

Muslim Voices on Democracy: A Reader





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Finally, we dedicate this work to all the Muslim voices speaking out for democracy and to those who have suffered or died for its cause.

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PREFACE

THE INDIVIDUALS whose words appear in this volume are a rebuke to the negative stereotypes about Muslims that have proliferated in the past several years. Indeed, as this publication goes to press, these stereotypes are being shattered by spontaneous and generally peaceful pro-democracy revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. These historic events are still unfolding, but have already altered the political landscape in the region.

This volume is designed to be a resource for teachers and students on the turbulent events taking place in many Islamic countries, events that rise at times to the level of civil, religious, and ethnic wars. Equally important, the readings are also intended to provide a platform for Muslims in many parts of the world who are struggling to advance the prospects of democracy, and to draw attention to the values Americans share with them in an especially difficult era.

The stories and articles that appear here are told exclusively in the words of Muslims. The Muslims who speak in these pages share a passion for democracy and a determination to bring democratic change to a part of the world noteworthy for its resistance to such change. Powerful forces in these countries resist or reject democracy, women's rights, and tolerance, in the name of stability and order, tradition, and/or their own interpretation of Islam. Secular authoritarian regimes, theocracies, and longstanding monarchies often discriminate against and sometimes oppress religious and ethnic minorities and resist democratic change. In countries like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, we have witnessed the violent lengths to which such regimes will go to remain in power. The political climate is further poisoned by the willingness and ability of non-state, radical Islamist groups to use violence against political innocents and against individuals struggling to advance democratic ideas. This violence is a terrible problem for the world, and most especially for Muslims, who are its primary victims.

Since September 11, 2001, and the subsequent deployment of U.S. troops to the region, such events have preoccupied Americans. In recent years, the American media has generated vast amounts of coverage of the Muslim world and of Muslims in general. Some of that coverage has been balanced and quite insightful. Other

reports have been confusing, misleading, incomplete and even frightening, to some. Too many Americans have been left with the impression that Islam and terrorism are two sides of the same coin — a perception that has been encouraged by some public figures.

Throughout the world, Muslims live in and influence a diverse array of cultures. Some democracy specialists have estimated that about half of the world's more than one billion Muslims live in “democracies, near democracies or intermittent democracies.”¹ In the Arab Middle East and North Africa, however, there are no fully free countries, according to the 2010 Freedom in the World Report,² an annual survey of civil and political rights published by Freedom House. Indeed, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was the only one in the world bypassed by the democracy wave of the 20th century. It is the area where Islam began and first developed, and it is the area where democratic ideals are most contested. As the report notes, “Violence remains a dominant theme in the politics of the region and a significant impediment to the exercise of fundamental freedoms” in many countries. Why democracy has had difficulty taking root in core Arab countries is a question that challenges democracy scholars. It is especially puzzling because polls confirm that, “Arabs show a clear preference for a democratic system...”³

The reasons behind this situation are complex, according to specialists, who study the region. Democratic transitions are difficult, and attended by many uncertainties. For example, will elections be genuinely free and fair? Will the winners really be committed to democracy and tolerance or will there be ‘one man, one vote, one time’? Will violence and instability — so common to the region — result? Distrust between various groups (moderate Islamists, secularists, ethnic and religious minorities, and others) is widespread, although recently there has been some movement to find common ground. In any case, while differences remain — differences which have religious and cultural dimensions — those differences are not rooted in the belief that Islam and democracy are incompatible.⁴

The writers in this volume present varying perspectives on how to achieve democratic change. Some argue strongly that democratic traditions are embedded in Islam and that democratic change must be anchored in and

¹ Islam and Democracy in the Middle East, edited by Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Daniel Brumberg, the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003

² http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Overview_Essay.pdf

³ “What Arabs Think”, Fares Braizat, *Journal of Democracy*, October, 2010, Volume 21, Number 4

⁴ “Why are there no Arab democracies?”, Larry Diamond, *Journal of Democracy*, January 2010, Volume 21, Number 1.

promoted through those traditions. Others maintain that democracy, tolerance, and respect for individual rights are universal values and that this universality is crucial and must be stressed.

Whatever their preferred path to democracy, these writers seek a break from governance and politics marked by autocratic rule and extremist violence. Some have taken great risks as a result of speaking out. They are hounded by their governments. Several live under constant threat of violence and death. Some are in exile. Others have gone to prison, where they have lost their good health. One was executed and another assassinated. Yet another, on hunger strike, died shortly after being rushed from his prison cell to a hospital. The voices in this book are those of just a few of the many Muslims in authoritarian states who risk jail, serious injury, and death on behalf of democratic values.

What is the source of the resistance to these values? Some Muslim scholars point to the role that religion plays in culture, noting that it has been millennia since Islamic countries have experienced a period in which religious dogma, including the place and authority of religion in society, has been widely examined and questioned. This is especially true in the MENA region. In these countries, religion, politics, and governance are often as deeply intertwined as they were 1,000 years ago. Even where polls find support for democratic change, it is often filtered through a religious prism. It can be very provocative and often dangerous to question, in a civil governance context, the traditional interpretations of the Koran or the Sunnah, the holy books of Islam, including the role of religious law (*shari'a*) in the affairs of the nation.

According to this argument, the resistance to the adaptation of ancient Islamic traditions has hindered the ability of these societies to change economically, as well as politically. Several recent UN reports seem to support this view by highlighting the developmental problems of the core Arab nations.⁵

In an effort to renew debate among Muslims about their religious traditions, scholars have accumulated a large body of modern religious Islamic works which set the stage for the growth of democratic ideals and practice in the context of Islamic culture. The vast majority of Muslims have not been exposed to the thinking of these reformers, however, due to a conscious effort by authorities, both civil and religious, to repress them, and the often violent antagonism of radical Islamists to reform ideas.

Other Muslim reformers reject the “religion-culture” line of reasoning and strongly argue that it was years of European colonization and occupation in the Middle East

that stymied democratic thought and developments in the region. This argument also points to Western support — and especially U.S. support — for autocratic regimes, during the Cold War and in the context of oil policy, as a serious impediment to democratic change.

Such debates are not mere scholarly discourse: These arguments are at the heart of passionate discussions that affect political and social policy in many Muslim countries and are the backdrop for much of the writing in this book.

This “civil war” among Muslims, as some experts have characterized it, has drawn increasing attention in recent decades, due largely to the emergence of a distinct, often violent, vision of Islam. This vision is most often associated with organizations such as the Taliban, the al-Qaeda network, and other such groups. These are the groups responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks and many other terrorist killings. These groups and their leaders claim that they represent the truest heart of Islam, and that it is their duty to wage *jihad* or holy war against non-Muslims and Muslims who do not share their views. Their Muslim opponents— who polls consistently show represent the overwhelming number of Muslims — argue that these *jihadists* distort the teachings of Islam and violate the religion’s most basic precepts.

In response to these developments, the drive for reform by Muslim democrats has taken on great urgency. An important aspect of this movement has been to challenge the radicals’ assertions that democracy is atheistic and anti-Islam, and to point out that some practices, such as the discriminatory treatment of women, are rooted in ancient tribal traditions that have no basis in the religion itself. Conscious of the injustices that especially have afflicted women, female Muslim scholars have played a critical role in these reformist, pro-democratic currents.

A dynamic Muslim democracy movement exists today. Men and women regularly speak on behalf of democracy and challenge the West to live up to its democratic ideals in its relations with nondemocratic regimes in the Middle East and elsewhere. It is our hope that this publication helps, in a small way, to illuminate the challenges faced by Muslim democrats and to identify some of the courageous fighters for freedom and democracy within these societies. Although the topics covered involve the political beliefs and actions of individual Muslims, which inevitably are shaped by the religious and cultural authority of Islam, it is not intended to be an analysis or history of the religion itself. It is also not the purpose of this resource to promote or prescribe a particular vision of democratic governance.

The political perspective of this book can be summed

⁵ http://hdr.undp.org/xmlsearch/reportSearch?y=*%&c=r%3AArab+States&t=%&lang=en&k=&orderby=year

up as a single standard: opposition to dictatorships of whatever stripe, and support for democratic governance, which can take a number of forms.

Section I, *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity*, is designed to give the reader a base of information on the debate within Islam, among Muslims, on the issues facing the faith today. In Section II, *Perspectives on Islam and Democracy*, advocates from a variety of points of view argue for the compatibility of democracy with Islam and Islamic culture. In Section III, *Governance in Muslim Countries — Pushing for Democratic Change*, academics, activists, and politicians discuss, usually from their own experiences, the difficulties of pushing for democracy and

human rights in some majority-Muslim societies. Section IV, *Petitions, Protests, Speeches, and Letters*, features the impassioned and often anguished voices of Muslims who have suffered persecution, imprisonment, and even death while fighting for their democratic rights. Finally, Section V, *Women, Freedom and Democracy in Islam*, features the voices of courageous women speaking to women's issues. Although women's voices are seen throughout the volume, in this section, they speak directly to the challenges faced by women in a traditional society.

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SECTION I:

The Challenge of Modernity

SECTION I EXPLORES how various religious and cultural perspectives, as well as traditions, influence political thought and governance in Muslim countries. This section is designed to provide an overall context for the sections that follow. The readings focus on the debates among Muslim scholars and political thinkers as they confront the challenges to democratic development and governance in Muslim countries. It is a sampling of opinion and is designed to be interesting and provocative, to stir questions and generate debate.

These authors argue that many of the ideas and impediments faced by Muslim democrats are rooted in cultural norms, in heritage and history. Over time, they write, ideas and practices related to how society should be organized have been deeply intertwined with Islam, which is best understood as a way of life, as well as a religion. Traditionalists argue that Islam was fully and completely expressed during its early period, when democratic governance did not exist anywhere. They see modern efforts to revisit what amount to sacred formulations on how society should be ordered as straying from the divinely revealed path.

This argument has resonance within much of the broader Muslim community. The perceived linkage between modes of governance and sacred law is perhaps the most serious issue facing Muslim democrats. Advocates for democratic change must deal with deeply felt religious and cultural feelings that are often an impediment to social, economic and political change. These age-old norms are usually very strongly supported by clergy. In recent years a “radical Islamist” politics claiming legitimacy through adherence to a nondemocratic governance model, rooted in a particular interpretation of Islamic law has made prospects for democratic change more difficult.

The strength of these radical Islamic political groups has pushed even secular authoritarian regimes to burnish their religious credentials by public statements and policies on Islam that strive to accommodate growing public sensitivity on these issues. Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in the latter years of Saddam Hussein’s regime are examples. Democracy advocates find themselves squeezed between the cynical manipulations of old-style secular autocrats and the

sometimes murderous zeal of religious radicals.

These challenges to Muslim democrats are strong and persistent obstacles to change. Nonetheless, there is a large and growing body of knowledge, analysis, and advocacy that seeks to meet the challenge to the democratic prospect posed by the powerful, combustible combination of culture, religion, and politics.

In the first reading of this section, **The People Are One Community**, the University of Virginia’s Abdulaziz Sachedina argues that, because Islam demands accountability on the part of public officials, democracy and rule of law must be components of any “Islamic state” and are, indeed, an inherent characteristic of Islamic tradition and civilization. In the second reading, **Hearts and Minds: Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam**, Abdurrahman Wahid, the first democratically elected president of Indonesia, calls for a strategy, led by Muslims and supported by non-Muslims, aimed at challenging extremist Islamist ideology throughout the world. Wahid lays out specific points to achieve this goal.

In the final reading of this section, **Reason and Freedom in Islamic Thought**, Iranian intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush traces what he describes as challenges to democracy thought within Islam, including rival schools of theology in Sunni Islam and what he describes as “dogmatic traditionalists” within the Shi’a tradition. Sunni and Shi’a Islam are the two main Muslim denominations and their differences are rooted in historical disputes over who should succeed the Prophet Mohammed upon his death. Today, the vast majority of Muslims belong to the Sunni tradition. Shi’a adherents are majorities in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Soroush, a devout Shi’a Muslim, is a leading advocate for the revival of *Ijtihad*, which is advocacy of a constant reinterpretation or explanation of Islam’s sacred texts, in the light of changing times or conditions. *Ijtihad* was effectively abandoned by Muslim scholars half a millennium ago, a development that Soroush and other scholars argue had a stifling effect on the ability of Islamic cultures to adapt to change. Soroush, a *Shi’ite*, has taken a leadership role in advocating a return to *Ijtihad*.

The People Are One Community

ABDULAZIZ SACHEDINA¹

Abdulaziz Sachedina, Ph.D., is the Frances Myers Ball Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. He has been conducting research and writing in the fields of Islamic Law, Ethics, and Theology for more than two decades. Dr. Sachedina's publications include: Islamic Messianism (1980); Human Rights and the Conflicts of Culture, co-authored (1988); The Just Ruler in Shiite Islam (1988); The Prolegomena to the Qur'an (1998), and The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism (2002), in addition to numerous articles in academic journals. He is an American citizen born in Tanzania.

This selection is abridged from the second chapter of The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism, in which Sachedina maps the foundational resources in Islam for the development of democratic pluralism as an inherent characteristic of Islamic tradition and civilization. Sachedina's argument demonstrates to both the Muslim and non-Muslim readers that democracy, in its minimalist sense of demanding the accountability of public officials and the rule of law, is not only a compatible but an inseparable component of any polity that claims to be Islamic.

UNTIL RECENTLY, different parts of the world lived in isolation from one another. With the advancement of technology, the information and cultural gaps between different regions and countries are exponentially decreasing. In the past, people's minimal exposure to various cultures and religions fostered certain biases and pre-conceived notions among people. The problem of prejudicial attitude was aggravated when different religious communities believed that the truth about their own religion was the only acceptable truth. This belief was the source of intolerance for others outside their own community.

Religious pluralism can be defined as the belief that a plurality of paths exists for humans seeking prosperity in this world and salvation in the next. People can be spiritual and moral despite the differences in their religious beliefs. In other words, plurality of religions means peoples of different faiths can live together in peace and harmony. In fact, as Islam teaches, people can transcend religious differences and work together for the betterment of the entire humanity. Humans share equally in creation as part of God's plan without any reference to their color, creed, or gender. This principle of peaceful coexistence among religious groups can create a sense of inclusiveness and acceptance of all humans as equal, which advocates accommodation as opposed to conflict among various communities that compete for exclusive claim to religious truth. In this way, pluralism is God's plan to encourage human beings to learn about one another and to respect the fact of being the recipient of God-given dignity.

Difference of opinion, religion, or belief is one of the major causes of human conflict around the globe. As the youngest of the *Abrahamic* traditions, Islam was in a better position to foster relationships among different communities because it emerged in a world of many religions. Mecca, the birth place of Islam, was home to different religious groups. Islam recognized and assessed other religions critically, but it never rejected them as having no spiritual or moral value. The element of spirituality, which the Koran encompasses, was (and is) actually shared by other monotheistic religions. The early Muslims faced the challenge of establishing their own specific faith community without denying the ability of existing religious groups to exercise their own beliefs.

In Islam, the Koran is believed to be the word of God. In this holy book Muslims expect to find guidance that would help them to live as good human beings. The Koran emphasizes the role of the united community (*umma*) in forming the character of an individual. The importance of the unity of the *umma* is a theme that is greatly repeated in the Koran. Thus, for example, the following passage:

The people were one community (umma); then God sent forth the Prophets, good tidings to bear and warning, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that He might decide the people touching their differences. (K, 2:213)

From this passage, three important points arise, which are essential to the Koranic conception of religious pluralism:

1. The unity of humankind under One God;

¹ This chapter is an abridged version by Maha Kaskas of Chapter 2, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, Oxford University Press, 2001. Ms. Kaskas is a student of comparative religion at University of Virginia.

2. The distinctiveness of religions brought by the prophets; and,
3. The role of revelation (the Book) in resolving differences that touch communities of faith.

One of the main Koranic arguments for religious pluralism is the relationship between the private and the public spheres of faith. Private faith, which is in the heart of a believer and cannot be judged by any other person, is beyond the reach of human institutions. Only God knows about it and only to God is the person responsible for its presence or absence in his/her life. Hence, no government can intervene in this expression of private faith. But the public sphere of faith requires that people of different faiths respect one another and learn to live in harmony and peace. Co-existence in the public space means that each faith community has the right to self-governance and can manage its own internal affairs without state interference. A longstanding debate exists among Muslims concerning the level of freedom given to individuals to believe or not to believe privately, as opposed to maintaining respect and tolerance of all religions in public.

From its origin, Islam has been a publicly oriented faith. The sacred law of the community (the shari'a) plays an extremely important role in guiding the community. The shari'a deals with all forms of service to God, whether performed as one's personal responsibility or carried out in relation to one's interpersonal responsibility. Through the performance of the duties in public, Muslims are able to make their personal faith accessible to the community. Although the shari'a deals with the most private aspects of a person's life, the judiciary in Islam may only deal with public aspects brought to its attention without prying, unless the rights of an innocent party are being violated.

Religious pluralism is an extremely important matter of public policy and Muslim governments must acknowledge and accept every person's right to his or her own personal spiritual destiny. Understanding Islam and religious pluralism requires an understanding of the manner in which minority religions were recognized during the inception and throughout the history of Islamic political order. The state policies of different Muslim dynasties accommodated individual as well as group independence in adhering to a particular religious tradition. The Muslim world is heavily divided over the shape of the public culture and the style of life that is visible in the civic forum. However, the pertinent issue in this controversy is respect for the other — the basis of coexistence among peoples of

diverse faith and cultures.

The Koran, as the sole source of authority for Muslims and the key to understanding religious pluralism in Islam, invites Muslims and other humans to ponder over the signs that God has created in diverse human communities and cultures. Muslims believe that the Koran contains a universal imperative that all humans should fulfill. Through nature, all humans obtain this knowledge at birth and have the necessary inherent ability to fulfill the goals of humanity and serve God.²

The Universal Message of the Koran might suggest that the revelation accepts religious pluralism as given and even necessary, requiring Muslims to continually negotiate, transform, and emphasize the basic unity of humankind in its origin and created by God. The principle of diversity is the cornerstone of the creation narrative in the Koran. Instead of viewing diversity as a source of tension, the Koran suggests that human variety is essential for a particular tradition to define its common beliefs, values, and traditions for its community life:

O humankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-Aware. (K.49:14)

This passage serves as a fundamental message to all humanity to recognize a single fact — that it was created through the same male and female and made into different races and tribes to know one another. Islam does not deny the validity of relative human experiences in knowing one's duties and acting according to the innate moral knowledge created by God in human nature. Instead, it challenges human beings to search for a common moral ground to act together for furthering the well-being of all human beings, regardless of their different faith commitments. Moreover, Islam requires Muslims to confirm the ability of other religions to offer salvation to other faith communities within the wider boundaries of monotheism. The Koran shares the biblical ethos of Judaism and Christianity, with an extremely inclusive attitude toward the People of the Book. The Koran declares that on the Day of Judgment all human beings will be judged, regardless of sectarian affiliation, on their moral performance as citizens of the world community. The moral ability in human beings permits the development of a "global ethic," which can then provide the pluralistic basis for mediating interreligious relations among peoples of diverse spiritual

² An examination of the entire Koran is necessary in order to obtain a full understanding of this idea. The Koran can be split into Mekkan and Medinan chapters. The Koran's theology of religious tolerance cannot be ascribed to the earlier Mekkan period of the revelation when Muslims lived as a minority among a hostile majority of the unbelievers, as some modern Muslim apologists have tried to argue. It was in Medina where the real issue of coexistence among the people of the Book (ahl al-kitab) first arose. It is best to examine the Koran as a whole in order to divulge the pluralistic and inclusive nature of the Koranic guidance.

commitment and enable them to build a working accord of values and goals.

Traditionally, most religious systems have demanded absolute devotion and faith of their followers to their professed religions. Such claims are usually thought to be necessary tools for the self-identification of a group against other claims of absolute faith. In addition, this sense of loyalty to one's faith became an extremely logical way for the members to assert their collective communal identity. However, such an exclusive identification was also an effective basis for aggression against and exploitation of those who did not share this sense of unity with the community of believers. Rationalization of such aggressive behavior, portrayed in religious terms as a "holy war," made it possible for the believers of a given system to forcibly impose their supremacy over the infidels in the name of some sacred authority.

A careful reading of the verse K.2:213 (shown above) is important for understanding the pluralism conveyed in this passage, which is renowned for its moral universalism, commanding Muslims to bridge gaps between the human communities. This verse exemplifies an embrace of all humanity under a single divine authority. The universal expression is based on affirmation of God's unity (tawhid), the centrality of God as the Creator in all that humans do. The shahadah, which includes the affirmation of God's unity and Muhammad's prophethood, became an important declaration of faith, which created a unique identity for the community of believers. Whereas it was still possible to be inclusive in the affirmation of God's oneness, acknowledgement of the prophethood of Muhammad became an essential trait of exclusive discourse of the Muslim community. The requirement to recognize the Prophethood caused the Koranic pluralism (based on the centrality of God's unity and diverse prophets sent to various communities) to be overshadowed by political success of Muslim rulers.

In Seventh Century Arabia, the establishment of the first Muslim community in the midst of other monotheistic religious communities created an elevated status for Islam, since Muslims at that time were generally more privileged. Thus, the notion emerged was that the Koranic revelation was the culmination of its predecessors, which should have been no longer applicable to humanity. The Koranic pluralism is expressed by promising salvation to "whoso believed in God and the Last Day" among "those of Jewery, and Christians, and those Sabeans" (K. 2:62). The Koran is actually silent on the supersession of the previous Abrahamic revelations through the emergence of Muhammad. Although the Koran renounces the alterations introduced in the divine message by the followers of Moses and Jesus, the Koran confirms the central theme of these religions, which is submission founded on

sincere profession of belief in God.

Most modern scholars of the Koran maintain the belief that human beings are endowed with sufficient cognition and volition to pursue their spiritual destiny through the revealed message of God. Moreover, God's promise of salvation applies to all who have this divine religion, with the basic beliefs such as the existence of God and the Last Day of judgment, regardless of one's formal religious affiliation — because God's judgment does not show favor to one group over another.

Religious pluralism entails actively engaging with the other Abrahamic religions, not only tolerating them. This engagement can only be accomplished by entering into dialogue with one another, thereby creating links between one another. If time was spent searching for similarities, rather than differences between religions, many disputes could have been prevented. Religious pluralism can function as a working standard for a democratic pluralism in which people of diverse religious backgrounds are willing to form a community of global citizens. In the Koran, religious pluralism is presented as a divinely planned reality in societies, which must be accepted in order to facilitate smooth relations in the public sphere.

In searching for the guidelines for religious pluralism, one must be willing to accept other religions in their quest for the Divine. The main point of consideration is whether the main monotheistic religions of the world; Muslims, Christians, and Jews, are willing to recognize one another as spiritual equals.

Revelation from God in general bears the truth that formulates a religion. Constitutive revelation reveals the religious path which guides its followers to recognize the essential truth, whereas instructive revelation gives people guidance and places them on a straight path to accomplish certain task. In Islam, constitutive revelation includes the constitutive truth that has been received by all the prophets:

We have revealed to thee as We revealed to Noah, and the Prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and We gave David Psalms, and Messengers We have already told thee of before... Messengers bearing good tidings, and warning, so that humankind might have no argument against God, after the Messengers; God is Almighty, All-wise. (K. 4:163)

When human beings apply constitutive principles of their religion in everyday life, then God's truth, although beyond the grasp of ordinary people, becomes accessible and understandable objectively in human performance of good acts.

The Koran recognizes that there are other religious practices given through revelation and recognizes that

these other religions do not contradict each other:

And to you [O Muhammad!] we have sent down the Book in truth as a confirmer of the Books [i.e., all revelations] that have come before it and as a protector over them...For every one of you [Jews, Christians, Muslims], We have appointed a path and a way. If God had willed, He would have made you but one community; but that [He has not done in order that] He may try you in what has come to you. So compete with one another in good works; unto God shall you return all together; and He will tell you of that whereon you were at variance. (K. 5:48)

This passage is extremely important, as it prepares people of different religions to be more accepting of one another, at least, at the level of ethical performance (“good works”), even when there are theological differences that cannot be bridged. Such recognition of pluralism in matters of religion and unity in matters of moral performance is the essential feature of the *Koranic* pluralism.

The Koran addresses the issue of intrinsic value in all religions by relating the desired level of submission to God to the performance of good works. The key to Koran’s insistence on salvation for other religions is that even the followers of other religious traditions can share in the ultimate salvation through righteous acts. Nevertheless, there are some verses in the Koran that can be interpreted as completely favoring the Muslim community and even empowering them to wage war against other religious communities. This disregard of others in some passages of the Koran is contextual and responsive to a certain threat posed by these communities to the security of the Muslims. However, historically Muslim scholars have resorted to the principle of abrogation in the Koran, claiming that certain tolerant verses towards the People of the Book have been abrogated and require Muslims to wage war against these people. Such a reading of the Koran is against the very spirit of its message, namely, to serve as a beacon of peace and justice to the world bereft with intolerance and violence. Moreover, Muslim scholars need to keep the political and social reality of the Muslim world in mind when providing the negative prescriptions to handle Muslim-non-Muslim relations in the world today. A scrupulous analysis of the conditions of the world today is needed to assess the relevance of normative tradition to actual life situation.

In trying to create an atmosphere whereby inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue would be possible, members of monotheistic religions must strip away their inherited prejudices toward each other. By doing this, there is hope that members of different religions may learn to respect and accept one another for who they are rather than who they should be. Members of such reli-

gions must shed their exclusivist tendencies, as this is widening the gap between themselves and others “in the name of God.”

These claims of exclusive salvation, reflected in the classical formulation of Muslim political identity, are contrary to the global spirit of democratization emerging through the acknowledgment of religious pluralism. Respect for non-Muslims in Muslim communities is something that should be expected from everyone in the community of faithful. Since its start, Islam has passed on to its members a sense of hope for a united universal community of faithful that would actively submit to the will of God. Islam has always stood out as the only monotheistic tradition that can help to deepen the West’s self-understanding in its liberal project of a public international order. Hence, to reject the Islamic notion of a moral and political public domain as opposing to modern Western values of liberty and democracy is to ignore the opportunity to engage the Islamic understanding of the world communities with similar worldly concerns.

In its natural theology built on the fact of creation of that nature in humanity (*fitra*), Islam connects all of humanity to its natural inclination to know the meaning of justice and to will its realization. Modern day Islamic spirituality must constitute more than just the language of a particular tradition. Islamic law stresses the importance of fulfilling the divine will on earth which is synonymous with the belief that faith is an instrument of justice. When law and faith come together in one’s life they create a sense of honor and safety, and among the community of believers this leads to social harmony. Ultimately, the vision of international relations in Islam is firmly founded on the world of community’s sharing in a cross-cultural moral concern for egalitarianism, peace, and justice.

Peace does not arise from governments incorporating the principles of religious pluralism. The resolution of conflicts does not require member states to maintain certain religious beliefs, but rather to strive for a just community of nations. Muslim thinkers have two main responsibilities: First, to the Islamic tradition itself and second, to the Muslim peoples. In order to face the future meaningfully, it is necessary to have Muslim thinkers who can stimulate believers in going beyond the normative community to promote a cross-cultural communication in which the Islamic tradition, with necessary authenticity, along with Christianity and Judaism, provides a credible voice of guidance, not governance.

The problem that most jurists face today is a confrontation between traditional values of the past and the emerging reality of political conditions that challenge the relevance of those values. The context of some randomly selected rulings regulating Muslim-Other relations under Muslim political dominance helps us to determine the

effective causes behind the jurists' opinions. In order to shed new light on the Koranic teachings regarding interreligious relations, Muslims may have to face possible changes in public international order where they would have to share membership based on equality with non-Muslim nation-states. Thus, past juridical decisions become unrelated in the modern system of international relations, and they are thus unable to shed light on the pressing task of recognizing religious pluralism as a cornerstone of inter-human relations. Thus, it is important for Muslim scholars to acknowledge that while the Koran is a fixed text, the interpretive applications of its revelations can vary with the challenging realities of history. The human need for an ideal government can not be fulfilled if particular political practices of the past cannot be modified to bring them in line with the mores of the present.

The word Islam has, throughout history, been a vehicle for human beings of heavenly purpose as well as with a political agenda, its meaning skewed to suit people, irrespective of the truths and standards set forth in Islamic theology. In some Muslim states, it is not uncommon for government officials to find religious justifications for policies that limit the universal rights of individuals, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Undoubtedly, some policies need be examined in the light of Islamic jurisprudence,

so that rationally deduced principles drawn from the divine revelation in the Koran can be connected to the core values and principles of contemporary Islam. Each Islamic movement, however small, while disagreeing on the means of providing the solution, agrees that the solution includes setting up an Islamic state, implementing the shari'a, and liberating Arab/Muslim territories from unjust occupation.

The Koran emphasizes that no lasting peace can be established without eliminating the causes of conflict, the violations of justice and fairness.

If two parties of believers fight one another, then make peace between them [by removing all the causes of conflict]; then, if one party of believers transgresses against another, [selfishly violating their rights,] then fight the transgressors until they obey once more God's commandment. Then, when the transgressors have submitted [their will once more to His], make peace between them with fairness and justice, and act equitably [so that the rights of neither party are violated]. Lo! God loves the equitable. (K. 49:9)

The Koran conveys a universal significance and application by demanding that the peace between the conflicting parties be restored by their just actions toward each other. "For surely, God loves the equitable."

Hearts and Minds: Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam

ABDURRAHMAN WAHID³

Abdurrahman Wahid, popularly known as “Gus Dur” was born in 1940 in East Java. After receiving a solid education in Indonesia’s secular schools, Wahid traveled to Egypt and Iraq for his secondary education and eventually returned to Indonesia to join the faculty at the University of Hasyim Asy’ari. Throughout the early part of his career, Wahid became widely known for his columns on cultural, social, and political affairs. In the 1980s and 1990s, Wahid was a social activist and opposed the institution of Indonesia as an Islamic state. In 1991, he established the Democratic Forum as an inter-religious coalition with the hope of counterbalancing an exclusive tendency growing in the Muslim community at that time. In 1999, Wahid became the first democratically elected president of Indonesia and held that post until 2001. Wahid also founded the Wahid Institute, which is dedicated to promoting a moderate and tolerant view of Islam. He died on December 30, 2009.

In this article, originally published on December 30, 2005 in the Wall Street Journal, Wahid provides an uncommon vantage point about overcoming Islamist extremism.

“Muslims and non-Muslims must unite to defeat the Wahhabi ideology.”

NEW ORGANIZATIONS report that Osama bin Laden has obtained a religious edict from a misguided Saudi cleric, justifying the use of nuclear weapons against America and the infliction of mass casualties. It requires great emotional strength to confront the potential ramifications of this (allegation). Yet can anyone doubt that those who joyfully incinerate the occupants of office buildings, commuter trains, hotels and nightclubs would leap at the chance to magnify their damage a thousand fold?

Imagine the impact of a single nuclear bomb detonated in New York, London, Paris, Sydney, or L.A.! What about two or three? The entire edifice of modern civilization is built on economic and technological foundations that terrorists hope to collapse with nuclear attacks like so many fishing huts in the wake of a tsunami. Just two small, well-placed bombs devastated Bali’s tourist economy in 2002 and sent much of its population back to the rice fields and out to sea, to fill their empty bellies. What would be the effect of a global economic crisis in the wake of attacks far more devastating than those of Bali or 9/11?

It is time for people of good will from every faith and nation to recognize that a terrible danger threatens humanity. We cannot afford to continue “business as usual”

in the face of this existential threat. Rather, we must set aside our international and partisan bickering, and join to confront the danger that lies before us.

An extreme and perverse ideology in the minds of fanatics is what directly threatens us (specifically, *Wahabi/Salafi* ideology—a minority fundamentalist religious cult fueled by petrodollars). Yet underlying, enabling and exacerbating this threat of religious extremism is a global crisis of misunderstanding.

All too many Muslims fail to grasp Islam, which teaches one to be lenient towards others and to understand their value systems, knowing that these are tolerated by Islam as a religion. The essence of Islam is encapsulated in the words of the *Quran*, “For you, your religion; for me, my religion.” That is the essence of tolerance. Religious fanatics — either purposely or out of ignorance — pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed. They justify their brutality with slogans such as “Islam is above everything else.” They seek to intimidate and subdue anyone who does not share their extremist views, regardless of nationality or religion. While a few are quick to shed blood themselves, countless millions of others sympathize with their violent actions, or join in the complicity of silence.

This crisis of misunderstanding — of Islam by Muslims themselves — is compounded by the failure of govern-

³ The introductory remarks on Mr. Wahid before his ascendance to the presidency of his country are based on John Esposito (editor in chief), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Oxford University Press, 1995. The rest of the remarks are based on editors’ research. Mr. Wahid is co-founder, patron and senior advisor to the LibForAll Foundation (www.libforall.org), an Indonesian and U.S.-based nonprofit that works to reduce religious extremism and discredit the use of terrorism.

⁴ Gus is an honorific for a young man from a respected Javanese family, and Dur is a diminutive of Abdurrahman.

ments, people of other faiths, and the majority of well-intentioned Muslims to resist, isolate and discredit this dangerous ideology. The crisis thus afflicts Muslims and non-Muslims alike, with tragic consequences. Failure to understand the true nature of Islam permits the continued radicalization of Muslims world-wide, while blinding the rest of humanity to a solution which hides in plain sight.

The most effective way to overcome Islamist extremism is to explain what Islam truly is to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Without that explanation, people will tend to accept the (unchallenged) extremist view — further radicalizing Muslims, and turning the rest of the world against Islam itself.

Accomplishing this task will be neither quick nor easy. In recent decades, Wahhabi/Salafi ideology has made substantial inroads throughout the Muslim world. Islamic fundamentalism has become a well-financed, multifaceted global movement that operates like a juggernaut in much of the developing world, and even among immigrant Muslim communities in the West. To neutralize the virulent ideology that underlies fundamentalist terrorism and threatens the very foundations of modern civilization, we must identify its advocates, understand their goals and strategies, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and effectively counter their every move. What we are talking about is nothing less than a global struggle for the soul of Islam.

