

Nurturing Islamic Peace Discourse

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Abstract

As the Muslim movements gain momentum around the Muslim world, so does the need for a discourse that would make a religious tradition relevant to the conditions of modernity. Unless Muslims are conscious of the conditions and challenges of modernity and its historical and contemporary trajectory, they cannot succeed in their emancipation from their oppressors. A new discourse must be produced by those Muslims who can look at the conditions of their times critically, in their pursuit of justice. Such a movement will produce a new epistemic basis for the new Muslim society, which still may be a mass society. The thought of important scholars, Khalis M. Jalabi and Jawadat Sai'd, is discussed as two examples of Islamic peace discourse.

Most Muslims agree that Islam as a faith and a practice is based on a paradigm of peace through justice addressing the causes of conflict in society. Muslims hold that Islam possesses a non-negotiable spiritual and social commitment to certain transcendent goals, among them being the moral unity of a universal humanity as enshrined in the notion of the Ummah. Respect for diversity is an absolute requirement for such unity, if we recognize that our unity springs from humanity's common purpose in searching for awareness of divine oneness and loving mercy. This recognition of the transcendent source of human goals in the search for unity forms the most authentic basis for the hope of world peace. Today we may continue to hope that intellectually and ethically enlightened Muslims are capable of extracting the spiritual paradigm of purpose and meaning at the core of

Islam so as to build, in cooperation with other faiths and peoples, a peaceful future for our planet. This hope requires from us an assenting force to support the search for the conceptual framework capable of addressing current needs.

Since the late 1970s, Islamic movements of various orientations, labeled "fundamentalist" or "radical" and now "Islamist," have assumed new forms and widened their appeal. The rise in religious activism and militancy since the 1980s is attributable to

the result of both conceptual innovations and emerging networks for communication and action that affect virtually all Muslims and profoundly shape the direction of contemporary Muslim thought.¹

The Islamic revolution in Iran (1978–79) revealed the wide appeal of an Islamic vocabulary to articulate popular political sentiment. In addition, armed resistance by Islamist movements to alien occupation boosted self-confidence as well as jingoistic bravado: the coalitions of Afghan *mujahidin* defeating Soviet forces, the struggle of the Lebanese Shi'ite Hizbullah to evict Israeli forces, and Chechniyani Muslims battling Russian forces. Certain militant groups employ indiscriminate lethal violence against state regimes, their western backers, or against fellow Muslims deemed insufficiently committed. Meanwhile, the perception is constantly reinforced that powerful Western nations employ cynical double standards regarding the rights or security of Arab Palestinians, Slavic Muslims in Bosnia, or Kosovar Albanians.

The most significant conflicts involving Islam are not those between the West and Muslims, but rather those between competing factions and visions within Muslim societies. Islamist movements around the world have generally exhibited signs of a slow maturation into constructive movements for peaceful change, with some notable exceptions as in Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, and Afghanistan. During the 1990s the tension and divide between the worldviews and cultural motivations of major expressions of Islamic identity have grown. On the one hand, there is the growing strength of conservative forms of particularist Islam seeking to impose hegemony and group cohesion by instituting uniformity and supporting particular political factions. They are shaped by a cultural determinism seeking to preserve a monolithic Muslim identity against the secularist conspiracy of global capitalism, or the extension of American power disguised as a quest for free markets, economic stability, and world peace. On the other hand,

there is evidence of an enlightened forward-looking Islam, which presents itself as a project for the realization of human unity, seeks societies based on unity in diversity, refrains from coercing public conformity to inherited norms and customs—which often have very little connection to Islamic values or faith and serve merely to perpetuate entrenched patterns of hierarchical authority and paternalism—and works to awaken responsibility for building a global order springing from recognition of the higher sovereignty of God. This generalization about the growing dichotomy among Muslim intellectual projects has a limited utility for seizing contrasting approaches to making Islam relevant to contemporary needs. The truth is that various combinations of these trends exist in every Muslim society to different degrees and has always been so.

A New Speech

The media headlines about a transnational network of Islamist terrorists targeting the United States masterminded by a diabolical Osama Bin Ladin, obscures the reality of intense intra-Muslim struggles for social and political transformation occurring in the form of ongoing debates over “Islam.” The context for most of the Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia remains one of rapid population growth with accelerated rural to urban shifts, deteriorating economic conditions with deepening inequities between rich and poor, and the inability of most states to provide adequate housing, health care, and social services. The wrenching modernization process Muslim-majority states are experiencing is accompanied by a conceptual transformation at both the theological and ideological levels. The appearance of fresh Islamic discourses, and the growing hunger for them, may be seen to parallel the history of campaigns for democracy, equality, and political transparency in the debates carried out in secular terms within non-Muslim countries over civil and political rights.

