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Islam's Renewal

Reform or Revolt?

Derek Hopwood

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To Joanna, devoted daughter and good friend

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Albert Hourani who established the study of the modern Middle East in the University of Oxford. We were close colleagues for some 30 years and I could not have wished for a better supervisor, guide and mentor. He brought into the Middle East Centre many others, teachers, researchers and students or just visitors, from whose works published or delivered in seminars I was able to benefit so much. From the many I would like to single out Mustafa Badawi who was dedicated to his subject and whose interest in modern Arabic literature naturally led to an interest in most of the problems of the modern Arab world; Nadia Abu Zahra who as an Egyptian anthropologist was a pioneer in the study of the social and religious aspects of Egyptian and Tunisian society; Ahmad al-Shahi with his unique knowledge of Sudanese society; and Ron Nettler with a deep interest in modern Islamic thought and sympathy for liberal Muslim thinkers. Many others helped me unknowingly by giving lectures, or participating in discussions during seminars and meetings of the Near East History Group.

It was an exciting atmosphere to work in and help develop. As Hourani put it himself, '[i]n one way or another much of our understanding of the Middle East during the last thirty years has been produced in and around the Centre'.

Derek Hopwood

CONTENTS

Part I Revolt 1

1 Libya: First Experience of the Arab World and Islam 3

2 How the Middle East Began to Be Studied 13

3 Leaders of Revival in Islam 21

4 Two Historical Movements 33

5 Leaders and State Formation 47

6 Leaders Against Colonialism 69

Part II Islamic Renewal: Calls for Reform 91

7 A Way of Approaching Islamic History 93

8 Thinkers Rather than Activists 101

9 What Is Modernity in Islam? 107

Part III Revolts Renewed 115

10 Features of Later Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Islamic Movements 117

11 Renewal Again 123

12 The Postmodern Era: The Rage of Islam 129

13 How Individual Countries Have Reacted in the Postmodern Era 141

14 Palestine: The Root Cause of Muslim Despair 169

15 Conclusion: A Hope for Tolerance 185

Works Consulted 191

Index 193

INTRODUCTION

Islam like most other religions has had to face the problem of living in the world of the time. A religion is founded on a set of core, unshakeable and eternal values, but as a living practised faith it has often had to adjust itself to the demands of a changing society without in any way compromising its fundamental beliefs. This study attempts to show that Muslims often viewed changes in society of their time as a corruption of original values and proclaimed as a way of controlling decline a return to the pristine society of early Islam. Throughout history men emerged who proclaimed this message of renewal (*tajdid*) and who often instigated a revolutionary movement in the attempt to achieve their aims. The first part of this study offers a theoretical analysis of the characters of some of these men and their movements and, later, looks at similar movements and men in more recent times.

While violent action appealed (and appeals) to some discontented Muslims, others produced an intellectual response to *tajdid* and deplored the actions of the revolutionary leaders. The central section of the book considers the conclusions of some of these thinkers as an alternative to revolution.

I write as a non-Muslim, but as someone influenced by my late teacher and colleague, Albert Hourani, who himself wrote movingly about his own sincere attempts to understand and appreciate the religion of the 'other' (Chap. 4). I realize that my attempt will not necessarily be viewed with approval by any Muslims who may read it, yet I hope they will be assured of its sincerity.

PART I

Revolt

CHAPTER 1

Libya: First Experience of the Arab World and Islam

I first set foot in the Arab world in September 1957, after walking down the gangway of the ancient but elegant Italian steamship onto the dockside of Tripoli harbour. It had sailed across the Mediterranean from Naples via Sicily and Malta. Tripoli and Libya were familiar names from the Second World War; the heat, noise and colour of the waiting crowds were not. I was about to take up my first job as a British Council officer. I had wanted to work in the Middle East after reading Arabic at Oxford and was offered the choice of a post in Libya or Lebanon. For no obvious reason and on the basis of no knowledge I had chosen Tripoli. Perhaps Beirut would have been a better introduction to the restless Arab world with its position as the centre of culture and nationalism. Some experts didn't even consider Libya in North Africa to be part of the Arab world and certainly not a centre of culture or of any kind of nationalism apart from localized feuding. Next door, to the west, Tunisia had been independent from the French for only a few months and further along the same French were beginning a lunatic war to try to prevent the Algerians from gaining their freedom. Being in Libya, I was introduced to a very different kind of Arab from the sophisticates of Cairo and Damascus. Few Libyans were educated; there was one very new university, no tradition of poetry and literature and a religious heritage that was unique to the area. So perhaps Libya was an indirect and gentler way in.

But there was something in the air. Something had changed. The Libyans had known the British for 15 years as the fairly benevolent army

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that had expelled the hated Italian colonizers with their German allies. The British had stayed on to help in post-war development. It was known that they had imperial interests in the Arab world and they seemed pretty invincible until the young and charismatic ‘Abd al-Nasser had apparently halted the pathetic British attempt to re-enter Egypt during the 1956 Suez invasion. The humiliating withdrawal had hinted at a new world and the young men of Libya saw a possible liberator in the Egyptian colonel. His picture was carried through the streets and hung in shops next to or instead of that of the Sanusi King Idris.

For better or worse, I was now standing on the harbour front, being hassled and harangued in Arabic and Italian. I wondered where our luggage was and whether we would see it again, but all was good-natured and finally we found it and a cooperative gharry driver (gharry, Hindi for a one-horse two-wheeled carriage, famous or infamous for the decrepit hangdog condition of the horses) who drove us through the sultry heat along the Italianate sea front, rather ironically populated with white-cloaked women and men—the first clear sign of an ex-Western colony implanted on African soil. To my inexperienced eye it was all rather confusing, Italian, exotic, hot and Arab—perhaps like a play in which the characters had wandered onto the wrong scene. It seemed colonial but the colonizers no longer ruled and the country was struggling through the early stages of independence.

We reached the offices of the British Council and I started work on a very enjoyable two-year contract. The premises were in a large Italian villa near the seafront and the British embassy was just further along (itself housed in an ex-colonial building).

Many young Libyans were keen to learn English after the years of Italian domination—the British were welcome (to a certain degree as expellers of the colonialists) and their language was seen as key to a rewarding career. The Council had just opened its office and apart from teaching English and hosting the usual cultural events was engaged in establishing schools and a university. Some of the expatriate teachers there had recently been expelled from Egypt after Suez and a lifetime of service there. They were not too happy with Anthony Eden but had been away from home too long to start a career back in Britain. They did not have the same interest in Libya that I had and their life centred very pleasantly on the beach club and cocktail parties. The British Ambassador was the kindly, eccentric old-time diplomat Sir Eugene Millington-Drake who had been British Minister in Montevideo during the Battle of the River Plate. I myself taught large classes of young Libyans eager to add knowledge of English to that of Arabic and Italian so that they could enter a world wider than that of their traditional background.

The United Nations had voted for Libyan independence in 1949 and when I arrived the country was trying to find its feet, rather torn between its relations with Europe and America and the rowdy nationalists of the Middle East. At independence it had had no government institutions or civil service and, it is said, only 20 university graduates. It was a country stitched together from three separate and rival areas—Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan—the latter largely desert. The total population was estimated at just over one million, 80–90% illiterate, inhabiting an area of 680,000 square miles. Its natural resources—before the discovery of oil—were meagre and it was kept afloat by foreign donations. Many of the expatriates of the time were there working on development and training projects.

Libya on independence faced enormous problems which had to be tackled if it was to improve even minimally the lives of its people. It had one of the lowest living standards in the world and the bulk of the population lived at subsistence level. The Bedouin way of life was mostly based on the camel and dates, and while it had for centuries sustained the nomad it could never have provided the calories needed for a Western way of life. It was anyway probable that life at subsistence level was not seen as a hardship until pointed out by someone. The poorer settled people survived on a diet of couscous (millet) to which, when lucky, vegetables and meat were added. Most of the land was arid, uncultivable desert with the productive areas lying in two narrow strips on the coast in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The climate was unkind to crops, with sparse rain in the winter and largely running to waste, while during most other seasons of the year the hot desert wind (*ghibli*) could cause serious damage. A lack of alternative resources meant that Libya's economy was chiefly agricultural. (There were several theories flying around as to how fertile the land had been in Greek and Roman times and whether it was possible to recreate a similar fertility.) It was estimated that 80% of the population gained a living (however meagre) from the land, through both pastoral and arable farming. There was, as in most countries, a steady movement away from the land into the towns, with young men seeking work not in industry but on foreign military bases, in the oil companies or the development agencies. Housing could not keep pace with the influx and many new immigrants had to squeeze into a large slum area (*bidonville*) in Tripoli, where dwellings were cobbled together from old crates, flattened petrol tins and other leftovers from the war.

There were few towns of various sizes, the largest being Tripoli in the west untouched by war damage, and Benghazi in Cyrenaica almost totally destroyed as it changed hands in the Second World War, one remaining monument being the twin-domed Italian cathedral, known to the disrespectful British soldiery as Mae West. In the desert, settlements were few and far between. One interesting feature was the small Italian colonial villages, built to a pattern around a square, with government offices and a church. Identical small houses had been constructed nearby for the Italian peasants who had been encouraged to immigrate and farm the inhospitable land. Many of these abandoned houses had been given to Libyan farmers who preferred to keep their animals in the houses and to pitch their tents in the gardens.

The legacy of problems that the newly independent country inherited was grim. Without foreign assistance it could barely have survived the early years or made much progress thereafter. (It was no less than fair that the outside world should have to some extent made good the damage caused by its having fought in and partially destroyed a totally innocent third party's country.) Given Libya's lack of trained personnel in all fields, some dozen UN and other agencies had been sent to the country to offer technical assistance. The Libyan Public Development and Stabilization Agency supported by British contributions helped to finance economic and social development and support the budget, and the Libyan-American Reconstruction Commission oversaw US financial aid. It was said there were too many fingers in the pie and there was some Libyan resentment at the number of foreign cooks stirring the broth. But that said there were a number of British experts with long colonial experience working there who were determined to try to make Libya work.

This was particularly obvious in the field of agriculture—Libya's only means of livelihood. Attention was paid to improving farming methods, irrigation and strains of seeds and to introducing new breeds of sheep and cattle. An agricultural farm near Tripoli founded under the Ottomans was enlarged as a centre of experimentation. Farmers were shown how to improve cultivation methods and were given large quantities of improved seeds. In seven short years some progress was made. Water management improved, which led to more beneficial methods of farming. In this poor peasant economy, tradition looked askance at innovation and it was difficult to get farmers to persist in new methods. In a harsh climate with poor soil, where a desert wind could decimate crops and rainfall could fail, ample fatalism and inertia were perhaps inevitable. In addition, migration towards the towns was more attractive to young men than hard work on the land. The future (especially with the hint of oil) was elsewhere. Yet at the time any improvement of living standards for the majority of the population did depend on consistent improvements in sowing, harvesting and marketing.

There was no heavy industry which was not seen to be really viable with so few natural resources and no working class. Some light and home industries were being developed, such as date processing, carpet making and flour milling, as well as local crafts which had a long tradition in some oases and souks including brightly coloured materials and rugs, baskets and metal wares. The kinds of things that were popular with tourists in Tunisia and Morocco, it was hoped, would become available in Libya.

In 1959 the Libyan economy was heavily dependent on spending by foreign communities and employers. The British and American forces and the oil companies employed a large proportion of the working population, the largest indigenous employer being the government. There was widespread underemployment and of course half the population—the female half—did not work outside the home. At the time there was a shift in the balance of workers—the British were running down their presence as the oil companies were increasing theirs. All the talk at the time was of Libya becoming as rich as the other Arab oil states. This seemed unlikely, but there was, however, the beginning of a building boom. This was started by the construction of the US Wheelus Air Base with all the necessary amenities for a comfortable American life abroad. The British bases seemed quite Spartan in comparison. The Libyans were far from comfortable with this large foreign presence, having tanks trundling along the roads and Super Sabres roaring overhead—young men were demanding that the foreign presence in their country should end.

Foreign troops were symbols of a colonial past especially to the younger, more committed nationalist youths, seduced by Nasserist rhetoric broadcast by the Voice of the Arabs radio. And British prestige had been fatally weakened by Suez. (Many of these same youths were, nevertheless, happy to attend free English lessons given at the British Council.) Oil wealth seemed to promise them proper independence and a respectable place in the Arab world. At the time this was an unfulfilled dream but the years 1956–1959 saw a rapid increase in oil prospecting. The chief reasons for this were the passing of a Petroleum Law in 1955 which regulated the granting of concessions and the exciting discovery of oil in the Algerian Sahara. Oil companies poured in and most possibly viable concessions were quickly snapped up. In 1959 it was not known whether oil fields existed but four oil-bearing wells had been sunk, the most recent near the Algerian border some 40 kilometres from a previous strike. It was there that hopes of finding enough oil to export commercially were centred. Tripoli was beginning to feel like an oil town. There was excitement in the air. Millions of pounds were being poured into the economy and traders and builders were experiencing a minor boom. Would Libya become another Iraq or Kuwait?

Even without oil, money for Libya to develop an educated population was urgently needed. English was seen as the language of the future and the classes at the British Council were full to overflowing: no women, of course, but late teenage youths and a few older men trying to improve their prospects—including the chief of traffic police and a desperately poor but enthusiastic farmer. One conspicuous success was the future chairman of the ABC Banking Corporation in Bahrain, at the time a humble clerk in Barclays. Under the Italian regime, few opportunities were given to Libyans to receive an education. However, it was obvious that there was a thirst for education throughout the country. A great attempt was made to catch up. Primary education was made compulsory—not so easy in a peasant and nomadic community—and secondary schools were opened in all the main towns, as were teacher-training colleges in Tripoli and Benghazi. As no native staff were available, many Egyptians were employed who often brought their own ideas on a variety of subjects—nationalism, republicanism, Arab unity and so on. Although it was inevitable that Libya should move into the modern Arab world, some felt unsettled by these unfamiliar ideas.

The educational system was based on that of Egypt, although there were growing demands for the Libyanization of the curriculum. The University of Libya was opened in 1956 in a palace given by the King, followed by a College of Sciences in Tripoli in 1957. The first professor of chemistry was a British expatriate from Egypt. A notable step was the admission of the first female undergraduate for the 1958 academic year. The position of women was one of the greatest handicaps to educational and social progress since about half the population was virtually unemployable. There were no women in government or public offices, no women doctors and few teachers. It seemed likely that in time Libya would follow the example set by its neighbours in giving women a bigger share in public life.

The lack of education meant there was a lack of trained personnel in all fields, especially of doctors, technicians and civil servants. UN agencies took on the task of training and were gradually producing a local administration to replace the many foreign advisers who had been brought in. Doctors and nurses were also sought. The World Health Organization was working to train midwives, nursing assistants and sanitary inspectors. Schemes were started to combat TB and widespread trachoma. The problems in Libya were as great as anywhere else, and experts had to contend with a fatalistic attitude towards disease (not surprising when there were no cures around) and with ignorance and a mistrust of doctors and medicine. Libya was basically a healthy country and disease arose mainly from poverty and consequent malnutrition.

If there was a worm in the bud in the Tripoli of 1959 one would have to look at the army. It was developing slowly around the Cyrenaican Defence Force, which, formed under the British, had helped to expel the Axis forces from Cyrenaica. It had a counterpart in Tripolitania—the Police Force which was a well-run body, also formed under the British and originally British officered and trained. The Libyan army was formed in 1952 and had reached a brigade strength of 3000 men. The aim was to reach 5000 men by 1963. Its commander was a Libyan brigadier who sought continued British help. A strong army was taken to be an essential part of a strong developing nation—and probably a breeding ground for ambitious nationalistic officers.

In general, Libyan development had been helped by a relative stability in the country despite the very obvious tensions between the two main provinces. The chief problem was the fostering of a national spirit among all the people. Each federal unit was the product of a different background and was differently orientated. Tripoli was the most sophisticated and, while it had been under strong European influence, had a greater sympathy with Egypt. Cyrenaica had stronger pro-British feelings, although it had been the birthplace of the Sanusi religious movement—the growth of which inspired the whole of this present study. Tripoli had a more urbanized population with a significant Berber component and Italian and Jewish minorities. Cyrenaica retained its basic Arab tribal structure. The Fezzan was largely desert with a few scattered oases, of which the largest—Ghadames—was a beautiful traditional town on the Tunisian frontier where the French had been quite active. The Fezzan population of 50,000 was chiefly nomadic with some Tuareg elements.

The tripartite nature of the country was necessary to allay the fears of the Cyrenaicans that their larger neighbour would predominate, and so Tripoli and Benghazi were given equal status as co-capitals—a cumbersome set-up which entailed the constant moving of the government and diplomats over 800 miles—a situation worsened by the King's decision to build a new third capital in the Cyrene mountains at al-Beida about 140 miles east of Benghazi. He liked its cool mountain environment during the hot summers but it did not increase his popularity with the Tripolitanians. There were still feelings of resentment among the Cyrenaicans that Tripoli was receiving the lion's share of economic aid. They felt they had a claim to at least an equal share as they had carried on the struggle against the Italians for a much longer period and had suffered more than Tripoli. At least the Sanusi leader, the Amir Idris, had been made King of the unified state but he was disliked by the opposition party in Tripoli which had tried to assassinate him. Parliamentary opposition was limited to that of individuals, political clubs being banned by law. In Tripoli there were no opposition newspapers.

Libya had adopted a form of Westminster government with all its trappings, but without the experience or qualifications to run the system efficiently. The British seemed to believe that once set up everything would run by itself. The King read a speech from the throne and the prime minister presided over a council of ministers. Two elections marred by great violence had taken place since independence. Government supporters, who stood as independents, gained a majority in both. As of 1959 it seemed that a kind of democratic system might succeed although nowhere in the Arab region were there good working examples. Three military coups[1] had rocked the area, all in British-influenced countries, and armies were beginning to be regarded as the bearers of nationalism rather than the older traditional leaders. Libya was not yet ready for its military coup. There was large support for Arab nationalism and at parades for the King or the Sanusi it was common to see banners waved bearing Nasser's portrait. There was widespread hatred of Israel and wide support for Algerian independence, but in general the country was pro-Western—it was so dependent on Western aid. The hoped-for oil revenues could probably change that. By 1959 Libya was beginning to flex its muscles. In addition to its treaties with Britain and the United States, a treaty was signed in 1955 with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which made offers of economic and technical aid.

I left Libya wishing it the best and with a desire to know more about the roots of its personality—tribal adherence to local territorial areas, the foundations of its religious and political feelings through its Sanusi inheritance and its deep desire to enjoy the fruits of the modern world.

Notes

1. In Egypt, Iraq and Sudan.

CHAPTER 2

How the Middle East Began to Be Studied

The serious study of the modern Middle East and of contemporary Islam expanded in Britain in the 1960s. Before this period one or two individual scholars had ploughed a rather lonely furrow and one or two universities (notably the London School of Oriental and African Studies) offered courses and degrees in Oriental Studies which rarely included a 'modern' paper. On the other hand Oriental Studies had a longer history but treated the Middle East as a classical area and its languages as 'dead'.[1] In 1957 St Antony's College in Oxford, a graduate college founded in 1950 to specialize in international studies, decided to establish a Middle East Centre (MEC) which would study the Middle East as a living, vibrant entity with living languages and a historic and widely observed religion.

The atmosphere of the post-imperial period in Britain influenced the development both of the College and of the Centre. Some few members of the University felt that much more attention should be paid to teaching and researching those regions of the world—often ex-imperial or colonial—not normally included in the traditional curricula of the various faculties. There should be a greater emphasis on the modern history, literature, economics and politics of these areas in addition to the study of classical languages, literature and religion conducted by 'orientalists' in the Faculty of Oriental Studies.

Albert Hourani was appointed director of the MEC in 1958—he was lecturer in Modern Middle Eastern History in the Oriental Faculty. Of Lebanese ancestry, he had worked and studied in the Middle East. Being

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Christian and Arab he brought a particular, sensitive approach to his calling. He knew the Arab world at first hand and had met many of the influential politicians there. He also knew many of the British officials who had devoted their lives to administering the different Middle Eastern countries—often when they were just experiencing independence from the Ottoman Empire.

In the early days of the Centre there were few academic publications on the modern Middle East apart from the travel literature—great works by Doughty, Burton and Philby—and the one or two memoirs and studies by ex-practitioners that were beginning to be written. Hourani's first books[2] had already appeared but before that he had been commissioned by the Foreign Research and Press Office (of the British Foreign Office) to write an unpublished report on '*Britain and Arab nationalism 1943*'. It is an intimate, first-hand account sounding very old-fashioned but unique in its insight for its time. It is confined to five countries of the Fertile Crescent where at the time (1942–1943) Arab nationalism was in an embryonic and confused state. Hourani is very critical in his assessment: 'It suffers from political cynicism and the worship of power. It is part of a movement of nostalgia for an irrevocable past—it lacks responsible and enlightened leadership, and is a purposeless upsurge of grievances, obsessions and violent emotions.' Islam does not play a very significant role. 'Often the adherents of this type of nationalism advocate a revival of the primitive fervour and purity of Islam; but in general the younger nationalists are indifferent in religious matters and hostile to the attempts of religious dignitaries to interfere in politics.'

Islam in fact appears surprisingly rarely in the report. Arab nationalism as a secular ideology wholly occupies people's minds. As Hourani writes later in the report, '[t]he great questions which sooner or later they (the Arabs) will have to face … of how far a Moslem nation can accept Western civilisation and yet remain Moslem is still almost wholly untouched'. He is more concerned with the role of Arab Christians and how they can survive in the new Arab world without European protection. He believed that '[t]o understand the West is the main task which faces Arab culture in our age'.

In 1942 it was Palestine that caused him the greatest anxiety. He astutely analysed the results of the Palestinian revolt (1936–1939) which resulted in the exhaustion of the Arab Palestinians, the disintegration of their leadership and a change in the mentality of the peasants who had become restless and filled with a sense of their own power. He felt that the whole country—Jews and Arabs—was simmering on the edge of another upheaval. 'It seems extremely likely that the peace of Palestine will once more be troubled.'

The Arab world that Hourani visited was distorted by the course of the Second World War and the hopes that it gave rise to that Germany might provide an escape from British imperialism. He was particularly concerned with the after-effects of the pro-German rising in Iraq the year before. He spoke to many of the participants and came to the conclusion that the rising was the 'expression of that diseased state of mind' which sprang from a 'sense of grievance against the universe' and was a challenge to Great Britain and an assertion that the Arabs were *something*. The Iraqi revolt was a continuation of the Palestinian uprising and both were only phases of the general Arab revolt that had been gathering force during the previous 30 years.

Hourani saw Arab society in a state of transition. Great Britain played a role, he asserted, in helping the Arabs achieve a more stable future—otherwise another wave of violence would break down the last bridges between the Arabs and Europe. His recommendations for the future placed a great burden on the British and included creating in the Arab world an atmosphere more conducive to peaceful change and to greater democratization. It was an idealistic programme written at a time when the world at large was fighting for a brighter future and when it was believed that Britain would still have an influential role to play. His recommendations were never put into practice as events and reality overtook them. However, his experience in compiling the report gave him a unique experience of the Arab world and influenced his views for the rest of his life.

In Oxford, St Antony's was from its earliest days outward-looking and brought into its fellowship men (and eventually women) who had fought, represented and spied in the areas of their expertise. On a regular basis there came many men to the MEC who had played a significant role in shouldering the British responsibility for the area to give reflective lectures on their experiences—sadly no women, as Gertrude Bell had died very much earlier and Freya Stark passed through without stopping to lecture. We thus heard from men who had met or known Sultan Abdulhamid, T.E. Lawrence, King 'Abd al-'Aziz, King Faisal or 'Abd al-Nasser. These men had been consuls, residents, ambassadors, political officers and advisers. They brought an immediacy of experience to their talks and gradually the modern Middle East and its history began to assume a reality that had hitherto been missing from Oxford Oriental studies.

They had often played a significant role in the founding and administration of the country or countries to which they were appointed. Overall they gave the impression that they believed they had done a good job and that they had been doing something worthwhile, that is serving their own country and helping the countries to which they had been sent. They exuded a certainty that their work had been beneficial and that no other country could have furnished such expertise. They also had a deep affection for the peoples and countries to which they had devoted their lives.

The most venerable of them was Sir Reader Bullard, who had begun his career in the Levant Consular Service in 1906 in Constantinople and who had been received by Sultan Abdulhamid and had later met T.E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell. His pioneering role continued as consul and minister in Jiddah at a time when King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz was wrestling with the modernization of Saudi Arabia. He was also ambassador in Tehran, most notably during the summit meeting of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill.

Typical of them all was Brigadier Stephen Longrigg who entered the British administration in Iraq in 1921 and served as Inspector-General of Revenue during 1927–1931. After working in the Iraq Petroleum Company, he moved to Somalia and then to Cyrenaica and finished as military governor of Eritrea. He wrote several important books on the history of the area (including *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 1925) and his conclusion on the British role in the Middle East could probably stand for that of the many: ‘The best (Britain) could give … was sympathy, administrative experience, the example of justice and reason and honesty, some funds, a background of world knowledge, and a period of tutelage during which the Arab nation could master the techniques of government and establish itself; she had no desire to interfere with the due development of Arab culture and ways of thought and moral concepts. … The local British officials, children of their country and centuries-old standards, did what they could, with a real devotion in many cases, to guide and help and strengthen.’[3]

Some of these administrators were often scholars and authors, having as their speciality the area in which they served. (Many also wrote their memoirs.) Outstanding was C.J. Edmonds who had served with the British Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia and in North West Persia. He returned to Iraq for many years as adviser in Iraqi Kurdistan. There he gained a unique knowledge of the Kurds and their language, eventually publishing an authoritative dictionary of Kurdish.

Another of a similar ilk was Glubb Pasha, a soldier famous for forming the Arab Legion of Bedouin soldiers in Transjordan and being a confidant of the Hashemite royal family. He led his force (Glubb's pig-tailed Bedouin) on two occasions—across the desert to Baghdad to relieve the besieged British residents during the 1941 uprising, and in the struggle for Jerusalem during the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, when the Bedouin held their ground and retained half of the Holy City. Glubb enjoyed talking about how he trained Bedouin soldiers and assured us that he and the British in general understood best the Bedouin personality. Alec Kirkbride had served in Transjordan too, having been sent there in 1921 to establish a government in the small desert emirate. He stayed on, a powerful presence, as resident and ambassador until 1952.

The Persian Gulf also exerted a powerful attraction over the British and numerous Britons devoted their working lives to establishing good relations with the *shaikhs* there. First, Harold Dickson who spent many years as political agent in Kuwait,[4] then Charles Belgrave whose bailiwick for long was Bahrain (known as Belgravia) where he was adviser to the ruler during 1926–1957.

Thus in the earliest days of the MEC a unique relationship was built up with these ex-'servants of empire'. They were the living embodiment of British history in the Middle East and provided the material on which later research could be founded.[5]

Elizabeth Monroe was appointed to support Albert Hourani in 1958. She had been director of the Middle East Division in the Ministry of Information during the war and in 1945 became Middle East correspondent of the *Economist*. She had a wide range of contacts in the Middle East.

By 1961 the British government had come to the conclusion that non-European studies in universities needed to be strengthened and consequently appointed a committee to make suggestions. This 'Hayter' committee issued a report which recommended that 'area' studies should be expanded in British universities. The committee felt that as Britain's imperial domains shrank and as locally gained expertise among British officials began to disappear, universities should undertake to train teachers and researchers in Oriental, Slavonic and African studies. Oxford agreed to take on modern Middle Eastern studies based in St Antony's College. This meant that younger scholars—usually without direct experience of the

Middle East—would be trained in languages and specialist research. Eight people were appointed to teach and research literature, economics, politics and so on. There was some opposition to these moves in the wider university. One or two faculties found it hard to accept that there could be serious study of the world beyond Europe and die-hard members of the Oriental faculty were alarmed by the implication in the report that a sound knowledge of ancient languages and cultures was less important than training in history or social sciences.

These younger scholars were now joined by a new generation of British diplomats who came to give lectures or to spend longer periods of time in college. They included men who had been a confidant of Ernest Bevin and of President Nasser, the last Resident in the Gulf, the man who had been sent to re-establish relations with Egypt after the Suez war, the man who had been sent to re-establish relations with Iran after the Mussadiq period, ex-ambassadors to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Oman, Tunisia and elsewhere. In addition there were often lectures given by members of a remarkable group of British journalists who were experts in the Middle East, including Patrick Seale, Robert Stephens, David Hirst and Peter Mansfield.

An interesting and direct result of the influx of social scientists studying the Middle East was a split between them and the more traditional ‘orientalists’—a new *querelle des anciens et des modernes.* The new scholars approached their studies through direct observation and through the analysis of archive material with more than a whiff of Marxism and had less sympathy for the language- and text-based approach of the orientalists. Albert Hourani, a great admirer of the orientalists—especially the Europeans—was rather caught in the middle, understanding both approaches. His solution was to found the Near East History Group, which brought together all Oxford scholars who were interested in the Middle East and in Islam. At its meetings and conferences a wide range of subjects were discussed from the early Muslim city to later Ottoman history and contemporary anthropology. The *querelle* never reached the bitterness of the Bernard Lewis–Edward Said debate although the work of Roger Owen (a Hayter appointment at the Centre) was singled out by Said. He asserted that Owen’s contributions to Middle Eastern economic history were ‘instructive correctives brought from the contemporary human sciences to the study of so-called Oriental problems’.[6]

In the years following Hourani’s appointment modern Middle Eastern studies took off in many ways to become a recognized field of study in

British universities. Many young students came to Oxford to undertake graduate studies and often to follow academic careers. Libraries and conferences flourished and as Albert Hourani concluded in his history of the MEC, '[i]n one way or another much of our understanding of the Middle East during the last thirty years has been produced in and around the Centre'.[7]

NOTES

1. When I read Arabic and Persian at Oxford in the 1950s the Arabic syllabus ended in 1407. There were lectures on modern Middle Eastern history but no examination.
2. *Syria and Lebanon* (London, 1946), *Minorities in the Arab World* (London, 1947).
3. *International Affairs*, xxix, p. 333.
4. He died before the MEC was established but his wife Violet left all his papers to the MEC Archives. She remained in Kuwait living in a house by the sea which is preserved as the Dickson House.
5. Many of them left their private papers to the MEC Private Papers Archive.
6. E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1995), p. 327.
7. *The Middle East Centre, 1957–2007*, p. 8.

CHAPTER 3

Leaders of Revival in Islam

My interest in Islamic movements was aroused during my time in Libya when I began to study the origins of the state. I discovered that it had been founded, at least in Cyrenaica, as a result of a religious revival movement.[1] The Sanusi movement had developed from the ideas of one man into a movement, into an organization that was able to resist for some time the Italian attempt at colonization. Professor E. Evans-Pritchard, the second professor of social anthropology at Oxford, had studied the way this development had taken place. He had served in Cyrenaica during the Second World War and had been in close contact with the Sanusi there. He analysed the ways by which leaders made themselves known and how they were able to inspire the creation of a movement, to pass on their authority to others if necessary or to routinize the movement into an embryonic state.[2] It was a process that had taken place throughout Islamic history in different places and in different circumstances, but it seemed to have common or similar features.

At the time that his work appeared a number of studies had been published on revival movements and their development but none had been comprehensive or had constructed a theory of why and how they had developed which could be applied to them all. I tentatively embarked on such a project by looking at the Sanusiya and then comparing it with two other movements of the time: the Wahhabiya (*Muwahhidun*) in Arabia and the Mahdiya in Sudan.

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Traditionally, Christians have believed that society is gradually moving towards an imagined ideal—a new Jerusalem—whereas in Islam it has long been believed that society at the time of the Prophet was ideal. How then could society continue to exist until the day of the final judgement? Any change could only be for the worse, necessarily a step away from the earliest ideal. This decline was expressed in the saying attributed to Muhammad that '[t]he best generation is mine, the next best that which follows and the next the succeeding one'. Such a doctrine could be seen as a challenge to anyone who could not stand by passively if society deteriorated in this way. Some inspired activists would every so often on their own initiative set about to try to repair the situation. The leaders of such movements would often emphasize the popular belief that from time to time a new leader—a *mahdi* (rightly guided one) or *mujaddid* (renewer)—would be sent to restore what had once existed. He would lead society back to an original observance of Islam. The early leaders usually preached in terms of Islam itself; the later ones often had to cope with the threat posed by the intrusion of non-Muslim invaders into their societies. Whether it was ever possible to recreate early Islamic society or whether at all it ever existed as they claimed are not really important questions. It is significant that these were the terms on which they framed their message.

A long history of revival movements accustomed the world of Islam to repeated disturbances from the calm tenor of religious life. It seemed natural that from time to time an individual would appear who felt called upon to proclaim his dissatisfaction with the contemporary observance of religion and demanded, usually in opposition to the existing political regime, that changes had to be made. He would summon the people to follow him in a *jihad* with the aim of overturning or resisting corrupt influences. Some men succeeded, others flared briefly and were extinguished.

This process of revival, success or falling away led the Orientalist scholar, Hamilton Gibb, to characterize Islamic history as a 'series of responses to challenges; but responses which took the form not of repudiation so much as the incorporation of new elements into the existing structures of symbols and worship'.[3] He characterized Islamic history as 'the march of the *umma* through the wilderness of religious fantasies, human passions, political conflict, opportunism and cynicism'.[4] This happened either (but rarely) with the support of the existing '*ulama*' or in the face of their opposition and with the encouragement and support of new men. Gibb believed that 'since mankind will not follow the Shari'a it is condemned to an empty and unending cycle of rise and fall'.[5] Perhaps not so empty though as each movement added something to the overall situation of the Islamic world and left an imprint. Other scholars have interpreted the whole of Arab history in terms of recurrent popular movements for liberation and unity, although such a wholesale interpretation does seem to ignore the long periods of relative tranquillity and of the quiet progress of the thought of philosophers who contributed to development without violent disruption—men such as Ibn Taimiya, al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun among many others.

To gain a clearer picture we can try to answer several questions about these activist movements:

1. What were the social, political and economic conditions that provided the background to the appearance of a *mujaddid* and caused him to appear at a particular time in a particular place? Karl Marx believed that people make their own history, but do not do it under circumstances of their own choosing. It is the interaction between the individual and the circumstances that makes the study of people so fascinating. Each of the *mujaddidun* made their own history in a variety of circumstances.
2. What was the prevailing intellectual, cultural or religious climate? Was there a popular expectation of the appearance of a *mahdi*? The claim to be a *mahdi* is the most extreme a putative leader can make—unless he actually claims divinity which is very rare. The task of the *mahdi* is to restore true Islam and to establish equality and justice. His dilemma is that he must disappoint his followers either by failing to achieve power or, having gained power, by failing to usher in the promised age.
3. What was the character of the man who emerged as leader? Is there a distinguishable type of man born to lead such movements? What is his background and is there a particular path that leads to an irresistible conviction that he is a born leader?
4. How are these movements started and what are the mechanics of gaining and keeping followers? How are men persuaded to 'follow' a leader and make a radical change in their lives? What are their expectations on joining a movement?

5. What is the message the leader preaches?
6. How does a movement develop? Does it lead to the foundation of a state, to radical change, or does it peter out in indifference or defeat?

* * *

The many movements that have arisen throughout Islamic history give us some information about a lived historical experience, but not so much about motivation and inner conviction. Much of this latter type of evidence exists in hints rather than in direct assertions. Muslim historians do not often give or know the kind of information needed. However, if we detect some overall pattern emerging, then can we assume that this pattern is one that is repeated throughout history although modified by all the different factors of time and place? As Richard Evans writes in his study *In Defence of History*, '[i]ndirect and inferential procedures are frequently employed [when writing history] where direct source material is inadequate'.[6] If so, it then becomes possible to assume that if a new leader emerges he will have passed through at least some of the stages that his predecessors in the field experienced and that his movement will develop in similar ways to those of earlier ones.

To understand these movements fully one must look into the economic, political and social environments in which they occurred. The psychological make-up of the leader may perhaps show us why a man acted as he did but this can be only speculation. Nor need the historian be concerned with the validity of the religious message—what is important is to analyse why the people who heard the message accepted it as valid in their own lives, why they left a settled life to follow a leader and perhaps put themselves in positions of danger. We may assume that Muslims historically have acted essentially in the same way as other men; that the impulses that moved them have been similar—economic improvement, removal of unjust governments, religious salvation—but that the ends pursued and their meaning have been expressed in Islamic terms.

By studying a number of Islamic movements and comparing them with others in European history I think it is possible to construct a theoretical model which can be applied wholly or partially to gain a better understanding of why and how they developed. It is clear that there is universally a type of man (almost never a woman) who feels himself called upon to found and to be the leader of a public movement, usually religious—although the man who leads a secular political movement may be of a similar type. It seems that throughout the world movements are founded and maintained in very similar ways; the fact of the 'conversion' of the leader and his followers is general. In the Muslim world the universal facts are expressed and interpreted in Islamic terms although movements have differed according to the character of the leader and the environment in which the movement arose.

1 IDEOLOGY

The ideology of revival movements coincides with the political theories of the orthodox '*ulama*' (scholars) who teach that the function of good government is to foster the right conditions for the operation of the *shari'a* and the Islamic ethic. The *shari'a* (the path or way) is a comprehensive system of ideal morality that men must follow to 'walk pleasingly in the sight of God'.[7] It covers men's relationships with each other as well as with God and demands right actions on the part of Muslims who spread the faith by means of *jihad*. For Muslims, part of the essential functions of a legitimate successor to Muhammad is to lead the community of believers in the correct path. Muslim jurists had asserted that a leader is necessary and the community must accept a legitimate one whoever he may be, and if he is deposed by another the new one must be obeyed. Thus, those who came forward to claim or seize power believed they had a legal sanction.

There may be times when one has to resort to violence as the only way to end living under a corrupt ruler and make a fresh start. At such times there has to be the conviction or a consensus that the rule is unjust and someone—rarely the '*ulama*'—must articulate that feeling. Self-appointed leaders or teachers come forward to preach a message that emphasizes the need to restore what has been lost and to recreate the ideal society that once existed. Their followers have to be convinced that such an ideal(ized) society is attainable. What a religious leader promises is a return to or recreation of early Islam, a situation without problems and doubts and of great security. Al-Farabi, the medieval philosopher, concluded that the function of such a leader was to found and rule a virtuous state.

The preacher must propagate a message that convinces potential followers and creates a collective sense of identity among them. The leader himself can have no identity without a convincing ideology. The historian must ask what makes an ideology effective at a given moment and what is its effect on individuals who accept it. All leaders need success and acceptance by followers to validate their message. The orthodox ‘*ulama*’ have traditionally been unwilling to support a leader of the kind of movement which disrupted society and which in their view was no substitute for the steady preservation of the *umma* (Islamic community) and its institutions. Movements nourished in violence often perish in violence and there was no knowing how a leader would interpret the *shari’a* once he gained power.

* * *

In many rural and desert areas of the Islamic world it is noticeable that the observation of religion is informal and the law is tribal and traditional. Many small domes are visible scattered through the countryside—the final resting places of wandering holy men who have been venerated and whose tombs are often the scene for popular festivals. Prayers are written and left there asking for blessings, cures from illnesses or relief from barrenness. This kind of ‘popular’ Islam—studied by many anthropologists such as Ernest Gellner—speaks more to the heart than the religion of the mind of the ‘*ulama*’.[8] Holy men and *sufis* (mystics) have wandered through the countryside or towns relating directly to the people—relying on them for food and accommodation—and in times of hardship have perhaps felt inspired to preach of a vision of a better future. Their listeners might then believe that the preacher was a *mujaddid* or even a *mahdi* who could lead them to a longed-for, dimly imagined millennium and who would inspire them to change their religious observances from a passive into an active experience, to make it an instrument for change. One can imagine that these people would be willing to throw in their lot with someone who promised greater rewards in this life and the next—and anyway perhaps a sense of excitement and purpose might have been better than an ordinary humdrum life.

When a revival movement has gained some momentum the expectations of those who have committed themselves to it are clear. They expect satisfaction in this world and the next—specifically for those have accepted the claims of the leader and have joined him—and a general salvation that will transform the world and may even herald its end.

2 The Leader

These movements have without exception been founded and led by one man. How this one man answers a calling is a fascinating subject and to understand it requires a substantial knowledge of the mechanics of conversion.[9] It is not always easy to study the lives of these leaders as we have few self-revelatory writings. But in some cases it is feasible to extrapolate from the life of one leader to another. It is clear that a certain sensitivity can lead to religious conviction and it is possible to sense such a sensitivity in a number of Muslim leaders. Such men become known by their convinced and fearless preaching and their effect on society. They are impressionable individuals liable to visions. They have an obsessive temperament and cling tenaciously to ideas once adopted—even in the face of strong opposition. It could be that opposition is a stimulant rather than a deterrent. They are convinced that they have an exclusive hold on truth and feel impelled to force their message onto others. Why such men should feel themselves so called is impossible to determine.

Such men have had characteristics that excite curiosity and provoke speculation about human nature. They have possessed the mystique of power and the ability to move masses of people. Their presence has evoked enthusiasm among their followers. They have been egocentric to the point of megalomania and have come to believe that they were the chosen one—the *mahdi*, the messiah. They all had a determination to succeed. As Adolf Hitler remarked, '[g]enius must have perseverance and fanatical tenacity—that makes a man a fighter to the core'.

3 Conversion or Identity Crisis

The well-known psycho-historian Erik Erikson has explained how putative leaders pass through a mental struggle, a severe illness or an emotional crisis (or crises) before they emerge as religious leaders (he was studying the life of Martin Luther at the time). Often the future leader may retire to meditate on whether to accept his calling. The crisis may be preceded by a period of intense study. He experiences the identity crisis which all young people have to face. If he comes through this with a positive decision to devote his life to active leadership he gains a permanent conviction of the truth of his calling with a new perception of himself empowered to act. Some men experience these processes to the limit. Some newly convinced leaders are led to be reformers (e.g. Muhammad al-Sanusi, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab), while others feel that they have to go further, to lead a revolt, which may signal a significant break with or a reinterpretation of the past. Those who go as far as to proclaim themselves the expected *mahdi* place themselves beyond the *shari'a* and perhaps the *ijma'* (consensus—approval) of the *umma* and the '*ulama'*. It is not easy to determine how far such leaders are motivated by personal ambition and how much by devotion to their cause. In some cases it seems that the love of power is the prime motivating force in their lives.

A further question may be asked about the experience of conversion or change: why is it expressed in religious terms (we are excluding here the secular leaders)? The inspired leader is convinced that his call comes directly from his concept of God. He is reacting to what he is certain is a sense of the divine reality. His actions are based on that assumption. A psychologist or historian can only try to observe or analyse how efficacious the results of this call are at a given historical moment. For example, taking it for granted that John Wesley was sincere, we can trace how the founding of the Methodist movement came about as a result of his convictions and his subsequent preaching which convinced those who heard him to follow him.

The convert must interpret what he hears in his mind or sees in his dreams on the basis of the material in his subconsciousness that his upbringing, his surroundings or study have shaped. The visions of religious leaders are consequently moulded by the beliefs and the theological material—already existing or newly acquired—that fill their minds. Conversion always takes root in soil prepared through previous knowledge or through the influence of the experiences of other people. The convert is a passive agent acted upon by external forces. He may make a free choice or be coerced by being forcibly convinced by others ('brain-washing').

