CHAPTER 1

Professing Islam in a Post-Secular Society

Introduction

The post-September 11th world has brought a new concentration upon the nature of Islam and the Muslim world, especially in light of the millions of Muslims that live in the West. The turmoil in Syria and Iraq, as well as in parts of North and East Africa, has brought hundreds of thousands of Muslim immigrants and refugees to the shores of Europe. Once there, they join the millions of other Muslims who have already made their homes in the West. Although the secular democracies of Europe are seen by many as places of opportunity and freedom, many Muslims find their presence to be unwanted, unwelcomed and hated; their religious sensibilities disrespected; their culture maligned, and their faith positions mocked and degraded. Indeed, the post-secular society, in which both religious communities remain an important and powerful presence despite the continual secularization of the lifeworld, is a contentious mix of worldviews, cultural norms, epistemologies and moral systems. Following the philosophical work of Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School, such a society can either chose to embrace the diversity and live in a dynamic democracy, or retreat into stagnant provincialism, in which the various secular and religious communities fail to engage in a productive discourse. As such, the challenge of the post-secular society can either result in a vibrant multicultural and cosmopolitan democracy, where constitutional values are the basis for shared citizenship, or the various factions can continue their discourse avoidance and fragment into warring faction, which will inevitably lead to increased social conflict.

The purpose of this study is to probe the various points in western society, especially Europe, where the issue of professing Islam can either be a force for solidarity among religious communities and secular citizens, or a force of division. Informed by the Frankfurt School for Social Research, especially Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and the 2nd generation philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, this study will be attempt to shed light on the future possibilities of a more reconciled future society wherein Islam finds a welcoming place within the post-secular society. As both a critical scholar of religion as well as a citizen of a secular state, I and many others wish to avoid the situation in which western societies degenerate into rigid communities of exclusivity; we wish to arrest and reverse the
entrenched economic marginalization that so many experience, as well as to abolish the religious bigotry that plagues both the Muslim community as well as the post-secular – and post-Christian – West. Rather we choose to seek out ways to peacefully co-exist and thrive together as one community regardless of the other’s faith or faithlessness. In order to explore the possibilities of such a future reconciled society, we, like the Frankfurt School’s critical religiology, will turn to philosophy, sociology, history, psychology, cultural studies and even theology. Although some remain skeptical, I find a turn towards theology to be extremely insightful, as its transcendent nature can inform us of the inner-dynamics of any given situation and help point us towards the ought, as opposed to simply abandoning the future to the is. Furthermore, “reconciliation,” which is an underlying theme throughout this work, is not simply a matter of eschatology, but one that we recognize as being within the realm of possibility in the here-and-now. Just as Karl Marx’s vision of a classless society reconciles the antagonism of class by the removal of that which antagonizes – oppression and exploitation of one class over all others; just as ‘Ali Shariati’s visions of a society beyond the colonial/colonized paradigm pointed to the reconciliatory potential of revolutionary Islam; just as Malcolm X, in his last days, saw a vision of the world that no longer used the yardstick of race to judge others, but rather judged based on the deeds of individuals; and just as Che Guevara had a radical vision of a society unified under the principle of equality and social justice, so too do we want to search for the potential for reconciliation within the context of our contemporary times. In order to do this, we will examine, interrogate, and critique both religion and secularity in a dialectical fashion, hoping to determinately negate that which leads mankind into continuous cycles of hatred and violence, while simultaneously preserving, augmenting, and fulfilling the prophetic and Socratic spirit that dissolves such irrational and destructive antagonisms. That being said, our aim, predicated on the permanence of the modern secular society in the West, wishes to see the construction of a more humane post-secular society; a society that values both the achievements of secularity as well as enlightened religion. In working for such a better society, we must turn our attention to one of the most vexing issues within western society today: the trouble with recalcitrant faith, especially Islamic faith, in the context of the post-secular West and its post-Christian society.

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1 One should not confuse the ‘post-secular society’ as being a society that has returned to religion. Many religious believers, seeing the destruction that secularity has had upon their faith, the moral values, and the pious way of life, engage in wishful thinking when they hear the phrase ‘post-secular,’ thinking that secularity is finally over. This is not the notion of ‘post-secular’ that we are discussing or attempting to advance in this study.
On the Contemporary Possibility of Witnessing and Professing

Professing a religious position can be a perilous proposition in a world that has been thoroughly secularized. It is an even greater problem when the faith that one professes is thought to be suspicious or threatening by the dominant group within one’s society, which is the case for Islam in much of Europe. When a community’s deeply held beliefs, the basis of their identity, spiritual life, and cultural norms, is thought to be backwards, oppressive, undemocratic and unenlightened, it becomes easy for that community to internalize those accusations and close themselves up within their particular religious lifeworld (religiöse lebenswelt) and refuse to engage the broader society in a non-antagonistic and/or open way. When the marginalized religious identity is the source of social scorn, many within the faith community often cannot bolster the courage to engage other voices as equal members within that society, despite the fact that the believers may be the carrier of all the same civil rights afforded to them via their status as equal citizens of such a society. The notion of “equality” through mutual recognition, as often articulated by the Critical Theorist Jürgen Habermas, is the precondition for democratic and pluralistic deliberation. When society fails to adequately internalize and/or practice such notions of equality, democracy becomes distorted and degenerates into a hollow state-ideology in service to a single class, race, creed, etc. Therefore, when an undemocratic and therefore unfree situation presents itself within a context of social hostility on the basis of religious faith, especially Islam, the Muslim believers are often confronted with three choices; (1) abandon the faith, (2) engage in “religious dissimulation” (taqīyah), or (3) retreat into fundamentalism – the cutting off of an individual from the symphony of voices within the national discourse and adopting a staunch and unyielding attitude towards their own beliefs. Religious fundamentalism, by its nature, deprives the national discourse of the authentic voices of religious communities, as the believers often refrain from the social and theological risk created

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2 I would like to note most forcefully that Islam and Muslims are not monolithic. The Muslim community, whether it be in the West or in the traditional Muslim world, are divided by the same antagonisms as westerners. Despite the unifying factor of the Islamic tradition, Muslims are separated by race, gender, class, sect, political philosophy, geography, schools of law, sexual orientation, language, nationalities, etc. While Muslims tend to agree on the basics of their religion, the interpretations and orientations within the religion is as numerous as the stitching in the Kiswat al-Kab‘ah (shroud on the Ka‘bah in Mecca). Managing such diversity itself has become a problem for the global ummah as many fundamentalist find such diversity threatening. With this in mind, the diversity of faith positions, etc. should be tacitly understood whenever the general terms of “Islam” and “Muslim” are used in this book.
by subjecting their beliefs to democratic deliberation. Many can no longer believe that the discourse partner in any way respects their sincere beliefs, as that partner seems not to find any value in what is offered. A poignant example of this retreat into one’s own particular community can be found in the 2005 Muhammad cartoon affair, where Muslims experienced the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten’s portrayal of Muhammad as a terrorist to be extremely offensive and disrespectful of their most sacred figure. The perceived disrespect left many western Muslims feeling deeply alienated from the broader society whom they previously thought had some respect for their Islamic identity even if they couldn’t be reverential towards their Islamic faith. Consequently, the post-protest withdrawal from Danish society diminished the possibility of a future reconciliation between people of different faiths and those of no faith.3 If there is no discourse partner then there is no discourse; if there is no discourse then there is no real possibility for reconciliation and peace.

On the other hand, irreverent and critical thought, which is often perceived as insulting, is essential in the modern world, as it helps diminish the temptation of dogmas, authoritarian ideologies and political economic idolatry. Yet, on the other side, the tyranny of relativism, which plagues modern society, leaving it without any philosophical and/or ethical anchors, cannot simply go unchecked and unquestioned. Joseph Ratzinger, later to be named Pope Benedict XVI, pointed out in a conversation with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas that there is a danger in the over extension of relativism, multiculturalism, and tolerance within a society that is rooted in the Enlightenment and the secular state. The danger is especially acute when that state fails to adequately integrate minorities into the overall national culture.4 The national anxiety concerning the non-integration and assimilation of Muslims within European society cannot be ignored as it is rife with future possibilities, both negative and positive; this anxiety can either be a source for discourse amongst European and Muslims or a source of continual antagonism and future violence.

3 Jyllands Posten wasn’t the only publication to experience the ire of radical Islam. The left-wing French newspaper Charlie Hebdo, which routinely satirizes religion, especially Islam, Muhammad, and Muslims, was firebombed on November 2, 2011, and was later attacked by gunmen on January 7, 2015. In the last attack, twelve people were murdered including the senior editor Stéphane “Charb” Charbonnier. The killing was believed to be motivated out of revenge for the disrespect of the Prophet Muhammad. This subject will be taken up later in this work.

The modern identity crisis of Europe – the question of what does it mean to be European in a post-secular society – is compounded by the mass immigration of Muslims who often are more oriented towards their national-cultural-religious place of origins as opposed to the culture and politics of their newly settled nation. As many of the center-right continuously proclaim, this problem is further compounded by the fact that many Muslim immigrants (both legal and illegal) enjoy the social benefits that Europe provides its citizens while seemingly contributing little-to-nothing of social value to their host countries. These “concerned” or sometimes “nativist”/“nationalist” voices view Muslims simply as parasites – enjoying the social benefits that Europe has created while at the same time delivering crime, poverty, and social chaos to their once peaceful and orderly cities and villages. There is a sense that the near-utopia of Europe has been sullied and destroyed by people of an inferior and alien culture. If they would only leave, it is thought, Europe could once again return to its happy retirement.

However, the non-integration of Muslims risks the production of the “perpetual other” within the secular European society, which threatens the very stability of Europe. In terms of assimilation, the retreat into the comfort of Islam, the culture of national origin, and the Muslim community’s often refusal to integrate within the national life of the host nation – the self-ghettoization of Muslims – creates a parallel society within Europe. They are not fully integrated but not fully segregated either, but rather a state of limbo exists. Coupled with the historical suspicion of Islam being anti-democratic, authoritarian, patriarchal, and violent, Muslims are seen not only as the suspicious “other” but also the lurking enemy within. In light of this, immigration by Muslims appears to many Europeans to look more like a stealth invasion, especially during the refugee/immigrant crisis of 2015 and 2016. The fact that this society within a

5 Since September 11th, 2001, there has been a remarkable incline in anti-Muslim rhetoric, politics, and political parties in both America and Europe. These can be seen in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, France, Greece, Italy, Ukraine, etc. Many of these parties have gained seats in the national legislatures but have failed to gain any substantial amount of control of any government body. Nevertheless, the frightening amount of silence – or lack of opposition – by others in the society could represent a tacit – not publicly endorsed – agreement with the center-right on the issue of immigrants and specifically Muslims. The silence of the majority is, to my thinking, the greatest threat to peace for Muslim immigrants in Europe.

