CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN DEFENSE OF MUHAMMAD: ‘ULAMA’, DA’IYA AND THE NEW ISLAMIC INTERNATIONALISM

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the relationship today between the ‘ulama’ and the da’iya—that is, the new Islamic media preachers, in their endeavor to form a new Islamic internationalism. With a loosening of state control over new, and global, Arab-language media, a new era of Islamic internationalism has been ushered in; but its contours and consequences are as yet in a state of flux. As noted by Muhammad Qasim Zaman, in the last quarter of the twentieth century the ‘ulama’ had a remarkable revival of their political, social and media fortunes.1 This is certainly also the case in the early twenty-first century, not least because they now have the Internet and the satellite TV channels at their disposal.2 But the ‘ulama’ also have competitors. The new media abound with non-‘ulama’ Muslims who speak freely and confidently about their Islam. And the media have produced a new class of stars, the da’iya, who command huge audiences, in particular the middle-class audiences so attractive to the commercial TV stations. Few of the da’iya are ‘ulama’. And those who are have been selected because they commanded other, more media-relevant qualities than those of the average ‘alim.

But to examine this phenomenon with relevance to the issue of Islamic internationalism, let me begin with a brief discussion of Pan-Islam.

Pan-Islam

After a long pause, Pan-Islam was rediscovered around 1990 as a subject of major scholarly investigations: Martin Kramer’s Islam Assembled

(1986), Reinhard Schulze’s *Islamischer Internationalismus* (1990), Jacob Landau’s *The Politics of Pan-Islam* (1994), Rainer Brunner’s *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century* (2004) and Peter Mandaville’s *Transnational Muslim Politics* (2001). All of these take as their starting point the ideologization of Islam, in at least two forms: The first is the policy of the Ottoman state in the Hamidian era after 1876, when the sultan’s title of caliph was revived and such major Pan-Islamic initiatives were undertaken as the foundation of the Red Crescent in 1877 and the construction of the Hijaz Railway in 1901–08. This state policy was directed at Muslims both within and outside the Ottoman Empire and took the form of propaganda, support for Pan-Islamic associations, missionary activities and the promotion of Muslim activists in the bureaucracy.

The second form is the emerging Islamic identity of the literate, often lay, Muslims in the major Arab cities and elsewhere as a result of European aggressions and the reporting of these aggressions in the newly founded Muslim press. At least from the time of the French invasion of Tunisia in 1881 and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, newspapers in many parts of the Muslim world regularly struck the chord of the need for Muslim unity. Some of this reporting was itself highly critical of the Ottoman sultan and his inability to defend Islam, and thus an unofficial Pan-Islamism gathered momentum, with al-Afghani’s 1884 essay on “Islamic Union” in the Paris-based journal *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqa* as a programmatic text. The seminal text of anti-Ottoman Pan-Islamism, however, is al-Kawakibi’s *Umm al-Qura* of 1899, a fictional report on a Pan-Islamic congress in Mecca with delegates from all over the Muslim world.

The end of World War I proved a severe setback for Pan-Islamic efforts for some time; the Soviet Revolution crushed the Muslim Union in Russia; and in 1924, Republican Turkey abolished the caliphate, depriving Pan-Islamism of its most important symbol. The caliphal conferences of the 1920s and the issue of Jerusalem in the 1930s led to the revival of a politically more modest Pan-Islam in the shape of a conference movement. This was revived by the newly independent states in the 1950s. But the Cold War and the Nasserite revolution in Egypt left the Muslim states divided over their global alliances. Never-

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