Studies have also shown that dreams or visions are a reflection of thoughts already in the mind of the dreamer at the time. Dreams do not usually include material that the dreamer has not thought about or experienced during his waking hours. 'Inspiration … comes only to the prepared mind which has already gathered together a whole host of relevant facts, impressions and ideas. The moment of inspiration often occurs in waking life when everything suddenly seems to link together in a new and significant pattern.'[10] In his waking hours he reworks the material he has dreamt or visualized in such a way that he can pass it on. The psychologist Calvin Hall has added to this interpretation the following concepts: the dream is a creation of the dreamer's own mind and tells him how he sees himself, others and the world. He adds that a dream is never a guide to objective reality but a picture of the way things appear to the dreamer; a dreamer is responsible for everything that appears in his dream.[11] Jung believed that one should not have a fixed mechanical interpretation of dreams (as he was convinced Freud had) but that they should be interpreted according to the individual dreamer's personality.

What these analyses show is that when our future leaders announce that they have had a personal religious experience, they are expressing in a public manner the more or less coherent ideas that their subconscious mind has been elaborating. This is not to say that they do not sincerely believe the ideas they have constructed and that they have been charged to pass them on to others. When a new leader is convinced of his role and has passed through his crisis, his dreams and visions become convictions. (To the convinced recipient this kind of analysis would seem pointless and even insulting—the messages and visions received by him are truly divine inspiration. For example, after John Wesley had experienced his 'conversion', 'the certainty that he was under God's protection was reinforced by the knowledge that God had given him both the temperament and constitution to spend his whole life travelling' and preaching to convert his followers.[12])

4 The Movement

It can be frustrating when reading the histories of revival movements throughout the world to be told merely that *x* founded a movement or that *y* inspired great devotion. How is it possible for a previously unknown man to inspire such devotion in his followers so that they will follow him perhaps to death? We know that the leader steps apart from his fellows in order to preach his message and to try to change society, for the conversion of the masses is always brought about by the converted leader.

How does he do this, how does he persuade others to follow him, how does he maintain their enthusiasm? His potential followers must feel a need for change, particularly in times of crisis or of dissatisfaction with their lives. This has to be focused and given expression. A leader is the one who organizes these floating ideas. He identifies himself in terms of an image of society as he hopes it to be. Movements seem to expand in situations of uncertainty, unrest or disturbance—economic, political, social or religious. To confirm his position the leader must emphasize the problems of the time and arouse in his listeners the expectation that he can help them to solve their problems.[13] If they believe his promises they fall under his spell and become his followers.

How does he create that willingness and desire to join and follow? Words are obviously the key to his power and influence. Calm, logical preaching, with much repetition, usually presenting an audience with dire alternatives—'follow me or suffer'—can achieve the desired effect. (Some men have had a much more emotional style and can be carried away by their own preaching.) Such words often instil fear in men's minds and words spoken by great preachers have an almost magical power over their audience. Eyewitnesses have testified to the power of the Sudanese Mahdi's preaching. (John Wesley's preaching could cause people to be converted *en masse*.) The effect of the word is magnified when heard in a crowd. Inhibitions are lessened, emotion predominates and feelings can pass from one listener to another. The whole crowd can quickly become totally infected. Preachers know this and they use their power of words to paint vivid pictures, and with constant repetition and certain techniques release restraint in their listeners, so that a kind of mass hysteria is created whereby one listener dare not disagree with the next. Once a movement is under way certain techniques can be used to maintain or strengthen the bond between leader and followers. A bond of charisma[14] (*baraka*) is established between them which is kept active by regular meetings, preaching and prayers. Religious exercises may be insisted on—such as the repetition or chanting of religious formulae and the name of God, accompanied by drumming to instil religious fervour.

On a more mundane level, the organization of a movement is essential to hold it together and to instil discipline. Deputy leaders, successors, small groups or cells (*zawiya*), tribal organizations, an army, treaties—some or all may be utilized to strengthen support and perhaps ensure continuity. Most important for the militant movement is success—often military. The movement is always directed against some kind of enemy—'corruption', the state, 'heretics', invaders or occupiers or neighbouring tribes. Sometimes, convincing preaching is enough to convince the 'enemy', but often force has to be used. The efficient organization of an army is essential and victories must be won if the leader is to remain in power. Followers may be inspired to total commitment in battle, and death is seen as the true reward. Waverers may be coerced into joining if the movement is strong enough; others may join without conviction with the promise of booty but may yet be drawn into the rituals and the atmosphere.

5 Routinization

Each movement developed in its own way according to the circumstances of time and place. Some failed or were defeated; some in alliance with other leaders or through internal change evolved into states—some very long-lasting—for example, the Almohads, the Sanusiya, the Mahdiya and the Wahhabiya. Many survived the death of the leader. The change into political state was the result of the message proclaimed—unjust rulers must be overthrown and replaced. The leader himself may be the visionary who appoints one or more practical-minded lieutenants. Leaders have to legitimize their position by providing their followers with some of the satisfactions they have been promised. He must come to terms with the political reality and pressures of his position. If success is achieved, then the new state has to be administered, an army organized, taxes collected and the ideas he propagated put into practice. The charismatic leader may not be fit to accomplish such tasks and may be assisted or even replaced by more practical men.

Finally, there is the reaction of the followers to the eventual developments of the movement to consider. How do they cope with the death of a leader, with the creation of a new state, with the almost inevitable failure of the promised era to materialize? Does the peasant or nomad return home disillusioned or does he keep the faith?

NOTES

1. There has been much discussion on what to call similar movements. Revival means to bring back religious fervour and to recreate past conditions of religious observance. They do not wish to reform but to recapture an imagined past.
2. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford, 1949).
3. A. Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East* (London, 1980), p. 123.
4. Ibid., p. 125.
5. Ibid., p. 116.
6. R.J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), p. 247.
7. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 2.
8. Although it must be said that some students believe that it is incorrect to talk about popular Islam, insisting that there exists rather a continuum in the Islamic tradition from the beliefs of the highly trained and sophisticated Azhar '*ulama*' to those of the illiterate believer who somehow knows instinctively that he is a Muslim.
9. Perhaps I lay too much stress on the fact of conversion due to my Methodist upbringing where conversion was considered essential before embarking on a religious life. The founder of Methodism—John Wesley—himself underwent a very noticeable conversion at a religious meeting when he reported that 'my heart was strangely warmed'. Those from other traditions

may rather stress the necessity of a long period of study and calm contemplation prior to embarking on a religious life.

10. A. Faraday, *Dream Power* (London, 1972) p. 284.
11. Ibid., p. 117.
12. R. Hattersley, *A Brand from the Burning* (London, 2002), p. 192.
13. The historian of millenarian movements Norman Cohn puts this very well when describing Christian expectations: ‘For amongst the surplus population living on the margin of a society there was always a strong tendency to take as a leader a layman … who imposed himself not simply as a holy man but as a prophet and saviour or even as a living god. On the strength of inspirations or revelations for which he claimed divine origin this leader would decree for his followers a communal mission of vast proportions and world-shaking importance. The conviction of having such a mission, of being divinely appointed to carry out a prodigious task, provided the disorientated and the frustrated with new bearings and new hope. It gave them not only a place in the world but a unique and resplendent place. A fraternity of this kind felt itself an elite, set infinitely apart from and above ordinary mortals, sharing in the extraordinary merits of its leader, sharing also in his miraculous powers. Moreover, the mission which attracted these masses from the neediest strata of the population was—naturally enough—a mission which was intended to culminate in a total transformation of society. In the eschatological phantasies which they had inherited from the distant past … these people found a social myth most perfectly adapted to their needs’ (N. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*) (London, 1957), p. 60.
14. Charisma can only exist in the form of a bond between the leader and his followers. Without followers a leader is nothing.

CHAPTER 4

Two Historical Movements

1 The Zanj Revolt

We can now hope to use the aforementioned theoretical structure to try to analyse some of the many reform movements that have occurred during the course of Islamic history. The original features of Islamic inspiration naturally appear first of all in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. He was the example for others to follow more or less directly. His was the life to which all later leaders would refer, many of whom would claim direct descent from him in order to gain legitimacy.

The first movement of great consequence is the Zanj[1] uprising, a violent revolt that took place in southern Iraq in the ninth century. Because of its unique nature it has been used by later historians and polemicists for their own purposes and termed one of the greatest rebellions in world history. Why is this? In the area at the time thousands of black slaves were toiling in the Mesopotamian marshes. It was fertile land for growing sugar and other crops but the sea had carried inland a nitrous topsoil that ruined the fertility. Slaves had been brought in to toil away, scraping off this topsoil and piling it in heaps so that the land could be brought under cultivation again. The dust, pollution and heat made life unbearable. They or their forebears had been captured and brought into the area from East Africa where they were exploited by ruthless slave owners.[2] They were herded together in camps of 500–5000, crowded in without their families, living on meagre handfuls of flour, semolina and dates. There seemed to be no escape from their situation other than through an uprising. They

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had tried unsuccessfully a few times to revolt but had lacked leadership and organization. The strong central caliphate and army in Baghdad had been able to defeat them.

The Iraqi marshes were one area where revolt could be possible, however.[3] Large numbers of soldiers could not move easily through the narrow waterways and rebels could melt away into high reeds growing everywhere. It was an ideal countryside for guerrilla warfare. The slaves were certainly the one group in the whole of Islamic history with most reason to revolt. If they were ripe for an uprising they needed someone to focus their discontent. In other cases where a movement of protest has emerged discontent has been rather less obvious—perhaps a general malaise with foreign occupation or a conviction in the mind of the leader that religious observation had sunk to an unacceptably low level. Slaves labouring under a scorching sun for little reward needed no one to point out the grimness of their existence, but they had little idea of how to organize a protest. Small, sporadic, individual uprisings could have been easily put down. Someone was needed to lead them.

There was a man living in Basra named ‘Ali ibn Muhammad (original name Ahmad) who might be that person. He was born near Rayy (present-day Tehran), whether the son of an Arab or Persian *maula* (non-Arab convert to Islam) is not clear. His father died when ‘Ali was quite young. He had a reputation for studiousness and spent a long period in Rayy studying a variety of subjects—it is reported that he had a good knowledge of astrolabes and of the occult—although he does not seem to have attached himself to any one teacher. When he was still a boy he fell so seriously ill that his parents thought he was dying. The boy later reported that during the crisis of his illness he believed he had heard his mother wailing at his bedside saying ‘He is going to die’ and his father replying ‘If he dies then who will take Basra?’ (‘Those words’ said ‘Ali ‘remained engraved in my heart until the moment I rebelled there’.) He recovered, however, and later left for Samarra (capital of the ‘Abbasid caliphate 836–892 on the banks of the Tigris) where he lived as a poet at the court of the caliph al-Muntasir (861–862). Some of the poetry he produced there describes his state of mind—internal disquiet, unhappiness with the state of the caliphate—hardly a fit subject for a court poet! His poetry is full of self-praise and of the need for positive action. He unsurprisingly had to leave Samarra after a time for Bahrain where he entered upon a more active career—perhaps the opportunity he had been waiting for.

Several points I think stand out already in the life of ‘Ali. A number of future reformers lost their fathers early and felt the need to seek a substitute figure. The relationship with the father is in any case part of the identity crisis during which the future leader has to assert his own character. In ‘Ali’s case, he either sought a substitute (we are not told if he adopted one particular teacher) or he was forced early in life to be more self-reliant and independent. Judging by his poetry he did not lack self-esteem and self-reliance.

An early emotional or physical crisis can also affect the leader. We know that ‘Ali almost died, recovered and reported hearing the mysterious conversation of his parents. Such a report is not uncommon, whether real or imagined, and it points to the leader’s view of his future or at least to his desire to convince others of his destiny. It would seem that from his early crisis until his departure from Samarra he went through periods of meditation and inaction. His poetry is both a questioning of the existing situation and an expression of disquiet together with a show of some confidence in himself. This kind of mood is typical of would-be reformers; it is part of the critical decision of changing from a passive to an active life; of recognizing the ills of society before attempting to undertake actions to cure them, or alternatively of deciding to retreat from the world into a contemplative life, such as that of a *sufi* (a mystic), for example. His poetry written at Samarra shows that he is disturbed by what he considers as the declining situation of the caliphate under the influence of Turkish soldiers and officials. In his view the capital was sinful and given to wine drinking. The ordinary people were in a miserable situation. We have here a would-be reformer criticizing those in power for their corruption and underlining the position of those who suffer. It is not clear why he left Samarra but it would seem that he had made his situation too difficult and he was without any support. If he was going to preach openly against corruption it would have to be elsewhere. He would undertake a *hijra*—as did the Prophet Muhammad in 622 from Mecca to Madina[4]—away from a corrupt society in order to combat it later. Reform movements have rarely begun in a capital city but more often on the fringes of power with the aim of eventually overthrowing central authority. ‘Ali decided to make for Bahrain.

The territory of Bahrain at the time included more than the islands of the present-day country. The name was also applied to territory on the mainland—the area around Hajar (near al-Hasa) and al-Qatif (both in present-day Saudi Arabia). This part of the world seems to have been somewhat disturbed in the ninth century. Dissident *khawarij* (those who had rejected ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib as fourth caliph in 657 and had formed an extreme sect which justified killing any opponents or those they considered apostates[5]) had settled there in the seventh century and the population was a mix of Arab tribesmen and Persian *mawali*, and of Sunnis and Shi’is. There was apparently some expectation of and readiness to accept a plausible ‘Alid claimant (someone claiming descent from ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib). This is probably why ‘Ali chose Bahrain as the place in which to put forward his claims and where he hoped they would be accepted. It was to the discontented *mawali* that he first appealed, although some Arab tribesmen also followed him for a while.

To gain acceptance, a new leader has to convince potential followers of his credibility. In the pro-Shi’i atmosphere of Bahrain[6] ‘Ali first attempted this by making a claim to ‘Alid descent with a genealogy that was almost certainly fabricated. He also claimed to be or was taken for a prophet, *mahdi* and *imam*. The latter two titles were not uncommon, that of prophet certainly was. *Mahdi* among the Shi’a is not necessarily the end-of-the-world figure of the Sunnis. His aim is to fill the earth with piety and justice and to reinstate the ‘Alid line of rightful imams—the aim of all ‘Alid uprisings. In addition, ‘Ali ibn Muhammad made use of the *kharijite* slogan ‘*la hukma illa lillahi*’ (judgement is Allah’s alone) to try to gain the allegiance of wavering *kharijites*, and the phrase ‘*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*’ (struggle in the path of God)—‘Ali ibn Muhammad trying to motivate followers with traditional religious terms before he later utilized the social discontent of the Zanj.

The unusual claim is that of prophethood. Coins of the period bear the title ‘*rasul Allah*’ (prophet of God), leaving no doubt as to what he was aspiring for.[7] He also claimed that he had visions about his mission. ‘In the course of this period I received signs of my leadership as *imam*, which were clear to the people.’[8] He said that ‘I received Qur’anic verses that I had not learned before and yet I was able to recite them in a flash’.[9] Later he claimed that ‘he saw on a wall a message being written to him by an invisible hand’.[10] All these things he set forth as proof of his inspiration and as justification of his claims to leadership. In so doing, he aroused opposition on the part of those who rejected his claims. (His opponents called him a renegade and an enemy of God. The ‘Abbasid rulers also demanded that he abandon his claims to prophethood and his mission—*risala*.)

However, in Hajar in 863 some did recognize him as prophet. He acquired some authority and succeeded in arousing a part of the population against the ‘corrupt’ ‘Abbasid caliphate. His early supporters were the *mawali*, non-Arabs in certain trades and professions who suffered discrimination and who followed him throughout the rest of his career. (Some even returned after his death to Bahrain and joined the Qaramita.[11]) In Hajar the split between ‘Ali’s supporters and his opponents was so severe that a civil war broke out and he had to leave the town for al-Hasa. There he again preached his message, which caused further division in the local populations and again he had to leave. He then had another vision which set him on the road to greater success.

‘A further example (of a vision) was the time I was lying down, musing about the place I should be heading for to set up residence. The thought of the desert and its recalcitrant inhabitants dejected me, but then a cloud cast a shadow upon me, thunder crackled and lightning flashed. A thunderclap resounded in my ears, and a voice addressed me saying, “Head for Basra”. I said to my companions who were with me, “A voice from the thunder has commanded me to go to Basra”.’[12] So in 868 he left on a second *hijra* for Basra.

In Basra at the time a bitter struggle was taking place between two tribal groups. Once again ‘Ali thought he had a chance to intervene by trying to recruit one side to his cause. It is not clear what his appeal was to them and it seems likely a case of opportunism. He was still following his inner urges but unable to convince anyone to follow him.[13] Undeterred he went off to Baghdad and there for some reason was able to increase the number of his adherents. Slightly encouraged he went back to Basra, passing himself off as a businessman from a wealthy family. Now he became convinced he had a cause. He started to preach in the mosque against the caliph al-Mu’tazz, a young man at the head of a reckless court unable to pay the army. ‘Ali now focused on attracting the Zanj slaves to his side, underlining the injustice of their lives and promising them freedom and wealth and revenge on their masters. He preached the *kharijite* doctrine of equality and asked any slave to execute him if he betrayed their trust. His movement began to gather momentum. It must have seemed to the slaves who heard his message that anything was better than their miserable lives and they were prepared to follow him. He was able to declare the revolt in 869.

‘Ali began to show considerable organizational skill. He ordered the rebels to capture slave owners and to free the groups of slaves who were with them. He punished the owners after public trials. He also planned that certain slaves should each at an appointed time capture their owners and execute them. He then sought out other slaves in order to inquire into their working conditions. He called together all those who had joined his cause and began to address them. He used the power of his oratory to strengthen their allegiance and repeated his promises to them. He swore that no slave would ever be returned to his owner and that it was not for wealth or honour of the world that he had rebelled. He assured them that God had chosen him as his instrument for their deliverance. He was accepted as the leader and took on the title of '*sahib al-Zanj*'—master of the Zanj.

His method of addressing his followers regularly was the normal way of maintaining fervour. What was unusual was that he spoke to the Zanj in Arabic, a language they did not understand. During his great orations he had the rare individuals who understood placed around him; the others would faithfully shout out their approval. He would also hold regular prayers, summoning all to attend by the blowing of a horn. After speaking he had to ask those who had understood him to translate for those who had not.[14] The numbers of his followers began to swell, absorbing well-trained black contingents from the 'Abbasid army and some local disaffected peasants.

Once the revolt had been declared its momentum was maintained by constant guerrilla warfare both against the slave owners and against the caliphal army. They made full use of the marshes and won numerous battles, capturing weapons, horses, food and liberating slaves. 'Ali assumed the title of *mahdi* and made good to a remarkable extent his promises of liberation and rewards. It was by continued military success that the movement prospered. He brooked no opposition and was extremely cruel towards his enemies and captives. Many were beheaded on his orders.[15] The historian al-Tabari called the revolt one of the most brutal and vicious to plague the central government.

Eventually 'Ali felt strong enough to attack Basra, the town from which the revolt had been declared. During a lunar eclipse he announced that God had promised him victory saying a little mysteriously that 'Basra will be a loaf of bread that you will eat from all sides. When the loaf is half eaten, Basra will be destroyed'. On the morning of the attack he led fervent prayers with his followers and announced another vision which promised that those attacking the city would be given courage and be strengthened by the angels of God. The Zanj raised their battle cry of

'*Allahu akbar*'. It all worked and Basra fell amidst carnage and pillage. The Caliph sent a large army against the Zanj but they expanded further north with Bedouin help. They fought the 'Abbasids to a standstill but could not take advantage of the situation as 'Ali had no plans for the future. He eventually retired from the battlefields and issued orders to his army chiefs from his camp at the capital he had built at al-Mukhtara. There he said he rejected the burden of prophethood (*nubuwa*) as he feared he would not be able to bear it. His followers eventually began to turn into the very masters they so hated and their community began to break down because of its greatly mixed nature, slaves, Bedouin and peasants. 'Ali understood this but could do nothing about it.

By 883, al-Muwaffaq, brother of the Caliph al-Mu'tamid, had reorganized the 'Abbasid army into a strong force that was able to face the Zanj and defeat them at al-Mukhtara. 'Ali was captured and al-Mu'tamid returned to Baghdad with his head. His companions were also captured and two years later they were executed in Baghdad. Most, but not all, of the Zanj joined al-Muwaffaq. Thousands died in the desert trying to flee, while others remained unsubdued in southern Iraq, living by plundering and robbing—until they rejoined the 'Abbasids or died, refusing to be anyone else's soldier.

Thus ended the Zanj uprising with its leader dead. Some writers conclude that in the end he had been semi-victorious—the slaves' workload had been lessened and they were gradually transformed into peasants or serfs.

We can now try to answer some of the questions posed earlier about the common traits of revival movements. The Zanj revolt arose at a time of great discontent among one particular group of people. The slaves had made unsuccessful attempts to revolt but had lacked a leader. Their situation was much more desperate that that of other movements. Their sense of hopelessness made them ready to follow someone who promised a better future. It would not seem that there was any great religious expectation at the time—apart from the search for an 'Alid claimant in Bahrain—hence 'Ali's fabricated genealogy. Nor did he come with a programme for religious reforms, such as a stricter observance of the *shari'a*. He did insist on regular prayers and he banned alcohol. ('You will be engaging armies in battle, so cease this indulgence in drink' 'and they assented to his demand.')[16]

The message of the leader was that he had been chosen by God to lead them out of slavery to freedom and wealth. He appeared sincere enough to convince men to follow him. They joined in small groups and were given tasks to further their cause—such as the capture and execution of their owners. ‘Ali was clearly a capable military leader who had good lieutenants and he was able to organize his followers into an efficient army. His repeated message to them was that they had to trust him and if he betrayed them they should kill him. They did trust him and he did deliver for several years.

The leader’s life did to a large extent follow a usual pattern. He was a sensitive type who passed through the crisis of his illness from which time he became convinced he had a mission. His later visions or dreams confirmed him in this belief. Not surprisingly, it took him some time to discover a way of achieving his calling. Voices seemed to confirm that he should head for Basra but without explaining what he should do there. It was there that his sense of calling and a cause came together—the slaves awaiting a leader. From here on, I think we have to accept that he wholeheartedly devoted his life to their cause and, if reported correctly, was sincere in offering them his life. When he was near defeat, he rejected al-Muwaffaq’s offer of pardon and promises of reward. Popovic in his study of the Zanj considers ‘Ali to have been an outstanding person, intelligent and eloquent, a good organizer and military leader, but an ambitious, totally unscrupulous man and a typical revolutionary. His movement had no social programme beyond that of abolishing slavery (surely a programme in itself) and had the political aim of opposing the ‘Abbasid Caliphate.

It is perhaps not for the historian to know the inner sentiments of those he studies. It is enough to study the results of their actions. ‘Ali ibn Muhammad showed himself to the world as an inspired leader who for a time achieved his aim of leading a successful movement.

2 Ibn Tumart

In about 1080 in a small Berber village in southern Morocco in the Atlas Mountains, a son, Muhammad, was born to Tumart (a Berber name meaning good fortune), who was from a humble family and was a lamplighter in the local mosque. It is said that Muhammad Ibn Tumart was a very pious child, of small stature and without resources, who used to light candles himself in the mosque. He would later claim to be a descendant of Idris, grandson of the Prophet who had taken refuge in Morocco from ‘Abbasid persecution. This claim which was fairly common among Berber leaders cannot be verified but it was to be used to give legitimacy to the future leader. It was clear, however, that under a modest and gentle exterior Ibn Tumart had an unconquerable will and an audacity that disdained all obstacles. He became very ambitious and cunning.

At the time of his birth Morocco and Spain were under the rule of the Almoravids (meaning those who live in frontier posts—*ribats*), a very conservative and puritanical sect that had been founded by another inspired leader, ‘Abdallah ibn Yasin.[17]

When he was old enough Ibn Tumart went to Cordoba in search of education and attached himself to a prominent scholar, al-Turtushi, who had wide knowledge of Islamic political philosophy. Following the example of many Islamic scholars, Ibn Tumart journeyed through the Middle East in search of knowledge and scholar masters. In Baghdad he came under the influence of (although probably never met) al-Ghazali, the greatest of medieval Muslim thinkers and who himself as a *sufi* (mystic) was not an exponent of puritanical Islam.[18] Ibn Tumart though inherited the Almoravid puritanical ethic and his main principle, like that of the later Saudi shaikh Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, was a strict tawhid (the absolute unity of God) and he ironically laid the blame for the theological decline of his society on the Almoravids (who had themselves been founded on puritanical principles. But it seemed to be the habit that the newcomer blamed the evils of his society on his predecessors.) He accused them of laxness in society, permitting the sale of wine and pork in the markets and religious art in mosques. He sought reforms that would re-establish Islamic society as it was in its earliest days.

He moved around preaching his reforms and causing great opposition. He was thrown out of Mecca by the authorities and decided to return to Morocco. On board the ship—and here we might be entering the mythological—he threw flasks of wine overboard and lectured the sailors on the importance of a moral life, that is praying in the proper way at the correct times. He had chosen the wrong audience and they threw him overboard as well. It is said that he bobbed about on the sea for a day and was picked up the next day. If such an incident actually took place it could well have confirmed his belief that he had been especially chosen by God for good works. He was landed at Béjaïa (Bougie) in present-day Algeria and from there began his long trek home preaching all the time along the way.

He continued to condemn wine drinking and music (breaking wine jars and musical instruments), the mixing of the sexes in public and the veiling of men and not women. He used the steps of mosques and schools as his pulpit and caused general offence where ever he went. Scholars and lawyers who had been leading a quiet life were particularly offended and he was thrown out of town after town. In 1119 he reached Bejara near Fez where he finally began to recruit a small band of followers including one ‘Abd al-Mun’im who became his chief lieutenant and eventually the first caliph of the Almohad Empire. Together they left for Fez and Marrakesh, the capital of the Almoravid Empire, where he confronted the caliph ‘Ali ibn Yusuf himself whom he accused of heresy. He heedlessly criticized the ruler for wearing the veil (‘I can only see women here’ he is reported to have said). On meeting a sister of the ruler unveiled in the street he criticized her violently. Quite remarkably he continued to rail against *bid’a* in the country, claiming that he was only a scholar seeking reform. He was not believed and was accused by the ‘*ulama*’ of being an impious innovator and of fomenting rebellion and was sentenced to death. The caliph, surprisingly, saved him and let him off with a flogging and expulsion, thus allowing him to continue to preach against the Almoravids and eventually to bring about their downfall.

Ibn Tumart took refuge with his own people in the Atlas Mountains living in a cave, perhaps following the example set by the Prophet Muhammad who lived for a time in his cave near Mecca in which he began to receive his first revelations. Ibn Tumart continued to preach his message of reform to the local tribesmen and his eloquence finally brought him rewards. After one sermon—and presumably after receiving inspiration—he proclaimed himself the expected Mahdi announced by God for the end of time.[19] It is not certain whether he had returned from his travels convinced he was the Mahdi or whether the devotion of the local people fed his ambition and inspired him with the idea of mahdism. His biographers tend to think he came home already with the idea of mahdism in his mind.

At first Ibn Tumart prohibited the shedding of blood as part of his ideology although it was difficult to restrain the desire of his followers for bloody battle. Once he had claimed to be the Mahdi he proclaimed jihad and war and bloodshed against the Almoravids—for those who fell would be martyrs. As the orientalist Ignaz Goldziher wrote, ‘[i]t is the sunna (tradition) to shed the blood of the enemy in God’s service. War is the function of the Mahdi’.[20] War against the Almoravids would be a war of the good against the wicked and his new empire would be founded on truth and the shari’a.

He claimed to be the sole and infallible interpreter of the Qur’an and the tradition. This placed him in absolute confrontation with the Almoravids, for he asserted that to doubt or oppose him was to resist

God's will. They naturally did resist his claims, which to them were false and self-delusional. Ibn Tumart himself had clearly reached the stage of total self-assurance, which led him to further action, now by force of arms rather than by preaching. It is difficult to imagine the mental crisis he experienced that enabled him to reach such a conclusion—a kind of religious intoxication or madness. His convictions would have been condemned out of hand by the orthodox '*ulama*'.

He took refuge in the High Atlas—a *hijra* (migration like that of the Prophet) from where he urged his growing band of followers to rebel against the Almoravid state and force them to purify their religious observance. During this time he issued instructions to his troops on how to fight and how to behave. Six tribes joined him (probably on the promise of booty) and they commenced guerrilla war in the mountains. Another of his lieutenants, al-Bashir, was a good organizer of the troops and enforced a strict and very heavy-handed discipline among the tribesmen. He executed all those suspected of being disloyal.

They were eventually forced into battle in 1130 against the Almoravids near Marrakesh. It was a disastrous defeat for Ibn Tumart's forces; 12,000 were said to have been killed, and the survivors only escaped because of torrential rain. A few months later Ibn Tumart died. He had, however, inspired an organization which survived him. 'Abd al-Mun'im became *amir* and later first caliph of the Almohad dynasty, which conquered Marrakesh in 1157 and ruled Morocco and Andalusia until 1269.

Ibn Tumart's life typifies that of the Islamic leader and reformer. We have seen that he had the determined character of one who was never deterred by opposition or setbacks. He had a strong message of reform which he never tired of preaching. He was convinced enough to proclaim himself Mahdi and through efficient organization left a movement that outlasted his death. The regime that survived him was based on his principles.

NOTES

1. Most of the information for this section can be found in Muhammad al-Tabari's *The History of al-Tabari*. Vol. 36, 'The revolt of the Zanj' trans. by D. Waines (New York, 1991) and in A. Popovic, *The Revolt of African Slaves in Iraq* (Princeton, 1999).
2. Arab writers were rather contemptuous of the black slaves calling them 'stupid, cheerful, thieves, speaking no Arabic and the cheapest slaves on the market'.

3. Centuries later Saddam Husain ordered the draining of the marshes as punishment for the Shi'a uprising in 1991. By building canals and dykes some 90% of the wetlands were lost and a wasteland of scorched earth left behind. All the reeds (which had been used by the marsh Arabs to build their accommodation) died, and all species of fauna vanished. After Saddam's fall great efforts have been made to restore the marshes with some success, although these efforts have been hindered by drought and the building of great dams upstream in Turkey.
4. The word *hijra* has both a historical and existential significance. Muhammad's migration marked a new beginning and a break with the past. For Muslims *hijra* generally means conversion, a decision to make a new start in life and a radical break from the past.
5. They rejected anyone nominated in their view illegally as caliph and adopted as their war cry—*la hukma illa lillahi*, meaning anyone could become caliph and we are all equal.
6. I first delivered a version of this chapter at a conference in Bahrain. The authorities felt the material was too sensitive for publication.
7. It is difficult to grasp why he took this title as it put him right beyond the bounds of orthodox Islam. It is said that some local tribes accepted him as a prophet. There are occasionally times when such leaders are carried away by their own claims and go further than they can justify.
8. Tabari, vol. 36, p. 32.
9. Ibid., p. 32.
10. Ibid., p. 34.
11. A Shi'a sect that flourished in Bahrain from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. It too had leaders who claimed divine guidance.
12. Tabari, ibid., p. 32.
13. One can imagine him rather like the speaker at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London, earnestly addressing no one.
14. This method of transmitting a message at second hand is very unusual if not unique.
15. So the policy of Islamic State in Iraq was not unprecedented.
16. Al-Tabari, op.cit., p. 48.
17. 'Abdallah ibn Yasin was a Berber preacher who followed a very strict form of Islam, banning such things as wine and music. His persuasive preaching gained many followers, in particular Yahya ibn 'Umar who was a practical man who established an army. Later after 'Abdallah's death the Almoravid regime was founded on his principles that spread through Morocco and Spain.
18. Some saw al-Ghazali as a *mujaddid* himself, although he never claimed to be one or preached actively in his own cause. He did undergo a spiritual

crisis and, obviously after an internal struggle, abandoned his career for an ascetic lifestyle, wandering around as a poor *sufi*. He seems to have had a similar inspiration to that of an active leader but it was not in his nature to attempt to become one.

19. A man guided by God and sent by Him to restore the rule of justice which would come before the end of the world.
20. I. Goldziher, *Le livre d'Ibn Toumert,* p. 100.

CHAPTER 5

Leaders and State Formation

1 IBN ʻABD AL-WAHHAB

It is difficult to establish all the relevant historical facts surrounding the beginning of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia in the early eighteenth century and which eventually led to the establishment of the Saudi state. In several respects it is similar to other revival movements but it also has its own features. It was the first of a number of such movements in 'modern' times and it carried on the traditions of earlier ones. Two aspects of the historical background to the Wahhabi[1] movement should be underlined. One is the low state to which religious observance had sunk among the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula by the beginning of the eighteenth century. 'Popular' practices had crept in and much weight was given to the power of 'holy' trees and the tombs of saints[2] (even the tomb of Muhammad in Medina) and to various other superstitions and talismans. Orthodox Muslim scholars and others would condemn such beliefs as *shirk* (polytheism) or *bid'a* (heresy) which besmirch the pure monotheism of Islam. It seems that in the Arabia of the time many of the ordinary people followed a way of life they felt comfortable with and considered an acceptable way to practise Islam. In Wahhabi eyes, however, this period is termed the time of *jahiliya* (ignorance)—also the term for the period before the appearance of Muhammad.

The other aspect concerns the continuation of the tradition of learning in the towns of the peninsula. This was quite remarkable given the splintered political system of the area. A number of minor *amirs* controlled

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various towns and there was continual interurban and intertribal feuding. The Ottomans ruled the Hijaz with its holy cities, Yemen and the eastern coast. Central Najd was too remote to be controlled by them. Despite the unsettled political situation religious learning in the towns had not been allowed to wither. Would-be scholars travelled to Medina, Cairo or Damascus to receive training from the '*ulama*' which they took back to put into practice in their home towns. Such scholars might become *qadi* (judge) to the local *amir* who appointed or dismissed them. They were concerned about maintaining a living tradition of religious learning in central Arabia and if there was *jahiliya* it was not among them.

Qadis of some repute had held office in towns such as Riyadh and Dar'iya. They followed various schools of Islamic thought including that of Ibn Taimiya, who had singled out various instances of *bid'a* and had spent his life trying to eradicate them. He was a fourteenth-century scholar who taught that the purpose of human life was obedience to God's will and that the function of a ruler was to impose on society a just law derived from God's commands. In his view good government derived from an alliance between *amirs* and the '*ulama*'—the principle Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab fostered later.

Two *qadis* in Arabia from the seventeenth century are known to have been moved to condemn in writing what they perceived as corruption around them. They owed their position to their local *amir* who was himself subject to various pressures and therefore limited in his ability to support them—if he had so wished—when they expressed dissatisfaction with the moral and religious practices of the people.

This was the tradition from which Muhammad Ibn 'Abd-al-Wahhab emerged. His grandfather himself did not leave Najd but studied under a local scholar who had been trained in Damascus. He became chief *mufti* of Najd and *qadi* of 'Uyaina—a town no longer in existence. His son 'Abd al-Wahhab (servant of the generous one) studied with him and succeeded him in 1713. He was dismissed by the *amir* in 1727 and moved to Hurailima where he died in 1740.

Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was born in 1703 and in the family tradition studied with his brother under his father. He showed his mettle early. He was clearly a precocious student of noticeably rigid opinions. He quarrelled with both his father and brother. He undertook the pilgrimage at the age of 12. When he came back home he began to take note of both what he thought were false religious practices and the constant feuding between the tribes of the area, all of which he was convinced were against the true spirit of Islam. He began, shall we say bravely, to speak out against them but comparatively still a youth roused little reaction. He had found a cause but not yet the right circumstances.

The next few years were the most vital and formative in his career. He left his father in Najd to go to Medina where he established relationships with influential teachers which helped to strengthen his convictions. After a long period of meditation[3] (and possibly after passing through an emotional crisis), he eventually returned to Najd where he began openly to preach his message of reform—in the face of considerable opposition. His studies—especially of the ideas of Ibn Taimiya—had left their mark on him.

This then was the milieu from which Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab emerged as an inspired *imam* or *mujaddid*.[4] Such new leaders are often—as we saw in the case of the *Sahib al-Zanj*—boosted in their self-awareness by prophetic dreams, visions or inner voices. Unfortunately we have no record that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab experienced any of these. It is perhaps significant, though, that one of the *hadiths* (traditions) that he mentions as being particularly influential to his thinking is prophetic: he seems to have taken it as a confirmation of his own role. The tradition states that ‘[i]f God desires good for his servant He will use him. They said: How will He use him? He said: He will grant him success in a righteous undertaking before his death’.[5] Later, when trying to persuade Muhammad ibn Saud to join him he prophesied with an idea of his own future: ‘I bring you good news of glory and power. Whoever holds to and works by the words of the unity of God will rule through them lands and men.’[6]

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab moved in due course to Basra where he continued to study and mix with teachers and students of different legal schools and *sufi* orders. While in Basra his conviction of the rightness of his ideas must have strengthened for he felt compelled to preach there against the current religious practices. He now had sufficient confidence in himself to preach even in the most hostile circumstances. But he gained no support and he was physically ejected from the town. Those to whom he preached were unconvinced by his message and by his call for reform. Such a rebuff might have discouraged a man less sure of his mission.

He had to face another crisis on his path from Basra to al-Zubair south of the town. He was walking alone, barefoot, through the desert and in the midday sun he collapsed from heat and thirst. According to the sources he was in his death throes (*mushrif ‘ala’l-halak*), when a passing traveller rescued him. Such traumatic experiences may have one of two effects on strongly religious personalities. They are either taken as a warning to desist from further action (and possibly retire to a life of meditation) or they serve to strengthen the individual's conviction (often after a period of retreat—*hijra*) that he is a man chosen and saved by God. In Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab's case, on his recovery, he returned to Najd to spend some months in retirement, largely because of disagreements with his father, until on the latter's death in 1740 he began his open campaign of reform which only ended with his own death in 1792.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab had followed the path of the new leader. A part of his identity crisis was concerned with the relationship with his father. This was of crucial importance to the development both of his character and of his theological views. He quarrelled openly with his father, yet ultimately submitted to his will. His father was of a much less combative nature than his son and although he condemned corruption in writing he was not prepared to face public trouble or opposition caused by himself or his son. (Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab's brother was of a similar character to their father and wrote a tract against his brother's preaching.) Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab respected his father's prohibition—unwillingly—and so, unable to speak out, left for the period of his sojourn in Medina and Basra. On his return to Hurailima he offered classes open to all those who he believed were in need of ‘spiritual comfort in the slough of despair, into which the Arab had sunk through years of ignorance and neglect. Prayers were neglected and perfunctory, the giving of alms no longer obligatory'.[7] St John Philby, the well-known Arabophile and desert traveller, comments rather nicely: ‘In Huraimila ‘Abdal-Wahhab insisted on the literal application of the law. People approved in principle the doctrine of his preaching but few were enthusiastic about its literal application to their private and public lives.'[8] He immediately began once again—now aged 35—to voice those views which annoyed his father. According to the sources ‘there arose between them words (*kalam*—controversy)' and once again he fell silent. To do so when having such a compulsion to speak shows a very impressive filial obedience. In this period of silence he probably composed his basic text, *Kitab al-tawhid* (Book of the Unity [of God]). As soon as ‘Abd al-Wahhab died his son began to openly preach his message.

This attitude of extreme respect and obedience towards his father was reflected in his attitude towards God and in the obedience he demanded of others towards his message. Obedience to God (‘*ibada*) is of the first importance and the believer's principal duty is to please Him by good works, regular prayer and performance of religious duties. There must be total service to Him in an attitude of love, trust, fear and hope. Perfect love of God is achieved in the most humble submission to Him.

Complete submission and obedience imply an unquestioning attitude on the part of the believer. This applies totally to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. Once convinced of the truth of his message, he demanded the total obedience of his followers to it and to him. His message is austere, laying stress on the avoidance of forbidden things and the restriction of human activities to those specifically sanctioned in the Qur’an. The future Wahhabi state pushed to the extreme the duty to obey; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab declared ‘We teach complete obedience to the *imamate* (his person and the state)’.[9]

His identity crisis is hard to assess due to lack of information. From his early attempts to preach, through the long periods of study, to the proclamation of his *da’wa* (mission) there was a steady growth of conviction, not an instant conversion. From an early age he was not afraid to preach, to suffer persecution and confront opposition. Problems with his father he transmuted into obedience to God and in his periods of silence and retirement he came to terms with his future task. His closeness to death in the desert and recovery must have strengthened his self-belief.

The new *mujaddid* feels estranged from the ways into which his society has settled. He must articulate that which he feels must be changed and must offer a convincing replacement ideology. He must convince all society to accept his ideas. He identifies himself with an image of society as he feels it should be, not as it is. In the Arabia where Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab appeared there seems among some to have been at least a vague unease with prevailing religious practices. He wanted to remedy the situation by trying to persuade his listeners that they needed to change their lifestyles. He had to implant new ideas in their minds. He used the power of words in his preaching to sway men—not in an emotional style, but with calm logical oratory, with much repetition, usually presenting men with dire alternatives—towards a new life following him or hell and punishment.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab must have had a deep impact on his listeners, with his stress on the necessity of observing the *shari’a* to the letter and of abandoning the forbidden pain of dire on punishment. He painted vivid pictures of hell and the day of judgement and at the same time he stressed that the sins of the worst backslider could be effaced by good works. A believer’s sincerity would be tested on the last day. His message was not dialectical or polemical, his style not emotional, but brief, threatening, to the point and repetitive. His words were those of a man deeply convinced that what he believed in was correct. His own certainty was transmitted to his hearers. He noted the following of himself: ‘I put my beliefs to certain idolaters, saying “The whole of worship belongs to God alone”, whereon they would be left amazed and speechless.’[10] Those who knew him added that he ‘aroused great reverence’ and that they had ‘heard of no-one more tender and less pompous towards those seeking knowledge, questioning him or in need’.[11] What seemed to be lacking in his message and in the subsequent Saudi society was joy.

Once a movement is under way, certain techniques may be employed to maintain the following and strengthen faith. A bond is established between the leader and his faithful followers which is kept intact by regular meetings and preaching. Religious ritual is duly observed—such as the repetition of the chanting of formulae and the name of God, with the rhythmic use of drums to instil fervour. When Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab had gained followers he stressed the advantages of belonging to the new community and he insisted that only those inside it would be saved. The first duty of his followers was to wage a *jihad*[12] against unrepentant Muslims in order to make the word of God reign everywhere. The *jihad* was one method of keeping and expanding his following, as were meetings in a *majlis* (gathering) and the public exposure of backsliders. The believer was continuously exposed to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s example and exhortation and to public pressure. As he wrote in his ‘*aqida* (creed), ‘[p]rayers are true adoration. Fulfil your vows and dread the day of which the evils have been foretold’. It was told of him that ‘[h]is tongue rarely abstained from saying *subhanahu* (glory be to God). People waiting for him would hear him coming saying *al-hamdu lillah* (praise be to God) and so on’.[13]

Most Islamic revival movements have had similar messages, although different aspects of it have been stressed depending on the character of the leader and of the situation. Some have been more extreme than others, with messianic and apocalyptic elements. Wahhabism was strictly orthodox. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab made no special claims for himself. His message was that Islam had been corrupted and a return to the pristine conditions of the early Islamic community was necessary. His ideas came directly from earlier scholars who had written about the need for Muslim renewal but had made no attempt to inspire a movement. They taught that the end of all action is to serve God. Faith is not just religious observance but a whole system of moral convictions based on sincerity in the service of God. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab taught that four things are necessary for the good Muslim: a knowledge and understanding of God, the prophet and faith; action stemming from this knowledge; the profession of faith; and patience in carrying out the faith. The greatest factor in all this is the oneness of God (*tawhid*); the greatest sin is *shirk* (idolatry).

