

Toward a Post-Orientalist Approach to
Islamic Religious Studies

by

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Introduction to *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*

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The Immediate Context

Public interest in Islam has increased dramatically in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The evidence for this includes a new abundance of faculty openings and curriculums in colleges and universities that deal with the Islamic religious tradition. As a consequence, Islamic studies as a field in departments of religion in North America has recently become more apparent than in the past--in the classroom, bookstores, professional societies, and conferences world-wide on Islamic topics. The reasons for this sudden surge of interest in Islam since September 11, 2001 by liberal arts deans, religious studies departments and scholars world-wide require little explanation. As recently as the last decades of the twentieth century, however, interest in, and room for, curriculum on Islam and Muslims could be found in barely one-tenth of the approximately 1200 academic departments of Religious Studies in North America. With the

rapidly increasing demand for Islamic studies in the first decade of this century, when at least fifty academic positions for specialists in Islam in religious studies have been advertised annually, there are not enough qualified candidates trained in religious studies who are also trained in Islamic studies.¹ Yet it was not so long ago that Islam did not even have a primary presence in the major professional society for faculty of religion, the American Academy of Religion. Indeed, as recently as mid-twentieth century, Islam was included within the Academy's coverage of world religions at its annual meetings as a subsection of the 'History of Christianity.' Now, The Study of Islam is a major program unit within the Academy with many subsections and cross sections with other religious traditions. Was 9/11 the cause of all that?

Not entirely. While Islamic studies as a field has been powerfully affected by political events, debates within the academy have had a longer and more pervasive role in shaping, and sometimes ignoring, this area of inquiry, whose trajectory we briefly sketch below. That trajectory over the past quarter century, we contend, has encouraged a rethinking among scholars about how to theorize and problematize the textual and social data of Islam and how to adjust their investigations to methodologies that address the urgencies of Islamic studies in the twenty-first century.

Islam in Religious Studies *Revisited*

The short supply of expertise on Islam in religious studies has been observed and lamented for several decades. In an article entitled "The History of Religions and the Study of Islam," Charles Adams had concluded in 1967 that, despite the ferment going on at the University of Chicago in comparative studies in the history of religions, it was difficult for him

“to see a direct and fructifying relationship between the activities of Islamicists and those of historians of religion.”² Adams further emphasized this problem in an identically titled companion article in 1974, written when he discovered that he was the only scholar to present a paper on Islam the previous year at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.³ The scope of those essays, written several decades ago, was limited, but it presented a portrait of the institutional and disciplinary constraints that still result in conflicts and tensions between religious studies generally and the study of Islam as carried out by Orientalists and area studies specialists.⁴ Until very recently, departments of Religion, including graduate programs, often looked to departments of Oriental Studies and area studies programs to teach courses about Islam. Adams’ paper can be seen as a kind of snapshot of that earlier time, which helps us to understand what has happened to the study of Islamic religion over the past thirty-five years.

The study of Islam has been, in effect, uneasily poised between Orientalism and area studies on the one hand and religious studies on the other. It is important to examine the implications of both area studies and religious studies, including critiques emerging within these fields, if scholars are to deal effectively with issues relating to Islam in the global public culture that is being formed today. Our contention is that a growing number of historians of religion specializing in Islam in the present critical moment are bridging and transforming these two traditions of scholarship—Orientalism and religious studies. The purpose of this volume is to demonstrate this claim and to assess its implications in this introduction and in the essays that follow.

Historically speaking, what we today call Islamic studies emerged from Orientalism, the erudite study of texts and ideas that became a highly developed field in the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and America. Albert Hourani published a thoughtful essay in 1991 titled “Islam in European Thought,” in which he sketched a nuanced intellectual history of European Orientalism. In the introduction, Hourani stated that his purpose was to show the roots of the European tradition of Islamic studies about God, man, history and society which lie at the heart of what we call ‘Orientalism.’ In particular, he tried to show how the study of Islam, when it emerged as a separate focus of study in the nineteenth century, was given its direction by certain ideas which were current at the time: ideas about cultural history, the nature and development of religions, the ways in which sacred texts should be understood and the relationships between languages.⁵ Orientalism had many influences in nineteenth-century intellectual tides, including the historical and literary criticism of the Bible.

In his usual lucid manner, Hourani was summoning academics in the emerging field of Islamic studies to reassess the achievements of scholars like Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) and others, without the polemics of the Orientalism debate. Hourani’s Orientalists were academics rooted in different university, national, denominational and theological backgrounds. His treatment of them brought out their individual achievements and failings. In Hourani’s account, they were shorn of the negative ‘Orientalist’ stereotype in which they and their work tend to be lumped today. Hourani was of course responding to the highly influential work of Edward Said, another Christian Arab intellectual, whose critique of Orientalism has had far-reaching consequences in Middle Eastern area studies and Islamic studies, but also in religious studies.

