the Hereafter. (16:120–122)

Also,

> Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Abraham? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter. (2:130)

Abraham was one who did not count the cost of his love for the total stranger. He adhered to that revolutionary idea that humanity was found outside one's close personal primary group, that it could be found in potentially dangerous strangers who were in need. God chose him as a model because he saw that the practices Abraham puts into play here reveal the "common humanity that runs deeper than customary distinctions of kin and stranger, friend and enemy."[3]

This story challenges us to redirect our love and look outwards to the "other." Throughout Abraham's meeting with the strangers, he is unaware that he is in the presence of the Divine. This is the point that God wants to convey to human beings: We should treat others as though we were relating to God because of the dignity that he has imparted to us,[4] our common humanity, and the single family we share through Adam in blood and Abraham in faith. Islam itself takes a similar approach and sees that in this event "God is portrayed as a guest for whose visit one must always be prepared."[5] That preparedness refers to the unselfish

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[3] J. Gerald Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50* (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 53.

[4] According to the beginning Qur'anic verses, 38:72.

[5] Snjezana Akpinar, "Two Responses to 'Interreligious Dialogue and Spiritual Hospitality': Hospitality in Islam," *Religion East & West* 7 (2007): 1, https://issuu.com/drbu/docs/issue7_art2.

self-giving love of Abraham that God encountered outside his tent, one He wishes replicated in each and every one of us.

In this paper, I explore the causes of humanity's alienation from God and argue the necessity of respecting the basic equality and human dignity of every person that results from God's creation in order to initiate restoration.

The conflicts in our world today largely find their origin in our alienation from God and one another. This alienation is the result of human forgetfulness – the root of the Qur'anic word for human, nasy, is "forgetful one" – that produces sin.

> Do not be like those who neglect God and God causes them to be oblivious to their own souls. (59:19)

> … they have forgotten God, so he has forsaken them. (9:67)

This alienation from God, the one thing that binds all human groups most tightly, causes true alienation from one another. Without remembrance – the antidote to forgetfulness – of our relationship with the True God, who is the Ultimate Other, we fashion an idol for ourselves.

> So remember Me; I will remember you… (2:152)

> Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of God – truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace. (13:28)

Worshipping a theological ideology, which focuses on one characteristic of God to the exclusion of another rather than opening to the infinite and expansive Mystery of the Divine Other, is also an idolatry practiced by extremists in religious traditions. Worshipping an exclusivist notion of God has implications not only for religious practice but also for global human relationships. When one's religious views cause one to disrespect the religious belief and practice of those outside their own tradition, tension naturally occurs. Instead of seeing "the other" in their entirety, as another human person who is owed dignity and respect, it becomes easy to define them solely by how they are opposed to us. Having reduced our understanding of their identity to this one distinguishing quality, it becomes easy to objectify and manipulate them, and more difficult to establish meaningful, mutual relationships with them. Thus, even as we move away

from authentic religious practice which draws us closer to God, we find ourselves moving further and further away from others in the human family. In the process, we dehumanise the other, and conflict and injustice ensue.

Abrahamic religions understand that while God is present in the world today, there is an unavoidable awareness of separation between God and humans that we must struggle to overcome throughout our time here in this world. This separation does not come from God's being eternal and humanity's being temporal, rather it results from the fact that human beings sin.

The principle components of any religion are orthodoxy and orthopraxy – what is right to believe and what is right to do – a combination that defines the lives of its adherents. In the Abrahamic religions, the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy takes on a special characteristic. All three of the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are founded on divine revelation. Their beliefs and practices, at the core, trace back to a message or command from God Himself. According to this tradition, orthodoxy and orthopraxy have in God their source and subject. The divine revelation has also shown humans to be in a relationship with – Hebrew bərit (covenant), Greek diatheke (covenant, testament) Arabic misaq (pledge) – that prescribes their behaviours and practices. This relationship between God and man is defined by mutual commitment and explicit responsibilities. These overarching principles form the framework of a society marked by harmony and peace, in which humans fulfil their responsibilities toward God through their treatment of the "other." Thus, these covenants signify that believers have a responsibility and duty to obey, have faith in, and revere God. Additionally, just as a son has a responsibility to care for and protect his siblings, as well as his father's livestock, land and other possessions, the believer has a responsibility to maintain and uphold the dignity of his fellow man, even if he is not a "brother in faith," but as a part of God's creation, "belonging" to God, as it were. As the Qur'an enjoins:

> Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong: those who do this are the successful ones. Do not be like those

who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes... (3:104–110)

A sense of religious duty has been used to justify acts of violence through history, from the bloody "conversions" of the Crusades to terrorist acts on 9/11 and sectarian suicide bombings in Afghanistan, Iraq, India, and Pakistan. The same scriptures that reveal the duty toward the other also contain instances of seemingly sanctioned violence toward the other. The book of Joshua, for example, contains the issues of "the ban," the practice of killing all living things in a conquered city or encampment and holy war.[6] In the Gospel of Matthew Christ states that He has come not to bring peace but a sword,[7] and Sura al-Tawba (Repentance) of the Qur'an commands that idolaters be "killed," "seized," and "besieged."[8]

However, each of these cases can be explained in context. Though all of these passages seem to advocate violence towards the other, any general application of them is an abusive misunderstanding. Of course, as history attests, such interpretations have sometimes been applied and have often coloured interactions between and attitudes toward members of different faiths and ethnic groups. Yet the "other" is not, for the true believer, to be regarded with fear or suspicion or murderous intent. Rather the other is of infinite value, both as a being created by God and a path towards greater relationship with Him. God does allow humans to work towards achieving this access to Him and, in essence, overcoming the alienation between Himself and humanity. Imam Ali9 advised his governor to Egypt:

And be aware that people fall under one of two categories: they are either your brother and sister in faith, or your equal in creation. (Nahjul Balaqah, "Peak of Eloquence," letter 53)

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6 Chapters 1–12.

7 Matthew 10:34–36.

8 Chapter 9: 6, 12–14.

9 Ali ibn Abi Talib (600-661 CE), the first Imam of Shias who was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. He ruled over the Islamic caliphate from 656 to 661. He was the first male who accepted Islam. Sunnis consider Ali the fourth and final of the rightly guided Caliphs. Shias consider him and his descendants the rightful successors to the Prophet. This disagreement split the Muslim community into the Sunni and Shia branches.

God would not allow humans to become misguided without making it clear that there was a path towards repairing this void between humanity and Himself. Through the examples put forth within all the Divine Scriptures, humans can become illuminated about the path that will lead them towards a reunion with God. The Qur'an gives an example of how to journey towards becoming closer with God and overcoming that alienation. One way to begin viewing how the Qur'an reveals its evidence about moving forward in a journey towards union with God is to see how the Qur'an views what is sacred and what is not. One can find such an example through the passage:

Wherever you turn, there is His Face. (2:115)

The same phrase can be seen in the Bible:

Behold me; here am I. (Isaiah 65:1)

These passages show that, rather than alienation, wherever one turns, God is reflected. This involves seeing the sacredness of the other and understanding that Allah is the source of all existence and all cosmic and human qualities as well as the End to Whom all things return. The Qur'an is pointing out very clearly that God is not simply sitting on His throne in heaven, but is present wherever you look; because of His all-encompassing presence, one must treat what one sees with the respect they would show God.

Religion, as some philosophers of religion have defined it, is but a "diagnosis and cure."[10] A religion proposes a diagnosis (an account of the basic problem) and a cure (how to decisively solve that problem) – one basic problem shared by every human person and one fundamental solution that, however adapted to different cultures and cases, is essentially the same across the board. Religions differ insofar as their diagnosis and cures differ. For example some religions are monotheistic and some

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[10] Keith Yandel, *Philosophy of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Regarding "diagnosis and cure" in some of the non-Abrahamic religions, Yandel says: "According to Advaita Vedanta, the sickness is our ignorance of our being identical with Brahman and the cure is gaining this knowledge. According to Jainism, the sickness is that we think we are ignorant and dependent and the cure is learning that we are omniscient and existentially independent. According to Theravada Buddhism, our sickness is that we take ourselves to be enduring substances and the cure is learning that we are only transitory states." (p. 33)

are not. Hence some diagnoses are offered in terms of alienation from God and cures are presented that concern removing that alienation, while other diagnoses and cures make no reference to God. According to the Abrahamic traditions, our sickness is sin and the cure is God's mercy and forgiveness, variously tied to our action and repentance or not, as the Qur'an says,

> Those who remember God and implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves [by transgression] – who forgives sins but God? – and who never knowingly persist in doing wrong. (3:135)

So sin can be considered that which causes the separation of humanity and individual humans from God. This is actually a vicious cycle – sin separates us from God, separation makes sin more likely, more sin increases the separation.

Moreover, humans are very social creatures. We enjoy being around friends, family, and people who share similar traits and values with us. For this reason, we tend to form groups that establish our place in society. However, the unfortunate effect of forming these "in-groups" is that they necessarily define "out-groups." People in these "out-groups" are often shunned by those who are considered part of the "in-group," sometimes with verbal abuse, and even occasionally with physical violence. The people in these "out-groups" are seen as "strangers," "aliens," and "others," designations that can be hard to shake and that can persist down through the generations, at least until someone finally chooses to conform to what the "in-group" wants them to do or to be. History is filled with examples of people, both in the East and in the West, who have suffered discrimination because they were relegated to an alien status. Interestingly enough, as the world has gotten "smaller" through the advent of modern technology and more and more people consider themselves to be "world citizens," the number of "aliens" that are seen as outside of the "in-group" has increased. There is no simple solution to this problem, unfortunately, as humans always seem to form such groups at the expense of others.

In the Qur'an, human beings are not separated into categories based on race or language. There is no mention in Surah 49 of the importance of one's lineage or ancestry, but according to piety – those who have

high ranks with Allah versus those who are sinful and disgraced in the eyes of God – for we are all created by God.

> People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware. (49:13)

Also,

> And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of your languages and colours. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge. (30:22)

However, it is important to remember that the relationship of alienation of people from each other and from God is not simply the cause of misunderstanding and differences in language. It is deeply rooted at the heart of humanity's relationship to itself and everything else. Alienation can be caused by struggle, oppression or suffering, and that is where we find ourselves today. We must realize that conflicts and "otherness" can truly cause alienation from ourselves, our fellow human beings, and God, as well as the rest of His creation.

We cannot discuss the word "stranger" without mentioning *The Stranger*, Albert Camus' brilliant novel. *The Stranger* captures the story of a man who does not feel connected to God and cannot see his purpose in this life. While some contend that Meursault, the narrator, may suffer from mental illness, more evidence suggests that he suffers from an inability to feel or give compassion. Meursault and his story demonstrate the potential for extreme individualism and violence as a result of discrimination and loneliness.

In his article "Camus' Stranger: His Act of Violence," Julian Stamm attempts to identify the reasoning behind Meursault's violent act. Before the murder, Meursault tends to choose to be neutral; instead of answering questions or facing tough situations, he passively avoids them. When given the opportunity to commit a violent act, he does so. Stamm concludes about this act, "Camus clearly implies that this can happen to you and to me, that such an act could be repeated over and

over again through all time."[11] As Camus may imply, there is certainly evidence for the human capacity to commit heinous acts of violence against each other. Perhaps, Meursault's act is the radical potential for our free will to go completely awry. Each human is endowed with free will, and Meursault's action demonstrates that there must be a counter-balance to our free will.

Karen Armstrong presents another choice for Meursault in her TED Talk "The Charter for Compassion." She believes that compassion for all people is the gateway to peace and acceptance of others in our world. Through a discourse of personal history and extensive research on various traditions, Armstrong presents her thesis: "Because in compassion, when we feel with the other, we dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another person there. And once we get rid of ego, then we're ready to see the divine. And in particular, every single one of the major world traditions has highlighted – has said – and put at the core of their tradition what's become known as the Golden Rule."[12]

How could we expect to overcome that conflict as a society when the conflict can barely be overcome on a person-to-person basis? Armstrong's solution to the conflicts in our world is simple; treat others the way you want to be treated. The disconnection between Camus and Armstrong directly relates to the larger issue: how do we avoid the feeling of otherness and create a connection with God? Armstrong argues that we do that through treating everyone with compassion.

Apparently Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) was the first philosopher to talk about "the other" by naming God as "The Wholly Other."[13] Perceiving God for him was the numinous experience that evokes fear and trembling, a quality of mysticism, the tendency to attract, fascinate and compel. The numinous experience also has a personal quality, in that the person feels that they are in communion with a wholly other.

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11 Julian L Stamm, "Camus' Stranger: His Act of Violence," *American Imago* 26, no. 3 (1969): 283, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26302600.

12 Karen Armstrong, "The Charter for Compassion," filmed February 2008, TED video, 21:15, http://www.ted.com/talks/karen_armstrong_makes_her_ted_prize_wish_the_charter_for_compassion.html.

13 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 28.

Martin Buber (1878–1965) and more recently Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) also speak about 'the Other.' Buber coins the 'I-Thou' engagement[14] and Levinas talks about the 'Face-to-Face' relation.[15] Here, I would like to deal with these two theses:

The book *I and Thou* by Martin Buber philosophically attempts to describe how humans can love others. We constantly categorise each other, creating distance between us. Meursault, the main character of Camus's *The Stranger,* never makes a connection to another being, neither human nor divine, but Buber's ideas offer the proper way to do so. The underlying philosophy of humanity's mode of engaging the world in Buber's book is an examination of humanity's existence that entails Meursault's difficulty in showing compassion towards others. He expounds upon Meursault's inability to connect with others, considering it a staple problem of modern society and offers a solution in the third section of *I and Thou*. Buber addresses the twofold mode of humanity's relationship with the world. Explained through the two terms I-It and I-You, Buber describes the modes of engagement that distinguishes the I's in both expressions. The I in the I-It relationship relies on the experience of the objectification of the surrounding world; the I in the I-You relationship is purely relational with the world. The humans' twofold mode of existence is further elaborated in part two where modern society has shaped man to choose one mode over the other. In a predominantly I-It society, Buber argues, man feels alienated because of the emptiness brought upon by the lack of relation with the world. Ultimately, Buber offers a solution in part three that seeks to reform society into a better community by acknowledging the necessity of encountering God.

While human encounters with others may be exclusive, Buber argues that in relation to God "unconditional exclusiveness and unconditi-

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[14] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

[15] Emanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 95. Also, I'd like to add that it was only near the completion of my research on this paper that I discovered a very inspiring multi-year project on encountering the other as stranger as represented by people of other religions. The project's name is: "The Guestbook Project: Hosting the Stranger," which is "an ongoing artistic, academic, and multi-media experiment in hospitality," sponsored by Boston College. It is available online: http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/guestbook/.

onal inclusiveness are one."[16] It is exclusive in that we relate to the You in such a way that we view the universe through God. At the same time, the inclusiveness of the "I-God" relationship is brought upon the fact that in relating to God, we are relating to His entire universe.

Nevertheless, the same feeling of actually loving another and potentially loving another still exists for the I. Not only is God eternal because of His inability to be reduced to an It, but the relation as both exclusive and inclusive fosters the actualisation of God within the world and makes Him the eternal You.

Through the combined effort of multiple people who have encountered God, Buber argues, societal reform from a world of I-It to I-You can solve the feelings of emptiness and anxiety. Finding God can give meaning back to life.

Emmanuel Levinas has a different approach to describing our relationship with the other. For him, the clearest and most potent revelation that I am not everything—that everything does not belong to me, and that my consciousness does not encompass everything—is the face of the Other.[17] "Other" here (especially when capitalized) means "someone else," "the other person," "the person I encounter." If it were not for the face of the other person, I might indeed maintain the illusion that everything I experience and enjoy (food, landscapes, things) is indeed mine. But once I encounter the Other, I realise that there is something absolutely and irreducibly apart from myself, and that the world I enjoy and seem to possess also belongs to the Other; my possession and sovereignty are contested. There is a religious dimension to his thought—ultimately the Other, who is calling us to service and responsibility, is God. He argues, however, that God does not do this directly, but rather through the face of the Other— i.e., through the neighbour ("near one"), whoever it may be, that I encounter—as well as through scripture (e.g., the Bible) and through "testimony," that is, the response within

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16 Buber, *I and Thou*, 127.

17 However, in a chapter entitled Phenomenology of Eros, describing femininity as a figure of otherness, Levinas talks about the manifestation of the beloved "Beyond the Face"; also the title of Section IV of the book: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Boston and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers & Duquesne University Press, 1979), 256–266.

ourselves that (even before we have a chance to analyse or choose it) is aroused by the Other.[18]

Radical conceptions treat the Other as identical to the Self or entirely the opposite. With the recognition that "conceptualizing activity is a highly suspect process, [since] conceptualizations of the Other do violence to it by forcing alterity to 'fit' within predetermined mental structures that deprive the Other of its own unique identity."[19] I suggest that the most helpful step to take is to avoid the assumption that "the Self" means the known and "the Other" means the unknown. Such a perspective leads to misguided statements such as "the Other" is unknown, therefore…" and similar generalisations. Since all conceptualisations rely, at least on a basic level, on certain primitive assumptions, I do not attempt to formulate a proof, but merely offer an alternative perspective to many of the radical positions. I propose that alterity can best be understood through a paradox: in recognizing the unknown within ourselves, we unite with the Other and their unknown qualities. The search for satisfaction in God captures this paradox.

Since this paper approaches alterity through a religious perspective, it is important to recognise that religious traditions are not constrained within any single intellectual paradigm. That is, Christianity and Islam emerged prior to the totalising rationality of Modernity and still exist through post-modernity. To view such a pre-modern, yet living, religion properly, we must do our best to disassociate Christianity, Islam, or other traditions from any one intellectual era or paradigm.

The process of understanding the self and the other is comparative. Through focusing on similarities and, more importantly, differences between others and ourselves, we form identities. Our descriptions of others and ourselves involve characteristics and other forms of distinction to emphasise how we are like or unlike each other. This focus not only defines how we view others, but also how we view ourselves. The entire system of descriptions turns on what separates one person from another. To describe myself as a citizen of the world might have a nice

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18 Richard A. Cohen, ed., *Face to Face with Levinas*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 27.

19 Marsha A. Hewitt, "Alterity and Ethics," *Religion* 27, no. 2 (1997): 101–105, https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.1997.0068.

ring to it, but it doesn't give a customs officer any information he might need to know. For me to be able to differentiate myself as an individual, I must be able to use words that set me apart from others. In this sense, the Self is not inherently known, but merely created relative to those around it. That is, perspectives on what make us each unique do inherently that: define us in comparison with others. In this sense, our understanding of ourselves comes not from within, but from the outside.

Due to this weak ability to understand the Self, Jonathan Smith argues that the Other becomes "most problematic when he is too-much--like-us …The problem is not alterity, but similarity."[20] That is, since the definition of the Self comes from comparisons to others, defining the Self as unique becomes problematic when the Other is not obviously so different. This tension, Smith asserts, creates identity issues. Curtis Freeman, however, offers a powerful alternative to Smith's assertions. He writes that an account of alterity is needed wherein "otherness is not simply the mirror image of the regnant ideology but something radically other. Only from such a standpoint of radical otherness can there be the leverage to subvert the structures of representation and domination."[21]

I suggest that such radical positions fall under the category of "totalizing rationality." We encounter the unknown constantly; we learn about foreign cultures on television, meet new people in the classroom or at work, and we recognize new thoughts and emotions inside ourselves. The unknown is not merely foreign cultures or separate religions. Through recognising that the known and unknown are not merely the Self and the Other, respectively, alterity takes on a new dimension. While the Other may indeed have qualities we do not understand, recognising the unknown in both the Other and the Self leads to a commonality between the two.

Edith Wyschogrod argues powerfully that, "a moral theory that promotes the conditions of agency for others betrays alterity in that

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[20] Jonathan Z. Smith, "What a Difference a Difference Makes," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews and "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985): 47.

[21] Curtis W. Freeman, "Alterity and its Cure," *Cross Currents* 59, no. 4 (2009): 404–441, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24461588.

it presupposes the other as a 'second self' to whom the conditions of agency are to be extended."[22] Such a radical position, however, ignores the fact that including "the unknown" as a quality of both the Self and the Other, does not actually make any presuppositions about the Other. Such radical positions are untenable insofar as they remove the possibility of any commonality between the Self and the Other. Indeed, Wyschogrod's thesis asserts that the only means of connecting with the Other are through entirely rejecting the Self. Marsha Hewitt correctly notes that "such a view is not only politically problematic as a prescription for daily conduct; it is also unsatisfactory. How can one possibly see another, feel another's need and suffering, if one has no sense of self that allows one to feel pain and suffering in ways that allow for basic human empathy toward the other's situation?"[23]

Whereas the alterity theorists I have cited focus on whether or not we can extend the traits we find in ourselves to the Other, I suggest that we ought to view the dilemma from the opposite perspective. The question changes from "Which of my qualities can I ascribe to the Other?" to "Are there traits in myself that I do not understand even as I condemn the unknown of the Other?" In this new perspective, the goal of discourse and establishing identities is not to control or be able to manipulate. Rather, engagement leads to greater insights about both the Other and ourselves that move towards unity. The drive for power through knowledge turns against itself when one recognises the Unknown inherent in himself. This paradox, that through our undefined or recognised qualities we are the same as the Other, leads to true unity. Indeed, proper religion itself embodies this beautiful uncertainty. Even as God is the ultimate Other, unknowable and transcendent, the call of religion is to experience satisfaction and hope in Him. Religion calls us both toward and away from ourselves through embracing the unknown both in God and ourselves. There is a unity in building community around the unknown. We are in a world that, because of sin, constantly

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22 Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 71.

23 Hewitt, "Alterity and Ethics," 103.

fails to achieve its aim, but at the same time we are creatures of a God who does not fail.

Lisette Josephides offers "moments" of this paradox in action. She explains that the Pauline *ecclesia* in Christianity, for example, was a "community of foreigners, founded on missionary activity undertaken in the name of charity (caritas, 'love') and as a 'means of summoning people of goodwill against xenophobia and racism' (Kristeva 1993: 23). The *ecclesia* is made up of 'uprooted wanderers' assimilated to a group new to all (1993: 22)."[24] She continues through the "moment" of "the exodus of Jews from Egypt and Ruth's marriage to Boaz (whose children founded the lineage of kings) reminds us that 'divine revelation requires a disparity, the welcoming of a radical otherness, the acknowledging of foreignness …' (1993: 24)"[25] In each of these moments we encounter the assimilation of foreignness into the Self. I disagree with Josephides, however, on the assimilation of the Other. Since the Self is not entirely known, the Other need not transition from unknown into known to become my brother or sister. I may indeed welcome the foreignness of the Other, but she must not assimilate into the known in order to become welcome.

Obviously, paradoxes cannot be entirely elucidated. By their very nature they are convoluted and resist explanation. Yet through at least recognising the paradox of alterity, I hope that the suppressing rationality of radical schemes might give way to a moderate understanding of otherness. The known and unknown exist in both the Other and the Self. Ironically, part of the "known" in both the Self and the Other is the fact that each includes the "unknown." Through an understanding of the utter transcendence and otherness of God we can better respect the Other and seek to move beyond the negative alterity which divides us and creates schisms.

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24 Lisette Josephides, "Cosmopolitanism as the existential condition of humanity," *Social Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2010): 391, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00121.x: 391.
25 Ibid.

Conclusion

If the human problem is alienation and the solution is reconciliation, the first step is recognising that alienation and its effects, then choosing to view the Other as one with equal dignity and deserving respect. The otherness of the other is not the problem. We can choose to treat the other as an object, an inferior and an enemy, or we can choose to treat the other as an equal actor in our shared space and time who deserves the same esteem, rights and privileges that we desire for ourselves. Such a stance does not require or imply love or special commitment – indeed, it is the recognition of a not-special commitment, a commitment owed to every human being, that can become the arena of our activity and a foundation for love.

The process of moving from alienation to relationship, compassion, and hospitality first of all involves a process of critical self-reflection, of learning to see our unconscious complicity in the structures and prejudices which alienate us from one another. The hoped-for fruit of this critical self-reflection is an awakening to the value of the other and the corresponding discovery of the capacity for relationship with this other, born from the acceptance of the other in their very otherness. The Other need not transform from unknown into known to become my brother or sister. I may indeed accept and respect the otherness of the Other.

Acceptance and respect for the other, even acknowledgement of duties toward the other as a fellow human being, is a necessary step toward curing the alienation that afflicts humanity. It is necessary, but not sufficient. This recognition is the precondition for love and compassion, a disposition which in turn leads us to extend ourselves in hospitality, welcoming the stranger in our midst as friend and honoured guest.[26] And it is in extending hospitality that we mysteriously meet God, face to face.

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[26] One of the brilliant philosophers who has made an inspiring contribution to the subject of "Hospitality" is Jacques Derrida. See, for example, Gil Anidjar, ed., *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Religion* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 356–420. Also, John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

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CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING – BREAKING CYCLES OF VIOLENCE

Nadja Furlan Štante

Introduction

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, in her search towards an embodied theology of just peace, claims that "there are so many deeply embedded forces in Western religion and culture that ensure that the War on Women, and war itself, will rage on. This does not mean these forces cannot be identified and impacted at the root. They can, but it is naive in the extreme to think they can be eliminated."[1] This paper aims to draw attention to the power of the feminine in terms of women's actions and voices in religious peacebuilding[2] towards peaceful theologies and societies, and critically re-examine structural violence against

1 Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield, Christian Theology and the Global War on Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 167.

2 The term peacebuilding thus is used increasingly to define the broad, complex, and sustained process of creating, securing, protecting, and consolidating a peaceful order – work that goes far beyond the formal negotiations that seek to end armed conflicts. Peacebuilding overlaps with development and good governance in the greater effort to build successful, prosperous, and resilient societies. It also reaches into social realms where religious institutions hold sway. It affects and is affected by the role of women in society generally and in creating peace specifically. Gender expectations and norms, the socially constructed roles and behaviours that societies often attribute to, or define as appropriate to, men and women – are shaped by culture, law, nationalism, and other aspects of societies, including religious beliefs and religious institutions. (See Susan Hayward, "Religious Women's Invisibility," in *Women, Religion and Peacebuilding; Illuminating the Unseen,* eds. Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2015), 3.)

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.249 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 45–55

women "which is so ubiquitous and yet so hidden."[3] While elaborating this claim, the paper takes upon the assertion that the "violence against women is the largest and longest global war"[4]. Peacebuilding is understood in its broadest meaning, in terms of women's active participation in building liberating theologies and societies. The latter could be understood in the words of Rosemary Radford Ruether, one of the pioneers of Christian feminist thought and interreligious dialogue, - it is about "the promotion of the full humanity of women"[5].

Just peacemaking is very much an interfaith and inter-religious work and should be placed as a crucial starting point of the urge for transformation of "violent" theologies and living every-day praxis.