It is the prohibitions and restrictions in Wahhabism that seem most obvious to the outsider, yet Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab insisted that social obligations stem solely from the religious practices which God has explicitly prescribed. Nothing can lawfully be forbidden other than practices forbidden by God in the Qur’an and *sunna* (the established practices of the Prophet). Everything considered innovative (*bid’a*) was thus prohibited, including music, gold ornaments, laughing, silk, tobacco, alcohol and the worship of trees, stones and saints’ tombs. The reward for this good and obedient life? He said: ‘The elect will see God in paradise as one sees the full moon.’

From Ibn Taimiya he most significantly adopted the notion that religion and state are indissolubly linked. He taught that without the power of the state, religion is in danger, and without religion and the restrictions of revealed law, the state can become a tyrannical organization. The duty of the state is to ensure the rule of *tawhid* and to build a society devoted to the service of God. The mission of the *imam* (ruler in this case) is to ensure respect for the orders and prohibitions that govern various areas of the life of the society and to ensure the solidarity of the community (state) in the face of opposition from outside.

The routinization of a movement is usually the final stage of its development. The *mujaddid* is the messenger who may be unconcerned with the practical tasks of administering a state, organizing an army (although we have seen that ‘Ali ibn Muhammad of the Zanj did this), collecting taxes and putting the ideas he propagates into practice. Thus, in coming to terms with political reality and pressures, the religious leader can develop into a different type or else may enter into an alliance with a more political man and leader (as with Ibn Tumart) to whom these practical matters may be entrusted. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab began his *da’wa* in his home town of Hurailima without political backing and soon became embroiled in the factionalism and quarrelling of the tribal peoples there. He was almost murdered by a group of slaves whose conduct he criticized. He escaped back to ‘Uyaina where he realized the need to ally himself with a strong ruler. He tried to do so with the local *amir* to whom, perhaps prematurely, he promised the rulership of ‘Najd and its Arabs’. The *amir* allowed him to preach and to destroy tombs and ‘holy’ trees. However, the ruler soon capitulated before the protests of another *amir*, the sheikh of the Banu Khalid, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab was on the move again. This time he arrived at his final resting place, the town of Dar’iya near Riyadh.

There the rulers were the Al Saud family. In 1744 Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab arrived much in need of a permanent home and to his great fortune he was welcomed by the *amir* Muhammad ibn Saud. Philby quotes Arabic sources to describe the meeting: ‘Welcome, said the prince. Welcome to a country better than your own country. You shall have all honour and support from us!’ Then did the prince take the *Sheikh*’s hand in his own, swearing loyalty to the religion of God and His Prophet, and promising to wage war in God’s cause. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab replied: ‘Be ye too assured of honour and power, for whoso believeth in the One God and works his will, he shall have the kingdom of the country and its people; for that is the divine unity.’[14]

Dar’iya was the home of the Saud family, only one of a number of often feuding clans in the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab was in need of protection and for reasons that are not entirely clear the *amir* thought that an alliance with him would help his cause. The two of them made a pact by which Muhammad ibn Saud engaged himself to wage *jihad* on behalf of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s doctrines, to observe the *shari’a* and enforce the good and forbid the evil.[15] The pact was sealed by the marriage of Muhammad ibn Saud’s son to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s daughter. The ruler became the *imam*, the man who leads the community in prayer, but was also a competent and ambitious desert warrior. The use of religion as the basis of their legitimacy differentiated the Saudis from the other clans and enabled them to expand their regime at the expense of others. At the same time Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab wrote letters to persuade fellow Muslims to enter into the field of *jihad* in order to destroy polytheism.

At home he continued to preach against anything he considered to be *shirk* and *bid’a*. Observance of a strict interpretation of Islamic *shari’a* led to the establishment of a theocratic state which began to unite previously warring tribes and which continued to exist after the deaths of both Muhammad ibn Saud and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. The latter was, therefore, an example of a *mujaddid* who established a community based on his message and who achieved complete success in that his community in alliance with a more political ruler long outlasted his death.

2 Uthman dan Fodio

Islam first penetrated into northern Nigeria—Hausaland—in the fourteenth century. By the seventeenth century it existed alongside the continuing observances of traditional local practices. The population of the large savannah lands was ethnic Hausa-Fulani people that today make up some 32% of the total Nigerian population. Slowly, local Islamic scholars trained in Islamic sciences began to develop influenced by scholars who travelled in from other parts of the Muslim world. By the end of the eighteenth century some of them began to criticize the continuing observance of traditional rituals and practices alongside an imperfect observance of Islamic law and ritual.

Into this community Uthman Dan Fodio was born in 1754.[16] It was a Fulani Muslim world whose educated members followed the Maliki law school and the Qadiri *sufi* sect. His father was a teacher and *imam* of the local community and taught the young boy to read and to memorize the Qur'an. He must have shown some unusual qualities from early on as it is reported that his parents firmly believed that their son had supernatural powers and control over the spirits (*jinn*—in Muslim belief supernatural spirits but also part of folk belief in more primitive societies). Perhaps local storytellers told stories of the *jinn*, but it is known that stories of the Prophet were also very popular. From an early age the figure of Muhammad must have been familiar to the boy. He certainly was devoted to him later in his life.

Uthman continued his education among the local scholars, some of whom knew and possibly conversed in Arabic. He was particularly influenced by one scholar, Jibril ibn 'Umar, a North African who had travelled across the deserts to reach the area. He had studied in Hijaz and was a zealous man who taught absolute obedience to the *shari'a*. Uthman was more moderate but sought to live up to the highest ideals of Islam. He tried at this time to make the pilgrimage and set off but his father summoned him back. To his deep regret he was never able to make the *hajj*. As he grew older and deepened his learning, his piety, intellect and charisma began to attract followers and he emerged as the leader of a group of young scholars.

He decided to leave his home base and set off as an itinerant preacher with a growing band of supporters. He was a fine, eloquent and respected teacher unafraid to speak his mind with the confidence of conviction behind him and he drew men and women to his side. He reached the court of one local king who was a quasi-Muslim and on entering the place was not afraid to demand the king's total allegiance to Islam. He was unafraid, he said, as he knew the hand of God was protecting him. In fact the king accepted his demands.

In addition to his preaching he would from time to time make formal retreats—once for as long as a year—into the desert to meditate. The need for occasional solitude, after constant exposure to crowds, seems to have been common to many preachers. During the period 1789–1804 he and his companions experienced a common result of such isolation and meditation—a state of heightened awareness, inspiration and commitment. During these periods he (and his companions) experienced mental and emotional excitement—most likely as a result of their Qadiri *sufi* training. Such experiences combined with visions and revelations are common in consolidating the beliefs of a leader and in convincing his followers.

With the existence of a number of rival Hausa rulers in northern Nigeria it was likely that Uthman's growing reputation as a mobilizer of men would spread and cause some apprehension. He moved out of the territory of one ruler, Yunfa of Gobir, who was not a convinced Muslim and who turned against Uthman and informed his fellow Hausa rulers of the dangers he saw in the preacher and in the possibility of a *jihad*. Uthman had to flee into the grasslands and turned for help to local Fulani nomads. There he was elected leader (*amir al-mu'minin*—commander of the believers) of a *jihad* to fight his opponents. He was eventually to head a substantial movement with an armed force. Mervyn Hiskett writes that the causes of the *jihad* are not at all clear but were mainly a combination of a growing Islamic awareness—prompted no doubt by Uthman's preaching—and political and social discontent, resentment against slavery and tensions between the nomads and peasants—classical causes of social discontent.

Uthman led the *jihad* and called on the leaders of the various communities to support the establishment of an Islamic state in the region. Apart from reminding them of their duty to practise the observances of Islam faithfully, he concentrated their thoughts to the warning that the appearance of the *mahdi* was nigh. The rising began in Hausaland and the *jihad* was fought against Yunfa of Gobir. The Hausa fighters and cavalry formed a strong army and after a few years Uthman was in command of a large Fulani empire, the largest state south of the Sahara. Uthman's brother and son took over the running of the empire while he retired to work to establish the new state on the basis of the *shari'a*. He was nominally Sultan of the new federal theocratic state of Sokoto although he never used the title preferring to remain *amir al-mu'minin*. His son succeeded him in 1815. Nothing could have been achieved without the inspiration of his father.

Uthman Dan Fodio did not start out with the intention of founding a state but in the circumstances of the times that was the outcome of his mission. It was eventually in an autonomous state that his message of reform could be best achieved. From the beginning of his mission he wanted those around him to be better Muslims and how he defined that state was influenced by those who taught him, particularly Jibril ibn ‘Umar, who had been exposed to Wahhabi doctrines. Because of his nature, however, he preached a more moderate version that did not exclude a form of *sufism*. He stressed more his love for the Prophet than the need for absolute obedience to a rather stern God.

> I swear by the Merciful God, nothing graces me Save my desire to love the Prophet Muhammad.[17]

Uthman wrote moving poems of love for Muhammad that enabled him to strengthen his hold over the congregations that listened to him. But he insisted that obedience to the *shari'a* was essential for any true believer. ‘He who doeth not what God has commanded and keeps not far from what God has forbidden, in truth he shall fall into the fire.’ The rewards for those who obeyed were great: entry to paradise where ‘[s]treams shall flow beneath them. They shall have clothes and wings of gold … there shall be women for them, pleasant to look at.’[18] He preached that the simple regime of s*ufism* was suitable for his fellowmen and that the extremes of *dhikr* (the essential *sufi* ritual as an attempt to achieve union with God) should be left to the adepts. In his later years he was concerned with maintaining the ideals of Islamic justice among his sometimes wayward flock who kept traditional practices alive and would wander away in search of plunder. He accused those who left him of being infidels.

From the earliest age Uthman had impressed his parents and companions with his strong personality—a young boy seemingly destined for a notable life. Their belief that he had powers to control *jinn* is both strange and significant. Such a belief in a fairly primitive society must have been thought a power for good[19] over malignant spirits. Moreover, he proved himself to be a precocious scholar, presumably absorbing to the limit everything that his father was capable of teaching him. He must also presumably have inherited some of his gentleness and moderation from his father. And yet to be an effective leader one must have a certain amount of steel in one's soul and Uthman did harden his heart against those he considered intransigent or infidel. He was generally admired for his gentleness and moderation and yet he was convinced that he had been selected to play a certain role in his society. His conviction derived from a series of visions in which he came face to face with the Prophet Muhammad and with ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the twelfth-century Baghdadi *sufi*. For Uthman such experiences ‘placed a cloak of divine favour over him’ and assured him that his calling really came from God.

During his retreats into the desert to meditate and under circumstances of deprivation he was able to experience the ultimate vision of being taken before the throne of God. Each vision strengthened his self-belief and ‘accompanied his translation from peaceful preacher to militant leader of a reformist community. He believed himself divinely appointed to carry the Sword of Truth if necessary in holy war’.[20]

He was convinced he was a *mujaddid* but he never claimed to be the *mahdi*. He announced in ‘John the Baptist’-like terms: ‘By God, I swear that I am not the awaited *mahdi* But I am the one who comes to give clear tidings about the *mahdi*.’[21] He believed in the imminent end of time and that he had to prepare for this event. His personality and convictions convinced others of his sincerity and of being God’s chosen one. He is still remembered as such today in Nigeria.

3 The Sanusiya

We can now return to Libya (the origin of this book) to consider the next leader who was born in 1787 near al-Mustaghanim to the east of Oran on the coast of Algeria. His life was to be closely connected, however, with another part of North Africa. Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sanusi is identified with Cyrenaica in present-day Libya. He was born into a distinguished family of scholars—men and more unusually women—of sharifian or Idrisid descent, that is those who traced their family line back to the Prophet with many hundreds of families. His birthday coincided with that of the Prophet, which gave an added aura of prestige and piety. He grew up to be of imposing appearance and of great height. Like other leaders of his type he was an eloquent speaker (although see later for certain differences) and unafraid to speak his mind. Those who knew him considered him a wise, religious personality who inspired people to accept him as leader and guide in spiritual and temporal matters.

The young boy was taught the Qur’an and Islamic sciences by his cousin and he soon showed himself to be a good scholar. He lost his father early and he later wrote that in life one needed to know both a physical and spiritual father and that a spiritual father was more important. It happened then that he would later seek such a person in the shape of the leader of a *sufi* sect. His father had been a scholar and also an excellent horseman and shot. His whole family was trained in *furusiya* (horsemanship).[22] He was athletic as were Shamil in the Caucasus and ‘Abd al-Qadir in Algeria. (King Idris of Libya, the grandson of al-Sanusi, said that the ‘[b]ody must be strengthened by a healthy and abstemious life, so that it becomes a worthy dwelling place for the soul’.[23])

It was expected that Muhammad should go on to study further and he was fortunate to be living close to one of the great centres of Islamic learning, Fez in Morocco, where the Qarawiyin university (*madrasa*) mosque is situated. Some 20 scholars are said to have trained him there and he fell under the influence of two *sufi* sects: the Shadhiliya, which stressed strict adherence to the *shari'a* and a sober form of *sufism*, and the Tijaniya, which firmly placed *sufism* within Islamic law and insisted that its members should follow the example of the Prophet in all matters. This became one of the central tenets of al-Sanusi’s teaching and he was deeply influenced by Ahmad al-Tijani, the founder of the Tijaniya and a widely venerated *sufi* leader, who was teaching at the Qarawiyin during al-Sanusi’s time there.[24]

In search of further knowledge he followed the well-worn path of Muslim scholars to Cairo and to Hijaz. It is said that he was rather disappointed with the scholars he encountered in Cairo. He was by now aged about 39, no longer young and inexperienced. He felt he did not receive the consideration he expected and it seems the established ‘*ulama*’ there were offended by his outright views, which contradicted their own. He was not as was, for example, Ibn Tumart, a controversial preacher and crowd-rouser but he expressed his views—brought from the far West—openly. He was publicly denounced as an innovator and a *fatwa* (legal opinion) was issued against him by the ‘*ulama*’ of the Azhar mosque in Cairo. It is interesting to quote from this as it shows exactly what they were afraid of and what they thought of his unorthodox views. There is an immediacy here that is rarely found in sources for the lives of other unorthodox leaders.

The *fatwa* criticized al-Sanusi’s absence from the community prayers which was ‘an abandonment of the commandments of God. It is an act of impiety, of immorality. It is to be noted that his interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna is legal. But he only acts in that manner in order to gain the confidence of the people and arrange illicit activities, such as the abandonment of the four orthodox rites[25] and the acceptance without intermediaries of the commandments of the Book and the Sunna. These facts constitute the greatest proof of the ignorance of this sheikh as well as his total blindness to the truth. … Deviation from these four rites shows the desire to live in error. He whose commands are in opposition to these rites is ignorant and a rebel. It is obligatory to belong to one of the four orthodox sects. To recommend the path of the Sufis, as understood by the people with whom we are concerned, is to transgress, to deviate from the general, legal path'. The Sanusi prayers are 'of the devil's influence; he is a "dog among dogs"—a pervert among perverts- and his Sufi professions are false'. 'And if they (the Sanusis) do not depart, let us force them to leave our territory in order that believers may be protected against their evil conduct and may live in peace and prosperity, in sha' Allah.'[26] 'All governors and holders of extended powers by virtue of divine grace are obliged to expel such individuals and to prevent them from spreading their false doctrines.'

Such condemnation clearly shows the effect that al-Sanusi must have had in Cairo. The '*ulama*' were frightened of the threat he posed to their own authority. Albert Hourani wrote that the '*ulama*' in Muslim society always 'tried to hold themselves apart from both government and society, preserving the sense of a divinely guided community, persisting through time and not linked with the interests of rulers or the caprice of popular feeling'.[27] In Cairo the '*ulama*' felt they had to rid themselves of al-Sanusi, who was popularizing an alternative teaching to theirs and threatened their authority. They had no doubts about their own knowledge and position. 'Our Ulema … have a perfect knowledge of all (Maliki) texts and advance them in a clear manner.'[28] Al-Sanusi was obliged to leave Egypt, though unshaken in his beliefs; he made his way to Hijaz.

In Mecca he studied with new scholars the works of earlier thinkers. One of these latter was Ibn Taimiya whose ideas had earlier influenced Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. It was quite common for Muslim thinkers to ascribe their society's problems to a falling away from the standards set by the Prophet. Ibn Taimiya laid the blame for some of the faults he saw on *sufi* practices and he rejected the mystical influences of Islam. The austere Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab followed him in this but al-Sanusi could not agree to reject *sufism*. Like al-Ghazali (1058–1111) he favoured a middle path between the '*ulama*' and the *Sufis* while rejecting the extreme practices of some mystics.

In Hijaz he preached among the Bedouin outside the towns who were traditionally feared as untutored Muslims and considered dangerous by town dwellers.[29] He gained a certain influence among them. His moderate yet austere version of *sufism* appealed to them as they apparently did not favour the more ecstatic practices of the *sufis*. His activities, however, once again upset the local scholars—now in Mecca—who accused him of debasing Islam to the level of robbers and brigands. Professor Ziadeh in his work *Sanusiyah* rather dismisses the Meccan '*ulama*': 'This great success, the inflexibility of as-Sanusi and the frankness of his views aroused the hostility of the pseudo-"*ulama*" who were dwarfed by his personality.'[30]

In 1840 he was on his way once again and left Mecca together with a number of his students. They made their way through North Africa and Cyrenaica in the east of present-day Libya. It is quite fortuitous that he ended up there—he was not welcome at home in Morocco, the French were in Algeria and the Ottomans had a presence in Tripoli. Egypt and Hijaz had been tried and found inhospitable. Cyrenaica was a political vacuum. In Benghazi the heads of some of the tribes together with prominent men of the town approached him with a request to stay among them. He willingly accepted and Cyrenaica and its desert hinterland soon became the home of the new movement that would become known as the Sanusiya.

Evans-Pritchard and other scholars have conducted a study of how and why the Sanusiya was able to fit so well alongside the tribal structure and how it was able to quickly spread so widely. In Libya at the time there were some 140 tribal networks and were a particularly strong feature in Cyrenaica. The structures ranged from the basic family unit to larger tribal federations. Each person owed allegiance to his tribe and would be ready to fight for it. The Sanusi arose among an established social structure and its success depended on building on and adapting the tribal organization. Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Sanusi was a charismatic personality who entered their lives and was able to persuade the tribes to follow him. He had the advantage of coming from outside Cyrenaica and was not, therefore, identified to any one particular tribe.

He suffered a serious illness at this period in his life and seemed to pass through some kind of crisis. He had to spend a long time resting and recovering. However, once he came through he emerged stronger and he started on a round of visits to tribal leaders, making contacts and preaching his mission. He sent messages to others, successfully encouraging them to accept him. In addition he visited desert oases in order to establish there a *zawiya* (*sufi* lodge) where they were requested. These *zawiyas* became the foundation of the Sanusi movement and were a site for a mosque, accommodation, teaching and agricultural facilities. (The first *zawiya* was built in al-Baida in Cyrenaica in 1843.)[31] He wanted to organize the Sanusiya alongside yet separate from the tribal system and hoped in so doing to put an end to traditional feuding and rivalries. The relative austerity of the Sanusis attracted the Bedouin suiting as it did their character and arduous way of life.

The message that al-Sanusi preached was a relatively moderate one and included some of the elements preached by other leaders. He believed that the only cure for the decline in society was to return to the days and example of the Prophet. He was a *sufi* who preferred quiet, contemplative mysticism to the gyrations and chanting of other orders. He criticized those *sufis* who claimed to have reached a Godlike perfection. He believed that there were many paths to God and asserted that no one could claim to know the ultimate truth. He had a simple and reformist vision of Islam and accepted the Qur'an and the *sunna* as guides while rejecting what he thought were the over-rigorous demands of the four law schools. He called for a renewal of Islamic theology that would keep a free interpretation of the *shari'a* alive.

He liked to go into a *khalwa* (a retreat and seclusion) for periods of meditation and would sometimes return after having had dreams and visions of the Prophet who inspired him with new messages. He passed these on to his followers but disliked addressing very large crowds. He would limit his audiences to 30 or 40 and sometimes only allow even smaller groups into his tent. This accorded with his plan to begin by influencing a few who would gradually expand across the area. He was a patient man and taught that intolerance and dispute led nowhere. 'As to rebellion and dispute, no good comes out of them.' God said: 'Do not dispute or you will fail and be *dispersed*; be patient.'[32] (Al-Sanusi was referring to the traditions of intertribal feuding.) He saw it as his mission to encourage an evolutionary process rather than a rebellion or *jihad*. In fact he did not preach *jihad*[33] except that of the personal process of self-purification. He stressed the need for austerity and he tried to build up his community through education, physical work, self-reliance and a dependence on local resources—all in all a kind of Tolstoyan vision of how society should exist and develop.

Al-Sanusi was principally a teacher, an organizer of great ability and a scholar. He founded and led an order that spread throughout the Libyan desert and into other parts of Central Africa. We have mentioned the routinization of charisma in the movements of revival leaders usually by a lieutenant or successor—with the Sanusiya it was the founder himself who consciously set up the organization. At its heart were the *zawiyas*, each with its head and sets of rules. There was no music or dancing, no alcohol, tobacco or snuff, and dressing and eating had to be according to the *shari'a*. Members were expected to work for a living and there was no voluntary poverty.

Al-Sanusi was a leader of a revival movement who gained the respect of his followers through his intellectual and spiritual superiority, his moral integrity and eloquence. Those who knew him commented on his extraordinary spiritual powers. His charisma came from his learning and command of language. He was not a military resistance leader. In fact he spent only 10 years in Cyrenaica leading his movement and 20 in the Hijaz where he preferred to study and to write.

He never claimed the title of *mahdi* but to the surprise of some he named one of his sons Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Sanusi. He said that in a vision the Prophet had told him to marry a certain woman who would give him two sons who would be great and glorious. He did and she did, and once again the Prophet appeared and commanded al-Sanusi to name his son Muhammad al-Mahdi. He complied and told the mother that 'I ask God that he will be the expected *mahdi*'.[34] However, it seems that Muhammad al-Mahdi never considered himself to be the expected one.

Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi was an example of a Muslim leader who was convinced that he had been given a mission in life. He did develop a significant position in society but his was more a quietist nature than some of the more dynamic leaders. He was a scholar with a very thorough training, yet he felt he needed he had to do more than confine himself to his books. Through his personality he was able to attract followers who accepted his call to a lead a life of strict Islamic observance. Unlike Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab who made the same call, he made *sufism* the centre of his life and allowed the veneration of saints as intermediaries. He was a gifted organizer who founded a thriving *sufi* brotherhood that survived his death. As founder of the Sanusiya he was not called upon to lead a *jihad* against an invading occupier. That was to be left to a later member of his family.

Among the movements that we study the Sanusiya is unique in that three members of the family carried on after the founder's death and two of them led a *jihad*. Muhammad al-Mahdi was too young to take over on his father's death and a council of *shaikhs* took control temporarily. There was no doubt, however, that he would be fit to rule. He had been well trained as a scholar with his father in Hijaz and soon showed some organizing ability. When he took over, the Sanusiya spread to its greatest extent throughout the Sahara and he eventually felt so secure that he scornfully dismissed the Sudanese Mahdi's appeal for recognition and cooperation, calling him 'an apostate of religion and renegade'.[35] However, because of his name and because there was at the time a certain expectation that the *mahdi* was about to appear, pressure was put upon Muhammad al-Mahdi to declare himself. It was said he was a saint, that he bore the right signs and that he was a worker of miracles. Nothing would convince him to take that step. He was though an eloquent and inspired leader of great personality and some would say a greater man than his father. Nicola Ziadeh went as far as to claim that he was '[o]ne of the greatest people the latter half of the nineteenth century knew'—a great compliment but perhaps not quite justified.[36]

He moved the headquarters of the movement in 1894 to the remote oasis of Kufra, where he wanted to lead an austere life and to be left alone to worship and pray according to the practices of the Prophet. The Sanusiya had reached the peak of its expansion, keeping its cohesion largely by means of its identification with the tribes and the organization of the *zawiyas*.

Some have claimed that the move to Kufra was to escape from the attention of the Ottomans, perhaps so but it brought the Sanusi closer to the French expansionists who were moving up through the Sahara. After al-Mahdi's death in 1902 the fortunes of the Sanusi declined—uniquely so because of having eventually to confront three European invaders: the French, the Italians and the British. He was succeeded by Ahmad al-Sharif, a rather uninspiring man who served as regent for the young Idris who headed the movement from 1910 to 1969, eventually as King of a united Libya.

Italy came late to Mediterranean colonialism when there was only Libya left for occupation. It had been ignored by the British and French, who were more interested in the major prizes of Egypt and North Africa. In September 1911 Italian troops invaded the coastal areas of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. They were faced with small numbers of Ottoman troops and Sanusi irregulars. It was not a full-scale war. Although the Turks had two outstanding leaders there in Mustafa Kemal and Enver Pasha[37] they suffered some heavy losses. The Sanusi forces fought from the hills and the interior and remained an irritant to the invaders. In September 1912 hostilities ceased until the end of the war. The Italians had made little progress and remained more or less besieged in a few of the coastal towns. The

Ottomans were distracted by the outbreak of fighting in the Balkans and agreed to sign a treaty (of Ouchy) in October 1912 which left Italy in Tripolitania and Benghazi while the Ottomans retained a nominal jurisdiction.

The Sanusi had had a taste of Italian tactics and in reply developed a hit-and-run and guerrilla war against a superior enemy—it was always an unequal fight though. The Italians moved to try to occupy eastern Cyrenaica but an uprising in Tripolitania forced them to stabilize their position in Tripoli, Derna and the coast of Cyrenaica. The Sanusi continued to resist from the interior into which the Italians were loath to enter. In 1915 the Ottomans looking for a means of attacking Britain from the rear persuaded the Sanusi to raise a *jihad* against the British occupation of Egypt. The Sanusi somewhat hesitantly agreed and there followed some engagements over the frontier in Egypt.[38] The Sanusi were soon forced back across the frontier and early in 1917 fighting came to an end in Cyrenaica. Britain and the Sanusi agreed a peace treaty and Idris, who was recognized as emir of Cyrenaica in 1920, signed a modus vivendi with the Italians.

With the British still in Egypt the Italians restarted an intensive campaign against the Sanusi, now fighting under the impetus of Fascist aggression and cruelty. In 1922 Idris went into exile and led the campaign from there—Evans-Pritchard writing harshly that as usual the Sanusi family deserted their comrades and followers.[39] The Sanusi were not left leaderless, however. As so often the times brought forth the man—not a religious leader this time but a man skilled in desert fighting.

‘Umar al-Mukhtar is probably the only national hero the Libyans have. He was born in Cyrenaica in 1858; orphaned early he was adopted by a religious leader. He was educated first in the local mosque and then for eight years in the great Sanusi mosque of Jaghbub. During the wars of Sanusi expansion he was sent to fight in neighbouring Chad. There he gained much military experience, which he was able to put to use against the Italians when they invaded in 1911. He resisted in the countryside, first against the Ottomans, and then until 1931 in the absence of any other leader he led the Libyan fight against the Italians.

In other times he might have been a religious scholar and leader as he had become a teacher of the Qur’an by profession. He had, however, also become skilled in desert warfare. He led small attacks against the enemy and then faded into the desert—much as the British Long-Range Desert group was to do in the Second World War. He reorganized the Sanusi forces and the Italians came rather to admire his character and skills. They saw him as poor and religious but an outstanding leader.

The Italians under ruthless military leaders began to increase their attacks, using aircraft and heavy weapons and imprisoning their opponents in concentration camps.[40] They were able to ambush and capture Sidi ‘Umar in 1931. They then hanged him. On his capture he recited verses of peace from the Qur’an and on dying he exclaimed: ‘Verily we belong to God and to him we return.’ The Italians recognized the important role of the Sanusi in opposing them and in an attempt to eliminate their influence closed down the *zawiyas*, arrested *shaikhs* and confiscated mosque lands.

The Italians had less than a decade in which to undertake the colonization of Cyrenaica before the country was devastated by the battles of the Second World War. The population suffered badly from the fighting, emigration and famine. Idris remained the figurehead of Sanusi resistance and in 1940 he agreed with the British that Cyrenaicans would fight alongside the Allies against the Italians and the Germans. The Sanusi battalions served with distinction under British command throughout the desert war. In return, while not promising independence, Anthony Eden declared in the House of Commons that the Italians would never be permitted to return to Cyrenaica.

From the death of Muhammad al-Mahdi until 1943 the Sanusi movement had maintained its leadership in resisting attempts to destroy it. The sense of solidarity inspired by Sanusi teaching and tribal links persisted until Libya became a state under a Sanusi King.

Notes

1. Wahhabism is the commonly used term in everyday parlance but its adherents refer to themselves as ‘*muwahhidun*’—Unitarians.
2. Reverence for holy figures still exists elsewhere today, for example the tomb of Sayyida Zainab in Cairo where messages for help are left for the saint.
3. There are various stories of him wandering through Persia and elsewhere during this period but it is difficult to verify them.
4. This is in accordance with a tradition of the Prophet which states that ‘at the beginning of every hundred years Allah will send a renewer for my community’.
5. Ibn Ghannam, *Rawdat al-afkar* (Cairo, 1949), vol. 1, p. 32.
6. ‘Uthman Ibn Bishr, *‘Unwan al-majd fi ta’rikh Najd* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 18.
7. H. St J. Philby *Saudi Arabia* (London, 1955), p. 39.

8. Ibid., p. 36.
9. *Imamate* is the term given to the doctrine of leadership in Islam.
10. Ibn Ghannam, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 3.
11. Ibn Bishr, p. 83.
12. *Jihad* is a struggle both against oneself and against unbelievers. ‘The holy war (*jihad*) has ten parts; one is fighting the enemy of Islam, nine are fighting oneself.’ The greater *jihad* is that which involves every member of the Islamic community struggling against any kind of infidelity to Islam. The lesser involves armed struggle against those who slander Islam or refuse to accept it.
13. Ibid., p. 82.
14. Philby, op.cit., p. 39.
15. The well-known Islamic concept of *‘al-amr bil-ma’ruf wal-nahy ‘an al-munkar’*.
16. Much of the information here is taken from the excellent book by M. Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth; the life and times of the Shehu Usuman dan Fodio*, (N.Y., 1973).
17. Hiskett, p. 33.
18. Ibid., p. 51.
19. Hiskett, p. 65.
20. Ibid., p. 68.
21. Ibid., p. 122.
22. In Tripoli in 1957 on holidays and occasions when King Idris visited the city, groups of Sanusis would ride ostentatiously through the streets on their decorated horses. It was probably a pale imitation of real desert horsemanship and of the time when the Sanusiya were a valiant force fighting against the Italians.
23. Quoted by N. Ziadeh in *Sanusiyah* (Leiden, 1958).
24. While he was influenced by Tijani it is not certain that they actually met. One source, however, quotes al-Sanusi as saying: ‘I received instruction from him (al-Tijani) and recited the Koran under his direction.’ Ziadeh, p. 37, f.n. 11.
25. The four schools of law: Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi and Shafi’i.
26. Ziadeh, pp. 40–44.
27. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London, 1991), p. 69.
28. Ziadeh, p. 43.
29. The historian al-Jabarti (1753–1825) reported that town dwellers called the Bedouin ‘Arabs’ and that they were considered to be uncivilized and fond of plundering desert caravans.
30. Ziadeh, p. 45.
31. In the 1950s the new state of Libya had twin capitals in Benghazi and Tripoli. King Idris wanted a new third capital and he decided to build one

in al-Baida in the cool isolation of the Jabal Akhdar (Green Mountain) in Cyrenaica, much to the inconvenience of ambassadors and government officials who had to sometimes commute hundreds of miles.

32. Ziadeh, p. 96.
33. There is disagreement by the two main authors on the Sanusi. Ziadeh writes that they were active in preaching *jihad*, and Vikor that 'the contention of a *jihadi* stance is not supported' in the writing of al-Sanusi. Probably the disagreement lies in the fact the Sanusis started their *jihad* against the Italians long after Muhammad ibn 'Ali's death.
34. K. Vikor, *Sufi and Scholar on the desert edge; Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi and his brotherhood* (London, 1995) p. 155.
35. Vikor, p. 157
36. Ziadeh, p. 65.
37. Mustafa Kemal, the future general in the Gallipoli campaign and as Kemal Ataturk the president of the Turkish Republic and Enver the future leader of the Committee of Union and Progress.
38. See R. McGuirk, *The Sanusi's Little War* (London, 2007).
39. Evans-Pritchard, op.cit., p. 177.
40. Even notoriously dropping prisoners from aircraft.

CHAPTER 6

Leaders Against Colonialism

1 Shamil

Tsarist Russia started to expand her empire into Muslim territory in the eighteenth century and Soviet and post-Soviet imperial ambitions continued into the twenty-first century. Catherine the Great had greedily eyed Ottoman lands bordering her own and devised her famous scheme for the partition of the Turkish Empire. Russia fomented rebellion in Crimea, the Morea and Georgia. The Ottomans caved in and began to lose territory and in 1783 Russia annexed Crimea—the first loss of a Muslim area to a Christian power. The local Tatar population was to have a chequered future under their new rulers, both tsarist and post-revolutionary. The Russians moved south through Cossack lands and Odessa was founded on the Black Sea in 1794.

Russia was in competition with European powers for an empire, but saw no prospect of founding a maritime one. It therefore concentrated on expanding its land frontiers southwards until stopped by Britain, who jealously guarded her Indian empire. Thus, Georgia, an ancient Christian state, became Russian in 1802 and Armenia, likewise Christian, in 1828. The remaining Caucasian area was divided into warring statelets and khanates almost exclusively Muslim. Russia determined to expand further into the Caucasus where it met spirited Muslim resistance of the kind encountered by Britain in India and France in Algeria. The mountainous terrain was ideal for guerrilla warfare and Russia had to wage a long and bloody campaign, a struggle that became a significant theme in Russian literature.[1]

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Daghestan, a region of the Caucasus, was peopled by tribes that had become Muslim centuries earlier and where a tradition of learning in Arabic had developed. The area had been under nominal Persian control, which had allowed a good deal of local authority and local *adat* (legal and other customs) to exist alongside the *shari'a*. As Tsarist forces approached and started to confront the Persians the local khan voluntarily submitted to Russian control in 1803, cannily acknowledging the superior strength of the tsarist state. However, apart from the fact that Russia as a Christian state would meet inevitable problems ruling Muslim peoples, it soon aroused hatred by heavy-handed policies—including exacting heavy taxes, expropriating local estates and building a series of fortresses.

So stricter observance of Islamic principles was propagated as a means of combatting the foreigner. In the case of Daghestan, at least two leaders appeared, one to become famous, the other to remain almost completely unknown. Ghazi Mullah (1795–1832) stemmed from a religious family in the area and had received a traditional training in orthodox Islam and in *sufism* (the Naqshbandi order). He knew Arabic well and had perhaps visited the great centres of Muslim learning. His education rather set him apart from the ordinary tribesmen who followed the *adat* and were reputedly not averse to deceit and lying, drink and theft. He had trained with a fellow pupil, Shamil, and together they began to promote the *shari'a*, spiritual purity and—particularly—*jihad* against Russia. They were supporters of what became known as *muridism*—obedience to the Qur'an in order to increase religious enthusiasm and patriotic fervour in the Caucasus.

Ghazi Mullah began to preach with great confidence to the tribes, insisting that the *shari'a* could only be introduced into Daghestan once the Russians had been expelled. With the usual conviction of a convinced *mujaddid* he proclaimed that without doubt he had been chosen by God to transmit His will. 'The hour of deliverance has arrived. God has aroused his people against the infidels. Many miraculous signs (unspecified) have already been seen to enthuse the true believer and to strengthen the courage of the fearful.' Rather too optimistically, he continued: 'The anger of God has halted the advance of a heavily armed enemy and forced him to retreat. We must seize this favourable opportunity given to us by Him.' Ghazi Mullah's fame spread among the *khans* of the region and in 1828 he was declared *imam* by the tribes. He proclaimed a *jihad* and rallied them against the Russians for a short while until he faced them in the battle of Gimry in 1832. He fought bravely until he was mortally wounded.

It is not really known how his followers reacted to the disappearance of someone who had claimed to be sent by God to free them from Russian domination. As it happened, a leader greater than Ghazi Mullah took over, but neither was he one who had enough power to lead them to freedom. Shamil Daghestani was born in Daghestan in 1797. His father was a landowner. Originally called ‘Ali, he adopted the name Shamil after a severe illness, which, according to local custom, would, it was hoped, bring him greater good fortune.

He was a dreamy child, sickly until he got through his illness, and yet with a boundless pride that set him apart from his fellows who so hated his arrogance that on one occasion they were provoked into attacking him and leaving him for dead. Violence was a common feature of Caucasian tribal life and there is no report of the boys being punished. Shamil crept away and hid until he recovered and emerged a much toughened character. This experience noticeably changed his life and attitude. He became known for his excellent horsemanship—much admired among the Daghestanis.[2] He grew tall, became athletic, a proficient shot and swordsman, and acquired an aura of leadership. He grew a magnificent beard, which—together with the palms of his hands and following local custom—he hennaed. He developed a noted self-control and tenacity that helped him to confront the Russians for a long period.

His father—a drunkard who moderated his drinking when his son threatened to kill himself—allowed him to begin to study Arabic and logic, and it is related that he had committed the Qur’an to memory by the astonishingly early age of six. There followed 17 more long years of religious study—all in Arabic, not his native language. He soon gained local respect as a well-educated man in the Qur’an and *sunna*, a respect often shown to those in Islamic society who have an especial aura of learning about them. That was the basis of his future career. He was a fellow student of Ghazi Mullah and together they witnessed the catastrophe of the Russian invasion. They became convinced that a twofold task lay ahead of them—repulsing the Tsar and introducing a strict observance of Islam among the tribes.

The two warring sides soon met and Shamil fought alongside Ghazi Mullah at Gimry. He was very seriously wounded by a sabre stroke and legend has it that he escaped by killing three Russians and leaping away over others. He had to go into hiding for another lengthy period of recovery, his lungs pierced, his flesh slashed, his ribs broken and two bullets in his body. Now again he had time to meditate on his position and once again he strengthened his self-belief—the near escape from death taken as convincing evidence that fate had saved him for a future role. Once he emerged in 1834 from convalescence with a few followers he was recognized as leader and the tribal elders elected him third *imam* of the Caucasus.[3] His was not to be just a military role as he made it a condition of his leadership that he would also work to reform the morals and institutions of the tribes. He restarted the work of Ghazi Mullah by organizing the tribes into a small permanent army ready to face the Russian invader. He was quite ruthless in maintaining the cooperation of the tribes. He visited uncooperative villages and had the hands (and also heads) of men cut off as examples. No appeals were countenanced and the doomed men sat on the ground, heads bowed to receive their punishment.

At the same time he laid great emphasis on the religious life of his people and began by suppressing the *adat*, determined that nothing in his state should contradict the *shari'a*. He punished drunkenness with death, fined smokers and inflicted corporal punishment on backsliders. In his joyless society, music and dancing were only allowed at weddings. He led an exemplary life, travelling round the countryside insisting on devotion to the Qur'an (a book not in their native language) together with love of their country. Those who heard his preaching commented on its simplicity and on his own simple lifestyle. He always ate alone, living on bread, milk, honey, rice and tea.

He insisted on regular rituals to maintain the spirits and discipline of his followers. Each man had to pray every Friday when Shamil would process to the mosque with his deputies (*na'ibs* appointed by him to help rule the country), his devotees piously carrying copies of the Qur'an and chanting all the time '*Ya Allah, ya Allah!*', an obvious attempt to maintain a fighting and religious spirit. He strongly believed that only a religiously devout country would successfully face the invader.

He did not claim to be the *mahdi* but took the title of caliph (i.e. he who must be obeyed second only to Muhammad), and the more military title of *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful). His followers considered him to be a prophet, claiming that if Muhammad was God's first prophet then Shamil was his second. Those who witnessed his actions said they saw in Shamil features that proved he had been given a divine mission. As a *sufi shaikh* he would sometimes go into retreat (*khalwa*) for a time and after several days of fasting and prayer he would collapse—perhaps into a mystic-like trance. He would then emerge to announce that the Prophet had appeared to him (when unconscious!) and had given him certain instructions. He never called himself a prophet but insisted that Muhammad had spoken to him.

He was able through religious inspiration and military ability to lead the struggle against the Tsar for some 20 years, becoming a legendary figure as the wars in the Caucasus gripped the attention of the Russian public. Eventually, in 1859, Russian strength overcame the resisters and Shamil was forced to surrender. He was treated with respect, met the Tsar and was finally allowed to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. He died in Medina in 1871. His tribes agreed to live in peace with their conquerors, while revering the memory of their great leader.

As we will see with ‘Abd al-Qadir in Algeria, Shamil was an educated political leader, who as head of a *sufi tariqa* (sect) was motivated by a spirit of independence and *jihad* against the invading unbelievers. They both wanted to found a Muslim state based on a strict observance of *shari’a* religious principles. Far from being a blind fanatic Shamil favoured negotiation. His opponents thought him an honourable man, a born leader, commander and politician. Both he and ‘Abd al-Qadir left behind them a spirited people unwilling to accept foreign infidel rule permanently. The hour of resistance had brought forth the men. Shamil was a *sufi* leader who had been willing and able to transmute his religious convictions into military action.

2 ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri

In the nineteenth century three Muslim leaders achieved fame through their struggle against invading foreign powers: Shamil against Russia, the Sudanese Mahdi against Britain and ‘Abd al-Qadir against France in Algeria. All were men who fitted the hour in which they were born—the era of European colonial expansion. They were men who had all the features of the typical *mujaddid* but whose lives—instead of being devoted to leading a revivalist movement—were taken up by opposition to the invader.

‘Abd al-Qadir was born near Mascara in Algeria in *c.* 1808. His father was a member of the religious aristocracy and head of an institution of the Qadiriyya *sufi* sect. He was a well known and respected scholar who claimed direct decent from the line of the Prophet (the son, therefore, did not have to fabricate a *sharifian* descent for himself). The son proved to be to be a precocious scholar, reading and writing by the age of 5 and having mastered the Qur’an by heart by the time he was 14. He had ambitions to become a *marabout* (*sufi* scholar). He continued his study and quickly became respected for his theological learning, his recitals of poetry and particularly his religious eloquence—like the best potential leaders he could sway his listeners by oratory. In 1825 he made the *hajj* with his father and was able to increase his religious knowledge by consulting scholars in Mecca, Baghdad and Damascus. He passed through Egypt where he was impressed by the reforms that Muhammad ‘Ali was introducing there.

According to his biographer, Colonel Churchill,[4] there were at the time stories current of ‘Abd al-Qadir having received mysterious signs of future greatness but which Churchill claims were all without foundation. It is not clear where these stories originated and why Churchill dismisses them so categorically. He obtained most of his information from talking daily to ‘Abd al-Qadir, who, we must suppose, himself dismissed them. It would follow, then, that at the time he had no pretensions to leadership, certainly not of the inspired kind. (It was rumoured that his father had a dream while away from home telling him to return to Algeria.)