Central to this “new speech” is the task of interpreting and applying Islamic sources in response to contemporary human needs. These attempts at “new thinking” commonly invoke the classical Islamic tradition of tolerance of dispute over the meanings of the Islamic sources: the Qur’an, the Hadith (or corpus of narrated traditions of the Prophet), and the various legal schools of Islamic jurisprudence (or *fiqh*).² These new thinkers of a self-critical new speech are consciously wrestling with the demands of modernity and are laboring to advance a reformed understanding of the relevance of the Islamic heritage to contemporary Islamic societies.

Historically, Islam has encompassed a wide range of intellectual and religious disciplines, divergent opinions, and competing schools of law. It has fostered a culture of argument where disagreement and critical appraisals of diverging interpretations were accepted as a normative feature of Islamic thought and practice.³ Present day ideologues, including the militant activists, generally imagine Islam as a monolithic utopian system for governing society, condemning criticisms of their interpretations or official religious policies (e.g., the Taliban in Afghanistan, the 'conservative' leadership in Iran, the so-called Wahhabi groupings of the Caucasus and newly independent states, and the Islamic Gama'at in Egypt). Parallel to this, a trend continues among Occidental scholars and policy makers of "essentializing" Islam by treating it as a static entity unchanged over time and inherently inimical to democracy, human rights, or pluralism. Both views neglect the long history of reforms and reinterpretations of Islamic sources in response to changing social and historical circumstances; or they dismiss evolving contemporary understandings of these sources, excluding them from the bounds of the Islamic tradition. Significant attempts at Islamic conceptual innovation promoting committed action for peaceful social transformation and modernity in harmony with normative Islamic values risk remaining unrecognized or even worse, becoming trivialized.

Emergence of a New Episteme Shaping Mass Culture

The chief distinguishing characteristic of current Islamization movements is the appearance of a new type of leadership: self-trained, charismatic religious intellectuals who are actors in newly emerging religious and symbolic fields. Their appeal is wider than the militant secular leftist and nationalists who dominated much of the Middle East and North Africa through the 1970s. These Islamic intellectuals represent a sharp break with the formally trained religious authorities (the 'ulama') of an earlier generation. Some observers disparage them as "micro-intellectuals"⁴ or ironically refer to the "dumbing down" of Islamist radicals.⁵ Many parts of the Islamic world are witnessing the replacement of traditionally educated religious scholars by these new Islamic intellectuals as sources of authority. A partial exception to this may be the Shi'ite communities of Iran, Lebanon, and Eastern Arabia, where for specific historical and theological reasons the traditional 'ulama' have emerged to play a political leadership role in social transformation.

The prominence of these new intellectuals and the heightened level of politicization in their discourse about Islamic themes and terminology are a direct consequence of mass higher education and of the spread of techniques of mass communication upon religious thought and activism. Islamist leaders and intellectuals address audiences in writings and in speech with a religious language and style more accessible than that used by state authorities. These fresh forms of discourse—rather than sacred texts themselves—become central to the religious and political imagination of the new Islamic intellectuals and their audiences. Several decades of postcolonial educational expansion throughout the Islamic world is leading to the “re-imagining” of religion and politics.⁶ The popularity of mass-marketed “Islamic” pamphlets and books in inexpensive editions exploiting modern printing technologies, as well as audio and video cassettes of sermons, exhortations, and topical discussions, are having a great motivating impact upon a growing audience.⁷

The outstanding results of this greater access to education and to mass media include the systematization and objectification of religion in Muslim popular imagination, thereby facilitating innovation; as well as a broadened sense of language and community transcending the narrow bases of local communities and dialects and creating new bases of religious and ethnic identity. The fact that individuals such as Bin Laden can recruit individuals from Africa, Eastern Europe, the Arab world, and Asia and coordinate far-flung activities testifies to the increasing viability of transnational networks for communication and action. Yet the potential exists for similar networks to serve the spread of an alternative discourse more deeply anchored in the core Islamic values of tolerance for diversity, justice, compassion, and human dignity.