6 Due to the Syrian civil war between the government of Bashar al-Assad, the Western (NATO) coalition and their Syrian allies, Russian forces and ISIS, hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees flooded into Europe. Amidst those refugees were also many immigrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraqis who were simply looking to Europe for a better and more prosperous life. Such a mass migration sparked a fierce debate with the EU countries as to
society is rooted in a religious identity only causes more suspicion and distrust within the national secular cultural, which trusts neither their religiosity nor the content of their religion. The refusal of both sides, the native European and the Muslim immigrant, to engage in a robust dialogue, discourse, and debate; to subject their deeply held claims – both religious and secular – to democratic scrutiny; and the refusal to think in terms of humanistic commonalities as opposed to ethnos and culture, all contribute to a situation where either violence will continue to be inevitable because discourse – the precondition for acceptance and respect – has been made impossible.

The Post-Secular Society

The Critical Theorist Jürgen Habermas is keenly aware of the antagonism between the religious and the secular, the immigrant and the native, the democratic and the authoritarian, and the religiously devout Muslims and their European neighbors who are just as committed to their secular values. In order to look for democratic means to address the antagonism between these antagonisms, Habermas, in his chapter, *What is Meant by a “Post-Secular Society”? A Discussion on Islam in Europe* revisits the sociological debate about secularism and religious communities within Europe, especially the particular challenges presented by Islam. Reviewing former thought about the inevitability of global secularity, he points out the three basic premises of traditional secularization theory; (1) that science, technology, positivism, natural causation, i.e. the anthropocentric vision of the world, can no longer be reconciled with a worldview that is rooted in a theological and/or God-centric understanding of ultimate reality; (2) that religion has resigned itself to the private sphere after the loss of its social power within the state, economy, and national institutions; and (3) that the material abundance that was created with the capitalization and industrialization of the West, the availability of consumer goods, the advance of medicine resulting in the increase in the lifespan and healthy living, the reduction of existential and material anxiety, and the alleviation of ubiquitous violence, all made religion superfluous to the average individual – where once God provided for the people, now the markets provide; where once Christians prayed for their “daily bread,” now the bread factories see to it that it’s available. The scarcity of necessities and the uncertainty of life, which was

what responsibility the EU has for such refugees and migrants. Not surprisingly, this influx of non-European Muslims became a flash point for the far-right and other liberals concerned about the influence of more Muslims in Europe.
the precondition for such religious faith, no longer exist for most people living in advanced industrial societies. Man provides where once God did, and thus religion in unnecessary. Religion, according to many of these theories, would become superfluous as the roles and functions it once exclusively held were taken over by secular civil society and the secular state. For many of them, including Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Weber and many 20th century sociologists, religion’s long life was soon to come to an end, as it could no longer sustain its theological claims and traditional roles within the conditions of secular modernity.

Yet Habermas is aware that those who have dogmatically held onto such theories of secularization have become frustrated by the failure of religion to fully disappear in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Their claims, that religion belongs to the adolescence, or even infancy of human history, that it’s a *gestalt des geistes* as Freud believed – and thus has no place in the adulthood of the modern humanity – are frustrated by religion’s stubbornness to find history’s exit door. In this sense, religion is *fluctuat nec mergitur*. Most stubbornly, and despite the ever-increasing secularization of the cultural, economic, and political realms, religion continued to infuse itself into the lifeworld of billions of people. The rise of religious fundamentalism, especially amongst Muslims both in Europe and the Middle East, the growth of conservative orthodoxy amongst the older denomination of Christianity, the move towards religiously infused governments in Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, etc., and the international and ecumenical popularity of the Pope Francis, all point to a resurgence of religion on a global scale. For the secularization theorists, religion’s shelf-life has long expired but it is still held onto by the masses, despite that it is understood by the expert cultures to be a roadblock to man’s progress and an entrenched impediment to his survival. Religion, for the militantly secular, scientific, and atheistic, is man’s poison – one he is too foolishly eager to consume. Confusingly, they wonder why so many continue to swallow the religion pill on a daily basis when they should know the pill is a placebo.

Like the religious believer who retreats into a purist way of thinking about the world, many secular fundamentalists also take refuge in Logical Positivism’s *metaphysics of what-is-the-case* – deeming all non-materialist, non-scientific, and non-causational explanations of ultimate reality to be

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8 ‘Tossed by the waves but does not sink.’
They see the continual existence of sacred stories, rituals, sacred space, and sacred persons to be nothing more than the mad ramblings of the mentally-disturbed, obscurantists, and hucksters, who may mean well, but are inevitably misguided by their reluctance to abandon their superstitious beliefs about God, angels, revelation, miracles, etc. For the logical positivist, that which cannot be measured through quantitative measures cannot be real and only that which is real can be measured. Therefore reality is limited to physicality and/or appearances. Additionally, they view the religious believers’ commitments to divine revelation, which they find to be devoid of reason and epistemologically unsound, to be a sign of man’s inability to mature and think rationally, abstractly, and systematically. From the perspective of positivists, religion, and all forms of mysticism as Ayn Rand would describe it, circumvent reason, make a mockery of the human intellect, and will ultimately lead human history into the ditch.

The worldview of the positivist has consequences. According to the German sociologist Max Weber, the increased rationalization of society leads to the inevitable disenchantment of the world. Man’s emancipation from traditional religious metaphysics – that once connected him to the totality of his own being through sacred space, sacred texts, sacred figures, rituals, and religious institutions – leaves him disconnected and existentially adrift. Where religion once provided a comprehensive interpretation of reality and orientation of action, the bureaucratization and rationalization of the world disconnected him from that holistic wholeness and left him isolated, without unconditionally meaning, afraid of others as well as the anonymous bureaucratic system he created by his own hands. This modern disenchanted man experienced himself locked within an “iron cage” without religious or metaphysical consolation. The modern world, which promised both material abundance and freedom from old and misguided dogmas, failed to replace the connectedness and sense of ontological and eschatological certainty that man once had living in a religious world. This sense of non-belonging, non-connectedness and the non-sense nature of a disenchanted world left him in a state of longing for the innocence of prior times. This being the case, a door for religion was left open by the failure of modernity to adequately address man’s psychological and spiritual needs outside of his material necessities.

10 Clearly a retreat into positivism wasn’t the case for dialectical thinkers such as Marx and the Frankfurt School.

From the perspective of the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School, who recognized man’s spiritual bankruptcy post-Enlightenment, the inadequacies of religion, including its criminal and pathological history, cannot be the final word on religion as a human phenomenon, as religions contain within themselves the accumulation of human wisdom, experiences, protests, and thoughts which cannot be easily discarded without vacating much of human knowledge and abandoning the cause of those who, in their suffering, took refuge in the comforting arms of its absolutes.\(^{12}\) As Max Horkheimer wrote, ‘religion is the record of the wishes, desires, and accusation of countless generations.’\(^{13}\) For Horkheimer, the longing for “perfect justice” remains an integral part of religion even within the modern period, and for that reason alone the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has to take seriously the human-centered claims of religion.\(^{14}\) For the Critical Theorist of religion, proleptic solidarity (solidarity with past victims) is a sufficient reason to preserve some forms of prophetic religion in the secular world, even if it is only in its distorted form (manifest religion) or through its transformation and migration into secular philosophy.

The continuation of religion’s existence amidst the thoroughly secularized world points to the fact that there is either (1) some persistent *longing* for something *other* than what-is-the-case (the world as it is) and (2) that religion still provides something to mankind that the secular world has yet to discover.\(^{15}\) Most dialectically, it appears that the very coordinates of secularity have produced the necessary conditions for religions’ continual presence – and/or rejuvenation – in society. In other words, secularity has produced a new form of religiosity: one that has become immune to secularity’s attacks, or at least has found the capacity within itself to deter secularity’s aggressively corrosive nature – a *post-secular* form of religion. This is not a world in which religion has triumphed over secularity, as could be misunderstood by reading “post” as being simply “after” in terms of time, but one where religion remains a continual and persistent presence *within* the increasingly secular world. Indeed, like a elastic band that is stretched at both ends, the more secular the contemporary world becomes, the more it creates the conditions for this new post-secular form of religion. The dialectic within secularity is such: as secularity expands


\(^{13}\) Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 129.

\(^{14}\) Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 129.

further into the lifeworld, it unintentionally produces the conditions which are filled by religion; as it alienates and disenchants more people, the more they turn to religion to fulfill their longing for transcendence; the more atheistic and meaningless the modern world becomes, the more it simultaneously calls for the messianic, i.e. the return to religion as a complete and total way-of-being.

As scholars of history, society, religion and secular philosophy, we are challenged by this paradoxical phenomenon. Surely we in the West cannot go behind history and return to religion as a comprehensive worldview that determines the trajectory of the state and civil society, nor can we anachronistically return behind the Enlightenment without collapsing civilization into a false utopian dream of what society should look like now that we’ve experienced the horrors of secular modernity. Indeed, as Adorno has remarked in his essay *Reason and Revelation*, any attempt to return to religion post-Enlightenment is rooted in what we perceive as our needs and desires, not our being convinced of the metaphysical truth of religion’s claims.\(^\text{16}\) No, we are forced to muscle our way through secular modernity with one eye turned back towards history in proleptic solidarity with past victims and the other sternly directed towards the future with the object of creating a more-reconciled future society, which must include space for religious voices. This situation imposes an important question upon us: what can we as Critical Theorists do on the practical level to address the growing antagonism between the secular and the sacred; between the atheistic citizen and their religious counterpart; between the secular West and the *dar-al-Islam* (abode of Islam)?

In the realm of society, Habermas’ late writings on religion are increasingly sensitive to the antagonism between the sacred and the profane and how it manifests itself in the life of the nation-state and body politic. In light of his time diagnosis and prognosis, he proposes an answer to the vexing conditions of *post-secularity* – one that lays a challenging burden on both the religious and the secular if we are to see that the fundamental antagonism between the sacred and the profane within our current transition period – that is exacerbated by the ever-increasing power of capitalist markets and their global expansion – does not bring the world to total violence, i.e. alternative future No. 2, the totally militarized world capable of ABC (atomic, biological and chemical) wars.

According to various critical religiologists of the Frankfurt School tradition, including Rudolf J. Siebert – a second generation Critical Theorist and the pioneer of the Frankfurt School’s systematic study of religion – the secularization process continues undisturbed by the “return to religion” movements that can

be witnessed throughout the world. In the West, these movements are primarily in response to the near complete secularization of the public sphere, the lifeworld, the economy, and the family. They are born from the continuing infiltration of secular values, consumerism, commercialism, the neo-imperialism in the Muslim world, and the globalization of the secular ethos in other parts of the world that are desperately attempting to hold onto their traditional religious values and cultures. These religious people, like the fundamentalists, are deeply wounded by secular modernity and have become painfully aware of the corrosive effects it has had upon their lives. However, Habermas also points out that these victims of secularity rarely acknowledge the beneficial side of the secular Enlightenment that they themselves benefit from. Too often the positive side of the Enlightenment, i.e. the attempt to make every individual the master of their own fate; to liberate them from the bounds of kin, class, region, and familial expectations and traditional roles; to free them from magic, superstition, and nature; the advance of technology; and to place temporal power in the hands of the people, is often not adequately articulated by the proponents of secularization. Yet, much of these so-called positive aspects of Enlightenment are not universally experienced as being beneficial. Definitions of what can be considered “positive,” for example, are very different in the West than among the devoutly religious. Emancipation, which in the West is often associated with an autonomous and democratic lifestyle, is rarely reconciled with the religious idea of true freedom that can only be found through the complete submission to the will of the divine. Yet, for the secular West, as Horkheimer and Adorno articulated in the first lines of their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment is to be understood in the broadest sense as the

advance of thought,... aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters... Enlightenment’s program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge.  

