

## REVIEW ARTICLE

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### THE SPECIFICITY OF ISLAMIC THOUGHTS

Recent titles discussed in this review article include: Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 367 pp., plus bibliography & index, Hb. £45.00, ISBN 1 85043 425 5; Raymond William Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 300 pp., plus index, Hb. \$29.95, ISBN 0 674 01203 8; and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 286 pp., plus index, Hb. US\$29.95, ISBN 0 691 09680 5.

IN MARCH OF 2001, the Taliban stunned the world by destroying the historic statues of Buddha at Bamiyan. The Taliban, in their narrow and peculiar understanding of Islam, had refused the advice of other Muslims who argued that such monuments represent civilization's historic legacy and should remain as they are. An Egyptian delegation even flew to Afghanistan to try to convince the Taliban of the error of their ways, arguing that Islam did not sanction the proposed destruction. Indeed, history shows that the Buddhas at Bamiyan, among many other pre-Islamic monuments, existed for centuries under Muslim rule, a clear indication that it was the Taliban's interpretation that was at fault and not that of other Muslims living today.

The Taliban and the Egyptian Islamists should not be seen as polar opposites: the one is an aberration, while the other is mainstream. Also, Islamic thought should not be misconstrued as following either one extreme or the other. This incident does, however, offer evidence of a bifurcation in the approach of contemporary Muslims toward the Islamic foundational texts, especially the Qur'an and the Sunna (including the Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad. There are those who heed the commands of the text in the literal, rigid and inflexible meaning of

the word. To such persons, following the precedents (*taqlid*) of previous authorities is the only way to understand Islam: however, because they apply the interpretations and practices of a bygone era, they appear retrograde and out of place. The others, while grounding their lives on the same foundational texts, read these sources applying *ijtihād*—the exercise of opinion based upon the use of reason. Their understanding of the text is dynamic and flexible: thus, they remain current.

This division goes back many centuries. A decisive moment in the institutionalization of the split may be located in the conflict surrounding the Muʿtazili rationalist doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾan during the third century AH (ninth century AD). The Muʿtazila advocated their doctrine within the framework of *tawḥīd*, God's unity, a concept that would become central to calls for change by subsequent reformers throughout Islamic history. Arrayed against the rationalists were those who insisted that a literal reading of the Qurʾan was the sole criteria for understanding matters of the faith. A set of social, economic and political circumstances came together to give victory to these literalists, which led to the birth of the fourth Sunni school of jurisprudence, the Hanbali *madhhab*, with its characteristic rejection of *ijtihād* as a source of law. Although adherents to the Hanbali *madhhab* always remained a minority among Muslims, literal meaning and *taqlid*, as an innate outcome, ultimately became 'orthodoxy' owing to a variety of complex factors. Hence, while never stamped out, *ijtihād* was marginalized in Muslim thought for much of the pre-modern era.

It was not until the nineteenth century that Muslim thinkers began to reassert, with increasing frequency and urgency, the necessity of *ijtihād* if Muslim societies were to formulate authentic and relevant responses to the challenges facing them. By then, however the "unthought," as Muhammad Arkoun would put it, had accumulated several layers, so Muslims were confronted with a truly formidable task. Indeed, one might even argue that all attempts at Islamic reform during the last hundred years have been no more than efforts to peel off these opaque shrouds which weigh down Muslim thinking and block Muslim creativity—a creativity which was inherent in Islamic thought for the first two centuries of its history. Ultimately, for 'reform' to be relevant and meaningful in addressing current concerns, it must be directed toward the removal of all of the constraints that were imposed in contexts that are no longer pertinent. We should learn from history, rather than trying to repeat it.

### Identifying the 'Islamic'

The three books under review help us to understand the current manifestation of this epistemological split and its consequences for contemporary

Muslim thought. Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi are the editors of *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, a volume packed with analyses of a multi-faceted discourse aimed at determining what constitutes 'Islamic' and how to forge an authentic Islamic identity in the face of secularization, globalization and increased Western military and economic dominance, as well as other local and regional concerns, not least of which is the urgent need for the internal reform and revitalization of Muslim society. A generous introduction outlines the general framework for the study and is followed by eleven essays or chapters, each focusing upon a vital and distinct aspect of Islamic thought in the twentieth century.

Reviewing an edited volume is never an easy task, what with the various authors and their different disciplinary approaches, so I have decided to consider each essay separately in order to be as fair as possible to the authors and to their subjects. That being said, each of these essays is rich in content and detail (and this applies to the other two books under review as well), so it is impossible to discuss more than their highlights here. Hopefully, this review article will pique the reader's curiosity and lead to a more thorough perusal.

In his essay, "The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and Its Challenge to Traditional Islam," Basheer Nafi roots the Islamic intellectual forums of the twentieth century in the upheavals of the nineteenth, when Muslims were confronted with the ascendant European Powers. Muslim reformers insisted that the circumstances required fundamental changes in Islamic thought as it had been constructed over previous centuries. Indeed, it has become a common methodological assumption that these changes were inspired by the confrontation with Europe. However, Nafi cautions that, while it is true that this formed the immediate background, one should seek out the "inner impulse" for reform. This approach avoids the pitfalls of a static understanding of Muslim society and situates reformism within its internal, unfolding dynamic. As such, reform becomes organic and consistent, rather than episodic, reactive and inauthentic. Nafi gives examples of reformers from the fourteenth century onward and in locales as far east as India and all the way to West Africa. Moreover, he reminds us that reformism was not solely a Sunni phenomenon. Shi'is also underwent reform as the Usuli School triumphed over the Akhbaris to reassert *ijtihād* on both the jurisprudential and theoretical levels.

It was only after the mid-nineteenth century that external pressures, in the form of European military superiority and economic dominance, caused Muslim statesmen to begin instituting wide-ranging reforms in an effort to meet the European challenge through modernization. Such modernizing schemes, superficial and imposed from the top, did not

amount to much; nonetheless, they still shook the position of the *‘ulamā’*, those scholars who had been schooled in the traditional institution of the *madrasa* and had served to perpetuate it in turn. States removed the two principal sources of their leadership and influence. They confiscated the *awqāf* (endowments) that had sustained the *‘ulamā’* economically; and they overhauled and secularized the school curriculum. This last act not only reduced the number of students attending traditional *madrasas* and, thus, the impact of the *‘ulamā’*, it also challenged their world-view, including their construction of Islam. To be sure, traditionalist scholars were still produced since conventional institutions continued to exist alongside reformed ones. But the leadership role of these traditionally-trained *‘ulamā’* had effectively been challenged. The ‘rupture with the past,’ of which current literature speaks, aptly describes the changed fortunes of the *‘ulamā’*. (Zaman, below, concentrates on this specific strand of Muslim thought.) In underscoring the challenge faced by the traditionalist *‘ulamā’*, Nafi says that the reformist agenda simultaneously devised modern ways to contain Western influence, while also disputing “the credibility, even the Islamicity of the dominant traditional modes of religion by questioning their timelessness and their reality at the same time” (40). Not interested in the preservation of the status quo, reformers like Egypt’s Muhammad Abduh based their reformist ideology upon four principles: God’s unity (*tawhīd*); a return to the Qur’an and the Sunna as the ultimate sources of legitimacy; an affirmation of the use of reason; and a reassertion of the use of *ijtihād*. Reformist thought, born of a crisis in which the European Powers dominated Muslims, would eventually exhibit certain weaknesses, especially as it sought to harmonize Western concepts and institutions with Islam and through its selective treatment and borrowing of European models. To their critics, Islamic modernists were thus exposed as Europeanizers who sought to undermine the foundations of Islamic society.

Nonetheless, the discourse of these reformers in newly-established journals and newspapers introduced “a new linguistic medium in society, less elitist than the language of the traditional ulema, comprehensible to the ordinary man and capable of carrying the novel idioms and concepts of the modern times” (48). In their advocacy of reform, in their articulation of political, social and economic responses to what challenged them and in their efforts to forge an authentic identity, they produced a clear distinction between state and society and prepared the ground for the later development of secular nationalism. The concept of the nation, initially thought of in Islamic terms (consider ‘Allal al-Fasi and Ibn Badis), would develop a life of its own during the twentieth century.