As Edward Said noted in *Orientalism*,⁶ Europe's earlier concept of the 'Orient' corresponded to today's Islamic Middle East. Said's implicit suggestion that Orientalism should be extracted and banished from Middle Eastern studies is too well known to require extensive treatment here. Suffice it to say that it is not necessary to subscribe to all of Said's critical analyses, based in part on his reading of the postmodern writings of Michel Foucault, to acknowledge that there were issues of power and colonialism associated with the institutional aspect of Orientalist study. Often referred to as the founder of Postcolonial Studies and Criticism, Said analyzed Orientalism not in terms of intellectual and social history as Hourani was later to do, but rather through textual criticism of Orientalist writings. He was able to expose the false assumptions about Middle Eastern (Islamic) societies and the Romanticism that was ascribed to them in Orientalist constructions. Said's was a bold and polemical project with many influences, ripples, and disturbances throughout the humanities and social sciences, especially in critical theory. It is interesting to note that shortly after Said's *Orientalism* appeared in 1979, he was invited by Albert Hourani to be one of the few to present a paper on the occasion of the 1980 Levi della Vida award whose recipient that year was Hourani himself. Inevitably, several critical ripostes to Said's *Orientalism* have appeared since 1979. For example, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* by Daniel M. Varisco (2007) is written from the point of view of what we will describe below as Post-Orientalist scholarship. Nonetheless, Orientalism remains for most scholars the *bête noir* in the expanding family Islamic studies today.

The 'Middle East' is more than a benign descriptive geographical term. It had been popularized by an American naval historian in 1902, to describe the sea lanes from Suez to Singapore as the crucial connector between the Near East and the Far East, at the high point of

the British Empire. The term was later taken up as a geographical category by the OSS (precursor to the CIA) during World War II, having its main applicability during the Cold War.⁷ Both departments of Near Eastern studies⁸ and Middle Eastern studies can be conveniently listed under the category of area studies rather than be construed as an academic ‘discipline’ as such. Near Eastern Studies departments typically include a large array of languages ranging from ancient cuneiform scripts to modern Hebrew and Arabic, with an enormous temporal range covering several discrete religions and civilizations. They do not offer a coherent intellectual program, since the specialists in these departments work on texts and languages that most of their colleagues cannot read. Departments of Middle East studies, which focus on the modern period, are supported in the United States by approximately eighteen federally funded National Resource Centers for Middle Eastern Studies (supported by the Title VI program in the U.S. Department of Education). These were created on the justification of the immediate relevance of the Middle East for security issues and policy users (during the 1960s and 1970s, study of languages like Arabic and Persian was supported by the National Defense Foreign Language fellowship program, which sounded too suspicious for scholars to mention when doing research overseas). Most Middle East specialists are social scientists (historians, anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists) or experts in language and literature. The intellectual justification for Middle East centers and departments rests generally on the concept of an interdisciplinary approach to a given region.

The academic study of religion in Euro-America emerged over the last century, first from Protestant seminaries, then Catholic and eventually Jewish institutions. While academic departments of religious studies are frequently found in private universities with religious

affiliations (some of which have divinity schools), the period since World War II has seen the establishment of departments of religion in public universities as well. Religious studies has struggled to gain recognition as a humanities discipline, in the face of opposition from both secularists and sectarians. This is not the place to attempt any kind of complete description of the development of religious studies. But it is important to note the expansion of departments of religious studies beyond the standard subjects of Biblical studies and Protestant theology, with the inclusion of Catholic Christianity, Judaism, and the religions of Asia, Africa and the Americas, particularly since the 1960s. Religious studies itself has very much become a mirror to the era of globalization.

Charles Adams, cited above, had described the study of religion in his day mainly under the heading of History of Religions, and he used the German term *Religionswissenschaft* to present its genealogy. In his view, the field was primarily the phenomenology of religion as defined by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and other scholars at the University of Chicago. His critique of it began with the observation that departments of religion, when attempting to overcome their parochialism, generally preferred to concentrate on tribal religions or on Asian traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Far Eastern religions. He observed that there were then hardly any graduate programs in religious studies that included Islamic studies as a field. Area studies centers and departments, he maintained, generally considered religion to be a secondary subject of no major importance, which reflected the influence of secularization theory on the social sciences. In addition, the publishing industry offered very few books on Islam, in comparison with Eastern religions. Finally, the bias toward archaic religions in the history of religions excluded historical and rational religions like Islam. The result was a situation of

impoverishment, in which the history of religions had failed seriously to engage with a major world-historical civilization. While the field of religious studies has expanded considerably in both scope and method since 1974, we feel that Adams's observations about the isolation of Islamic studies from religious studies still in part holds true, but that Islamic studies is currently in the process of change, as the papers in this volume document.

To counter the situation as he saw it, Adams proposed a stern remedy: what was needed was nothing but "old-fashioned historical, literary, and philological studies directed to the Islamic tradition, the mastery of linguistic tools, and the study of an enormous textual tradition."⁹ This immersion was unavoidable, he argued, because highlighting the general and the comparative would necessarily make the study of Islam superficial. From today's perspective, Adams's point of view, which now seems odd outside the context of the time in which he wrote, seemed to amount to a reassertion of some aspects of Orientalism. However, there were a number of items missing from his description of Islamic and religious studies which would definitely be needed today. For example, he makes no mention of the reactions of Muslims to Euro-American scholarship (although he does in a later statement which we will quote below), or to their participation in it. His discussion of Islamic studies does not consider the impact of having Muslim students in the classroom. Nor is there any reflection on the scholars' own pre-commitments. He does not discuss the massive stereotypes of Islam relating to terrorism, violence, oppression of women, etc. He makes little mention of recent history, particularly European colonialism, modernity, or fundamentalism. Furthermore, he does not refer at all to the role of the media and popular culture presentations in establishing the image of Islam today. And of course, the more recent phenomena of post-structuralism, deconstructive literary criticism,

feminist and gender studies, post-colonial discourse, and the critique of Orientalism itself, were all to influence scholarship over the decades after Adams's original essays. These more recent concerns of Islamic and religious studies vibrate throughout the present work.