The *Sunni* (as opposed to *Shi'ite*) fundamentalists' goals generally include: claiming to restore the perfection of the early Islam practiced by Muhammad and his companions, who are known in Arabic as al-Salaf al-Salih, "the Righteous Ancestors"; establishing a utopian society based on these Salafi principles, by imposing their interpretation of Islamic law on all members of society; annihilating local variants of Islam in the name of authenticity and purity; transforming Islam from a personal faith into an authoritarian political system; establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate governed according to the strict tenets of Salafi Islam, and often conceived as stretching from Morocco to Indonesia and the Philippines; and, ultimately, bringing the entire world under the sway of their extremist ideology.

Fundamentalist strategy is often simple as well as brilliant. Extremists are quick to drape themselves in the mantle of Islam and declare their opponents kafir, or infidels, and thus smooth the way for slaughtering non-fundamentalist Muslims. Their theology rests upon a simplistic, literal, and highly selective reading of the Koran and Sunnah (prophetic traditions), through which they seek to entrap the worldwide Muslim community in the

confines of their narrow ideological grasp. Expansionist by nature, most fundamentalist groups constantly probe for weakness and an opportunity to strike, at any time or place, to further their authoritarian goals.

The armed ghazis (Islamic warriors) raiding from New York to Jakarta, Istanbul, Baghdad, London, and Madrid are only the tip of the iceberg, forerunners of a vast and growing population that shares their radical views and ultimate objectives. The formidable strengths of this worldwide fundamentalist movement include:

- An aggressive program with clear ideological and political goals;
- Immense funding from oil-rich Wahhabi sponsors;
- The ability to distribute funds in impoverished areas to buy loyalty and power;
- A claim to and aura of religious authenticity and Arab prestige;
- An appeal to Islamic identity, pride and history;
- An ability to blend into the much larger traditionalist masses and blur the distinction between moderate Islam and their brand of religious extremism;
- Full-time commitment by its agents/leadership;
- Networks of Islamic schools that propagate extremism;
- The absence of organized opposition in the Islamic world;
- A global network of fundamentalist imams who guide their flocks to extremism;
- A well-oiled "machine" established to translate, publish and distribute Wahhabi/Salafi propaganda and disseminate its ideology throughout the world;
- Scholarships for locals to study in Saudi Arabia and return with degrees and indoctrination, to serve as future leaders;
- The ability to cross national and cultural borders in the name of religion;
- Internet communication; and
- The reluctance of many national governments to supervise or control this entire process.

We must employ effective strategies to counter each of these fundamentalist strengths. This can be accomplished only by bringing the combined weight of the vast majority of peace-loving Muslims, and the non-Muslim world, to bear in a coordinated global campaign whose goal is to resolve the crisis of misunderstanding that threatens to engulf our entire world.

An effective counterstrategy must be based upon a realistic assessment of our own strengths and weaknesses in the face of religious extremism and terror. Disunity, of course, has proved fatal to countless human societies faced with a similar existential threat. A lack of seriousness in confronting the imminent danger is likewise often fatal. Those who seek to promote a peaceful and tolerant understanding of Islam must overcome the paralyzing effects of inertia, and harness a number of actual or potential strengths, which can play a key role in neutralizing fundamentalist ideology. These strengths not only are assets in the struggle with religious extremism, but in their mirror form they point to the weakness at the heart of fundamentalist ideology. They are:

- Human dignity, which demands freedom of conscience and rejects the forced imposition of religious views;
- The ability to mobilize immense resources to bring to bear on this problem, once it is identified and a global commitment is made to solve it;
- The ability to leverage resources by supporting individuals and organizations that truly embrace a peaceful and tolerant Islam;
- Nearly 1,400 years of Islamic traditions and spirituality, which are inimical to fundamentalist ideology;
- Appeals to local and national — as well as Islamic — culture/traditions/pride;
- The power of the feminine spirit, and the fact that half of humanity consists of women, who have an inherent stake in the outcome of this struggle;
- Traditional and Sufi leadership and masses, who are not yet radicalized (strong numeric advantage: 85 percent to 90 percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims);
- The ability to harness networks of Islamic schools to propagate a peaceful and tolerant Islam;
- The natural tendency of like-minded people to work together when alerted to a common danger;
- The ability to form a global network of like-minded individuals, organizations, and opinion leaders to

promote moderate and progressive ideas throughout the Muslim world;

- The existence of a counter ideology, in the form of traditional, Sufi and modern Islamic teachings, and the ability to translate such works into key languages;
- The benefits of modernity, for all its flaws, and the widespread appeal of popular culture;
- The ability to cross national and cultural borders in the name of religion;
- Internet communications, to disseminate progressive views — linking and inspiring like-minded individuals and organizations throughout the world;
- The nation-state; and
- The universal human desire for freedom, justice, and a better life for oneself and loved ones.

Though potentially decisive, most of these advantages remain latent or diffuse, and require mobilization to be effective in confronting fundamentalist ideology. In addition, no effort to defeat religious extremism can succeed without ultimately cutting off the flow of petrodollars used to finance that extremism, from Leeds to Jakarta.

Only by recognizing the problem, putting an end to the bickering within and between nation-states, and adopting a coherent long-term plan (executed with international leadership and commitment) can we begin to apply the brakes to the rampant spread of extremist ideas and hope to resolve the world's crisis of misunderstanding before the global economy and modern civilization itself begin to crumble in the face of truly devastating attacks.

Muslims themselves can and must propagate an understanding of the “right” Islam, and thereby discredit extremist ideology. Yet to accomplish this task requires the understanding and support of like-minded individuals, organizations, and governments throughout the world. Our goal must be to illuminate the hearts and minds of humanity, and offer a compelling alternate vision of Islam, one that banishes the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness from which it emerged.

Reason and Freedom in Islamic Thought

DR. ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH

Abdolkarim Soroush is one of the most influential Iranian intellectuals working today. Once a favorite of Iran's ruling establishment, he later became a critic of the regime. He is known for his thought-provoking ideas on Islam and politics.

Born in Tehran in 1945, Soroush is a Shi'a Muslim who studied analytical chemistry, history, and the philosophy of science in England. The Iranian revolution in 1979 fostered hope among many reform-minded Iranians, including Soroush. At the request of Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolution's spiritual and political head, Soroush returned to Iran in 1980 to help reshape the country's university curriculum. Soroush would resign just three years later, as he did not agree with the rules being discussed — such as restricting the subjects taught and separating the sexes in classrooms. He remained in Iran even after becoming a regime critic, publishing writings on Islam and democracy and co-founding the intellectual publication Kiyān. In the late 1990s, the regime began exerting stifling pressure on the magazine as well as on Soroush himself, prompting him to leave Iran for the United States. Soroush has been a professor at a number of universities in the U.S., including Georgetown, Princeton, Yale, and Harvard. He won the Erasmus Prize in 2004, he was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine in 2005, and in 2009 Foreign Policy magazine named him among the most desired thinkers to whom the world should listen.

Presented below are excerpts from Soroush's keynote speech presented on April 7, 2001, at Georgetown University at the Second Annual Conference of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington, D.C.

COMING FROM IRAN and its Shi'i tradition, I have a lot of room to introduce philosophical ideas, including extra-religious ideas. Shi'i Islam has long been very comfortable with philosophy and has produced great metaphysical philosophers. The tradition lives on today in Iran, being taught in seminaries and universities across the country.

Things become very difficult and tortuous when one comes to the concept of democracy and Islam. On one hand, democracy has its roots in ancient Greece and comes down to us through Western philosophers, political thinkers, leaders, and so on. As a result, democracy seems a foreign idea and, thus, alien to Muslims. On the other, we have our own Islamic tradition, our own interpretation of religion and text. Reconciling the two can seem a futile and dubious task.

In the past, Muslims thinkers were not generally faced with secular traditions; their focus was always on the Islamic tradition, or that of another religion, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on. Now, however, Muslims are before a new phase of history, where Muslims must adapt to a great civilization that is not based on religion, i.e., modern Western culture. There are all sorts of secular ideas and theories that must be addressed. Coming to terms with these nonreligious ideas is the most challenging task facing Muslims in modern times.

Most of you are probably familiar with prominent reformers in the Muslim world such as Muhammad Arkoun, Hasan Hanafi, Hamid Naser Abu Zeid and others. What they

are doing is reviving Mu'tazilite experience in the Sunni Islamic world. As you know, within the Sunni tradition there are two rival theological traditions, the Ash'arite school and the Mu'tazilite school. Since their defeat, the Mu'tazilites have been marginalized in Islamic societies.

The Ash'arite tradition has produced great poets, mystics, and especially theologians, but few philosophers. One of the main principles of Ash'arite Islam is that there are no objective, external values; all values must come through religious revelation. This is a crucial point for understanding the problem we have at hand, that is, the conflict between democracy and Islam.

Though there are democratic values in Islam and though there is no conflict between democracy and Islam on a procedural level, the theoretical basis of democracy is problematic. Values of democracy and its criteria are extra-religious values which Ash'arite theologians reject, which makes it very difficult to explore this topic. Due to its secular value system, democracy cannot be reconciled with Islam without first unearthing sources for democratic values within Islam itself. Otherwise, the task is futile, as without this grounding, democracy will never be acceptable to a religious mind.

What most reformist thinkers in the Sunni world are trying to do is revive the Mu'tazilite school of thought. Their goal is to show that rationality per se is acceptable in the Islamic milieu, even when not based on religion. They strive to demonstrate that there are values that need not be derived from religion.

I am very happy about these developments, as this moves the Sunni world closer to a solution. We once had philosophers, theologians, and jurists who believed that ideas could be independent of Islam without being incompatible with Islam, and today their fertile work is being gradually reassessed around the Muslim world.

Having written on this subject in Iran, I have suffered considerable hardship and criticism, but one consolation is the fact that there is such a large, welcoming audience to these ideas, as there are few epistemological obstacles in the Shi'i tradition to this project. Of course, there is opposition, but it comes largely from dogmatic traditionalists who fear change, as opposed to thinkers with genuine philosophical problems with rationality. The majority of Iranian society does not share the worldview of the dogmatists, so stimulating dialogues and lively philosophical debates are common in Iran among the religious classes as well as in university circles.

Contrast this to the case of my friend in Egypt, Dr. Hamid Nasr Abu-Zeid. As a result of a campaign against him—against which he received very little support from colleagues—he was declared a murtad or apostate. Dr. Abu-Zeid's offense was writing a book that argues for interpreting the Quran according to the Mu'tazilite tradition. The Mu'tazilite ideas of this book—which he considers his most important work—ran afoul of the Ash'arite sensibilities of the Egyptian religious establishment.

Isn't it time that we acknowledge that there are extra-religious values that are independent of religion, and that we do not need to justify everything using religious texts or prophetic tradition? You need only resort to your own reason, we're now being told, and not by non-Muslims, liberals, or secularists, but by our Muslim forefathers. Mu'tazilite thinkers have already explored this area extensively and provided us the tools to solve many of our problems. In a democracy, we need a new epistemological grounding today to calmly and reasonably engage with modern ideas; we need to embrace these new democratic ideas rather than reject them as foreign to Islam. We can appropriate them—they are not the exclusive property of the West—and make them our own. I'm not saying that we should uncritically accept Western ideas, either; all ideas must be carefully examined in light of our tradition.

In fact, my forthcoming book is entitled *Reinventing the Mu'tazilite Experiment*, so this relates to my current research focus. I think that the Muslim world needs the re-invention and rethinking of Mu'tazilite tradition. Muhammad Arkoun, for example, is keen to reexamine the defeated philosophical movements within the Islamic tradition, giving them the credit and attention that they have been denied in the past. Arkoun is doing this from a postmodern perspective, it is true, but the outcome is welcome, nonetheless.

In an Islamic milieu, there is no contradiction whatsoever between having a democratic rule and basing it on religious duties. There is no separation of church and state, as it were. Since Islam enjoins no particular form of governance, the specifics of governance are left in the hands of the people. The Prophet has left no rulings about whether a society should be led by a President, Prime Minister, or other type of leader, for example. It is up to us to decide.

What is more important is what our motivation is in seeking political power. Do we do it because it is our religious duty or because it is our secular duty? If you could convince your people that it is your religious duty to have a democratic system of governance, you would have succeeded in resolving the problem and obviating the distinction between secular rule and religious rule. This is gradually happening in Iran.

Islamic thinkers in Iran are working to show society—both the masses and the clerical establishment—that reformers are not heretical or weakening people's faith in Islam. To the contrary, they argue, reformers are actually strengthening the faith by reminding believers to exercise their religious duties, one of which is to have a democratic system of politics.

Muslims must be, after all, lovers of justice. Adl (justice) is the floor, as it were, of ethics and ihsan (generosity) is the ceiling. Thus, ethics lies between the two limits of justice and generosity. If we can not attain ihsan, we must at least strive to implement adl in society.

Muslims need to familiarize themselves with the theories of justice, that of the past—this important topic has been the focus of great thinkers since the time of Plato—but we must not forget that justice varies with time and place. We must figure out how justice is to be attained in modern times, under the conditions of modern life.

In the past, the focus of political theory was exclusively on the existence of a just ruler. A just society was assumed to result inexorably from the presence and leadership of a just ruler—nothing more needs to be done beyond giving leadership to this person. This naive view of society as depending on personal justice lives on in some societies, such as Iran (though, ironically enough, the nation's constitution tacitly endorses the separation of powers). Emphasis must be shifted from the lone leader to institutions, laws, and processes. There is no alternative to structural justice, we can not return to personal justice.

We in the Third World have suffered greatly from the absence of freedom. We have complained and written a lot, but justice has not been given enough attention. Now it's time for us to give prominence to the notion of justice. Justice is the mother of freedom. With structural justice—drawing on our past defeated traditions—we can have freedom and perhaps eventually create a better political system.

SECTION II

Perspectives on Democracy

OVER THE PAST few decades, scholars and statesmen have debated whether majority Muslim societies, deeply rooted in tradition, religion, and authoritarian rule, can make the transition to democracy. Most were skeptical. The “wave of democracy” that swept over Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the 1990s did not reach the Muslim Middle East. Rather than peaceful political change, the region experienced deepening violence from radical Islamists and crushing repression from autocratic regimes. The deeply encouraging events in Egypt and Tunisia, still unfolding as this publication goes to press, offer hope that the beginning of the difficult transition to democracy may be underway.

The debate about these issues is nowhere more intense and energetic than in the Muslim world. A critical aspect of this debate centers on the political practices and traditions that take their legitimacy from Islam. Even to have such a debate makes controversial assumptions about the nature of Islam, its revelations, and the societies which it has shaped. As noted earlier in this volume, traditions, attitudes, and practices regarding the role of religion in governance and society are extremely sensitive and controversial.

This section offers readings that reflect the conversations around democracy, religion, society, and culture that are occurring throughout the Muslim world. The voices here offer often-provocative views, representing a broad spectrum of political opinion. They especially focus on the relationship Islam should have to democratic governance, ranging from a government rooted in *shari’a* law to one that eschews any connection to religion. The individuals whose writings appear in this section include academics, politicians, activists and journalists. Two of the writers presented here lost their lives due to their early support for democracy: Farag Fouda, who advocated separation of religion and government, and Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, who strongly argued for an Islamic Republic, rooted in democratic values. Others have been jailed or suffered in other ways.

In the first reading, **Islam’s Democratic Imperative**, Sheik Dia al-Shakarchi, an Iraqi Shi’ite theologian, observes that in diverse societies, different communities, Muslim and non-Muslim, practice their religion in a variety of ways. He argues that, in Islamic legal traditions, when strong religious interests can be accommodated only in one path, taking that path becomes a religious duty. He concludes that only democracy can guarantee the “free choice” that different Muslim communities need to practice their faith, an apparent allusion to the sectarian strife between Shia and Sunni in Iraq.

In reading two, **Islam and Democratization: The**

Winds of Change, Anwar Ibrahim, a leading Malaysian political leader now in exile, urges Muslims to continue to press for democratic change and calls on Western countries to back away from a focus on the separation of church and state, or mosque and state. Democracy in the Muslim world, he writes, will evolve by finding ways in which democratic values will “resonate through Islam’s public and private realms.” And in a clear allusion to U.S. support for Israel, he calls U.S. policy in the Middle East unbalanced, while criticizing Western support for authoritarian regimes in Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The third reading features excerpts from **The Missing Truth** by Farag Fouda, an Egyptian intellectual whose scathing critique of the radical Islamist vision ultimately cost him his life — he was gunned down in 1992. In this piece, he argues that Islam “finds no problem with direct or indirect elections of rulers,” and calls for the separation of religion from the State. He says that advocates for the “immediate enforcement” of *shari’a* law are “deeply anti-democratic” and that the vision of a religious state is rooted in a hazy, romantic view of a past that never existed.

In reading four, **The Islamic Case for a Secular State**, Mustafa Aykol of Turkey argues against both Islamic extremism and, in his words, “extreme secularism.” Aykol, a journalist, calls for a “neutral entity” that accepts the diversity of modern Turkey, noting that the Koran celebrates “pluralism on earth.” And in reading five, **The System Is Blocked**, Nadia Yassine, a leader of Morocco’s largest Islamist organization, argues that Islam is a “more all-encompassing” ideology than any other, and therefore can enfold all of the economic, social and political needs of Moroccan citizens. Yassine attacks what she called the “vulgar Darwinism” of the West, a “materialist philosophy” rooted, in her analysis, in the desire for “economic supremacy.”

In reading six, **Real Democracy Is the Answer**, the selection of readings was written by the late Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, a Sudanese Sufi Islam theologian and political figure, who argues for an Islamic republic anchored in democracy, freedom and a new understanding of the Koran. Taha was executed for statements calling Sudan’s *shari’a* laws a distortion of Islam.

Finally, in **Muslims and Democracy**, Abdou Filali-Ansary, a Moroccan editor and intellectual, outlines the challenge that modernity and especially democracy pose in majority Muslim societies and argues that certain “essential” conditions that must be achieved for democracy to succeed: 1) updating religious conceptions; 2) establishing the rule of law; and 3) putting in place the conditions to achieve solid economic growth.

Islam's Democratic Imperative

SHEIK DIA AL-SHAKARCHI

Sheik Dia al-Shakarchi, a leading Iraqi Shi'ite theologian, argues that democracy is not only compatible with Islam, but is essential to it. This article was widely printed throughout the French-language and English language press in the Middle East and elsewhere in the wider Muslim world. It was written prior to the January 2005 elections in Iraq and can be read as an appeal for the development of democracy in that country.

DURING THE LAST 25 years, Islam has played an increasingly influential role in politics, and not only in the Islamic world, with political Islam frequently expressing itself in radicalism and terror. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have not always agreed on the extent to which this is compatible with genuine Islam.

How Islam is understood varies widely among devout, moderately religious, and non-observant Muslims, as well as among Islamic scholars, political parties, and organizations. Even western experts and critics of Islam hold different views. Overall, there are two conflicting images of Islam: a peaceful Islam, which is ready for dialogue and coexistence, and a fundamentalist Islam, which is militant and even terrorist.

There is a widespread misperception that Islam's holy texts are written in a way that can justify both interpretations. But, in my opinion, the reason for different — and frequently contradictory — interpretations is an incompetent and incomplete approach that detaches individual texts from their context and construes them without a thorough understanding of the true spirit of the Koran.

This approach to Islamic texts — coming from both secular and religiously oriented Muslims, as well as from non-Muslims with an interest in the subject — calls into question the compatibility of Islam and democracy, and also whether Islam is compatible with peace and moderation. But, based on more than a decade of study and debate, I am convinced of the compatibility between Islam and democracy. Indeed, in my view, democracy is not only permitted by Islam, but can be regarded as a religious rule.

My understanding is drawn from a principle contained by the basic Islamic theory of legal reasoning, which asserts that when strong religious interests can be realized only through a particular path of action, that path itself is no longer a matter of choice. It also becomes a religious rule. Thus, if we can establish that democracy is the means to realize the strong interests of the Muslim com-

munity — and I believe we can do this — then democracy may be declared a religious duty in Islam.

Even if democracy might be viewed primarily as an evil from an Islamic point of view, there is another principle of interpretation of religious laws in Islam, according to which minor evils — even if religiously impermissible or not recommended at first — become permissible, recommended, and even mandatory if they alone can prevent major evils.

The Muslim interest in democracy is best understood through a clear perception of the reality of how Muslims live. A country like Iraq, for example, is home to a diverse and varied population: Arab and Kurd, Sunni and Shi'ite, not to mention minorities of other religions and ethnic groups. Moreover, not all Muslims practice Islam, nor do those who practice do so in the same way.

So religion cannot be imposed; individuals must practice it according to their own decisions. Any enforcement of religious practice only creates hostility toward religion. Thus, I believe that a political system that best serves free choice — including the choice of people to be practicing Muslims — is the best system for Islam.

Of course, the problem of Islam's compatibility with democracy may be analyzed from different points of view. One possible approach is purely practical, comparing democracy with all other conceivable alternatives. In my opinion, there are only five conceivable alternatives in a Muslim country.

The first is secular dictatorship. This is unacceptable for two reasons. First, dictatorship itself is ugly and unacceptable; second, secular dictatorship excludes Islamic parties from participating normally in the political system. We have considerable experience of this in the Middle East.

Of course, an Islamic dictatorship is also possible. But this, too, is unacceptable. As with a secular dictatorship, Islamic dictatorship is ugly and destructive. Such a dictatorship would damage Islam by associating Islam with unjust rule and creating enemies for Islam.

A third alternative is democracy, but with secular restrictions on religious parties. In fact, this would be a pseudo-democracy, and would infringe on the rights of religious people to full participation. Likewise, an Islamic democracy with restrictions on non-religious parties would be a mockery of democracy and harmful to Islam. This would also be unrealistic, because in the current age of globalization, any claims to democracy would be exposed as obviously false.

So, in my view, true democracy is the only alternative, because it is realistic and promotes peace. Call this ideology-free democracy: a political system that tolerates restrictions imposed only from within, never from outside, the democratic process itself.

We must recognize that democracy has proved its worth around the world. It is the best way of organizing a society based on reality and not ideals. Why shouldn't Iraqis benefit from the proven experience of other peoples?

Islam and Democratization: The Winds of Change

ANWAR IBRAHIM

Anwar Ibrahim has been education minister, finance minister, and deputy prime minister of Malaysia. Jailed in 1998, he was accused of sodomy (a victim, his supporters charge, of a highly political character assassination and smear campaign). He was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison. After Ibrahim spent six years in solitary confinement, the Malaysian Federal Court overturned his conviction, resulting in his release in September 2004. In exile, he held a number of visiting professorships at distinguished universities, including Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, and Oxford University. He was also a consultant for the World Bank in the areas of governance and accountability and was appointed as Honorary President of the London-based group Accountability. During this period, Ibrahim became an international champion for democracy and democratic accountability. He returned to Malaysia and was arrested in 2008, once more on sodomy charges. He was subsequently elected to Parliament, as leader of the opposition. International human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have called for the charges to be dropped and the international outcry has damaged Malaysia's reputation as a moderate Islamic country. At this writing his trial has last for more than eight months. This selection is a reprint of the acceptance speech given by Ibrahim in April 2005 when he received the 2005 Muslim Democrat of the Year award at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Center for Studies of Islam and Democracy (CSID). The topic is: Democracy and Development: Challenges for the Islamic World.

MR. CHAIRMAN, ladies and gentlemen: I am deeply humbled by this award and I accept it in all humility. I would also like to share this award with Dr Azizah, whose tenacity in the face of adversity continues to be a source of strength for me. Let me thank the Center for this great honor, but let me not hesitate to say that there are still thousands out there who are in jail one way or the other for their political beliefs. Let us take this opportunity to express our solidarity with them; let us resolve to continue to support the cause of freedom regardless of color, creed, or religion.

About two months after gaining freedom, I visited Indonesia to call on old friends and to congratulate them for the remarkable success story in political reform, that is, the practice of democracy on a scale unseen in the Muslim world. The changing tide in the rise of democracy in other parts of the Muslim world pales before this nation with the largest Muslim population, as it stands out as the most significant political development in the recent history of democracy.

When the Asian financial crisis broke out, Indonesia was among the worst affected. But just as it is always darkest before dawn, the riots, violence and the killings were the birth pangs to the emergence of a new nation. In place of oppression and dictatorship, Indonesia is now secured by the pillars of freedom and democracy. Indeed, Indonesia can serve as a model of democracy for the world. There were attempts to galvanize Islamic radical-

ism, but when Muslims in Indonesia were asked to choose between ideological exclusivity and moderation they overwhelmingly chose the latter. They took the road that was closed to them by 30 years of corrupt dictatorship. They elected for a free press, an independent judiciary, and free speech. They elected for freedom and democracy. And the changes brought about now provide an enduring lesson on making that giant leap from autocracy to democracy without violence or bloodshed.

The other enduring lesson from Indonesia, which reinforces what I have been advocating for some time now, is that the impetus for democratization of the Muslim world can and must come from Muslims themselves. And that is what Indonesia has done. Why must such a process be driven by America or Europe or any other region for that matter? We hear the view that Islam and democracy are diametrically opposed because it is argued that sovereignty belongs only to God. By juxtaposing the exercise of state power with the sovereignty of God, this view confers on tyranny the mantle of not only worldly legitimacy but divine ordination. On the other hand, secularists raise the specter of radical Islam gaining power in the event of elections by popular vote. This generates fear among established democracies in the West who naturally then opt for the so-called lesser of two evils, which is to allow secular despots to hold on to power. The upshot of all these is that the Muslim world suffers the dubious distinction of having the longest ruling autocrats and dictators.

Clearly therefore it is not Islam but the exploitation

of the fear factor that has precluded the democratization of the Muslim world. I call on Islamists who are opposed to democracy to change their mind set and work towards developing a vibrant democracy, marshal the forces of freedom and harness them so that Muslims may stand up for their fundamental dignity and establish the institutions of democracy, freedom, and civil society.

Compact to constitutional freedoms

While the history of Islam's expansion is replete with the stories of conquest, it is equally true that Islam was also spread through commerce and trade. Even as it spread its wings, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies evolved. Muslim societies in this regard stood out for their tolerance and moderation, not chauvinism or bigotry. Is it not therefore conceivable that when the seeds of democracy and freedom are planted in the hearts of Islamists these values will germinate in the psyche of their worldview? In the current tide to move to democracy, Islamist political parties, and for that matter other parties as well, should be bound by a compact to respect and honor the values and principles of democracy and freedom, and not to renounce them upon gaining power.

In promoting democracy and freedom, it is imperative that outside parties should be weaned away from their fixation on perpetuating the separation of church and state. For the Muslim world, a more productive pursuit lies in finding how democracy and freedom can resonate through Islam's public and private realms. For Islamists in particular embracing democracy and freedom should carry no stigma. Accepting democracy and freedom is not converting to American values or ideals; nor does it mean that they will have to stop criticizing U.S. foreign policy, culture, or values.

Likewise, it is also misconceived for the U.S. to view the movement of Islamists to democracy from the prism of so-called die-hard fundamentalist groups in the Arab world. This fallacy has led to the assumption that Islamists are diametrically opposed to the United States and will have nothing to do with them, or worse, that they will work towards the destruction of America. This anxiety sometimes borders on paranoia and is of course completely unfounded, 9/11 notwithstanding. Yet, we must concede that anti-American sentiments are not a mere figment of the imagination. While I do not propose to discourse on their underlying causes, it may perhaps be useful to take a moment to look closer into this.

There seems to be a general consensus that the underlying causes for the progress of political reform in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East, have their roots in the Bush Administrations forward strategy of freedom. Under this strategy, democracy and freedom is to be spread across the Muslim world through multi-

lateral as well as bilateral initiatives. True, these efforts have made some impact but they have not succeeded in ameliorating anti-American sentiments as a whole. To a large extent, this is because the strategy has been long on rhetoric but rather short on reality.

I say this because American foreign policy vis-à-vis Muslim countries is still mired in a strategy of selective ambivalence. This is a policy of vicariously aiding certain countries to resist the tide of reform through omission rather than commission. This policy has meant turning a blind eye to blatant human rights violations and other kinds of abuses, which clearly make a mockery of the democracy and freedom being preached. This policy means that in return for the support to the United States in the war against terror, these countries are made strategic partners and are given economic aid and other sweeteners. To my mind, this is a case of reverse conditionality. This strategy of selective ambivalence confers on repressive regimes the mantle of legitimacy simply because they raise the specter of terror and vow to fight it as an ally of the United States.

These regimes are not averse to claiming legitimacy through Islam even though the people are denied civil liberties enshrined in Islam. How can anyone talk of an ideal Islamic society without freedom of thought and expression, or freedom from arbitrary arrest and rule of law? Isn't it farcical to talk of an ideal Islamic society without sustainable economic development, social justice or cultural empowerment? Can there be an ideal Islamic society where intellectual development is stifled and women continue to be treated as second-class citizens?

Islam and Civil Society

While the bloodshed of Algeria's aborted elections of 1992 continues to haunt us, the lessons of history should fortify instead of weaken our conviction to pursue freedom and democracy. September 11th should never be allowed to take us backwards. That there is a need to wage war on terror is not in dispute in as much as terrorism terrorizes all. But the zeal with which this war is being prosecuted should be reinforced by the conviction to forge ahead to promote the principles of freedom and democracy where they are needed most, not sacrifice them on the altar of expediency.

Even leaving aside now the issue of selective ambivalence, one has to be rather guarded about jumping to conclusions when talking about the winds of change in the Muslim world. Apart from Indonesia, and to a certain extent Turkey, do elections really demonstrate that democracy is alive or are they merely tools to legitimize state power? Isn't it true that certain states continue to be under one-man or one-party rule despite the trappings of reform including the possibility of presidential elections?

A few elections do not make a civil society.

To be fair, certain states are already moving positively and firmly on the path to real democracy. Yet I must caution that one may be long on promise but short on delivery. All Muslim countries must seize the moment now to adopt modern, democratic constitutions, hold free and fair elections, ensure the separation of powers and guarantee fundamental civil liberties including allowing the full participation of women in political life. They must put a stop to extra-judicial procedures, arbitrary arrests, and the use of the state apparatus to silence political opposition. With these institutions and practices in place, abuse of power will be checked, corruption can be more effectively dealt with, and economic wealth can be more equitably distributed to the people.

Role of a Vibrant Opposition

Constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties become pious platitudes when the voices of dissent are not allowed to be heard. Democracy is participatory government in its fullest sense and that presupposes the existence of a vibrant opposition, as the bulwark against the tyranny of absolute power.

Opposition must not be just merely tolerated but must be allowed to flourish as the people's conscience. Its paramount role is to hold the powers that be to account when they go astray and to remind them that power is trust, not might.

The challenges ahead remain daunting for the Muslim world as well as for America. Many parts of the Muslim world still look at the United States as arrogant purveyors of power. And it doesn't serve the cause of freedom for

America to merely dismiss this perception as a manifestation of hatred of modernity or hostility fuelled by fundamentalist ideology. I have no hesitation in applauding the role of the United States in promoting freedom and democracy, not just in the Muslim world but the world at large. After all, freedom is not a territorial construct. Nor is democracy only needed in the Muslim world. As I have said before, whatever its faults, the United States has been the strongest advocate of democracy throughout the world without which the voices of freedom would have remained still and silent.

As for the Muslim world, let us forge ahead with a renewed resolution to fight not just extremism and terrorism but authoritarianism and despotism in all its guises. Let us not forget the untold acts of torture, brutality and massacre committed under the regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Saddam Hussein. Even today, gulags, sham trials, and information apparatchiks continue to oppress and terrorize the people. These remain the greatest impediments to freedom and democracy and the establishment of the institutions of civil society.

In this regard, I dare say with conviction that the role of Muslims in the West should not be taken lightly. Muslim civil societies in America such as the CSID for example must be applauded for their intellectual and moral leadership in the quest for freedom and democracy. It is our fervent hope that they will continue in this noble cause and not recoil in the face of adversity. The time is ripe to move forward.

On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.

Excerpts from *The Missing Truth*¹

FARAG FOUDA

Farag Fouda was a contemporary Egyptian Muslim intellectual who understood both politics and religion. His strength was in calling for their separation as the way to build a modern Muslim society. He categorically rejected the so-called Muslim Caliphate vision, held by some Islamist intellectuals and activists of the second half of the 20th century, which seeks to establish a system of governance that combines the head of state and the prince of the faithful in one person, the Caliph, ²Fouda's critique of that vision and its followers was unrelenting and scathing.

Fouda's courage and his acid-tongued opposition to Islamists and their vision earned him their deadly enmity. As his forceful writings and challenging logic attracted more followers in Egypt, the Islamists targeted him for removal. The same group that assassinated President Sadat in 1980 had planned to "do away" with leading secular statesmen and intellectuals, including Naguib Mahfouz.³ Whereas their attempt on the latter had failed, it succeeded with Fouda, who was gunned down at age 47 in 1992.

Excerpts from Chapter 1

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, I wish to be clear and candid. The topic I plan to address has been visited before and many opinions have been expressed: some driven by fear, others by outbidding and exaggeration. Behind all these reactions stands a large socio-cultural barrier: the belief held by most Egyptians that they should "close the door that brings wind." But we are not speaking of wind here. We are speaking of a hurricane that could cast doubt about our status as Muslims and believers.

What I discuss below are mundane matters that pertain to faith and religion. The readers have observed in recent political and parliamentary elections the slogan "Islamic State, Come back"; "Islam is the Solution"; "Islamia. Islamia." These are slogans that one wonders whether they are political or religious. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin. These slogans are not new; they constitute the old belief of the Muslim Brothers that Islam is a duality: religion and state; sword and Koran.

This belief paints the Egyptian society as either jahili (pre-Islamic), or far from true Islam. Somewhere in the middle, there is a camp that sees that any solution lies in the immediate enforcement of the shari'a. To them, they imagine that immediate reform would follow once the shari'a is applied. In this regard, I like to make few clarifications in my search for the missing truth. Whenever

appropriate, I shall make my conclusions in light of the clarifications.