While women have been marginalized from peacebuilding generally, the emerging field of religious peacebuilding has been particularly challenging for women. With formal religious authority primarily vested in men in most major religious traditions throughout the world, those women seeking to work through religious institutions or to shape pro-peace religious attitudes often struggle to find spaces to lead efforts or exert influence. Despite these challenges, many women of faith pursue peace actively both within and outside religious institutions. These efforts are exemplified by women such as the late Dekha Ibrahim Abdi of Kenya, Venerable Mae Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta of Thailand, and Sister Mary-Bernard Alima Mbalula of the Democratic Republic of Congo…[6] To some degree, women's marginalisation from the top tier of institutional religious and political leadership suits them for this sort of cross-boundary work. Less visible and less constrained by institutional commitments, they are freer to make moves that would otherwise be considered politically or socially risky.[7] For many of the women involved in this work, the relationships they build are crucial and transformative. Indeed, many note that women's work for peace is often very relational,

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3 Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield*, 168.

4 Ibid., 31.

5 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

6 Susan Hayward, "Women, Religion, and Peacebuilding," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, eds. Atalia Omen, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 312–313.

7 Ibid., 316.

that is, focused on building and deepening interpersonal relationships that can be both individually and socially transformative. The opposite of "war" is not peace but rather creativity. Creativity in the form of empowered embodied experiences of women stepping from the passive invisible backstage role to the forefront of everyday life, decision-making and visible spaces. Or as Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian political, human rights activist, lawyer, former judge and Nobel Peace Prize Winner has put it: "It's not just about hope and ideas. It's about action."[8] The liberating question of this paper is illumination of the ambivalence of invisibility and marginality of women in religious peacebuilding, good practices and future issues.

Women of Faith Transforming Negative Gender Stereotypes and Restoring Peace

At this point it is important to consider that peacebuilding has its traps and shadows. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite claims: "Many whom I have met in the peace movement seem blind to the fact that both peace-making and war making in the West are products of the same male-dominant culture."[9,10] She further elaborates this statement with the thought that it is important to continuously recognise that a Western culture of misogyny is so pervasive that it structures even the best efforts at resisting violence, including movements for peace. This misogyny has elements of the heroic, the erotic, and the identification of femaleness with weakness and subordination. But these structural legacies of both Western philosophy and Christian theology are well disguised in peace traditions.[11] So, it is crucial for peace work to be effective today in ad-

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8 Shirin Ebadi, "Quotes," Quotetab, accessed January 19, 2018, https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-shirin-ebadi/its-not-just-about-hope-and-ideas-its-about-action.

9 Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield,* 148.

10 Also worth mentioning here is the transfer of the elitist and Eurocentric view, which in Western culture is strongly influenced by the perception of the other, the different. (See Maja Bjelica, "The Turkish Alevis: In Search of an Identity," *Poligrafi* 22, no. 87/88 (2017): *Religions and Dialogue*, eds. Helena Motoh and Lenart Škof, http://ojs.zrs-kp.si/index.php/poligrafi/issue/view/32/16, 94.

11 Thistlethwaite, *Women's Bodies as Battlefield*, 148..

dressing the "war on women," to identify the ways in which patriarchy has affected even the most creative of peace paradigms.

Religious beliefs and institutions create undeniable barriers to women's peacebuilding, as gender norms, prejudices, and negative gender stereotypes marginalizing women in political, economic, and social life are often grounded in particular religious teachings and understandings. Negative gender stereotypes are a real danger, especially if marginality, invisibility, and the absence of voice are somehow seen as women's special virtues and gifts. Women as well as men must be power brokers, senior mediators, and religious prophetesses within their own religious traditions. Here we return to Rosemary Radford Ruether's call for "the promotion of the full humanity of women." She elaborated this principle in the following way:

> Whatever denies, diminishes or distorts the full humanity of woman is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or community of redemption. This negative principle implies the positive principle: what does promote the full humanity of women is the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the mission of the redemptive community.[12]

Although this critical principle of feminist theology has been negated within the history of Christianity, and patriarchy and consequent subjugation of women have shaped both the sources and Christianity, the Christian tradition has not lacked critical principles that are useful for feminist theological development. However, religious actors, particularly male clergy, but also conservative laywomen and men, obstruct women's leadership or participation in peacebuilding and peacemaking efforts, or refuse to address women's priorities. They may resist efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality, arguing that these efforts contradict fundamental religious teachings and positions. They may stigmatise women survivors of sexual violence, such as women who become pregnant and give birth after rape, etc. Yet, for many women

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12 Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk*, 19.

facing persistent violence and suffering, their religion is also a source of support and empowerment.

Working invisibly and at the margins has clear drawbacks for religious women peacebuilders, as it hampers their ability to be role models to new generations of women, attract funding or support for their work, or ensure progress toward gender equality in society at large. But there is another side to this story. Many religious women involved in peacebuilding cite their very invisibility and marginality as helpful in ensuring their safety and the safety of those with whom they are working, or the effectiveness of their work. Precisely because women are not at the heads of religious institutions, they are afforded more flexibility and the ability to erect and mobilise effective informal networks outside traditional power structures. They are not preoccupied with institutional bureaucratic management, which offers them more time to operate on the ground and build closer connections to local communities. Susan Hayward's field research results state that in Northern Ireland from the 1970s to the 1990s the nuns became much more radical than many of the priests. The nuns were freer to offer their services in ways that the priests could not. So, you saw some of them doing interfaith work, or getting involved in other issues where the priests were absent.[13] Similarly there is the observation of the founder of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN):

> For a long time the women of FOMWAN have spoken on behalf of Muslims when there was some issue the government wanted to address, because it was easier to work with us than with the men's organizations, where there is so much bureaucracy they can't respond promptly. The men do not have a rapid response like we have, so the government has turned to us to speak for Muslims. The male leaders are under the Supreme Council, the highest Islamic body. The group is led by the Sultan, the emirs, the clerics. Bureaucracy has made them not as effective as they ought to be, and they don't seem to be implementing projects in their communities.[14]

Speaking about moving beyond stereotypes S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana warns how stereotypes distort understandings of Muslim women's

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13 Hayward, "Religious Women's Invisibility," 15.
14 Ibid., 16.

work for peace. Especially in the USA and Europe, the common image of the passive, veiled Muslim women, in need of rescue and redemption, needs to be debunked, because it obscures a far more complex and diverse reality. Shirin Ebadi also states that "whenever Muslim women protest and ask for their rights, they are silenced with the argument that the laws are justified under Islam. It is an unfounded argument. It is not Islam at fault, but rather the patriarchal culture that uses its own interpretations to justify whatever it wants."[15]

The stereotype of a Muslim woman as the oppressed victim of Islam is often grounded, consciously or not, in an assumption that Islam is an oppressive and violent religion that undermines the rights of women. S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana states that:

> There is certainly some truth to the argument that Muslim woman in some contexts are oppressed and constrained by particular interpretations of their tradition. However, when offered as a broad and unqualified generalization, such images obscure the diverse and complex experiences of women over fourteen centuries and across many continents. They fail to account for the roles countless Muslim women have played as proactive agents of change, who are both inspired and empowered by Islam to work toward more peaceful and just societies.[16]

Increasingly, Muslim women are also becoming more active in civil society and adopting Islamic frameworks and texts to create space in public areas. For some activists, wearing Islamic dress and covering their hair helps them negotiate more active roles. Derived from core Islamic principles and values, Muslim women's peacebuilding efforts take different forms in different areas of operation. They include advocacy, being intermediaries, observation, education, transnational justice, and interfaith and intrafaith dialogue.

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[15] MG (Muslim Girl). "Shirin Ebadi: First Muslim Woman Nobel Peace Prize Winner," *MG* (blog), January 19, 2019, https://muslimgirl.com/shirin-ebadi-first-muslim-woman-nobel-peace-prize-winner/.

[16] S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, "Muslim Women's Peacebuilding Initiatives," in *Women, Religion and Peacebuilding; Illuminating the Unseen,* eds. Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2015), 72.

Breaking the Boundaries

Most Muslim women's roles include advocacy peacebuilding efforts. Razan Zaittouneh of Syria, Tawakkul Karman of Yemen, Shirin Ebadi of Iran (Iranian lawyer and human rights activist, the first Iranian and Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Prize, in 2003); and Asmaa Mahfouz of Egypt advocate for peace, justice, and equality in their societies. As advocates, they attempt to empower the weaker parties in conflict situations, restructure relationships, and transform unjust social and religious structures. Their activities often aim at strengthening the representativeness and inclusiveness of governance.

The significant achievements of the Muslim women leaders described above were not easily won; each faced and met challenges in advancing their work. Tawakkul Karman of Yemen (called "the Mother of the Yemeni Revolution" and "the Queen of Peace") was threatened seriously and arrested many times. Yet threats to her life only seemed to strengthen her determination to struggle for a more peaceful society. She continued to forcefully criticise the widespread corruption and killing of innocent people and, as a journalist, continued to report human rights abuses in her country. Like Karman, Asmaa Mahfouz of Egypt also paid a high price for her activities: she faced arrest and at one point was forced into hiding after the government accused her of being a foreign agent. Shirin Ebadi of Iran, the first female judge in the history of Iranian justice, had to step down from her position, and since 2009 she has been in exile in the UK.[17]

Political oppression is not the only challenge that Muslim women face. The modern era has brought new challenges for the Muslim world in general and Muslim women in particular. Traditional and modern sociocultural structures alike often limit women's participation in the public domain and kerb their opportunities to participate fully in the social, political, and cultural development of their societies. They are often excluded from official decision-making mechanisms at national and local levels. They suffer from discrimination, notably in education and health care. Some are forced to marry at a very early age or become

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[17] Ibid., 73.

victims of honour killings. In the midst of violent conflicts women are deliberately targeted to defile the honour of their nations and families. The images and realities of discrimination and (structural) violence in the form of child marriage, restrictions on employment and political participation, and violence and honour killings are contexts that are vital to understand the importance of the active work of women in relation to conflict and peace. These challenges can be fully understood by stepping back to explore the broader historical and global factors that have contributed to their emergence. Among them are the linked legacies of colonial regimes (identified with Westernization) and orientalism (a pattern of images of Muslims as other and less worthy), self-orientalism, globalisation, feminist movements, patriarchal structures, and religious and cultural sources of legitimacy. Rosemary Radford Ruether, while affirming the importance of different expressions of religious and interreligious feminisms, also acknowledges the postcolonial critique of liberal feminism and the ways in which it has been abused in the interest of vested power. Ruether elaborates the complexity of relations between the above listed systems:

> But the relations of western feminism and colonialism are more complex than westerners dominating third world societies and western feminists reading them through the lens of ignorant paternalism. There are also cases where the leaders of a third world country entered into colonial relations with the west and became advocates of western feminism in order to dominate their own society. A fascinating example of this is Iran, whose shifting history in relation to both colonialism and feminism is traced by Iranian historian Nima Naghibi in her 2007 book, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*.[18]

Zayn Kassam discusses the way in which Muslim women have become the target of both Islamophobia and reactionary ideologies within Islam. She exposes three myths (negative stereotypes and prejudices) about Muslim women that are prevalent in the West: that the war in Afghanistan will lead to a liberation of Muslim women, that capital-

[18] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women and Interfaith Relations: Toward a Transnational Feminism," in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 21.

ism will improve life for Muslim women, and that Islam is essentially misogynist and the liberation of Muslim women will require secularism. Each of these myths points to the ways in which feminist ideals have been co-opted by a broad anti-Islamic rhetoric of fear in the West. Kassam argues that the only affirmative and just path to change for Muslim women will have to emerge from within, from Muslim women engaging their own religious resources and participating in the public and political sphere.[19] This emphasis on particularity and difference, not only between but also within religions has come to characterise postmodern feminism, thus rendering the dialogue between women of different religions even more complex, but also more authentic.

Interreligious work is often misunderstood as finding the religious "lowest common denominator." It is not. It is bringing the best of one's own religious tradition to the table, while also accounting for one's own faith and its legacies in violence and conflict. From this standpoint women's interreligious dialogue remains mainly personal and interpersonal and rarely affects or changes the religions to which it belongs. However, dialogue "from below," as we could call women's engagement in interreligious dialogue, often yields important insights and experiences which could be highly instructive and inspiring for the broader tradition, and genuine dialogue can profit from the participation of all voices. It could also be seen as a venue for women's religious peacebuilding.

Conclusion

Because religions have so often marginalised the "Other," who is seen as different and inferior, dialogue becomes a way of seeing them as human and faithful. Dialogue can therefore lead to the mending of difficult, even utterly broken, relationships. That is why the so called "religious awakening" of the individual is needed. Today, key religious elements are influencing most major conflicts and misunderstandings

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[19] Zayn Kassam, "Constructive Interreligious Dialogue Concerning Muslim Women," in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 109–127.

between peoples and nations around the world; therefore, the importance of new religious awakening in terms of interreligious, just peacemaking in which women have a crucial role. The power of the feminine in the form of women's voices or actions in interreligious dialogue and religious peacebuilding are fundamentally prone to the practicality and personal character and they touch "the untouchable" and see the "hidden, invisible"; still they witness the ubiquitous traces and forms of violence. Contrary to stereotypical assumptions, many Christian and Muslim women have played and continue to play diverse roles in peacebuilding in their communities, and contexts and challenges that they face contribute to some of their strengths. Since women have had limited access to official and direct peacebuilding efforts at the top level, they have developed skills to work effectively at the grassroots level through informal channels. Their power often lies in their relationships. They have been particularly effective in building relationships, encouraging empathy, and bringing diverse groups together. Rather than accepting roles as passive victims behind the curtains, they become active leaders of their own stories and societies. Rather than being limited or oppressed by their religious texts, they find and lift up in Christianity and Islam a set of values and norms that oppose patriarchal structures and affirm their efforts to resolve conflict and build sustainable peace.

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ISLAMIC MYSTICISM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Mohammad Saeedimehr

> My heart is capable of every form,
> a cloister of the monk, a temple for idols,
> a pasture for gazelles, the votary's Ka'ba,
> the tables of the Torah, the Koran.
> Love is creed I hold: wherever turn His camels, love is still my creed and faith
>
> Ibn 'Arabi

Introduction

Dialogue between Muslims and the followers of other religions, as a practice in reality, has a long history. During the early centuries after the emergence of Islam, especially the Abbasid period, many meetings for debates took place between Muslim scholars and the representatives of other religions who lived under the rule of Islamic states. Though these debates might seem to lack some conditions of what nowadays is typically seen as an ideal dialogue, they embedded initial forms of interreligious or interfaith dialogue[1] in its broad sense. This situation has continued to the extent that currently many Muslim intellectuals are motivated to engage seriously in dialogue with Christians, Jews, and the adherents of other religions. Nevertheless, theoretical discussion about the nature, goals, and conditions of interreligious dialogue

[1] Some writers use "interfaith dialogue" and "interreligious dialogue" differently; the former applies to a dialogue with the followers of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and the latter applies to a dialogue with the followers of other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. In this paper, I use "interreligious dialogue" in a broad sense, namely a dialogue between the followers of all major religions.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.237 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 57–78

is a modern endeavour. Despite the current rich literature on these topics many more issues remain that need thorough and deep attention of scholars who believe in the fruitfulness and even necessity of interreligious dialogue and are interested in making a positive contribution to the contemporary discourse on it.

In this paper I investigate Islamic Mysticism to find out how and to what extent the mystical views can build theoretical bases for a productive and fruitful interreligious dialogue. After some clarifications about the two keywords of this research, i.e., "interreligious dialogue" and "Islamic mysticism," three mystical principles as the metaphysical-theological, the anthropological, and the hermeneutical bases of interreligious dialogue are discussed. In this section, regarding the unique status of Ibn 'Arabi[2] in Islamic mysticism, I mostly deal with his views. Finally, I show how these principles can construct a plausible ground for the legitimacy and the utility of interfaith dialogue.

Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue has been defined in several ways. "Cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, at both the individual and institutional level" seems to be a rather appropriate description. "Interaction," in its broad sense, embraces the exchange of religious heritage including theological beliefs and religious experiences as well as joint enterprises to increase peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

The participants in interreligious dialogue are expected to seek a diversity of goals such as acquiring more profound knowledge of their own tradition and a more authentic and sympathetic understanding of others' religious beliefs and practices. In order to be sufficiently successful, this dialogue should take place within some specific conditions. The participants should be totally honest and sincere in striving

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[2] Abu Abd al-Allah Muhammad ibn al-Arabi (560/1165-630/1165) known as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master). He wrote numerous books, among them these two are the most well-known: *The Meccan Illuminations* or *Revelations [al-Futūḥat al-Makkiya]* (Beirut: Dar al-Sader, n.d.) and *The Bezels of Wisdom [Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam]* (Beirut, 1946).

to come closer to the Truth. They also should have mutual trust and religious tolerance.[3]

To be sure, we can propose a more comprehensive list of what one may call "the prerequisites" of profound and productive interreligious dialogue. First, these can be divided into inner (individual) and outer (social) prerequisites. By the former, I mean those preconditions which should exist in the personality of individual participants in the dialogue. The social preconditions relate to the whole environment of the dialogue, including financial support of governmental and private organisations. Individual preconditions are of several types, including moral and doxastic ones. Humility is one of the most significant individual preconditions, which is considered as both a moral and an epistemic or intellectual virtue. Intellectual humility "involves having an appropriate, modest, and non-haughty view of our mental abilities, advantages, and disadvantages, that we have the ability to properly evaluate, and evaluate various ideas and positions in a way that includes respect for others who disagree with us. etc."[4] Moral humility "includes the understanding and genuine experience of oneself as merely one of the morally important beings whose interests and well-being are as worthy of equal consideration and care as the interest of others."[5] The positive role of humility in fostering interreligious dialogue seems beyond any doubt. A humble religious individual does not believe in any a priori moral and full-scale doxastic privilege for himself over the followers of other religions. Instead, he can easily assume that he is morally on a par with the adherents of other religions and that, through a sincere and effective dialogue, he can share his religious knowledge with them to gain a deeper understanding of his own as well as others' traditions.

Humility, in the above sense, typically amounts to a remarkable degree of tolerance towards the people of other faiths. Tolerance is sym-

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3 For a more detailed explication of the nature of interreligious dialogue and its rules, areas, and goals see: Leonard Swidler, "Interreligious and Interideological D: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection Today," in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 6–30.

4 Vojko Strahovnik, "Humility, Religions, and Dialogue," *Poligrafi* 22, no. 87/88 (2017): 4–5.

5 Ibid., 5.

pathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or even conflicting with one's own. To be sure, religious tolerance does not in itself imply that the tolerant person accepts the content of conflicting beliefs or the appropriateness of dissimilar practices of the adherents of other religions. Instead, what it requires is to accept their holding that belief or performing that practice. Tolerance, then, is not an attitude towards religious beliefs and practices but believers and practitioners.[6]

Another point regarding interreligious dialogue is that it can be realized in different modes or levels. According to some classifications, it has four different levels: 1. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joy and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. 2. The dialogue of action, in which persons of all religions collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. 3. The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. 4. The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.7 It should be noted that in what follows I am mostly concerned with the third and fourth levels of interreligious dialogue.

Islamic Mysticism

English texts usually use the phrase "Islamic mysticism" to refer to a specific part of the Islamic tradition. This term commonly is taken to mean the same as what is meant by the Arabic/Persian word 'irf ān. In order to show the status of Islamic mysticism within the Islamic tradition, many scholars used to distinguish between the exterior and interior dimensions of Islam. Islamic mysticism here comprises the interior

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[6] For a detailed discussion on the meaning and implications of religious tolerance see: Tay Newman, "The Idea of Religious Tolerance," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1978): 187–195, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20009713.

[7] M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 95–96.

dimension of Islam compared to the Shari'a as the exterior dimension. For example, Sayyid Hossein Nasr writes:

> In the Islamic context mysticism means the esoteric dimension of Islam identified for the most part with Sufism but also with Shi'ite esotericism, both Twelve-Imam and Isma'ili. Moreover, Islamic mysticism understood in this sense is primarily a path of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah, 'irfān*) to which the element of love is attached in accordance with the structure of the Islamic revelation…[8]

This distinction is also expressed through the distinction between esoterism (outward religion) and exoterism (inward religion). To be more illustrative, this distinction is sometimes expressed using the metaphor of the circle:

> In Islam these two domains - outward and inward - are more or less distinct, though they bear a clear relationship to one another. This relationship is traditionally described as follows: the outward religion, or "exoterism" (known in Islam as the *Shari'a*), may be likened to the circumference of a circle. The inner Truth, or "esoterism" (known as the *ḥaqiqa*) that lies at the heart of the religion, may be likened to the circle's centre. The radius proceeding from circumference to centre represents the mystical or "initiatic" path (called the *tariqa*) that leads from outward observance to inward conviction, from belief to vision, and, in scholastic terms, from potency to act.[9]

As indicated in Nasr's words, in the Islamic context, "mysticism" and *Sufism* (*taṣawwuf*) are frequently taken as having the same referent. In this view, *Sufism* "is the name given to the mysticism of Islam."[10] However, these two terms are not synonyms; they don't have the same meaning. "Mysticism" is derived from the Greek *muein*, which means "to close the eyes and lips." Therefore, "mysticism" literally connotes the meaning of knowledge of the Truth not by mere reason or other ordinary means but by heart.

Sufism is the English translation for the Arabic word *taṣawwuf*, which means "being a *sufi*." Yet there has been a disagreement over the

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8 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Introduction to the Mystical Tradition," in *History of Islamic Philosophy (part 1)*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (Oxon: Routledge, 1996), 367.

9 William Stoddart, *Outline of Sufism: The Essentials of Islamic Spirituality*, foreword R. W. J. Austin (Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2012), 4–5.

10 A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.

meaning of *sufi* in this context. Among the several proposed morphologies, two are more common. According to the first, *sufi* is derived from the Arabic passive verb *ṣufiya*, which means "it was purified." "The Sufi is thus the perfect initiate, the yogi of the Hindu tradition, the being who has succeeded in climbing backthe arc of divine manifestation and who has "reached God" (*waṣil*)."[11] According to the second view, which seems less plausible, *sufi* is derived from the Arabic word *ṣuf* (wool). This morphology is in harmony with the fact that since a real mystic must live a highly spiritual life he must be an ascetic and wearing coarse-grained woollen robes is a symbol for having an ascetic style of life.[12]

These etymologies aside, the exact meaning of *sufism* (*taṣawwuf*), as used nowadays in the Islamic and Western texts, has not been so clearly determined:

> As Carl Ernst has pointed out in his excellent introduction to the study of Sufism, the word was given prominence not by the Islamic texts, but rather by British Orientalists, who wanted a term that they found attractive and congenial and that would avoid the negative stereotypes associated with the religion of Islam stereotypes that they themselves had often propagated.
>
> In the Islamic texts, there is no agreement as to what the word *sufi* means, and authors commonly argued about both its meaning and its legitimacy…
>
> The modern studies of Sufism reflect the disagreement over the word found in the primary texts. Scholars do not agree among themselves as to what the name means, and any number of definitions and descriptions can be culled from their studies.[13]

Some scholars used to divide Islamic mysticism/sufism into two main sub-branches: Theoretical and practical. The former consists in the theoretical exposition of the Truth, and the latter is nothing but the realisation of the Truth via spiritual practice.[14] Theoretical mysticism consists in the Knowledge of the Absolute Being or Reality (God), His

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[11] Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, transl. Roger Gaetani (Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc., 2010), 4.

[12] Ibid., 5.

[13] William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 2–3.

[14] See: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 32.

attributes, names, and manifestations and the features of the Beginning and the End. Practical mysticism, on the other hand, is the knowledge of how one can travel one's spiritual journey (*sulūk*) towards God. Mysticism, in both these applications, is a certain kind of knowledge. However, "practical mysticism" is sometimes used to convey another meaning, namely a kind of human practice or a form of life in accordance with mystical knowledge – a practical process of intentional ascension towards God. It seems that, in the following passage, David Cook is considering this last meaning of "Islamic Mysticism."

> Mysticism in Islam is understood in terms of a process (*tariq*) that is guided by the direction of a spiritual mentor (called a *shaykh or a pir*) having the goal of eventual union with God (Allah). This process is usually a life-long one, during the course of which it is crucial that the initiate combat his or her baser impulses located in the soul (Qur'an 12:53). To complete this process, the initiate must place himself or herself completely under the spiritual supervision of the mentor and carry out an ever-increasing series of spiritual (and sometimes physical) exercises. These exercises have the goal of emptying out the personality of the initiate and filling it with the remembrance of the divine and, ultimately, preparing the person for union. Additional exercises can include mortification of the body and deprivation of sleep and food, but interestingly not chastity, which is not seen as a value by Muslims. The initiate proceeds through a series of levels or stations that progress toward the promised union.[15]

What would be, then, the position of Islamic mysticism towards issues like religious diversity and interreligious dialogue? Some contemporary scholars of Islamic mysticism assume that among different Islamic sciences, mysticism can provide a more positive and sympathetic explanation of the diversity and prepare a productive way for the dialogue. Nasr's view seems to be a good example. After a very absorbing discussion of Islam's positive encounter with other religions (Christianity, Judaism, as well as the eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism) on different levels such as jurisprudence, theology, history,

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15 David Cook, "Mysticism in Sufi Islam," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Religion*, May 4, 2015, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.51.

science, and philosophy[16], he concludes that it is only on the level of Islamic mysticism (or Sufism, in his own words) that "the most profound encounter with other traditions has been made and where one can find the indispensable ground for the understanding in depth of other religions today." He continues:

> The Sufi is one who seeks to transcend the world of forms, to journey from multiplicity to Unity, and from the particular to the Universal. He leaves the many for the One, and through this very process is granted the vision of the One in the many. For him all forms become transparent, including religious forms, thus revealing to him their unique origin. Sufism or Islamic gnosis is the most universal affirmation of that perennial wisdom which stands at the heart of Islam and in fact of all religion as such.[17]

In the rest of this paper, I shall defend this view through explaining some principles or doctrines of Islamic mysticism which directly or indirectly can pave the path for promotion and enhancement of interreligious dialogue. This topic, it must be emphasized, is too broad to be exhausted in a short paper. Thus, what follows should be seen just as a small part of what should be done in this respect.

A Metaphysico-Theological Basis

The metaphysical problem of "unity and plurality" is usually seen as one of the most complicated problems of philosophy which can be traced back to the ancient era. During the history of Islamic philosophy and mysticism, three main views have been presented. According to the first view, apparently endorsed by the so-called Muslim peripatetic philosophers like Avicenna (370/980-429/1037), the universe consists of numerous distinct entities or existents. The theological implication of this view is that God and His creatures are metaphysically distinct entities while God, as the creator, is the efficient cause of them. The second view, proposed and defended by Mulla Sadra (979/1572-1050/1640), is based on the metaphysical principle of the gradation of existence

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[16] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," in *Sufi Essays*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 1999), 143–146.
[17] Ibid., 146.

(*tashkīk al-wujūd*). Existence has a unique reality that embraces a hierarchy of grades or levels. The highest level which is infinite in itself belongs to God, and other levels of existence which are more or less finite pertain to His creatures. On the one hand, existence, as the single reality common among hierarchical levels of beings, provides a real unity. On the other hand, the multiplicity of levels provides a real plurality. This view is usually called "unity in plurality and plurality in unity."