In what ways, and to what extent, have these interdisciplinary concerns of religious studies influenced Islamic studies? What Charles Adams, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, William Montgomery Watt, and other Islamicist historians of religion did achieve was to lay the foundations for a bridge from Orientalism to religious studies, across which the next generation of scholars would travel with greater ease. Thus, a growing interest in Islam has slowly arrived in religion departments during the past four decades (recall that this field is still represented in only slightly more than about 10 percent of all departments of in North America). However, the growth of Islamic studies has demonstrated greater sensitivity to issues of modernity, politics, gender, and newer methods and theories of investigating social and written texts, which were missing when Adams voiced his skepticism about in the history of religions. How did this change come about?

Three decades prior to the publication of the present book, a pioneering attempt was made to address the problem of the absence of Islamic studies in religious studies scholarship and curricula. The year was 1980, which, significantly, coincided with the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the taking of American hostages in Tehran, although those events were to occur after the symposium had been planned and organized; it was also one year after the publication of Said's *Orientalism*. An International Symposium on Islam and the History of Religions, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, was convened at Arizona

State University. Fifteen scholars were invited to present papers on the application of theories and methodologies in the humanities and social sciences to the Islamic fields of data in which they conducted research. Specialists in Islamic pilgrimage, Muhammad's biography, conversion to Islam, Quranic and scriptural studies, and other topics in comparative religions, presented their findings. The symposium invitation encouraged these specialists in Islamic studies to address their work to new contexts, where their conversation partners would increasingly be specialists in Asian, African, European, American, and other religions, along with comparativists who were specialists in hermeneutics (interpretation) theory, ritual studies, gender issues, conversion, religion and conflict, and related approaches. In 1985, several of the papers presented at the symposium were edited and published in a volume titled *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*.¹⁰ In a foreword to the volume, Charles Adams reassessed his earlier assessment and concluded:

The conventional wisdom, to which I have added my own voice in the past, has been that historians of religions have failed to advance our knowledge and understand of Islam as religion and that Islamicists have failed to explain adequately Islamic religious phenomena. The third factor—increasing Muslim sensitivity to Islamic studies in the West—far from resolving the issue of how to approach the study of Islam as religion to the satisfaction of either religionists or Islamicists has created still more strident divisions.¹¹

We noted above that some of Adams' insights, such as those just quoted, have seemingly endured. Today, foundational questions in the study of Islam, such as the origin of the Quranic text, or the development exegetical genres, usually take place in area studies or Near or Middle East studies programs, whereas the anthropological inquiry of Islamic ritual, such as the performance of pilgrimage or the performance of religious identity for that matter, are often also

explored in religious studies departments. Graduate institutions where students can train both in Middle East Studies and religious studies are still limited in number.

Nevertheless, *Approaches to Islam* was just a beginning. Its twelve chapters left much of Islamic religious history, rituals and practices, theology, and textual studies for others to approach, by applying current methods and theories in comparative studies. The current volume revisits the impetus behind the project begun at Arizona State University nearly thirty years ago, taking stock of the progress made since then and moving the agenda forward for the twenty-first century. To accomplish this, we have assembled fourteen articles that illustrate the paradigm shift in the new Islamic studies. To provide a link with the Arizona State symposium, we have invited a response from one of the participants in that event, Bruce Lawrence, who comments below in an afterword on recent achievements in and future challenges to scholarship on Islamic religion, in light of the papers that appear in this work.

The scholar-participants in the Arizona State Symposium included a number of senior Islamicists, such as Charles Adams (McGill University), James Kritzeck (Notre Dame University), Jacques Waardenburg (University of the Utrecht), Muhammad Abd al-Rauf (Director of the Islamic Center in Washington, DC), and Richard Frank (Catholic University of America). Several younger scholars, such as Bruce Lawrence, who were to build careers in the field of Islamic studies, also attended and read papers, including William Graham (Harvard University), Marilyn Waldman (Ohio State University), Frederick Denny (University of Colorado), Richard Eaton (University of Arizona), and Andrew Rippen (University of Calgary). The symposium and the subsequent volume, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, marked

an occasion for younger scholars eager to build a new field of study in conversation with senior colleagues who were in sympathy with the vision of a vital emerging field of Islamic studies but who had established their careers in the era of Orientalism, which had recently come under attack. The essays that follow in the present volume in many ways echo the significance of *Approaches*, by also bringing together senior scholars who, in this present case, began their careers in the 1980s, with younger scholars now beginning to work within the new field of Islamic studies. Much that was left unsaid and undiscussed in *Approaches to Islam* finds expression in the chapters below, an indication that the field is growing and changing with the times.

Toward a Post-Orientalist Islamic Studies

The heirs to the 1980 symposium writing in this volume have continued the project of incorporating within the discourses of religious studies the expertise of the past three decades of Islamic studies. In so doing, they continue the transformation of the subject matter of Orientalism with theories and methods more common in contemporary scholarship. In *Approaches to Islam and Religious Studies* (1985), the works of anthropologists, such as Max Weber, Jack Goody, Victor Turner, and especially Clifford Geertz, were particularly in evidence in the arguments and footnotes of several chapters. In the chapters found below, many of the approaches and presuppositions of that earlier generation of scholars have been replaced or enhanced by newer, different, and sometimes contending ideas. In these pages, the reader will find frequent reference, direct and indirect, to the ideas of historians Marshall Hodgson and Peter Brown, anthropologist Talal Asad, sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Bryan Turner, and philosophers

Michel Foucault, Charles Talyor, Alasdair MacIntyre and Kwame Anthony Appiah, among others. This intellectual trajectory exemplifies the type of engagement that is required in the contemporary context. These essays may serve as an indication of what may be called a *post-Orientalist* approach to Islamic studies, an approach or cluster of approaches which includes the study of foundational texts but which insists upon connecting them to the questions and debates of contemporary scholarship across disciplines and regions.