First Clarification

The Egyptian society is not jahili. In fact it is the closest to true, genuine Islam, to the extent that one may consider genuine adherence to faith a strictly Egyptian feature. Egyptians had always been loyal to their religious beliefs: be it under the Pharaohs before the advent of celestial faiths, with the arrival of Christianity before Islam, or under Islam. Strong evidence supports this claim: the number of Egyptians frequenting mosques, their enthusiasm to build more mosques, they are the largest nationality in the Hajj (pilgrims) to Mecca, their celebration of religious holidays, their joy over the advent of Ramadan and their sorrow when it ends, etc.

Second Clarification

The enforcement of the shari'a is not an end in itself, but a means to establish an Islamic State. This is the core of our discussion. Shari'a advocates believe in the duality of Islam as faith and state. Shari'a according to them is the link between the State and the religion. This confirms that they are two sides of the same coin, and that takes the discussion into its real arena, that of politics.

A simple question arises: if the Islamists raise the slogan of the Islamic State, and if they have a large number of advocates in political parties that call for a faith-based state ruled by Islam, why don't they present us – the

¹ Farag Fouda, *The Missing Truth* (in Arabic), Dar el Fikr, Cairo, 1987.

² Fouda argued that vision to be "regressive," having had its genesis in the writings of the Muslim Brotherhood. He recognized that while the Brotherhood led the regressive trend, it was by no means the only defender of the vision. Other militant groups have mutated and became more extreme than the Brotherhood. They have resorted to violence and terror as their means to take the Muslim umma back to early Islam – to the days of the prophet and his Guided Caliphs.

³ Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989.

people — with a declaration or manifesto that outlines the political and economic policies of their proposed system of government that cover education, housing, health, and other areas. And while at it, they should also explain how they plan to solve the problems in those sectors from an Islamic perspective.

If they can do that, if they can produce such a manifesto, their demands to establish an Islamic state would be acceptable and make more sense to us. Equally importantly, the enforcement of shari'a would become part of a whole. For in a society characterized by sufficiency and justice, where citizens feel secure and safe and where they enjoy dignity, freedom and rights of citizenship, no one could object to the application of shari'a.

Personal Status Law

Readers might think that what I just proposed is an easy logical task for political Islamic activists, but it is not. They are unable to interpret Islam and Islamic history. As a demonstration, I refer to a recent example of the promulgation of the personal status law. Surrounding the application of that law was a wide debate during the last ten years. When the first draft law was proposed, it angered advocates of women's rights. The second draft provoked advocates of men's rights. On the third attempt, both camps accepted the draft and it became law. What I wish to demonstrate here is that the personal status law should be an easy aspect of any political manifesto, because it is a clear application of shari'a.

No one disputes that shari'a is the only source of legislation regulating personal and family matters. However, the problem arose when legal experts realized that they were facing a new world and new developments whereby women gained new rights and where, for example, women's work became a matter of fact and right. There were new realities and controversies that our Islamic predecessors could not have imagined. Our legal experts found themselves in a position where they disagreed both among themselves and with the public. Moving between the three personal status bills, they also oscillated between the different Islamic schools of thoughts: from Malik to Abu Hanifa to others. Astoundingly, all discussions did not go beyond the second Hijra century (the eighth century C.E.)!

Modern Economy

Can anyone imagine what could happen when we move into the realm of economics and how to raise productivity? What will our jurisprudents do when they learn that the savings of Egyptians finance public sector investments? Those savings⁴ are in the form of deposits

that earn interest. All of these are new situations that old preachers of the Islamic State did not know could exist and consequently, did not think of solutions for them.

Selecting the Ruler

I have just presented the easiest of all issues. There are other more complex matters like the election of the ruler, the system of government, and relationships between the various branches of government, as we understand modern governments. Let us take selecting the ruler as an example. What are the conditions that should be fulfilled in selecting a ruler in an Islamic State? Muslim, rational, mature, etc...are qualities that immediately come to one's mind. But this is not all. Our ancient Muslim predecessors made it a condition that their ruler be a descendant of Quraysh. To some of us, this comes as a surprise because we know that Islam treats people equally and makes no distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs except on the basis of their piety and faith. The condition may have been stipulated in order to sustain the rule of the Umayyad and the Abbasids whose roots go back to Quraysh. There are also some corroborating accounts from recent history that in introducing Farouk as the King of Egypt, politicians recommended that he appear in public with a long beard and a rosary to project piety. They also tried to fabricate evidence that his roots go back to the Prophet to justify why he should be appointed Imam of all Muslims.⁵ Perhaps like me, the readers may not feel comfortable with this condition that divides Muslims into "blue-blooded" individuals (the rulers of Quraysh), and "red-blooded" subjects: the rest of us. The truth is that there are no rules in the Koran that stipulate this condition; nor did the Prophet address this issue.

What we really have are several different ways to choose rulers in Islam: 1) the pledge of allegiance to the "selected" individual, as presently applied in Saudi Arabia; 2) the pledge of allegiance to a sealed document written by the ruler, in which he chooses his successor (as Abu Bakr chose Omar); 3) the rule of the Faqih (scholar) in Iran; 4) a referendum on the enforcement of shari'a implies approval of the ruler (Pakistan). Conservatives like to stick to precedents and refuse to go beyond, while liberals believe that existence of many methods means flexibility, thus no strict rules to select the ruler. Briefly, Islam finds no problem with direct or indirect elections of rulers.

Paradoxically, the ruler's term of office in Islam is unlimited. Rulers are given the pledge of allegiance so long as they adhere to the Koran and the Sunna. However, that did not prevent rulers from staying in office even when

⁴ At the time, ranging between 30 to 40 billion Egyptian pounds in the late 1980s.

⁵ Curiously, this is what was done in a totally different context (Iraq), attempting to link Saddam Hussein to the Prophet's descendants.

they violated Koran and Sunna, whether by mistake or by design. Advocates of the Islamic State claim that Shura or consultation should deter the ruler from becoming a despot. But what does Shura mean? Is the ruler obliged to follow it? Is he obliged to consult but not obliged to follow consensus?

We must admit that many of us have realized that we are facing new conditions that our predecessors did not face before and that democracy i.e. the rule of the people is not in conflict with Islam. The ideas of the advocates of democracy that produced different approaches to parliamentary rule and direct and indirect elections cannot be contradictory to the essence and spirit of justice in Islam. Conservatives who advocate the Islamic state⁶ reject the rule of the people based on their conviction that God is the ruler. They are concerned that the majority of the people would approve a legislation that contradicts God's shari'a and that the right of parliaments to produce legislation could usurp God's divine prerogative.

Third Clarification

Now I turn to the claim that the immediate enforcement of Shari'a would be followed by immediate reforms in society and immediate solutions to its problems. I like to demonstrate that social reform is not contingent upon a good Muslim ruler or the adherence of Muslims to their faith. It is conditioned by other socio-political factors. I like to use the era of the four Guided Caliphs as an illustration to prove my point.

Combined, the four Guided Caliphs reigned for a total of 29 years. Abu Bakr's ruled for two years and three months, during which he waged war in the Arabian Peninsula against those who reverted from Islam (Al Murtadeen). Ali (the fourth Caliph) ruled for four years and seven months and also fought those who rejected his rule. Under those two, the concerns of war were far more pressing than running state affairs. The two other eras Omar (10 years) and Osman (12 years) were long enough to provide a model for the Islamic State. Both Omar and Osman were close to the Prophet. Omar was well known for his firm support of the new faith. Osman was both a true believer and the son-in-law of the prophet.

The Shari'a was no doubt in force during the reign of two longer-serving Caliphs. Yet the two eras were drastically different. Omar — as well as Muslim subjects — were concerned with the essence and core of the faith. He left behind him a path and a model that no one could dispute. Osman, on the other hand, was controversial: his deeds and conduct irritated his subjects, who saw him as viola-

tor of the Koran and Sunna and wanted to get rid of him. Both rulers were assassinated. A non-Muslim lad killed Omar, whose death was sadly mourned and grieved. Osman died at the hands of revolting Muslims who unanimously claimed that his was the fate he deserved. There are accounts that Muslims refused to bury their caliph, pray at his coffin or place his corps in the Muslims cemetery. It is alleged that a handful of his immediate family buried him at night in a Jewish cemetery, several days after his murder.⁷

What kind of public anger would follow a ruler to take revenge from him — from his corpse as it lay there — without any consideration for his history in Islam or his 86 years of age! Even though the anger must have been enormous, it does not reflect on Islam in any way. Osman was never one of the pillars of Islam. He was human and he made mistakes.

The severe treatment of Osman raises several questions: Was not Osman at the time of his selection one of the best-qualified Muslims to rule? Was he not one of the six "slated" men on track to become Caliph following the Prophet's death? Were Muslims not firm believers in their faith and close to the sources of Islamic legislation (Koran and Sunna)?

Was Sharia not in force at the time of Osman's death?

From the above, several conclusions emerge.

First conclusion

Justice does not necessarily prevail in the presence of a good ruler or pious subjects. It does not come automatically with the application of Shari'a. Justice comes from a good system of governance, i.e. controls to be exercised over the ruler if he errs, that deter him if he exceeds his limits and ousts him if he fails to achieve what he promised his subjects. The controls could be internal stemming from the conscience of the ruler, like Omar's case. However, this is rare and cannot be considered the rule. Things have to be institutionalized and codified. Muslims faced Osman when they became convinced he violated the rules of justice and the core of Islam. Yet, he did not change his policies nor did he repent. The people searched for precedents to guide them, but did not find any.

When things got worse, they besieged him and asked him to go, but because there were no rules to follow, he answered them that he will not leave a position that God conferred upon him! Then the situation deteriorated and he was about to be killed by his subjects. Rationally, they offered him three options: 1) that he be punished for his deeds like any Muslim who commits a mistake, then he

⁶ The likes of Omar Abdel Rahman (the blind Imam jailed in Federal U.S. prison for inciting the first bombing of the twin towers in New York) and Omar El Telmessani, a known figure in the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

⁷ Traditionally, Muslims bury the dead within 24 hours. In modern times, burying heads of State takes longer due to complex logistical arrangements for visiting international dignitaries. The fate of Osman's corpse was extraordinary by any measure, ancient, or modern.

can resume his duties as a Caliph; 2) that he voluntarily gives up his position; and 3) that he leaves at sword point.

Osman believed that holding the Caliph accountable and punishing him for his mistakes had not happened under his two predecessors, and there were no rules to guide that kind of action. He insisted on remaining in his position and said that relinquishing it was out of question. To the suggestion that the pledge of allegiance (Bai'a) be renounced, his answer was: "Were you forced to give your pledge to me"? His question implied that the pledge was eternal and there is no chance to withdraw it.

From his perspective, Osman announced that the Islamic system of government was based on three rules: a) the Caliph rules for life; b) rulers are not accountable to their subjects, and thus cannot be punished if they make mistakes; and c) subjects have no right to withdraw their pledge of allegiance once they give it to the Caliph. The people felt differently, and could not reconcile their differences with Osman. With no resolution in sight, they had to kill him.

The incident between Osman and his people raises several questions: is there an alternative? Are there clear features or principles for rulers to follow? Are there principles in the Koran and the Sunna that tell us how to choose rulers and how to oust them? Does the pledge of allegiance have an expiration period? Do the subjects have the right to withdraw allegiance just as they confer it? Do subjects have the right to punish their ruler? And, if so, how is this right organized and carried out?

These questions, critical as they obviously are for governing the Muslim Umma, have remained unanswered. No one has made any attempt to answer them after the four Guided Caliphs have passed.

Second conclusion

The enforcement of Shari'a itself is not the essence of Islam. Much more important than its application is the establishment of a system of just and fair governance that conforms to the spirit of Islam. Often in Islamic history, Shari'a was enforced, the ruler was good, the subjects were pious, but still things did not go well, as they could have. Something was absent and still is.

What happened in Sudan is instructive of how dangerous it would be to start with the penal side of Islam. The ruler in Sudan applied Shari'a and announced that relevant punishments would be applicable, forgetting that he was ruling over a country threatened by famine. The result was that even those who advocated Shari'a became much less enthusiastic; their ranks shrunk and their popular support significantly diminished. The lesson: when calling to enforce Shari'a, it is advisable to start with the trunk of the tree, not the branches; the essence not the veneer; justice not punishment. In other words, good governance starts with security, not fear.

Third conclusion

Moving from Osman's time to the present, we find that nothing has changed from an Islamic perspective with regard to societal problems or how to handle the rulers if they deviate. How can Shari'a solve complex socio-economic problems? How to raise wages and reduce prices? How to solve the intricate housing problems? How to resolve external debt issues? How to transform the public sector into a productive engine? How does the simple enforcement of the Shari'a guarantee that all the above problems will be solved?

Advocates of Shari'a who think its application will produce magical solutions are challenged to think about such issues. Lurking underneath is the need to formulate a comprehensive declaration of policy. Going back to the second century of Islam would create more problems. For example, advocates continue to regard parochially the notion of bank interest. If they persist, they will end up with massive dislocations in the money market, ultimately causing chaos and destruction rather than development.

We should remember that it is not Shari'a that will cause these problems. Rather, it is using the interpretations of the second hijra century if they were applied to our world today. The socio-economic conditions of our world have changed over the last few centuries. The world has gone beyond borrowing money for dire personal need. We now have inflation that reduces the purchasing power of money.

This is about bank interest. What about other issues that have emerged since the second hijra century: the complex factors that determine wages, prices and cause housing crisis? Are all these phenomena related to the enforcement of Shari'a? Of course there is no link whatsoever. However, there is a strong link if we are talking about a manifesto that organizes the life of citizens, including the role of Shari'a, in a way that does not contradict with Islam or conflict with realities.

Fourth conclusion

We need to pay attention to substance, and differentiate between going backwards and moving forward, and between the essence the veneer. Society will not change and Muslims will not progress by simply growing longer beards or shaving off moustaches. Islam will not cope with the challenges of modern times when young Muslims put on the Pakistani attire, call each other early Muslim names, use hands when eating instead of silverware, and debate whether one should enter the bathroom with the right or left foot! These are superficial and irrelevant matters that unfortunately seem to occupy the minds of youth — much more than the essence and core of faith. It breaks my heart to see our young people concerned with

such trivia. I am disappointed that their teachers and mentors who call for the revival of Islam are busy instilling in their minds idiocies and misconceptions, convincing them to give up “mundane” and “secular” sciences to focus instead on worshipping God.

Is this true Islam? Is this how we plan to move into the twenty-first century? Are those folks fit to lead their societies? Are they qualified to advocate a religious state? I claim not. Those are people who hate their societies. Does not society have the right to reciprocate? Just as they claim we are pre-Islamic, we could accuse them of prejudice and rigidity. They are outcasts both to Shari’a and to the law. They think they are the guardians of society, while they should be the ones to guard. They have been unfair to Islam because they made it appear as a religion of prejudice and stagnation when in fact it is a faith of tolerance, development and openness.

I reiterate that the call to enforce Shari’a is a veneer that has no essence and no content. The core is in providing rules for the organization of society that do not contradict with religion and cope with modern developments simultaneously. This is a difficult thing to ask advocates of the Shari’a because we are asking them to open their eyes and see the world: to live, experience and interact with it, before they plan its future. I wonder if they can do that!

Fourth Clarification

Those who advocate the immediate enforcement of Shari’a are deeply anti-democratic. This is either intentional because they do not believe in democracy, or unintentional because they are enthusiastic about Shari’a. They forget that something as crucial as choosing the form of governance should be subject to large-scale public debates. I have explained that this is not a question of applying Shari’a. It is a choice between the religious and the secular state; a choice between the civil state that we all know and have experienced, and the religious state that remains romantically hazy in the minds of its advocates without articulation. This is a matter that cannot be debated in a session or two or in a week or two.

We have to remember that the Egyptian constitution, like other laws, is rooted in Shari’a, which is the main source of legislation in Egypt. But the constitution is not a sacred book. Citizens can disagree with it and may call for its amendment but must follow stipulations in the constitution on how to go about such amendments. Of course advocates of Shari’a voice their objection to the constitution, particularly the stipulation about the multiparty system. They wish to limit the party system to two only: the party of God, and the party of the devil.

Neither the constitution nor public referenda are tools they wish to use. So, the only way out is for them to produce a manifesto and form their own parties. If they win a

majority, we will have to accept them and shut up.

At this point, the reader may object because existing laws do not allow the formation of faith-based political parties, since political parties should be open to all Egyptians regardless of faith. But we have gone beyond this point. The Muslim Brotherhood has a party; it has newspapers, magazines and offices. It even has deputies in the National Assembly.

The Muslim Brotherhood is there and they are legitimately present. Saying otherwise would hide our heads in the sand. It might therefore be useful to allow other religious and political groupings to form their own parties. At least this way each would be asked to draft their political programs. Then we can have real dialogues on grounds of political realities. They would be after political power. Imams will have to be more prudent about what they say in mosques.

People should not worry that such a move may cause the formation of Coptic political parties. History tells us that this will not happen. Early in the twentieth century, when Mr. Fanous tried to form a party for Copts, he ended up with a handful of members. The Wafd party, on the other hand, was able to absorb the overwhelming majority of Copts under the banner of secularism.

To the readers: I have just presented the alternative view. I have tried to show that the Islamists have chosen the easy way out, but before they entertain the possibility of taking over power and become rulers, they have to think carefully. They have to understand that Islam does not contradict modernity, and that the future is made by hard work, not by isolation, and by exerting creative minds not bullets to terrify the innocent folks. Most importantly, they have to grasp the missing truth: they are not alone in the community of Muslims.

Excerpts from Chapter 4

What next?

Our long Muslim history shows that the Islamic State has done a disservice to Islam as a religion. As God wanted it, Islam is a religion and a faith — not the messy business of entangled interests or a sword to intimidate. The truth is that people are people all over whether they Umayyad, Abbasids, or modern folks.

I trust the reader has implicitly realized that as we spoke of history we were addressing the present and looking into the future as well. In so doing, we have looked at the issues that perplex us. I do not know if, like others, I should, have ignored almost 1000 years of Umayyad and Abbasids ruthless and bloody rule to accept on face value the “Islamic State” of starry-eyed idealists. Further, I do not know what is the magic of the era of the Guided

Caliphs to cause our young people to wish to destroy their present societies.

I tried to demonstrate that a critical examination of the reign of the Guided caliphs was by no means “golden,” and that we should perhaps thank God for what we now have. This is not an attack against the Caliphs, God forbid. They were the Prophet’s companions and eminent jurists-prudents. However, we approached them from a human angle, and used the political scale of governance. There, we have found that they were merely humans that can and should be criticized. As rulers, they made mistakes and were not infallible.

The truth was that the era of the Guided Caliphs — short as it was — started with wars and ended with wars. It started with the Ridda wars under Abu Bakr, and ended with civil wars under Ali⁸. Most of those armed conflicts were motivated by zeal and enthusiasm for Islam on the part of both Caliphs and the subjects. However, they ended by reluctance of the subjects that became more tempted by worldly affairs. Comparing Mua’wya’s food feasts with truth as Ali told it, victory was for the delicious food. Truth was devalued.

So was the Islamic State, but not the religion if Islam. In human history, this is how states built on religion develop and this is how they end. And it is the end that matters. In the case of the Islamic State, the end was bitter. Worse is the fact that we did not grasp the lesson and did not make use of past experience. Some still insist on emulating the early Islamic State and Islamic rulers, as if we read history only to repeat our mistakes.

If the Guided Caliphs made human mistakes in governing the umma, how can we describe our contemporary rulers, who terrorized us and oppressed us and Muslim activist response was political assassinations and spilling innocent blood? In a recent student union election, Islamists raised the slogan “your vote is a bomb,” as if violence is all they associate with Islam, forgetting that Islam is the religion of tolerance and mercy.

In our countries we do not confront the “extremism of ideas and thought.” Rather, misguided popular perceptions confront violence with kisses, the sword with embraces and bombs with warm words. Let us look at how democratic nations face violence in Ireland, Italy, or Germany. No one has stopped to analyze terrorist motives or justify their acts as we do here. Popular sentiments give terrorists credit for daring to stand to the State as the common enemy. Upon reflection, we shall discover that the target is really not the State; it is the whole system of which we are part. They target the safety that we seek and the legitimacy that we consider our refuge.

If these extremists were knowledgeable, I would have liked to have a dialogue with them and if they were merciful, they would have listened. The truth is that they have exceeded all limits; they have gone beyond the power of words to assassination, and beyond logic to blood. There is no option but to continue the march of democracy. There is no alternative but to use logic to attract those who still have in their hearts some space for tolerance. There is no solution but to implement the law, in order to stop violence and isolate the extremists from the rest of society. We have to separate extremists from the moderate trend in political Islam that is represented by many respectable men and women capable of proper dialogue, with their knowledge and tolerance vis-à-vis others.

When moderates differ, they pray that God may guide all to the right path. Extremists believe that Islam is a state and a religion and it is their right to do so. By contrast, moderates believe that Islam is only a religion, and that’s their right. Some moderates believe in political activism and it is our duty to support them and provide them with a forum to express their opinions. Extremism and fundamentalism are the enemy of moderation. We wish that extremists acquire a contemporary view of the era, accept societal changes, believe in national unity and respect the laws of the land. We are convinced that democracy provides room for everyone and that the future is for all.

True Islam lies in the progress and advancement of nations, in the achievement of social interests, and in the accumulation of more knowledge. There is privacy in religion; it is not permitted to impose opinions on others. Legislation is for the people, but the principles guiding legislation are for God. Islam is concerned with ends before means, which the early Islamic era will not come back and we would not go back to it. Both are impossible.

We believe that the mind should rule and thinking should precede the claim that others are not believers. We believe that God will hold us accountable, but accountability is in the after-life, not now. Islam does not recognize priesthood or clergy. No person is sacred in Islam and no one is infallible. No one is beyond criticism. Islam does not recognize titles and no one has the right to claim that he is the protector of Islam. We are all Muslims and we can all defend Islam. We can all defend the nation: Copts and Muslims alike. We are all citizens. We are not a majority and they are not a minority. We are not invaders and they are not war prisoners. We are all Egyptians. We are not rulers and they are not subjects. We are both rulers and ruled.

Finally, I like to summarize why I do not wish to mix poli-

⁸ Throughout the five years of Ali’s reign, he had numerous battles on his hands: the battle of the Camel between the Prophet’s companions, Seffein between Ali and Mua’wya, Mehrawan between Ali and Al Khawarej, followed by several small battles also between Ali and al Khawarej.

tics with religion and insist on the need to separate the two. My reasons are as follows:

1. He who makes claims should produce evidence. We call for separating politics and religion. Those who disagree must explain how they propose to implement their vision. They have to come up with a declaration or manifesto.
2. We believe in political dialogue and in separating right from wrong on social issues. We refuse that political dialogue take place based on haram and halal, what is religiously right and wrong. People differ on social issues, and there are no absolute standards that render some people as kafirs and others believers.
3. Koran and Sunna should not be used in the political arena, because they do not belong there. Some religious figures used Koran and Sunna to elevate President Sadat when he made peace with Israel. Others also used Koran and the Sunna to criticize and degrade him for the same act. That left many Egyptians puzzled, not knowing what is right and what is wrong.
4. The historical events we documented provide strong evidence on the need to separate State from religion. If not there is a danger that the caliphate notion regains strong currency.
5. Separation of State and religion is the surest way to maintain national unity in Egypt between Muslims and Copts.⁹ Otherwise, sectarian strife could break the development potential for all Egyptians, Muslims, and Copts alike.

⁹ Muslims constitute about 90 percent of the Egyptian population, while Copts the remaining 10 percent.

The Islamic Case for a Secular State

MUSTAFA AKYOL

Mustafa Akyol is a Turkish Muslim writer, who argues both against Islamic extremism and what he calls extreme “secularism.” Akyol was born in Ankara in 1972. He later graduated from the Istanbul Nişantaşı Anadolu Lisesi and the International Relations Department of Bosphorus University. He earned his master’s in the History Department of the same university.

Akyol writes regularly for Turkish newspapers, comments on Turkish television, and is currently working on a book, entitled “The Islamic Case for Freedom,” which will be published in 2011. Many of his opinions can be read on his website, TheWhitePath.com. In past years he has lectured at several universities in the U.S. and the U.K. on issues of faith, science, religious tolerance or interfaith dialogue.

IN JUNE 1998, a very significant meeting took place at a hotel near Abant, which is a beautiful lake in the east of Istanbul. The participants included some of the most respected theologians and Islamic intellectuals in Turkey. For three days, the group of nearly 50 scholars discussed the concept of a secular state and its compatibility with Islam. At the end, they all agreed to sign a common declaration that drew some important conclusions.

The first of these was the rejection of theocracy. The participants emphasized the importance of individual reasoning in Islam and declared, “No one can claim a divine authority in the interpretation of religion.” This was a clear rejection of the theocratic political doctrines — such as the one established in the neighboring Iran — which granted a divinely ordained right to a specific group of people for guiding society.

The second important conclusion of the Abant participants was the harmony of the principles of divine sovereignty and popular sovereignty. (Some contemporary Islamists reject democracy by assuming a contradiction between the two.) “Of course God is sovereign over the whole universe,” the participants said, “but this is a metaphysical concept that does not contradict with the idea of popular sovereignty which allows societies to rule their own affairs.”

The third argument in the declaration was the acceptance of a secular state that would “stand at the same distance from all beliefs and philosophies.” The state, the participants noted, “is an institution that does not have any metaphysical or political sacredness,” and Islam has no problem with such political entities as far as they value rights and freedoms.

In sum, the “Abant Platform,” as it became known, declared the compatibility of Islam with a secular state based on liberal democracy. This was a milestone not only

because the participants included top Islamic thinkers, but also because the organizers were the members of Turkey’s strongest Islamic community, the Fethullah Gülen movement.

From diversity to secularity

Let me elaborate a bit more on why a secular state is not just compatible with Islam but also good for Muslims. The need for such a neutral political entity comes basically from the diversity of modern societies. The Turkish society, for example, includes not just practicing Muslims, but also Muslims with secular lifestyles, Christians, Jews, agnostics, atheists, New Agers, and God knows what. Moreover, among practicing Muslims, there are so many different religious interpretations. Establishing a religious state will inevitably impose one of these interpretations on all other citizens. This authoritarianism will not only suppress many rights and freedoms, but also create resentment among those who feel oppressed. And this resentment will easily breed hatred towards religion, which will undermine the very reason of its existence — winning the hearts and minds of men, and leading them to God.

In the Medina of the seventh century, during the time of Prophet Muhammad, it was quite feasible to found a theocratic state, because all Muslims constituted a small, self-contained community and the definition of true Islam was clearly and unambiguously made by the prophet. Today, Muslims live side-by-side with non-Muslims all around the world, and there are many different Islamic interpretations, about none of which we can be sure by any objective criteria. That’s why even overwhelmingly Muslim nations like the Pakistanis who cherish Islam as their identity can not find peace with the shari’a law, because they strongly and fiercely disagree on what that is.

The solution seems to be in ending the official acceptance and sponsorship of religion, and leaving matters of

faith to individuals and communities. This is needed not because there is a problem with religion, but because we humans have different ideas about it, and we can't find peace unless we accept this natural diversity.

After all, isn't it the Koran itself that celebrates pluralism on earth? "Had Allah willed He would have made you a single community," the Muslim scripture reminds. "So compete with each other in doing good." (5:48) The secular state can well be an impartial institution that serves and protects all the competitors.

The problem with secularism

All of these arguments stand in favor of a secular state. But they would not justify a secularist one. Such states are based on anti-religious philosophies and they take measures to diminish or even destroy the role of religion in their societies.

The world has seen many examples of such tyrannies

since the Enlightenment. The French Revolutionaries, particularly the bloody Jacobins, inflicted terror on the Catholic Church and tried to de-Christianize French society by imposing neo-pagan myths and practices. The communists went further by their purges, gulags, and massacres. "Religion is a poison," said Mao, and he and his comrades did everything they could to wipe it out.

Today the big question in Turkey is whether our republic will be a secular or a secularist one. Our home-grown secularists have never gone as far and radical as Mao, but some of them share a similar hostility toward religion. And they have every right to do so as far as they accept to be unprivileged players in civil society. But they don't have the right to dominate the state and use the money of the religious taxpayers in order to offend and suppress their beliefs.

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The System Is Blocked

NADIA YASSINE

Nadia Yassine is a leader and spokesman of “Justice and Spirituality,” Morocco’s biggest Islamist organization, a nonviolent “resistance” movement, which is illegal but tolerated by the monarchy. She belongs to a so-called “new generation” of Islamists: Western-educated but not Westernized. Due to her statements calling for a republic in Morocco, she was charged with damaging the monarchy and, if found guilty, may face heavy fines and up to five years in prison, although the trial has been delayed for years. Yassine founded the women’s section of the Justice and Spirituality movement. She and a group of like-minded women hold intellectual forums to develop jurisprudence through the eyes of women. She published a book entitled Full Sail Ahead, and was banned from holding a passport until 2003. Since then, she has given a number of lectures in the Middle East, the United States, and Europe. She has also taken part in a number of cultural forums as a spokesperson for the Justice and Spirituality movement, and to develop dialogue between civilizations and peoples. In this interview with Bild, a German newspaper, Yassine touches on the distrust many people have toward Islamist group, her dislike of “American imperialism” and Western culture; politics, and economics; and her vision for a new system in Morocco, rooted in Islam. The interview was reprinted in “Dialogue with the Islamic World.”

Bild: *The new Moroccan family code, the “Modawwana,” has been praised as an historic step towards equal rights for women in the Arab world. Are you in favor or against it?*

Yassine: We were already out on the streets six years ago calling for changes to the “Modawwana,” as it has long been clear to us that women must enjoy a better role in society. There are many women in our movement running projects and institutions. Take me, for example. I am the spokeswoman for our movement. We support changes, but the necessary ideas don’t have to be imported from the imperialist West.

Do you regard the new law as good or bad?

Yassine: Of course, it is good and important. There is no doubt about it. I will try to make our position clear in another way. If the “Makhzen” (the governing elite in Morocco) had not been sure that we supported the new law, they wouldn’t have pushed it through. We gave them clear signals of our approval. Yet, the law does not go far enough and also ignores the realities of life in Morocco today. I’ll give you an example. In the countryside, there are many unregistered marriages. People there younger than 18 continue to marry, although this is forbidden under the new law.

What should be done differently?

Yassine: It is all fine and good when you tell women that they are now free. But what about unemployment, which makes it impossible for women to be independent? Eco-

nomie changes are not the only thing we need. There has to be a restructuring of all sectors of society. Only then can we truly achieve something positive.

Then you want to totally change everything. It sounds like an impossible undertaking.

Yassine: It’s not as impossible as it might seem. The system is blocked by the current constitution.

You mean the system of constitutional monarchy?

Yassine: Yes, as soon as this is changed, there will be economic and social progress. You can’t solve individual problems without looking at the whole picture, which includes women, the economy, and education. It is all one system. Movement can only come about through a change in the constitution.

So you get rid of the monarchy, you come to power, and all the problems are then solved?

Yassine: No, it is not as easy as that. We do not want to take over power. It is a much too heavy burden to carry alone. We have to work together with all political parties and all of the other forces in society. We need each other and only together can we solve the difficult problems of our country. And this can only take place through democracy, free elections, a multi-party system, the division of powers, and an independent judiciary. The people of Morocco have a right to democracy. But first, all forces in society must work together to change the constitution.

Many don't believe you.

Yassine: I know that quite well. They'd prefer to hear that we want to set up an Iranian republic and force all women to wear headscarves.

Then you wouldn't shut down all the nightclubs and bars?

Yassine: No, bans don't work. Prohibiting alcohol won't work. You only have to turn to the U.S. to see that the prohibition of alcohol only brought problems. You can never achieve anything through compulsion. In contrast, you can achieve much more with democracy and education. It is better to convince people that it is in their interest not to drink alcohol and visit nightclubs.

And when education doesn't deliver the desired effects?

Yassine: We'd have to see first, but I also don't think that it would be so tragic. I simply want a just society in which people are the main concern.

Do you have a paradigm? Perhaps back to the past, to the society at the time of the Prophet Mohammed?

Yassine: The society at the time of the Prophet comes very close to how I image things. But I also find the Swiss model very interesting. It would be difficult, however, because we don't have a culture of democracy here in Morocco. We have to first develop one. And this we can only achieve together with all of the other groups in society.

Many refer to what is currently going on between East and West as the "clash of civilizations," while others call it a North-South conflict. Is it a matter of politics or religion?

Yassine: Of course it is all about politics. What takes place in the Muslim world is directly related to American imperialism, which has no interest in our religion, but in our resources, our oil. It most certainly has nothing to

do with a clash of cultures, differing ideologies, belief or non-belief. We are living through a new phase of colonialism, which nowadays is referred to as the search for new markets. Oil is a curse for many countries with a majority Muslim population. This is an anti-imperialist struggle against neo-colonialism. It doesn't matter if one is Muslim or Christian — this is a universal problem.

Imperialism and colonialism are catchwords. In concrete terms, what is it that you find so reprehensible about the politics of the West?

Yassine: I think that imperialism is based on the desire for economic supremacy and on a materialist philosophy — a vulgar Darwinism that believes only the strongest must prevail. We want to build bridges between the North and South on the basis of civil society. Today, poverty is no longer only a phenomenon of the South. There is also poverty in the North. If things continue according to the law of the jungle, then we will end up with a future marked by a universal struggle between rich and poor.

Is there an Islamic economic model — an alternative concept to capitalism that could make the world a better place for all mankind?

Yassine: I think that Islam is more all-encompassing than any other ideology. Islam is a way of being. For us, as Sufis, Islam is a spiritual state that has nothing in common with the currently prevailing capitalism. At its very beginning, Islam ruled with sense of justice over a simple merchant capitalist society. It was an economic order that cannot be compared in the slightest to today's wild liberalism, which has created a system with the hyper-rich on one side and masses of poor on the other. We are not completely against capitalism. Islam, however, can provide it with a human and just dimension

Real Democracy Is the Answer

MAHMOUD MOHAMMED TAHA

Mahmoud Mohammed Taha (1909–1985) was a Sudanese political figure and Sufi theologian. Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam. Taha played a prominent role in Sudan's struggle for independence, and was a co-founder of the Sudanese Republican Party. He was notable for his advocacy of liberal reform within Sudanese society and within Islam itself. The regime of Sudanese President Gaafar al-Nimeiri executed Taha for sedition and apostasy, after Taha protested the imposition of Shari'a in Sudan by President al-Nimeiri. In death, Taha became something rare in contemporary Islam: a moderate martyr.