The third view, usually called "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" (unity of existence) and mostly reflected in the mystical works, has been interpreted in different ways.[18] According to one standard interpretation, this view contends that there is no existent in the reality except God and thus, the so-called "creatures" are not real existents but mere manifestations of Him. It is widely believed that the first Muslim mystic who theoretically developed this view was Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), though according to some scholars, he never used the term "*waḥdat al-wujūd*."[19]

With regard to the principle of the unity of existence, Ibn 'Arabi distinguishes between two dimensions of existence; hidden or interior and unveiled or exterior. In the first dimension, there is no plurality and no determination and thus, God, in this respect, is totally unknown and epistemologically inaccessible. The second dimension is the realm of

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[18] For a deep and detailed exposition of the most significant interpretations see: Mulla Mohammad Mahdi Naraqi, *Qurrat al-'Oyoon* in *Muntakhabati az Athar-e Hukama-ye Ilahi-e Iran,* ed. Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Qum: Markaz-e Intisharat-e Dafter-e Tabliqat-e Eslami, 1378/1999), 534–601.

[19] A few Sufis – like Ahmad Sirhindi – believe that Ibn 'Arabi's authentic view was not a metaphysical thesis about the unity of existence but an exposition of what we may call "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*" (the unity of witnessing). According to this interpretation, what is claimed here is that during the final stages of his or her spiritual journey, the real mystic or *sufi* ascends to a very high level so that whenever he/she looks at the whole universe via the heart, she/he witnesses nothing real but God. It is obvious that according to this construal "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" would not be a metaphysical but an anthropological and epistemological thesis. For a survey of this view see: Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1971).
Ibn 'Arabi's endorsement of this view has provoked negative reactions in the Islamic world, especially among some Muslim jurists (m*ufti*). For example, the *hanbali mufti*, Ibn Timiyyeh, accused Ibn 'Arabi of heresy because of his support of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

God's manifestations in the sense that His multiple attributes manifest in the form of multiple creatures.[20]

Following Ibn 'Arabi, Sayyid Haydar Amoli (d. 787/1385), a distinguished Shi'ite mystic, made a distinction between theological monotheism (*al-tawhîd al-ulūhi*) and ontological monotheism (*al-tawhîd al-wujūdi).* The former is the monotheistic view of the "folk of the exterior" (*ahl al-zāhir*), which merely means that there is no god but Allah. The latter, however, is the view of the "folk of the interior" (*ahl al-bātin*), who do not believe in the plurality of existents but accept just one single being; i.e., the Divine being.[21]

The quintessence of the metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* – i.e., the explanation of unity in respect to the unicity of existence or the highest Reality (God) – and interpretation of plurality in respect to its multiple manifestations or theophanies (*tajalliāt*) has a great impact on the mystic's whole picture of God, man, creation, religion, prophethood, etc.

The first question is about the creation; how the One came to manifest Himself in the multiplicity of the world. According to the Muslim mystics, this multiplicity initially was present in God's knowledge in the form of archetypes or "permanent entities" (*al-a'yān al-thabita*). Though the very essence of God was eternally hidden, His Different Names and Attributes (*al-Asmā' wa al-Sifāt*) had an ontological request for being manifested via creation. Thus, God revealed the whole creation by his cosmic order (*al-amr*) and brought about the creatures as signs and mirrors, reflecting Him in a limited manner. The ground of this cosmic emergence is nothing but Divine love as is divulged in the sacred tradition (*al-hadith al-qudsi*)[22]: "I was a hidden treasure. Then I loved to be Known, Thus, I created the creation to be known."[23] Among all God's other manifestations, man enjoys the highest status.

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[20] Majid Fakhri, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 258.

[21] Reza Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue: Sufi Perspectives on the Universality of the Qur'anic Message," in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Indiana: World Wisdom, inc., 2004), 143.

[22] "*Al-hadith al-qudsi*" refers to those sayings of the prophet Muhammad whose wording is of the Prophet but the content is attributed to God. Because of this, they are not included in the Qur'an.

[23] Fakhri, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 259.

The so-called "perfect man" (*al-Insān al-Kāmil*) is the compendium of the whole creation in which all the possible perfections are instantiated. Thus, the perfect man is the microcosm as opposed to the created universe as the macrocosm.

How can we, then, explain the undeniable fact that different religious people have different conceptions of God in their minds and consequently worship different deities? Ibn ʿArabi accepts this fact and emphasises that ordinary people (who have not reached the stage of the perfect man) first create a god in their imagination and then worship this "believed god."[24]

God is created in the belief of His bondsmen. For, when a person rationally considers God, he creates what he believes in himself through his consideration. Hence, he worships only a god that he has created through his consideration. He has said to it "Be!", and it has come into existence. That is why God commanded us to worship the god brought by the Messenger and spoken of in the Book. For if you worship this God, you will be worshiping your creator, and you will have fully given worship its due.[25]

Nevertheless, according to *waḥdat al-wujūd*, even these different gods are the One's manifestations in different minds and imaginations. Yet, there is no mistake in believing in these gods; the main mistake is committed when one takes these "believed gods" as the Absolute Reality and denies others. A perfect mystic is able to believe in God in all His manifestations.

Moreover, the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* entails the unity and universality of Divine revelation. Each Divine prophet is a specific manifestation of the universal Divine logos, or God's word, which is commonly named by the mystics "the reality of Muhammad" (*al-haqiqat al-muhammadiyya*). Accordingly, each religion reveals a specific aspect of Divine Names and Attributes.[26] Therefore, the diversity of religions

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24 Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue: Ibn ʿArabi and Meister Eckhart," The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/interreligious-dialogue.html.

25 Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiya, Beirut: Dar al-*Sader, vol. IV, 142–143. The translation is quoted from: Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue."

26 Nasr, "Islam and the Encounter of Religions," 149.

as a socio-historical fact never means that they are totally opposite ways to opposite aims. Instead, there are different ways that are supposed to guide man to the same objective.

Diversity of religions is occasionally expressed differently using a specific mystical jargon; the unity of the religion and the diversity of the Divine law (*Shari'a*). Commenting on the Qur'anic verse "And We sent no messenger before thee but We inspired him, (saying): There is no God save Me (Allah), so worship Me" (21:25), Ibn 'Arabi writes:

> In this verse God mentions "worship," but no specific practices, for He also said: "For each [of the prophets] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way" (5:48), that is We have set down designated practices. The period of applicability of the practices can come to an end, and this is called "abrogation" (*naskh*) in the words of the learned masters of the Law (*Shari'a*). There is no single practice in each and every prophecy, only the performance of the religion, coming together of it, and the statement of the monotheism (*tawhid*). This is indicated in God's words, "He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in thee (Muhammad), and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish religion, and be not divided therein" (42:13).[27]

According to this view, one may say, the unique Divine religion is the single spirit which, over the history of mankind, has become immanent in various bodies as different Divine laws. But how can we explain the diversity of *Shari'a* while *religion* is the same? Why God did not fix the same *Shari'a* for all human beings through the history of revelation? Ibn 'Arabi's response is clear: The inner constitutions, as well as mental and spiritual capacities of humans, are not the same; some are less knowing and some others are more knowing, some are less vicious and others are more vicious. These natural differences lead to people's different images of God. Few of them can gain a (pure mystical) knowledge of God beyond any limitations while others picture God just through His attributes. It seems that, to understand this explanation in a more rational fashion, we should apply these natural differences to nations and societies too. Consequently, the idea would be that each specific Divine law accords with the dominant cognitive and spiritual capaci-

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[27] Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiya*, vol. II, 414.

ties of a specific nation during a certain period of time. Regarding these differences among different nations, each Divine law emphasized some specific aspects of religious doctrines and practices which were more fitting to the society.

It is noteworthy that one should not conclude from the foregoing remarks about Ibn ʿArabi's point of view that he advocates religious pluralism in the sense that all different religions are totally *equal* in respect to presenting the Truth for mankind. Using the metaphor of "sun and stars" he, as a Muslim mystic, endorses the view that Islam, as the final manifestation of Divine religion, has abrogated the previous forms (Divine laws) without annulling them:

> All the revealed religions are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that take place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all revealed religions. They are not rendered null by abrogation, that is the opinion of the ignorant.[28]

Understood in this way, Ibn ʿArabi's view of the diversity of religions is commonly labelled by the contemporary traditionalists as "transcendental unity of religions."[29]

This attitude toward the unity of the quintessence of Divine religion and the diversity of its manifestations has been adopted by other great Muslim mystics. Kashani, for instance, put the difference in terms of the permanency of the "absolute" or unconditioned religion and the mutability of its different forms: "So the right religion *(ad-dīn al-qayyim*) is tied to that which is immutable within knowledge and

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[28] Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyah*, vol. III, 153.

[29] For a classical exposition of the idea of "transcendent unity of Religions" see: Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, introduction Huston Smith (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1984).

action; while the revealed Law is tied to that which alters in respect of rules and conditions."[30]

The relevant implications of the mystical principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* for interreligious dialogue are not limited to what has been mentioned so far. More scrutiny may lead one to discover new implications. For example, as William Chittick has shown, we may concentrate on how for Ibn 'Arabi *waḥdat al-wujūd* can lead to the truth of opposite religious beliefs. On the face of it, this conclusion may look, especially for professional philosophers and theologians, absurd and irrational. Nevertheless, if one sees a belief as a specific manifestation of the Truth, then every belief will have its own contribution to truth. Chittick elucidates this line of thought as follows:

> "God," after all, is *wujūd*, and *wujūd* embraces all of reality on whatever level it is envisaged. In respect to its manifestation, *wujūd* is named by every name in the cosmos. Thus every knowledge possessed by every knower … is in fact knowledge of God…

If everyone has a belief, can we say that all beliefs are true?... He [Ibn 'Arabi] would most likely say that the answer depends on what we mean by "true." If "true" means that a knotting corresponds to reality, then of course all beliefs are true, since each belief represents some aspect of reality, however limited and distorted that aspect might be. If a belief did not correspond to reality in some way, it would not exist… Hence, we can reach a preliminary conclusion that beliefs are true, no matter what their content.[31]

In order to explain the diversity of human pictures of God, Ibn 'Arabi sometimes uses the metaphor of a mirror. The Real, or God, is like a single mirror in which everyone sees his or her own image: "It is as if someone sees in the mirror his own image or the image of the others. In both cases, the mirror is a single object and the forms are many for the seer." And what brings about the people's controversy over the true image of God is that "every believer believes in God only through what he creates in his own soul. Thus, in their beliefs, God is made. That

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30 Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue," 162.

31 William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 138.

is, they see not other than their own souls and what they have made within it."[32]

Fīṭra: The Anthropological Basis

The theory of *fīṭra*, applied to the very nature of the man as originated by God, has been more or less accepted by many Islamic schools of thought. However, mystics usually develop this theory and interpret it in a mystical fashion. The Arabic root "*f-t-r*" initially means "to split or cleave" and in its secondary usage means "to create" as if the act of creation is essentially like splitting the curtain of non-existence and bringing out the creatures into existence. The Qur'an calls God *fātir* since He is the Creator of the world. When the human nature is involved, different English translations are proposed for the Arabic word *fīṭra* such as "primordial or original constitution" and "innate or archetypal nature." Generally speaking, the theory of *fīṭra* claims that due to the Divine creation and in terms of their original constitution, human beings have a certain kind of inclination to and knowledge of God and religion. The proponents of this theory have been typically inspired by the following famous Qur'anic verse:

> So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith – God's original (*Fīṭrat Allah*) upon which He originated mankind. There is no change in God's creation. That is the right religion; but most men know it not. [30:30]

According to this verse, God has created man in a permanent original state which is directed towards the permanent Divine religion. Moreover, according to a very well-known hadith (saying of the prophet Mohammad), every new-born child is born in accordance with this primordial nature.[33]

Understood in this way, *fīṭra* provides man with innate knowledge of monotheism and the initial inclination to worship God and to choose the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqim*) towards Him. Of course, during the life of man this primordial state can be reshaped and even dis-

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32 Ghasem Kakaie, "Interreligious Dialogue."

33 For an informative description of *fīṭra* see: Nevad Kahteran, "Fīṭra," in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

torted by many factors including the social and cultural environment and educational systems, etc. This can justify the fact that many adults fail to deploy their own *fiṭra* and consequently go astray in their lives.

What would be then the relation between man's primordial knowledge of God and what God reveals to him through prophetic revelation? The answer is that there is a deep affinity between these two to the extent that to follow the prophet and the revealed law is in itself nothing but to follow the requirements of the human primordial nature. Thus, the prophetic message as the outward guide is in full accordance to the primordial inclination and knowledge as the inward guide.[34] In other words, Divine revelation helps man to develop his *fiṭra* in the best possible way.

In its metaphysical sense, Ibn 'Arabi interprets *fiṭra* as the Light by which the darkness of possible beings is split and the difference between them takes place. Regarding the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, this means that *fiṭra* is identical with God, who, according to the Qur'an, is both the *Fatir* (creator) and the Light of the heavens and the earth [35:1 and 24:36]. In its anthropological sense, Ibn 'Arabi provides different characterizations of *fiṭra*. Sometimes he takes *fiṭra* to be the "knowledge and confession of the existence of the Lord (*rabb*)." In other cases, he claims that man's worship of the unique God and his belief in God's unity are in accordance with human primordial nature.[35]

The Hermeneutic Basis

In the view of all Muslims, the glorious Qur'an as the speech of God revealed to the prophet Muhammad, is the main source of Islamic

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[34] Shah-Kazemi explains the Qur'anic view on the affinity between *fiṭra* and *Shari'a* (revealed law) appealing to some verses of the Qur'an which allude to the fact that the Divine prophets are *from* the people and the verses which take the Qur'an as a *reminder* for mankind. See: Shah-Kazemi, "The Metaphysics of Interfaith Dialogue," 164–165.

[35] For a detailed discussion of Ibn 'Arabi's view on *fiṭra* see: Reza Akbari and Mohammad Qafurinezhad, "Fetrat dar Andisheye Ebn Arabi wa Ertebate An ba E'teqad be Wojude Khoda [Ibn 'Arabi on *Fīṭra* and Its Relation to the Belief in God], *Pazhuheshnameye Erfan* (Spring and Summer 1389/2010), 23–42.

teachings.[36] Due to its miraculous language and extraordinary semantic depth, the Qur'an is usually assumed to need interpretation or exegesis (*tafsir*). According to a well-known tradition (*hadith*) from Mohammad, the Qur'an has a hidden aspect (*baṭn*) which in its turn has another hidden aspect and so on up to seven (or as it was mentioned in some citations, up to seventy) aspects. Inspired by this *hadith*, Muslim scholars typically believe that the Qur'anic verses have hierarchical (vertical) layers of meaning and the ideal interpretation of the Qur'an should undertake the task of penetrating the surface of the outward layer of meaning to reach the deeper ones. From the very beginning years after the revelation, the need for interpretation gave birth to a branch of Islamic sciences known as the science of exegesis (*'ilm al-tafsir*). From a historical perspective, one finds that many different schools with diverse methods of *tafsir have gradually developed.*[37] In what follows I shall very briefly explore the mystical approach to the Qur'anic exegesis with an emphasis on Ibn 'Arabi's approach.

Generally speaking, the main presupposition of the mystical approach to exegesis of the Qur'an is that while the exterior meaning (*zāhir*) of the Qur'anic verses is authentic, one should not limit oneself to it. Instead, he should go further to unveil the numerous interior meanings (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'an. In order to disclose the deeper layers of meaning, the mystics believe, the exegete cannot merely employ his reason. Instead, he should traverse the path of "unveiling" (*kashf*) the truth behind the Qur'anic letters.[38] The word *ta'wil*, as opposed to "tafsir," is sometimes used to refer to the mystics' hermeneutical method of interpreting the Qur'an. In different sources of the Qur'anic studies, *ta'wil* is

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36 To be sure, besides the Qur'an, the authentic Islamic traditions (sayings of Mohammad, for the Sunnis, and sayings of Mohammad and the Imams, for the Shi'ite) are seen as the secondary source of Islam.

37 For a short sketch of different genres and diverse historical schools of Qur'anic exegesis see: Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 28–30, 147–168. The author classifies the historical schools into four: the Makkah, the Madinah, the Kufa, and the Basrah schools. The different genres of Qur'anic exegesis include paraphrastic, narrative, legal, linguistic, thematic, and scientific.

38 For an in-depth and detailed explanation of Ibn 'Arabi's view on the roles of reason and unveiling in interpreting the Qur'an see: William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 232–239.

used in very divergent meanings.[39] Some scholars hold that in the early centuries of Islam these two words were used interchangeably to denote any type of the Qur'anic exegesis. After that time "tafsir" began to be applied only to those interpretations mostly inspired by the first generations of Muslims, while *ta'wil* became a term referring to other types of interpretations. Eventually, some mystics, like al-Nisaburi, used *ta'wil* and "tafsir" for esoteric and exoteric commentary, respectively.[40]

Ibn 'Arabi takes the Qur'an as the main source of whatever he speaks of and whatever he writes. It is due to this absolute dominance of the revelation over his thought that we find almost all of his works full of numerous references to the Qur'anic verses. Corresponding to the distinction between esoteric and exoteric aspects of the universe as the macrocosm and of the man as the microcosm, Divine revelation too has apparent or exterior meaning (*zāhir*) and hidden or interior meaning (*bāṭin*). In contrast to the so-called *bāṭiniyya* (esotricists) who totally dismiss the literal meaning and only take the symbolic and allegorical meanings into account, Ibn 'Arabi sees both types of meaning essential and indispensable. Thus, making any change in the words and even letters of the Qur'an would count as *taḥrif* (alteration of God's words) which is religiously forbidden. As Chittick points out:

> Ibn 'Arabi never denies the literal and apparent meaning. But he frequently adds to the literal sense an interpretation based upon an opening which transcends the cognitive limitations of most mortals. He often tells us that God may unveil meanings of the text to the gnostic which others never perceived, and these unveilings can be trusted as long as they do not gainsay or contradict the literal meaning… We cannot replace one word with another and say that this is what was really meant.[41]

It should be noted that Ibn 'Arabi's emphasis on the unchangeability of the Qur'anic words after being revealed to the Prophet doesn't entail that each Qur'anic verse only has one single meaning forever. Here Ibn 'Arabi unfolds a mysterious fact about the Qur'an: Some reciters of the

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39 For a detailed discussion of the tafsir/ta'wil dichotomy see: Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis,* 84–109.

40 Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on The Qur'an in Classical Islam* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 42.

41 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, xvi.

Qur'an are in a situation that the Qur'anic verses descend upon their hearts instead of their tongues. For these people the Qur'an is perpetually new, that is to say, "it continually brings new meanings to hearts prepared to receive it; none of these meanings annuls the preceding one, and all of them were inscribed from the beginning in the plenitude of the Qur'an's letter."[42] Ibn 'Arabi writes:

> The servant whose inner sight [*al-basira*] is enlightened – he who is guided by a light from his lord [Qur'an 39:22] – obtains with each recitation of a verse a new understanding, distinct from that which he had during the preceding recitation and that that he will obtain during the succeeding recitation… He whose understanding is identical in two successive recitations is losing. He whose understanding is new in each recitation is winning.[43]

Ibn 'Arabi uses the word '*ishāra* (allusion) instead of tafsir to convey the fact that the mystical exegesis consists in making allusions to the unveiling knowledge gained through reciting the Qur'an.[44]

The Role of Mystical Teachings

Now it is time for considering how and to what extent the abovementioned mystical principles can affect the mystic's position on interreligious dialogue. The productive role of the Islamic mysticism in fostering interreligious dialogue between Muslims and the adherents of other religions may be considered in two different, though interrelated, areas; doxastic and moral.

(I) Doxastic Area: As we considered, the metaphysical principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* potentially has many notable implications for interreligious dialogue. Being the different manifestations of God's logos, all religions (or Divine laws) have their common root in Divinity. Therefore, the mystical insight leads to the firm belief that, instead of being crossing ways, different religions are parallel path which all end in

42 Michael Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore; Ibn 'Arabi, the Book and the Law,* transl. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 26.

43 Ibn 'Arabi, *al-Futūḥat al-Makkiya*, vol III, 128–129.

44 For an exposition of the difference between Ibn 'Arabi's approach and that of other Muslim mystics such as al-Sarraj and al-Ghazali see: Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on The Qur'an in Classical Islam*, 37–41.

certain knowledge of God. They are, as the renowned Muslim *sufi* Jal al-Din (1207–1273) Rumi has pictured, different ladders which all go to heaven.[45]

Moreover, according to the mystical teaching that all beliefs, as different manifestations of the Truth, have their own contribution in truth, one is not justified in presupposing the falsity of beliefs endorsed by other religions. Instead, one should try to face them sympathetically and unveil the profound truth. This maxim encourages one to discover further truths by means of dialogue.

The theory of *fiṭra* teaches us that God creates all human beings, though different in race and religion, with a common Divine construction and primordial nature directed to the aim of knowing God and worshiping Him. This view creates an optimistic belief about the Divine nature of all human beings, in general, and the participants in the interreligious dialogue, in particular.

According to the mystical hermeneutics of the Qur'an, this Divine book is an inspiring source of infinite esoteric meanings. Thus, there is no such thing as the unique or final sense for a Qur'anic verse. Instead, in consonance with the existential stage of the interpreter, frequently, God descends new meanings to the reciter's heart. Through unveiling these novel meanings, the interpreter of the Qur'an finds himself plunging into an "ocean (of meanings) without a shore." Acquaintance with these interior meanings can potentially pave the way for a non-dogmatic approach to the beliefs and practices promoted by other religions.

(II) Moral Area: Due to the profound interior knowledge of God and the life-long spiritual journey towards Him, a mystic acquires the highest moral virtues such as generosity, patience, and gratitude. Among these, humility and tolerance have great significance for interreligious dialogue. The core of the principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is that all creatures, including human beings, lack real existence – they are nothing but God's affairs (sho'un) and the manifestations of His names

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[45] Different telling metaphors are used to convey this mystical depiction of the diversity of religion. The metaphor of light bulbs is another example: "The various prophets and spiritual teachers are like the light bulbs that illuminate a room. The bulbs are different, but the current comes from one source, which is God." (James Fadiman and Robert Frager, *Essential Sufism* (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1998), 4)

and attributes. Having a firm belief in this view, a mystic always finds himself or herself absolutely dependent to God just as a ray is dependent on the source of the light. This "existential" humility embedded in deep layers of the soul acts as a basis for moral (and intellectual) humility. Consequently, the mystic will avoid any type of egotism, selfishness and arrogance and there would be no space for overestimation about his (and his coreligionists') advantages. As I already alluded, humility toward the adherents of other religions leads to religious tolerance which prepares the tolerant for an active participation in interreligious dialogue.

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM LANDSCAPE IN MODERN SYRIA AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF EASTERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT TO INTERRELIGIOUS DYNAMICS

Andrew Ashdown

Introduction

This paper considers Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria and the importance that eastern Christian thought can make to the interreligious context within the Middle East.[1]

The paper concludes that the significance of the theology and spirituality of the 'Antiochene' paradigm has been under-recognised in western discourse and that, having coexisted within the cultural environment of Islam, it is uniquely placed to play a major role in Christian-Muslim dialogue and the reframing of Islam's engagement with modern society.

[1] This paper is a brief summary of edited sections of a thesis for which the author was awarded a PhD in 2019. The work was published in November 2020 by Routledge as 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Syria: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics.' These edited sections are reproduced with permission.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.226 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 79–99

Christian landscape

Christianity is deeply embedded within the religious and cultural identity of Syria. Yet, although "eastern Christianity constitutes one of the largest Christian traditions in the world," it has been significantly understudied until recent years.[2] Prior to the Islamic conquest, there was a diverse Christian presence across the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula, which evolved to include all five families of the Christian Church. Today, Damascus is home to the three Antiochene Patriarchates of the Eastern 'Antiochian' Orthodox, the Syriac Orthodox and Melkite Catholic Churches.

Whilst the initial Muslim invasions were often brutal,[3] Christians adopted the Arabic language during the 8th-9th centuries and became vital conduits of Greek philosophy and theological dialogue, playing an important administrative role in the courts of the Caliphs. The violence of the Crusades in the 11th and 12th centuries caused lasting tensions for eastern Christians with their fellow Muslim citizens. But it was also a time of encounter between western and eastern Christendom and Islam.

Under Ottoman rule, the millet system allowed non-Muslim communities a degree of administrative autonomy. However, dhimmi status imposed a second-class citizenship, subject to the jizya and multiple other taxes. The situation for Christians improved during the Tanzimat political and economic reforms in 1857–1860. However, the freedoms given to non-Muslims and the advantages these offered Christian communities through strengthening trade opportunities with Europe, caused tension and violence between Christians and Muslims that exploded into serious riots in Lebanon and Syria in 1850 and 1860.

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[2] Anthony O'Mahony, "Eastern Christianity and Jesuit Scholarship on Arabic and Islam. Modern History and Contemporary Theological Reflections," in *Philosophy, Theology and the Jesuit Tradition*, edited by –Peter Gallagher, Anna Abram, and Michael Kirwan, 159–186 (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 159.

[3] See: Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam. From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (Cranbury (New Jersey), Port Credit (Ontario), and London (England): Associated University Press, 1996).

Whilst the millet no longer exists, the principles of administrative autonomy continue to be reflected in religious structures.

The Christian plurality of the region expanded in the 18th century when the Catholic family of Churches were established. Protestants arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, all five 'families' of the Christian Church: the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, Protestant/Evangelical and Assyrian Church of the East are present in Syria. The Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches have always found the presence of western Christianity, inherently different in structure and theology, challenging. This has often been a source of disunity and division, but ecumenical relations have much improved in recent years, especially in the face of the challenges caused by conflict and religious extremism. These challenges have also led to a significant re-examination by eastern Christians of their role and identity in the region.

Since the end of the Ottoman Empire, the Christian population in 'Greater Syria' has declined from about 30% of the population to less than 5%. Conflict and emigration due to economic, cultural and political factors, have all played a role in this decline. The genocide in Turkey; events in Israel/Palestine; the rise of militant Islamism; the consequences of recent regional conflicts; have all had a devastating impact on the Christian presence. And fear of the militant Islamism that has characterised most of the external 'opposition' in the Syrian conflict has caused many Syrians to continue to support the Syrian government during the recent conflict. As Razek Siriani writes:

> The reason for the large-scale emigration is that many Christians (…) fear that a society marked by tolerance, safety, plurality and coexistence will be replaced by one that is exclusive, monolithic and fanatically Islamic. Such fears are not exclusive to Christians. Many Muslims have opted to leave the country for similar reasons.[4]

Yet for centuries Syria has been a place of refuge – for Armenians and Syriacs, Iraqis and Palestinians. The country has played an impor-

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[4] Razek Siriani, "Syria," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, ed. Mariz Tadros, Kenneth Ross, and Todd Johnson, 102–113 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 109.

tant role in the renaissance of eastern Christianity. During the recent conflict, religious leaders have played a key role in peace-building initiatives and have worked hard to encourage and restore trust within society and provided significant levels of humanitarian support to local communities.

Muslim landscape

The Muslim landscape in Syria is also far from uniform in political, social or religious expression. Pierret writes: "There is no such thing as a unified 'Syrian' religious scene."[5] The pre-war figure of 87% of the population as Muslim includes all Muslim communities, including Kurds, Shi'a sects including Alawites, Isma'ili and Druze. There has long been resentment amongst some Sunnis that the Alawite minority have held power for over 40 years and promoted secular modernity.[6] Yet the Ba'ath Party, under both Bashar and his father, Hafez Al Assad, has included representation from all communities within Parliament and the Army leadership and has encouraged religious freedom. For this reason, many Syrians are opposed to political Islamism and support Arab nationalism. The tension between these two paradigms has been considerable in Middle Eastern politics in recent decades.