But ‘Abd al-Qadir was a natural leader and impressed those Europeans who met him with his character and appearance. His physical handsomeness and qualities of mind made him popular even before his military operations. He was of medium height, with regular features, a black beard, and he followed a simple lifestyle. His fervent faith in Islam struck everybody. He was, in addition, an extremely fine horseman. All in all he gained an ascendancy over those around him. He was well known and respected as a member of the Qadiriyya *sufi* sect that was widespread in Algeria and could have succeeded his father as local leader, exercising a certain amount of power and ensuring that proper *sufi* practices were observed. Once back home, however, he determined on a religious withdrawal (*hijra* or *khalwa*) during which he could study and meditate. According to Churchill,[5] he sought no worldly acclaim.

His life, however,—and that of all Algerians—was changed for ever in 1830 when the military forces of Charles X of France invaded the country, heralding the colonization of Algeria for the next 130 years. The French reached Oran in the west by 1832 where ‘Abd al-Qadir’s father had called for a *jihad* against the invader and was opposing them in successful guerrilla attacks. His father was old and tired, however, and asked his son to take his place. Already known for his piety, he was now to be given the opportunity to demonstrate his military skills. There are no reports that he was unwilling to take over, but he did not appear before his people claiming to have received his mission from God and the Prophet.

He took on the leadership and quickly showed he could fight with great bravery. He did not hold back from being in the thick of the fighting and on occasion his great horsemanship enabled him to escape from dangerous situations. At the same time he insisted that as a condition of his accepting the leadership all the people had to obey the Qur'an and he used his position to proclaim the need for religious reform. 'My great object is reform', he declared.[6] Perhaps more surprisingly, Churchill records that 'Abd al-Qadir presented the one simple and majestic idea of an Arab nationality.[7] In the mosque he would preach for hours on end with moving eloquence. He condemned the widespread sins of the country and threatened heaven's judgement on those who would not reform and join in the sacred cause of the *jihad*. He promised those who became martyrs a glorious reward. At times his listeners would jump to their feet, wave their spears aloft and cry out '*al-jihad*!' Banners were waved, drums were beaten and trumpets sounded, the people carried away by their love and admiration for him. His natural eloquence acted like a spell. 'Abd al-Qadir's father would cry out: 'Behold the sultan announced by God!' and 'Abd al-Qadir would be overwhelmed by the emotion of the moment.

The fighting against the French intensified under his leadership and by a treaty signed in 1834 he was given the leadership of the Oran area. He took the title of *amir al-mu'minin*—commander of the faithful, traditionally the role of the caliph as military leader. In the mountainous Western area of the country he was able to convince other tribes to accept his rule and to force the French to sign another treaty in 1837. He showed his prowess by organizing a state among the rival tribes. He established judicial equality and imposed equal taxes. He set an example by his fervent adherence to Islamic principles and by following an austere lifestyle. He was not averse, however, to inflicting harsh punishment on any tribesmen who had joined the French and would tolerate no weakness in his army. For a moment, Churchill modifies his admiration and is critical: 'His severity might be called oppression, his executions and punishments might be stigmatised as tyranny' but doubtless the unruly tribes needed firm discipline and he was acting in accordance with the practices of his time. He was, however, considerate to prisoners of war. 'The generous concern, the tender sympathy' he showed to prisoners of war was 'almost without parallel in the annals of warfare'.[8]

‘Abd al-Qadir was an absolute ruler and found his support in Algerian religious sentiment, the one factor that could unite the tribes against the French. He kept the movement going by rousing oratory and by the example of his own faith and self-confidence. He was also able to move to an early routinization of his state and army. He built arsenals, forts and warehouses and stored crops to sell for arms. He had founded a mini empire based on the cohesion he had instilled in the Algerian tribes and the strict regime he insisted on—banning alcohol, gambling, wine and music.

However, despite all his achievements, the superior force of the invader triumphed. Under General Bugeaud the French fought a bitter seven-year-long battle. The French adopted a merciless scorched earth policy that forced the starving inhabitants to desert their leader. Bugeaud destroyed all the Algerian fortifications and in 1847 ‘Abd al-Qadir was forced to surrender.

When resistance was no longer possible, he said: ‘Believe me, the struggle is over. Let us be resigned. God is our witness that we fought as long as we have been able. I was not born to be a fighter.’ He claimed that circumstances had deprived him of the career he had really wanted to follow. ‘When God ordered me to arise, I arose. I used gunpowder to the utmost of my means and ability, but when He ordered me to cease, I ceased.’[9]

He was taken to France where he was imprisoned but not badly treated. The French respected their former enemy. They said that he had become the ‘living representative of an idea profoundly agitating the masses’—the incarnation of a principle of a great religious sentiment.[10] Owing to his bad health in prison, Louis Napoleon eventually released him on condition that he caused no further trouble in Algeria. He decided to settle in Damascus where fate gave him the opportunity to gain worldwide fame. He was befriended by Richard Burton (British Consul) and his wife Isobel who was quite overwhelmed by him. She described him thus: ‘He dresses purely in white … enveloped in the usual snowy burnous … if you see him on horseback without knowing him to be Abd al-Kadir, you would single him out … he has the seat of a gentleman and a soldier. His mind is as beautiful as his face; he is every inch a Sultan.’[11]

In 1860 the notorious riots broke out in the city in which the Druze population began to massacre the Christian inhabitants. At the height of the troubles ‘Abd al-Qadir intervened and saved the lives of thousands of Christians who had been threatened with massacre. He was recognized in

Europe for his chivalry and given awards by the French and others. He was received by Louis Napoleon in Paris. He died in Damascus in 1883.

‘Abd al-Qadir was a Muslim leader who was propelled into leading a *jihad* against a foreign invader who was disrupting the way of life in the country. His religious convictions combined with military efficiency made him the ideal leader. He did all he could to defend his homeland and its religion against outside intervention. His fervent faith in Islam was unquestioned as was the compassion in his nature. He was defeated by much superior forces and faced exile, yet retained a general humanity that impressed those who met him.

3 The Sudanese Mahdi

Muhammad Ahmad, the Sudanese Mahdi, is the best known of all the Islamic leaders claiming this title. He faced the British Empire at the height of its power and defeated one of its most popular figures—General Gordon—at the siege of Khartoum. He was considered a deranged madman—the ‘mad mardi’—who was willing to send his lightly armed troops into battle against British guns. In the most popular mind Corporal Jones of ‘Dad’s Army’ faced the fuzzy wuzzies[12] with his bayonet. Several films have been made about the campaign including one with a blacked-up Lawrence Olivier playing the gap-toothed Mahdi.

Muhammad Ahmad was born in 1844 in Dongola in north Sudan. The country was ruled by the Turco-Egyptian regime at the time with a governor appointed by Cairo. This foreign government was unpopular, particularly when it imposed taxes and fostered slavery. The country was a tribal Muslim society split among various sects and there existed a widespread if imprecise messianic belief in the coming of the *mahdi*. This belief had been influenced by an earlier *mahdist* movement in west Africa and by ideas of reform stemming from the Wahhabis in Arabia.

Muhammad’s father was a boat builder on the Nile from a family that spuriously claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. The father died early, which greatly affected the young boy. The family moved to the north of Omdurman when he was still a child, but one who seemed different from other children, showing signs of a mature religiosity and devotion to learning. He went to study under a *shaikh* living near Khartoum and he seemed determined to try to live a life of asceticism, mysticism and worship. When he was 17 he sought out another teacher, Muhammad Sharif, the grandson of the founder of the Samaniyya *sufi* sect. Muhammad stayed with him for seven years and he became renowned for his piety and asceticism and his inspiring eloquence. In 1870 his family and a few disciples moved to Aba Island south of Khartoum where he started to teach and soon gained a reputation for his compelling eloquence and religious devotion. With his personal magnetism people listened to him and were moved into joining him. Like other leaders he lived in almost complete seclusion in a cave where he frequently fasted. Lytton Strachey wrote about him that '[t]here was a strange splendour in his presence, an overpowering passion in the torrent of his speech'.[13] He preached a message of a return to the strict virtues of early Islam, regular prayers, devotion and simplicity as laid down in the Qur'an. He, like Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab earlier in Arabia, considered all those who deviated from this path to be heretics. He had a personal magnetism that moved people into joining him. He had an obvious v-shaped gap in his teeth (*falja*) that was taken as a sign of his sincerity and good fortune.

He invited his teacher Muhammad Sharif to join him and for a while they cooperated well together until disputes broke out between them as the younger man began to assert his own personality—he had outgrown his teacher—and started causing resentment with his greater popularity. Muhammad Ahmad also unwisely criticized the use of music and dancing at Muhammad Sharif's son's circumcision party. In revenge he expelled the younger man from the Samaniyya *sufi* order and Muhammad Ahmad had to join another branch, no longer beholden to Muhammad Sharif, whom he denounced for openly breaking the religious law. This gained him widespread publicity and sympathy. On his own he travelled around preaching his message of reform and, it is said, granting an especial blessing (*baraka*) to those who listened to his sermons. In 1878 he became the leader of his branch of the Samaniyya and was joined by a supporter, Abdallahi, an efficient, ruthless and devoted follower, who became his right-hand man and eventual successor. He said that he had just looked at Muhammad Ahmad and had immediately admired him and had sworn everlasting loyalty.

During this period Muhammad Ahmad underwent a conversion or extreme religious experience for which his intense and emotional personality had prepared him. He reported that he had been appointed as *mahdi* by an assembly of all the prophets from Adam to Muhammad—that he was the *mahdi* of God and the representative (or *khalifa*) of the Prophet. He promised that he would found a universal regime that challenged all men to follow him or be destroyed. He called those who accepted him

Ansar—the name given by the prophet to all who welcomed him to Medina. He was surely capitalizing on the various local expectations of the coming of the *Mahdi*, who would prepare the faithful for the reunification of the entire Muslim community. The pious around him were sure that he showed all the signs of the expected one and were prepared to follow him—as far as the next world as his reign was forecast to last only eight years when Jesus would return. Moreover, his message for which he claimed divine authority was to the whole of the Islamic community: 'Information came to me from the *rasul* Allah (the Prophet) and the angel of inspiration is with me, sent from God to direct me and He has appointed him.'

With his charisma, Muhammad Ahmad was able to form a bond with his followers—and the concept of a *mahdi* became real in people's minds. They were now prepared to accept him, follow him and fight for him. Gordon was sure that each follower was 'a determined warrior, who could undergo thirst and privation, who no more cared for pain or death than if he were stone'.[14] Muhammad Ahmad declared that the Prophet had appeared in a vision to encourage him to fight and he wrote in detail about his calling to the leader of the Sanusi Brotherhood. 'I was told by the Lord of creation, Muhammad, that I am the expected Mahdi and he placed me on his throne several times in the presence of the four *khalifas.* … I was told none would gain a victory over me, having received the sword of victory from him.' The Prophet also said to me: 'You are created from the light issuing from the centre of my heart.' 'Do not make enquiries about me from the ulema, who are full of the love of this world, lest they turn you aside from the path of my love; such people are hindrances to my worshippers.' 'The Almighty's will was to inspire me with Mahdism.' 'All that I have told you regarding my Mahdism has been revealed to me by the Lord of creation when I was wide awake and in good health. I was not asleep nor hallucinated, nor drunk with wine, or mad.' 'Other verses and traditions all point to the same end. Obedience to God's chosen one is a necessary duty, for God says "Follow the path of my representative".'[15] This letter is a unique document in the history of Mahdism showing how the mind of an inspired man had become totally convinced of his calling.

We have another interesting source that throws light on the activities of Muhammad Ahmad. Rudolf Slatin Pasha (1857–1932) was an Anglo-Austrian soldier and Governor-General of Darfur under General Gordon. He was captured by the *mahdist* forces and on his release he published a remarkably detailed account of his captivity relying on an impressive gift of recall—*Fire and Sword in the Sudan; a personal narrative of fighting and serving the Dervishes 1879–1895.*[16] Although far from his purpose, his book enlarges on several features which help us to answer some of the questions about leaders posed earlier in this study. We understand from Slatin how Muhammad Ahmad gradually strengthened his calling, gaining greater confidence and widening his ambitions. Success was founded on success until he achieved victory over Gordon.

Slatin also commented on the ways in which Muhammad Ahmad maintained his following. Those who met him remarked on his commanding personality, which he exploited in his preaching. Slatin often describes his fervent addresses in the day or night to a 'rapt' audience. In addition to threat of punishment for backsliders and rewards for the faithful, the nub of his message was that he had come to renew society. 'I will destroy this world (*al-dunya*) and will construct the hereafter (*al-akhira*).'[17] He continued to receive visions which enhanced his authority. He reported that Muhammad had told him that he would conquer Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem and that after a long and glorious life he would die in Kufa. At this time, 'a most wonderful comet appeared taken as a sign that the true Mahdi had appeared on earth and that the government was about to be overthrown'.[18] Slatin commented that '[g]reat enthusiasm now prevailed amongst his followers who lost no opportunity of telling the credulous and superstitious populations through which they passed of the wonderful miracles performed by the Mahdi'.[19]

The local '*ulama*' lost no time in dismissing his claims as false, saying that he had none of the qualities of the expected one. With his authority confirmed in his own mind he ignored them and introduced changes in doctrine and practice. He replaced the pilgrimage with the *jihad* and belief in the *mahdiya*. More actively, he launched the *jihad* against the occupying forces: 'Kill the Turks—he said—and do not pay any taxes.' He spread his message among different tribes and in different areas until his movement became countrywide. He told his listeners that the time had come when religion must be purified and he visited many sheikhs of the tribes to tell them of his designs. He utilized the spirit of bitter hostility against the outsiders who had come to exact taxes from them. Apart from the dubious promise of paradise for martyrs his concept of the ideal society was bleak—the renunciation of the pleasures of life, the *shari'a* strictly applied, especially the *hudud* (legal punishments), no alcohol, smoking, dancing or the playing of instruments. He forbade the study of theology including *tafsir* (Qur'an commentary)—presumably to prevent the discovery of any text that might have contradicted his claims and his message. His followers were forbidden to display any wealth or extravagances and had to dress—like him—simply. But, as Slatin noted, in his own house the Mahdi lived in great luxury surrounded by many young girls.[20]

He knew full well that religion was the only means of uniting the Sudanese and, therefore, addressed all his adherents ordering them to prepare for *jihad*. He had some early success but he was reluctant to face a powerful enemy and retreated to Mount Musa where, he said, he received further inspiration. He moved through the country claiming to perform miracles, summoning all to *jihad* and promising paradise to those who died in the struggle and four-fifths of the booty to those who survived.

In 1883 his ragtag, yet inspired, army met and defeated the Egyptians near el-Obeid. They routed an Egyptian force of 8000 men led by the British commander Colonel William Hicks Pasha. He had been recruited by the ruler (khedive) of Egypt to train a force of mainly inexperienced Egyptian soldiers who had been expelled for supporting the 'Urabi Pasha uprising in Egypt. He was killed and his forces massacred—it is said that only 300 escaped. The newspaper headline read 'Hicks Pasha's army destroyed by the False Prophet'.[21]

After this victory the Mahdi gained in confidence and announced that everyone must now join the *jihad* and renounce all the 'pomp and vanities' of this world and think only of the world to come. Severe penalties would be inflicted for misdemeanours.[22] He laid down instructions for marriages and dowries and insisted that society should behave exactly as it had in the time of the Prophet. He considered it a crime to doubt his calling as *mahdi*. To maintain morale—apart from the promise of booty—he held regular parades and reviews when guns were fired and war drums beaten. He had collected several verses from the Qur'an in a *ratib (collection)*, which his followers had to recite daily for 40 minutes after morning and evening prayers. He worked up his troops to the highest pitch of fervour and promised that 20,000 angels would accompany them into battle. His men charged into the battle shouting '*Fi sha'n Allah*' (in the cause of God).

The British were rather caught on the wrong foot and were panicked into sending General Charles George Gordon to evacuate their forces from Khartoum. He was the wrong choice. He became so confused concerning the purpose of his mission that he obstinately refused to leave, ensuring his own death. He believed that somehow he could save the Sudanese people from themselves—not obviously a British imperialist aim.

He wrote to his sister: ‘I would give my life for these poor people of Sudan.’ ‘If I am humbled, the better for me.’[23]

Khartoum fell to the Mahdist forces in January 1885 and Gordon was despatched to meet his maker. His head was shown to Muhammad Ahmad and exhibited for his followers to stone. The whole of Sudan was now in their hands and everyone was convinced that the Mahdi was in fact God-sent. He began to introduce his changes into Islamic law and made loyalty to him a part of true belief. He even attempted (unsuccessfully) to convince the non-Sudanese of the truth of his mission as he claimed that his message was universal. But he died only six months after the fall of Khartoum. ‘Abdallahi, the *khalifah*, succeeded him, still committed to the vision of *jihad* until General Kitchener exacted his revenge at Omdurman in 1898.

The Sudanese Mahdi conformed absolutely to the pattern of the Muslim *mujaddid*. He was a sensitive boy committed to religious studies at a time of discontent caused by a foreign occupying power. His message of purifying religious observance coincided with an attempt to expel the foreigner. He believed Islam would only flourish once the Egyptian regime had been ended. With crowd-swaying oratory he persuaded the people to follow him and put himself forward after a period of isolation and after claiming to have had a series of visions as the expected *mahdi*. With good organization and by insisting on religious rituals and exercises he enthused his *Ansar* to go with him into battle and he met great success until his early death.

What is striking about Muhammad Ahmad is his rise from an obscure background to an absolute belief in his own divinely inspired calling. He died too soon to avoid disappointing his followers and left it to others to carry on his *jihad*. The Mahdist movement continued to exist in the shape of the Ummah party in Sudan with its leader the great-grandson of the Mahdi himself—Sadiq al-Mahdi.[24]

4 The ‘Mad Mullah’

At the end of the nineteenth century Somaliland existed as a pastoral society in east Africa with the longest coast line on the continent. The two main languages of the country were Somali and Arabic.[25] The population was nearly 100% Muslim and *sufism* was well established. Islam had come early to the area and the country was governed by local dynasties of Arabized Somalis or Somalized Arabs. In the scramble for Africa, Britain[26]

(1888) and Italy had established protectorates there. The French had taken next-door Djibouti and neighbouring Christian Ethiopia had cast covetous glances on the country. There had been a certain awakening of Islam in the late nineteenth century when Western encroachment was feared to be a threat to the Somali way of life. In this traditional society a *wadaad* was important in organizing s*ufism*. He was a man of religion trusted to mediate between man and God. His role had traditionally been considered secondary to that of the spear bearer (the secular man) but by the 1890s the *wadaad* had also assumed a role in the running of secular affairs. Another aspect of life in this illiterate society was the vital role that extemporary poetry played in communication and in entertainment; a proficient practitioner could gain a great reputation among his fellows.

In this Islamic yet quite remote society there appeared a potential leader who felt called to shake up tradition and eventually to lead a *jihad* against the British colonial intruders who gave him the derogatory nickname of the ‘mad mullah’, in the attempt to diminish his appeal among his followers and his reputation with the British public. Despite the title he still proved to be quite a formidable opponent. The British military historian, Douglas Jardine (Secretary to the Somali Administration 1916–1921), claimed he was called mad because he was ‘cursed’ with madness akin to genius. The Daily Mail of 1902 reported that the fact that he was attempting to outface the might of the British Empire was ‘certain proof of his clinical insanity’.[27] Jardine added that he must have been a fraud as ‘any religious motive that originally inspired him had been strangled by a passion for power and plunder’[28]—the very same factors at the root of British ambitions. He may have been like the ‘Sudanese Mahdi but he was a despicable imitation of a genuine patriotic and religious revolt’. Jardine allowed that ‘viewed through Oriental eyes the motives that inspired the Mullah’s revolution were not such as to merit whole hearted condemnation—but he was a selfish megalomaniac’.[29]

Muhammad ‘Abdallah Hasan was born in 1856 in the part of Somalia that fell under the British in 1886. His great-grandfather and his father were men who had followed a religious life (*wadaad*) while his maternal grandfather was a great warrior chief (spearman). Muhammad was both an excellent horseman and a promising young scholar who knew the Qur’an by heart at age 11. He already possessed the qualities of a quick learner and a promising leader and went on to continue his religious education for ten years in Islamic centres in Mogadishu and Sudan where he was taught by a number of teachers. To complete his training he felt the need to attend a great mosque and so spent one and a half years on the pilgrimage to Mecca. There he studied under the *sufi shaikh* Muhammad Salih of the Salihiya sect from whom he received a very thorough spiritual training. He viewed this experience as a physical and psychological hardship and an ordeal from which he emerged a changed man, who had been spiritually transformed by the spirit of Allah. He began to see visions of the Prophet and of angels. He said he was 'shaken and overawed' and from then on was seized with the determination to devote his life to spreading the teaching of the Salihiya *sufi* order.

He returned to Somalia in the 'power of the spirit'[30] to preach and to encourage conversion to the Salihiya. In Berbera he immediately met opposition from the population, who were mainly adherents of the Qadiriya version of *sufism*. There were doctrinal differences between the two *sufi* schools but it is difficult to believe that a largely illiterate population would have been much troubled by these. There were, however, tribal and regional differences and the Qadiriya who believed strongly in the mediation of saints and holy men and in the value of visits to their tombs, something that was deeply disapproved of by the more puritanical Salihiya. These latter had been influenced by the Wahhabiya in their puritanism but not to the extent of banning *sufism*. Muhammad 'Abdallah packed his bags in the face of such opposition and took to the life of the wandering *wadaad*.

In the interior of the country he did not make many converts but spent several years helping to settle tribal disputes and prevent raiding. By organizing the tribes in this way his reputation grew and it is said that even the British approved of his efforts. His work as a secular man was complemented by a growing feeling that he possessed supernatural powers in his religious role. He arrived in Burao where he declared that he had received a revelation that he was in reality the expected *mahdi* and that the time had come (1899) to wage a *jihad* against the British. He did not receive a very favourable reception in Burao, where he had a disastrous conflict with the religious authorities whom he criticized for their saint worship and moral laxity. He told them that they should be more regular in their prayers and should give up the luxuries of tea drinking, chewing *qat*[31] and eating fat sheep's tails. He was, he complained, tired of preaching to 'bored and unsympathetic audiences' but they were in fact quite worried by his attack on their lifestyle.

He retired once again to the interior where his preaching took on a more openly political aspect. He wanted to use the centralized organization of the Salihiya order to strengthen political resistance to the British invader. This would, he hoped, help to overcome the decentralizing tendencies of the tribes. He began to create what his opponents called the *dervish* state[32] whose object was to drive out the infidel so that a pure form of religion and religious observance could flourish in Somalia. If he became their temporal head—he told his followers—he would guide them to true religion and virtue. This message had some appeal and together with his charismatic character he was able to activate an irritating resistance to the British. He was a strict leader who could not tolerate opposition to his leadership and flogged those who refused to obey him. He sent emissaries throughout Somalia to convince others to follow him and many responded with enthusiasm.

His organization of warriors had a central leadership, rigid hierarchy and military character. Weapons were obtained from the Ottomans and Sudan and the *dervish* forces began to attack the British protectorate. It was a sideshow for the British Empire, which did not consider Somalia to be a vital piece of territory (its main purposes seemed to be to supply meat to nearby Aden and to keep others out) but facing lightly armed *dervishes* seemed to be not so very different from what had happened a few years earlier in Sudan. To the British Muhammad ‘Abdallah was a nuisance whom they did not really understand. At first the *dervishes* gained in strength and inflicted defeats on the British. A little later (1904) the British gathered a larger force that faced the rebels and killed about a thousand. The Mullah had to flee but he continued the struggle by encouraging his men and by building a number of forts. By 1913 he was able to dominate the hinterland of the country.

The conflict was interrupted by the First World War, during which he led a campaign of robbing and killing. In 1920 after the war the British—in Middle Eastern expansionist mode—struck against him with a combined land and air force.[33] This was more successful. Muhammad tried to recoup his losses but he died of pneumonia in December 1920. In the long history of the British Empire he was a minor irritant. To the Somalis he is the father of their modern nation.

In his life and personality, Muhammad ‘Abdallah showed many of the traits of other Muslim leaders. His enemies, the British, found it appropriate to call him ‘mad’ as his religious commitment did seem to them to be a form of madness. Later Somali historians have written about him and provide a fairer view of his reputation and achievements.[34] Like many others, he based his whole life on the belief that he had been specifically selected by the Prophet for the mission of reforming the observance of Islam in his country. He was later forced into the role of military leader.

He was described as a typical Somali, tall, vigorous with regular features, an excellent horseman, but also a serious scholar. He had two qualities dear to the Somalis: a remarkable poetic talent and an unyielding refusal to submit or abandon his principles. Jardine wrote with grudging admiration that he had an ‘extraordinary tenacity of purpose’ and was ‘never tempted to abandon his ideals and come to terms. No misfortune broke his spirit’.[35] He promised in a poem: ‘If I do not abandon faith the guiding truth, No matter how infinitely terrible the fire which the Englishman brings upon me, By the Lord, I will not submit.’[36] He ascribed his extraordinary power of verse to Divine Truth and he used it to exert an unusual influence over the tribes. He was a master of eloquence and excelled in the art of composing impromptu poems (which he probably had carefully composed earlier) that ‘so readily inspire and inflame’.[37] He had been called ‘sharp-mouth’ at school because of his ability with words. He combined this skill with a very strict discipline, often punishing those who did not live up to his standards. It is said he had 60 men killed who had contemplated desertion and had 300 women mutilated and executed because they would not pray.[38]

Muhammad ‘Abdallah’s message was first of all one of religious reform—the Somali people must accept his—or the Salihiya—version of Islam. In his convinced view the Qadiriya version was corrupt. Under the influence of Wahhabism he wanted to banish the veneration of saints, music and dancing and the use of *qat*. He declared that his message had the full support of the Prophet who had come to him in visions and revelations. He was sure that anyone who did not join him and accept his message was an infidel. He abhorred any Christian influence in his country coming from Ethiopia and Great Britain. This he would have to eliminate. ‘I have sought and found the Prophetic guidance which appointed me to tell the unbelieving white invaders “This land is not yours”.’[39] In several poems and speeches he repeated that the British ‘have destroyed our religion and made our children their children’. In fighting them he made explicit the reward that those who fell in battle would receive. ‘Our men who have fallen in battle have won paradise. God fights for us. We fought by God’s order.’

5 AHMADIYA

The Islamic revival movements that I have considered so far have all been nurtured by leaders who claimed prophetic or divine sanction. Each mission fell outside the realm of orthodox Islam and, therefore, was most likely to have been rejected by the orthodox ‘*ulama*’ of the time. Some of these movements were supported by substantial sections of the population of the country in which they had taken birth. Sometimes the influence of these leaders outlasted their deaths. I want now to look briefly at one leader whose claims fell well outside the usual pattern and yet he was able to inspire a movement that has long outlived him.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was born in Punjab in 1835—notably within that period of widespread European expansion already touched upon. He was a member of an affluent Mughal family—the once powerful Turco-Mongol dynasty that ruled the Indian subcontinent. His father was a physician and the son began early in life to memorize the Arabic text of the Qur’an and to conduct further studies in Arabic and Persian. In the mid-nineteenth century the attempted dissemination of Christianity in India provoked a strong anti-British movement—the famous Mutiny had taken place in 1857–1858. Muslim leaders had called for a jihad against their occupiers. Ghulam Ahmad was working as a clerk during this period while also continuing his religious studies. Moved by the currents of the time he was not afraid to argue in public, however, against the Christian missionaries and in defence of Islam.

His feelings of religious motivation developed to such an extreme that he went into seclusion (*hijra*) for 40 days (the mystic period of Muhammad’s praying and fasting in the cave) during which time he claimed to have received divine instruction to announce his prophethood—a very extreme claim. But he went further and added that he had been divinely appointed as the messiah/mahdi in the likeness of Jesus. He declared that God had given him the good news that he was His illustrious son.

In 1882, on the basis of this inspiration, he asserted that he had been given divine approval as a reformer and he began to found the Ahmadiya community. He gained approval among some discontented Muslims of his idea that Islam was in decay and that there was a need for a mujaddid to appear who would bring about reform. He rejected the idea of armed jihad as a means of bringing about reform and taught that Islam had to be defended by the ‘tongue and the pen’.

The orthodox ‘*ulama*’ hastened to condemn him and issued a fatwa declaring him to be a heretic deserving punishment by death. Undeterred, however, he continued his mission, announcing several further prophecies and travelling around the country lecturing on and debating his beliefs. He died in 1908, leaving behind him a sect that is led by a number of caliphs in some 200 countries. This is an astonishing expansion based on his claims and beliefs that were far from being orthodox and yet which still attract many followers who do not accept other Muslims as believers unless they adhere to Ahmadiya views.

On the positive side, they emphasize the need to return to the real essence of early Islam and reject aggression, jihad and terrorism and encourage only the peaceful propagation of religion. The eccentric beliefs unique to Ahmad cut off the Ahmadiya from the orthodox world of Islam, which in return condemns them as non-Muslims. As a leader, he shared some common features with other leaders but in the end he went further out on a limb than any of them.

NOTES

1. Much information about Shamil and his policies can be found in A. Zelkina, *In Quest for God and Freedom. Sufi responses to the Russian advances in the North Caucasus* (London, 2000).
2. Especially the famous djigitovka (trick riding) so admired by the Russians who witnessed it.
3. The second had been murdered by the renegade Hadji Murad. The murder was the subject of a famous novel by Tolstoy.
4. C.H. Churchill, *The Life Abdel-Kader* (London, 1867).
5. Ibid., p. 12.
6. Churchill, p. 29.
7. Is it possible that as early as this ‘Abd al-Qadir thought in terms of Arab nationalism?
8. Ibid., p. 208.
9. Churchill, pp. 280, 294.
10. Ibid., p. 267.
11. M.S. Lovell, *A Rage to Live* (London, 1999), p. 513.
12. The nickname given by British soldiers in the Sudan to Hadendoa tribal warriors because of their elaborate hairstyle. According to Rudyard Kipling the British admired their bravery.
13. Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1986), p. 210. He adds that even Gordon had an uneasy respect for him.

14. Strachey, op.cit., p. 255.
15. Quoted by Ziadeh, *Sanusiyah*, pp. 54–56.
16. London, 1896.
17. Slatin, *Fire and Sword*, p. 173.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 139.
20. Slatin, p. 231.
21. Strangely, the paper dignified him with capital letters.
22. Most Islamic regimes have imposed at some time the severest penalties for infringement of the *shari'a*, mutilation, beheading, whipping, stoning to death.
23. D. Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East* (Reading, 2004) p. 209.
24. Educated at Oxford and seen playing tennis on the college courts in long white flannels.
25. Admitted to the Arab League in 1974 although the official languages are stated to be Somali and Arabic.
26. In the 1940s I used to note a London Midland and Scottish steam engine named 'British Somaliland' speeding down a local railway line. It sounded exotic but I had no idea where it was—perhaps near the 'Straits Settlements'—another named locomotive?
27. L. James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1995), p. 332.
28. D. Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (London, 1923), p. 55.
29. Ibid., p. 313.
30. A phrase quite similar to that used to describe Methodists inspired by religious fervour.
31. The leaves of an Arabian shrub chewed as a stimulant.
32. The Persian/Turkish word for a *sufi* follower.
33. The post–First World War tactic of using aircraft against tribesmen was also tried successfully in Iraq together, it is rumoured, with the use of gas.
34. See Abdi Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness* (London, 1993) and S.S. Samater, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1982).
35. Jardine, p. 315.
36. Samater, p. 147.
37. Samater quoting J.S. Trimingham, op.cit., p. 187.
38. Reported by Jardine, a hostile witness.
39. Samater, p. 1.

PART II

Islamic Renewal: Calls for Reform

This section considers the alternative to the numerous revolts demanding change already described. While Islamic history has been categorized as a series of such upheavals, there have always been thinkers who have supported peaceful change based on a re-evalution of Muslim values. The section begins by looking at how one Western scholar has looked at these currents of thought.

CHAPTER 7

A Way of Approaching Islamic History

My late colleague Albert Hourani was very concerned that as a scholar writing about Islam one should approach the religion of the other with due respect. Hourani, as we noted earlier, was responsible for developing the study of the modern Middle East at Oxford. He devoted his scholarly life to the history of the Arab world and of Islam. He wrote as a committed Christian with strong ties to the Arab world. He had studied and lived in the Middle East (particularly Lebanon, the home of his ancestors) in the 1930s and 1940s before he later fell under the influence of scholars in Oxford working on Muslim history and religion. His mind from then on turned very largely to a consideration of how non-Muslim scholars should write about Islam. His Roman Catholic faith did not allow him, unlike some of his colleagues, to accept Islam as a genuine revelation, but there is convincing evidence throughout his published work that he admired and understood the convictions and way of life of sincere Muslim believers. It is clear from the words of a University sermon that he preached in Oxford that he felt he could come close to the heart of Islam when he studied it at its highest—that was, he said, the *sufi* vision of the Divine Source—but he could not consider Muhammad a genuine prophet and or admit that the Qur'an does not contradict the New Testament.

Hourani had converted to Roman Catholicism after leaving his own church, the Scottish Presbyterians (whom his father had joined from the Greek Orthodox Church) and his approach to Islamic studies was influenced by his Catholic faith. In his sermon he stressed that he, like Cardinal

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John Henry Newman (a Catholic convert from Anglicanism who had preached from the same pulpit in St Mary's Church), had been engaged in a search for a faith by which he could live. He found that faith or, as he said, he found the Kingdom of God and enrolled himself in it. His faith and his work became intertwined. For him the final goal of man was to draw near to God and to seek the total purification of his soul from everything other than God.[1] The ultimate reality was the voice of God speaking to the human soul through the individual conscience, a voice that could guide one to live in peace with others and to embrace the charity of forgiveness. The aim of the believer—Christian or Muslim—was (re)union with God whereby the soul felt itself to be in the presence of God. There is a notable passage in Hourani's sermon where he speaks about what he calls Islam at its highest—that is in *sufi* thought. 'All created things have descended from the Divine Source in successive stages, and all strive to return to that source: men, moved by their love of God, may ascend … through the world of images, to the courts of God.' This is the point at which his vision of Islam comes nearest to his vision of Christianity. But Christianity has for him the unique extra dimension of God himself descending to earth and appearing in flesh.

This aspect that distinguishes Christianity from Islam gave him the certainty of faith that he wrote so forcefully about in his earliest works. But he was fairly young then and inexperienced. In later life he became more restrained and omitted from his writing the bold sentiments that somewhat take one aback by their forthrightness. He was writing at that time as a young Lebanese Christian who felt threatened by Islam. He wrote that 'Lebanese and Syrian Christians [have] a special mission to re-state Christianity in Arabic in face of the Moslem world'.[2] And he added that 'every human community must, if it would avoid falling into mortal sin, make itself servant of something higher than itself'. A mortal sin in the Catholic Church is a grave or serious sin committed in full knowledge of the gravity of the offence, usually by individuals. It is not clear how a community could fall into mortal sin unless it totally rejected its faith as a whole. Nor is it clear whether Hourani would have included Islam as 'something higher than itself'.[3] I believe he would not have expressed himself in quite the same way in his more mature years. (He once described a fellow-scholar's earlier work as 'the kind which mature men may regret having written in the heat of youth'.)

His faith gave him a clear pattern for his personal and working life. He was very sure of the place of religions in the world. He wrote in 1947:

'Certain groups of modern educated Arabs … regard Islam and Christianity as mere survivors of a dark age and … look forward to their imminent extinction. … This hope is vain. Revealed religion cannot vanish from the world to which it has brought light.'[4]

The Christian scholar of Islam has to find a way of writing about his subject. In the beginning Hourani in this confrontational way was not averse to expressing bold, prescriptive opinions that aimed to set a (seemingly impossible) agenda for Muslim–Christian relations: 'The whole future development of the Arab countries depends on a change in the spirit of Islam', in its 'living creative spirit'.[5] He discerned in the relationship between Arab Christians and Muslims only the 'contemptuous toleration of the strong (Muslim) for the weak (Christian); a situation that must be changed by absorbing differences into deeper unity, in a mutual love for God that would lead to a sort of humility and forgiveness'.[6] The two sides, he wrote optimistically, should engage in a dialogue of fruitful tension. He would not in later years look for a change in Muslim attitudes or for any sort of unity in love.

His approach mellowed rather into a serious consideration of the problems of Muslim–Christian relations. He noted the look of uneasy recognition with which the two religions faced each other and he approached Islam with a sense of a living relationship with those he studied. He felt the need to stretch out across the gulf created by power, enmity and difference. Dialogue, he asserted, should be at the heart of our studies.[7] He believed that both sides had one common aim (which he often restated), which was, again in the words of al-Ghazali, that of drawing nearer to God[8] with a pure soul when '[a]cts only had value if they were performed by minds and souls directed towards the goal of knowing and serving God'.[9]

Hourani set out the three ways in which one may approach the religion of the other: by way of argument, that is by trying to persuade others of the validity of *our* beliefs; by looking for common features in the two religions; or through 'witness', by which he meant making clear what he believed in while leaving it to others to judge the value of his writing and of his faith. He knew that Cardinal Newman had similar ideas for he asserted that the way of argument would only show that controversy is superfluous if we all understood each other or fruitless if we could not change our views. By trying to discover common features we might find ourselves in a situation where all statements were accepted even if they contradicted each other. So we need not dispute or prove, wrote Newman, but define and describe. This is the method Hourani adopted, describing the way of Islam in his work and leaving others to judge the value of what he wrote.

The defining of another's religion must be done with reverence and respect, the reverence and respect of the serious scholar. Hourani chose to write about Islam as it was and as it is and he thought it charitable to write about it at its best,[10] at what he called its highest, that is as it is taught and practised by the trained '*ulama*' and as followed by some *sufis*.

He saw many positive factors in Islam which strengthened his respect for it as a faith and a way of thought, although he did stop short of ascribing divine inspiration to it. He believed that all cultures produced by the human spirit have value and that their ideas should be treated with respect. For him Islam is a manifestation of the human spirit, a form of human reasoning in an attempt to know God, a valid but limited response to truth. One should admire a virtuous Muslim life and those scholars who revere the Qur'an. But in the end a Christian cannot consider Islam to be a valid form of salvation. Hourani took to heart the conclusions of the second Vatican Council in defining his attitude. 'The Church looks with esteem upon the Muslims who worship the one living God … who has spoken to men.'[11] He was impressed by other scholars who similarly 'esteemed' Islam and who had something stimulating to say about it. For example, he quoted with approval the conclusion of one of them, the Hungarian Jewish orientalist Ignaz Goldziher, who said: 'A life lived in the spirit of Islam can be an ethically impeccable life.'[12] Yet he carefully concluded that 'it is, to say the least, a matter of doubt whether, and in what sense, the Islamic revelation can be regarded as valid'.[13]

For Hourani Islam was not a divine revelation but an encountered, living religion followed by millions across the world and it was a religion with a history. It could be described and analysed as it is and as has been practised. From his many writings it is possible to extract what he thought were its essential features. He thought that the Muslim world had a 'unity which transcended divisions of time and space'[14] and that within that world there existed a corpus of knowledge 'transmitted over the centuries by a known chain of teachers'. It was a moral community that continued to exist even when rulers changed and one that preserved its faith in one God; a community that observed prayers, fasts and pilgrimages in common. He admired and tried to understand how this 'profoundly unified' society was able to withstand outside shocks by taking in what was of value and refining it. He was influenced and, he admitted, moved by Professor

Hamilton Gibb's vision of the Islamic *umma* persisting throughout history.[15] It was this vision that he tried to perpetuate in his own work. Unity was more important than some of the disruptive movements (studied in this work) and factors that tended to disturb society.

The Sunni world best represented Islam for Hourani. It was this steady world that kept a balance between extremes—a world in which the '*ulama*' slowly accumulated tradition and in which Muslims strove for moral perfection, where Islam could be observed without let-up or hindrance. It was a world in which the *shari'a* was adhered to as the way 'by which men could walk pleasingly in the sight of God and hope to reach Paradise'.[16]

This very positive view of Islam entailed writing about it at its highest and that for him included *sufism* at its highest. He disliked its more mundane aspects, what he considered to be the almost commercial exploitation of the *sufi tariqas*. The sincere dedicated *sufi* followers he considered men of the highest motives, men who in every age kept the 'world on its axis'. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali—the twelfth-century scholar—seemed to represent all that was best in Sunni and *sufi* worlds. He aimed to keep the whole community on the right path by underlining all the moral implications of Muslim practices. Man's chief aim was always to draw nearer to God. While perhaps not a full *sufi*, Hourani saw in him all that was noblest in the *sufi* masters whose aim was the 'utter absorption of the heart in the remembrance of God'.[17]

Into the nineteenth century he considered other scholars who had struggled to preserve the *umma* in the face of the modern world and he laid emphasis on two of them: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh. Both of them stressed that all the basic principles of Islam were valid and that they had to be observed meticulously for Islam to prosper. Although al-Afghani perhaps seemed a little rough, Hourani saw in 'Abduh an ideal type of man: 'In later years [his] gentleness increased and those who knew him were conscious of his kindness and intelligence and a certain spiritual beauty'[18]—surely the kind of man that Hourani could relate to.

He was worried, however, by the growth of radicalism in the late 1960s. He was unhappy with what he carefully termed a 'disturbance of spirits'. It was as though he had closed his eyes to the unwanted occurrence of violent change. He had earlier expressed his misgivings about extreme *shi'ism* and insisted that it was essential that the 'gap between different Islamic sects should be bridged'.[19] He later came to appreciate what he saw as the more positive qualities of *shi'ism*—a view he developed under the influence of two *shi'i* scholars[20] in Oxford.

Looking at the whole history of the Muslim community, he attached especial importance to the transmission, development and continuity of knowledge passed down through the ages by a known chain of teachers—the *silsila*. There are two aspects to this process - the one referring to *hadith* (traditions) passed down through a recognized chain (*isnad*), which he admitted could be fabricated or faulty, and the other was the relationship of teacher and pupil and of colleagues. In this regard, he quoted the opinion of the French orientalist Louis Massignon that it is possible "to hold a view of history which sees the handing on of knowledge of God from one individual to another as the only significant process most deserving of study".[21] This process was seen in an almost mystical light: "History is a chain of witnesses entering each other's lives as carriers of a truth beyond themselves".[22]

Hourani could not himself accept a divinely inspired aspect to the Prophet Muhammad's life, but he wanted to state this in a way which would cause least offence to believers. He envisaged a possible escape from this dilemma by following the advice of the Dutch scholar Snouck Hurgronje, who suggested that Islam should be studied in its historical reality without making judgements about what it ought to be. This approach extended to the principle, which Hourani accepted, of studying the society in which Islam emerged and the societies in which it continued to exist, although he suggested that the study of the different Islams was the task of social historians and anthropologists. He particularly admired the works of scholars who stressed the specificity of different societies, not seeking the high Islam that he sought but seeking what he and others have termed popular Islam—that is, people's interpretation and observance of sometimes non-orthodox practices. He accepted the formulation that whatever people believe to be Islam is Islam.[23] But his way was "not to study these popular traits but to confine [himself] to the high, urban literate tradition of Islam".[24]

In sum, Hourani achieved the study of the other's religion from the secure basis of his own faith. This method gave him a sincere appreciation of the subject of his study which he approached with "patience, clarity and love, and a final acceptance of the mystery of otherness".[25]

NOTES

1. These words are strikingly similar to those he uses about the great Muslim philosopher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (*A History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 170).
2. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon* (London, 1946), p. 265.