The following are a selection of Taha's writings, including his brief, dramatic courtroom repudiation of the system and the judges who sentenced him to death.

Principles of the Republican (Jumhuri) Party (excerpts from a July 17, 1963, response to queries from John O. Voll, currently professor of Islamic history and associate director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, posted on "The Republican Thought, Glimpses of the Life and Thought of Uztaz Mahmoud Mohammed Taha," www.Alfikra.org).

...My own party was "The Republican Party." It built its ideology on Islam. We opposed the tendencies of some of the political parties towards an Islamic state, because we were sure they did not know what they were talking about. An Islamic state built on ignorance of the pure facts of Islam can be more detrimental to progress than a secular state of average ability. Religious fanaticism is inalienable from religious ignorance. Fortunately none of the political parties of the Sudan really meant what it professed. Political propaganda among the masses was the end.

The Republican Party was the most explicit party in outlining a program for the formation of an Islamic state — only we did not call it Islamic. We were aiming at universality, because universality is the order of the day. Only the universal contents of Islam were tapped. What do I mean? This brings me back to the idea of the renewal of Islam which I promised to discuss.

Intrinsically Islam means peace. "Peace be with you" is the form of greetings of the Muslims at the times of day or night. You must be in peace with yourself, with your fellow creatures and with God.

This status cannot be attained merely by wishing for it. It comes at the end of a long drawn-out spiritual experience....

The central belief in Islam is monotheism. Monotheism means that God alone is the architect of every thing

that happens inside us, to us or to the elements, visible or invisible, of the universe around us. God is the Embodiment of Kindness, Knowledge, and Wisdom. That being that, good is fundamental, and evil only a lapsing phase. ...

Our present civilization of collectivism and impersonal bigness is giving way to the age of small things -- the individual, the-man-in-the-street. Every individual is, authentically, an end in himself. He is not a means to any other end. He — even if he is an imbecile — is a "God" in the making, and must be given the full opportunity to develop as such.

Liberty is the prerequisite need. Men must be free from all dehumanizing influences — poverty, ignorance, and fear.

Real democracy is the answer. The central problem of democracy has always been to reconcile the needs of the individual with the claims of society...

Socialism is also reconcilable with democracy, Islam, renewed, would provide the legislative ground-work for the human society, in this planet as a whole, that would live in a democracy reconciled with socialism. It would also help the individual to be himself.

Here I must stop. I left a great deal unsaid. Writing in English, on a subject like this, does not afford me the chance of clarity I could, otherwise, have mastered in Arabic. If what I said here can be of any help to you my labor is, thereby, rewarded. Should you feel the need to labor any point by a fresh set of questions, you are welcome.

I hope you are enjoying your stay with us out here.

Evolution of Shari'a, from The Second Message of Islam by Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, Translated by Saad Abunoura

It is a big blunder to assume that Islamic Shari'a in the seventh century with all its minutiae holds valid for implementation in the twentieth century. This is because the

difference between the seventh century society and that of the twentieth century is incomparable. Any one who has such awareness needs not to expatiate on this fact as it speaks volumes for itself. Hence, we are left with two options. Either Islam, as brought to us by the impeccable Prophet in Quran, is capable to accommodate the potentialities of the twentieth century society and to undertake the guidance of such society in the fields of legislation and ethics. Or otherwise its capability ran out at the limitation of regulating the seventh century society and the likes succeeding societies, and hence the humanity of the twentieth century has to abandon Islam and seek solutions for its problems in other ideologies, a matter that is not upheld by any Moslem.

However, Moslems are not aware of the exigent need to evolve Shari'a. They assume that the problems encountered in the twentieth century can be accommodated and solved by the same legislation that accommodated and solved the problems of the seventh century. This is mere ignorance.

Moslems proclaim that Islamic Shari'a is a perfect legislation. No doubt this is true. However, the perfection of Shari'a lies in its capability to evolve and accommodate the potentialities of the social and individual life and to direct and guide this life towards consistent elevation, no matter how complex this social and individual life in

terms of activity, vitality and rejuvenation.....

Mahmoud Mohammed Taha's statement before the court of Mahallawy, January 7, 1985

I have repeatedly declared my view that the September 1983 [Shari'a] laws violate Islamic Shari'a and Islam itself. Moreover, these laws have distorted Islamic Shari'a Law and Islam and made them repugnant. Furthermore, these laws were enacted and utilized to terrorize the people and humiliate them into submission. These laws also jeopardized the national unity of country.

These are my objections from the theoretical point of view. At the practical level, the judges enforcing these laws lack the necessary technical qualifications. They have also morally failed to resist placing themselves under the control of the executive authorities which exploited them in violating the rights of citizens, humiliating the people, distorting Islam, insulting intellect and intellectuals, and humiliating political opponents. For all these reasons, I am not prepared to cooperate with any court that has betrayed the independence of the judiciary and allowed itself to be used as a tool for humiliating the people, insulting free thought, and persecuting political opponents.

Muslims and Democracy

ABDOU FILALI-ANSARY

Abdou Filali-Ansary is co-founder and former editor of the Moroccan quarterly Prologues: revue maghrébine du livre, a French-Arabic journal of philosophy, literature, and the social sciences based in Casablanca. He is director of the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) in London. He was also founding director of the King Abdul-Aziz Foundation for Islamic Studies and Human Sciences in Casablanca, Morocco, and secretary-general of the Mohammed V University in Rabat, having also taught modern philosophy there. He is the author of Reformer l'Islam? Une introduction aux débats contemporains (2003). He has contributed widely to the academic discourse on Islam and modernity and on democratization and civil society in the Middle East, and has written numerous books and articles on Islam's reformist traditions. The essay below was excerpted from an article which appeared in the July 1999 issue of the Journal of Democracy.

THE PAST is often held to weigh especially heavily on Muslim countries, particularly as regards their present-day receptivity to democracy.

I do not dispute that past history has had an overwhelming and decisive influence in shaping the contemporary features and attitudes of Muslim societies. But the past that is most relevant today is not, as is commonly thought, the early centuries of Islamic history, but rather the nineteenth-century encounter of Muslims with the modernizing West.

It is widely believed that the key to understanding contemporary Muslim societies is to be found in a structure of beliefs and traditions that was devised and implemented at (or shortly after) the moment at which they adopted Islam. ... This view has been subjected to intense criticism by a number of scholars, but it still influences dominant attitudes in academia and, with much more devastating effects, in the media.

This theory rests on two assumptions: first, that the past is ever-present and is much more determining than present-day conditions; and second, that the character of Muslim societies has been determined by a specific and remote period in their past during which the social and political order that continues to guide them was established.... The ultimate conclusion lurking behind these considerations is that, due to the overwhelming presence and influence of that particular part of their past, the societies in question are incapable of democratization....

Apart from the many other criticisms that have been directed against this set of views, it should be emphasized that it is not based on any solid historical knowledge about the way in which this “implicit constitution” was shaped and implemented or imposed. Some of its proponents refer to a normative system that was never really

enacted: They invoke the model of the “rightly guided” caliphate, which lasted, at most, for about three decades after the death of the Prophet. Many others cite instead the social order that prevailed during the Middle Ages in societies where Muslims were a majority or where political regimes were established in the name of Islam. In both of these versions, however, the power of this past to determine the present remains, by and large, mysterious. It is simply taken for granted, with no explanation given about why the past has had such a far-reaching and pervasive effect in these societies. To understand how the belief in these misconceptions was born and came to influence contemporary attitudes so powerfully, we must turn to a particular moment in modern times — the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century.

A Tenacious Misunderstanding

The earliest intellectual encounters between Muslims and Europeans in modern times took the form of sharp confrontations. Jamal-Eddin Al-Afghani (1838-97), one of the first and most prominent Muslim thinkers and activists in the struggle against despotism, became famous for engaging in a controversy against European secularists ... Al-Afghani attacked the positivist ideologues of his century, who were deeply convinced that religion was responsible for social backwardness and stagnation and that scientific progress would soon lead to its disappearance. Through his choice of terminology, Al-Afghani implicitly equated these nineteenth-century positivists with the seventh-century opponents of the Prophet. For Muslim readers, this formulation defined the terms of a large and enduring misunderstanding. From then on, secularism was seen as being intimately related to, if not simply the same thing as, atheism. The confusion was taken a step

further when, some decades later, other Muslim authors wishing to coin a term for secularism, and either ignoring Al-Afghani's choice of the term *Dahriyin* or feeling that it was inappropriate, chose *ladini*, which literally means nonreligious or areligious.

These initial choices of terminology gave birth to the opposition in the mind of Muslims between, on the one hand, the system of belief and the social order that they inherited and lived in, and on the other, the alternative adopted by the Europeans. ... The feeling that has prevailed since then among Muslims is that there is a strict and irreducible opposition between two systems — Islam and non-Islam. To be a secularist has meant to abandon Islam, to reject altogether not only the religious faith but also its attendant morality and the traditions and rules that operate within Muslim societies. It therefore has been understood as a total alienation from the constituent elements of the Islamic personality and as a complete surrender to unbelief, immorality, and self-hatred, leading to a disavowal of the historic identity and civilization inherited from illustrious ancestors. It is worth noting that the vast majority of Muslims in the nineteenth century, even those who were part of the educated elite, lived in total ignorance both of the debates going on in Europe about religion and its role in the social order and of the historical changes reshaping European societies. They were not aware of the distinction between atheism and secularism. The consequences of this misunderstanding still profoundly shape the attitudes of Muslims today.

Thus secularism became known to Muslims for the first time through a controversy against those who were supposed to be their “hereditary enemies.” ... Hence the choice of a term for the concept of secularism was decisive. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth, the confrontation with the colonial powers, thought to be the carriers and defenders of a mixture of aggressive Christian proselytism and of the new secularism, played an important role in strengthening this dualism. In the diverse conflicts that local populations waged to defend their independence, identity and religion became intimately fused. The oppositions between local and intruder, between Muslim and European, between believer and secularist were, in one way or another, conflated. The resulting polarization came to dominate all attitudes and approaches to questions related to religion, politics, and the social order.

One of the most striking consequences of this evolution is that Islam now appears to be the religion that is most

hostile to secularization and to modernity in general. Yet intrinsically Islam would seem to be the religion closest to modern views and ideals, and thus the one that would most easily accommodate secularization. “The high culture form of Islam,” writes Ernest Gellner, “is endowed with a number of features — unitarianism, a rule-ethic, individualism, scriptualism, puritanism, an egalitarian aversion to mediation and hierarchy, a fairly small load of magic — that are congruent, presumably, with requirements of modernity or modernisation.”¹ In a similar vein, Mohamed Charfi observes that, on the level of principles, Islam should favor individual freedoms and the capacity for religious choice. The historical developments noted above, however, caused Muslim societies to evolve in the opposite direction — toward the loss of individual autonomy and total submission to the community and the state.² ...

From Settlement to System

This polarization, which still determines the type of questions that can be asked, rests on two main prejudices: The first is that Islam is a “system,” and should be treated as a structure of rules. The dubious character of this assumption has been clearly pointed out by the eminent scholar of comparative religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith: “[T]he term *nizam* [or] ‘system,’ is commonplace in the twentieth century in relation to Islam. This term, however, does not occur in the Quran, nor indeed does any word from this root; and there is some reason for wondering whether any Muslim ever used this concept religiously before modern times. The explicit notion that life should be or can be ordered according to a system, even an ideal one, and that it is the business of Islam to provide such a system, seems to be a modern idea”³ Once Islam has been defined in this way, it can be used to assess whether other new or alien concepts can be accommodated within it and to decide the degree of their compatibility with its presumed and predefined content. This stance, however, reflects a particular attitude toward religion, not a particular feature of Islam.

The second prejudice is more insidious. It is based on the confusion of Islam as a religion with Islam as a civilization. This confusion is deeply entrenched, again because of prevailing linguistic usages both in Arabic and in European languages. For Islam, no distinction has been drawn comparable to that between “Christianity” and “Christendom.” The same word was, and still is, used to refer both to a set of beliefs and rituals and to the life of

¹ Quoted by Samuel Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” in Marc F. Plattner and Larry Diamond, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 19.

² Mohamed Charfi, *Islam et liberté: le malentendu historique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 191.

³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York, 1962), 117.

the community of believers through time and space. Only recently, thanks to the work of historian Marshall G.S. Hodgson, has the necessity of drawing a sharp line between Islam and “Islamdom” been recognized as essential for explaining key phenomena in the history of Muslims.⁴ Islamdom, in its golden age, was a social and political order built on norms adopted from Islamic sources but specifically adapted to the conditions of the time (only at a later stage were these formulated as explicit rules). This enabled Muslims in the Middle Ages to create and maintain a world civilization attuned to the circumstances of the era.

Muslims at that time lived within polities bound by Shari’a, yet did not consider the political regimes to which they were subjected to be in conformity with Islamic principles. The rulers were considered to be legal but not really legitimate. Even though they were not fully legitimate, they had to be obeyed, but only to avoid a greater evil, the Fitna (the great rebellion or anarchy). ... Muslims came to understand that it was no longer possible to implement the fully legitimate system of Khilafah, the virtuous or rightly guided caliphate, that the republican ideal was out of reach, and that they had to accept the rule of despots. They could, however, limit the extent of the power accorded to autocratic rulers by invoking Shari’a, to which a sacred character had come to be attributed. In this way, at least some degree of autonomy from the political authorities, and minimal protection against arbitrariness, could be attained. This is what one may label the “medieval compromise” or “medieval settlement.” The sacralization of Shari’a achieved through this process led to another far-reaching consequence: Ever since, Islam has been seen as a set of eternal rules, standing over society and history, to be used as a standard for judging reality and behavior.

In fact, Shari’a was never a system of law in the sense in which it is understood nowadays....What happened in the nineteenth century was the transformation of the medieval settlement into a system in the modern sense of the word ... In the face of this duality, people adopted an attitude of resignation, accepting that the norm was, at least temporarily, out of reach. By contrast, some modern Muslims have elevated the actual conditions and rules under which their medieval forefathers lived to the status of a norm, and decided that they too have to live by these rules if they are to be true Muslims.

This has led to the contradictions of the present day: Secularization has been taking place for decades in Muslim societies, yet prevailing opinion opposes the

concept of secularism and everything that comes with it (like modernity and democracy). As a historical process, secularization has so transformed life in Muslim societies that religion, or rather traditions built on religion, no longer supply the norms and rules that govern the social and political order. In almost all countries with substantial communities of Muslims, positive law has replaced Shari’a (except with regard to matters of “personal status,” and more specifically the status of women, where the traditional rules generally continue to be maintained). Modern institutions — nation-states, modern bureaucracies, political parties, labor unions, corporations, associations, educational systems — have been adopted everywhere, while traditional institutions are, at best, relegated to symbolic roles. ... The evolution from the premodern attitude, combining resignation toward despotism with millennial hopes, to the typically modern combination of sharp political determination and desire for this-worldly progress, is clearly a visible consequence of these very changes, that is, of the secularization that has actually been going on in Muslim societies.

Secularism, however, continues to be rejected as an alien doctrine, allegedly imposed by the traditional enemies of Muslims and their indigenous accomplices. Islam is seen as an eternal and immutable system, encompassing every aspect of social organization and personal morality, and unalterably opposed to all conceptions and systems associated with modernity. This creates an artificial debate and an almost surrealist situation. The changes that are evident in the actual lives of individuals and groups are ignored, while ideological stances are maintained with great determination. Secularists and, more generally, social scientists are often pushed into adopting defensive positions or withdrawing altogether from public debates. Frequently they feel obliged to prove that they are not guilty of hostility toward religious belief, morality, and the achievements of Islamic civilization.....

Attitudes Toward Democracy

We saw that, as a consequence of the inversion of norms that occurred in Muslim societies during the nineteenth century ... shari’a-bound societies are now equated with “truly” Islamic societies. Implementing the shari’a has become the slogan for those who seek a “return” to Islam in its original and pure form, which is held to embody the eternal truth and ultimate pattern for Muslims.

What could the status of democracy be in societies that have evolved in this manner? One first must perceive the difference between a question posed in this way, which attempts to interpret the actual evolution of particular

⁴ Marshall G.S. Hodgson’s main work is *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). A summary of his conclusions appeared in a collection of articles published posthumously under the title *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, edited, with an introduction and a conclusion, by Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

societies and their prevailing conceptions, and the kinds of questions frequently asked by fundamentalists and by some scholars, such as: “What is the status of democracy with regard to Islam?” This latter formulation posits Islam as a system that one can use to evaluate everything else.

One can discern two possible answers to the question of democracy as I have posed it. The first accepts the strict identification between Islam and shari’a-bound systems, and thus rules out any possible future for democracy in this particular environment. The second identifies democracy itself with a kind of religious faith or “mystical ideal.” ... The concept hovers, like a mystical symbol, in the background of the discussion on democratization in the Middle East, with an implied assumption that liberal democracy constitutes an ideal polity where the common good is realized by means of the population deciding issues through the election of individuals who carry out the “people’s will.”⁵

There even appears to be a certain trend toward adopting this second attitude. More and more fundamentalists accept the idea that Islam is not opposed to democracy; some argue that by embracing the principle of shura (or “consultation”), for example, Islam has always favored the kind of relationship between rulers and ruled that democracy entails. Democracy may even end up being described as a Western adaptation of an originally Islamic principle. Many fundamentalists are prepared to go as far as possible to support democracy — with the notable reservation that it should be maintained only within the limits set by shari’a. A “guided democracy” is the system envisioned by many fundamentalists and traditionalists of different sorts...

This shows how much popularity, or rather prestige, democracy enjoys within contemporary Muslim societies. This support for democracy reflects in some cases a realistic recognition that it responds to the needs of contemporary societies, that it is indeed the only alternative that really works and makes possible the peaceful and rational management of public affairs. ... In many other cases, however, this newly favorable reception of democracy arises from its being viewed as another utopia.⁶ While this may have certain immediate advantages, especially in contexts where democratic systems are in place or where democratization is under way, it may also encourage attitudes that are harmful to the longer-range prospects for democratization. For it may lead to democracy’s being seen as an alien or unattainable ideal, and thus strengthen the idea that the Islamic alternative is more workable and better adapted to the conditions of Muslim societies.

In other words, democracy may be treated in the same way as other modern ideologies, such as nationalism and socialism, which recently enjoyed a brief ascendancy in some Muslim countries. Both nationalism and socialism were indeed endowed with a quasi-religious aura; they were adopted as ultimate worldviews and total beliefs, and considered as magical remedies to all the ills and problems of society. This kind of approach would only deepen the initial misunderstanding on the part of Muslims of both secularization and democracy. The result would be to strengthen the view that Islam and democracy represent two irreducibly separate and opposing outlooks, even if some mixture of Islam and democracy were to be envisaged and tentatively implemented.

Replacing Democracy with Its “Building Blocks”

What might be an appropriate strategy for democrats in this situation? For those who are convinced that democracy is not a new religion for humanity, but that it provides the most efficient means to limit abuses of power and protect individual freedoms, enabling individuals to seek their own path to personal accomplishment, there can be a variety of approaches. The most effective ones avoid the reified and “utopianized” version of democracy, either by highlighting such concepts as “good governance” or by supporting some of the “building blocks of democracy,” that is, conceptions and systems that are linked to or part of democracy.

Replacing highly prestigious and, at the same time, highly contentious notions with terms that refer to easily understood facts and ideas is neither a retreat from conceptual clarity nor a defeatist position. A few years ago Mohamed Abed Jabri was bitterly attacked by a large number of Arab intellectuals for proposing to replace the slogan of secularization with such notions as rationality and democratization. Secularization, he contended, had become a charged issue for Arab public opinion because it was understood as being more or less equivalent to Westernization; its actual contents, however, such as rational management of collective affairs and democracy, could hardly be rejected once they were understood and accepted in their true meaning. In a similar vein, Niblock has observed: “Focusing on the ‘big’ issue of democratization has detracted from the attention which can be given to a range of more specific issues which affect populations critically. Among these are the level of corruption, the effectiveness of bureaucratic organization, the independence of the judiciary, the existence of well-conceived and clearly-articulated laws, freedom of expression, the respect given to minorities, attitudes to human rights

⁵ Tim Niblock, “Democratisation: A Theoretical and Practical Debate,” *The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (November 1998): 221-34.

⁶ Tim Niblock, “Democratisation,” 226.

issues, and the extent of inequalities which may create social disorder.”⁷

In order to avoid a new and devastating misunderstanding that would present democracy as an alternative to religion and make its adoption appear to be a deviation from religious rectitude, it is essential to renounce quixotic confrontations and to accept some “tactical” concessions — especially when the use of appropriate terminology can bring greater clarification without sacrificing substance. ... a more “conceptual” approach is required, one that would help present democracy in terms understandable and acceptable to Muslim publics, and thus bridge the gap between a “mystical” representation and a more realistic comprehension. It would answer the need for analytical terms that can clarify the conceptions and adjust the expectations of Muslims regarding democracy, and that can encourage the kind of political support that is equally distant from mythical or ideological fervor on the one hand, and egotistical or individualist attitudes on the other.

... Finding the right terms is not easy. Interpretations of democracy and democratization are so rich and diverse that it may be difficult to reach a consensual view on the subject. All such interpretations, however, seem to point to some basic features as being essential conditions for achieving real democracy. It is possible to underscore at least three such conditions that seem to be required for the particular case of contemporary Muslim societies: 1) the updating of religious conceptions; 2) the rule of law; and 3) economic growth.

1. The *updating of religious conceptions* should be understood not in terms of the Reformation that occurred in sixteenth-century Christian Europe, but rather as the general evolution of religious attitudes that has affected Christians and Jews (except within limited circles of fundamentalists) since the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries and achieved its full effects only in the early decades of this century. The Reformation is a singular event in history, linked to a particular environment and to specific conditions. It cannot, as some observers are suggesting nowadays, be “replicated” in the context of another religion and under twentieth-century conditions.

There is, however, another process of change in religious attitudes that, although it first occurred in one particular environment, is of more universal scope and significance and seems to be related to modernization in general...

An evolution in this direction has proceeded quite far among Christians and Jews, but has made only limited headway among Muslims. The reification of Islam that began in the nineteenth century is the most important obstacle to such progress. Thus it is significant that a number of contemporary Muslim thinkers agree that new attitudes toward religion are now required both by a scrupulous interpretation of sacred sources and by modern conditions. Their teachings imply a strict separation between the sacred message of Islam and Muslim attempts to implement it in the course of history, including the political systems and legislation created in the “golden age.” ... This trend (if one can so label a collection of otherwise unrelated thinkers who come to similar conclusions) has received little coverage in the media. Its influence has also been restricted by the educational policies of modern states and by intimidation on the part of the fundamentalists.

2. The *rule of law* is a notion that expresses something that Muslims have longed for since the early phases of their history, and have felt to be part of the message of Islam. ... Fundamentalists claim that the only way of satisfying this aspiration for lawfulness is by implementing shari’a, which they present as the sole remedy for the arbitrariness and abuse of power common in most “Muslim” states. This argument can be countered by showing that the modern concept of “rule of law” is clearer, more operational, and easier to monitor, and thus that the dichotomy of “Islam (or rather shari’a) vs. despotism” trumpeted by fundamentalist propaganda is not the whole story...
3. *Economic growth* here refers to the idea of continuous progress, which is a basic component of modernity, replacing the messianic hopes and political resignation dominant in pre-modern societies with the voluntarism and this-worldly resourcefulness of modern times. Democracy, as an expression of the free will of the citizens, cannot thrive if no collective will is allowed to surface or to have a say about the changes that society is compelled to undergo. Economic growth offers the prospect of an improvement in the conditions of life, which seems to be required in every modern society, and all the more so in “developing” ones. No prospect of democratization can be envisaged if no economic growth is actually taking place. ...

⁷ Ibid., 229.

SECTION III:

Governance in Muslim Countries: Pushing for Democratic Change

THE READINGS in this section illustrate the political problems and personal challenges faced by democrats and human rights activists in Muslim countries and their strategies for dealing with them, practically and politically. It is a diverse collection. It includes formerly communist countries, theocracies, and countries still dominated by a patriarchal tribal culture. It illustrates the breadth of opinion on this issue — and it is by no means an exhaustive accounting of views. Rather, it gives a platform to Muslims who believe that democracy and democratic change are fully compatible with Islam and can be accommodated by contemporary Muslim culture, in all its diversity.

Many factors that affect the prospects for democratic governance are not covered, such as the lack of sustainable economic growth policies and the low literacy rate in Arab and African Muslim countries. For individuals interested in pursuing that aspect of the issue, the United Nations Development Program reports on the Arab world are a good reference point. Governance issues present a complex picture and with these six readings, we try to present a facet of it.

In the first reading, **The Rise of Muslim Democracy**, Vali Nasr, an Iranian-born intellectual and foreign policy specialist, outlines the elements that must be present for democracy to emerge in Muslim countries, which include “established [political] parties, a robust private sector, and an ongoing democratic process,” and argues that Muslim democracy offers the best bulwark against extremism. In the second reading, **The Secular State and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Bringing Africa into the Debate**,

Penda Mbow of Senegal argues that Islam and modernity are “not incompatible” and that within Islam, there is room for the study and acceptance of human rights. She urges Muslims to reinterpret sacred texts in the light of contemporary change, especially with regard to the role and rights of women in society.

Similarly, in the third reading, **The Rights of Women**, Ayesha Imam of Nigeria attacks that country’s *Shari’a* Penal Code, arguing that its provisions are not rooted in the Koran. She notes that Muslim societies are diverse, and reflecting the “various needs and changing concerns of different” communities. She defends the right of Muslim women to push for change.

In the fourth reading, **Address to the 5th Congregation of the Erk Party**, exiled Uzbek democracy leader Muhammad Salih notes that Uzbekistan is still suffering from 75 years of being “soaked in atheism and atheistic communism ideologies.” He denounces dictatorship and terrorism, and argues that Muslims, just like non-Muslims, want to live in a peaceful democracy.

In reading five, **Reaching the Next Muslim Generation**, the late Mohamed Charfi of Tunisia discusses the importance of education to democratic development and points to the threat posed by the *madrassa* schools that teach extremist Islam.

And finally, reading six features the **Campaign for Good Governance**, in which Zainab Hawa Bangura of Sierra Leone, daughter of a Muslim cleric, singles out the traditions of autocratic, hereditary rule in Africa, rather than Islam, as the source of the region’s current problems. She argues that democracy is the answer.

The Rise of Muslim Democracy

VALI NASR

*Vali Nasr is professor of International Politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He is a specialist on political Islam and has worked extensively on political and social developments in the Muslim world, with a focus on the relation of religion to politics, violence, and democratization. Dr. Nasr has also published numerous academic articles as well as several books, including *Forces of Fortune: The Rise of a New Muslim Middle Class and What It Means for Our World* (2009), *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (2006); *Democracy in Iran* (2006), and *The Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (2001).*

*This chapter is excerpted from an abridged version of an article published in the April 2005 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*.*

THE DEVELOPMENT of democracy in the Muslim world is following many paths. The emergence and unfolding of one important trend, Muslim Democracy, which has developed in practice and from the ground up, is a hopeful if still somewhat ambiguous trend. It reflects Muslim experience with democracy in particular political arenas separate from the general debate about Islam and democracy. It is impressive that Muslim democracy has become a “fact on the ground” over the last fifteen years. However, the “Muslim Democrat” label has been shunned thus far by its agents and the bulk of scholarly and political attention has focused on how to promote religious reform within Islam as a precursor to the acceptance of democracy in the Muslim world. Yet, since the early 1990s, political openings in several Muslim-majority countries — all outside the Arab world — have resulted in the electoral successes for Islamic-oriented (but non-Islamist) parties.

Unlike the Islamists, who claim that Islam commands the pursuit of a shari’a state, Muslim Democrats view political life with a practical eye. They focus on creating viable electoral platforms and stable governing coalitions, consisting of both Islamic and secular interests, within a respected democratic structure. Islamists consider democracy a tool that might be useful in their primary goal of building an Islamic state. By contrast, Muslim Democrats use Islamic values to help them win votes within a legitimate democratic structure.

The rise of Muslim Democrats has triggered the combination of Muslim religious values¹ into political platforms designed to win regular elections. While complications and setbacks will likely stall progress, this consolidation of Muslim values into democratic political proposals will probably define the relationship between Islam and

democracy, at least in several Muslim-majority countries. These political changes have more promise with respect to building a bridge between Islam and democracy than possible religious and ideological changes within Islam.

Over the past fifteen years, open electoral competition in several Muslim-majority countries illustrates the trend in Muslim political behavior. The examples of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey suggest that parties and their platforms will likely dominate the strategic “middle ground” of politics. In most of these countries’ recent election contests, center-right political parties have obtained a majority of the seats in parliament, while Islamist political parties were marginalized. For example, in 2001, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) captured 64 percent of the seats in parliament and, thus, sidelined the country’s Islamist party, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). These recent histories suggest that, in these Muslim societies, those parties managing to integrate Muslim values into broader right-of-center political platforms are more likely than either the Islamist or the liberalist and secularist parties to dominate the important “middle ground” of politics. These “middle ground” parties can appeal to a wide range of voters, which will make them politically successful.

Muslim Democrats can originate from either Islamist or secularist points of departure. For example, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey has Islamist roots, but the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) sprung from a nonreligious political party. However, not all Muslim Democratic parties have been successful in securing the middle ground of Muslim politics. Yet, the trend is clear. Muslim Democracy has emerged not from careful theoretical planning, but from a practical need for addressing the opportunities and demands created by elections in Muslim-majority countries. Parties are induced to making

¹ These values are drawn from Islam’s teaching on ethics, morality, the family, rights, social relations, and commerce, for example.

compromises and practical decisions in order to maximize their interests and those of their constituents within democratic governing structures.²

Liberalism and Consolidation

Muslim Democracy does not always flow from ideas of Islamic moderation, and it may not always act as a liberalizing force. In some cases, Muslim Democrats have backed the enforcement of Islamic law or restrictions on women and minorities, not out of religious conviction, but because of strategic deals made with more conservative parties to secure votes in societies where conservative Islamic practices dominate. However, this reality is not yet a cause for alarm. The commitment to liberal and secular values is a necessary condition for Muslim Democracy's final success, not for its first steps. The inherent competition of the democratic process will transform the unsecular tendencies of Muslim Democratic parties into a lasting commitment to democratic values.³

Muslim Democrats are not arguing for a change in Islamic teachings as a path to democracy. Instead they are working in the trenches to secure votes and, thus, are changing Islam's relation to politics. These political activities, rather than theoretical or ideological arguments, will spark changes in Muslims' attitudes toward society and politics. In this way, the emergence of Muslim Democracy suggests that political change will precede religious change.

Evidence now available from events in the Muslim world reveals the shape of Muslim Democracy: what it stands for, who supports it and what factors have contributed to its evolution, successes and failures. Muslim Democracy is a relatively new political phenomenon about which there is still much to learn.

For some time, it was assumed that the key process leading to democracy in the Muslim world would be an intellectual endeavor, a moderation of the Islamist perspective or even an Islamic Revolution. This assumption was based on the dominance of Islamist ideology, which calls for the institution of a utopian Islamic state (dominated by authoritarian politics), across the Muslim world for nearly a quarter-century. The Islamist surge since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 led many to argue that ideological moderation must precede political moderation because Islamists would only use democracy to seize power. Once the Islamists were in power, the institution of an Islamic state would swiftly follow. Therefore, as the argument goes, democracy would have to wait until the liberalization of Islamic thought was realized and the Islamists were no longer a threat. However, it has not been the intellectuals who

have given shape to Muslim Democracy. Politicians, such as Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia and Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan, are grappling with the key questions emanating from the interaction of Muslim values with democratic institutions and the nature of Muslim voting behavior.

Interestingly, the rise of Muslim Democracy has occurred as the same time as a steady increase in the religious consciousness within Muslim-majority societies. However, this resurgence of religious conviction has not led to electoral victories for Islamist parties. Rather, the freedom of Muslim Democrats from intellectual baggage has allowed them to move nimbly with the changing tides of electoral circumstance.

While Muslim Democrats lack a clear, unified message across countries, the degree of commonality across these various areas of the Muslim world suggests that Muslim Democracy is a major trend and not a cluster of unrelated political accidents. The differences across the independent examples of Muslim Democracy are still important. In Turkey and Malaysia, Muslim Democracy is a formula for electoral success that has yet to result in a lasting vision for governance. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, it is only an ad hoc political arrangement between right-of-center and Islamist parties that has captured the middle, but still needs to resolve internal political conflicts and differences.

The experiments with Muslim Democracy also allude to uncertainty about its future path. The Muslim Democratic movements could become more like one another, or they could begin to take diverging paths. Muslim Democracy could prove an independent force for moderation within Islam or it could come to be a reflection rather than a shaper of society's religious values. For all these reasons, it will bear close scrutiny in the years ahead.

Key Factors

The rise of Muslim Democracy has depended on the interplay of several factors. First, Muslim Democracy has surfaced in countries where democracy emerged after the military formally withdrew from politics, but remained a powerful player. Second, Muslim Democracy has emerged in countries where the private sector matters. Third, Muslim Democracy evolved in countries where strong competition over votes existed.

Military involvement

Military involvement in politics has had three notable effects. First, it limited the Islamists' room to maneuver politically. Second, it gave all parties an incentive to avoid confronting the military while angling for advantage within the democratic process. Finally, the military's meddling

² This reliance on campaign-trail methods is reminiscent of Christian Democracy as it emerged in Europe during the first part of the 20th century.

³ Again this story parallels the history of the Christian Democrats in Europe.

in politics led to more opportunities (elections, political realignments, and shifts in coalitions) for experimentation with new political formulas.