Islam in Syria has been deeply impacted by the Islamic 'reform' movements and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood was bitterly opposed to the secular nationalist movements in Syria, Iraq and Egypt. Dividing itself into political and militant wings which committed multiple acts of violence, the Muslim Brotherhood was crushed and outlawed in Syria in the 1980s. But its exiled leaders have continued to wield significant influence in supporting the militant opposition and western allies in the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless,

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[5] Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria. The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

[6] For detailed studies on the history of the Alawites, and how and why they came to hold the balance of power, see: Leon T. Goldsmith, *Cycle of Fear. Syria's Alawites in War and Peace* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2015); Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, eds., *The Alawis of Syria. War, Faith and Politics in the Levant.* (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2015); Stefan Winter, *A History of the Alawis. From Medieval Aleppo to the Turkish Republic* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

a critic of the Syrian government and former member of Parliament, Muhammad al-Habash (b. 1962) admitted: "Almost all Syrians are moderates and centrists; they do not support the war and destruction but instead seek reconciliation and coexistence."[7]

Prior to the conflict, the polarisation of Sunni and Shi'a; the strengthening of Shari'a law in conservative Sunni ideology; the secular constitution of the country; the rise of minority communities; the presence of large numbers of refugees from Iraq and Palestine; the impact of post- 9/11 wars launched by the United States and its allies[8], and decentralised authority within Sunni Islam – all had an effect on how the Islamic landscape was evolving in Syria.

Muslim-Christian dynamics during the conflict

There has been interreligious engagement in Syria for centuries. And faith leaders have acted as a bridge between their communities and the political leadership. Although trust within society at large has been damaged by the war, religious leaders have sought to model good relations and have played an important role in local ceasefire and reconciliation arrangements throughout Syria. Despite western scepticism about such initiatives, dozens of religious leaders and thousands of local volunteers have been involved in these processes and fighting has been successfully ended in towns and villages throughout Syria.

Maaloula is one of the most important Christian villages in the Levant. In 2013, the village was attacked by hundreds of 'rebel' fighters. A village leader stressed: "We must emphasise that the so-called 'moderate' 'Free Syrian Army' were major partners in all of these. There was no distinguishing between the 'moderate' groups and the extremist factions."[9] On 7 September 2013, the militants murdered three male

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[7] Mohammad Abdul Al-Habash, "M.A. Al-Habash: The Crisis in Syria," Speech at the UPF Interfaith Consultation on the Crisis in Syria Amman, Jordan, October 11-13, 2013, Universal Peace Federation, October 13, 2013, http://www.upf.org/resources/speeches-and-articles/5718-ma-al-habash-the-crisis-in-syria.

[8] Jerome Drevon, "Embracing Salafi Jihadism in Egypt and Mobilizing in the Syrian Jihad," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 4 (2016): 322, https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2016.1206272.

[9] Interview with Maaloula resident in her home. 3 September 2016.

members of a family after they refused to convert. Over the following months Churches were desecrated, houses gutted, and farmlands destroyed. A villager said: "We spent hundreds of years living together without a problem. It was only after residents of the village went to live and work in Qatar and Saudi Arabia and returned with sectarian tendencies that tensions developed."[10]

The Christian village of Saidnaya, whose convent has been a place of pilgrimage for Christians and Muslims since the 7th century, was besieged in 2013 by militants for 6 months. When the town was close to capture, Christian and Muslim residents joined the Syrian Army in defending the town whilst the remainder went into the churches to pray for safety. When I visited Saidnaya in 2017, the Mother Superior said to me: "When you return to England, tell them to come to Saidnaya to thank the Christians and Muslims of this town for saving this monastery and for saving Christianity in this land from the terrorists that your government is supporting."

Across Syria, Christians and Muslims fought side by side against militant jihadists to protect their communities. In 2017, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo, Antoine Audo wrote:

> At the start of the conflict, militants tried to pit Muslims against Christians, but they failed. Our country has a rich culture and history to which Syrians are loyal, regardless of religion. Syria is more than one man: this is not well understood in the West. It is important that we continue to represent Arab Christianity, to show the Muslim and Arab world that there are Christians with whom they can have a dialogue.

The extreme ideologies held by most of the militants have been well documented. But whilst sectarian dynamics have been used to intensify division, most Syrians say the primary drivers of the conflict were political and economic. However, they have also witnessed brutal sectarian violence committed by Islamist groups against any opposed to their ideology. Hence all factors have been present. And however much Islamists claim to consider the interests of all Syrians, there is little evidence

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[10] Former resident speaking with other Maaloula refugees at St. Saviour Monastery, Lebanon. 1 May 2017.

to suggest the truth of the claim. Healing and the rebuilding of trust between communities will take a long time.

It is not surprising that most Christians have supported the government that has protected their social and religious freedoms. Christian leaders in Syria have been heavily criticised for doing so, but their position is not just a pragmatic necessity. It is rooted in historical legal traditions by which Christian communities have been able to wield positive influence for their communities.

Eastern Christian approaches to Christian-Muslim dialogue in Syria

In the matter of Christian-Muslim relations, western Churches and governments have neglected the importance of the eastern ecclesial Antiochene paradigm.

Here I briefly consider the work of three theologians who have been influential participants in contemporary religious and political discourse in Syria and Lebanon. They are: Georges Khodr (b. 1923), Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon; Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem (b. 1965), and Antoine Audo (b. 1946), Chaldean Catholic Bishop of Aleppo. I also consider the Protestant influence on Middle Eastern interreligious dynamics.

The eastern ecclesial paradigm is important, both because it represents 12% of the global Christian population, and because it includes Greek, Byzantine, Syriac and Latin traditions that represent a plurality inherent in Arab culture. This dynamic of 'living dialogue', though under-recognised and under-studied in wider discourse, has continued in eastern Christianity from the Church Fathers to the present day. And in a context in which Arab identity has become increasingly contested, Syria's tradition of diversity has the capacity to inform modern interreligious discourse.

The 20th century and beyond

Western understanding of the Christian-Muslim dynamic is indebted to the work of Louis Massignon (1883–1962), a Melkite priest who

was instrumental in raising the profile of Christian-Muslim dialogue in the Catholic Church and is believed to have significantly influenced the Vatican II document, *'Nostra Aetate'*.[11] His influence however went far beyond Catholicism. He studied with the Shi'ite scholar Ali Shariati (1933–1977), whose thought played a role in the religious revival in Iran in 1979.

Massignon regarded Abraham as the model of 'sacred hospitality.' Through mystical engagement, Massignon understood Islam as a mediator of Grace. He believed that both Christian and Muslim responses to suffering are rooted in hospitality, mutual compassion and commitment to 'the other' – the stranger. He believed that the Syriac Catholic rite, rooted in eastern tradition, could help explain Islamic thought to the West, and that "the healing of divisions between eastern and western Christians and of the antagonism between Islam and Christianity could flow from a spiritual experience of God, lived by believers open to dialogical encounter with the other."[12] In other words, through this 'sacred hospitality,' we can encounter the divine in the 'Other.'

Eastern Christians have had to engage with Islam for centuries in a way that western Christians have not.[13] It was only in the 20th Century and following Vatican II that the importance of this interreligious dynamic and eastern Christianity's contribution to it was recognised. The eastern Christian paradigm presents an opportunity for deepening understanding of political, communal and interreligious space in the modern world.

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[11] See: Christian S. Krokus, "Louis Massignon's Influence on the Teaching of Vatican II on Muslims and Islam," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2012.686264; Anthony O'Mahony, "Louis Massignon: A Catholic Encounter with Islam and the Middle East," in *God's Mirror. Renewal and Engagement in French Catholic Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

[12] Stefanie Hugh-Donovan, "Louis Massignon, Olivier Clement, Thomas Merton, Christian De Cherge: Radical Hospitality, Radical Faith," *A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55, no. 3-4 (2014): 476.

[13] See: Andrew M. Sharp, "Modern Encounters with Islam and the Impact on Orthodox Thought, Identity and Action," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 5, no. 1 (2014), https://orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/IJOT1.2014/Sharp.pdf.

Georges Khodr (b. 1923)

Of all contemporary Eastern theological experts in Christian-Muslim relations and dialogue, perhaps the most influential has been Georges Khodr, the Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon. In his published articles, he "rekindles and reawakens the Christian theological flames of the early centuries that present the primordial and the simple Christian message of divine love."[14] His writings emerge from the patristic heritage and mystical theology of the Eastern Church, whose theology is rooted in an understanding of the 'Other' that speaks to the Christian-Muslim dynamic.

The Eastern Orthodox are the most numerous denomination in the region and their contribution to Christian-Muslim relations is important. Rooted in the Byzantine tradition and enjoying foreign protection and support, the Eastern Orthodox Church was deeply impacted by the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of the *millet* system, which allowed a flourishing of the Christian communities. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, however, the Eastern Orthodox had to renegotiate their status in a context that was overwhelmingly Muslim. This involved celebrating and affirming their indigenous Arab identity and promoting secular nationalism in order to secure equal status with Muslims.

The Eastern Orthodox community is more numerous in Syria than in Lebanon. They have "walked a thin line between Arab-Syrian nationalism and Lebanon's uniqueness as a place where East and West could meet on an equal footing."[15] The Eastern Orthodox have long sought to indigenise their theology within the culture of the Arab world in order to affirm their eastern identity. However, in the light of the rise of political Islam and Islamic extremism, that cultural identity is being contested.

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14 Sylvie Avakian, *The 'Other' in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Theology and George Khodr's Spiritual Theology* (Frankfurt Am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 39.

15 Sotiris Roussos, "Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the Middle East," in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley (Oxford, New York: Routledge, 2010), 114.

In the 1940s, Georges Khodr was instrumental in the renaissance of the Orthodox Church in Lebanon. He set up educational centres which formed a new generation of clergy and religious leaders. This also led to resurgence in monasticism and the establishment of new centres of theological study, such as Balamand University in Lebanon, a leading institution in the Middle East.

Khodr was born in Tripoli, Lebanon in 1923. His youth was spent in an Islamic quarter of the city, an experience that symbolised for him the "coming out" of Christian communities into full participation in the life of their communities. Khodr believed that Christians should be a part of the Islamic world with equal rights and that they should fully participate in the life of their compatriots.

In one of his most influential articles, Khodr writes: "If obedience to the Master means following him wherever we find traces of his presence, we have an obligation to investigate the authentic spiritual life of non-Christians."[16] For Khodr, it is the Trinitarian 'economy of the Spirit' which makes the presence of Christ possible and the living of authentic spiritual lives "possible for all human beings, regardless of any religious restrictions."[17] He writes: "The Spirit operates and applies His energies in accordance with His own economy and we could, from this angle, regard the non-Christian religions as points where His inspiration is at work."[18] If that is so, then Christ cannot be "owned" by some people and not by others, and we have a duty to discern Christ in others.

Khodr criticises western theology for its exclusive dogmatism and believes Eastern Christianity's mystical approach to theology represents a truer reflection of Christian theology and spirituality. The pervasiveness of western thought and civilisation, he believes, is spiritually destructive, since the West tends "to consider man as the centre of the

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16 Georges Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World - the Economy of the Spirit," *The Ecumenical Review* 23, no. 2 (1971): 118–119, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1971.tb01114.x.

17 Aviakan, *The 'Other',* 12.

18 Khodr, *Christianity in a Pluralistic Word,* 125–126.

universe."[19] By contrast, eastern spirituality, with its spirituality of detachment and pursuit of truth, is a place where the spiritual life can become "incarnate in history as a movement, ready to be transmitted by utilizing the instruments of knowledge, even politics itself" in the service of humanity.[20] Khodr believes that eastern culture and spirituality have the capacity to "help Europe to transcend itself" and to be spiritually renewed in the service of humanity.[21]

His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II. Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church (b. 1965).

The Syriac Orthodox Church is part of the Oriental Orthodox family of Churches.[22] Following the Council of Chalcedon (451CE), the Oriental Churches were isolated from Roman and Byzantine Christianity.

The Syriac Orthodox Church has a rich history and liturgical tradition. Situated originally in Antioch, the See was forced to move owing to persecution. In the 13th century it settled at the monastery of Deir ul-Zafaran in Mardin in Eastern Turkey until 1933. Following the Sayfo massacres the Patriarchate moved to Homs and then in 1959 to Damascus.

In 1995, it was reported that there were 89,000 Syrian Orthodox in Syria, representing about 10% of the Christian population. Due to political instability and religious persecutions its numbers have declined in the Middle East, but grown significantly elsewhere, particularly in Europe, Lebanon, and America. Patriarch Aphrem was born in Qamishle, Syria, and studied in Lebanon, Ireland, and Egypt. Amidst the conflict, the Syriac Orthodox presence in Syria has remained influential. The Patriarchal Headquarters at Ma'aret Saidnaya trains clergy from

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19 Metropolitan Georges Khodr, *The Ways of Childhood* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 97.
20 Khodr, *The Ways of Childhood,* 97.
21 Ibid., 103.
22 See: Aho Shemunkasho, "Oriental Orthodox," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, ed. Mariz Tadros, Kenneth Ross, and Todd Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 247–258.

all over the world and, reflecting the Church's emphasis on education, a new University was opened there in 2018. Additionally, the charitable work of the Church through the St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee is benefiting thousands of people across Syria. Patriarch Aphrem's representative role as religious leader both nationally and internationally is significant and in this role his speeches offer a window into a Syrian Christian response to the contemporary context and to Christian-Muslim relations.

The importance of the presence of Christians in the Middle East is often stressed by both Christians and Muslims in Syria. In a lecture in 2015, entitled, 'Do Muslims Need Christians in the Middle East?', Patriarch Aphrem said:

> I believe that Muslims need Christians to challenge themselves to live in a pluralistic and multi-religious society where they can affirm their religious identity without being afraid of the other...Living together should be conceived by Muslims and Christians alike as a divine vision and plan. We Christians believe that God has placed us in the region with the mission of spreading love, tolerance and enlightenment.

The Syriac community however has been subject to extreme persecutions. During the Sayfo massacres of 1915 it is estimated that over 500,000 Syriacs were murdered. And recent massacres by ISIS and Islamists of Syriac Christians in Iraq and Syria have reignited memory of this history. The kidnap on 22 April 2013 of two Aleppo Archbishops, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop Gregorios Ibrahim and Eastern Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi, has had a profound impact on the Christian communities. In response to the increased rise in sectarianism both in Syria and across the Middle East, Patriarch Aphrem says:

> Fanaticism and religious extremism should not be allowed to spread in the region. It should be made known to all that Christians will not abandon their faith or alter their way of living because of the ideology of individuals and groups to whom moderation is foreign and tolerance is alien. We will continue to live in peace with the millions of peace loving Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups in the Middle East. As Christians, our mission is to spread love, peace, and harmony in the world.

Patriarch Aphrem has been a strong critic of western support for militant groups. Speaking at the launch of a Report on Religious Freedom at the House of Commons, London, on 24 November 2016, he said:

> It is very important to identify who our persecutor is. The report suggested that the persecution of Christians in Syria is done by both State and non-State groups alike. We do not see it as such. The Syrian government has always been supportive of Christians. In Syria, violence against Christians is inflicted by the terrorist groups, including ISIS and Al-Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda), who desire to wipe us out of Syria. It is not the government, or any official state authority that is committing violent attacks against Syrians. In Syria, all discrimination and persecution that the Christians are currently suffering from, are carried out by the terrorist groups, some of which are internationally recognised as 'moderate opposition.'

Another significant Syrian cleric is Antoine Audo, Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo. The Chaldean Church is Syriac but in full communion with Rome and remains a truly indigenous, eastern expression of the Catholic Church.

Like Khodr, Audo's theology and spirituality is rooted in the patristic tradition.

In an interview in December 2016, he said:

> Christians accept plurality. We cannot reflect on our shared existence in Syria without dialogue, but this is often more difficult for Islam, which finds it difficult to enter dialogue at a critical and historical level, and often, dialogue will consist simply of affirmative speech. Islam in the Middle East cannot get away from the struggle with modernity and faces a problem with the idea of secularism, as this attacks something very deep within Muslim thought. But there is a difference between public and private speech, since many Muslims recognise that without Christians, Syria will lose both its quality of life, and its unique identity. [23]

Audo affirms the importance of eastern Christian identity but cautions against it becoming inward and distrustful of others. He states that Christians should engage politically, socially and culturally and that the interreligious encounter that takes place daily should develop into deeper dialogue.

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[23] Interview with Bishop Antoine Audo in Damascus. December 2016.

He writes: "A re-reading of the contribution of eastern Christians to the development of Arab and Muslim civilisation allows us to envisage ways of openness, trust and conversion." Most importantly, eastern Christians have "opened up spaces within the fabric of Muslim-Arab culture, spaces of freedom and communication between faith and reason" and are uniquely placed, in a context where Arab Muslims feel threatened in the face of modernity and globalisation, to enable dialogue with Muslims. "Finally," writes Audo, "true Islam must understand that it will not be able to modernise itself without there being peace with Christians. This road to peace will lead it to be liberated from all its complexes of fear of the other."[24] The vocation of eastern Christians is therefore "to become a bridge, or better, a model of communion between the Christian west and the Muslim world."[25]

The Protestant and Evangelical Churches

Though numerically small, the contribution of Arab Protestant Churches to religious discourse in the Middle East is significant. Protestant Arab Christians have been termed a "double minority" – "a minority within a Christian minority".[26] Nevertheless, their contribution to religious discourse, education and health provision, economic and political life are significant. Protestant and Evangelical Christians number only about 0.3% of the population. There has historically been a problematic relationship between the Protestant Churches of the Middle East and those of the eastern traditions. Questions of identity arise at the interface between eastern Christian and reformed western tradition. However, ecumenical relations have much improved in recent years.

The Protestant presence in the Middle East dates to the early 19th century, the first Protestant congregation being formed in Beirut in 1827. In 1920 the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

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[24] Antoine Audo, "Eastern Christian Identity: A Catholic Perspective," in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery (London: Melisende, 2010), 36–37.

[25] Ibid., 17.

[26] Mitri Raheb, "Protestants," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, ed. Mariz Tadros, Kenneth Ross, and Todd Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 269.

was formed. Wahba identifies three key areas in which the contribution of the Protestant and Evangelical Churches in the Middle East has been significant: preaching and teaching (including through media); education, through numerous institutions; and through the provision of social services to all communities.[27]

Reflecting on the post 'Arab Spring' context, a 2017 study entitled 'Christian Citizenship in the Middle East. Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?' suggested:

> Throughout the history of the Arab Region, Middle Eastern Christians, inspired by the teachings of the scriptures, have lived at the intersection of two allegiances: allegiance to their Christian mission, and allegiance to their Middle Eastern citizenship.[28]

In 2006, George Sabra, Principal of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, wrote an article confronting this issue. Sabra discusses the dilemma of being Christian in a predominantly Islamic context and suggests two ways in which Christians have responded to this reality. The first, he describes as 'Arab Christian.' This paradigm seeks to avoid estrangement with Muslims and underlines a sense of identity with Arab culture, history, and Islamic civilisation in order to find common ground and ensure positive coexistence. The second which he terms 'Eastern Christian,' affirms the distinctiveness of Christianity in relation to Islam and seeks to preserve Christian freedom and identity, maintaining "a critical distance from Islam and Islamic culture and tradition."[29] These two responses to Islam have only been possible because of what he calls the 'western' factor. 'Western' influence is nothing new. Since biblical times, Middle Eastern society has been influenced by Greek philosophy and language, and since the 5th century Byzantine controversies divided the eastern churches.

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27 Wafik Wahba, "Evangelicals," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, ed. Mariz Tadros, Kenneth Ross, and Todd Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 286.

28 Mohamed Girma and Cristian Romocea, eds., *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East. Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 19.

29 George Sabra, "Two Ways of Being a Christian in the Muslim Context of the Middle East," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (2006): 46, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410500399342.

The 'Arab Christian' position has been associated with the Oriental and Orthodox Church, which supports Arab nationalism and tends towards anti-Ottoman, anti-Western, and anti-Zionist positions. The 'eastern Christian' position has come to the fore in recent years and presents "a sense of identification and continuity with the West," in which eastern Christians feel more 'at home' in the worldwide Christian family.[30] Lebanese academic and philosopher Dr Charles Malek (1906–1987) stresses that the relationship between East and West is historic and that western civilizations have left a lasting "imprint" on eastern Mediterranean culture and history. This pro-western attitude is reflected in sympathy towards western politics, which has led to tensions with and suspicion of those who hold to this position. However, most eastern Christians are proud of their Arab ethnicity and grapple daily with the complexity of possessing multiple identities.

These two 'ways' of Christian self-identification are both present in Syria but are not mutually exclusive. As Sabra says, both outlooks contain "some truth" and remain part of the dilemma of being Christian in a Muslim context.

There have been considerable efforts to improve ecumenical relations in recent years. However, there remain long-standing theological and ecclesiastical tensions between the Eastern churches and those of Protestant origin. Without question, the western churches are bearers of westernised ecclesiastical structures and theological traditions, some of which sit uncomfortably with those of eastern Christianity. The latter's patristic traditions and spirituality of the desert with their emphasis on hospitality and engagement with alterity offer rich resources for inter-religious dialogue.

Protestant Christianity, with its emphasis on incarnational theology brings great benefits to the region in the fields of education and social welfare. Eastern Christianity, with its trinitarian emphasis and affinity to mysticism is gifted in reflecting relationality amidst plurality and spirituality in the midst of struggle. The two 'wings' of Christianity and their theological approaches each bring strengths that can enhance and complement the other.

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[30] Ibid., 48.

This tension requires further study. In the history of eastern theology and spirituality, and of eastern Christianity's engagement with Islam lie significant resources for engaging with the complex interreligious dynamics that prevail in the region and also for the strengthening of the ecumenical dynamic in the region.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly examined the encounter between Christianity and Islam in Syria and considered a few eastern theological contributions to that discourse. There remains commitment to the preservation and improvement of interreligious relationships, but given the level of suffering and destruction experienced within Syria and the fragmentation of society, priority has been given to the humanitarian response. Given the rise in militant Islam, Arab religious identity is now contested and requires renewed discourse.

A re-reading of the Christian contribution to the development of Arab and Muslim civilisation will help understanding of the roots of Christianity. The Orthodox and Oriental Churches, the monastic movement, the spirituality of the desert and patristic theology all offer a key to reconnecting with the spirituality and culture within which early Christianity engaged with Islam and to challenging the violent ideology that has characterised the militant Syrian opposition. Similarly, recognition of plurality in Arab religion and culture and eastern Christianity's capacity to engage with it offers potential for grappling with the post-conflict context in Syria. Such dialogue will be a necessary part of healing and establishing stability in Syrian society.

Amongst many Syrians, there is a fear that the rise of Islamism, even if defeated, might lie dormant in loyal adherents until the next opportunity arises to assert itself. This fear alone causes continued emigration. Christian leaders in Syria have often been criticised for 'siding' with the Syrian government. Such a view underestimates the influence of the historic role of religious leadership in Ottoman society and the social, cultural, and religious complexity of the contemporary context in which religious leaders play an important representative and intermediary role, often acting as 'critical voices' in politics. Religious leaders have

played an important leadership role during the conflict, most taking a critical stance against violence and radical ideology and becoming involved in local and national reconciliation initiatives.

The Christian presence in Syria, though seriously weakened, remains a dynamic, diverse, influential, and vital part of Syrian society. Its engagement at all levels of society and with all communities, represents a positive foundation for learning from the conflict and helping the country restore trust in society, reconcile fractured communities, overcome sectarian fears and encourage and nurture frameworks for political dialogue. Plurality and difference define Syria. This plurality represents both a challenge and a resource for the future. Whatever the future holds, it is hoped that the political space that emerges will be a dialogical one which the secular and diverse religious mosaic of Syrian society can peacefully cohabit.

It is estimated that 50% of Syria's Christians or more have left the country since the beginning of the war. How many will return? It is impossible to predict what impact this will have on Syrian society.

The future role and identity of Islam in Syrian society and its relationship with modern statehood will be crucial to the stability of the society that emerges in the years to come. The extent to which contemporary and particularly juridical expressions of Sunni Islam are able to sustain the space in which religious pluralism and freedom of religious practise are maintained, will determine future levels of communal trust and the survival of religious plurality in Syria. Therefore, studies within Islam of these issues are essential to assisting a secure religious future.

The breadth of the Christian presence distinguishes Christianity in Syria, and the shared culture and experience of the Eastern Churches makes them a significant resource for the worldwide Church in discerning and developing future models of Christian-Muslim engagement. The 'Antiochene paradigm,' rooted in cultural, theological and historical frameworks familiar to both Islam and Christianity and holding an important position within the wider ecclesiastical and political context has been neglected by the worldwide Church for too long. The Antiochene patristic theological and spiritual approaches to interreligious dynamics, given contemporary voice by modern theo-

logians and Church leaders, have a much more important role to play than has hitherto been recognised.

Since it embraces cultural diversity and the equal distribution of resources in a way that radical Islam does not, Christianity has the potential for bringing a helpful contribution to political, social, and religious discourse There is deep concern amongst many Syrians – Sunnis included – that in a Sunni-led state, an interpretation of Sunni ideology would take precedence that would undermine 'democratic' processes and plural religious and cultural space. Is there a conflict between what might be called the 'right to rule' and the need for pluralising 'space' within society? Post-conflict Syria will need to find a way of dealing with such questions and the multiplicity of identities.

Syria has been through one of the most violent conflicts the world has seen in recent decades and the interreligious dynamic has survived. Until now, the interreligious context in Syria has been insufficiently understood and studied. In seeking a clearer understanding of that dynamic and in a reframing of eastern Christianity's ecclesiastical, theological and spiritual traditions, lies the potential for discerning new frameworks of religious and political engagement, a sustained embrace of plurality and a significant contribution towards lasting peace.

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EXPOUNDING THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION IN ISLAM AS UNDERSTOOD BY SYED MUHAMMAD NAQUIB AL-ATTAS

Mesut Idriz

Religion is one of the key features concerning human life in its entirety, and various scholars generally acknowledge that the human nature as such needs religion. The word that denotes the term "religion" in the Qur'an is dīn. However, in actual fact, the concept of dīn is different from what has been understood and defined to be religion either by the West or others. Hence, we maintain that to understand the total meaning of religion (dīn), its signification must be deduced from the Holy Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the Arabic language to which the terms belongs.[1]

[1] This article is a modest attempt to discuss the meaning of the concept of religion (*dīn*) as understood and espoused by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas in his book *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of ethics and Morality,* first edition (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1992); latest edition (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International, 2018). A more elaborated version of this treatise is found in the first chapter of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's work *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, first edition, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), and the latest version (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2014). This monograph was formerly a speech presented on 5 April 1976 at the International Islamic Conference held by the Islamic Council of Europe in the Hall of the Royal Commonwealth Society, London. Al-Attas's major works have been translated into Korean, Japanese, Russian, Albanian, Arabic, Malay, Indonesian, Turkish, and other languages. As one would find out later, his works treat their subjects independently but are interrelated. Each is part of a whole; each is a block in the enitre structure of his study, deep understanding, comprehension, and presentation of Islam as a religion. The author of this article is a student of al-Attas and when the draft was being prepared for submission for the

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.233 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 101–115

First, we should clarify that it is an undeniable fact that one of the root causes of the problems that beset the mind of the modern Muslims is the corruption of language, the infusion of alien concepts, which are responsible for distorting the original meaning of Islamic basic vocabularies that Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas refers to as Islamic language. These basic vocabularies are commonly shared by Muslim people around the world. Moreover, these basic vocabularies are based in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition (i.e., the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH). Al-Attas consistently argues that when the original meaning of these basic vocabularies is tampered with, it brings confusion to the Muslim worldview. He further suggests that to free our individual minds from confusion, we must establish a strong foundation in understanding the Islamic language as it shapes the worldview of its followers. Therefore, he persists in stressing that whenever Muslims speak of Islam, they must refer it to the '*dīn*,' not religion as perceived by the West and others.

