

# Islamic Perspective

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# **Ethno-apotheosis and Bilderverbot:**

## ***The Theo-Philosophical Basis for the Current Western Daseinkampf***

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### **Abstract**

The West today is seeing another rise in fascism. While these new forms of palingenetic ultra-nationalism often appear aesthetically distinct from their mid-twentieth century predecessors, they preserve within their new identity philosophy the same philosophical and theological elements as their predecessors. Taken together, these core elements can be classified as the “fascist minimum,” or “geist of fascism.” These newer forms of fascism, which I have called “Alt-Fascism,” have arisen partly due to the dysgenic nature of neoliberalism, which has increased the numbers of the precariat in the West. However, the rise of Alt-Fascism can also be attributed to modern cosmopolitanism and the multicultural post-secular society, which has brought millions of non-Westerners into the western “ethnosphere,” offering them a political form of westernity detached from traditional ethnos. Rage against these “foreigners” is especially acute when the foreigners are also Muslims from the Middle East and Africa. Against these Islamic “invaders,” Alt-Fascists have developed a radical identity politics that includes at its core an *apotheosis*, or deification, of an assumed identity rooted in pre-modern European history and culture, as a way of remarrying what they see as the basis of their traditional identity: blood and soil. By retreating into a biological-spatial concept of identity, they hope to impose a stigma of “non-

identity” onto the European Muslim community. Against this return to identity philosophy stands the Frankfurt School, who philosophical translation of Judaism’s *bilderverbot* (image ban) forbids anyone from elevating the temporal to the level of the divine, as a way of forbidding the rise of another Hitler. The Frankfurt School’s metapolitical work, wherein their anti-identity-thinking philosophy has saturated much of the West’s consciousness in regard to ethnic minorities post-Shoah, remains one of the most stubborn opponents to the rebarbarization of the West, especially Europe. As such, it is the Alt-Fascists’ most formidable opponent in the current *daseinkampf*. In this sense, it is the work of secular Jewish intellectuals who have prepared the way for the multicultural modern Europe that the Alt-Fascist are now attempting to undermine, and it is against both the Muslims and the Frankfurt School that Alt-Fascists direct their ire.

**Key Words:** Alt-Fascism, Ethnos, Anti-Ethnos, Bilderverbot, Idolatry, Apophatic Theology, *Daseinkampf*.

## Introduction

In response to the growing collapse of neoliberalism and the world order it established after the end of the Cold War, as well as the cultural, social, and secular/religious “chaos” that developed during the triumph of neoliberalism, new forms of fascism have begun to arise in order to bring order back to a dysgenic and disorderly world. Although these new forms of fascism are often perceived as being something other than fascism, they uniformly determinately negate (*aufhaben*) their fascist predecessors, especially Mussolini’s Italian Fascism and Hitler’s National Socialism. This means they both preserve and negate their antecedence, thus giving the appearance that they are something other than fascism while keeping within themselves the very core of fascism, what can be called the “fascist minimum” or the “geist of fascism.” In this essay, I have dubbed these new forms of “alternative fascism,” or “Alt-Fascism,” as they are built upon the same philosophical, theological, and ideological foundations as their predecessors while making substantive changes to warrant distinction. In some cases, Alt-Fascism appears as something new simply because it has developed out of a different historical and time context as its predecessors, thus it is saturated with the cultural markers of its new host society. American Alt-Fascism appears as something very America, which it is. But its contemporary American appearance does not negate its philosophical kinship to historical fascism, nor does such an appearance adequately hide its roots in the same ideology as historical fascism. In other cases, the leaders of

contemporary Alt-Fascism intentionally camouflage their ideology's philosophical dependence on its historical predecessors by linguistic acrobatics and false analogies. For example, the fact that Alt-Fascist leaders generally do not publicly call for gas chambers or the violent overthrow of their enemies, allows them that they're not fascists at all. Although the difference in method may have changed – from politics to metapolitics – their core ideology remains consistent.

Central to the philosophy of Alt-Fascism is the concept that I describe as “ethno-apotheosis” (ἔθνικός- ἀποθέωσις): the “deification” (*apotheosis*) of the ontologically rooted nation (*ethnos*), so that it becomes an socio-political and cultural absolute that constructs a comprehensive way-of-being-in-the-world that cannot be transgressed. In other words, it becomes an authoritarian imperative that demands absolute submission from all those it seeks to rule. Such a deified ethnicity serves as the basis for “white nationalist identity politics,” the core of contemporary fascism. This deified *ethnos* thoroughly structures the *weltanschauung* (worldview) of the Alt-Fascists, and that worldview saturates every aspect of their lifeworld.

Nevertheless, despite its success in attracting multitudes of followers within the carnage of neoliberalism, such a rebirth of fascist ideology does not remain unopposed in contemporary Western society. In this essay, I will argue that the deification of ethnicity is also the basis for Alt-Fascism's conflict with the Frankfurt School and its critical theory of religion, especially its philosophical translation of the Jewish concept of *bilderverbot* into a socio-political category, which defies all attempted to create false-absolutes out of the temporal, the conditioned, and/or the created. Pitted against each other, the struggle between the Alt-Fascist ethno-apotheosis and the Jewish *bilderverbot* provide the conceptual framework for understanding the *daseinkampf* that Alt-Fascists and the Frankfurt School are currently engaged in within the West's neoliberal collapse.

## Ethnos

If we are going to understand what is deified by various forms of Alt-Fascism, then we must have a firm grasp on what Alt-Fascists believe ethnicity to be, especially in contradistinction to the concept of “race.” Once we have an adequate understanding of “*ethnos*,” we can then explore how such a concept can be elevated to the level of a false-absolute and see how it is used to structure the worldview and lifeworld of the Alt-Fascist and their struggle against modernity.

In his Fourth Political Theory, the Alt-Fascist Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin argues that *ethnos* (ἔθνος) should be understood as “community of language, religious belief, daily life, and the sharing of resources and goals; as an organic entity written into an ‘accommodating landscape,’” as well as a “refined system for constructing models for married life; as an always-unique means of establishing a relationship with the outside world; as the matrix of the ‘lifeworld’” (Dugin, 2012: 47). Dugin’s conception of *ethnos* overlaps with the German term *volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community), as the *volk* (people) are bound together by their pre-political foundations: *blut und boden* (blood and soil), shared language, traditions, religion, and historical geographical space. In his book *Ethnos and Society*, Dugin argues that *ethnos* is *koineme*, or the “simplest form of society,” i.e. its “invariable structure,” which remains constant as a society continues to develop and become more complex (Dugin, 2018: 1). In other words, *ethnos* is the unchanging *geist*, the core, the foundation, of a society that continues to develop in its social ornamentation and on its cultural peripheries. Regardless of what develops on the surface, the submerged foundation remains constant and consistent, wholly resistant to the changes made on the surface of the society.

For the New Right philosophers Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, ethnicity is central to anthropology, as a people’s anthropology delivers to them knowledge of who they are. As such, “it represents the essence of people’s relations among themselves and with the world” (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012: 17). Thus, without firm knowledge of such a self-discovering anthropology, the new members of that people will continue to lose connections with their ancestors, the historical sources of their civilization, their own cultural resources, and thus themselves. The key to maintaining consistent national identity is the continue reproduction and inculcation of this ethno-anthropology in each generation. Consciousness of historical-being is consciousness of present-reality.

Julius Evola, who is one of the most important philosophical and spiritual sources of Alt-Fascism, argues in his book *The Myth of the Blood: The Genesis of Racism*, three key points about “race,” which he uses in the same way that many of his intellectual heirs use the term “*ethnos*.” First, he claims that the concept of “humanity” is an “abstract fiction” (Evola, 2018: 1). Human nature is not universal but rather determined by race. Because of this, there is no equality among the races, as there is no equality in nature. There is only difference. Second, each race has a “determinate spirit,” which “constitutes its internal aspect” or even its “formative cause” (Ibid). As such, the spirit of the race “stands at the basis of the form proper



to its civilization, to the creation and to the deeds of those individuals which compose it” (Ibid). Last, corresponding to every “race of the spirit” (*theoû génos*) is a historical task – the project that through the confluence of history, fate has determined for each civilization and peoples (Ibid, 2). Such a historical task can be forgotten or neglected when the ethnotic particularity of a given people, and thus the particularity of its historical task, is abandoned for a cosmopolitan mixing of blood with other races, etc. The lesser the purity of blood, the less the people are congruent with the mission bestowed upon them by their ethno-geist. As such, in order to remain faithful to the primordial ethnos, and thus the ethno-bound historical task, every volk must abandon the practice of racial mixing, for it pollutes the blood and dilutes the spirit of the people. The Judaic, Christian, and Islamic idea of monogenesis, which was substantiated within secular scientific language via modern anthropology, proves to be dysgenic for every nations’ distinct characteristics and transcendental project. Therefore, many Alt-Fascists, much like their fascist predecessors, hold fast to the myth of a polygenesis in order to preserve the “uniqueness” of each nation and their historical task.

Although the idea that each race has an accompanying spirit unique to itself has precedent among the ancients, it can also be found in the medieval period with Jean Bodin, Pierre Le Charron, and Tomaso Campanella, as well as the Enlightenment thought of Montesquieu. However, it was with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic philosopher Johann Herder (and later by Fichte), and Herder’s notion of “*völkerggeist*,” or “ethnopluralism,” that the idea was carried successfully into modernity (Ibid., 5-6). Yet, as Evola mentions in his citation of Herder, Herder’s conception did not quite ascent to the level of biology or race, but rather his concept of a nation remained closed within the confines of culture. In other words, it stayed within the realm of “faith, language, and literature” (Ibid., 6). Nevertheless, even for Herder, the spirit of different peoples attested to their differentiation, and therefore their distinct being-in-the-world that ought not be sacrificed for cultural amalgamation among the nations.

The idealist philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation*, took Herder’s concept of *völkerggeist* even further, cementing the connection between the realm of biology to the realm of spirit. In his “Thirteenth Address,” Fichte says,

*Spiritual nature was able to present the essence of humanity in extremely diverse gradations in individuals and in individuality as a whole, in peoples. Only when each people, left to itself, develops and*

*forms itself in accordance with its own peculiar quality, and only when in every people each individual develops himself in accordance with that common quality, as well as in accordance with his own peculiar quality then, and then only, does the manifestation of divinity appear in its true mirror as it ought to be; and only a man who either entirely lacks the notion of the rule of law and divine order, or else is an obdurate enemy thereto, could take upon himself to want to interfere with that law, which is the highest law in the spiritual world. Only in the invisible qualities of nations, which are hidden from their own eyes qualities as the means whereby the nations remain in touch with the source of original life only therein is to be found the guarantee of their present and future worth, virtue, and merit. If these qualities are dulled by admixture and worm away by friction, the flatness that results will bring about a separation from spiritual nature, and this in its turn will cause all men to be fused together to their uniform and conjoint destruction (Fichte, 1922/2017: 114-115; Evola, 2018: 8-9).*

What is extraordinarily clear with this passage is twofold: (1) every ethnos has a spirit that animates its historical-being that is wholly unique to itself, and (2) “admixture” of the ethnos with members of another ethnos results in a violent rupture – if not complete divorce – of ethne from their corresponding historical-spirits, leaving both ethne flattened, disfigured, and emaciated – drained of that which animates it. This *rassengeist* (ethno-spiritualist) philosophy explicitly argues the following: *Diversity in isolation*, i.e. ethnopluralism, protects both spirit and the biological ethnos, as diverse societies remain monolithic within themselves. *Diversity in conglomeration*, as one finds in modern multicultural and multiethnic democracies, destroys both spirit and biological ethnos of the host peoples and their culture.

If we distill these notions of ethnicity into a conception, we are left with the following: ethnicity is conceived of as being the unique physiological and spiritual characteristics of a given people who are related to each other both biologically and culturally, via blood, soil, language, shared history, tradition, and religion (pre-political foundations). As such, true ethnicity is dependent on biology and spirit being identical; it is both an anthropological reality and a Dasein-existentialism. From this perspective, wherever the connection between blood and spirit is severed, there you find dysgenic and ultimately necrogenic tendencies. Thus, non-

identity is the geography of chaos, discord, and strife, which calls out for a radical cleaning: a *daseinkampf* (struggle for existence).

With this rassegeist philosophy in mind, the regenerative task of modern Alt-Fascism, is (1) the purification of the ethnos via biopolitics, (2) the purification of the ethnos' intellectual realm via the dissemination of palingenetic ideology, and (3) the congealment of the purified ethnos around a social, political, and cultural project: the transformation of the West into an Archeofuturist ethnostate, wherein the West is able to actualize its Faustian *dasein* without being impeded upon by the "anatopists" (those in the wrong place), i.e. non-Westerners in the West. In such a way, the spirit of the *Urvolk* (primordial people), those who were firmly *bodengebunden* ("bound to the soil") is revived and can once again shine brightly through its descendants in their world-historical project.

## Deification of Ethnos

*Apotheosis* is the assimilation of a temporal subject to the status of a god. In Latin, apotheosis is translated to *deificatio*, or the process of "making divine." In both the Greek and Roman worlds, the distinction between the gods and mankind was porous and ill-defined, and at least since the time of Alexander of Macedon (356-323 BC), worship (*cultus*) was directed towards human rulers as if they were gods, or at least demigods (Cross and Livingstone, 1997: 92). Additionally, it was common practice in the Roman Empire for the Emperors to be worshiped (or honored) as if they were gods. Emperor Augustus chose the honorific title of *divi Filius*, or "divine son," as he was the adopted son of Julius Caesar who was deified by the Roman Senate, then becoming "Divus Iulius" (Divine Julius), after his assassination on March 15, 44 BC. Christians in the Roman Empire did not accept the divinity of the emperors, for it conflicted with their exclusivist-theology. This refusal to honor the emperors with cultic ritual, which they believed was reserved exclusively for the true divinity, may have been one of the reasons why they were sporadically persecuted by the Roman state (Ibid). However, Christian Emperors through Theodosius I (347-395 CE) used the honorific title "divi," but did not claim divinity themselves. Rather, it designated a humbler position; it was a way of expressing the idea that they ruled by the grace of the Divine alone (Ibid). Without such grace, the Christian emperor had no authority over the Christian believers. Saints were also afforded the title "divi" with their canonization. However, canonization is not deification, as the saints remain mere mortals – albeit augmented in their nearness to the divine – despite their august standing in the church (Ibid).

With this in mind, we can argue that apotheosis – or the process of “making divine” – is an act by which a temporal, created, or material entity, subject to all the laws of nature, time, and space, is reconceived of as an absolute – outside of the laws of nature, time, and space. The time-bound and earthly-nature of the entity is given a new extra-earthly existence. This deified entity is no longer the subjected to the confines of history but is in fact the author of history. It is that which decides the *fatum et fortuna* (fate and fortune) of the world. In other words, that which was profane was made sacred, and given the powers of the absolute sovereign (Agamben, 2007: 73-76).

This deification of the temporal has societal implications: the absolute must be recognized, honored, and obeyed. Since it is conceived of as that-which-is-not-conditioned, but is the conditioning subject, it demands obedience, loyalty, and submission. Through such submission it offers an ontologically rooted identity, a well-defined community, and a clear path to individual and social redemption, through which the community preserves itself as the people uniquely unified with and through the sovereign absolute. By keeping the conditions of loyalty set forth by the absolute, a “covenant” if you will, the community remains protected, given a geo-spatial place to flourish, and the time, resources, and a collective will-to-power to actualize their world-historical purpose. However, when the absolute is neglected or abandoned, when the absolute as axis-mundi is no longer consulted in the daily affairs of its people, the community suffers. In a free-floating subjectivity, it loses its sense of self, its sense of mission, its sense of enrootedness, and its ability to define itself on the basis of its primordial being (its absolute). Without a strong attachment to the deified absolute, there is no ontologically rooted community, no firm identity enrooted in space and time, and thus no future as a unique people existing as an expression of their unique geist.

On the foundations of Herder and Fichte, and the biocentric philosopher Ludwig Klages, as well as the traditionalists and occultists Rene Guénon and Julius Evola, today’s alternative fascist movements have rejected the Abrahamic cosmopolitan deity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and deified ethnos in all its tribal particularity, placing it at the center of their socio-political *lebensphilosophie* and identity politics. As such, ethnos, being both physiological and a matter of spirit, and manifested in the particularity of culture, becomes the unmovable core at the center of a people’s national identity. Being of such importance to the individual and society, ethnos is transfigured into the unconditioned absolute. Without exception, it is the entity that cannot be forsaken without violating the covenant,

denigrating the primordial identity, and abandoning the historical task, all of which would have deleterious effects on all members of the ethnos. For Alt-Fascists and their antecedents, to forsake the ethnos risks the loss of a distinct identity, as amalgamation leads to dysgenic and necrogenic social developments: the flattening of global diversity into a monoculture and mono-ethnos.

From the perspective of the Alt-Fascists, as a given people's identity is manifest within the outward expressions of the ethnos, i.e. culture, tradition, religion, and other historically rooted markers of identity, must be protected as essential elements within the continual reproduction of their distinct society. However, this reproduction of the already existing society also means the preservation of social statics, i.e. the perpetuation of inequality, the class structure, social hierarchies, gender antagonisms, minimization of autonomy against collective solidarity, etc. In other words, in order to preserve both the biological and ontological uniqueness of a people, certain injustices have to remain, for within the confines of social statics, traditional identity is reproduced. The progressive push within history, as Hegel would attest to and Marx sought to bring about, undermines the very basis of traditional society, especially when "progress" means a struggle for an increasingly equal society at the expense of the already existing society and its historical inequalities. Equality translates to the proletarianization of the demos; It is the rule of the mob, the anonymous *Das Mann*, the herd, i.e. those who are carriers of the ethnos without being identical expressions of the ethnos. In their mediocrity, they are the greatest threat to the devolution of ethnotic society, as they are the weak link within it. As such, they must remain concealed within the confines of the already existing society by (1) ideological saturation amongst the demos, and (2) the systematic expulsion of all other alternatives to the existing traditional society, either ideologically or physically (segregation or exclusion).

Because the threat of devolution of the ethnos via progressivism is ever-present, the ethno-apotheosis is all the more necessary. As stated before, in the name of social statics, ethnos is theologically transformed into the absolute which commands obedience, submission, and the abandonment of the individual will. As a fascist absolute, it (1) gives a sense of primordial enrootedness in the European ethnosphere; it (2) provides an interpretation of reality, i.e. the reification of racial hierarchy and/or the justness of racial exclusion; it (3) delivers an orientation of action, i.e. the defense and reproduction of the ontologically-bound ethnostate; it (4) provides a set of strictures that delineates "in-group" and "out-group" identities, and in doing so makes the "enemy" identifiable; it (5) provides sacred time, space,

individuals, and literature, i.e. those entities that are tied to the history and preservation of Europe's Greco-Roman and Germanic heritage, etc., and (6) it provides a powerful social adhesive for all Europeans and European-derived peoples. Like a traditional religious deity, the deified ethnos, through its authentic representatives, can call upon the devout to defend it from the "hordes" that are "invading" the white ethnosphere; it can expect them to do horrible atrocities in the name of the ethnos, including genocide of the "anatopists" – those responsible for *überfremdung* (over-foreignization) and *déculturation*. All atrocities can be justified in the name of the deified ethnos, as that deity is the sole possessor of autonomy and ultimate authority. Because individualism has been absorbed and neutralized by the collective identity, all "sins" – according to the Abrahamic moral systems – that are done at the behest of the ethnos can be forgiven since it is the collective *volksgemeinschaft* (ethnic community) that benefits from those sins. Ethnic collectivity absolves the individual of the sins committed in the name of the ethnos. It is only when the individual sins *against* the ethnos that the collective cannot burden responsibility and absolve the sin. Rather, it is the opposite; it has a duty to punish the individual for their transgressions against the deified ethnos.

Nevertheless, there is a profound weakness in ethno-apotheosis: it is idolatry. It is rooted within a false-absolute. It is an escape from reality and freedom into the arms of illusion and unfreedom. That which can be transfigured into the divine by human hands can also be made temporal, for that which delivers divinity to the object is itself subject to the authority of that which delivered its divine status, i.e. the people themselves. The deified objected does not self-deify. Rather, it is dependent on a deifying agent for its godly augmentation. Therefore, even though it is reconceived as an absolute, it remains conditioned, as its assumed absolutivity is born from outside of itself, and thus dependent on an external source of authority for its absolutization; in this case, the *volksgemeinschaft* is where the power of deification lies. In other words, that which was taken from the realm of mankind and deified, can be dragged back into profanity; it can be expunged from the realm of the gods and returned to the realm of mankind ((Ibid). The reality of the false-absolute, the ideology of ethno-apotheosis, and the destructivity it engenders against the non-identical "antopists," is precisely why the *bilderverbot* (image ban) of the Second Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue is deployed by the Frankfurt School in its struggle against fascist rebarbarization. This ban on idols, translated into political philosophy, is precisely what the Alt-Fascists today are attempting to overcome, as the metapolitical work of the Frankfurt School within the institutions

of the West have been the greatest stumbling block within their quest for the reintegration of the West into an exclusive ethnosphere.

## Muslims as the Anti-Ethnos

In Europe today, the image of the Muslim community have congealed into a singularity in the minds of Alt-Fascists: they are the *anti-ethnos* – the living embodiment of that which is in opposition to the life, wellbeing, and future of the historical European ethnoi. As such, they are the penultimate enemy of the European *dasein*; not merely an ideological enemy, but an existential threat – all the more potent as they grow in number and assimilate into European society. Thus, the struggle against immigration into Europe is a *daseinkampf* – a struggle to the death between authentic (*eigentlich*) Europeans and the inauthenticity (*uneigentlichkeit*) of modern European cosmopolitanism, of which the growing Muslim community is seen as the main threat (Heidegger 1962).

Alt-Fascist do not follow the liberal ideology of political-based citizenship: the *willensgemeinschaft* (willed community), wherein membership in the nation is granted by the nation itself, since it is the elected representatives who are burdened with the implementation of the demos' autonomy. However, community, for Alt-Fascists, is not chosen so inorganically; it is not a matter of the autonomous will, nor is it the work of an elected government. Rather, it must grow from the historical-biological ethnos and its accompanying geist. Following Alexander Dugin, if "ethnos" is the "community of language, religious belief, daily life, and the sharing of resources and goals; as an organic entity written into an 'accommodating landscape,'" which conditions the "always-unique means of establishing a relationship with the outside world; as the matrix of the 'lifeworld,'" then the newly European Muslim immigrants, no matter what generation they are in Europe, remain stubbornly outside of that ethnotic matrix (Dugin 2012: 47). This is due not because they have resisted being integrated into European culture, but rather because the Alt-Fascist conception of community and/or nation allows no entry into its determining ethnos from those who are not a product of that ethnos via "nature" and "history." As the matrix of particularities that constitutes each ethnos is closed to only those who have organically sprung from that ethnos, no attempt to enter into any aspect of that ethnos from the outside can be tolerated, as all attempts, from the Alt-Fascist perspectives, leads to (1) and illusion of authenticity (*eigentlichkeit*) in the automaton plastic society, (2) the delusion of authenticity on the part of the well-intentioned "anatopist," and, from standpoint of Fichte and Klages, the

flattening and eventual “destruction” of the *geist* of the nation itself (Fichte, 1922/2017: 115). As such, the biopolitics of Alt-Fascism erects an impenetrable barrier to those attempting to seek entrance into the nation, as it restricts membership into the nation on the basis of *ethnos*’ inherent exclusivity. From the political perspective of the Alt-Fascist, the “liberals” that have opened up the floodgates to the “wretched of the earth,” especially to Muslim immigrants, have made the ultimate mistake: they have offered up their geographical space, their biological insularity, and the particularities of their *geistes*, with their corresponding historical task, to the slaughter of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the de-biologization of the “*demos*”; In a word: inauthenticity. As a result of their “openness” to the expansion of their community to non-authentic members, they have voted for their own “replacement” (Camus 2018).

Alt-Fascists argue that modern “democracies,” which cherish their socio-cultural diversities, have destroyed the very nations they believe their governments were tasked to protect. By offering membership in the nation, despite being from another *ethnos*, they have created a new people, one less dynamic, one less capable of sharing an historic task, and one less identical with, or at least a congruent extension of, its past self. The negative identity, the unalterable reality of non-identity, for the Alt-Fascist, which derives with living as an inauthentic member of an otherwise organic community, cannot be made permanent. The threat of genocide once again looms quietly in the midst of modern Alt-Fascist politics, for it is only in the purification of the *ethnos* that the *geist* of the people can survive modernity’s dysgenesis. Such a purification can only come about through two methods: (1) “remigration,” the anatopists’ willing return to their native homelands, or (2) through violent removal. The first, for the Alt-Fascist, is preferable, since the second would also mean the violent destruction of much of their own cherished societies. However, the second is secretly desired, as it appears as an opportunity for revenge against the non-identical other for fouling their *ethnosphere*, as well as revenge against the agent of the fouling: the liberal cosmopolitan citizen.