The experiences of Turkey and Pakistan with military involvement had similar results, even though the military in Turkey sided with the secularist groups while the Pakistani military favored Islamists. In Turkey, the Islamists learned to adopt practical policies to avoid the generals' wrath, while Pakistan's right-of-center party, the PML, saw Muslim Democracy as the means to strengthen a frail system of elected civilian rule and the party's standing within it. In both cases, "Muslim Democratic" parties sought to reduce military pressure on politics through a readiness to compromise with generals as well as through efforts to build broad coalitions that the generals would hesitate to confront. While Indonesian and Bangladeshi experiences with the military were somewhat different than those of Turkey and Pakistan and, furthermore, Malaysia's experience had nothing to do with military prompting, it seems clear that Muslim Democracy is more likely to emerge in countries where Islamist and secularist forces have a shared interest in protecting the democratic process from the military.

Private sector

The less state-dependent and more integrated into the world economy a country's private sector is, the more likely that country is to see Muslim Democracy gain traction as a political force. Muslim Democracy, in short, needs the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie needs Muslim Democracy because it combines the religious values of the middle and lower-middle classes with policies that serve their economic interests. In the 1980s, Turkey's Prime Minister (later President) Turgut Ozal (d.1993) implemented many policies that led to an economic liberalization in Turkey and the growth of a vibrant, independent private sector. In Indonesia, the later years of Suharto's regime saw the mixing of support for moderate Islam with engagement in global trade. While Bangladesh and Pakistan lag behind Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia in terms of their participation in global trade, they also have robust private sectors. This evidence seems to show that the deeper a country's involvement in the global economy and the stronger (more independent) its private sector, the more likely Muslim Democratic movements will emerge and the more Islamically moderate that movement will be.

Electoral competition

In situations where there is strong electoral competition, parties will feel pressed to act pragmatically because no one party can easily dominate the democratic process. Additionally, the existence of multiparty systems in each of these countries strengthens electoral competitiveness

because each party has a strong organizational structure and historical significance. Despite bouts of military rule, multiparty political structures have helped foster a smooth return to competitive elections once the political processes have been reopened. These regular competitive elections have pushed parties at both ends of the political spectrum (i.e. Islamists and secularists) toward practical political platforms. The net effect of this tendency is to reward moderate political parties — the game is to win the middle. Muslim Democracy emerges in these contexts because non-Islamist groups are able to more effectively integrate those who vote based on Muslim values into broader platforms and wider coalitions than Islamists can.

In Muslim countries where the factors listed above do not exist or are weak, the prospects that Muslim Democracy will emerge are much lower. However, if and when Muslim Democracy captures a clear and unified message across countries in the Muslim world, it might become more easily exportable to countries whose circumstances will not permit Muslim Democracy to arise "from scratch." There is also evidence to support the transferability of Muslim Democracy. For example, in the 1990s, Pakistan's PML consciously sought to imitate Malaysia's UMNO.

The rise of Muslim Democracy suggests that the values of Muslims (not to be confused with the demands of Islamists) can interact with practical election strategies to play the main role in shaping political ideas and driving voter behavior. In the end, Muslim Democracy represents the triumph of practice over theory. The future of Muslim politics is likely to belong to those who can speak to Muslim values and ethics, but within the framework of political agendas fit to thrive in democratic settings. ...

...Even at this early stage it is clear that the sheer competitive logic inherent in open politics is driving Muslim Democracy forward, especially in places where gradual democratization has ensured the continuation of that competition through repeated elections. Established parties, a robust private sector, and an ongoing democratic process are the ingredients that need to be in the mix if Muslim Democracy is to put down roots and blossom. Muslim Democracy offers the Muslim world the promise of moderation. As Islamists find themselves caught up in the Muslim Democratic dynamic, they will find themselves increasingly facing the hard choice of changing or suffering marginalization. Finally, it is Muslim Democracy that offers the whole world its best hope for an effective bulwark against radical and violent fundamentalism. Muslim Democracy provides a model for pragmatic change, which will in turn be the herald (not the follower) of more liberal Islamic thought and practice. As both a model and historical record, it deserves attention and scrutiny as part of the larger debate on the future of democracy in the Muslim world.

The Secular State and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Bringing Africa into the Debate

PENDA MBOW

Dr. Penda Mbow is professor of history at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal. She is also president of the Senegalese Citizens' Movement. She has been published widely on African political and social issues, often focusing on the role of Islam in Africa. She has previously served as Senegal's minister of culture and as cultural advisor to the Senegalese department of ethnography and historical heritage. Dr. Mbow has received numerous academic awards, including a Fulbright grant to study at Michigan State University and a Rockefeller Foundation award for research at the Bellagio Center in Italy. In recognition of her achievements as a scholar, thinker, and political activist, she was named Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur Française (Knight of the French Legion of Honor) in 2003 and Commandeur de l'Ordre National du Mérite in 1999. Her thoughts below are excerpted from an article written in 2006 for Women Living Under Muslim Laws, "exploring issues around secularism."

...What then, is the relationship between Islam and democracy?

This boils down to the issue of secularity. For fundamentalists, democracy is based on shura, i.e. discussion within the community of believers. It also involves referring to those who have the power "to tie and untie" (dhawu-l-hal' wal' aqqi), i.e. those who, after the disappearance of the Caliphs, had the religious knowledge and wisdom to discern true from false. Naturally, advocates of democracy do not share this point of view. Thus, in a country like Senegal where religious brotherhoods play a prominent role, will their followers continue to be seen as followers rather than citizens in times of elections, for example? This takes us back to the issue of the *Ndigguel*, a voting order always followed by the majority of the disciples of a *marabout* (religious leader).

Senegalese society like other societies in the world has been undergoing profound changes. The economic and moral crises have pushed women to the forefront. Women are at the center of the debate regarding modernity in Senegal. They ask for more access to education, a greater role in the decision-making process, and the full implementation of the democratic option in our country. This momentum is seen as a threat by conservatives who try to stop it by stirring up sacred scriptures. How can women fight this conspiracy? They need to learn *Quranic* exegesis in order to find the arguments that advocate equal rights for men and women. An exegesis of the scriptures based in evolution is therefore necessary.

Great Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century have developed an Islamic vision of human rights. Among them are Si Hamza Boubakeur, Ihsan Hamid al-Maf regy, Muhammad Hamidullah, Sinaceur, Ali Merad, Chadine, etc

and Senegalese researchers like El Hadj Rawane Mbaye. With this in mind, it would be mistaken to think that Islam has nothing to do with human rights theories. Studies on this issue focus on three aspects. The first discusses the founding values or the source of the Islamic philosophy; what thinkers say about man's identity, his situation in a divine economy, the meaning of his commitment. The second [explores] the slow conquest or what constitutes the historical dossier of stakes involved; the outstanding points of the debate on religion and human rights. And the third examines the current struggles or the dimension in real life; the prospect of the commitments; the meaning of the religious framework for the defense and development of human rights. In this area other topics are covered: the definition of man, the respect of human dignity, freedom in general, political and individual freedom, individual rights (to life, education, property, etc.).

As this discussion has shown, Islam and modernity are not incompatible. Islam, with *Ijtihad*, gives any Muslim the possibility to make a personal interpretation effort in order to grasp the changes taking place within communities in time and space. Faith does not mean surrendering one's intelligence; on the contrary, Islam is a religion of learning. The evolution of the family, women's status, the relationships between Islam and politics, are all topics that need to be looked into. In the debate on the Family Code reform, Senegalese Christians and women's associations are fighting for the same cause. They advocate for a stable state, for secularity and for the consolidation of citizenship. As we have seen, religion is a reality in democratic processes which can end up causing distortions in public life, in relationships between individuals, between

religious communities and brotherhoods. Control of power relations is justified with reference to religion, which is also used to exclude women from this control of power. In any attempt to search for a rebalancing of the statutes and positions in society, above all it is necessary to reinvent a new approach to Islam so as to define the scope of public

space. Thus, human rights and secularism constitute “spaces” for the liberation and emancipation of women. For them to achieve the ideals of peace and democracy, this presupposes that women have a good command of the evolution of the Islamic discourse, of how Shari’a has been elaborated and what Ijtihad is about.

The Rights of Women

AYESHA IMAM

Dr. Ayesha Imam is a widely published academic who has lectured and carried out research in women's studies and gender analysis at universities and research institutes in Nigeria, the U.K., Canada, and Senegal. She is also a woman's human rights and democratic development activist. Imam is founding director of BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights in Nigeria (BAOBAB is a gigantic tree, native to Africa, which is second only to the sequoia in size). BAOBAB undertakes research, advocacy and education to protect and develop women's legal rights issues under customary, secular, and religious laws. Ayesha Imam is a core group member of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), and coordinated research in eight countries in Africa and the Middle East on the ways in which different systems of laws and social practices combine to structure women's lives in Muslim countries and communities. She is also the former chair of the Africa Democracy Forum, a network of African democracy activists which works on mutual solidarity, information, and skills exchange across the continent. With BAOBAB, Dr. Imam was the 2002 recipient of the John Humphrey Human Rights Award for their work in protecting women's rights under the new Shari'a Penal Codes in Nigeria, which were drafted and implemented in a retrogressive and discriminatory fashion. Below are excerpts from her acceptance speech.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored on behalf of BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights and myself, to accept the conferment of the John Humphrey Freedom Award. When BAOBAB was formed in 1996, it did not occur to us that one day the work we set out to do would be internationally recognized in this way...

Promoting Women's Rights in Muslim Laws

BAOBAB works on women's rights in customary and secular laws, as well as religious laws, but the work for which it is best known — and for which Rights and Democracy have chosen to honor us — is that of defending women's rights in Muslim laws and practices ...

Until 1999, Muslim laws in contemporary Nigeria had been largely uncoded family and personal status laws (marriage, divorce, child custody and maintenance, inheritance). They were not enacted as written statutes. In 1999, beginning with Zamfara state, some states starting passing a series of new Shari'a Acts. In principle, this could have included many areas in economic and social development, such as provisions for the collection and distribution of zakat (the charity tithe, which is one of the five pillars of Islam), or the implementation of regulations prohibiting usury (such as charging interest on loans by moneylenders or banks). In practice, however, in none of the 12 "new Shari'a" states has there been much beyond elaborating and executing punishments for offences like theft, zina (adultery or fornication, depending on marital status), and drinking alcohol.

The politics of the situations in which these new Acts were passed has had the unfortunate consequence of serious shortcomings in their drafting, content and implementation. Even more unfortunately, those politics have also produced claims that the new Shari'a acts of 1999-2002 incorporate perfectly a universal God-given code, and that to raise any issues of possible defects (and therefore of the possibility of removing those defects) is un-Islamic, anti-Shari'a and tantamount to apostasy — in short a politics of intimidation and threat. However, the falsity of allegations like these is clear, when examining the nature of Muslim laws.

There are several "schools" of Muslim legal thought (fiqh). The four main Sunni schools that exist today were formed through the personal allegiance of legal scholars or jurists to the founders from whom each school took its name — Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi, and Hanbali. Each school was influenced by its own specific circumstances of origin. For instance, both Hanafis and Malikis are the representatives of the legal tradition of a particular geographical locality — the former in Kufa, present-day Iraq, and the latter in the Arabian city of Medina. The two later schools, following Abu Hanifa and Al-Shafi developed precisely out of a controversy in jurisprudence (i.e. human reasoning about law). Consequently each school has variations according to the cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts in which they were developed and the philosophy of reasoning that was accepted.

Even the oldest schools of Muslim law did not exist until many decades after the revelation of the Quran and the Prophet's death (peace be upon him). Hence the laws

they outline (commonly collectively referred to as Shari'a or as Islamic law) are clearly not direct divine revelations from Allah, but mediated through human judicial reasoning (ijtihad in Arabic). Amongst the principles to be borne in mind in ijtihad are istihsan (equity) and istihsal (the needs of the community). It was recognized in that "golden period of Islam" that there were legitimate variations in Muslim laws, based on context — and therefore that Shari'a must be subject to progressive development and therefore to change.

Reflecting the various and changing concerns of different societies, Muslim laws are diverse. For instance, orthodox Shia Shari'a permits daughters who have no brothers to be residual heirs, while the Maliki school does not. Hanafi Shari'a enables a woman to choose a husband without her father's permission, Shafi shari'a does not. The schools also vary in their attitudes towards the management of fertility — some permitting family planning and/or abortion while others do not or require differing conditions.

On polygyny (i.e. the marriage of a man to more than one woman at a time) there is wide variation in Muslim legal discourses. The Quran permits polygyny. It does not require it. And it specifies certain conditions that should be fulfilled if polygyny is to occur. Furthermore, it is also known that the surahs on polygyny were revealed after the battle of Uhud when many Muslim men were killed, so that many women and their children were suddenly without a man's contribution to their livelihood and in precarious economic straits. None of foregoing statements are contentious. Yet, Muslim thinking and laws on polygyny varies tremendously. Yusuf Ali and others have argued that the conditions are impossible to fulfil, and therefore that polygyny should be banned. Others have argued on the basis on surah 24:32, that monogamy is clearly preferred. Hence in Tunisia and South Yemen before re-unification, for instance, polygyny was banned or allowed only on very stringent conditions, which had to be validated by a court. At the other end of the spectrum, there is emphasis on the permission to marry polygynously. Hence in Nigeria, for instance, not only is there fierce insistence that polygyny is allowed by immutable law, but men often go further to say that they must marry polygynously in order to be like the Prophet (although the Prophet's first marriage was wholly monogamous and ended only with the sad death of his wife). These and other variations in Muslim law and reasoning have rather significant effects on women's rights and lives.

Muslim laws and consensus of legal scholars and the community (ijma) also change over time. As with polygyny, slavery is permitted in the Quran but not required. Yet Muslim legal thinking has now developed such that Muslim states no longer permit slavery.

Muslim laws are therefore not unchangeable law, to be accepted unquestioningly by all Muslims. In fact, the scholars after whom the four currently accepted schools of sunni Shari'a were named, had no intention of making their views final and binding on all Muslims. Imam Hanbal urged "do not imitate me, or Malik, or al-Shafi, or al-Thawri and derive directly from where they themselves derived." Imam Malik, the founder of the school of fiqh accepted in Nigeria, cautioned that "I am but a human being. I may be wrong and I may be right. So first examine what I say. If it complies with the Book and the Sunnah, then you may accept it. But if it does not comply with them, then you should reject it." So in the views of the very founders of the schools of Shari'a, good Muslims were precisely those who questioned and examined and trusted their own reasoning and beliefs. Furthermore, the founders also found it acceptable that the reasoning of one legal tradition might be considered correct on one issue, but that of another more correct on a different issue.

The unthinking acceptance which dominates most Muslim societies derives from the myth of the "closing of the doors of ijtihad," whereby for the last thousand years and more, legal jurisprudence has ceased to develop in favor of following established models. But it should be noted that this was a political event not a religious requirement. Abu Zahra wrote of the acceptance of ijma (a consensus about the schools of shari'a at that time) in the tenth century that it was "but for the maintenance of national unity and to check individual deviations, that al-ijma was legalized as an authority after the sacred texts." Refusing further ijtihad and legal development is not a religious or divinely sanctioned act. It is not required in the Quran or by the Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet, pbuh). Unfortunately, both existing argumentation and the possibility of developments in Muslim law, especially as regards women's rights, are being blocked in Nigeria, by the fiction that there is only one unchangeable, uncriticisable system of Muslim laws and that this is already in effect in the "new Shari'a" states in Nigeria.

The more immediate and pressing problem, however, is that the new Shari'a Acts criminal legislation and their implementation are a travesty even of the conservative orthodox jurisprudence. Amongst other things, they lack some of the important safeguards in orthodox Muslim jurisprudence, such as the doctrine of shubha, that there should be no conviction where there is any element of doubt; or the requirement of repeated and voluntary confessions if there is not the eye-witness testimony of four witnesses of impeccable character to the willing act of sexual penetration; to the permissibility of the retraction of confessions right up to and including the moment of execution of punishment.

Furthermore, the implementation of the new Shari'a

Acts has clearly been discriminatory against women. By postulating that, by itself, pregnancy outside marriage is evidence of zina (a minority position in Shari'a which is not held by the Hanafi, Hanbali and Shafi schools, nor a variant of the Maliki school), women have been held to a different standard of evidence than men. Pregnant women are required to provide evidence to prove their innocence, but men are not. If the prosecution does not provide independent evidence (such as four eye-witnesses), men can simply walk away, unlike such women. And yet, the Quran specifies that whoever brings an allegation of zina without four witnesses will themselves be guilty of false witness and liable for punishment. In addition, zina, which is defined as a heterosexual act must necessarily include at least one man and one woman. But, more women than men have been both charged and convicted of zina. Women who ought not to even have been charged, have been convicted of zina and sentenced to death, by ignoring the well-established Maliki doctrine of the "sleeping embryo" (kwantace in Hausa), whereby a child born to a woman within a set period after the end of her marriage (in some areas up to seven years), is assumed to be the child of that marriage. Women have also been accused and convicted of zina as prostitutes, for instance, with neither confession nor the testimony of four witnesses to a willing act of sexual intercourse, nor even pregnancy, for evidence.

Another consequence of these factors is to deprive women and girls of any protection under Shari'a from sexual assault or rape. A woman making such a charge would be required to produce male witnesses as evidence. Which men of impeccable character would stand by to witness such acts? How many rapists wait for an audience before sexually assaulting women and girls — or for that matter boys? Thus the victim of abuse is in double jeopardy, likely to find herself convicted of both zina, (having admitted that non-marital sex took place) and false testimony (in being unable to produce the requisite witnesses).

In addition, there are a host of practices, with no legal

basis at all, which are being imposed on society in the name of "sharianisation." These include the widespread imposition of dress codes on women, attempts to force women to sit at the back of public vehicles, and a mid-night curfew in Gusau. Many of these are enforced by extra legal groups of young men vigilantes — sometimes openly supported by the state government as in Zamfara, but sometimes with attempts to control and stop them from taking the law into their own hands, as in Kano state.

In responding to these factors, BAOBAB has refused to be intimidated by accusations of being anti-Islam or by threats of violence and other harm. BAOBAB led the way in offering support and efforts for reversal and redress to victims of the discriminatory implementation and violation of rights of the new Shari'a acts ...

BAOBAB has also consistently worked to enable and encourage the widening of discussions, prevent the silencing and end the current climate of fearing to talk. It has raised publicly critiques of rights violations in the name of Muslim laws and Islam, and encouraged others to do so. Additionally, BAOBAB started a series of workshops whereby members of Muslim communities (members of the ulema and ordinary Muslims, rights activists, conservatives and progressives from different walks of life and parts of the country) came together for several days. During this time, they examine Quranic surahs and hadith, discuss both dominant and less well-known interpretations of these, and look at the actual constructions of Muslim laws in countries and communities around the world....

...These workshops thus examine the potential and actuality in Muslim laws and practices for establishing and promoting women's rights, as well as critiquing negative constructions and practices even when the latter are claimed to be Islamic. In so doing, they empower many of the participants with the knowledge and confidence to challenge the assertion that rights violations in the name of Islam and supporting Shari'a, should be ignored, and to work instead towards progressive visions of Muslim laws....

Address to the 5th Congregation of the Erk Party, Uzbekistan

MUHAMMAD SALIH

Muhammad Salih was born in Uzbekistan in 1949. He was a soldier in the Soviet Army from 1968 to 1970, and served in the Soviet Army units deployed to Czechoslovakia in the “Prague Spring” of 1968 to crush the growing pro-democracy movement. This experience profoundly altered Salih’s view of the Soviet Union and Communism. Following his army experience, Salih embarked on a career in journalism, literature, and political opposition to Soviet rule. Despite pressure from the authorities, Salih’s international prominence, and popularity in Uzbekistan gave him a measure of security. In the 1980’s, he founded “Birlik” (Unity), the first opposition movement in Uzbekistan. In 1990, Muhammad Salih established “Erk,” the first political party in Uzbekistan, which declared independence from the Soviet Union to be its first political goal. In March 1990 he was elected to the Uzbek Supreme Assembly. In the period beginning in 1990, Uzbekistan was wracked by political upheavals, as its citizens, through elections and mass demonstrations, fought for free and fair elections. Salih was a leader of this movement. In June 1992, he was imprisoned, but shortly thereafter transferred to house arrest. Soon afterward, Salih went into exile abroad, and at this writing lives in exile in Norway. In August 2005, Salih organized the National Salvation Committee, which united nearly all the democratic forces and groups in Uzbekistan and outside. His speech below is excerpted from an address to the ERK in 2003, during a period of brief openness permitted by Uzbek leader Osolom Karimov.

Dear Comrades-at-arms, Honored comrades,

Thanks to the Creator for giving us the opportunity to meet again. In these ten years, the world is aware that a great deal of difficult conditions has been given for the opposition’s liberty. It is not easy to be opposing to the regime. Had it been easy, 90 percent of the population would have crossed to the opposition side. This 90 percent on the disagreeing part exists on strength.

But disagreeing is one thing. Enduring suffering for lack of expression is another. Nobody wants to endure suffering....

.....Government bans against opposition groups continue. For the government, “constructive opposition” seems necessary. ...

It seems that until now, the government still does not understand the function of the opposition in society.

...In contemporary states, for government, the opposition’s sequence of opinions as well as ideas is a society’s immune system. Whether this system is not working or non-existent, societies will always, in stagnant condition, live on. This is the most shining example of our society. ...

... when will democracy come to Uzbekistan?

In the past century, this question was loudly raised during the period of Perestroika. But not after independence. The regime did not like to hear the question. This word, when sounded, brought threats that began. Then

some were thrown into jail, then they were tortured. They learned to kill in silence. The hunt for democrats began. According to the Eastern Calendar, this oppression is exactly the length of the “muchal” — 12 year cycle, that is why 12 years continued. You are assembled here today so as to not allow the new cycle of this oppression to take place. You assembled for the word democracy to be said with a loud voice.

Uzbek democrats believe in the things that nobody else believes. They believe in the possibility of chances with democratic paths for Uzbekistan. Faith for the future and for results is worthy....those who believe that changes in Uzbekistan towards democratic path are few.

Let us introduce, and at least once, to have the chance for a democratic election. We will bring democracy to our beloved homeland in not 200 years, but 200 days, with God’s permission....

In this difficult situation, nothing is able to free us. We need to resolve our own problems. Otherwise, even Allah cannot help us. The Koran ordered this: “To be precise, until some kinsmen themselves change, Allah will not change their situation.” Also, our prophet said: “you will be governed by your leaders as you see suitable”... I am not asking you not to battle against injustice. On the contrary, I ask you to fight. I want to say this: the sooner we arise to fight against injustice, in the shortest time, we shall have a just leader.

My dear Comrades, honored Comrades-in-arms! How can we escape from this impoverishment? For 75 years, we were soaked in atheism and atheistic communism ideologies.

Yet, despite 12 years of independence, we still do not have our own consciousness and ideals...

We do not want to see people who fear [an] oppressive ruler, we want a society that fears God. We want to see a humanity of dignity and honor. Only such a humanity can be the rung of our society's vertebrae. Only this type of people can be the guarantee of our safety, abundance and life. ...

... western intellectuals have analyzed and concluded the cause of a passive humanity: "there is no basis for democracy in the Islamic world" (this perspective is similar to that of our leaders). That is to say, the problem is placed against religion. Western scholars had profoundly researched on this. ...[but] Muslims also can want to live in democracy. The best example is Turkey. With the exception of its education system, Turkey is a comparatively suitable example for us as a state model. In this model, the relevant needs at-

tained in religion and state affairs are incomparable in the Islamic world. For this reason, Uzbekistan is in great need for this custom-fit model.

...As a party, we have always said that we sharply denounce any kind of terrorism. Nothing can justify terrorism —not with any notion, neither national nor religious, because terrorism is anti-humanity. Terrorism has no relations to the religion of Islam. Because terrorism is anti-morality, Islam on the other hand is morality, high morality. For this reason, it is wrong to say that "Islam" is the post-script to terrorism. ...

My honored friends, our country is standing at a crossroad. Nothing has come out of this crossroad today. ... Our aim has always been open and transparent in the political arena. Our aim is to build a democratic and lawful state in Uzbekistan. There will be no place for dictatorship or any kind of monopoly. ...

...We are prepared to cooperate with every group and organization, free the people from oppression and we hope to serve our people with impartiality. Enough of that, let our intentions be pure. ...

Reaching the Next Muslim Generation

MOHAMED CHARFI

Mohamed Charfi, former president of the Tunisian Human Rights League and minister of education from 1989 to 1994, is the author of “Islam and Liberty: The Historical Misunderstanding.” This article appeared in the March 12, 2002 New York Times and discusses the importance of education and the threat to democracy posed by the type of Islam taught in many madrasas (Islamic schools). Charfi died in June 2008.

SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, the world has come to know more about the educational systems prevalent today in Muslim countries and their role in promoting hostility toward the West. The educational system of Osama bin Laden’s native Saudi Arabia is being criticized in the West, particularly in the United States. The Indian government ... [has]... announced an effort to reform the Muslim religious schools known as madrasas, though this is perhaps a mixed blessing given that the same government is using the schools to promote Hinduism as part of its nationalist program. Across the border in Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf is pursuing reform of his country’s educational system — a project that will be watched by other Muslim nations. ...

Muslim countries entered into their rebirth and modernization in the nineteenth century. The prosecution of apostasy and the use of corporal punishment fell away; power passed, in general, from religious councils and tribunals to parliaments and secular courts. These changes were everywhere incomplete, hesitant, fragile — notably because their doctrinal foundation was accepted only grudgingly by the state and the elites, and still less by the general public.

This was clear in the common approach to education. A great effort was made to teach foreign languages and scientific subjects. But in teaching religion, history, philosophy and civics, traditional approaches prevailed. Schools taught Muslim law, the shar’ia, with its classic content; they presented Muslim history in a theological fashion as though we were still living under the Umayyads or the Abbasids. Muslim law was taught as sacred, and the idealized caliphate, the first centuries of Islam’s expansion after Muhammad’s death, was offered as a kind of heaven on earth.

The consequences of such teachings on the minds of young people in most Muslim-majority countries have been disastrous. Students learn that, in order to be good believers, they should be living under a caliph, that divine law makes it necessary to stone the adulterer and forbid lending at interest . . . only to discover, out in the street,

a society directed by a civil government with a modern penal code and an economy founded on a banking system.

Many Muslim children still learn at school the ancient ideology of a triumphant Muslim empire, an ideology that held all non-Muslims to be in error and saw its mission as bringing Islam’s light to the world. And yet young people see their governments working to live in peace with non-Muslim powers. Such discordant teachings do not prepare children to live in a changing world.

Osama bin Laden, like the 15 Saudis who participated in the criminal operations of September 11, seems to have been the pure product of his schooling. While Saudi Arabia is officially a moderate state allied with America, it has also been one of the main supporters of Islamic fundamentalism because of its financing of schools following the intransigent Wahhabi doctrine. Saudi-backed madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan have played significant roles in the strengthening of radical Islam in those countries.

Even in countries where religious teaching is less exalted, the general orientation toward fundamentalist instruction is not altogether different.

Tunisia is among the rare exceptions. Since 1989, a radical reform aimed at modernizing the entire educational system has been undertaken. In religious matters, programs and textbooks emphasize the thinking of scholars influenced by the best of our late-medieval thinkers, like Averroes and Avicenna. Such writers have developed new readings of the Koran and given Islam a content that allows for discussion of sexual equality, human rights and the development of democracy. Tunisian history is taught so that a young Tunisian will see his country’s part in all its fullness, forgetting neither the strategy of Hannibal nor the philosophy of St. Augustine. The science curriculum at higher grades incorporates Darwinian evolution and big-bang theories about the origin of the universe, neither of which is taught in traditional Islam-based programs.

Our hope is that young Tunisians, through a more secular education, can be brought up to value individual liberty and openness to others. Combined with the eman-

cipation of women and universal education — all of which were part of President Habib Bourguiba's reforms, beginning in the late 50's — this educational system is already helping to form a more modern society.

Unfortunately, the political structure has not kept pace. The police are omnipresent, the press and judiciary are controlled by the state and the country has become hostage to a system of personal power that comes from an earlier age. Fundamentalism is marginal in Tunisia, for the moment. But it will return if it becomes the last refuge of the discontented.

For now, we can hope that Mr. Musharraf will learn from Tunisia's recent mistakes — like failing to make the political system more democratic — as he can learn from its progress in creating schools that can help open the minds of a generation of students. Muslim countries today, after experiences with fundamentalism in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, need to begin a new phase of engagement with the world. Educational reform needs to be at the heart of this effort. Tunisia, though an imperfect example, offers important lessons in how it can be done.

Campaign for Good Governance — Sierra Leone

ZAINAB HAWA BANGURA

Zainab Bangura is Sierra Leone's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and co-founder and former Chair of Sierra Leone's youngest political party — Movement for Progress Party — that seeks to promote good governance, integrity and the empowerment of women, youth and the disabled. She is the former executive director of the National Accountability Group and a former member of the World Movement for Democracy Steering Committee. She is widely recognized for her work on democracy and human rights in Africa, and has won a number of awards, including the African International Award of Merit for Leadership (Nigeria, 1999); the Human Rights Award of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (New York, 2000); the Bayard Rustin Humanitarian Award of the A. Philip Randolph Institute (Washington, D.C., 2002); and the Democracy Award given by the National Endowment for Democracy (Washington, D.C., 2006). The selection below is excerpted from her keynote address to the Third Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy in Durban, South Africa.

IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE and an honor for me to be here tonight. What was not said in the introduction is that I am an African Muslim Woman, a first generation to be educated in my family. I am sure my cleric father and traditional oriented mother would be wondering up there somewhere above about the transformation that has taken place within their daughter who was going to be taken off from school and married off at the young age of 12.

Fortunately for me and millions of other African traditional Muslim girls and all of you here tonight (something my parents do not know), is that we are the babies of the age of human rights, democracy, and good governance. We have institutionalized into reality the dreams of the framers of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have taken their dream, turned it into reality, and we are marching forward to a better life for ourselves and others. It is only in an age of human rights, democracy, and good governance that you and I can gather here today as brothers and sisters from all over the world, not because we share the same ethnic language, religion or race, but because we share the same principles and values that have created a bond amongst us.

These binding principles and values of Democracy, Human Rights, and Good Governance have spearheaded our determination and commitment; they epitomize our struggles for building true democratic nations. But it has not been an easy battlefield, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As a generation we are still caught between the clashes of modernity, on one hand — symbolizing the freedom and ability to choose our leaders in free and fair elections on a regular basis, to enjoy a vigorous rule of law, having an independent and non-discriminatory judiciary, the ability to protect our ethnic, religious and cultural beliefs, the ability to participate and express our interests and values and to develop mecha-

nisms to control the state's ability of coercion — and, on the other hand, that of traditional rule representing autocratic and hereditary rulers, not leaders, chosen by divine power who stay in office until death, the patronage system, which allows our leaders to use state resources only for the benefit of family members or people loyal to them, election officers hired to rig elections, no respect for the rule of law, no impartial police to enforce the law, no impartial judges to decide or interpret the law.

This clash between the building of modern democratic states and retaining the old traditional African empires or chiefdoms that our generation has been caught between has had a very devastating effect on our continent. To quote Tony Iyare of Nigeria:

Our continent has been plunged into a huge theatre of operations, threatening to smother into shreds. From the troubled Horn to the Senegambia region, Mano River, Sahel, Great Lakes and the Maghreb, Africa is bleeding. Virtually everywhere you turn from Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Guinea, Liberia, Morocco, Eritrea, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, to Ethiopia, a protracted bloodbath is raging. Some countries like Zimbabwe, Guinea and Togo, owing to the intransigence of a failed vision and a rudderless leader, may just be waiting to boil.

The most ironic aspect of all this is, ladies and gentlemen, that civilization actually began on the African Continent. Our continent was a center of culture and sophistication long before the European arrived. We had one of the oldest civilizations — NOK culture flourished in Nigeria in 500 BC. The Nigerian state of Benin exchanged ambassadors with Portugal in 1486. The city of Timbuktu was a major trading centre of international fame hundreds of years ago.

In terms of resources, Africa has the largest untapped

natural resources in the world. Forty percent of the world's potential hydroelectric power supply, the bulk of the world's supply of chromium, 30 percent of Uranium, 50 percent of the world's diamonds, 90 percent of the world's cobalt, 50 percent of phosphates, 40 percent platinum, enormous petroleum reserves, the world largest producer of bauxite, 3 percent iron ore, millions and millions of acres of untilled land, fertile enough to produce 130 times what it presently yields. The world's largest producer of cocoa is an African country. There is no other continent blessed with such abundance and diversity.

Yet ... the statistics tells us a grim picture about sub-Saharan Africa: The continent is trapped in the world's worst poverty and stagnation – it is the poorest region. Thirty of the 34 countries ranked lowest in the UNDP human development index are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Poverty, ladies and gentlemen, walks on its legs almost everywhere on our continent. In addition, we have 50 percent of the world's estimated refugee population of 700,000, and 80 percent of the estimated 500,000 child soldiers in the world. Even nature seems to be conniving against us. Of the world's 40 million HIV infected people, 27 million are in Africa, creating 11 million HIV orphans on our continent.

The core problem obstructing our development is not a lack of resources, although that is a serious constraint in many countries. Nor is it long years of colonialism; that was more than 40 years ago. The core problem is the lack of democratic states with true democrats as leaders. Our greatest tragedy in sub-Saharan Africa, unfortunately ladies and gentlemen, is that we have suffered from misguided dictatorships and autocratic rule for too long.

Most of our African leaders have bestowed upon themselves god-like qualities and the unquestionable authority of the most powerful chieftain. They are mostly refusing to retire as our continent's elder statesmen, but keep changing their countries' constitutions to extend their stays. And yet the longer they stay in power, the more disdain of their people and the greater their power becomes. They have consolidated presidential powers and planted roots of cultism, making it more difficult to get rid of them than it was to get rid of colonialism.

The role of democratic leadership in Africa has been barren for a long time now. Our first generation of leaders governed through their sheer strength and personality. The second generation of leaders, who were younger, less educated, less sophisticated, and less nationalistic mastered power politics, but little else. They silenced all opposing voices but those of the party line and succeeded to plunder our continent's abundant resources. What we need now are democratically-elected men and women with reasoned voices and clear visions to rebuild our badly battered continent.

When the independence struggle began in Africa in the 1960s we produced 95 percent of our own food. Today, every

country except South Africa is an importer. Our economies have all gone backwards since independence.