Nafi maintains that by “attempting to engage modernity on philosophical and socio-political levels, the Muslim reformists contributed in

a significant measure to affirming the relevance of Islam to modern times" (51). They also paved the way for the assimilation of modernity with the least possible loss for Islam. Finally, it was under the wing of these reformers that political Islam was born and that Islamic activists, such as Hasan al-Banna and Abu al-'Ala' al-Mawdudi, found space for their projects.

It might be tempting to think that, with the rise of political Islamist activists wanting to take over state power, reformism would have no place in Muslim thought during the second half of the twentieth century. Current media, which sensationalize the activities of extremists and the attempts of various states to curb the 'Islamic awakening,' create the false impression that Islam is contested, protected, interpreted, or advocated by representatives of these two camps alone. However, simply scratching the surface reveals that such generalizations are far from true. William Shepard contests these positions in his essay on "The Diversity of Islamic Thought: Towards a Typology." Shepard reminds us that Western imperialism in its various forms remained dominant as Muslim thinkers continued their search for spiritual and cultural revival. Traditional explanations for the decay of Muslim society no longer sufficed given the persistence and depth of the Western challenge. This was especially true after the 1970s, when Western cultural imperialism was seen as the most direct threat. In fact, when relevant to their subject, the authors in this edited volume (as well as Zaman and Baker) recognize the 1970s as a significant turning point in Muslim thinking. New responses and alternative strategies became necessary; hence, a veritable rainbow of opinion suffused Islamic discourse.

Examining the various manifestations and articulations of this discourse, Shepard categorizes Muslim groups and intellectuals as belonging to one of three broad types, each of which he subdivides. Those with a secularist orientation reject the notion that Islam is all-encompassing and argue that it should be limited to ritual and private life: public life should be governed by reason and not by the *shari'a*. Secularists are positioned across the political spectrum, from Kamal Ataturk and Reza Shah on the right to the anti-religious communist regime of Albania (among other states) on the left.

Islamists, who might be either modernists or radicals, affirm the central role of Islam, not only in private life, but also in public life; hence, they are opposed to secularism. They argue that it is not Islam per se, but the way in which the religion has been interpreted that has led to the moral and material decline of the Muslims. If Muslims only would be true to their faith and live, once again, according to the sources, they would regain their previous unity, strength and glory. What makes these Islamists either modernists or radicals is their attitude toward the

sources and the extent to which one should adhere to them—if at all. Thus, Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi, for example, can distinguish between *shari‘a* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) to advocate greater flexibility in understanding Islam (to such an extent that he might be considered a secularist). He has gone so far as to say that most existing Egyptian legislation is in conformity with the *shari‘a*. Others, like al-Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, are more rigid in their understanding of the *shari‘a* and how it should be applied. Indeed, groups typified as Islamist exhibit a greater range of opinions and strategies than the others. To illustrate the point, Shepard notes that

some movements are more populist, as with both the Muslim Brothers and the Iranian Revolution, while others are more elitist, as with the Jama‘at-i-Islami. Some are willing to accept a limited amount of Islamic legislation for a start . . . while others are inclined to insist on all or nothing (79).

Indeed, some are willing to participate in the political process and to field candidates for election, while others opt for violence as the preferred route to power. The appeal of all of these groups lies in their combination of modernity with a strong claim to Islamic authenticity.

While the secularists and the Islamists are modern, the traditionalists and the neo-traditionalists have “a strong loyalty to the particular forms they have inherited from the past” (81). The traditionalists are, of course, the conservative, conventionally-trained scholars mentioned above. The neo-traditionalists are those who have taken on some modern values while still cherishing their traditions, such as the Azhar *‘ulamā’*, the *āyatollās* in Iran during the Pahlavi period and the members of Sufi orders. All traditionalists have been in the minority because of the transformations of the twentieth century yet, although their numbers are relatively few, traditionalism is still a very complex phenomenon.

Shepard classifies the traditionalists according to two scales: a vertical one ranging from a striking modernism to extreme traditionalism; and a horizontal one ranging from adaptationism to extreme rejectionism. Shepard’s typology shows not only the range of Islamic thought, but also—and this is significant—that secularism, which was once believed to be the wave of the future, has been seriously challenged. Islamic states, political parties, banking, garb, values, norms and so on are being asserted by all manner of groups and movements. Shepard believes that there is presently a stalemate between the Islamists and the secularists. Perhaps this explains the ‘heavy-handedness’ of some regimes when they strike against Islamists of all types and the equally fierce and often irrational reaction by extremist groups, as the Algerian case illustrates.

Although Egypt did not suffer to the same extent as Algeria during the 1990s, the Egyptian regime apparently had no coherent policy to distinguish between the Islamist groups in the country, including the New Islamists, which only made the situation worse.

According to Shepard, Sufi orders are neo-traditional. Elizabeth Sirriyeh's essay, "Sufi Thought and Its Reconstruction," discusses their current status in greater detail. Sufism struggled for many centuries before it was finally accepted by mainstream Islam, yet it still bore the brunt of attacks by Islamic reformers in the nineteenth century. Considered backward, reactionary and attractive only to the ignorant masses, Sufism declined rapidly during the first half of the twentieth century, especially in the Middle East. It flourished, however, in India and West Africa due to the books of Ahmad Reza Khan, on the one hand, and the spread of the Tijani and Qadari orders, on the other. As Sirriyeh points out: "[I]n most of sub-Saharan Africa until late in the twentieth century, to think of Islam was to think about Sufi interpretation of it" (109).

Building upon earlier efforts at reform, Sufism began to experience a rebound in the Middle East toward the end of the twentieth century. An important aspect of this reform was emphasis on adherence to the *shari'a*. For instance, the well-known Egyptian Sufi, Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, "stressed obedience to the *shari'ah* in an organized, socially responsible manner with the suppression of wild forms of *dhikr*, music, dance, and the mixing of men and women" (115). Ibrahim also defended Sufism's Islamic authenticity to critics, saying that it sought human perfection, which is an essential Islamic duty. The most notable revival of Sufism, however, has involved its spread to the West, as illustrated by the rising fortunes of the Naqshabandiyya-Haqqaniyya order in England and the United States. Neo-Sufis, like Idris Shah, influenced this westward expansion, despite severe criticism that neither Shah's method nor his philosophy owe anything to Islam or traditional Sufism.

Attacked in the past, Sufis are still being assailed in the present. Yet, if history provides a clue, they will remain with us in the future, for the mystical remains an intrinsic part of religious experience.

The fifth and sixth essays in this volume deal with nationalism, democracy and the state. In "Nationalism and Culture in the Arab and Islamic World," Ralph Coury considers two related subjects; the presentation of nationalism—primarily Arab nationalism—in Western discourse and the Islamist response to the same phenomenon. This discussion is important because nationalism and the territorial state have played pivotal roles in the modern history of the Muslim world, roles so central that they are indicative, according to Reinhard Schulze,

of the dominant, while extremely flexible, world-view among Muslims. Thus, Coury asks "how are we to understand the persistence of the widespread assumption that this [Islamic] world is exceptional in its immunity to nationalism" and that it can only produce a flawed variety of it? Coury believes that this assumption is due to the Orientalist approach to the Islamic world as having a religious essence with "unique and exceptional features that are decisive and everywhere the same" and the contention that Islam "has governed the cultural, economic, social, and political process of Islamic societies" (133-34), although this is not said of any other religion or part of the world. Paradoxically, despite this 'unity,' the Islamic essence is also thought to be fragmentary because Orientalists view Islamic societies as "mosaics of eternally antagonistic, or at least profoundly disparate religious, sectarian, tribal, and ethnic groups" (135).