### **Against the Idolatry of a “Divine” *Ethnos***

The rise of alternative forms of fascism within the modern capitalistic and democratic societies was predicted in the 1950s by the Frankfurt School, who, while living in exile in the United States, continued their earlier research on the “authoritarian personality” amongst the American workers (Adorno et al 1950). What they found was that a larger percentage of Americans, just like their kin in



Europe, have personalities that are structured in such a way that they would welcome, support, and advance an authoritarian government and culture. It was no surprise to those familiar with American history that such a large percentage of Americans displayed these psychological characteristics. American history, just like European history, is a history of barbarism as well as accomplishment. Both are equally true, and both equally tell the story of the Western history. Nevertheless, the “spirit of America,” residing in America’s liberal ideology of freedom, justice, and democracy, which saturates the lifeworld of Americans, was thought to counteract the authoritarian structures found in many of citizens. However, what we’ve learned since the end of the Cold War and the triumph of neoliberalism is the following: as neoliberalism continues to create a world in its own image, i.e. a world of gross income inequality, justice disparities, and newer forms of economic and political colonialism, many authoritarian personalities have turned to greater forms of *völkisch* palingenetic right-wing authoritarianism (Alt-Fascism), which purports to create the psychological, as well as socio-political means, of halting the neoliberal onslaught. However, these newer forms of authoritarianism create false-idols in their fight against the neoliberal deconstruction of their societies, worldviews, and ways-of-being-in-the-world, which are just as dangerous and deadly as neoliberalism’s demons (Kotsko 2018). Being so, they are in fact iatrogenic: the “cure” of Alt-Fascism brings about a worse illness than the neoliberal hegemony it is meant to treat.

Against both the neoliberalism of the capitalist ruling-elites, as well as their right-wing *völkisch* detractors, stands the Frankfurt School, who have determinately negated the image ban of Judaism and Islam in their political philosophy. This secularized ban on images of the divine, stands firmly against the falsity of ethno-apotheosis – the deification of ethnos and its re-mythologization, undermining it and showing it to be merely wish-fulfillment, delusional, irrational, and ultimately a greater threat to Western civilization than neoliberalism itself. For these reasons, the Frankfurt School has become a central target by Alt-Fascist intellectuals and activists.

## **Bilderverbot: From Theology to Polity**

According to the first-generation critical theorist, Leo Löwenthal, Judaism, especially the *bilderverbot* – the Second Commandment of the Decalogue – the ban on false idols – was “codeterminative” for critical theory’s critique of society (Löwenthal, 1987: 112). This was attested to in a letter to Mr. Herz, dated

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969, written after the funeral of Theodor W. Adorno by his friend Max Horkheimer, who was also the initiator of the Frankfurt School for Social Research (Critical Theory). In the letter, Horkheimer states: “I may say that Critical Theory, which we both developed, has its roots in Judaism. It derives from the idea that *thou shalt make no image of God*” (Horkheimer, 2007: 361). Along with Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Judaism’s utopia motif, its longing for that which cannot be positively expressed, animated much of their work, even though it was often denied (Löwenthal, 1987: 232). “Conceived in sadness” but “filled with hope,” the early critical theorists, including Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin, secularized bilderverbot’s inherent theological negativity into a philosophical negativity that aimed at the critique of all that is augmented to the level of an absolute (Ibid., 74). As Adorno wrote in his *Negative Dialectics*,

*The Jewish religion brooks no word which might bring solace to the despair of all mortality. It places all hope in the prohibition on invoking falsity as God, the finite as the infinite, the lie as truth. The pledge of salvation lies in the rejection of any faith which claims to depict it, knowledge in the denunciation of illusion (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 17).*

This inherent negativity of the bilderverbot is translated into the political concept of utopia, which also remains radically “apophatic” (without positive articulation). Again, in his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes,

*The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology (Adorno, 1999: 207).*

Thus, the Jewish commandment by which God is not positively depicted, in image or in language, which then serves as an apophatic basis for critique of all false-idols, dialectically transforms into the apophatic concept of utopia, wherein all false-absolutes within the social-political realm are rejected as idolatrous, false, and illusionary. Just as the idols made of wood and stone cannot be made into gods, all that “puffs” itself up into being an absolute within the temporal and special socio-political realm is denounced as being a false utopia: mere wish fulfillment. That which cannot be positively depicted in apophatic theology can likewise not be

positively depicted in an apophatic utopia. As Max Horkheimer wrote in November of 1969, “according to Critical Theory, whatever is purely good, that is, the absolute positive, can’t be represented. On the other hand, we’ve always explained that what is bad, what is to be changed and improved, can be described in the most diverse fields” (Horkheimer, 2007: 362).

This refusal to positively articulate a utopia, or at least “the good,” while focusing purely on the negative, has spawned many critics of Critical Theory on the Left, who argue that critical theorists posit no affirmative goals for a future human condition, and therefore are only attempting to alleviate the liberal society of its imperfections. In other words, in not articulating a positive utopia, there is no concrete telos to their struggle. On the conservative right, individuals like Roger Scruton make a similar argument. He believes that critical theorists risk nothing because they stand *for* nothing, only *against* the world as it is. In his view, they are a purely negative affair – undermining that which they don’t like but replacing it with nothing better. Thus, their deconstruction of the already existing society does not produce a better society, only one that is more fragmented, disintegrating, and weakened, and thus more subject to the consumer society, drugs, kitsch, and anything else that will opiate the fissures of a plastic-modernity (Scruton, 2016: 115-158).

Additionally, many among the Alt-Fascists argue that Critical Theory’s Jewishness shows in its critique of the already existing society, especially in regard to Europe and its traditional folk culture and values. It is claimed that the Frankfurt School, with its notion of equality and universal human rights, the very essence of its “Judeo-Bolshevism,” undermines Europe’s national identities, thus making it a safe place for Jews to exist as “others” (anatomists) or even to “colonize” via its accommodating institutions, which diminish the historical ethnos of the given European nation in the name of multiculturalism, tolerance, and equality. Alt-Fascists remember that within a traditional Christian and/or ethno-nationalist society, Jews were the perpetual “non-identical,” the “anti-race” of the Europeans, and were thus *persona-non-grata*, and therefore at risk of annihilation (either through assimilation or through extermination). Therefore, Alt-Fascists claim that the work of the Jewish critical theorist is to destroy the ethnic particularities of the West, so that the “non-identical” can exist peacefully within a geography where there is no longer a particular historical ethnic identity to be non-identical with (MacDonald, 2002; Walsh, 2015).

## Kulturkampf is Daseinkampf

What we have in the modern *kulturkampf* is the struggle between two political philosophies built upon two secularized theologies. On the one hand, the Frankfurt School, building upon the apophatic Jewish Second Commandment, rejects the apotheosis of ethnos, as such a deification of ethnos is the worst kind of cataphatic idolatry; it manufactures a false-absolute out of biology and geist (*rassengeist*), which are inherently temporal, conditioned, dynamic, and subject to historical change. From the basis of that false-idol proceeds an illusionary attempt to posit a white ethnostate as a utopia for people of European descent – thus giving them a false hope of a return to an earthly Eden wherein they will escape the dysgenic and necrogenic conditions born of neoliberal modernity. It is a wishful yet impotent return to a fictional utopia, which attempts to unravel both the universalism of the Enlightenment and the Christian tradition. As such, it is a re-paganization retribalization, and rebarbarization of the West in order to bring about a Euro-pagan apocatastasis – one that would drive out all assumed dysgenic forces. Being so, it poses a deep threat to anyone non-identical to the white “ideal type” or to anyone anatopical, as it risks the reenactment of fascist totalitarianism, fascist eugenics, and genocide, in the name of the “rebirth” of the White West, who has once again found its unique “historical task.”

As the Frankfurt School, through its metapolitical influence on the institutions of the West, struggles against such a rebarbarization, the nature of this struggle becomes clearer: it is a *daseinkampf* – a very real struggle that goes beyond mere culture, but rather is a struggle for soul/geist of the modern West, one that will determine its nature and future.

## Conclusion

Today, because of the enormous failures of neoliberalism to create the just and prosperous world that it once promised, alternative forms of fascism have arisen in order to make the future more akin to the idealized past. This attempt to “return” to a bygone age is especially threatening to those who are newly “Western,” and don’t share in the historical ethnos of the people they now called neighbors. This is especially important for Muslim immigrants, who are often seen as being the alien and unwanted source of the West’s cultural decline as well as a hostile threat within the West. Alt-Fascism, just as its historical antecedent, promises to end such chaos and restore traditional society and culture, so that nations of Europe are once again

for the Europeans. In response to the rise of these new forms of Alt-Fascism, many on the political left have attempted to further undermine the “traditional” worldviews and cultures of Europe, in an attempt to create a more welcoming and inclusive space for the “others,” only to alienate further those who see their national cultures slipping away via secularism and multiculturalism. In light of this antagonism, the most important task of contemporary Critical Theory is to find avenues wherein the progressive ideals of the Enlightenment can be reconciled with those elements within traditional European culture and society that can still be preserved. Through the long and arduous process of *aufheben*, both a preservation and negation, as well as realization and augmentation, of those elements of traditional society must be kept alive and made available to continual reproduction within society. In other words, in order to transcend the being-towards-annihilation that manifests through Alt-Fascist politics, as well as the inherent destructiveness of the ideology of “progress,” the Critical Theorist, with one foot in history, culture, the arts, and historical identity, and the other in hope for the not-yet, more-peaceful, and fully reconciled society, must discover a path to determinately negate the negativity of both oppressive elements of the past and the destructiveness of “progress,” while preserving that which is essential for a future society both “enrooted in” and “transcending” the past without fetishizing the future. Alt-Fascism thrives on the purely negative; when that which was once the cornerstone of faith, being, and identity, is replaced by amorphous formalism, mere abstract freedoms, and cultural disintegration, an anxious people gravitate towards the “stabilizing” and “regenerative” forms of palingenetic authoritarianism, which promises to restore the abandoned world of yesterday. In order to avoid such a growth of authoritarianism, the past must find a home in the present, and the past must be made an integral part of the future, without subjugating the future to the dictates of the past.

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## **US Foreign Policy:**

### ***The Making of an Insecurity Community in the Muslim World***

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#### **Abstract**

Why is there no security in the Muslim world or its geographic proxy, the greater Middle East (ME)? This paper focuses on the role of the United States in creating a conflict-generating regional regime that governs the behavior of all states and their proxies, including the United States. Invoking the idea of “regime” implies that security is relational, interactional, and regional, meaning that multiple actors create it as each identifies and relates to the others as friends or foes. This relationality suggests the United States is neither the cause of regional insecurity nor the controlling agent of its outcomes. Yet, it is the key player in keeping the region in a permanent state of war. Focusing on the region as a unit of analysis, the article suggests that regional security cannot be reduced to the characteristics of any singular state such as its regime type, leadership style, sectarian tendency, resource curse, or even foreign alignment, as the mainstream literature often does. Using a qualitative method of discourse analysis based on texts produced by the American Foreign Policy Establishment (AFPE), this article questions the viability of America’s long-term strategic posture or lack thereof in the greater ME, which includes the South Asian states of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Security, Muslim world, United State of America, Proxy, Western Civilization.

## Introduction

Why does every state in the Muslim world or its geographic proxy, the greater Middle East (ME), suffer from insecurity? The mainstream literature in the Americentric field of international relations (IR) explains this tragedy either as a natural order of Middle Eastern governance dating back to millennia or a result of bad behavior by anti-American regimes and their proxies. In either case, the literature depicts the United States as a victim of violence perpetuated by its enemies, leaving it no choice but to defend its interests, values, and allies with violence if necessary. Representing America as a victim, the mainstream IR literature depicts the United States as the only legitimate sovereign authority endowed with the legal right, moral responsibility, and institutional capacity to bring peace, democracy, and development to the region. Representing itself as both a victim and global leader, the mainstream literature creates a Manichean discourse of good versus evil founded on a series of flawed binaries. For example, one can easily observe how they, referring to US enemies, choose war; we have no choice but to fight them. They are fanatics; we are reasonable. They have no respect for human rights or civilian lives; we do. They cause collateral damage; we limit it. They wage war to repress their people and dominate their region; we fight not only to defend our vital national interest but also to protect the human rights of others. They are malicious, angry, deceitful, and dishonorable; we are peace-loving, principled, trustworthy, and well-meaning. In effect, the common theme in these dualities, although expressed ever so cryptically and always veiled by political correctness, revolves around the idea that “we” are superior to “them.” Constructed and promoted in the circles of US policy elites, this shared sense of superiority shapes and defines the public discourse of American patriotism in which the myth of America, as a liberal empire of good in an eternal fight against evil, is constructed. Indeed, this shared sense of superiority constitutes the epistemological foundation of America as an exceptional liberal empire endowed with the natural right to give or take life, to build a nation or bomb it, to lead the world in a coalition of the willing or go it alone. Indeed, it is this shared sense of imperial we-ness that makes it possible for a rather small number of policy elites to easily name and rename enemies of the United States in the ME without having too much fear of public blow back. Unsurprisingly, Americentric security experts almost always blame others for creating insecurity in the Middle East, while they totally dismiss the role of the United States in producing and maintaining a conflict-generation regime of insecurity in the region.



Consequently, the Americentric security studies do not offer a systematic explanation of insecurity in the Middle East. And when they do, they draw on flawed binaries inherited from Orientalist studies of the past, repurposed to fit liberal imperialism of the present. Now as in the past, the Western Self is presumed to be superior to the oriental Other because of the presumed immutability of “their” Islamic laws, norms, and traditions; their cultural affection for despotic leadership and tyrannical rule; their supposed aversion to reason; and their assumed penchant for instant gratification, idleness, rage, and revenge, among other things.

These fictional binaries function as technologies, as well as an epistemology, of power and domination, allowing preachers of US liberal imperialism to invent a series of immutable opposition between Judeo-Christian values and those of Islam, as Samuel Huntington puts it. They enable security “experts” to discover a historical conflict between Sunnis and Shi’ites, as Vali Naser describes. They license cultural “experts” to essentialize ethnosectarian conflicts constructed in recent times as historical facts. These binaries are explicitly expressed even by figures who try to mask their shared sense of imperial superiority. For example, Barak Obama’s famous Cairo speech in 2009 intended to repair the American relations with the Muslim world in the aftermath of eight years of Bush-Cheney criminal violence and in the ME. Ironically, he could not free himself from the notion of Muslims’ lust for idleness, rage, and revenge. “They [referring to Muslims of the ME] are not thinking about how to kill Americans . . . Contrast that with South-east Asia. . . which is filled with striving, ambitious, energetic people who are every single day scratching and clawing to build businesses and get education and find jobs and build infrastructure.” (Obama’s Speech in Cairo, 2009).

As he was preaching Muslims to be nonviolent, he was working on his military doctrine, which eventually expanded America’s hegemonic status by shifting from the use of American boots on the ground to drones and, proxies; boosted support for US regional dictators; and strengthened US debilitating US sanctions against its regional enemies. Indeed, his actions were louder than his soft words (Golldberg 2016). In short, elites associated with Americentric security studies either focus on the individual behavior of enemy states to explain insecurity in the ME, or the presumed immutable religio-cultural attributes. In either case, they miss or dismiss the role of the United States in creating and maintaining a conflict-generating system. In a major and unconventional departure from the Americentric security studies, in this paper, I focus on the role of the United States in promoting and maintaining a conflict-generating regional regime of insecurity, which shapes the

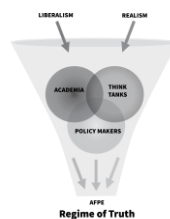
security behavior of every state in the region. Drawing on Stephen Krasner's definition of an international regime, I define a regional regime in terms of its organizing "principle, rules, and norms around which actors' expectation converged" (Krasner 1982). In fact, the organizing principle, rules, and norms of this US-led and constructed conflict-generating regime converge around the security of the United States and its regional allies at the expense of creating insecurity for US enemies and their proxies. This US-led securitization regime, I argue, is akin to a maintaining a permanent state of war, where the United States fights to maintain its hegemony over the region while other states negotiate their survival either by toeing Washington's line or resisting it. In either case, achieving security for any state is impossible, regardless of its regime type (democratic or authoritarian), leadership style, alliance (pro or anti-American), history (previously colonized or not), size, power, and demographic composition. If the regime of every state in the greater ME is insecure because of it faces existential threats from within and without, it is then safe to hypothesize that the Middle is a regional insecurity community. In this paper, I first focus on the role of the American Foreign Policy Establishment (AFPE) as the main agent of producing a narrative of "us" and "them," insofar as US relations with the Muslim world is concerned. Then I describe how the AFPE rationalizes its narrative from different epistemological angles. Next, I make a comparative analysis between the Insecurity Communities of the Middle East (ICME) and the North Atlantic Security Communities (NASC). The purpose of this comparison is not to idealize the NASC, but to reveal the role of the United States in instituting two different regional regimes of security: one for its Western states, which it identifies as allies, and the other for Middle Eastern and South Asian states, which it identifies either as enemies or temporary allies with the potential to become enemies. Before making some concluding remarks, I show how, despite its costly wars of balancing and regime change, the United States has miserably failed to either achieve its stated objectives or reduce the costs of blow backs from its failed policies.

### **The American Foreign Policy Establishment.**

Made up three circles of figures, the AFPE can be best conceptualized as a Venn diagram: Academia, think tanks, and government agencies. These three groups work together organically without necessarily being connected organizationally. By far, the largest circle contains scholars working in the discipline of international relations (IR) and related fields. The next circle encompasses so-called field experts

employed by interest groups. Euphemistically referred to as think tanks, these advocacy groups represent an assemblage of highly connected figures linked to private interests on the one hand and public institutions and policymakers on the other. The final and most exclusive circle is composed of appointees and technocrats associated with the executive branch; the elected members of Congress, especially key committee and subcommittee chairpersons and their respective staff; and career professionals working as heads of agencies and their senior staff members. Together, this assemblage of people produces what Michel Foucault refers to as a “regime of truth”(Foucault 2001). Foucault introduces the phrase to explain the entanglement between power and knowledge.

As such, different components of the AFPE monopolizes the production of truth-claims. For example, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Brookings Institution, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and the Middle Eastern Research Institute (MERI) have nearly monopolized the market for the production of knowledge concerning the unconditional support of the United States gives to Israel in the Middle East. Another prominent think tank, the Rand Corporation, has been producing knowledge exclusively built on how to help different US administrations fine-tune their multibalancing techniques and regime changes by military, diplomatic, and economic means. Unsurprisingly, it has been on the payroll of the Pentagon and America’s military-industrial complex since WWII. Other influential think tanks include the American Enterprise Institute, Hudson Institute, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Worthy of mention here is a parastatal organization called the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), which proudly claims to have 4,900 members. As the largest, oldest, and most centrist association, the CFR represents the embedded rationality of both wings of the AFPE, and by extension, the subjectivity of the American public vis-à-vis corporate media outlets. Walter Lippman referred to the making of the America’s collective consciousness as “manufacturing consent.” Together with other influential think tanks a regime of truth.



This “regime of truth” produced two mutually reinforcing epistemological categories of explanations—cultural realists and rationalists. While the former blame Islamic cultural or civilizational characteristics as the root-cause of insecurity in the greater ME, the latter blames enemies of the United States. Yet both epistemological approaches constitute different but reinforcing voices of the same imperial body—the United States.

### **Cultural Realism: Justifying Insecurity in the ME**

Deeply embedded in an Orientalist view of the Muslim world, cultural or civilization theorists such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis substitute “race realism” with what could be called “cultural realism.” Defining the West and the East as civilization enemies dating back to time immemorial, cultural realists do what their racist brethren had done in the past: ascribe inherent superiority to the West and inferiority to the East. From such a flawed binary, cultural realists conclude that insecurity in the Muslim world is endemic to their inherently violent cultural or civilization rage. It is worth mentioning that reducing the Muslim world into a unified, ahistorical block of people contradicts the factual heterogeneity and cultural diversity of the Muslim world. Yet reason, facts, and empirical reality has no room once a civilization is essentialized into a delusional ideology. Filled with ignorant, ignoble, and outright racist presumptions, the organizing principle of such cultural theories is founded on a flawed binary: there are two irreconcilable and immutable civilizations. One is the Western, Judeo-Christian civilization, and the other is Eastern, Islamic one. The former is defined in terms of its cultural affinity individualism, rationalism, and peaceful humanism, while the latter is judged for the opposite—blind-faith communalism, irrational rage, and violent behavior. Unsurprising, so-called experts in the AFPE often repeated clichés, accusing Muslims of having fought each other for millennia, concluding that they will be fighting each other for generations to come. The perlocutionary effect of such speech acts is obvious: conflicts in the ME are endemic to the Islamic or Middle Eastern culture. Such a cliché thinking showed in Barack Obama in his 2016 State of the Union Speech: “The Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia.”

Having constructed an oppositional binary in terms of “us” and “them,” “cultural realism” appeals to pseudo-scientific methods to essentialize “Western civilization” in its opposition to Islamic civilization. In so doing, cultural realists invent cultural or civilizational categories to do what their race realist of the past

had done. For example, Samuel Huntington divides the whole of humanity into nine civilizational categories—Western, Slavic, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, African, Latin American, Sinic, and Japanese. In so doing, he justifies the violent-producing imperial ordering of the world by proposing that the West is left with no choice but to prepare for a clash of civilization against the rest (Huntington 1996). Besides Huntington, there are others who replace race with Culture to hide the structural violence of the US-led imperial ordering of the ME. For instance, Bernard Lewis, a cultural realist with “expertise” in the history of Islam, blames the pervasive insecurity in the greater Middle East on some sort of cultural, historical rage, occupying the individual memory of all Muslims for millennia, a. A rage they seem incapable of shaking off. This is why “so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not be easily modified,” Lewis suggests in his article, “The Roots of Muslim rage” (Lewis 1990). Such ethnic representations effectively essentialize 1.4 billion individuals into a homogenous mass of irrational, immature, and violent beings who cannot help themselves but be violent and live in violence. Meanwhile, the perlocutionary effects of such speech acts is *to rationalize* US-NATO use of violence to tame the ME by any means necessary. For culturalists, such means include preparing for an ultimate clash of civilizations, as Huntington proposes. It also means getting ready for an eventual Armageddon, as Christian Zionists preach. Furthermore, it means waging regime change wars to ensure the absolute domination of the United States over the ME, as neoconservative desire. Finally, it too means balancing “good Muslim” leaders, meaning allies of the United States, against the “evil” ones, meaning US enemies.

In fact, the idea of balancing “good” against “bad” Muslims is the organizing principle “rationalists.” As Mahmood Mamdani correctly demonstrates, the difference between “good” and “bad” Muslims is all about how the United States and its NATO allies categorize their compliant allies, proxies, and hired hands as “good” and those who resist them as “bad” (Mamdani 2004). Unsurprisingly, US-backed militants, for example, are branded as “good Muslims” fighting on our side against “them.” This good and evil rationality transcends from culturalist contention to rationalist arguments—the point of next section.

### **Rationalism: Insecurity in the Discourses of American Realism and Liberalism.**

Essentializing the Muslim world into a unified block of people is the dominant modus operandi in neoconservative circles. But it is not so influential among liberal

and realist security experts in the AFPE, who cling to the claim of universal “rationality” to explain insecurity in the ME. Nevertheless, Americentric liberals and realists both dismiss the role of the United States in creating a regional insecurity regime in the ME, as race-cultural realists do. Self-interest in both liberalism and realism is presumed to be the driving force for all rational actors according to their relative power. From this premise, liberals contend that the force of self-interest drives individuals to cooperate with each other and into making a hierarchic social order at the national level. In so doing, individuals participate in building legal-rational institutions, which regulate their competition, advance their collective interests, and make them all better. These assumptions are prominent in the Americentric discourse of liberalism in which individuals’ desire for more power is represented as a rather positive social force within the legal/rational framework of a given nation-state, and “criminal” behavior outside of it. From this liberal angle, those with more sociopolitical power earn the right to secure their social hierarchy by instituting what might constitute legality or criminality, morality or immorality, good or evil, and even rationality or irrationality. Defining legality, rationality, and morality in terms of relative position of power, Americentric liberal internationalists (liberalism applied under the condition of international anarchy in the context of the US-led liberal/capitalist hegemony) categorize the United States and its Western allies as advanced democracies of peace in opposition to their warmongering authoritarian enemies. What is notable in the narrative of liberal internationalist is the essentialized dualism of “us” versus “them,” which is also prominent in race-cultural realism. The same is true for Americentric realism.