An historian who has had considerable influence on contributors to the present volume is Marshall G. S. Hodgson (d. 1968). His posthumously published three-volume *Venture of Islam* resituated historical analysis of the formation of the Islamic tradition from pre-Islamic Arabia to the broader historical and cultural *oikumene* of West Asia and Africa, ‘from the Nile to the Oxus.’¹² Hodgson contended that the significance of Islam in world history was much more than that of a distinctly new religious tradition among others in Asia, Africa, and eventually in Europe and the Americas. It was also a civilization inclusive of other religious, ethnic, and political communities, for which he coined a new term of art, ‘Islamicate.’ He defined Islamicate as something that “...would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.”¹³ This terminological reconceptualization has induced scholars to give more focused analysis to the impact of Islamic styles of thinking, discourse, moral and social interaction, and the like, within what Garth Fowden has termed the historic evolution among Middle Eastern religions in late antiquity ‘from empire to commonwealth.’¹⁴ Louis Ruprecht (chapter 9) and Bruce Lawrence (afterword) below

both give explicit reference to Hodgson's world historical approach to Islamic studies, and to religious studies more generally, over the past quarter of a century.

Another influence at work in Islamic studies today is the critical theory approach of anthropologist Talal Asad. Asad shares with Hodgson the belief that approaches to Islamic studies by the mid to late twentieth century were still deeply Euro-centric; Asad's criticism has seeped into the criticism of the study of Islam among a growing number of scholars in religious studies more generally. The fundamental insight of Asad's critique of Orientalist and history of religions approaches to the study of Islam is his charge that the eighteenth century Enlightenment was the fountainhead of academic conceptualizations of *religion* as well as the *secular*. In Asad's view, religion and the secular are mutually implicated in Western Post-Enlightenment scholarship on religion; each finds its *raison d'être* in relation to its opposition to the other.¹⁵ This conceit of modern scholarship, Asad reasoned, did not apply equally well to the religions of Asia, especially Islam, among whom the understanding of religion was not a product of Western understandings of modernity. In constructing his anthropology of Islam,¹⁶ Talal Asad argued forcefully that Muslim societies must be understood on their own terms and not a superimposed Western model. In 1993, Asad essayed his critique of Post-Enlightenment approaches to the study of religion in *Genealogies of Religion*. The subtitle, *Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*,¹⁷ indicates his intellectual heritage traceable to another Arab critical theorist already discussed above, Edward Said, and before him, Michel Foucault.

René Girard's books and essays stimulated discussion among some contemporary historians of religion on the association of religion with violence. Using older concepts drawn

from Continental phenomenology, Girard posited that at the root of *the sacred* is primordial violence, caused by ‘mimetic desire.’ Religion arises out of and seeks to resolve primordial social violence, *ab origine*.¹⁸ The association of violence with religion has become a major concern of contemporary scholarship, and it is reflected in the writings of several authors in this volume. Talal Asad and other scholars of religion writing in the post-9/11 moment have located the focus of understanding Christianity and Islam in the concept of ‘power.’ Asad’s articulation of the importance of this conceptual centerpiece in the study of religions is found in virtually all of his books and interviews.¹⁹ The implications of Asad’s contribution to contemporary Islamic studies, in his discussions of religion in relation to the state and holders of power, is discussed below in the essay by Richard Martin and Abbas Barzegar, and the afterword by Bruce Lawrence.

Beyond critical theory, another philosophical influence on Talal Asad and reflected in this volume, especially in the papers by Vincent Cornell and Louis Ruprecht, is the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. Appearing just a couple of years following Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theory* (1981) mounted a critique of Post-Enlightenment constructions of rationalism and ethics.²⁰ Tracing the failure of Post-Enlightenment humanistic disciplines to the Kantian rejection of Aristotelianism, MacIntyre sought remedy in the concepts of ‘practices’ and ‘traditions.’ If the authority of religion in human life was dismantled by the Enlightenment, then what reason, MacIntyre asked, do modern humans have for acting humanely and morally? The answer he found in religious and social practices across the traditions—religious traditions—of the premodern world and still working, and indeed thriving, in Post-Enlightenment societies. In Chapter 1, Vincent Cornell deploys

MacIntyre's notion of 'epistemological crisis' occasioned by a tradition's failure to explain and guide contemporary society by its classical system, in order to understand critical responses of Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden to Western modernity.