There are 88 different places in the Holy Qur'an that mention the word *dīn* and its derivatives in various forms. The most important verses pertaining to al-Attas' discussion are the verses below, which will be referred to in this article:

1. 2:132, "*wa waṣṣā bihā ibrāhīmu banīhi wa ya'qūbu yā baniyya inna'l-Lāha 'ṣṭafā lakumu 'd-dīn falā tamūtunna illā wa antum muslimūn*" meaning "And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob; "Oh my sons! God hath chosen the Religion for you; then die not except as Muslims, i.e. those who have correctly and truly submitted,"
2. 3:19, "*inna'l-dīn 'inda'l-Lāh al-Islām…*" meaning "The Religion before God is Islam (submission to His Will),"
3. 3:85, "*wa man yabtaghi ghayr al-Islām dīnan falan yuqbala minhu wa huwa fi'l-ākhirati mina'l-khāsirīn*," meaning "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)"; and

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purpose of publication the author consulted al-Attas for clarification and endorsement of the draft.

4. as for the term *dīn*, its primary notion is derived by al-Attas from the Quranic exposition of the covenant (*al-mīthāq*), a starting point of the dominant elements in all other Islamic concepts such as freedom and responsibility, justice, knowledge, virtue, brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and the role and character of individual Muslim and the Community. The verse reads: "*wa idh akhadha rabbuka min banī* ādama *min ẓuh*ū*rihim dhurriyyatahum wa ashhadahum 'alā anfusihim alastu birrabikum qālū balā shahidnā*" meaning "When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' – They said: 'Yea! We do testify!'"

The religion (*dīn*) of Islam has several connotations, which convey a single unity of coherent meaning, describing the true picture of Islam. Al-Attas repeatedly emphasises that the word *dīn*, and all its construct forms, occurs many times everywhere in the Qur'an. Moreover, in many cases, he says, *dīn* is used in its verbal noun form. By paying great attention to the studies done by great Muslim scholars in the past about all the verses in the Holy Qur'an in which the term '*dīn*' has been used, students of Islam can grasp its basic and important meaning.

The term *dīn* is derived from the Arabic root *D-Y-N* and, as we mentioned earlier, connotes several conceptually interrelated meanings and in a single unity of harmonious meaning the religion of Islam. Concerning this, we can quote what al-Attas writes:

"*D-Y-N* has many primary significations which although seemingly contrary to one another are yet all conceptually interconnected, so that the ultimate meaning derived from them all presents itself as a clarified unity of the whole. By 'the whole' I mean that which is described as the Religion of Islam, which contains within itself all relevant possibilities of meaning inherent in the concept of *Dīn*."[2]

According to al-Attas, the primary significations of the term *dīn* can be reduced to four: 1. Indebtedness; 2. Submissiveness; 3. Judicious power; and 4. Natural inclination or tendency. He further attempts

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[2] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 1995, 41; for more meanings and concepts derived from the root, see Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2005), 13:166–171.

to explain them briefly and place them in relevant contexts, drawing forth the coherent ultimate meaning which is intended, that denotes the faiths, beliefs, practices, and teachings adhered to by the Muslims individually or collectively as a Community (*Ummah*) and manifesting itself altogether as an objective whole as the Religion called Islam.

Al-Attas further explains that the word '*dana*,' which conveys the meaning of being *indebted*, can further illustrate the concept of religion (*dīn*).[3] Commercial enterprises generally include a debtor and a creditor. In this context, in a state of indebtedness one will find oneself subject to certain principles governing the "*debt*." These principles require one to adhere to fixed laws and ordinances and put one under certain obligations (*dayn*), which naturally involves judgement: *daynūnah*, and conviction: *idānah*. The laws that governed the relation between the debtor and the creditor can only be realised in well-organised societies, towns and cities, denoted by *mudun* or *madā'in*, or *madīnah*[4] in its singular form. Here, the judge, ruler, or governor assumed the responsibility of making the society a well-organised one. These organised societies that are depicted before human mind's through these connected terms later indicate a kind of civilisation. Hereby it can be understood that the word religion (*dīn*) is conceptually connected with the verb *maddana*, which means to build or to found cities, to civilise, to refine or to humanise. The very notion of law, the order, the justice, the authority, and social cultural refinement inherent in all these significations derived from the concept of *dīn* must surely presuppose the existence of a mode or manner of acting consistent with what is reflected in the law, the order, the justice, the authority, and social-cultural refinement. It becomes increasingly clear that the concept of *dīn* in its most basic form indeed reflects in true testimony the *natural tendency or inclination* of man to form societies, obey laws, and seek just government.

Each of these primary significations in the context of human world affairs demonstrate their mutual actual and conceptual connections; the connection and relationship between the Creator and the created;

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[3] Ibid., 42–45.

[4] For more details on these three interrelated terms see Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-Arab*, 13: 166, col. 2.

the Master and the slave; and the delineated notions of human relationships with each other.[5]

Now briefly the concept of *indebtedness* in its religious and spiritual context should be explained.[6] If man ponders seriously about the very inception of his creation, he will then realise that he owes his life to someone. This indebtedness is owed to God, who created man and thus provides for the maintenance of his existence. Again, man, in his very existence, is indebted to Allah. This is based on the fact that He who brings him to existence also maintains him in his existence. In the name of the Almighty Allah, the Holy Qur'an[7] says:

> "Man We did create from a quintessence of clay; Then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; Then of the clot We made a lump; Then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; Then We developed out of it another creature. So, blessed be God, the Best to create!"[8]

In addition, it is an erroneous view that man is indebted to his parents for bringing him to this earth since both his parents are also indebted to the same God. Thus, man indeed possesses nothing, not even his very own self. He is from the very beginning of creation in a state of utter loss when Allah the Almighty affirms in the Qur'an:

> "Verily man is in loss (*khusr*)."[9]

With man's recognition of his real position in relation to God, he will realise that his very self, his soul, has already acknowledged God as his Lord, and thus made covenant with Him (God). Since man owns absolutely nothing for which to "repay" his debt, he is therefore obliged to enslave himself to God. Normally, a *slave* has to obey and respect the commands of his *master*. He has "no right" to transgress against the commands of his master. Similarly, an *'abd* (Arabic: servant or slave) repays his debt if he is consciously and willingly submitting to the com-

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5 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam,* 43.

6 Ibid.

7 The quoted passages are taken from the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of Holy Qur'an* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 2016).

8 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Mu'minun*: 12–14.

9 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Asr*: 2.

mands, prohibitions, and ordinances of God and thus lives with the dictates of His law. The word "repay" here means "returning himself to Him Who owns him absolutely." The "returning," therefore, is what is also referred as *ibādah* which is indeed a "return to the inherent nature" since the obligation to serve God is a normal process which is guided by his natural tendency. This natural tendency to serve and worship God is denoted by the term *fitrah*.[10] With the "return to inherent nature," it fundamentally refers to the spiritual elements of man and not his physical aspects of being. The concept of "return" is expressed in the Qur'an by the term *raj*ʿ:

"By the heaven that hath rain"[11]

The word *raj*ʿ is interpreted as rain, which signifies something that returns repeatedly from the skies by which He brings forth the living plants from earth that is dead. The Holy Qur'an refers to this as follows:

"… In the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead."[12]

Similarly, the religion of Islam "is like rain which gives life to man who is otherwise dead like the earth," asserts al-Attas. If we base our reason on the above statement, we can argue that *raj*ʿ or rain returns after it has fulfilled its purpose of being that is to bring benefit to the earth by bringing life to it. Metaphorically, in order that man can "repay" his debt he has to "return" himself to God to whom he is indebted. His return must be like the returning rain. Then, in addition, the very self of man (i.e., his soul) has already acknowledged God as his Lord in the world of soul before the existence of man. The Qur'an affirms the followings:

"When the Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendents, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): 'Am I not your Lord?' – they said: 'Yea! We do testify!'"[13]

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10 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Rum*: 30.
11 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Tariq*: 11.
12 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Baqarah*: 164.
13 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Araf*: 152.

Here in the Qur'an, Allah addresses Himself not only as Allah but also as *Rabb*, another name of Allah that carries the meaning of the relationship between "the King and the slave"; the Governor and the governed; the Sustainer and the sustained. These definitions of that relationship establish Allah's All-Embracing Authority and Sovereignty. Man, therefore, is bound in a covenant (in Arabic: *al-mīthāq; al-'ahd*) that determines his purpose, attitude, and action with respect to the self in his relation to God. Then, the concept of *submission* is possibly common to all religions, just as belief and faith is the core of all religions. What makes Islam differ from other religions is the form and nature of its *submission*, not the belief in one God.[14]

Concerning submission, the term for real submission is *aslama* as Allah says:

"Who can be better in religion (*dīn*) than one who submits (*aslama*) his face (i.e., his whole self) to God".[15]

Submission is not simply any submission. Al-Attas classifies *submission* into two categories: willing or *real* submission and unwilling submission. Willing submission refers to sincere, conscious and total submission to God's will. In addition, it refers to a continuous act lived throughout the entire span of one's ethical life and also the kind that operates not only within the realm of the heart but also manifesting itself outwardly in the action of the body as works performed in obedience to God's law. Unwilling submission refers to a kind of submission that is momentary or erratic, or not in the form that is revealed and commanded by God. As mentioned earlier, the fundamental core of true religion is not the belief, but rather the kind of submission. To elaborate this, it is the example of *iblis* (satan) who became a *kafir* (infidel) for not submitting to the command of God. Unwilling submission therefore is a manifestation of arrogance, disobedience, and rebellion against God's law. The religion (*dīn)* of real submission referred to none other than Islam in which is enacted total submission (*istislām*) to God alone, whence it is the best and only religion (*dīn*) accepted by Allah:

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14 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, pp. 52–55.

15 The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Nisa*: 125.

"If anyone desires a religion (*dīn*) other than Islam, never it will be accepted of him ..."[16]

"Verily, the Religion (*al-dīn*) in the sight of God is Islam"[17]

The term *dīn* denotes also religions other than Islam because Qur'anically man cannot escape being in the state of living a *dīn,* since all submit (*aslama*) to God's will. This is based on the Qur'anic verse:

"Do they seek for other than the religion (*dīn*) of God? While all creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willing or unwilling submitted (*aslama*) to His will, and to Him shall they all be returned"[18]

The notion on how to submit willingly or consciously is perhaps a matter of great debate for other religions. Every religion has its own patterns or means of submission. Historical facts affirmed that the bases of their system or forms of submission, which naturally changes from generation to generation, would always lead their followers to the path of an "unwilling" type of submission. One of the obvious reasons lies on the fact that people perceive their religion as a mere tradition since its form of submission is generally based upon their own cultural tradition, which has no basis from the concept of *millah*. The concept of *millah* refers to "the manner of institution of belief or faith, the manner of expression of the law, the manner of religious attitude and ethical and moral conduct, the manner in which submission to God is enacted in our life." The religion of Islam, on the contrary, has its own system or forms of submission based upon the *millah* of the Prophet Ibrahim and of other Prophets after him which all together are considered to be the form of the right religion (*dīn al-qayyim*). The perfect crystallisation of the *milal* of the Prophets reflect the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Based on the above discussions, the concept of '*dīn*' reflects the idea of a kingdom –a cosmopolis. This kingdom is called the kingdom of God, which embodies a comprehensive and all embracing order that governs the social and political affairs of man. The social order includes all aspects of man; his physical, material, spiritual existence

16 The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 85.
17 The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 19.
18 The Holy Qur'an, *Ali Imran*: 83.

that does justice to the individual either as a physical being or as spirit and society; thus, a Muslim is at once himself and his community. In Islamic social order, Allah is the "King of the Kingdom" on earth whose Will, Law, Ordinances, Commands, and Prohibitions "hold absolute sway."[19]

With regard to the meanings of "judicial power" and "natural tendency or inclination," al-Attas treats both as one correlated issue. Significantly, he elaborates that Man is God the Almighty's vicegerent (*khalifah*) on the earth which is given the trust *(amānah*) of government to rule according to Allah's Will in that socio-political rule. Realising that the *amānah* refers to the self-responsibility to do justice to itself, the rule of one's self by itself is far more fundamental than socio-political rule. Islam is a social-order in which every individual based on their given capacity and power must fulfil and realise their responsibility. They have to strive to achieve the ideal for themselves in the way *(ihsān* or perfection in virtue) manifested by the Revealed Law or *Sharī'ah*, obeyed by all members in the community. Consequently, every Muslim is a *khalīfah* of Allah on the earth as well as *'abd* of Allah, man is striving by himself to perfect his *'ibādah* (service and devotion) in the manner approved by Allah. Since man is answerable to Allah alone, he must direct his true and real loyalty (*tā'ah)* to Allah.[20]

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19 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 55–56. For details on the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an by various classical Muslim scholars of the past on the term "*millah,*" please refer to https://vb.tafsir.net/, accessed July 28, 2020.

20 Here the reader can realise the relationship between the meanings of "judicial power" and "natural inclination or tendency" that were parts the four meanings of religion (*dīn*). In various parts of al-Attas's works this issue can be further realised. Al-Attas thinks it is extremely important to discern both the intimate and profoundly significant connection between the concept of *dīn* and that of *madīnah* which derives from it, and the role of the Believers individually in relation to the former and collectively in relation to the latter. As he further asserts that considerable relevance must be seen in the significance of the change of name of the town once known as Yathrib to *al-Madīnah: The City*. The first Community of the Believers was formed there at the time, and that marked the New Era in the history of mankind. It must be seen that the fact that al-Madīnah was so called and named because it was there that true *dīn* became realised for mankind. There the Believers enslaved themselves under the authority and jurisdiction of the Prophet, their *dayyān*; there the realisation of the debt to God took definite form, and the approved manner and method of its payment began to unfold. The City of the Prophet was where the true *dīn* was enacted under his authority and jurisdiction, where the City for the Community became naturaly inclined to the epitome of the socio-political order of Islam; and for the

According to al-Attas, commerce, trade, and such activity together with its implications are intrinsic to the concept of *dīn*. The Qur'an itself inexorably portrays the worldly life "in the apt metaphors of commercial enterprise." Among the things involved in the trade (*al-tijārah*) in *dīn,* is man himself. He is the subject as well as object of his trade. His loss and gain is dependant upon his own sense of responsibility and exercise of freedom. The object selling (*bay'ah*) and bartering (*ishtarā*) is he himself; and the prosperity (*rabiha al-tijārah*) or loss (*mā rabiha al-tijārah*) depends on his own inclination towards the exercise of his will and deeds.[21] As the man so engaged in *tijārah,* he indeed realised the utter seriousness of it. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Verily, God has purchased of the believers their selves."[22]

The concept of *dīn* portrays the man of Islam (i.e., the Muslim) as a city dweller, a cosmopolitan, living a civilised life in accordance to clearly defined foundations of social order and codes of conduct, to whom obedience to Divine Law, endeavour towards realising true justice and striving after right knowledge are cardinal virtues. As Islam is the epitome of the Divine Cosmic order, the Muslim is also an epitome of the cosmos. A Muslim is a *microcosmic* representation – '*alam sagir*' – of the *macrocosmos* – '*alam al-kabir.'* As Muslims regard Islam as *a kingdom*, a social order, so the Muslim is a *kingdom in miniature*, as we know that man is indeed, both soul and body, in which soul governs body as God governs the Universe. And man also has two distinct souls which are: the higher, rational soul known as *al-nafs al-nātiqah*; and the lower soul, the animal or carnal soul known as *al-nafs al-haywaniyyah.* Man's rational soul acts and should act as King, and his carnal or animal soul must submit to it. The effective power and rule as well as the total

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individual Believer it became the symbol of the Believer's body and physical being in which the rational soul, in emulation of the Prophet, exercises authority and just government. For further illustrations, s*ee* al-Attas's *Islam and Secularism*, 2nd Impression (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993), 54–63, 64–70, 71–79, 82–83.

[21] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam.,* 57

[22] The Holy Qur'an, *Al-Tawbah*: 111. When God proclaimed His Lordship to Adam's progeny, it is the rational soul of man that He addressed. Thus, when God and man made covenant, it was the rational soul that accepted this covenant.

submission of the man's animal soul to man's rational soul is indeed interpreted as *dīn*.[23]

Realising that the word man (*insan*) is derived from *nasiya* (*forget*), he is subject to forgetfulness that causes his disobedience, inclination to injustice (*zulm*), and ignorance (*jahl*). But God has given to man three faculties:

a) Power and means to attain the truth,
b) Indication of the right and the wrong related to the causes of man's action,
c) Intelligence.

With such equipment, man is appointed as *khalīfah*, and consequently, the *amānah* as *khalīfah* is placed upon him beside the responsibility to rule with social and political justice, and the most fundamental is ruling, governing, and maintaining of man by his rational soul.[24]

Since man is a physical being, a kingdom on a *miniature or microcosmic* scale of the *macrocosmos*, only in this stage is he said to attain freedom, which is a state of tranquillity known as *al-nafs al-mutma'innah*. The relation of man and his God is maintained and improved through his *'ibādah*; therefore, only those who are true, sincere and consistent in their *'ibādah* will truly know God. Furthermore, without consistent '*ibādah* man will never achieve Knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*), and '*ibādah* also will never become proper without proper knowledge. Therefore, '*ibādah* and knowledge are inseparable.[25]

Such, according to al-Attas, is the fundamental core of the religion of Islam, and this can be concluded in this direct quotation:[26]

"It is implicit in our exposition that Islam is both belief and faith (*imān*)[27] as well as submission in service *(islām)*; it is both assent of the heart (*qalb*) and

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[23] For further explanation concerning *al-nafs al-haywaniyyah* and *al-nafs al-natiqah*, see Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 58, 149. See also Ibn Sina, *Kitab al-Najat* (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah, 1985), 197–200, 202–203. See also Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 68–69.

[24] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 144–145.

[25] Ibid., 60, 108.

[26] Ibid., 61–62.

[27] The word '*iman*,' generally translated as faith and belief, is derived from *amana* (ordinarily rendered, "he believed") which means "when used transitively, 'he granted him peace and security,' and when used intransitively, 'he came into peace and security.'" See, Maulana Muham-

mind (*'aql*) confirmed by the tongue (*lisān)* as well as deed and work (*'amal*); it is the harmonious relationship established between both the soul and the body; it is obedience and loyalty (*tā'ah*) both to God as well as to the Holy Prophet; it is accepting wholeheartedly the truth of the Testimony (*kalimah shahādah*) that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah - Islam is the unity of all these, together with what they entail, in belief and in practice, in the person of the Muslims as well as in the community as a whole. There can be no separation, nor division, nor dichotomy between the harmoniously integrated parts of the unity thus established…"

This is the meaning of *dīn* and Islam. However, we should bear in mind that the meaning of *dīn* and Islam bind up other Islamic elements likewise, in the sphere of social and political life of individual Muslims and the Ummah as a whole. The covenant serves as the focal and dominant element in the concept of freedom, responsibility, justice, knowledge, virtue, brotherhood, and so on. The notion of *dīn* incorporates all aspects (society, personal piety, politics, civilisation, environment), incorporates environmental consciousness, the harmony of man and nature, notions of justice, accountability, the whole cosmos within the concept of *dīn*.

Al-Attas further illustrates that the word "justice" is indeed one of the basic concepts in Islam, which has been misunderstood by other religions and philosophies. Generally, justice is defined as a harmonious condition or a state of affairs whereby everything is in its proper place. Concerning man, justice means basically a condition and situation whereby he is in his right and proper place. Thus, justice ('*adl*) and injustice (*zulm*) begin with the self. Therefore, justice is also applicable to man's self alone. Hence, this concept of justice corresponds to the idea of "reward" and "punishment," for every man in reality must think and act for his own salvation, for every human being is responsible for his own action since every man bears his own burden of responsibility. This point is more approachable to our mind if the idea of man's covenant to his God can be truly and logically apprehended. For the fact that man's soul has already made a covenant with God, which clearly implies that any wrong and evil acts, or the act of disobedience and

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mad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles and Practices of Islam* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Limited, 1936), 119.

denial of God, would mean a violation of his own contract, which is thus being unjust to his own soul. Therefore, in Islam, any acts of suicide, are considered a major sin not because of the depravity it gives to the state, but it is forbidden because of its injustice to the self. So, the central focus of justice in Islam is with one individual self and not the relational affair of two different individuals or parties, and the failure to do justice to oneself will result in the failure of justice to be performed outside one's individual self; i.e., to others. On the Day of Judgement, it is that man or rather that man's self who will suffer. How much more if he breaks the Law of God or His Covenant on which the viability of all his actions depend entirely. It is no wonder then that accordingly on that Day, the dead (the body with all its parts since each part will be testifying against itself because it has wronged the soul) will be resurrected and reunited with its soul in order to answer for the things it has done. Because it has wronged the soul. Because man placed himself in the wrong place.[28]

In the beginning of Miskawayh's discourse on justice, he observes that justice is one of the forms of man's activities which clearly demonstrates the genuine signification of happiness. The concept of happiness is ultimately a matter of individual self for no collective happiness is concerned more than individual happiness. By emphasising individual happiness, it is indeed essential to clarify that happiness refers not to the physical entity in man, the bodily pleasure or a state of mind, but to certainty of the ultimate truth, which renders our action in absolute compliance with it. Likewise, justice is a matter of one individual self since true and real justice is only performed by one who is in a state of being just to one's self.[29]

Furthermore, to do justice implies *knowledge* of the right and proper place for a thing or a being to be; of right as against wrong; of the mean or limit; of spiritual gain as against loss; of truth as against falsity and falsehood. Because of this, Muslims find that knowledge occupies a most important position in the religion of Islam. However, even in the

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[28] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 64–65.

[29] Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*, trans. Constantine K. Zubayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 95.

case of knowledge, man has to do justice to it, which is to know its limit of usefulness and not to exceed or fall short of it; to know its various orders of priority in relation to its usefulness to one's self; and so on. In further explanations, knowledge is of two kinds: that which is given by God to man, and that which is acquired by man by means of his own effort of rational enquiry based upon experience and observation. The first kind of knowledge pertains to self or soul, and such knowledge gives insight into knowledge of God, and for that reason is the highest knowledge. Thus it follows that knowledge of the prerequisites becomes necessary, and this includes knowledge of the essentials of Islam (*arkan al-islam* and *arkan al-iman*), their meanings and purpose and correct understanding and implementation in every day life and practice. In addition, every Muslim must have knowledge of these. The second kind of knowledge is acquired, as we have mentioned above, through reason, experience, and observation; it is discursive and deductive and it refers to objects of pragmatic value.[30]

Based on the above detailed explanation, it can be concluded that, according to the understanding and exposition of al-Attas, the concept of religion in Islam is very different from what is oft perceived. In Islam, the concept of religion (*dīn*) and its significance are indeed reflected from the term *dīn* itself, from its root *D-Y-N,* where many other conceptions emerged. Apart from the religious aspect, al-Attas tries to form a systematic meaning of the term *dīn* by ultimately relating it to the *civilisation and social refinement.* He further attempts to present the significations of *dīn* in what al-Attas terms the "human secular context" and the "religious context." As those conceptions really portray a true and complete concept of religion and if we translated them into reality, they will manifest as a complete system or way of life in the religion of Islam.

We may conclude with a thought that a further comparative study between Al-Attas's approach to the religion of Islam as well as the western and the eastern approaches to the concept of religion as exposed in various literatures and beliefs would be highly welcome and encourag-

30 Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, 68.

ing – as an effort toward the advancement of the mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim religious scholars.

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CONSUMING EID AL-ADHA: CONSTRUCTING AND EXPRESSING THE MUSLIM IDENTITY

Amar Ahmed

Introduction

The events of 9/11 led the Western public and academic interest in Muslims and their identity to grow especially in the United States. In Europe, the academic discourse increased following the so-called Muslim mass migration of 2015 and onwards. However, much of the literature – particularly the ethnographic – examines the community as a minority in the West from the contexts of discrimination,[1] especially against women wearing headscarves,[2] and the issue of Muslim integration and/or assimilation[3]. Even those who have conducted ethnographic research, whether in the MENA[4] region or in the West, tend to have orientalist, colonialist, and/or essentialist perspectives[5].

In this paper, a) I argue that there is a lacuna in the ethnographic research of Muslims and how they construct their identity in various sociocultural contexts that, consequently, will b) show particularism

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1 Karen J. Aroian, "Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents," *The Journal of School Nursing* 28, no. 3 (2012): 206, https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840511432316.206.
2 Rebecca S. Robinson, "Hijab in the American workplace: Visibility and discrimination," *Culture and religion* 17, no. 3 (2016): 332, https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2016.1211543.
3 Pippa Norris and Ronald F. Inglehart, "Muslim integration into Western cultures: Between origins and destinations," *Political Studies* 60, no. 2 (2012): 228, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00951.x.
4 Middle East and North Africa (MENA).
5 Gabriele Marranci, *The anthropology of Islam* (London: Berg, 2008), 31–52.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2020.228 | Poligrafi, no. 99/100, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 117–143

among them. c) I write to contribute to this body of knowledge through analysing the meanings that Muslims associate with Eid Al-Adha which leads to their identity construction and expression through celebrating and consuming the holiday. d) I discuss the rituals surrounding the holiday which would reveal some of the significant values of the celebrators who would be under the umbrella of the Islamic culture; though the possibility of non-Muslims celebrating the holiday with their Muslim friends must be acknowledged – which ethnographic accounts could reveal – I concentrate on Muslims' celebrations in this article. Eid Al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice is one of two Islamic holidays – the other being Eid Al-Fitr – which is celebrated each year among the Muslim communities, and it is widely considered to be the holier of the two.[6]

Visible ethnographic literature investigating religious and cultural holidays mainly revolve around Western holidays such as Thanksgiving[7], Easter[8], and Christmas[9]. Islamic holidays – especially Eid Al-Adha – have not received the same scholarly attention, especially the research that would fit under the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) that offers a framework and bridges the gap between consumption behaviour and cultural meanings.[10]

In the context of this paper, using the term "consuming" does not refer to the traditional commercial meaning since one may consume an idea, an experience, a culture, and/or even a religion. For example, feasting with family during Eid Al-Adha is not simply about eating or

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6 Ziasma Haneef Khan, P. J. Watson, and Zhuo Chen, "Meanings of animal sacrifice during Eid-ul-Adha: Relationships with religious orientations and Muslim experiential religiousness in Pakistan," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 37, no. 1 (2015): 37, https://doi.org/10.1163/15736121-12341299.