However, even when individuals have been emancipated from their fears, myths and fantasies, many intrinsically feel the price has been too high for

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such liberation. They would be much happier to retreat into a traditional worldview and way of life. Freedom from the strictures of traditional societies is too heavy of a burden, too disorienting, too confusing, and is devoid of the necessary metaphysical moorings that anchor the individual in a worldview that orders their existence and renders it meaningful. Although much of the anxiety felt by secularized individuals stems from the fear of being isolated, standing on their own two moral and intellectual feet, and appropriating the responsibility for their own lives, there is nevertheless a legitimate awareness that something is missing in the secularized lifeworld that is independent of individual angst and anxiety.\textsuperscript{19}

Beyond the purely subjective answer, secularity has failed to answer the most basic questions about life, its end point, its meaning, and how to console the grieving person in their moment of inner-most despair and torment. Consequently, there is a pervasive feeling of nihilistic emptiness in today’s secularized world. It continues to create mentally, physically and spiritually broken and crippled individuals, who are isolated and on the margins of society. Despite the problems, the pain of spiritual vacuousness is being globalized through the secularization process via aggressive forms of capitalism; the pain that was once limited to secular Western nations is swiftly becoming \textit{weltschmerz} (world pain) and many are looking once again towards religion for anesthetic answers.

It is important to note that for Habermas, the object of the post-secular society can only be the society that has already been thoroughly secularized and not one presently struggling to become secular.\textsuperscript{20} In other words, to be post-secular presupposes a prior state of \textit{secularity}. Therefore, post-secularity is limited to only those nation-states which have a secular constitution, secular polity, and a secular state; those states that have constructed a secular way-of-being-in-the-world through some kind of rational deliberation or non-theistic philosophy as opposed to a traditional theocracy or any other form of governance that relies on revelation or divine command for its legitimation. Furthermore, the cultural climate of the nation-state must also be one that is not only \textit{open} to secularity, but accepts it as a basic norm, i.e. that the desire-ability of secularity is not a subject of disagreement and contestation (even if the degree of secularization and what that ultimately means can be a matter of debate). States in which the secular constitution and secular government is imposed from above upon a people who identify themselves as predominately


\textsuperscript{20} Habermas, \textit{Europe}. 59.
religious and in favor of some form of religiosity within the government, cannot be described as a secular nation per se, as they fail to reflect the general consensus of the people. A current example can be found in post-Mubarak Egypt. When given the opportunity to democratically elect their leaders, the majority of Egyptians elected a religious political party – the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) and Muhammad Morsi, who, despite being democratically elected, was overthrown in a coup d'état in 2013 by the secular military under the direction of General Abdal-Fattah el-Sisi, who later banned the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* under the pretext of being a “terrorist” group. Egypt, despite its “secular” constitution, secular military and secular-oriented ruling class, can hardly be considered a secular nation as the will of the people is thoroughly divided between those who want religion to have some influence on the government and those who advocate for a purely secular state. Because secularity itself is still bitterly contested among the people, resulting in a lack of consensus about the desirability of secularity, we should not regard it as a secular nation even if religion has been forcibly removed from governmental institutions. It is a *formal* secularity at best, and not one that has been adopted as a way-of-being for the vast majority of citizens.

For Habermas, if the secular West has moved into a post-secular condition, we then have to have a change in consciousness concerning three important factors. First, Habermas points out that citizens of secular states find themselves anxious at the sight of resurgent religion which ‘shakes the secularistic confidence that religion is destined to disappear.’ He believes that they must begin to resign themselves to the inevitability that religion will persist despite the growth of secularism. Second, secular citizens are becoming more aware that religious voices are increasingly contributing to various discourses within the public sphere; that they are ‘assuming the role of communities of interpretation’ and that they can contribute as a ‘sounding board’ for society when engaged in difficult moral and ethics decisions and dilemmas. Additionally, the existence of other religions within the multicultural societies of the West confronts Christianity’s exclusivism and privileged status by presenting alternative interpretations of reality and moral problems, and in doing so can offer previously unimagined solutions. Habermas points out that religions have increasingly become sources for meaningful thought-material in a world that has become increasingly malcontent to accept the finality of the status quo or the simply given. Lastly, the influxes of religious minorities into secular

22 Ibid., 63.
23 Ibid., 64.
Europe are a constant test of the Enlightenment values that Europeans have claimed to be universal.\textsuperscript{24} The physical presence of the foreign “other,” their alternative lifestyles, and their persistent questioning of what Europe takes to be \textit{self-evident} pushes Europeans into a self-reflexive mode – a rethinking of the way-of-being that was previously understood to be normative and inherently good and ethical. The limits of multiculturalism, the respect for diversity, and the belief in the universality of \textit{Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité} regardless of national origin, are fundamentally tested by the cultural and religious “other” within European society. Yet, Europe must ask: can such “enlightened” values persist when other cultures read those same values through religious lenses? Does such an alternative reading of “core” values bring to light the tacit “European-ness” of how they’ve been traditionally articulated since the Enlightenment? For example, can an Islamic reading of liberty, equality, and fraternity deepen and expand the vitality of such values in Europe or are the different readings – the secular European Enlightenment and the Islamic tradition – too radically different to be complimentary or reconcilable?

To view these questions from the standpoint of the ‘neutral observer’ is to take the wrong perspective. According to Habermas, we must rather ask a series of pertinent questions, ‘How \textit{should we understand ourselves} as members of a post-secular society, and what \textit{must} we expect from one another if \textit{we} want to ensure that social relations in secular nation-states remain civil despite the growth of cultural and religious pluralism?’\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, how does both the religious foreigner practice their religion in a secular society and how does the secular citizen embody their convictions within a society in which religion remains an active component in the public sphere? How do these groups of believers, non-believers, and agnostics learn to engage in conversations that do not descend into crude stereotypes, crass innuendos, disrespect, and hatred? Can they witness for their different religious and philosophical positions together as citizens, or is shared citizenship too deficient in providing them a platform by which they could discover an “overlapping consensus” on a variety of issues? Additionally, can secular society regain a healthy admiration for religion, and can religious communities understand and appreciate the role and achievements of secularity within the modern world despite their absence of divine legitimation? How should these two work together so that their living together does not descend into hating and killing? Can Habermas’ notion of post-secular society prepare a space in which professing a religious worldview – especially one that is associated primarily with foreigners – can

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 65.
be done safely and as equal citizens? Can the political, economic, and culture spheres of the nation-state be widened enough to allow for full integration and democratic participation of the “other”? Complete and meaningful integration through honest and universal discourse, not toleration through faux-respect, seems to be the current challenge in our current secular societies, but do the conditions of the post-secular society allow for such integration and acceptance? In order to answer that, we must delve into what it means to be Muslim in the post-secular society.

What Does It Mean to Profess Islam?

Through their adherence to five pillars and the moral code of Islam, Muslims profess every day to the most basic of theological claims: tawḥīd. ‘There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’ (La ilaha il Allah, wa Muḥammad Rasūl Allah). It is both a statement about ultimate reality, that the world and all it contains is a creation of a divine being that interjects its will into human history – a belief that is also shared by Jews and Christians – and a statement about how and why the divine has entered into history, not as an divine incarnation like Jesus of Nazareth in Christianity, but through a human messenger, a Prophet. For Muslims, the religion that was perfected by the divine is a complete and total way of life – a way of being that is meant to be understood as a total ‘submission’ (islam) to the will of the creator: a radicalization of what Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke: ‘not my will Lord, but yours be done.’

For Muslims, this Christian statement has to carry through to all aspects of life, not just during ṣalāt al-jum‘ah (congregational Friday prayers), the ‘eids (holy days), or in moments of crisis. Similar to the Calvinists, who find religious devotion in the everydayness of work, Muslims see the potential for ibādah (worship) in all things at all times (as long as they’re permitted activities). As such, all aspects of daily life take on a religious significance.

Profession is bearing witness through words – through the speech act – through language that expresses the ultimate commitments, ultimate concerns, ultimate values, and core beliefs of the individual. It articulates the

27 This conception of profession is obviously different from the act of confession which is seen as a sacrament within Catholicism. For Catholics, the sacrament of confession is the confession of sins and transgressions to a Priest in exchange for penance and hopefully absolution. Outside of this particularistic ritual, Catholics share the same phenomenon with other religion, the confession of beliefs as a public act of religious affirmation.
utmost concerns, the essence of being, the spiritual aspects of human existence, and it affirms the duty of the believer to embody the values expressed and revealed by the divine. Additionally, Islamic professing is the merging of both words and intentions (niyyah) so that the speech-act itself stands as a testament to the identical nature of the believer’s sincere intentions. Through their public profession, the believer offers their belief and praxis to the judgment of history, their peers, their community, and their God. For the devout Muslim, both the public and private sphere are arenas in which they either succeeds or fail to incorporate the ideals, potentials, principles, and the Islamic social values that are expressed in both the Qur’an and the Sunnah. As such, the devout believe that they will be questioned on the Day of Judgment (Yawm al-Qiyāmah) about how they fulfilled their time on the earth, which includes time in both the public and private realm. Did they dedicate the time Allah provided by engaging in shirk (polytheism) via the devotion of the earthly idols of wealth, fame, status, power – living in the having mode of being – or did they commit themselves to the furthering of justice, compassion, and mercy – living in the being mode – the embodiment of tawḥīd (oneness of God) and taqwá (God consciousness)?

Because of the integrated wholeness of the Islamic tradition, the bifurcation of the lifeworld into a religious private and secular public sphere is a problem for the devout Muslim; faith does not stop at the threshold of the home and it cannot be artificially locked within the home. The five pillars of Islam are to be equally confessed in the realm of the family, civil society, and the state, regardless of whether they reside in a secular or religious society. Therefore for most Muslims, Islam cannot be relegated and/or isolated to the home without doing considerable damage to the integrated wholeness of the believer’s lifeworld. If the individual Muslim in praxis remains steadfast in separating the two spheres of life they often senses that they violate the very creed they profess which recognizes no such distinction, causing great difficulty, anxiety, and fear of divine punishment. If Islam is the perfected religion established by the God of the Qur’an, and that the Prophet instituted it in such a way that it is a religion that regulates – and therefore liberates – all spheres of life, and if the individual is a modern European who only confesses his religious beliefs behind closed doors while living the secular life in the public sphere, then they effectively forsake the sunnah (the way of the Prophet) and the divine

command to submit to the will of Allah (at all times). Muslims fail to engage in a meaningful *imitatio Muhammadi* if the bifurcation of the lifeworld separates their religious life into private and public praxis. In light of this inner-conflict, western Muslim are often trapped between two imperatives, (1) to faithfully integrate their religion in all spheres of being and be alienated – or even marginalized – from the society in which they live – which is often hostile towards outward displays of religion, or (2) to isolate the religious life to the private and abandon the constitutional example of the Prophet. Steadfastness to the first may insure salvation; steadfastness to the second may insure social survival but engender salvational anxiety. Sincere profession of faith in a bifurcated society often instills great pains of conscience within many Muslim. For many believers, the question is: where is the balance, and is it even possible to be a good secular citizen as well as a devout Muslim? Surely one can be a law-abiding citizen, engage in civil affairs, and advance the interests of one’s nation-state and community, but can one do this while openly professing Islam as the motivation for such actions?