The new discourses propel an increasing trend toward a changing mass culture allowing greater weight for Islamization expressed through civil actions. When the traditional intellectual and scholarly elites ignore or discount this new style of thought and symbolic field of possible and imagined discourse, they risk becoming irrelevant to the actual needs of their societies and more easily kept on the leash of ruling cliques or autocratic leaders. These two components of the emerging transformation of local Islamic cultures—“new speech” and “new thought”—are complemented by a “new action”: a strong social commitment reflecting Islamic imperatives for equity, egalitarianism, and human welfare exemplified within Islamist movements at the local community level through a wide array of religious

and civil institutions and efforts. This “new action” springs from a renewed call to live core Islamic values which are neglected or merely paid lip service to by state authorities and the established political elites. Islamists have been providing services and support to the needy in a number of countries where the state does not, including basic health and welfare services, housing, even employment opportunities and security against crime. In so doing, they buttress their claim that they offer an Islamic justice where governments fail.

Self-Critical Thinking Muslims

Enlightened reformist groups are interpreting Islamic sources in ways that harmonize Islamic practices with international human rights and popular Muslim demands for social equity and political accountability. The conceptual innovations with which certain Muslim intellectuals are experimenting need to find expression in an appropriate language in order to be able to exploit new networks of communication and action for social transformation. When westernized, intellectually sophisticated Muslims familiar with postmodern categories of thought impatiently sneer at the naive, rustic, or overly pious tone of discourse popular with many new Islamic intellectuals, they ignore the realities of current Islamic societies. Attempts to introduce new discourses must be adjusted to the particular mentality and level of understanding of the people. The Prophet himself enjoined: “Speak to people in accordance with their measure of understanding” (*‘ala qadri ‘uqulihim*). These efforts at new speech may stimulate the capacity to spur common interaction and deliberation in creating the community institutions on which an Islamic civil society and a genuinely voluntary democratic culture must rest. This is especially relevant for those reflective thinkers who ponder upon and advocate the need for fresh interpretations of the sources in harmony with present-day conditions and needs.⁸ Their ideas are under constant attack by powerful and well-financed conservative forces determined to discredit and delegitimize them.

Recall that the state-imposed ideologized versions of Islam are being employed by governments and institutions to legitimize repressive policies, to cover up human rights delinquencies, and to rationalize the lack of transparency, participation, and accountability in governance. Islam is not a government property. Its recent transformation into state-imposed ideologies in countries such as Sudan, Iran, and Pakistan has to do largely with a strident cultural nationalism marked by an inability to engage in self-criticism and

an intolerance of divergent views. The reality in a number of Muslim-majority countries is that an intolerant form of puritanical Wahhabi Islam exported from Arabia has been steadily displacing the more moderate expressions of the Muslim Brethren or local Islamic traditions (e.g., in Yemen, the Gulf, the Caucasus, Central Asia). Furthermore, depending on the political context, supporters of Islamization may easily turn out to be the victims of oppression from secular regimes — as with Uzbekistan's crackdown on pious Muslims sporting lengthy beards and overly frequenting the mosque or the current Turkish regime's prohibition of female university students wearing headscarves or male students wearing beards.⁹

As Dr. Maher Hathout recently asserted,

Islamic ideas and ideals need to be articulated in a language that is understood by the masses, and carried out by institutions that can effectively deal with issues that are relevant to the people.¹⁰

He further characterized the past several decades of Islamic discourse in America as reactionary, factional, archaicizing, and ritualistic; and urged Muslims today to consciously articulate clear positions on the burning issues of democracy, freedom of expression, minority religious rights, women's rights, and modernity.¹¹ Indeed, his assessment may apply equally to the thought and speech of the majority of Muslim ideologues and conservatives worldwide. Abdal Hakim Murad, an English Muslim intellectual, points to the widespread ignorance among many leaders in the Islamic world of the ideas which underpin modernity, declaring that

unless Muslims are conscious of the global trends of their age, they will continue to be losers; ... I am concerned to alert Muslims to the realities which are taking shape around them, and which are moulding a world in which their traditional discourse will have no application whatsoever.¹²

Are such laments over the predominant tone and content of current Islamic discourses unduly pessimistic? Today there are a variety of competing views on Islam. There exist creative and courageous Muslims who are truly taking up the challenge of preserving their culture and identity in a changing world. They offer authentic attempts to transform Islamic societies through more open acceptance of participatory civic institutions, by mediating an enlightened version of their faith addressing actual conditions and needs. More importantly, these thinkers are actively engaged in the intellectual and social ferment of society, and do not stand aloof from ques-

tions and concerns touching everyday life. This current of thought calls for Muslims to take up the task of critically thinking out the causes and conditions of their present predicament, understanding the obstacles preventing adequate responses, and learning how to make appropriate efforts for realistic change. Going beyond showy piety (the most insidious form of vanity and conceit) or cultural chauvinism, rising above the litany of laments over a glorious and powerful past and the myth-making of an ideal unchanging Islam, dispensing with psychic wounds of inferiority or temptations for vengeance with regard to western power and domination—they are calling for Muslims to begin thinking intelligently and acting wisely.