Proclaiming to see the world for what it is, not what it ought to be, realists argue that violence is endemic to self-interested human-nature (classic realists) or self-interested states under the condition of internal anarchy (structural realists). In the in Americentric discourse of realism, the argument is that it is the self-interest of all nation-states that drive them in producing an anarchic order at the international level. As such, the United States is an equal participant. Defining anarchy in terms of a decentralized order, Americentric realists contend that every state under the condition of what is essentially a US-led anarchy relies on self-help in meeting its political, social, and environmental challenges. This presumed functional sameness of all states, realists argue, forces each to behave according to its relative power to influence the behavior of others. In other words, realism in the AFPE is a theory that justifies America’s power and domination by coercive, incentivizing, institutional, and even seductive means (lies, spins, deception, and propaganda). Joseph Nye, an influential figure in the AFPE, classifies the different means of US

domination into two categories: “soft power” and “hard powers.” For Nye, America’s competition for more hard and soft power is both natural and universally good. Because it is natural, the argument goes, the United States has no choice but to operate under the condition of international anarchy. What Nye, as other realists in the AFPE, dismisses is the fact that the contour of international anarchy since WWII has been shaped in the context of US global hegemony. And the United States has exercised its hegemonic power differently in different regions. For example, since WWII, the United States has not militarily or economically balanced its Western allies against each other, neither has it waged any regime change wars to topple any of them. The opposite direction has been taken in the ME, where the United States has only relied on balancing the region against itself, as well as deploying the weapon of regime change to discipline its allies and punish its enemies. Yet, realists in the AFPE still cling to idea that anarchy is a natural result of self-interested interactions among functionally similar states. Alexander Wendt, a critic of realism, argues that anarchy is not neither natural nor evitable. It is rather a constructed order based on how states come to separate their allies from their foes. As he puts it, “anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt 1992). However, what Wendt should really say is that anarchy, at least since WWII, is what the United States makes of it. In fact, since WWII, it has prevented anarchy from forming among its Western allies, but it has promoted anarchy in the ME in the ME. In a sense, Wendt is correct, the United States has treated its Western states as allies with an imagined sense of civilizational we-ness, and except for Israel, it has treated Middle Eastern states either as enemies or potential enemies.

Realists in the AFPE also argue that international anarchy in the context of US-hegemony is both natural and universally good, meaning what is good for the United States is good for the world. Expectedly, their internal debates revolve around how much more power should be used and by what means in which issue areas, but they never question the inherent good of US-led hegemony. If applied correctly, they argue, America’s liberal hegemony is the victory of good over evil, legality over criminality, democracy over authoritarianism, and responsibility to protect human rights over violations of civil liberties and human life.

In short, despite the epistemological differences in the Americentric theories of IA, they are rooted in the same ontological foundation on which a shared sense of imperial rationality or mentality (imperiality) or identity is constructed. This imperiality shows up in different shades of Americentric race, culture, liberal, and realist theories, as they all produce various versions of “us” versus “them” narrative.

In these narrative, America's struggle against its enemies is rationalized in term of a struggle for the mythical purity of the American creed (race-realism), or the presumed supremacy of the Western Judeo-Christian civilization (culturalism), or the self-invented superiority of liberal rules and norms, or the right of survival requiring more and more power (offensive realism) or more and more security (defensive realism).

Unsurprisingly, the members of the AFPE, regardless of their partisan and ideological differences, have complete consensus on one principle: The United States has both the right and the responsibility to dominate the ME by any means it deems necessary. This is not to deny that internal differences over partisan, ideological, and organizational interests and values do not exist in the AFPE. It is rather to emphasize how the AFPE identifies itself as the defender of America as a liberal empire endowed with both the legal right and moral obligation to lead the world as it deems fits. So embedded is this imperial we-ness that questioning the self-appointed leadership of the United States over the world or casting doubt on the legality, morality, or pragmatism of America's military interventions, regime changes, and balancing in the ME is nothing short of political suicide for US politicians. It is this intellectually hegemonic context that security experts explain Middle Eastern insecurity. These explanations revolve around five categories.

The first category refers to the size and institutional weakness of states to explain insecurity in the region. For example, Sadeghinia argues that "the existence of some of the world's smallest states" causes insecurity (Sadeghinia 2011: 73). Obviously, mini European states such as Belgium and Luxemburg are some of the most secure places, but they are secure because of their regional location not their size. Relatedly, no ruling regime in the ME has been able to nationalize its sovereignty through democratically legitimately institutions regardless of size, regime type, leadership style, demography, and even foreign alliance; therefore, it is safe to assume that institutional weakness is a regional phenomenon, as is security. The second category explains insecurity in terms of competition for regional supremacy fueled by sectarian differences. For example, the forty-year competition between the so-called Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Iran is explained in terms of their tendency for regional supremacy (Cordesman 1984: 4). However, Iran-Saudi conflict began in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution; therefore, the sectarian differences cannot explain their fear of each other. The third category frames conflict in terms of geographical disadvantages. For instance, it is argued that Iraq's access to the open sea contributes to its regional security. A similar argument is



made regarding Iran as a state surrounded by US allies, or Afghanistan as a land-locked state, or Syria as a neighbor of Israel. However, these geographical “disadvantages” are the effects of the US-led regime of insecurity not the cause of conflict. The fourth category sees insecurity in terms of resource conflicts (Klare 2001). Once a conflict is explained in terms of resources, border disputes are also interpreted as the cause of conflicts. Indisputably, most border disputes in the ME date back to colonially drawn borders. Yet they often remain dormant unless and until a regime securitizes them into an existential threat. Therefore, resource conflicts do not in and of themselves explain conflict. Only when a particular resource is securitized does it produce conflict.

Finally, the fifth category focuses on what Kristian Coates Ulrichsen refers to as an “integrated approach to security.” Ulrichsen’s approach considers factors such as demography, identity, economics, and the environment as sources of conflict (Ulrichsen 2011). Yet, none of these factors or a combination of them can explain why a shortage of water or sectarian differences, for instance, leads to conflict in some cases but not others. That is not to say that such differences do not exist, but to emphasize how they become conflictual once securitized against an existential enemy (Buzan and Wæver 2009).

What these categories have in common, however, is their focus on individual states as they struggle over (1) a lack of socially embedded legitimizing institutions of governance (liberal institutionalism); (2) security aimed at defeating potential threats (defensive realist), seeking more power directed at regional supremacy (offensive realist); and (4) conflicting identities (constructivist). Taking individual states as the main unit of analysis, these scholars pay little or no attention to the imperially ordered *regional* differences in security governance of the West and East. And when they do, they take a Eurocentric view that blames the pervasive insecurity of the ME on individual characteristics of each state with almost total disregard for the US-led regional ordering of the Middle Eastern states.

Of course, there are exceptions. For example, Arshin Adib Moghaddam rejects such positivist, realist arguments (Adib-Moghaddam 2006). Such exceptions are almost always outside of the AFPE. Analyzing the Iran-Iraq War, Moghaddam argues that the battle between the two states boiled down to “clashing narratives of state identities competing for dominance within a temporally disrupted, embattled regional society” (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 5). Focusing on the “embattled regional society,” he shows how insecurity is deeply embedded in and influenced by the global discursive construct produced by what he calls the clash between local “neo-

fundamentalists” in the region and global “neoconservatives” in the United States (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 23). Importantly, Adib-Moghaddam’s non-positivist approach shows that the diversity of material interests or identities across the ME does not in and of itself produce war or peace. Instead, he focuses on how the state-to-state security in this region is enmeshed with the embattled regional society, in which every ruling regime in the region competes for the survival of its state and its official identity.

This embattled regional society differs sharply from the European Security Community, where states are secure and nationalized. By nationalization of the state, I mean the long process of building socially embedded regimes endowed with the institutional capacity to stitch the nation together and govern it through consensus making rather than coercion. In short, although the literature on the possible causes of insecurity in the ME provides a nuanced understanding of security problematics in the region, few scholars have focused on insecurity as a regional phenomenon related to the US-led security arrangement of a region. That is why this article focuses on the role of the United States in producing a regional regime of insecurity in the greater Middle East.

Drawing from constructivism in international relations, this article treats security or insecurity as a relational construct—a region is secure when most of its member states have developed a shared sense of we-ness that binds them together as a regional community with trust, shared values, and similar laws, rules, and destinies. As Emanuel Alder and Michael N. Barnett argue, a shared sense of we-ness, if constructed in a region, becomes the organizing principle for generating and thus expecting a nonviolent, lawful, and trusting relationship among member states (Adler and Barnett 1998). Conversely, the lack a regional shared sense of we-ness indicates what preachers and practitioners of the school of realism in international relations call anarchy: a decentralized system of governance where every state see its neighbors as potential enemies. In such a region, alliances are built on temporary and transactional basis, absence of war is considered peace, and peaceful coexistence sounds unreasonable and unthinkable.

Given its rich Islamic heritage, the ME has the *potential* to develop a shared sense of regional we-ness, especially because a great majority of the people in the ME already has a shared sense of belonging to the umma—an extra-territorial “imagined community” of Muslims. But organized violence pervades all aspects of life in the ME, as every state in the region struggles against its internal and external enemies. On a systemic level, I attribute this pervasive insecurity to Washington’s

consistent use of regime change wars, which are waged to maintain and expand the supremacy of US-liberal hegemony in the region through a system of balance of power play.

Regime change wars have been one of the most enduring features of US foreign policy posture in the greater Middle East (ME). For over seventy years, the United States has deployed regime change to overthrow resistance regimes in the hope of installing compliant clients. Aimed at maintaining and expanding its regional hegemony, the United States has institutionalized its regime change wars by using two seemingly contradictory theories of realism and liberalism. Speaking in a realist language of primacy of power, regime change wars have consistently been rationalized and normalized as a three-prong strategy, which revolves around three interconnected themes: 1) keeping US military supremacy over an entire region at any cost; 2) maintaining a balance of power in favor of its regional allies against its regional foes; and 3) keeping its allies divided in the old spirit of divide and rule. I refer to this three-pronged strategy as multibalancing. In no region of the world has the US-led regime of multibalancing been more institutionalized than the greater Middle East (ME).

Multibalancing, by definition, is highly unstable and violent because it involves multiple actors that have no choice but to play an existential game of survival. Akin to the old British strategy of divide and rule, multibalancing is the act of dividing a region into overlapping zones of conflict. For example, the United States has divided the ME into three major spaces of conflict: the Near East, the Greater Persian Gulf area (GPG), and South Asia. In the Near East, Washington has helped create, shape, and define a space of conflict by favoring Israel against its immediate neighbors and the rest of the Muslim world. In the GPG, it has defined the space of conflict in terms of protecting its oil-producing allies against their regional enemies. The GPG region was first formed against the rise of Arab socialist nationalism, targeting Iraq and its allies until 1979. Then the US sided with Iraq against Iran until 1990. Next it contained both Iran and Iraq until 2003. Since 2003, Washington has defined security of the GPG in terms of protecting its rich oil producing monarchies against what is assumed to be a powerful regional menace, Iran.

In South Asia (SA), Washington has helped create a perpetual space of conflict by dealing with Pakistan and Afghanistan as mere instruments to achieve several inherently conflicting objectives. For instance, Washington simultaneously treated Pakistan as an ally, a non-ally, and an enemy during the Cold War. As an ally, It armed Pakistan to deter the Soviet Union from reaching the warm waters of the

Persian Gulf, an exaggerated fear cooked up in the halls of Pentagon. As a non-ally, it took a seemingly neutral position in Indo-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. Given India's overwhelming superiority, however, the pretention of neutrality was tantamount to support for India, which the United States favored against China. As an enemy, Washington took an adversarial position against Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s to punish Islamabad for its friendly and compromising position toward China. The instrumentalization of Pakistan did not change after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Once again, as an ally, Washington partnered with the Pakistani military to force a regime change in Kabul, creating and a network of Afghan warlords financially backed by oil-rich Gulf monarchies. As a non-ally, the United States continued to favor India over Pakistan. As a mistrusted enemy, the CIA set up shop in Pakistan to check and discipline Islamabad into compliance. Once US-backed warlords, the so-called mujahedin, came to power in Kabul in 1992, the administration of George H.W. Bush shifted its position on Pakistan and began to accuse it of what Washington had willfully ignored for over ten years: developing deliverable nuclear weapons. Sanctions were imposed. Out of such chaos emerged the Taliban, with the backing of Pakistan, Gulf oil monarchies, and some oil-sectors in Washington(Scott-Clark 2007; Rashid 2010).

Since the 2001 regime change in Afghanistan, Washington has continued to pursue conflicting objectives. As a frenemy, it has simultaneously coerced and incentivized the Pakistani regime to help institute a pro-American, pro-Indian, anti-Iranian, proportionally non-Pashtun regime in Afghanistan. But Washington's conflicting goals for Pakistan are delusional to say the least, given Islamabad adversarial relationship with Delhi, Pakistan's long borders and vital relations with Iran, and having a Pashtun majority population living on its border states with Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Washington has continued favoring India over Pakistan to check China, ignoring the shared economic, political, and security interests between China and Pakistan. Unsurprisingly, US conflicting strategic goals have miserably failed, as China's influence has increased with regional-sized projects such as its \$900 billion Belt and Road Initiative.

However, the rationality of multibalancing has always depended on the US' credibility to repeatedly and frequently show that it is ready, willing, and able to enforce through its regime change wars. In effect, regime change for the United States has functioned as a disciplinary measure to enforce its multibalancing aimed at a three-prong strategy of maintaining the supremacy of its military power, disciplining its regional allies into compliance, and deterring its foes with the threat of

extreme violence to contain them within its often shifting redlines that change from administration to administration.

As such, multibalancing and regime change are two pillars of a US-led regime of regional insecurity, whose credibility depends on US willingness to show that it is ready and able to terrorize, at times a whole nation, as a means to its ends. Over the years, the means have ranged from bombing the infrastructure of a country to rubble in the name of saving its people; to conducting horrifying kill, capture, raid, torture policies; to sabotaging the entire economy of a country; to imposing deadly sanctions on millions of people; to accusing its enemy regimes of mismanaging their economies, corruption, human rights violations, and even posing threats to regional or global security. To exhibit its power over life, property, and the pursuit of happiness in other countries, every so often Washington puts on a global show to exhibit the “beauty” of its latest weapons of death and destruction, as NBC’s Brian Williams declared on the eve of April 17, 2017, when President Donald Trump ordered cruise missile strikes to punish the Syrian government for an alleged chemical weapons attack. However, had Syria been ruled by a regime loyal to Washington, it would not have been targeted for regime change to begin with. By extension, the United States would not have allowed its regional allies to blatantly violate Syria’s sovereignty. Nor would it have accused Syria of violating the human rights of its people, committing war crimes, being authoritarian, and possessing illegal weapons. But if Syria had been under missile attacks as an ally of the United States, Brian Williams would have been grieving for the death and suffering of Syrian people under attack not only by their enemies, but also the enemies of humanity.

Since WWII, the ME has not experienced a single day of respite from US-led interventions, regime change wars, and so-called nation-building projects. These policies have helped create a series of politically weak, militarized, and socially disembedded states ruled by un-nationalized regimes. Together these regimes constitute the Insecurity Communities of the greater Middle East (ICME), which include the South Asian states of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## **Insecurity Communities of the Middle East**

Conceptually, the ICME is comparable to the North Atlantic Security Communities (NASC) that the United States helped build after WWII. The term “security communities” was first coined by Karl Deutsch (Deutsch 1957). Deutsch defined it

as a region where interstate war is highly unlikely and even unthinkable. Having experienced the savageries of two world wars in twenty years, Europeans could see that *realpolitik* in the context of anarchy was no longer sustainable, if they were to survive. Reflecting this social and intellectual recognition, the organizing principle of the NASC was formed on the idea that security is a non-exclusionary, collective good—either every state in a region has it or none do.

The interdependency of security implied that the security of all European states depended on transforming the European regional regime of insecurity (anarchy) that had plagued the continent since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. Throughout these centuries, European states had resorted to a system of balancing within Europe during “peaceful” periods, and regime-change wars during periods of realignment. Meanwhile, outside of Europe, European imperial powers had waged colonizing proxy wars all along.

To transform the continent to a regime of security, Deutsch insisted that European states needed to institutionalize two interrelated systems of governance. At the national level, member states had to nationalize their sovereignty by earning the trust of their people built on legal-rational rule-based democratic institutions. At the regional level, they needed to give up some of their national sovereignty to inter-governmental organizations that would regulate interstate affairs through consensus building to serve their collective, long-term economic and security interests. The functional output of such integration, Deutsch insisted, would have spillover effects on further social and cultural integration. Deutsch proposed that developing regional security communities could take different paths, depending on social context. For example, it could be formed by what he called *amalgamated sovereignty*, akin to the American federal states, or *plural sovereignties*, similar to the European Union (EU). Ironically, Deutsch’s theory for the NASC turned into a reality because it fitted Washington’s realist strategy of containing Soviet Communism. The United States began to invest in the collective security of its Western allies. It also invested in promoting interstate economic, political, and cultural integration. The result was the gradual evolution of the NASC into a regional security community whose members no longer prepare for war with each other. Consequently, Europe is no longer the bloodiest continent on Earth.

In the ME, the AFPE took a much different approach, largely because of its Orientalistic view of the Muslim world. The outcome was the evolution of the ICME. During the Cold War, the United States copied the British Empire by

dividing the greater ME into friends and foes. The AFPE instituted a regional regime of multibalancing, regime change, and state-building to advance and solidify its interests. Unlike in Europe, the United States did not invest in the economic and political integration of the region. Nor did it push for the formation of any intergovernmental organization conducive to regional cooperation. If anything, while it undermined Arab, socialist nationalism that had the potential to create a “pluralistic regional security” community akin to the NASC, it encouraged the formation of the highly conservative Arab League, as well as the conservative Saudi-led Organization of Islamic Conference (now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation).

At the national level, the United States sided with personalistic regimes, as opposed to investing in the construction of institutional capacities that could, in long-run, nationalize them. At the start of the WWII, there was ample political will, desire, and hope for Middle Eastern regimes to nationalize themselves. But the United States and its Western allies, in competition with the Soviet Union, only invested in arming their allies and strengthening extractive industries. Washington supported and financed military coups and covert operations of all sorts to prevent the rise of any nationalist party, leader, or movement. The exemplary case was the 1953 coup in Iran. American and British intelligence agencies overthrew Mosaddeq, not because he was communist, socialist, or anti-Western, but because he supported the nationalization of Iran’s resources (Sharifi 2013).

This short-term transactional approach to security has produced unintended consequences—blowback in the CIA lexicon. For example, US support for the Afghan Mujahedin in the 1980s spread Saudi-backed jihadism throughout the region and created fertile soil for the Taliban and the Islamization of Pakistan, among other disasters. The 1953 coup in Iran and subsequent US support for the Shah led to the 1979 Revolution. And the consequences of the US backing of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War are obvious.

The long-term consequences of this US-led regime of insecurity are clear: no regime in the ICME has been able to legitimize its authority. An un-nationalized regime relies on organized violence. Every regime is stuck in what Antonio Gramsci calls a “crisis of authority.”

For Gramsci, when a ruling regime lacks the capacity to earn the trust or consensus of its social forces, it can only rule by coercion. Accordingly, when a regime fails to build the institutional capacity to relate to its social forces, it loses its traditional legitimacy, and in turn, its “great masses become detached” from what

they previously understood as legitimate traditional authority. This is what Gramsci calls an “organic crisis,” which he says destroys traditional legitimacy but fails to replace it with a modern one. In his words, “This crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears” (Gramsci 1992: 275-76). In fact, every ruling regime in the ICME is in a state of organic crisis. To manage such organic crises, every one of them securitizes itself against its societal forces. Doing so produces four overlapping strategies of survival—co-optation, coercion, divide and rule, and military alliance.

### **Strategies of survival**

First, the strategy of cooptation revolves around creating a network of patronage to operate the system. While all regimes in the ICME co-opt a tiny segment of the population to serve as their client operatives, each does so according to its material and human resources. For example, the oil-rich Gulf regimes can afford to provide generous social welfare to their tiny native populations, rely on their royal families to act as the nation’s patron, hire Western contractors to operate and protect the country, and import immigrant slaves to serve the everyday needs of the system. For the other ME states, patronages are built on political, social, and even cultural or sectarian privileges rather than direct payments. In Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, co-optative clientelism has been achieved by instituting various forms of military-commercial elite classes.

The second strategy is using coercion to terrorize some of the population into submission and induce political apathy. Every regime in the ME relies on repressive military police systems to survive. The third strategy is to securitize sectarian, ideological, and ethnic differences to divide the population into fighting segments, so that each group fears its existential Other more than the regime. Every regime in the ME uses divide and rule by balancing different social forces against one another. This strategy is more prominent in the Gulf monarchies, where sectarianism is mixed with the distribution of scarce resources. There is a segregation of all social and political spaces based on a tribal hierarchy. In Iran, the Shi’i clerical establishment is at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy of society. In Pakistan, the political-commercial-tribal sectors act as clients of the military police regime. In Afghanistan, the structure of government is founded on ethnosectarianism.



The final strategy of survival is the formation of alliances. Given their vulnerability to sudden collapse, ruling elites in the ICME must balance between two available choices. Either they seek to align themselves with Washington, or they resort to what Stephen M. Walt refers to as “strategies of opposition” (Walt 2005). For Gulf monarchies, seeking Washington’s protection has been the only path to survival since their inception as states. Britain provided this imperial protection until 1971, and the United States has done so since. Now, as then, this protection comes at the cost of near complete alignment with Washington. However, seeking imperial protection does not assure survival, as was the case with the Shah of Iran, who succumbed to social revolution. For this reason, all regimes in the region participate in one or more regional military alliances.

Alternatively, regimes can oppose the US. Stephan Walt lists four possible strategies of opposition: balking, binding, blackmailing, and delegitimizing (Walt 2005). While balking entails non-cooperation and sabotage of American military hegemony, binding is committing to the framework of international law and pursuing diplomatic channels with other regional and extra-regional powers. Meanwhile, blackmailing is when a regime uses terrorism, the threat of developing weapons of mass destruction, and destruction of soft targets to raise costs for the United States. Finally, delegitimizing involves soft power employed to undermine the legitimacy of the United States in the international arena.

The US more than any other state or nonstate actor has played a crucial role in making the ICME. This is not to say that the US is the sole cause of insecurity, but to emphasize its significant role in creating a deadly game in which every state and nonstate actor behaves according to its relation of identity or differences with the United States. As such, the governing rationality of every actor in the ME is shaped, not according to its singular will, long-term interest, aspirational value, or even enduring strategic vision, but by its short-term survival. The United States is no exception. In this game, yesterday’s enemies become today’s allies, depending on the agenda of the AFPE. Against this background, the state-to-state relations, as well as state-to-society relations, in the ICME have remained in a state of perpetual instability and insecurity.

## **Failed Policies**

As we speak, Afghanistan and Pakistan are on the brink of collapse. After nineteen years of US occupation, the Taliban now controls over 60 percent of Afghanistan’s

territories, warlords continue to rule the country, and corruption is rampant. The national economy runs on foreign aid, opium production, smuggling, and a protection tax on the people. At this point, the best the Trump administration had hoped for has come true. It has negotiated with the Taliban with hope of making a power-sharing arrangement with the divided government in Kabul, along with its appointed warlords: an option that was available to the US in 2001. After forty years of non-stop internationalized civil war that started with the competition between Moscow and Washington, the prospect for peace in Afghanistan peace is bleaker than ever. However, the fate of Afghanistan is deeply entangled with its neighboring states, especially Russia, Pakistan, India, and Iran, as well of the United States. Meanwhile, Pakistan is not better off either. Since its independence, Pakistan's India-centric strategy has not changed, neither has its security calculus in relation to Afghanistan and the rest of the region, including its tribal areas. Therefore, if there is to be a solution, the US-led regime of balancing and regime change has to be replaced with a regional security community.

The same is true for Iran's relations with itself and the region as a whole. For the last four decades, the AFPE has accused Iran of spreading political Islam, sponsoring terrorism, attempting to make weapons of mass destruction, violating human rights, striving for regional hegemony, wanting to destroy Israel, and threatening American interests. Meanwhile, the debate between the hawks and doves has revolved around how to deal with the menace of Iran by forcing it to either collapse or become compliant. What has not been debated, however, is the role of the US in instituting a regional insecurity regime. And Iran has played it masterfully since the AFPE has failed miserably in its stated objectives. For example, for forty years, the United States has tried to isolate Iran, but Iran has more regional influence now than it did forty years ago. This influence includes Iran's foothold in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan. That is not to say Iran's increased influence has made the lives of Iranians better, or improved the security of Tehran at home or abroad. It is to emphasize that neither the United States and its regional allies, nor Iran and its regional allies are better off today, insofar as the state's security and legitimacy are concerned. Meanwhile, the costs of this forty-year war remain incalculable.

In dealing with Iran, the United States has created a security dilemma for itself and the Iranian regime. First, it is not at all controversial that blowback from the 1953 CIA-backed regime change created the conditions for the 1979 Revolution. Since then, Iran has faced an irresolvable security dilemma in dealing with

Washington and its own society. This dilemma has revolved around how to resist the United States without provoking it into a military confrontation or totally submitting to it and thus exposing itself to internal collapse by the social base that holds it together. Meanwhile, it has tried to manage its opposition at home without either allowing it to bring it down or coercing it too far. In its own version of multibalancing, Tehran has lived in a deep security dilemma in which confrontation with the United States remains risky, but submission to it means death. Also, repressing its political opposition remain risky because it can empower anti-regime political opposition, but freeing the opposition from constraints means death by social revolution promoted and financed and possibly armed by the United States and its regional allies. Given this security dilemma, the Iranian regime has done what every other regime in the region does: rely on a loyal but narrow social base to remain in power while aligning itself with regional allies and proxies to enlarge its strategic depth. Although Iran's security dilemma is a game that Tehran has learned to play masterfully in its interaction with regional foes and allies, it is the AFPE that has created this security dilemma and the rules of the game, which Tehran has learned to play with. For forty years, while Washington war hawks have pushed for a military or social revolutionary regime change, the doves have worked hard to contain, deter, and if and when possible to destroy Iran by invoking the idea that all options are on the table. These options have included three methods of regime change: (1) the Iraq or Afghanistan model that resorted to the direct use of the US military; (2) the Syria or Libya model that relied on local allies and proxies; and 3) the color revolution model used in Eastern Europe or now in Venezuela that focused on bankrupting the economy on one hand and financing a social opposition into existence on the other. In any case, the end goal has remained the same: to force or induce a regime change in Tehran in the hope of installing a pro-American regime. For forty years, Iran has survived and defended itself against these ongoing threats because it has been able to maintain its internal cohesion despite deep ideological and visional differences among state elites. So, the US-Iran conflict continues.