3. Ibid., p. 119.
4. *Minorities in the Arab World* (London, 1947), p. 124.
5. Ibid., p. 123.
6. Ibid., p. 125.
7. *A Vision of History* (Beirut, 1961), p. 110.
8. *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London, 1991), p. 170.
9. Ibid., p. 169.
10. *Europe and the Middle East* (London, 1980), p. 76.
11. *Islam in European Thought*, p. 40.
12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. Ibid., p. 74.
14. *History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 4.
15. *Emergence of the Modern Middle East*, p. xiii.
16. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 2.
17. Ibid., p. 170.
18. Ibid., p. 135.
19. *Minorities in the Arab World*, p. 124.
20. Hossein Modarressi and Hamid Enayat.
21. *Islam in European Thought*, p. 97.
22. Ibid., p. 102.
23. Ibid., p. 101.
24. Ibid., p. 102.
25. J. Berque, *Egypt* (London, 1972), p. 7. Hourani perhaps developed the concept of the ‘other’ from the anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, his colleague at Oxford. Evans-Pritchard asserted that the main issue of anthropology was that of ‘translation’—that is finding a way to translate one’s own thoughts to the world of another culture.

CHAPTER 8

Thinkers Rather than Activists

While the Muslim world over the centuries has been assailed by invasion and disturbance, a certain tradition of quiet thought and teaching has been maintained. As mentioned in the previous chapter learning was passed on from generation to generation by trained and dedicated scholars who were part of the *silsila* (chain) of learning. These '*ulama*' strove to teach and interpret whatever the political and social conditions in which they lived. We have seen how in various places and at various times they were attacked by activist reform-minded leaders who condemned them for their cooperation with corrupt rulers.

On the whole the traditional '*ulama*' were content to accept Islamic scholarship and practice as they existed. Their scholarship might be super commentaries or super glosses on existing works—not provocative or profound scholarship. However, as we have seen there were exceptions, inspired thinkers and scholars who moved Islamic thought onto new paths—men such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111) or Ibn Taimiya (1263–1328) who taught and wrote and were influential but who were quietist rather than active leaders. The tradition of reformist thought continued in the nineteenth century when there appeared certain Muslim thinkers (including Muhammad 'Abduh 1849–1905 and Jamal-Din al-Afghani 1839–1897) who shunned the revolutionary path and asserted that Islam was capable of an internal development which could lead to an accommodation with contemporary Western values without its losing its essential nature.

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Muhammad ‘Abduh—the most profound Islamic thinker in Egypt of the nineteenth century—believed that society had decayed and that it was in need of reform. Although he was inspired to propagate ideas of reform and was an intellectual leader, he did not have the nature that would lead him to become an activist preacher who would lead a movement of opposition. He remained an ‘*alim*’ throughout his life urging change through the printed word (together with sermons and teaching). He wrote about the problem of bridging the gap between what he believed Muslim society should be and what he saw it had become.[1]

‘Abduh was probably more influential than al-Afghani—an influence he retains today in some quarters. In general he approved the changes introduced by Muhammad ‘Ali (ruler of Egypt 1801–1849 and modernizer) and others but he also saw the dangers of the British occupation of the country, the dangers of increased secularization, of following principles derived by human reason for worldly gain. He was also aware of how fragile the European culture was among those who adopted superficial French manners.[2] He maintained that ‘although Orientals imitate Europe there is no profit in that unless they perfect their knowledge of its sources’.

He asked how the gap between Islam and modernity could be bridged and answered himself by saying that Muslims had to accept the need for change based on the principles of Islam. Islam demanded change, he felt, but only if this change were rightly understood in the light of the original and pure sources of the faith—leaving plenty of space for individual interpretation. Islam should be the moral basis of a modern and progressive society but it could not approve everything done in the name of modernity. Islam should act as a restraining principle. A society living according to God’s commands must by reasoning affirm what was relevant and admissible to contemporary society. Thus Muslim society could adopt modern ideas and sciences without having to abandon Islam itself.

‘Abduh still left many problems unsolved—for example which commands of Islam should society live by, or which ideas from Europe were acceptable. Later thinkers claimed that he had made such concessions to modern ideas as would eventually lead to secularization. Some still follow him today, while some have reacted sharply by turning to more oppositional and radical forms of fundamentalism.

His solution was similar to that preached by reformist leaders—a closer observance of the *shari’a*. In his case, however, he did not urge a simple return to the past—the message of many reformers—but that the need for change should be accepted and acted upon and he linked that change to the principles of Islam. He believed that in true religion there was a difference between what was essential and unchanging and what was inessential and could be changed. This is a different approach from that of say Ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhab, who insisted that it was necessary to reform Islam by shedding all accretions (*bid'a*) from the time after Muhammad and that which would remain would be the true and necessary basis of Islam.

ʻAbduh had been a disciple of Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani, a more intense and activist man. He began to formulate ideas on how Muslim society should react to what he saw as the threat from Europe. He did not reject all Western ideas and was in fact influenced by some of them. He believed in man's ability to act to change his condition and to make progress in social and individual development. Any progress would depend on his moral state. He underlined the necessity of acting rationally and of accepting ideas produced by reason. Muslim society would make progress again if it accepted these ideas and returned to the truth of Islam—thus coming up against the recurring question of what is 'true' Islam and who should interpret it.

Islam to al-Afghani was primarily a belief in the transcendence of God and in reason. *Ijtihad* (independent judgement) was a necessity and the duty of man was to apply the principles of the Qur'an afresh to the problems of the time. If society did not do this it would stagnate or merely imitate. But imitation corrupts society. He maintained that '[i]f Muslims imitate Europeans they do not become European for the words and actions of the Europeans spring from certain principles which are generally understood and accepted within Western society'.

He insisted that Islam should be active and energetic. He quoted the Qur'an in support of these assertions. 'God does not change what is in a people until they change what is in themselves.' Europeans had integrated and welcomed change. Muslims would have to do it in their own way by becoming better Muslims. He was convinced that that Europeans had modernized because they were no longer really Christian and that Muslims conversely were weak because that were no longer really Muslim. He advocated that Muslims should stand together to become stronger in the face of the West. They had to be 'true' Muslims to succeed. When Muslims followed the teachings of the Prophet they were, said al-Afghani, 'great in the worldly sense'[3] after which there was a long and melancholy decline. His dynamic message passed down to others in Egypt of the more activist leaders and his message certainly inspired them to follow his teachings. In Egypt Hasan al-Banna'—the founder of the Muslim Brothers (who had known ‘Abduh’s colleague Rashid Rida)—and his successor Sayyid Qutb took the essence of the message as the basis of their more forceful activities.

With Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb a threshold is crossed from the relative calm of the thought of ‘Abduh and Rida to the often more extreme activities of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* and their splinter groups. The *Ikhwan* were concerned with opposing the ‘external’ imperialism of the British occupation of Egypt. The justification for this opposition was no different in kind from the struggles of ‘Abd al-Qadir against the French in Algeria or Shamil in the Caucasus against the Russians. *Jihad* meant struggle against opponents, a struggle ending if necessary in death and martyrdom. The activities of the *Ikhwan* included the burning of buildings, rioting and attacking the British forces.

The *Ikhwan* also sent volunteer squads into *jihad* against those they considered to be the imperialist Zionist occupiers of the Muslim Arab land of Palestine. They fought well and suffered in the general defeat of the Arab armies. They were deeply marked by the loss of Palestine. Henceforward, the movement adopted the ambitious multiple aims of expelling the Jews from Palestine and the British from Egypt and of cleansing the world and restoring Islam. They formed Liberation Battalions which were given arms by the Egyptian government. There were numerous clashes between them and the British forces. The most serious event was Black Saturday 26 January 1952 when a large part of Cairo was set on fire and 30 people were killed.

The coup by the Free Officers in 1952 signalled a significant change in the fortunes of the *Ikhwan*. They criticized Nasser for negotiating with the British in 1954 and called for an end to the military regime. They attempted to assassinate him—a shot was fired at him by a member of the *Ikhwan* while he was addressing a rally in Alexandria. A light bulb above his head was shattered and several people were injured. The *Ikhwan* had gone too far and their leaders were arrested and six executed including the would-be killer. The death sentence on the leader Hasan al-Banna was commuted to a life sentence. The ideas of the *Ikhwan* remained potent in Egyptian society as part of a strong fundamentalist current among many who saw a return to a pure Islamic society as an answer to all their problems. The Islamic party in Egypt adopted the all-embracing slogan ‘Islam is the solution’ as their motto.

The ideas of the *Ikhwan* were taken to another level by a new inspirational thinker, Saiyid Qutb, who was born in 1906 in Upper Egypt. His mind developed early in two ways: he learned to appreciate the beauties of Qur'anic recitation and became a critic of traditional religious and educational institutions which he thought should widen their academic base. In Cairo from 1929 to 1933 he received a British-style teacher training and during 1948–1950 went on a life-changing visit to the United States. Much of what he saw there which Westerners take for granted as a part of everyday life shocked Saiyid Qutb to the core. He observed the open relations—even in churches—between men and women which in his view could only lead to vice and corruption. Like many a Muslim man he seemed unable to conceive of human relations in terms of intellectual equality and mutual support—let alone that women had any role outside the family. He adopted a very gloomy view of Western civilization. For him Islam and the West were incompatible—two camps between which coexistence was impossible. There would have to be a struggle between believers and non-believers, between secularism/capitalism and Islam. Modernization represented the triumph of the West and the defeat of Islam. He saw the West with its emphasis on science and technology destroying the validity of religion. People were abandoning the spiritual in life for the material. The West was failing to provide for the dignity and welfare of mankind. This situation he termed a state of *jahiliya* (the time of ignorance before the revelation of Islam) in which he included much of the contemporary observance of Islam.

Saiyid Qutb considered Islam to be a complete social system which catered for all people's needs and which differed fundamentally from all other systems.[4] The past of Islam had to be summoned up to combat the West and modernization and to destroy all ideas of *jahiliya*. He predicted the death of capitalism and criticized all attempts to reconcile Islam with contemporary society, demanding that society should comply with the values of Islam. Modernity should be dismantled and young people should be educated into the true Islamic spirit.

Qutb argued that Muslims would have to fight against the state in order to recreate their ideal society. He condemned democracy, political parties and a sovereign electorate, which he termed shirk (polytheism). He would lead the struggle against the ruling state and a new generation would recover Islam. No victory would be possible unless Muslims dissociated themselves completely from the state and actively opposed it.

Qutb's thought show at least two things: first, his belief that Islam offered a complete solution to all society's problems and needs for future progress, and second, that—as with many other thinkers—few practical policies were offered to solve specific problems. His ideas were largely negative in that he considered everything that came from the West to be pernicious, his solutions too non-specific to have much practical application.

At first President Nasser consulted Qutb frequently in search of policies for the new state but Qutb refused to join the government and in fact turned against it as he believed it was ignoring Islam. He took part in the unsuccessful plot to assassinate the President of Egypt and was imprisoned. While in jail, he wrote two works of a radical anti-secular nature containing anti-Western material based on his interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic history. While imprisoned he witnessed the ill treatment of other members of the *Ikhwan* and sympathized with them, convinced that only a government bound entirely by the principles of the *shari'a* could or would act morally.

Released, rearrested and tried, he was executed for his part in the attempt to assassinate Nasser. His radical ideas have lived on and have been the inspiration for several of the more extreme Islamic movements that arose following his death.

In character Saiyid Qutb followed the path of his Muslim predecessors. Convinced through education and upbringing of the profound value of Islamic principles he grew up convinced that those principles needed to be restated in terms appropriate for the twentieth century and then acted upon. His nature and his convictions led him to state openly his dissatisfaction both with the government and with the '*ulama*' of the Azhar. He wrote rather than preached his message but was convinced enough to rise up against the man he considered to be an unjust ruler. More than with other reformers his ideas have outlived him and have led the world into violent confrontation.

NOTES

1. A. Hourani, *Arabic thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 136. This section is based on Hourani's writing.
2. An abiding memory of Cairo life is dinner I attended in a 'French'-type apartment, with white-gloved waiters, 'Louis XV' gilt furniture, European and Egyptian guests speaking fluent, if accented, French.
3. A. Hourani, ibid., p. 129.
4. He did not seem to know (or care) that Methodism had made the same claims in the eighteenth century or communism in the nineteenth.

CHAPTER 9

What Is Modernity in Islam?

Much has been written about the concept and effects of modernity on people and society. The individual movements that we have looked at so far have been seen as ways of reviving Islam as conceived in the minds of inspired individuals who lived in certain societies. The movements were formed initially as responses to localized problems and needs, as an attempt to rectify an existing situation and to restore to their followers the original Islam which they considered to be the universal solution to all problems. This solution was never considered as a way of 'modernizing' their societies—as on the contrary they hoped to return to preexisting conditions. When movements had to face foreign invasions, their message was that the foreigner had to be resisted because he brought with him 'modern' innovations and concepts that were considered to be anti-Islamic. Returning to an earlier purer Islam could be taken as a step backwards. If it were achieved—as it was in a way, for example, in Saudi Arabia—it became obvious that the Islamic solution could create a framework for the development of a state and society in the contemporary world. The demands of modernity, however, were of a different nature and had to be faced and integrated into that society. Religion could contribute only to a certain degree by helping to define the general objectives of society and the attitudes of those appointed to oversee its progress. Those who thought about this process wanted not to '"suffer" modernity but actively [to] accept and foster modernization … in a religious context that [was] in harmony with the indigenous culture'.[1]

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If change (modernization or modernity) is not integrated as smoothly as possible, the process can disrupt societies and distort values. Change has to be generally seen by the people as beneficial; otherwise individuals may become alienated (or radicalized), divided against their societies and each other, in situations where previously held values have not yet been replaced by other accepted norms. Such unstable situations may lead to political instability, social tensions, psychological disturbances and economic inequality.

In the Islamic Middle East change was frequently stimulated under European influence and colonization (in a wide sense). Traditional modes of religion, governance, economics and education were put under scrutiny by some thinkers and an intellectual response was put forward. These challenges to accepted attitudes had appeared in the name of the more advanced outside world and they had raised the problem of what it was to be modern and whether this was a question relevant to a contemporary Muslim: could one be 'modern' and remain a Muslim? There was no general agreement on an answer to this vexed question.

One should at this point make the distinction between modernization and modernity (or modernism).[2] It is a theoretical distinction and one not always adhered to. Modernization usually entails the introduction into society of the products of modern life: technology, communications, transport, industry. The terms modernism or modernity have been used to define the processes set in motion by integrating new ideas and new ways of doing things into a traditional milieu—integrating new ways of thought and analysis, of changing lifestyles.

Modernization began in Europe with industrialization, commercialization and economic developments whereby people learned to accept new methods of production and to abandon traditional modes of economic relations. Instead of being tied to the land and to seasonal patterns, they could start to make individual choices and decisions which took people away from their traditional backgrounds—moving from village to town for example—and widened their expectations. Regular income offered more life possibilities. (Of course religious leaders were usually on hand—in Britain for example the Methodists—to point out the evils of straying too far from the right path in making such decisions.) People had to become more mobile and capable of conceiving and absorbing change. Modernization then progressed into and beyond the so-called postmodern age. Industry declined and technology largely took its place. This was something which could be imported wholesale into societies not yet fully industrialized or modernized. Faced with modernization people have had to make choices about their lifestyles and have had to adopt mental attitudes consistent with the styles they choose.

The problem of rational choice faced by modern men and women involves weighing the relative merits of alternatives and having the freedom to doubt the efficacy of solutions traditionally offered by religion, politics or society. Doubting and choosing involve discussion and evaluation which lead to conclusions over which rational men and women may disagree. Not all modernizing societies reach the stage of encouraging or permitting dissent and some vehemently forbid it. They insist that choice and decisions cannot be left to the ordinary citizen.

Opponents of modernity who defend traditional ways of thought and action consider the effects of change unwelcome and debasing. For them strictly traditional society is sufficient in itself and they deny that there is any necessity for new ways to enter hearts and minds. For example, the guardians of such societies strongly oppose women's emancipation, political choice or religious dissent.

In the Arab world those disturbed by the values of modernity have stressed the concept of *asala* (authenticity—remaining true to oneself and ones heritage). Such people claim that it is essential to maintain their integrity when faced by the kind of profound change which they consider to be detrimental to their older cultural values, the importance of which they seek to emphasize. Present times are looked upon as just an interval between the perfect origins of society and their re-establishment. These traditionalists engage in a struggle against the modern world—which they consider the enemy—in an attempt to preserve the Arab's authentic soul as expressed in language, culture, history and Islam.

The solution to the problems of contemporary society proposed by many reformers has been a return to the purity of the early days of Islam. Muhammad was reported to have said that his generation was the best and the question which exercised thoughtful believers was how it was possible to revive the past in changed conditions. One extreme response has been that of groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan—namely, a renunciation of many of the innovations of modern life. But that is not the solution offered by more moderate Muslims such as the Moroccan intellectual Abdou Filali-Ansary. He posed the question in his own terms:

> How can one be a Muslim today? There is no simple answer. On the one hand, Islam seems to be a compendium of beliefs unchanged over the centuries, on the other modern life offers us a collection of more up-to-date concepts, more in conformity with contemporary scientific theories and

> ideas developed by modern man which are in general more satisfying from an intellectual point of view. There is often no compatibility between the two aspects; not just with Islam as a faith but also with Islam as a form in which it is lived in the conscience of millions. Most Muslims live an ambiguous life in which they maintain an attachment to the Muslim community without totally adhering to all the beliefs which flow from it. Therefore, everyday life and belief can be in sharp opposition.[3]

Responses to the problem of how to be a Muslim and be modern have been numerous. Some have found it impossible and have entered a secular world without religious faith. Others have attempted to live Islam in a manner befitting contemporary circumstances following the concepts of *tajdid* (renewal), reformism (*salafiyya*) or fundamentalism. *Tajdid* we know was preached by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in Arabia and by the Sudanese Mahdi. Reformism was more a reaction to the challenge posed by the modern world and its concepts. Many were the solutions offered by a variety of thinkers. For Hasan al-Banna Islam was a faith and an ideology that encompassed and regulated all human affairs which did not shrink from facing new problems and necessary reforms. He believed that modernism had already gone too far and he held the West responsible. In particular he criticized the effects of Western educational systems, which instilled doubt and heresy in the minds of Muslims.

Reinterpreted, Islamic culture and tradition would be able to resist and eradicate Western encroachment. Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb followed their predecessors in putting forward a reintegration of Islamic values as a solution to contemporary problems. It was a simple and appealing message that had taken some of the elements of al-Afghani's and 'Abduh's teaching and condensed them into a rather negative—yet activist—attempt to reform Muslim society. The activist, more radical approach does not have time for subtleties and the consideration of others.

The extreme denial of modernism stemmed from feelings of rejection, alienation and despair. The only feasible solution was the reinstatement of a total system based on Islam alone and extremists rejected the rights of others to hold differing views. Other Muslim thinkers have been less intolerant in their views. Some believed that the existing *shari'a* could be modified slowly into a system adequate for modern life. They assert that the '*ulama*' are responsible for the stagnation in Islamic thought because they too claim the sole right to have opinions and they maintain that their texts are binding and unalterable. These thinkers disagree with those vociferous groups that claim to speak for all Islam and call for the establishment of an Islamic state. They oppose those breakaway movements—such as *Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra*—and they dispute the right of any individual or group to issue prescriptions claiming divine sanction. No human being, they say, has the right to speak in the name of God and to interpret exclusively the will of heaven. They claim that the fundamentalists do not have a plan for society and are more concerned with form than content, for example growing beards or wearing the veil. Religion in this form pushes society backwards and the idealization of the Islamic past is dangerous. In their view Islam as a state has been detraction from Islam as a religion.[4] 'Islamic movements have used the lack of a national ideology to mobilize the power of Islam but their backward looking vision is an antonym of modernity.'[5]

Among those Muslim thinkers who wanted to maintain the *shari'a* adapted to the modern world, Sadiq al-Mahdi (great-grandson of the Sudanese Mahdi, carrying on the family tradition of political leadership but claiming no divine sanction) understood the demands of modernity and believed that it was necessary to have a new kind of religious thought which could 'modernize' the *shari'a*. He understood that Westernization (modernism) was Europe-centred and therefore could be rejected. Identity, he said, refers to the nature of man's response to incoming changes. He considered modernization to be man's attempt to master his environment. His message of moderation was lost, however, in the morass of Sudanese politics and he was never able to put his beliefs into practice.

The well-known Moroccan philosopher Muhammad 'Abed Jabri put forward his views on the future of Islamic society in his work *A Critique of Arab Reason* and in the 1990s published a series of articles explaining how Muslims could accept into their world the attitudes introduced within the modern context of democracy and human rights. Jabri was particularly scathing about the harm done by the *salafis* (fundamentalists). He believed that contemporary *salafism* was harmful because it hindered a realistic evaluation of the conditions under which present-day Muslims live.[6] *Salafis* with their emphasis on a regression to an early Islam could no longer confront the challenges that all human societies have to face. *Salafism* in its intolerance is the direct progenitor of contemporary extremism. Fundamentalism will recede, he said, writing before the rise of the Islamic State, if *salafis* agree to rebuild the *shari'a* according to modern concepts. He thought that the traditional *salafi 'ulama'* were hardly capable of that as they had been unable to adapt to the demands of societies that had experienced the processes of modernity. *Salafi* intellectuals had been unable to transform the historical consciousness of Muslims and had seen the past only as something to be recreated, not as a way forward to an acceptance of a modernity founded upon modern and rational principles. To move forward in that way, believed Jabri, would involve a transition that Islamic societies do not seem willing to make.

Jabri concluded that it is 'the task of modern intellectuals … to provide, build, and disseminate new concepts which would make possible a real reform. It is the reform of a traditional '*ilm* (knowledge), or rather its replacement by a more workable and modern knowledge, which will provide the necessary preconditions for a real renewal in the Muslim world view'.[7]

Such moderate thinkers struggle with the concept of modernity, seeing it as an unescapable feature of the modern world but one with which Islam still finds it difficult to coexist. They know that Muslims have to live with modernity, and nowadays with the even more problematic set of concepts grouped together under the umbrella of 'postmodernism'—an age which reflects the present chaotic state of the world where it is difficult to find certainty of beliefs, a world 'suspicious of desiccated notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation … or ultimate grounds of explanation'.[8] The Islamic world could not quite have experienced postmodernism as it had not yet succeeded in coping with modernism. The so-called Arab Spring was an attempt to move forward which ended in a struggle (termed by some as an Islamic winter) between the traditional conservative forces of the status quo and the more extreme versions of the Islamist movements.

To the ranks of Muslim thinkers who attempt to cope with the demands of accepting or rejecting modernity one should add the Tunisian Muhammad Talbi who has expressed the most tolerant and benevolent point of view. Ploughing a perhaps lonely furrow, there is no ambiguity for him. His faith is absolute and his attachment to coherent and satisfying views for modern man is also firm. He is one of those rare intellectuals who have striven to gain a satisfactory balance between a living faith and an uncompromisingly modern vision. For him faith is the free choice of the individual which does not conflict with or constrain reason. He believes that God has given man entire freedom in this. As he writes, '[t]here is no meaning to faith if there is no freedom of choice. The renewal of Islam is more to do with questions of the social and political order than with questions of theology which remain entirely sound. Muslims have suffered because they used Islam politically'.[9]

He is clearly opposed to all those revivalist leaders who have done so and have tried to impose on others their interpretation of religion. Nobody—he asserts—has the right to speak in the name of Islam and therefore dictate to others the nature of their faith. No one sect can claim a monopoly of truth: 'The religious organizations are numerous and they promote different interpretations. Each thinks it is the foundation of Islam, its basis and its source, and that anyone who disagrees with it is in error. I do not subscribe to any trend which speaks in the name of Islam, establishing itself as an ultimate authority.'[10] Islam has always been torn apart in areas other than worship.

These movements and individuals have gone astray in their use of or appeal to the *shari'a* in a way 'not cognisant of reality or history, as an edifice characterized by "retrospectiveness", imaginary and chimerical, incompatible with reality'.[11] The result of aggressively promoting such a doctrine is 'the tensions which we live with today … in which a fanatical extreme has been reached'.[12]

Talbi is looking for the eternal ethical principles of Islam to be reasserted away from the distortions caused by the misreading of history and the attempts to impose an Islamic government which denies freedom of choice and tolerance. He is of course calling for tolerance, freedom of choice, self-discipline and responsibility. He advances a positive Islamic vision of people able to interpret the contemporary world and to fix their position in it for themselves. His vision of Islam for the modern world is that of the best political order under which an individual can make a 'free and spontaneous choice of (the) pious Islamic path'.[13] Without freedom of choice religious belief cannot be properly established.

NOTES

1. J. Cooper quoting Barbara Stowasser, in *Islam and Modernity* (London, 1998), p. 38.
2. Arabic has two roots to express modern and it is quite difficult in everyday usage to distinguish between them. '*Asri* tends to mean 'contemporary' and *jadid* new. It is interesting that *mujaddid* (the historical term for the awaited reformer or *mahdi*) comes from the second root and means not someone who brings in something new but who restores something that once existed—the very opposite of modernization.
3. *Islam and Modernity*, p. 4.

4. Compare the views of Muhammad al-Nuwayhi well summarized by I.J. Boullata, in *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany, New York, 1990), p. 158.
5. Boullata, p. 163 quoting Halim Barakat, in *Al-mujtama' al-'arabi al-hadith.*
6. 'Can modern rationality shape a new religiosity?' by A. Filali Ansari, in *Islam and Modernity*, p. 167.
7. Ibid., p. 171.
8. T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Post-modernism* (Oxford, 1996), p. vii.
9. *Islam and Modernity*, p. 9. See R.L. Nettler, 'Mohammad Talbi's ideas on Islam and Politics', pp. 129–155.
10. Ibid., p. 145.
11. Ibid., p. 148.
12. Ibid., p. 153.
13. Ibid., p. 153.

PART III

Revolts Renewed

Movements of revolt were not slow to reappear in the twentieth century since when they have spread and have often assumed violent forms. A root cause of Muslim rage has been the continuing unequal situation in Palestine/Israel.

CHAPTER 10

Features of Later Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Islamic Movements

Islamic movements of the twenty-first century have assumed an especially violent and extreme character. Some of them can trace their roots back to earlier movements of reform and revolt. Some have a sharper awareness of continuity than others. In contemporary Sudan, Libya, Algeria, Somalia and the Caucasus there has been some sense of continuity. In Sudan, although no new Mahdist movement has emerged, there remains an attachment to the person and ideas of the Mahdi; in Libya the descendants of the Sanusis were there at the fall of Gaddafi. In the Caucasus the name of Shamil has been evoked in the continuing resistance to the Russian attempts to impose neocolonialism; in Somalia there remains a memory of the Mullah, and in Nigeria, of Dan Fodio. In Algeria, although resistance has been religiously inspired, there is no direct similarity to the situation in the nineteenth century.

Each state faced with disturbances has had to struggle to cope with the rise of these disruptive movements. My interest in them has not, however, been primarily concerned with a state's ability or inability to respond but is rather an investigation into the characters and motives of the men most concerned with animating the movements that have arisen. They (the men and the movements) have appeared in a new age and have consequently been influenced by novel and different circumstances. The development of technology and the social media has meant that twenty-first-century movements have often been more widely spread and made cohesive not by rallies addressed by an eloquent and charismatic leader—and on occasion

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led into battle by him—but by long-distance inspiration through social media. In this way, the leader remains apart from direct personal contact with his followers and his message to them is received via cyberspace. Yet, beneath the smart technology, the motives and personality of the leaders have been remarkably similar to those of their predecessors and they have often followed a similar path of personal development. But it must be said that at the same time there still exist gifted and thoughtful men who expound strikingly tolerant ideas and who have chosen to follow a non-activist or quietist approach to demands for reform.

The leaders and participants in the new movements have been those members of society who have become disillusioned with contemporary life and who have taken it upon themselves to act in order to create a new and more acceptable situation. They feel betrayed by politicians who, despite their promises, have in their view corrupted the basic principles of Islam, and in these men's words and opinions there exists a disappointment with what even the most popular nationalist leaders have tried to achieve. In the 1970s Ahmad Shukri Mustafa (the Egyptian activist) had expressed his deep discontent: 'I reject the Egyptian regime and the Egyptian reality in all its aspects since everything is in contradiction to the *shari'a* and belongs to heresy … we demand a return to natural simplicity and we reject so-called modern progress.'[1] 'Mechanized society has made people forget their being, their reality and their religious duty.' Two elements of these words are striking: the claim that the *shari'a* has been abandoned and the call for a return to 'natural simplicity'. While the demand for the full observance of the *shari'a* is self-obvious, what is meant by natural simplicity is not so clear and whether it is achievable is quite another matter. Although probably unconsciously, Mustafa is echoing the belief of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that the more man deviated from a 'state of nature', the more degenerate he became. And like Leo Tolstoy he believed the 'the state is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but above all to corrupt its citizens'. It is perhaps far-fetched to compare Mustafa with either Rousseau or Tolstoy but there is in his desperate plea a firm belief in a return to simplicity to solve all problems. He had no chance to try out his ideas as he was executed in 1977 for anti-state activities.

His vision was shared by other movements such as *al-Qa'ida*, the Algerian Front Islamique du Salut or Boko Haram, who shared a view of the world in black and white that included an extreme stand on religion. They viewed anyone outside their particular movement as an enemy and fit for condign punishments, which involved the use of violence against men and women, including torture, executions, rape and kidnapping—actions considered by them as legitimate and an offering to God. Death for such believers was of no consequence and was but a stage on the road to a perfect society.

In their version of society dissent or honest disagreement was inconceivable, an attitude founded in their utter certainty of having the truth, in their belief in a strict interpretation of the *shari'a* and—deriving from Wahhabism and Salafism—the notion that any form of democracy (including debate and elections) was no substitute for the law of God. Entertaining other opinions was considered to be *shirk* (heresy, the association of anything extraneous with the uniqueness of God). Being of a *sunni-salafi* persuasion, these extreme movements also consider the Shi'a to belong to the enemy camp that has as a whole corrupted religion. Consequently, the Shi'a have suffered persecution as much as other groups—for example Yazidis and Christians.

In some areas where a movement has maintained a grip on power (particularly the Islamic State) they have been able to make progress towards establishing the ideal organization of their vision. Their primary object has been to found a state based solely on the *shari'a* following the model of the historical caliphate, their leader taking the title of caliph or *amir al-mu'minin* (prince of the believers).

A dozen or more leaders emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. None has been long-lived and several have met violent deaths. Can they be considered as the true heirs of earlier leaders? In one sense they can, as individuals who came forward with the age-old message (however primitive or simplistic) that their society or state was corrupt and that it had to be reformed—by violent means if necessary. These men have been active beyond the boundaries of orthodox Islam and where possible state or foreign intervention has been used to suppress them.

They are of a breed of men, self-inspired, and convinced that they have a God-given role to lead their societies towards a millennium. They have been motivated by overall feelings of alienation and, unlike the majority of people around them, they have felt an impetus to act. Their discontent was with the unsatisfactory political situation in their homeland and their general inability to effect change. They also considered that the West—the non-Muslim world—was seriously harming their lives through political and educational systems that were instilling incorrect values into the minds of the citizens, especially the young. In politics they particularly hated the power and influence of the United States and the fact that American boots were desecrating the soil of the Muslim holy places.

Many of the young minds they influenced were frustrated and rebellious too, discontented with their elders and their corrupt lives. Some of them had gone to fight in Afghanistan to defend Islam against a foreign and godless invader. They had become militants ready to take up arms in the name of a *jihad* against the West and its influence. So much in their lives appeared unproductive and contrary to the real spirit of Islam.

Their leaders came from different backgrounds but had in common a conception of Islam which they were convinced had to be imposed on the world. It was a simple vision derived from the uncompromising views of Saiyid Qutb and the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, who themselves had taken ideas from Ibn Taimiya and heirs of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab—although these younger radicals were now convinced that the rulers of Saudi Arabia had themselves strayed from his precepts.

Some traditional concepts they proclaimed in a rather simplistic manner, for example the imminence of the appearance of the awaited *mahdi*, the practice of *hijra* or their blind adherence to the precepts of *shari'a*. Although they originated from different backgrounds these men were drawn into similar modes of action. Some had received a basic education but had been rebellious and disruptive students straying into criminal or violent behaviour. Some had been imprisoned for a period for criminal activities or for plotting against the state and while in prison had absorbed more radical ideas and more extreme positions. Others had followed advanced training in technical subjects, engineering, agriculture or surgery and yet their trained minds had not prevented them from adopting radical positions.

As they lived under the influence of the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq they became familiar with violence and death inflicted on them by invaders. It was more than likely that their thoughts turned towards vengeance and to ways of removing the foreign presence. Violence seemed to be the only answer. Some of them took up the fight in order to cleanse their own state and its religion of corruption and infection. They formed groups and gathered followers. They did not look very much beyond the task of removing corruption and of creating a clean slate on which they could impose their ideal of the *shari'a*. They generally ignored the opinions of the established Islamic scholars of their time whom they considered to be beholden to corrupt governments or mired in traditional ways of thinking.

The most chilling aspect of the activities of these new leaders has been their continual use of violence with a religious justification for killing, raping and torture. Such horrors are perpetrated on obvious opponents—Westerners, Christians, Yazidis and Jews—and on those considered deviant Muslims (Shi'is, *sufis* or any Muslim who disagrees with them). The Algerian leader, Antar Zouabri, declared that every Algerian who refused to fight against the government was an apostate. For him the killings, massacres, arson attacks and kidnapping of women were 'an offering to God'.

Some of the leaders remained local in appeal—for example those in Algeria, Somalia or Nigeria; others, notably 'Usama Bin Laden, the leader of *al-Qa'ida*, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State 'caliph', gained a wider influence.

NOTES

1. D. Hopwood, *Egypt, Politics and Society* (London, 1982), p. 118.

CHAPTER 11

Renewal Again

On the morning of 20 November 1979, the routine of the pilgrimage in the Great Mosque in Mecca was shattered by an announcement through a loudspeaker in terms that were familiar throughout the history of the Muslim world that a *mahdi* had appeared. Groups of the new *mahdi*'s followers emerged from the crowds of worshippers to occupy the mosque—all this was happening in the precincts of the most revered mosque in the world. It took several days and many deaths for the Saudi regime to regain control and subdue the movement.

One year later in Northern Nigeria as many as 8000 believers were killed in the central mosque in Kano as they were led in a violent protest against local religious leaders. This and the Meccan movement, although widely separated geographically, had much in common. Both issued from backgrounds that much earlier in history had known very significant reform movements that had profoundly changed the history of their area and had protested against what had been seen as the corruption of religious ideals. Now two self-proclaimed leaders once again convinced willing believers to join them in movements that would face impossible odds and lead to almost certain death. Both of them had railed against the corrupt nature of their societies and called for a return to early ideals of Islam. Both men were immediately declared heretics by the official '*ulama*'; both had chosen significant Muslim dates on which to proclaim their movements—in Mecca the first day of the new century, and in Kano the Prophet's birthday. Both movements laid bare feelings of deep discontent among certain sensitized sections of the population.

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Yet another year later in October 1981 Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, was assassinated by members of an Islamic group as punishment for having in their view corrupted Egyptian society with false, non-Muslim values. Once again men—convinced they held the unique version of the truth—had committed actions that put them beyond the pale of society to face almost certain death.

When I first studied these outbreaks in 1983,[1] the widespread disturbances in the Muslim world with terrorist attacks, suicide bombings and the breakdown of societies such as Syria, Yemen and Libya had not yet begun, although there was war raging between Iran and Iraq and the unremitting struggle of the Afghan *mujahidin* continued against the Soviet invaders. However, the three events were symptomatic of the underlying discontent which later burst into the wild excesses of the Boko Harm in Nigeria, of 'Usama bin Laden and al-Qa'ida emanating from Saudi Arabia, and of the Islamic State (*Daesh*) in Syria and Iraq.

Under President Sadat there were significant developments in the political aspects of Islam in Egypt. Sadat had damned the Nasser era as a period of materialism and unbelief and professed himself to be a sincere, believing Muslim motivated in all his actions by love of his fellow men. He did not, however, follow consistently Islamic policies although there were hesitant moves in that direction from time to time. In practice his approaches to the West and to Israel alienated fundamentalist Muslim groups. He was trapped in something of a dilemma as he relied on aid from Saudi Arabia and was under pressure to prove that Egypt was a strict Muslim country. He toyed with what seemed like half-hearted proposals to introduce Islamic criminal penalties such as amputation of the hand for theft, banning alcohol and punishing apostasy by death—all controversial moves in a country with a large and ancient Christian minority. Nothing was done in this direction and at that time most Egyptians would have likely been opposed to such measures or, for example, any retrograde moves in the progress achieved in women's equality.

When Sadat was ostracized by the Arab world for his agreements with the Israelis at Camp David, he was relieved to some extent from Muslim pressure and was, in the pursuit of liberalization and equality, able to introduce measures that moved Egypt in a different direction, not towards becoming a non-Muslim society, but towards a less rigid interpretation of Islam. He wanted to make a separation between religion and state, which was anathema to many orthodox believers. He responded: 'Those who wish to practise Islam can go to the mosques, and those who wish to engage in politics may do so through legal institutions.' He felt driven to such an attitude by those who were engaging in more and more extreme politics. He had initially encouraged Islamic movements as an ally against the leftist opposition of Nasserites and others, but in so doing he had built up a good deal of trouble for himself.

After 1967 the banned Muslim Brothers had resumed some of their activities, particularly among the students. Nasser had released some of the previously detained *Ikhwan* and Sadat completed the process. Others returned from exile and by the late 1970s their propaganda and recruitment had noticeably increased. In 1980, at least one mosque in Cairo was filled to overflowing with Brothers praying, and at the end of Ramadan a large public square (outside the ex-royal palace) was covered with carpets on which thousands of others prayed. Their journal, al-*Da'wa*, which had been banned since 1954, had reappeared in 1976. Sadat, true to his words, allowed this freedom of religious activity while withholding political status from them. This was bitterly resented as it ran counter to their philosophy of attempting to replace everything in Egypt with a truly Islamic state. Some concerned Egyptians called for them to be represented as a political party able to participate in elections. The *Ikhwan* did not, however, resume the violence for which they had been known earlier.

Their basic orientation did not change. They deplored the moral deterioration in Egypt and called for the introduction of Islamic principles based entirely on the *shari'a*. If this were achieved, they claimed, Egyptians would then be able to avoid the dangers of corruption and contamination from the West. This was following their beliefs from their earliest days that everything evil in society had derived from the weak observance of Islamic principles caused by European influence. They criticized Sadat for having opened the country too far to the West. They criticized the socialist economy of Nasser because it had failed to create a society of equality and justice and had denied people their freedom. Nationalized industries, they claimed, transferred ownership of plants to the government and not to the people. Under Sadat the *Ikhwan* aimed to abolish left-wing parties, to ban communism as an atheistic creed and to purge the government and bureaucracy. They inevitably opposed any accommodation with Israel, a state that had appropriated Islamic land and against which a *jihad* must continue. They also professed themselves unhappy at Egypt's isolation from the Arab Muslim world.[2]

They widened their membership, especially among students and the middle classes. They ran welfare, feeding and medical programmes, thus gaining prestige lost by the government. Their propaganda was carried out on university campuses by Islamic groups in a most obvious manner.

For example, the wearing of the veil and Islamic dress by women students became more widespread.[3] The struggle for influence among students caused the government some disquiet and the authorities kept a wary eye on them—fearing that their activities could slip over into the political opposition. Sadat was opposed to universities becoming, as he said, 'arenas of political rowdiness'.

To some younger, more impatient Egyptians the *Ikhwan* were beginning, however, to seem incapable and unwilling to take action. More extreme groups emerged led by those keen to make their mark, such as *Al-Takfir wa-al-Hijra* (Group of Penitence and Withdrawal—'accusing others of unbelief and making *hijra*'). The existence of the group had been known since 1973 when it was implicated in an alleged plot to overthrow the government. Its ideology comprised a total rejection of existing society and a call for the *shari'a* to be reintroduced. The *sunna* of the Prophet should be the supreme example—implying (because of a seeming inability to face the demands of modern life) that all problems would be solved by a return to the conditions of the earliest days of Islam. Such a return would surely lead to a confrontation with the ruling elite whose non-observance of Islamic principles had led to society's problems in the first place. It was the simplest of ideologies. They insisted that the leader of the state had to be a Muslim who abided totally by the *shari'a*. If he did not, then he had to be replaced. The members of the group despised the '*ulama*' of the Azhar who supported the government, considering them corrupt hypocrites and opportunists who stood in the way of building a good and just Islamic order.

The leader of the group was Ahmad Shukri Mustafa, a disillusioned former member of the *Ikhwan*, and his followers were young students and others who felt alienated from the patterns into which Egyptian society had fallen. Born in 1942 in middle Egypt, he had attended both an Islamic school and Assiut University where he studied agriculture. He had joined the *Ikhwan* in 1965 and had been arrested for distributing their leaflets and imprisoned for six years. In jail he had read about and had been influenced by Sayyid Qutb's assertion that all Egypt was in a state of *jahiliya*. He took on the mantle of leadership and encouraged other prisoners to follow and to accept his conviction that most Egyptians were apostates for failing to struggle against the state.

He was released from prison in 1971 by Sadat and went on to finish his studies, but continued to recruit like-minded people. By this time the *Ikhwan* had officially rejected Qutb's theories. In 1973 following the further arrest of some of his members, he took a group to live in a cave cut off from society following the example of the Prophet's *hijra*. By 1976 he had some 2000 devotees living in isolation from the wider world in a poor area of Cairo. Their leader demanded complete devotion to him and the group and that they will be willing to make any sacrifice for their cause. Carried away by their enthusiasm they developed long-term aims and Ahmad took the extreme step of declaring himself the expected *mahdi*. He proclaimed his conviction that all existing Muslim scholarship was unnecessary as each Muslim should engage in *ijtihad* (independent judgement).[4] He shunned *jahili* society and all its mosques. His group encouraged women to join.

On a more mundane level he tried to kill some ex-members who had left him and in July 1977 the group shocked the public by kidnapping and murdering an ex-government minister (a member of the *'ulama'*) when the demands they put forward were not met. There were disturbances in Cairo with bombings and killings and 400 members of the group were arrested and accused of trying to overthrow the regime. Five including Ahmad were executed for the minister's death and many others sentenced to imprisonment. These moves did not weaken them but strengthened their resolve, inspired by what they saw as the positive example of the revolution in Iran in 1979. Sadat, faced with this kind of Islamic extremism, tried to divert public criticism by announcing the reintroduction of the traditional Islamic penalties for the crimes of apostasy and adultery and of the whipping of drunkards. This was an unconsidered and panicky over-reaction that caused considerable public concern and the government soon announced that the law on apostasy at least would be shelved.

In this ferment other groups appeared and in November 1979 over 100 members of a group known as *Jihad* were arrested and charged with forming an anti-government party. In the following January members of the same group carried out bomb attacks on churches in Alexandria. They and other groups were accused of receiving arms and aid from foreign governments (mainly Gaddafi's Libya) in order to commit sabotage. Sadat's reaction was to ban any religious group from forming a political party while at the same time he sought some religious sanction for his own policies. He turned to the *'ulama'* of the Azhar University to gain support for his peace treaty with Israel. It was they who traditionally supported the ruler against any popular discontent so that the religious life as they interpreted it could be maintained. They had supported Nasser in a similar manner.