The energy needed for recasting the direction of Muslim thought and action must arise from within Islam itself. There are socially committed thinkers writing and speaking about the peaceful legacy of Islamic faith and practice and exploring the potential for re-animating a peaceable model for the social transformation of Islamic societies. Out of the array of options afforded by Islamic civilization and its rich speculative and religious legacy, they promote ideas and values for constructing a viable synthesis of Islamic principles and the modern expectations for rights, democratization, and political transparency. Several are producing a corpus of writings in Arabic which is attracting growing attention or controversy, while others write in English for the Muslim diaspora audience. Collectively they are calling for a “revolution” in the thinking of the generality of Muslims. They do not hesitate to critique ideas and practices long accepted without question by Muslims. And they do so on the basis of a searching re-examination of the Islamic sources concerning issues directly relevant to peaceful change, strengthening Islamic civil society, and rethinking the role of force or violence in social transformation.

It is possible to identify a distinct current within the stream of contemporary Islamic intellectual projects, which may be denominated “Islamic civil action.” This phrase has overtones of the struggle for justice and freedom enshrined in the much-abused term “jihad.” Struggle for social justice through pursuing conflict need not of necessity be violent or conducive of bloodletting and destruction. The 1978–79 Iranian revolution displayed remarkable nonviolent features as a “people’s power” movement. In the 1980s there was some discussion in Arab Muslim circles of nonviolent resistance to tyranny and occupation, with the term “civil resistance” (*al-muqawamah al-madaniyyah*) chosen to convey this notion.¹³ There was even a certain acceptance of this active technique of pursuing struggle

among Palestinians during the *Intifadah*,¹⁴ and by the Kosovar Albanians countering Serb repression from the late 1980s until 1997 (Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Democratic Alliance of Kosovo). At the present moment, the terms “peaceful action” (*al-'amal al-silmi*) and “civil jihad” (*al-jihad al-madani*) are being employed to convey a similar notion.¹⁵ It is noticeable that the term “nonviolence” (the Arabic coinage *la'unf*) is for the most part avoided, due to cultural preconceptions among Arab Muslims that it connotes passivity, weakness, and lack of courage.

Two Proponents of an Islamic Peace Discourse

Among the voices of this fledgling and fragile trend toward an Islamic peace discourse, we may mention two thinkers of Syrian nationality: Khalis Jalabi and Jawdat Sa'id. We focus on them primarily because they are producing significant works aiming to re-conceptualize the data of Islamic sources relating to nonviolent direct action and peace building,¹⁶ and both are active in discussing and spreading their ideas within Arab Muslim society. An earlier generation of Muslim intellectuals and leaders in South Asia writing in Urdu or English devoted considerable effort along similar lines, such as Gandhi's colleague Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958), Tayyebulla,¹⁷ the remarkable Pathan leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan¹⁸ (d. 1988), and currently Wahiduddin Khan (president of The Islamic Center in New Delhi). Under the shadow of Gandhi's ideas and career, these South Asian Muslims adapted the term “nonviolence” to convey the notion of an active technique of conflict for bringing peaceful social transformation.

The thought of the contemporary Arab thinkers to be introduced below is independent of, and a departure from, that of the preceding South Asian thinkers, since they are consciously seeking to address key notions of modernity and transformation toward a just society through a fresh re-appropriation of Islamic sources, and wrestle with prevailing conceptions of what Islam teaches on force, violence, civil discord (*fitnah*), resistance, and accountability. These enlightened thinkers utter a new discourse framed in terms of an Islamic legacy for peace and bringing the spirit of self-critical awareness and tolerance of opposing views. It is imperative that this thin yet potent stream of speech and thought be given the opportunity to flow without being blocked. It has the potential to give meaning and direction to an emerging peace discourse which re-invigorates a wealth of Islamic concepts relevant for building a peaceful future. Our world shall

draw closer to global peace only when Islam becomes at peace with its conflicting selves.