This 'essentialist' view was taken up in post-modernist discourse, in which academics placed greater emphasis on smaller, heterogeneous groups and "sang the praises of the playful, the hybrid, the nomadic, the migratory, the fragmented, the contingent, the multiple, diffuse, and de-centered self" (135). It is easy to see why the Orientalist characterization of Arab nationalism would be repeated in such a framework. Neo-liberalism or neo-modernism, by contrast, would highlight larger, universal structures, such as capitalism, the market and globalization, and the diminished role of the state. Smaller structures, such as those invoked by nationalists, are criticized because they may impede the spread of capitalism or threaten the hegemony of the capitalist core. Thus, Arab nationalism (which is criticized from left and right) is seen not only as unworkable and flawed, but also as unable to make any headway in Muslim societies owing to the nature of Islam. Ernest Gellner, for example, says that people in the West have sought

power through production rather than force, and having both disassociated glory from territory, and abjured faith in a unique and obligating salvation, [are] no longer inclined to go to war against each other. But they share the planet with other religions in which there are societies which exemplify either the role of honour-committed coercers, or which take an absolutist Faith seriously and literally, or both of these conditions at once (138).

And when Islam has already been characterized as a 'barrack-room religion' or a 'tribal religion,' it is not surprising to see it demonized in this imagined construct. Islam and Arab nationalism are seen as incompatible and unable, either together or separately, to produce the type of 'good nationalism' prevalent in the West. Elie Kedourie, in particular,

made a career out of tarnishing Arab nationalism and his efforts are followed in tight step by Martin Kramer and the Karshs.

Coury reminds us that Arab nationalism is not only criticized by Westerners and Orientalists, but also by Islamists and secular Arab intellectuals, regardless of their faith. They have viewed nationalism as an alien ideology brought to the region by the West as a means to divide and conquer it. Hazim Saghiyya contends that it has created a new form of paganism; Bassam Tibi says that it has promoted superficiality and sloganeering. Whether it resulted from a methodological imperative or was intended to promote strategic interests, the nation-state confounded culture and politics. Arab nationalism in conjunction with the nation-state has become an antiquated, ineffective means of governance that must be replaced by local associations or, alternatively, by larger loyalties so as to better serve market forces and globalization—if, as some believe, no other ideology has been left standing except liberal, democratic capitalism.

Such criticism notwithstanding, Coury believes that Arab nationalism and the nation-state continue to have relevance. He argues that “nationalism has been as modular in the Islamic world as it has been anywhere else, and that it has not differed essentially from the contractual, civic nationalism that is said to characterize the nationalism of the West” (161). State structures, such as they are, remain intact and many other factors supporting Arab unity remain vital. Arab intellectuals, such as Muhammad al-Jabiri of Morocco and Burhan Ghalyun of Syria, have transcended local entities to speak of Arab unity and a larger, more viable governing structure as Arabs continue to develop social, economic and cultural ties. Finally, Coury says, these scholars, among others, are aware of two contending trends: one internal, constant and homogenizing; and the other external, episodic and promoting sectarian and ethnic differences into communal incompatibilities. The interaction of Arab nationalism with local nationalisms and pan-Islamism still continues.

Abdelwahab El-Effendi’s essay, “On the State, Democracy and Pluralism,” takes up Muslim attitudes on political issues from their first, nineteenth-century manifestations through to the ‘*khilāfa* debate’ and the subjects of Islamic government, democracy and human rights. The earliest discourse, especially during the nineteenth century, focused upon constitutionalism, particularly the appropriate limits to the authority of the ruler and the participation of influential groups in governance under established rules of law. Although these early efforts were rather fruitless, Iran’s 1906 Constitutional Revolution energized the atmosphere: the ‘*ulamā*’ participated and overall support for such endeavours increased. This support, however, grew tepid as members of the Majlis began to seek wider representation, including minority religious groups,

and to advocate an expanded democratic process. Nevertheless, this short-lived experiment set the themes of political discourse.

It was the '*khilāfa* debate' that initially stirred up serious political controversy among Muslim thinkers. When the Caliphate was abolished in 1922, in the context of nationalism and nationalist aspirations and the secularizing reforms of Turkey's Ataturk, a number of Muslim intellectuals and groups strongly objected. Rashid Rida, for example, considered the re-establishment of the institution to be a religious duty believing, as many did, that the Islamic community did not exist without a Caliphate. By contrast, Shaykh 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, himself educated in traditional circles (a graduate of al-Azhar, as well as a *sharī'a* judge), argued that the Caliphate was repressive and despotic, that it could not be justified according to Islamic texts, and that Muslims were free to choose their own form of government. The debate was so contentious that he was dismissed from his post. Another notable figure, Muhammad Iqbal, also supported the move to abolish the Caliphate and to vest authority in an elected assembly.

The focal point of the debate soon shifted, especially with the rise of the Islamists, from the necessity of the Caliphate for the existence of the community to the necessity of an Islamic state for the good of that community. Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s and went on to become the most influential of the self-styled intellectuals familiar with both traditional and modern forms of learning. The Islamists' central premise was and is that people must be guided back to 'true' Islam since their deviation from the straight path is the source of Muslim misfortune. The writings of al-Mawdudi and, later, Sayyid Qutb were widely influential in post-Caliphate discourse. Both condemned nationalism and both rejected democracy, arguing that the divine will is the final and ultimate authority and not the "whims of men." Al-Mawdudi advocated the creation of a 'true' Muslim community to set up a "theo-democracy": while the leader of this Islamic state would be elected and receive advice from an elected assembly, he would also be absolute in his authority and within his rights to disregard all advisors if he so chose. Qutb preferred to concentrate on the creation of the 'community,' believing that it was still too early to consider the question of political structure. By the 1970s and owing to a host of intervening developments, Salafi and other conservative groups began to claim that they represented the very community that would establish the long-desired Islamic state. Particularly in Egypt, the mid-1970s saw groups like Takfir Wa Hijra and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya trying to bring their new order into being through the use of violence.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Islamic discourse on democracy also gathered momentum as Islamic states emerged in Iran,

Sudan and Afghanistan, and as Islamic political parties competed in local and national elections. In his conclusion, El-Effendi says that

we can discern three main trends as far as Islamic attitudes to democracy were concerned: those who enthusiastically espoused the idea and worked to promote it and to prove its compatibility with Islam; those who were inclined to accept democratic procedures, but voice conceptual and philosophical objections to democracy and propose certain procedural limits on the democratic process to ensure conformity to *Shari'ah*; and finally, those who reject democracy root and branch (189).

Given the diversity of their opinions on other issues, it is unsurprising that Muslims also have divergent ideas about democracy. Islam is latitudinal and the Muslim understanding and interpretation of the faith runs the gamut from the literal to the rationalist—and sometimes involves a mixture of both. (Of course, as Shepard's typology indicates, the possible lines of demarcation can vary.) This may be illustrated by the fact that Sunni Muslims were once able to identify with any one of the four schools of *shari'a* (at present, this is hardly the case), yet still seek a ruling from the other three *madhhabs*. Indeed, even non-Muslims have had recourse to the *shari'a*, despite possessing their own courts. El-Effendi concludes by noting that "whatever is holding up democratic advances in the Muslim world, it is not religious doctrine."

After the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, he set about constructing an economic infrastructure for the nascent Muslim community. In the twentieth century, reformers and Islamists followed his example and turned their attention to the financial and developmental issues vital to their community. In fact, it was al-Mawdudi who popularized the term "Islamic economics," as we learn in Rodney Wilson's essay on "The Development of Islamic Economics: Theory and Practice." Al-Mawdudi criticized the economic injustices that prevailed in his time, especially the indebtedness of Muslim sharecroppers. Although not an economist himself, his writings on the subject influenced people like Muhammad Abdul Mannan and Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqi, trained economists who published pioneering works in the 1960s. Mannan saw Islamic economics as both system and science: as a system based upon the Qur'an and the Sunna, as well as the consensus (*ijmā'*) of religious scholars; and as a normative (prescriptive) science governing the behaviour of the Muslims (in other words, economics as a behavioural science). Siddiqi, who was not opposed to conventional, neo-classic economics, proposed that an Islamic strategy should be developed to construct an economic system with clear goals, well-defined moral values and based upon the *shari'a*.

A decade later, after the Islamic Development Bank's establishment (1973) and the First International Conference on Islamic Economics in Mecca (1976), Islamic economics emerged as a discipline. At its core is economic justice, in which wealth, in the words of Umer Chapra, becomes a means for realizing human well-being and facilitating spirituality, not for wasteful ostentation.