In its relations with Iraq, the United States has treated Iraqis as an instrument of its balancing for over fifty years. In the 1970s, it used the oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf, which at the time included Iran, to balance against Iraq. In the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, Iraq invaded Iran to take advantage of the turmoil. Rather than brokering a peace deal, the United States shifted its balancing strategy in favor of Iraq. The result was a near-genocidal eight-year-long war that cost millions of lives and trillions of dollars. Perhaps Henry Kissinger described the

sordid intentions of the AFPE best when he said, “It’s a pity they can’t both lose.” In fact, the war left both countries in ruins.

Having financed the war with borrowed money from Gulf monarchies, Saddam was confronted with bills he could not afford. This financial crisis contributed to the 1990 decision of Saddam to invade Kuwait, prompting the United States to take a different position. Ten years prior, Washington had no problem with Saddam invading Iran. But invading Kuwait became a different story: the world order was in jeopardy, H.W. Bush said. Suddenly, the AFPE partially recovered from its amnesia and reminded the world of Saddam’s genocidal crimes against Kurds and Iraqis (but not Iranians, incidentally). Following the ejection of Saddam from Kuwait in 1991, the US imposed one of the harshest regimes of sanctions in history. For thirteen years, while the realist wing of the AFPE pushed for maintaining what they called dual-containment, the emerging neocons pushed for a regime change. This continued until 2003.

In 2003, the neocons finally got their wish: a regime change aimed at installing a compliant pro-American, anti-Iranian regime in Baghdad. Imbued with imperialism, they wrapped themselves in the flag and told the public that the “American way of life” was at stake. By invading Iraq, the US was protecting the American people, defending its national interests, fighting terrorism, and democratizing the ME. Like colonialists of old, the Bush administration installed a provisional government by a US viceroy: Paul Bremer, whose idea of “democratic pluralism” was to institute *muhassessa*: a parliamentarian quota system that divided Iraqi voters into existing ethnosectarian constituencies. Once instituted, the new Iraqi government, composed of conflicting forces, fragmented the country into three ethnosectarian enclaves, each competing for a different vision of the nation. The process led to the effective ethnic cleansing of previously mixed neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Sixteen years have passed since the War in Iraq, which was followed by pathological nation building. Still the poisonous blowbacks from the event reverberate across Iraq and beyond. These indisputable blowbacks include the eruption of an internationalized civil war; the arrival of global jihadists; the rise of the Islamic State; and the increased intervention of neighboring states such as Iran, Turkey, Syria, and the Gulf monarchies, all for the purpose of pushing the Iraqi government onto their sides. Under the current regional circumstances, the hope for nationalization of the Iraqi state, regardless of its regime type, leadership, ethnosectarian tendency, or foreign alliance is highly unlikely. Tragically, the same applies to the rest of the region.

## Conclusion and Implications

If the tragedy of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen should teach us any lesson, it is the fact that security is indeed a collective, regional good, meaning that either all can enjoy it or none can. The learned lessons from US failures could also teach us that the ongoing US-led regime of multibalancing is a major contributor to more insecurity because it divides the region into multiple zones of conflicts where all state and non-state actors play a game of survival of the fittest. As if multibalancing was not destabilizing enough, the US-led strategy of forcing or inducing regime change has exacerbated the insecurity of every actor in the region, including the United States. Considering the anarchic ordering of the greater ME, the future will likely be no different from the past, at least as long as the AFPE refuses to recognize what Albert Einstein defined as insanity: “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Tragically, under the Trump administration, the already bleak prospect of imagining a different regional order appears even dimmer.

Meanwhile, there is ample evidence of the colossal failures of the United States in bringing even a modicum of peace to the Near East, in the GPG, or the SA. Even documents produced by the US government admits as much “At War with Truth,” a report published by *The Washington Post* on December 9, 2019, reveals how “US officials constantly said they were making progress. [But] they were not, and they knew it” (Whitlock 2019). Through hundreds of interviews with military personnel, government bureaucrats, diplomats, and experts associated with the AFPE, the report underscores “how three presidents—George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump—and their military commanders have been unable to deliver their promises to prevail in Afghanistan” (Whitlock 2019). The story of Afghanistan is not unique. From Palestine to Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and beyond, the AFPE, as an assemblage of influential figures who wield a disproportionate level of power in constructing America as a liberal Empire, has failed to achieve its often repeated promises to bring peace, security, democracy, reform, and development to America’s allies; to coercing its enemies into compliance; and to maintain US liberal hegemony, which it sees as a gift to humanity, over the region. Reality tells us a different story, however.

As we speak, the blood-soaked region of the greater ME and South Asia is replete with various forms of resistance, rebellion, and revolution against Middle Eastern regimes, regardless of their differences in leadership, regime types, demographic composition, history, and foreign backers. Meanwhile, other extra-

regional powers, such as China, Russia, have increasingly and forcefully become major players in the US-led regime of insecurity, namely in support of the so-called resistance states and non-states, such as Iran, Syria, Houthis, and Hezbollah of Lebanon for example.

Under these dark circumstances, the same conversation on how to better divide and balance the ME against itself is no longer desirable or workable. What the regions needs now is a serious conversation on how to work toward building a regional security community in the greater ME. This paper aims to promote that conversation, even though the AFPE cannot yet imagine it. Nevertheless, if the creation of the NASC was possible in Europe, the bloodiest and most fragmented continent on earth in the last millennium, the creation of a regional security community in the ME can also be both desirable and possible. As done in Europe in the aftermath of WWII, the US has ample capability to lead the effort, if it were to learn from its failures. However, given the monopoly of knowledge production in the hands of the AFPE, such a possibility is unlikely without the emergence of a genuine grassroot movement in the United States. Indeed, the last best hope is the rise of a genuine social resistance in the United States that could kickstart a decolonizing process of liberating the United States from its liberal/realist imperial rationality, or its race-cultural realism. In that world, it would be possible for America (1) to invest in peace, stability, and the security for all, rather than perpetual wars, balancing, and regime changes; (2) to push for models of sustainable development that would enrich all lives, rather than allowing a few to control the bodies and souls of the rest; and (3) to radically overhaul democratic institutions at local and global levels as opposed to essentializing ethnic nationalism as a way of creating increasing numbers of physical and spatial borders. Short of going along with the world to a more peaceful place, the next best alternative for the United States is to withdraw from the ME and allow local powers to deal with their insecurity problems.

Whether the United States chooses to play a constructive or destructive role might be a moot issue, considering how its disastrous failed policies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine have created a deep “organic crisis of authority,” as Gramsci puts it. In Gramsci’s words, “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” As quoted above, the Middle is pregnant with so many contingencies. Given the precarity of the moment, the expelling of the United States from the ME is also likely. In either

case, if the United States were to end its regional regime of multibalancing, the Middle East in general, and the United States in particular, would be economically, politically, and socially better off because there would be less fuel added to the fire of ethnosectarian hate, less investment in arm races across the region, less ammunition for wars of regime survival, and a whole lot more opportunity for building social capital and legitimacy. Indeed, if the dark effects of the US-led regime of insecurity were to be lifted, regional powers, such as Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt could, at the minimum, find a chance to work toward a pluralistic regional security community in line with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with the hope of evolving into a fully developed security community in the heart of the Muslim world. In any case, the current course of action is unsustainable, given how US regional hegemony has come under serious attacks.

While no one can possibly predict the future, it is rather obvious that the greater ME is pregnant with crises of poverty, inequality, ethnosectarian hatred, militarism, and environmental degradation. For better or worse, these crises are regional in nature, and they require regional solutions. Although this paper merely focused on the rationality of militarism through the lens of multibalancing and regime change, it is undeniable that the poverty, inequality, ethnosectarian hate, and environmental disasters are deeply interlinked with each other. For example, the Shi'ite-Sunni divide is a regional crisis created in the context of the ICME. The solution to it also requires a regional, comprehensive approach. With all its flaws, especially from a positivist paradigm, this paper hopes to promote such a conversation.

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## **A Reflection on Shah Ismail's Poetry**

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### **Abstract**

The Safavid era has been debated from different perspectives by historians and social scientists but Shah Ismail's poetical aspects have been less discussed and inquired upon. Of course, this is not to argue that his poetry has not been researched upon within academia but what I think needs to be more investigated is the *angle of inquiry* as most researches have focused upon the *political significance* of Shah Ismail's poetry rather than *Gnostic importance* of the Safavid Order. In this paper, I would like to focus more on the Gnostic dimensions of Shah Ismail's poetry and how he has specifically redrawn the Shiite Imamology in the bosom of his poetic corpus. In other words, by doing so, we can see clearly that how his emphasis on *Imamology* set new vistas before Shiites both in Iran and Turkey as well as Caucasus and beyond in Eurasia. Last but not least, it should be noted that the Safavid Order as a Sufi Tariqa has been revived in contemporary Iran but what is of interest and less debated is the omission of Shah Ismail's poetic corpus in the contemporary form of this order which seems to be more *Persianate* rather than relying upon the Turkish legacy of Shah Ismail as one of the most important *Pirs* of the Safavid Order.

**Keywords:** Shah Ismail, Turkish Poetry, Sufism, Shiite Clergy, Imam Ali

## Introduction

Shah Ismail (1487-1524) was born in Ardabil in northwest of Iran and now is buried there next to Sheikh Safi al-Deen Ardabili who was the founder of the Safavid Order in 1301 when the latter took the spiritual leadership of the Zahediyeh Order in Gilan at the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. There are many works and significant researches on the Safavid Dynasty in various languages including the German scholarships. Thus, I am not intending to repeat that stream of scholarships but my main interest in this speech is solely on poetical dimensions of Shah Ismail which is reflected in his Diwan and in particular on how Shah Ismail has conceptualized his *relation* to Imam Ali. Most of all known Sufi Orders around the world since the outset of Islam extend their *silsila* i.e. their spiritual lineage to Imam Ali and the Safavid Order is no exception in this regard but little research has been conducted on the conception of Shah Ismail in regard to Ali as reflected in his poems. (Gallagher, 2018. 361)

In other words, most researchers have worked upon the political dimensions of Shah Ismail and the claims which have been recorded in the historical treatises by foes and friends but I am not interested in this speech on these forms of analyses. On the contrary, I would like to analyze and interpret the kind of conceptions which may appear through the poems which are collected in his Turkish Diwan edited by the Iranian scholar Rasul Ismailzadeh who himself is a very known Turkologist in Tehran. The Diwan I refer to in my study is published in 2001 by *International Publication of Al-Huda* in Iran where you can find all of Shah Ismail's poems in Turkish and Persian languages.

At the outset it must be mentioned that the dominant view in Iran on Shah Ismail is the political conception of this figure in the Iranian history as a King who established modern Iran and unified her under a centralized Shiite state after the fall of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE when it was overthrown by the Arab Caliphate. In other words, there are not much academic debates on Shah Ismail as a Gnostic and a Poet in Iran today. (Tabatabaei, 2020. 86) Maybe one of the reasons is that Shah Ismail's poetry is expressed in Turkish and contemporary academic milieu in Iran is dominated by Persian language since the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925 where a sense of apathy towards the Turkish language grew among the Iranian intelligentsia who endorsed a kind of Persianate nationalism which defined itself against Islam (and by extension Arabic language) and Turkish language. This state of cultural mentalité has been institutionalized up to this very

day and talking of Shah Ismail's poetical dimensions is not considered as an academic pursuit and very little is known about it. (Miri, 2019. 26)

For instance, when we look at academic textbooks (or even in school books) in literature where authors discuss the history of Iranian literature and poetry there is no mentioning of Shah Ismail or any other poets who have written in other languages than Persian. This is to argue that there is a systematic negligence towards non-Persian texts and poetries and literatures and the Diwan of Shah Ismail too should be understood against this academic culture in Iran.

Having said this, I have to add that there is yet another obstacle which makes Shah Ismail's poetry in terms of its content irrelevant in contemporary Iran as far as religious debates are concerned and that is what orthodox Shiite clergies attributes to Shah Ismail, i.e. his *heretical views* (Ghali or Ghulat Inclinations) attributed to Imam Ali and *People of the Prophetic House* (Ahl al-Bayt). (Moosa, 1987)

To put it otherwise, theologians of orthodox Shiite Islam referred to Ghulats as heretics who “exaggerate” the status of the Imams in an undue manner by attributing to them divine qualities and in their views Shah Ismail and his Kizilbash are part and parcel of that heretical tradition. This is to argue that we have two institutional obstacles as far as Shah Ismail studies are concerned, i.e. Linguistic Ideology and Religious Orthodoxy and these two factors have created a context where the major debates on Shah Ismail and his Gnostic views on Imam Ali are made outside academic circles and hence of poor quality.

## Shah Ismail as Khata'i

There are many debates outside the academic circles about the *pen-name* of Shah Ismail which is *Khata'i*. Some argue that this term refers to Khotan - which was an ancient Iranian Scythian Buddhist kingdom located on the branch of the Silk Road that ran along the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert in the Tarim Basin (i.e. modern Xinjiang or Uyghur Republic in China)- and hence someone from that region would be termed in Persian as *Khata'i* i.e. coming from Khotan. There is another definition of Shah Ismail's pen-name i.e. *Khata'i* as *he who made a mistake* or *he who was wrong*. But by analyzing the contents of the poems it seems the second definition is the correct one as Shah Ismail is attempting to refer to his shortcomings before Imam Ali and Ahl al-Bayt. For instance, in Poem Number 62 he states

بیزه شمع تجلی مصطفی دور  
 اونونچون سرور آل عبا دور  
 تمامت خارجی عجب کی، بیلمز  
 امیرالمومنین شیر خدادور  
 خدیجه محرم اولدی چون رسوله  
 یقین بیل! فاطمه خیرالنساء دور  
 منیم میریم حسن، شاهیم حسین دور  
 کی، زین العابدین درده دوادور  
 محمد باقر اولدی عین گوهر  
 امام جعفر، امام و پیشوادور  
 امام و سروریم موسای کاظم  
 کی، سلطان هم علی موسی الرضا دور  
 سئوه رم من تقی و هم تقی نی  
 اولارکیم، شیمدی نقد اولیادور  
 ای والله خاک پای عسگری نون  
 چکرمن چشمیمه، چون توتیادور  
 یئنه دولدوله میندی شاه مهدی  
 الونده ذوالفقار مرتضی دور  
 الهی عفو قیلگیل سن گناهییم  
 "خطائی" بیر فقیر بی نوادور

(Rasul Ismailzadeh, 2001. 98)

Here at the end of Poem 62 we can see that Shah Ismail himself is defining the exact meaning of his own penname by saying

*My God! Do forgive my sin*

*Khata'i* (i.e. the sinner who is begging for forgiveness) is a poor and helpless man

In other words, there is no textual endorsement for the first interpretation of Shah Ismail's penname as referring to Khotan and Turkish ethnic origins as though he is propagating a kind of early form of Turkish ethno-nationalism. This interpretation is an anachronistic definition of the penname of Shah Ismail and is not backed up by the structures of the poems in the Diwan either. This is to argue that Shah Ismail views himself as a fallible human being before the Infallible Ones which are consisted of 14 holy personalities in the Shiite theology. We can see various poems where Shah Ismail refers to Imams as manifestations of the Holy and through these references we can reconstruct his Gnostic understanding of Shiism but what I would like to do in this paper is to focus on his view of Imam Ali and how the latter has been portrayed in Shah Ismail's poems.

Of course, there are great many poems in the Diwan and to talk about all of them or refer to all these poems it would be a very cumbersome task so I will select few of these poems and discuss one of them in some details as far as my time allows.

### Ali in the eyes of Shah Ismail

Ali ibn Abi Talib (601-661) was the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. He ruled as the fourth caliph from 656 to 661, but his importance is not only of historical significance. On the contrary, Ali plays a pivotal role in the constitution of all Sufi orders around the globe up to this very day. Because he is considered as the medium of divine grace (فیض الهی) and in this capacity Ali is not confined to the historical past but Ali is a recurrent presence in the life of any person who embarks upon Gnostic Sojourn (سلوک معنوی).

How does Shah Ismail view Ali? How is Ali re-presented in his poetry? In the opening of his Diwan there is a poem on Ali which reads as following:

منم بیر تن ولی جانوم علی دور  
 دامارومده گزن قانوم علی دور  
 منه بو دفتر و دیوان گر کمز  
 منوم دفترله دیوانوم علی دور  
 منم بیر قطره سو اونون یانیندا  
 منوم دریای عمانوم علی دور

منم یعقوب سرگشته جهاندا  
 منوم یوسف کنعانوم علی دور  
 بو سوز علی سوزی دور ای خطائی!  
 منوم بو سوزده اوستادوم علی دور

(Rasul Ismalizadeh, 2001. Preface)

The distinction between soul and body has always been part of premodern metaphysics and Shah Ismail employs this distinction in a metaphoric fashion by arguing that Ali is the *soul* and the relation between Ali and *Khata'i* is the relation between body and soul. In most mystic poetries we can see the use of metaphors such as 'Sea' and 'Drop' and Shah Ismail employs this metaphoric language in demonstrating the *relation* between himself and Ali by comparing himself to a *drop* before the *Sea of Oman* which is personified by Ali.

In other words, Sea of Oman seems to represent the ocean or the unlimited capacity of being in the eyes of Shah Ismail and Ali is the Ocean of Spirituality in the context of life. Man is lost in this world even that man is someone who is a prophet such as Jacob but Shah Ismail is telling that by finding your spiritual master then you are liberated from bewilderment. However, it seems here there is an issue which may be worth to dwell upon and that is the relation between prophethood and Imamate as interpreted by Shah Ismail which may not be welcomed by the Orthodox Shiite Clergies and that is the precedence of Imamate to Prophethood.

How could one draw such a conclusion from this poem? If we agree that Jacob was a prophet in the parlance of Koran then how could he be bewildered by the loss of Joseph? Here the relation between Jacob and Joseph is not conceptualized as the relation between Father and Son but as a Guide and the Guided and the Guide is Joseph. Then Shah Ismail claims that he is bewildered but his Joseph is Ali. This is exactly where the debates and discussions on the Safavid Order, in general, and Shah Ismail (and Kizilbash rituals and practices), in particular, get controversial as it seems they consider *Velayat* higher than *Nabuwat*.

In other words, in this poem seems Jacob in the absence of his master is lost (as Shah Ismail is lost) but Joseph is not perplexed and the Joseph of Shah Ismail is Ali and as a matter of fact the true origin of all guidance springs from Ali. This is to argue that even the historical Joseph was a manifestation of eternal spring of Guidance, i.e. Ali. Of course, the term *Velayat* itself needs to be pondered upon as

the relation between Jacob and Joseph is based on Velayat but this is not to be considered as the relationship between master and slave or king and subject.

On the contrary, when we say Joseph is master and Jacob is mastered this is only meaningful when we understand the term velayat as *hub*, i.e. love and the love leads you to follow the beloved and in the absence of *Pir* you are bewildered and this is how Shah Ismail portrays his relationship to Ali. Of course, he confesses that this understanding is not his own but inspirations which have come to him through Ali as he has committed mistakes. In other words, he considers his relationship to Ali not as a relation to a Caliph or a historical figure in the past but to a living reality which guides him through all aspects of life. That's why he states that all these inspirations which I have told you are not from me but Ali and Ali is my Master (Ustad) in delivering you all these talks. To put it otherwise, the distance between Shah Ismail and Ali seems to disappear as the former has become one with the latter in the same fashion that soul and body get interwoven.

## Conclusion

To sum up; Khata'i starts with the comparison between soul and body where Ali is the soul and he is the body but then ends up by stating that this word -سوز- (Logos or λόγος) is not mine but the word of Ali which is expressed through me. Here we can see how Khata'i is uplifted to the heights of a holy manifestation of Ali in this juncture of history. But in contemporary Iran this dimension of Shah Ismail is deeply absent and his mausoleum (next to Sheikh Safi al-Deen) is turned into a museum rather than a holy shrine as it is customary among Shiites. However, this is not the case among Alevis in Anatolia who considers Shah Ismail as a divine emanation and therefore come as pilgrims to Ardabil in order to do *Ziyara* or pay pilgrimage to his shrine.

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## Revisiting Al-Nasikh Wal-Mansukh Genre

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### Abstract

Muslim tradition generally holds that there are *al-nasikh wal-mansukh ayat* (abrogating and abrogated verses) in the Qur'an, though there is no consensus about it in the tradition. Rather, the tradition is ambivalent if not contradictory as this paper will demonstrate. Further, Muslim scholarship of the last three hundred years has mostly distanced itself from the genre. In some cases, scholars have "vehemently" critiqued it, showing that it has no basis in the Qur'an, *sunnah*, or *ḥadith*. The paper revisits the issue through the reflections of a twenty-first century Qur'an scholar, Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018 C.E.), and the history of development of the genre. Khan shows there is no *al-nasikh wal-mansukh ayat* in the Qur'an and so does the history. The only basis for the existence of this genre is the late consensus of the community advocated by al-Shafi'i (d. 820 C.E.). The paper agrees with both assessments. However, it goes further and suggests that *al-nasikh wal-mansukh* should not remain part of the Sciences of the Qur'an (*'ulum al-Qur'an*). The suggestion will help scientifically and critically trained contemporary Muslims who when approach the tradition on this issue do not know what to make of it. This confusion contributes to their remaining away from reading the Qur'an for the reason that they may misunderstand the Qur'an due to their lack of knowledge of this genre.

**Key Words:** Naskh, Abrogation, 'ulum al-Qur'an, Tafsir, Al-nasikh wal-mansukh, Tradition.

## Introduction

The paper explores the issue of *al-nasikh wal-mansukh ayat* (abrogating and abrogated verses) in the Qur'an through the lens of Irfan A. Khan's Qur'anic scholarship and the historical development of this genre in the Muslim tradition. Khan is particularly suited for revisiting the issue as he is a twenty-first century Qur'an scholar, who was trained in natural sciences, traditional Islamic sciences, and modern western Continental and American philosophy. He belongs to a group of Muslim scholars who have been moving away from this genre starting with Shah Waliy Allah Dehlawi (d. 1762 C.E.). Khan reflected on the Qur'an for the last seventy years of his life<sup>1</sup> and concluded that the genre is based on mis-interpretation of its foundational *ayah* Q 2: 106. If Khan's conclusion is correct, the paper will resolve concerns of scientifically and critically trained Muslims who ask: when exploration and debate of this issue will end; why they should carry the burden of a mistaken tradition; and why they need to learn the genre when they approach the Qur'an for pragmatic purposes, i.e. to live their lives in the light of Qur'anic guidance?