The thinkers discussed below are working under great constraints in the face of the failing Israeli–Palestinian peace process, repressive secular or Islamic statist regimes, and the crescendo of anti-American anger and suspicion being capitalized upon by radical Islamists in the Arab world and Central and South Asia. Conscious and self-critical attempts to re-appropriate the Islamic sources should be allowed to compete with the strident, shallow, and alienating discourse of violent and narrow-minded actors. The conceptual innovations elaborated by Islamic Civil Action must have a voice in shaping the direction of contemporary Muslim thought. This discourse utters new speech, is born of new thought, and prompts new action. Yet the essential experiences, ideas, and values are timeless and transcend history, leading one back to the real origin and goal of true peace—God.

Khalis M. Jalabi

Khalis Jalabi is a Syrian physician of Turkish-Kurdish origin born in 1945 in Qamishli, near the Syrian-Turkish border, and trained in Damascus and Germany. He studied medicine and the Shari'ah at Damascus University, then specialized in surgery in a number of East German medical centers for nearly ten years. In the early 1970s, he published several popular medical works on the human body, which continue to be reprinted and used in the educational curricula of Arab countries. Since 1984 he has worked in various provinces of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and for the past six years he has practiced as a surgeon at the King Faisal Hospital in Burayda. Every Thursday Jalabi writes a weekly feature column in the major Saudi daily *Al-Riyadh*, in which he introduces current scientific, anthropological, and cognitive-psychological ideas to his Arabic audience—including his notion of “peaceful action” (*al-'amal al-silmi*) which parallels what theorists such as Gandhi and Gene Sharp term “nonviolent direct action.” He recently received an award as the best feature writer for 1997 from the publisher of *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London). Jalabi is married to the sister of Jawdat Sa'id and is influenced by Sa'id's ideas to some extent, as well as the example of nonviolent action advocated by Mubarak 'Awad during the Palestinian *Intifadah*. He is well read in philosophy and the Western physical and social sciences.

In 1984 he published a major work, *Fi l-naqd al-dhati: Darurat al-naqd al-dhati li-l-harakat al-Islamiyyah* [On Self-Criticism: the Necessity of Self-Criticism for the Islamic Movement] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah,

various reprints), which treated aspects of ideology, political movements, and violence among Islamists. In his articles for *Al-Riyadh* from 1997 to 1998 (1417–1419 A.H.) he elaborates an original perspective on an Islamic paradigm for “neutralizing violence” (*tahyid al-‘unf*) and of discriminating between force and true “resistance power” (see the three-part article in *Al-Riyadh* for 18 Sept., 25 Sept., and 2 Oct. 1997). In a sophisticated manner, he searches for the basis of peaceful action within the ritual practices, teachings, and values of Islam; see e.g., “*al-Hajj wa al-dars al-la‘unf*” (The Pilgrimage and the Lesson of Nonviolence), *Al-Riyadh*, 24 April 1997 (17 Dhu al-Hijjah 1417). His “*Ta’sis la‘unf ‘Arabi dakhil*” (Establishing Regional Arab Nonviolence) (*Al-Riyadh*, 18 June 1998 [24 Safar 1419]) reports on his paper delivered at the major conference of Arab educators, journalists, and thinkers on “Extremism, Violence, and Terrorism” in Amman, Jordan, on 3–13 May 1998, where he boldly advanced his ideas and answered sharp critiques from skeptical participants.

His recent book, *Sikulujiyyat al-‘unf wa istratijiyyat al-‘amal al-silmi* [The Psychology of Violence and the Strategy of “Peaceful Action”] (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1998), is an analysis of human violence by recourse to Islamic tradition—with the aid of contemporary behavioral psychology, social anthropology, and philosophy. Here, Jalabi advocates the use of “peaceful action” as an effective technique for creating and sustaining momentum for a transformed civil society on an Islamic basis. Another work, *Falsafat al-quwwah wa l-muqawamah* (The Philosophy of Power, and Resistance), is scheduled to be published soon and consists of a collection of articles. He seeks to foster adoption of this tactic of “peaceful direct action” for invigorating Arab-Islamic political, cultural, and social revival. Jalabi has attended several conferences in Amman in recent years and one on “Democracy & Islam” convened by the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Washington, D.C., in 1994. He has also appeared on TV in Jordan and the UAE.