Emerging as it did in the second half of the twentieth century and in the larger context of the Cold War, Islamic economics confronted the economic stances of Marxism and capitalism. Baqir al-Sadr, a leading Shi'i cleric who was later executed by Saddam Hussein, rejected the basic assumptions of Marxist analysis, especially its materialist underpinnings, while simultaneously arguing that Islam was incompatible with capitalism, particularly because he saw the latter as being inherently unjust. In the 1980s and the 1990s, when communism was no longer a threat and global capitalism was demanding open markets, deregulation and privatization—in short, a diminished state role in economic affairs—Muslim economists seized the opportunity to critique capitalism more emphatically in an effort to promote their alternative Islamic vision. Syed Naqvi, for example, noted that Islam does not object to private property and the accumulation of wealth, but cautioned that unfettered self-interest, a mainstay of capitalism, might be a motivating factor in economic behaviour, but must not go unchecked. Excessive self-interest, the exploitation of labour and economic injustice are all qualities that require the mediation of norms and values derived from the *shari'a*.

Wilson then turns his attention to Islam and development, highlighting the work of Khurshid Ahmad of Pakistan, Aidit Ghazali of Malaysia and others. Ahmad maintains that human values are the vital element in the development process and that there is no single Islamic 'way' to achieve development: the path should involve a multiplicity of approaches or models. Ghazali, the leading Malaysian writer on the subject, stresses religious values and principles as being crucial to development, which is intended to benefit people after all. Both see the Islamic concept of *tazkiya*, purification and growth, as the framework for development and the way to achieve *falāḥ*, success in both material and spiritual attainment.

If Muslim works on development only began to appear toward the end of the century, those on finance and banking started to reach maturity at the same time. Perhaps inspired by the model of the Islamic Development Bank, many Islamic banks have been established in the last few decades, such as the Dubai, Qatar, and Bahrain Islamic Banks, the Jordan Islamic Bank, and the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt and Sudan. By the year 2000, Islamic banking had become a US\$150-billion

industry. Central to the concept of Islamic banking is the Qur'anic prohibition against usury or excessive and exploitative interest on monetary loans. *Mudāraba*, the sharing of profit and loss, has long been practiced among Muslims. But as risk to banks increased, Sami Homoud proposed an alternative called *murābaḥa*, mark-up trade financing, where the mark-up and the period of repayment are agreed upon in advance by the lender and the borrower. Most of the banks mentioned above use *murābaḥa* in their financing, even for the long-term projects conducive to economic development. Still, other practices, such as *ijāra* (leasing) and *mushāraka* (partnership), have also appeared to meet the demands of an expanding industry.

Wilson ends his essay by mentioning several issues that have not yet been dealt with—or only marginally addressed—such as Islamic taxation, especially the role of the *zakāt* and *jizya* (the poll-tax on non-Muslims), the distinction between religious and non-religious tax and the role that Muslim states should play in a global economy. Undoubtedly, these and many other topics will be addressed in the future as Muslims continue to find strategies to keep up with the evolving global market.

Compared to the discourse on Islamic finance, that on gender is relatively underdeveloped (if voluminous), for some of the fundamental assumptions governing it have not changed. Hiba Abugideiri's essay, "On Gender and the Family," discusses the literature on the subject and finds that it has been constrained by an emphasis on motherhood at the expense of women's legal and religious rights. Part of the problem is

that twentieth-century Islamic discourses uphold a system of law that has ultimately petrified the very process of interpreting gender roles vis-à-vis the institution of the family in ways that prevent their redefinition . . . because the paradigm of family used to guide the interpretative process renders the Islamic values of family and a traditional understanding of gender roles synonymous (223-24).

Hence, although liberal, traditional and Islamist thinkers evince varying attitudes toward other issues—say, democracy—they all converge on the issue of gender. In large part, this is because the position of women is seen as relational to men: in other words, a woman's individuality or personhood is de-emphasized and she is only considered, ideologically and biologically, in relation to men and to society—either as a wife or as a mother. Viewed only in terms other than herself, she functions as the cultural authenticator of society.

It is instructive to note that such thinking is a reversal of what was advocated by earlier figures—Muhammad Abduh, for example, whose

view of the family “was tied not to establishing gender roles based on a designated sexual division of labour or sexual difference, but rather to reforming rights of men and women as equal members of both society and family” (229). Abduh saw no difference between men and women in terms of their common humanity and he conceived of women as social, not domestic, agents. Abugideiri shows that it was secularist, nationalist discourse, beginning with Qasim Amin, that initiated the reversal. With its vision of middle-class domesticity, nationalist discourse reduced the role of women to the mothers who would provide *tarbiya* (cultural upbringing) to the nation’s future generations. Amin’s emphasis on the education of women, it seems, was intended not to enhance their public role, but the performance of their domestic duties. During the course of the twentieth century—and particularly with the Islamic resurgence of the last few decades—Muslim thinkers reappropriated and Islamized this nationalist thesis. In their discourse, the domestic role of women became still more sensitive because “their biological and ideological reproductive capacity was conceptually tied to the preservation and regeneration of Muslim society” (231). If Amin viewed women as the guardians of the nation, certain Islamists have seen them as the guardians of Islam. Furthermore, the family is perceived as a divinely-ordained institution. Gender roles are not social constructs, but divinely-mandated, and Islamic values are confounded with traditional views of gender.

What is striking, Abugideiri says, is that modern Islamists frame their views on gender and the family in the context of the notion of spiritual equality. But equality “does not entail non-differentiation of their respective roles and functions in society,” as Jamal Badawi asserts (233). This differentiation is understood as the application of the Qur’anic concept of complementarity: a husband is responsible for the protection, economic well-being and overall leadership of the family (that is, in dealing with society and the public sphere) and a wife is responsible for the home, where “she rules as a queen” (over the family and the private sphere). A host of other notions characterized by gender inequality depend upon this concept, not least of which is the institution of *ṭā‘a* (wifely obedience). When a woman is seen as a wife or wife-to-be, mother or mother-to-be, a woman who is single, educated and financially-independent is not recognized as a member of a legal category worthy of elaboration—her relational status has not been fulfilled.

This is not to say that the role of women is taken lightly. Women are the unique ‘cement’ that keep family, society and culture together. The major impediment to gender justice is the limited conceptual space left for Islamic thinkers to attempt to expand women’s rights and to redefine their role. Works by Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Khaled Abou

El Fadl represent pioneering efforts to reclaim some needed space by focusing upon family law and Qur'anic hermeneutics, where the interpretative process is considered a human endeavour. Such interpretative methods should consider, not resist, change in the pursuit of gender justice. The modest beginnings of what Wadud calls "gender Jihad" will allow for an authentic Islamic response that bases itself upon Qur'anic exegesis and challenges the patriarchal, authoritarian hermeneutics that have corrupted Islamic texts through selective reading and subjective interpretation.

The last three essays in this volume deal with Islamic thought concerning non-Muslims, namely, the West in general; Christians and Christianity; and the Jews. In "Reflections on the West," Jacques Waardenburg discusses the different meanings that the 'West' has acquired in Muslim literature. Noting that the term indicated Western Europe until World War II, after which it largely referred to the United States, Waardenburg reminds us that "Muslim discourse about the West developed in particular historical contexts and situations, in which certain Muslims and certain Westerners encountered each other, (263)" producing a wide range of opinion dependent, in part, upon the experiences of different Muslim countries with the 'West.' Muslim discourse on the 'West' is a construct and Waardenburg identifies five different meanings for the term.

First, there is the East-West (Orient-Occident) opposition: for instance, the 'East' is spiritual, while the 'West' is materialistic, and so on. This meaning was largely replaced by another one in which the 'West' is a political force, a power and a potential enemy, whether in terms of colonialism or, later, as a combatant in the Cold War. A third meaning posits the 'West' as the locus of modernity; thus, the term has positive connotations for those wishing to develop their societies along 'Western' lines and negative ones for those wishing to preserve their traditions or advocate alternative models. The fourth meaning focuses upon the 'West' as a 'particular way of life' in its external aspects. The fifth is a moral springboard: the 'West' stands for a disintegrating society, in which materialism reigns and which is, above all, secular, seductive and aggressive. This society is destructive—not only of itself, but also of others. This is a negative image of a world and a culture that must be avoided.