Still another influential philosopher in contemporary religious studies is Charles Taylor, who, like Asad and MacIntyre, has wrestled with the problematic of the first section of papers below, the encounter of religious traditions with modernity. Taylor's project at first appears to be diametrically opposed to that of MacIntyre, insofar as Taylor has sought to articulate a philosophy of modernity that builds upon the liberal moral philosophies of John Stuart Mills and John Rawls; like MacIntyre, however, Taylor is amenable to the claims of religious traditions upon the consciences of modern humans, that is, he wants to find a place for such claims for those living under the condition(s) of modernity. In one of his shorter but nonetheless influential works, *Multiculturalism*, Taylor tackles the contemporary Post-Enlightenment condition of how Western moderns should relate to cultures and traditions of reasoning beyond modern Euro-America. It is here that Taylor addresses a central problem of particular importance for contemporary scholars in Islamic and religious studies: how to reason with Muslim and other non-Western intellectuals in the inevitable global encounter of cultural traditions—especially acute in the twenty-first century. In this sense his project goes beyond that of Talal Asad and critical theorists more generally by imagining the conditions under which the differences among cultural (religious) identities would not keep one tradition from recognizing and appreciating others. The title of his lead essay in *Multiculturalism* is "The Politics of Recognition." His categories dwell particularly on religion, gender, sexuality, nationalist, race and ethnicity. "A number of strands in contemporary politics," he tells us, "turn on the need, sometimes the

demand, for recognition. . . . [T]he demand comes to the fore in a number of ways in today's politics, on behalf of minority or 'subaltern' groups, in some forms of feminism, and in what is today called the politics of 'multiculturalism.'"²¹

Taylor's multicultural approach is framed as we have noted, however, by his avowed Western, liberal, Post-Enlightenment horizon of understanding. The debate about Multiculturalism comes from intellectuals who have recently come to re-appreciated the Stoic notion of 'cosmopolitanism.' In a repost to Taylor in the third edition of *Multiculturalism*, Kwame Anthony Appiah charges that Taylor's Multiculturalism places too much emphasis on broad categories of social identity (race, religion, sexuality, etc) and pays little attention to more personal elements of identity which account, Appiah suggests, for conflicts and social movements within the broader social identities of Taylor's multiculturalism. What constitutes who we are and our personal differences (identities) as a member of a religious tradition, gender, class, or ethnic group? Those scholars in this volume who lean more toward cosmopolitanism (see the essays by Ewing and Ruprecht) find greater explanatory power in Appiah's approach, but with some reservations. As David A. Hollinger asserts, "Multiculturalism is a prodigious movement, but its limitations are increasingly apparent. It has not provided an orientation toward cultural diversity strong enough to process the current conflicts and convergences that make the problem of boundaries more acute than ever."²² It is "the current conflicts" that occupy much of the attention of scholars in religious studies today.

One of the most profound effects on the practices of scholars in Islamic and other Islam experts for the past three decades has been the dramatic increase in religious groups advocating

violence, often justified by explicitly stated theological warrants. The problem of 'religion and violence' essayed by Girard and others now became 'Islam and violence' and has seemed to fall in the laps of scholars of Islam to explain to a demanding, sometimes frightened, often confused, and occasionally angry, public. Within the academy, one approach to the explanation and interpretation of groups such as Al Qaeda was the claim that they operated outside the borders of normative Islam, and anyway, represented only a small percentage of the global Muslim population. This approach was endorsed by no less than President George W. Bush who, in a speech delivered on September 17, 2001 at the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C., added a new element to the "it's not really Islamic" explanation when he assured his immediate audience and the American people more generally: "The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war."²³ Invoking 'evil' to explain the meaning of violent acts sanctioned by religious justifications finds more consanguinity within theological studies than in the social sciences. In the humanities, and in theological studies in particular, there has been a greater ambivalence about the ontological status of good and evil and about what deserves to be labeled 'evil.'

Within religious studies, Bruce Lawrence has attempted to counter the wholesale association of Islam with violence and evil.²⁴ Lawrence has demonstrated the compelling power of the media to bombard audiences with images of Muslims linked to violence and he has problematized the general Western view of Islam as a unified body of believers, ideas and practices, that lacked a history of values shared with the West; what has been lacking in Western understandings of Islam, in Lawrence's view, is reference to the experience of colonialism and post-colonial struggles. Another approach to understanding movements such as Al Qaeda and

Lashkar-e Taiba, developed in Sociology and Political Science, is that advocated by Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi in Chapter 6. Kurzman and others construe Al Qaeda and other fundamentalist groups as social movements or social movement organizations (SMOs). Quintan Wiktorowicz, writing on “The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of a Community,” says: “SMOs are seen as viable and enduring crucibles for contention, capable of collectivizing what might otherwise remain individualized grievances and ideological orientations. They provide formal institutionalization, leadership, mobilizing structures, and a division of labor through bureaucratic organization.”²⁵ Wiktorowicz analyzes how the Salafi Islamist movement divides into two contending movements, the jihadists who advocate violence and the reformists who do not, and how they fit the patterns of social movements organizations globally beyond Muslim societies. By combining the study of the historical background and origins of groups like Al Qaeda with theoretical analysis of social movement organizations, Islamic studies is in a position to explain and interpret violent religious social movements in Muslim societies without reference to metaphysical notions of ‘evil’ and ‘evil doers.’