Jawdat Sa‘id

Jawdat Sa‘id was born in 1931 in the Circassian village of Bi‘r ‘Ajam, south of Qunaytra in the Golan Heights. His family (named *Tsai*) was part of the wave of Circassian immigration from Russian territory into the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire in the late nineteenth century. At the age of fifteen he was sent to study in Cairo at the prestigious Al-Azhar University, graduating in 1957 with both a university degree in Arabic literature and a diploma in education. After returning to Syria he taught for

over ten years, first in the *Dar al-Mu'allimin* (Teachers' College) in Damascus and then in high schools in and around Damascus, including teaching "morale" in military schools (e.g., in the city of Hims in central Syria). Increasingly, he found himself demoted to less prestigious schools.

In 1968, Sa'id was dismissed from his government employment as a teacher, due to his advocacy of ideas on Islamic peace and their implications for radical social transformation, for his published views (his first book appeared in 1966), and for his activism through lecturing in mosques, civic centers, and within Syrian intellectual and social circles. In 1968 he was imprisoned by the Syrian authorities for a year and a half. He has been to prison under the Ba'ath regime five times, usually for periods of several months, the last time being in 1973. During the early 1980s, when the Syrian *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Muslim Brethren) were actively opposing President Asad's regime, he was often interrogated and watched, although he has never been a member of the Muslim Brethren. For well over a decade he chose to live in voluntary internal exile, working in Tolstoy-like fashion at his family's apiary in Bi'r 'Ajam. This exemplifies his conviction that intellectual freedom must be linked to gainful work. His withdrawal from active social engagement, coinciding with the clash between the Islamist opposition and the Syrian government, was motivated by his understanding of the Islamic requirement to avoid *fitnah* or civil discord and violence.

Since the early 1990s, Sa'id has gradually become more active within Syria, cultivating contacts and engaging in dialogue with a wide spectrum of religious, political, and social trends—within the Sunni religious establishment (e.g., Grand Mufti Shaykh Ahmed Kufaro; or Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, professor at the *Kulliyat al-Shari'ah*, Damascus University), with Communists, Arab nationalists, and the Union of Arab Writers (founded by the respected esoteric teacher As'ad 'Ali). This reflects Sa'id's commitment to accepting other viewpoints, fostering a more secure sense of community and common purpose among Arab Muslims, and tolerating the pursuit of different directions in finding solutions. "We don't have to agree intellectually in order to support each other," he insists.

In 1993 the Damascus–Beirut publishing house *Dar al-fikr al-mu'asir* reprinted a fresh edition of his collected works in six volumes, in a series entitled *Sunan taghyir al-nafs wa l-mujtama'* (Programs for Transforming Self and Society). In 1993 he openly convened a series of eleven public dialogue sessions (*majalis*) in his home town of Bi'r 'Ajam, exploring ideas of

social and individual change. The results of these sessions were published in 1995 under the titles *The Concept of Change* and *Winds of Change*. His ideas have drawn condemnation from the Syrian *Ikhwan*, who published attacks on his writings, dubbing him *al-shaykh al-ahmar* ("the red shaykh"; i.e., a communist). Increasing interest in his ideas is being shown within Syria, and in Jordan, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, where he was interviewed on Gulf TV; he has published articles in several leading Arab-Islamic journals.

He has participated in several recent conferences in the Arab world (e.g., in Khartoum, 1993). In 1997 he appeared several times on Syrian TV in the program *Al-Hiwar al-maftuh*, in company with Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti. He has participated in discussions and seminars in North America during several recent trips, in Virginia, New Jersey, and Montreal (including community mosques, Arab cultural centers, and The Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University). On 6–7 February 1998, he attended the Symposium on "Islam and Peace in the 15th/21st Century" in Washington, D.C., at The American University, sponsored by the NGO Nonviolence International with the cooperation of The Center for Global Peace, where over twenty-five Muslim thinkers and community leaders from around the world held intense discussions on Islamic resources for peaceful change.¹⁹ During this recent Washington visit he also spoke on Islamic notions of violence and peace at The Middle East Institute, Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, the School for International Service at The American University, the Arab cultural center *Markaz al-Hewar* in Vienna, Virginia, and the mosque-center *Dar al-Hijrah*.