The paper introduces Irfan A. Khan and his scholarship to place him in the context of the current discussion of *al-nasikh wal-mansukh*. It then presents Khan's arguments and derivation about the mis-interpretation of Q 2: 106. After that it uses Khan's two concrete examples from the Qur'an where he shows *naskh* does not exist, while the Muslim tradition generally holds it does. Finally, the paper will present a short historical review of the development of the genre based on Muslim sources through David S. Powers' seminal paper, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verse."<sup>2</sup> The review supports Khan's position of no *naskh* in the Qur'an. Neither Khan nor the paper claims to be the first to suggest Q 2: 106 is mis-interpreted. "One of the earliest and perhaps the outstanding representative of this group," Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 1066), maintained that Q 2: 106 and Q 16: 101 "referred, originally, to the suppression of Jewish and Christian religious practices and their permanent replacement with others designed specifically for the Muslim community" (Powers, 1982. 247).<sup>3</sup>

## Irfan A. Khan

Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018)<sup>4</sup> studied physics, chemistry, and mathematics for his bachelorette from Aligarh Muslim University, India in 1952. After graduation, he studied traditional Islamic sciences (*tafsir*, *ḥadith*, *fiqh*, etc.) from *Thanwi Darasgah*

(secondary school)<sup>5</sup> which he attended from 1954–58 in Rampur, India; he studied/taught modern western philosophy, particularly Continental philosophy and Indian religions in Aligarh Muslim University from 1958-73. During this time, he completed BA in theology and MA in philosophy from the university as well. In 1974 he moved to the US and did MS and PhD in philosophy by 1986 from the University of Illinois at Chicago. In his methodology to understand the Qur'an, he belongs to Maulana Hamid al-Din Farahi's (d.1930) school of *naẓm*.<sup>6</sup> According to the school, *naẓm* in the Qur'an implies that "there is structural and thematic coherence in each individual *surah*, among adjacent *surahs* of a group, among the adjacent groups of *surahs*, and the Qur'an as a whole" (Azmat, 2017. 78). Further, Farahi believes, "*Naẓm* is the only single characteristic of a text (*kalam*) that establishes correct direction [of meaning]" (Farahi, 1991, 29).<sup>7</sup> Khan firmly believed that the Qur'an in its current sequence of compilation as a *muṣḥaf* (bounded between two covers) was a very organized book. To the extent that if someone did not find *naẓm* at certain place in the Qur'an, he believed they did not reflect deep enough.<sup>8</sup> Khan encountered Farahi's thought when he attended *Thanwi Darasgah* which was established at the direction of Maulana Abul 'Ala Maududi (d. 1979) for scientifically educated minds to learn traditional Islamic knowledge. At the *Darasgah*, his *tafsir* teacher was Maulana Jalil Aḥsan Nadvi (d. 1981), (Azmat, 2016. 161). "Nadvi was the most respected and famous teacher of the Qur'an at the *Darasgah*. Nadvi's Qur'an teachers were Maulana Akhtar Aḥsan Iṣḥāḥī (d. 1958) and Maulana Amin Aḥsan Iṣḥāḥī (d. 1997), both among the best students of Farahi" (Falahi, 2012. 21-2).<sup>9</sup>

## Khan's Interpretation of Q 2: 106

Khan believed that the Qur'an is a clear (*mubeen*) book and that it is *primary* guidance for all generations to come till the Day of Judgment (Khan, 1987. 40).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, according to him, the Qur'an cannot have abrogating and abrogated verses in it. Before we consider Khan's analysis, let us determine Qur'anic use of *naskh*. The root of *naskh* is *nskh* which appears four times in the Qur'an: Q 2: 106, 7: 154, 22: 52, and 45: 29. The verses Q 7: 154 and Q 45: 29 are used in the sense of copying or transferring "text" and "record" respectively. The verse Q 22: 52 describes a phenomenon that every messenger or prophet faced, i.e. Satan threw something in the revelation to cause e.g. misunderstanding among the listeners. However, God guarantees the protection of His verses from such activity. Therefore, Q 2: 106 is the only verse from the root *nskh* related to the abrogation or

eradication of some verses of the Qur'an by others as understood by Muslim tradition. For Khan Qur'anic use of abrogation in Q 2: 106 relates to the abrogation of Divine Commands of earlier verses "in the Torah by fresh commandments in the Qur'an" (Khan, 2005. 29). For him this meaning of *naskh* should be clear to anyone who gives due consideration to literally context of the Qur'an. He finds that the context of Q 2: 106 is the address to the Children of Israel. According to his analysis of *surah al-Baqarah*, this address starts from Q 2: 40 and ends at Q 2: 123 dealing exclusively with the history and issues related to Jews (Khan, 2013. 7). Khan sub-divides this section into eleven smaller units: Q 2: 40-46, "Divine Expectations From The Children of Israel;" Q 2: 47-61, "A Critical Survey of Their Performance;" Q 2: 62, "Merely Making a Covenant Is Not Sufficient;" Q 2: 63-74, "The Children Of Israel's Disregard of Their Covenant;" Q 2: 75-82, "How The [Jewish] Scholars Muddled The Divine Text;" Q 2: 83-86, "Social Implications of the Covenant;" Q 2: 87-93, "Turning Into A Disbelieving Community;" Q 2: 94-101, "Causes of This Continuing *Kufr* [disbelief];" Q 2: 102-103, "Using the Book For Worldly Gains;" Q 2: 104-112, "Disrespecting The Prophet and Instigating The Believers;" and Q 2: 113-123, "Concluding Remarks" (Khan, 2005. 151-87). Since the whole section (Q 2: 40-123) *exclusively* deals with the Children of Israel, therefore Khan concludes: to read Q 2: 106 as the basis for the theory of *al-nasikh wal-mansukh* in the Qur'an is a great disservice to the Qur'an. Such reading is possible only when Q 2: 106 is read independently of its literary context.

According to Khan, *naskh* in the sense of the abrogation of one Qur'anic verse by another "has been a topic of discussion among commentators of the Qur'an as well as the scholars of Islamic Jurisprudence" (Khan, 2005. 30). He considers this sense of understanding *naskh* "non-Qur'anic." According to him, the commentators and jurists' interest was "the derivation of Divine Commandments from the Qur'anic *ayat*." Despite their common goal they "differ as to how many *ayat* of the Qur'an were actually abrogated." Khan is correct in this assessment. For example, "By the fourth/tenth century Muslim scholars had identified over 235 instances of abrogation (*naskh*), and that number would eventually double" (Powers, 1982. 246). By the time of Jalal al-Din al-Khūḍayrī al-Suyutī (d. 1505), it reached five hundred. Al-Suyutī reduced the number to twenty abrogated verses. Shah Waliy Allah (d. 1762) "accepted five verses as abrogated, [even then he] does not seem to be much pleased to recognize this theory, as he warns to be careful rather meticulous in this matter" (Hasan, 1965. n. 44, 199). Later, Muḥammad al-Khūḍarī harmonized "all the verses which al-Suyutī' supposed to have been abrogated" (al-Khūḍarī, 1938. 246-51).<sup>11</sup>

Khan believes the companions of the Prophet experienced abrogation in the Qur'anic verses. They could do so as “the Qur'an was still continuing” coming down bit by bit during the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life. According to Khan, the whole Qur'an was not in front of them, therefore “quite often the believers had to change their understanding of the *ayat* of the Qur'an with newer revelations” (Khan, 2005. 30). With each new revelation “a change was brought in their understanding of the totality of the Qur'anic commandments” (Khan, 2005. 30). However, Khan believes that today we have the whole Qur'an in front of us. Therefore, “we can proceed to form, from the very beginning, a coherent understanding of its *ayat*, giving due consideration to all the relevant literary contexts” (Khan, 2005. 30). To prove this point Khan provides two examples from the Qur'an that have been subject of *naskh* in the Muslim tradition. He shows in the examples how these *ayat* can be understood without requiring abrogation by the current readers of the Qur'an.

### **Khan's No Naskh in the Qur'an Examples**

Khan's first example is Q 2: 184 and Q 2: 185 considered abrogated and abrogating verses respectively by the Muslim tradition. The *ayat* are about the exemption from fasting in Ramadan due to some inability. Q 2: 184 has three groups of people who are exempted from fasting in Ramadan: i) who are ill, ii) who are on travel, and iii) who have the power or ability (*al-Taqaah*) to fast but they may skip fasting if they feed one poor per day of the missed fast; Q 2: 185 includes the first and second group of people but not the third group of people. The tradition thus holds that Q 2: 185 abrogates the third group of Q 2: 184. Khan disagrees with this understanding. To him if Q 2:183-185 is seen as a “coherent discourse,” no abrogation is required. He asks, “why today's students of the Qur'an have to grapple with such information” (Khan, 2005. 31)? Naturally, if the “students of the Qur'an” want to understand the history of revelation or how the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) understood these *ayat*, their study will be legitimate. But if today's students of the Qur'an want to get guidance from the Qur'an to live their lives, then they must consider the Qur'an as a primary guidance for them as if it were just revealed in their personal and historic circumstance. Such fresh revelation cannot have abrogation in it. According to Khan, the Book is a very organized discourse that should therefore be studied as a “coherent whole.” Further, in the derivation of the meaning or understanding the Text, Khan wants to be totally loyal to it. Meaning, there must be clues in the text that must allow for interpretation.

Imagination, historically understood meanings, etc. must also stand this test. In the *ayat* under discussion, (Q 2: 184-85), Khan finds the clue in the Text that allows him to see a quite different meaning which removes any contradiction between the two *ayat*. He points out, “*al-Ṭāqah*” in Q 2: 184 that can also be understood as “‘one was unable to do something’ or ‘one was hardly able to do something’”(Khan, 2005. 30) instead of “having the power / ability to do something,” i.e. fasting. Meaning, the “persons who have lost the ability to fast [e.g. permanently ill persons] or who can hardly fast [e.g. due to old age], they can feed a poor person in ransom” (Khan, 2005. 31). The Text through its words legitimately allows this meaning and hence acceptable to Khan without experiencing any abrogation.

Khan’s second example is Q 2: 180 about which generally Muslim tradition believes that it is abrogated by Q 4: 11-12. The *ayah* Q 2: 180 states that a person at death bed should make a will for the distribution of his inheritance among the parents and relatives. The bequestor decides inheritance portions as long as they are according to *ma ‘ruf* (“good traditions of society”). The *ayah* is not a suggestion but a Divine Command to make the will. The *ayat* Q 4: 11-12 define precise portions of inheritance, as opposed to *ma ‘ruf* portions of Q 2: 180, to the inheritors. Further, God commands to first fulfill the bequest and debt and balance to the inheritors. Khan believes though the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) would have experienced the abrogation of Q 2: 108 by Q 4: 11-12, today’s readers of the Qur’an should not see a contradiction between Q 2: 180 and Q 4: 11-12 as the whole Qur’an is in front of them. According to him, the bequest verse Q 2: 180 “falls in line with” Q 4: 11-12. Khan argues, “To make the job of individual believers easy God, The Merciful, Himself gave a general *wasiyah* on behalf of all of them [in Q 4: 11-12]. He made the Divine *Wasiyah* binding on all, still giving them freedom to add a special *wasiyah* [Q 2: 108] in view of their particular situations” (Khan, 2005. 32). Remaining loyal to the text of Q 4: 11-12 and *ayah* Q 2: 180, Khan sees Q 2: 180 as a “supplement” to Q 4: 11-12 and sees no abrogation of Q 2:180.

The above two particular examples show that Khan sees Qur’anic *ayat* as having many perspectives. “At one place one aspect is made clear. At another place another aspect is chosen for clarification” (Khan, 2005. 460). Therefore, “we cannot understand any Qur’anic *ayah* correctly if we close our eyes to other contexts in the Qur’an where the same, the similar or related topics are discussed” (Khan, 2005. 459). It seems Khan has a point. The point is that reading the Book in the post-prophetic period when the whole Book is available to us and reading it in the

prophetic period when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was himself present and Qur'anic revelation was coming down piece by piece are two different situations and require two different methodologies to correctly understand the Qur'an. Further, Khan also believes that there are places in the Qur'an that seem to abrogate its injunctions, but at such "places the Qur'an itself makes it clear that one of these commandments was only a temporary injunction (58:12-13), or was valid up to a point of time (33:51-52), or applies under a specific situation (8:65-66)," (Khan, 2005. 32). These situations cannot also be considered abrogated as "there is no real contradiction, and therefore no *naskh*." Let us review the historical development of this genre in the Islamic tradition to see if the tradition supports Khan's position.

### **The Historical Development of Naskh Genre**

David Powers in his seminal paper, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," uses "Q. 2: 180 and 2: 240 ('the bequest verses') which, according to the general consensus of Muslim scholars, were abrogated by Q. 4: 11-12 ('the inheritance verses')" to demonstrate the historical development of *naskh* genre (Powers, 1982. 247).<sup>12</sup> His analysis shows the Muslim tradition is ambivalent about this issue and there is no agreement among the Muslim scholars. Based on Powers' analysis, I will first present an overall summary of the developments of the genre and then explore the details in each phase. Also, I will refer only to Powers' analysis of Q 2: 180 in the paper for brevity. He provides detailed analysis of Q 2: 240 that can be followed in his paper (Powers, 1982. 285-90). In the first phase, "the bequest [*waṣīyya*] verses remained operative throughout the lifetime of Muhammad [peace be upon him]" (Powers, 1982. 256). The first "explicit reference to the abrogation of Q. 2:180 occurs in a statement attributed to Ibn Abbas (d. 687)" in Basra (al-Tabari, 1954. 26-28).<sup>13</sup> According to Powers, "This statement could not have been made prior to A.D. 656, when Ibn Abbas was appointed governor of Basra" (EI 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1960. Ibn Abbas). Thus, the earliest reference to *naskh* in the Muslim sources is around 656 A.D. Approximately, by tenth century C.E. "the case for abrogation emerged as the majority position, but the outcome of this controversy was by no means inevitable." Powers shows "the commentators began to disregard the claims that had been made by the opponents of abrogation, until the very terms of controversy were eventually forgotten" (Powers, 1982. 247-248). Due to Muslim scholars' uneasiness with the issue, three understandings of the abrogation emerged: full, partial, or specification (*takhsis* or no-abrogation). The Muslim scholars "attempted to find an indicator of abrogation in the Qur'an and *ḥadith*, but without

much successes” (Powers, 1982. 294-95). The ultimate fate of the issues rested upon the consensus of the Community. One may wonder if the all too human consensus of the Community can overwrite Divine Commands and overrule the prophetic *sunnah* or *ḥadith* without evidence from the two foundational sources! As a matter of fact, we find both sources emphasize bequest. For example, even the supposedly abrogating *ayat*, Q 4:11-12, command that the inheritance should be divided *after* any bequest and debts are paid. Similarly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) “attached the utmost importance to the drawing up of a last will and testament.” The Prophet said, “It is not the right of any man who has property to bequeath to spend three [consecutive] nights unless his testament is written and in his possession” (Powers, 1982. 255).<sup>14</sup> Ahmad Hasan, a contemporary Pakistani scholar in his extensive study in the theory of *naskh* concludes: “The classical theory of *naskh* cannot go back to the Prophet because we do not find any information from the Prophet” about abrogation. He argues, “it is inconceivable that the Prophet had left such an important problem to the direction of the people” (Hasan, 1965. 186).

Powers divides the “doctrinal developments” of abrogation in the Muslim history in four stages: 1) “the period of revelation (610-632);” 2) “the early authorities (632-799);” 3) “the period of the collection of *ḥadith* (ninth century);” and 4) “the classical period (tenth-fifteenth centuries)” (Powers, 1982. 248). During “the period of revelation” he finds two sets of verses related to the issue of bequest, one set in Mecca and the other in Medina. Meccan (610-622 C.E.) set of verses consists of six verses (Q 2:180-182, 2:240 and 5:105-106); Medina (623-630 C.E.) set consists of four verses (Q 4: 8, and 4: 11-12, 4: 176). Powers finds two prophetic dicta through the *sunnah* that limited scope of the first and second set of Qur’anic *ayat*, i.e. bequest shall not exceed one-third of the estate, and “no bequest to an heir.” With this review, Powers concludes the Qur’an, as noted in the above Meccan and Medinan verses or any other place, “does not contain any explicit reference to” the abrogation of bequest verses nor the *ḥadith*-literature “ever referred to the abrogation of the bequest verses,” and that “the bequest verses remained operative throughout the lifetime of Muhammad” (Powers, 1982. 254-56).

The second stage of development took place between 650-799 C.E. During this period three opinions emerged regarding abrogation: full, partial, and no abrogation, where full abrogation became the majority opinion. Powers lists various reasons and short coming of each position that were responsible for defining one or the other type of abrogation in the Muslim sources (Powers, 1982. 259-66). Without going in those details it may be instructive to mention the names of the Muslim scholars who



held these positions: 1) **Full Abrogation:** Ibn Abbas (d. 687), Ibn Umar (d. 683), Mujahid (d. 722), 'Ikrima (d. 723), al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), Qatada (d. 736), and al-Suddi (d. 745); **Partial Abrogation:** Ibn Abbas (d. 687), al-Rabi' (d. 682), Ta'us (d. 720), al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), and Qatada (d. 736); **No Abrogation:** Muslim B. Yasar (d. 718), Ta'us (d. 720), al-Dahhak (d. 723), Abu Mijlaz (d. 725), and al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), (Powers, 1982. 259-63). It is interesting to note that some scholars in this period hold more than one position. This may point to having changed their opinions over time. Finally, and most importantly, none of the authorities during this period sight the prophetic dictum, "no bequest to an heir." Powers identify only two persons, Qatada (d. 736) and Imam Malik (d. 795), in this period who mention this maxim not as prophetic *ḥadith* but as a legal maxim (Powers, 1982. 267).

The third phase of abrogation doctrine, "the period of the collection of *ḥadith*" (9<sup>th</sup> century), is the most crucial. In it the legal maxim "no bequest to an heir" turns into a prophetic *ḥadith*. Perhaps, the first time this maxim appears as a prophetic *ḥadith* is in *Risala of Shafi'i* (Powers, 1982. 268). The *Risala*'s author Muhammad ibn Idris Shafi'i (d. 820) faced the challenge to provide "indicator of abrogation in the Qur'an and/or *ḥadith*" for the abrogation position when, as we noted in the above, none existed. Shafi'i solved this problem by arguing: 1) it is "a transmission of the public from the public and it is therefore greater authority" than "the transmission of one (individual) from another," 2) "scholars are agreed on it (*alayhi mujma'in*)," 3) since there are some unknown transmitters "we have transmitted it [the maxim] from the Prophet as an interrupted (report)," 4). Shafi'i provides a *sanad*, chain of transmitters, "Sufyan informed us, on the authority of Sulayman al-Aḥḥwal, on the authority of Mujahid, that the Messenger of God said, 'No bequest to an heir'" (Powers, 1982. 268-72). However, the *sanad*, (Sufyan – Sulayman al-Aḥḥwal – Mujahid – Muhammad (peace be upon him)) "is defective, for Mujahid was born after Muhammad [peace be upon him] died and could not possibly have been in direct contact with the Prophet" (Powers, 1982. 272). Powers notes, "Within a century after Shafi'i's death the *isnad* were improved and the *matn*, too, was substantially modified" (Powers, 1982. 273). By the first half of the ninth century, five versions of the bequest *ḥadith* were in circulation. Three versions resemble Shafi'i's *isnad* and hence qualified as not reliable. The other two versions are quite different from Shafi'i's *isnad*. They also reach the Prophet through a companion of the Prophet. These two *ḥadiths* are also defective for various reasons. When Powers reviews *ḥadith* collections, he finds Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 874) do not quote the bequest maxim *ḥadith*. Actually, Muslim does not even mention the

bequest maxim at all and Bukhari mentions it as a “general legal maxim.” The five versions that exist in one or some later *ḥadith* collections are: *Muṣannaḥ* of Abdl al-Razzaq (d. 826), *Sunan Ibn Maja* Ibn Maja (d. 886), *Sunan Ibn Tirmidhi* of Tirmidhi (d. 892), and *Sunan* of Nasa’i (d. 915). The five versions in these collections mention “at most three Companions” in their chains and these *ḥadiths* are “qualified as *ahad* or isolated reports” (Powers, 1982. 280). Such *ḥadith* can only be used for “probable knowledge” and not for as an “indications of abrogation.” Hence, there is not a single reliable *ḥadith* for abrogation position.

By the tenth century, the fourth phase of the *naskh* genre development, “Muslim scholars had identified over 235 instances of abrogation (*naskh*), and that number would eventually double” (Powers, 1982. 246).<sup>15</sup> While in the eighth and ninth centuries scholars tried to present various unsatisfactory solutions to overcome defects in *isnad* of the legal maxim “no bequest to an heir,” in the tenth century another defect became important and required solution. The issue was that the legal maxim presented as *ḥadith* never acquired the formal status of *tawatur* (Powers, 1982. 281). The problem was solved by al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144) three hundred years after Shafi’i . Whereas Shafi’i turned the legal maxim to prophetic *ḥadith* using consensus of the Community as a compensating factor, al-Zamakhshari again used consensus of the Community to overcome the defect of *tawatur*. He argued, “the Community has accepted it (i.e., the *ḥadith*) to the point that it was treated as a *mutawatir*-report, despite the fact that it is one of the *ahad*” (Powers, 1982. 280-81).<sup>16</sup> After al-Zamakhshari, abrogation became majority opinion and “the commentators began to disregard the claims that had been made by the opponents of abrogation, until the very terms of the controversy were eventually forgotten” (Powers, 1982. 247-48). Despite the abrogation became the accepted majority opinion, “a small number of commentators from either pointing out the short comings of this position or articulating an alternative to it” continued (Powers, 1982. 282). According to Powers, Abu Muslim al-Isfahani (d. 1066), “the author of a twenty-volume commentary on the Qur’an,” is one “of the earliest and perhaps the outstanding representative of this group” (Powers, 1982. N. 118, 282).<sup>17</sup> Among the commentators Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) presented the most intellectually rigorous critique of abrogation arguments. He “demonstrates that none of the four ‘sources’ invoked by the proponents of abrogation – Qur’an, *ḥadith*, *ijma* and *quyas* – constitutes an acceptable indicator of abrogation” (Powers, 1982. 284).<sup>18</sup> However, despite al- Isfahani and al-Razi’s arguments against abrogation, they failed to change the majority position.

The issue of no abrogation in the Qur'an surfaced with vigor once again with the reformers of the eighteenth and later centuries. The most important among them is Shah Waliy Allah (d. 1762) due to his profound grounding in classical Islamic scholarship. His effort was to remove "the apparent contradiction between pairs of abrogated and abrogating verses." As noted earlier he reduced such pairs to five. After him, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) "vehemently refuted it" (Hasan, 1965. 188);<sup>19</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905 ) "accepted this theory in principle, but practically he, too, denied the repeal of the verses in the Qur'an;" Al-Khidri, Mohammad Amin, Rashid Rida (1935), and Mawlana 'Ubayd Allah Sindhi (d. 1944) did not believe in abrogation; and Aslam Jayrajpurī (d. 1955, India) concluded, "God's words are too lofty to be abrogated by human opinion" (Baljon, 1961. 49).<sup>20</sup> Among relatively recent scholars, Hungarian Muhammad Assad (d. 1992) and Egyptian Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996) vehemently oppose abrogation in the Qur'an. According to Assad, "there does not exist a single reliable tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever declared a verse of the Qur'an to have been 'abrogated'" (Asad, 1984, 23). The case of al-Ghazali is important and we will discuss it in greater detail in the following.

Al-Ghazali is a late twentieth century scholar and a graduate of the prestigious traditional school, al-Azhar University, from the College of Islamic Sciences and then later from the College of Arabic Studies (Mohammad, 2019. 1). Further, he held many teaching positions and government posts. He taught at al-Azhar, Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, then in Qatar, and Algeria. In 1971 he was appointed Egyptian Minister of Charities and Endowments. He returned Egypt in 1981 from Mecca "as a minister in charge of Islamic propagation in the Ministry of Endowments." He authored about fifty books, and received King Faisal International Award for Distinguished Service to Islam. Al-Ghazali "absolutely denies the concept of abrogation as understood by the classical jurists, thereby seeking to show that the entire gamut of related legislative discourse is in fact constructed on a foundation of misinterpretation and misconception" (Mohammad, 2019. 4). Al-Ghazali's language in discussing the abrogation in the Qur'an is not "gentle persuasion" but sometimes "abrasive." Regarding abrogation of certain verses of the Qur'an, he considers such efforts "crass stupidity" (Mohammad, 2019. 4). One of his findings, among many others, is that "atomistic understanding" of the verses of the Qur'an is one of the main causes of the abrogation issues. When the same verses are read thematically the problem goes away. Fortunately, due to "the trust of his peers" and several governments, he is not scorned by the traditional Muslim scholars or "by the body politic of the Muslim ummah" as was the case

with Muhammad Amin (d. 1908) of Egypt (Mustafa, 1988. 17) and others like him. A rational rebuttal from the traditional Muslim scholars to the likes of al-Ghazali and Amin is awaited. Anger, scolding, “castigation,” etc. from the traditional Muslim scholars may not suffice.

Beyond the benefit of correcting one historical mistake in the Muslim tradition and moving towards revised methodology of understanding the Qur’an, there are two important reasons to address and come to a conclusion about the fate of the genre. The first is that Muslims must know what is Allah’s Will regarding bequest. Can dying persons give away everything they owned to anyone and leave nothing for inheritors,<sup>21</sup> or do they follow consensus of the Community to give only one-third from the estate in bequest or have no bequest for the heirs? The paper finds “no indicator of abrogation in the Qur’an and *ḥadith*.” The theory of abrogation is based on the consensus of the Community. Is the consensus of the Community infallible; can human consensus override Divine command; and do we have to believe that the Divine changes Will during the sending down of Qur’anic revelation? The second reason is that abrogation is used for ideological purposes. For example, in our own time Muslim extremists “have argued that the [sword] verse [Q 9: 5] abrogates more than one hundred other verses of the Qur’an that advise or advocate peace, co-existence, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness as the basis for relations between Muslims and other faiths” (Halimi, 2017. 1). Thus, the issue of *naskh* is not academic only, it is real, relevant, and urgent as there are lives at stake.

## Conclusion

Among many of the issues that contemporary Muslims face, the issue of *naskh* in the Qur’an is mind boggling for them when they approach Muslim tradition to correctly understand the Qur’an. The problem is not if there was a “critical mass” of the contemporary Muslims who felt blocked understanding the Qur’an due to the absence of knowledge of *naskh* genre and therefore, we can afford not to correct it. The problem is psychological. When contemporary Muslims approach the Qur’an, they have in the back of their minds that they do not know the *naskh* genre and hence they may be making a mistake when trying to understand the Qur’an directly with their own minds as a communicative act between them and God. It is amply clear that there is no evidence of abrogation in the Qur’an, *sunnaḥ*, and *ḥadith*. The only thing that holds the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an is based on the infallible consensus of the Community. It is a cause for concern that humanly reached

consensus can be considered infallible, even when God's command goes against the consensus.