This portrayal or construct fits particularly well in Islamist discourse, which views the West in oppositional ideological terms, as if a conflict between Islam and the West has always existed. After the 1970s, the West's secularism and materialist ideology were deemed threatening to Islam, but its science and technology were broadly accepted. However, when the West's political impact is discussed, a wide spectrum of views dependent upon experience again emerges. In general, the thesis of the

'clash of civilizations' is rejected and initiatives for dialogue are welcomed. There is also an appreciation of certain Western norms and values that are viewed as being universally applicable. Muslim discourse on culture and cultural relations is also quite varied and raises several concerns with the West as a referent. There is a growing tendency to discuss the West in intellectual and ethical terms. Overall, Muslim discourse on the West, in its varied forms and for numerous reasons, has generated as many stereotypes about the West as Western discourse has generated concerning Islam and the East. This is a veritable field in itself and one requiring further research.

The next essay, "Perception of Christians and Christianity," is by Hugh Goddard, who explores the changing attitudes of Muslim thinkers toward Christians and Christianity as their experience with the Christian West evolved. Muslims and Christians have always interacted and, prior to the twentieth century, the Muslim view was informed by the classic concept of Christians as 'People of the Book.' As *dhimmi*s (members of a protected community), Christians were accorded autonomy in religious affairs in return for the payment of certain taxes, such as the *jizya*. Discourse during this period either showed a warm appreciation of Jesus and Mary, especially their spirituality, or consisted of little more than hostile polemics, with Christianity seen as having been grossly corrupted well before the coming of Islam. During the nineteenth century, with the arrival of Christian missionaries and the West as a colonial power, the tendency, with few exceptions, was to equate Christianity with colonialism.

In the twentieth century, Muslim attitudes began to demonstrate evidence of fresh thinking, especially about Jesus, as is evident in the writings of Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad and Muhammad Kamil Hussein, among others. The same may be said about texts dealing with Christianity by such authors as Isma'īl al-Faruqi, Hasan Hanafi and Adnan Aslan, who have made attempts to generate a deeper understanding of the faith and have called for a reappraisal of traditional attitudes. The discourse on Christians necessarily includes discussion of *dhimmi* status and the *jizya*, and opinion varies considerably. Thus, while some see these as forming a framework for contemporary relations, others, like Muhammad Selim al-Awa, consider them to be part of history and no longer valid in modern states. Changes in attitude, especially in the post-colonial period, have been boosted by the calls for interfaith dialogue that followed meetings between Western Muslim and Christian groups, which began publishing journals and newsletters about their encounters. In the Middle East also, especially in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war, Arab Muslims and Christians met to discuss their relationship in the interfaith framework. This has resulted in the formulation of an

Arab Muslim-Christian Covenant around the principles of the rejection of bigotry and the promotion of equality, tolerance, political participation and coexistence.

The last essay in the book is "Thinking about the Jews" by Suha Taji-Farouki. Muslim thought on the Jews has undergone several transformations in the modern period largely owing to the Zionist project and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The realities of this experience, ranging from the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948, through successive Arab-Israeli wars (especially the one of 1967), to the peace process of the last few decades, have necessarily influenced Muslim ideas and attitudes.

Two principal phases are apparent from Taji-Farouki's discussion. First, there is the traditional Muslim position of the classical period, which was based upon the Qur'an and other exegetical works. Like Christians, Jews were considered 'People of the Book' and were accorded *dhimmi* status, with their lives, property and places of worship guaranteed in return for the payment of *jizya*. They enjoyed autonomy in their internal, religious affairs, but also had a considerable number of opportunities to interact with the dominant culture in various fields, from business to intellectual endeavours, so that a "profound cultural and intellectual exchange" (321) took place between the two communities. This "creative symbiosis," as S. D. Goitein has described it, has become the basis for understanding Muslim-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages.

Recent scholarship attempting to equate anti-Zionism with historic anti-Judaism (or even anti-Semitism) prefers to show the 'darker' side of Jewish life under Islam and challenges Goitein's description as a myth; however, the vast majority of scholars agree that creative symbiosis is a concept central to the study of early Muslim-Jewish relations. Mark R. Cohen, for example, has found that the scale of Jewish persecution under Islam "did not remotely approach Jewish suffering in Western Christendom" (332). When there were instances of persecution, they were not directed at the Jews per se, nor were they accompanied by the usual irrational accusations against the Jews as a community. There have been no recorded expulsions of Jews from Islamic lands and, Cohen says, the Jews of Islam lack a collective historical memory of persecution at the hands of Muslims. When Muslim traditional texts (for example, exegetical and jurisprudential works) are scrutinized by scholars, such as Ronald Nettler and Camilla Adang, one finds that negative stereotypes certainly exist, but that the treatment of Jews is "devoid of hatred" (333) and that Jews were treated no differently than the Christians and Zoroastrians also encountered by early Muslims.

This attitude began to change during the nineteenth century as traditional political and social structures began to crumble. The advent of political Zionism and the struggle for Palestine provided “the backdrop to an appropriation of the Qur’anic and early Islamic treatment of the Jews that [was] both new, and unique to the specific circumstances of the twentieth century” (334). In discussing the range of opinion during this second phase of Muslim thought on the Jews, Taji-Farouki raises several interesting points concerning the creation of an Islamic meta-narrative on Palestine (Palestine is for all Muslims; Palestine is a *waqf* or perpetual trust for all generations) that sought to make sense of the situation and to offer solutions based upon a particular reading of foundational Islamic texts. Taji-Farouki traces the development of this meta-narrative, especially during the Mandate period, showing how traditional stereotypes were appropriated to characterize contemporary Jews creating, in the process, an image of the “essential Jew” (328). Mahmud Abu Rayya, for example, conflated early Jewish converts to Islam (who were transmitters of Hadith) with Zionist Jews in pre-1948 Palestine. These early Jewish converts were “cunning deceivers” (325) who had incorporated *Isrā’īliyyāt* (a traditional Muslim literary category focusing upon Hebrew prophets and legends) into Muslim tradition to undermine Islam. An early Jewish convert, Ka’b al-Ahbar, was accused of being the first Zionist and a member of the conspiracy to assassinate the second caliph, ‘Umar.

The *Isrā’īliyyāt* issue had emerged in the context of Salafi and reformist attempts to return to a pristine, rationalist Islam. Muhammad Abduh, for instance, questioned the applicability of these legends in the larger context of his criticism of *taqlīd*, while Rashid Rida laid the foundation for the conflation of past with present by insisting that the *Isrā’īliyyāt*, with their irrational content, had actually been introduced to corrupt the faith. The meta-narrative gained greater acceptance through writings on the subject by conservative ‘*ulamā*’, Islamists and diverse other scholars and was accentuated by repeated Arab military defeats and Israeli intransigence.

This was a new anti-Jewish attitude that differed from traditional Muslim stereotypes as well as from European anti-Semitism. European-style anti-Semitic literature was known, but it served as an “external proof” in Muslim discourse, indicating that such texts were “functional, rather than organic” (338). However, during the last decades of the twentieth century in particular, when it became clear that Israel would not yield and that Arab governments could not restore Palestinian rights, motifs from European anti-Semitism began to form a strand in the broad range of opinion emerging alongside political Islam. Israeli and other scholars who claim that the new anti-Jewish discourse is part

of “historic anti-Semitism” not only over-generalize, but repeat the error of conflating past with present. Needless to say, the current political climate provides the best explanation for the pervasiveness of this anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist attitude, as well as the cold peace between Israel and Egypt more than two decades after Camp David.