In May 1979 they issued a ruling on the peace treaty:

> Egypt is an Islamic country and it is the duty of its guardian to ensure its protection. If he considers that the interest of the Muslims lies in being gentle towards their enemies, this is permissible because he is responsible in matters of war and peace … and more knowledgeable about the affairs of his subjects. … The existence of treaties between Muslims and their enemies is governed by clear regulations established by Islam. … The Azhar "*ulama*" are of the opinion that the Egyptian-Israeli treaty was concluded within the context of Islamic judgement. It springs from a position of strength following the waging of the *jihad* and the victory (of October 1973).[5]

The statement ended with an appeal from the Qur'an to other Muslims to follow Egypt's lead 'lest ye lose heart and your powers depart'. As a concession to Muslim sentiment, Sadat's amended constitution approved by referendum made the *shari'a* the main source of legislation in Egypt.

Young Muslim idealists viewed such manoeuvrings with cynicism. Within the Egyptian army—the guardian of the revolution but not, under Nasser, of religion—a young lieutenant, Khalid Islambouli, joined the extremist group *Jihad*. On the day of the parade in October 1981 to celebrate the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal in 1973, he led a small group of soldiers up to the reviewing stand and emptied his gun into President Sadat. He was captured and executed in 1982. He had pleaded that he had punished the one responsible for the moral corruption of the country. 'I killed the pharaoh. This is a religious cause.'

Sadat's successor, an unknown air force officer, Hosni Mubarak, stamped on all trouble and opposition from the Islamic fundamentalists and thus became the ally of the West.

NOTES

1. 'A movement of Renewal in Islam', in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. by D. MacEoin and A. al-Shahi (London, 1983).
2. For example, the Headquarters of the Arab League had been transferred from Cairo to Tunis on Sadat's shaking hands with Begin.
3. Seen by some as a backward step in a country where women's liberation had made certain strides.
4. Orthodox scholars taught that *ijtihad* could only be exercised by trained and qualified '*ulama*.
5. *Afro-Asian Affairs*, 76, p. 8.

CHAPTER 12

The Postmodern Era: The Rage of Islam

A consistent line can be traced in the earlier historical responses of Islam to crises in society but in the postcolonial, postmodern period the response has become all too violent, fragmented and widespread. This violent response has occurred worldwide—inspired by Saiyid Qutb's writings—but taking from him only the most superficial elements of his profound Islamic justification. The extreme reactions have been an attempt to try to fill the void created by the collapse of nation states, the failure of communism, the end of Arab nationalism and of moves towards Arab unity.

Today the world is faced with interstate, interethnic and inter-sectarian rivalry and fighting. This rivalry tends to draw in outside interference and/or support—covert and unacknowledged (e.g. Iranian) or open (Saudi). All over the Middle East area there are attempts to find a solution to the fragmentation of states and the void left by discredited ideologies. The dictators of the twentieth century destroyed most opposition to their rule but did not succeed in completely eliminating Islamist opposition. The influence of the *Ikhwan* rose and fell in Egypt. Saudi Arabia (and to a lesser extent Morocco) continued to acknowledge Islam as the justification for the state, while Gaddafi introduced into Libya his own eccentric version of religious life and government. No Arab dictator was strong enough or indeed willing to follow Ataturk's path of secularization—which now sees a backlash in Turkey. Consequently, Islam remained as a focus of opposition to corruption and oppression.

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The influence of the *Ikhwan* remained in some areas and was often a breeding ground for other groups and individuals who committed acts of violence. Everywhere small associations of dissatisfied young Muslims sprang up who proclaimed their own version of Islam—an extremist version of the message of Sayid Qutb. This was coupled with a rise in violence and brutality and an opposition to all Western influence. To the non-Muslim Islam seemed to have become a religion of violence, hatred and revenge. The need for revenge was fired by Western military activities in the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan. The extremist groups appeared in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and elsewhere. Often one man came forward for a time as self-proclaimed leader. Some have since disappeared or have been eliminated, but stripped to their bare essentials there still exist the traditional Islamic movements, sparked by discontent, led by an influential—or even charismatic—leader who proclaims his message of return and reform and gathers about him convinced followers who are prepared for the ultimate sacrifice. Violence against opponents has generally increased and modern technology has provided methods of instant communication unknown earlier.

In 1979 a world-changing event occurred in the shape of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Russians had intervened in the country in order to support the pro-Soviet regime of Nur Muhammad Taraki. This seemed to be a late continuation of Tsarist expansionist policy in Central Asia and Afghanistan could be reached directly through Russian-controlled territory. It was, though, a great mistake to reverse the anti-colonialist movement of the twentieth century and it radically altered the basis of the relationship between Islam and the non-Muslim nations of the world. The Soviet invasion provided an extreme example of the cliché that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The United States and the Gulf Arab monarchies decided to support financially the Islamic resistance to the Soviet occupation. (During this period the United States was also selling weapons to Saddam Husain's Iraq in its eight-year-long war with Iran in an attempt to strangle the fundamentalist Islamic state at birth. Iran was also supporting the opposition in Afghanistan.)

Opposition to the Afghan government supported by the Soviet Union had grown among tribal and urban groups who became known collectively as *mujahidin*—those who wage *jihad* against the infidel. The name became commonly used in the West and the bravery of the Muslim Afghans fighting a secular superpower was much admired. These fighters were eventually joined by other Muslims who came from different parts of the world, the most significant of whom was undoubtedly ‘Usama Bin Laden from Saudi Arabia. He was a traditional type of Muslim leader but entirely of the modern age employing modern means to fight and to propagate his message. Added to this was a particular ruthlessness nurtured by his uncompromising opposition to American influence in the Muslim world.

He was born in Riyadh in 1957 of wealthy Yemeni immigrants who owned a construction company. He had the kind of privileged upbringing which would not obviously have prepared him for a life of extreme radical activities. However, after schooling, he joined the *Ikhwan* al-*Muslimun* in Saudi Arabia. Like many another young Muslims of his time his mind was a fertile ground for the radical thought of the *Ikhwan* and of Saiyid Qutb. Islam, as he conceived it, shaped his political beliefs and influenced every decision he made.

(It is likely that in the period 1976–1981, when a student at Jeddah University, he met the influential Palestinian scholar, preacher of *jihad* and future founder of *al-Qa’ida*, ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Azzam. He was a true Muslim scholar who had studied in the Faculty of *Shari’a* in the University of Damascus. During vacations he would return to his village in Palestine where he preached and taught in the local mosque. He then enrolled in al-Azhar in Cairo and completed a Doctorate in Islamic Jurisprudence. He had taken his studies further than most fellow leaders but had not followed the more traditional, quietist role of an Azhar ‘*alim*—indeed he felt that the only solution to the problems of contemporary Islam was a universal *jihad* against all its enemies. In 1979 he was moved to issue a *fatwa* declaring that fighting against the occupiers in Afghanistan and Palestine was an obligation on all Muslims. The aim of all believers should be to create a single Islamic state regardless of the frontiers set by the colonialist powers.)

As with other potential Muslim leaders, ‘Usama’s main interests at school had been the study of Islam, interpreting the Qur’an and the role of *jihad*. He added to the general concept of *jihad* what he thought were legitimate targets for murder by the *jihadists.* He absorbed Saiyid Qutb’s convictions that the United States was immoral and he called upon Americans to convert to Islam and to abandon their corrupt way of life. This kind of call had been commonplace with earlier leaders but addressed only to fellow Muslims—now ‘Usama was looking far beyond the world of Islam. He believed that only the complete restoration of the *shari’a* would lead the world back to morality. There could be no secular governments whether socialist, communist or Arab nationalist. He listed very comprehensively the four main enemies of (Sunni) Islam as the United States, Israel, the Shi'a and all heretics.

His message was disseminated by modern technology, including video recordings that were keenly analysed by his opponents. More traditionally in Arab style as a means of expressing himself he composed poetry (as had the 'Mullah' of Somalia) that was keenly read or listened to by his followers. Eventually, however, because of his status as a wanted terrorist he was unable to address his audiences publically or en masse.

After 'Usama had graduated in 1981 he travelled to Pakistan to help 'Abd Allah 'Azzam in the recruiting and training of volunteers to join the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. He used his personal fortune to finance the travel, training and accommodation of recruits. In 1989, after the Russians had finally withdrawn in the face of unrelenting *mujahidin* opposition, 'Azzam and 'Usama agreed to further their activities within the framework of the loose organization, *al-Qa'ida* (the base), to try to bring about their aim of universal *jihad* by random symbolic acts of terrorism.[1] They had helped to defeat one opponent; now it was time to turn against others.

There was yet another figure, a radical leader who had an influence on 'Usama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who largely guided him in the development of his more radical ideas. Al-Zawahiri also came from a stable, well-to-do background and yet was particularly receptive to a radical interpretation of Islam. Born in Ma'adi in Cairo, he was a studious boy who turned towards the study of medicine and qualified as a surgeon. After service in the Egyptian army he opened a clinic in Ma'adi. Despite his career of healing he was attracted by political Islam and at the age of 14 had joined the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*. He built up a cell in order to try to put Saiyid Qutb's ideology into practice and amalgamated with others to form the more extreme organization of Islamic *Jihad*. In 1981 he was arrested along with hundreds of others in Egypt following the assassination of President Sadat. After being tortured he was released and then got to know 'Usama in Jeddah and in Pakistan. These two Islamic activists agreed to merge Islamic *Jihad* with *al-Qa'ida*. Zawahiri became 'Usama's personal adviser and physician and the two of them masterminded *al-Qa'ida*—some observers claim that Zawahiri was the real brains behind the movement. They began their *jihad*—their motto being 'There is no reform without jihad'—in the form of terrorist attacks against Americans and others. 'We, with God's help, call on every Muslim who believes in

God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God's order to kill the Americans.' Zawahiri made the transition from life-saving physician to death-dealing terrorist with no difficulty. His inspiration or conversion had led him in a perverse direction.

Victory was to be gained by continuing warfare against all enemies. Home in Saudi Arabia, Bin Laden's rhetoric aroused the disquiet of the royal family who feared that this activist reformer was more willing than they were to disrupt the status quo. He was, therefore, expelled to Sudan. His terrorist activities there and in Somalia, Yemen, Egypt and Saudi Arabia meant he had to seek sanctuary back in Afghanistan.

Into the twenty-first century the confrontation between the non-Muslim world and Islamic terrorism became increasingly intense. Soon after the New York attack, the United States invaded Afghanistan in the attempt to dismantle *al-Qa'ida* and deny it a safe haven by removing the Taliban[2] from power. The Taliban vehemently refused the American demand to hand over Bin Laden and to expel *al-Qa'ida*. The aims of the invasion—later supported by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—were confused: a mix of President Bush's search for revenge, an imprecise aim to set right Afghan politics and an attempt to defeat Islamic terrorism. As time passed, one aim was clearly achieved—the elimination in 2011 of 'Usama Bin Laden in Pakistan. In 2012 President Obama declared: 'We have achieved our central goal, *or have come very close* (my italics), which is to decapitate (unfortunate choice of word) *al-Qa'ida*, to dismantle them, to make sure they can't attack us again.'

In October 2014 foreign troops officially ended operations in Afghanistan, leaving a confused situation in which the Taliban seemed to be still strong, Afghan government and democracy weak and terrorism having moved into a much more intense stage elsewhere. Zawahiri became de facto leader of *al-Qa'ida* after Bin Laden's death and carried on his murderous activities. He published a book *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* in which he laid out his and *al-Qa'ida's* ideology. He foresaw the future—like Saiyid Qutb—in terms of a perpetual *jihad* against non-believers, whom he usually termed Jewish American Crusaders (a description that neatly encapsulated all his pet hates). He insisted that *jihad* should be an ideological and physical struggle with no truce until American/Western influence was eliminated from the Middle East and the Muslim world. If Americans and their allies were the first force, he said, Islamic militant movements were the second force that depended on God alone.

In a sense, another arm of the Afghan war was launched in 2003 by the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq—the official justification being the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, the suppression of Saddam's support of terrorism and the freeing of the Iraqi people (from Saddam). No weapons of mass destruction were found and it soon became obvious that Saddam, however viciously, had been the key factor in maintaining the stability of the country. He had not established any links with *al-Qa'ida* as his official ideology of secular Ba'thism was clearly at odds with that of the extreme Islamic group. It was later admitted, however, that another aim of the invasion had been regime change. The Iraqis suffered the full might of American retaliatory force—the shock and awe of cruise missiles, napalm, white phosphorous, cluster and bunker bombs and depleted uranium weapons. Iraqi resistance quickly collapsed.

The Ba'thi state, which had lasted from 1968 under Saddam Husain and others, had gone. He had crushed all opposition to his rule and had used the Ba'th Party and the army to run the country. The Americans dismantled both of these and created a vacuum in which anarchy reigned. An insurgency against occupying forces began soon after the invasion and lasted through the ensuing war until 2011. The forces ranged against the US coalition were diverse and included Ba'thists, nationalists and a variety of religious groups. These latter often attracted foreign participants who took the fight as an opportunity to engage in *jihad* against the West. One group thus engaged was the *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad* (Group of Unity and Struggle) led by the Jordanian *al-Qa'ida* member Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, another leader willing to lead and inspire and die if necessary in the *jihad* against the non-Muslims.

Zarqawi was born in Jordan in 1966 of an impoverished family. He did not follow the traditional Islamic education of his fellow leaders; on the contrary in his youth he was a habitual, violent and alcoholic criminal arrested several times by the Jordanians. At school he was known as a disruptive, ungifted student. He lost his father early and descended further into rebellious behaviour. Attracted to fighting, he was drawn to Afghanistan to join the *mujahidin*. There he was befriended (and probably influenced) by 'Usama Bin Laden.

Back in Jordan he helped to found a new organization—*Jund al-Sham* (Army of Syria), a militant group with no clear objective (it had no religious connotation in its title). He was imprisoned when guns and explosives were found in his home. In jail he acted as a strong-arm man while absorbing more radical Islamic beliefs. Released under King Abdullah's amnesty in 1999, he fled to Pakistan and Afghanistan where Bin Laden funded a training camp for members of the new group *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-al-Jihad*. Zarqawi gained a reputation as an extreme terrorist fighting the Americans. He planned and carried out numerous attacks in Iraq where he targeted in particular Shi'i mosques—as he considered the Shi'a to be heretical non-Muslims—and the US-led forces whom he hated equally for their occupation of Iraq.

Zarqawi was obviously an inspirational leader, but only in the direction of violence and bloodshed, waging *jihad* against the United States—'for the sake of Allah against the sects of apostasy'. Bin Laden is believed to have accepted him as the Amir of *al-Qa'ida* in Iraq although some of its members seemed to be uncomfortable with his obsessive belligerency towards the Shi'a.

He was killed in a targeted strike in June 2006. As a leader his reputation was mixed. He was disliked for his anti-Shi'a and anti-civilian activities. He was not a leader with a deeply committed ideology of reforming Islam. He claimed though that '[w]e are fighting for the victory of Islam and we preach the oneness of God; we support *jihad*'. Like Qutb he opposed democracy and all things American. His legacy can be seen in the warped policies of the Islamic State—more of a gangster than an inspired leader.

At this time another leader emerged from the seemingly inexhaustible source of younger men motivated to lead extremist movements. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (taking the name of the first caliph) was born Ibrahim al-Badri in Iraq in 1971. He trained as a religious scholar and appeared to be a shy man who eschewed violence. It is thought that he also studied Islamic theology at the University of Baghdad. In the 1990s and the early twenty-first century he is known to have lived and worked in a mosque in a very poor district of Baghdad. The American invasion notably changed his life. He was arrested by the Americans in February 2004 as a 'civilian internee' and almost unintentionally as a hanger-on of the militants they had been searching for in Falluja. They described him as a 'street thug'. His year-long incarceration had a deeply embittering influence on him—almost the effect of a conversion. He was released as a 'low-level prisoner'. In 2006, with a group of friends he joined the *Mujahidin Shura* Council (an umbrella organization of Muslim Sunni groups formed to take part in the insurgency against the Americans) and he was put in charge of introducing the *shari'a*. In the same year the Council was transformed into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and al-Baghdadi was given the post of supervisor of the *shari'a* committee. ISI then became the Iraqi branch of *al-Qa'ida* and al-Baghdadi its leader. He replenished the staff of ISI with ex-Ba'thi officers from the military and intelligence who had been imprisoned by the United States and then left unemployed and seeking revenge. With this ready-made pool of supporters who brought certain skills to the fight he organized the horrific suicide attacks—traced back to the legacy of al-Zarqawi—against numerous targets, quite regardless of the civilian casualties caused.

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, Baghdadi sent delegates there who formed the new group *Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham* (Front of Victory for the people of Syria). In 2013 he announced its merger with ISI to form the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; *Daesh*).

Sunni Muslims have supported ISIS in opposition to the Shi'i-led government in Baghdad and have answered the call to join the mission to restore the lost glory of Islam. In June 2014 ISIS proclaimed its credo of a worldwide caliphate (the institution that took over leadership of all Muslims on the Prophet's death). Al-Baghdadi took on the role of caliph, thus reviving the office that had lain vacant since the disappearance of the last Ottoman sultan—an office whose future had been much debated by Muslim jurists and scholars who had suggested various solutions, none of which had gained general approval.[3]

ISIS proved to be efficient in a number of ways and unlike other insubstantial movements it soon proved that it was well organized and planned. It had a military wing that proved capable of defeating units of the Iraqi and Syrian armies and an administration that gained access to funding from banks, the oil industry and taxes. It also applied the *shari'a* in a very fundamental manner, using public beheadings as a brutal means of control.[4] It paid particular attention to the education of children, believing that indoctrinated youth would both influence their parents and carry conviction for the future. 'It doesn't care that it horrifies us; it knows that millions of Muslims have been horrified by what our governments have been doing to them.'[5] In practice, ISIS had created a state in the areas it had captured and taken the successful formula of similar *jihadist* groups to new lengths. Most significantly, it has not just preached *shari'a*—it has put it into practice.

As head, al-Baghdadi has defied most of the norms of the charismatic leader. He did not follow the usual path of preaching to a group of followers, inspiring them to action. If he had a 'conversion', it was to a deep hatred of the US occupation of Iraq which he absorbed from his contacts with other *jihadists* while imprisoned by the Americans. His reputation is that of a skilled and ruthless battlefield tactician, which made him more immediately attractive than al-Zawahiri, the theologian. Before coming to power he worked on a strategic plan behind the scenes and, when proclaimed leader, he went forth and executed it. His success inspired loyalty and confidence. In common with all other leaders, however, he insisted that his calling was from God. He shunned the spotlight and shied away from making speeches to mass audiences in order to maintain an aura of mystery. His efficiency has been behind the 'success' of ISIS to date and, although all decrees come from the top, it would seem that the group has become more than the man. The movement has exerted a powerful attraction on foreign believers eager to share in its activities and struggles and ready to face martyrdom.

ISIS has roots in earlier movements and takes its inspiration from Sayyid Qutb with his concept of perpetual *jihad* against the 'enemy'. In many ways, it is the most extreme of all the movements studied here with its commitment to unrelenting violence. In that way it is the logical continuation of Qutb's thinking that to achieve your aims—a West-free, infidel-free, modernity-free world—you have to eliminate those who do not accept your ideology. Qutb must have realized the implications of his message of relentless and continuous *jihad*. ISIS ideology stresses violence over theology and theory. It claims authority over all Muslims and aims to restore the lost caliphate as a means of anchoring the universal state. The word of Allah must be made supreme in a world in which the glory of the past will be regained through *jihad* carried out by those who have the authority to do so. As the *shari'a* is restored, Islam must be purified and *bid'a* (innovation) eliminated—earlier the aim of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. In fact a former *imam* of the mosque in Mecca has said that '*IS* has adopted *Salafist* thought … they drew their thoughts from what is written in our own books … the ideological origin is *salafism*'.[6]

ISIS regards other Arab states—the emirates, monarchies and states founded on the basis of the Sykes/Picot agreement—as being illegitimate, artificial creations. It has a particular disdain for the Shi'ite community, which has monopolized power in Iraq and elsewhere and has persecuted the Sunnis. They have to be eliminated together with the Western, crusader invaders—the Americans, the West and Israel.

Embedded in their ideology is the ancient tradition of expecting the imminent appearance of the *mahdi* who they trust will help them in their final battle against the 'enemy'. In eschatology there is a tradition that states that the final battle at the end of time will take place in Dabiq: 'The last hour will not come until the Romans land in Dabiq[7] (in Syria near Aleppo). An army consisting of the best soldiers of the people of earth at that time will come from Medina to counter them.' There will be a Muslim victory followed by the conquest of Constantinople and the defeat of Dajjal (an imposter—the false Christ) after the return of Jesus. The expectation of the *mahdi* is part of their nostalgia for an imagined past; hence their hatred of modernity and of the West that contributed to the corruption of the present. Hence also, the ISIS policy of destroying the monuments and artefacts of the ancient Near East which are considered irrelevant to the recreation of their imagined past as they were built by infidel peoples and civilizations before the revelation of Islam.

While the destruction of irreplaceable antiquities seems barbaric, the West has also been revolted by the methods by which ISIS has pursued its aims—terror, suicide bombing, beheading, enslavement, mistreatment of minorities, especially women. The spoils of war—slaves, women, money—are to be given as rewards to those successful on the battlefield. At the same time, it has proved to be successful in establishing some features of a state: an army, guerrillas, money and tax systems and in particular education.

The Islamic State is the outcome of the long history of revival movements. Its aims have been no different: the establishment of a purified Muslim state, the elimination or conversion of opponents, *jihad* and the unfettered application of the *shari'a*. Al-Baghdadi, in shunning the limelight, has not emulated the very public roles of previous leaders, but he has played an inspirational and practical background role in developing ISIS.

Another feature which repeats the history of earlier movements is the criticism of the activities of the Islamic State by the traditional *'ulama'* who continue to see themselves as the guardians of law and order, of the status quo and of the correct interpretation of the Qur'an, tradition and *shari'a*. Two grand *muftis* have spoken out. The *mufti* of Saudi Arabia declared that '[e]xtremist and militant ideas and terrorism which spread decay on earth, destroying human civilization are not in any way part of Islam, but are enemy number one of Islam, and Muslims are their first victims'. His colleague in Egypt said that '[t]errorism cannot be born of religion. It is the product of corrupt minds'.

Perhaps more remarkably, a large group of Muslim scholars issued in September 2014 a detailed open letter to al-Baghdadi rejecting his and ISIS's interpretation of the Islamic sources to justify their activities and beliefs. 'You have misinterpreted Islam into a religion of harshness, brutality, torture and murder. This is a great wrong and an offence to Islam, Muslims and to the entire world. Islamic State's *jihad* is warmongering and criminality.'[8] There follow 24 clauses which detail what in the writers' view is permissible and what is forbidden in Islam. Their conclusions are based on a detailed analysis of Qur'anic and traditional texts, which they claim are generally accepted in the Muslim world. All beliefs and activities, they assert, must have a Qur'anic basis and interpretations must be made only by those qualified to do so. Their programme is not a solution for the future but rather an eternal justification for their traditional beliefs. Their conclusions are a stinging denunciation of all that al-Baghdadi stands for and a justification of their own beliefs, but not a programme for future reform.

They classify the following as being forbidden by the Qur'an, the *shari'a* and *hadith* (tradition): the issuing of legal judgements (*fatwas*) without the necessary learning; the oversimplification of the *shari'a*; 'cherry-picking' Qur'anic verses to justify actions without considering the whole Qur'an; ignoring the reality of contemporary times when deriving legal judgements; killing the innocent; maltreating Christians, Jews and Yazidis; forcing conversions; declaring the caliphate without the consensus of all Muslims; denying women and children their rights. Finally on the vexed matter of *jihad* the authors of the letter insist that in Islam *jihad* is a defensive fight which is not permissible without the right cause.

This letter could have been written at any time in history as a condemnation by the Muslim establishment of a self-appointed revivalist reformer. In the twenty-first century it is a summary of what a group of scholars and clerics believes to be permissible or forbidden. But in reaction to the credo of a man such as al-Baghdadi it does not appear to offer a practical solution to the problems and demands of the postmodern era.

NOTES

1. In 1989 'Azzam was assassinated by unknown assailants. Numerous people were suspected including 'Usama himself, Mossad, Iranian intelligence and Egyptian Islamic *Jihad*.
2. The puritanical reformist movement in Afghanistan.
3. For example, Rashid Rida had suggested that one of the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula might proclaim himself caliph, for preference the Imam of Yemen, or Egypt, could be asked to nominate someone suitable. (Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 243.)

4. This had been practised centuries earlier by the Zanj movement.
5. H. Roberts, in *London Review of Books*, July 2015.
6. Quoted by J. Dorsey in a newsletter on the Internet.
7. IS has named its journal *Dabiq*.
8. The text can be found on the Web.

CHAPTER 13

How Individual Countries Have Reacted in the Postmodern Era

This chapter considers the ways in which seven countries that lived through revival movements in earlier times developed later in their history.

1 SAUDI ARABIA

The pact between Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud in 1744 did not ensure an uninterrupted future for the new state. It did, however, lay the foundations on which a very long process of development could take place based on the combination of the message of religious reform of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab and the military prowess of the Saudis. The Saudi expansion in Arabia awoke the attention of the Ottoman rulers of Hejaz and Yemen and they sent their vassal Muhammad ‘Ali, viceroy of Egypt, across the Red Sea to attempt to destroy the upstart state. He achieved this with ruthless efficiency and the Saudi regime shrank back to the area of Najd. There it contested control of central Arabia with the Al Rashid’s clan until the latter came out on top and drove the Saudis away into Kuwait. This was the low point of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s ambitions, but at this low point there emerged the figure who was going to turn around the fortunes of the Al Saud once and for all—‘Abd al-’Aziz Ibn Saud, the great-great-great-grandson of Muhammad ibn Saud, the protector of Ibn ‘Abd-al-Wahhab. He was able to recapture Riyadh in 1902 and finally defeat the Al Rashid clan in 1921.

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He expanded his kingdom with the support of a group of warriors known as the Ikhwan—the brothers. They were tribesmen who had accepted the Wahhabi creed and had maximized the military tendencies of tribal society with the zeal of new converts. They settled in groupings called hijras—following the example of the Prophet and many others. They were useful in expanding Saudi control but they let their expansionist and purifying tendencies get out of hand. They burned to expand and export the Wahhabi doctrine into neighbouring British-controlled Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan and they ran amok in Mecca and Medina destroying revered sites. Ibn Saud realized that he risked riling the British if the Ikhwan spread into other states and they in turn became disillusioned with him who seemed to be favouring the modernization of the country and forgetting or ignoring the demands of religion. They claimed that 'they alone were the defenders of the true faith and the supporters of the Law which Abd al-Aziz was seeking to destroy. (He) wanted power and conquest, they alleged; he was a friend of infidels and a party to all their activities.' In the end he was forced to turn on them and ultimately to defeat them. The ideology and aims of the Ikhwan remained beneath the surface of Saudi politics with those who criticized what they considered to be corruption within the Saudi regime.

In 1932 Ibn Saud proclaimed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia by uniting Najd and Hijaz. Despite the rapid development of the country and the growth in oil wealth there was never any question that the new kingdom would abandon its close ties with Wahhabism and the family of the descendants of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab—the Al-al-Shaikh—retained a very powerful influence on the religious, social and educational affairs of the state. The original aims of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab were partially lived up to although with the demands of the modern world hardly as strictly as he would have wished. There was natural tension between those impatient to integrate the country into the modern world and those '*ulama*' who viewed most modernization with suspicion if not abhorrence. They were able to put a break on certain developments, for example in education and women's equality, and Islamic punishments were to a large extent retained.

Some of the simmering discontent exploded in 1979 with the seizure of the mosque in Mecca by a young rebel, Juhayman ibn Saif al-'Utaibi, and his followers. Born in 1936 in a *hijra* of the Ikhwan he had been brought up to know about and resent Ibn Saud's defeat of the Ikhwan. He believed that the monarch had betrayed the original principles of the Wahhabi state. He enjoyed reading and thinking about religious texts and like many a would-be leader he drew his own conclusions—however superficial—from such texts. He served in the National Guard from 1955 until 1973 when he left to go to Medina University, which was under the leadership of the leading Saudi scholar Ibn Baz. There he joined a *salafi* (followers of the original practices of Islam) group and studied texts that would in his view show him what kind of acceptable path he should follow for a perfect Muslim life. He came to the conclusion that his aim should be the dismantling of the Saudi state and its replacement with an uncorrupted Islamic society. He recruited young people as followers also termed ikhwan—often students (some of them foreign) of the shari'a, disoriented and enraged by the pace of change in the country. They claimed that they wanted to return to the basic ways of the Qur'an and *sunna* to emulate the Prophet and to isolate themselves from the sociopolitical system.

Juhaiman published texts explaining his beliefs—that the royal family was corrupt and money-loving and that the '*ulama*' were in their pay. The logical conclusion was that the royal family had to be removed together with their hangers-on. This was not much of a programme but in 1978 Juhaiman and about 100 of his followers were arrested and questioned by the '*ulama*'. They were considered harmless and were released. It does not appear that the Saudi '*ulama*' subjected them to a thorough theological discussion of the kind that earlier would-be reformers had had to endure.

The '*ulama*' were mistaken as Juhaiman moved on to the extreme if totally unrealistic step of proclaiming his brother the expected mahdi. He wrote down his philosophy thus: 'We are Muslims who wanted to study the shari'a but we quickly understood that it could not be done in these schools and colleges where no-one dares criticize the government. We know that one day we shall be strong enough to name us a mahdi and we shall take refuge at his command in the Great Mosque where we will proclaim the beginning of the new Islamic state.' He was convinced that he would receive divine help in overcoming the unbelievers.

On the first day of the new Muslim millennium Juhaiman and some 400/500 followers seized the Grand mosque in Mecca. A two-week siege ensued before the takeover was defeated and Juhaiman killed in the fighting. It was a sad and pathetic uprising with almost no hope of success. The disillusionment and the convictions of those who were prepared to risk their lives are worthy of note. They underline how extreme was the despair they felt. The Saudi government was shaken by the siege and the movement was crushed by force but they really had no answer to the moral demands posed by Juhaiman and his followers. Perhaps Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab would have approved of his dissatisfaction if not of his actions.

2 Nigeria

The British Empire had created the state of Nigeria in West Africa by fusing together the Muslim north and a largely Christian south. The north, split by tribes and chieftainships and far away from a centre of Islamic orthodoxy, struggled to find its identity. It lagged behind the south in wealth, development and education. Whereas the south found it possible to absorb the Western type of education that was spread by missionaries, it was resented in the north as they believed it was harmful to Islamic teaching and values.

Tensions in different areas and among various tribes arose after independence was gained in 1960. Nationalism was not strong enough to hold together the country which began to lose its rationale in the 1980s. The north resented its inequality with the south and within the Muslim areas themselves conflicts burst out over the definition and interpretation of the *shari’a* and tradition, the position of the Shi’a minority and the rulings of various more or less qualified local scholars. There were in particular disputes over the rights of some Muslims to declare others non-believers. The discontent in the region was fuelled by widespread poverty, which led to a rise in the membership of radical Muslim sects as a way of expressing resentment and of looking for an improvement in living standards and prospects. Violence flared as a means to an end. The opposition of Muslim politicians and academics towards Western education became more widespread. The people of the north began to feel themselves out of place and unequal in greater Nigeria. As one Muslim leader was to say later, ‘[w]e are an Islamic caliphate. We have nothing to do with Nigeria. We don’t believe in this name’.[1]

This was a situation of growing discontent that provoked a leader to come forward to give it a focus and a voice. Mohammed Marwa of the Fulani came from Marwa in Cameroon across the border from Nigeria. After an education at home, he moved as a wandering *malam (teacher)* into Kano, where he became well known for his controversial preaching. The British authorities had been worried by him and pushed him back across the frontier. He reappeared in Kano after independence and embarked on a hectic career of disruptive activities based on his conviction that society was corrupt and that the majority of the poor population was exploited. He sincerely believed that he had been called to be the *mujaddid* of the time in the image of his great predecessor, Uthman Dan Fodio. He was, however, a much more extreme character, able to proclaim such doctrines as that the *hadith* and *sunna* were redundant. He was not averse to changing Islamic ritual and the wording of the prayers. He even rejected the prophethood of Muhammad, claiming that he was superior to that 'mere Arab' and that he was *annabi* (the prophet). He could exploit certain religious emotions in the area at the time—the expectation of the *mahdi*, rivalry between the *sufi* sects Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya—and after 1979 the excitement of the religious revolution in Iran.

To more orthodox Muslims, he flagrantly exceeded the bounds of the reasonable interpretation of Islam, but his preaching against the undue wealth of certain rich Nigerians did have great appeal for the poor and dispossessed youth, recent converts and unemployed immigrants of the area who felt that the authorities were not helping them enough. Muhammad Marwa preached against materialism and ostentation and banned such symbols of wealth as watches, radios, bicycles and cars. He foretold better times and proclaimed a *jihad* against the corrupt authorities and promised immediate entry into paradise to any who joined him and were killed in the struggle.

The disadvantaged who joined him, presumably easily with his radical views, accepted his assurances of a better future and of invulnerability when facing the army's weapons through his charms and amulets. He took his people off into a *hijra* or enclave in Kano where any opponents were to be summarily tried and executed. By 1979 he had gained some 10,000 followers who moved around with concealed weapons and really thought themselves invincible. Their attacks against the police and the religious authorities forced the army to intervene. In December 1980 Muhammad and his followers marched on the central mosque in Kano crying 'There is only one God. All the people of Kano are unbelievers'. They were met with gunfire from the army. As Muhammad had assured them they were invulnerable, they charged with their spears against machine guns. After vicious fighting and much rioting and pillaging, thousands were killed and their leader died of his wounds.

They had been misled by a false prophet who had made use of the volatile situation in the country to gain followers for his cause. He had no acceptable ideas for the reform of what he saw as corrupted Islam among the orthodox Muslim leaders but, plausibly, had some concern for the disadvantaged, despite leading many of them to certain death.

His own death led to a backlash of violence over the following 20 years. Northern Nigeria has had a history of engendering militant Islamic groups and the one that now arose—Boko Haram—was more lethal and long-lasting than any before. It was founded in 2002 by another radicalized Muslim leader, Mohammed Yusuf (1970–2009). His sect took the name 'The Group of People of the Sunna for Propaganda and Jihad' but was familiarly known as Boko Haram—meaning Western Education is forbidden, a name based on the feeling mentioned earlier that Western-type education was unsuitable for Muslims. It was a Sunni fundamentalist sect that aimed to live by a strict interpretation of the *shari'a*. It developed into a *salafi jihad* group influenced by Wahhabism that deeply resented the wealth of the Christian south of Nigeria. Some joined Boko Haram in the hope of improving their economic situation.

The group was more or less peaceful in its early days, adopting the well-worn practice of *hijra* to the more remote parts of north-eastern Nigeria, where they would create a more perfect society away from secular values. Mohammad Yusuf was born in the Yobe state in northern Nigeria. He dropped out of secondary school but still felt the need for a religious education. He therefore enrolled for Qur'anic training in neighbouring Chad and Niger during which he absorbed a series of radical Islamic ideas derived from Ibn Taimiya and Wahhabism. He soon became known as a skilful preacher who insisted on two main themes: that Western education was entirely contrary to Islamic values and that no Muslim should take part in any activity—political or social—associated with the West. He worked his way through various radical groups until founding his own.[2] He became more radical than his older contemporaries. (He quarrelled with his teacher from Kano, Ja'far Mahmud Adam, over doctrinal matters—the younger self-confident upstart disputing with his elders.) He became convinced that Nigeria was run by non-believers and that eventually a *jihad* would have to be fought against the Christians. He founded a religious complex and school that attracted to his following disenchanted and vulnerable youths from poor Muslim families.

Nigerians unconnected with Muslim radicalism, academics and theologians, have attempted to uncover the reasons for the growth of Boko Haram, for the attraction radical Islamic movements have had for disaffected youth and most interestingly to analyse the psychological make-up of leaders, so that the police using such psychological profiling might be able to spot potential trouble makers. The results are interesting as the traits pinpointed in trying to identify such people's mental, emotional and personality characteristics might also give pointers to the innate personalities of other Muslim leaders—if only in the most general terms. Abeeb Olufemi Salaam writes in *E-International Relations* about the psychological make-up of Mohammed Yusuf. He concludes that his impulse to preach and encourage violent religious radicalism was the result of 'psychological deficiencies within his personality', leading to total adherence to a set of values that include intolerance, moral absolutes, the desire for vengeance, feelings of relative deprivation, selfishness and delusional thinking.

Others who have studied cult leaders have come to similar conclusions. A common trait among such leaders is the ideological intolerance which refuses to accept the beliefs of others and proclaims that anyone who differs is an enemy. They are convinced that they alone possess the solution to the world's problems and that they are the chosen representative of the deity. They have a grandiose idea of who they are and of what they can achieve. As we have seen, such men despise those of the same religion but who interpret it differently. Thus Mohammed Yusuf quarrelled with his teacher and held in contempt those qualified '*ulama*' who criticized him for his deficient knowledge of Islamic theology. He retorted that Islam had been 'hijacked by nefarious western values'. Those who disagreed with him were *kuffar* (unbelievers). He needed to exact vengeance on such 'deviants'—hence his violent activities. He thought that the West, especially the United States, was aggressive in its attitudes and that he therefore had to be aggressive in return.

This and the need for vengeance could well have been hardened by feelings of relative deprivation—the conviction that you are unfairly deprived in relation to others who are richer, better educated and better fed than you are. Such feelings could push the activist to try to somehow remedy the situation. Mohammed Yusuf was angered by the state's inability to eliminate corruption, by the inequality between the very rich and the very poor, and by the poor quality of education. He preached an alternative way of life that attracted the disaffected youth of his region who were ready to accept his grandiose vision of his own abilities.

In time, Boko Haram attracted some 10,000 adherents who became increasingly violent and extreme. The Nigerian police initially ignored warnings of their growing militancy but were eventually forced to arrest Mohammed Yusuf—a move that increased his appeal and turned him into a kind of hero. For some reason he was released—perhaps simple inefficiency—and with his release Boko Haram violence escalated. In 2009 during a clash between the organization and government forces he was recaptured and summarily executed.

The movement could have ended there and then, and the government believed it had crushed it. However, another leader was waiting, one more pathologically addicted to violence—Mohammed Shekau (also known by the caliphal name of Abu Bakar). Some say he was born in Niger, an ethnic Kanur (an African Muslim group living mainly in northeast Nigeria); others that he was born in Shekau village in Nigeria. Commentators differ by some ten years over his birth date. He followed a traditional Islamic education, concentrating on studying *tawhid* (the unity of God) under a traditional Muslim *'alim*. He was known as a loner and a quiet theological student. However, somewhere in his personality there was inherent a strong tendency towards radicalism. Something or somebody must have convinced him that his life should be one of radicalism, although no obvious person or event is mentioned in the available sources. However, after 11 years' study he was reportedly dismissed from his institution for aggressive and militant behaviour. He claimed he was an intellectual and a theologian, but became a radical activist using his acquired knowledge to justify the most extreme interpretation of Islam. Some of those reporting on him termed him 'part gangster, part theologian'. He was attracted to the *Ahl al-Sunna* group (Boko Haram) and soon became deputy leader. He was recognized as a complex individual, but one who had the ability to inspire others as a leader. Although he leads a Muslim movement dedicated to creating an Islamic state, his actions are often violent and cruel. He claims he is a fearless and invincible man who will die only on God's command.

He does not have the charisma of his predecessor nor, it would seem, his oratorical skill, but he has an intense ideological commitment combined with a ruthless streak. He does not communicate face-to-face with his 'foot soldiers' but regularly delivers addresses on videos. He wields power through a hierarchical cell structure. This method of operation is at variance with that of the other leaders who maintained their authority through directly speaking to and inspiring gatherings of supporters—forging thereby a charismatic link. Critics maintain that he has no real ideological commitment and is interested only in vengeance. He has said chillingly: 'I enjoy killing anyone that God commands me to kill.' Under his leadership, Boko Haram has become more radical and ruthless in its murders and kidnapping. Shekau has declared that he is waging a *jihad* against Christianity, the United States and against all who disagree with him. Nigerian '*ulama*' question his understanding of Islam and do not regard him as a scholar. They condemn his love of violence.

On the death of Mohammed Yusuf, the Nigerian government believed that it had crushed Boko Haram, but in 2010 there was an unexpected resurgence after a mass prison outbreak. Under Shekau it increased attacks on the police, on Christians, on other ethnic groups and on dissenting mosques; it kidnapped hundreds of people including schoolgirls in order, they claimed, to convert them. They were accused of regularly using torture, executions and rape on their prisoners.

The Nigerian government brought in foreign troops to attempt to crush Boko Haram. At the same time, Shekau announced that he had joined the wider Islamic struggle and had associated himself with *al-Qa'ida* (which, it is hinted, did not completely support Boko Haram's violence). In March 2015 he declared that Nigeria was part of the re-established caliphate and of the Islamic State. As he said, '[w]e have nothing to do with Nigeria. We don't believe in this name'. They would be known henceforward as the Province of West Africa of the Islamic caliphate with Shekau their emir and *imam*. The authorities on the other hand believed that they had killed him or had at least eliminated Boko Haram. Colonel Rabe Abubakar of the Nigerian army described Shekau as 'irrelevant', 'a waning terrorist over whom Nigerians should lose no sleep', 'a drowning person struggling to hold on to anything to keep afloat'.

Does Shekau fall into the general pattern of Muslim revivalist leaders? I think he does. His training and personality combined in a deadly manner to inspire him to lead his movement with extreme, although not unprecedented, violence. Using modern methods of communication rather than direct sermons he stressed that the new Islamic State had a duty to seek vengeance.

3 Libya Under Gaddafi

The Libya that I had known and watched develop in its oil era came to an end in 1969 when a young army officer, Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi, led a bloodless coup to depose King Idris. As an eccentric dictator, he ruled Libya for more than 40 years with an iron hand, keeping the country united and crushing all signs of opposition. He was the son of a goatherd from the small settlement of Gaddafa near the town of Sirte in central Libya, not a Tripolitanian or from the Sanusi-influenced tribes of Cyrenaica.

He received an early Islamic education from a local teacher, but he followed the path of other revolutionary Arab leaders into an army career. He first took the Arab nationalism of Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser as his model and prepared a ‘free officers’ coup with a small group of officers. Soon he emerged as undisputed leader.

Tripolitanians under the King Idris regime had resented Sanusi rule from Cyrenaica. Gaddafi, coming from outside Sanusi inner circles, reserved his early vindictiveness for them, considering them to be corrupt and divisive. At the time he considered *sufis* to be heretics and anti-revolutionary. He hunted down their leaders, smashed Sanusi graves, disinterred the body of the Grand Sanusi and blew up the University of Jaghbub. He arrested Zubayr, the nephew of Idris who was badly treated and sentenced to death. He endured 9 years’ solitary confinement and 30 years’ ill treatment in prison.

The Sanusi were embedded in the tribal system, which Gaddafi considered to be antithetical to his modernizing, reformist policies. He marginalized the tribes in Cyrenaica in favour of his own Western ones and tried to redraw tribal frontiers in an attempt to blur territorial loyalties. But the tribal image remained strong and it proved well-nigh impossible to completely abolish tribal memories.