Witnessing in Islam: On the Tradition of Radical Praxis

The practice of “witnessing” for the faith of Islam takes on two fundamental dimensions. First, when in times of peace, the propagation of the Islam via *da'wa* (invitation to Islam), or activities associated with calling others to Islam. Muslims are encouraged to present Islam to non-believers in the most peaceful, merciful, and loving way, as to interest them in an alternative and *truthful* way-of-being, learning more about the will of the divine, and ultimately welcoming them into the *ummat al-Islamiyah* (Islamic community). Despite the stereotype of the Muslim that conquers by the sword, forcefully compelling anyone into Islam via violence or the threat of violence has been strongly condemned by an unequivocal verse in the Qur’an (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:256): *there shall be no compulsion in religion*. According to Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence), if a non-Muslim is ever wrongly forced to accept Islam, they are within their rights to revert back to their original tradition (or non-tradition). *Da'wa* is meant to be an open invitation to Islam, not an attempt to incarcerate within Islam. In peacetime, Muslims are to stand as witnesses for the Islamic tradition both in word and in deed through their submission to the moral and ethics principles laid out in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* (way of the Prophet), *ahl*

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30 Al-Qur’an 5:3, ‘This day, I have perfected your religion, completed my favor upon you and have chosen Islam as your religion.’ My translation. We will return to this issue briefly.
al-bayt (The House of the Prophet), and the ḥadīth (reports of Muhammad’s words and deeds). Muslims are to stand as examples of righteousness in a world that is post-righteous (or even sometimes pre-righteous). Although this command goes beyond the clothing that one wears (which is a form of witnessing), it is often the Muslima (the Muslim woman) that stand at the frontline of this struggle in secular societies, as she is the most readily identifiable because of her hijab or other head-coverings. Muslim women are the ones that are approached most often with questions about Islam; they are the ones that will most often be harassed because of the faith; they are the ones most often pitied (in the West) because they’re seen as oppressed under their headscarf and behind their niqāb (face veil); and they’re the ones most often singled out for discrimination because of the suspicion of terrorism that surrounds the Muslim community. Like the women who openly wept for the executed Jesus on Golgotha, Muslim women are on the frontlines for the struggle for recognition while often the men hide behind their western clothing and practice taqīyah (religious dissimulation) to the best of their ability. Amidst those with anti-Islamic sentiments, it is the Muslima that are most often the bravest mujahideen (those who struggle for the sake of Allah).

Whereas professing is inherently concerned with the individual and the divine – a relationship that can easily retreat exclusively into the private sphere – the practice of witnessing is a public praxis that is geared primarily towards the individual believer and the society around them. The social aspect of witnessing is one that cannot be overlooked in understanding how the dynamic of Islamic witnessing works. It is within society that the subjectivity of the Muslim can transcend itself, go out to the other, and return back to them and complete their faith. The “other” in society is that which makes possible the realization of the believer’s moral commitments, social obligations, and divine commandments. It is with the “other” in society that the Muslim is commanded by his religion to practice the humanistic values of compassion, mercy, solidarity, and unconditional love. Although the mystics of Islam, the Sufis, often stoically shy away from the world outside of themselves and seek refuge in a deeply personalized relationship with the divine, and therefore sometimes forget the social demands of the ummah (community), the non-mystic Muslim, adhering to the prophetic model of religious life, is compelled to realize their religiosity in concert with others – whether that be in a community of believers or in a community of adversaries – either one of which serves as the

31 The ahl al-bayt is especially important for Shi’i Muslims, as it is the house of the Prophet via ‘Ali that they take as another source moral authority.
basis for the social dimension of the Islamic creed.\textsuperscript{32} For example, the poor make it possible for those who have resources to purify and therefore make halāl (permissible) their accumulated wealth (if it wasn’t gained through illicit means, in which case purification does not follow charity). Without the fulfillment of their obligations to the poor, the subjective religiosity of the individual Muslim is suspect; their commitment to the divine command is insufficient, diminished, and stands unfulfilled. It is through the other, especially in this case the poor and marginalized, which allows the individual to abide by the divine laws and dictates of the Qur’an. Therefore, witnessing in Islam inherently means being-with-others and being-for-others. In the end, it is a freely chosen altruistic commitment that stresses the absolute need for social justice, social equity, and social harmony – where the subjective desires of the individual are superseded by the objective needs of the community. Without the witnessing of Islamic values in society, Islam retreats into a private hyper-personalized faith that depletes it of its social potentials, its social force, and its commitment to the furthering of a future reconciled society. This same phenomenon can be seen in the historical privatization of Christian social values in the West. Only in times of great need, such as the Civil Rights struggle in the u.s., do these humanistic values reappear in individuals of great moral courage, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who not only called for civil rights but also for the “redistribution of wealth,” which was not popular among capitalists and the white majority of the United States. For King, it was a moral disgrace that the u.s. massively produces poor people like commodities, even though it is the richest nation on earth.\textsuperscript{33}

New Religion as Return of the Old

Islam, like Christianity, is not only a matter of a personal relationship with the divine, but is also a matter of active and dynamic social solidarity with the poor, the suffering, and the victims of nature and history, the tyrannized and the oppressed, and all those forced to live under unjust conditions. It was for these innocent victims, created by al-Qur’aysh (Muhammad’s tribe in Mecca),

\textsuperscript{32} It is certainly not the case that all Sufis shy away from social life but it is a general orientation among mystics to find a deeply personal relationship with the divine that often overshadows the commitment to the greater world.

\textsuperscript{33} According to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s son, MLK III, the demand for the “redistribution of wealth” was the reason his father was murdered. See Martin Luther King III’s interview by Rev. Al Sharpton, PoliticsNation, MSNBC, 20 January 2014.
the Roman Empire, and racist America that Muhammad, Jesus, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm x and many others fought on the side of. Their religious faith led them to bind themselves to the plight and predicament of those who were despised, neglected, and abused: the social outcasts and those who found themselves the victims of systematic discrimination, oppression, and violence. Furthermore, the advancement of hyper-individualization, egoism, narcissism, and bourgeois coldness, that is characteristic of modern civil society as advanced by global capitalism, is a great fear of the ummah and other religious communities, as it undermines the communicative rationality that is the adhesive of their community. Many Muslim scholars identify how western Christianity has been privatized and depleted of its social force and relevance, leaving civil society to be steered by corporate greed, individual competitiveness, and the politics of unaccountable power. They fear precisely what Nietzsche accused the West of doing: turning God’s cathedrals – and possibly his mosques – into God’s tombs, and thus handing the keys to the earthly kingdom over to tyranny of the markets. Requiem aeternam deo.34 The idea that this market-zeitgeist could migrate – and has migrated – into the dar al-Islam (abode of Islam) is alarming to Muslims who see Islam as the antithesis to the values that drive global capitalism. Summing up their stance against this radical social change, a devout Muslim once told me: you can keep your Gucci, Prada, and Mercedes-Benz, and we’ll keep our faith, traditions, and families. The threat of the displacement of Islam for secular capitalism, which according to the Critical Theorist Walter Benjamin is a new religion itself, is real and should be taken seriously by both Muslims and the West, as it is one of the greatest contributing factors in the resentment that the Muslim world has against western nations.

In order to witness the encroachment of corporate capitalism within the most holy of spaces within the Muslim world, one need only visit Mecca – the most sacred space for Muslims – where the commercialization of the surrounding area continues unabated. Every western fast food chain, designer clothes, technological gadgets, or luxury items most associated with western bourgeois culture and the consumer society can be purchased within the city. It is a very modern city dedicated to a pre-modern religion and the modern cult of consumption. This phenomenon is the result of the collaboration with Saudi Salafism and corporate capitalism; the most poignant symbol of this alliance being the new Makkah Royal Hotel Clock Tower or Abraj al-Bait Tower that looms ominously over the great mosque of Mecca – a grotesque display of

cheap grandeur in the city of the most humble prophet; it is symbolic of corporate style capitalism awkwardly superimposed on prophetic religious faith. Additionally, it continues on the tradition of the Wahhabi-Salafi destruction of Islamic architecture that begun with the conquest of Mecca by the Wahhabi-Salafis in 1803. Just as was done to Islamic monuments and dwellings to build the new petro funded *Clock-Tower* and the grandiose expansion of the Grand Mosque, Abdul Aziz, a leader of the puritan reform movement, destroyed any edifice that didn't conform to his narrow and puritan interpretation of Islam, including tombs, shrines, and homes associated with the *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (biography of the Prophet). However, as the 19th century Wahhabi-Salafis destroyed historically significant edifices in the name of religious reform, today's Wahhabi-Salafis destroy in the name of other goals: profits.35

Critics have dubbed this commercialization of sacred space the “Las Vegas-ization” of Mecca, as the “other-worldliness” of the sacred geography appears increasingly diminished in contrast to the secular and capitalist oriented culture. In the end, the “otherness” of Mecca is giving way to the “sameness” of every other major city in the world, as it sheds the aura of sacredness for ubiquitous advertisements and the same consumer goods that are found throughout the world. Apart from the Grand Mosque and other features of the city associated with Muhammad and the early Muslims, Mecca becomes indistinguishable from other Middle Eastern cities where the influence of corporate capitalism is abundant. For many Muslims, it appears that Mecca has returned to the market ethics of al-Qar’aysh, the primary enemies of the early Muslims, who also maximized profits from the pilgrims on their way to visit the holy Ka’ba, just as the first century money-changers did around the Jewish Temple, which sparked Jesus’ earthly *dies irae* (day of rage) against their profit making. For these Muslim critics, it appears that the globalizing secular force of capitalism has created a *new jāhilīyah* (age of ignorance) and its *destruktiven geist* (destructive spirit) has pierced the very heart of Islam’s most sacred space. Mecca, in many ways, stands today as a city divided between two religions. First, the religion of Islam that has always resisted its integration within the antagonistic spirit of capitalism, and secondly, the new “religion” of globalized capitalism – which has a way of quietly undermining the communicative nature of revealed religion, leaving behind a pitiful shadow of what religion once was. Additionally, from the perspective of Walter Benjamin’s dialectical materialist historian, the catastrophe of elegance and luxury comes at the cost of the more than

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half a million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia that live in squalid conditions, are abused at the hands of their employers, and are denied their basic human rights by the Kingdom. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, these workers often times live in conditions reminiscent of slavery.\footnote{See Human Rights Watch, “Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia.” July 14, 2004. www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmainpage=search&docid=412ef32a4&skip=0&query=saudiarabiamigrantworkers (Accessed 10/12/2014).} Echoing Benjamin’s Angelus Novus, who sees all of history as a singular event of barbaric tragedy, the dialectical materialist historian sees the new skyscrapers, shopping malls, and luxury office buildings as testaments to the sickness within today’s Saudi (and broader Muslim) society. When the Islamic command to clothe, house, and feed the poor, the sick, and the broken gives way to gaudy and vain-glorious displays of unmerited wealth and undeserved luxury, then the prophetic values of Islam have been overtaken by the corrosive nature of a very secular globalized capitalism. They have, in this sense, exchanged the religious morality of the Prophet Muhammad for the secular philosophies of Ayn Rand, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. It is capitalism with an Islamic façade.