Taji-Farouki ends her discussion by presenting some alternative approaches (not in the sense of political solutions) aimed at mitigating the attitudes described above and makes special mention of people like Sadiq Nayhum and Mohammad Talbi, who critique the ways of thinking common among political Islamists. She also mentions the often positive influence of ‘official’ Islam, such as the Azhar *‘ulamā’*, who stepped forward to endorse the peaceful relations initiated by President Anwar Sadat. However, efforts at interfaith dialogue in Europe and the US may bring Jewish and Muslim groups together, but the continuing Palestine conflict impedes the realization of any meaningful progress in this direction. Moreover, without Israeli and Western recognition of the impact of Zionism on the current Muslim formulation and attitudes, there will be only limited opportunities to develop alternative approaches. Stated differently, if there is no threat, there is no need to be on the defensive—nor on the offensive for that matter. Only when the Palestine conflict is ended will interfaith dialogue and other, similar initiatives be more fruitful.

#### **Egypt’s New Islamists as a moderating force**

In *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists*, Raymond Baker presents the moderate Islamic intellectuals who make up the *Wassatteyya* (Centrist) movement, an organized Egyptian grouping that is influential among the various contemporary Muslim thinkers and tendencies discussed above. United by their common stand, members of the movement come from a wide range of professions and include journalists, lawyers, judges, members of the *‘ulamā’* and other religious scholars. In their writings, public pronouncements and other elaborations, they have addressed a wide range of issues in the spheres of culture, society, politics and the economy. In Baker’s opinion, “because these Islamic scholars have maintained an organic relationship to their society as individuals and as a group, their work can be situated in the modern history of Egypt and the Middle East” (4).

Appealing to those groups and individuals who fall within the category of the Islamic awakening and to society at large, members of the *Wassatteyya* movement start from the assumption that Islam is a civilization that demands constructive social action. All Muslims, they believe, must engage in moderate, productive and creative activity to meet the challenges of modernity and secularism. They have spoken

repeatedly and unapologetically against extremism and the use of violence. At the same time, they argue that the best way to combat extremism is by renewing the national struggle against poverty, while simultaneously working for social justice and progress. This is the way, they feel, to rekindle hope and faith, and to rescue youth from the despair and alienation that make them potential recruits for extremists. Baker groups and presents the *Wassatteyya* and their ideas in three separate sections on culture, society and politics.

The first section, on culture, considers the group's attitudes toward education and the arts. In perhaps a deliberate reference to Muhammad Abduh, the group calls for a national commitment to education, describing it as a necessary step and the one most certain to achieve social reform. By education, they mean both formal schooling (*ta'lim*) and cultural upbringing (*tarbeyya*). As Baker notes, the New Islamists provide "a realistic critique of the deteriorating conditions in education and the inadequacy of the government's response" (23). The journalist, Fahmy Huwaidy, a member of the New Islamists, uncovered a 1996 report on education in Egypt that had been suppressed and had even cost its author his career: the report showed a steady decline in the proportion of the budget allocated to education. The inadequacy of Egypt's educational infrastructure was underscored by the fact that 77% of the primary schools surveyed held two sessions a day and that some schools in Cairo and environs even held three. Middle and higher grades and even higher education fared no better and, in addition to large classes, such facilities as libraries, laboratories, educational equipment and playgrounds were absent, broken down, or simply inadequate. This neglect

created a vacuum into which all kinds of disruptive forces moved— anomic social pressures, anti-social forces, and various groups with competing political agendas. These outside intruders ranged from American education experts brought in at the upper levels, to Islamist extremists who crowded in from below (28).

Students and their parents have naturally looked elsewhere and, by the year 2000, more than 5000 private schools were operating under very loose regulation by the Ministry of Education. Some of these schools provide a Westernized curriculum, others an Islamic one. Private for-profit universities also came into being, but their facilities remain "modest, and the faculties are mainly overworked adjuncts from the national universities" (31).

The New Islamists assert that this debacle is the result of a cultural crisis brought on by a failure to resolve issues of national identity and that meaningful educational reform cannot take place until these issues are

settled. Tariq al-Bishry traces the dilemma to Egypt's struggle against colonialism, when two competing trends of opposition and resistance came into being, one Westernized and nationalist and the other Islamist. Nationalist governments failed to devise a rational educational policy owing to the inconsistency of their overall orientation creating severe policy gaps that were exploited by many groups. The New Islamists' position is that the government's lack of vision has been extremely dangerous and that it led to terrorism, "a phenomenon that grew in the void created by the collapse of the regime's ideology into incoherence at a time when the material conditions of ordinary Egyptians were deteriorating" (38).

To deal with the cultural crisis, the New Islamists, in their centrist moderation, propose a renewal based upon their understanding of Islamic civilization "as one that inspires learning and instills confidence in human reason as a guide to understanding not only revelation but also the world" (45). Islam, rightly understood, relies upon rationality, sound advice and healthy argumentation—all enjoined by the Qur'an. Hence, there can be no renewal and revitalization of Islam without the use of *ijtilhād*. The *Wassatteyya* want to forge a broad national consensus coalescing around civilizational identity and engaging the moderate social forces that lie between Westernized Egyptians and Islamist extremists. They see their role as providing guidance, *tarshid*, in a long-term process that will require new definitions and a new understanding of the nation. They argue for an end to the duality that creates confusion and for educational reforms based upon inclusiveness, rational thought and creativity. The school curriculum should develop the sense of a secure Arab-Islamic identity and provide the values needed to build a strong community. But critical and imaginative thinking are not only necessary for reformers, but for students as well. Students need larger frameworks of understanding within which they can make sense of their reality; they also need the freedom to explore that reality. Indeed, students should be encouraged to participate in national issues so that they connect with the nation and society.

The movement's elaborations on the arts and their place in Islamic society took place in the shadow of ugly developments as Islamist extremists attempted to silence all of those whose work they found disagreeable. Nasr Hamid Abu Zeid was tried on charges of apostasy; Farag Foda was assassinated; and, in 1994, Naguib Mahfouz survived an attempt on his life. The New Islamists have condemned these attacks in no uncertain terms. Addressing religious extremists, Yusuf al-Qaradawy, for example, insists that there is no justification in the Qur'an or the Sunna for prohibitions against the arts. On the other hand, addressing secular extremists who argue for absolute freedom of creative

expression, Huwaidy notes that freedom and responsibility are inseparable and that freedom is absolute nowhere in the world. Distancing themselves whenever possible from these 'cultural wars,' the New Islamists have acted consistently to create space for dialogue and to remind both sides to consider such issues in the larger context of national needs.

They have also criticized the government's cultural policy for promoting consumerism and degrading spiritual values, as the lawsuit brought by Mustafa Shaka against the "Ramadan Riddles" indicates. The spiritual values behind the Ramadan fast, they insist, are being eroded and Ramadan has become closely identified with unrelated things like watching television serials, smoking *nargilas* and frequenting entertainment tents that provide music and dancing all night long. They object to the commercialization of Ramadan and argue that the media could and should play a constructive role in propagating proper values, not misguided political propaganda.

In the second section of his book, which looks at the New Islamist position on society, Baker emphasizes their rejection of violence and extremism: differences, they believe, should be solved through dialogue. True, the *Wassatteyya* advocate building a community according to the *shari'a*, but their understanding of the *shari'a* and their approach to it, including its implementation, set them apart from Islamist activists. Crucial to their view is the distinction between *fiqh* or the process of adducing law and the *shari'a*. *Fiqh* is a human endeavour and thus subject to change from one time to another. To the New Islamists, the extremists misunderstand and misrepresent Islam by putting *fiqh* and the *shari'a* on the same plane and demanding their immediate application. But the *shari'a* is not a ready-made structure that is imposed from above: it is flexible as well as comprehensive. It must answer the needs of society and it can only do that if it is applied gradually and thoughtfully, and if it is based upon *ijtihad* to permit modern, creative solutions to modern problems.

This community, contrary to the position of extremists, is inclusive, pluralistic and tolerant. Its position on the role of women, for example, although ultimately grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunna, goes a long way toward dealing with prevalent gender injustice, which, significantly enough, the New Islamists admit exists. They proclaim that men and women, who have absolute equality in human dignity and responsibility, are the essence of humanity and the expression of the unity of creation. While they do believe that the primary duty of women is to care for the family, they contend that nothing in Islam prevents women from seeking a public role and even political leadership.