He experimented with various forms of government veering away from his early Arab nationalism. He was notorious for introducing the unique concept of the people’s government—the *Jamahiriya*—and the green books in which he outlined his policies. In the mode of earlier Islamic leaders, he gave a simplified, almost primitive Islam the key role in his ideology. His Islamic revival returned to Qur’anic origins and he rejected later scholarly interpretations of the *hadith* (traditions) and so incurred the inevitable disapproval of the ‘*ulama*’. He followed only the *shari’a* and placed his own ideas on a par with the Qur’an, which the ‘*ulama*’ condemned as *shirk* (blasphemy). Like other revivalist leaders (and not the usual army revolutionary), Gaddafi was driven by a sense of divine mission and his world view was influenced by his Muslim faith. He believed himself to be the channel of God’s will. He had an unshakeable belief in his position and in his own ideas, however eccentric.

The 1990s found Libya in a period of economic depression when poverty remained a severe problem despite the oil wealth. Opposition to Gaddafi among the Sanusi tribes grew and they began guerrilla attacks on the government from the mountains. Gaddafi retaliated by killing over a thousand prisoners held in Tripoli jail whom he accused of being

Islamic militants, but he nevertheless returned to the tribes and rehabilitated the *sufis* whom he viewed as a useful counter to the *salafist* radicals.

There usually comes a period in the lives of dictators[3] when circumstances favourable to their remaining in power are outweighed by opposing factors. By 2011 the Cyrenaicans in particular had suffered enough under Gaddafi. Tribal leaders came together in 'Day of Rage' during which they demanded greater self-rule for their home territory. A conference in Benghazi named Zubayr Ahmad al-Sanusi as leader of the Cyrenaica Transitional Council, a body established to protect the rights of local people. Crowds in the streets of Benghazi waved Sanusi flags, carried pictures of King Idris and sang the Sanusi anthem. For a few months Libya rose together against Gaddafi. He was finally cornered near his home town of Sirte. He died under rather unclear circumstances, but it is reported that he cried out before being shot: 'God forbids this!'

After his death all the fissiparous tendencies in the country came to the fore. Tribal Sanusi loyalties remained strong but were opposed by militias recruited in the towns of the west and by the extremist Islamists whom Gaddafi had feared. He had risen and fallen as an Islamic leader, convinced of his own unquestionable right to lead and guide.

4 Daghestan

The mountainous region of the Caucasus is unique in world history. It is a colonized area still ruled by an imperial power which has attempted in the postcolonial age to (re)gain its independence. A Daghestan local leader declared: 'Russia is the last empire. It is built on blood.' Its Muslim peoples fought the advance of the Tsarist Empire in the nineteenth century under the inspired leadership of Shamil until his defeat and capture in 1859. Although the area was integrated into the Empire, as in other mountainous areas, its dwellers, the inhabitants of Daghestan and Chechnya, remained restless and unwilling to submit to the Orthodox Christian imperialists of St Petersburg. The two areas rose together unsuccessfully against Russia during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and Chechnya rebelled several times during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the Russian revolution Ingushetia, Daghestan and Chechnya declared independence until they were forcefully reintegrated by the Bolsheviks in 1921 and became the Daghestan Soviet Socialist Republic.

Discontent simmered among the Soviet Muslim peoples who were now subject to an atheist communist state that viewed all its ethnic minorities with the utmost suspicion. During the Second World War Stalin ordered the mass deportation of non-Russian minorities and in 1944 the Chechen people were deported to the Kazakh and Kirghiz areas. After grievous suffering, they were allowed to resettle in 1956. They and other Caucasian peoples were left with feelings of bitter resentment which led them into another unequal struggle to try to gain independence.

The Communists kept a firm hand on their empire, although the mountainous nature of Daghestan meant that control was more difficult there than, say, in central Asia. A change came with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 when former Soviet Republics broke away from Moscow. Chechnya followed suit and its leader Dzhokhar Dudayev unilaterally declared Chechen independence, just as Latvia or Kirghizstan was doing. Russia at first hesitated to use force to bring Chechnya back under the Russian yoke until in December 1994 Boris Yeltsin sent Russian troops to subdue the country. They were overwhelmingly strong for the Chechens who retreated into traditional guerrilla warfare. The *mufti* of Ichkeria (Chechen Republic) declared a *jihad* against the invaders.

This first Chechen war lasted from 1994 to 1996 until a truce was agreed. Those years had seen a vicious struggle between the Russian army and the Chechen guerrillas, a nationalist battle with Islamic overtones. The capital Grozny was almost obliterated during the fighting. The situation demanded a new leader, a successor in fact to Shamil who might lead a successful fight to gain independence. The following three years in the area descended into chaos, a situation which helped the growth of a radical Islamism on the back of Chechen and Daghestani nationalism. A new leader (Basayev) did emerge among the Chechens. He was not in the mould of a traditional Muslim leader, but more a militant nurtured out of a local situation. He was born in Chechnya in 1965, given the name of the national hero and known as Emir Abdallah Shamil Abu Idris. His family had a long history of involvement in Chechen resistance against the Russians and the Soviets. They were deported by Stalin to Kazakhstan during the Second World War. His father returned in 1957. His son did not follow a traditional Islamic education but another pattern altogether. He graduated from his local village school with its secular curriculum and aged 17 was conscripted to serve in the army as a firefighter (Chechens were forbidden to serve in combat units.) He subsequently worked on a state farm near Volgograd (Stalingrad) and later as a computer salesman in

Moscow. There were reports that at this time he went for training to Pakistan and Afghanistan where he got to know 'Usama Bin Laden, but this seems unlikely on two counts: first, there was only a very short interval when he might have gone, for Bin Laden left in 1990, and, second, when asked about his relationship with the Saudi he replied firmly: 'I have not met Bin Laden.'

In 1991, when Dudayev was elected president of Chechnya, he did return to his homeland to begin a career in the army which lasted until his death in 2006. He became a leader like his namesake and a hero to his people. He fought the Russians in two wars (the second Chechen war lasted from 1999 to 2009). These wars spilt over into neighbouring Abkhazia and Daghestan—everywhere Russia was the superpower versus peoples fighting for their independence. Although Basayev did not have the religious appeal of his earlier namesake, he did gradually adopt a more Muslim position when he claimed that the Chechen/Daghestan struggle against Russia had become an outpost of the global *jihad*. He studied the bases of Islamic thought in its extremist form and helped to change the nature of Islam in the Caucasus. It had originally been influenced by a moderate *sufism* that favoured compromise and a secular government, but subsequently changed into a *salafist* approach advocating the full implementation of the *shari'a*.

Basayev was drawn into several military campaigns and into a vicious terrorism in the name of which several atrocities were committed. Commentators considered him to be a guerrilla commander who had turned into a master terrorist, a hero fighting for independence who became an extremist with the usual Wahhabi leanings. He did not distinguish the cause of Chechen independence from that of Islamic extremism. Instead he considered Chechnya to be a modern Islamic state that was fighting for its freedom.

Basayev was killed in battle in 2006. He had not been a second Shamil, and had been diverted by the lure of extremism and terrorism and the call of the wider *jihad*. He had a certain charisma which he cemented as a military leader, but not in the way of being a traditional source of Islamic inspiration. He died leaving a tense situation in both Chechnya and Daghestan where violence remained a feature of Chechen life and disturbances were common in Daghestan. President Putin characterized the Chechen cause as part of world Islamic terrorism, denying that the Chechens had any justification for their struggle.

Basayev was a leader inspired by a cause yet sullied by terrorist activities.

5 ALGERIA POST ‘ABD AL-QADIR

After the capture of ‘Abd al-Qadir in 1847, the history of Algeria was shaped by a 100 years of French occupation. Its institutions, culture and even language were influenced by the French presence. In addition, it suffered the unique fate of becoming an administrative part of the French mainland ruled by a governor-general. A large settler population shaped the country’s development. In implementing their policies, the French often and inevitably came into conflict with local traditional and religious rulers. Despite best French efforts, there remained among the indigenous population a strong sentiment of being Arab or Berber and Muslim in face of the foreign population.

‘Abd al-Qadir had set a pattern of resistance and there remained deep pride in his achievements and a strong belief that efforts had to be made (e.g. in Constantine) to maintain Islamic learning against the odds and even to attempt to wage *jihad*. The Berber population in the mountainous areas clung to their tradition of independence and in 1871 a revolt broke out provoked by a French attempt to expand their colonial authority into previously self-governing Berber areas where there was already hardship caused by a grain famine. A local leader was on the spot—Muhammad al-Mokrani—who inspired a short-lived movement of resistance. He was a Berber chieftain from a family that had owned considerable agricultural land in the area and whose position was threatened by French incursions. The feeling of resentment spread among those who felt that a cherished status quo was at risk.

Al-Mokrani had received an Islamic education from his father and family and was said to have memorized the Qur’an at an early age. His hereditary status encouraged him to launch a *jihad* against the French in March 1871. He brought together local Berber forces and was supported by other local leaders. Substantial numbers rallied under the rebel flag, but they were fighting a far superior enemy and the French forces reacted vigorously. Al-Mokrani led the *jihad* for a short while until he was killed in May of the same year. His short-lived leadership was an expression of the deep resentment felt by colonized people against their masters—in this case against the disturbance of traditional rights and religious values.

The Berber areas of Algeria—Kabylie—remained unquiet under the French, while the metropolitan areas endured the spread of French culture and language and valuable lands were settled by thousands of immigrants from Europe. There did remain, however, a deep and solid undercurrent of Arabic and Islamic values that eventually formed the platform for the reassertion of a native Algerian identity.

A generation of Islamic leadership emerged in Algeria at the time of the First World War. Despite the anti-French resentment, it is estimated that some 150,000 Algerians fought and suffered alongside the French in the trenches and elsewhere in the war. Opposition[4] to the idea of French Algeria hardened in the 1930s and was focussed by the foundation of the Association of Algerian *Ulama* inspired by Abdel Hamid Ben Badis with the aim of spreading education and knowledge of the true Islam among the population. He was born into a religious family in Constantine, the town in eastern Algeria where Islamic observance had remained strong. He grew up in a scholarly atmosphere and had memorized the Qur'an by the age of 13. He was taught that it was his duty to defend the rights of the Muslim population of his town.

He continued his training in the famous Zaitouna mosque in Tunis where he became convinced of the need to cleanse Islam of such corrupt practices as the veneration of saints. He was urged to return to Algeria to preach reform of Islam and to halt the cultural and religious decline brought about by French policies. He did return to Constantine and published articles condemning French morals and values. He worked hard to spread the knowledge of Islam as he believed that national regeneration would only come about on the basis of a correct religious life. In this way, he was encouraging the growth of the national unity of Algeria. The Association of Algerian *Ulama* echoed his call for the purification of Islam and for a return to the Qur'an and *sunna* and the rejection of folk (*sufi*) practices and beliefs in the countryside.

Ben Badis lived in the tradition of the quietist reforming scholar who did not encourage or attempt to lead a *jihad* and his life showed that it was possible to continue to follow the Muslim tradition even under an oppressive French occupation. His influential message was: 'Islam is our religion, Arabic our language, Algeria our fatherland.'

More overtly, however, nationalist leaders still stressed the essential value of Islam to the state and society. They also opposed the mystic stream of thought as the *sufis* preached otherworldliness and passivity, which did not accord with the nationalist enthusiasm to work and fight for independence.

Another influential leader, now in Paris itself, was Messali Hadj, who led a workers' movement in the 1920s and although a convinced nationalist he too stressed the importance of Islam to the future of Algeria. He would seek to establish a new state in which there was a fusion of society with Islamic values.

Three men contributed in its formative years to the furtherance of the Islamic Algerian cause, Ben Badis, Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas.[5] The movement still had to live through the Second World War with its devastating effects on French pride and the bitter War of Algerian Independence (1954–1962). The war was fought by the Algerian Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), which summoned all Algerian Muslims to rise up and establish a sovereign democratic society in accordance with the principles of Islam.

After independence, the FLN's ideology combined three strands—nationalism, socialism and Islam, the latter defined as the main foundation of national consciousness, the legitimizing factor of the regime and a crucial part of the Algerian identity. The Islam of the leaders in government was of the strongly reformist nationalist variety of Ben Badis and his association of nationalist '*ulama*', which supported women's emancipation and social development. Some younger Algerians also looked to French culture and philosophy as a guide and were influenced by secular thought and communism,[6] while still recognizing that Islam would have a role in the future development of society. Others, influenced by the waves of Islamic radicalism coming from the Middle East, absorbed through the classroom and mosque some of the ideas of Saiyid Qutb and others. The FLN continued as the major political force, but in the 1980s Islamic radicalism coalesced into the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). Its announced policy was no surprise—the establishment of Algeria as a state adhering to the *shari'a* where women should remain in the home and the national language would be Arabic.

The co-founder of FIS was 'Ali Belhadj, a young activist who showed some of the characteristics of the typical Muslim leader, though within the Algerian context and emerging at a time of anger and violence in the Muslim world. He was born in Tunisia of Algerian parents, who had a Mauritanian background, and was originally a teacher of Arabic. In the 1970s he was associated with the Algerian Mouvement Islamique Armé (GIA—an early grouping of Islamic activists) and was arrested by the authorities in 1983 for disruptive activities. Sentenced in 1985, he was released in 1989 when the Algerian constitution was amended to allow the formation of a multi-party system. Although we do not know very much about his time in prison, it would seem more than likely (taking other cases as examples) that his incarceration at the very least strengthened his radical view and frustrations. He absorbed much of the anger of the time, touched with a great deal of violence. He voiced the usual catchphrases—women to remain at home, non-Muslims, secularists and democrats all condemned. Belhadj insisted that there could be no democracy in Islam, only the system of *shura* (a consultative gathering) was permissible as he insisted that voting was against the law of God and was blasphemy. He said that the majority does not express the truth. He also called for the complete elimination of all French intellectual and ideological influence in the country forever—echoing the ideas of Sayyid Qutb.[7] He took to preaching radical and aggressive sermons in the notorious mosque of Bab el-Oued in Algiers. He attracted disillusioned youth and other malcontents to his cause. The FIS rapidly became the largest Islamic party under the joint leadership of Belhadj and Abbasi Madani—an elderly *shaikh*, one time independence fighter and professor at the University of Algiers and a fairly moderate Muslim.

The great irony of Algerian politics was that in the relatively free legislative elections of 1990, the FIS took 54% of the votes and in a democratic system would have taken the reins of government. The army and government panicked and cancelled the results. The FIS who had termed the elections blasphemy now called for mass demonstrations, in particular against the American-led Desert Storm operation in August 1990 aimed at ejecting the Iraqis from Kuwait—this was hardly because they supported Saddam in his adventures, rather that they, like ‘Usama Bin Laden, strongly objected to US boots desecrating the soil of the Hijaz. In 1991 both Belhadj and Madani were arrested and imprisoned for 12 years.

The situation in Algeria deteriorated as the government banned FIS, a provocation that caused a civil war to break out between the armed forces and the armed wing of FIS—the GIA. Vicious fighting lasted until October 1997 during which more than 100,000 people were thought to have died.

Once again a leader emerged whose name is synonymous with horrendous violence, although he too based his claim to leadership on Islamic legitimacy. He was Antar Zouabri, leader of GIA in the 1990s. Born in 1970 he was the son of a municipal employee with no obvious religious background. At school he kept to himself and was known as a poor pupil from an impoverished family. He seemed to have no religious training at all. He left to work in a fruit and vegetable market. He was soon engaged, however, in FIS and was sent as a Muslim activist to Iraq.

Later, he deserted to join GIA and to commence a career of violence—rape, theft and assassinations. When organizing massacres of his 'opponents', he declared his belief—mainly self-inspired and based on a very limited knowledge of theology—that the 'world must know that all the killings, massacres, fires, displacing of people, the kidnapping of women, are an offering to God'. His aim, together with that of GIA, was to purge the land of the ungodly with whom there could be 'no agreement, no truce, and no dialogue'. When he became leader of GIA in 1996, he issued a *fatwa* (lacking the qualifications demanded by the '*ulama*' for such a declaration) to the effect that every Algerian who refused to fight the government was declared an apostate. He was killed by the army in 2002.

His life and activities were influenced by the dire situation in Algeria where the Islamists felt that their success had been stolen by an infidel government. He was asserting the right and the duty of believers—but only those who followed his extreme interpretation of Islam—to take over the government and to install the strictest form of the *shari'a*. His personal experiences—notably his time in an Iraq under American occupation—must have fuelled his desire to reorder the world. His rise to power was through violence and military activities, seemingly remote from any ability to convince followers through religious conviction. *Jihad* was his creed based on violence and vengeance.

The GIA lasted from 1993 to 2004. By its name—the Armed Islamic Group—it proclaimed its purpose: to overthrow the government and to found an Islamic state. Its motivation followed the Machiavellian principle of the end justifying the means. Its only method of attempting to achieve its ends was extreme violence. It attacked and tried to kill all its opponents. It had extremist Taliban-like views and a kind of blood lust seems to have overcome any real religious beliefs. Religion to GIA was a political ideology which was denounced by other Algerians, even those who were members of the Islamist movement.

A government amnesty led many members of GIA to lay down their arms. Some no longer believed in the culture of violence. In 2003 GIA announced its support for *al-Qa'ida* and changed its name to '*al-Qa'ida* in the Islamic Maghreb'. When Belhadj and Madani were released in 2009 after a decade of conflict, there seemed to be small appetite for reopening old wounds. Algeria emerged from another of its great periods of suffering.

6 Sudan After the Mahdi

After the defeat of the Mahdist forces by General Kitchener, Sudan had to endure half a century of British colonial rule. It was not an oppressive rule, but paternal and reasonably efficient, with the trappings of empire, a governor-general, a political service and development plans. The British did not interfere with Islam and ran the Arab Muslim north of the country separately from the south, which was animist, African and partially Christianized. In 1946 they decided to unite the two entities, thereby storing up great trouble for the future. The Mahdists tried to keep the memory and influence of the Mahdi alive and to build politics in his name.

The British promoted the position of the son of the Mahdi, Saiyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, who was head of the *Ansar* sect (followers of the legacy of Muhammad Ahmad), which was the forerunner of the *Ummah* party. His political ideology was that of a democratic Islamism, a creed rather unknown and little promoted outside Sudan. He believed that ‘[t]he democratic republican system is a system deeply rooted in Islam, our pure, tolerant and democratic religion’. He led the *Ummah* party and his aim was to keep Mahdiism alive. He garnered support in several parts of the country; the British seemed to approve and created him a Knight of the British Empire. He was an impressive figure, and even charismatic.

His grandson, Sadiq al-Mahdi, took over the leadership of the party and sect. He had a sophisticated view of the development of Sudan, believing that modernization would come about as man mastered his environment. This process was not the same as Westernization, which had a Europe-centred and imperialist side and should, therefore, be rejected. Islam would be able to accommodate the demands of modernization as nothing in a modern state was in conflict with a reasoning, tolerant interpretation of Islam that was open to new ideas.[8] The *shari’a*, he believed, could be adopted as a modern system of law. Man had to reinterpret it through the exercise of *ijtihad* (reasoned judgement) and five principles taken from the Qur’an and the *sunna* would have to be applied, namely consultation (*shura*), justice, equality, respect for treaties and freedom. These principles would have to be regarded as religious obligations.[9] He believed in the truth of the mission of the Mahdi which was to revitalize Islam, to abrogate certain laws and to take account of the general interest of the country and of the circumstances of the time (this was first and foremost to conduct the *jihad* against the occupation of Sudan). Mahdiism, in his view, like all influential reformist movements had made a synthesis of reason and tradition. The Mahdi's mission had been universal but his enemies (the British) had confined it to Sudan in order to prevent a wider resurgence of Islam.[10]

Sadiq kept the name of the Mahdi alive but lacked the overwhelming appeal of his great-grandfather and was not sufficiently ruthless to be able to survive the maelstrom of Sudanese politics. He was ousted by an army coup in 1989 led by General Omar Hasan al-Bashir. The decade of the 1990s saw an attempt to introduce full-blown Islamicization into the country. The leading figure in this attempt was Hassan al-Turabi, a would-be leader who stood on the edge of power and exercised considerable influence through his ideas—which were not always consistent. He was born in 1932, the son of a *sufi* sheikh and *shari'a* judge. He first received an Islamic education at school and at home where his father had given him a strict and traditional training after school hours. He then studied law at the University of Khartoum. He joined the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* while at university at a time when other student movements were also flourishing, including that of the communists. He then went to London University to take a Master's degree in Law and finished an outstanding academic career with a Doctorate in Law at the Sorbonne in Paris. On his return to Khartoum he made known both the scope of his ambitions and the direction of his ideological leanings by becoming leader of the *Ikhwan* in the 1960s.

His aim was to be a leader of reform—a *mujaddid*—but in the Sudan of his time he was hampered by the unstable political situation and the presence of two other strong figures. He attempted as much as was possible to put his own ideas into practice. The core of his thought was that a true Muslim state cannot function unless it is rooted in the *shari'a*. At the start of his postgraduate career he had maintained quite a progressive Islamic ideology (influenced by his study in Paris?), including favouring democracy, women's rights and abolition of the death penalty for apostasy. He suggested that the *shari'a* could be introduced gradually and not by force and not made applicable to non-Muslims. He embraced human rights and even, it is reported, was not against the consumption of alcohol. He preached sermons which were noted for their moderation and liberal approach. He did not approve of the traditional '*ulama*' who, he considered, were bogged down in narrow historical debate and he insisted that the ideal Islamic state could not be governed by them: '[T]hey tend to rely on narrow texts, and can turn the Islamic approach into a series of prohibitions.'[11] He added:

'Traditionally there has been no recognized class of orthodox leaders in Sudan so there is no need to recognize one now.'

As al-Turabi had to work with military dictators, he was forced into compromise and more extreme views. Professor Niblock maintains that in Sudanese politics '[f]lexibility of approach seems to have existed in inverse proportion to actual involvement in implementing an Islamist programme'.[12] Al-Turabi had to live with this and his career was deeply influenced by the rule of Ja'far al-Nimeiry (an army general who seized power in 1969) and his successor Bashir. His life was an interaction with these two and a continuing attempt both to expand his own influence and to implement his ideas of Islamicization. On occasion he went too far and was imprisoned or dismissed from office.

To further his aims, in 1976 al-Turabi founded the National Islamic Front, a fundamentalist movement which influenced the government from 1979 and dominated until the late 1990s. Its aim was to impose Islam from the top down, that is with the government bringing in change. From 1979 to 1983 he was Attorney-General (Minister of Justice) when the Nimeiry regime together with the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* imposed the *shari'a* on northern Sudan. Al-Turabi's prestige at this time spread throughout the world as he travelled abroad as the visible and articulate spokesman for Islamic government.

Under Bashir, Islamicization continued, with al-Turabi being, among other things, the speaker of the National Assembly. He was the power behind the throne during the years 1989–2001 as leader of the only Islamic movement (apart from Iran) to take control of the state. He became chairman of the (renamed) Popular National Congress party—successor to the National Islamic Front. This movement or a splinter from it engaged in dangerous activities that caused concern outside Sudan, such as welcoming 'Usama Bin Laden after his expulsion from Saudi Arabia, establishing links with *al-Qa'ida* and attempting to assassinate President Mubarak of Egypt.

Such imprudent steps led to his downfall as he was suspected by President Bashir of plotting against him, and he was imprisoned for several years. On his release in 2005 his influence had waned as Sudan after its flirtation with terrorism tried to regain credit particularly with the United States. Bashir pledged to rule Sudan with Islamic dignity and law after he had been accused of war crimes in the fighting in Darfur. During his life, al-Turabi had adapted to the existing situation, not embodying it in the manner of other inspired leaders as he had had to accept the power of the military dictatorships. In opposition, he had recast himself as more democratic and flexible, even to the extent of appearing to oppose the growing religious fanaticism in the wider Middle East. He died in 2016. Thus, perhaps, in one sense, some of the aims of both Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Turabi had made their way into the fabric of Sudanese society and will perhaps remain influential in northern Sudan.

7 Somalia

On independence, the combination of the unstable political situation and its divided history meant that Somalia was plunged into a catastrophic civil war between various armed groups. Islam was the motivating force behind much of the fighting. Civil war broke out and the government lost overall control. Somalia was categorized as a failed state—that is one in which the government has lost its legitimate authority. (One of the features of a failed state is the rise of vengeance-seeking groups.) The citizens of Somalia reverted to the observance of customary and/or religious law in most regions. A portent of trouble came with the formation of a new organization—the Islamic Courts Union—which was a grouping of the members of 11 courts who united to form a rival administration to the Federal Government of Somalia. Its stated policy was the strict observance of the *shari'a* throughout the country. They were a militant body and by 2006 had imposed their control and the *shari'a* over much of the south of the country.

A transitional national government was formed which seized back control of the southern conflict zones from the Islamic Courts Union, which itself under great pressure split into smaller groupings including one that took the name of *al-Shabab* (Youth)—the movement of the young *mujahidin*. Hard-line leaders came forward who claimed the authority to act and initiate policies on behalf of the group.

The leading name in Somalia was Ahmed Abdi Godane, known as Mukhtar Abu Zubayr. He was born in Somalia in 1977 and initially known for his quiet and pious life. He gained a scholarship funded by a wealthy Saudi family to study in Sudan and Pakistan. He was influenced by the situation in Afghanistan and he joined other foreigners to train and fight there. In 2001 he returned home to become a critical figure in the radicalization of Islamic politics. He sought to involve Somalia in the global Saiyid Qutb *jihad* rather than in its national and tribal politics. He rejected any negotiations with what he termed the apostate government of Somalia.

In 2006 he was appointed secretary-general of the Islamic Courts union and in 2007 became leader of the breakaway group *al-Shabab*. With them he embarked on a rampage of bombings and suicide attacks, assassinations and destruction.

As part of the general *jihad* they opposed any Muslim who disagreed with them, all Christians, especially the infidel Americans, and all *sufis* whose practices they claimed were in conflict with a strict interpretation of the *shari'a*. They desecrated the graves of prominent *sufis* and destroyed *sufi* mosques and the university. Some foreigners were attracted into the *Shabab* and its violence spilled over into neighbouring Kenya.

Mukhtar was not a leader of the charismatic type. He led a fairly reclusive life, writing poetry and addressing his followers by video and through the Internet. Perhaps surprisingly, given the Wahhabi trend of the movement, his followers were inspired by the playing of Western-themed music, which was popular among Somali youth. He ruthlessly suppressed internal opposition and drove the *Shabab* into evermore indiscriminate acts of violence. Beheading became the norm for anyone who had converted away from Islam. In 2012 he announced by video that he had merged *al-Shabab* with *al-Qa'ida*, asserting that this joining together would 'lead us to the path of *jihad* and martyrdom that was drawn by our imam, the martyr "Usama"'.

Some of his followers did not like the merger as they believed it diverted them from the nationalist fight. Some defected, dismayed by what they felt was his false interpretation of Islam, while others believed that the *Shabab* interpreted the *shari'a* far too harshly. As the government regained lost territory, the *Shabab* leaned towards *al-Qa'ida* for support and even started to fly the black banner of ISIS.

The traditional '*ulama*' of Somalia expressed strong disapproval of Mukhtar's policies. They declared that Islam had been grossly misinterpreted. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad Salaad, Chair of the Somali Islamic Scholars Council, said that 'Islam is misinterpreted by *al-Shabab* and other groups. We as scholars completely disagree with their definitions and terminologies. They are preaching an Islam which destroys even its own followers. They have perverted Islam. [All such groups] are just as wrong as each other. To join them would be even worse. These people do not represent Islam'—similar sentiments have been expressed through the centuries.

Mukhtar had led his group into abhorrent violence. He was terminally targeted by the Americans in 2014. After his death the search for a stable government in Somalia continued.

8 PALESTINE: 'IZZ AL-DIN AL-QASSAM

In the nineteenth century, Palestine remained a part of the Ottoman Empire that was eyed greedily by more than one European power. Its religious heritage meant that the territory was not just looked upon as a place for settlement and exploitation. Possession of the Holy Places would give especial prestige to whichever power managed to obtain it. During this period no strong Muslim leader appeared to challenge either Ottoman suzerainty or European ambitions.

It was not until after the First World War that one European power—Britain—seized the chance to take the Holy Land over for a disastrous 30 years during which time there was continuous Arab (Muslim and Christian) resistance to the British Mandate and to the British commitment to foster the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine.

'Izz al-Din al-Qassam is a well-known figure in Palestinian resistance history and is viewed as the father of Palestinian nationalism and even as a direct link to the Hamas organization. In a land of few heroes, he has been seized upon as someone to be revered. He was a religious scholar and leader who, like others beforehand, found himself drawn into a more secular movement of opposition against an invading and occupying power.

He was born in Jableh near Lataqiya in northern Syria in 1883, the son of a *shari'a* official and local leader of the Qadiriya *sufi* sect. His grandfather was also a leading *shaikh* of the Qadiriya. 'Izz al-Din was inspired to lead a religious life and first of all studied with a local scholar, before moving to the centre of Muslim scholarship in the Azhar Mosque in Cairo in 1902. Although some sources claim he studied with Muhammad 'Abduh, who was Chief Mufti at the time, it seems unlikely that the *Shaikh* would have had time for young students. It is possible he gave a lecture or two that 'Izz al-Din attended. However, he must have been talked about as he was a great influence in Cairo. The other name mentioned is that of Rashid Rida, the journalist and thinker and close colleague of 'Abduh, whom he might very well have met and had discussions with. From the atmosphere of Cairo at the time it seems that 'Izz al-Din at least came away with certain ideas about contemporary Islamic practice and thought. Like many others—'Abduh and Rida included—he came to understand the necessity of modernizing Islam, that is he was critical of the stagnant ways into which he felt Islam had fallen. Things must be changed, he preached, by effort (*jihad*—adopting Rida's word) in order to bring Islam to terms with the modern world but also, and this would become relevant later in his life, to defend Islam against outside attack when the loss of Muslim territory to non-believers seemed imminent.

'Izz al-Din returned to Syria to Jableh to preach in the local mosque on the necessity of the progressive reform of Islam; in his terms, a stricter enforcement of the moral standards of the *shari'a*, regular prayers and fasting, no gambling or alcohol—ideas that he may have inherited from the Ibn Taimiya Wahhabi tendencies of Rida. He cooperated with the Ottoman officials to enforce the *shari'a* and gained a reputation for 'piety, simple manners, and good humour'.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his religious convictions, his thoughts soon turned to warlike matters. When the Italians invaded Libya in 1911 he actively supported the Libyan–Ottoman resistance. He preached *jihad* and recruited a small number of men to join the fight. He collected funds and travelled with his group to Alexandretta awaiting permission to set sail for Libya. In the meantime, war broke out in the Balkans and the Ottomans came to an agreement with the Italians. 'Izz al-Din was refused permission to sail and was ordered back home. Undismayed, in 1914 he volunteered as chaplain to the Ottoman army and was posted to the south of Damascus. He was caught up in the war there and in the aftermath of Amir Faisal's short-lived kingdom of Syria.

Then with a small band of supporters and seemingly with great optimism he set out to fight the French mandate troops in his home area of Lataqiya. One of his supporters who was interviewed later claimed that with 'Izz al-Din in the mountains there was a climate of intense religious practice which included memorizing the Qur'an, discussing *jihad* and rituals associated with the Qadiriya—an atmosphere that seems similar to other camps of those fighting under an inspirational leader.[13]

The result of his fighting is not clear but he soon aroused the antagonism of the hostile French mandate authorities. He and a few companions quickly slipped out of Syria via Tartus into Palestine. The French tried him *in absentia* and did him the honour of condemning him to death. But he now had to face and inspire his troops against two different occupiers, one of whom was determined never to leave the country. He ended up near Haifa—an expanding port with a growing population of workers. He began to preach at night school to casual labourers and landless peasants who had been displaced by land sales to Jewish settlers. As with other such preachers, he would combine a double message: the need for religious reform and the need to resist outside infiltration. The threat from outside in this case was doubly felt; the loss of land was both a national disaster and a religious one with Muslim land falling to foreign non-Muslims. He became well known as a preacher, apparently for his 'thunderous' style, which had the power of words to sway his hearers. He attracted a following from the slums and in a practical way tried to encourage peasants to form co-operatives.

His activities displeased the head of the night school who sacked him for his excessive preaching. But he had become familiar with some of the local '*ulama*' who offered him the post of itinerant marriage registrar. He could now go around the villages still preaching—in the words of a British police report—in 'a spirit of religious fanaticism'.

'Izz al-Din seemed in general to be an angry man and a motivated reformer. He was disheartened by British violations of the old ways and angered by what he thought were innovations (*bid'a*) introduced by the '*ulama*', who in turn denounced him as a Wahhabi. He was also incensed by the way in which Palestinian landowners were benefitting from land sales to Jews and by the inability of the traditional Arab ruling classes to follow a coherent policy vis-à-vis the British and the Zionists.

He and a few colleagues opened a branch of the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA), which had been founded in Egypt in 1927 as an adjunct to the Muslim Brotherhood. It was hoped that the Palestinian branch would support the nationalist movement and strengthen young men's religion. Within these developments he called for young Palestinians to be trained in arms in the same way as he believed Jewish groups were being trained. By 1933 he was recruiting armed groups in northern Palestine, one of which adopted the name 'Black Hand'. At the same time, Jewish settlers were developing much stronger resistance groups such as the Haganah—the embryonic Jewish army. In 1935 arm supplies for the Haganah were discovered which caused great dismay and indignation among the Arabs, who then called a general strike. 'Izz al-Din fled into the hills. The British banned his YMMA and placed him under surveillance, but he continued with his attempts to convert more followers to his cause of religious reform and national liberation.

Disaster struck when a British police constable, who was on search duty in the hills, was found dead and al-Qassam was believed to be responsible. The British sent out search parties for him. He was surrounded in a cave and died firing his gun at his attackers and encouraging his men to fight and die as martyrs.

His movement had been tiny and short-lived but in the hopelessness of the Palestinian Arab situation shone out as a beacon. It did not achieve anything in itself except that his death could be said to be the indirect reason for the Arab revolution in Palestine in the years 1936–1939 which caused the British such pain. He was evoked as a national symbol of resistance and, in the view of Arab nationalist writers, he showed the correct path of resistance to both Britain and the Zionists. From the point of view of this study, he showed all the traits of the inspired leader. He undertook a religious training that fixed his ideas on necessary religious reform and was an effective preacher who passed on and inspired others with his ideas—using the power of words to enthuse his followers. His movement for religious reform was diverted into national resistance once he was faced with the threat of colonial usurpation in Syria and Palestine. As with all the other leaders the invaders eventually gained the upper hand.

NOTES

1. The name Nigeria was coined by the wife of the Governor-General, Lady Lugard.
2. Some sources believe that within the sect he emerged as a leader rather than founding it himself.
3. Unless they die young like Ataturk and Nasser.
4. The most popular leader for a time after the war was a grandson of the Emir ‘Abd al-Qadir, Khalid ibn Hashim. He called for political reform and full assimilation of all Algerians. He soon left, however, for Damascus.
5. A long-lived and influential nationalist leader (1899–1985).
6. Whom one met at academic conferences arguing and speaking exactly like their French contemporaries.
7. One of his favourite authors together with Ibn Taimiya.
8. Words from a seminar given at the MEC of St Antony’s College, Oxford.
9. H. Bleuchot, ‘Islam, droit penal et politique’, in *Sudan* (Reading, 1991), p. 275.
10. Ibid., p. 272.
11. T. Niblock, ‘Islamic movements and Sudan’s political coherence’, in ibid., p. 263.
12. Ibid., p. 266.
13. Mentioned in M. Sanagan, ‘Teacher, Preacher, Soldier, Martyr; rethinking ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam’, in *Die Welt des Islams*, 52, p. 330.

CHAPTER 14

Palestine: The Root Cause of Muslim Despair

The loss of Palestine and the founding of the state of Israel have had a profound effect on the Arab and Muslim psyches. From the point of view of this book we can see how Israel/Zionism began to affect the ideas of Muslim thinkers/leaders as soon as the first news of Zionist settlement began to be widely known. It was a nationalist concern—with the loss of Arab territory and the appearance of a new settler population—and a religious crisis with the loss of part of *Dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) to non-believers and the threat to their third holiest place, Jerusalem. It was a confusing situation—complicated by the British Christian mandate—affecting the feelings of territorial and religious devotion in a profound manner. These feelings were no less profound than those the Jews had always professed for their lost holy city and those the Zionists developed for the land of Palestine/Israel. I wonder whether the Zionists have ever fully taken into account the depth of Arab/Muslim feelings. After all some Zionists had called Palestine a 'country without people' and others had suggested that all Arabs living there should be expelled. Regard for the Muslim attachment to Jerusalem can in Zionist thought take second place to the much older Jewish devotion to the temple in the Holy City. Some Jews look forward to the day when the temple is rebuilt on its original site.

When Zionism first appeared and Jewish land acquisition began in Palestine, Arab apprehensions were quickly aroused. George Antonius, the Christian Arab historian of the Arab Awakening, who was born in Lebanon, reported that the Arab members of the Ottoman Chamber of

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Deputies protested angrily in 1911 against the Jewish acquisition of land in Esdraelon and the subsequent dispossession of Arab peasants.[1] Only six years later the British government issued the Balfour Declaration in which it was stated that it viewed with favour the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine—a short paragraph that changed the history of the Middle East. News of this statement reached Cairo first and caused strong protests among the Arab leaders who happened to be gathered there. In occupied Palestine (the British had taken Jerusalem from the Ottomans in 1917) the British authorities did their best to conceal the news. For whatever reasons the British issued the Declaration and whatever they imagined the consequences might be, a later Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, called it the biggest mistake of British foreign policy in the twentieth century.

Writing before the foundation of the state of Israel, George Antonius prophesied that putting it into practice would cause great suffering to the Palestinian people. He published his influential work *The Arab Awakening* in 1938 when the Arab revolt was raging in Palestine. It is a historical study of the Arab world, a condemnation of the Balfour Declaration and a plea for tolerance and understanding in the future. It was written when the Nazi persecution of European Jews had not yet reached its peak although he did write at the time that '[t]he treatment meted out to Jews in Germany is a disgrace to its authors and to modern civilisation'[2] and he stated forcefully that everyone had a duty to help suffering Jewry.

There stand out in Antonius' work at least two themes: the injustice being done to Palestine and the need for reconciliation. From the beginning he was convinced (and believed all British officials in Palestine were likewise convinced) that Zionism could achieve its aims only by force. When the Peel Commission made its recommendations for the partition of Palestine he was equally convinced that it could again only be realized by force. When fighting did take place in 1936 (revolt of 1936–1938) he felt that those threatened by Zionism, particularly peasants and labourers, would have to resort to violence. The violence of the Arabs was the result of the violence done to them, and nothing but harm would come from the terror raging in Palestine at the time.

As have many others, Antonius viewed the problem in moral terms. It was, he believed, morally wrong to dislodge one people for the benefit of another: 'No code of morals can justify the persecution of one people in an attempt to relieve the persecution of another.'[3] He saw that no room could be made in Palestine for a second people except by exterminating or dislodging the nation in possession—and he was writing without the benefit of hindsight.

What was his solution? It was one of moral justice but, *with* the benefit of hindsight, one that was impossible. He suggested that an independent Arab state should be established—tied to Britain—which would allow in as many Jews as it could hold who would live in ‘peace, security and dignity’ and enjoy full rights of citizenship. All faiths and minorities would be protected. He realized such a solution would dismay those Zionists who were committed to the foundation of a Jewish state. Even without the Holocaust would such a Shangri-La ever have been possible?

During all the long-drawn-out Arab–Zionist negotiations could anyone have spoken convincingly for the Palestinians? Albert Hourani wrote in 1943 that ‘George Antonius died at the moment he was most needed, the moment for which his whole life had been a preparation’.[4] Antonius was respected as a good mediator but could any one man have stood against the resources of Zionism? He believed in ‘mediation and the possibility of rational solutions’ and ‘his background and instincts lifted him above parochial disputes and made him aware of much bigger and more important areas of human prejudice and ignorance’.[5] He made his mark in 1937 when he gave evidence to and deeply impressed the members of the Royal Commission on Palestine (Peel). Two years later he became secretary of the Arab delegation to the Anglo–Arab Conference at which ‘the force and persuasiveness of his advocacy obliged the British Government to modify their previous interpretation of the promises made to Arabs and Jews during the First World War’.[6] This was the opinion of Sir Harold Beeley of the British Foreign Office who after the Second World War worked with Ernest Bevin to try to solve the Palestine problem.

With Antonius dead the only other possible Arab leader might have been Hajj Amin al-Husaini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He was from an old and respected Jerusalem family which under the Ottomans had held high religious and executive positions. The concept of Jerusalem being the third holiest place in Islam and the ambition of preserving it as such must have been at the very centre of their thoughts. Al-Husaini had a varied education in a Qur’anic school and the Azhar for a year but left without graduating and without the title of ‘*alim*. He studied some law with the Rashid Rida. His religious education was therefore incomplete and he did not qualify for the position of *mufti*. After the First World War he was immediately caught up in Jerusalem in the Arab–Jewish dispute. He was an intensely political man, possessing great energy and organizing ability. He was from early on inspired by two deeply held ideas: Arab nationalism and a detestation of the Zionist aim of changing the character of the country. For him, Palestine was an Arab Muslim country belonging to the wider Arab world and he believed that any alteration of its basic character would isolate its inhabitants from their Arab neighbours. He was convinced that European Jews settling there would spread usages and customs alien to the more traditional Islamic way of life. If change were to come it should be organic and internal, not imposed from outside. He devoted his life to a vain attempt to stem the tide of this change.

Practically, he began to organize small groups of *fedayeen* (commandos) to strike against the Jews and the British. After riots in Jerusalem in which al-Husaini played a significant role he had to flee to Transjordan. His exact role in the riots, which caused some bloodshed, was not determined but it is clear that he supported—and to some extent inspired—action against the Jewish population and that he was not averse to the shedding of blood. The struggle against Zionism took on the form of a *jihad*.

The British, in an attempt to calm the situation, pardoned him and appointed him Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921—in fact Grand Mufti, a new title designed to enhance the prestige of the office. He was also elected President of the Supreme Muslim Council, which in 1926 became the Arab Higher Committee. Neither body under al-Husaini was able to put up much resistance to the constant Zionist pressure for more concessions, more immigration, more land. He was not the inspiring leader needed at the time but neither was he in a very strong position. Those who met him found him to be a slightly sinister character, so cat-like in his appearance and movements.[7] He did, however, achieve some 'success' in 'leading' the Arab revolt of 1936–1939; at least the British Commission appointed to investigate the disturbances apportioned a large share of the blame for them to him. The Arab Higher Committee under his chairmanship had clearly instigated illegal acts and had not condemned sabotage and terrorism. The Mufti saw the revolt as a movement of the people, largely peasants, who had risen to defend their country and their rights. In that sense al-Husaini was in the long historical view fulfilling the role of Muslim leader of a movement against foreign invaders who were considered to be a threat to traditional society, its way of life and the role of Islam.

The alliance of Zionism and the British army was too much for him and all Palestinians. He had to flee the country via Lebanon and Iraq to Nazi Germany where he found that his desire for a Jew-free Palestine coincided disastrously with the views of Himmler, Eichmann and company.[8] Albert Hourani in his report on Arab nationalism in 1943 wrote: 'The Mufti is far away, and although he still retains his influence with the masses, it is no secret that for several years before the Iraqi revolt (of 1941) many of the leading figures in the Arab movement were finding it increasingly difficult to work with him, and were becoming increasingly uneasy about the way in which he was going.'[9]

Amin al-Husaini did have some of the qualities of the Muslim leader, an absolute devotion to the Islamic cause, some organizing and inspirational ability in leading a revolt, but faced with insuperable opposition he chose the wrong course of aligning himself with the 'enemy of his enemy' and so ended up on the losing side.