Jawdat Sa'id is well versed in classical and contemporary Islamic thought and intimate with the Qur'an and Hadith. Yet his approach to the Islamic tradition is neither *taqlidi* (traditionalist) nor *fiqhi* (legalist). He creatively appropriates the classical texts in a fresh manner, challenging conventional wisdom as well as interpretations that he feels have imprisoned the minds of Muslims for centuries. He goes beyond restating traditional wisdom in terms of contemporary problems and forces one to ponder the actual implications of the texts to arrive at a fresh understanding changing one's perception of present conditions. Among the influences on his thought one might mention the fourteenth century North African historian and social scientist Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century theologian and polemicist Ibn Taymiyyah, the early twentieth century Egyptian religious reformist Muhammad 'Abduh, the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, and the

Algerian modernist reform thinker Malik bin Nabi. His first book, *The Doctrine of the First Son of Adam; The Problem of Violence in Islamic Action* (Damascus, 1966; 5th ed. Beirut, 1993), was an original and deeply thought-out attempt to define an essential Muslim understanding of nonviolent peaceful paths for social change based on prophetic and Qur'anic precedents. The impact of this unique work continues to be felt, and it may fairly be described as ahead of its time. In subsequent works he articulated his core ideas in more detail while expanding his search for the historical and prophetic patterns of peace. Sa'id is aware of several contemporary trends in western thought (through translation), including socialism, psychology, semiotics, and psycho-politics. He is familiar with western modes of discourse from pragmatism (Pierce) and existentialism (Sartre) to the postmodernism of Foucault. Yet he makes a conscious attempt to express his ideas in an Islamic idiom accessible to both educated Muslim youth and independent critical thinkers. In his talks and recent lectures, he displays a constant interest in reaching students and young thinkers.

Sa'id's body of work represents a creative attempt to rethink some of the most difficult issues facing Islam today: the role of force and violence in achieving social and political ends; the best paths for transforming society; the problem of determinism and human liberty and how it shapes change; and the rationale and purpose disclosed by historical processes and providence. Taking the Qur'anic paradigm seriously, he investigates and exploits the lessons of history—up to and including current affairs—to discern the patterns which shape events and unfold modes of thought. Complementing this is another dominant concern: the prophetic method (*manhaj*) for social transformation, and several writings exhibit a deep familiarity with and appreciation of Christianity. A lengthy study, "Law, Religion and the Prophetic Method in Social Change," is to be published in *The American Journal of Law and Religion*, in English translation by his niece 'Afra Jalabi. Sa'id argues that the most certain path to change and creation of a politically mature, just society lies in creating the nexus of aware individuals who may seed a mature community. He dismisses the tendency to await a heroic leader or sudden reversal of history. His latest major work, *Be as Adam's First Son!* (Damascus, 1997), is a summary and refinement of his ideas over the past thirty-some years.

For Jawdat Sa'id, history and prophetic religion are inseparable, and their true lessons have not yet been absorbed by most people. He is convinced that both the movement of history and the example of the prophets support

the idea of humanity's progress toward broader conceptual maturity. People must be assured of hope for a better future, maintain faith in the efficacy of divine guidance, and affirm the compatibility of faith and reason. The awareness of a transcendent power and order shaping the future of humanity, and the hope in a coming global civilization more perfectly in harmony with divine providential order, is a marked feature of his thought. He views the current condition of Muslims with some estrangement, finding that they have not yet emerged from the notion that religion and piety alone can effect real change. Yet his perspective is not one of detachment, as he articulates a profound grasp of what Islam teaches about changing one's self and transforming one's society. *Ustadh Sa'id* offers a creative paradigm of contemporary Islamic thinking concerning one of the most essential facets of Islam: Peace.

Notes

1. Dale F. Eickelman, "Trans-state Islam and Security," in S.H. Rudolph and J. Piscatori, eds., *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 28.
2. For the argument that the extralegal traditions of theology, philosophy, Sufism, and ethics may provide richer resources for the reconceptualization of Islamic principles required for meeting future needs, see Karim D. Crow, "Divided Discourse: Muslim Discussions about Islam and Peace," *The Diplomat* 2, no. 6 (November 1997 / Rajab 1418): 32–34.
3. See Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993). Recall the Shari'ah notion of differences between Islamic law rites (*ikhtilaf al-madhahab*), which constitutes a distinct genre of classical legal literature.
4. Olivier Roy (Sorbonne), *L'échec de l'Islam politique* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1992) 118–166.
5. Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim, director of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, Cairo; in a lecture given in Washington, D.C., November 1997, with reference to the militant groups in Upper Egypt responsible for the Luxor carnage of October 1997.
6. See D. F. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (November 1992): 643–655; and D. F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37ff.
7. In December 1997 I purchased a cheap pamphlet from a sidewalk vendor in downtown Amman near the Husayn Mosque: an Arabic translation of Samuel Huntington's notorious article "The Clash of Civilizations" printed along with two refutations by Sunni religious scholars.
8. Among the important and more rigorous treatments, see e.g., Turki 'Ali Rabi'u, *al-Islam wa malhamat al-khalq wa l-usturah / Islam (The Slaughter of Humans, and Myth)* (Beirut: 1992); the views sketched by Iftikhar H. Malik, "Islamic Discourse on Jihad, War and Violence," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 47–78; the attempt by M. A. Muqtadar Khan, "Islam as an Ethical Tradition of International Relations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 2 (1997): 173–188; the excellent contributions by Sohail H. Hashmi, "Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace," in T. Nardin, ed., *Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (The Ethikon Series, Princeton University Press, 1996), 146–166; S. H. Hashmi, "Is There an