It is not surprising that the two countries in Africa, Botswana and Mauritius, that have been continuously democratic since independence have been the only two countries that have achieved relatively good development performance in the past three decades.

In addition, the bloodbath of civil wars waging across our continent has taken place only in countries with long years of either military rule or one-party dictatorship: Sierra Leone, Liberia, DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Uganda, Central Africa Republic, and all the others. We therefore know that the political elites in Africa are as guilty as the rebel leaders for the devastating civil wars that have been devastating our continent. We all know the fact that democratic citizens and leaders do not fight intra-state wars, but learn and accept the arts of compromise. Democracy is conflict resolution. People are inclined to see others as less threatening and more trustworthy.

We have also seen that countries with democratic governments like Botswana, Mauritius, Ghana, Senegal, and Benin tend to be more prosperous. They mostly have market economies, which are likely to prosper. They have fostered education of their people, which has been helpful to innovation and economic growth. They have strongly sustained the rule of law and secured property rights. They have effectively enforced contractual agreements avoiding arbitrary intervention in the economic lives of their countries and citizens. Finally, they have lowered barriers to communication which is requisite for modern economies to grow. Seeking and exchanging information has become easier and far less dangerous in these countries than it is in Zimbabwe, Gabon, Togo, and Cameroon.

My African brothers and sisters here today, I am saying to you without any hesitation that if our continent is to develop and join the global world, our present leaders in Africa must examine their consciences and understand and accept the unique and proud history and circumstances of the African people. They must realize and understand that our first generation of African leaders did not fight for independence to be less free instead of more free, poorer instead of better off, more illiterate instead of educated, permanent refugees, having generations of their children grow up in refugee camps, instead of the stable and prosperous lives they so rightfully deserve, dying of HIV instead of living to a ripe old age and telling their grandchildren about their exploits as youngsters.

I say to you tonight, *aluta continua*, the struggle continues unabated. There is no turning back. You and I must continue to hold our hands together (that is what the World Movement for Democracy is all about) and move forward in our commitment to building more democratic countries, countries that all of us here tonight will be proud to call home.

I thank you.

SECTION IV

PETITIONS, PROTESTS, SPEECHES, AND LETTERS

THIS SECTION focuses on the lives and words of democracy advocates who have dared to speak truth to power. Throughout the Muslim world, workers, intellectuals, journalists, and activists have stood up and spoken out for democratic ideals in both secular and Islamic regimes. Theirs is a perilous existence. In some countries, these individuals have paid a high price for their courage, ranging from police harassment to jail time to forced exile. In some cases, they have lost their lives. These individuals are not firebrand revolutionaries calling for an armed struggle. They are arguing for the rule of law, respect for internationally recognized human and worker rights, a democratic process, and religious tolerance. Even jail cannot stop the flow of words, and some of the most eloquent writing comes from individuals in prison cells. From Syria to the Sudan, these brave individuals take stands for freedom that they must know will bring the wrath of the authorities down on their heads — and still they stand up. This section details some of their stories.

Reading one contains **The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change**, signed by opposition parties and political figures in Syria, calling for greater political and social freedoms. Syria has been ruled by the secular Ba'th Party for more than 45 years. The Ba'thists took power following a military coup, and their hold on power is embedded in the country's constitution. In the second reading, **A Lucky Charm**, Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam of the Sudan, a human rights worker in Darfur, tells human rights activists in the West that their award to him is like a "lucky charm," a form of protection for him and for his colleagues who are performing humanitarian work in the middle of a genocidal war in that region. In reading three, **Letter to the European Parliament**, the jailed Egyptian dissident Ayman Nour appeals to members

of the European Parliament for their help and support. Nour, a former member of parliament, was stripped of parliamentary immunity and imprisoned in 2005 by the regime of Hosni Mubarak on charges of committing fraud in the formation of the pro-democracy al-Ghad Party. Nour denies the charges and has maintained a vigorous correspondence with friends and allies from prison.

In reading four, **A Letter to Free People: Freedom for Akbar Ganji**, Iranian journalist Akbar Ganji bitterly attacks his jailors, and sets out his democratic beliefs. Ganji was jailed for five years after speaking out on Iran's political situation at an international conference. He used his time in Tehran's notorious Evin prison to call for an end to theocratic rule in Iran and the creation of a secular, democratic state.

In reading five, **Libya, Yearning to be Free**, jailed dissident Fathi Eljahmi sends a series of letter to Muammar Gaddafi, urging democratic reforms in Libya. Eljahmi, a former provincial governor, was imprisoned for the better part of six years for advocating democracy and freedom of expression. He died in prison. In the sixth reading, **A Reply to My Accusers**, Egyptian dissident Saad Eddin Ibrahim addresses the court at his trial, attacking the "contrived" case against him and his colleagues, and arguing that government is simply trying to silence him and other advocates of democracy. Ibrahim, a prominent intellectual and director of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, after years of self-exile abroad, has returned to Egypt. Finally, in reading seven, **In Defense of the Labor Movement in Iran**, Iranian labor leader Mansour Osanloo passionately describes the circumstances of his imprisonment, the treatment of his family, and the undemocratic policies of the government. Osanloo, currently serving a five-year-sentence in Evin prison, has been jailed on and off since 2005.

Name: Egyptian ... Address: Tahrir Square

KAMAL ABBAS

Writing in the midst of protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, Kamal Abbas—general coordinator of Egypt's Center for Trade Unions and Workers Services (CTUWS) and recipient of the AFL-CIO's 2009 George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award on behalf of Egypt's independent labor movement—relates his feelings on Egypt's 2011 peaceful revolution for democracy. The article is reprinted, with permission.

NOW, I AM PROUD TO BE EGYPTIAN. I can sit in the evening among my children and grandchildren and tell them the story of the revolution; the story of boys and girls who refused the injustice and tyranny under which we have lived for years and years. I will tell them the story of Mohamed and Boulis [Peter]: the two boys who stood one against the other, each of whom hates and wants to destroy the other ... I will tell them how Boulis and Mohamed stood shoulder to shoulder confronting tyranny. I will tell them how Muslims protected churches against the violence of the regime's thugs and how Christians guarded Muslims while they performed their prayers in Tahrir [Liberation] Square.

I will tell them that I have no explanation except that this infamous regime made us reveal our worst part. I will tell my children and grandchildren how thousands, or rather tens of thousands, including young and very beautiful girls demonstrated and that those beautiful girls were not harassed. I will tell them that young males used to listen to the speeches of young females and received orders from them to keep order during the sit-in.

I will tell them again and again the stories which we told each other when we were sitting on the curbs or in the middle of Tahrir Square and how we laughed mockingly when the regime stooges described us hirelings: that we received orders from the USA and Iran, and that fast food meals are provided to us from Kentucky Fried Chicken [a valued meal in Egypt]. I will tell them how we received the news that the regime was falling and how "rams" [cabinet ministers forced to resign] were driven to the slaughterhouses to be sacrificed to save the regime!

I will make them laugh very much when I tell them our jokes and comments when we saw the photos of "rams" on the front pages of newspapers. I will tell them about the parties we made and the poems

we heard, how we danced enthusiastically when we heard the music, which we heard before but did not feel when we were in despair. I will tell them the love stories which were born in the square and the marriage parties.

I will tell them about the Sunday **mass** and how charm-

ing were the hymns chanted by Muslims and Christians all together. I will tell them about the Muslim prayers for the souls of the martyrs. I will cry. Yes, I will cry when I remember the mother of a martyr who overcame her grief and came to support us.

I do not want anyone to apologize for accusing me of yielding to tyranny. I do not want an apology for describing us as a people who can only bear with humiliation, generation after generation, and that our history is a witness that we were subject to several tyrants of the world.

I do not want anyone to apologize that he did not hear me or did not care when I said that we are neither a submissive nor a dormant people. But we are patient. And everyone should take care when we become impatient. And I will forget their sarcastic smile in response to such words.

I want no apology from those who did not believe us when we said that heralds of revolution are seen in the Egyptian skies: look for them in the workers' strikes and sit-ins and in the protests of the poor and the oppressed.

I only want them to listen to our story; the story of the revolution of anger, the revolution of the Egyptian youth who came from the virtual world to Tahrir Square on 25th January 2011.

It is the story of the youth who came from the poor and the rich classes raising up one flag – the flag of freedom – and turned Tahrir Square from a place which witnessed how the police treated Egyptians brutally and harassed female protesters to a square for freedom, where the revolutionists stay and teams of young men and women defend its entrances. The square attracted the attention and respect of the whole world. It has become the Square of Freedom, the castle of the revolution and its emblem. The young revolutionists, armed only with faith, managed to defeat the assaults of the regime's thugs.

Thousands were injured in this square. The noble blood of the martyrs which covered its roads and curbs made us stronger and more insistent on taking one road, the road to freedom, and to raise one flag carrying one sentence: "The people want to overthrow this regime."

The Casablanca Call For Democracy and Human Rights

On Oct. 22-23, 2010, a group of Arab intellectuals, politicians, and civil society advocates convened a Conference on the Future of Democracy and Human Rights in the Arab World in Casablanca. Citing the “dramatic and alarming backsliding of political reforms in the Arab world,” they issued a remarkable, frank and courageous appeal to the Arab nations. The “Casablanca Call for Democracy and Human Rights” represents a powerful consensus among disparate political groups that democracy must be the foundation for social and political justice in the region. In light of the dramatic events a few months later in Tunisia and Egypt, their statement appears to be prescient, as well as bold. The statement has been signed by hundreds of prominent Arabs. The Conference was sponsored by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy.

WE, THE SIGNATORIES TO THIS CALL, as politicians, intellectuals and civil society advocates, believe that the achievement of democracy and the embodiment of human rights in the Arab world is an absolute necessity and requires a broader engagement of all citizens and political and social forces. We observe, with great concern, the dramatic and alarming backsliding of political reforms in the Arab world, due to several structural obstacles since the beginning of the new century. We hereby appeal to all parties concerned with the future of democracy - governments, civil society institutions, political organizations, trade unions, and the media - in the belief that the achievement of real and effective reforms is the responsibility of all parties.

We affirm that confronting the various obstacles that continue to prevent the achievement of a peaceful transfer of power requires the following:

- 1) An immediate undertaking of profound and effective political reforms that respect the rule of law and institutional integrity based on the principle of separation of powers. This must be done in accordance with the principle of peoples' sovereignty, respect for human rights and freedoms, and by confirming the ballot box as the only legitimate method of achieving a peaceful transfer of power, and ensuring the transparency of the electoral process, accepting its results, and enhancing the efforts of independent monitors in accordance with international standards;
- 2) Protection of an independent judiciary as a top priority for democratic change, as a prerequisite for the protection of human rights and freedoms, and as the guarantor for the supremacy of the rule of law and state institutions;
- 3) The immediate release of all political prisoners -
- numbering in the thousands in various Arab prisons — and putting an end to political trials of any kind, torture of political opponents, and the practice of kidnapping;
- 4) Enabling and encouraging political parties and trade unions to engage in their right to organize freely, use all available media outlets, take advantage of public funding, and be free of any interference of the state apparatus in their affairs;
- 5) Acknowledgment of the right of civil society organizations to perform their advocacy roles freely and effectively, having their independence and privacy duly respected, their internal affairs not disrupted, and their sources of financial support kept open and active. We call upon all Arab governments to engage with civil society organizations in real partnerships to achieve sustainable human development and to empower women and youth to take part in the development process;
- 6) Guarantee of freedom of expression, free access of the media and journalists to information and news sources. The respect for the independence of journalists' syndicates and allowing them to disseminate information and opinion without censorship, and undue administrative, or judicial pressures, and the abolishment of the imprisonment penalty in cases against journalists;
- 7) Development of mechanisms to ensure the neutrality of state institutions and their placement in the direct service of their constituents regardless of political allegiances, and without interference in the affairs of political parties and civil society organizations;
- 8) Mobilization of all forces and efforts to comply with

good governance, political integrity and transparency, and combating corruption as an unethical social, political, and economic phenomenon that has turned administrative corruption into a system for administering corruption. We believe this undermines development efforts, drains national resources, and threatens social peace;

- 9) Summoning of the private sector to play its role in the contribution to political reforms, the preservation of freedoms and to strive for social justice, affirming the strong link between development and democracy, and ensuring transparency and free and fair competition;
- 10) Supporting efforts to achieve national reconciliation and unity and avoid the dangers that threaten unity, and feed the sectarian, religious, ethnic, and political conflicts that destabilize Arab states and societies;

- 11) Appealing to democratic forces in the entire world to put pressure on their own governments to refrain from supporting non-democratic regimes in the Arab world, and from adopting double standards in their relations with Arab regimes;
- 12) Reaffirmation of the interconnectedness of political reform with the renewal of religious thought, which requires support for, and expansion of, the practice of *ijtihad* in a climate of complete freedom of thought, under democratic systems of government. Furthermore, we support the dialogue that began several years ago between Islamists and secularists at the local and regional levels and emphasize the importance of continuing such endeavors in order to provide solid ground for the protection of democracy and human rights from any political or ideological setbacks.

SIGN THE CASABLANCA APPEAL (IN ARABIC)

The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, Syria

On October 16, 2005, five Syrian opposition parties, opposition representatives, and leading members of civil society issued the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change. The Declaration is a call for change based on political freedom, respect for ethnic and religious minorities, separation of powers, and free expression. Around 40 of its members were arrested in the course of the following five or six months, and harassment and imprisonment continues today. Undeterred by the government's actions, more than 160 members of the Damascus Declaration National Council met in the Syrian capital on December 1, 2007, to elect a secretariat and to reaffirm their commitment to democratic reform at the end of a "peaceful and progressive process." Opposition parties that were signatories to the Declaration included the Democratic National Grouping in Syria; Kurdish Democratic Alliance in Syria; Committees for the Revival of Civil Society; Kurdish Democratic Front in Syria; and the Future Party (Shaykh Nawwaf al-Bashir).

SYRIA TODAY is being subjected to pressure it had not experienced before, as a result of the policies pursued by the regime, policies that have brought the country to a situation that calls for concern for its national safety and the fate of its people. Today Syria stands at a crossroad and needs to engage in self-appraisal and benefit from its historical experience more than any time in the past.

The authorities' monopoly of everything for more than 30 years has established an authoritarian, totalitarian, and cliquish [fi'awi] regime that has led to a lack of [interest in] politics in society, with people losing interest in public affairs. That has brought upon the country such destruction as that represented by the rending of the national social fabric of the Syrian people, an economic collapse that poses a threat to the country, and exacerbating crises of every kind, in addition to the stifling isolation which the regime has brought upon the country as a result of its destructive, adventurous, and short-sighted policies on the Arab and regional levels, and especially in Lebanon. Those policies were founded on discretionary bases and were not guided by the higher national interests.

All that — and many other matters — calls for mobilizing all the energies of Syria, the homeland and the people, in a rescue task of change that lifts the country out of the mold of the security state and takes it to the mold of the political state, so that it will be able to enhance its independence and unity, and so that its people will be able to hold the reins of their country and participate freely in running its affairs. The transformations needed affect the various aspects of life, and include the State, the authorities, and society, and lead to changing Syrian policies at home and abroad.

In view of the signatories' feeling that the present moment calls for a courageous and responsible national stand, that takes the country out of its condition of weakness and waiting that is poisoning the present political life, and spares it the dangers that loom in the horizon, and in view of their belief that a clear and cohesive line on which society's various forces agree, a line that projects the goals of democratic change at this stage, acquires special importance in the achievement of such change by the Syrian people and in accordance with their will and interests, and helps to avoid opportunism and extremism in public action, they have reached an accord on the following bases:

Establishment of a democratic national regime is the basic approach to the plan for change and political reform. It must be peaceful, gradual, founded on accord, and based on dialogue and recognition of the other.

Shunning totalitarian thought and severing all plans for exclusion, custodianship, and extirpation under any pretext, be it historical or realistic; shunning violence in exercising political action; and seeking to prevent and avoid violence in any form and by any side.

Islam — which is the religion and ideology of the majority, with its lofty intentions, higher values, and tolerant canon law — is the more prominent cultural component in the life of the nation and the people. Our Arab civilization has been formed within the framework of its ideas, values, and ethics and in interaction with the other national historic cultures in our society, through moderation, tolerance, and mutual interaction, free of fanaticism, violence, and exclusion, while having great concern for the respect of the beliefs, culture, and special characteristics of others, whatever their religious, confessional, and

intellectual affiliations, and openness to new and contemporary cultures.

No party or trend has the right to claim an exceptional role. No one has the right to shun the other, persecute him, and usurp his right to existence, free expression, and participation in the homeland.

Adoption of democracy as a modern system that has universal values and bases, based on the principles of liberty, sovereignty of the people, a State of institutions, and the transfer of power through free and periodic elections that enable the people to hold those in power accountable and change them.

Build a modern State, whose political system is based on a new social contract, which leads to a modern democratic Constitution that makes citizenship the criterion of affiliation, and adopts pluralism, the peaceful transfer of power, and the rule of law in a State all of whose citizens enjoy the same rights and have the same duties, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, sect, or clan, and prevents the return of tyranny in new forms.

Turn to all the components of the Syrian people, all their intellectual trends and social classes, political parties, and cultural, economic, and social activities, and give them the opportunity to express their views, interests, and aspirations, and enable them to participate freely in the process of change.

Guarantee the freedom of individuals, groups, and national minorities to express themselves, and safeguard their role and cultural and linguistic rights, with the State respecting and caring for those rights, within the framework of the Constitution and under the law.

Find a just democratic solution to the Kurdish issue in Syria, in a manner that guarantees the complete equality of Syrian Kurdish citizens with the other citizens, with regard to nationality rights, culture, learning the national language, and the other constitutional, political, social, and legal rights on the basis of the unity of the Syrian land and people. Nationality and citizenship rights must be restored to those who have been deprived of them, and the file must be completely settled.

Commitment to the safety, security, and unity of the Syrian national [union] and addressing its problems through dialogue, and safeguard the unity of the homeland and the people in all circumstances, commitment to the liberation of the occupied territories and regaining the Golan Heights for the homeland, and enabling Syria to carry out an effective and positive Arab and regional role.

Abolish all forms of exclusion in public life, by suspending the emergency law; and abolish martial law and extraordinary courts, and all relevant laws, including Law 49 for the year 1980; release all political prisoners; [allow] the safe and honorable return of all those wanted and those who have been voluntarily or involuntarily exiled

with legal guarantees; and ending all forms of political persecution, by settling grievances and turning a new leaf in the history of the country.

Strengthen the national army and maintain its professional spirit, and keep it outside the framework of political conflict and the democratic game, and confine its task to protecting the country's independence, safeguarding the constitutional system, and defending the homeland and the people.

Liberate popular organizations, federations, trade unions, and chambers of commerce, industry, and agriculture from the custodianship of the State and from party and security hegemony. Provide them with the conditions of free action as civil society organizations.

Launch public freedoms, organize political life through a modern party law, and organize the media and elections in accordance with modern laws that ensure liberty, justice, and equal opportunities for everyone.

Guarantee the right of political work to all components of the Syrian people in their various religious, national, and social affiliations.

Emphasize Syria's affiliation to the Arab Order, establish the widest relations of cooperation with the Arab Order, and strengthen strategic, political, and economic ties that lead the [Arab] nation to the path of unity. Correct the relationship with Lebanon, so that it will be based on liberty, equality, sovereignty, and the common interests of the two peoples and countries.

Observe all international treaties and conventions and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and seek within the framework of the United Nations and in cooperation with the international community to build a more just World Order, based on the principles of peace and mutual interest, warding off aggression, and the right of nations to resist occupation, and to oppose all forms of terrorism and violence directed against civilians.

The signatories to this declaration believe the process of change has begun, in view of its being a necessity that brooks no postponement because the country needs it. It is not directed against anyone, but requires everyone's efforts. Here we call on the Ba'thist citizens of our homeland and citizens from various political, cultural, religious, and confessional groups to participate with us and not to hesitate or be apprehensive, because the desired change is in everyone's interest and is feared only by those involved in crimes and corruption. The process of change can be organized as follows:

1. Opening the channels for a comprehensive and equitable national dialogue among all the components and social, political, and economic groups of the Syrian people in all areas and on the following premises:

The need for radical change in the country, and the rejection of all forms of cosmetic, partial, or circum-spection reform.

Seek to stop the deterioration and the potential collapse and anarchy which could be brought upon the country by a mentality of fanaticism, revenge, extremism, and objection to democratic change.

Rejection of the change that is brought from abroad, while we are fully aware of the fact and the objectivity of the link between the internal and the external in the various political developments that are taking place in our contemporary world, without pushing the country toward isolation, adventure, and irresponsible stands, and anxiousness to safeguard the country's independence and territorial integrity.

2. Encourage initiatives for the return of society to politics, restore to the people their interest in public affairs, and activate civil society.
3. Form various committees, salons, forums, and bodies locally and throughout the country to organize the general cultural, social, political, and economic activity and to help it in playing an important role in advancing the national consciousness, giving vent to frustrations, and uniting the people behind the goals of change.
4. A comprehensive national accord on a common and independent program of the opposition forces, which charts the steps of the stage of transformation and the features of the democratic Syria of the future.
5. Pave the way for convening a national conference in which all the forces that aspire to change may participate, including those who accept that from

among the regime, to establish a democratic national regime based on the accords mentioned in this declaration, and on the basis of a broad and democratic national coalition.

6. Call for the election of a Constituent Assembly that draws up a new Constitution for the country that foils adventurers and extremists, and that guarantees the separation of powers, safeguards the independence of the judiciary, and achieves national integration by consolidating the principle of citizenship.
7. Hold free and honest parliamentary elections that produce a fully legitimate national regime that governs the country in accordance with the Constitution and the laws that are in force, and on the basis of the view of the political majority and its program.

These are broad steps for the plan for democratic change, as we see it, which Syria needs, and to which its people aspire. It is open to the participation of all the national forces: political parties, civilian and civil bodies, and political, cultural, and professional figures. The plan accepts their commitments and contribution, and is open to review through the increase in the collectivity of political work and its effective societal forces.

We pledge to work to end the stage of despotism. We declare our readiness to offer the necessary sacrifices for that purpose, and to do all what is necessary to enable the process of democratic change to take off, and to build a modern Syria, a free homeland for all of its citizens, safeguard the freedom of its people, and protect national independence.

DAMASCUS, 16 OCTOBER 2005

A Lucky Charm

DR. MUDAWI IBRAHIM ADAM

Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam is the founder and chairman of the Sudan Social Development Organization (SUDO), and independent nongovernmental organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights, peace-building, and development. Under Dr. Mudawi's leadership, SUDO has successfully implemented various human rights projects as well as water, sanitation, and health projects. SUDO has also been active in Darfur, holding workshops with different groups on human rights and providing humanitarian assistance to the millions who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the conflict. SUDO has been working to implement a peace-building and reconciliation project with different tribal groups in Southern Darfur. Due to his role in exposing the Sudanese government's role in massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law in Darfur, Dr. Mudawi has been detained by the Sudanese authorities three times since 2003. During imprisonment, he went on a hunger strike to protest being held in solitary confinement without being charged or provided access to a lawyer, his family, or medical attention. In October 2005 he received an award from Human Rights First for his efforts to promote human rights in Sudan. That speech is reproduced below

This award, for me, is a lucky charm.

And, fortunately, it is not a charm I have to wear around my neck to benefit from its protection. It is a bit big for that.

For me, this award has the protection of recognition. If I am arrested again, which in Sudan today is always a real possibility; this award can help protect me from being harmed in prison.

And so I thank you and my family thanks you.

Every night if I do not walk through the door at the minute I'm supposed to, my youngest son calls me and says "Where are you now?"

Your support gives me a lifeline of protection.

So while I am privileged because I have people like you asking about me and watching out for me, there are thousands of people who are risking their lives trying to protect other people — and many, many people losing their lives without being seen, noticed, or felt.

Imagine the girls and women in Darfur who are losing their dignity and security through rape.

Imagine a man losing his dignity in front of his sons, being beaten, humiliated, in front of those to whom he is supposed to give protection.

Imagine a mother giving birth to a child being born from an enemy.

Imagine a man losing his dignity seeing his wife's belly cut in front of him to kill his future child.

Imagine a man losing his humanity — seeing his beloved young daughters, his old mother and his wife being raped in front of him.

What is happening in my country can only be described

as savagery.

By profession, I am an engineer. My expertise is water supply systems. I founded an organization with others devoted to development, which we see as a human right.

But we quickly realized we needed to address other human rights issues. What would you do if this were your country, if you were faced with these atrocities? You would fight them too.

And so, SUDO's mission is to create a human rights movement capable of defending itself and seeking a society free from all forms of human rights violations.

So how can we address the situation in Sudan? I wish I could stand here tonight and lay out a blueprint to solve the crisis. After all, I live and work in Sudan. I am being given this award tonight. I should know. But I need to tell you the truth: I do not believe there is a simple answer.

The best course, in my view, would be a political solution — a peaceful political negotiation — mediated by a prominent figure with the active support of the international community including the United States.

Unfortunately, this seems a distant prospect. The Sudanese government will need to come under intense international pressure, and today that is not happening.

Such a negotiation between all parties including the Janjaweed, must be accompanied by a lasting ceasefire.

I am here to ask you to help me achieve this. As long as I am able, I will dedicate my life to making this happen.

This is my first visit to the United States. I fear that most people in this country are paying little attention to my country and have only a vague sense of what is happening there.

You can help change that. I urge you to talk about what is happening in Sudan, tell people about what you have heard and seen tonight about my beloved, bloody country. Get involved in human rights. Call newspapers and television stations. Give money to efforts that tell our story and promote peace. Call your leaders -- tomorrow morning. Call anyone you know in a position to do something.

My organization and my colleagues and I will continue to do what we can on the ground, but without greater international involvement and support, we will not prevail.

When I go back to Sudan later this week, I will be asked — at SUDO, by my friends, by my family — if I brought you this message and delivered it well.

They will ask me if I think people will act as a result of my trip.

And in response, I will show them this award. I will tell them that we have been recognized. That Americans appreciate what we are doing. I will tell them you care.

And they need this. The people I work with are in the line of fire — helping others at great personal risk. You know that many humanitarian organizations have left Sudan. Groups like ours are all that is left.

So I will do everything I can to make sure the aura of protection afforded by your recognition tonight extends to them.

Thank you so much for this award.

Letter to the European Parliament

AYMAN NOUR

Ayman Nour is founder of the opposition al-Ghad Party in Egypt and a former member of Parliament. The party has argued for political reform rooted in liberal and democratic values, with a strong focus on human rights issues. Nour's call for constitutional reform, limiting the president's powers and opening presidential elections to multiple candidates, has been the focus of particular hostility from the Hosni Mubarak regime. Most observers believe that the aging Mubarak is laying the groundwork for his son to succeed him.

On January 29, 2005, Nour was stripped of his parliamentary immunity and arrested. He was charged with forging signatures on petitions he had filed to create his party. Dr. Nour strongly denied the charges — he needed only 50 signatures, but had garnered thousands. The arrest, occurring in the election year, was seen as politically inspired and widely criticized by governments around the world.

On March 12, 2005, he was released on bail, a week after he announced from jail his decision to run for president. He was the first runner-up in the 2005 presidential election with seven percent of the vote according to government figures and estimated at 13 per cent by independent observers. On December 24, 2005, he was sentenced to five years in jail. Mr. Nour's imprisonment ended Egypt's brief experiment with allowing opposition politics to flourish. His al Ghad Party had become the only legal opposition with a growing, anti-establishment following. He was unexpectedly released on February 18, 2009. He had been in ill health, and his release was widely seen as a response to international pressure and a gesture to the new U.S. president, Barack Obama. Today, he is again leading the opposition in the Egyptian parliament.

In May 2006, while Nour was imprisoned, his wife, Gameela Ismail, sent a letter from her husband — which had been smuggled out of prison — to the European Parliament. This letter was published by The Arabist, June 8, 2006.

30 May 2006
Tura Mazraa Prison
South Cairo

From: Ayman Nour

To: Esteemed Members of the European Union Deputy
Head of the European Parliament

I address this very short letter to you and to all the honorable and free people in the world, to all the representatives of the free people and those whose consciences refuse oppression, injustice, false accusations and merciless murder.

My letter is very short due to the circumstances out of my control restricting my freedom and depriving me of my human rights, the foremost of which is the right to write, express and reject the injustice and suffering I am subjected to!!

The day my freedom was taken away in January 2005, your great efforts — after God and combined with the efforts of my supporters — played a crucial role in my release. The first faces I saw — an honor to me — were the faces of a delegation of European male and female parliament representatives. Your visit to me during my

imprisonment is not only reason for breaking the doors of this prison and my temporary release, it also gave me the possibility of exercising my right in running for the first presidential election. I was imprisoned to prevent me from running for the election in January 2005. With God's grace and the enthusiasm of the reformists I was able to come in second to the president and be the only competitor to him and his son despite the rigging and all forms of injustice, defamation and changing the results. I also paid an extra price when my constituency's election results were rigged thus causing me to lose my permanent seat in the parliament due to blatant rigging. Some of you were in Cairo and witnessed a part of the tragedy.

Today I pay a new and high price as punishment for having run for the presidential election. I am also being prevented from continuing the democratic reform path in Egypt so that the current regime can strengthen its presence by claiming there is no alternative for it other than fundamentalism and terrorism, thus forcing people inside and outside Egypt to accept its presence.

Unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, I do not pay this price alone. My children, family, party, my whole generation and all the reformists in this country pay the price, too. I lost my freedom, my work as a lawyer, journalist

and chairman of the first and only civil political party to be established in a quarter of a century, the duration of Mubarak's rule. I am threatened of remaining in prison for five years and prevented from exercising my political rights for another five years to guarantee that Egypt is inherited by Mubarak's son, as well as making me an example to anyone who thinks of breaking the power monopoly not only in Egypt but in the Arab world!!

I call upon you to exert every effort to defend my fair case not for my sake, nor for the sake of my children or my party that is being destroyed, my human rights which are violated in this prison every morning, or my life which

illness, injustice and oppression are eating away at. I ask you to defend my fair case to keep hope alive for the coming generations which we do not want to lose hope. It is for these generations that I call upon you to exert every effort to defend my fair case and to visit me in prison to witness the truth which the Egyptian regime is very good at concealing and telling lies to prove the opposite. Free people of the world, I am dying alone for a principle, for my country and for freedom. Please raise my voice before my spirit departs this world.

AYMAN NOUR

Published by Arabist, June 8, 2006

A Letter to Free People: Freedom for Akbar Ganji

AKBAR GANJI

Akbar Ganji is an Iranian journalist and writer. He started his career as a supporter of the anti-Shah movement and served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard during the Iran-Iraq War. He grew disillusioned with the revolution and began to speak out. He was arrested on April 22, 2000, after he took part in a conference held in Berlin on April 7-8, 2000, under the title "Iran after the elections." The conference was held in the wake of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) elections of February 2000, which resulted in a huge victory for reformist candidates. The gathering was termed "anti-Islamic" and "anti-revolutionary" by Iranian state TV, IRIB, which broadcast part of the conference on April 18, 2000. Ganji was accused of having "damaged national security" and initially sentenced to 10 years, followed by five years internal exile. After a series of legal maneuvers and charges, on July 16, 2001 he was sentenced to six years imprisonment on charges of "collecting confidential information harmful to national security and spreading propaganda against the Islamic system." Ganji embarked on a hunger strike for more than 80 days from May 19, 2005, until early August 2005. He was imprisoned in Evin Prison in Tehran until his release on March 18, 2006. Ganji has won several international awards for his work, including the World Association of Newspapers' Golden Pen of Freedom Award, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression's International Press Freedom Award, the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, and the John Humphrey Freedom Award. The letter below was written in the early stages of his strike.

Nineteen days have passed since I began my hunger strike. I have lost nineteen kilograms. I am imprisoned.

I do not have permission to make phone calls or read newspapers. I have been denied visitation.

I cannot walk outside my cell. The liars say they have no political prisoners. They say the political prisoners are not on hunger strike. They distort the facts by calling a cell a suite, saying that prisons are as comfortable as they can be in a hotel!

Calling a donkey a parrot does not miraculously turn the donkey into a parrot!

Prisoner is someone whose liberty has been taken away.

Does calling a prison a hotel change the nature of the prison?

A political prisoner is someone who speaks his conscience. We are arrested solely because we differ from what is permitted. Human rights organizations are aware how hundreds of people have been imprisoned only because of different views.

The liars change their words. First they say Ganji is in solitary confinement. Next he is on hunger strike. Then they say Ganji has to be punished. Next they quote doctors that Ganji has asthma. Have the doctors prohibited Ganji from visitations, reading newspaper, making or receiving phone calls, breathing fresh air, or seeing the sunlight?

Is it why you have sent a smuggler who is sentenced to 15 years in prison to my cell in order to murder me?

If punishment is to force me show remorse for my mani-

fests, you will not achieve your objective.

Iranian Stalinists have inherited these techniques from Stalin's interrogators.

I have written the republicanism manifests after much research and study. I will not take back my word. I will not show remorse. I will not stop my hunger strike until I reach my goal.

Today my weary face reflects the true face of the Islamic republic of Iran's regime. Today I am the symbol of justice. Look closely and you see the regime's injustice. People wonder if I am the same person they once knew. Their torture has reduced my weight from 77kg to 58kg. They hide me from the world. They hide me from the journalists.

Khamanei will be directly responsible for my death. Mortazavi gets his orders from Khamanei via Hejazi (Khamanei's chief of staff).

I am against Khamanei's unlimited lifetime rule because it is contradictory to the rule of people. I knew my statements would have ramifications and I was right.

Even Rafsanjani, Karoubi, and Moin tasted a bit of Khamenei's democracy in this election. One-man rule contradicts democracy.

In this system, one man orders and the rest have to obey. Mortazavi has told my wife that hundreds die everyday, Ganji could be one of them. These are Khamenei's words that are spoken by Mortazavi. Ganji may die but seeking liberty, justice, democracy, hope, dream, and ideals will never die. Loving one another and making sacrifices will always stay alive.