We now turn to highlight further the influence of one historian of religion in particular upon the new religious discourse on Islam. The writings of Bruce B. Lawrence have contributed significantly to the field of Islamic religious studies, but at same time he has brought the theoretical discourses of the humanities and social sciences into critical review and productive dialogue with the Islamic tradition and Muslim subject.²⁶ As mentioned above, Lawrence was among those who, as a young professor from Duke University, participated in the discussions and interventions at the 1980 Symposium. As much as any other person present at that conference, the subsequent writing and teaching of Bruce Lawrence has led the way in exploring

further what the symposium had set out to do—to encourage the development of as a new subfield that is fully integrated with . The intellectual evolution of a scholar like Lawrence since 1980 typifies the changes that have taken place in the field of in general, and we consider him here as an example that demonstrates the new perspectives that many have come to embrace. Of particular importance to the project of this volume was his 1989 theoretical demonstration that ‘modernity’ and its attendant ideologies of ‘modernism’ form the contexts in which religious fundamentalism—another product of modernity-- must be understood as the ‘countertext.’²⁷ In *Defenders of God* and increasingly in his writing on Islam since 1989, Lawrence has engaged the notable works of Hodgson, Asad, and others outside of Islamic studies —challenging, negotiating with, and using their arguments to theorize Islamic data within . It is a hallmark of his approach that an erudite understanding of Islam can also work conversely to influence theory in the humanities and social sciences. Whereas Orientalism and even area studies still today accept the languages and history of the Middle East and other religions of the Muslim world as sufficient resources for understanding Islam, Lawrence’s comparative approach to understanding religious phenomena across traditions makes Islamic studies more intelligible within the discourses of religions studies.

Like most of the senior scholars active today, Lawrence was trained essentially as a medievalist, tracking the questions highlighted by scholars of the previous generation (like his Yale mentor, Franz Rosenthal) who were comfortable describing themselves as philologists and Orientalists. We would argue that the best of Post-Orientalist scholarship in Islamic studies is based on solid training in the languages, texts and history of premodern Islam, such as Lawrence received, as a necessary basis for discourse about Islam and Muslims today. There is a distinct

difference in quality and explanatory power between Lawrence's several books on fundamentalism and modern Islam, on the one hand, and the growing number of works by reporters, public policy specialists, and others now regarded by the general public as experts on Islam, for whom Islamic history would seem to have begun with the Iranian Revolution, or even as late as September 11, 2001. This quality of bringing critical and theoretical tools to the analysis of Islam and of Muslim societies, and the data of Islamic studies to critical and theoretical tools, is once again demonstrated in Lawrence's afterword below, and it is echoed throughout the chapters that precede it.

The Present Situation

Despite the evolution of post-Orientalist approaches to the study of Islam in religious studies, since the 1980s, as exemplified in the work of scholars like Lawrence, some problems remain. Although we are now moving past the ten percent mark for representing Islam in departments of religious studies, job descriptions in vacancy announcements still tend to focus narrowly on expertise in classical languages and texts. That is, very frequently a job in Islamic studies is defined exclusively as the study of classical Arabic texts such as the Qur'an and the foundational texts of Islamic law. While such works remain in our view as very important, an exclusive focus upon them leaves out an enormous amount of premodern Islamic civilization, not to speak of the traumas of the colonial era and the dramas of the contemporary age. Would it not be strange if academic positions in the history of Christianity were still exclusively defined in terms of the study of the New Testament Greek text, ignoring the vast spectrum of Christian thought and practice from the Church fathers to Aquinas, the Reformation, and popular

interpretations in our own day? Yet in dealing with Islam, it is somehow convenient to gloss over the need to document and trace multiple varieties and regional variations of Islamic religiosity in later and recent history.

One consequence of continuing to define vacant and new positions in Islamic studies in terms of the structure of the field in the heyday of Orientalism is that many among the current generation of graduate students (and their mentors), seem ready to believe that the study of Arabic legal and exegetical texts from the eighth to the twelfth centuries are sufficient to define Islamic civilization in a normative sense, without feeling the need to refer to the questions of contemporary scholarship and methodology. This exclusive focus on seminal foundational texts as such, without explaining their significance in living situations of the Muslim world, may be a vestige of, and be compared to, the “Great Works” approach to the history of religions that characterized nineteenth century studies of world history, as suggested by the analysis of Albert Hourani, cited above. Such an attitude would have the unfortunate effect of keeping Islamic studies in an intellectual ghetto of philological specialization that remains impenetrable to outsiders. In this sense, the problematic presented to scholars at the 1980 Arizona State Symposium must still be posed to younger scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim: *by what methods and theories will you explain and interpret Islamic social and textual data to other scholars in religious and in cultural studies who are not specialists in your field?* Moreover, why should the study of other historically important (if not outright dominant) Islamic discourses such as Sufism, Shi`ism, philosophy, poetry, ethics, and history be ignored or dismissed in an effort to maintain an old, some might say ‘Orientalist,’ criterion of what is authentic or normative?

Fortunately, the dialogical character of academic life in North American colleges and universities does not permit narrowly trained scholars to remain in their shells forever, as they find themselves surrounded by an interdisciplinary range of scholars outside their field to challenge them to think in new and interesting ways. In addition, it seems to be the case that the most progressive academic programs in Islamic studies have integrated comparative and theoretical studies of religion into their curriculums. Nevertheless, we feel that those academic graduate programs that still ignore, or even worse, resist engagement with the theoretical and comparative questions of Islamic and religious studies are doing a severe disservice to their students and to the future of the discipline.

The essays contained in this volume, in contrast, are offered to exemplify and encourage the wider approach of the new, post-Orientalist Islamic studies. The authors of these articles are scholars at different stages of their careers; they focus on different texts, methodologies, and regions. However, they share the commitment to engage knowledge of the larger Islamic tradition with the tools of modern academic discourse in order to bring Islamic studies out of the ghetto of academic isolation, relying increasingly on newer approaches to the study of religion in the twenty-first century. We hope that the result of this project will be to encourage a larger conversation in religious studies that will include partisans of all forms of scholarship on Islam.