Islamic Ethic of Humanitarian Intervention?" *Ethics and International Affairs* 7 (1993): 55–73; Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, "Justifications of Violence in Islamic Tradition," in J. Partout Burns, ed., *War and Its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 122–160; and three thought-provoking issues of *ISLAM 21* (The International Forum for Islamic Dialogue, London) under the direction of Dr. Laith Kubba: vol. 1 (Fall 1995), "Tolerating the Diversity of Islamic Thoughts," vol. 2 (August 1996), "Towards Objective, Relative and Rational Islamic Discourses," and vol. 3 (July 1997) "Modernist Trends in Contemporary Islamic Thinking."

9. On 11 October, 1998 a one-hour peaceful demonstration was held with 2.5 million people holding hands throughout Turkey (esp. in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and eight other major cities), to protest the ban on students wearing headscarves and beards on campuses. On 12 October, leading journalists and spokespersons of civil organizations were detained by the authorities for allegedly provoking this nationwide protest. For more information on this movement, see <http://www.respect-for-beliefs.com> and www.tesettur.com; and the Organization of Human Rights & Solidarity for Oppressed People (MAZLUMDER) at www.mazlumder.org.tr.

10. Maher Hathout, "Islamic Intellectual Discourse in America," *Islamic Horizons* 27, no. 5 (September/October 1998): 24–25.

11. *Ibid.*, 24.

12. In his lecture given at the Belfast Central Mosque, March 1997; see "Islam and the New Millennium" (<http://sunnah.org/audio/millen.htm>).

13. See the work by the Iraqi scholar-journalist Khalid al-Qishtayni, *Nahwa l-la'unf* (Towards Nonviolence) (Amman: Dar al-Karmil, 1984; and the fuller text of the Jerusalem reprint by the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence, 1986). The Amman conference of 15–18 November, 1986, sponsored by the Arab Thought Forum, helped popularize this notion of "civil resistance"; see the Arabic proceedings, ed. Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, *al-Muqawamat al-madaniyyah fi l-nidal al-siyasi* (Civil Resistance in Political Struggle) (Amman: Muntada al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1988), and the English papers, ed. by Ralph E. Crow, et al., *Arab Nonviolent Political Struggle in the Middle East* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

14. See e.g., Mubarak Awad, "Non-Violent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 52 (Summer 1984): 22–36; Souad R. Dajani, "Towards the Formulation of a Strategy of Nonviolent Civil Resistance: The Occupied Palestinian Territories as a Case Study," *International Journal of Nonviolence* 1, no. 1 (September 1993): 35–54; and S. R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country: Searching for a Palestinian Strategy of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 95–158.

15. Since his release from prison in 1996 and subsequent exile, the Sudanese opposition leader Sadiq al-Mahdi has been calling for "civil jihad" against the Bashir regime. Note the recent work by Khalid al-Qishtayni, *Dalil al-muwatin li-l-jihad al-madani* (The Citizen's Guide to Civil Jihad) (London: Dar al-Ra'id, 1998).

16. Understanding these terms from the perspective of international peace studies; and see Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping* (New York: United Nations, 1992), 32–35.

17. The president of Assam Congress from 1940 to 1948 who supported the All India Congress and Muslim-Hindu unity; see his work written in 1944 under British detention in Jorhat and published posthumously as *Islam and Non-Violence* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1959).

18. For details of Khan's profound social movement of the *Khudai Khidmatgaran* "Servants of God," or so-called "Red Shirts" (1929–1938), see the exhaustive study by D.G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Gaffar Khan: Faith is a Battle* (New Delhi: Ghandi Peace Foundation, 1967); and the perceptive article by Robert C. Johansen, "Radical Islam and Nonviolence: A Case Study of Religious Empowerment and Constraint among Pashtuns," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (1997): 53–71.