AKBAR GANJI, JUNE 29, 2005

Libya, Yearning to Be Free

FATHI ELJAHMI

Fathi Eljahmi was an imprisoned Libyan, who was considered Libya's most prominent democratic dissident and during his lifetime received significant international attention for his work. He was arrested in October 2002 and sentenced to five years in prison for stating at a "People's Conference" in Tripoli that reform in Libya would require a constitution, free speech and democracy. He was briefly released that month, and then re-imprisoned after calling for democratization of Libya in a television interview. In early 2004 he, his wife, and his eldest son were taken into custody. The Libyan government claimed that Eljahmi was put on trial in late 2005, accused of the capital charges of "trying to overthrow the government, insulting Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and contacting foreign authorities, after he talked to a US diplomat." Despite urgent representations from abroad for his release due to poor health, Eljahmi died on May 21, 2009, in Amman, Jordan. He was evacuated to Amman for emergency medical treatment after he fell into a coma after an apparent hunger strike while in Libyan custody.

Below is a series of letters from Eljahmi to Gaddafi, urging democratic reforms in Libya.

AUGUST 13, 1991

In the Name of God, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful

The Brother Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi,

With regards,

I have thought a lot before deciding to write you this letter.

Like every Libya citizen I have endured and persevered against tyranny and infringement upon liberties.

My business was confiscated and my ability to conduct business was frozen. My children were expelled from their schools, due to the decrees of Ahmad Ibrahim who is wanted by justice. However, the nobles are exempted from justice.

My house has been invaded three times in one year. As a result my family has endured material losses and psychological trauma. The latest incident occurred on June 11, 1991. I am grateful to God that my family was in Benghazi, trying to heal the wounds of the first invasion in April 1991.

My office on the First of September Street has been confiscated. The Revolutionary masters have become the caretakers of the Obedience Movement. As a result we the Libyan people lost our civil rights.

I have used the forum of People Congresses. In 1987 and at the People's Congress in Manshia, Tripoli, I have stated my views about the war in Chad, tyranny, infringements upon liberties, the misuse of authority and centralized power.

In January 1989, I publicly declared my opposition to the regime from within the People's Congress. I acted as an independent voice and not part of a political party. I spoke out, because I love this land, which has given me every-

thing. I have always been of the view that I must educate and inform those in charge about pockets of danger. I have always conducted my business in public service this way.

I have told your advisors that the country may face great catastrophe. Some of the advisors I spoke with are Abdalla Mansour and Mustapha Al-Kharoubi.

There is lack of credibility. The circle of power has expanded. Apathy and corruption have become pervasive within society. The whole society feels terrorized by the state and the circle of nobles has expanded. Big and small know who the decision makers are. Some and the commoners as a whole suggest the Qadadifas are the decision makers and I think it is true.

This may be my last letter, I am currently in Cairo but I plan to return to Libya soon to face my responsibilities.

I am ready to express my honest opinion and accept my responsibilities as a Libyan citizen and under the rule of law and free speech.

I felt this bitterness because of what happened. I have been deprived of my right to work and the security of my family was left to the street.

Perhaps you will not see my writings, but I feel internal peace, because I know every fate is pre-destined.

Lord be my witness, I have delivered the message.

The peace and blessing of God be upon you.

ENGINEER FATHI ELJAHMI

MAY 16, 1992

In the Name of God, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful

The brother Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi,

Peace, mercy and blessings of God upon you,

I have sent you a letter last fall (1991). Today the events have developed and the picture in Libya has become bleak. The lack of will to make a balanced and decisive decision will lead the Libyan people toward a catastrophe. I see the images in Somalia, Lebanon, and everywhere. Change has shaken the whole world and this will happen soon in Libya.

We have grown tired of the same figureheads and the internal conditions in Libya. The current situation in the homeland has deteriorated. Libyans are growing silent day-by-day and apathy has become pervasive within society.

There is no sensitivity on my part for writing you, because I have used all available legal means beginning with the Basic People's Congresses and the legal system and writing to you personally. In the past I have resigned my position as a public servant and thank God, I feel proud for forming an independent outlook through dialogue.

As a Libyan citizen who is calling for change in the economic and social policies, for human rights and free expression and for building institutions based state. Even though we currently hold the decision to re-arrange the Libyan home, I feel distressed that my aspirations may in the future come through Great States.

I call for national reconciliation and for an immediate conference for the entire honorable political powers within Libya, for the declaration of general amnesty, for the release of all prisoners of conscience, for a national dialogue, for affirming the rule of law, for the return to normal life and for the formation of a temporary government.

I think your security is tantamount to the security of the Libyan people and there can be no security for you without the security of the Libyan people.

I hope that you receive my letter. The unity of the country and the security of its soil are at risk. Its unity can be torn apart and bloodshed, if it starts, no one can predict its outcome. I am ready to take part in the national reconciliation if accepted from all sides.

I affirm my readiness as a citizen to play a role within society under a law that protects free speech and expression.

I also affirm that I have nothing to worry about, because all things are pre-destined.

Lord be my witness, I have delivered the message.

ENGINEER FATHI ELJAHMI

SEPTEMBER 24, 2000

In the Name of God, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful

The Brother Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi,

With regards,

Peace, Mercy and Blessings of God upon you,

I have sent you few letters about tyranny, misuse of authority and my being deprived of making a living.

I have declared myself politically opposed from within the People's Congresses and also in the complaint to the District Attorney via Bab Ben Ghasheer police.

What is required of me? I have used the forum of the People's Congresses, the Judiciary and I have written to your Excellency on the daily struggles. Today, I face difficulties from Abdalla Ali Al-Qadhafi, the Coordinator of the Administration for People's Leadership. He uses his position to affect justice within a society, which is surrounded by panic and fear.

I am writing to you, because I love freedom and free speech. I wish to address you about the recent difficulties that I am enduring. I have no choice if I am deprived from earning a living. If the intent is to make me leave the homeland, then it is my right to affirm my continued commitment to the homeland and the future of my children.

If putting obstacles is the goal then it is my duty as a Libyan citizen that I hold firm to my commitment to enduring principles. After all, accepting disagreement is mercy. The progress of this nation will not happen without the creation of a free man, whom we believe in his rights and duties to society.

I conclude this letter to your Excellency by saying we have had enough. Please fear God. I am in distress because of the suffering and the problems, which are caused by the beneficiaries of the current systems. I know that my battle is continuing.

I end my letter by asserting that I ask nothing of you but I want to make you aware of the suffering. I am ready for dialogue.

I also affirm that I have nothing to worry about, because all things are pre-destined.

Lord be my witness, I have delivered the message.

Please accept my full and utmost respect,

ENGINEER FATHI ELJAHMI

A Reply to My Accusers¹

SAAD EDDIN IBRAHIM

On June 30, 2000, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the chairman of the board of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Cairo, and a number of his colleagues were arrested by the Egyptian authorities. The Center itself was shut down on July 1. The allegations against Ibrahim claimed that he had received foreign funding without the permission of the authorities and that he had used these funds to disseminate false information damaging to Egypt's national interest.² It was also alleged that the Ibn Khaldun Center had committed financial and other improprieties, and it was even hinted that Ibrahim had been involved in espionage. The State's case against the Ibn Khaldun Center and its staff continued in courts for nearly three years. Egypt's highest court exonerated Saad Eddin Ibrahim and his co-defendants in March 2003. During his incarceration, Ibrahim's health suffered, yet the State allowed only minimal medical care. Upon his release he traveled to the U.S. several times for surgery.

One of the Arab world's most prominent spokesmen on behalf of democracy and human rights, Saad Eddin Ibrahim is also prominent sociologist who has held a number of academic posts at prominent universities in Egypt, the United States and Europe. . He has also served as president of Cairo's Union of Social Professions and as secretary general of the Independent Commission for Electoral Review, which monitored Egypt's 1995 parliamentary elections.

On July 27, 2000, Ibrahim presented an eloquent statement to State Security Prosecutors in which he emphasized that his arrest was really about "matters still unspoken" — and then went on to speak about them. A minimally abridged version of his statement follows, translated from the Arabic by the Ibrahim family and slightly revised by Naiem A. Sherbiny.

THIS IS NOT a case about Egyptians receiving foreign funding from abroad, for our government is the largest recipient of grants, gifts, and aid from abroad. Our private sector is the second largest recipient of such grants, aid, and loans. At the tail end of this list are the civil-society organizations, one of which is the Ibn Khaldun Center. These organizations, totaling approximately 15,000, receive no more than about 10 percent of private-sector receipts and less than about 1 percent of what the Egyptian government receives from foreign sources: \$30 million, \$300 million, and \$3 billion, respectively. The total that the Ibn Khaldun Center received annually from those sources did not exceed \$300,000. It is therefore impossible that all this commotion could be over those \$300,000, which are spent on training and employing 30 young people; moreover, 10 percent of it is paid to the government in the form of taxes. All this is done with a degree of transparency exceeding that of the State and the private sector.

We estimate that in the investigation and prosecution of this case — including the costs of searching and guarding the premises of the Ibn Khaldun Center and imprisoning its staff — the government of this country I love

has probably spent more in the past month than the Ibn Khaldun Center's entire annual budget.

Furthermore, this case is not about uncovering a group of thieves or embezzlers, whether of the European Union's money or that of any other donor organization. These organizations have not asked and will not ask Egyptian State Security to perform the role of auditing authority for the European continent. In fact, these organizations entered into contractual relationships with the Ibn Khaldun Center, and both parties are bound by the provisions of the civil contracts that govern their financial relationship. Most importantly, the Ibn Khaldun Center did not rob an Egyptian bank, steal from Egypt's people, embezzle from its government, or smuggle money across its borders. Just the opposite is true: The Ibn Khaldun Center and Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim help bring a modest amount of funds into the country and distribute the majority of this amount as salaries and incentives to some of Egypt's sons and daughters—amounts that were deposited in Egyptian banks and also fed into the treasury of the Egyptian government through taxes.

If the State Security authority seeks to expand its scope of specialization to include financial auditing services,

¹ The first six paragraphs of the introduction to this volume, as well as Dr. Ibrahim's voice, is from *The Journal of Democracy*, volume 11, number 4, October 2000. The other part is editor's remarks.

² These allegations seemed to refer in particular to the production of a documentary film on Egypt's election process, funded by a grant from the European Union.

then let it begin its new responsibility with those who take loans from Egyptian banks and do not repay, and with those who steal from the Egyptian people and embezzle from state funds and go unpunished.

This case also cannot be about catching a group of dishonest youth. Let us say that, in a moment of greed or foolishness, some staff members attempted to defraud the Ibn Khaldun Center, or succumbed to planting forged records of their efforts to register voters, out of fear of state security investigators. If it is true that these things took place, then it is the Ibn Khaldun Center and its chairman, as well as its academic and professional reputation, that are the victims — and not the Egyptian people or the Europeans, and certainly not the security of the Egyptian state. In case it is later established that some of these young staff members did indeed forge or cheat or betray — let us assume that any or all of that is true — I draw your attention to an article in a leading Cairo paper,³ the same morning as the arrest of the Ibn Khaldun staff. In this article, the minister of education admitted that group cheating occurred in schools in several cities and towns, occasionally with the help of government officials.⁴

Or listen to the outcry of the governor of Giza:⁵ “Giza’s youth let me down. We gave fresh graduates shop outlets to start small businesses. After they had paid small down payments and promised they wouldn’t sell or rent the shops to anyone, they broke their promises. Some rented the shops secretly, others abused these shops by using them for illicit and immoral activities.”

Or when the minister of housing, spoke of another case: “In the Mubarak project for youth housing, apartments are distributed according to eligibility criteria, but unfortunately some youth applied using forged documents. This means that they were even willing to steal from the needy.”⁶

These are examples of three confessions of two ministers and one governor in one month who fell victim to cases of cheating or forgery from youth — youth who are similar to those who may have cheated the Ibn Khaldun Center. Keep in mind that the Ibn Khaldun Center doesn’t have the resources of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Housing, or the governor of Giza to either detect or prevent cheating.

Those who prepared this case and tried to implicate

the Center should redirect their efforts to the serious crooks in this country, as they have spread across Egypt from Port Said to the New Valley and from Alexandria to Al Hussaynia, passing through Giza and the Mubarak housing project. Even if some young people betrayed the Ibn Khaldun Center, they are the deformed offspring of major swindlers who operate freely on Egyptian soil.

This case is not about some youth who may have broken faith with the Ibn Khaldun Center, and this case is not about “receiving international bribes” for the purpose of tarnishing Egypt’s image or reputation. Beyond the naïveté of these accusations from a legal standpoint, the Ibn Khaldun Center and its researchers are a source of pride for Egypt abroad. Read what professor James Manor, director of the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex and the coordinator of the Global Project on Civil Society, stated in a Cairo magazine,⁷ or what *The Economist* wrote while commenting on the Ibn Khaldun Center on the same date. As noted by various international media, the current damage to Egypt’s image abroad is coming from those attacking the Ibn Khaldun Center, and from those who imprisoned a prominent sociologist whose work enhances Egypt and the Arab world.⁸

These sentiments have been echoed by distinguished intellectuals in Egypt.⁹ Their message is that Egypt’s reputation is tarnished when its security forces announce to the world that no honest Egyptian could possibly be working in the fields of human rights and democracy — that all of them are hired agents motivated by bribes and foreign funding. Egypt’s reputation is further tarnished when international media from Berlin to Paris and from London to New York report that Egyptian authorities arrested a 61-year-old professor in the middle of the night and put him behind bars like a dangerous criminal.

This same sorry arrest scenario was employed by security forces against the secretary general of the Egyptian Human Rights Organization in December 1998. In that instance, Egypt’s reputation was dragged through the mud in front of a distinguished audience gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris, where the imprisoned Hafez Abu Saada was among those to be honored.

This case is not about giving national secrets to foreign entities, though that is the broken record that Egyptian

³ “Those Who Cheat Are Not One of Us,” *Al Ahram*, July 1, 2000.

⁴ Port Said, Al Husaynia in Sharkiya, Alexandria, Cairo, and New Valley

⁵ Giza is one of Egypt’s 26 provinces, article appeared in *Al Ahram El Araby*, July 15, 2000

⁶ Dr. Mahmoud Ibrahim Soliman, Minister of Housing, in *October Magazine*, July, 23 2000.

⁷ *Al Ahram El Araby*, July 22, 2000.

⁸ *The Times of London* and the *New York Times*, July 10, 2000 and the *Washington Post*, July 16, 2000.

⁹ Dr. Said El Naggar, *Al Wafd*, July 19, 2000, Dr. Abdel Monem Said, *Al Ahram*, July 11, 2000, Dr. Ibrahim Dessouky Abaza, *Al Wafd*, July 6, 2000, and Dr. Medhat Khafaga, *Al Wafd*, July 14, 2000.

security forces never tire of using. Similar fabrications were leveled against 102 public figures in Egypt as early as 22 January 1953. Our security forces may have upgraded their surveillance equipment and interrogation techniques; it is clear, however, that they have not upgraded their thinking over the past 50 years. They do not realize that Egypt's enemies today are not the same as those of the past. The foreign entities that the Ibn Khaldun Center is accused of working with are the same organizations that supply the government with security equipment, food, and medicines. They are the organizations that we have welcomed to help us expand economic partnerships and trade. And the government of Egypt is engaged with some of these entities in joint military-training operations on a regular basis.

How could one private center be guilty of espionage for the same foreign organizations to which the State has opened its land, sea, and sky for military maneuvers? Do they not realize that we are in a new century and a new millennium? No, this case is not about giving away our secrets, or tarnishing Egypt's image, or accepting foreign funding, or some youth who went astray. This is, in the end, a case about matters still unspoken.

Those matters still unspoken, which State Security cannot openly interrogate, include the work of the Ibn Khaldun Center, along with some of its sister civil-society groups, to ensure the integrity of elections and reduce the possibilities for election fraud. Our efforts in this regard were modest in 1995 but resulted in monitoring 88 polling stations and reporting on the irregularities that were found. The reports issued by the National Monitoring Committee we formed were used as evidence in several administrative court cases, where judges eventually nullified the results in 80 out of 88 electoral districts. The courts, in other words, verified the results of our work. We believe that, in order to prevent this from happening again in the upcoming parliamentary elections, a case has been contrived against us. If certain forces were hoping to rig elections again in peace and quiet, they needed to make it appear that the secretary-general of the national monitoring group was himself a forger, a foreign agent, and worse. And they have succeeded already in a moral character assassination, even if no charges are ever proven in court. This is part of what has been left unsaid in this case.

"They plot, but Allah also plots, and Allah is the most powerful plotter of all" [The Koran, 3:54]. They did not anticipate that on the eighth day of this case against the Ibn Khaldun Center, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court would issue its bombshell: the invalidation of the sitting parliament and its predecessor because the elections were not monitored independently by the judiciary.

There is another matter which is left unspoken, and that has to do with the Copts of Egypt. The Center has been addressing this issue for the past five years, following an increase in violent sectarian incidents in the country.¹⁰ We drew attention to the problem, we warned of potential damage, and we called for respecting the rights to full citizenship of Egyptian Copts. Those rights include the right to full participation in the political process, including access to the legislature. This has not pleased the security forces, who still repeat the broken record about foreign circles instigating all problems inside the country.

What those forces failed to admit is that the ruling National Democratic Party did not nominate one Copt for parliament in the 222 electoral districts throughout the country, in either the 1990 or the 1995 elections. They did not care to investigate the content of the Egyptian press or education system to see what is said — or unsaid — about the Copts.

Things now happening in this arena can show us one of the real reasons behind the vindictive and fabricated tactics of those involved in this case. Today there is a new openness about these issues as a result of the efforts of the Ibn Khaldun Center: Newspapers are writing about the issue of Coptic nominees for the fall elections in a way that never happened in 1990 or 1995. We at the Center are pleased to see this happening, and we accept that now we are paying a price for what was formerly left unsaid.

There is a third unspoken area, and that is related to women's participation in public life. The Ibn Khaldun Center helped to found the Egyptian Organization for Women Voters' Rights (HODA) at a time when we saw that the percentage of women participating in politics was decreasing in Egypt while rising everywhere else in the world. What was originally unspoken has now been fully recognized through the establishment at the beginning of this year of the National Council for Women. Ms. Amina Shafik, the director of HODA, was appointed to the select group of members.

We want to state for the record of this investigation, as well as to the prosecutor general, that the Ibn Khaldun Center works at the forefront of both research and applied action. It is mainly our applied actions that have provoked a firestorm of negative responses. These are predictable reactions from societal forces opposed to change, open development, and enlightenment. We never imagined that reactionary fear of change would lead them to use a weapon of moral mass destruction against the leaders of change, but they have done so with the Ibn Khaldun Center.

I have said what I have to say, and I ask God's mercy on me, on them, and on all Egyptians.

¹⁰ From Sanbo to Kafr Demiana, from Ezbat el Akbat to El Kosheh where two violent incidents occurred.

In Defense of the Labour Movement in Iran

MANSOUR OSANLOO

Mansour Osanloo is a founding member and head of the executive committee of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTBC), the independent transport workers' trade union in Tehran, Iran. Since December 2005, Osanloo has been in and out of prison, as the authorities in Tehran continue to repress fundamental trade union and human rights in that country. During this time, Osanloo has been beaten by police in the presence of witnesses, held for months in solitary confinement and has alleged that he has been tortured while in custody. His family has been harassed by authorities. At this writing, he is incarcerated in Tehran's Evin Prison. His plight has generated an international campaign for his release among trade unionists and human rights group. This letter below was published in the Iranian Workers Bulletin, Issue 9, December 2006.

Board of Citizenship Rights Review:

With greetings and congratulations for the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan, and wishes for your success in tending to people's affairs! I respectfully inform you that I, Mansour Osanloo, employee of Vahed Bus Transit Co. of Tehran and suburbs, and president of the board of directors of the Company Union, was arrested by plain-clothes men claiming to belong to the Ministry of Information, one of whom went by the name of Mr. Asna Ashari, in front of my home, located at 48, Western Golbarg Avenue on December 20, 2005 (84/10/1).

I was held in ward 209 of Evin prison for seven months, under temporary confinement. During the said period, considering the rights of citizens and prisoners, I was mistreated in the following manner, which I hope will be investigated by your office. I was held in solitary confinement in a cell for the duration of three months and 23 days, with the exception of short periods, during which I had cellmates, who did not have similar charges as mine. One belonged to a group affiliated to Al Qaeda, who believed one goes to paradise by killing seven Shi'a believers, which caused me much psychological distress.

In the corridors of the ward, I had to wear a blindfold at all times. When being taken to the Court House, I was handcuffed by the guards. Interrogations were carried out in special rooms and were always accompanied by harassments and threats to the effect that I would be staying in prison as long as they wanted to keep me there, and that the judge counted 90 percent on what they tell him and my defense counted for nothing. Then, for a full month, my visiting rights, use of telephone and use of the courtyard for fresh air, were suspended.

While in prison, I broke no rules. They exerted a lot of psychological pressure by changing the interrogation teams and asking questions, which had no pertinence to

the charges they had laid on me. The allegations against me were the usurpation of the union title for our organization and attempt at jeopardizing the security of the country, but they forced me to share details about my private life, my work, and my relationship with friends and colleagues. They had created an atmosphere to make me feel guilty about my family and fear my own and my family's death. When parliamentarians visited Evin prison, they did not allow them to visit ward 209. My interrogator told me to refrain from speaking to inspectors and keep whatever has happened to me in ward 209 to myself. They made it understood that either I stay in prison for 15 years or I cooperate with the interrogators. They told me no matter where in the world I live; they have the power to annihilate my family.

Even after I was released from prison, the harassments continued. They phoned me repeatedly and asked me to meet them, to which I did not comply. Later, in the Revolutionary Court, in an empty room on the third floor, they continued the same conversations. They asked me to contact them once a week and report my activities to them. I did not comply with their requests and fearful of consequences, I went to the U.N. office in Tehran and explained my lack of security and personal and occupational condition to the person in charge of human rights issues. After this, once again they summoned me to the Revolutionary Court and threatened me with imprisonment, and in order to avoid going to jail one more time, they asked my wife and I to sign a statement saying we would not see any of my long time friends and colleagues. I know them for 20 years and among Iranians it is not acceptable to turn away friends or family from your home.

The men also call my wife's work place and my son's cell phone and ask them to tell me to meet them. This causes a lot of distress for my family. They are so scared of my being harmed that they don't allow me to go as far

as the head of the street alone and they always follow me. The phone calls continue. They asked me to go out of town on a trip. After I left town, they still kept calling my wife's work place and my son's cell phone asking them to ask me to contact them. I finally called them last week; they again reprimanded me for not having called sooner.

Where in our penal code does it say that a man, who has been released after 8 months in temporary confinement and has placed bail equivalent to 150 million Tomans, who hasn't been tried and hasn't been sentenced yet, should meet with interrogators and inform them of

his whereabouts? I love my country, my revolution and my system of government, but I want the existing problems and shortcomings of the law and those contrary to independence and freedom in the Islamic Republic to be corrected and people feel happy and satisfied in their own country. I therefore request that you investigate the above-mentioned case. I have made this complaint for the betterment of the country and the satisfaction of its citizens and the achievement of a society based on law.

Respectfully,
MANSOUR OSANLOO

SECTION V

WOMEN, FREEDOM, AND DEMOCRACY

THIS SECTION features voices of Muslim women. It offers a window into one of the most contentious and complex issues in Islam: the role and status of women. We begin with an essay by Zainab al-Suwaij, a democratic activist from Iraq and executive director of the American Islamic Congress, that seeks to shed some light on that complexity.

Muslim Women: Caught between the Past and Present

ZAINAB AL-SUWAIJ

The role of women in Islamic society is a thorny topic. While there is no shortage of books and articles specifically devoted to the issue, there are few works that address it dispassionately. There are two competing views in the literature on Muslim women today: The first is apologetic, arguing that women are already liberated, through Islam and Islamic norms of “modesty,” including the headscarf, or hijab, circumscribed relations with the opposite gender, and segregation of the sexes at the mosque and other places of worship. The second view sees women as fundamentally oppressed by Islam, or the Shari’a [Islamic law] and, standing in need of liberation, mainly through a process of modernization and Westernization. In other words, Muslim women, in the Islamic context, lack volition in choosing how to live their lives.

Historically, the majority of Islamic societies have been patriarchal. This system of organizing society and family has endured into the modern period, and in many respects was reinforced with the coming of Islam in the seventh century. For example, Islamic law, particularly Sunni law, has favored males over females in inheritance matters. Also, in certain court cases, especially regarding family law issues, a woman’s testimony carries far less weight than that of a man. Despite some of these legal provisions, many of which are written in the Koran and in the traditions (hadith) of Muhammad, social practice and the implementation of these laws has varied from one Muslim society to another.

Language provides another insight into the role of women in Islamic society. How women have been defined — at least in Arabic, which is the language of the Koran — demonstrates how deeply embedded are traditional notions of women in Arab society. For example,

the term “harim” refers to women and/or the physical place which they occupy in a household. It shares the same root with the word “haram” (sacred, forbidden, taboo), “mahram,” the (male) kinship group to which a woman belongs, and the notion of honor, “sharaf.” This term, “sharaf,” in many specific social contexts of Arab and Muslim world, has meant that the social identity of men, their honor, is premised on controlling a women’s sexuality. One can see how challenging change would be where such values predominate. And yet, in a number of Muslim societies, women have made progress toward achieving greater equality in such circumstances.

Many Islamists argue that Muhammad and the Koran liberated women in seventh century Arabia — a fact which carries some truth, for that time and place. It is worth noting that the developments that many Islamists often emphasize as “liberation” are, as noted earlier, the veil, or hijab, and the public segregation of men and women. In any event, the reality is that we no longer live in the seventh century, and attitudes and mores towards women have changed in much of the Islamic world. These attitudes and mores have to do with modernity and its universal human rights imperatives, including the full equality of the sexes.

It is this modern turn in history — which, with respect to the Middle East, can be dated to Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 — that provides the context and backdrop for the (re)interpretation, apologetic and otherwise, of Islam’s past as it relates to the treatment of Muslim women.

How a Muslim woman — or for that matter any woman — is understood, of course, depends on the religious, cultural, and historical context in which she lives. Today many Muslim women are caught between making sense of their religious past (or their memory of the past) and how it is practiced, through laws and social mores in their societies, while at the same time struggling to understand the present, which is likely to shape their future. A reader of the following selection of writings on women should try to keep in mind both the contemporary context and the history of Islam, but also the universal human rights imperatives — whether they are understood negatively or positively — which are informing these analyses of current-day Muslim women.

Reading one is Shirin Ebadi’s **Nobel Lecture** from 2003, in which she calls for mankind to put “into practice

every human right.” In Reading two, **Excerpts from *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World***, Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan author and university who was born in a traditional harem, argues that defects in Arab governance are not rooted in Islam, but stem from the acts and manipulations of autocratic rulers.

Reading three features a voice from perhaps the most conservative theocracy in the region, Saudi Arabia. In this reading, Mody al-Khalaf passionately protests the second class status of women in **Am I Not Saudi?** In Reading four, **I Will Never Be Silenced**, Bangladeshi Taslima Nas-

rin, who lives under death threats from Muslim extremists, tells the European Parliament that only “secularization” of Muslim countries will bring justice and freedom for all. In Reading five, **We Must Continue Our Fight**, Nadjet Bouda, an Algerian human rights activist, calls for help in the fight against terrorism.

Finally, the readings include a passage from Benazir Bhutto’s book, **Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West**, which she completed just prior to her assassination on December 27, 2007.

2003 Nobel Peace Lecture

SHIRIN EBADI

Born in 1947 in Northwest Iran, Shirin Ebadi grew up and was educated in her home country. After receiving her law degree from Tehran University, Ebadi began her career as a judge in Iran's Department of Justice in 1969. While serving as a judge, she also earned her doctoral degree in private law in 1971. Ebadi became the president of Bench 24 of the (Tehran) City Court in 1975 and was the first woman in the history of Iranian justice to serve as a judge. After the revolution in 1979, all women in the Justice Department were dismissed from their posts and given clerical duties. Ebadi requested an early retirement from the Department of Justice and used this time to write many books and journal articles. In 1992, Ebadi obtained permission to practice law, a right she was continually denied during the 1980s. Since then, she has defended many Iranian people and has served as a university law professor at the University of Tehran. She campaigns for strengthening the legal status of children and women. In 2003, Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her democracy and human rights work, especially on behalf of women's, children's, and refugees' rights. She was the first Iranian, and the first Muslim woman, to have received the prize.

In the name of the God of Creation and Wisdom,

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Honorable Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel extremely honored that today my voice is reaching the people of the world from this distinguished venue. This great honor has been bestowed upon me by the Norwegian Nobel Committee. I salute the spirit of Alfred Nobel and hail all true followers of his path.

This year, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to a woman from Iran, a Muslim country in the Middle East.

Undoubtedly, my selection will be an inspiration to the masses of women who are striving to realize their rights, not only in Iran but throughout the region — rights taken away from them through the passage of history. This selection will make women in Iran, and much further afield, believe in themselves. Women constitute half of the population of every country. To disregard women and bar them from active participation in political, social, economic, and cultural life would in fact be tantamount to depriving the entire population of every society of half its capability. The patriarchal culture and the discrimination against women, particularly in the Islamic countries, cannot continue forever.

Honorable members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee! As you are aware, the honor and blessing of this prize will have a positive and far-reaching impact on the humanitarian and genuine endeavors of the people of Iran and the region. The magnitude of this blessing will embrace every freedom-loving and peace-seeking individual,

whether they are women or men.

I thank the Norwegian Nobel Committee for this honor that has been bestowed upon me and for the blessing of this honor for the peace-loving people of my country.

Today coincides with the fifty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; a declaration which begins with the recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, as the guarantor of freedom, justice and peace. And it promises a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of expression and opinion, and be safeguarded and protected against fear and poverty.

Unfortunately, however, this year's report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as in the previous years, spells out the rise of a disaster which distances mankind from the idealistic world of the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2002, almost 1.2 billion human beings lived in glaring poverty, earning less than one dollar a day. Over 50 countries were caught up in war or natural disasters. AIDS has so far claimed the lives of 22 million individuals, and turned 13 million children into orphans.

At the same time, in the past two years, some states have violated the universal principles and laws of human rights by using the events of 11 September and the war on international terrorism as a pretext. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 57/219, of 18 December 2002, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1456, of 20 January 2003, and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2003/68, of 25 April 2003, set out and underline that all states must ensure

that any measures taken to combat terrorism must comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights and humanitarian law. However, regulations restricting human rights and basic freedoms, special bodies and extraordinary courts, which make fair adjudication difficult and at times impossible, have been justified and given legitimacy under the cloak of the war on terrorism.

The concerns of human rights' advocates increase when they observe that international human rights laws are breached not only by their recognized opponents under the pretext of cultural relativity, but that these principles are also violated in Western democracies, in other words countries which were themselves among the initial codifiers of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is in this framework that, for months, hundreds of individuals who were arrested in the course of military conflicts have been imprisoned in Guantánamo, without the benefit of the rights stipulated under the international Geneva conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the [United Nations] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Moreover, a question which millions of citizens in the international civil society have been asking themselves for the past few years, particularly in recent months, and continue to ask, is this: why is it that some decisions and resolutions of the UN Security Council are binding, while some other resolutions of the council have no binding force? Why is it that in the past 35 years, dozens of UN resolutions concerning the occupation of the Palestinian territories by the state of Israel have not been implemented promptly, yet, in the past 12 years, the state and people of Iraq, once on the recommendation of the Security Council, and the second time, in spite of UN Security Council opposition, were subjected to attack, military assault, economic sanctions, and, ultimately, military occupation?

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to say a little about my country, region, culture and faith.

I am an Iranian; a descendent of Cyrus The Great. The very emperor who proclaimed at the pinnacle of power 2500 years ago that "... he would not reign over the people if they did not wish it." And [he] promised not to force any person to change his religion and faith and guaranteed freedom for all. The Charter of Cyrus The Great is one of the most important documents that should be studied in the history of human rights.

I am a Muslim. In the Koran the Prophet of Islam has been cited as saying: "Thou shalt believe in thine faith and I in my religion." That same divine book sees the mission of all prophets as that of inviting all human beings to uphold justice. Since the advent of Islam, too, Iran's civilization and culture has become imbued and infused

with humanitarianism, respect for the life, belief and faith of others, propagation of tolerance and compromise and avoidance of violence, bloodshed and war. The luminaries of Iranian literature, in particular our Gnostic literature, from Hafiz, Mowlavi [better known in the West as Rumi] and Attar to Saadi, Sanaei, Naser Khosrow and Nezami, are emissaries of this humanitarian culture. Their message manifests itself in this poem by Saadi:

*"The sons of Adam are limbs of one another
Having been created of one essence."
"When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest."*

The people of Iran have been battling against consecutive conflicts between tradition and modernity for over 100 years. By resorting to ancient traditions, some have tried and are trying to see the world through the eyes of their predecessors and to deal with the problems and difficulties of the existing world by virtue of the values of the ancients. But, many others, while respecting their historical and cultural past and their religion and faith, seek to go forth in step with world developments and not lag behind the caravan of civilization, development and progress. The people of Iran, particularly in the recent years, have shown that they deem participation in public affairs to be their right, and that they want to be masters of their own destiny.

This conflict is observed not merely in Iran, but also in many Muslim states. Some Muslims, under the pretext that democracy and human rights are not compatible with Islamic teachings and the traditional structure of Islamic societies, have justified despotic governments, and continue to do so. In fact, it is not so easy to rule over a people who are aware of their rights, using traditional, patriarchal and paternalistic methods.

Islam is a religion whose first sermon to the Prophet begins with the word "Recite!" The Koran swears by the pen and what it writes. Such a sermon and message cannot be in conflict with awareness, knowledge, wisdom, freedom of opinion, and expression and cultural pluralism. The discriminatory plight of women in Islamic states, too, whether in the sphere of civil law or in the realm of social, political, and cultural justice, has its roots in the patriarchal and male-dominated culture prevailing in these societies, not in Islam. This culture does not tolerate freedom and democracy, just as it does not believe in the equal rights of men and women, and the liberation of women from male domination (fathers, husbands, brothers ...), because it would threaten the historical and traditional position of the rulers and guardians of that culture.