**Witnessing in the Time of War**

Witnessing in the time of war is of utmost concern in the latest period of Islamic history, as it has come to the forefront under European colonialism, post-colonialism, the “War on Terror,” the Arab Spring, and the various civil wars that have recently plagued the Muslim world. Although the western World’s fascination, condemnation, and distortion of the Islamic concept of jihād has gone on since the rise of the first Islamic empire that displaced the crumbling and oppressive Byzantines and Sasanians in the Middle East, and later threatened the lands of the Roman Catholic Church, it has yet to fully understand what jihād means from within a normative Islamic perspective. Whether this is intentional or through neglect is a continual topic of debate. On the other hand, a pervasive symptom of the nouveau-jahili-status (state of modern ignorance) of today’s dar al-Islam is that many Muslims aren’t able to adequately define or intellectually defend the notion of jihād either. When it comes under scrutiny, many Muslims adopt a reactionary attitude that levels the complex concept down to a simple slogan of “holy war,” the very same misconception of jihād that many uninformed westerners have. Religious illiteracy is not only a symptom of secularization, but of deficient religious education in supposed religious societies, and the Muslim majority countries are no exception. In a
classical understanding of jihād, especially in times of peace, it is a struggle within oneself to perfect that which is confessed and witnessed; it’s a struggle to be just, fair, honest, and life-affirming; it is an concerted effort to ‘enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong’ (Qur’an, 3:110); it is a struggle to direct one’s energies, resources, and time towards realizing a society that does not brutalize, oppress, and make into idols the gods of the market: success, fame, status and wealth. In times of war, jihād bil-saif (struggle of the sword) is an active struggle to defend the Muslim ummah from those who wish to inflict harm upon it. Although the laws governing Muslims engaged in warfare are precise and extensive, and are therefore beyond the scope of this discussion, it is clear both from the Qur’an and the hadith that Muslims are (1) not to initiate hostilities with others, (2) not to attack innocent civilians, whether they be men, women, children, clerics, etc., (3) must cease hostilities if the enemy surrenders or sues for peace, (4) cannot abuse captives, (5) cannot force Islam upon captives, and (6) cannot poison wells (engage in biological and chemical warfare).37 Lastly, similar to the Augustinian Just War Theory (jus bellum iustum), the war against the enemy must be proportional and must avoid civilian casualties at all costs.38 Of course, history demonstrates to us that the Muslim world is not a society of saints and often violates its own prescribed norms, as Muslim so often justify violence against innocent civilians by creatively interpreting away certain prohibitions, by declaring them non-applicable, or by anachronistically making normative certain actions of past Muslims that have been since rejected or abandoned via ijma’ (consensus) by Islamic scholars over the centuries.39 Furthermore, the practice of takfīr, or declaring a Muslim to be a non-Muslim (a form of excommunication), and therefore mistakenly believing it is permissible to kill these “murtaddin” (apostates), is also become a commonly held belief among some orientations, and is likewise a symptom of the modern condition in the Muslim world. This is most certainly not limited to the Muslim community, as all religions have a criminal history when we see the core of the faiths transformed into an ideology that crudely legitimates and/or masks limited self-interest. From the perspective of the critical religiologist, the Christian religion of ‘becoming and liberation’ is distorted into the Crusades, witch burning, and the Inquisition; the Jewish religion of

38 The Augustinian Just War Theory was a compromise between Christians and the Roman state that betrayed the radical pacifism of the earliest Christian communities.
39 This neglect of Qur’anic norms concerning warfare can be witnessed most poignantly in ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) repeated human rights abuses.
‘sublimity’ is turned into an ideology of state sponsored repression and murder of Palestinians as well as the denial of their most basic human rights; the religion of ‘imagination’ turns into Hindu nationalism and fanaticism against Muslim minorities; and likewise the Islamic religion of ‘law’ turns into 9/11, hijackings, beheadings, and suicide bombers.40 We also see this same phenomenon among secular states that also espouse prohibitions against exacting violence among innocent people but fail to uphold such standards precisely when they are most necessary. ‘The land of the free’ – predicated on the American Constitution – degenerates into the slaughter of Native Americas, the enslavement of Africans, the internment of Japanese citizens, and the so-called “war on terror” which itself terrorizes innocent victims of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, etc.41 The nation that fights against terror has refused to close its own terrorist training camp in Fort Benning, Georgia, i.e. the School of the Americas, now known as Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, which is responsible for some of the most brutal and repulsive human rights abuses in Latin America. A nation that obsessives over abortion but finds no flaw in napalming pregnant Vietnamese women and their toddlers is hardly a nation that can claim to be rooted in the Gospel tradition of loving one’s enemy. What kind of enemy can the unborn and newly-born be? The already historically dubious claim that the United States is a “Christian” country is made even more unbelievable by the militaristic praxis of the “hawks” in Washington d.c. – both Republican and Democrat – whose instrumental rationality – which allows them to think strategically about the destruction of nations – outweighs any remnants of communicative reason which would inform them of the intrinsic worth of the life they will inevitably destroy. From the perspective of the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory, nations are invaded, undermined, and overthrown for profit, not for the Orwellian notions of freedom, justice, and liberty, which may provide ideological justification but are rarely the true motivation for aggressive militarism. Millions of martyrs, both American soldiers and the citizens of nations that they were ordered to invade, can attest to the “aims” and “benefits” of neo-imperialism, which have profited the few – especially western corporations – while the many, including American citizens, suffer.


For traditional Islamic *fiqh*, in order for a military struggle to be a legitimate *jihād*, i.e. to be justified by the Islamic tradition itself, its war aims must be just, honest, and in accordance with the spirit of compassion and mercy. Both the theory that guides the aims and the praxis that carries it out must be in congruence otherwise it risks its Islamic legitimacy. In Islam, the Orwellian functionalization of principles, whether they are purely Islamic or “universal,” such as freedom, justice, and liberty, etc., is condemnable, as it delegitimates the concepts, undermines rightful authority, and breeds cynicism concerning publicly stated intentions. It also has a more perversive and pervasive affect: the continual impoverishment of language – its impoverishment of substantive meaning via its functionalization as cover for ulterior motives – is a major problem both within the Islamic and western world. Words just do not carry the same credibility that they once embodied because they have been so woefully distorted by various powers looking to camouflage their plans behind universally accepted values. This is true both for states as well as groups, especially terrorist groups such as al-Qae‘da and ISIS.

Ultimately, all attempts to engage in a *jihād bil-saif* must be justified via rational discourse and legitimately rooted within the Prophetic tradition. It must therefore also maintain the standards, regulations, and prohibitions that were articulated both by Muhammad and the Qur‘an, as these are the constitutional sources of the normative values that govern all forms of *jihād.*

Just as the once-revolutionary nature of Bourgeois philosophy is twisted into its opposite, the revolutionary and compassionate nature of *jihād* has also been transformed into the very opposite of its original emancipatory intention. Suicide bombers have not only become the fear of non-Muslims flying on Russian Aeroflot (Ἀερόφλοτ) airlines, United States and NATO soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, bus riders in Britain and Israel, and trains in Spain, they are also feared by Muslims in historically Muslim lands who reject extremism, who visit Shi‘a shrines, or who work for peace and reconciliation between warring factions. Indeed, if one was to adopt a quantitative methodology, one should clearly see that Muslims have been the victims at the hands of such terroristic activities more so than westerners. The Islamic *ummah* is targeted both by

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42 While I do not like to engage in the fashionable counting of victims in order to make a quantitative statement about who has suffered more, I do believe that the reality of human suffering at the hands of injustice both in the Islamic and western world can be a point of mutual recognition, discussion, and eventually reconciliation. This is what I call *intersubjective-passiology*. Through an honest discourse centered on the common human experience of suffering, different peoples can come together and hopefully overcome their animosity towards each other. The grieving faces of western mothers and fathers are
the great powers of the West and those who claim to fight for the preservation of Islam through its “purification.” The Muslims who find themselves within one of the many conflict zones in the world are doubly victimized.

Although what is deemed “radical” in today’s discussion of religion – those that bend religion to their extremist and often violent ideology – the real “radical” nature of Islam is in the opposite approach; the prophetic trajectory that Muhammad directed the early Muslim community towards was the truly radical approach, if we understand the term “radical” as being to “grasp the roots” of a given subject or action. In this case, the roots are in the prophetic tradition of the Biblical and Qur’anic prophets. When we examine what in Islam is described as the “age of ignorance” (jāhilīyah), there we see the prototype of those contemporary Muslims who brutalize, oppress, and murder, embodying not the example set forth by Muhammad, but by his enemies: al-Qur’aysh. Likewise, in the example of the Roman Empire, its sociopathic Caesars, its Legions, and its Praetorian guard, we see the prototype for those “Christians” who brutalize, oppress, and murder today; and in the example of the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians we see the archetype for the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) that deprives Palestinians of their native land, their families, and their lives. In the victims of al-Qur’aysh, the Roman Empire, and the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians, we see the model of the unjust martyr-manufacturer, whose spirit can be found today in the authoritarian and violent expressions of the religions that were once their victims.

From the perspective of the critical religiologist, the prophetic tradition, initiated by Abraham, as he accepted the call of his unseen God, laid down the geography for the prophetic and therefore radical tradition of love and mercy, justice and peace, that permeated the history of religious revolutions through Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah of the 7th century Arabia. Furthermore, it is the radical commitment to equality, equity, justice, compassion, which manifests itself in the care of the poor, the orphan, and the widow that was translated into secular language – forsaking the theological legitimation – by socialists and even many communists. Impatient for a heavenly manifestation of a reconciled and therefore peaceful and un-alienated society, they attempted to construct a world in which the messiah could endorse upon his arrival (even if many, like Marx himself, could no longer believe in such religious figures). Regrettably, such lofty values in secular form are also subject to distortion, denigration, and functionalization for the means of oppression and brutality, as

the same grieving face of the Islamic mothers and fathers. That shared grief is fertile soil for solidarity and reconciliation.