Addressing the sectarian conflict that has emerged in Egypt, the New Islamists insist that it is not religion per se that is the cause, rather it is the dilution of religious values and religion improperly understood and

applied that fan religious hatred. They call for national unity and fraternity, and categorically affirm the absolute equality of Muslims and non-Muslims in civil and political rights. In their discourse, the traditional status of *dhimmi*s and the special taxes are irrelevant: all are equal citizens with constitutionally-guaranteed rights. This inclusiveness also extends to secularists on the basis of constructive dialogue and the integration of all elements in the nation.

In addition to a revamped educational system, the national community needs an economy that serves a higher order of human dignity and justice. This Islamic economic order should have its elements "assessed according to their capacity to enhance human relationship to Divine purpose" (132). The Islamic economy will not be based upon exploitation, excess and the accumulation of wealth for its own sake. Rather, it will be ethical, humane and balanced. Economic development and the eradication of poverty are inherent in this system. The notion of *istikhlāf*, humanity's role as God's vice-regent on earth, shapes the New Islamist view on many issues, such as human rights, which includes the economy. In this notion, human beings, regardless of nationality, religion, or gender, have the obligation to build, grow and progress. Islam does not provide a blueprint for how this order should come about, merely general principles. The creation of a framework is a demanding task left to human endeavour and the creativity of each generation.

Baker addresses the New Islamists' discourse on politics, the nature of the state, democracy and citizenship in the third section of the book. Islam, properly understood, they maintain, provides for the "full participation of non-Muslims as citizens of an Islamic community . . . Egyptians as a people are made up of both Muslims and Copts who are the joint heirs of an incomparable shared history and culture" (165). As a matter of fact, Fahmy Huwaidy advocated the election of Copts in the electoral campaigns of 2000. The New Islamists also believe that democracy is the best means to achieve justice, arguing that democratic political processes are inherent in the Islamic concept of *shūrā* (consultation).

Thus, an Islamic political system would have several characteristics: legitimate authority resting with the people; society having duties and responsibilities that it exercises independently of the commands of the ruler; freedom and equality as the rights of all citizens; injustice religiously forbidden; and finally, the *shari'a* providing the guiding principles for legislation to achieve all of these goals. Once again, there are no blueprints. What Islam or the *shari'a* provides is general principles, values and norms, and it is up to each generation, using *ijtilhād*, to devise a political system that best meets society's needs.

In their discourse, the New Islamists address themselves to the extremes of right and left, to the religious and the non-religious, in order

to articulate a centre—a national consensus based upon pluralism and equal rights. They approach all subjects from a position of *ijtihad*, which they see as essential to the revitalized understanding of Islam needed to underpin their new society. They readily admit that they do not have all of the answers for the social, economic and political reconstruction of their society. Nor do they put themselves forward as the exclusive spokesmen for Islam or recognize any group which claims such exclusivity. Their moderate stands put them at odds with extremists. Unfortunately, the Egyptian regime has often lumped these moderates with the extremists in hasty attempts to suppress the latter, further exacerbating the situation. For example, a political party founded on the principles advocated by the New Islamists, the Wassat Party, which included Muslims and Copts, was denied legitimacy by the regime and thus prevented from fielding candidates for election. This ‘black and white’ approach to ‘things Islamic’ is neither conducive to harmony nor constructive when it comes to addressing Egypt’s pressing national concerns. It is certainly a counter-productive method of dealing with the conditions that facilitate the emergence of extremist attitudes and their propagation. Regardless, the New Islamists have taken upon themselves the task of *tarshid*, ‘guidance’, and seem to be gaining valuable ground. Only time will tell if the vision that they articulate can succeed and endure.

#### **Resistance to state Islamization in India and Pakistan**

Islam arrived in India roughly at the same time as in Egypt, but it took centuries before a civilizational structure developed there to produce an outstanding and truly unique expression of Islam. Distinctive in many respects, Indian Muslims have had continuous links with the Middle East and have often shared similar experiences and challenges, for example, British rule during parts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Sometimes they even shared the same rulers: a scion of the Baring banking family, Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer) was a finance minister in India before he became the British consul-general in Egypt in 1883, a post which he held until 1907.

It is tempting to think, like those who ‘essentialize’ Islam, that Indian and Egyptian Muslims have responded in the same way to modern, external and secular pressures like colonialism. However, Muhammad Qasim Zaman dispels any notion of the homogeneity of Muslim thought in *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, a masterly study of the role of the ‘*ulamā*’ in India and, after 1947, in Pakistan. Zaman focuses upon those Muslim intellectuals who were trained in conventional *madrasas*, especially the Deobandi *madrasa*, and who fall within the category of ‘traditionalists’ in William Shepard’s typology. They are not Islamic modernists like Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal, nor

are they Islamist activists like Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Mawdudi. Although numerically they are a minority, it would be a mistake to consider their role as insignificant or inconsequential. In fact, it is persistent and seems to be expanding. In 1947, there were only 150 *madrasas* in Pakistan; currently, there are more than 2700 of these traditional institutions in Punjab province alone.

Zaman starts out by examining the response of the ‘*ulamā*’ to the changing world around them as occasioned by the advent of British colonialism. Confronted with both colonial law and British ‘reform’ of their own laws, these scholars had to devise strategies and justifications to safeguard Muslim law and the foundational sources of such law, as well as the qualifications of individuals who could interpret the law in an authoritative manner. In assuming a conservative position regarding several issues that they felt encroached upon the *shari‘a*, like the circumstances surrounding the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act of 1939, these ‘*ulamā*’ not only preserved the integrity of the Muslim community—and, of course, Islam, at least from their perspective—but also created a space for their own continued leadership. What Zaman has demonstrated is that the ‘*ulamā*’ “had the resources within the Islamic legal tradition to bring about legal change [and] that the ulema were indispensable to the guidance of the community” (30-31).

What is remarkable here is that, rather than invoking *ijtihād*, like their counterparts elsewhere, these ‘*ulamā*’ have opted for *taqlīd* or the imitation of past precedent. This is particularly striking because most of these ‘*ulamā*’ belong to the Hanafi school of law, usually considered the most cosmopolitan of Islam’s four schools, whose founder, Abu Hanifa, was the original champion of *ijtihād*. While *taqlīd* in other contexts might rightfully convey rigidity and petrification, Zaman makes it clear that this has not been the case here, particularly in his discussion of contending Deobandi viewpoints on the partition of India. One can follow *taqlīd* while still having the latitude to practice *ijtihād* in some instances. So although al-Mawdudi favoured partition to create an Islamic state, another Deobandi scholar, Mawlana Husyan Ahmad Madani, opposed partition and advocated a position of “united nationalism.”

Zaman also notes the diversity of opinion in religious commentaries. He shows that these commentaries, rather than representing useless, sterile scholasticism, have “allowed scholars to preserve the identity and the authority of their school, their legal tradition, while simultaneously providing them with the means of making sometimes important adjustments in that tradition” (38). One of his examples is taken from the work of Mawlana Zafar Ahmad Uthmani, a Deobandi scholar who not only used his commentary on the Hadith to show that the Hanafi school is solidly based in the Prophetic tradition, but also used that same

Prophetic tradition to refute the position of Madani, his Deobandi colleague, on united nationalism.

Having established the authority of their school and legal tradition and having carved out a central role for themselves in the process, the *‘ulamā’* needed to maintain their role both under colonial rule, which introduced educational ‘reform’ (that is, a secular curriculum), and in post-independence states, which also moved to regulate education and bring educational institutions under their control. Under British rule, many a *madrasa* was closed down, especially if it did not teach secular or (according to the criteria of some administrators) otherwise ‘useful’ subjects. In his discussion of the issues surrounding the *madrasa* reforms in Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s, Zaman observes that they apparently amounted to little more than government attempts to bring the *madrasas* under its control. But much as they had resisted British attempts, the *‘ulamā’* also defied the Pakistani state, seeing the proposed reforms as thinly-veiled pretexts to undermine altogether the institution of the *madrasa* and the authority of the *‘ulamā’*. The differing view of reform held by these scholars was lost on the government. These Deobandi *‘ulamā’* did not see reform in terms of incorporating a secular or ‘useful’ curriculum into their courses of study. Rather, reform meant a change that would bring “religious doctrine and practice, as interpreted by these reforms, into conformity with whatever is conceived of as true or original Islam” (80).