## Note

1. From 1982 till his death, I witnessed his fingers and eyes on Qur'anic words every day.
2. Objection may be raised on the use of non-Muslims' research for writing about Islam. The objection may be valid about the research studies done during the colonial or early post-colonial times. However, since then not only triumphalism or eurocentrism of the west has subdued, western scholarship itself has become conscious of such tendencies. The type of research this paper has depended upon is the historical critical research based on Muslim sources by non-Muslim scholars like David Powers. Such research is data driven that can be challenged by the Muslims if they feel it is faulty.
3. Also see Ahmad Hasan, "The Theory of *Naskh*," *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 187; also "Muhammad b. All al-Daw'udli, *Tabaqat al-mufasssin*, ed. Ali Muhammad Umar (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1972), II, 211, no. 543; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Bughyat al-wu'at Suyuti at fi tabaqat al-lughawiyyin wal-nujjat* (Cairo: Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1383/1964), I, 188, no. 313; Ibn Aibak al-Şafadi, *al-Wafi bil-wafayat*, ed. H. Ritter (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1962), IV, 130, no. 1639; Dhahabi, *Mizan*, III, 655, no. 7973; J. Jomier, *Le Commentaire Coranique du Manâr* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1954), pp. 194-195," in Powers, "On the Abrogation," n. 118, 282.
4. Most of Irfan Khan's papers and some videos are available on the Association of Qur'anic Understanding website: <http://quranicunderstanding.com/quranic-study/> accessed Aug. 31, 2019. He wrote two books which are referenced in the paper.
5. For more information on the *Darasgah*, see Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi, ed., *Islam, ma'ashiyat aur adab: Khutūṭ kē a'inah main* (Urdu) (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 2000).
6. For Farahi's biography, works and scholarship please see: <https://www.hamid-uddin-farahi.org/> accessed Aug. 31, 2019; my translation into English.
7. My translation into English from Urdu.
8. I once asked Irfan Khan about Amin Aḥsan Iṣḥāḥi's *tafsir*, *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an*, where at some places one finds *naẓm* is forced on the text. He responded that *naẓm* was there but Iṣḥāḥi did not reflect deep enough on such places; also see Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Iṣḥāḥi's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publication, 1986).
9. My translation into English from Urdu.
10. Also see Q 12: 1, 15: 1, 24: 34, 26: 2, 26: 195, 27: 1, 28: 2, 43: 2, 44: 2, etc.
11. Also, Ahmad Hasan, "The Theory of *Naskh*," 188.

12. John Burton also reached the same conclusions as Powers did: neither in the Qur'an nor in the *ḥadith* there is any evidence of abrogation of the Qur'anic *ayat* by the other Qur'anic *ayat*. See, John Burton, "The Exegesis of Q. 2: 106 and the Islamic Theories of 'naskh: *ma nansakh min aya awnansaha na'ti bi khairin minha aw mithliha*,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985): 452-469; also see Louay Fatooh, *Abrogation in the Qur'an and Islamic Law: A Critical Study of the Concept of "Naskh" and its Impact* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
13. Also, Bayhaqi, *al-Sunnan al-kubra* (Hyderabad: Da'irat al Ma'arif al-Uthmaniyya, 1352/19330, VI, 256," in Powers, "On the Abrogation," n. 42, 259.
14. The *ḥadith* is quoted in *al-Musannaf*, Muslim, *al-Musanad* of Ahmad B. Hanbal, and *Nasai*.
15. Also see "al-Nahhas (d. 338/950), *Kitab al-nasikh wal-mansukh* (Cairo, 1938); al-Jassas (d. 370/981), *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Istanbul, 1335-8/1916-18); Hibatallah b. Salama (d. 410/1019), *Kitab al-nasikh wal-mansukh* (Cairo, 1960); Ibn Hazm (d. 457/1064), *Fi ma'rifat al-nasikh wal-mansukh*, on the margin of *Tafsir al-jalalayn* (Cairo, 1966); Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 542/1148), *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo, 1387/1967); Abd al-Muta'al-Jabari, *al-Nasikh fil-shari'a-l-Islamiyya* (Cairo, 1961), p. 71," in Powers, "On the Abrogation," 246.
16. See al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967), I, 224, in Powers, "On the Abrogation," 280; Zamakhshari also supports full abrogation of Q. 2: 180 by the Qur'an and *ḥadith* using seventh and eighth centuries scholars.
17. "See: Muhammad b. Ali al-Da'udi, *Tabaqat al-mufasssirin*, ed. Ali Muhammad Umar (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1972), II, 211, no. 543; Jalaal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Bughyat al-wu'at fi tabaqat al-lughawiiyyin wal-nujjat* (Cairo: Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1383/1964), I, 188, no. 313," etc. in Powers, "On the Abrogation," n. 118, 282.
18. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-kabir* (Cairo, 1889), V, 68; Powers, "On the Abrogation," 284.
19. Also see Ernest Hahn, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's The Controversy over Abrogation (in the Qur'an): An Annotated Translation," *The Muslim World* LXIV (1974): 124.
20. Also, Hasan, "The Theory of *Naskh*," 188," in Powers, "On the Abrogation," 247; also Khaleel Mohammad, "Muhammad Al-Ghazali's View on Abrogation in the Qur'an," 2, 4, available at [http://www.forpeoplewhothink.org/Topics/Abrogation\\_in\\_the\\_Quran.html](http://www.forpeoplewhothink.org/Topics/Abrogation_in_the_Quran.html) accessed Jan. 27, 2019.
21. There may be wisdom when bequestor holds the power to give away his/her estate to anyone at any time. For example, in such a case, the inheritors or others may remain nice to him/her in the hope to gain assets.

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## **Lebanese Street Politics** ***Popular Insurrection & Public Squares***

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### **Abstract**

On 6 April 2020, Henry Kissinger – former US Secretary of State, National Security Advisor, and Nobel Peace Laureate winner – cautioned, ‘The world’s democracies need to defend and sustain their Enlightenment values... A global retreat from balancing power with legitimacy will cause the social contract to disintegrate both domestically and internationally’. Kissinger called on the international community to do three things: ‘First, shore up global resilience to infectious disease; Second, strive to heal the wounds to the world economy; Third, safeguard the principles of the liberal world order. ...The pandemic has prompted an anachronism, a revival of the walled city in an age when prosperity depends on global trade and movement of people’. Conceding Kissinger’s call, this article evokes the concept of “Street Politics” (Bayat, 2017, 2013, 1998; and Zacka, 2017) in order to demonstrate what social and political protest, coupled with agency, could accomplish.<sup>1</sup> Since 17 October 2019, the Lebanese streets and public squares have been burning with revolutionary youth fever. The youth have been demanding an overhaul of the entire political system; and the ousting of the corrupt ruling elite, the previous civil war (1975-1990) warlords, who have been in power since the early 1980s. Why did this call for dignity and freedom come about, and how is it evolving? Is it a phase in the unfolding of the “Arab Revolutions”; or what has been dubbed as the “Arab Spring”? What is the role of various Lebanese political actors, civil society organizations, and the Islamists in the unfolding of the “Revolution”? Taking Kissinger’s premonition into account,

namely, '[t]he reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus'<sup>2</sup>, one questions: is COVID-19 the nail on the coffin of the Lebanese "Revolution"?

**Keywords:** Street politics; public squares; COVID-19; corruption; IMF; Lebanese state; default; Hizbullah; revolution; demonstration; uprising; draconian measures.

## Introduction

This article is divided into five Sections: Section I: furnishes the necessary background by analyzing Lebanon's default after decades of corruption; Section II: discusses the reaction of the ruling elite; Section III: evaluates Hizbullah's reaction and the street's response; Section IV: gauges Hariri's resignation and studies its aftermath; Section V: highlights the Lebanese State's and Hizbullah's handling of the COVID-19 Crisis; Section VI: delves into PM Diab's Rescue Cabinet and the IMF's Bailout Plan.

## SECTION I. Lebanon's Default after Decades of Corruption

On 7 March 2020, PM Hassan Diab made the watershed announcement that Lebanon has defaulted on its debt.<sup>3</sup> What caused Lebanon from shifting from being the "Switzerland of the Middle East" in the 1960s to being one of the most debt-ridden countries in the world? In Lebanon, the culture of corruption is a rampant and a deeply engrained epidemic. Since the civil war ended in 1990, the warlords became the political leaders and divided the cake among them. The Lebanese political system is characterized by clientelism, or the infamous 'isms': nepotism; favouritism; sectarianism; confessionalism; and most importantly, crony capitalism, in a deep state<sup>4</sup> (*imperium in imperio*) typified by the erosion of the rule of law and governed by the spoils system, as opposed to the merit system. Although the post of the Ombudsman was founded by a law in 2005, until today it has not been implemented: maybe because the Ombudsman is the cornerstone of the merit system and a guarantee of the rule of law. For the past 30 years, the politicians were stealing the resources of the country. This means that the rich become richer and the poor poorer. According to the latest surveys in Lebanon, 1% own 58% of the means of production and distribution; 0.8% own 49% of the deposits in bank accounts, and

these are the politicians and their retinue. Over the past 40 years, they have embezzled over \$800 billion in public funds and tax evasion. Out of the \$800 billion, 56 Lebanese politicians smuggled and transferred \$189 billion from their Swiss accounts to the Luxembourg and other Island safe- havens. Noteworthy, the Swiss authorities agreed to cooperate with the Lebanese government in its future investigation into the matter.<sup>5</sup>

From 1984 to 2020, Lebanese public debt increased from \$1 billion to almost \$100 billion, 38% of which was wasted as subsidies for the National Electricity Company (EDL), which loses around \$2 billion annually and there is hardly any electricity produced. Private generators make up for the electricity shortages. In other words, average Lebanese citizen pays two bills for the electricity. The same goes for water. Consumer products are on the rise, in a country that exports \$2 billion and imports \$20 billion a year! Many factories and business became bankrupt, and many employees lost their jobs. Added to that are around two million refugees (Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi), who are draining the resources of a country of four million Lebanese citizens. In short, before the demonstrations, the economic situation was on the verge of collapse.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.1 The Litmus Effect: the Catalyst that Ignited the Street**

The direct trigger of the demonstrations, which started on 17 October 2019, and the straw that broke the camel's back is the government's Whatsapp tax of \$6 a month; or 20c per day, in the proposed 2020 budget plan. People of all sects, denominations, age groups, males and females, stormed the streets and everyone was chanting "Revolution".

Scenes of national unity reminiscent of March 2005 First Cedar Revolution, after the assassination of PM Rafic Hariri, demonstrated the strong social bond, social cohesion, community cohesion of the Lebanese, all across the sectarian divide. The demonstrators used the word (*waja* ' to indicate their grievances: a lot of grievances (*waja* ' , literary 'pain'). Although the demonstrators formed ad hoc committees, they are disorganized and they lack uniform voice and demands. They are scattered and have no unified leadership, no unified ideology, and offer no feasible alternative to the government or cabinet. Thus, there seems to be no horizon for the 'Uprising' to bear fruit, and this is what the political elite were aiming at in order to saw discord between the demonstrators and stop their socio-political movement.

Although the government retracted the WhatsApp tax on the evening of 17 October, instead of appeasing the demonstrators, it emboldened them to carry on further seeking more concessions from the Cabinet, calling for the fall of the regime, and chanting the Arab Spring call of down with the regime: “The people want the downfall of the political system”. In the Lebanese context, this does not mean only the Cabinet or the Council of Ministers headed by the Sunni PM, but also the Maronite (Catholic) President and the Shi’ite Speaker of the Parliament, as well as the resignation of the Parliament as a whole. In reference to the protestors’ demands of the resignation of the three aforementioned leaders, the crowds chanted: “All of them must step down”; Other slogans read: “Down with the Oligarchy: Power to the People”; “Down with the rule of the Central Bank (BDL)”; “Lebanon’s Uprising”; “Revolution”; “Civil State without a sectarian system”; “You (political elite: ruling class) are the civil war, and we (demonstrators) are the popular revolution”.<sup>7</sup>

## **SECTION II. The Reaction of the Ruling Elite**

The Lebanese State tried to appease the demonstrators. The Council of Ministers held a meeting in the Presidential Palace on 21 October 2019, where major decisions were taken to appease the demonstrators and uphold accountability and transparency. This became known as the Hariri reform plan, an over ambitious paper that had no chance of being implemented by the corrupt political elite and the failing private and public financial institutions. The basic points of the plan are the following: (1) Approve and ratify the State Budget of 2020 with a 0.63% deficit, which is unprecedented during the past 30 years; (2) An annual tax on the Central Bank (\$3 Billion) and private banks (\$400 million) to reduce state debt by 50%; (3) A promise of no new taxes on the citizens; (4) Reduce 50% of the salaries and benefits of the current and former politicians (presidents, ministers and MPs); (4) Close the Ministry of Information and reduce 70% of the budgets of state councils, such as: [Council of the South; Council for Development and Reconstruction; Ministry of the Displaced, etc.]; (5) Reduce the operating budget deficit of the National Electricity Company (EDL) to \$1 billion; (6): Approve and ratify a General Amnesty Law and Old Age Law before the end of the year, as well as programs for poor families and increase housing loans for the youth, etc; (7) Put the \$11.8 Billion CEDRE Conference loan (6 April 2018) and the McKenzie plan (7 March 2019) on track, as roadmaps for structural reform.<sup>8</sup>

Echoing the demonstrators' demands, on 23 October 2019, the Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri said: 'The time is ripe to establish a civil state'. The President delivered a National Address on 24 October, arguing that the protests have no horizon of changing the political system, since this could only be done through institutional processes of the Lebanese state, and not on the street. Aoun stressed that reform is a political process, clarifying that when he was an MP ten years ago, he proposed many draft legislations to stamp out corruption, but they have not been voted upon till this very day; a special tribunal to look into the crimes of the theft of public money; retrieving stolen money; and lifting the immunity and the banking secrecy on civil service employees, i.e. former and current ministers, presidents, MPs, and government employees.

In his mid-tenure national address, on 31 October 2019, President Aoun gave a speech in which he proposed a uniform (civil) personal status law for the 18-sects that form the Lebanese mosaic or myriad, which is unprecedented.<sup>9</sup> Aoun promised to clamp down on corruption and called for the establishment of a civil state where all citizens are on par in front of the law (rule of law; everyone is under the law). He called for appointing the ministers based on their merit and specialization; rather than their political allegiance.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, these measures did not appease the demonstrators. On the contrary, the demonstrations increased nationwide, and most of the key roads were blocked, thus paralyzing the whole country and its already ailing economy. The street was not impressed. They reiterated: "All of them, means all of them"; "Leave, means leave; your tenure caused hunger, and people want the downfall of the regime".

On 3 November 2019, a female demonstration roamed the streets of Beirut asking for women's rights and portraying feminist slogans, among which were the following: "Our Revolution is a feminist revolution"; "I'm going to cause the downfall of the regime, which is sectarian, hierarchal-patriarchal, racist, and capitalist"; "Women have the right to grant the nationality to their children"<sup>11</sup>; "No to violence against women"; "It's never too late for the future of our children"; "I want to see my children"<sup>12</sup>; "The revolution is a female"; "Power to women". In short, the women demanded gender equality in four domains: social, economic, political, and, most importantly, legal, because many women do not have access to the justice system, or justice, as such.<sup>13</sup>

### **SECTION III. Hizbullah's Reaction and the Street's Response**

The Lebanese resistance movement Hizbullah fought the Israeli army until the Israeli Defence Army (IDF) withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, after 22 years of occupation. Hizbullah reaped political capital and boosted its pan-Arab and pan-Islamic credentials as being the only guerrilla movement that forced Israel to withdraw and return occupied land, while regular Arab armies succumbed to Israeli's military might. Since 1992, Hizbullah became a parliamentary party after winning seats in the legislature. In 2005, the Party joined the Council of Ministers, and since then it has been represented in the Cabinet with an average of two ministers.

#### **Hizbullah as the major player: Nasrallah's speeches of October 19 and 25**

In both speeches, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hizbullah's Secretary General, put his weight behind and lent his support to the Cabinet, Hariri's Reform Paper, and he shored up the Lebanese government and Aoun's Presidency. Nasrallah argued that it is better to keep the status quo ante since it took two years to elect a President, one year to form the Cabinet, and the Parliamentary elections were conducted almost a year ago. Therefore, according to him, there is no need for change, but rather to enforce the reform measures of the Cabinet and the President. On 19 October 2019, Nasrallah argued that a technocrat cabinet "will fall in two weeks"; so it could not be the solution, as the demonstrators want. According to him, the only solution is to enact the reforms the current political system has repeatedly promised.

#### **First Speech**

In his 19 October speech, although Nasrallah called the revolution a "popular movement", in his 25 October speech, he retracted that and accused the demonstrators of furthering 'foreign agendas that aim to destroy the country'.

Nasrallah admonished the revolutionaries to form a unified delegation and go and discuss their demands with the President. If they refuse and remain adamant, then they prove that they are taking part in the conspiracy theory that aims at destroying Lebanon and its institutions; thus, causing power vacuum, anarchy, discord (*fitna*), which could even deteriorate into civil war, as he claimed.

In protest, on 26 October 2019, an estimated one million protestors took to the streets in Lebanon. They formed a 220 km human chain from the South to the

North. This is reminiscent of the Baltic Chain of 1989, where one-third of the population of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) participated in a human chain to demand the independence of their countries from the Soviet Union.

## Second Speech

On 24 and 25 October 2019, in Riad el Solh, bloody confrontations erupted among the protestors, who used their arm fists, stones, spray, and sticks in order to engage each other. The Army and Security Forces intervened to separate and defuse the crisis. The protestors blamed infiltrators from Hizbullah, accusing them of aiming to deflect the revolutionary movement from its objectives. The chaos was short-lived, and everything gradually returned to normal, but at the price of some casualties. On the afternoon of 25 October, Hizbullah bussed its supporters from three different locations and forced the demonstrators to listen to Nasrallah's speech. This increased the confrontations and led the Security Forces to act as a buffer between the two confronting groups. Hizbullah blamed conspiracy theory for what has happened accusing some demonstrations of trying to tarnish the image of the 'Resistance' (i.e. Hizbullah or Party of God) by including its leader Nasrallah among those who should step down because he is accused of being corrupt like other politicians: "All of them, means all of them, including Nasrallah"; and Hizbullah supporters replied paying homage to their leader: "Oh God, Oh God, behold our Nasrallah". The pun is that "Nasrallah" means in Arabic: "victory of God". Some demonstrators called for unity: "One, one, one: the Lebanese people are one".

On 25 October 2019, Nasrallah gave his address asking his supporters to vacate all the public squares and streets in order to avoid confrontation with the demonstrations, and they immediately obeyed. Again, Nasrallah warned of the conspiracy theory that aims to cause discord (*fitna*) and lead the country into civil war, warning against any power vacuum, chaos, or anarchy. Nasrallah claimed that the demonstrators are politically motivated and that they are pawns moved by 'regional powers and foreign embassies'. A bold answer to these claims was levelled by one of the demonstrators in *Barjah*, a Sunni girl, who accused Nasrallah of being the speaker of the Lebanese Republic, which implies that the President and the PM are puppets in his hands.

It is remarkable to note that protests in Hizbullah's and Amal's<sup>14</sup> dens are unprecedented (although both parties tried to disperse the demonstrators, sometimes by force): in Hermel and Baalbek in the Bekaa; and Tyre or Sour, Nabatiyyeh and Kafar Rumman, which became a bastion of the Lebanese Communist Party, in the

South. Eventually, Lebanese Army Rangers were dispatched to protect the protestors.

### **Street vs. Street<sup>15</sup>: Hizbullah's Counter-Revolution Tactic and Message?**

Is it a coincidence that every time a foreign emissary comes to Beirut, hell breaks loose and a show of force, coupled with street violence erupts between competing groups? For instance, on the same day that the Director General for Political Affairs at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Richard Moore, was supposed to visit Lebanon, on the 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> days of the Uprising, scenes reminiscent of the civil war days crippled Lebanon.<sup>16</sup>

While demonstrators were distributing flowers to the Security forces in Antelias<sup>17</sup>, on the Ring Bridge<sup>18</sup> – separating the predominantly Muslim West Beirut from the predominantly Christian East Beirut – an informal mini-war erupted between the supporters of the “Revolution” and their counterparts: Hizbullah’s and Amal’s backers, who came in the hundreds on their motorcycles. They outnumbered the demonstrators and portrayed a level of anger (*thymós*)<sup>19</sup> not seen before.

Holding and hoisting Hizbullah’s and Amal’s flags and banners, wearing black masks, and armed with metal rods and clubs, they stormed, looted, and burned the demonstrators’ tents in Riad el Solh and attacked the demonstrators on the Ring Bridge, throwing big rocks at them, and targeting them with laser beams, while shouting sectarian slogans: “Shi’a, Shi’a, Shi’a”; “Allah, Nasrallah and the entire Dahiya”; “Sayyid Nasrallah has foresight”<sup>20</sup>; “At your service Nasrallah”. The demonstrators responded: “This is Lebanon, not Iran”; “Hizbullah is a terrorist” (3x); “Revolution” (3x). For more than four hours, the Lebanese Army and Security Forces had hard times keeping the two groups apart, while suffering few minor injuries in the process.

Hizbullah’s and Amal’s supporters practiced mayhem and hooliganism on the touristic Monot Street in Achrafieh, in the Christian heart of Beirut, which is a den of the right-wing Phalangists<sup>21</sup> and the Lebanese Forces<sup>22</sup>, who were on their guard holding machine guns, while taking combat positions on balconies and roof tops. Luckily, there was no need to use these weapons, as Hizbullah’s and Amal’s supporters left after they vented their anger on parked cars and shops. Although Hizbullah issued political declarations denying any organizational role in this “Shi’ite flare up”, its image, as an upholder of civil peace, was badly tarnished.



On 26 November 2019, in Tyre (Sour), Hizbullah's and Amal's supporters attacked the demonstrators; looted and burned their tents shouting the same slogans as above. This came as a reaction against the demonstrators' blocking of the roads, an action that caused the death of two Hizbullah supporters, in a deplorable car accident that burned the entire car.

## **SECTION IV. Hariri's Resignation & its Aftermath**

In an attempt to put an end to the protests, on the 13<sup>th</sup> day, in the afternoon of October 29, violent confrontations erupted between the demonstrators (victims) and their opponents [thugs, infiltrators] who came armed with sticks and stormed Riad el Solh and Martyr's Square. The attackers destroyed and burned the tents of the protestors, demolished the loud speakers, and other property such as cars and TV crews' equipment.<sup>23</sup> Although they came under fierce rock-throwing, Security forces intervened by firing teargas and pushing the attackers away from the public squares of the demonstrations, thus gradually restoring law and order. Living up to his promise of not allowing anyone to crack down on the demonstrators, PM Hariri announced his official resignation via a televised 1.22-minute short address.<sup>24</sup>

Afterwards, Hariri went and submitted his resignation to the President.<sup>25</sup> In an interview with *al-Mayadeen TV*, the veteran politician, ex-MP Walid Jumblatt called for the formation of a technocrat government as soon as possible, hoping that: 'In these critical times, I call for peaceful and calm dialogue to prevail among the various parties', warning that the fall of the regime or the political system cannot be accomplished in this way.<sup>26</sup> In turn the Maronite Patriarch Bshara al-Ra'i condemned the attack on the demonstrators and hoped that the resignation of the Cabinet will be seen as a positive step towards a speedy formation of a new reform Cabinet, which is tasked of finding a comprehensive solution to the crisis.<sup>27</sup> Rumour had it that Hariri resigned after he got a direct order from Saudi Arabia, after falling out of favour for a long time. Hariri took that as a test of virtue, and he gave his homage to the Saudis and obliged.

The resignation put an end to the "Presidential deal" that brought Aoun to the Presidency. The "Presidential deal" dictated that Hariri remains PM till the six-year tenure of the President elapses. At the time, Aoun served more than half his tenure.

### **Nasrallah's reaction: third speech**

Nasrallah gave an address in the afternoon of 1 November 2019, in which he called for the speedy formation of a 'serious, honest, and sovereign Cabinet that can obtain the confidence of the people and fulfil their demands'. Again, he admonished against power vacuum, stressing that time is not on the side of the Lebanese if they want to avoid the imminent economic collapse. He added, 'If the Lebanese State fails to pay the salaries of its employees, we (Hizbullah) would not default and we will keep on paying... This is a token of our integrity and commitment to our people'.<sup>28</sup> Nasrallah praised the wisdom and foresight of his constituency in not heading the provocations, i.e., the insults and calls for violent confrontations among the Lebanese. Nasrallah stressed that Hizbullah will not use its weapons as a political bargaining chip to impose its will in the formation of the new Cabinet, cautioning that, 'we always have Lebanon's national interest at heart'.<sup>29</sup>

## **SECTION V: The Lebanese State's & Hizbullah's handling of the COVID-19 Crisis**

The first cases of COVID-19 were detected in Lebanon after an Iranian flight carrying Lebanese pilgrims landed on 21 February 2020. This was followed by another COVID-19 infected plane from Italy.<sup>30</sup> More and more planes carried the deadly virus causing the first-wave spread. The Lebanese authorities were fully alarmed and took harsh measures in an attempt to curb the spread. In spite of the financial misery Lebanon is facing, since 2 March 2020, all schools and universities were closed via a directive by the Minister of Education that urged online teaching. Since mid-March, the Lebanese State imposed draconian measures of a total lockdown: curfews, social distancing, banning of crowds, and limited cars on the streets by a rotation policy alternating between odd and even plate numbers. All sea, land, and air exits were completely closed, including the national airport<sup>31</sup>: almost a total lockdown, with a daily curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am, even in the Holy month of Ramadan. As the numbers of COVID-19 infected people increased, the Lebanese state feared a second-wave spread. In order to assess the situation and determine the future course of action, the Lebanese authorities imposed a total closure; a total lockdown starting from 13 May 2020 at 7:00 pm and ending on 18 May at 5:00 am.