7 Melanie Wallendorf and Eric J. Arnould, "'We gather together': consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day," *Journal of consumer research* 18, no. 1 (1991): 13–31, https://doi.org/10.1086/209237.

8 Theodore Caplow and Margaret Holmes Williamson, "Decoding Middletown's Easter bunny: a study in American iconography," *Semiotica* 32, no. 3/4 (1980): 221–232, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.535.6958&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

9 Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Priscilla A. LaBarbera, "The meaning of Christmas," in *SV - Interpretive Consumer Research*, edited by Elizabeth C. Hirschman (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1989), 136–147.

10 Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, "Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research," *Journal of consumer research* 31, no. 4 (2005): 868–882, https://doi.org/10.1086/426626.

drinking, rather it is about consuming a social setting. Through this social setting, Muslims express the importance of family and the value of collectivism as parts of their identity. These are the meanings associated with consuming the feast.

"Identity" may be defined as the idea an individual has about oneself, characteristics properties, body, and values, while "image" is the way others view and judge an individual.[11] Individualists define the term as to what a person owns or experiences; while collectivists define it through relationships, group memberships, and fulfilment of expectations. Nevertheless, religion plays a significant role in shaping people's identity and behaviour.

When researching for ethnographic or sociological literature regarding the consumption of Eid Al-Adha, much of it came via newspaper articles and online blogs. That is not to deny the existence of studies in books and academic journals. Much of the academic research – especially in English – regarding Islamic holidays study Eid Al-Fitr, since it follows a month of fasting during Ramadhan.[12] Most academic papers concentrate on the sacrifice and the health-related issues such as viruses[13] and nutrition[14], and the meaning of the sacrifice[15]. Moreover, much of the academic debate revolves around the religious and historic aspects of the holiday and the story behind it.[16] The more recent discourse focuses on animal rights and the ecology surrounding the sacrifice, since millions of animals are slaughtered

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11 Marieke De Mooij, *Consumer behavior and culture: Consequences for global marketing and advertising* (London: SAGE Publications Limited, 2019), 153–156.

12 Xiaochun Yang, "The festival of fast-breaking Eid al-Fitr in the Great Mosque of Lhasa. Some observations," *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 47 (2016): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.4000/emscat.2867.

13 Antoine Nougairede, Christelle Fossati, Nicolas Salez, Stephan Cohen-Bacrie, Laetitia Ninove, Fabrice Michel, Samer Aboukais et al., "Sheep-to-human transmission of Orf virus during Eid al-Adha religious practices, France," *Emerging infectious diseases* 19, no. 1 (2013): 102, https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1901.120421.

14 M. M. Farouk, J. M. Regenstein, M. R. Pirie, R. Najm, A. E. D. Bekhit, and S. O. Knowles, "Spiritual aspects of meat and nutritional security: Perspectives and responsibilities of the Abrahamic faiths," *Food Research International* 76, no. 4 (2015): 882–895, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2015.05.028.

15 Khan, Watson, and Chen, "Meanings of Animal Sacrifice," 37–53.

16 Asma Barlas, "Abraham's sacrifice in the Qur'an: beyond the body," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 23 (2011): 55–71, https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67380.

during that day each year.[17] Sociologically, scholars investigate the challenges that Muslims face when celebrating in the West, such as in Canada[18] and France.[19]

Torlak *et al.*[20] looks into the unique experiences of Turkish consumers to formulate the consumption ritual experiences and discourse of Eid Al-Adha, and Van de Bruinhorst's[21] dissertation discussing the holiday using the example of Tanga in Tanzania are the most relevant ethnographic studies that I found. Ljamai[22] concentrates on the sacrifice aspect of the holiday, similar to the majority of academic works that investigate Eid Al-Adha. This is understandable due to the richness of meanings constructed during the ritual. In this paper, not only will I analyse the sacrifice, but also other consumption rituals within the celebrations. It is important to note that each experience is unique due to the different sociocultural contexts that Eid Al-Adha is celebrated within and, therefore, one should not generalise or essentialise findings.

All in all, Eid Al-Adha has not received the deserved ethnographic attention that describes how its participants construct meanings as much as other prominent holidays have and do, such as Christmas, Easter, and/or even Eid Al-Fitr.

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[17] Wendy Doniger, "Afterword: Cruelty and the Imagination of Animals in India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 2 (2015): 277–280, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-3139048.

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[19] Anne-Marie Brisebarre, "The evolution of sacrificial practices for Eid al-Adha in urban France," *Ethnologie francaise* 168, no. 4 (2017): 607–622.

[20] Ömer Torlak, Müjdat Özmen, Muhammet Ali Tiltay, Mahmut Sami İşlek, and Ufuk Ay, "Ritual as assemblage: feast of sacrifice experiences of Turkish consumers," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 10, no. 2 (2019): 476–494, https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-05-2018-0091.

[21] Gerard C. Van de Bruinhorst, *"Raise Your Voices and Kill Your Animals": Islamic Discourses on the Idd el-Hajj and Sacrifices in Tanga (Tanzania)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 29–440.

[22] Abdelilah Ljamai, "Sacrifice and Islamic Identity," in *Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity*, ed. Joachim Duyndam, Anna-Marie J.A.C.M. Korte, and Marcel Poorthuis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 221–229, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004335530_014.

Background

Eid Al-Adha falls on the tenth day of *Dhu Al-Hijjah*, which is the twelfth month of the Islamic Calendar. In Islamic tradition, the background of Eid Al-Adha stems from the story of the Prophet Ebrahim (Abraham). One of the key trials of his life was God commanding him to sacrifice his son. It was on mount Arafah where the son was about to be sacrificed by his father to submit to the will of God. That is when the prophet Ebrahim was sent an animal to sacrifice instead to signify that he had passed the test and his sacrifice had already been accepted; hence, the name of the holiday and the ritual of the slaughtering and sacrificing of an animal which is usually a sheep. Prior to the act, the Devil had attempted to sway Ebrahim and his family away from actualising the commandment of God; however, the father threw pebbles at the Devil and drove him away. This created the ritual of throwing stones at pillars that signifies the rejection of Satan during Hajj rites.[23]

Muslims rituals look to summarize the passages through journeys of human life.[24] In general, on the Day of Arafah, non-pilgrims (Hajj) have been observed to fast. The following day, special Eid Al-Adha prayers are performed at the mosques in congregation when it is followed by *Khutbah* (Sermon) delivered by the Imam and by the end of that attendees greet each other and shake hands as observed in many Muslim communities such as the Bosniak.[25] Sacrificing an animal is the next step of the celebrations – which is considered one of the most important rituals of the day – and the animal has to fit certain criteria and a specific ritual must be followed. The meat of the sacrifice is then divided into three parts, one third donated to the poor and needy, one to relatives, friends and neighbours, and the last part is kept at home to be cooked for the Eid feast and the following meals.[26] It is not unusual

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23 Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in holy lands: The evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic exegesis* (Albany: Suny Press, 1990), 105–221.
24 Marranci, "The Anthropology of Islam," 27.
25 Mehmed Handžić, "Kurban Bajram/Eid Ul Adha," *Novi Muallim* 14, no. 55 (2013): 111, https://doi.org/10.26340/muallim.v14i55.315.
26 Torlak et al., "Ritual as Assemblage," 480.

for families and friends to gather and attend more than one feast a day during Eid celebrations especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia.[27]

Eid Al-Adha involves religious and cultural rituals which are performed by Muslims across the world. The doctrinal mode of ritual developments that are frequently repeated, such as annual celebrations, build a precise memory routine for the ritual's abstract or schematic organisation.[28] Despite the fact that over time some details of scripted actions may vary from one performance to another, the schematic sequence of events repeat in a fairly high degree of accurate repetition. This repetitive routine is typically guided by a firm social hierarchy which further minimizes unintended innovation, increases policing, monitoring, and sanctioning of nonconformity. Besides preservation, the implications of routinisation include identification of anonymous worshippers to include in a community. In short, the preservation allows rituals to withstand changes throughout generations, and for those who are performing those rituals to express their identity as part of the community.

The religious rituals of Eid Al-Adha are performed virtually identically among the members of the "imagined community"[29] around the world. However, different cultures and contexts can reflect particularism in the practices. For example, Muslims attend Eid prayer that includes a sermon. The topic or the language of the sermon can differ slightly across nations due to the context it is being delivered in.[30] Similarly, Muslims feast during the Day with the main dish tending to feature the meat of the sacrifice; however, the food in the feast is adapted to the local customs and even to specific household traditions - Van de Bruinhorst reports that his informants in Tanga were even confused

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[27] Noraziah Ali and Mohd Azlan Abdullah, "The food consumption and eating behaviour of Malaysian urbanites: Issues and concerns," *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 8, no. 6 (2017): 163, https://ejournal.ukm.my/gmjss/article/view/20088/6386.

[28] Scott Atran, *In gods we trust: The evolutionary landscape of religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 156.

[29] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso books, 2006), 1–206.

[30] Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise Your Voices," 83–85.

whether spices and salt are allowed or not.[31] Developing ethnography in various sociocultural contexts and geographical locations would reveal the meanings constructed and symbolism within the performance of the rituals. Moreover, it would allow us to examine whether those meanings remain the same across contexts since, for instance, prayers could mean submission to god and/or inclusion, the sermon may communicate the value of listening to the wise and elderly and/or supporting a shared cause, and feasting could construct and expresses collectivism and/or reward patience.

The Meanings and Values of Eid Al-Adha

Celebrations tend to be taken for granted by the participants as the cultural discourse negotiates meanings and issues that are difficult for many to acknowledge, recognise, articulate, and deliberate verbally.[32] The reason this paper argues for the need for ethnographic research with regards to Eid Al-Adha is the fact that celebrators utilize actions and experiences to construct and express their identity. I will proceed to analyse some potential meanings and values that the celebrators communicate as parts of their identity.

Collectivism: The Social Aspects of Eid Al-Adha

Symbols may be seen as relations, rather than objects.[33] Hence, meaning comes from spatial and temporal relationships established between symbols that are objectively experienced throughout social interactions. Every single Eid Al-Adha ritual symbolises a Muslim's relationship with an entity. For example, 1) Eid prayers as a submission to God[34]; 2) two thirds of the sacrificial meat are given to the poor and the needy and other members of the community[35]; and 3) feasting tends to start with

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31 Ibid., 139.
32 Caplow and Williamson, "Decoding Middletown's Easter," 221–32.
33 Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, and David Murray Schneider, *Symbolic anthropology: A reader in the study of symbols and meanings* (Naw York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 22.
34 Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise Your Voices," 274.
35 Torlak et al., "Ritual as Assemblage," 480.

the nuclear family and then expand to encompass the extended family and friends.[36]

Moreover, Eid Al-Adha rituals highlight the collective nature of the Muslim culture in general. For instance, the animal sacrifice is for the family and community, the Eid prayers are generally collective and include public sermons, and family and friends are the centrepiece of the feasts. This expresses the significance of family and community.

Similar to what they do for *Iftar* during Ramadhan[37], many central mosques around the world arrange a feast, or at least offer some snacks and treats[38] with an open free invitation for anybody to attend, especially those who have no place, no family, or friends to celebrate with.[39] Some philanthropists and families even host open houses for Eid brunch.[40] This is important especially for immigrants who live and/or work abroad. This affirms the sense of inclusion as people donate money and food to mosques serving this purpose.

Eid Al-Adha coincides with and marks the Hajj season. I will further describe the rites in a coming section. However, it must be noted that the rites are performed by all pilgrims at the same period of time, wearing identical clothing, and aiming to achieve the same goal.[41] People from around the world and from different backgrounds get together to perform the rites, which emphasises the membership in the "community".

The celebratory atmosphere and joy that surround Eid Al-Adha is a common feeling[42]; the shared religious, cultural, and/or national iden-

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36 Syen Adnan Raza, "A Pakistani Eid (1991)," *The Valpo Core Reader* 360 (1991): 5–6, http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1310&context=core_reader.

37 Trade Arabia, "Bahrain mosque serves iftar for 400," July 5, 2015, http://www.tradearabia.com/news/MEDIA_285611.html.

38 Zainab Iqbal, "Eid Al-Adha During a Pandemic," *Bklyner*, July 30, 2020, https://bklyner.com/eid-al-adha-during-a-pandemic/.

39 Santriani Bohari, "Here's How Muslims Around The World Celebrate Eid Al Adha," *HHWT*, August 25, 2017, https://www.havehalalwilltravel.com/heres-how-muslims-around-the-world-celebrate-eid-al-adha.

40 Tasmiha Khan, "How Families Are Celebrating Eid al-Adha This Year," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/31/parenting/eid-al-adha-families-coronavirus.html.

41 Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 25–26.

42 Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 350.

tities in each context bringing the celebrators together. Everybody receives the same greetings and good wishes offering a sense of unity.[43] I stress the need for ethnographic research with regards to Eid Al-Adha as it will reveal which part of their identity the participants associate the holiday and its consumption rituals with. For instance, members of a Muslim community within a European country could only construct their religious identity through their celebrations since they would be coming from different cultural backgrounds; while celebrators in a Muslim-majority country could construct and express their religious, cultural, and/or national identities. Still, the common celebratory feeling should reflect some sense of belonging to an "imagined community".

The main characteristic for the holiday is its social aspect. In order to comfortably participate in all collective rituals, one must be able to forgive. I believe that this assumption is reasonable since much of the consumption rituals are collective, such as the prayers and the feast. Should one have an issue with a community or a family member, it would make the meeting awkward. Eid brings the society together during prayers. Two thirds of the sacrifice go to other people, constructing the value that one's family is not reduced to their blood-relatives, but more generally the community in which they live. In some cultures, Eid breakfast puts the nuclear family around the same table.[44] The extended family surround the holiday feast. Afternoons mark the gathering of friends.[45] All those are opportunities for a person to come to a common ground with the people with whom he/she have differences with.

Family is an integral entity within the Islamic culture since Islam stresses the significance of strong family relationships and emphasises respect and kindness within the institution.[46] During the celebrations, Muslims visit and greet each other. Distant family members and acquaintances get together with some immigrant families returning

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 32–33.

45 Ibid., 33.

46 Nur Suriya Mohd Nor, "Islam and Buddhism: Similarities of Moral Practices," *Al-Iqtan: journal of Islamic sciences and comparative studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 31–34, https://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/al-itqan/article/download/117/49.

"home" if Eid Al-Adha coincides with holidays, for example, French families of North African origin.[47] Therefore, positive kinship and family relationships are highlighted during Eid.

Eid Al-Adha organises the society and emphasises social order. Muslims attend Eid prayers lining up to pray to the same God regardless of social status. Eid prayers are additional to the daily five prayers that Muslims pray.[48] Prayers attendees perform the same rituals and listen to the same sermon, which is usually Eid-specific.[49] Being all under the same "rules" during Eid prayers reflects the Islamic value that all people are equal before God no matter one's background.[50] The same applies to Hajj, where all pilgrims wear the exact same attire in order to perform the rituals which unify them. Last but not least, the fortunate giving to the unfortunate characteristic of the holiday stabilises the society and the feeling of equality is symbolically and periodically represented.

Submission to God's Will: The Religious Aspects of Eid Al-Adha

Islam literally translates as "submission to the will of God".[51] The rituals of Eid Al-Adha are full of symbolism that are articulated and enacted.[52] God has asked Muslims to be humble as all are equal in God's eyes regardless of ethnicity and social status[53]. This is enacted through bowing and prostration before God during prayers and through the rites of Hajj – to sacrifice if capable, which is articulated through the intention of the sacrifice prior to performing it, to care for the family

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47 Anne-Marie Brisebarre, "The Sacrifice of 'Id al-kabir: Islam in the French Suburbs," *Anthropology today* 9, no. 1 (1993): 11, https://doi.org/10.2307/2783335.

48 Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in focus* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1993), 55–58.

49 Ibid., 58.

50 Ibid., 28–29.

51 Solomon A. Nigosian, *Islam: Its history, teaching, and practices* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Preface.

52 Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 427–429.

53 Samir Ahmad, Abuznaid, "Business ethics in Islam: the glaring gap in practice," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 2, no. 4 (2009): 284, https://doi.org/10.1108/17538390911006340.

institution that is seen as they attempt to come together, to engage in solidarity within the community as is observed during the prayers and exchange of meat, to listen to and respect the elderly, especially one's parents,[54] which is reflected in the interactions during the feasts, and to show compassion to the unfortunate[55] as realised through donating a third of the sacrifice to the needy.

The sacrifice ritual is an integral part of consuming the holiday. After all, the holiday is named after it. Sacrifice – specifically *Qurban* – means performing a holy act and etymologically it is performing an act that makes one closer to God that in turn one will be beloved by God. Throughout history, sacrifice can be found as an expression of penance and humility of humans before God with the aim to avoid God's punishment, regain His favour, show love to Him, and/or answer to His will.[56]

Sacrifice refers to giving up things which are valued, desired, or loved for the sake of something which is more worthy. It can be tangible and countable such as wealth, possessions, or life, and it can be intangible and immeasurable as are love and other pleasures. Sacrifice aids peace and cooperation and societies would lack cohesiveness and strength without it. The ritual offers an abundance of symbols and symbolic meanings.[57] Symbols are "storage units" filled with information that transform human behaviour and attitudes, carry meanings, and are tools for "rousing, channelling, and domesticating power emotions".[58]

Atran argues that religious rituals give validation by satisfying the emotions that motivate religious beliefs and experiences as they are often sequential, rigidly formulaic, and publicly performed, thus forging

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54 Nor, "Islam and Buddhism," 30.

55 Ibid., 38.

56 Mari Jože Osredkar, "Sacrifice – The constitutional element of the human and faith relationship," in *Sacrifice: From origins of culture to contemporary life challenges*, ed. Robert Petkovsek and Bojan Žalec (Wien and Zürich: Lit, 2019), 114.

57 Muhammad Shoaib Khan and Anwaar Mohyuddin, "Symbolic Importance of Ritual of Sacrifice on Eid Ul Adha (Research Based Study on Satellite Town Rawalpindi)," *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2013): 59, http://www.impactjournals.us/download/archives/--1376906657-7.%20Applied-Symbolic-Anwaar%20Mohyuddin%20Copy.pdf.

58 Victor Turner, Roger D. Abrahams, and Alfred Harris, *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 443.

personal identity and memory according to cultural parameters. They are set by signs and displays that manipulate individual sensations and coordinate the minds and bodies of the people involved into convergent expression of public sentiment.[59]

Atran states that religious offering and sacrifice always yield nonrecoverable costs, yet they are emotionally arousing. He shows how sacrifice – human or animal – has always been part of religious and cultural lives of mankind where often the animal is consumed by the congregation. Religious offerings of unrecoverable costs are involved in the selection of the item and the ceremony.[60]

For Eid Al-Adha, multiple ethnographic studies regarding the process of sacrifice and its timing would show how codified it is across the world. For instance, the sacrifice must meet the condition and minimum requirements prior to the act, such as minimum age and type of animal. The sacrifice is divided into three equal sections to be consumed by 1) the person who performs that sacrifice and his family, 2) the person's friends, neighbours and acquaintances, and 3) the poor and the needy, yet, not necessarily universally.[61]

The animal sacrifice serves as a reminder of the prophet Ebrahim's story of willingness to sacrifice his son to comply with God's order. At least once a year, Muslims recognise the importance of appreciating God's wisdom when tested in life. Moreover, the sacrifice reflects one's appreciation for God's generosity in giving the individual life, health, money, time, energy, and other resources that a person uses to have a good life. Furthermore, it is a ritual that is performed by many Muslims around the world on the same day, which promotes the sense of community.

The prime reason for Muslim sacrifices is for the will and gratitude of God who is always present and will reward the sacrifice through various and eternal ways.[62] Moreover, God demands individuals sacrifice

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59 Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, 173.
60 Ibid., 114–117.
61 Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 82, 417–418.
62 Ibid., 327.

time, which is manifest as the most precious commodity in various ways, mainly prayers.[63]

Besides the sacrifice and Eid prayers, millions of Muslims perform the Hajj rites prior to and during the Eid Al-Adha period. Hajj (Pilgrimage) to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam that must be performed by all financially and physically capable adult Muslims at least once in a lifetime and the rites mainly occur from the eighth to the twelfth of the same month, *Dhu Al-Hijjah*.

Marranci describes the Muslim pilgrimage ritual.[64] Hajj is a collection of rites that recall the relationship between Ebrahim, his family and God. Each pilgrim re-enacts Ebrahim's and his wife's *Hajar's* actions according to Islamic tradition. Marranci emphasizes the symbolism revealed during it with regards to the different stages of human life. Two of the rites during Hajj involve seven circumambulations of the *Ka'ba* and seven times running back and forth between two hills near the Ka'ba – similar to what *Hajar* did in search for water for her son. The important and emotional rite of *Waqfat Arafah* occurs on the 9th of the month where pilgrims stand on the Plain of Arafah where pilgrims ask God for forgiveness for their sins. It marks the moment where the pilgrim is purified by his/her repentance. Following the travel through the mountain pass of *Muzdalifa*, pilgrims go towards the valley of *Mina* where they recall Ebrahim's rejection of Satan's lure. The pilgrims throw seven pebbles at a tall stone pillar and then an animal, usually a sheep, is sacrificed to memorialise God's substitution of sheep for Ebrahim's son. During Hajj, all pilgrims wear identical garments called *Ihram Clothing* that signifies that all Muslims submit to God, that all humans are equal despite wealth or social class, serves as a reminder that life is finite since a Muslim is buried in a similar garment, offers a symbolic value of rendering the Islamic identity visible since more than two million Muslims perform the Hajj ritual yearly, and puts the "ummah" with its different cultural traditions under one creed. Similarly, men shave their heads and women cut a fingertip-length of their locks, a matter of fundamental importance in diminishing, symbolically, one's status in

63 Nigosian, *Islam*, 103.
64 Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 25–26.

traditional social order. The change from those garments to the resumption of everyday dress and shaving mark the end of the ritual.

To summarise, the sacrifice, Eid prayers for non-pilgrims, and Hajj, are religious rites that celebrators perform and consume as symbols to submit to God's will through reliving and experiencing the story of Ebrahim.

Giving and Charity: Eideyah and Meat

Eid Al-Adha is the time for the practice of *Eideyah*, a tradition that is performed within many Muslim communities.[65] While most popular holidays involve gift exchange, Eideyah is unique because it tends to be a one-way gift from specific people (elders) to certain members (children). Despite it being a system where everybody receives *Eideyah* at one point in their lives, it still differs from other one-way gift-giving systems such as birthdays or weddings. During the latter celebrations, the person celebrating the birthday and the couple getting married receive the gifts, the receivers are then still socially obliged to give gifts for the giver's birthdays or weddings. *Eideyah* on the other hand categorizes the givers and the receivers such that some are always on the receiving end. I believe *Eideyah* practice has not received the sociological attention it deserves akin to the gift-giving practice of, say, Christmas.

There is some particularism among Muslims regarding *Eideyah* as in some traditions and societies it is a monetary gift[66], while in others, they give out candies to the children or a small symbolic gift[67] instead of cash.[68] Some would argue that a monetary gift provides the opportunity

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65 Amjad Iqbal, "Demand for New Notes for Eidi rises," *Dawn*, July 16, 2015, https://www.dawn.com/news/1194767/; Shailvee Sharda, "Eidi: A tradition wrapped in emotions & nostalgia," *The Time of India*, August 9, 2013, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Eidi-A-tradition-wrapped-in-emotions-nostalgia/articleshow/21718937.cms; Reza Jalali, "Muslims in Maine: Eid Mubarak!," *Maine Policy Review* 24, no. 1 (2015): 159–160, https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol24/iss1/43.

66 Ibid., 159–160; A. Iqbal, "Demand for New Notes."

67 Dawood Mohammad, العيدية وحدها ... لا تزال صامدة من رصيد التقاليد [Eideyah only … Still standing from the traditions]," November 27, 2009, https://www.albayan.ae/our-homes/2009-11-27-1.496290.

68 Sharda, "Eidi."

for the receivers to obtain whatever they want.[69] In some societies, *Eideyah* is not exclusively a gift from elders to children since it can also be given to the mother, sister, aunts, grandfathers, and grandmothers.70 Moreover, the gift-giving process during Eid reinforces values similar to those of other gift-giving rites, such as solidarity and kinship.

Eideyah is an important ritual during the celebrations. Rituals are opportunities to "affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meaning of the cultural order"[71] and they are powerful tools to manipulate cultural meaning. The earlier image of researchers seeing gift-giving as a form of economic exchange has been transferred to the perspective of symbolic exchange to emphasise social bonds and may be guided by unselfish factors.[72] Other studies argue that it is a form of social expression.[73] The Eideyah ritual is full of symbolic meanings such as unselfishness, generosity, sense of community and belonging, care for family institution, and special attention to children. Moreover, the uniqueness of the ritual and the "categories" of the givers and receivers express the identity of the participants.

Sherry breaks down gift-giving into three stages. The first step is *gestation,* where an event motivates the giver to obtain the gift which may be *structural* (prescribed by culture) or *emergent* (personal decision and idiosyncratic). The second stage is *prestation,* during which the recipient reacts to the gift and the giver evaluates this reaction. The third is *reformulation,* where the bonds are adjusted to mirror the new relationship emerging between the giver and the receiver. The second stage determines the third either positively or negatively.[74] The routinisation

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69 Ibid.

70 Mohammad, "Eideyah Only."

71 Grant McCracken, "Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods," *Journal of consumer research* 13, no. 1 (1986): 78, https://doi.org/10.1086/209048.

72 Tina M. Lowrey, Cele C. Otnes, and Julie A. Ruth, "Social influences on dyadic giving over time: A taxonomy from the giver's perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research* 30, no. 4 (2004): 555–557, https://doi.org/10.1086/380288.

73 Russell W. Belk and Gregory S. Coon, "Gift giving as agapic love: An alternative to the exchange paradigm based on dating experiences," *Journal of consumer research* 20, no. 3 (1993): 410–411, https://doi.org/10.1086/209357.

74 John F. Sherry Jr, "Gift giving in anthropological perspective," *Journal of consumer research* 10, no. 2 (1983): 164–165, https://doi.org/10.1086/208956.

of the process of *Eideyah*, especially the monetary type, is structural and leaves little room for surprises unless the giver decides to offer greater amounts than usual. Therefore, the reaction would be the same yearly. The relationships are affirmed between the givers and receivers. Interestingly though, the amounts that a giver gives could differ according to recipients' "needs", their financial situation, and age.[75] For instance, a teenager or an unemployed adult would "need" a higher amount of money than a six-year-old. The more ethnographic accounts are written, the more we can engage in comparative studies regarding what type of *Eideyah* is given in different societies, who tend to be the givers and who the receivers, and the societal and cultural values that the process constructs.