In the Islamic Tradition, Abraham (‘Ibrāhīm) is call al-Khalīl Allāh, the “friend of God.”
had happened under the brutal regime of Stalin and other communist despots, who shrouded themselves in altruistic values while systematically denying and destroying the humanity of millions. Nevertheless, both secular and religious martyrs have been created throughout the millennia while in search of more just and equitable social conditions. With the ongoing struggles in the Ukraine against the 2014 neo-fascist coup d'état of the Right Sector and Svaboda Party in Kiev, the struggle between secularization and religious politics in Turkey, the struggle for democracy against military dictatorship in Egypt, the struggle for Shi'a and Sunni reconciliation in Iraq, and the struggle against both the ‘Alawite state and ISIS terror in Syria, it is clear that history will continue to produce more of what it has always produced: martyrs.

“Perfected Religion”: A Problematic Conception

The historic rise of Europe out of the Dark Ages has come at the expense the traditional Muslim territories, especially in the Middle East and North African, which was the principle bearer of advanced civilization in the Mediterranean area after the fall of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Despite the fact that the early Muslims severed the southern part of the Mediterranean from its northern half – which was culturally integrated via the shared Greco-Roman culture and later Christianity – the southern Mediterranean was quickly integrated into a more progressive society than the European one: the various Islamic Caliphates and dynasties. Chief among the reasons for the Muslim's rapid advancement, in terms of intellectual achievements and not territorial gain, was its insistence on education, the emergence of scholarship, and the unconquerable drive to absorb the knowledge of the previous civilizations into the growing Islamic empire.  

Be the 8th century CE, the Islamic empire was vast, stretching from India to Western Europe, from the southernmost point of Arabia to deep within central Asia. In order to organize such an empire, in order to codify the Islamic tradition, in order to provide for the needs of the new Islamic territories, the Muslims had to be practical, less dogmatic, and learn from those who came before. They were rich in religious zeal, piety, and morality, but lacked the worldly experience of being rulers of empires. This reality would require gaining and expanding upon knowledge received from the previous civilizations. From India the Muslims learned complex mathematics; from the Romans they learned about logistics of city building, from the

Chinese they learned about paper (and later gunpowder), and from the Greeks they learned philosophy; the latter being the most important for the advancement of Islamic thought, Qur’anic exegesis, systematic theology, and the art of logic. Platonism and Aristotelian logic, which fertilized the earliest of Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi (801–873 CE), resulted in an unprecedented depth in understanding the sources of Islam. Al-Qur’an, the ḥadīṯh, and the Sunnah, were also supplemented by the great works of Greek philosophy, such as Plato’s Republic, The Dialogues, and his other works on epistemology and metaphysics. Aristotole played an important role among the intellectual elites in the Muslim world, to the point where some scholars claimed that his works were close to having near-revelation status. These texts and may others delivered to the Muslims the categories and concepts they needed in order to become a world power and to systematize their own religious tradition. These ancient sources of knowledge were continually developed further in the Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad as well as in the great libraries and universities of al-Andalus (Islamic Iberia). The great works of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (Alpharabius), Ibn Rušd (Averroes), Ibn Sinā (Avicenna), Ibn ‘Arabi, Nasir al-din al-Tūsī, etc., were all steeped within the thought of both Islamic theology and Greek philosophy – religious revelation and autonomous reason; by way of Islamic Spain, this mixture would later fertilize the intellectually sterile grounds of Europe itself, thus laying the foundations for the European Renaissance. Philosophy, no matter where it derived from, whether it be a work of ethics, metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, or politic-economic, was not rejected by the Muslim intellectuals simply because it was of foreign origin or was originally developed by those men of different faiths or no faiths at all, but was governed by a different criteria: can “truth” be found in these pagan philosophies? And in light of the Qur’an, could these truths be reconciled with divine revelation? As the Islamic empire grew, so too did its rapacious desire to learn the knowledge of other peoples. Muslim scholars remembered two important proverbs: ‘seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave’ and ‘the ink of the scholar is more sacred then the blood of the martyr.’

For the early Muslim intellectuals and scholars, the truth of philosophy could be reconciled with the faith of Islam via reason and sound logic. No

46 There is some debate as to whether the former phrase is something the Prophet really said or if it is just a pious truism that is common within the Muslim community. The second phrase seems to be authentic according to the scholars of ḥadīṯh but has a weak isnad (chain of transmission). Either way, both represent the zeitgeist of the Muslims in the early empires.
one exemplified this more than al-Kindī, better known as the philosopher of the Arabs in the 9th century, who attempted to demonstrate that the believer could read the Qur'an and other sacred texts through reason. He did not believe that reason was the enemy of revelation, but rather it was a divine gift to humanity for the understanding of all that exists. Arguments made by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were no strangers to arguments concerning īman (faith), 'aqīda (creed), kalam (theology), fiqh (jurisprudence), etc., but were deeply en-grained in the logic of the arguments themselves. Early Islamic philosophers, seeing the tremendous accomplishment gifted to the world by Greek thinkers, absorbed their works into Islamic thought. This syncretism rescued Islam from the intellectual stagnation that was already potentially there; it gave Islamic thought a more complex and sophistication vocabulary by which one could interpret the Qur'an and other sources of Islam more effectively. Additionally, this also gave the Muslim intellectuals the philosophical and scientific categories by which they could fulfill the divine command to investigate the world and all it contains, without which they would have to either (1) reinvent such intellectual tools or (2) remain intellectual underdeveloped. By engaging the Greek texts and translating their wisdom into Islamic thought, philosophy was not only infusing the new religious tradition with the ability to comprehend itself in a much more precise and in-depth way, but philosophy was also pressed into service of the broader Muslim community.

Yet for some, the Islamic practice of interrogating non-Islamic thought and inviting the wisdom of others into the Islamic domain was not a virtue that brought about a more progressive and beneficial society, but a dangerous mixture of Allah's religion and man's fallible thought. For these believers, whatever comes from Allah should never be conflated or “diluted” with the thoughts of man, let alone those who were outside of Islam: kāfirūn (disbelievers). The preservation of the “purity” or authenticity (ṣahīh) of Islam was of utmost importance, and so damnant quod non intelligunt. This aversion to outside thought remains within much of the ummah of Muslims today, especially among those of a more fundamentalist trajectory.

This reactionary response to those who are unable to experience Islam as a dynamic religion as opposed to a stagnant one have made their objections to Islamic philosophy known from the beginning of the Islamic empire until today, and still hold a considerable and undeserved tyranny over many Islamic intellectuals who, as a consequence, isolate themselves within academia.


48 ‘They condemn what they do not understand.’
where such thought can occur without any influence on the masses. Those who could help the Muslim world the most are often the ones least likely to enter into civil discourse within the Muslim public sphere for fear of reprisals. It is not because these Muslim intellectuals are not engaged in robust and powerful critiques of the Muslim societies that they have little to no influence in the Muslim world, but it’s because of the lack of legitimacy that they have with the common believer. They are often seen as outsiders, those influenced by western ways of thinking, and insufficiently Islamic, as if being Islamic means to be anti-intellectual. In the end, the contribution of the Islamic philosophers, who learned from their teachers the Greeks, cannot be forgotten. From the perspective of Habermas and other critical philosophers, the Muslim world cannot engage in a damnatio memoriae (damnation of memory) to expunge the Muslim philosophers from Islamic history, but rather must return to them in the modern period, as such philosophy may hold the key to an Islamic form of modernity that is both sufficiently Islamic and also valid within the conditions of an increasingly secular global society.

However, this distrust of “outsider” knowledge is not unique to the Muslim world, as this bifurcated intellectual tradition, or the double truth thesis – which is intrinsic to the divisions of class and education – was also the case in the Roman empire: *let the plebeians have their religion and we’ll keep our patrician philosophy*; the western Enlightenment period: *let the peasants keep their superstitious religion and we’ll keep our reason and rational civil/natural religions.* Rational truth had to be protected from the mythologically enamoured and exclusivist masses, who, from the perspective of the intellectual elites, had not the mental capacity to understand reality for what it really was, but rather needed “pictorial” and/or simple representations of reality. Two forms of faith were thus produced: unenlightened religion for the “riff raff” (Hashwîyya), faith justified by reason for the elites.

As stated before, *Sūrah al-Ma‘ida* (5:3) of the Qur’an states, ‘This day, I have perfected your religion, completed my favor upon you and have chosen Islam as your religion.’ From the position of those who attempt to preserve the intellectual chastity of the Islamic tradition, this verse is taken to mean that Islam is a “closed” religious system, as if through “perfecting” Islam it has been made impenetrable to any other knowledge, wisdom and/or thought. Perfected is taken to mean “without lack,” “fully developed,” “already identical with itself,” and “complete.” Additionally, it is assumed that by ‘perfected’ any other

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50 My translation.
form of thought that may migrate into Islam is inherently invalid due to its origins outside of Islam. If the knowledge is not *sui generis* to Islam, then it is not Islam at all. Yet this is a completely unphilosophical and non-dialectical way to approach the meaning of the phrase ‘perfected your religion.’

In order to understand the Qur’anic language that is used to describe the ontological state of Islam during the time of Muhammad, we have to think in terms of Islam *in-and-of-itself* and the believer who approaches the Islamic tradition from the outside (even if they are a Muslims). Islam is the object of study and the Muslim is the subject that studies. These are two very different phenomen and therefore have two very different ontological statuses: the Qur’an is – for lack of a better word – the incarnation (*incarnationem*) of the divine for Muslims; it is the word of Allah (*Kalam Allah*) made present in the finite and fallible world; it is *Deum in libro.* For most devout Muslims, it is the uncreated but historically bound presence of the divine that is accessible – on the surface level – to all believers. The Qur’an as such is the door to the divine presence. The believer accesses this presence through recitation, contemplation, and study. Furthermore, it is a record of Allah’s thought concerning historical (particular) and ahistorical (universal) issues, problems, etc., revealed to Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah in the 7th century Arabia. Being that the believer is a finite creature, the product of history, and bound to their own mortality, moral fallibility, and incomplete knowledge, they are in need of guidance. Therefore it is the duty of the believer to not only come to *know* the Islamic tradition from within itself but also to incorporate and embody the values, principles, and ideals of the Islamic tradition so that the object (Islam) and the subject (the believer) become identical with each other to the best of the believers ability. This attempt to be a believer who has incorporated the Qur’anic way-of-being-in-the-world requires a certain amount of intellectual and philosophical tools, as the Islamic tradition is not one that asks its devout to be “childlike” in faith, to be without education, or to mortify intelligence, but rather demands of its followers to be people of intellect as opposed to simply being people of *taqlid* (imitation).