In turn, Hizbullah saw in COVID-19 an existential threat. In order to coax the Party's constituency to fully abide, to the letter, by all the COVID-19 precautions

and directives, Hizbullah fielded two Sayyids – Safiyyeddine and Nasrallah – who wield enormous religious influence on the constituency to fully abide and obey.

### **Safiyyeddine**

On 25 March 2020, Sayyid Hashim Safiyyeddine – the head of Hizbullah’s Executive Council, Shura Council member, and Nasrallah’s cousin – elaborated on the Party’s COVID-19 strategy.<sup>32</sup> First, he admonished against using antibiotics to fight COVID-19, as they destroy one’s health and do not offer a cure against the virus. Hizbullah’s strategy is to shore up all of the medical, healthcare, and public health resources of the Lebanese state by having a standby army of specialists and recruits to lend a helping hand: 1500 doctors; 3000 nurses and paramedics; 5000 health care service employees; and most importantly, 15000 field health care service employees, spread all over Hizbullah’s constituencies, and closely working with the local municipalities, and the Amal Party healthcare services, as well as closely coordinating and cooperating with the Lebanese state health institutions.<sup>33</sup>

In the meantime, Hizbullah is taking all necessary precautions and is disinfecting streets and public places, thus thoroughly cleaning its constituencies. Safiyyeddine added, as a worst case scenario, if the Lebanese State’s health care system fails to deal with a possible exponential growth of the virus, then Hizbullah is ready to step in and help. The Party has a ready-made thorough plan to implement in case of massive war, and Hizbullah is now using it to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, after they have trained their health service cadres to cope with such a colossal crisis. In every governorate, Hizbullah has made ready makeshift hospitals (for severe cases) and health clinics (for those needing total isolation), even massive field hospitals, if the situation on the ground dictates recourse to such a course of action (like the Iranians did in Tehran). Safiyyeddine added that the Party closely monitored – in a total quarantine fashion – around 1200 religious studies students and pilgrims, along with their families, who came recently from Iran. According to him, there were only few positive cases carrying the COVID-19 virus. Others were put in isolation for a fortnight, even though they portrayed no symptoms, as COVID-19 is asymptomatic in most cases. Hizbullah is closely monitoring these and any new cases via the Party’s 15000 field health care service employees, who are continuously in close contact with the local majors, clan leaders, and municipalities.

Safiyyeddine addressed the conspiracy theory floated by Iran and China. He said that everything is possible, as: ‘the person who cooks the poison, will eat it in the

end'. Safiyyeddine clarified that he meant the US Administration, and not the US people, whom he felt sorry for, as they are suffering from the virus due to its swift dissemination in the States.

In short, the message behind Safiyyeddine's talk is that Hizbullah is ready, and it has taken all necessary precautions. He added that the Party is receiving lots of donations from its constituency, including substantial amounts in USD, as charity or "religious monies: *ammwal shar'iyya*" — or as part of the *khums* (one-fifth 'religious tax').<sup>34</sup> Finally, Safiyyeddine reiterated the absolute importance – from a religious and moral perspective – to fully abide by the COVID-19 precautions and admonitions.

### Nasrallah

In turn, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah gave three speeches in order to address the gravity and menace of COVID-19. In his first Speech on 28 March 2020, Nasrallah anticipated Kissinger's 6 April 2020 talk when he argued that COVID-19 is much worse than a whole-scale World War. According to Nasrallah, COVID-19 is something unprecedented that humanity is facing. He argued that COVID-19 will eventually lead to a New World Order and might threaten the foundations of the "Liberal Capitalist World Order", as he dubbed it. Nasrallah asked people to learn from what they are seeing on TV's, namely, how aggressive and invincible this minute, invisible virus seems to be; to the extent that the world's greatest and largest democracy, the US, is having hard times dealing and coping with COVID-19, as was evident by the skyrocketing number of dead and infected people, and the rate with which the virus was spreading. He admonished a return to religion, humility, and sharing our fate – via social and communal solidarity (*takaful*) as the only means to stand up against and "defeat" this virus. Nasrallah said, 'Our strongest weapon is continuously invoking God and depending on His mercy and omnipotence, while, at the same time, taking all protection and precautionary measures to keep it at bay'. He added, 'People should stay vigilant and aware... We could contain the spread of the virus by more anticipatory planning and strict obedience to the directives and measures of the Lebanese State in fighting this pandemic... Throughout history, we have passed through greater calamities than COVID-19, and we have prevailed and overcame... God willing, we will prevail again'.<sup>35</sup>

In his second Speech on 7 April 2020, Nasrallah heeded the message of the Muslim Doctors addressed to him<sup>36</sup> and reiterated the global dimension of COVID-

19, but also underscored the domestic, local dimension: ‘We stress the strict application of the COVID-19 protocols... We call on you to exercise maximum patience and extreme caution until we emerge victorious over that lethal virus’. He cautioned that it is a binding religious duty (*taklif Shar‘i*) to abide by the COVID-19 lockdown and the Lebanese State’s directives and strict measures, such as house confinement (working from home when possible and ordering online and via food delivery services); social distancing; wearing gloves, masks, and face shields in public places; and observing the curfew hours from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am.<sup>37</sup>

In his third Speech on 22 April 2020, Nasrallah thanked the Lebanese Government and the Ministry of Health for their constructive efforts in combating COVID-19, and also profusely expressed his gratitude to the people for heeding the directives and precautions, calling on them strongly to continue doing so in order to foil any second-wave spread of the virus. In spite of the economic misery of many because of the lockdown<sup>38</sup>, Nasrallah called on the people to be patient and to stringently observe the draconian measures needed to combat the virus. He repeated that observance is a religious duty (*taklif Shar‘i*) in order not to endanger the self, the family, and others, in line with the stipulations of the *hadith* on the harm principle<sup>39</sup> (*la darar, wa la daraar*).<sup>40</sup>

In anticipation of the Holy month of Ramadan, Nasrallah called on everyone to fast ‘for their interest (*maslaha*) in the here and now, and in the hereafter’, as he put it. He added that fasting teaches the believer the ability to exercise fortitude and confers steadfastness, firmness, and continuity, especially in the battlefield: ‘He who is less patient, is the one who yields in the battlefield at the end of the day’. Nasrallah reiterated that God honoured and glorified the believers (*akramana wa sharrafana*) by the (religious) duty of fasting as a token of free will and gratitude to exercise this special ritual observance (*‘ibada*). Nasrallah added that the same patience ought to be exercised in facing COVID-19.<sup>41</sup> At the end of his fourth Speech on 13 May 2020, and in order to foil a third-wave COVID-19 spread, Nasrallah reiterated the same mantra.<sup>42</sup> He reminded all the Lebanese – as well as those residing in Lebanon – of the duty to be more stringent in their strict obedience of the Lebanese State’s directives, or else the sacrifices of the two and a half months quarantine would be compromised. Finally, since his speech almost coincided with the “International Nurses Day”, Nasrallah thanked paramedics and nurses for putting their lives on the frontline in order to serve others.<sup>43</sup>

## SECTION VI: PM Diab's Rescue Cabinet & the IMF's Bailout Plan

The demonstrators are asking a revamp of the entire political system: they demand the resignation of the entire political establishment, as a step in the right direction of changing the political system in order to make it more equalitarian and representative: "The people want the downfall of the political system"; "All of the politicians must go". Hizbullah begs to differ. In his two speeches on 19 and 25 October 2019, Nasrallah said that the institutions of the Presidency, Cabinet, and Parliament must remain the same, admonishing against any power vacuum, which, according to him, causes chaos, anarchy, and discord (*fitna*), and might even drag the country into civil war. Nasrallah argued that it took two years to elect a President; almost one year to form the Cabinet; and the Parliamentary elections were conducted on 6 May 2018, after being frozen for almost a decade.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, according to Nasrallah, there is no need for a change in persons, but rather, what is needed is to apply promulgated standing laws in a just, fair, and equitable manner, and to enforce the structural reform measures of the Cabinet and the President. On 19 October 2019, Nasrallah contended that a technocrat cabinet 'will fall in two weeks'; therefore, it could not be the solution, as the demonstrators want. This calls for an explanation. The bottom line is that Hizbullah and its allies do not want to lose their 72-MP majority in the Parliament. However, with the passage of time and in order to prevent further economic and financial collapse, Hizbullah and its allies heeded the street's pressure.

After mandatory parliamentary consultations,<sup>45</sup> on 19 December 2019, President Aoun named Hassan Diab – Engineering Professor and Vice-President of External Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) – to head the new technocrat cabinet, thus giving in to popular demand to form a non-political, specialists' Cabinet.<sup>46</sup> On 21 January 2020, Diab formed his 20-seat Cabinet, twelve Ministers of whom holding US passports. For the first time in Lebanese history, the Cabinet contained six women ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Defence, which is unprecedented in the Arab world.<sup>47</sup> Noteworthy, the Ministers of Justice and of the Youth and Sports are well-known political and social activists, campaigning for change and reform, thus supporters of the "Revolution". The remaining three women ministers, the Ministers of the Displaced, Labour, and Information (spokesperson of the cabinet) were also vocal in supporting the "Revolution".

On 25 January 2020, David Schenker – the US State Department’s Assistant Secretary For Near Eastern Affairs – said that the U.S. cannot reward Lebanon after months of bad administration. Schenker cautioned that Hizbullah punishes those who disobey its orders, as it has done with Hariri senior.<sup>48</sup> He added that the US is closely observing if the Cabinet is ‘committed to eradicate corruption and to lead the country out of its financial crisis’.<sup>49</sup> In February 2020, Schenker warned that the U.S. could sanction corrupt politicians under the Global Magnitsky Act. Nevertheless, according to the Department of State, since 2006, the U.S. Administration has accorded Lebanon military aid worth \$1.7 Billion; and over the past ten years, billions in humanitarian, developmental, and educational aid.<sup>50</sup>

On 22 April 2020, the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea held a press conference at the AUB, where she announced an USAID donation of \$13.3 million via the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) aimed at fighting COVID-19 and strengthening Lebanon’s health sector as well as supporting needy Lebanese families that are below the poverty line.<sup>51</sup> One day later, in a talk with *Al-Nahar Daily Newspaper*, Secretary of State Mike (Michael Richard) Pompeo said that the US will support the Lebanese government if it heeds the demands of the street, i.e. the demonstrators: ‘This is what democracy is all about’, he said.<sup>52</sup> The U.S. beefed up its pressure on the Lebanese government. To add the nail on the coffin, Dorothy Shea informed the President and PM that dismissing Riad Salameh – the governor of the Central Bank (BDL) – will make the U.S. retaliate by freezing Lebanese gold and assets that are worth \$20 Billion, as Amal’s leadership council member Qabalan Qabalan contended.<sup>53</sup> Noteworthy, Hizbullah accuses Salameh of working on furthering U.S. influence in Lebanon by (1) informing the U.S. Treasury about any dubious financial transactions related to Hizbullah, and (2) by imposing the Treasury’s sanctions on the Party. In this respect, Hizbullah claims that U.S. pressure led to liquidating Jammal Trust Bank (JTB) – which many rich and influential Shi’ite businessmen did business with, to the extent of dubbing JTB as ‘The Shi’i Bank’.<sup>54</sup> On 28 April 2020, Hizbullah’s Deputy Secretary General, Shaykh Na’im Qasim argued that Salameh alone should not bear the brunt of decades of corruption that led to the imminent economic collapse. Rather, Salameh, along with all the ex-corrupt political establishment and subsequent Lebanese Cabinets since the 1990s, should be held accountable.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion: the Corruption's Epidemic & the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In light of the draconian measures taken by the Lebanese state to curb the spread of COVID-19, one questions if the ongoing 'Lebanese Revolution' would lead to chaos and further deterioration; or would it finally lead to the much anticipated political, social, and economic reforms? Without such structural reforms, the International Community will not shore up Lebanon with the much needed fresh money.<sup>56</sup> As a move in the right direction, on 1 May 2020, the Lebanese government officially asked the IMF for a \$10 Billion bailout – ten times more than its quota – when it presented its structural economic reform plan.<sup>57</sup> Schenker said that the reform plan is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition:

It is good that they asked but it is not just about asking. It is a necessary first step... I don't want to prejudge what the IMF may be looking for but it has to meet a level of transparency and a full commitment to this... Hezbollah is not known for its support for reforms. This is an organisation that funds its activities through illicit finance, corruption ... Reform at the ports that collects revenues is not going to be appreciated by everyone in Lebanon.<sup>58</sup>

In brief, in addition to reforms, such as controlling borders and closing illegal passages with Syria, as well as not exempting Hizbullah from customs procedures, etc., the International Community is asking the Lebanese government to heed people's demands and embark on a serious plan in order to execute the promised reforms. Although Hizbullah supports the Lebanese government's reform plan, the Party regards Schenker's demands as politically motivated, as were the STL's verdicts issued against Hizbullah before.<sup>59</sup> On 6 May 2020, the head of Hizbullah's Parliamentary Bloc, MP Muhammad Ra'd clarified: 'we do not mind any international aid package as long as it does not encroach upon Lebanon's sovereignty... we welcome any non-politically motivated assistance'.<sup>60</sup> According to the Minister of Finance, Ghazi Wazni, public debt has reached an unprecedented proportion: 'more than 176% of the GDP'.<sup>61</sup> On the same day, Bloomberg estimated that Lebanon needs \$28 billion over the next five years.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, on 9 May 2020, Retired General David Petraeus and former CIA Director clarified that if the IMF and the International Community agree to bail out Lebanon from its default, then this does not mean that they are supporting Hizbullah as such; rather, the aim is to shore up the Lebanese state and its institutions.<sup>63</sup>



In this global whirlwind of change, the average Lebanese citizen is anticipating whether the “Revolution” will win more concessions from the political establishment, at a time when stringent State measures and the fear of an uncontrollable spread of COVID-19 has curtailed massive street demonstrations. Another difficulty, which poses a serious problem to the uniformity of the “Revolution’s” demands, is the fragmentation of the demonstrators into more than 107 different groups. Will Street Politics recapitulate to the status quo ante, or will it persevere in its demands to stamp out corruption until the very end, no matter what the costs are? In this regard, Asef Bayat has something to say:

*But the street politics of revolutionary times exhibits its constraints when the exceptional episode comes to an end, when the ordinary people long for normalcy, expecting rewards for the hardship they have endured in the revolutionary battles, and when reforming or building institutions becomes necessary. This means that political engagement and mobilization cannot remain only in the main squares for long but have to be adjusted to the everyday of people’s lives, in the backstreets, neighbourhoods, households, workplaces, schools, and villages. The ways in which the revolutionary movements come to fruition, and the ideas and strategies they carry, greatly influence the shape of mobilization beyond the streets (Bayat, 2017. 134).*

It seems this is exactly what has happened to the Lebanese “Revolution”. It did not die out; it simply began another phase of its evolution. As revolutionary fervour cannot remain ignited forever, in the process of time, it is expected to wane. Nevertheless, it will also take another shape and course of action, as Bayat’s aforementioned quote demonstrates.

## Note

1. The article's title might also be reminiscent of the late Fouad Ajami's "Public Square" argument, as later developed and employed by CNN's Fareed Zakaria's "Global Public Square" (GPS) weekly program.
2. Henry A. Kissinger, 'The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order', Wall Street Journal, 3 April 2020, via <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>.
3. <https://www.dw.com/en/lebanon-to-default-on-debt-amid-financial-unrest/a-52676967>
4. Lebanon is a deep state in the sense of being controlled by elite politicians and entrenched, career civil servants (government employees) acting in a non-conspiratorial manner, to further their own interests and the interest of those who put them in power without due regard to the interest of the state, or public interest as such.
5. 'Scandal of Lebanese Politicians' Transfer of Billions of Dollars abroad "Confuses" Banks', via <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2057301/scandal-lebanese-politicians%E2%80%99-transfer-billions-dollars-abroad-%E2%80%98confuses%E2%80%99-banks>; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/267731-oueizat-asks-swiss-lebanese-authorities-for-info-on-suspected-transfers>
6. Johnny Siddiq, Radio Voice of Lebanon, 'Alli Sawtak ["Raise Your Voice"]', 5 February 2020 (last accessed: 18 March 2020) via <https://vdl.com.lb/program/frontend/web/index.php?r=site/episodes&ID=149>. See also "Lebanese Anger Never Falts," Lematin, 23 January 2020, via <https://www.lematin.ch/monde/colere-libanais-faiblit/story/29369966>.
7. Personal recollection. For instance, see also <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/File/Get/d6d48b1b-6be2-4fd9-8b4f-6bdccdf026bc.mp4>.
8. « Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises » (CEDRE): <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/lebanon/news/article/lebanon-cedre-conference-06-04-18>; [https://www.fes-lebanon.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/Mckinsey\\_Plan/Summary\\_of\\_the\\_Economic\\_Vision.pdf](https://www.fes-lebanon.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Mckinsey_Plan/Summary_of_the_Economic_Vision.pdf); <https://blog.blominvestbank.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/What-the-McKinsey-Report-says-about-Lebanon-Overview-and-in-focus-sections.pdf> (Accessed: 1 May 2020).
9. 1 In 1998, the late ex-President Elias al-Harawi challenged religious personal status laws and proposed a draft legislation of civil marriage, which was not welcomed by both Christian and Muslim religious and political leaders.
10. 1 'Aoun spells out the characteristics of the new Cabinet, and Hariri is the most lucky candidate', <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/444300/>; 'Lebanese

President Aoun calls for “non-sectarian” system: Michel Aoun says Lebanon must change from confessional to civil state as protesters call for a technocratic government’, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/lebanese-president-aoun-calls-sectarian-system-191101055607826.html>.

11. 1 Noteworthy, the Lebanese Law of Nationality is patriarchal in orientation, where the man can grant the Lebanese nationality to any women he marries; while the women cannot even grant the Lebanese nationality to her children if she is married to a non-Lebanese.
12. 1 In reference to the unjust religious custody laws, which are patriarch in orientation, thus granting the man special prerogatives. Noteworthy, Lebanon has no civil personal status law, a reality that leads to non-uniformity of the law and discriminatory practices due to the presence of 15 different religious courts dealing with such cases.
13. 1 <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/2019/11/3/-ثورتناخنسويةتظاهرةللنساءتجوب-بيروت>. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/File/Get/d6d48b1b-6be2-4fd9-8b4f-6bdccdf026bc.mp4> ; Al-Akhbar 3900 (4 November 2019): 6-7.
14. 1 Amal is the second largest Shi'ite organized political party in Lebanon. It is headed by Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament since 1992. Noteworthy, Hizbullah's current Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, also took office in 1992.
15. 1 See Chapter 6 entitled “Square and Counter-Square”, in: (Bayat, 2017. 113-134).
16. 1 Namely, the Sunday-Monday, 24-25 November 2019: from 11:00 pm till 4:00 am. See, ‘British envoy Moore: The matter of choosing leaders and a cabinet is a domestic issue for the Lebanese’, <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon-news/485162/british-envoy-moore-the-matter-of-choosing-leaders/en>; ‘Senior British official urges govt formation’, <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Nov-25/496216-uk-envoy-in-beirut-to-meet-officials-urge-govt-formation.ashx>; ‘British envoy: “We support formation of new government in Lebanon” ’, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191126-british-envoy-we-support-formation-of-new-government-in-lebanon/> (Accessed: 26 November 2019).
17. 1 A predominately Christian area, which is five kilometres to the north of Beirut.
18. 1 Tabaris Square, near Burj al-Ghazal Building.
19. 1 Rage and personal venting of anger against injustice and tyranny.
20. 1 In reference to the conspiracy theory floated by Hizbullah, namely, that the demonstrators are orchestrated and led by foreign powers, most notably the US. This accusation came in the wake of Jeffrey Feltman's Congressional testimony. Feltman is former Ambassador to Lebanon and John C. Whitehead Visiting Fellow in International Diplomacy - Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution. See, Jeffrey Feltman (19 November 2019), ‘What's next for Lebanon? Examining the implications of current protests’, via:

- <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/whats-next-for-lebanon-examining-the-implications-of-current-protests/>.
21. 1 <http://www.kataebonline.org/>
  22. 1 <https://www.lebanese-forces.com/>
  23. 1 <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/443755/>; <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/video/2019/10/29/v80989-lebanon-protest-clashes> (Accessed: 29 Oct. 2019).
  24. 1 <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2019/10/29/lebanon-saad-hariri-prime-minister-resignation-intl-ldn-vpx.cnn>; <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/video/2019/10/29/v80995-lebanon-hariri-resigns>; (Accessed: 29 Oct. 2019).
  25. 1 <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/443807/> (Accessed: 29 Oct. 2019).
  26. 1 <http://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/1355426/> (Accessed: 29 Oct. 2019).
  27. 1 <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/443839/> (Accessed: 29 Oct. 2019).
  28. 1 Noteworthy, on that very day, Hizbullah paid the salaries of its employees in new unused US-dollar bills, in a country having severe shortages in foreign currency, thus lowering the black market's exchange rate of the US-dollar from 1800LL to less than 1600LL, when the official exchange rate is pegged at 1515LL. Likewise, on 29 November, when the price dropped from 2300LL to 1800LL. It seems the trend in the depreciation of Lebanese currency is taking an upward spiral. In May 2020, the black market's exchange rate reached 4300LL per one dollar. In an attempt to fend off charges against Hizbullah accusing the Party for being behind the dollar hike and the devaluation of the Lebanese currency, Nasrallah affirmed: 'We neither collect dollars nor give dollars to Iran and Syria; rather, we bring dollars to Lebanon'. See Nasrallah's speech of 4 May 2020: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=19091&cid=148>; Al-Akhbar 4042 (5 May 2020): 4-5.
  29. 1 <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=12613&cid=113> (Accessed: 1 May 2020); <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2019/11/1/> (Accessed: 1 November 2019).
  30. 1 'Iranian, Italian Planes Land in Beirut amid Coronavirus Fears', (24 February 2020), via <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/269416>.
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  32. 1 Talk Show with Imad Marmal on Al-Nanar TV at 9:30 pm, local time, on (25 March 2020): <https://almanar.com.lb/6444187>; <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=17628&cid=113>.
  33. 1 For Hizbullah's COVID-19 detailed plan see: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=17414&cid=155>

34. 1 Khums (one-fifth: 20%): refers to the proportion of a Shi'ite Muslim's wealth that should be given, as an obligatory religious duty, to the religious authority (marja'), whom that person emulates, in conformity with the Shi'ite interpretation of the Qur'anic verse (8:41): 'And know that whatever booty you take [in war], the fifth thereof is for Allah, the Apostle, the near of kin, the orphan, and the wayfarer, if you really believe in Allah and what We revealed to Our servant on the day of decision [battle of Badr, decision between the forces of faith and unbelief], the day when the two hosts meet. Allah has power over everything'.
35. 1 Full text: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=17774&cid=113>; Summary and highlights: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=17772&cid=113>; Al-Akhbar 4016 (30 March 2020): 1, 2-3; Video: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/uploaded/videos/2020/03/28/sayed-complete-28032020.mp4>.
36. 1 <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=18158&cid=113>.
37. 1 See Nasrallah's speech of 7 April 2020, Al-Manar TV at 9:00 pm, local time: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=18157&cid=113>; <https://video.moqawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=2107>.
38. 1 At the time, the World Bank estimated that 55% of the Lebanese were below the poverty line.
39. 1 This is a binding hadith for both Sunnis and Shi'is. For Ayatullah Sistani's views on the subject, you may consult the following link: [http://shiaonlinelibrary.com/-/قاعدة-لا-ضرر-ولا-ضرار-تقرير-بحث-السستاني/الصفحة\\_1](http://shiaonlinelibrary.com/-/قاعدة-لا-ضرر-ولا-ضرار-تقرير-بحث-السستاني/الصفحة_1)
40. 1 <https://video.moqawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=2108>; <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=18694&cid=113>.
41. 1 <https://video.moqawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=2108>; <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=18694&cid=113>.
42. 1 Especially after investigations revealed that many Diaspora returnees did not abide by the quarantine and gave wrong telephone numbers and addresses in order to escape the surveillance of the medical authorities.
43. 1 <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=19393&cid=148> (Accessed: 14 May 2020).
44. 1 According to the Ministry of Interior, the turnover was 48%. Does this imply that the demonstrators comprise the rest, namely, the 52%? I do not think this is case since many of those who voted for their political parties and leaders are disenchanted and frustrated with them because of their chronic inability to deliver on their election promises and reform platforms and plans.
45. 1 According to the Lebanese National News Agency, out of 128 MPs, 69 votes named Diab, 13 MPs named Nawwaf Salam, Lebanon's Permanent Representative to the UN, and one vote went to Halima Qa'qur, while 42 abstained from naming anyone. The bottom line is that only six Sunni MPs named Diab, which implies that the majority of the Sunnis are against his

- appointment, including the Future Movement of former PM Saad Hariri. Noteworthy, Diab served, for three years as Minister of Education in the 2011 Miqati Cabinet.
46. 1 Interestingly, AUB's President Dr. Fadlo Khoury has been vocal in his support of the "Revolution" and he toured the public squares disseminating his message and guiding the protestors.
  47. 1 'Twenty Ministers for the New Government', Lematin, 21 January 2020 via <https://www.lematin.ch/monde/20-ministres-nouveau-gouvernement/story/23706808> (Accessed: 18 March 2020).
  48. 1 This seems a direct reference to the 2005 assassination of PM Rafik Hariri that eventually led to the formation of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). Although the STL has delayed giving its final verdict due to the COVID-19 crisis, it has accused four Hizbullah operatives of the killing. See, 'STL delays Hariri case verdict due to coronavirus', The Daily Star (10 May 2020), via <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/May-10/505630-stl-delays-hariri-case-verdict-due-to-coronavirus.ashx>.
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  54. 1 'US sanctions Lebanese entities that funnel funds to Hezbollah militants' families', <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/us-sanctions-lebanese-entities-that-funnel-funds-to-hezbollah-militants-families-1.985030>. JTB was sanctioned in August 2019, and it ceased its operations in September of that year.
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## **Secularism as Extremism?**

### ***Disrobing Secular Feminism and the White Gaze in France***

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#### **Abstract**

On August 23, 2016, French police forced a Muslim woman to remove her burkini on a public beach in Nice, France. According to *The Telegraph*, a London-based newspaper distributed across the UK and internationally, at least four officers confronted the woman. She was consequently forced to remove her clothing with the possibility of a fine. The story immediately spread across the world with two distinct images included in media representations which captured the exact moment of this woman's disrobing. In these images, the Muslim woman is sitting in a submissive position on the beach while the male officers loom over her in intimidating and authoritative power poses. She appears to be taking off what seems to be a long-sleeved blue top and a matching blue hat; it is unclear what differentiates this tunic from a "burkini." The most poignant part of this photograph is the White gaze upon this Muslim woman. She is subjected to the White male gaze, as exemplified by the French officers, as well as of the females surrounding her, as demonstrated by the women in the background. These White women "appropriately" dressed in one or two-piece swimsuits, stare at the Muslim woman with disapproval, with several of them even crooking their necks to get a better look. This White gaze is important to consider as it illustrates the ways in which patriarchal gazes (through both male and female eyes) define and police the boundaries of public acts of feminism. This paper examines the

ways in which secular feminism, as represented in the photos by the inaction and disapproving gaze of the White females, as well as power and patriarchy, as explicitly characterized in the photographs by the male French police officers, illuminate the ways by which Muslim women and their *public* feminisms are subjugated and rendered voiceless, as symbolized by the public, almost voyeuristic, disrobing of the Muslim woman due to the Burkini Ban in France. Although alternatively, Muslim women around the world seek to create feminist spaces within the counter-publics (see Felski, 1989), where they may be able to regain their narratives and voices even as systems of patriarchy and secular feminism continue to oppress them. I want to argue that by just existing and asserting their preferences to wear burkinis or hijabs within the public sphere in France, these women are exerting certain acts of feminism(s)—gesturing towards a feminism that looks and acts differently from the secular feminism found in France.