Mauss[76] reveals that moral obligations and construction of social bonds are main elements and reasons for gift exchanges, the gifts indicating social relationships and classifications. This naturally entails the loss of economic value to secure social value for the individual or group. The animal sacrifice for Eid Al-Adha is divided into thirds, in most cases, with the majority of the meat given to acquaintances, the poor, and the needy. This promotes numerous cultural values. Firstly, it brings neighbours and distant people together, constructing the importance of having good relationship with the rest of the society. Secondly, it encourages sharing and generosity. Thirdly, it is a reminder that charity helps enhance the life of the poor. This yearly occasion can turn into regular charity through contact with people in need.

It must be noted that *Eideyah* is also practiced during *Eid Al-Fitr*, however, Eid Al-Adha is marked by the sacrifice and unique due to the Hajj season.

Patience is Rewarded: Abundant Homemade Feasting

In the case of Eid, one of the rewards for being patient is the opportunity to indulge abundantly in life's pleasures, mainly food, drinks,

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[75] Paltoday, "ما أصل العيدية في العيد؟ [What is the origin of Eideyah in Eid?]," August 19, 2012, https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/144797/.

[76] Marcel Mauss, *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), 83–107.

and social time. Many Muslims fast[77], save money[78], and go for wardrobe shopping[79] long before the event in preparation. Many observe Arafah Day through fasting that is followed by feasting on Eid Day, creating a meaningful sequential structure[80].

Martens and Warde state that scholarly work in sociology of dining is virtually non-existent at both the level of friends' homes and the extended families'. The authors find that the occasions are often not bound by a set of rules and conduct, but there are several forms of improvisation that either involve less effort for the host(ess), such as using home delivery services and supermarket meals, a communal effort, with each person bringing a course, or the service becoming a collective performance between the guests and the host(ess).[81] In the Eid Al-Adha feast, it is common to find the collective effort in which the guests bring along some dishes and sweets, while the host(ess) cooks the main dish that features the meat from the sacrifice. One the other hand, it is actually rude to bring any sort of food to the host(ess)'s house in some cultures.[82]

Moreover, celebrators would describe the food within the feast as being fresh, traditional, local, and "homemade," or "made from scratch".[83] Similar emic descriptions regarding Thanksgiving Day may be found.[84] However, in some cases during Eid the meat may not be local, the rice may be imported, and side dishes may simply just be "transformed at home". Consumers of Eid Al-Adha would argue that "as long as you put an effort in it and prepare at home, then it is homemade".

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77 Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 171.
78 Ibid., 328.
79 Ibid., 174.
80 Ibid., 171.
81 Lydia Martens and Alan Warde, "Power and resistance around the dinner table," in *Consuming Cultures: power and resistance*, ed. Jeff Hearn and Sasha Rosenei (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 92–106.
82 Elizabeth Devine and Nancy L. Braganti, *The Travelers' Guide to Asian Customs and Manners* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 142–194.
83 Elizabeth C. Hirschman, Ayalla A. Ruvio, and Mourad Touzani, "Breaking bread with Abraham's children: Christians, Jews and Muslims' holiday consumption in dominant, minority and diasporic communities," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 39, no. 3 (2011): 439–441, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-010-0209-2.
84 Wallendorf and Arnould, "We Gather Together," 27–29.

The main dish is usually prepared at home. However, many of the side dishes, snacks, and drinks may be obtained from supermarkets and transformed by either removing the packaging and serving them on a plate or just combining several purchased elements together. For example, hummus and bread are sides that are often found during the feast in some Arab Muslim homes, and both may be made at home in certain households, especially in the Levant; but they also may be bought from supermarkets and bakeries. However, they could not be served in their original packaging. They are served on plates at home and may simply have olive oil added on top of the hummus. Salads are an example of combining elements, where the ingredients are bought and then simply cut and put together to be served in a bowl. Moreover, in some cultures, recipes have an element of secrecy to them as they are passed through generations and are rarely shared outside the immediate family.[85] Ethnographic accounts would reveal the particularism reflected among households even within the same sociocultural context studied.

In short, Eid Al-Adha consumers feast abundantly in social settings and go through great efforts to have the feast prepared and consumed at home. This gives the special sense to the holiday, marks it as unique from the rest of the days in the year, and gives participants the experience of reward for their patience and hard work throughout the year.

The Sacred and the Mundane

It would be interesting to investigate what the consumers of Eid Al-Adha consider as sacred within the celebrations and what is mundane. Sacred does not have to be religious in this case. Sacred in this context would mean the things and actions that the participants view as integral elements of the celebrations, the elements without which Eid celebrations are not complete. The mundane in this context are the things that tend to exist during Eid; yet, their absence would not really have an impact on the overall experience.

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[85] Peter Heine, *Food culture in the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 62.

During Eid, people do not go to work in Muslim-majority countries, which gives necessary time for visitations. The main aspect of the holiday is the social settings. Gatherings can be seen as the most sacred. Whether it is at the mosque for prayers, breakfast with the nuclear family, visiting distant acquaintances, feasting with the extended family, or going out in the evening with friends, the holiday could not be considered a "proper" one without the social gatherings. Various ethnographic accounts would showcase whether the social aspects are considered the most sacred among the holiday consumers, how they rank those social settings in term of sacredness, and the particularism reflected in those rankings in different contexts.

There is the "giving" aspect of the holiday. *Eideyah* plus giving out money and/or the meat to the needy make Eid special for givers and receivers. Some donate clothes to the poor as they see that as an important component of the holiday since one would not really feel that it is Eid unless they were wearing festive clothes[86].

Naturally, the religious aspects of the holiday are seen as essential. The prayers and the sacrifice are the backbones of the celebrations.

When it comes to food, abundance and variety are important in order to feel that the Day is special, and single it out from the rest of the year. Most families would have specific Eid dishes that otherwise would not be cooked or served. However, those dishes differ across households. Many would say that the food has to be local and "traditional". It would be interesting to see if ethnography reveals that consuming "foreign" food such as pizza or burgers during the Eid main feast may be considered a "sin".

Dishes and side dishes which are also prepared throughout the year can be seen as mundane. People may even attempt to refrain from eating them during the feast since they "can eat them anytime they want". Moreover, the societies that go out in the evenings of the holiday to places such as restaurants, coffee shops, cinemas, etc., may do so less as they grow older in order to avoid traffic and crowds. Would they prefer to gather at someone's place and either get food delivered, pick it up

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86 Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 174.

from restaurants, and/or consume the leftovers of the feast since the main point for doing so is to socialise?

Local Identity Expression (Particularism): Clothing, Foods, Ritual and Practices

Muslims share the same religion, yet it would be naïve to assume that all their practices are identical since many factors affect those practices – especially the local culture. In CCT, the authors discuss Consumer Identity Projects being the ways consumers create a coherent self by utilising market-produced materials.[87] There is wide agreement within social sciences that people wear clothes as a statement of identity.[88] As mentioned earlier, many participants of Eid wear their traditional local attire which are newly acquired while they strive to be dressed their best to mark the special day. The traditional clothing is a statement of one's identity. During Eid, they are statements of national and cultural identities as local style of clothing differ across societies and communities.

Moreover, there is an emphasis on being well-groomed and "smelling good". Going to barbershops to get a haircut and a fresh trim among men, and going to a hair salon to prepare for the holiday by women, are common practices in many societies hours before the Day, with many women getting Henna as part of their hair-salon ritual (for instance, in Bangladesh).[89] Many Arabs utilise the traditional *oud*[90] and/or *bukhoor*[91] to smell good.[92] This adds to the "special" feeling of the holiday that expresses the consumers' local identity.

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87 Arnould and Thompson, "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)," 871–73.

88 Fred Davis, *Fashion, culture, and identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3–5.

89 Nadia Tasnim Piya, "Cultural festivals those have an enormous impact on the fashion industry of Bangladesh," *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology* 4, no. 5 (2018): 573–576, https://www.ijariit.com/manuscript/cultural-festivals-those-have-an-enormous-impact-on-the-fashion-industry-of-bangladesh/.

90 Also called agarwood: a scent.

91 Incense.

92 Rosdalina Bukido and Laila F. Bamastraf, "The Acculturation of Local Culture and Arabic Culture in Manado of North Sulawesi," in *International Conference on Ethics in Governance (ICONEG 2016)* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2016), 184.

The same applies to food since what is eaten is part of one's identity. The fact that consumers would emphasise that the food and drink consumed during the Day must be traditional, local, and fresh reflects the notion that the holiday celebration is a marker of identity. They see that consuming the holiday as "traditionally" as possible is what makes the holiday special. For instance, some Arabs would even go camping in the desert and feast there as part of their celebrations due to their heritage as nomads.

There are practices and rituals that are connected to the holiday which are only local or regional. The *Heya Beya* is an example of that. This ritual is observed in Gulf countries such as Kuwait and Bahrain and is part of their folklore.[93] It is a small basket made out of palm leaves that holds plants such as wheat or barley which are planted weeks before Eid and hung around the house to grow. It is a children's activity – they water it every morning. On Arafah Day, children wearing their traditional dresses go with the family to the beach, wave the plant around while singing a specific chant before tossing the plant into the sea. The chant and the entire ritual are prayers to God to make Eid a happy holiday and to bring back the ones who travelled to Hajj safe, healthy, and with gifts for them. The ritual is a social activity that teaches children patience, care for belongings and others, and sacrifice. These are the same values that Eid Al-Adha constructs for adults. Moreover, being part of the local folklore with traditional elements, *Heya Beya* is a mean of local, national, and cultural expression of identity during a religious holiday.

Conclusion

This paper argues the need for more ethnographic research exploring the meanings and values that Muslims construct and express as parts of their identities. Muslim holidays, especially Eid Al-Adha, are under-researched from the point of view of what Muslims do and say

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93 Daily Tribune, "Heya Beya: Children learn joy of giving," *The Daily Tribune: News of Bahrain*, September 13, 2016, accessed July 2, 2020, https://www.newsofbahrain.com/bahrain/24952.html.

rather than what the scriptures and scholars say. The paper discusses the meanings of Eid Al-Adha that members of the community may associate with the holiday as part of their collective and individual identities. It showcases how identity and values are (re)constructed through consuming holidays. Moreover, it argues that extensive ethnographic research in different contexts would reveal the particularism among the "imagined community" which defies orientalist and essentialist points of views.

I believe that the most promising research questions in the future revolve around ethnographic accounts discussing sociocultural issues regarding the consumption of the holiday. Examples include, but are not limited to a) the particularism in practices such as *Eideyah* and the values it constructs in different contexts; b) the experiences and perceptions of the celebrators themselves, such as the positive and negative feelings they associate with the holiday and what they consider as sacred and mundane; and c) how the celebrations change, what aspects of them remain, and the challenges faced once an immigrant moves from a society where the majority celebrate a certain holiday to one where the majority do not.

When it comes to the Muslim identity, Marranci discusses one potential reason for the academic interest in it being recent. Social scientists initially were "too busy" attempting to investigate the way "Islam creates Muslims". Only around the 1990s did research on Muslim identity fully develop in an effort to understand western-born Muslims. Still, social scientists have "privileged the *outside* perspective".[94] Therefore, ethnographic research of Muslims from the *inside* perspective is required to describe the meanings expressed as parts of their identities.

The celebration of Eid Al-Adha is a collective ritual which celebrates material and spiritual abundance that is enacted through sacrificing, gift-giving (*Eideyah*), collective prayers, social gatherings, and feasting. Through consumption, basic needs are met abundantly, culture is expressed, and identity is constructed. Identity construction during Eid does not stop at that. The collective prayers are a way to consume the religious aspect of the holiday. The family and friends gathering is to

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[94] Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 95.

consume the social side. The *Eideyah* and including the poor are parts of the charitable nature of the religion and culture. Hence, consumers not only construct their identity through market-produced material, but also through consuming spirituality and social settings.

The rituals of sacrificing, fasting, and praying affirm the religious identities of participants as Muslims. Consuming food, gatherings, and respecting the elderly while caring for offspring reflect societal values. Wearing traditional dresses and styles, eating local food, and celebrating by folklore are statements of national and cultural identities.

This paper contributes to our understanding of Muslims' consumer behaviour and how they utilise ritual consumption to construct their identity. It explores how the holiday is consumed to reflect the celebrators' religious identity, their most significant values, such as family, charity, sacrifice, and patience, what they consider as sacred, and how they may differ individually while being collectively Muslims. It shows how traditions may endure, to remain unchanged while creativity and change occurs when allowed.

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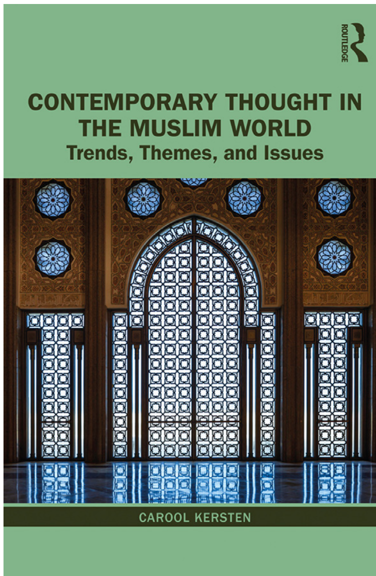
BOOK REVIEW

REVIEW OF Carool Kersten, CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT IN THE MUSLIM WORLD: TRENDS, THEMES, AND ISSUES

Routledge, 2019, 218 pp., ISBN 9780415855082

Maja Bjelica

Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World: Trends, Themes, and Issues, a scientific monograph by Carool Kersten, is a synthetic presentation of the intellectual aspect of the contemporary Islam and Muslim world. This condensed text was enabled by the author's 35-year experience in wide readings and researching of the intellectual history of Islam and thoughts and texts of Muslim intellectuals. To the author's deep engagement in his research field testify not only his edited and authored books, such as *The Fatwa as an Islamic Legal Instrument: Concept, Historical Role, Contemporary Relevance* (in 3 volumes, from 2018), *A History of Islam in Indonesia: Unity in Diversity* (2017), *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (2015), *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the*



Study of Islam (2011), or other chapters and articles he contributed to the scientific collections and journals, but also the interviews and talks he gives to the public through the media in order to offer an alternative view on Islam and the Muslim world to the Western societies.

This book, published by Routledge in 2019, is an alternative account in its field, "counterbalancing narratives that emphasise politics and confrontations with the West,"[1] and this is only one of the reasons this book is "an essential resource for students and scholars of Islam."[2] Another is the impressive variety of topics this book covers: starting from an overview of contemporary Muslim intellectuals and with an attempt at categorisation of their ideas, followed by a fundamental insight into philosophies of knowledge and their transmission and apprehension of reason. The author proceeds to specific topics, such as scripture, where he focuses on the Qur'an, the spiritual dimensions and Sufism in contemporary Islam, politics, legal systems, and law, along with issues of plurality, including emancipation, tolerance, and human rights, offering insights into the latest manifestations of globalisation, ecology and even medical ethics.

The table of contents, listing these topics, unfortunately does not present their content in detail, since the titles of subchapters are omitted from it. If included, these could present to the reader the actual structure of the book and its intersections, its connectedness through themes, and its deep insight. However, the content becomes clear when one goes on reading chapter by chapter, where it is possible to realise that each chapter adds a pebble to the colourful mosaic of the themes and ideas in the Muslim world.

The first chapter, "The problem of taxonomy: Categorizing contemporary Muslim intellectuals," opens the problem of categorisation of the vast variety of Islamic intellectuals' ideas and touches upon the issue with the process of taxonomy: it is typically too rigid for a coherent account of the actual maze that these ideas form. As the author points out, "like taxidermy, taxonomy is best not performed on the living."[3]

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[1] Carool Kersten, *Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World: Trends, Themes, and Issues* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), iii.

[2] Ibid., iii.

[3] Ibid., 6.

In this vein he stresses that the alternative categorisation he proposes should be applied to ideas and not the individuals that expose them. Kersten offers three clusters of ideas: "Traditional and socially conservative," "Reactionary," and "Progressive Islamic discourses." The first cluster names the mainstream current of ideas that considers centuries of Islamic doctrines and employs them mainly in socially conservative values and customs. However, the author stresses that heralds of these ideas are not to be confused with the so called "traditionalists," whose orientations are usually more radical, but also the denomination of "moderate" is not accurate since representatives of these themes regard themselves as deeply devoted believers. This kind of comment makes this book very precious, because it allows for a widening of perspectives on Islamic issues that the Western public might not be aware of.

In a similar manner, Kersten warns about the various denominations used for the cluster of reactionary ideas that are often too general and confusing. He takes the example of the term Salafism as broken down by the political scientist Quintan Wiktorowicz, who distinguishes three Salafistic groups, "purists," "politicos," and "jihadis." The first group does not engage in politics, but mainly in education and personal conduct and they are prone to spread Salafism through non-violent and non-political means, and therefore these so called "purists" are not to be associated directly with reactionary ideas. The "politicos" are prone to enact the Islamic law in the political arena and public life, whereas the "jihadis" add to this the support of the use of violence. The latter two groups can therefore be considered as Islamists due to their political engagement of Islam, but, as the author emphasises, not all Islamists are to be considered as politicised Islamists,[4] nor do they all condone the use of violent means. In order to avoid misnaming and to allow for inclusion of a wide range of contextualised interpretations of modes of engaging Islam in society, Kersten uses the term "reactionism" for thoughts emerging from a general discontent about the circumstances in the Muslim world and searching for a solution to solve these situations using the past Islamic traditions. Among reactionary thinkers he presents are the Egyptian poet and scholar Sayyid Qutb and the Iranian

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[4] Ibid., 13.

sociologist Ali Shari'ati, whose revolutionary ideas were also adopted by violent Sunni and Shi'a political extremists.

Kersten understands as progressive Islamic discourses those perspectives and ideas that would in general be marked as "liberal" or "modernist," which, in his point of view, are not completely appropriate terms for their comprehensive description. These ideas are mainly prone to advocacy of a creative, critical, and future oriented understanding of the Islamic cultural heritage while trying to find their proper space in the present globalised and postmodern world. Among progressive thinkers he presents Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Iqbal, Mohammed Arkoun, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Hasan Hanafi, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Abdolkarim Soroush, Farid Esack, Ebrahim Moosa and others. These intellectuals present their views in a direct and often provocative way. Given that their ideas are outside the traditionalistic perspectives of Islam, they stand on the borderline of acceptability and are regularly criticised by conservative and reactionary thinkers. Many times, these progressively thinking intellectuals were forced to seek refuge from their hegemonic systems in exile abroad.

The following chapter, "Philosophies of knowledge: Transmission and reason," offers an insight into one of the main themes of Islamic intellectual history; that is, the understanding of knowledge and how it is acquired. The main division in these epistemological debates is between *naql*, the transmitted knowledge through revelation and Islamic tradition, and *'aql*, knowledge that derives from the use of reason (*ijtihad*). These debates are often politicised and are held in the realm of hegemonic, orthodox discourses. After a brief presentation of the dominant themes in questions of epistemology argued by both Sunni and Shi'a Islam, the author goes into a deeper exposition of progressive heritage thinkers. He presents the so called Arab Averroists (Mohammed Abed al-Jabri), Renewers (Hasan Hanafi), and Critics (Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd). An interesting aspect of this chapter is that the author offers specific insights to the contemporary Muslim thought in Indonesia, Turkey, and Iran. Moving from renewal thinking to Islamic post-traditionalism and transformative Islam, Kersten presents some progressive Muslim discourses in Indonesia of which he exposes authors as Nurcholish Madjid and his idea of the

need of modernisation and the movement for the renewal of Islamic thinking, and Abdurrahman Wahid with his alternative reinterpretation of doctrines in the vein of Islamic post-traditionalism. The author presents Turkey's Ankara school and its inclination towards historical criticism and rationalisation, of which two representatives are mentioned, Edip Yüksel and Fazhur Rahman. The exposure of new religious intellectuals in Iran is particularly interesting, since it offers some insight into the controversy, alternativity, and dynamic rationality of Ali Shariʿati's thought, the "intersubjective hermeneutics" and "new theology" of Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and the "new religious intellectualism" of Abdolkarim Soroush that reconciles reason and Islam. At the end of the chapter Kersten dedicates a page to the methodology of *ihsan* advocated by the Kuwait-born and California-based professor of law Khaled Abou El Fadl that combines a delegitimisation of hegemonic discourses, a plurality of the postmodern context and ethical understanding.

The author also offers details about the intellectual formation of the aforementioned progressive thinkers, listing the universities and professors where they gained their education and scientific background, as well as exposing the various theoretic and cultural influences they were subjected to. It is interesting to note that a great majority of these thinkers were at least partly educated in the Western countries, which has led to their knowledge and inspiration from Western theorists, philosophers, and scientists. It is telling that Kersten returns to these progressive thinkers throughout the remaining chapters of the book, in which he addresses a variety of specific topics, since their ideas affect different areas of religion, society, and culture. They come from different fields of knowledge, such as history, philosophy, linguistics, law, and social sciences and they adopt alternative ways in approaching the Islamic legacy. Their epistemologies are mainly anthropocentric, which allows for an understanding of knowledge and tradition as a result of human interpretation.

In the third chapter, "Scripture: Alternative ways of engaging with the Qur'an," Kersten presents some new, innovative, and sometimes controversial ways of reading and approaching this Islamic sacred text, which is always a very sensitive issue. First, he exposes textualist

and contextualist approaches of which the former is atomistic, based in literary and legal readings, while the latter is more holistic, plural, based on ethical reading. To these the author adds Mahmud Muhammad Taha's contrarian reading and Muhammad Shahrur's scientific contemporary reading of the Qur'an. He concludes the chapter with an "indirect exegesis," offering a possible way to understand revelation in post-revolutionary Iran through the explications of Shabestari and Soroush. The following chapter entitled "Spiritual dimensions of contemporary Muslim thought: Sufism today: Psychology, literature, and Islamization of knowledge" offers an insight into the critiques of modernism through the connections between modern-day Sufism and traditionalism. This is followed by a presentation of the Islamisation of knowledge and Sufi psychology which integrate the intellectual and spiritual realms of Islam. Connections of Sufism and literature are explicated very well, deriving from Sufi poetry, biographical writings, and stressing the imaginary and individualism. Further manifestations of contemporary Sufism are possible as urban, intellectual and otherwise, as represented also in ethnographic studies or its role in Turkey's "third way" – the neoliberal politics established through the so called "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis."

The second part of the book centres on themes in the realm of the political, ethical, and moral, social and public, local and global. The fifth chapter, "Islam and Politics: Thinking about secularity, freedom and democracy," opens with a question about Islam being either a religion and a state, or a religion and not a state. This is followed by an exposition of the terms "secularity," "secularisation," "secularism" and the differences among them and the variety of approaches to them in Islamic thought. Kersten also offers valuable insights into themes such as the form that theorising Islam and the state has taken in Indonesia; freedom, democracy and reason in Iran and Turkey; the case of democracy in the Arab-Islamic world; Euro-Islam: citizenship, loyalty, and political participation of Muslims in minority situations. The sixth chapter poses a question: "Shari'a: Islamic legal system or ethical guideline?" The author's answer inclines towards the latter, explaining that the term "Islamic law" for denominating the notion Shari'a is an unfortunate translation, since the term would literary mean "route to a wa-

ter source."[5] Kersten brings to the fore the technically proper term for Islamic law, *fiqh*. He offers substantivist critiques and interpretations of Islamic law and also instances of debating Islamic law in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He discusses the notion of *maqasid al-shari'a* which he explains as a version of philosophy of law and translates as "the higher objectives of Shari'a," being "the preservation of religion, life, property, intellect and offspring."[6] This inspired a development of maqasidi thinking, which led to an alternative theological approach based on a theoretic system that is cognitive, holistic, hierarchic, and multidimensional, and represents a moral orientation, which is mainly relevant to questions of minority rights. Here, the legal and ethical questions are of central importance and their discussions are oriented towards acceptance of diversity, equality, and tolerance towards plurality.

The seventh chapter is dedicated to "Dealing with difference and plurality: Emancipation, toleration, and human rights" and touches upon contemporary themes such as Muslim feminism; minority *fiqh* and religious diversity; Islamic exclusivism and religious pluralism; Islam and human rights. These discourses are emancipatory in nature, striving for pluralism and often inspired by Sufism. They understand and stress the phenomena of cultural hybridity and the importance of intellectual symbiosis, characteristic of the cosmopolitanism of the late 20th century progressive Muslim thinkers that left an impact on discourses considered in the chapter that follows. The eighth and last chapter of the book discusses "Issues of the twenty-first century: Globalization, ecology and medical ethics." An interesting view proposed by the author is that globalisation was long integrated into the Islamic tradition, which is clear from its sacred texts and territorial expansion, having a long history of intensive interactions with other civilisations. Muslims in a globalising world are, intellectually speaking, reacting to the globalising processes in different manners, but progressive thinkers are contributing to a securitisation of the globalisation debate. Some intellectuals are warning against the dominant debates on the legal system, opposing modernisation and secularisation of the public life tak-

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5 Ibid., 127.
6 Ibid., 129, 135.

ing all the space in the discourse, while we are globally "sleepwalking into a crisis" in term of ecological concerns, as Sayyed Hossein Nasr has put it.[7] Kersten briefly touches on the topics of medical ethics and bioethics, exposing their problematic treatment founded in the Islamic law, the ontological turn of the meaning of "being human" and the vulnerability of Muslim ethics.

This overview provides a kind of a detailed "table of contents," which is unfortunately missing in this book. It should be said that, due to the wide-ranging contents of the book, some topics are not presented in depth. For example, regarding the realm of feminism, Kersten claims that women's voices are virtually absent from traditional and reactionary discourses, and present mainly in progressive Islamic discourses.[8] They address themes on women's rights and gender equality. In the survey across the categories of contemporary Islamic thought in the first chapter, the author briefly introduces such names as Fatima Mernissi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Amina Wadud, Saba Mahmood, Kecia Ali, Sa'diyya Shaikh, Asma Barlos. However, in the final chapter that includes a subchapter on feminist thinkers, only three of them are presented, adding to their voices the ideas of Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, who is an advocate of LGBTQ+ rights and the destabilisation of heteronormativity. This topic would merit a subchapter of its own, which would allow for both issues – namely, gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights – a more detailed account.

The reader is enriched by a great variety of topics and offered insight into a complicated net of intricate connections of topics in the contemporary thoughts of Muslim intellectuals; a conclusion could have aided the reader in connecting them. A note on topics that were not included in this condensed presentation of contemporary thought would also be beneficiary, so the reader could further appreciate the breadth of Islamic tradition. On the other hand, an extensive bibliography and abundant index are available.

The book is part of the Routledge series *Contemporary Thought in the Islamic World*, also edited by Kersten, which includes various other

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[7] Ibid., 183.

[8] Ibid., 23.

studies on a wide variety of topics about Islamic tradition, with titles such as *Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Its Interpretations in Iran* by Ali Akbar and Abdullah Saeed, *The Sociology of Islam* by Bryan S. Turner, *Alternative Islamic Discourses and Religious Authority*, edited by Carool Kersten and Susanne Olsson, *The Symbolic Scenarios of Islamism: A Study in Islamic Political Thought* by Andrea Mura, *A Muslim Response to Evil: Said Nursi on the Theodicy* by Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan, and *A Muslim Reformist in Communist Yugoslavia: The Life and Thought of Husein Đozo* by Sejad Mekić. It seems like all these titles are branches of Islamic thought whose roots and trunk are presented in this book and which carries infinite possibilities for further research about the richness of contemporary ideas of Islamic intellectuals and their development.