When the proponents of the “closed” theory put forth their argument concerning the inability of Islam to appropriate the wisdom of others into itself without diluting its purity and authenticity, they cancel its *entelechy*, its process of “becoming” – the internal development of all there is beyond that which has already been and that which is to be. Since Aristotle, philosophers have insisted that nothing is what it was, and nothing is yet what it will be, all is “becoming” – the present is but a moment within the dialectical relationship between the

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51 ‘The divine in the book’
past and the future. With the cancelation of “becoming” the religious purists forces a stationary state upon the Islamic tradition; they imprison it within its own history, which inevitably impedes its ability to deliver the necessary and adequate moral and intellectual tools, concepts, and categories needed within the 21st century for Muslims to address their very modern problems. This stationary state, this petrification of what is an inherently dynamic (as in it embraces its own inner-development) religious tradition – as all religious traditions that remain beneficial to mankind must be or they will become historically irrelevant – has unfortunately handicapped the Muslim ummah as they have become ill prepared for the challenges and predominate coordinates of life in the modern age.52 The main source of the community’s identity, their interpretation of reality and orientation of action, is somehow stuck within the 10th century (or slightly beyond) because it is not allowed to recognize its own development as it passes through (and creates) history. This development – often accompanied by social, intellectual, and politic-economic forces from outside of it – is condemned as bid’a (innovation) by those who fail to recognize the internal dynamics and perpetual recreation of Islam from within itself. For these intellectual idol makers, Islam is a fetish – having magic-like powers that can deliver the Muslim world from its enemies all on its own, as long as it is “pure.” Contrary to the approach of the philosophers, who emphasized the dynamics of Islam, fundamentalism forces the religion into a state of stasis (στάσις – “standing still”). This “islam” is formal, without prophetic and revolutionary content, without internal development, and as such cannot adequately address the problems of the modern period; it remains locked in an “iron cage” of history; a perpetual looking backwards without genuine self-propelled movement forward. This diminished form of “islam,” with its crippled philosophical immune system, stands completely alien in the contemporary world that surrounds it. This is the dead-idol that fundamentalism and extremism has made of Islam, and one of the primary reasons why the Muslim community remains bewildered within the post-secular conditions, stuck without the philosophical capacity to navigate the religion in a rapidly changing global situation.

52 Some scholars attribute this artificial arrest of the Islamic tradition to the thinking of Ibn Taymiyyah, a 13th/14th century Islamic scholar, theologian and logician, who was skeptical of what he thought was bid’a (innovation) in the daily religious lives of Muslims. His thought is seen as an early attempt to exorcise the Islamic tradition from the innovations that Muslims had brought into it. Many of the Muslim world’s most reactionary and purist movements lay claim to Ibn Taymiyyah as their intellectual precursor.
To the point about purity and authenticity, a historical example that may shed light on the present situation is available. Post-Revolutionary Iran experienced a conflict between two “forms” of Islamic intellectualism. Those who wished to keep Islam pure from all outside influenced argued for a *Islam-i maktabi* or “authentic Islam,” while those who saw no contradiction with Islam being supplemented, or even fertilized by other philosophies – especially third world liberation thought inspired by Karl Marx, Che Guevara, Albert Camus, Franz Fanon, Jean Paul Sartre and even Nietzsche – argued for *Islam-i iltiqati* or “syncretic Islam.” The later was predominately influenced by the works of the left-wing Shi’a intellectual ‘Ali Shari’ati, whose legacy was claimed by the non-clerical *raushanfikran-i mazhabi* (religious intellectuals). These religious intellectuals confronted what they saw as the intellectual stagnation of the ‘Ulamā’ (religious scholars), which wished to place tradition above intellectual creativity and “independent reasoning” (*ijtihād*). They believed the petrified religious thought that the ulema faithfully guarded was unsuitable for the modern problems of Iran and the broader Shi’a community, as it had lost the revolutionary and socially progressive *geist* that early Islam embodied. Additionally, they argued for a place among the leadership of the revolutionary republic partially due to the fact that their “ideology” – in the Shari’ati sense of a *comprehensive system of ideas* – played an important role in revolutionizing the Iranian public. Although he never expressly admitted it, it was the deep well of *Islamized* political-leftist language and arguments of Shari’ati that Khomeini drew from in his opposition to the Shah. The religious intellectuals understood that traditional Shi’a Islam, as embodied by the political quietism of most of the clerics, would not sufficiently motivate the masses in their rebellion against the Shah’s “White Revolution,” and therefore a spirit of revolution had to be provoked in Islam from outside. “Safavid Islam,” to their minds, had become stagnant, conservative, and reserved, but leftist theory and political praxis would force the Shi’a in Iran to recover the revolutionary potentials that were latent within their tradition, especially in what Shari’ati called *Alavi*.

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54 Hamid Algar, *Roots*, 93.
Shi‘ism or Shi‘ism before it was co-opted by the Safavids. Just as the working class, dark skinned people, and other Third World peoples were persecuted by the imperialist, whites, and the “First World,” so too were ‘Ali and Hussein persecuted by the rich and powerful, and now the people of ‘Ali and Hussein were being persecuted and oppressed by the new Yazid, the Shah of Iran. Did ‘Ali not fight his oppressors, the religious intellectuals asked. Did Hussein not fight his oppressors? Should not revolutionary Shi‘a Islam, or what is sometimes called “Red Shi‘ism,” fight its western and monarchical oppressors? Lest the Shi‘a forget Karbala, and make the same history-changing mistake again, the Shi‘a – with the conceptual aid of Islamized leftist language – overthrew the Shah in 1979 and regained their independence from foreign domination. Unfortunately, after the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran chose to suppress the thought of ‘Ali Shārī‘ati as it attempted to build a nation more aligned with the traditionalism of the Shi‘a clerics that had little space for western philosophy – especially of the Marxist variant – despite its important contribution to the success of the revolution. It is possible that the philosophical basis for Shārī‘ati’s work was too alienating for many of the more conservative ‘Ulama‘, which looked with suspicion at all his secular western (and leftist) influences. Nevertheless, according to Hamid Algar, ‘many people were ready to participate in the Revolution under the leadership of Imam Khomeini to a certain degree because of the influence upon them of Dr. Shārī‘ati.’ It is to a major degree that the Iranian people owe their successful revolution to the recovery of the philosophical heritage of Islam as it was ignited by ‘Ali Shārī‘ati’s reintroduction of philosophical conceptions into Islamic thought and praxis. It was the revolutionary spirit of Islam-i iltiqati that broke the back of the Shah, not the religious conservatism of the quietest clerics.

In his June 2014 article on aljazeera.com, the author Hasan Azad asked the perplexing but pertinent question, Why are there no Muslim philosophers? As we’ve already demonstrated, this is a highly complex question that had garnished a tremendous amount of attention from academics and scholars, both western and Muslim. From the perspective of the Critical Theory of

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57 Hamid Algar, Roots, 96–97.
58 In Islamic history, Yazid was responsible for the murder of Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson. His murder and the penitence movement that it sparked was the true beginning of Shi‘a Islam.
59 Hamid Algar, Roots, 111.
Religion, the absence of “Islamic Philosophers” – in the strictest sense of a “philosopher” as being the inheritor of a philosophical tradition which began with the Greeks – has to do with the legitimation crisis that philosophy went through in Islamic history. As was stated before, from the most gregarious of intellectuals within the Muslim world’s golden age, philosophy, regardless of its origin, was investigated for its truth content and much of it was translated into Arabic, debated, and infused into Islamic theology, political thought, and jurisprudence. However, as the Muslim world began to collapse upon itself due to outside pressures as well as internal divisions and weaknesses, a reactionary and defensive attitude towards Islam became increasingly common among the believers. Unfortunately, if the religion can no longer be intellectually defended due to the absence of qualified “apologists” (ἀπολογία – to speak in defense), it is inevitably defended through violence. The idea that a “return to Islam,” i.e. the de-intellectualized fundamentalist orientation, was the only way to rescue Islam from a world in which the balance of power began to shift away from the dar al-Islam, took hold among many intellectuals and layman alike. It is important to remember that it was Islamic philosophy, its own articulation and augmentation of Greek philosophy, which laid down the intellectual and scientific roots of the European Renaissance. Because of this, Muslims inadvertently rescued Europe from perpetuating its own catastrophic collapse into barbarity. Yet simultaneously, it abandoned one of the more important sources of its own vitality. Europe’s philosophical gain was the Muslim world’s loss; Europe recovered the wisdom of the Greeks, the mathematics of the Hindus, the architectural genius of the Romans, etc., while the Muslim world fell into decay. The suppression of philosophy and human rationality in favor of blind faith in revelation – that was incomprehensible to most without theo-philosophical categories by which to read it – led to the Muslim world’s intellectual decline. In the process, blame was shifted towards philosophy and the philosophers as being the bid’a that caused the collapse; philosophers were accused of being heretics, apostates, and introducers of “foreign” ideas; their books and the books of their Greeks predecessors were suppressed, and the Muslims world slid into its own “dark ages.” In the place of an Islam that thinks and believes came an Islam that only believes; thus abandoning the Qur’anic demand to think, ponder, reflect, and investigate the world and all it contains through reason and imagination. With the abandonment of philosophy under the accusation that it imported foreign ideas into the Muslim community and thus made Islam corrupt and weak, came the complete de-legitimization

of philosophy in the Muslim world. Philosophers of the Islamic faith are still today tepid in their thought, unwilling to antagonize those who still remain in Plato’s now Islamized cave.

Looking critically back into history, we see that a very serious problem occurred in the 10th century. The closing of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) among the Sunnis, in favor of what the 19th and 20th Turkish scholar Bediüzzaman Said Nursi described as *taqlīdi-Islam* (Islam by imitation), had created the conditions for intellectual stagnation, at least in the case of Islamic jurisprudence.\(^{62}\) Scholars believed that the major questions concerning the true and proper Islamic way-of-being were decided among the first few centuries after the death of the prophet and therefore the development of Islam beyond the already established customs and norms of the first generations endangered Islam: as the boundaries of the empire grew, more and more “foreign” influences crept into the *umma* and threatened the orthodoxy of the “perfected” religion. In light of this, Sunni scholars moved to replace *ijtihād* with *taqlīd*, or reasoning with imitation/precedence – as a way of preserving their notion of the “perfected” religion.\(^{63}\) However, what such a move actually did was cancel the natural development of the tradition and its ability to adequately address the problems and challenges of the times precisely because it robbed the Muslims of the dialectical tension that would have driven its development when confronted with thought and praxis that opposes Islam or Islamic tenets. From the philosophical perspective, as thought continues to become more differentiated, more complex, and more dialectical, as the old answers no longer hold sway, new answers determinately negate the thought that proceeded them, and the development of thinking continues unabated. As ways-of-being and ways-of-thinking approach the boundaries of Islam, Muslim philosophers and theologians had to engage in critical evaluation of these alien philosophies and were therefore motivated to engage in a higher degree of critical analysis. When the reactionaries forced Islam to retreat behind its own dogmatic and un-reflexive precedents, it consequently cut itself off from its own capacity for creativity and dialectical imagination concerning religion, philosophy, culture, and polity, and thus it became stale, inflexible, and enslaved to its own past. Being systems of thought that are naturally self-reflective and self-critical, religious traditions must be able to continue to engage in a constant rethinking

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63 One should note that the Shi’i tradition, for the most part, continued with the practice of *ijtihad* and did not follow the Sunnis into their stagnation.
and reexamination of their own creeds, dogmas, and principles as not to become stationary and intellectually obsolete. If a religion fails to articulate itself within language adequate to the difficulty of the contemporary task at hand, then it inevitably dies. History, as Hegel has reminded us, is full of dead religions that could no longer speak to the needs and intellectual challenges presented to them. As of yet, none on the major world religion have died, but even the smaller ones that have died did so amidst massive amounts of human suffering and violence. How much greater would it be if one of the world religion were to descend rapidly into extinction? If the future historian does an autopsy of the Islamic world, he will see that it was the rejection of philosophical thought that partially led to the Muslims' inability to remain relevant, vital, and dynamic in modernity. It was also the primary cause of much of the descent into violent barbarity that unfortunately can be witnessed in much of the Islamic world today.