In resisting the state and keeping their distance from it, these *‘ulamā’* nurture an ambivalent position toward state power. Such ambivalence may have existed in the past, but here Zaman discusses the immediate background to current configurations, particularly the efforts of the government of General Zia ul-Haqq (1977-88) and its “thoroughgoing program of Islamization,” which was continued by the subsequent government of Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s. Despite the widespread Islamization, tension between the *‘ulamā’* and the state did not dissipate—in fact, it may have increased—and Zaman argues that the Haqq and Sharif eras saw the commencement of Pakistan’s current social problems. Government-appointed judges, who were often Western-educated, had little regard for the ability of the *‘ulamā’* to interpret the law, considering them anachronistic, if not completely uneducated, because they had not attended college or university. Meanwhile, the *‘ulamā’* grew more suspicious of the state, which was strengthening its authority and expanding its legitimacy at their expense through the Islamization programs. Indeed, the state’s newfound strength allowed it to penetrate deeply into all of its citizens’ affairs.

The *‘ulamā’* have also had an ambivalent relationship to those Islamist activists who call for an Islamic state. Zaman explains this situation with

references to the Sunni activist, al-Mawdudi, and the Shi'i, Khomeini. At stake is the eventual role of the 'ulamā' and the entire issue of authority. Thus, while al-Mawdudi saw authority as resting with the *amir*, the head of the community that brought about the Islamic state, for Khomeini, authority *was* the head of the state, as encapsulated by his notion of *vilayat-i-faqih*, and he went so far as to suggest that the government's power should not be constrained by Islamic law. In sum, the ambivalence of the 'ulamā' to these activists, notwithstanding their call for the implementation of the *shari'a* in an Islamic state, has been related to their fear that, "in the guise of upholding Islam, the state might make it subservient to its own goals and ultimately absorb it within itself" (107).

Of interest in Zaman's unfolding discussion of the role of Pakistan's 'ulamā' is the emergence of sectarian identities and the subsequent intensification of Sunni-Shi'i conflict. Several factors are responsible for this turn of events and Zaman discusses the social and economic background of the persons and groups involved in sectarian conflict. One factor was the Iranian Revolution, which seems to have emboldened the Pakistani Shi'a to raise several grievances against existing conditions and to demand the right to practice Shi'ism freely. Shi'i political parties were formed, protest marches were held and petitions were signed. A particular Shi'i group, Sipah-i Muhammad, came into being in 1991 and was linked to violent methods; it eventually splintered into many extremist factions. Fearing the spread of the Islamic Revolution or of Shi'ism itself, as well as the vilification of Muhammad's companions in Shi'i ceremonies, militant Sunni groups, such as Sipah-i Sahaba, began to organize in turn. Zaman discusses this militant environment and its deadly consequences (over 900 sectarian riots in eight years with 436 dead and over 1000 injured) not only in terms of sectarianism, but also in relation to the social and economic forces in Pakistan that fuelled the tension.

Sunnis and Shi'is share a great deal, especially their rural-urban dislocation, their traditional *madrassa* education and even their participation in the war in Afghanistan. Altogether, sectarianism seems to have expanded the influence of the 'ulamā' from the bottom up, especially with the expansion of the *madrassa* network to accommodate the millions of Afghani refugees who were displaced by decades of war. Of course, several other factors influenced these developments, not least US and Saudi financial assistance and Pakistan's strategic decision to support the students, the Taliban, of these *madrassa* institutions in their attempt to take Kabul in 1996. In one sense, the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan may be seen as an expansion of the role of the Deobandi 'ulamā', who had educated the new rulers in their schools. And, not surprisingly, the sectarian milieu in which these students were educated had its effects

later in Afghanistan, as the massacre of Shi'is in Mazar-i-Sharif demonstrates.

Although not all of the Deobandi '*ulamā*' supported the Taliban's vision of Islam and its method of rule, Pakistan's active participation in the Afghan regime's eventual fall exacerbated the poor relations between the '*ulamā*' and the regime of Parvez Musharraf. Such conditions ensured the continuation of ambiguities regarding the role of Islam and the '*ulamā*' in Pakistani public life and the latter's ambivalent attitude to the state.

Zaman ends his study by describing and comparing the religio-political activism of some '*ulamā*' in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and India, exploring the links that they forge with one another and with governments (especially for financial support). These links have been important in allowing the '*ulamā*' to situate themselves within larger developments in the Islamic world. A case in point discussed by Zaman involves the career of the Indian scholar, Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadawi. With Saudi support and with his own perspective on Islam and nationalism, especially as they pertained to India, Nadawi was a virulent critic of Arab nationalism and chastised the Arabs for abandoning Islam. In general, however, the failed promises of liberal, nationalist and socialist ideologies (in addition to Islamist activists) have given the '*ulamā*' a space in which to continue to exert their influence. This prospect, according to Zaman, should raise the

well-worn question of how the interests of Islam are best served: Are they served better by trying to interpret the foundational religious texts in a way that modern exigencies and values seem to require? Or should long-standing religious traditions as historically articulated guide the position one adopts in facing these exigencies (190)?

The answer, it seems, as these questions are debated by Muslims everywhere—and not only the traditionally-educated '*ulamā*', who are, after all, but a thread in a tapestry—is bound to be varied and complex, and the paths taken will be multiple.

### **Conclusion**

The three books before us deal with Islamic thought on different levels, from the macro to the micro level. In their edited volume, Taji-Farouki and Nafi show us the meandering path of Islamic thought in much of the Islamic world over the past century; Baker examines the Islamic thought of a group of Egyptian intellectuals, a movement to find a 'centre' that, while often relevant to Muslims in general, has the specificities of Egypt in mind; and Zaman considers a particular strand

of traditional thought as it has evolved in South Asia, but more so in Pakistan.

I will limit myself to two overarching observations by way of a conclusion. The first is that if Islamic thought could be described in one word, that word would be 'complex.' There is an incredible variety of Muslim opinions and attitudes on any single issue. This complexity has been a constant feature of Islamic thought throughout its history. Muslims who stood against the status quo and who wanted to change their society had recourse to inherent concepts within Islam, such as *iṣlāḥ* (reform), *tajdīd* (renewal), *ijtihād* and, above all, *tawḥīd*. In the twentieth century, the complexity increased as a result of the emergence of territorial nation-states, which have constantly influenced both religious and secular thought. Today, it is less accurate to speak of Islamic thought than of how Muslims in each nation-state think: despite the fact that they all use the same foundational texts as their sources of legitimacy, the evidence shows that Muslims really want to address their own immediate concerns before all others. In fact, to do so and to reform one's own condition is Islamic practice as understood from the Qur'anic verse (13:11) which says: "God does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts." It is then more practical to think of the concerns of the immediate *umma* rather than the more abstract and unmanageable concerns of the universal Islamic community. The stalemate between the secularist and the religious that Shepard notes above means that the living conditions of the people will further deteriorate as each side tries to check the other. Some sort of accommodation between the two sides must be reached. Hopefully, it is an accommodation that will see the two sides as one wheel working for the common good, not as two separate wheels, each spinning its own interests.

The second and related observation is that studies like these allow us to see the historical trajectory of where Muslim thought, in all of its shades and configurations, has been and where it is now. The simple and obvious truth is that all thought, including religious thought, is historically conditioned. Understanding the political, economic and social context can provide us with clues on how thought was constructed and how we can deconstruct it, and I use 'deconstruct' in the literal meaning of the word—to pick apart, to dismantle—so as to render its extremist versions ineffective. Extremist thought is the by-product of a set of circumstances often described as including poverty, oppression, alienation and other negative attributes. Thus, if extremist thought is a threat, then it is the circumstances which nurture it that must be addressed and resolved.