A Glance Ahead

The essays in this volume are gathered in three separate sections, each of which addresses a critical topic that requires rethinking in order to fulfill the goals of post-Orientalist Islamic studies. The three topics revisited by our authors consist in Islamic perspectives on modernity,

social scientific and humanistic perspectives on religion, and Asian perspectives on the Muslim subject. We have chosen these categories to highlight the contemporary significance of the Islamic tradition, the interdisciplinary approaches that are increasingly required in religious studies, and the specifically regional and local factors and histories that govern the positioning of Muslims as subjects in particular contexts. In chapter 14 below, Bruce Lawrence reviews each of the chapters in light of some central themes of the volume, such as cosmopolitanism. Here we look more briefly at the general of each of the three main subsections of the book.

Modernity, addressed in Part I below, and indeed throughout the entire book, is one of the most pervasive and yet widely debated topics encountered in scholarship on religion today, to which we have already made reference above. The slipperiness of its definition paradoxically clashes with its omnipresence as a marker of current temporal awareness. In terms of our subject, however, it probably goes without saying that modernity has been defined as an intrinsic characteristic of the civilization and culture of Europe and America; put in somewhat different terms, modernity is seen as a direct product of the Enlightenment. A corollary of this perspective is the customary expectation that Muslim societies are by definition excluded from that modernity, despite their having been on the receiving end of the Enlightenment through widespread colonization beginning in the late 18th century. During the colonial period, while the so-called West was assumed to be scientific, enlightened, and powerful, the Islamic Orient was backward, superstitious, and effeminate. The relics of this mentality are still present in academe and undoubtedly contribute to the dangerously reductive “clash of civilizations” narrative brought on by Samuel P. Huntington’s infamous 1993 article by the same title.²⁸

In Part I, Vincent Cornell, drawing on McIntyre and Rawls, reflects on the “epistemological crisis” of Muslim intellectuals who have not yet thoroughly analyzed the principles of Islamic tradition in terms relevant today; he argues for the need to attain an “overlapping consensus” on issues such as democracy and human rights, much as was done in an earlier age when Muslim thinkers internalized the language and conceptual apparatus of Greek philosophy. More optimistically, Omid Safi draws attention to the vigorous reform movement in Iran, in its insistence on applying independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) to issues of fundamental religious principle, and he suggests that progressive Muslims in North America could benefit from this powerful intellectual demonstration. Katherine Ewing comments on the way in which Turkish Islamists in Germany embrace scientific perspectives as an unselfconscious part of their own modern identity. Some modern Muslim negotiations with the age of colonialism have ended up absorbing European categories and styles of thinking so thoroughly that they have become second nature. This is the case, according to Cornell, with the widespread Muslim adoption of 19th-century definitions of culture as an absolute, which has been neatly turned around in the form of Occidentalist stereotypes about the culture of “the West.” Likewise, A. Kevin Reinhart maintains that Salafi and neo-Salafi movements have a mythical view of uncontextualized scripture that owes much to the Protestantism that Arabs experienced in the form of Christian missions. Jamilla Karim points out that African-American Muslim women use the concept of culture to relativize and dismiss the claims of Arab and Asian Muslim women that they represent “true” Islam. Inevitable shifts in globalizing societies mean that religion is no longer the simple practice of everyday life, but a choice and a commitment that illustrates individual belief;

Reinhart makes this point with regard to the practice of reading texts, but it equally applies to choices of gender roles, as demonstrated by Ewing and Karim.

Part II addresses the volatile character of religious identity through different disciplines and methods. Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi present a strongly data-based social science as the method for correction of bias in the understanding of religious movements. David Gilmartin comments on social science, not as a purely scholarly method, but as an authoritative framework appealed to by the organs of the state for defining national folklore and identity. Richard Martin and Abbas Barzegar apply the humanities discipline of religious studies in a comparative fashion as a tool for exploring the intellectual history of Islam, while Louis Ruprecht draws on intellectual history to reconsider the character of culture and identity on a global scale. Gilmartin shows how in Pakistan Sufism has been defined in one way by the Auqaf Department (ministry of charitable trusts) in terms of pietistic exemplary lives, while in contrast the Institute of Folk Heritage considers Sufism as the voice of popular culture. Martin and Barzegar propose a concept of Islamic orthodoxy defined by changing sources of power. According to Ruprecht, even the discipline of comparative religion should be seen in parallel to dominant features of modernity, including the museum, national identity, and Romanticism.

Part III returns to the analysis of the subject from the perspective of Muslim societies in Asia. Tony K. Stewart and Scott Kugle both discuss the formation of sacred biography in South Asian Sufism. They overlap in using the example of the prominent Chishti master, Nizam al-Din Awliya' (d. 1325), but their different approaches illustrate widely varying possibilities in the deployment of . Stewart focuses on the role of community memory and the model of piety that

makes a community ideal out of an individual life story, arguing that it is the religious ideal that forms the real subject of hagiography. Kugle in contrast brings out the role of poetry that depicts powerful homoerotic features in the relationship between Nizam al-Din and his poet-disciple Amir Khusro.