Yet the contemporary situation in which the Muslim world finds itself is forcing many scholars and jurists to rethink the wisdom of closing *ḥijāb*; they see that this self-inflicted wound is partially responsible for the abysmal state of the Islamic community. Not only has the Muslim world lost its place as a world leader, but the most dynamic developments within the Muslim community tend to be some of the most violent and reactionary, this being the result of the forced de-hellenization of Islam. The life of the mind, and not just the study of the West's instrumental rationality – numerate thought: engineering, computers, chemistry, etc. – but also the communicative rationality imbedded in the arts, in literature, and especially in philosophy, must also be once again revived if the Muslim world is to have its own humanistic renaissance.

From the perspective of the critical religiologist, for Islam to survive the onslaught of secular modernity, it must come into contact, recover, and integrate into itself its own philosophical and intellectual heritage and history. Although the heritage is deep, it is currently neglected in the *dar al-Islam*. The language and conceptual material that was determinately negated from earlier philosophical thought by the early Muslim empire, which allowed the Muslim world to advance far beyond those cultures that preceded it, must be rediscovered and re-imagined within the Islamic context: an Islamization of philosophy and its critical-analytical-dialectical potentials. This process not only means returning to al-Kindi, al- Fārābī, Ibn Rušd, Ibn-Sīnā, and other Islamic intellectuals, etc., to uncover that which was buried by the heap of intellectual ashes that

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smothered its potentials, but also to critically examine the heirs to their Greco-Islamic philosophy: “occidental” philosophy. Regardless if Muslims scholars, intellectuals, and common believers think that philosophy’s importance is limited because it lacks theological legitimation, unlike theology, western philosophical thought predominates throughout the global economy as well as international institutions, international law, and global culture. At the moment, some Muslim intellectuals can speak the language of liberalism, socialism, and cosmopolitanism, but the intellectual concepts that steer the majority of Muslims – which are bound to a religious way of life – remain irrelevant to world affairs, as the world has already moved into a secular epoch that remains entirely hostile – or at least alien – to prophetic religion. Not only would the works of the classical liberal philosophers, Locke, Hume, Smith, Rousseau, Voltaire, etc., reignite certain revolutionary qualities within the Islamic tradition, but the much more radical philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Marx-Engels, Sartre, Nietzsche, and the Frankfurt School could aid in the articulation of a vision of society that remains buried deep within the hidden recesses of the Islamic tradition; a vision of more reconciled society of freedom, justice, mercy, and compassion, free from irrational compulsion and oppression. To uncover and incorporate, transplant and translate such philosophical material could once again give life to the Muslim world and help release it from its self-imposed isolation, self-ghettoization, and metaphysical nihilism; for it is in the secular language of philosophy that the revolutionary potentials reside in the modern epoch. It is no longer the theological that motivates mankind in his praxis in an increasingly secular and capitalist world, but rather the philosophical sentiments that have already migrated from the religious into the secular; values like freedom, liberty, justice, democracy, equality, and fraternity, whether those values are articulated in their bourgeois, Freudian or Marxian formulations. Philosophy, pressed into the service of Islam, coupled with the spirit of inquisitiveness about the world, life, truth, and thought, could help liberate Islam from those who’ve disfigured it into a deformed lifeless “whitened sepulcher,” and resurrect that which once made it the envy of the “known world.”  

From the perspective of Islam, the religion itself is “perfected,” which means that it understand and accepts its own internal development, its own increasing differentiation within the context of the times, and the unending strive to be identical with itself (to embody its own constitutional values, principles, and beliefs). Nevertheless, the active agent that can allow Islam to do such things is the Muslim ummah itself, as it is the only entity through which Islam can be made manifest. Yes, it is true that Muslims can say (or repeat) that Islam is perfected, but no they cannot allow the concept of perfection to become a barrier to the attempted “perfection” of society (if that is even possible). The Qur’an
does not state that the Muslims are perfected, and therefore every articulation of Islam’s tenets from the mind of an imperfect interpreter must be assumed to be fallible, and therefore subject to robust scrutiny and criticism. Yet the perfectability of the believer is not a given, and therefore it must continually be realized through the realization of the perfect nature of the Qur’an – which can only be comprehended via categories worked out by generations of philosophers, theologians, and scholars. Therefore, it is an absolute necessity that Muslims rejuvenate and resurrect their own philosophical heritage as well as engaging in an honest and robust discourse with modern philosophy.

Fear of Philosophical Blasphemy

In light of the antagonistic conditions fostered by secular globalization as well as the post-secular society, one can imagine the uproar that would happen if a Muslim philosopher were to reenact Nietzsche’s insightful tale of the madman exclaiming the death of God in a devout Muslim country. The self-proclaimed anti-Christ wrote about the murder of God as such,

We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun?... Do we not hear the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? For even Gods putrefy! God is Dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him.65

What would happen to such a “madman” had he articulated this thesis in the presence of those de-Hellenized fundamentalist believers who fail to see the deeper point and more philosophical point of Nietzsche’s rhetorical claim? On the surface level, this appears to mock those who continue to believe in a living divine being. However, beyond the surface is a deeply philosophical statement that expressed absolutely nothing about the ontology of God but rather the conditions of the possibility for believing in the divine in our secular-scientific and industrial age.66 Would this madman spark outrage? Would there be an international riot, burning of the philosopher in effigy, attacks on western

65 Friederich Nietzsche, The Gay Science (New York: The Barnes & Noble Library of Essential Reading, 2008), 103. We will return to Nietzsche’s Death of God latter in this volume.
embassies, would it be ignored by the masses as the insane rambling of a man whose lost touch with his sanity, or would it be considered an invitation to discourse about state of the world and its alternative futures? The recent history may shed light on what may occur in this hypothetical situation.

Delivering an addresses in 2006 entitled *Glaube, Vernunft und Universität – Erinnerungen und Reflexionen* (Faith, Reason and the University – Memories and Reflections), then Pope Benedict XVI warned about the dangers of “de-Hellenizing” religion, i.e. the separation of the faith and reason. In his speech in Regensburg, Germany, he quoted the Byzantine emperor Manuell II Palaiologos, who said ‘Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.’ This speech emphasized the theological claim that God limits himself within his own dictates, his own rationality, his own self-imposed limitations, and does not transcend or violate himself through an absolute will; he limits his will as not to become unrestrained, or, as it can be conceptualized, God is not pure will over logos. The discussion about the use of reason within religious faith was an attempt to ignite a discourse between religions concerning the importance of maintaining rationality as an integral and necessary component of religion. However, the language that the Pope was using was steeped in philosophical concepts and not theological protocol-sentences that religious fundamentalism is typically expressed through. As a result, many outraged believers, both within the intellectual elites as well as the laymen, took to the streets to condemn the Pope for offending Islam and disrespecting the Prophet. On the other hand, many fundamentalist Christians, instead of expressing solidarity with their co-religionists, condemned the Muslims for being wantonly violent in the face of the Pope’s statements, despite the fact that secularist and atheists would accuse those same Christians of the same religious obscurantism as they do the Islamic community. Additionally, while post-religious Europe found itself in a strange position of defending the very Pope that many had often deemed “our Taliban,” they emphasizing that if the Pope’s speech had been considered in its entirety, one could easily see that it was an invitation to discourse about the nature of faith and reason – which is not a foreign subject in history of Islam, even if it is foreign to modern fundamentalism. However, many within the Muslim community reacted violently, while being misinformed of the particulars of the Pope’s speech and the subject it was addressing. One need not question the sincerity of the protests – for many thought the Pope and not an emperor of a bygone age said such disparaging words against Islam. However, some Muslims critically studied the entire document, such as Tariq Ramadan, while others abandoned any attempt for dialogue in favor of an emotional outrage, despite the fact that the subject is
Professing Islam

an important theological issue for both Christianity and Islam. This was not a failure to communicate, but a failure to think.

Discourse on difficult matters such as this simply can’t happen when one side no longer possess the philosophical language that is the precondition for such a discourse, while the other can no longer put themselves into the perspective of the religious believer, and therefore garnished little sympathy for their wounded sensibilities. While the use of the emperor’s speech may have been unfortunate, the Pope’s intentions were neither to antagonize nor to cast aspersions on Islam and Muslims per se, but rather to warn his listeners of the dangers when reason is excommunicated from religion. Had there been a discourse partner within the Muslim community who could speak the philosophical and theological language required for such an intricate discussion, such as Ibn Rušd and/or his Catholic student Saint Thomas Aquinas, then the tensions would have a greater potential for reconciliation. Until the Muslim community can once again recover its own philosophical heritage and once again bring it to the foreground of thought, it will continue to be needlessly antagonized by critical-philosophical thought emanating from the secular West, even when it isn’t motivated out of ill will or hatred. From the perspective of the critical theory of religion, invitations to discourse about uncomfortable matters should not be taken as signs of disrespect, but as an opportunity for mutual-understanding and potentially future reconciliation. A “perfected” religion remains open to discourse as it has confidence in its own claims while at the same time is prepared to re-examine itself based on better and more differentiated categories and arguments. It does not shy away from debate but rather invites it and invests itself in it. This episode demonstrates the depth to which much of the Muslim world has suppressed its own philosophical resources that were once the envy of Europe. Therefore philosophy is desperately needed in order to avoid the predictions of the neo-Conservatives’ clash of civilizations: the democratic secular rational West vs. the authoritarian religious irrational East.67

Clearly, from a theological perspective, the perfection of Islam fears no critique of itself. The question is rather, can modern believers enter into a meaningful discourse with those who can no longer believe, or speak a philosophical language to express a more differentiated way of engaging the world?

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67 I do not ascribe to the clash of civilization thesis. It is ultimately too simplistic to think of the Muslim world as being monolithic, just as it is a mistake to think of the West as being equally monolithic. The reader should not mistake my use of the words “Muslim,” “Islam,” and the “West” as somehow endorsing such a thesis, but rather these words are being used in a general way to avoid the necessity of excessive qualifiers.
Can the Muslim community, not just individual intellectuals, find within its own resources the necessary tools to engage in such a conversation without truly mining its own philosophical heritage – the language that both the West and the Muslim world once shared? Can the ummah adopt the attitude of the Muslim philosophers who cared little if wisdom of older philosophers came from non-Muslims, but were rather solely concerned with the truth claims of their statements? If it cannot, and the tyranny of the fundamentalist position – which cares little about the nuances of theology or philosophy – continues to suppress dialectical, analytical, and critical thought, all in the name of purity of creed, we may not see any new Muslim philosophers and the Islamic philosophical tradition may remain with one foot in the crypt of history. However, the appearance of the crypt is but a warning signpost for all religions that fail to adequately development within themselves through history, for if they don’t, they will become the next victim of history: another dead religion within an already crowded cemetery of religions.