**Key Words:** Colonial gaze, Muslimness, Feminism, Secularism, White Gaze

## Introduction

On August 23, 2016, French police forced a Muslim woman to remove her burkini on a public beach in Nice, France.<sup>1</sup> According to *The Telegraph*, a London-based newspaper distributed across the UK and internationally, at least four officers confronted the woman and told her to remove her clothing lest she be charged with a fine (*Telegraph*, 2016). The story soon become international news with these distinct images capturing the exact moment of this woman's disrobing (see Figures A and B in Appendix).<sup>2</sup> In these images, the Muslim woman is sitting in a submissive position on the beach while the male officers loom over her in intimidating and authoritative power poses. She appears to be taking off what seems to be a long-sleeved blue top and a matching blue hat; it is unclear what differentiates this tunic from a "burkini." The most poignant part of this photograph is the White gaze upon this Muslim woman. She is subjected to the White male gaze, as exemplified by the French officers, as well as of the females surrounding her, as demonstrated by the women in the background. These White women "appropriately" dressed in one or two-piece swimsuits, stare at the Muslim woman with disapproval, with several of them even crooking their necks to get a better look. This White gaze is important to consider as it illustrates the ways in which patriarchal gazes (through male and female eyes) define and police the boundaries of public acts of feminism. This paper examines the ways in which secular feminism, as represented in the photos by the inaction and state-conditioned

disapproving gaze of the White women, as well as power and patriarchy, as explicitly characterized in the photographs by the male French police officers, illuminate the ways by which Muslim women and their *public* feminisms are subjugated and rendered voiceless, as symbolized by the public, almost voyeuristic, disrobing of the Muslim woman due to the Burkini Ban in France. Although alternatively, many Muslim women around the world seek to create feminist spaces within the counter-publics (see Felski, 1989), where they may be able to regain their narratives and voices, even as systems of patriarchy and secular feminism continue to oppress them. For the purpose of this paper, I want to argue that by just existing and asserting their preferences to wear burkinis or hijabs within the public sphere in France, these women are not only gesturing towards a feminism that looks and acts differently from the White, secular feminism found in France, but are also enacting the creation of another type of counter-public space where they may exert moments of agency. In addition, I want to note that this paper does not seek to essentialize the West in general and France in particular, nor does it seek to generalize the experiences and modes of secular feminists and feminism. Instead, this article aims to comment upon the institutionalized hegemony of the West and its state-sanctioned secular feminism, as well as remark upon the ever-prevalent structures of White supremacy, anti-Muslim sentiment, and the policies these systems have historically enacted. Ultimately, this paper seeks to illuminate the possibilities some Muslim women seek to excavate in response to the restrictive institutions and spaces found within the French context.

## Historicizing the White Male Colonial Gaze

In *The Colonial Harem* (1986), Malek Alloula examines a collection of postcards of Algerian women, created and disseminated by the French in Algeria during the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The postcards illustrate the thirty years of French colonial presence in Algeria, highlighting the disfiguring and ‘demystifying’ realities of Algerian society. The staged poses in the photographs depict a falsified tableau of Algerian women, wherein native models reenact ‘exotic’ rituals in the photographer’s studio in costumes the photographer provided. The postcards do not represent Algeria and Algerian women but instead, a White man’s illusion of the ‘Oriental’ woman and the allure of her inaccessibility behind the veil in the ‘forbidden harem.’ The photographer extracts certain features of Algerian life from their indigenous context only to re-inscribe them within a paradigm that answers to

the political and psychological needs of the imperialist's appropriation of the 'Orient.'

In the way that Orientalism created false knowledge to dominate the 'Other,' the photographer in Alloula's book takes the photographs to create a false reality about the lives of Algerian women. In his lack of access to Algerian women, who wore veils, dressed in loose clothing, and traveled in groups, the French photographer became frustrated. His feelings of frustration inform his conclusions; since he does not have access to these women, then they must be imprisoned in their homes and sexually repressed. The postcard photographs depict the Algerian women as imprisoned; they were made unapproachable and not relatable—ultimately relegating these women as 'Othered.' Later postcards started to reveal the nakedness of these women; which not only connotes an eroticized, sexually frustrated but also a 'savage' and uncivilized native. As the photographer reveals each woman's nakedness, his power grows, especially as the positioning of the camera reveals itself to be *inside* the place of confinement. The photographer's sexual access to the women reveals his control over her as well as over his own pleasure over conquering her 'secret reality.' As these images are immortalized on postcards, they travel around to various countries, constructing the place they come from as 'exotic.' As such, through the colonial gaze, the photographer transforms his Orientalized imaginings into a notion of reality as it disseminates through hegemonic discourse.

Consequently, the photographer of these postcards successfully silences Algerian women and their narratives. Yet historically, the Algerian women during the time of French colonization did not lack agency. Franz Fanon writes in "Algeria Unveiled" in *A Dying Colonialism* (1967) how the veiling of the Algerian women unsettled the colonizers. By wearing the veil, Algerian women were able to observe without being seen—something that completely challenged the power dynamics of colonization—as "there is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself" (Fanon 1967, 44). The colonizer was obsessed with and even fetishized the veil, as it upheld a vague and *in-between status* in the mind of the colonizer. It additionally proved to be an expedient strategy in which to confirm the backwards and patriarchal stereotypes of Algerian society, and more broadly of Arabs, where women were reduced to the confinement and repression of the veil. Consequently, the veil and the colonizer's rationalization of the veil were used as justification of the colonization and occupation of Algeria.

Fanon maintains that behind the veil, the thoughts of Algerian women were indecipherable, for all the colonizer knew, she could have been observing him with disdain rather than acceptance. For the European, unveiling the Algerian woman meant

*“revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure. Hiding the face is also disguising a secret; it is also creating a world of mystery, of the hidden. In a confused way, the European experiences his relation with the Algerian woman at a highly complex level. There is in it the will to bring this woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession” (Fanon 1967, 43-44).*

Consequently, this illustrates the ways in which the White gaze aimed to take hold of the colonized Other in order to possess her and occupy her body—police it. Furthermore, he demonstrates that Algerian women took advantage of their veil to actively resist the French, establishing their position in Algerian society by combating both colonialism and patriarchy. These women aided rebellion militias by hiding grenades on their person (Fanon 1967, 57), sneaking through checkpoints inconspicuously, and generally serving as messengers of weaponry and information—making veiled Algerian women one of the ultimate threats to French colonialism.

In this way, even though the subaltern veiled Algerian woman’s narrative was silenced by the colonial gaze and hegemonic colonial discourse, as portrayed by the pervasive distribution of the postcards studied by Alloula, she was still able to exert her agency within colonial society. She was not only able to actively resist and fight against French colonialism, but she was also able to psychologically disarm and unnerve colonizers with her returning gaze through her veil. Although Alloula’s and Fanon’s accounts of the White, colonial gaze towards veiled women is not exhaustive (nor do they encompass the vast amount of scholarship on gaze and veiling), they serve the purpose of this paper to demonstrate the ways in which the White male gaze aimed to regulate and monitor the veiled woman, despite any instances of agency or resistance that the veiled woman may have illustrated. It is this similar, oppressive gaze that can be seen in the White male gaze and secular feminism in France.

## Connecting the White Colonial Gaze to the Gaze of Secular Feminism in France

The female gaze of the secular feminist can be just as subjugating as the male White gaze upon the 'Othered' Muslim woman. As seen in the photograph, the White women's gaze confirms the Muslim woman's moment of overt oppression as a tableau for the White gaze. Whether it is a burkini or the veil, the White feminist tends to attach monolithic definitions and connotations whereby the woman who wears the burkini or the veil is Otherized and oppressed—thus through her disapproving and disgusted glance towards the Muslim woman, the White woman in the photograph becomes manifest through this very lens of secular feminism. As El Guindi states in the introduction of her book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance*, "Western-ideology feminists (in the East and the West) have dominated the discourse on the veil, viewing it as an aspect of patriarchies and a sign of women's backwardness, subordination, and oppression. This uni-dimensional approach narrows the study of the veil to single-context analysis and leads to a distorted view of a complex cultural phenomenon" (El Guindi 2003, 3). In this way, the veil, as well as the burkini, are heavily politicized and latent with Orientalist imaginings under the female White gaze, which this paper argues, connotes secular feminism.

Vast scholarship on the hijab has shown that since the representation of politics is seen through the body and clothing of women, the veil and by extension, the burkini, cannot only be seen as a religious piece of clothing. Hijab possesses political associations as well as a history that links it with various discourses. Some of these include the Western lens in which hijab is seen as traditional and backwards, indicative of a society that oppresses women, physically and sexually.

According to Chandra Mohanty in "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses," (1988) not only do "Western" men and patriarchy define "third world women," but so do "Western" women and their "Western" concept of feminism. "Western" feminism assigns its own category of inferiority to these women, especially by analyzing them apolitically and ahistorically. The universalization of the institution of "Western" feminism illuminates a Western hegemonic power structure over "third world women." Women's oppression is not a global phenomenon and often the proofs of its universality ring hollow. For example, a common misconception of "Western" feminism conveys that the veiling of women connotes the increased sexual control and segregation of women (Mohanty 1988, 142-143). It is important to consider that although many women

share similar practices (such as wearing the veil), the significance a woman places upon this practice, in a particular realm, may differ from individual to individual. The “Western” institutionalized conceptualization of “third world women” is comes from a particular production of knowledge created not to unite women globally, but to further distinguish them from superior “Western” women. Mohanty elegantly describes how “third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read ‘not progressive’), family oriented (read ‘traditional’)...illiterate (read ‘ignorant’), domestic (read ‘backward’), and sometimes revolutionary (read ‘their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war; they-must-fight!’)” (Mohanty 1988, 148). These women are seen as inferior to “Western” women in this “western,” hegemonic mentality in which the “West,” yet again, is able to affirm its authority over the “third world” by downgrading “third world” women as traditional, backward, and “sexually oppressed.” In essence, the “West” can be described as a mass producer of hegemonic knowledge legitimizing the control of the “Othered” “third world” woman.

In the case of France specifically, hijab is largely seen through the Western gaze, as well as from a public gaze, as opposed to a private one—a space in which an individual can practice their beliefs and/or perform their feminisms in the ways they want. Although the French secularist state has existed since the early twentieth century, it has recently grown to explicitly and systemically force the assimilation and erasure of Muslim identity—most likely due to the increased rates of immigration from North Africa. As such, overt physical symbols of Muslimness or Islam (such as articles of clothing like the burkini) were banned by the secularist regime. In France, Islam, Muslims, and any blatant signifiers of this identity have been marked as backward, uncultured, savage, and lower class in order to contrast the “higher” position of secularism to be progressive, modern, cultured, universal, and elite. In this secularist, Western, ‘modern’ frame of reference, Islam, Muslims, and their dress were publically marked as disadvantaged Others (Scott 2005, 107-108).

The case of the hijab and burkini completely goes against this binary framework of the public and the private spheres, as hijab is indicative of private mode of performance or interiority of belief/politics/ideology that is publicly visible. This discourse between private motivations (personal, religious beliefs) for public acts (wearing the hijab or burkini) is the reason for such contention amongst the hijab and what people wear or do not wear, especially surrounding the women’s body—which has often proved to be one of the most policed and surveilled sites. In such policing, the Muslim woman is stripped away from her political agency as all the

authority is held in the hands of the state that controls and manages all people and their ideologies through systems of Orientalism and its understandings of nationhood, secularism, and modernity—which ultimately culminates in the disrobing of the female, Muslim body.

## **Secularism in France and Constitutions of “Legitimate” Feminisms within the Public Sphere**

In “Symptomatic Politics: The Banning of Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools,” Joan W. Scott delineates the political landscape of French secularist politics and its connection to Muslim veiling practices. Scott maintains that the French secularism, or *laïcité*, theoretically aims to establish a concept of citizenship and representation based on universalist notions of visual homogeneity of the nation within the public sphere. Yet in practicality, this secularist politic is acted out as an intolerability of dissimilarity, as symbolized by the ban of particularly the Islamic head scarf, as well as through a strong reaction against the visible differences that North African, Muslim immigrants project, and the French nationalist belief in their ability to assimilate into French norms of dress and sexuality. Ultimately, the head scarf poses as such a powerful symbol that has the French government up in arms because it

*“is tangible sign of intolerable difference. It defies the long-standing requirement that only when immigrants assimilate (practicing their beliefs in private) do they become fully ‘French.’ It stands for everything that is thought to be wrong with Islam: porous boundaries between public and private and between politics and religion; the supposed degradation of female sexuality and subordination of women. The head scarf in the public...is a synecdoche for Islam in the body of the French nation-state” (Scott 2005, 109-110).*

In this way, the French secularist agenda against the Islamic headscarf plays out as an imagined clash between the public and private spaces, wherein hypervisibilized Muslim women in a headscarf or the burkini occupy a space within the public that contradicts French xenophobic and racist anxieties.

Furthermore, Scott highlights the ways in which modest dress in the form of a veil or a burkini acknowledges women’s sexuality by asserting it as inaccessible within the public sphere—thus making the rules of engagement between genders explicitly public (Scott 2005, 122). While some Muslim feminists argue that this is



a liberating practice for them, those who call for the removal of the veil (i.e. secular feminists) think that such a removal “will make Muslim women the equals of French women [not necessarily equals to men], free to experience what is taken to be the superior French way of conducting gendered relationships” (Scott 2005, 122). In this way, Islamic practices of covering within the public sphere evokes for many French feminists a notion of uncontrollability of Muslim women’s sexuality as delineated by its “elusiveness” and “hidden” nature. Ultimately, for Scott, the “most stunning contradiction was the alliance of so many French feminists, who, in the name of the emancipation of Muslim girls, rushed to support a law that offered the status quo in France (women as the object of male desire!) as a universal model of women’s liberation” (Scott 2005, 123). In this way, White, secular feminists, in their campaign against veiling in France, seem to not only reproduce patriarchal oppressions that seek to objectify women but also aim to marginalize Muslim women into the private while simultaneously excluding them from the public.

What constitutes “proper” and “legitimate” public feminisms and what makes visible the public displays of Islamic practice by Muslim women (by wearing the burkini or headscarf) as antithetical to such a “proper” form of public feminism? As evidenced by Scott, the public feminism that exclusively displays French nationalist ideals of sexuality and assimilability is what constitutes as the only proper way to occupy public feminist spaces in France. In other words, it is not only the French, White woman who typifies the ideal feminist—it is she who also embodies French nationalist agenda that of anti-immigration, pro-assimilation, and pro-visual homogeneity.

As can be seen from the images of the forced disrobing of the Muslim woman in the beach in Nice, France, a Muslim woman is barred from occupying any space within the public sphere. In this instance, her presence and coverings must be erased so she may exist publicly. In her article, “Communicating Gender in Public Space,” Louba Skalli theorizes a space where marginalized social groups, such as Muslim women who wear the veil in France, may challenge patriarchal public and private bifurcations by occupying a third space, called the “subaltern counter-publics”—a term which was coined by Nancy Fraser (Skalli 2006, 37). Skalli describes the creation of women’s “inner spaces” as a means of negotiating their access to the wider public sphere. While this article argues that the act of writing by women is precisely that, a strategic and transgressive act that increasingly permits women’s voices to enter the larger public sphere despite the multiple filters seeking to neutralize its subversive impulses, the subversive potential comes from an attempt to interpret reality in ways that contradict, correct, and even discredit reductionist

dominant male discourses. Consequently, for Muslim women, aside from writing, just existing and being is a transgressive and subversive enough of an act. Perhaps it is within such a space that Muslim women may be able to occupy and realize certain possibilities of survival.

## **Islamic Feminism and Combatting the Silence of the Muslim Woman**

Although, discussions surrounding veiling and the burkini in France are undoubtedly embedded in the language of the politics of public and private spaces and the perceptions regarding the superiority of secularism, they are also rooted in deeper institutions and modes of thinking that illuminate questions as to why the burkini and the hijab is understood and debated as it is. The contempt with which hijab, and thus the burkini, is held in a secular France is linked to its association to an Orientalist view of Islam or Muslimness that holds it to be a religion or peoples that is constituted as backwards, oppresses women, and then sexually represses her. Alternatively, the burkini and all other forms of religious covering need to be explored through an Islamic or Muslim feminist mindset in which hijab or burkini is demonstrated to empower or liberate a woman in a way that cannot be seen or comprehended through a Western gaze. As Homa Hoodfar writes in “The Veil in their Mind and our Heads,”

*“The assumption that veil equals ignorance and oppression means that young Muslim women have to invest a considerable amount of energy to establish themselves as thinking, rational, literate students/individuals...the veil, which since the nineteenth century has symbolized for the West inferiority of Muslim societies, remains a powerful symbol both for the West and for Muslim societies. While for Westerners its meaning has been static and unchanging, in Muslim societies the veil’s functions and social significance has varied tremendously...While it [the veil] has clearly been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a means of regulating and controlling women’s lives, women have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy...The static colonial image of the oppressed veiled woman thus often contrasts sharply with the lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency” (Hoodfar 1997, 249-250).*

Here, Hoodfar debunks the White, secular feminist's notions that Muslim dress, such as the veil or the burkini, is oppressive and inherently patriarchal. She illuminates that Muslim women can indeed find agency within such a system of dress—whether that be the veil or the burkini. If one eliminates the Orientalist and racist connotations associated with Islamic veiling and dress code, it creates a space within which Islam and feminism can coexist in a way that reflects the lived experiences of many Muslim women. This space allows for the existence of Islamic feminism. In “Islamic Feminism: What’s in a Name?” Margot Badran (*Feminist Ezine*) explicates how Islamic feminism can be defined as a discourse and practice that can be used as a project or identity (although these two are not mutually exclusive) in which Muslim women can advocate for women’s rights, gender equality, and social justice while using Islamic discourse and adhering to the egalitarian spirit of Islam’s teachings. Badran also underlines the way Islamic feminism becomes the perfect space in which Muslim women can negotiate religion and patriarchy in productive ways.

Alternatively, in countries such as Iran, where hijab and other modest clothing are forcefully imposed upon the women, the patriarchal and governmental obsession with women’s bodies and their dress is still applicable. Although it seems unlikely that women in Iran will be forced to disrobe in the future, as grotesquely seen in the photographs above, they will still be subjected to male and female gazes. In this way, even though societies that inflict compulsory hijab are not operating under colonial or Orientalist discourses, they are still functioning under the oppressive systems of patriarchy, moral policing, and surveillance policies. In this instance, White, secular feminism is still not the answer, as it relegates a specific understanding of feminism whereby any modest covering or religious adherence to modest covering would be seen as oppressive. One needs to look beyond dress in order to bring about the voice and agency of *all* women—whether or not they choose to veil, cover, or don the burkini.

Ultimately, the forced disrobing of the Muslim woman as pictured in the viral photographs above highlights the oppressive measure of the French government whereby the woman is dehumanized and humiliated within the public sphere because of her choice in dress. The authoritative stance and gaze of the male officers and the judging, curious gazes of the females surrounding the woman is especially reminiscent in the embodied and overt subjugation of the Muslim woman. The White women surrounding the Muslim woman in this image represent the epitome of secular feminism, who do not seem to intervene except to enjoy the scene unfold in front of them, with an air of disapproval or even disgust. Perhaps

they even approve of the disrobing of the Muslim woman—as her humiliation is sure to liberate her. The fact of the matter is that secular feminism colludes with patriarchy, colonialism, Orientalism, racism, and at times, secularism, as a means to subjugate Muslim women—seeking to erase Muslimness and Muslim women from the public space like a beach, where any woman should be allowed to express herself as she may wish. State-sanctioned, secularized feminism also works within a superiority complex; wherein such feminists prescribe a universalized feminism—that oftentimes only benefits the hegemonic majority. Consequently, such a monolithic understanding of not only Muslim women’s realities, but also of feminism in general is one of the major reasons why secular feminism proves to be detrimental to Muslim women’s lives. Ultimately, centering the hijab and burkini as an area of discussion on secularism deviates from the Orientalism and oppressive undertones of such policies. Banning or enforcing the veil and burkini perpetuate a system of objectifying a woman’s body as a representation of politics and ideology. *More specifically, placing an overemphasis on the burkini and hijab at the heart of such a discourse disseminates the patriarchal surveillance of women’s bodies, clothes, and sexualities by both men and women.* Overall, the focus should be on bringing about spaces and environments wherein oppression is erased, not identities. The invisibilization of veiling, burkinis, and visible symbols of Muslim identities as supported by feminist groups and governments speaks volumes about the oppressive rhetoric and systems in place against “Othered” identities. In this way, feminist and other activist groups should dismantle monolithic understandings of Muslim women as well as disassemble hierarchies and systems that seek to silence Muslim women around the world.

Lastly, the analysis of this incident in Nice, France brings about the question as to who is and who is not allowed to exist and remain visible within the public sphere. For whom is public feminisms viable and accessible? Clearly, it can be illustrated that a Muslim woman is not allowed to practice any such mode of public feminism within France—lest she is punished and fined. Muslimness—in whatever capacity, race, shape, form, or dress it appears in—will never be considered as a legal form of feminism within the French context. Muslimness cannot occupy any public space, nor can Muslimness ever be considered feminist.

In this way, Muslim women and all manifestations of Muslimness are perpetually relegated to marginality, within the private spaces of feminism. For a Muslim woman living in France who either dons a veil or a burkini, her existence and subjectivity must be constricted and regulated by French political notions of secularity. She may never be able to breathe freely within the public sphere—

consequently deprived from ever practicing her feminism publicly. But it is possible that she may be able to construct an ephemeral counterpublic space where she is able to exert her subjectivity and choices—even if it is for a few brief moments.

## Appendix



Figure A



Figure B

## Note

1. Oxford Dictionary simply defines the burkini as a women's swimsuit that covers the entire body, leaving only the hands, feet, and face exposed (Burkini, n.d.).
2. The top image (Figure A) was published in *Telegraph*, 2016 and the bottom one (Figure B) in *Siasat Daily*, 2016.

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