One has to say to those who have mooted the idea of a clash of civilizations, or prescribed war and military intervention for this region, and resorted to social, cultural,

economic and political sluggishness of the South in a bid to justify their actions and opinions, that if you consider international human rights laws, including the nations' right to determine their own destinies, to be universal, and if you believe in the priority and superiority of parliamentary democracy over other political systems, then you cannot think only of your own security and comfort, selfishly and contemptuously. A quest for new means and ideas to enable the countries of the South, too, to enjoy human rights and democracy, while maintaining their political independence and territorial integrity of their respective countries, must be given top priority by the United Nations in respect of future developments and international relations.

The decision by the Nobel Peace Committee to award the 2003 prize to me, as the first Iranian and the first woman from a Muslim country, inspires me and millions of Iranians and nationals of Islamic states with the hope that our efforts, endeavors and struggles toward the realization of human rights and the establishment of democracy in our respective countries enjoy the support, backing and solidarity of international civil society. This prize belongs to the people of Iran. It belongs to the

people of the Islamic states, and the people of the South for establishing human rights and democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the introduction to my speech, I spoke of human rights as a guarantor of freedom, justice and peace. If human rights fail to be manifested in codified laws or put into effect by states, then, as rendered in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human beings will be left with no choice other than staging a "rebellion against tyranny and oppression." A human being divested of all dignity, a human being deprived of human rights, a human being gripped by starvation, a human being beaten by famine, war and illness, a humiliated human being, and a plundered human being is not in any position or state to recover the rights he or she has lost.

If the twenty-first century wishes to free itself from the cycle of violence, acts of terror and war, and avoid repetition of the experience of the twentieth century — that most disaster-ridden century of humankind, there is no other way except by understanding and putting into practice every human right for all mankind, irrespective of race, gender, faith, nationality, or social status.

In anticipation of that day. With much gratitude.

Excerpts from *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*

FATIMA MERNISSI

*Fatima Mernissi was born in Morocco in 1940. Along with her sisters, mother, and grandmother, she grew up in a traditional harem which was guarded by a male custodian to keep women indoors. At the time of Mernissi's birth, Moroccan nationalists had just won independence from France, which contributed to a national emphasis on educating both men and women. Thus, Mernissi received not only a basic education, but proved capable of higher education as well — earning her master's from Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, and her doctoral degree from Brandeis University in the U.S. Mernissi is a well-known feminist in North Africa and a prominent activist in the Muslim world. Her many written works include *Beyond the Veil* (2003), *Women in Islam* (2002), and *Scheherazade Goes West* (2001). Mernissi is a lecturer at Mohammed V University and a research scholar at the University Institute for Scientific Research, also in Rabat.*

*The following selection is taken from *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (2002). The first part of the reading is from the introduction to the book and touches upon the relationship between Islam and the West, democracy and Islam, and other topics. The second part of the reading comes from the final chapters of her book and heralds a long-awaited change for women living under the weight of Islamic traditions.*

Following the War against Iraq, 1991¹

How completely horrifying, then, are the prospects for a woman in an Arab society put to fire and sword in the name of international law and with the authorization of the Security Council of the United Nations! And what can be said when this is done by the very Western states that claim moral leadership of the world by forcing other nations to accept as universal the democratic model, which strips violence of all claim to legitimacy? Was this war inevitable? That is the question.

Why is the promise of democracy so threatening to hierarchies, why is it so destabilizing to Asian and African regimes, and why does it rally the holders of power around the appeal to the old traditions? Is it because the idea of democracy touches the very heart of what constitutes tradition in these societies: the possibility of draping violence in the cloak of the sacred? The West began to be considered credible for leadership of the nations it had traumatized through its own colonial terror when it promised to condemn all violence against humanity as illegitimate. The democratic model constituted a break with the sorry world of internal and interstate massacres and pogroms because it stood against violence and its legitimation.

Never had the Westerners, marked in the memory of the Third World by their past as brutal colonizers, succeeded in making themselves more credible as the bearers of good for other cultures than at the moment of

the fall of the Berlin Wall. With the aid of the media, that event and the chain of falling despotisms which followed, especially the tragic ... rout of Ceaușescu and above all the stillborn putsch in Moscow, stirred up a wind of long repressed hope in the Arab medinas. I remember the day when a fishmonger in the Rabat medina left me standing with my kilo of marlin in hand while he rushed to the neighboring shop, which had a television set, to hear the announcer report the capture of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. When he returned after ten minutes and I expressed my displeasure to him at being abandoned, he gave me a reply that suggests what this moment meant to the masses: "I had the choice between serving you, which would have brought me forty dirhams² [five dollars], and watching the apocalypse. Don't you see that there is no comparison? Forty dirhams or the apocalypse? Who would choose forty dirhams? I am illiterate, Madame, but I can sense, just like you who are probably covered with diplomas, that history has come to a turning point."

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the men, institutions, and symbols of the Eastern European despotisms were seen as having universal meaning, despite the fact that they were geographically and ethnically localized. It is true that only the Europeans, more exactly the Germans, were involved as actors. It was they whom we saw climb the wall, rejoice over the falling of that wall, break it into pieces, and wear those pieces as jewels, relics of demolished frontiers and of a ripped hijab (curtain,

¹ Written around the time of the Gulf War, under the watch of the first President Bush. [Editors]

² Dirham is the base unit of Moroccan currency. [Editors]

veil). If a child should play around at translating the expression “Iron curtain” into Arabic, he would stumble on the word *hijab* and translate it as *al-hijab al-hadidi*.³ And he would be right, because the translation of the word “curtain” in the sense of something that divides space to impede traffic, is precisely *hijab*.⁴ The shopkeepers in the North African medinas and the peasants in the Atlas Mountains had no trouble identifying with those young blonds of both sexes who were hugging, singing, and destroying the wall, drunk with freedom amid the desire to put an end to authoritarianism. At the fall of the Berlin Hijab a new word burst out in the medinas, a word as explosive as all the atomic bombs combined: *shaffafiyya* (transparency).

Excluded from power and leading a life as mutilated as the arbitrary politics that crushes them is inefficient, Arab youths of both sexes were suddenly interested in those people of the North who shouted in the streets for liberty and justice. The only idea they had of Germany was of a rich country where the strength of the *deutsche mark* caused the people to seek pleasure rather than brood over the fate of the poor. And suddenly here they saw them, animated by a feeling so familiar, so visceral, so fundamental, the yearning for justice and freedom that they thought to be solely the preoccupation of the excluded: “Allah! The Germans feel just like us. They love their poorer brothers and are freeing them,” Ali, a merchant in the *Suq al-Sabat*, the shoe market in the Rabat medina, kept exclaiming.⁵ He bought a black and white television set for his shop three days after the fall of the wall: “Just in order to see the world, *Ustada*, (professor), just to see.” The West that we believed to be anesthetized by its luxury and libertinism opened up to emotions forgotten since the humanizing wave of 1968. An unforeseen Europe flashed onto Arab television screens: “*Kafir* (infidel) and humanist. Allah is great,” murmured Ali, one eye on his shoes, the other on the screen.

In the days following the crumbling of Berlin’s *hijab*, just before the bombing of Baghdad, Europeans emerged for the Arab masses as promoters of the democratic credo, which would solve the problem of violence and reduce its use. And then the powerful wave of universal hope raised by the Europeans’ song to freedom and the promise to condemn violence was rudely and brutally dashed by this war. It was a war in which the nonplussed Arab masses

witnessed in a few months, like some bad twist in a tale in the *Arabian Nights*, the putting to sleep of those humanistic European youths who had been singing of nonviolence. What they saw on their television screens was the appearance of another breed they had forgotten about: old generals with *kepis* and medals just like those of the colonial army generals who enumerated with pride the tons of bombs they had dropped on Baghdad. Two weeks after the beginning of the bombing, Ali sold his black-and-white television set and gave the money to the Moroccan Red Crescent to buy medical supplies for Iraq: “I don’t understand anything, *Ustada*. This is a matter between the big shots. They just have to settle it between themselves. The shoe merchants of Baghdad are not in it. Why bomb the people? Can you imagine what would happen if they dropped a bomb on the *Suq al-Sabat*? A mere firecracker would send the whole medina up in flames! I am forty-six years old. The last time I saw a *kepi* on a French general I was ten years old. It was in 1955, on the eve of independence. But the Americans with their machines — it’s like in the movies! Except that — God help us — it is our brothers who are the target. I have nightmares. My wife forbids me to look at the TV.”

Violation is obscene. But violation, just after having flaunted before the eyes of the victim the hope of a new era in which violence would have no place, is more cruel than anything the human mind can describe. It is this ambivalence of the Europeans toward violence, which has created confusion in people’s minds (I am speaking in ethnic terms, for the Gulf War has thrown discussion back to the most archaic level, that of two tribes who camp on the two shores of the Mediterranean). I have never felt my colleagues in the North so frozen in their European-ness and I so frozen in my Arabism, each so archaic in our irreducible difference, as during my trip to Germany and France during the war to participate in discussions that were supposed to establish a dialogue, but that in fact established nothing but our pitiful inability to breach the boundary between us, to see the other in all his or her difference without letting that difference threaten and frighten. For as long as difference is frightening, boundaries will be the law.

I was born in a harem, and I instinctively understood very young that behind every boundary something terrifying is hiding. It is fear, or rather, fears, that I want to

³ This is a North African Arabic translation. In other parts of the Arab world, the most common Arabic translation is ‘*al-sitar al-hadidi*.’ [Editors]

⁴ On the concept of the *hijab* and especially its visual, spatial, and ethical aspects see my *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991), pp. 93-97. The British edition is entitled *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁵ The *Suq al-Sabat* is supplied with rejects from factories that make shoes for export. The narrowness of the street makes it an excellent place for communication. During times of important political events, all the radios and television sets are turned on, and buying and selling come to a stop when the news is being broadcast. Thanks to their friendship with the factory workers in Casablanca, Ali and his neighbors in the street can order custom-fit shoes for the shopper, with a choice of colors and features. Parallel to the mainstream shoe industry, the informal network between workers and small storeowners attracts a growing clientele, especially of fashion-conscious young people.

speak about in this book. About all sorts of fears that burst forth from everywhere, from within and from without, from the East and from the West, and that multiply ad infinitum with strange mirroring effects. About individual fears, but most of all about collective fears. The former lead to suicide, which in the end is a personal matter, but the latter lead directly to fitna, outbreaks of violence all the more murderous because they take place within the intimacy of the group.

Women's Song — Destination Freedom

The Arab world is about to take off. This is not a prophecy. It is a woman's intuition, and God, who knows everything, knows that women's intuition is rarely wrong. It is going to take off for the simple reason that everybody, with the fundamentalists in the lead, wants change. The fact that they propose to go forward by going backward doesn't alter the fact that they ardently want change. There is a very strong wish in this corner of the world to go elsewhere, to migrate collectively to another present. Foreigners perhaps do not feel this, but every morning I wake up with the radio at my ear and think: anything can happen; perhaps everything will change between one minute and the next.

By plunging a knife into the sore spots — dependence, lack of democracy, powerlessness — the Gulf War shattered something deep within us. I have thought a lot about what that might be, and I have come to the conclusion that it smashed the multiple circles of cold fear that have pressed on us. What worse could happen to Arabs than what the war produced — the whole West with all its technology dropping bombs on us? It was the ultimate horror. When you have gone through an experience of horror — and all those who have experienced deep depression know it — you emerge free of fear. Not that you are rid of it, but you have conquered it. The Arab world, paralyzed by all the fears that this book explores,⁶ has finally with this war had the opportunity to live through them and emerge from the experience, a bit shaky per-

haps, but with the firm conviction that making the perilous jump into the unknown is the least dangerous thing that could happen to us.

A sense of hurtling toward the unknown is already reflected in good-natured daily chitchat: "Ma zal ayish?" ("Are you still alive?") replaced "Hi, how are you?" during the war. Everyone now knows that for an Arab, surviving means changing, exploring those dimensions of life that have been muzzled — aql (reason), individual freedom, ra'y (judgment), and especially khayal, that power of imagination that will assure supremacy in the world of the future. But although Arabs are amazed in this post-Gulf War era at the possibilities opening up to them, women already began their resolute and perilous march toward the realm of freedom some decades ago. Why, I will be asked, did women form this audacious avant-garde? Because we had nothing to lose except our fears, our masks, and all the crippling effects of segregation and confinement.

Women are eager to plunge into adventure and the unknown. The symbol of that eagerness is the Palestinian Mother Courage whom we see every day on our television screens, standing firmly in the street, neither intimidated nor filled with hatred toward the Israeli soldiers whom she scolds as though they were teenagers who have trouble relinquishing adolescence to become adults.

Arab women are not afraid of modernity, because for them it is an unhopd-for opportunity to construct an alternative to the tradition that weighs so heavily on them. They long to find new worlds where freedom is possible. For centuries, confined and masked, they have been singing about freedom, but no one was listening. Muhammad al-Fasi, a Moroccan scholar, had the idea of collecting some of the songs that circulated in the harems of Fez during the 1930s. Many spoke of forbidden passions, of nocturnal rendezvous, of crazy escapades, and some ridiculed the effectiveness of locks and chains. Others celebrated the bird who played false when given the chance.

⁶ Mernissi's book speaks of many fears: fear of the foreign West; fear of the Imam; fear of democracy; fear of the freedom of thought; fear of individualism; fear of the past; and fear of the present. [Editors]

Am I Not Saudi?

MODY AL-KHALAF

Mody Al-Khalaf is a Saudi writer and educator, based in Riyadh. She is director of cultural and social affairs at the Cultural Mission of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia and former director of the women's department and general director of scholarship programs for the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. She was an assistant professor at the Girls' College of Education and has held posts in Prince Sultan University and the Arab Open University, teaching English and English linguistics. This article is taken from the Arab News, October 8, 2004.

AS A SAUDI WOMAN who has often tried to push the wheels of change forward, I have been labeled many things ranging from “feminist” to “secularist.” What bothers me the most, however, is the charge that I am disloyal to my country. Because I criticize the state of current affairs regarding women in Saudi Arabia, I have often been accused of giving our enemies free ammunition to use against us.

I assure all my countrymen that that is the last thing I want to do. I am a firm believer that positive change cannot come from anywhere but within — and I have said it on more than one occasion. I do not believe anyone has the capability nor the right to “save” us. That is something we have to do on our own and in our own way. At the same time, positive change will not happen by itself. We cannot sit passively waiting for something to happen and that is why I write. I am realistic enough to realize that I might not see all the changes I want in my lifetime. Nevertheless, I know the time has come to pave the way for the women of tomorrow who will never forgive us if we do not make a beginning now.

Some 70 years ago, King Abdul Aziz united this country and laid the foundations for the tremendous changes that came in the following decades. In an amazingly short time, we changed from an essentially nomadic tribal society, plagued with poverty, illiteracy and superstition into a modern country far beyond the imaginations of King Abdul Aziz and the Saudis of that day.

Unfortunately, however, the enormous strides we took were not on all levels. The status of women in Saudi Arabia is still one that is in the Dark Ages. On our recent National Day, like any good patriot, I reminded my sons of the historical significance of the day. I told them how lucky they were to be born at a time when things have changed for the better. But, I confess, within me there was a deep sadness for all that still needs to change.

Silently I kept asking myself, if I am a Saudi national, why am I treated as a second-class citizen? Why can't I get an ID card, without anyone's permission, proving

that I am a national? Why do I need a male mediator between me and my government?

Am I not Saudi?

Why don't I have an independent judicial entity to represent myself in court or anywhere else for that matter? Why can't I take part in the politics of my country? Why can't I vote or nominate myself for a political position?

Am I not Saudi?

Why can't I travel, even if I have a mahram, without permission from a legal guardian? Why can't I lease a house or even rent a hotel room in my own country? Why can't I study, work, or even have surgery without male permission? Am I not just as Saudi as the males who give me permission? The list is endless...

When King Faisal opened the doors to female education in the 1950s, it was not an easy thing to do. He faced vicious opposition from people who saw female education as a threat to their beliefs and morals. King Faisal, however, was armed with the knowledge that he was doing right and he stood firm. Today, we all see the wisdom of his decision and his stance. Educated Saudi women are contributing to society in a way our grandmothers never could. From raising an educated generation at home to taking part in whatever society allows them to do, Saudi women have shown extraordinary capabilities and patriotism. Women graduate at a younger age than men and often take jobs that involve commuting hundreds of kilometers and doing double the normal work for half the normal pay. Saudi women who have had opportunities abroad have shown that they can be good pilots, lawyers and even U.N. representatives. We have great potential; we are a virtually untapped national resource.

Education has also enlightened us women on our rights as human beings first and women second. With that enlightenment has come the painful realization that it is not Islam that deprives us of many rights but the laws of the country — laws that were, and still are,

dictated by unfair social customs. King Faisal had the wisdom and strength to stand up in the face of oppressive social customs that have no religious basis.

As we have just celebrated our National Day, I would like to make a plea on behalf of Saudi women for our government to take a stand once again. We Saudi women want to and need to feel as if we were truly first-class

citizens of this great country. We deserve to have equal rights with men.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that I do not write this article to avoid punishment or to seek reward. Rather, it is dictated by patriotism and love for my country which is the same reason which is behind all my articles.

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I Will Never Be Silenced

TASLIMA NASRIN

Taslima Nasrin is a Bengali Bangladeshi author, feminist human rights activist, and secular humanist exiled in Calcutta, India. She worked as a government physician until 1994. She is a noted critic of Islam and religion in general. She was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1994 and a Humanist Award (from the International Humanist and Ethical Union) in 1996. She received the Simone de Beauvoir prize in 2008 for her defense of women's rights. Since 1993, Nasrin has faced several death threats from Islamic fundamentalists for her criticism of Islam, the Quran and Muhammad. In March 2007, an Indian Islamist group offered a bounty of 500,000 rupees for her beheading. While attending a literary function in Hyderabad, India, she was attacked by a group of Islamic activists. She lived under difficult and dangerous conditions in India for some time — she was denounced by Muslim clergy and received death threats from Islamic fundamentalists. In 2008, the government of India asked her to leave the country, and she currently lives in Sweden.

What follows is a slightly adapted version of a speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, on December 17, 2002.

I WOULD LIKE to express my heartfelt gratitude for your having invited me to the European Parliament in commemoration of the anniversary of my having received the Sakharov Prize in 1994. I am proud to be one of the winners of the Sakharov Prize. Receiving this esteemed prize helped greatly to give me the inspiration and courage to go on with my struggle for equality and justice for everybody, whatever their religion and gender.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought. This, of course, is the basic human right. But, shockingly, very few people in some countries enjoy this freedom. They are not encouraged to think differently, not allowed to do things differently.

I came from a country where religious fundamentalists, including governmental authorities, denied my freedom to have thoughts different from their own. As punishment, they demanded my execution by hanging. I was forced to leave my own country. I had to pay heavily for the sole reason that I believe in human rights and freedom of expression. For more than a decade, I have been struggling to help people understand the importance of freedom of thought, which is an essential part of human rights as well as of democracy. Like me, thousands of fellow sufferers have had the same struggle. Some are in prison, some in exile.

The fundamentalists are increasing in number. People, afraid to oppose the fundamentalists, keep their mouths shut. It is really very difficult to make people move against a sensitive issue like religion. Yet religion is the source of fundamentalism. Probably we will not be able to see any dramatic change in Muslim society, for it is in the backyard of modern history. But we should not give up; we have to fight the fundamentalists to create a better world.

All religions are oppressive to women. All religions are against democracy, human rights and freedom of expression. So, in the West, we see the separation of state and church. But most of the Muslim countries still have seventh-century Shari'a law, in which women are oppressed, human rights are violated and freedom of expression is not respected. Now, secularization of Islamic countries is urgently necessary as well as secular education instead of religious education. We cannot create any good by using bombs.

I am not a pessimistic person. I believe that if the silent majority were to protest against those who believe in irrational blind faith and who want to go backwards instead of forwards, who are for tradition not innovation, who oppose individualism and plurality of thought, then the world would become a truly civilized place in which to live. To eradicate poverty and illiteracy, to rid it of dogma, bigotry, and all kinds of obscurantism, to bring light to the darkness, what is urgently needed is worldwide enlightenment.

Freedom of expression for some is not enough. We must work for the freedom of expression for all.

Human rights for some is not enough. We must work for the human rights of all.

Justice for some is not enough. We must work for justice for all.

Peace for some is not enough. All must be free from violence and aggression.

I, come what may, will not be silenced. Come what may, I will continue my fight for equality and justice without any compromise until my death. Come what may, I will never be silenced.

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We Must Continue our Fight

NADJET BOUDA

Nadjet Bouda works as a human rights activist in Algeria, an Arab country wracked by years of civil war and governed by a secular regime that uses broadly repressive measures to combat any popular Islamist threat to its rule.

Ms. Bouda was only 16 when she joined Rally for Youth Action, an Algerian NGO that conducts civic education and human rights awareness programs with and for Algerian youth. By the age of 20 she was acting as the organization's president and spokeswoman.

Still in her early 20s, Ms. Bouda now works with SOS Disparus, advocating on behalf of the hundreds of Algerians who have "disappeared" as a result of Algeria's ongoing civil war. Her activism reflects the importance of youth in the effort to spread democratic values throughout the Muslim world. The statement below is taken from her acceptance speech upon receiving the National Endowment for Democracy's 2002 Democracy Award, shared with three other women from predominantly Muslim countries.

E SALAM ALA EL DJAMIA, in Arabic this means PEACE BE WITH YOU, and I hope that one day peace will reign not only here but also in my country.

I would like to thank the National Endowment for Democracy for offering me this award. Through which they are not only recognizing me, but also many other genuine Algerian activists, who are waging a continuous battle against dictatorship, all dictatorship, because we strongly believe that there is no such thing as enlightened despots or dictators. These activists fight daily for peace and democracy in Algeria.

This moment is one of the special moments of my life. At such moments, I always like to share special thoughts with those around me.

My first thought is of the person who has always been behind me during my years of struggle. She has always been there and has always encouraged me to continue my fight.

I would like to tell you about my mam, who is a very traditional woman. She never had the opportunity to study at the university or read about the theories of Rousseau or Jefferson. But she nevertheless understands the utility and importance of this cause, our cause, which is that of peace and democracy.

This traditional woman, who, each time that I got ready to go out and protest or make a public statement, had a fear in her heart for her daughter.

Only God knows how difficult it is for a mother to experience that, especially in a country that is in the middle of an armed conflict that has claimed thousands of lives. She feared I could be manipulated, or raped or even assassinated. In spite of all of this, she never asked me to give up my fight. For this I would like to say thank you mam, thanks for

being there for me, thanks for believing in me, and thanks for charring me with this cause.

Secondly, I would like to thank my sincere comrades and friends in Algeria, with whom I fight side by side in spite of all the obstacles. My comrades are not only members of the two civil society organizations with which I'm active (le Rassemblement — Actions Jeunesse, and SOS Disparus), but are also found throughout Algerian society.

They are journalists who, in spite of all the pressures and difficulties that they face both from their editor as well as from the regime, try to ensure that the voice of truth is heard.

They are the activists within civil society and political parties who fight on a daily basis to establish a culture of democracy in Algeria.

They are also simple citizens and courageous youths in all the regions of the country, who speak out against injustice and in favor of human dignity.

I would also like to thank all my comrades and friends in the international community, who I do consider essential partners in the fight for truth and justice, which for me are the key building blocks of peace and democracy.

I would like to share this prize with all of you: my mother, my Algerian friends and my fellow international activists. And I would like to say to you all: TODAY MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST CONTINUE OUR FIGHT.

Since September 11, 2001, the world has a new understanding of the importance of fighting against terrorism. As someone who has lived more than ten years of terrorist violence in my own country, I see this as a positive effect of this terrible human tragedy.

But, from the experience of my country, I can tell you that fighting terrorism by arms alone will not bring an end to this deadly violence.

In my country, the policy of combating terrorism through armed means alone has cost us one hundred twenty thousand lives, thousand of disappeared persons, a destroyed economy and a profound isolation from the rest of the world.

If it is true that the level of violence has decreased since the terrible time of the mid 90's, it also true that hundreds of innocent people still die each year.

In my opinion, this is not a victory. And the roots of terrorism remain as strong today as during the 1990's. WHY?

In my opinion, the factors that produced terrorism in the 1990's still exist in Algeria today.

My fellow countrymen, countrywomen and I need your help to fight against the roots of this terrorism. They are found in:

First: the limits to freedom of expression and association in my country;

Second: the absence of the rule of law and an independent judiciary;

Third: the lack of transparency and public confidence in our electoral process and political institutions;

Fourth: corruption and poor economic management that have led to the wasting of our resources and failure to create jobs for the thousands of youth that enter the job market each year;

And fifth, they are also the result of the inequalities of the world economic and political systems that means that most of the resources are from the south, but most of the decisions are made in the north.

I would like to invite you to help us to fight against the roots of terrorism in Algeria by assisting us to combat the political, economic and social injustices that led to this terrible phenomenon.

I would like to ask the policy makers present in the audience tonight to remember these issues in discussions with your Algerian counterparts.

I would like to ask the civil society activists in the room to continue and intensify exchange programs with my fellow Algerian activists.

I would like to invite the journalists among us tonight to reach out to your peers in Algeria and share your experience with them.

And I would love to ask the American people to open your heart to and to include in your prayers the thirty million Algerians who dream one day of fully assuming their rights as citizens in a land of PEACE.

Thank you once again for this honor, thanks for sharing this special moment with me. May good be with you. Wa el salam alaikoum wa rahmatou ellah.

From Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West

BENAZIR BHUTTO

Born in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1953, Benazir Bhutto was prime minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990 and from 1993 to 1996. She was chair of the Pakistan Peoples Party and the first woman ever to be elected to head the government of a Muslim state. She lived in self-imposed exile from 1999 to 2007, due to the military-led government's charges of corruption against her and members of her family. Such a confrontation with Pakistan's military was part of the Bhutto family's story. Benazir Bhutto's father, former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed by a military coup in 1977 led by army chief General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq. Zia imposed martial law and reneged on a promise to hold free elections. He subsequently charged Benazir's father with conspiracy to commit murder. He was sentenced to death by a martial law court and hanged on April 4, 1979. Both the accusation and the sentence were extremely controversial in Pakistan and in the international community. During this period, Benazir Bhutto and her mother were held in detention by the Zia regime. In the years following Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's death, Benazir's two brothers were killed under suspicious circumstances.

*Despite this family history, Benazir Bhutto continued to speak out and to become a respected advocate for democracy. Under an amnesty arrangement negotiated with the government of General Pervez Musharraf, Bhutto returned to Pakistan in October 1977 to run as the chief opposition candidate in the January 2008 general elections. She was assassinated in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007, two weeks before the elections. The passage below is taken from her last book, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West*, written in part during the last weeks of her life.*

I RETURNED to Pakistan on October 18, 2007, with the goal of moving my country from dictatorship to democracy. I hoped that this transition could take place during the scheduled elections of 2008. I feared that otherwise the extremists would march toward Islamabad. Islamabad is near the town of Kahuta, where Pakistan's nuclear program is being carried out.

It is my fear that unless extremism is eliminated, the people of Pakistan could find themselves in a contrived conflict deliberately triggered by the militants (or other "Islamists") who now threaten to take over Pakistan's nuclear assets. Having a large Muslim nation fall into chaos would be dangerous; having the only nuclear-armed Muslim nation fall into chaos would be catastrophic. My people could end up being bombed, their homes destroyed, and their children orphaned simply because a dictator has focused all his attention and all of the nation's resources on containing democrats instead of containing extremists, and then has used the crisis that he has created to justify those same policies that caused the crisis. It may sound convoluted, but there is certainly method to the madness.

This is such a tragedy, especially because Islam is clearly not only tolerant of other religions and cultures but internally tolerant of dissent. Allah tells us over and over again, through the Quran, that he created people of different views and perspectives to see the world in different ways and that diversity is good. It is natural and part of God's plan. The Quran's message is open to and

tolerant of women's full participation in society, it encourages knowledge and scientific experimentation, and it prohibits violence against innocents and suicide, despite terrorists' claims to the contrary.

Not only is Islam compatible with democracy, but the message of the Quran empowers the people with rights (democracy), demanding consultation between rulers and ruled (parliament), and requiring that leaders serve the interests of the people or be replaced by them (accountability).

Islam was sent as a message of liberation. The challenge for modern-day Muslims is to rescue this message from the fanatics, the bigots, and the forces of dictatorship. It is to give Muslims back the freedom God ordained for humankind to live in peace, in justice, in equality, in a system that is answerable to the people on this earth accepting that it is God who will judge us on the Day of Judgment.

It is by accepting that temporal and spiritual accountability are two separate issues that we can provide peace, tranquility, and opportunity. There are two judgments: the judgment of God's creatures in this world through a democratic system and the judgment by God when we leave this world. The extremists and militants who seek to hijack Islam aim to make their own judgments. In their failure lies the future of all Muslims and the reconciliation of Islam and the West.

GLOSSARY

Allahu Akbar “God is great,” or “God is the greatest.”

Ash’arite A school of early Muslim philosophy. It was founded by the theologian al-Ashari (d. 945) who gave it its name. In contrast to the Mutazilite school of Greek-inspired philosophers, the Ash’arite view was that comprehension of the unique nature and characteristics of God was beyond human capability. This view ultimately prevailed. According to Ash’arites, while man had free will, he had no power to create anything. It did not assume that human reason could discern morality, with the result that independent philosophical inquiry was subordinated to theological interpretation. The Ash’arite school is often blamed for the demise of Arab philosophy and stifling freedom of inquiry among the broader society, with negative consequences for Arab civilization.

Ba’thist A member of the Arab Nationalist Ba’th Party, founded in Syria. Ba’ath means resurrection or renaissance. The Ba’th party ruled Iraq until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and remains in power in Syria.

Chador Literally “tent,” a chador is the head-to-toe garment or cloak worn in some Muslim traditions; associated especially with Iran — more prevalent in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Coptic Copt; Egyptian Christian.

Dahriyin Jamal-Eddin Al-Afghani, a renowned 19th century Muslim scholar, used the term *Dahriyin* to refer to secularists, which in its Koranic origin, had been used to describe atheists.

fi’awi Clique or cliquish.

Hijra Literally “withdrawal,” it refers to the departure of Mohammed and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 c.e.; also immigration or migration.

ijtihad The independent or “personal” interpretation of the Koran, Hadith and other Islamic texts, made by a “qualified jurist,” without reliance on earlier interpretations. It is usually used today by reform scholars to describe their attempts to reinterpret Islam in the light of modern society.

ijma In Muslim jurisprudence, it means “consensus” or agreement; ijma is one of the four sources of law in Sunni Islam, which are ijma, sunna, qiyas and the Koran.

Imam In Shia Islam, a religious leader claiming direct descent from the Prophet; prayer leader in a mosque.

Kafir[s] Literally, an ingrate; in Islam, someone who is ungrateful to Allah; an unbeliever or infidel.

Kholoa A woman’s right under Islam to divorce her husband in a *shari’a* court.

Madrasa Literally, a place where teaching or learning takes place; a religious school.

Marabout A saint; the tomb of a saint or holy person (in North Africa)

Medina Second holiest city in Islam; the burial place of Mohammed and site of the Hejira from Mecca in 622 c.e.

Mahram Anyone a Muslim is forbidden to marry; e.g. a blood relative.

Mu’tazilite “Those Who Withdraw, or Stand Apart” is a school of early Muslim philosophy; the Mu’tazilah, in the eighth century, were the first Muslims to use the categories and methods of Hellenistic (Greek) philosophy to derive their perspective. Among other principles, they held that because God was one and unique, the Koran must have been separately created; they held that through free will man chooses between good and evil, and is ultimately responsible for his actions. There is much more to this philosophy, which was rejected by most Muslims a millennium ago, but its emphasis on free will, the power and legitimacy of reason, and the “separateness” of the Koran from Allah are powerful tools that modern reformers are trying to resurrect.

Nizam Literally, “administrator of the realm”; also hereditary ruler of the former Indian state of Hyderabad.

Quraniun Muslim reformers; also believers in the Quran (Koran).

Quraysh The tribe to which the Prophet Mohammed belonged.

The Prophet Mohammed, founder of Islam.

Ridda apostasy in Islam; an illegal act in defiance of *shari’a*.

**shari’a,
shari’ah
sharia,**

Sharia’a Islamic law: Islamic religious law, based on the Koran.

Shi’ite A member of the Shia sect, the second largest branch of Islam. Shi’ite Muslims believe that the only qualified successors to the Prophet Mohammed are members of his family, in the first instance his cousin and son-in-law Ali. The term Shi’ite derives from the Arabic partisans or

party of Ali. Approximately 10 percent of all Muslims are Shi'ites. They are concentrated in Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.

shura The Arabic word for “consultation.” Usually refers to the duty of the ruler under Sharia law to consult with members of society on policy decisions. The *shura* tradition is often cited by Arab democrats who argue that there are the roots of representative democracy in Islam.

Sunna The way of life prescribed for Muslims on the basis of the teachings and practices of Muhammad and interpretations of the Koran.

Sunni Sunni Islam is the largest branch of Islam, and traces its roots to the followers of Abu Bakr, who believed him to be the legitimate successor to the Prophet Mohammed, rather than his cousin Ali. Sunni derives from *sunnah*, or the custom or well-trodden path of the Prophet.

Surah A chapter in the Koran.

Taqlid Literally “to follow or to imitate,” it generally refers to the practice of following the decisions of religious authorities without question.

ulama,

ulema Literally, ones possessing knowledge or the community of learned men in the Muslim community; imams, scholars who issue rulings and interpretations of the Koran, Sunnah and other Islamic texts.

Wafd Literally, delegation, in this context referring to an Egyptian nationalist party that grew out of an Egyptian delegation that attempted to push for Egyptian independence in the aftermath of World War I.

**Wa el salam
alaikoum wa
rahmatou**

allah Peace be upon you together with God's Mercy.

Zakat The giving of alms; charitable giving.

Zina Pre-marital or extramarital sex.

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ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

555 New Jersey Ave., NW | Washington, D.C. 20001
Tel: 202.879.4401 | shankerinstitute.org