Ebrahim Moosa and Carl Ernst examine different theaters for the application of ethics in Muslim societies. Moosa introduces the prominent leader of the Deoband seminary in India, Qari Muhammad Tayyab, who philosophically reflected on the Hanafi legal tradition in search of ethical universals. Ernst investigates the program of Malaysian Prime Minister Ahmad Badawi, who has introduced the formula of “civilizational Islam” (*Islam hadhari*) to encourage development and pluralism while fending off the Islamist opposition. Tayyab and Badawi both struggled to implement the ethical concept of “objectives of the *shari`a*” and make proper use of *ijtihad*, in ways that address the distinctive character of the contemporary era. Both Ernst and Moosa point out the inherent problems in attempts to streamline *shari`a* as policy, whether in the name of fundamentalism or the nation-state, since neither is exempt from questioning on ethical grounds.

In the final chapter, Bruce B. Lawrence draws out several of the themes in this volume, which he introduces in relation to voices heard (Fazlur Rahman) and not heard (Marshall Hodgson) in the 1985 *Approaches to Islam in* and its prior symposium. Both Rahman and Hodgson, Lawrence points out, asked the question that was prescient of the postcolonial and subaltern studies that were soon to emerge: “to what extent do scholars have to declare their precommitments, not just religious but also scholarly precommitments?” One such lingering

scholarly precondition, as Talal Asad has persuasively argued, is the force, often hidden and subconscious, of Judeo-Christian prejudgments. Lawrence also identifies for further discussion the problem of the contemporary relation of the orthodox to emerging popular expressions of Islam, and how Muslims are dealing with transnational communications systems that feature, and reconstruct, Islam and Muslims themselves.

Closing Word

The chapters that now follow in this volume overlap considerably in the topics and categories they consider to be important for the study of Islam today, although they demonstrate a healthy independence of judgment and a willingness to argue and theorize in terms of evidential examples. They demonstrate the historical depth and familiarity with the textual traditions of premodern Muslim thought, which are indispensable in the appreciation of contemporary Islam, and indeed are explicitly invoked in writings of modern-day Muslim thinkers. They also apply a wide range of research methodologies reflecting the multi- and interdisciplinary character of post-Orientalist Islamic studies as they probe the characteristic problems that have to be considered in today, particularly ideology, gender, and the nation-state. In short, we believe the following pages indicate the continuing maturation of the field of Islamic studies over the past few decades, and the importance, now more than ever, of integrating it into the wider discipline of religious studies. We hope these essays will encourage debate surrounding the issues they raise and contribute to a continued process of rethinking Islam between theory and practice.

 Endnotes

¹ The shortage of specialists in Islamic studies and the high demand for the subject means that frequently non-Islamicists are called upon to teach basic courses in the study of Islam. This situation was one of the reasons for the compilation of a volume of essays entitled *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) , in the “Teaching Religious Studies Series” sponsored by the American Academy of Religion.

² Charles J. Adams, “The History of Religions and the Study of Islam,” in *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa with Mircea Eliade and Charles H. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 177-93. The quotation is from p. 178.

³ Charles J. Adams, “The History of Religions and the Study of Islam,” *ACLS Newsletter* 25/3-4 (1974), pp. 1-10.

⁴ As an example, one may consider the very hostile comments of Julian Baldick, in “Islam and the Religions of Iran in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*,” *Religious Studies* 24 (1988), pp. 47-56. In defense of what he calls “traditional European scholarship,” Baldick accuses American Islamicists of cowardly behavior that sacrifices objectivity by coddling the sensitivities of Muslims.

⁵ Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979 [1978]).

⁷ Charles Kurzman, “Cross-Regional Approaches to Middle East Studies: Constructing and Deconstructing a Region,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 41/1 (June, 2007), pp. 24-29, available online with color maps at <http://www.unc.edu/mideast/Kurzman_MESA_Bulletin.doc>.

⁸ Departments of NES generally include the Ancient Near East, while departments and centers of Middle East Studies generally do not.

⁹ Adams (1974), p. 7.

¹⁰ Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

¹¹ In Martin, *Approaches to Islam*, p. vii.

¹² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹³ Hodgson, *Venture* 1:59.

¹⁴ Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ This point is made in Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ A seminal contribution of Talal Asad's oeuvre is his paper, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," Occasional Papers (Washington D.C.: Ctr. for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown, 1986).

¹⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

¹⁹ See, for example, “Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions: Interview with Saba Mahmood,” *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* 5.1 (1996).

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 3d ed. (North Bend, Ind.: The University of Notre Dame Press, [1981] 2007).

²¹ Charles Taylor and others, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. and intro. By Amy Gutmann, (3rd ed.; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 25.

²² David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995). Hollinger’s book is discussed by Ruprecht and Lawrence below.

²³ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-11.html>, last viewed on 6 November 2008.

²⁴ Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁵ Quinta Wiktorowicz, “The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of Community,” in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to HipHop*, ed. By miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 209.

²⁶ Donald K. Emmerson makes the distinction between these two referents as follows: ‘Islam’ refers to normative beliefs, doctrines, and orthodox institutions imputed to God on a vertical divine/human axis, while ‘Muslim’ refers to the horizontal axis of human social interaction, the observable basis of empirical discourse about Islam in history. See Emmerson, in *Debating Islamism*, eds. Richard C. Martin and Abbas Barzegar (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, forthcoming in 2009).

²⁷ Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalism revolt Against the Modern Age* (Harper & Row, 1989).

²⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993); online at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19930601faessay5188/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations.html> (last viewed 5 December 2008).