* * *

The Arab and Zionist causes had their supporters in the outside world. It was not surprising that Zionism being a European ideology garnered greater support in Europe and America, above all among the Jewish population. Support for the Arabs—who had no influential diaspora lobby—was harder to find. Some serious students of the Middle East did come to the conclusion that the British government had made a serious error in committing itself to the establishment of a Jewish National Home. Some considered this to be a political mistake that alienated the Arab world; others believed that no government had the moral right to give away someone else's country to a third party. One British historian, famous in his time, who supported this viewpoint, was Arnold Toynbee. He was well known for his multivolume work *A Study of History* in which he attempted to account for the rise and fall of all civilizations. Such an attempt has long since fallen out of favour but is relevant to our purposes here as he viewed history (including the Balfour Declaration) in moral terms.

History to Toynbee was morality and he considered that the historian had a positive calling to promote a better world. 'A study of human affairs must be comprehensive if it is to be effective. It must include not only the whole of the living generation, but also the whole of the living generation's past. In order to save mankind we have to learn to live together in concord. … In order to live together in concord successfully, we have to know each other, and knowing each other includes knowing each other's past.'[10] In addition, he writes, the historian must judge and evaluate, he must take a stand on the issues he writes about.

Three themes appear consistently throughout his work on the Middle East—the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the role of Judaism and Zionism, and the effect of both of these on Arab nationalism and on Palestine. Concerning the third of these three themes he argues that the natural unity of the Arabs was broken by the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, by the imposition of the mandate system and by the introduction of an alien nationalism, Zionism, into Palestine. He too believed that the Balfour Declaration could not be put into operation without injuring the rights of the local inhabitants. Britain had pledged itself to support an independent Palestine and from 1918 onwards it should have done everything possible to encourage this rather facilitating Jewish immigration.

As historian-cum-prophet Toynbee foretold in 1931: 'I prophesy confidently that, sooner or later, the Jews will have to come to terms with the Arabs.'[11] It would be a difficult but not impossible task and its achievement would be a triumph of concord and *virtue*. At the time little had been achieved and he foretold again that Britain had only 12 or so more years to solve the problem. He further surmised that there would be an ignominious end to the Mandate accompanied by disaster and loss and misery.[12]

When he was writing again in 1954 he then knew the fate of Palestine and of the Jews in Europe. He was saddened that Jewish society had been affected by the evils of secular nationalism and that Palestine had become a Jewish state. The West had to bear the blame as it had transformed 'an inoffensive Jewish denizen of the Pale … into a Zionist *sicarius* (daggerman) … bringing bane to the Holy Land'.[13] He remained firm in his assertion that the Jews had been illegally given and had immorally taken Palestine and that the Palestinians were the innocent and suffering third party.

It was all too easy to accuse Toynbee of anti-Semitism and he firmly rejected such accusations. His colleague and friend, the Jewish Historian, Lewis Namier agreed that 'to my knowledge no anti-Jewish feeling entered into Toynbee's anti-Zionism', which he attributed to his pro-Islamic position. Roland Stromberg commented that 'one might attribute it to his anti-nationalism and to his expecting more from the Jews than a repetition of the ways of power politics and racial intolerance'.[14] Toynbee admitted that he was opposed to Zionism and he repeated in 1964 his view that '[t] he Palestinian Arabs would never have been dispossessed and the relations between Arabs and Jews so utterly hostile … if Britain had not made the series of moral errors and political blunders that she did make in her dealings with Palestine from 1917 to 1948'.[15]

Arnold Toynbee was a consistent outside voice raised to object to the treatment of the Palestinian Arabs. His was neither an Arab nor Muslim voice, but the voice of a historian who had come to an independent conclusion based on his reading of the facts. He was, he wrote, disillusioned that Zionism had developed into an onerous nationalism that established itself in the Middle East. The voices of those raised in Britain and elsewhere against extreme Zionism had to face the charge of being anti-Semitic. The Jewish voice was heard more often and came from supporters of the concept of an Israeli state. It was often difficult for those seeking a more equitable solution to make an acceptable case. British officials working in Palestine under the Mandate were sometimes frustrated by the intellectual resources mustered by the Jewish partisans that drowned out the Arab case. Thomas Hodgkin was one such working with the High Commissioner in the 1930s who became critical of British policy and resigned from the Colonial Service after the Arab uprising. He later joined the Communist Party and became a historian of Africa. He knew many of the leading figures in Palestine including George Antonius whom he respected as the best of the Arabs: 'charming civilized cultured … always a patriot first and last'.[16] Hodgkin also had to meet some of the leading Zionists including a young Isaiah Berlin, 25 years of age, a Jewish refugee from Latvia. He came to Jerusalem in 1934 and Hodgkin noted: 'I like having Isaiah here—he came three or four days ago—I have been trying to find good company for him—but they are mostly Jews that I find. Arabs (apart from George Antonius who had lunch with him yesterday) would either be too rude or too stupid for him. He speaks Zionist opinions (without calling himself a Zionist) and I try to answer with British official opinions (without in the least calling myself a British official), and as we neither of us claim to be expressing our own sentiments it is all very amiable and pleasant.'[17]

Later, as a leading British intellectual, Berlin was considered to be a supporter of liberal Zionism and, therefore, holding an impeccable position in British intellectual circles. The more important he became in academic and political circles, the more his Zionism grew. He said very little in public about the Israeli–Palestinian situation but that he viewed it as a tragic clash between right and right and voiced his support for a two-state solution. He was a liberal not a religious Jew who hated the Hasidic fanatics and among those who despised the Arabs and wanted to expel them from Palestine. Not religious and yet committed to Israel and to encouraging its academic development in particular, Zionism to him was to be a nationalist movement that had no dark chauvinistic side.

With Berlin and others supporting Zionism, the opposing view was difficult to maintain and it could easily be tarred as anti-Semitism. There were those, however, in Britain who did seek justice for the Palestinians, academics and politicians, including Albert Hourani (son of an immigrant—like Berlin—and his brother Cecil—more openly politically activist) who carefully and scrupulously made his views known. In Oxford he knew Raymond Carr who was the second Warden of St Antony's College and a close colleague. After Hourani's death Carr wrote an obituary note about him: 'Albert and I first met when we came to Oxford after the war—he at Magdalen and myself at All Souls. I was deeply impressed by his learning, so much wider and deeper than my own. Most of all I was touched by his kindness; it was manifest in his smile, the gentleness that shone in his face.'[18] Carr was a bit of a dandy, who enjoyed the high life in London, and was keen to be accepted among the 'super-dons' of Oxford at the time—Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Bowra and others. There was a strong Jewish influence, a pro-Zionism, and Carr was strongly influenced by this. He grew close to Berlin. No Arab scholar had the same influence or reputation.

The Jewish question had long interested Carr and, according to his biographer, '[l]ike most Englishmen of his generation, he thought the 1917 Balfour Declaration a mistake. … It was clear that the whole notion of a "Jewish homeland" had no basis whatsoever in international law. But now it had been created and had received the backing of international law, it had to be supported. And, moreover, "the responsibility was ours".'[19] After the Holocaust Carr was openly pro-Jewish and consequently pro-Israeli. But he explained: 'Naturally, I recognize the injustice done to the Palestinians, but I am a great admirer of Israel … I have always been an admirer of Jewish civilization.'[20]

With Carr openly pro-Israeli, Hourani carefully and scrupulously made clear his views that an equitable solution should be found to the Palestine dispute which fully recognized Arab rights. Carr seemed to have mixed feelings about Hourani's attitude. 'When I migrated to St Antony's, I saw at first hand his (Hourani's) unsparing dedication to his pupils. Rightly they loved him. He was more than a supervisor of theses, generous of his time and with his learning. He cared for his students' troubles and guided their careers later in life. The College owes him an enormous debt. Under his guidance the MEC became, not only a centre of scholarly excellence, but a happy place to work in—no easy achievement as relations between Israel and the Arab world deteriorated.'[21]

Jewish students made known their appreciation of Hourani's even-handedness. For example, Joshua Sherman (historian of the British in Palestine) came to St Antony's and was met by Hourani. 'He soon knew that I had been born in Jerusalem, that my mother had been born in a small Zionist agricultural colony in Ottoman Palestine, and that my relationship to all the passions of the Middle East was and remains ambivalent. In discussing all that he spoke with regret, not bitterness; he had of course strongly held views, but these were expressed with unfailing courtesy and openness.'[22]

However, several fellows in St Antony's including Carr felt they had to adopt a pro-Israeli stance, as did Isaiah Berlin, to counterbalance what was seen as the 'excessive Arab influence in the College'. Berlin treated Carr as an acceptable alternative to Hourani when it was time to elect a new warden. Berlin's wife is recorded as having called the MEC an 'Arab propaganda factory'[23]—a remarkably trite opinion and one that did not take into account the sincere efforts made by all at the Centre to teach and research with impartiality. When Carr became Warden he adopted as his aim the expansion of firm relations with Israel and the Jewish world, an aim that reflected his academic choices, his ideological sympathies and intellectual, social and political circles.

This consideration of the divergences in St Antony's College demonstrates how the dispute between Arabs and Israelis was played out far from the scene of conflict. It shows how some men of goodwill were attempting both intellectually and politically to achieve a fair-minded solution and how a careless word could prejudice the situation. It is very easy to characterize an academic institution as a 'propaganda factory' and criticize Zionism as anti-Semitism.

* * *

In the conflict itself religion has come to play a central role, mixing its influence with that of nationalism. From the days of George Antonius, through the Second World War and the foundation of the state of Israel, the Palestinians lost more and more territory. Several Arab conferences were held in an attempt to rally support for Palestine—for example in Jerusalem in 1931 and at Bludan in 1937. There was growing apprehension in the Arab world over the increase in Jewish immigration into Palestine, which it was feared would change irreversibly the character of the country. The Arabs attempted to strengthen hostility to Zionism through strengthening their own nationalism and they stressed its supra-religious character. But they found it impossible to separate nationalism from Islam. Hourani wrote: ‘Islam was what the Arabs had done in history.’[24] Even the Christian founders of the secular Ba’th party had to admit that Islam and the Arabs were inseparable.

After 1967 all Palestinian territory was in Israeli hands. The conquest of Jerusalem was the ultimate humiliation. Palestinian Muslims found it unacceptable that Israeli police could bar their access to the mosque on the Temple Mount (*Haram al-Sharif*). Again in Hourani’s words, ‘[t]he 1967 war was a turning point in many different ways. … At a very deep level [it] left its mark on everyone in the world who identified himself as either Jew or Arab and what had been a local conflict became a worldwide one’.[25] It had a profound effect on Arab nationalist thought and perhaps more so on Muslim thinkers, although no one leader appeared who could stimulate a Muslim response. Most of the radical movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries included some reference in their ideology to the regaining of Jerusalem as a principal aim.

One leader who exercised great influence in the Gaza area of Palestine was Shaikh Ahmed Yasin, co-founder of *Hamas*. He was born in Palestine in 1937 (or perhaps 1929) and in 1948 on the foundation of Israel his family had to leave the family home for a refugee camp in Gaza. The shock of this enforced flight and the misery of a refugee camp had a deeply disturbing effect on someone who seemed to be a sensitive youth. At least in common with most refugees, it must have aroused a sense of injustice and a desire for revenge. In his case he wrapped his future aims in religious terms. His life was grievously changed when while playing football he suffered an accident which caused irreparable damage to his spine. Henceforward, he was a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair with a severe loss of sight. For many, such injuries would have meant an end to an active life, but Yasin continued his studies in Cairo and at home. For a time he taught Arabic in a school in Gaza where his classes were popular. He encouraged his pupils to attend Friday prayers regularly in the local mosque.

Those who knew him commented on his ‘selflessness, simplicity, conviction and true sense of service’. Such admirable qualities are rare in anyone but perhaps more so in a severely disabled individual. They could quite possibly have led to a pacifist, quietist existence but he devoted his life to the revival of Islam—not so much the recovery of Palestine. For a time he was accepted as a non-activist by Israel, although he did become famous for the fiery sermons he preached which attracted large crowds. He emphasized the need to combat secularism and halt the moral and educational decline of Palestine. His approach was not that of an ‘Abduh or even al-Afghani, as his ideas were based on a radical interpretation of the Qur’an and rather narrow beliefs.

Despite his disability he remained active. He founded the Islamic Centre in Gaza which became the spur for other religious institutions in the territory. He also joined the local branch of the *Ikhwan*. His role was organizational and inspirational but he allowed his mosque to be used as a place to stockpile weapons, which was soon discovered and he was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. Under an exchange agreement, he was released and he resumed his preaching and social work rather than instigating direct action, which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO, and breakaway groups) under Yasir ‘Arafat was responsible for at the time. It was a more spontaneous event—the first *Intifada* (awakening)—that in 1987 swept through occupied Palestine as a movement of defiance and thrust Yasin into a leadership role. The movement needed a more inspiring leader than ‘Arafat.

He became the most prominent religious figure in Gaza and was jointly responsible for founding a rival to the PLO—*Hamas* (Movement of Islamic Resistance) with the aim of liberating Palestine. It replaced the *Ikhwan* in Gaza. He became its spiritual leader and, as had the Grand Mufti, he proclaimed that Palestine was and always should be Muslim territory. He encouraged armed resistance and brought down Israeli retaliation on his head. He was imprisoned once again. His prestige grew while he was in prison and *Hamas* increased its suicide and other attacks. He was again released but the Israelis soon placed him on their list of terrorist leaders and sought to eliminate him. A missile smashed into him and his entourage in 2004. His death caused widespread condemnation. His life had in some ways followed the pattern of that of many a leader—despite his handicap he was an inspiring preacher and capable organizer, but not a great prophet or original thinker.

Perhaps negotiations with Israel would have achieved something. Confrontation certainly did not, although *Hamas* continued to exist after Yasin’s death and won elections in Gaza. Its policy of total opposition based on religious justification appealed to the population. It offered more than the PLO as religious rewards were promised to those Muslims who fought against the Israeli presence and died in the battle.

The Charter of *Hamas* lays out the aims and hopes of its adherents. It is an offshoot of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* with an ideology that blends traditional activism with Palestinian nationalism. Its twin aims are the destruction of Israel and the creation of an Islamic state. Muslim resistance movements as we have seen have usually been triggered by discontent caused by disruption to traditional ways of life, discontent given voice to by an inspirational leader; such was the case with *Hamas* and Ahmad Yasin. The Charter has been described as an important document of Islamism. Each of its clauses is underpinned by Qur'anic quotations, which to a Muslim stand as indisputable justifications. In putting forward its claim of a land for a people, this document can be compared to Jewish Zionist writings with their justification for taking over the same land for another people. While fundamentalist Zionists have based their claims on divine promises, they have also drawn on modern concepts of European nationalism. Muslims rely more on the word of God through his Prophet and on strong religious beliefs.

The Charter begins by claiming that Palestine is a *waqf*,[26] which has been consecrated for future generations of Muslims until the Day of Judgement. *Hamas* is a part of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* who have been waging a *jihad* against Zionism inspired by the example of 'Izz al-Din Qassam, the war of 1948 and the rising of 1987. *Hamas* is confronting the 'vicious Nazi-like enemy, the despicable Nazi-Tartar invasion'. 'Our nationalism (*wataniya*) is part of our religious faith with which we confront Israel.' *Hamas* uses the terms Jews and Zionists interchangeably and holds them responsible for what it calls the evils of history, for example the French Revolution, communism, the First World War, Freemasonry and so on. The *Hamas* Charter discloses what it considers to be the real intentions of the Jews—world domination—and it claims that only Islam can forestall them. Almost as an afterthought it states that, nevertheless, it is possible for members of all three religions to coexist in safety.

Hamas assumed the role of the PLO in its unrelenting opposition to and non-recognition of Israel. However, it has been hinted that, as with the PLO, some moderation may one day be shown in modifying its charter.

The Charter illustrates that which George Antonius and others feared has come to pass. 'The development of Zionism in the post-War (First World War) period has been one of the main psychological factors in the deplorable growth of anti-Semitism.' This conclusion was penned in 1938 when anti-Semitism was not widespread in the Arab world. It was a European phenomenon that became associated with the spread of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Opposition to Zionism could easily be equated with anti-Semitism. Ernest Bevin in his efforts to be even-handed in his approach to Palestine was accused of anti-Semitism. His assistant retorted: 'Bevin was sixty four when he became Foreign Secretary, he had been a prominent national figure for three decades and his antisemitism had not been discovered during that time.'[27] But he resented the pressure exerted on him by the Zionists and he came to believe that the suffering the Jews had endured since 1933 was being exploited—not necessarily in their best interests—by the Zionists.

Arab writers have asserted that anti-Semitism did not previously exist under Islam but that it grew together with the spread of Islamicism. Twentieth-century Muslim fundamentalists laid the blame for the Arab world's troubles at the door of the West; the Jews played a major role in Western civilization and were therefore equally to blame for the Arab dilemma. Sayyid Qutb had published his essay *Our struggle with the Jews* in 1950 in which he claimed, however, that there had long been enmity between Muslims and Jews. 'The Jews have confronted Islam with enmity from the moment that the Islamic state was established in Medina.'[28] 'As for today, the struggle has indeed become more deeply entrenched, more intense and more explicit, ever since the Jews came from every place and announced they were establishing the State of Israel.'[29] His further explanation is startling: 'Then Allah brought Hitler to rule over them.' 'And again today the Jews have returned to evil doing which made the Arabs, the owners of the land, taste of sorrows and woe.'[30]

Modern Islamists fully subscribe to the anti-Semitism of Sayyid Qutb and others. By bringing religion into the struggle with the Jews they have made negotiation or reconciliation that much more difficult. Qutb insisted that the Jews were intent on exterminating Islam and were therefore inherently wicked. He used discredited arguments—for example the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, or that the Jews were not people of the Book, that is members of a tolerated religion—as to him they were *al-yahud al-kuffar* (heathen Jews).

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the well-known Egyptian scholar and member of the *Ikhwan*, has expressed conflicting views on the Jews ranging from 'there is no enmity between Muslims and Jews' to 'O, Allah, take this oppressive Zionist, Jewish band of people … do not spare a single one of them'. There appears to be in him, a trained Islamic scholar, a conflict between the traditional, more tolerant Muslim attitude towards the Jews and a virulent anti-Semitism brought about by seeming invincibility of Zionism.

NOTES

1. H. Beeley, 'Ernest Bevin and Palestine', in D. Hopwood ed., *Studies in Arab History* (London 1990), p. 124.
2. *Arab Awakening*, p. 411.
3. Ibid.
4. A. Hourani, *Great Britain and Arab Nationalism* (unpublished report), p. 60.
5. T. Hodgkin, 'George Antonius, Palestine and the 1930s', in *Studies in Arab History*, pp. 89, 98.
6. H. Beeley, 'Ernest Bevin and Palestine', in ibid., p. 117.
7. Hodgkin, op.cit., p. 89.
8. In 2016, quite incredibly, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that the Mufti had inspired Hitler with his policy of Endlosung.
9. Hourani, *Report*, p. 60.
10. Toynbee, *Study of History*, Xll, pp. 138–139.
11. *International Affairs*, Jan., 1931, p. 44.
12. Ibid., p. 58.
13. *Study* Vlll, p. 290.
14. A.D. Breck, 'A.J. Toynbee, The Jews and the Middle East', in A.J. Toynbee, *Presentation Volume* (Baghdad, 1979), pp. 7–8.
15. *International Affairs*, Oct. 1964, p. 641.
16. Hodgkin, op.cit., p. 102.
17. Ibid., p. 83.
18. *The Middle East Centre, 1951–2001*, p. 56.
19. M.J. Gonzalez, *Raymond Carr, the Curiosity of the Fox* (Brighton, 2013), p. 341.
20. Ibid.
21. *The Middle East Centre*, p. 56. Carr could also be rather foolish at times. He once introduced me to a visitor to College as 'the local representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization'. In 1973 the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies was founded at a meeting convened by several leading British academics interested in the Middle East at the premises of the British Academy. Hourani was elected president and I secretary. Immediately, Bernard Lewis, a Fellow of the BA, persuaded its secretary to write to Hourani insisting that BRISMES was an illegal body as 'British Society' was a term of art to be used only by associate bodies of the Academy. Hourani forthwith resigned and I was invited to tea in his Oxford home by Professor Edward Ullendorff of the School of Oriental and African Studies (and Fellow of the BA). I went and he did his best to try (unsuccessfully) to persuade me to abandon BRISMES. The Academy soon saw the folly of its ways and Hourani was re-elected.

22. Ibid., p. 51.
23. Raymond Carr, p. 345. I was once invited to lunch with the Berlins—a very pleasant occasion but one clearly aimed at winning me over.
24. *History of the Arab Peoples*, pp. 413–414.
25. Ibid., pp. 413–414.
26. A *waqf* in Islamic law is a donation for charitable purposes; once given the gift is inalienable and cannot be recovered. The Mufti of Jerusalem regarded his country in the same manner.
27. H. Beeley, in *Studies in Arab History*, p. 117.
28. R.L. Nettler, *Past Trials, Present Tribulations* (Oxford, 1987), p. 81.
29. Ibid., p. 85.
30. Ibid., p. 87.

CHAPTER 15

Conclusion: A Hope for Tolerance

H.A.R. Gibb devoted his lifetime's study of Islam to an attempt to understand 'the specific attitude of [Muslims] towards religion'.[1] He came to the conclusion that the history of Islam could be categorized as a series of responses to challenges which came either from inside Islam itself, caused by changes in social or economic conditions, or from other sources. The '*ulama*' who embodied traditional Muslim orthodoxy lived through these challenges but were not equipped to overcome them by themselves. They could either condemn innovations or disturbances to the even tenor of their lives while continuing to follow their own traditions or they could 'adapt' and ally themselves with new situations or states that grew out of political or social change. If a challenge were integrated it would become part of a new orthodoxy which the '*ulama*' embraced. Thus Islam lived in its first 1000 years with what Gibb called a 'lack of harmony between the inner life of the community and its political development', until in the last three centuries it had to face the intrusion of European ideas and 'the attempt to transplant new and alien institutions'.[2] After Gibb's writing Islam has had to face the more violent intrusion of the armed might of America and Russia, the spread of technology and the advent of the post-modern era.

In this study I have considered the series of challenges that arose during the course of Islamic history and in particular the men who embodied them. They were inspired by the desire to 'purify' Islam where they thought it was corrupted and to create suitable conditions in which the

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shari'a could be observed. They based their authority on claims of divine and prophetic inspiration. Such men have appeared regularly and have led movements that have often been stained with violence. Resulting deaths have been an inevitable consequence but no deterrent. Violence created by non-Muslims has provoked counterviolence. '*Ulama*' opposed to such reactions have insisted that those pursuing violence (*jihadists*) have 'misinterpreted Islam into a religion of … warmongering and criminality'.

The early twenty-first century has seen a catastrophic fall in the standards adopted by those activists seeking to spread their version of Islam. In October 2015 a joint statement issued by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross complained that '[r]arely before (presumably since World War II) have we witnessed so many people on the move, so much instability, so much suffering. In armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Southern Sudan, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere combatants are defying humanity's most fundamental norms. Every day we hear of civilians being killed and wounded in violation of the most basic rules of humanitarian law, and with total impunity'.[3] The Red Cross added that [the use] of starvation, rape and other forms of sexual violence, summary executions, as well as inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees' must stop. 'The world has entered a new era and not a peaceful one with combatants ignoring the most fundamental rules of behaviour in conflicts.' The statement continued: 'In the midst of conflict, there is also hope, immense compassion and solidarity, which make it possible to imagine and work towards a different era.'

Many men and women have been distressed by the violence practised in the name of religion and largely in the name of Islam. For them, violence is the antithesis of a religion which preaches that it should be based on love, compassion and a complete acceptance of the freedom of choice—religious pluralism and mutual respect. Pope Francis and President Rouhani of Iran issued a joint statement in 2016 stressing the importance of inter-religious dialogue and 'the responsibilities of religious communities in promoting reconciliation, tolerance and peace'.

The respected religious teacher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali had in earlier times taught that the true Muslim should observe the *shari'a* with sincerity and with an understanding that the purpose was to establish a right relationship with God. It only had value if it was 'performed by minds and souls directed towards the goal of knowing and serving God'.[4] A perfunctory adherence to the *shari'a* was not sufficient. A virtuous Muslim should follow the example of Muhammad in the service of God with the ultimate aim of emptying the soul of everything other than Him. Then the fulfilled Muslim would understand the meaning of the duties commanded by the *shari'a*. Ghazali, not unlike Christian saints or mystics, described in his writings an ideal way of life, perhaps beyond the reach of ordinary Muslims but put before them as a goal. Later scholars have claimed that al-Ghazali was the *mujaddid* of his time, born to renew Islamic thought and practice for succeeding generations.

The more recent thinker, the Tunisian religious scholar, Muhammad Talbi, has insisted that '[f]aith is the free choice of the individual which does not conflict with reason. God has given man entire freedom in this'. 'There is no meaning to faith if there is no freedom of choice.'[5] His aim has been to renew religious concepts and to keep them alive as valid responses to the problems of the postmodern era. He has advanced a positive Islamic view of people with a freedom of choice who are able to interpret the contemporary world and to fix their position within it for themselves.

Others have also tried to point to a peaceful way forward for the concerned Muslim. Husain Amin, the well-known Egyptian writer of the mid-twentieth century, tackled the problem of how the East could adopt the scientific spirit of the West in order to revive Islam and give the world a new spirituality. His son, Husain Ahmad Amin, followed him in an attempt to prescribe correct attitudes for the Muslims of his time, namely a tolerant and non-confrontational mode of behaviour. In his book *The Sad Muslim's Guide to Required Behaviour in the 20th Century*[6] he asserted that various misconceptions had distorted the real message of Islam and had 'hindered Muslims from responding to the changing needs of society'.[7] He considered that a correct knowledge of Islamic history would show that the *shari'a* had developed centuries ago but had not been amended to match contemporary conditions. An acceptable modernization of the *shari'a* would enable believers to 'adhere to their Islamic identity and confidently accept change'.[8] Amin's promotion of peaceful progression stands in sharp contrast to the assertions of those postmodern activists who insist on a strict adherence to traditional *shari'a* with extreme penalties for all transgressions.

A striking example of the kind of tolerance and compassion called for by the Red Cross was given much earlier by the Arab Muslim leader, King Husain of the Hijaz, who was concerned with the problems he felt would be caused by the issuing of the Balfour Declaration. He saw that only tolerance and understanding could bring about a just solution. George

Antonius drew attention to an article published by Husain in his Meccan newspaper, *al-Qibla*, in which he quite remarkably urged the Arabs of Palestine to bear in mind the precepts of the Qur'an and the Bible and exhorted them to welcome the Jews as brethren and to cooperate with them for the common good. Antonius believed that this call by a respected Muslim demonstrated his freedom from religious prejudice and fanaticism.

On the non-Muslim side I want to mention again two historians writing on the Middle East, each of whom had a humanitarian view of its problems, believing that goodwill was necessary to help to solve them. Neither had a perfect solution but both believed that without compassion and understanding little positive could be achieved. They had seen at first-hand the ways in which Muslims were facing the demands of the contemporary world and their reactions. George Antonius, writing in 1938 when the Arab–Jewish dispute had tumbled into a never-ending history of violence, saw only one solution: 'No lasting solution—he wrote—of the Palestine problem is to be hoped for until the injustice is removed. Violence, whether physical or moral, cannot provide a solution … [it] defeats its own ends; and such immediate gains as it may score are invariably discounted by the harm which is inseparable from it.'[9]

Arnold Toynbee was particularly concerned with what he considered to be the injustices done by the British government to the Arabs of Palestine. He did not offer a solution but as a historian he hoped that his profession might help to promote goodwill. He wrote: 'In order to save mankind we have to learn to live together in concord.'

Somewhere we might ponder such thoughts of concord comprises the Monreale cathedral in Palermo in Sicily. When the Normans invaded in the eleventh century (i.e. at the time of the Crusades), they found much to admire in the Arab/Islamic heritage of the island. (The Arabs had ruled there for some three centuries.) The Normans from the distant North occupied the island and brought about a meeting of cultures noticeable particularly in architecture. One culture accepted the other in a desire to create something new and unique and, in the words of an observer, the great cathedral of Palermo 'captures a magical moment in European and Asian and African history' when a diversity of styles came together in harmony. It is 'perhaps the world's most architecturally diverse multi-cultural place of worship'. It represents a moment when the different sides preferred cooperation to strife.

Nearby in the Royal Palace stands that smaller example of a cultural melting pot—the Cappella Palatina, built by the Normans with Arab workmen in a harmonious blend of different styles. It unites Norman architecture, Arab arches and scripts and Byzantine dome and mosaics. The Arab-type *muqarnas* (ornamental vaulting) are exquisite and the many paintings are reminiscent of Abbasid art from Baghdad. It was famously visited and described by the French writer Guy de Maupassant. May he have the last word?

> The Cappella Palatina, the most beautiful there may be in the world, the most surprising religious jewel dreamed up by human thought and executed by the hands of an artist. … The colourful and calm beauty, penetrating and irresistible, of this small church is the most absolute chef-d'oeuvre imaginable. … One can encounter in no other monument the marvellous uniting [of different styles and cultures] which makes this divine masterpiece unique.[10]

The chapel was completed by people from different backgrounds working together. It is perhaps not an example of perfect tolerance but it at least engenders the impression of a harmonious whole which surely creates a feeling of deep serenity and wonder in the observer.

NOTES

1. Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East*, p. 114.
2. Ibid., p. 114.
3. Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, October 2015.
4. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 169.
5. Cooper, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 9.
6. H.A. Amin, *Dalil al-muslim al-hazin ila muqtada al-suluk fi al qarn-al-'ashrin* (Cairo, 1983).
7. N. Abu Zahra, in *Islam and Modernity*, p. 82.
8. Ibid., p. 84.
9. Ibid., p. 269.
10. G. de Maupassant, *La vie errante* (Paris, 1890), p. 60.

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INDEX[1]

A
Abbas, Ferhat, 156
‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn Saud, 141
‘Abd al-Mun’im, 42, 43
‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri, 73–77
‘Abdallahi, 78, 82
‘Abdallah ibn Yasin, 41, 44n17
Abduh, Muhammad, 97, 101–104, 110, 164, 179
Afghani, Jamal al-Din, al-, 97, 101–103, 110, 179
Afghanistan, 109, 120, 130–135, 139n2, 153, 162, 186
Ahl al-Sunna, 148
Ahmadiya, 87–88
Al Rashid, 141
Al al-Shaikh, 142
Algeria, 41, 58, 59, 61, 69, 73, 74, 76, 104, 117, 121, 154–158
‘Ali ibn Muhammad, 34, 36, 40, 53
‘Ali ibn Yusuf, 42
Almoravids, 41–43, 44n17
Ansar, 79, 82, 159
Antonius, George, 169–171, 175, 177, 180, 182n5, 187–188
Amin, Husain, 187
Amir al-mu’minin, 56, 72, 75, 119
Azhar, al-, 31n8, 59, 106, 126–128, 131, 164, 171
‘Azzam, ‘Abdullah Yusuf, 131, 132, 139n1

B
Badri, *see* Baghdadi
Baghdadi, Abu Bakr, 58, 121, 135, 136, 138, 139
Bahrain, 8, 17, 34–37, 39, 44n6, 44n11
Baida, al-, 62, 68n31
Balfour Declaration, 170, 173, 174, 176, 187
Banna’, Hasan, al-, 103, 104, 110
Bashir, Omar Hasan, 43, 160, 161
Basra, 34, 37–40, 49, 50
Ba’thism, 134

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D. Hopwood, *Islam’s Renewal*, St Antony’s Series,
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Belhadj, Ali, 156–158
Ben Badis, Abdel Hamid, 155, 156
Berlin, Isaiah, 175–177, 183n23
Boko Haram, 118, 146–149
Britain, 4, 10, 13, 15–17, 65, 69, 73, 86, 108, 164, 167, 171, 174–176
Bugeaud, General, 76
Bullard, R., 16
Burton, Richard, 14, 76

C
Cappella Palatina, 189
Carr, Raymond, 176, 177, 182n19, 182n21, 183n23
Chechnya, 151–153
Churchill, C.H., 16, 74, 75, 88n4, 88n6, 88n9
Conversion, 25, 27–29, 31n9, 44n4, 51, 78, 84, 133, 135, 136, 138, 139

D
Dabiq, 138, 140n7
Daesh, *see* ISIS
Daghestan, 70, 71, 151–153
Damascus, 3, 48, 74, 76, 77, 131, 165, 167n4
Dar'iya, 48
Da'wa, al-, 51, 53, 125
dervish, 80, 85
Dickson, H., 17, 19n4
dreams, 7, 28, 29, 40, 49, 62, 74
Dudayev, Dzhokhar, 152, 153

E
Edmonds, C.J., 16
Evans-Pritchard, E., 21, 31n2, 61, 65, 68n39

F
Fez, 42, 59
Filali-Ansari, Abdou, 109, 114n6
France, 69, 73, 74, 76
Front de Libération Nationale, 156

G
Gaddafi, Mu'ammar, 117, 127, 129, 149–151
Gaza, 178, 179
Ghazali, Abu Hamid, al-, 23, 41, 44n18, 60, 95, 97, 98n1, 101, 186, 187
Ghazi Mullah, 70–72
Gibb, H.A.R., 22, 23, 97, 185
Gimry, 70, 71
Glubb Pasha, 17
Godane, Ahmad Abdi (Mukhtar Abu Zubair), 162
Goldziher, I., 42, 45n20, 96
Gordon, General, 77, 79–82, 88n13

H
Hajar, 35, 37
Hamas, 164, 178–180
Hamas Charter, 180
Hayter Report, 17, 18
Hicks, William, 81
Hijaz, 48, 55, 59, 60, 63, 142, 157, 187
hijra, 35, 37, 43, 44n4, 50, 74, 87, 120, 126, 127, 142, 145, 146
Hitler, A., 27, 181, 182n8
Hodgkin, Thomas, 175, 182n5, 182n7, 182n16
Hourani, A.H., xi, 13–15, 17–19, 31n3, 31n7, 60, 67n27, 93–97, 98n2, 106n1, 106n3, 139n3, 171, 173, 176–178, 182n4, 182n9, 182n21, 189n1, 189n4

Huraimila, 50
Husain, King, 187, 188
Husain, Saddam, 44n3, 130, 134
Husaini, Hajj Amin al-, 171–173

I
Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad, 27, 41, 47–54, 60, 63, 78, 103, 110, 120, 137, 141, 142, 144
Ibn Taimiya, 48, 49, 53, 146, 165, 167n7
Ibn Tumart, 40–43, 53, 59
Idris, King, 4, 59, 67n22, 67n31, 149–151
ijtihad, 103, 127, 128n4, 159
Ikhwan, 104, 106, 120, 125, 126, 129–132, 142, 143, 160, 161, 179–181
Imamate, 51, 67n9
Intifada, 179
Iraq, 8, 11n1, 15, 16, 33, 39, 44n15, 89n33, 120, 124, 130, 134–137, 142, 157, 158, 172, 186
Islambouli, Khalid, 128
Islamic Jihad, 132, 139n1
Islamic State (ISIS), 44n15, 56, 111, 119, 121, 124, 125, 130, 131, 135–139, 143, 148, 149, 153, 158, 160, 163, 180, 181
Israel/Zionism, 10, 115, 124, 125, 127, 132, 137, 169–181
Italy, 64, 65, 83

J
Jabhat al-nusra li-ahl al-Sham, 136
Jabri, Muhammad ‘Abed, 111, 112
Ja’far Mahmud Adam, 146
Jaghbub, 65, 150
jahiliya, 47, 48, 105, 126
Jama’at al-tawhid wa-al-Jihad, 134, 135
jamahiriya, 150
Jibril ibn ‘Umar, 55, 57
Jihad, 22, 25, 36, 42, 52, 54, 56, 62, 63, 65, 67n12, 68n33, 70, 73–75, 77, 80–84, 87, 88, 104, 120, 125, 127, 128, 130–135, 137–139, 139n1, 145, 146, 148, 152–155, 158, 159, 162, 163, 165, 172, 180
Juhaiman ibn Saif al-‘Utaibi, 142
Jund al-sham, 134

K
khalwa, 62, 72, 74
Kano, 123, 144–146
Kufra, 64

L
Lebanon, 3, 19n2, 93, 98n2, 169, 172
Libya
  agriculture, 6
  army, 3, 9, 149, 150
  education, 8, 150
  government, 7, 10
  oil, 5, 7, 8, 10, 149, 150
Longrigg, S., 16
Louis Napoleon, 76, 77

M
Madani, Abbasi, 157, 158
mahdi, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 36, 38, 42, 43, 56, 58, 63, 64, 72, 73, 77–84, 87, 110, 111, 113n2, 117, 120, 123, 127, 137, 138, 143, 145, 159–162
Mahdi, Sadiq al-Mahdi, 82, 111, 159, 162
Mahdi, Saiyid ‘Abd al-Rahman al-, 159
Massignon, Louis, 98
Maupassant, Guy de, 189, 189n10

Mecca, 35, 41, 42, 60, 61, 73, 74, 80, 84, 123, 137, 142, 143, 188
Messali Hadj, 155, 156
Methodism, 31n9, 106n4
Middle East Centre, vii, 13, 15, 17, 19, 19n4, 167n8, 176, 177
Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, 87
Mokrani, Muhammad al-, 154
Monreale cathedral, 188
Monroe, E., 17
Mouvement Islamique Arme, 156
Muhammad ‘Abdallah Hasan, 83
Muhammad Ahmad, 77–80, 82, 159
Muhammad ‘Ali, 74, 102, 141
Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sanusi, 58, 63
Muhammad ibn Saud, 49, 54, 141
Muhammad al-Mahdi, 63, 64, 66
Mohammad Marwa, 144, 145
Muhammad Salih, 84
Muhammad Sharif, 77, 78
Muhammad Yusuf, 146, 147, 149
mujaddid, 22, 23n1, 26, 44n18, 49, 51, 53, 54, 58, 70, 73, 82, 87, 113n2, 145, 160, 187
mujahidin, 124, 130, 132, 134, 162
Mukhtara, al-, 39
Muntasir, al-, 34
Muslim Brothers, 103, 125, 166
Mustafa, Ahmad Shukri, 118, 126
Mu’tazz, al-, 37
Muwaffaq, al-, 39, 40
muwahhidun, 21, 66n1

N
Nasser, Gamal ‘Abd al-, 4, 10, 15, 18, 104, 106, 124, 125, 127, 128, 150, 167n3
National Islamic Front, 161
Newman, Cardinal, 94, 95
Nigeria, 54, 56, 58, 117, 121, 123, 124, 130, 144–149, 186
Nimeiry, Ja’far, 161

O
Omdurman, 77, 82
Ottomans, 6, 14, 18, 48, 61, 64, 65, 69, 85, 136, 141, 164, 165, 169–171, 174, 177
Oxford University, 17–19, 21, 89n24, 93, 97, 176, 182n21

P
Palestine, 14, 15, 104, 115, 131, 164–167, 169–181, 188
PLO, 179, 180, 182n21
Peel Commission, 170
Philby, St J., 14, 50, 54, 66n7, 67n14
Popovic, A., 40, 43n1
Popular Congress Party, 161

Q
Qadiriya, 84, 86, 145, 164, 165
Qa’ida, al-, 118, 121, 124, 131–136, 149, 158, 161, 163
Qaradawi, Yusuf, 181
Qassam, ‘Izz al-Din, 164–167, 167n13, 180
Qutb, Saiyid, 104–106, 110, 120, 126, 129–133, 135, 137, 156, 157, 162, 181

R
Rida, Rashid, 104, 139n3, 164, 165, 171
Riyadh, 48, 53, 131, 141
Roman Catholicism, 93, 94
Russia (Soviet Union), 69, 70, 73, 130, 151–153, 185

S
Sadat, Anwar, 124–128, 128n2, 132
salafiyya, 110

Salaam, Adeeb Olufemi, 147
Sanusi, 9–11, 21, 60–62, 64–66, 67n22, 68n33, 68n38, 79, 117, 149–151
Sanusi, Zubair Ahmad, al-, 59–63, 67n24, 68n33, 151
Saudi Arabia, 16, 18, 36, 107, 120, 124, 129–131, 133, 138, 141–144, 161
Saudi Arabia (*mufti*), 48, 138, 152, 164, 171–173, 179, 182n8, 183n26
Said, Edward, 18, 19n6
Saint Antony's College, 13, 15, 17, 167n8, 176, 177
salihiya, 84–86
samaniyya, 77, 78
Samarra, 34, 35
Shabab, al-, 162, 163
Shamil, 59, 69–73, 88n1, 104, 117, 151–153
shari'a, 23, 25–27, 39, 42, 51, 54–57, 59, 62, 63, 70, 72, 73, 80, 89n22, 97, 102, 106, 110, 111, 113, 118–120, 125, 126, 128, 131, 135–139, 143, 144, 146, 150, 153, 156, 158–165, 186, 187
Sharif, Ahmad al-Sharif, 64
Shekau, Mohammed, 148, 149
shirk, 47, 53, 54, 105, 119, 150
silsila, 98, 101
Slatin, Rudolf, 79–81, 89n17, 89n20
Snouck Hurgronje, 98
Sokoto, 56
Somalia, 16, 83–85, 117, 121, 132, 133, 162–164
Strachey, Lytton, 78, 88n13, 89n14
Sudan, 11n1, 21, 77, 80, 82, 83, 85, 88n12, 117, 133, 159–162, 167n9, 167n11, 186
sufism, 57, 59–61, 63, 70, 82–84, 97, 153
Syria, 18, 19n2, 98n2, 124, 134, 136, 138, 164, 165, 167, 186

T

Takfir wa-al-Hijra, al-, 111, 126
Talbi, Muhammad, 112, 113, 114n9, 187
Taliban, 109, 133, 158
tawhid, 53, 134, 135, 148
Tijani, Ahmad, 59, 67n24
tijaniya, 59, 145
Toynbee, Arnold, 173–175, 182n10, 182n14, 188
Turabi, Hasan, 160–162
Turtushi, al-, 41

U

'ulama', 22, 25–27, 31n8, 42, 43, 48, 59–61, 80, 87, 88, 96, 97, 101, 106, 110, 111, 123, 126–128, 128n4, 138, 142, 143, 147, 149, 150, 155, 156, 158, 160, 163, 166, 185, 186
Ummah party, 82, 159
'Umar al-Mukhtar, 65, 162–164
'Usama ibn Laden, 121, 124, 131–135, 139n1, 153, 157, 161, 163
Uthman dan Fodio, 54–58, 145

W

wadaad, 83, 84
Wahhabism, 52, 53, 66n1, 86, 119, 142, 146
Wesley, J., 28–30, 31n9

Y
Yasin, Shaikh Ahmad, 178–180
Young Men's Muslim Association, 166
Yunfa, 56

Z
Zanj, 33–40, 43n1, 53, 140n4
Zarqawi, Abu Mus'ab al-, 134–136
Zawahiri, Ayman al-, 132, 133, 137
zawiya, 30, 61–64, 66
Zouabri, Antar, 121, 157
Zubair, al-, 49