There is much to be said for the relevance of this book to interreligious dialogue, as it presents the broad aspects of Islamic thought, its various branches and routes that are far from encompassing Islam as an exclusivist religion. Many contemporary Muslim thinkers presented in this book are calling for religious tolerance and adhere to a pluralistic understanding of religious life and are therefore more than suitable for considerations in the realm of interreligious dialogue. But this is again, only one of the many precious aspects of Carool Kersten's insightful book on contemporary Muslim thought.

ABSTRACTS

Carool Kersten

Religion and Literature, Identity and Individual: Resetting the Muslim-Christian Encounter

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century inter-faith encounters have become a casualty of a paradigm shift in the thinking about the global order from the political-ideological bi-polar worldview of the Cold War era to a multipolar world marred by the prospect of culture wars along civilisational fault lines shaped by religiously-informed identity politics. On the back of 9/11 and other atrocities perpetrated by violent extremists from Muslim backgrounds, in particular relations with Muslims and the Islamic world are coined in binary terms of us-versus-them. Drawing on earlier research on cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridity and liminality, this article examines counter narratives to such modes of dichotomous thinking. It also seeks to shift away from the abstractions of collective religious identity formations to an appreciation of individual interpretations of religion. For that purpose, the article interrogates the notions of cultural schizophrenia, double genealogy and west-eastern affinities developed by philosophers and creative writers, such as Daryush Shayegan, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Navid Kermani.

Keywords: cultural hybridity, Islam, literature, religion.

Rasoul Rasoulipour

The Other as My Equal

The tremendous human capacity to "love" one another is, in my opinion, the strongest evidence both for the existence of God and for the relationship that God intends for human beings to have with God and with each other. At the same time, the human capacity for envy, hate, aggression, and violating the dignity of "other" humans is similarly great evidence that something is horribly wrong – human beings fail to maintain the intended relationship with God and each other. God's intention does not change, but we forgetful human beings lose sight of it from time to time. This problem is at the root of human alienation from God and others that leaves us isolated, oblivious, suspicious and fearful.

This paper intends to provide a framework that allows us to see the source of the problem, to explore some of the causes for human alienation from each other and creation, and to find ways to heal the gap between ourselves and the rest of God's creation. I believe that all struggles, oppressions and sufferings result from this alienation, and a substantial mission of all religions, at least the Abrahamic religions, is to heal this divide by seeing the other as one's equal.

Keywords: the other, equality, human dignity, alienation, stranger.

Nadja Furlan Štante

Christian-Muslim Women in Religious Peacebuilding – Breaking Cycles of Violence

In a broader context, the main focus of this paper is the question of women's religious peacebuilding, which is understood in its widest sense, in terms of women's active participation in building liberating theologies and societies. It is about the promotion of the full humanity of women. While elaborating this theme, the paper takes up Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite's assertion that the "violence against women is the largest and longest global war." Just peacemaking is very much an interfaith and interreligious work and should be placed as a crucial starting point of the urge for transformation of "violent" theologies and living everyday praxis. While women have been marginalised from peacebuilding generally, the emerging field of religious peacebuilding has been particularly challenging for women. The liberating theme of this paper is illumination of the ambivalence of invisibility and marginality of women in religious peacebuilding, good practices and future issues.

Keywords: women, religious peace-building, interreligious dialogue, obstacles, good practices.

Mohammad Saeedimehr

Islamic Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue

My aim in this paper is to investigate Islamic Mysticism and find out how and to what extent mystical views can build good grounds for a productive and fruitful interreligious dialogue. First, I provide a brief clarification of what I mean by

the notions of 'interreligious dialogue' and 'Islamic mysticism.' Then, I explain three mystical principles as three bases for the promotion of interreligious dialogue. These are the metaphysico-theological principle of 'the unity of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), the anthropological thesis of *fitra* (primordial nature), and the hermeneutic method for interpreting the Qur'an. Finally, I explore the implications of these principles for interreligious dialogue and discuss the role of mystical teachings in promoting interreligious dialogue in two different, though interrelated, areas: doxastic and moral.

Keywords: Islamic mysticism, Interreligious dialogue, Sufism, Ibn 'Arabi.

Andrew Ashdown

An Exploration of the Christian-Muslim Landscape in Modern Syria and the Contribution of Eastern Christian Thought to Interreligious Dynamics

This paper considers Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria and the importance that eastern Christian thought can make to the interreligious context within the Middle East. It briefly describes the diverse historical and contemporary Christian and Muslim religious landscapes that have cohabited and interacted within the country and the cultural, religious, and political issues that have impacted the interreligious dynamic.

Based on fieldwork undertaken in government-held areas during the Syrian conflict, combined with critical historical and Christian theological reflection, the article contributes to understanding Syria's diverse religious landscape and the multi-layered expressions of Christian-Muslim relations, in a way that has not been previously attempted. Providing insights into interreligious praxis prior to the conflict and in its midst, the article contributes to an understanding of the effect of conflict on interreligious relationships.

The article considers the unique contribution of eastern Christianity to the Christian-Muslim dynamic and concludes that the significance of the theology and spirituality of the 'Antiochene' paradigm has been under-recognised in western discourse and that, having coexisted within the cultural environment of Islam, it is uniquely placed to play a major role in Christian-Muslim dialogue and the reframing of Islam's engagement with modern society.

This article contributes therefore to knowledge and understanding of the changing Christian-Muslim dynamic in Syria and the neighbouring region; a new understanding of the religious landscape; and a door to exploring how east-

ern Christian approaches to Christian-Muslim relations may be sustained and strengthened in the face of the considerable religious and political challenges faced by both communities today.

Keywords: Middle East, Syria, Christian-Muslim relations, Eastern Christianity.

Mesut Idriz

Expounding the Concept of Religion in Islam as Understood by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

The discussions concerning the religion in Islam have a long history in Muslim intellectual tradition, particularly in the Arabic language. However, with the rise and development of Islamic oriental studies in the Western world in the last two centuries and particularly after the second half of the 20th century onwards, a "return" to semantic studies began re-emerging. Realizing the necessity, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas began to focus and develop the definitions that had been altered, and clarified misunderstood and misleading concepts in relation to the religion of Islam in both the Muslim world and the West. Beginning from the 1970s, al-Attas began explicating his thoughts for the English speaking milieu (later in other languages). Al-Attas's profound knowledge in various disciplines, traditions, cultures, and languages allowed him to begin to contribute scholarly input as he contributed his beliefs as well as ideas in the academic environment. In this article, al-Attas's comprehensive understanding will be discussed briefly, but in some detail, including is own specific intellectual contributions.

Keywords: Religion in Islam, al-Attas, Dīn and Religion, the Qur'an, Dīn and Arabic.

Amar Ahmed

Consuming Eid Al-Adha: Constructing and Expressing the Muslim Identity

There is a lacuna in ethnographic research with regards to Muslims' identity construction and expression from an internal perspective. Eid Al-Adha is an Islamic holiday which is rich in symbolism, collective rituals, and spiritual and material abundance. The article will interpret the meanings and values that consumers of Eid Al-Adha construct as parts of their identity, mainly being the religious one.

It will discuss how the holiday expresses significant Muslim values like collectivism, submission to God, sacrifice, charity, patience, and sacredness. Moreover, it will explain possible differences in consumption reflecting particularism due to national and/or cultural identities. The paper furthers our understanding of what Muslims do and say during their consumption of the Day rather than referring to scriptures or scholars. It contributes to the body of knowledge of Muslim holidays, the meanings associated with them, and how celebrators utilize the symbolism within them to construct their identities.

Keywords: Muslims, Identity, Eid Al-Adha, Consumer Culture Theory, Islamic Culture, Cultural Consumption, Identity Construction and Expression.

P O V Z E T K I

Carool Kersten
Religija in literatura, identiteta in posameznik: ponastavitev muslimansko-krščanskega soočenja

V prvih dveh desetletjih 21. stoletja so medreligijska srečanja postala žrtev paradigmatskega premika v razmišljanju o globalnem redu s politično-ideološkega bipolarnega svetovnega nazora obdobja hladne vojne proti multipolarnemu svetu, zaznamovanemu z možnostjo kulturnih vojn na civilizacijskih prelomnicah, ki so jih zarisale z vero prepojene identitetne politike. Po terorističnih napadih 11. septembra in drugih grozodejstvih, ki so jih zagrešili nasilni ekstremisti iz muslimanskih okolij, se zlasti odnosi z muslimani in islamskim svetom oblikujejo v okviru binarnega razločevanja mi-oni. Na podlagi predhodnih raziskav o kozmopolitizmu, kulturni hibridnosti in liminalnosti avtor v prispevku preučuje narative, nasprotne tovrstnemu dihotomnemu načinu razmišljanja. V prizadevanjih, da bi se odmaknil od abstrakcij oblik kolektivne verske identitete k zavedanju o individualnih interpretacijah religije, prevprašuje pojme kulturne shizofrenije, dvojne genealogije in afinitet do Vzhoda in Zahoda, ki so jih razvili filozofi in predstavniki ustvarjalnega pisanja, denimo Daryush Shayegan, Abdelwahab Meddeb in Navid Kermani.

Ključne besede: kulturna hibridnost, islam, literatura, religija.

Rasoul Rasoulipour
Moj bližnji kot meni enak

Izjemna človeška sposobnost »ljubiti« drug drugega je po mojem mnenju najmočnejši dokaz tako za obstoj Boga kot za odnos, za kakršnega je Bog želel, da bi ga človek imel do Njega in do svojega bližnjega. Obenem je človeška zmožnost za zavist, sovraštvo, nasilje in teptanje dostojanstva »drugih« ljudi podobno močan dokaz, da je nekaj hudo narobe – ljudje ne zmorejo vzdrževati želenega odnosa z Bogom ali z drugim. Božji namen se ne spreminja, samo raztresena človeška bitja včasih pozabimo nanj. Težava tiči v jedru človekove odtujitve od Boga in drug od drugega, zaradi nje smo osamljeni, pozabljivi, sumničavi in preplašeni.

V prispevku želim ponuditi okvir, ki nam bo pomagal uzreti vir težave, raziskati nekaj razlogov za človekovo odtujenost od bližnjega in od stvarstva ter poiskati načine za premostitev vrzeli med nami in ostalim božjim stvarstvom. Verjamem, da vsi spopadi, vse zatiranje in trpljenje izvirajo iz te odtujitve in da je bistveno poslanstvo vseh religij, ali vsaj abrahamskih religij, premostiti ta prepad tako, da drugega obravnavajo kot enakovrednega.

Ključne besede: drugi, enakost, človeško dostojanstvo, odtujitev, tujec.

Nadja Furlan Štante

Kristjanke in muslimanke v religijski izgradnji miru - zaustavitev ciklov nasilja

V širšem kontekstu je glavni poudarek prispevka vprašanje ženske (religijske) izgradnje miru, ki je razumljeno v najširšem pomenu, v smislu aktivnega sodelovanja žensk pri izgradnji osvobajajočih teologij in družb. Gre za promocijo polne človečnosti žensk. Prispevek temelji na predpostavki Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, da je »nasilje nad ženskami največja in najdaljša svetovna vojna«. Pri izgradnji miru pomembno mesto zavzema medreligijski dialog. Le-ta bi moral postati ključno izhodišče za preobrazbo nasilnih teologij in vsakdanji praks. Medtem, ko so (bile) ženske pri izgradnji miru marginalizirane, je nastajajoče področje religijske izgradnje miru še posebej zahtevno in hkrati velik izziv in vir moči za ženske. Osvobajajoče vprašanje tega prispevka je osvetlitev ambivalentnosti nevidnosti in marginalnosti žensk pri religijski izgradnji miru, dobre prakse in (prihodnja) vprašanja.

Ključne besede: ženske, religijska izgradnja miru, medreligijski dialog, ovire, dobre prakse.

Mohammad Saeedimehr

Islamski misticizem in medreligijski dialog

Moj namen v pričujočem prispevku je raziskati islamski misticizem in ugotoviti, na kakšen način in v kolikšni meri lahko mistični nazori predstavljajo dobro podlago za tvoren in ploden medreligijski dialog. Na začetku na kratko opredelim pojma »medreligijski dialog« in »islamski misticizem«. Nato pojasnim načela misticizma, ki tvorijo osnove za razvijanje medreligijskega dialoga. To so metafizično-teološko načelo o »enotnosti obstoja« (*wahdat al-wujud*), antropološka teza o

fitri (prvinski naravi) in hermenevtična metoda za tolmačenje Korana. Nazadnje preučim implikacije teh načel za medreligijski dialog in obravnavam vlogo mističnih načel pri spodbujanju medreligijskega dialoga na dveh različnih, a medsebojno povezanih področjih: doksastičnem in moralnem.

Ključne besede: islamski misticizem, medreligijski dialog, sufizem, Ibn ʿArabi.

Andrew Ashdown

Raziskava o krščansko-muslimanski krajini moderne Sirije in doprinosu vzhodnokrščanske misli k medreligijskim dinamikam

Avtor v prispevku obravnava krščansko-muslimanske odnose v sodobni Siriji ter pomen, ki ga vzhodnokrščanska misel lahko ima za medreligijski kontekst Bližnjega vzhoda. Na kratko opiše raznolike zgodovinske in sodobne krščanske in muslimanske verske krajine, ki so soobstajale in vplivale druga na drugo v okviru države, ter kulturna, verska in politična vprašanja, ki so sooblikovala medreligijsko dinamiko.

Na podlagi terenskega dela na območjih, ki so bila med sirsko vojno pod nadzorom vladnih sil, ter kritičnega zgodovinskega in krščanskega teološkega razmisleka avtor predstavi raznolike verske krajine Sirije in večplastne odseve krščansko-muslimanskih odnosov v njej na povsem nov način. Z vpogledi v medreligijsko prakso pred vojno in med njo pomaga razumeti posledice, ki jih je vojaški konflikt imel za medreligijske odnose.

Avtor v članku razmišlja o edinstvenem prispevku vzhodnega krščanstva h krščansko-muslimanski dinamiki in ugotavlja, da je pomen teologije in duhovnosti »antiohijske« paradigme v diskurzu Zahoda premalo priznan in da je ta vsled svojega soobstoja s kulturnim okoljem islama edinstveno primerna za to, da prevzame glavno vlogo v krščansko-muslimanskem dialogu in pri preoblikovanju pogleda na islamsko interakcijo s sodobno družbo.

Članek tako prispeva k poznavanju in razumevanju spreminjajoče se krščansko-muslimanske dinamike v Siriji in širši regiji, podaja novo razumevanje verske krajine in odpira vrata preučevanju možnosti za vzdrževanje in krepitev vzhodnokrščanskih pristopov h krščansko-muslimanskim odnosom ob precejšnjih verskih in političnih izzivih, s katerimi se skupnosti danes soočata.

Ključne besede: Bližnji vzhod, Sirija, krščansko-muslimanski odnosi, vzhodno krščanstvo.

Mesut Idriz
Koncept religije v islamu, kakor ga je razumel Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

Razprave o religiji v islamu imajo v muslimanski intelektualni tradiciji dolgo zgodovino, zlasti na področju arabskega jezika. Z vzponom in razvojem islamistike in orientalistike v zahodnem svetu v zadnjih dvesto letih, še posebno pa od sredine 20. stoletja dalje, so se strokovnjaki spet začeli »vračati« k semantičnim študijam. Zavedajoč se nujnosti te potrebe, se je Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas začel posvečati podrobni razdelavi spremenjenih definicij ter pojasnjevanju zavajajočih ali napačno razumljenih konceptov, povezanih z islamsko religijo, tako v muslimanskem svetu kot na Zahodu. Zato je zgodnjih 70. letih prejšnjega stoletja svoje misli začel predstavljati angleško govorečemu okolju (pozneje pa tudi v drugih jezikih). Z razlago svojih prepričanj in idej v akademskem okolju, temelječih na poglobljenem znanju z različnih znanstvenih področij, poznavanju različnih tradicij, kultur in jezikov, je pomembno prispeval k učenosti. V pričujočem članku bom na kratko, a relativno podrobno predstavil al-Attasovo celovito vedenje in nekaj njegovih specifičnih intelektualnih prispevkov.

Ključne besede: religija v islamu, al-Attas, dīn in religija, Koran; dīn in arabščina.

Amar Ahmed
Oblikovanje in izražanje muslimanske identitete: potrošnja kurban bajrama

V etnografskem raziskovanju se na področju študij oblikovanja in izražanja muslimanske identitete z notranjega gledišča kaže vrzel. Kurban bajram je islamski praznik, poln simbolike, kolektivnih obredov ter duhovnega in materialnega obilja. V članku so razloženi pomeni in vrednote, ki jih praznovalci kurban bajrama kot potrošniki kulture oblikujejo kot del svoje, pretežno verske, identitete. Avtor preučuje, na kakšen način se skozi praznik izražajo pomembne muslimanske vrednote, kot so kolektivizem, pokorščina bogu, žrtvovanje, dobrodelnost, potrpljenje in svetost, in ponudi razlago možnih razlik v potrošnji – partikularnosti, ki izvirajo iz nacionalnih in/ali kulturnih identitet. Članek pomaga bolje razumeti, kaj muslimani počnejo in govorijo med potrošnjo kurban bajrama, medtem ko se s svetimi spisi in učenjaki ne ukvarja. Avtor z njim prispeva k poglabljanju vedenja o muslimanskih praznikih in pomenih, ki so z njimi povezani, ter opisuje, kako praznovalci s pomočjo praznične simbolike izoblikujejo lastno identiteto.

Ključne besede: muslimani, identiteta, kurban bajram, teorija potrošne kulture, islamska kultura, kulturna potrošnja, oblikovanje in izražanje identitete.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS / O AVTORICAH IN AVTORJIH

CAROOL KERSTEN

Carool Kersten is a historian of Islam and scholar of religions specialising in the intellectual history of the contemporary Muslim world. He is Reader (Associate Professor) in the Study of Islam and the Muslim World at King's College London, and a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Philosophical Studies of the Science and Research Centre Koper in Slovenia. The author or editor of eleven books, his latest publications include *Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World: Trends, Themes, and Issues* (2019) and *The Fatwa as an Islamic Legal Instrument* (3 volumes, 2018). He is currently working on a new book for Edinburgh University Press, entitled *Islam and Contemporary World Literature*, and a project on Islamic ethics for Gerlach Press in Berlin.

Carool Kersten je zgodovinar islama in religiolog, specializiran za intelektualno zgodovino sodobnega muslimanskega sveta. Je izredni profesor za študije o islamu in muslimanskem svetu na Kraljevem kolidžu v Londonu ter višji znanstveni sodelavec Inštituta za filozofske študije ZRS Koper. Napisal oziroma uredil je že enajst knjig, med njegovimi najnovejšimi publikacijami sta *Contemporary Thought in the Muslim World: Trends, Themes, and Issues* (2019) in *The Fatwa as an Islamic Legal Instrument* (3 zvezki, 2018). Trenutno pripravlja novo knjigo za založbo Edinburgh University Press z naslovom *Islam and Contemporary World Literature* ter projekt o islamski etiki za berlinski Gerlach Press.

RASOUL RASOULIPOUR

Dr. Rasoul Rasoulipour is a faculty member of the Dept. of Philosophy and the Special Advisor to the Chancellor on International Affairs at Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. He was the Director of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue in Iran (2006–09), and a visiting associate professor and then a non-regular faculty in the Theology Department, University of Notre Dame, IN (2009–12). Since 2011, he has been a member of the World Religions and Spiritualities Council at the Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. He is the author of four books, including the Sacredness of the Other: Love and Healing, and more than twenty philosophical papers published in academic journals.

Dr. Rasoul Rasoulipour je univerzitetni predavatelj na Oddelku za filozofijo in posebni svetovalec rektorja za mednarodne zadeve na Univerzi ‚Al Hvarizmi' v Teheranu, v Iranu. Vodil je iranski Center za medreligijski dialog (2006–2009), poučeval kot gostujoči profesor in nato kot član izrednega visokošolskega osebja na Oddelku za teologijo Univerze Notre Dame v Indiani, ZDA (2009–2012). Od leta 2011 je član Sveta za svetovne religije in duhovnosti na Fetzerjevem inštitutu v Kalamazooju, v Michiganu, ZDA. Je avtor štirih knjig, med njimi Sacredness of the Other: Love and Healing, in več kot dvajsetih filozofskih člankov, objavljenih v akademskih revijah.

NADJA FURLAN ŠTANTE

Dr. Nadja Furlan - Štante is Principal Research Associate and Professor of Religious Studies at the Science and Research Centre Koper. Her current research interests are women's religious studies, ecofeminism, and interreligious dialogue.

Dr. Nadja Furlan – Štante je znanstvena svetnica in profesorica religijskih znanosti na Znanstveno-raziskovalnem središču Koper. Fokus njenega znanstveno-raziskovalnega dela je osredinjen na ženske religijske študije, ekofeminizem in medreligijski dialog.

MOHAMMAD SAEEDIMEHR

Mohammad Saeedimehr is a professor of philosophy and theology at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University (TMU). He received his PhD in Islamic philosophy from TMU in 2000 and the advanced degree in Islamic sciences from the Seminary of Qum (1998). His main areas of expertise and academic interests are Islamic philosophy and theology and analytic philosophy (philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and epistemology). He is the author of several papers and books including *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1996), *Islamic Theology* (1998), and *Necessity, Reference and Possible Worlds* (2015).

Mohammad Saeedimehr je profesor za filozofijo in teologijo na Oddelku za filozofijo Filozofske fakultete Univerze Tarbiat Modares. Na Semenišču v Komu je leta 1998 zaključil podiplomski študij islamskih znanosti, leta 2000 pa na Univerzi Tarbiat Modares doktoriral iz islamske filozofije. Njegova osrednja strokovna in akademska interesna področja so islamska filozofija in teologija ter analitična filozofija (filozofija religije, metafizika in epistemologija). Je avtor več esejev in član-

kov, med njimi *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1996), *Islamic Theology* (1998) ter *Necessity, Reference and Possible Worlds* (2015).

ANDREW ASHDOWN

The author holds a PhD from Winchester University (2019), an MA in Abrahamic Religions from Heythrop College, London University (2014), and a BD in Theology from King's College, London University (1988). The author has been engaged in the Middle East for over 30 years, as well as in Christian-Muslim initiatives in Britain, the Middle East and Africa. In recent years, his research has focussed on the religious context in Syria and has included multiple visits to Syria in the midst of the war as a guest of faith leaders in the country. He currently works in advocacy for an international charity.

Avtor je leta 1988 diplomiral iz teologije na Kraljevem kolidžu Univerze v Londonu, leta 2014 magistriral na področju abrahamskih religij na Kolidžu Heythrop Univerze v Londonu, leta 2019 pa pridobil doktorski naslov na Univerzi v Winchestru. Svojo doktorsko disertacijo z naslovom »An Exploration of Christian-Muslim Relations in Syria. 2000-2018. Contextualising the Religious Landscape, Historic and Contemporary Dynamics in Christian-Muslim Relations, and Eastern Christian Frameworks of Engagement« je priredil za knjižno objavo; publikacija je pri založbi Routledge izšla novembra 2020. Avtor se že več kot 30 let ukvarja s tematiko Bližnjega vzhoda, sodeloval je tudi v več krščansko-muslimanskih pobudah v Veliki Britaniji, na Bližnjem vzhodu in v Afriki. Zadnja leta se v svojem raziskovalnem delu osredotoča na verski kontekst v Siriji, v sklopu tega je Sirijo med vojno tudi večkrat obiskal kot gost njenih verskih voditeljev. Trenutno dela kot javni zastopnik mednarodne dobrodelne organizacije.

MESUT IDRIZ

Mesut Idriz is currently professor of Comparative History of Civilizations and Islamic Civilization at the University of Sharjah, and Director of the Sharjah International Foundation for the History of Arab and Muslim Sciences (SIFHAMS). He has taught in various institutions of higher learning, including the International University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Sakarya University (Turkey), the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), and the International Islamic University Malaysia (Malaysia). Besides educational institutions, he was Chief Editor (Academics) at MPH Group Publishing (Kuala Lumpur). He has published, edited, and translated numerous academic books and

articles concerning the Balkans, Ottoman and Muslim history, Islamic civilisation, the history of Islamic education (particularly the tradition of *ijazah*, diploma). His works have been published in English, Arabic, Turkish, Albanian, Persian, French, and Malay. His most recent book is *The Middle Eastern Jewellery: Reflection of Islam on the Forms and Symbols* (co-authored with Meri Ugrinovska, 2018). He is currently working on his research work on the conception and institution of the "intelligence service(s)" (*istikhbarat, mukhabarat*) in Islam from the language and legal perspectives, under the proposed title *Islamic Istikhbarat in Context: Language and Legal Analysis* (to be published in 2022).

Mesut Idriz je profesor primerjalne zgodovine civilizacij in islamske civilizacije na Univerzi v Šardži in direktor Mednarodne fundacije za zgodovino arabskih in muslimanskih ved v Šardži (SIFHAMS). Poučeval je na več visokošolskih institucijah, med drugim na Mednarodni univerzi v Sarajevu - IUS (Bosna in Hercegovina), na Univerzi v Sakaryi (Turčija) ter na Mednarodnem inštitutu za islamsko filozofijo in civilizacijo (ISTAC) in Mednarodni islamski univerzi Malezije (Malezija). Bil je tudi glavni urednik akademskih publikacij pri MPH Group Publishing iz Kuala Lumpurja. Kot založnik, urednik ali prevajalec je sodeloval pri številnih akademskih knjigah in člankih, ki se ukvarjajo s področji Balkana, otomanske in muslimanske zgodovine, islamske civilizacije, zgodovine islamskega izobraževanja (zlasti tradicije t. i. *ijaz* oziroma spričeval). Njegova dela so izšla v angleškem, arabskem, turškem, albanskem, perzijskem, francoskem in malajskem jeziku. Njegovo zadnje objavljeno delo (v soavtorstvu z Meri Ugrinovsko, objavljeno leta 2018) je *The Middle Eastern Jewellery: Reflection of Islam on the Forms and Symbols*. Trenutno se posveča znanstveni raziskavi z delovnim naslovom *Islamic Istikhbarat in Context: Language and Legal Analysis* (predvidena objava v letu 2022), v kateri preučuje zasnovo in institucijo »obveščevalnih služb« (*istihbarat, mukhabarat*) v islamu z jezikovnega in pravniškega vidika.

AMAR AHMED

Amar Ahmed is a final year Ph.D. candidate in Sociology of Culture at the University of Ljubljana. He has worked as a lecturer following his M.Sc. and published an article. His research interests are in the areas of cultural consumption, cultural expression, and consumer behaviour within different sociocultural contexts using ethnography. He aims to contribute to the scholarship of Consumer Culture Theory.

Amar Ahmed je doktorski študent sociologije kulture na Univerzi v Ljubljani. Po pridobitvi magistrskega naziva je začel delati kot predavatelj, objavil je tudi stro-

kovni članek. Raziskovalno se ukvarja s področji potrošnje kulture, kulturnega izraza in potrošniškega vedenja v različnih družbeno-kulturnih kontekstih, naslanjajoč se na etnografijo. Njegov cilj je prispevati k vedenju o teoriji potrošne kulture.

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